

BABUR'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO UNDERSTANDING AND DEVELOPMENT OF LINKAGES BETWEEN CENTRAL AND SOUTH ASIA

It is an interesting study to explore linkages between Central and South Asia in historical perspective. This piece of research digs out the impact of increased linkages on the people of the two regions. Central and South Asian Regions have geographical, ethnic, historical and cultural connections. Natural and human geography played a significant role in the transfer of ideas and goods between the Central and South Asia. From time immemorial important personalities and crucial events have affected these linkages. Maurya, Kushan, Greek, Hindushahi, Mongol, Timurid and Mughul dynasties influenced the developments in Central Asia and South Asia. Zahiruddin Mohammad Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodhi of the Indian Lodhi dynasty in the battle of Panipat in 1526 and founded Mughal Empire and influenced to a great extent the war technology in the subcontinent. Babur is credited with introducing cannons in warfare when he invaded India. During the 1st Battle of Panipat, he has about fifteen thousand soldiers and many cannons. Ibrahim Lodi the Sultan of Delhi on the other hand had about forty thousand troops and hundred war elephants.

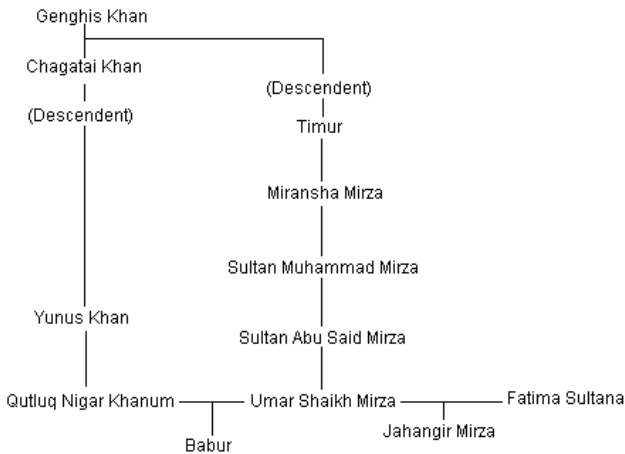
Babur is said to have used his cannons to good effect. The success and the new developments in its wake facilitated the flow of ideas and natural resources and goods between South and Central Asian Areas. This paper explores the development of linkages in the aftermath of Babar's Indian expeditions. It will be useful to know Babur's Central Asian pedigree and understand the origins of Indian Mughal Empire in a new perspective. It also analyses Babar's works particularly Tuzik-e-Baburi

(Baburnama) to understand the connections between the two regions in historical context.

PEDIGREE:

Zahir-ud-Din Mohammad Babur, the first emperor of Indian Mughal Empire was born on February 23 (February 14) 1483 in the Andijan city of Namangan province in Ferghana valley in the present day Uzbekistan. Babur in his memoirs says that Farghana has seven separate townships, five on the south and two on the north of the Saihun (Syrdarya or Jaxertes). Of those on the south one is Andijan. It has a central position and is the capital of Farghana country. It produces much grain, fruits in abundance, excellent grapes and melons.¹ He died in Agra (India) on 26 December in 1530 of fever at the age of 47. He was buried 9 years later, as per his wishes, in a garden in Kabul now known as Bagh-e-Babur. He was son of Umer Shiekh Mirza.²

Babur's Ancestors



Source: Wikimedia

Babur was Turko-Mongol prince from Ferghana, who inherited a small kingdom east of Samarkand when 11 years old. He was descended from Amir Timur on father's side and from Genghis Khan on his mother's.

CENTRAL ASIAN MILIEU:

The Central Asian scene was showing political commotion in that time. There was struggle for existence in the true sense of the term. In that survival of the fittest kind of political environment Babur opened eyes. The emergence of Shaybani Khan weakened the Timuid ruling dynasties of Central Asia. Shaybani Khan (1451-2 December 1510) defeated and compelled the Timurids rulers to leave Samarkand, their capital bay 1500. Babur was very young when his father died. After several unsuccessful campaigns against Shaybani Khan, Babur left Central Asia for the area now called Afghanistan.

Kabul and Qandahar are two big trade markets between Hindustan (India) and Khurasan. From Khurasan Caravans come to Qandahar and Caravans from Kashgar, Fergana, Turkestan, Samarkand, Bukhara, Balkh, Hissar and Badakhshan come to Kabul. In that period Kabul was a big trading center. If merchants went to Cathay (Northern China) or Turkey, they would make no higher profit. To Kabul come 8000 to 10000 horses every year. To Kabul come from Hindustan every year caravans of 15000 to 20000 household heads, bringing slaves, white cloth, sugar etc.¹⁰



Map of Central Asia:

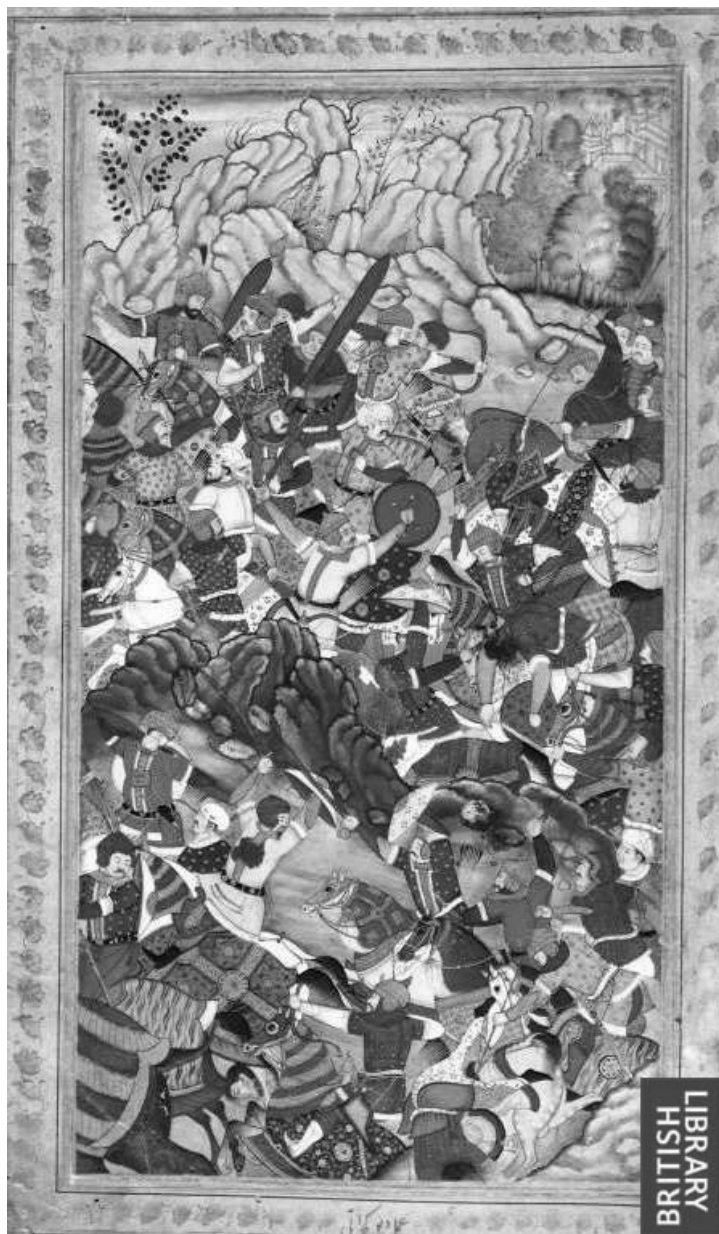
<http://www.ce.utexas.edu/prof/mckinney/papers/arial/CentralAsiaWater-McKinney.pdf>

DEPARTURE FROM CENTRAL ASIA:

Despite several attempts Babur could not succeed to regain his domain of Samarkand. He realized that his survival is unlikely in that situation. He looked around for a better place. The political conditions of Kabul domain were not stable. The Arghun dynasty was one among the ruling dynasties of Central Asia which ruled the area between Sindh and southern Afghanistan from late 15th to early 16th centuries. Mukim got control of Kabul peacefully in 1501-2 which was in tumult after the death of its ruler Ulugh Beg Ibn Sa`id. Babur gained control of Kabul in 1504 and Mukim left for Kandahar. Babur slowly and gradually enlarged his Khandom by attacking Afghanistan and capturing Kabul in 1504.¹²

THE CONQUEST OF INDIA:

The internal and external political developments affected India in the 16th century. The rulers of India both Muslims and Hindus did not care much about their subjects. He defeated Ibrahim Loghi at the first battle of Panipat in 1526 and secured north-western India. He convinced his central Asian supporters to stay in India with him and don't let other contenders including Afghans and Rajputs get upper hand. He achieved those two objectives but died in 1530.



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Panipat_%281526%29

Mughal Dynasty produced great rulers, military commanders, builders and administrators'. Shah Jahan (R. 1628-58) build Taj Mahal and other magnificent buildings. Akbar (R. 1556-1605) expanded and consolidated the empire. Aurangzeb (R. 1658-17-7) was great administrator and strengthened synergy between the court and religious establishment.¹⁵

Further detail will help to understand Babur conquest of India. In his first trip to India he remained there for 5 months and reached back to Kabul in May 1505.¹⁶ Babur rapid victories along with his exceptional military insight provided an origin from which to secure his control in northern India. His artillery and his pervasive strategy of Central Asian cavalry against the Rajputs and Afghans confirmed effectiveness. From his stay in Transoxiana (Mawarannahr) he brought a new knowledge the use of gunpowder.¹⁷

Central Asian states, Kabul, the Punjab, Delhi, and other territories of Northern India up to Gwalior in the south and till Bihar in the East were encompassed by his empire.¹⁸ Babur won critical wars in India because of his advanced military technology as well as capability as a commander to inspire discipline and mobility among his troops.¹⁹

INTERACTION BETWEEN INDIA AND CENTRAL ASIA.

There are more than 250 manuscripts on Central Asian history, literature mostly in Arabic and Persian in the museums and libraries of India. Baburnama has a lot of material on relations between subcontinent and Central Asia in medieval times.²⁰ Two-way movements for trade and culture continued during Moghul Rule and after that.²¹ Several hundreds of manuscripts are available in Pakistan`s libraries mostly written in Arabic and Persian in Middle ages. One research scholar submitted Ph. D thesis on Central Asian manuscripts available in Peshawar many of them are of Mughal era.

In the military field he introduced innovations in India. Irrespective of the fact that who introduced artillery in India but credit goes to Babur for its effective use in the first battle of

panipat in 1526 which turned the tables against the huge army of Ibrahim Lodhi. Babur not only used new technology but tried to improve it also. He got Ottoman cannon experts. They helped him to increase number of cannons. Kabul has become a cosmopolitan city and an important halting spot in the trade between South and Central Asia. Babur claimed that eleven to twelve languages are spoken on that route between the two regions. It was purported that up from Hindustan come ten, fifteen, twenty thousand caravans bringing slaves, cotton cloth, refined and unrefined sugar and aromatic roots. Many merchants are not satisfied with 300% or 400% profit. Babur earned most of his revenue from traders through his system of taxation. They were taxed 2.5% on silver and 5% on gold. He received a tariff on foreign trade from 5% to 10%, an income tax on harvests from a third to a half and a progressive wealth tax on flocks.²³

Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur established a state by the sword but he has also provided a conducive environment, which attracted artists and scientists. His empire was administered by his ministers with ample sovereignty. Baburnama depicts Babur as an orthodox Sunni Muslim who was a master of Turkic and Persian languages. His autobiography is a masterpiece of that genre of literature.²⁵ Babur left violent political arena of his Inner Asian birthplace came for Afghanistan and then established his empire in India. His training, education, social milieu and origin were engrossed in Persian and Turkic culture. He and his descendants are responsible for the nurturing of this Turko-Persian Culture and growth of this cultural influence in South Asia. And this interaction produced remarkable artistic, literary and historiographical results.²⁶

NATURE OF CHANGE:

Different changes occurred in different fields after Babur's conquest of India in 1526. He not only improved military technology but also tried to bring changes in the mechanism of agricultural production. For instance Babur introduced new crops in India and encouraged the use of improved water lifting devices for the purpose of irrigation. His generosity in this context helped improvement and change. The

loyalty which Babur created among his followers was an important factor in the survival of Mughal Empire despite his early death and 15 years of Homayun Persian exile.²⁷ Generally the Muslim conquest of India brought many changes in almost all sphere of life. Mughal rule gave India one official language, new coinage and uniform administrative system. After the establishment of Mughal Empire the Islamic concept of human equality and brotherhood continued its appeal to the downtrodden underdogs and lower caste people among Hindus. Hunting, Hawking, polo and many other games were influenced in the form and techniques.²⁸

Mughal rule also affected the gardening in India. Mughal rulers liked flowers and gardens. In gardening they have contributed a sense of precision, balance and harmony and many local Indian imitated those plans of gardening. Central Asian cuisine influenced Indian diet. To a considerable extent Babur advent in India influenced Indian economy. Changes took place in economic sector particularly trade flourished in the two regions. It strengthened contacts between South, Central and West Asia. A large numbers of businessmen, tourists, sufis (mystics) travelled to Indian subcontinent from Merv, Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, Balkh, Herat, Khurasan, Persia and Europe. The Mughals strengthened and facilitated commercial relations with the outside world. The exchange of customs, ideas, traditions and values took place. Towns and cities flourished due to increased economic activities. Urbanization increased. In the Mughal factories luxury goods of beauty and value were produced. India is an ancient civilization. In ancient times it had great learning institutions but with passage of time they became stagnant. Muslims particularly Mughals brought to an end that stagnancy. They introduced new education system through the media of Arabic and Persian. A chain of schools and colleges through madrasas educational system were established.²⁹ Many changes were brought in the Indian judicial system also. Islamic Sharia courts were organized and made efficient to deliver justice. This synergizing the Indian legal system with the rest of the Muslim world facilitated movements of goods and people. For instance it paved the ground to honour the letters of credit

issued either in India or in the rest of the Muslim world irrespective of the fact whether it were issued by Muslims or non-Muslims. Commercial activities increased with north Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. A better coordination was established between mercantile classes, administrative nobility and religious establishment. The systemic uniformities and coordination facilitated travellers to a great extent. For instance it helped Ibn Batuta to become envoy and trader in Malabar, judge in Maldives and prayer leader in India. These positions complemented each other without any contradiction. Government, law and religion safeguarded the interests of merchants and traders. This led to expansion of trade and India became rich. In the short interval in Mughal rule in India under Shar Shah Suri some changes occurred which further facilitated travel and travel related activities and that influenced economic and military activities under latter Mughals. Shar Shah Suri abolished many taxes which hindered progress of free trade. He constructed networks of roads. From 1540 to 1544 he built G T Road (Grand Trunk Road) which connected Bengal to Afghanistan. These developments influenced Indian economic, social, political, strategic, cultural and linguistic thought-processes.³⁰

DEVELOPMENT OF LINKAGES:

The interaction between Central and South Asia under Babur and his descendants provoked thoughts. The two people tried to develop and expand convergences and minimize divergences and a higher level of assimilation and syncretism occurred. In the new environment Babur and his followers and those who came from Central Asia after him retained their identity. They introduced administrative and legal systems which superseded the existing morals, ethics and social conduct. In this social milieu Muslim community which was strongly Islamic in character tried to find non violent ways of interaction with non-Muslim communities of India.³¹ The arrival of Muslims particularly Mughal influenced Indian culture much. This change touched almost every aspects of life. It impacted Indian forms of arts, cuisine, languages, architecture, urban planning, dress and social usages, customs, traditions, conventions and values. The

languages brought by Mughals particularly Arabic, Persian and Turkic were modified by contact with local languages which led to the creation of new languages in India. The impact of these languages still exists in several South Asian dialects. From the interplay between the two communities a new language Urdu, Hindi or Hindustani developed which helped communications among peoples. The development of Urdu in itself is an interesting episode it like Arabic, Persian, Turkic used Arabic script. Around the military encampments still the centers of administration a mixed lingua was taking form as the allied soldiers' coined phrases out of Persian and Hindustani. This new language of the camps would become the Urdu of northwestern India.³²

In the records bequeathed by a vanished age Babur appears before us in the diverse roles of ruler, warrior, sportsman, craftsman, author, penman, and devoted student of Nature; and as we turn the pages of the priceless Memoirs, in which he frankly discloses his hopes and fears, his thoughts and deeds, we realise that we are in the presence of one of the most human and attractive personalities that ever graced an Asiatic throne. The colour of an autumn leaf, the hue of a tulip, the scent of a melon, sufficed to arouse his admiration and emotion; while his love of flowers, as has been mentioned, led to his introducing into India the terraced gardens or pleasancess, which have been described by a modern writer as the greatest contribution of the Mughals to Indian art.³³

The Mughal rule was favourable for efflorescence of fine arts and development of learning and literature.³⁴ During Humayoun's reign poets and scholars from all parts of Persia, Turkestan, Bukhara and Samarqand continued to emigrate to India in larger number than before.³⁵

Mughal rule galvanized Urbanization in India due to which many cities with fresh cultures rose. Because of this new development traditional economies and rural areas remained less developed. New small factories (Karkhana) developed in which imported technologies were used. Few examples will help in this

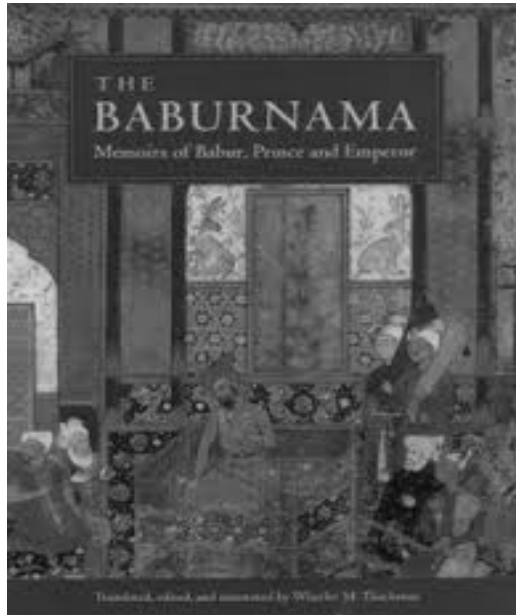
context. In ceramic tile the western and Central Asian architectural patterns were adopted. Chinese pottery influenced Rajasthan's blue pottery culture. Indians were sent to Samarkand to learn book binding and paper making. Printing flourished in Farrukhabad (A city in India) and Muradabad (India) became famous for brassware, Firozabad (India) emerged centre of glassware and Saharanpur (India) for woodcarving, Banaras (India) for jewellery, textile and Mirzapur (India) for carpets. Once established in Agra Babur and his men found the heat and humidity of India trying. He complains of dust and particularly of hot winds. He regards it a matter of urgent necessity to develop a new environment, to keep his followers reasonably contented. In this water was to play an important part. To improve his new kingdom, and with Samarqand always in his mind, he began to lay out gardens. His favourite Bagh-e-Wafa (the Garden of Fidelity, is described in his memoirs.³⁶

Steel describes Babur as the lovable, versatile, volatile soul which wrote down its virtues and its vices, its successes and its failures with equally unsparing truth, and equally invariable sense of honour and humour.³⁷ About his memoirs Steel further claims that it is not a novel, neither is it a history. It is the life-story of a man, taken from his own memoirs. The impression one gets is of a tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, gentleman, apothecary, ploughboy and thief.³⁸ Babur was at one and the same time poet, painter, soldier, athlete, gentleman, musician, beggar and King.³⁹ William R. is of the view that it is as a conqueror and not as an administrator that Babur must be considered to have laid the foundations of the Mughal Empire.⁴⁰

UNDERSTANDING THE LINKAGES:

Under Mughal rule Indian scientific advancements crossed geographical boundaries and many advances in different branches of science in the Muslim world reached India.⁴¹ From this fine blend a new architecture came into being which can be viewed in many cities of the subcontinent. Lahore Badshahi Masjid (Mosque) and Taj Mahal in Agra are two good examples in this context.⁴² In literary context Baburnama generally and particularly its part III is the straight forward, concise prose used

by Babur.⁴³ His longing for Central Asia is clear from his description of India and Indians. India (Hindustan) has few attractions. In comparative perspective he considered Indians less attractive, with less social interaction, no manners and concept of guest culture. Fine horses, able dogs, delightful grapes, good quality educational institutions and other first rate necessities are deficient. Babur complains that there is no good bread, food, fruits, fresh cold water, hot baths, candles and candlesticks.⁴⁴



Source: <http://www.fishpond.com.au/Books/Babur-Nama-Zahir-al-Din-Babur>

Baburnama is a fine piece Chagatai Turkic language. After Ali Shar Navai it is another master piece in that language. It encompasses not only Sufism, law, prosody, poetry but prose as well. With out an iota of doubt Babur diary (Tuzik-e-Baburi or Baburnama) has become one of the classic autobiographies of world literature. It spotlights a remarkable life. Baburnama shows a huge breadth of interests as well as clear cultivated

intelligence. Babur wrote not only in Turkic languages but in Persian language as well. His poems in Persians reflect his literary taste and stature. The friendly relations between Mughal and Safavid courts further augmented this literary amalgamation. Persian became not only language of the empire's records but of literary expression as well. India produced great poets and prose writers in Persian. Akbar the grand son of Babur translated Baburnama into Persian.⁴⁵ Some experts have pointed out that Babur Persian prose is better than his poetry. He preferred the use of plain, clear words to express his thoughts.⁴⁶



Source: Author visited the Ali Shar Navai mausoleum in Herat in 1998

There are few examples in the history of great conquerors who were also immanent poets. Babur was a good poet in Turki. Babur was one of those men who are so active in mind and body that they are never idle and always find time for

everything. He was pre-eminently human and has drawn a picture of himself in his memoirs in which no attempt is made to hide either his virtues or vices. He was also one of the first military commanders in Asia to appreciate the value of artillery.⁴⁷

Babur describes the local flora and fauna in exquisite detail. He says that the flying squirrel is found in these mountains, an animal larger than a bat, with a curtain, like a bat's wing, between its arms and legs...Tulips of many colours cover these foothills. He says that he has counted 32 or 33 different sorts. He developed a lifelong passion for gardening.⁴⁸ The first things which Babur observes and sees fit as being worthy to put pen to paper are related to irrigation, settlements, mammals, birds, and fruits. What is significant is that the descriptions are almost done in a way a naturalist would record his observations. Also his detailed description of the beauty of the peacock bird shows that his interest does extend beyond detached calculations of what is and is not valuable money-wise. Next Babur describes the defects of India which includes a great number of things some of which are the lack of good horses, grapes, ice/cold water, bread and candles. The next section, which describes the advantages of Hindustan, begins with pleasant things of Hindustan are that it is a large country and has masses of gold and silver. It is significant that the very first thing listed as an advantage of Hindustan is its wealth. It seems that Babur was not that impressed with the lifestyle of Indian people, their landscape or their technology but was very much impressed by its wealth⁴⁹

Tuzik-e-Baburi (Baburnama) offers the keen observations of a well educated Central Asian Muslim on his environments. He talks about his military and political campaigns. It is full of the detail descriptions of the natural and human geography of Central Asia, Afghanistan and South Asia. He has also discussed the flora, fauna, nomads, pastures, and city life enriched by his predecessors Timurids and other ruling Central Asian dynasties.⁵⁰ The Akbar additions of miniatures and Persian translations further help to understand the Delhi court life. Miniature painting is one of the greatest contributions in the

realm of arts by the Timurids to the world in 15th and 16th centuries. Kamaluddin Behzad miniature paintings are clear evidence of this remarkable addition.⁵¹ The Mughal paintings not only helps to understand the architectural similarities between Central and South Asia but much more than that. It is a wonderful reflection on that time and clime.⁵²



Source: <http://landscapelover.wordpress.com/category/belgium>

Zahir-u-din Muhammad Babur was not just the first Mughal king but one of the greatest empire builders. History as a branch of human knowledge was much developed by Muslims. Writing history was an established tradition in the Muslim World. Writing royal autobiographies was something quite new in that time. Babur established this tradition. Persian was literary

language in that point in time. His grip over Persian language was quite firm yet he preferred to write his memoirs in Chagatai Turkic language which was his mother tongue. Baburnama is personal, direct and lively. He starts the memoirs when he inherited the throne at the age of 12 and ends it in September 1529 a year before his death. The reader of Baburnama knows much about the author. It shows Babur as a lover of gardens, melons and a great warrior. He was proud of being a Persian poet. It tells about what he thought, saw and did. He depicts important events of his life and the important characters who played a role in those events. It is not just an intimate personal portrait of a prince but of a strategist, of a describer of Indian plant and animal life in loving detail. He said he has simply written truth and realistically depicted what actually happened.⁵³

Baburnama is unique in many respects. This historic document provides mine of information about the region in that time. The Turkic text of the memoirs is incomplete notwithstanding Baburnama is considered as one of the longest sustained prose of the Turkic language. It is translated into Persian, English, Urdu and many other languages. It shows Babur quite clearly as a leading person of his time. In his memoirs Babur writes about his life, how he became a king, the political ups and downs in his career, and what compelled him to leave his ancestral homeland. His is a record of meticulous details. He provides very useful information about people, history, nature and geography of his kingdom. His chronicle is no doubt the King's view of his time and space.⁵⁴ It provides an opportunity to know Babur's perspective on the conflicts and wars between peoples and nations and a vivid and attractive panorama of the lands, traditions, societies of the South and Central Asia. He is straightforward in his description of himself. It is not just narration of personal panegyrics but also acknowledgement of some personal weaknesses. On the one hand Babur is happy with his Indian success but on the other it clearly brings to limelight his longing for Central Asia. In the ecstasy of success he also feels the agony for being away from his birthplace. It not only gives glimpses of his fascinating life but also his firm grip over the language. The detail description of

some people, their genealogies and extensive depiction of nature may not be of interest to some readers nonetheless it is primary source on that age and space.⁵⁵ Babur's contributions to understanding and developments of the two regions of Central and South Asia are acknowledged both by the people of the two regions.⁵⁶

Babar is the link between Central Asia and India, between predatory hordes and imperial government, between Tamerlane and Akbar. The blood of the two great warriors, Chingiz and Timur, mixed in his veins, and to the daring and restlessness of the nomad Tatar he joined the culture and urbanity of the Persian.

It will be worthwhile to quote Stanly Lane-Poole on Baburnama:

“His battles as well as his orgies were humanized by a breath of poetry. Hence his Memoirs are no rough soldier's chronicle of marches and countermarches, 'saps, mines, blinds, gabions, palisadoes, ravelins, half-moons, and such trumpery'; they contain the personal impressions and acute reflections of a cultivated man of the world, well read in Eastern literature, a close and curious observer, quick in perception, a discerning judge of persons, and a devoted lover of nature; one, moreover, who was well able to express his thoughts and observations in clear and vigorous language. 'His autobiography is one of those priceless records which are for all time, and is fit to rank with the confessions of St. Augustine and Rousseau, and the memoirs of Gibbon and Newton. In Asia it stands almost alone'.⁵⁷ Pakistan inherited many institutions, values, systems and perspectives from British colonial period and British Rulers of India benefited a lot from the Mughal legacy. Pakistani society is directly and indirectly influenced by Mughal period. In the educational institutions of Pakistan, in its syllabi ample projection is given to the contributions of Mughal Dynasty.⁵⁸



Source: The author visited Babur Mausoleum (Kabul) in December 1997

The utter frankness of self-revelation, the unconscious portraiture of all his virtues and follies, his obvious truthfulness and fine sense of honour, give the Memoirs an authority which is equal to their charm. If ever there were a case when the testimony of a single historical document, unsupported by other evidence, should be accepted as sufficient proof, it is the case with Babar's Memoirs. No reader of this prince of autobiographers can doubt his honesty or his competence as witness and chronicler.⁵⁹ The power and pomp of Babar's dynasty are gone ; the record of his life —the *littera scripta* that mocks at time—remains unaltered and imperishable.⁶⁰

Conclusion:

Babar was a prolific writer and keen observer and he is also important because he is participant observer. On the one hand he took active part in the regional political developments in that point in time and on the other he chronicled what happened during his expeditions. His world renowned Baburname is an excellent depiction of his time and clime. On the one hand it helps to understand the ecstasy of a successful empire builder on the other it also exposes the agony of a displaced person. In that point in time trade flourished and exchange of people between the two areas increased. South Asian Cuisine is much influenced by Central Asian and Turkic food culture and vice versa. South Asia took many names of its cities from Central Asia. Many sufis/ saints migrated from central Asia to Indian Subcontinent. And to a considerable extent Mughal Architecture was influenced by Central Asian styles. Ethnic intermingling increased which helped in understanding of the two peoples. With advent of Zahiruddin Babar the founder of Mughal Empire in the subcontinent Central Asian impact increased on the Cultural and religious values and Sufi traditions. Baburnama helps to understand the linkages between South and Central Asia in sixteenth century and provides excellent background to those researchers who want to understand and explore contemporary linkages between the two regions.

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