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Syed Hasan Askari's Contribution to South Asian Medieval Studies as a Historian: An Assessment

Abstract

Professor Syed Hasan Askari (1901–1990) was a distinguished historian from Patna, Bihar, renowned for his extensive work on medieval Indian history. As a professor of history at the Patna University, he authored numerous scholarly works, with a particular focus on the regional history of Bihar. Beyond political history, he made significant contributions to the socio-cultural and religious history of the period. One of his notable achievements was his work in Sufi studies, where he extensively explored medieval Persian manuscripts across various genres of Sufi literature. This, combined with his critical textual analysis of primary historical sources, set him apart from his contemporaries. Moreover, he translated and introduced many of these sources, making them accessible to a broader audience. Professor Askari left behind a remarkable legacy of historical scholarship and unwavering dedication. This study provides an overview of his scholarly contributions and evaluates his impact on South Asian medieval studies as a professional historian.

Keywords: Syed Hasan Askari, Bihar, medieval India, sufi literature, malfuzat, maktubat, regional history

Introduction

Professor Syed Hasan Askari (1901–1990) was a distinguished historian specializing in medieval Indian history, particularly of the Bihar region, his place of origin. His extensive writings covered a wide range of socio-cultural, religious, and political themes from a historical perspective. He authored numerous scholarly works on the regional history of medieval Bihar, Sufism, Sufi literature, and the socio-cultural history of the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) and the Mughal Empire

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(1526-1857). A dedicated teacher, diligent researcher, and prolific author, Professor Askari made an indelible mark in the field of medieval Indian studies.

The present paper is an attempt to shed some light on the life and times of Professor Askari, provide an overview of and assess his contribution to medieval Indian historiography. While exploring his scholarly writings, the study analyzes the kind of primary sources, especially the manuscripts, consulted by him for historiographical purpose, and examines his unique approach and method in history-writing. It is hoped that the present study will introduce his scholarly contribution to the academic community in general, and particularly the scholars and students of history, in Pakistan. It will be especially beneficial for the researchers of pre-modern or medieval Indian history who are interested in exploring and appreciating new avenues and themes in medieval studies.

The paper is divided in three sections: the first section deals with the biographical sketch of Professor Askari, and throws light on the awards and honours he received along with his professional achievements. The second section highlights his historical works, which were published in varied reputed academic journals and collections of his articles. The third and the last section of the paper assesses his scholarship as a historian, while analyzing the wide range of historical sources he consulted as well as the approach and methodology employed in his writings. This section also briefly discusses his academic legacy. It is followed by a brief conclusion of the study.

1. Prof. Askari's Life at a Glance

Professor Syed Hasan Askari, an eminent historian and an authority on medieval Indian history, was born to a small *zamindar* (land owing) family in the village of Kujhwa, District Saran, North Bihar (now Siwan) in 1901. He was the third son of Syed Razi Hasan and Raziat Fatima, whose forefathers had settled in Bihar in middle of the eighteenth century. His father died while he was only fourteen years old and was brought up and educated by his elder brother, Syed Sultan Ali. From his early days of school education, he showed a commitment to his studies and was able to secure District Junior Scholarship while doing matriculation at Chapra Zila School,¹ Bihar, from where he passed matriculation in first division in 1918. In 1921, he got admitted in Greer Bhumihar Brahmin College (now Langhat Singh College), Muzaffarpur,² from where he received his B.A. (Honours). He got his Master's degree in History from Patna University³ in 1924 and Bachelors of Law in 1925.

Prof. Askari got married in 1921, but after the demise of his wife, he married Umme Salma in 1926. It was the same year when he started his academic career as a teacher in New College, and next year, in 1927 he was appointed as Lecturer in History in Patna College. He served as assistant Professor from 1934 to 1950, and Professor of History from 1950 to 1956. During these years, he also became President of the Medieval India Section of the 10th Session of the Indian History Congress in 1947. In 1950, he was appointed as the Head of the History Department, Patna College. From 1962 to 1969, he served as the Honourary Director of K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna, established in 1950 in order to undertake research in the field of history and archaeology. Kashi Prasad Jayaswal (1881–1937), after whom the institute was named, was a renowned

lawyer and historian of India, who contributed to ancient Indian history. Prof. Askari retired in 1956, but was re-employed by the Patna University till 1964. He was also the first K. P. Jayaswal Fellow from 1986 to 1989.

Professor Askari served as the President of the Regional Records Survey Committee, Bihar, and remained an active member of several editorial boards, research committees, academic institutes, and organizations. In recognition of his contributions, Magadh University⁴ awarded him the degree of Doctor of Literature *honoris causa* in 1969, followed by a similar honor from Patna University in 1984.

Professor Askari departed this world on November 28, 1990, at the age of 89 in Patna, India.⁵ He was survived by four daughters and three sons. Among his children, two daughters reside in Karachi, Pakistan, while the rest of his family is settled in India. Known for his open-mindedness and simple, austere lifestyle, Professor Askari left an enduring impression on all who knew him. Reflecting on his worldview and modesty, Professor A. L. Srivastava wrote that he was a

“thoroughly religious and devoted Muslim of liberal views, having respect for all religions and ways of life. In fact, I feel that he is at heart and also in appearance and attitude a Sufi. Like a Sufi, he is ... careless about his dress and physical appearance...”⁶

1.1 Awards and Honours in Recognition of Scholarly Services

In recognition of his invaluable contributions to the field of history, Professor Syed Hasan Askari was honored with several prestigious awards. The Government of India conferred upon him the Padma Shri, the country's fourth-highest civilian award, in the category of Literature in 1985. This honour was presented to him by Giani Zail Singh, the seventh President of India (1982–1987).

Earlier, in 1979, he received the President's Certificate of Honour from Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, the sixth President of India (1977–1982). In 1974, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, the fifth President of India (1974–1977), presented him the Ghalib Award in recognition of his outstanding scholarly contributions. These accolades reflect the widespread acknowledgment of Professor Askari's remarkable achievements and enduring legacy in the field of historical scholarship.

In 1971, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1919–1980), the Shah of Iran from 1941 to 1979, extended a special invitation to Professor Syed Hasan Askari and his wife to attend the national celebrations marking the 2,500th anniversary of the Persian monarchy. Unfortunately, due to his declining health, Professor Askari was unable to attend. Over the course of his life, he was honored with several prestigious titles and accolades, including the title of Khan Sahib (1943),⁷ Bihar Ratnam (1987),⁸ Komudi Samman Prashastari Patra (1990),⁹ and Tamra Patra (1990).¹⁰ In 1968, the Bihar Research Society recognized his outstanding academic contributions by publishing the Syed Hasan Askari Felicitation Volume in his honor. Edited by Dr. S. V. Sohoni, this special issue of the Journal of the Bihar Research Society included scholarly articles as well as two pieces on Professor Askari by eminent historians and close colleagues: Professor Qeyamuddin Ahmad (1930–1998) and Professor A. L. Srivastava (1899–1973). The volume also featured a comprehensive list of his research publications up to 1968. Similarly, in 2001, the K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute commemorated the centenary of

Professor Askari's birth by publishing a special centenary volume titled *Readings in Indian History (Syed Hasan Askari Centenary Volume)*, edited by Bijoy Kumar Chaudhary. In addition to scholarly contributions from notable historians, the volume included a section of reminiscences, where his peers and students paid homage to his enduring legacy.

To honour the scholarly contributions of Professor Syed Hasan Askari, the Bihar State Archives began organizing an annual memorial lecture in his name, a tradition that has continued since 2013. In 2019, the Archives further commemorated his legacy by naming its central hall after him. That same year, Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia, published an article detailing his biographical sketch and academic contributions. To preserve and promote his academic legacy, Professor Askari's family launched the Professor Syed Hasan Askari Historiography Project. Spearheaded by his grandson, Syed Ahmer Raza, based in Los Angeles, California, the project features a meticulously developed digital archive of Professor Askari's life and writings in both English and Urdu. This online collection, a remarkable academic service, serves not only as a tribute to Professor Askari's scholarship but also as an invaluable resource for researchers and students of history. The Historiography Project, initiated in 2015, involved years of dedicated effort and collaboration with scholars worldwide. In 2019, the website was officially launched, offering comprehensive details about his biography, a complete bibliography of his writings, and summaries (descriptive and informative abstracts) of his works.

1.2 Professional Achievements

Prof. Syed Hasan Askari was a regular contributor to the annual sessions of the Indian Historical Records Commission, the apex body of the Government of India on archival matters, where he was also elected as an Associate Member. Between 1938 and 1958, he actively attended and presented papers at the sessions of the Indian History Congress. Prof. Askari was closely associated with the Regional Records Survey Committee of Bihar, India, and served as its Honorary Secretary. In December 1947, he was elected President of the Medieval India Section during the tenth session of the Indian History Congress held in Bombay. Additionally, he was a Member of the Council of the Bihar Research Society for nearly two decades. He served on the Editorial Board of *Medieval India Quarterly* at Aligarh Muslim University and was a select member of the Governing Body of the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library in Patna, India. Furthermore, he was appointed as a Member of the Committee of Historians by the Government of India. His junior colleague and close friend, Prof. Qeyamuddin Ahmad, writes about him:

“Prof. Askari represents a happy combination of high scholarship and noble character. His knowledge is wide and deep and yet he carries the weight of his scholarship lightly. He is humble, modest and of unassuming manners. He shuns publicity and avoids public functions or formal assignments. His advice and guidance is readily available to anyone seeking it...”¹¹

2. Prof. Hasan Askari's Historical Works: A Brief Thematic Survey

Prof. Hasan Askari developed an interest in historical research around 1936, encouraged and persuaded by Dr. S. C. Sarkar, then Head of the History Department at Patna College. That same year, he began his scholarly writing career. However, from 1946 onwards, he increasingly focused on the study of Sufi literature. Prof. Askari's research spanned a wide range of topics in medieval Indian history, including Sufism, regional history—particularly of Bihar—socio-political developments of the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526), and the Mughal Empire (1526–1858). His encyclopedic knowledge of the regional histories of Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa, combined with his expertise in Persian and use of original primary sources, elevated his stature as an institution unto himself among his contemporaries. In total, he authored more than 200 research works, primarily articles, though he never wrote a book. His scholarly contributions frequently appeared in renowned research journals, including: *Indian History Congress*, *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, *Hindustan Review*, *Historical Quarterly*, *Journal of Indian History*, *Indian Historical Records Commission*, *Journal of Orissa Academy*, *Journal of Bihar Research Society* and *Journal of Historical Research*. *Indian Historical Quarterly*, *Ma'asir-i Urdu*, *Urdu Adab Quarterly*, *Nadim Urdu Journal*, *Patna University Journal*, *Journal of Calcutta Historical Society*, *Journal of Pakistan Historical Society*, *Indo-Iranica Calcutta*, *Current Studies Patna University Journal*, *Sanam Urdu* and *Asian History Congress*. Many of Prof. Hasan Askari's articles were later compiled and published as collected works or editions. The following is a brief discussion and analysis of his contributions:

Prof. Askari's work, *Maktub and Malfuz Literature: As a Source of Socio-political History* (1981), was published by the press of the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library, Patna. The book is divided into three sections: The first section focuses on *Maktubat-i-Sadi*, a collection of 100 letters by Shaykh Yahya Maneri, a Firdawsi Sufi of Bihar. Prof. Askari demonstrates how this Sufi literature serves as an indispensable source for reconstructing the socio-political history of 14th-century Bihar. This work originated from a lecture Prof. Askari delivered in 1976 as part of the Khuda Bakhsh Annual Lecture series, initiated by the library to invite eminent scholars in Arabic, Persian, and Islamic Studies to share their insights. The second section explores the *malfuzat* (discourses) of Firdawsi and Shattari Sufis of Bihar. It presents a detailed case study of the *malfuzat* of Makhdum Sharaf al-Din Yahya, analyzing seven well-known and six lesser-known collections attributed to him. The third and final section examines another genre of Sufi literature, *isharat* (sufi treatises containing mystical subtleties), attributed to Makhdum Sharaf al-Din Yahya of Maneri. Through this work, Prof. Askari argues that Sufi literature, with its diverse genres such as *maktubat*, *malfuzat*, and *isharat*, offers valuable 'alternative' sources for studying the socio-cultural and religious history of medieval India.

The 51-page long monograph titled *Aspects of the Cultural History of Medieval Bihar* (1984) by Prof. Askari explores the synthesizing role of Muslim poets who composed works in Hindi. It highlights the cultural interaction between Sufism and Hinduism, providing valuable insights into the demographic profile of the city of Patna, its various localities, and the etymology of its name.

The first volume of the *Collected Works of Prof. S. H. Askari*, published in 1985, includes several essays on Sufi literature and is dedicated to his student, Paul Jackson. Some of the essays in this collection examine two key genres of Sufi literature: *malfuzat*¹² (compilations of Sufi discourses or table talks held in the *khanqahs* or assemblies of Sufis) and *maktubat* (collections of correspondence or epistles by Sufi masters addressed to their disciples, contemporaries, rulers, administrators, military generals, nobles, and other state functionaries). The work underscores the significance of *malfuzat* as an untapped source of social history. Prof. Askari provides a detailed case study of *Ganj-i-Arshadi*, the *malfuz* collection of the Chishti Sufi Arshad Badr al-Haqq (1637–1701) of Jaunpur. He also highlights the importance of *maktubat* as a credible source for reconstructing medieval history, exemplified through his case study of *Maktubat-i-Sadi* (One Hundred Letters), a collection of 100 letters by Makhdum Sharaf al-Din Ahmad Yahya Maneri (c. 1290–1381), a prominent Sufi of the Firdawsi Silsilah in Bihar. Additionally, the volume includes essays on Zain Badr Arabi, a disciple of Makhdum Sharaf al-Din who compiled his mentor's *malfuzat*, and Malik Ibrahim Bayyu (d. 1353), another eminent Sufi of Bihar.

Prof. Askari's work, *Amir Khusrau as a Historian*, was published in 1988 as the second volume of his *Collected Works*. Dedicated to his close friend, Dr. Z. A. Desai (d. 2002), the book explores the life and contributions of Amir Khusrau as a social historian. It critically evaluates the sources Khusrau utilized for documenting the social history of his time, including *Risail-ul-I'jaz* and *I'jaz-i-Khusravi*. The final chapter delves into Amir Khusrau's contributions to Indian music, reflecting Prof. Askari's personal interest and technical expertise in the field of Indian classical music. This chapter provides detailed insights into musical instruments, various types of *rags* (melodic frameworks), and Khusrau's influence on the development of Indian music.

Prof. Askari devoted significant attention to regional history, particularly the medieval history of Bihar. His work, *Islam and Muslims in Medieval Bihar* (1989), was published as the third volume of his *Collected Works* and dedicated to his student, Ved Parkash. The book traces the origin and development of Sufi traditions and the spread of Islam in medieval Bihar. The book is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the advent and spread of Sufism in medieval Bihar, highlighting the role and contributions of prominent Sufi shaykhs, their *khanqahs* (Sufi dwellings), and *silsilahs* (initiatic chains or spiritual lineages). The second section examines the socio-religious life of Muslims in the Bihar region and evaluates the impact of Islam on Bihar and eastern India during medieval times.

Prof. Askari's another work, *Medieval Bihar: Sultanate and Mughal Period* (1990) offers a description of Muslim rule in medieval Bihar under the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) and Mughal Empire (1526–1858). Spanning from the early 13th century to the 18th century, the book examines the political, economic, and cultural history of the region. A notable focus of the work is the Nuhani Kingdom of Bihar, established by the Afghan noble Bahar Khan, also known as Muhammad Shah Nuhani, around 1523 during the reign of Sultan Ibrahim Lodhi (r. 1517–1526). Prof. Askari highlights the historical significance of the Nuhani Kingdom, which came to an end in 1532 with its annexation by Mughal Emperor Humayun.

Another of Prof. Askari's works, *On Awfi's Jawami-ul Hikayat* (1995) offers an extended introduction to the early 13th-century historical text *Jawami-ul-Hikayat* by Qazi Sadid al-Din Muhammad Awfi (d. 1232–33).¹³ *Jawami-ul-Hikayat* is a Persian collection of anecdotes in prose, and while it holds literary value, it is also of significant historical importance. The introduction provides a brief biography of Awfi, an overview of the contents of *Jawami-ul-Hikayat*, its significance for historiography, and the historical context in which Awfi lived. Prof. Askari concludes with an analysis of the condition and authenticity of the sources used by Awfi in his writings and stories.

In addition to his scholarly works in English, Prof. Askari also wrote in Urdu. He explored the contribution of Muslims to medieval Indian Hindi literature in a work titled *Ahd-i Vustā kī Hindī Adabiyāt men Musalmānon kā Hissah* (The Contribution of Muslims in Hindi Literature of the Medieval Period), published in 1995. Some of his Urdu articles were also included in another collection titled *Hindūstān ke 'Ahd-i Vustā par Maqālāt* (Research Articles on the Medieval Period of Indian History), also published in 1995. The following year, in 1996, another collection of his research articles in Urdu, titled *Maqālāt-i Sayyid Hasan 'Askarī* (Research Articles of Syed Hasan Askari), was compiled by Syed Mohammad Husnain.

Prof. Hasan Askari also contributed to the translation of Persian texts into English. He translated *Shahnama Munawwar Kalam* by Shiv Das Lakhnawi (1980) and Zain Khan's *Tabaqat-i Baburi* (1982) from Persian to English. Another of his translations was *Iqbalnama* by an Anonymous Contemporary Writer (1983). Prof. Askari also edited and wrote an introduction to *Sirat-i Fīrūzshāhī* in 1999, a work authored by an anonymous writer in 1370–71, based on a manuscript found in the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library, Patna. He later translated this work from Persian to English, and it was posthumously published in 2021.

In addition to his other works, Prof. Askari edited *Fort William India House Correspondence, 1787-1791* (1976). He also co-edited *Comprehensive History of Bihar* (1983) with Dr. Qeyamuddin Ahmad. Prof. Askari discovered and introduced *Maktubat-i Sadi* (1995), a facsimile edition of the 8th manuscript written by Makhdum Sharaf al-Din Ahmad Yahya Maneri. As previously noted, this collection consists of one hundred letters written by the Makhdum to his *khulafa* (spiritual descendants), murids (disciples), and other contemporaneous figures, including nobles, provincial governors, civil administrators, and military commanders. Additionally, Prof. Askari compiled and introduced *Tārīkh-i Farrukh'siyar va Avā'il-i 'Ahd-i Muḥammad Shāh, Ma'rūf bih Shāh'namah-i Munavvar Kalām* by Shiv Das Lakhnawi (1974).

An exhaustive description of these articles is not feasible here due to space constraints. However, the research articles written by Prof. Askari can be thematically divided into three main sections:

1. Articles focusing on the political history of the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal India.
2. Articles examining the history and major trends of Islam and Sufism in India.

3. Articles exploring and analyzing various genres of Sufi literature, including *tadhkirahs* (biographical works on the lives of Sufi shaykhs), *malfuzat*, *maktubat*, and others.

What follows is a brief thematic survey of his articles:

The first theme of Prof. Askari's research articles is the political history of Muslim rule in India. He extensively explored various aspects of the political history of the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughal Empire, and several regional kingdoms, with a particular focus on the regional history of Bihar under Muslim rule. Prof. Askari analyzed the religio-cultural patterns and administrative innovations during the Tughlaq Dynasty (r. 1320–1413).¹⁴ He also examined the rise and consolidation of Mughal rule in India, particularly under the reigns of Emperors Akbar (r. 1556–1605), Humayun (r. 1530–1540 and 1555–1556), and Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707), alongside their religio-political policies. Additionally, he delved into the influence of Persian socio-cultural traditions on the Mughal court.¹⁵ Beyond the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire, Prof. Askari also researched regional kingdoms. He wrote about the rise of the Nuhani kingdom in Bihar during the reign of the last Sultan of the Delhi Sultanate, and the eventual decline of the kingdom under Mughal Emperor Humayun. Furthermore, he examined the Sharqi kingdom of Jaunpur, which controlled the Bihar region (along with present-day Uttar Pradesh) during the fifteenth century.

Another key theme in Prof. Askari's research articles is the regional history of Bihar and Kashmir, with a focus on their socio-political aspects. He documented the political history of Bihar during the reigns of Mughal Emperors Akbar, Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658), and Aurangzeb, examining the impact of their imperial policies on the region. Prof. Askari also authored a two-volume history of Kashmir, in which he explored the demographics, socio-cultural traditions, and political trends of Kashmir as a Muslim-majority region from a historical perspective. Additionally, he examined the resistance movement led by Raja Narain Singh, a Rajput landlord from Kutumba (present-day district Aurangabad, Bihar), against the political and economic hegemony of the British East India Company in 1781–82.¹⁶ Raja Narain Singh is regarded as one of the first freedom fighters against British colonial rule.

Prof. Askari made extensive contributions to the study of the history of Sufism in medieval India and its various genres of Sufi literature, with a particular focus on *malfuzat*, *maktubat*, *tadhkirahs*, and *isharat*. He conducted in-depth studies of the Sufi literature produced by the Firdawsi and Shattari Sufi shaykhs of Bihar, with a special emphasis on Makhdum Sharaf al-Din Yahya Maneri.

3. Prof. Hasan Askari as a Historian: An Assessment of His Scholarship

The above discussion clearly demonstrates that Prof. Askari was a prolific author who wholeheartedly devoted himself to research and academia. His contributions to the discipline of history, particularly medieval Indian history, are invaluable and cannot be overstated. In the words of eminent historian, A. L. Srivastava, he was “honest and frank in his opinions about historical events...” and he did not “indulge in adverse criticism of the views and works of others. He disdains joining and party or group of politically-minded scholars of history.... He

has a balanced and contended mind...¹⁷ What follows is a critical analysis and assessment of his scholarship:

3.1 Focus on Regional History

Though Prof. Askari wrote on themes related to all-India history, he paid particular attention to the development of regional history. Regional history focuses on the historical developments occurring in a specific geographical area or region, distinguishing itself from the national perspective in history, which emphasizes a country and often promotes its national narrative.¹⁸ Unlike the centers of political control and government, regional history examines areas on the peripheries or margins of power, bringing the contributions and roles of these regions to the forefront of historical inquiry.

Prof. Askari moved away from traditional national history and embraced the regional history approach in many of his works. He extensively explored the religious, socio-cultural, economic and political history of medieval eastern India, with a special focus on Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa. Hailing from Bihar and spending much of his life in Patna, Prof. Askari investigated the history of this region during various periods when it was under the political influence of different kingdoms and empires.

Medieval Bihar under the Mughals was a hub of international trade and economic prosperity. Additionally, it was a rich center of intellectual and cultural activities. This cultural diversity played a significant role in the evolution of syncretic trends in the socio-cultural fabric of medieval Bihar.

Except for sporadic references in *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* and *Sirat-i Firuz Shahi*, the history of Bihar had long been a neglected subject in historical studies. This overlook was likely due to the lack of accessible sources, with the few available being in Persian. Prof. Askari thoroughly studied these Persian sources and translated them for wider use. He produced comprehensive works on Mughal Bihar, focusing on historical events from the reign of Emperor Babur (r. 1526–1530) to Emperor Farrukhsiyar (r. 1713–1719). He also authored several research articles on the Afghan-Suri tribes and their contributions to the development of Bihar. Prof. Askari began his work by surveying epigraphical sources and traced the history of Bihar over the centuries. He particularly examined the impact of the imperial policies of the Delhi sultans and Mughal emperors on the region. Additionally, he studied the role of renowned personalities from Bihar and their contributions to the region's history. For example, he wrote about Maharaja Kalyan Singh 'Ashiq', a native Mughal governor of Bihar (r. 1798–1838). Prof. Askari's series of works on Bihar culminated in a critical review of Kalyan Singh's *Khulasat ut-Tawarikh*, an important text reflecting local responses to British rule. In addition to his work on Bihar, Prof. Askari also wrote several articles on the history of Kashmir.

3.2 Emphasis on Socio-cultural, Literary, Religious and Intellectual History

It is indisputable that political history has occupied the historiographical center stage for many centuries, and it was one of the branches of history that developed under royal patronage in ancient empires, along with military history.

However, in the last century, historians have shifted their focus from political history to other fields, including social, cultural, literary, religious, and intellectual history. While Prof. Askari, like many of his contemporaries in India and elsewhere, did examine the political history of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire, as well as some personality-specific studies, he departed from the conventional dynastic framework typically used in political history. Prof. Askari, for instance, explored the role of the Mughal navy, and highlighted its weaknesses as a contributing factor in the decline of the Mughal Empire. He also studied the relations of the East India Company with regional kingdoms.

Prof. Askari gave particular attention to the development of largely ignored fields of historical scholarship. His scholarly works illuminated a wide range of themes in socio-cultural, religious, and intellectual history. He not only studied the socio-cultural life of the people in the Bihar region during medieval times but also focused on the cultural history of northern India. His study of Amir Khusrau as both a social historian and a music theorist serves as a testament to this broader approach.

Another area of history that was close to Prof. Askari's heart was the religious life and belief system of the people, with a particular focus on Islam and Sufism. He meticulously explored various genres of Sufi literature in Bihar to document the history of the development and spread of Islam in the region. In doing so, he intertwined themes of intellectual history with his study of the religious aspects of medieval Indian history.

In addition, Prof. Askari also paid considerable attention to literary history, and showed how literary productions such as travelogues and poetic compositions can help construct political, social and cultural history of an era. He also made significant contributions to women's history by writing an article titled *Princess Zebun-Nisa: Facts and Fiction* (1998), which was published posthumously in 2021. The article examines the life and times of Mughal Princess Zebunnisa, the eldest daughter of Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir. A scholar and accomplished poetess in her own right, Zebunnisa's life has often been surrounded by myths. Prof. Askari's work seeks to debunk many of these myths, offering a more authentic account of her life, which has been distorted in some inauthentic historical narratives.

3.3 Contribution to Sufi Studies

Prof. Askari will always be remembered for his significant scholarly contributions to the study of Sufi traditions, particularly in the context of regional medieval Indian history. His works extensively explored the origins and development of Sufism in Bihar and its influence beyond the region. Challenging the common perception of Sufis as apolitical figures, Prof. Askari demonstrated that the Sufis of Bihar actively engaged in contemporary politics. A notable example is Makhdum Sharaf al-Din Maneri, who maintained cordial relations with the Delhi Sultans. Makhdum Maneri corresponded with Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq (r. 1325–1351) and Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq (r. 1351–1388), offering guidance on improving state governance. Prof. Askari further argued that some Sufis also served as sources of legitimacy for early Mughal and Afghan rulers,

highlighting their significant role in shaping political and social structures of the time.

Another prominent theme in Prof. Askari's work was the biographies of Sufis from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. He authored detailed biographies of several prominent Sufis from the Firdausi, Shattari, and Madari *Silsilahs*. These biographies are now widely used by contemporary medieval historians as non-statist sources for constructing the socio-cultural history of these regions. In addition, he highlighted the Sufis' message of tolerance and accommodation, which significantly contributed to the peaceful coexistence of Hindus and Muslims. Additionally, he conducted an in-depth study of Sufi literature, uncovering rare insights into the cultural life and religious conditions of the time, particularly the syncretic trends and harmonious interactions between different faiths. His nuanced exploration of the diverse genres of Sufi literature is further elaborated in the next section.

3.4 Use of Unconventional Historical Sources

Before analyzing the sources studied and consulted by Prof. Askari for his historical research, it is essential to address the broader issues surrounding sources in medieval Indian studies. The sources for medieval Indian history can be broadly categorized into two main types: statist historiographical sources and non-statist accounts. The statist sources, primarily court chronicles, were authored by historians associated with royal courts, often aiming to please the rulers. These sources, marred by partiality, typically lack neutrality and a systematic analysis of historical developments. They reflect a statist discourse, promoting official narratives or the royal perspective of events. Consequently, these court-centric accounts focus predominantly on the political, administrative, and military history of medieval India, while neglecting religious, social, cultural, and intellectual dimensions. Furthermore, these works represent the elite worldview, with little to no reference to the lives of common people. This reductionist approach confines the history of an entire era to stories of kings, their courts, political intrigues, betrayals, rebellions, and conquests. As a result, the richness and diversity of the period's broader historical context remain largely unexamined in these accounts.

In contrast to the aforementioned statist sources, the varied genres of Sufi literature offer a non-elitist perspective on the politics, economy, society, and religion of medieval India. The insider approach of Sufi literature sheds light on religious traditions, belief systems, social life, and cultural patterns, providing a more grounded and inclusive view of medieval Indian society. However, a significant historiographical gap exists between the outsider perspective of statist sources and the insider approach of non-statist accounts, such as Sufi literature. Ignoring either of these two approaches or sources results in an incomplete and imbalanced portrayal of medieval Indian society. A truly holistic understanding requires the integration of both perspectives.¹⁹

Returning to Prof. Askari, he skillfully utilized both conventional historiographical sources and unconventional Sufi literature, with a particular emphasis on the latter. This focus stemmed from the fact that Sufi literature had largely been overlooked by historians. While writing political history, he placed special attention on the religious and socio-cultural history of medieval India, for

which the study of Sufi literature proved indispensable. Prof. Askari consulted rare and lesser-known original Indo-Persian sources, often in the form of manuscripts preserved in libraries or private collections. Notably, his discovery of a manuscript of Mulla Daud's *Chandayan*—a 14th-century Sufi text adorned with rare paintings—in the *khanqah* of Maner Sharif, received widespread acclaim. In particular, he relied heavily on the vast repository of oriental manuscripts housed in the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library at Bankipur, Patna, Bihar.²⁰ This esteemed library holds extensive collections of manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu, as well as in regional languages, making it an invaluable resource for his research.

Prof. Askari spent a significant amount of time at the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, as he also resided in Patna. He extensively consulted its collection and translated several unique Persian manuscripts into English, shedding light on various aspects of medieval Indian history. The Sufi literature he studied spanned diverse genres, including *malfuzat*, *maktubat*, *diwans* (collections of poetry), *isharat*, and philosophical treatises. Prof. Askari was among the pioneering historians who focused on these genres of Sufi literature produced in a peripheral region, most of which were composed in Persian. His work also underscored his remarkable proficiency in the Persian language.

Here it seems pertinent to briefly discuss the significance of Sufi literature and its varied genres for historiographical purpose. Prof. Askari underscored the need to utilize the *malfiz* literature produced in medieval India in order to reconstruct the history of that era. In his words, *malfizat* are the “dialogical compendiums indicative of the interchange and decisions on a variety of subjects, of course, not treated necessarily in all their fullness. They are discursive rather than compact...” Prof. Askari also claimed that the *malfizat* and *maktubat* of Makhdum Sharaf al-Din exceeded those of other Sufis in India and elsewhere.

It is pertinent to briefly discuss the significance of Sufi literature and its varied genres for historiographical purposes.²¹ Prof. Askari emphasized the importance of utilizing *malfiz* literature produced in medieval India to reconstruct the history of that era. In his words, *malfizat* are “dialogical compendiums indicative of the interchange and decisions on a variety of subjects, of course, not treated necessarily in all their fullness. They are discursive rather than compact...”²² Prof. Askari also highlighted that the *malfizat* and *maktubat* of Makhdum Sharaf al-Din surpassed those of other Sufis in India and beyond, offering an unparalleled resource for understanding the socio-cultural and intellectual dynamics of the time.²³

In one of his detailed articles on the significance of Sufi literature, Prof. Askari advocated for the use of its varied genres as alternative non-statist source material to construct the socio-cultural history of medieval India. He rejected the notion that Sufi literature merely documents the renunciation and spiritual pursuits of Sufis. Prof. Askari argued that *malfizat* and *maktubat* were not limited to fanciful accounts of spiritual tales and miraculous feats. Instead, they provide invaluable insights into the socio-political contexts of their time, revealing the active involvement of Sufis in temporal and even political affairs aimed at contributing to the ‘good of the people’.²⁴

Prof. Askari's friend and junior contemporary, Z. A. Desai, emphasized that the varied genres of Sufi literature are "indispensable primary sources" for reconstructing the history of medieval India. He argued that these sources often surpass court chronicles, which present a narrow and limited view of history. Referring specifically to *malfuz* literature concerning the history of medieval Gujarat, Desai noted that these texts contain "valuable material about the life of the people right from royalty, nobility, and saintly establishments down to traders, artisans, peasants, soldiers, and the lower strata of society."²⁵ In addition to providing a comprehensive picture of social and cultural life, these sources also offer critical insights into political and administrative history. Desai concluded that

... these works help conjure up a medieval rural world in all its fullness. Apart from the spiritual and religious personalities, and discussions on mystic and ethical topics, we come to know of social customs, religious ceremonies, manners, prejudices and predilections, modes of behaviour and address, food- and dress-habits, games and pastimes, prevalent among different sections of society.²⁶

In particular, *malfuz* literature serves as an important source for reconstructing the history of medieval India, as it provides valuable information about the religious, social, and cultural life of that period, areas in which official sources are often silent.²⁷ K. A. Nizami, another prominent medievalist historian from Aligarh, observes:

Malfuz writing is one of the greatest literary achievements of medieval Hind-Pakistan. Through these records of conversations we can have a glimpse of the medieval society in all its fullness, if not in all its perfection—the moods and tensions of the common man, the inner yearnings of his soul, the religious thought at its higher and lower levels, the popular customs and above all the problems of the people.²⁸

According to Nizami, these "alternative" sources of history can serve "both as a corrective of the impressions created by the court chronicles and as a source of information for the religious, cultural and literary movements of the period."²⁹

Another effective source for understanding the socio-political history of medieval India is *maktubat*, or letters often written by men of influence, state officials, and renowned Sufis to their subjects and disciples. These letters served as a means of offering counsel or seeking guidance. As a genre of Sufi literature, *maktubat* allowed Sufis to propagate their views and teachings to those associated with them. The *maktubat* of Sufis offer an alternative source of history, contrasting with court histories that provide the official version of events. They are invaluable for assessing the socio-cultural and intellectual climate of the past. According to Green, *maktubat* functioned as a "paper technology," offering a precise record of Sufi masters' thoughts and actions.³⁰ Prof. Askari utilized Sufi *maktubat* to present the words of the Sufis, which were meant to inspire their followers. He effectively adapted the literary style of this genre to produce a socio-political history of medieval India. In doing so, he laid the foundation for a historiographical tradition in South Asia that echoed earlier practices in Central Asia and Iran, where Sufi literature had been employed to recreate the socio-cultural aspects of history.

3.5 Historical Methods and Approach in Prof. Askari's Works

Prof. Hasan Askari's historical works provide ample evidence that he employed a variety of methods and techniques in his scholarly research. He often used empirical, descriptive, and exploratory approaches, particularly when investigating uncharted areas of history, but he seamlessly integrated these with a highly analytical approach. One of Prof. Askari's greatest contributions as a historian was his introduction of manuscript studies, with a specific focus on regional Sufi literature, to reconstruct the social, cultural, religious, and intellectual life of medieval India. Furthermore, he examined Sufi manuscripts through the lens of political and administrative history. A notable example is his study of the early eighteenth-century work *Mirat-ul-Mulk* by the Chishti Sufi Tajuddin. Prof. Askari analyzed its contents to draw insights on the later Mughal administration, showcasing his ability to combine religious literature with political history.³¹

Manuscript studies, across any language, culture, and historiographical tradition, require careful verification of their authenticity. Source criticism, which involves evaluating the authenticity and authority of historical sources, becomes particularly challenging when dealing with manuscripts. Prof. Askari dedicated significant effort to locating and identifying rare, centuries-old Persian manuscripts in vast collections and archives. These manuscripts were often in deteriorated conditions due to age and weather-related damage. As such, handling these manuscripts with the utmost care was essential. Prof. Askari ensured their preservation while meticulously assessing the value of their contents.

By employing both internal and external criticism, Prof. Askari meticulously evaluated the qualities of manuscripts, such as their validity, reliability, authenticity, and relevance to the subject at hand. He conducted a critical study of the authorship of these manuscripts, carefully assessing the trustworthiness of their authors. Additionally, he performed a detailed textual analysis, weighing the historical data found in the Sufi sources. Through comparative analysis of multiple copies of the same text found in various libraries and collections across India, Prof. Askari sought to ascertain their authenticity. He also explored many seminal and rare manuscripts, many of which were later added to the Khuda Bakhsh Library Collection. One such exploration was the *Diwan* of the Mughal Emperor Humayun. His exceptional command over Persian manuscripts and language was widely recognized, as noted by Father Paul Jackson, a scholar of Sufism and his doctoral student, who opined:

“I thought it would be possible to skim through the Persian manuscripts and pick out the important features of Maneri's teachings. To my utter consternation, I could scarcely even read the manuscripts. It was in this situation that Askari Saheb came to my rescue.”³²

In addition to documentary sources, Prof. Askari also drew upon non-documentary sources, specifically the auxiliary branches of history, such as numismatics (the study of ancient and medieval coins) and epigraphy (the study of inscriptions from ancient or medieval times). He deciphered many rare coins and inscriptions of historical significance. This clearly demonstrates his broad interest and expertise in these sub-fields of history. Prof. Askari also made significant

contributions to women's history, particularly through his study of the life of the accomplished Mughal princess Zebunnisa. His work offers a revisionist perspective, debunking the myths surrounding the royal princess. While Prof. Askari primarily focused on medieval Indian history, some of his works also address the early colonial period of British India.

Prof. Askari's contribution as a medieval historian is highly commendable, as his scholarly works in both Urdu and English cover a wide range of topics related to medieval Indian history. However, two themes stand out as particularly prominent in his research: medieval Bihar and its Sufis, and the broader Sufi tradition. These were areas he consistently and comprehensively explored throughout his career. In addition to these two main themes, Prof. Askari's research encompassed several other key areas, including the political history of India, particularly in Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa; hagiographies of prominent Sufis, their epistles and discourses; and the evaluation of historical sources, along with the discovery of new texts in the form of manuscripts. He also examined early specimens of Urdu/Hindi language, produced translations, edited works on the Mughal Empire, and contributed various miscellaneous pieces, including descriptions of notable personalities and monuments. The diversity of his research interests and areas of expertise highlights the immense contribution Prof. Askari made to the study of medieval Indian history.

3.6 Critical Study and Textual Analysis of Historical Sources

Prof. Askari also critically analyzed several important works, including Hasan Nizami's *Taj al-Ma'asir*, Ikhtisan Dehlavi's *Basatin al-Uns*, Amir Khusrau's *Ejaz-e Khusrawi*, Muhammad Kabir's *Afsana-i Shahan* and Karam Ali's *Muzaffar Namah*. These works provide valuable insights into the history of medieval India, spanning the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries. Among them, three books are particularly rare and invaluable sources for the history of Bihar:

1. *Basatin al-Uns* offers first-hand information on the military campaigns of Sultan Ghiyath al-Din Tughlaq (r. 1320–1325) in the Tirhut region of Bihar.
2. *Afsana-i Shahan* provides an account of the Afghan rulers and chiefs of Bihar.
3. *Muzaffar Namah* covers the history of Bihar during the time it was under the control of Nawab Alivardi Khan (d. 1756), up to the year 1772.

3.7 Translation of Historical Sources

In addition to his contributions to history-writing, Prof. Askari also translated several important works on the Mughal Empire from Persian to English. Some of his translations and edited works include the early eighteenth-century text *Shahnamah Munawwar Kalam* by Shiv Das Lakhnawi, *Iqbalnamah* (which deals with the reign of Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar) by an anonymous author, and an English translation of *Tabaqat-i Baburi* by Zain al-Din. All three of these translations provide valuable first-hand information about the later Mughal period. Prof. Askari also translated *Sirat-i Firuz Shahi*, a rare work on the reign of Sultan Firuz Shah Tughlaq. This text offers unique insights into the Sultan's interests in

history, theology, politics, ethics, astronomy, and law. It is also a key source for understanding his administrative policies, economic reforms, and political decision-making.

4. Academic Legacy of Prof. Askari

As one of the pioneers in studying Sufi literature for historiographical purposes, Prof. Askari left a lasting legacy that has been followed by many scholars. His junior contemporaries in India who continued his work include several prominent figures:

1. Ziauddin Abdul Hayy Desai, popularly known as Z. A. Desai (b. 1925–d. 2002), a notable epigraphist from Gujarat. He was also a renowned architectural historian and a scholar of Indo-Persian literature. Desai served in the Archaeological Survey of India and focused on historical research from a regional perspective, particularly in Gujarat.
2. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, known as K. A. Nizami (b. 1925–d. 1997), an esteemed historian and diplomat from Aligarh, who extensively worked on Sufis and Sufi literature, particularly of the Chishti *Silsilah*.
3. Nisar Ahmed Faruqi (b. 1934–d. 2004), former Professor and Head of the Arabic Department, University of Delhi, and notable scholar of Islam and Sufism, also worked on sufi literature.

In Pakistan, this academic tradition was continued by two eminent historians:

1. Prof. Riazul Islam (b. 1919–d. 2007) from the University of Karachi, who utilized sufi literature for history-writing of medieval South Asia.³³
2. Prof. Muhammad Aslam (b. 1932–d. 1998) from the University of the Punjab, Lahore, who worked on the historical significance of *malfuz* literature.³⁴

Prof. Askari taught and trained thousands of students. Among his most prominent students were:³⁵

1. Dr. Paul Jackson (d. 2020; a renowned scholar of Islam and Muslim-Christian relations)
2. Dr. P. N. Ojha (Professor and Former Director of K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna)
3. Dr. Ved Parkash (Professor of History, Guru Gobind Singh College, Patna)
4. Dr. Qeyamuddin Ahmad (d. 1998; Former Professor of History, Patna University)
5. Dr. Imtiaz Ahmad (Former Director of Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library).
6. Vishwanath Prasad Varma (d. 2005; Former Professor and Head of Political Science Department, Patna University)
7. Rajiva Nain Prasad (Former Professor and Head of History Department, Magadh University, Bodh Gaya/Bihar)

8. Surendra Gopal (d. 2022; Professor of History, Patna College)
9. Dr Jagadish Narayan Sarkar (Former Professor and Head of History Department, Jadavpur University, Kolkata)
10. Syed Mohammad Husnain (Former Professor and Head of Urdu Department, Magadh University, Bodh Gaya/Bihar)

Conclusion

In the final analysis, Prof. Syed Hasan Askari's scholarly contributions and groundbreaking writings have made a significant impact on the discipline of history and historical research on medieval India, particularly with a focus on Bihar. As a historian, he endeavored to remain as objective and impartial as possible in his approach and presentation of historical facts. He refrained from analyzing historical events through the popular lenses of 'communalist' or 'Marxist' perspectives, opting instead for a balanced approach in reading and interpreting historical developments. This impartial stance is highly commendable. The renowned historian Prof. Srivastava acknowledged that some of his research papers "solved many a knotty problem of Medieval Indian history."³⁶ Bijoy Kumar Chaudhary regarded him as "one of the tallest figures in the field of medieval Indian history."³⁷ In the words of Qeyamuddin Ahmad, Prof. Askari was one of the "greatest historians [of Bihar], who personified a rare blend of high scholarship, warm humanity, and perfect gentlemanliness."³⁸

Prof. Askari's research on medieval Bihar and Sufism provides a fresh perspective with profound insights into the complexities of the past. His approach to historical data, drawn from rare source material, showcases his acumen and depth of perception. By emphasizing the significance of Sufi literature as an alternative source of history, he laid the foundation for a non-statist discourse in medieval Indian historical studies. With remarkable ingenuity, he combined a range of research methods, including source criticism, internal and external criticism, textual analysis, and empirical, exploratory, and analytical approaches. His exceptional command of the Persian language enabled him to thoroughly examine and study the original Persian manuscripts of the medieval period. His wide-ranging interests in history are also reflected in his expertise in musicology, numismatics, and epigraphy. As a dedicated teacher, Prof. Askari inspired and benefited generations of students. His professional contributions were fittingly recognized by both the government and academic institutions. He will always be remembered as one of the finest historians of medieval India in the twentieth century.

Notes & References

¹ This famous high school was established in 1839. Notable alumni of the school include the first president of India, Rajendra Prasad who was in office from 1952 to 1962.

² Muzaffarpur is a city located in the Muzaffarpur District in the Tirhut region of the state of Bihar. Rajendra Prasad, the first president of India, served as a professor of English in Langhat Singh College.

³ Patna University was the first university established in the province/state in 1917.

⁴ The Magadh University was established in 1962 in the historic religious site of Bodhgaya, which is a sacred site for the Buddhists.

⁵ For details on his biography see, Prof. Dr. Hannah Lord Archambault (Ashfield, Oregon, USA) and Syed Ahmer Raza, “Professor Syed Hasan Askari Historiography Project,” Los Angeles, California, USA. <https://www.professorsyedhasanaskari.com/biography>.

⁶ A. L. Srivastava, “Professor S. H. Askari as I Know Him,” in Prof. Syed Hasan Askari Felicitation Volume, ed. S. V. Sohoni, The Journal of the Bihar Research Society, Patna (Special Issue 1968), pp. v-vi.

⁷ Prof. Syed Hasan Askari was awarded the title of “Khan Sahib” by the British Indian Government in 1943. According to various sources, there were some communal disturbances among the student in 1942 and the Patna University Senate was likely to be burnt. Prof. Askari offered himself as member of faculty to guard this building along with law enforcement officials and remained in the Patna University for three continuous days. There was no report of loss of life and destruction of building.

⁸ Bihar Ratna was awarded to Prof. Askari for exceptional service towards advancement of Literature in recognition of Public Service of the highest order in 1987. Bihar Ratna is the highest civilian honour in the state of Bihar.

⁹ Komudi Samman Prashastari Patra was awarded to Prof. Syed Hasan Askari at Komudi Mahotsava in 1990.

¹⁰ Tamra Patra was awarded by Bihar Purvaid Parishad to Prof. Askari in 1990.

¹¹ Qeyamuddin Ahmad, “Prof. Syed Hasan Askari: A Brief Biographical Sketch,” in Prof. Syed Hasan Askari Felicitation Volume, p. iv.

¹² The term malfuzat is the plural of malfuz, which literally means ‘words spoken.’ As a genre of sufi literature, it originated in the twelfth century in the Persianate world, but it was introduced in South Asia during the fourteenth-century. For details, see Amina Steinfelds, “His Master’s Voice: The Genre of Malfūzāt in South Asian Sufism,” *History of Religions*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (August 2004), pp. 56-69.

¹³ For details, see J. Matīnī, “ ‘Awfī, Sadīd-Al-Dīn,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. III, Fasc. 2 (2011), pp. 117-18.

¹⁴ For more information, see S. H. Askari. “The rise and fall of Muhammad bin Tughlaq’ by Agha Mahdi Husain (review)” in *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Vol. XXV (1939), pp.72-76. See also, Syed Husain Askari. “Bihar in the First Quarter of the 18th Century,” in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 5 (1941), pp. 394-405.

¹⁵ S. H. Askari. “Humayun Badshah by S. K. Banerji [review]” in *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Studies*, Vol XXV, Pt. I, (1939), pp. 68-71. See also, S.H. Askari. “Bihar in the Time of Akbar”, *Journal of the Calcutta Historical Society*, Vol. 59 & 60, (1940 & 1941).

¹⁶ For more detailed discussion on it see, Syed Hasan Askari, “Some Unpublished Letters of Raja Ramnarain Relating to Shah Alam’s Invasions of Bihar,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 3 (1939), pp. 979-1001.

¹⁷ Srivastava, “Professor S. H. Askari as I Know Him,” pp. vi, vii-viii.

¹⁸ Sun Jie Sun Jinghao, “The Regional History Approach as Methodology,” *Journal of Zhejiang University*, 1/6 (2015), p. 35.

¹⁹ For some discussion on sources on medieval India see, Tanvir Anjum, *Chishti Sufis in the Sultanate of Delhi 1190-1400: From Restrained Indifference to Calculated Defiance* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 17-26.

²⁰ Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library at Bankipur, Patna was established by Khan Bahadur Khuda Bakhsh (d. 1908) in 1891, which was based on the personal collection of his father, Muhammad Bakhsh. The library was inaugurated by Sir Charles Alfred Elliott, the then Governor of Bengal.

²¹ For a discussion on the importance of sufi literature for historiographical purpose, see Zafar Mohyuddin and Sarfraz Hussain Ansari, "Sufi Literature: A Significant Source for Social History of Medieval India," *Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol. VII. No. II (Jul-Dec 2021), pp. 307-17.

²² Syed Hasan Askari, *Maktub and Malfuz Literature: As a Source of Socio-political History* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library, 1981), p. 32.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ For details see, Syed Hasan Askari. "Malfuzat and Maktubats of a 14th century Sufi Saint of Bihar" in *Journal of the Bihar Research Society*, Vol. XXXIV(III) (1948), pp. 87-103.

²⁵ Ziyauddin A. Desai, "Persian Sources of the Social and Cultural History of Medieval Gujrat", in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, eds. Muzaffar Alam, Françoise 'Nalini' Delvoe and Marc Gaborieau (New Delhi: Manohar for Centre de Sciences Humaines, 2000), pp. 394, 399.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 400.

²⁷ Muhammad Aslam, *Malfuzati Adab ki Tarikhi Ahammiyyat* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1995), see Introduction, pp. 9-16.

²⁸ K. A. Nizami, *On Sources and Source Material (Being Volume One of Historical Studies—Indian and Islamic)* (Delhi: Idarah-'i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1995), p. 69.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 167.

³⁰ Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), p. 110.

³¹ Syed Hasan Askari, "Mirat-ul-Mulk: A Contemporary Work Containing Reflections on Later Mughal Administration," *Indica*, The Indian Historical Research Institute (Silver Jubilee Commemorative Volume), (1953), pp. 27-37.

³² *Readings in Indian History, (Syed Hasan Askari Centenary Volume)* ed. Bijoy Kumar Choudhary (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 2001), p. 43.

³³ Riazul Islam, *Sufism in South Asia: Impact on Fourteenth Century Muslim Society* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³⁴ Aslam, *Malfuzati Adab ki Tarikhi Ahammiyyat*. The book offers a study of 29 *malfuzat* of medieval and early modern South Asia.

³⁵ Prof. Askari had thousands of students, acquaintances, and connections. The given list is not exhaustive at all. Owing to limitations of space, only a few prominent ones are mentioned. If the name of any important student is omitted, it is unintentional.

³⁶ Srivastava, "Professor S. H. Askari as I Know Him," p. vii.

³⁷ *Readings in Indian History (Syed Hasan Askari Centenary Volume)*, p. i.

³⁸ Qeyamuddin Ahmad, "Syed Hasan Askari—A Profile", in *Readings in Indian History (Syed Hasan Askari Centenary Volume)*, p. 11.