



Full Length Research Article

**THE DECLINE OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE AND THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL AWARENESS:
GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES**

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 30th January, 2014
Received in revised form
28th February, 2014
Accepted 15th March, 2014
Published online 23rd April, 2014

Key words:

18th century,
Later Mughals,
Enlightenment,
Ashobname

ABSTRACT

The Enlightenment is much more than the historical period. It helps us to understand the distant conclusions towards which certain assumptions lead; and to decide whether or not, that is where we want to go. Enlightenment shaped out past and present. It is the story of man's first attempt to come to grips with the contemporary world and all its unsolved problems. Enlightenment was not about beliefs or opinion but an *attitude of mind*; about the nature and man's place in it, could be understood in terms of general laws that were applicable to everything that existed. This makes Enlightenment an international and trans-regional reality. Although, its texts were translated and circulated not only in Europe but in other regions like South Asia but when shared conceptions refracted through the prism of individual socio-cultural settings, it was bound to create the different patterns though essentially keeping the same scheme.

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INTRODUCTION

Many of the people who lived in the Western Europe in the first quarter of the 18th century felt that the things were changing for the better in all kind of ways as life was becoming more secure, well provided and predictable. The period of continuous warfare came to an end by 1715 and was followed by relative peace. The population increased and with discovery of the new world, the horizon of the Europeans extended to enlarge the entire globe. This operated at all kind of levels. The educated began to understand that different cultures had validity of their own. The less intellectual started to drink tea and coffee and the emergence of coffee houses became new centers of sociability or social sites. With these changes came the change in the mental climate. The dark and enclosed world was now challenged by a new vision that opened everything out in space and time. Scientists had shown the universe to be far wider than anyone had previously expected. The scientific progress of the 17th century was been probably self generating and often inaccessible to common people but its result was to transform educated men's perception of the world in general. Usually the new vision is ascribed to Newton but the rationalism of Rene Descartes and empiricism of Francis Bacon had created the mental attitude

and thus paved the way for the laws of Newton. Throughout the 18th century, Sir Isaac Newton was seen as the symbol of a new conception of the universe, as a rational system whose laws were accessible to humanity through science rather than through religious revelation. Most of the people believed that the world is governed by universal laws but is still the divine creation. Human intelligence by deduction and observation could understand the nature of the plan that divine wisdom and benevolence had created for human happiness¹.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In purely practical terms the Enlightenment had lasting victories to its credit. People stopped burning of witches, persecution of heretics, serfdom was abolished and the movement for the abolition of slave trade had been launched. Judicial torture had been abolished in France, Austria and Prussia and the death penalty was coming under attack. One cannot divorce the Enlightenment and its attitude from the take of industrialization which with all its tragedies and destruction was eventually to provide the ordinary people with the means to live comfortable lives. In the realms of idea too Enlightenment was the gateway to the modern world. It marked the transition from a world in which one took what was given, in terms of religion, politics and way of life to a world where man was seen as the architect of his own destiny. With the American declaration of independence and the declaration of the rights of Man, the concept of the universal

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rights replaced the divine right, social hierarchy and aristocratic honor. The Enlightenment is much more than the historical period. It helps us to understand the distant conclusions towards which the certain assumptions lead and to decide whether or not that is where we want to go. Enlightenment shaped out past and present and the story of man's first attempt to come to grips with the contemporary world and all its unsolved problems. The Enlightenment originated in the "natural order" of the scientists was reflected and broadened by speculation of contemporary philosophers like Descartes, Hobbs, Spinoza, Locke and Hume. In the early 17th century, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke set forth ideas that became key to Enlightenment. Hobbes argued that people were selfish, cruel and greedy. They should be controlled by a powerful government and absolute monarchy can provide orderly society. Lock had more optimistic views and believed that people were basically reasonable and moral. They have certain "natural rights", like right to life, liberty and property. All governments are formed to protect these natural rights and can be overthrown if they fail in purpose. He rejected absolute monarchy. Lock's empirical study of the human mind and the use of newly available anthropological evidence, showed that values were not universal.

This led him to deny the existence of innate ideas and he propounded that human mind is "tabula rasa" the blank slate. All ideas, he thought were the product of sensation and reflection, which implied that man in different environments will come to different conclusions. What they called "good" or "bad" was merely their way of referring to pleasure and pain. Kant writes, "Enlightenment is humanity's departure from self imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's intellect without the guidance of the other. This immaturity is self imposed, when its cause is not lack of intelligence but a failure of determination and courage to think without the guidance of someone else. Dare to Know...this then is the slogan of Enlightenment". The perennial concern of enlightenment was to apply reason or philosophy to public life, in politics, economics and sociology. In each of these fields it developed in different ways, it also meant different things to people in different situation. To reforming rulers and their ministers, it signified practical efficiency, to educated people it implied a more secular attitude to life, it meant a more purified religion to some, to others it was almost an intellectual game.

The common people though might still believe in the witches but were not allowed to burn them anymore. The men of the enlightenment approached the problem of politics with same tendency to react against past and against each other. Enlightenment consigned much of the past philosophies of Bossuet and others to dustbin. It began by affirming the autonomy of politics. Religious belief was essentially private matter, respected by the state and perhaps useful in appropriate habits among the unenlightened, but the church as a corporate body had no right to intrude in the political affairs of a secular commonwealth. Politics, of course was a science. The laws that must regulate civil society if properly understood by the people, who were beginning to regard themselves as citizens of a commonwealth rather than as subjects in a realm, would enable them to operate the system with maximum efficiency. Traditionally the state policy had always been a confidential business that was not for the ordinary people to applaud or

criticize. In the new atmosphere both the governments and their critics appealed to what they were beginning to call 'public opinion', in order to disarm the opposition. By the end of the ancien regime in France, ministers and their opponents were hiring writers to acclaim or denounce each others policies and to influence business confidence, as reflected on the stock exchange. The impact of enlightenment, Industrial revolution and the emergence of bourgeoisie public sphere in Europe was not possible without the presence of social sites as described by Jurgen Habermas like coffee houses in England, Salons in France and *tischgesellschaften* in Germany. With the emergence of Public sphere in 18th century Europe, the sphere of state authority was monitored, public sphere interacted with private sphere and met with the bourgeoisie at social sites where the issues were discussed, negotiated and opinion was formed and communicated to the state. However in the pre colonial India, a form of publicity is assigned that is compatible with Middle Ages in Europe.

It is compared with representative publicness, as Habermas clarifies that in representative publicness the public sphere was nonexistent, and the public domain was appropriated by the ruling powers for the display of their status, dignity and authorityⁱⁱ. But there seems to be some exaggeration on the part of Habermas when he contrasted between 'the publicity of representation' and 'public sphere'. It would be more appropriate to characterize the publicity in pre colonial period as the public sphere rather than as the 'representative publicness'.ⁱⁱⁱ In 18th century India there was emergence of a middle class or 'corporate group'^{iv} that had some of the qualities of European Bourgeois. The public sphere is an area in social life where individuals can come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action. It is discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and where possible to reach a common judgment, this public sphere can be seen as a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk and a realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed. The public sphere mediates between the 'private sphere' and the 'sphere of public authority' the public sphere crossed over both these realms and through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of the society.

Although, the courtly rituals and ostentatious displays at public places was part of Mughal sovereignty^v, but the public space was not exclusively controlled by the ruling powers. The common people also used the same space to constrain power. Farhat Hasan has used the Friday prayers and recitation of *Khutba* as a ritualistic communication, through which the state conveyed its authority in civil society through *Khutba*, civil society communicated its condition of acceptance of that by preventing its recitation when these conditions failed^{vi}. There were other places also that are compatible with social sites like the *khanqahs* of the Sufi saints, streets and market place and for 18th century we get the evidence that in the market place there was a place that was reserved for speeches. The social sites like Friday prayers and *khanqahs* (hospices) were bound to have religious overtones about various public concern issues. This was one of the reasons that public sphere in India could never achieve the secular nature of the European Public sphere and democracy was still a very farfetched idea. A

literary genre in Urdu in the 18th century that is known as *Shahr Ashob* or *Ashobname* is another *social site* from where emerged 'public sphere'. The scholars and poets moved from the discussion of art and literature to touch upon the political domain. In *Ashobname* the poet made a critique of the prevailing political and social situation. They raised the issues of inefficiency and advised for better governance. The use of Urdu widened the scope of *Ashobname*. The emergence of *ashobname* demonstrates the extent to which the 'public sphere' in the world of letters was enmeshed with the 'political public sphere'. These *ashobname* had shared subject and the common attitude of lament towards the socio economic and political crisis but in a literary form that relied on contemporary standards of literary aesthetics. Scholars like, Mir Taqi Mir, Sauda, Qaim Chandpuri and Shah Waliullah, were offering detailed analysis of the prevailing social and political conditions and were making pointed criticism of the Mughal state policies. Mir Taqi Mir wrote a poem 'Masnavi-i-Kibz', condemning the Mughal officials for being dishonest and inefficient. Mir also wrote *Mukhammus dar hal-i-lashkar* and *Mukhammus dar shahr-i-gufta*. Sauda wrote *Mukhammus-i-shahr-i-ashob*, *Qasida-i-Shahr-i-ashob* and *Qasida-i-tazhik-i-rozga*^{viii}. Another famous *Ashobname* is Qaim Chandpuri's *Mukhammus dar ahwal-i-Delhi*. Ali Hasrat of Lucknow and Nazir Akbarabadi are other important poets who wrote *Ashobname*.

The poets have given eye witness accounts of the prevailing condition of general unemployment and poverty of the masses, covering all the sections of society. After examining the plight of *mu'azzam* (the pronouncer of *azaan*), the *khatib* (the reader of the *khutba*), *wai'z* (sermon deliverer) *musahib* (companions of the nobles) the *tabib* (medical practitioner) the *tajir* (merchant), the *kisan* (peasants), the *wakil*. *Shair* (poet), and the sheikh (mystic) and the wretched condition of the *mansabdar*, Sauda concluded that, "I have no more patience to listen to you any further; there is no heart which has not been affected by grief; none is here whose eyes are not filled with tears, Except this, there is no other answer to what you have said. Do not say too much, this is a period of its own kind."^{viii}

Another poet Rasik Azimabadi, has given an account of the poverty of the different professional classes of society in Bihar, Bengal and Orissa in *Masnavi shahr ashob*. He has also described the condition of the Kings, *wazirs*, nobles and rich men who had become wretched and deplorable. He adds that *mashaikh* too were victims of poverty and the respect that was shown to them earlier and their sermons had become a story of the past. He adds that they passed their days in starvation and they had even forgotten to recite *wazifa*. He says that Patna, which was once a populous city, and a kind of magical and wonderful city had lost its glory and affluence due to corruption^{ix}. The poets who depended on the patronage of the kings and nobles for their livelihood were hard hit due to the prevailing conditions. Mir, Sauda and other poets of the 18th century those have composed *shahr ashob* gives an account of not their personal hardship but highlights the prevailing condition of general poverty. In *mukhammus* and *musaddas* (poems of five lines and six lines stanzas) form of poetic compositions there is a graphic description of the society and culture of the period. Saudas, *Mukhammas dar hajvi shaikhji* contains information regarding marriage rituals. Another

Mukhammus dar hajv-i-ahliya-i-Zahik, gives an account of the wife of Mir Zahik and the effects of evil spirit of Sheikh Saddu, which took her in its grip and the rituals performed to exercise it. In *mukhammus dar hajv-i-Maulana Nudrat Kashmiri*, Sauda gives an account of the *maulvi* and criticizes the morality of his daughter according to 18th century standards^x. In *Mukhammus dar-i-halat-i-gharaib*, Sauda describes the prevailing poverty in the military camp and shows the soldiers discussing whether or not the eating of the crow was permissible. From a critical study of some other *mukhammus*, it appears that a radical change was taking place in the social structure of the Muslim community with the decline of the Mughal Empire. The feudal set up of the society was such that it was not possible for one class of people to cross over to other. But things changed with the decline of the Mughal Empire. Shah Hatim who was an eyewitness of those changes says that the greatest tragedy of the age was that the kings have become like beggars and the beggars have become crown wearers. Sauda also says that the nobles who used to employ soldiers have suffered economic ruin because they did not realize any money from their *jagirs* as it is occupied by the enemies of the state. The peasants do not pay land revenue and nobles cannot control them. Old nobles have retired from public life and if anyone talked to them about the political affairs of the country they turned their faces away and ask him to talk of something else^{xi}.

Conclusions

Their writings show the development of same *attitude of mind* in the 18th century India though without the touch of European philosophy. However there is no evidence to show that these writers of *Ashobname* were influenced or even familiar with the contemporary stream of thought in Europe. However, from the later half of the 18th century with the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal by Warren Hastings the translation of Indian Persian, Arabic and Urdu sources started but there is no substantial evidence to prove that English, French or German works were also translated in Urdu or Persian. Hence the *Ashobname* emerged as independent genre without any substantial contemporary influences.

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