

BADAUNI

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'I am not concerned with those who are not bound by the *sharia*, and who disown it in principle and in detail,' Badauni says in the short introductory statement to his work, 'for such persons do not deserve to be addressed in this way. They are not fit to be included among the trustworthy, among those possessing vision and mastery of affairs.'¹² He has stated a little earlier: 'We must realise...that the reading and study of this branch of knowledge'—that is, history—'has been a cause of deviation from the straight path of the illustrious *shariat* of Muhammad...for those of weak faith, who are filled with suspicion and doubt. It has landed them in different positions and in the turbid ways of caprice and innovation, and has therefore become a source of disappointment. Such people as are by nature not disposed towards faith become hardened and suffer abiding loss (even) when they read the Eternal Word...How could they attain to a true knowledge of history?'¹³

Why, then, did Badauni write at all? History is too important to be ignored. 'How can one deny absolutely the value of a branch of knowledge, which is one-seventh of the Seven Sections and is the foundation for the strengthening of faith and certainty?' 'History is in itself a noble branch of knowledge and a refined art, as it is a means of warning to those who are aware and a source of experience for those who have intelligence and insight.'¹⁴ And, after all, not everybody is predisposed to error. So Badauni could say: 'I address myself to those people who have a healthy nature, a keen mind and the habit of judging justly,'¹⁵ and proceed to write what he wanted, and as he wanted.

He was very fortunate, indeed, in the time during which he lived. He was born in 1540. The fate of the Mahdavi leaders hung in the balance, and hardly anyone could get educated without becoming aware of the deep rift among the *ulama* caused by the teachings of Syed Muhammad of Jaunpur and being affected by the personalities and opinions of the different parties to the conflict. There were among the *suffis* those who possessed and enjoyed as well as those who despised wealth and influence, and both types had

admirers and followers. The struggle for power between Afghans and Mughals put the loyalties of many to the test and must have made many more reflect on the nature and value of loyalty itself. And finally, by the time Badauni was qualified and mature enough to undertake literary work, Akbar's intellectual curiosity was demanding satisfaction, and he was collecting men, ideas and books. After a period of necessary apprenticeship in the households of government officers, Badauni was presented before Akbar by Jamal Khan Qurehi and Hakim Ain-ul-Mulk. Abul Fazl found his way to the court about the same time. Shaikh Abd-un-Nabi was the *sadr*, and Akbar was uneasy under his dominance and that of other *ulama*. 'As learning was a merchandise much in demand,' Badauni says, 'I had the privilege of being addressed (by His Majesty) as soon as I reached (his presence). I was included among the members of the assembly and was thrown into the discussion with the *ulama* who blew the trumpet of profundity and thought nothing of anybody... By the grace of God, the power of my mind, the sensitiveness of my intelligence and that boldness which is a natural quality of youth, I often proved myself the superior.'¹⁰ For now on Badauni was in the thick of the battle. He was fighting for the *shariat*, and anyone who got hurt was the enemy: Akbar, Faizi, Abul Fazl, all intellectuals, all infidels, all accursed Shias, all fanatical Sunnis, all impostors. Could one want better hunting ground and more varied game?

But let us try to understand him. He received his education at the hands of persons like Miyan Hatim of Sambhal who, even if they cannot be called liberal in our sense of the term, were men of goodwill and free from fanaticism and the conceit of the learned. He seems to have studied also under Shaikh Mubarak of Nagor, the father of Faizi and Abul Fazl and a supporter of the Mahdavis. His father took him round to visit *sufis* and devout persons, and seems to have cultivated in him an attitude of reverence. He was learned enough in theology and jurisprudence to be able to meet the *ulama* on their own ground and emerge victorious. In fact, he found favour with Akbar because of his literary ability and his success in argument against the *ulama* of the court. He was willing to join in the fight because he was angered by the conceit, the fanaticism, the intellectual crudity and the bad manners of these *ulama*. What he writes of Maulana Abdullah Sultanpuri and Shaikh Abd-un-Nabi, and even more his sympathetic account of the Mahdavi leaders, Miyan Abdullah Niyazi and Shaikh Alai, should convince us that he was orthodox, but not insensitive or narrow-minded. He is sarcastic

and contemptuous in his treatment of impostors exploiting the good name of the *sufis* to win favours from kings and courtiers ; he shows no respect for *sufis* who amassed wealth. But he makes no adverse comments on *sufis* whose life and conduct was obviously idiosyncratic and could easily be construed as heretical. He always speaks of Shaikh Mubarak of Nagor with respect, although the Shaikh was the originator of the idea of the superiority of the *Imam-i-Adil* over the *ulama* and himself drafted the *fatwa*, and although the Shaikh said on one occasion to Bir Bal—whom Badauni disliked intensely—in the presence of the Emperor that there were interpolations in the books of the Hindus, and many accretions also in our religion (of Islam) and one could not trust anything.⁷ His chronogram for the date of the Shaikh's death is 'The perfect Shaikh,'⁸ which means that his reverence for him lasted till the very end.

Badauni is fairly proud of his literary competence and his ability as a disputationist, but he has no illusions about his own piety. We may disregard as purely formal his frequent references to his own sinfulness, but he mentions, without trying to extenuate his own folly, an incident when he was wounded, and might easily have been killed by rowdies for making love to the wrong woman in the wrong place. If his sense of truthfulness is perverted, it spares him as little as anyone else. He seems to be aware that while others have their faults, he himself is bold and blunt and cannot resist the impulse to be mischievous.

Why is it, then, that Akbar and Badauni changed their opinions about each other, and while Akbar began to suspect that Badauni was at bottom a fanatic, Badauni became severely and maliciously critical of Akbar, his ideas and policies. Badauni relates how once Akbar asked him to come forward and then said to Abul Fazl : 'I thought this young man had attained the state of annihilation and followed the path of the *sufis*, but he has turned out to be such a fanatical theologian that no sword could cut through the jugular vein of his fanaticism.'⁹ Akbar had misunderstood the purport of a verse which Badauni had inserted in a translation of the *Mahabharata*, and Badauni was able, with Abul Fazl's support, to clarify his position. But Akbar's suspicion would seem to indicate, as Badauni continuously affirms, that his own attitude had somewhat hardened, and he was not inclined in principle, even if he was in practice, to allow a wide latitude to his Muslim courtiers and favourites in the matter of belief. We must not, therefore, dismiss Badauni's bitter criticism of Akbar's favourites and his reforms as

deriving from fanaticism, ingratitude or sheer perversity.

We know what Badauni thought of Shaikh Abd-un-Nabi, Maulana Abdullah Sultanpuri and in general of all the *ulama* who frequented courts, whether Akbar's or Islam Shah's. But was this a valid reason for condemning all the *ulama* and denying the value of theological study? Was it at all a plausible reason turning away from the *shariat*? If the nature and conduct of particular *ulama* could serve as an argument against the *ulama* as such, what about the courtiers, in particular those who were close to Akbar? Badauni could have felt that they did not deserve lenient treatment if, fault for fault, they were no better than the official *ulama*. Both in their own ways offended against the *shariat*, which for Badauni was the final criterion of judgement.

But could the *shariat* itself be defined precisely enough to serve as a criterion? That is Badauni's weak point. How can one choose between wicked fools who claim to represent the *shariat* and wily intellectuals, poets and courtiers who make a fashion of deriding it? Badauni is vexed enough to lose his balance, and he touches the depths of meanness in the aspersions he casts on Faizi and Abul Fazl, his benefactors throughout his career at the court. But he was not really mean. He seems to have felt, like many educated Indian Muslims towards the close of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, that while the *ulama* could not be defended and a liberalisation of the Indian Muslim way of life was essential, respect for the *shariat* must be maintained at all costs. And not Indian Muslims only. I remember Dr. Behljet Wahbi of Egypt, who came to lecture at the Jamia Millia in 1934, saying that if one did not pray, one should admit it was something wrong, not make a principle out of not praying. Badauni saw in his time the righteous *ulama* being persecuted, the wicked in the seat of judgement, and he must have felt that if, in such a contingency, the example and the influence of the court reinforced the general sentiment against the official *ulama* and their enforcement of the *shariat*, the *shariat* itself, which was the mainstay of Muslim life, would be destroyed. Therefore, he utilises his command over language to vent his spleen on those who were impudent and supercilious in their attitude towards the *shariat* and who ultimately succeeded in eradicating all reverence for it from the heart of the Emperor.

Badauni had no taste for investigation and research, no desire to add to existing historical knowledge. He states quite ingenuously that for the period beginning with the establishment of the Delhi

Sultanate up to his own time his account is just a selection from the *Tarikh-i-Mubarakshahi* and the work of Nizam-ud-Din Ahmad Bakhshi, which he calls the *Nizam-ul-Tawarikh* and also the *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*. But he has 'added something of his own.'¹⁰ When we examine this 'something of his own,' we find that Badauni was not interested in political history. Indeed, his lack of interest is much more than is indicated by his remark in the introductory statement that he would briefly relate something about each king. Not only do we find his narrative interspersed with verses, quatrains, *qasidas* and chronograms; he seems to think the production of poetry of equal if not greater importance as compared to political events. He discusses a poet and quotes his poems in between the accession of Razia and an account of her reign, and of the two, the poet seems to be the far more significant personage. Nasir-ud-Din's reign occupies four pages as against thirty-one allotted to *qasidas* written during his reign. The death of Balban's crown-prince, Sultan Muhammad, provides opportunity for inserting long elegies. What he thinks of political ideas and policies is evident from his passing over the advice given by Balban to his son by saying that it has been mentioned in the histories of Delhi, and from his giving more space to Kaiqubad than to Balban. His values do not change when he is writing of his own time. Momentous administrative decisions are thought worthy of only this brief reference: 'And in this year His Majesty ordered the institution of branding and muster under the guidance of Shahbaz Khan Kamboh, the appointment of *Karoris* in all the territory under control and the reversion at one stroke of all land to Khalsa.'¹¹

The 'something more' which Badauni has added to his selection of events from his two sources includes also continuous references to *sufis* and poets. The references are not particularly helpful, except perhaps in fixing dates, for hardly has anyone's death been mentioned without a chronogram being given. Badauni was also fond of relating anecdotes. He has not the rambling imagination of a story-teller, and he would have regarded telling stories a frivolity. He has no taste for the supernatural. In the account he gives of natural portents and calamities that followed the killing of Sidi Maula by Firuz Khalji he is quite restrained as compared to Barani, and he qualifies his statement about the drought by saying that it may have been due to natural causes. But anecdotes do enrich his narrative. There is the story of slave-girl of a Ilutmish who is found to be his sister. There is the romance of Sayyid Musa and Mohini,

the goldsmith's daughter. This is something that happened in his own time. Badauni interrupts his narrative to tell this story at length; one feels that here, at last, he has stopped looking at persons and actions through the glasses of the *sharīc* and has identified himself completely with the persons whose fate he describes. The story is a literary masterpiece.

But most characteristic of Badauni are his epigrams and sarcastic remarks. It would not be easy to find a more accurate and incisive summing up to Muhammad Tughluq's reign than Badauni's: "The sultan was relieved of the people and the people were relieved of the sultan."²² The following are typical examples of naughtiness.

"And in this year the Scholars of the Age, Mir Murtaza Sharīh Shirazi, departed from this inn of mortality. First, he was buried at Delhi, in the neighbourhood of the grave of Amir Khusrau (May God have mercy on him). Then, because the *Sadr* and the *Qazi* and the *Shaikh-ad-Islam* represented (to His Majesty) that Amir Khusrau was an Indian and a Sunni and Mir Murtaza an Iraqi and a *rafīc*, there was no doubt that Amir Khusrau would find his company a torture... His Majesty commanded that his body should be removed and buried elsewhere."²³

"And in this year Shaikh Ibrahim Chishti died a natural death at Fatehpur. He bid farewell to mountains of gold and rendered his account to the Creator of life. Out of his wealth twenty-five crores in cash, in addition to elephants, horses and other goods were taken into the treasury, the rest fell to the share of his enemies—his sons and representatives."²⁴

"Makhdum-ul-Mulk died at Ahmadabad in the year 900, A. H. Qazi Ali was sent from Fatehpur to Lahore to make an inventory of his property. He uncovered so much wealth and buried treasure that one could not open its lock with the key of the imagination. A part of the treasure found in the family grave-yard of Makhdum-ul-Mulk were boxes filled with gold bricks, which had been buried under the pretence that they were corpses. What was apparent to the eyes of men was so much that only God the Creator could make a reckoning. All these bricks, along with the books, which counted for no more than mere bricks, were confiscated to the Treasury."²⁵

These are chronograms which are not only naughty but nasty, such as "the miserly Shaikh"²⁶ for Shaikh Ibrahim Chishti and "carcase of a swine"²⁷ for Shaikh Gadai.

It goes without saying that Badauni's *Muntakhab-ul-Tawarikh* is obviously and intensely subjective. It belongs to the category of

Memoirs rather than histories, and indeed often reminds one of the Memoirs of St. Simon. But perhaps the value of Badauni's work lies just in this. He wears no disguise ; he writes as he feels. He has no affiliations of class or interest, he is a free-lance. He has no idea of pleasing anyone, and no conception of the historian's function that can make him dissident. If we agree that he means by the *shariat* only an attitude of reverence for God, the Prophet, the revelation, we shall realise that he has allowed himself and would allow to others latitude for difference of opinion and for living as one liked. We may still sometimes feel irritated, but we shall also feel that here is someone who enjoys looking at life from all sides, who writes with relish and writes well, who has not searched for facts that were obscure or had escaped the notice of others but has given us something live and vibrant, reflecting him and his age.

REFERENCES

1. Badauni, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, ed. Lees (Calcutta, 1865), Vol. I, p. 3.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
6. *Ibid.*, Vol, II, p. 172.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 312.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 388.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 399.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 374.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 311.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 374.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 119.