



Chahar gulzar-i-shujai of Har Charan Das: An important persian source on history of Awadh

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Abstract

Chahar Gulzar Shujai is an infamous work in the history of Awadh in Persian language written by Har Charan Das. He dedicated this book to the (Nawab e Awadh) Shujaul Daulah 1754-1775. This book is till now remained as an unpublished a manuscript. Har Charan Das was born about 1123 Hijri (1711-12) in Meerut (U.P.), after the invasion of Nadir Shah (1739) began to live in Delhi and few years later became employee under the supervision of Nawab Qasim Ali Khan. Har Charan Das abandoned Delhi with his seignior Qasim Ali Khan and walked towards Awadh and stayed in Faizabad permanently. After the death of Qasim Ali Khan entered in the service of his children Bakht-un-Nisa Khanom, Shafeeqe Ali Khan and Husain Ali Khan.

Keywords: Chahar gulzar shujai, Har Charan Das, Awadh, Shujaudaula, Qasim Ali Khan

Introduction

As the title of the book depicted about the contents, the author divided to this book into five chapters named *Chaman* means garden.

First Chaman (Garden): is consisted to the religious history of Hindus in which displayed to the Mahesh and Vishnu.

Second Chaman (Garden): is about Sat yug.

Third Chaman (Garden): is comprised of Tirtayayug.

Fourth Chaman (Garden): is included of Duaperyug.

Fifth Chaman (Garden): The fifth chaman contains important historical information and divided into two sections. First one is about the Hindu Kings Judhishter to Ghaznavids, and second part is divided into nine chapters (Qisms) about Muslim sovereigns. The last chapter of this book in most valuable part comprises the history of the Mughals from Humayun^[1] to Shah Alam^[2].

Har Charan Das the author of this work was son of Udai Rai and grandson of Mukund Rai, the family of Chaudhris and Qanoon Goyan of the Parganas of Meerut. Because he mentioned about this.

“During that period, Chaudhry Balkishan of Riwari, who was extremely narrow-minded and tyrannical man was appointed as the governor of the pargana of Meerut by Mir Kamal al-Din, the destroyer of the world, who was the steward of the Sarf-e-Khas under Naib Ruzafzoon Khan, the overseer. Acting on the orders of the court, the aforementioned Chaudhry seized the lands and gardens of the town of Meerut from the Sufi Saints and others of the regions of Maliyana and Rampur Pavati^[3].”^[4]

Harcharn Das provides information about his job, employment, and service, stating that he first became a servant to Mohammad Baqer Khan, who at that time was the superintendent of the royal stable at that time. After that, he joined the service of Yaqub Khan, who was the superintendent of the royal lamp house. When Yaqub Khan was relieved from his position as the superintendent of the

lamp house and Abdul Subhan was assigned to that role, Har charn Das left this service and joined Mr. Ahmad Ali Khan, who was the superintendent of the royal mint. Later, he served Sheikh Abdul Bari, who was in charge of a division of two hundred cavalry and two hundred infantries, Harcharan das was appointed to the position of a clerk by the mentioned division^[5].

He further informs that he was employed in the service of Nawab Qasim Ali Khan in the first regional year of Alamgeer Th'ani (1754-1759) means Alamgeer Second. He also accompanied the service of the family members of Nawab Qasim Ali Khan i.e. Najeeb-un Nisa Khanum alias Bibi Khanum and wife of late Nawab Najmuddaula.

Harcharn Das served more than forty-nine years in the service of Qasim Ali Khan and his descendants. He was a praise singer (or eulogist) for Qasim Ali Khan. He remembered him with great respect and mentions him with kind words in this book. The family of Nawab Qasim Ali Khan was so kind and careful for the author because he appraises them in several times in this book. But when circumstances changed and he had not had any employment Har Charan Dass devoted himself to the study of historical books and some famous biographical accounts of great Indian kings etc. The learned men of that time Ibrahim Ali Khan Alias Mirza Kharati son of Hikmat Maab Khan who was the royal Physician of Emperor Ahmed Shah, (1748-1754) gave access to his own library to HarCharanDass and HarCharanDass took this opportunity as a golden chance and borrow some important books from this library, like : *Tarikh-i-Farishta*, *Habib-us-siyar*, *Mirat-i-Alam* etc. and went through the *Shahnama*, *Rajawali*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Bhagvat Gita*, and other translation of Indian works, because he inform us:

“I devoted myself to study and to the books and histories of former kings, and I found shelter and generosity in the household of Ibrahim Ali Khan, known as Mirza Kheyraati, son of Hekmat Yab Khan, who was among the distinguished philosophers of King Mohammad Shah. Mirza Kheyraati, due to his close familial relation to the late Khan Qasem Ali Khan, had come into the companionship of the said Khan and added prestige to the eastern regions, namely the bungalow of Faizabad. In the fields of mathematics and

science, he was the alchemist of his time, and he had gathered many books, especially histories of former kings and other works, which he engaged with and taught”.

After becoming aware of my position, he graciously provided me with many historical texts such as the *Tarikh-e Fereshteh* [6], *Habib al-Siyar* [7], *Mor'at al-'Alam* [8], and others for my reading. In addition, other books such as the *Shahnameh* [9], *Rajavali* [10], the *Ramayana* [11], *Mahabharata*, *Shri Bhagavat* [12], and the *Jog Bashisht* [13] which Fayzi had translated from Sanskrit into Persian were already in my possession. I studied all of them wherever I could find them.

I came to understand the affairs of the past from the books of the past, and I recalled the chronicles of compulsion, kingship, and nobility that were recorded in those books. And what I have seen with my own eyes over the course of my life, now reaching eighty years until this present year, which is the Hijri year 1190 of the affairs of kings, nobles, and my own masters under whose favor I was raised, as well as the experiences of my elders and what I myself have gone through, I have brought all of these together in one place [14]. Hercham Das had a deep passion for the study of history and, at the age of eighty, he compiled this historical book. While he was engaged in writing it, the Bani Bahadur took offense at him, cutting off his allowance and financial support. As a result, he fell into financial hardship and struggled to make ends meet. After a few days, when Bani Bahadur became blind, he was forced to summon Hercham Das and reinstated his financial assistance, which was granted by the government of Shuja' al-Dawlah. Hercham Das came to Faizabad in the year 1127 Hijri.

Harcharn Das was a eulogist and great admirer of Nawab Shuja' al-Dawlah, and dedicated this book in the name of, Shujauddawla because he writes.

"His Excellency has a great fondness for gardens and colorful meadows, and since each story in this book is no less delightful than flowers and multicolored fields, I have therefore named it the *Four Gardens of Courage*. I have arranged each of its meadows to recount the lives of the yogis, rajas, and kings of Hindustan." [15]

Harcharn Das regarded this book as a testament for his sons, embedding within its numerous pieces of advice and guidance, as he states:

sinner, Harcharn Das, the author of this book—being a sinner through and through—has recorded with his pen the conditions of kings, nobles, and other affairs of the time. He thought it proper to include some accounts of his own life in this book as well, so that they might remain as advice and legacy for his noble children." [16]

About the composition of the book *Chahar Gulzar Shuja'i*, Hercham Das says that:

"The reason for the composition of this book was not hidden from the pure and receptive minds of the complete eloquent scholars, that His Majesty, the Emperor Alamgir II, in the year 1167 Hijri (1753 CE), this insignificant humble servant, Hercham Das, son of Udi Rai, son of Makand Rai, son of Sagar Mal Chaudhary, Barrister of Law, in the district of Meerut, in the Capital territory city of Shahjahanabad in Delhi [17]."

Hasrcharn Das explicitly mentions the sources he used for the composition of *Chahar Gulzar Shuja'i* in his book, as has been explained earlier in this article. Additionally, whenever he acquired information from any source, he included it in the aforementioned book. The author titled his

work in honor of Nawab Shuja' al-Dawlah and divided it into two sections. One section was dedicated to the Hindu kings, and the other to the Muslim kings.

Hercham Das divided his book into five sections, or *chamans*. The first section deals with the history of *Mahishasura and Vishnu*; the second section discusses Sat Yuga; the third section focuses on Treta Yuga; the fourth section addresses Dwapara Yuga; and the fifth section pertains to Kal Yuga, the current age. In this last section, he covers the period from *Raja Jadhishter* to the kings of Delhi, up until the era of Shah Alam II.

Chapter five of this book, which is the most significant and essential part of this history, is divided into two sections. The first section is titled *Safha* (Page), and the second section is titled *Qism* (Part). The final section of this book focuses on the history of the Timurids of India and is considered a crucial part of the work. The author also provides detailed accounts of the local rulers, governors, and others, including figures such as Qasim Ali Khan, Nawab Shuja' al-Dawlah, Nawab Asaf al-Dawlah, Nawab Siraj al-Dawlah, Nawab Ahmad Shah Bahadur, Mohammad Shah bin Jahandar Shah, Aliwardi Khan, the Nazim of Bengal, Abu al-Mansur Safdar Jung, Nawab Mohammad Khan Bangash, Nawab Saadullah Khan, Nawab Mohammad Ali Khan Rohilla, Asad Yar Khan, Shafiq Ali Khan, Nawab Saidullah Khan, Nawab Hafiz Rahmat Khan Rohilla, Sardar Khan, Dundi Khan Rohilla, the ruler of Bans Bareilly, and the Hindu Rajahs from Yudhishtir to Khawandi Rao, son of Malhar Rao Maratha, Suraj Mal Jat, Jawahar Singh, Ratan Singh, Raja Ji Singh, among other notable figures. The author also includes information about cities, towns, and villages in India, as well as the architecture of India, such as the fortresses of Kalinjar, Shahjahanabad, Dolatabad, Aurangabad, Faizabad, Allahabad, and others.

One distinctive feature of this book is that the author incorporates verses from the poets of previous generations alongside his historical writing and occasionally composes his own poetry. This adds to the significance of the history and provides readers with a sense of attachment and enjoyment. Although his poetry does not reach the literary or cultural stature of prominent poets, it is not inferior to that of his contemporaries. For example, he has composed beautiful verses on the instability of the world: When Harcharn Das discusses contemporary cultural information, he meticulously records all the details, both minor and significant, and presents them in written form, providing separate explanations and clarity. For example, in the case of the wedding of Aqa Ali Khan, the young son of Qasim Ali Khan, the information he gathered is both fascinating and readable. He describes all the customs and rituals of Indian weddings, detailing everything from the food, charity offerings, and decorations to the joyous canopy, games, and other related festivities from start to finish.

Unfortunately, the details of Hercham Das's life are not mentioned in any book except for some information he himself provided in this work. The renowned scholars Elliott and Dawson, among others, have drawn extensively from this book in their own writings, where they have recounted the events Harcharn Das described in detail:

Chahar Gulzar Shujai serves as a significant historical source on eighteenth-century India. During this period, numerous historical accounts were commissioned at the behest of the British, often reflecting their perspectives and

interests. However, this particular work was authored independently, driven by the author's own initiative. As a result, the historical narratives presented in the text are considered to be impartial and objective.

Unfortunately, this valuable work remains unpublished, and only a limited number of manuscripts are known to exist in select libraries. These include:

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2. Manuscript No. 1732— British Museum, London.

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