

Historiography of Aligarh City :

An ode from 1500 B.C to 1947 A.D

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Abstract : The history of Aligarh traces back from the time of Mahabharat, when the capital of Pandavas was shifted to Ahar (presently Bulandshahar District) after the destruction of Hastinapur. Being near to Delhi as well as Mathura (Braj), Aligarh previously known as Kol has his own significance in the history. The geographical setting of the city makes it an important city for settlements. The archeological explorations have found potteries such as OCP(Ochre Colored Pottery), PGW(Painted Grey Ware), RW(Red Ware) in the region which date backs to 1500 BC.

The written descriptions and history of the city flinches from the Sultanate period in Tarikh-e- Firuzshahi to Ain-i Akbari, Amal-i Shahjahani and Tuzk-e- Jahangiri. Ibn Battuta's has also mentioned about Kol in his Rihla, when he traveled along with 15 ambassadors representing Ukhaantu Khan, the Mongol Emperor of the Yuan dynasty in China. They traveled to Koil city en route to the coast at Cambay (in Gujarat) in 1341. Other than Ibn Battuta travelers like Fitch, Mildenhall, Hawkins, Francisco Pelsaert, Peter Mundy and W. Foster have mentioned about Koil in their travel accounts.

The first prominent writing about history of Kol is Akhbarul Jamal by Raje Mohammad in the Eighteenth Century who specifically writes about the Balai City. Muslim history scholars such as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Altaf Husain Hali, Zakaullah, Ziauddin Barani etc. have written well about the city in their respective works. Also there are British writings and records for the Koil city. After the establishment of AMU, Prof. Mohammad Habib has also written well about the city. His son Prof. Irfan Habib has proficiently worked over the geographical and historical setting of the city. A comprehensive work by Prof. Jamal Siddiqui over the complete Aligarh District gives well information about the city. After the establishment of MAO College, there have been many writings over Aligarh Movement and post 1857 history. Tariq Hasan, Theodore Morrison and many other writers have written over the history of Aligarh Muslim University and Aligarh Movement. The Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University have produced many thesis on the history of the city under the supervisor of different guides which already have worked over the history of the city.

The different historians have written about the history of the city in different aspects. Some have written in narrative aspect and some have written taking account the political and social scenario of the city at different period of time. The historian have strained to trace different layers of history over the city.

IndexTerms – Aligarh, Koil, Historiography, Aligarh Muslim University

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of the Aligarh City traces back from 1500 B.C till establishment of Aligarh Muslim University. The initial history can be traced by archaeological reports of ASI, Mathura Circle. The first proper written record of the Aligarh (Koil) history is traced by persian manuscript namely Akhbar-ul Jamal.

Akhbar-ul Jamal by Raje Mohammad Kolvi was written in 1740 in Nastaliq is basically a piece of mystic literature and written with a spirit of mystic fervor. The author, put of deep emotional association with the local saint, Shams-ul Arifin Hazrat Sheikh Jamal entitled his work after his name. The author has described at the length the various Saints of the noted mystic orders with a greater emphasis on the account of Sheikh Jamal.

Apart from the biographical notices, it also provides some valuable information about various categories of contemporary notable persons like Qazis, mustasibs, mansabdars, zamindars, bakhshid and scholars. It throws light on the archeological monuments and remains of Koil and its environs. In it, we get the history of eminent families of not only Koil but also of Sikandrarao, Tappal, Atrauli, Marahra, Jalesar, Akrabad, Chandaus and Nanau. From these accounts it appears that most of the Islamic settlements in and around Koil took place during the reigns of Humayun and Akbar. The book, however suffers from lack of substantial

evidence to support its findings. It does not deal with political events. The authors statements about the past History of Koil are largely based on current legends and traditions. For example, his statement that the present Jami Masjid of the city was originally constructed by Qutubuddin Aibek on the ruins of Rajput temple is not substantiated by any historical evidence. His omission to give any information about Sabit Khan, who was his contemporary is rather strange.

In spite of some omissions, the significance of the book for local history can hardly be over emphasized. Various important officials and persons of Aligarh, otherwise untraceable from any other source, have been identified from its pages, particularly, those appearing in the inscriptions of the later Mughal period. Similarly, various extinct tombs and buildings have been located through the information provided by this book. The author speaks of there being nearly one thousand graves and tombs in and around the city of Koil.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, a scholar and prominent muslim leader has also written about the history of the city in his Aligarh Institute Gazetteer. Some references of the city have also been mentioned in his book "*Asarus Sanadid*" which is on the monuments of Delhi. He has not written in depth about the ancient history of the city. His major emphasis was on the socio, cultural and political history of the city which could transform the minds of the people of that time. His orthodox style of writing makes him exclusive among the different historians of his period.

Another milestone for the written history of Koil is a comprehensive book "*Aligarh District: A Historical Survey (From ancient times to 1803 A.D.)*" written by Jamal Muhammad Siddiqui in 1981. The author has traced the history of Aligarh from the period Mahabharata to the British time by means of written historical works, mystic literature, administrative literature, travel accounts, memoirs, epistolary collections, archeological reports, administrative records, biographical notices, regional and local history, topographical works, social and cultural history, Gazetteers, Settlement and Census Reports and Linguistic works.

The author talks about the Geographical setting, nomenclature of city, ancient history and archeology of Koil. He has associated the history of the city in macro context with respect to the nearby capital cities. Different rulers such as Sultans, Mughals, Sabit Khan, Bangash, Surajmal Jat, Nawab Vazir, Najaf Khan, British Occupation and also different Zamindar clans have been discussed well by the author. He had thoroughly researched over epigraphical supplement to morsel the history of the city. He also covers the different architectural monuments in the city which traces back to different reigns and layers of the city.

The author has written the book in narrative aspect taking account all the historical records available for the city. Proper references have been given for every instance written in the book. Although the nomenclature of the city has not been justified by the author. There are many references for the name **Koil**, and none of the reference can be concluded due lack of evidential support.

Prof. Mohd. Habib, an eminent historian from Aligarh Muslim University writes about the times from the Mahmud Ghaznavi and his impact on Koil. Also he has majorly written on Aligarh movement and establishment of MAO College. His Marxist style of writing is been reflected over his writings over the city.

Prof. Irfan Habib, son of Prof. Mohd. Habib has proficiently worked over the geographical and historical setting of the city. His atlas of Ancient Indian History and Mughal Empire tells well about the topography and geographical setting of the city. He describes Koil as one of the most suitable city for settlements for its geographical setting. According to him, the city had natural mounds along with the other resources which makes it apt for settlements. He has also mentioned about the Dor Fortress and Aligarh Fort in his respective writings. The Mughal links of the Koil district are well seen in his book "*The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*". Like his father, his style of writing is also been reflected over his writings over the city.

Most of the historians have written about the history of Aligarh after the emergence of MAO College. Aijaz Ahmad, Theodore Morrison, Tariq Hasan, David Lelyveld, Altaf Husain Hali, Ishrat Qureshi, A.A. Zuberi etc. are few of the names who have actively written over the history of MAO College.

Tariq Hasan in his book "*The Aligarh movement and the making of the Indian Muslim mind, 1857-2002*" mainly emphasize over the education scenario in 1857. He has talked about the conditions of the muslims during the British and their need for

education at that time. The rigorous efforts of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in establishing MAO College can be known by this book. The author has also translated this book in urdu as “*Aligarh Tareekh*”. The author accounts the Historic, Association, Architectural significances of the MAO College, the growth of MAO College into Aligarh Muslim University and Aligarh Movement. It tells the transitional approach of Indian muslim from illiteracy towards education. It explains how the overall social and political scenario of the Indian muslims changed after the emergence of Scientific Society and MAO college presently known as Aligarh Muslim University.

Other writers such as Aijaz Ahmad, Ishrat Qureshi and A.A. Zuberi have also written in the similar aspects. Theodore Morrison and David Lelyveld have written about MAO College from British aspect. They highlight the role of Britishers in establishing the MAO College. Altaf Husain Hali in his book “*Hayat-e- Javed*” mainly talks about the life of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and alongwith the struggles in establishing the MAO College presently known as Aligarh Muslim University.

There have been many researches over the period of time from the Department of History, AMU, Aligarh over the History of the city. The students and research scholars have covered different aspects of the city under the guidance of different Professors. The style and approach has varied upon the aspect covered by the student or the research scholar.

Dr. Manvendra Kumar Pundhir, a professor in the History Department of AMU has also written over the archaeological discoveries of the city and is engaged in further archaeological works over the city.

The city has further potential for exploration and many layers of history are still there to be revealed and proper conclusion about the history needs to be made.

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