

Ahmad Bin Yahya Al-Balazuri's 'Ansa'ab-ul-Ashra'af' Its Methodology and Critical Analysis of the 'Seerat-Traditions' in it

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Abstract: Ahmad Bin Yahya bin Jabir Al-Balazuri's book, 'Ansa'ab-ul-Ashra'af' is a comprehensive history of the Arabs. The contents of the book have been categorised in the order of Families and Tribes, keeping in view their superiority, social status and veneration in their respective communities. Accordingly, the book begins with the description of Banu Hashim, the reputed family of the Holy Prophet (SAW). In this connection, the author has accorded valuable collections regarding the life and Prophetic mission of the Holy prophet (SAW). Following is a character sketch of Ahmad Bin Yahya Al-Balazuri as a critical account of the traditions pertaining to Seerat-e-Nabvi (SAW) included in his books, 'Ansa'ab-ul-Ashra'af'.

Key Words: *Seerat:* The Life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) *Hijra:* Islamic Calender. *Hadith:* Anything (Sayings and Deeds) attributed to the Holy Prophet (SAW) *Muhadith:* Scholar in the field of Hadith *Caliph:* Islamic Ruler. *Maghazi:* War fought in the leadership of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

I. Introduction:

'Ansa'ab-ul-Ashra'af' (Genealogy of the Elites) is a famous, reliable and authentic book of the History of Islam, written by 'Balazuri', a well-known and renowned historian of the third century (Hijra). 'Balazuri' has been the pupil of the famous 'seerat-writer', Muhammad Bin Sa'ad, ⁽¹⁾ who died in 230 H. His full name is Abu Ja'afar Ahmad Bin Yahya. He was born in Baghdad (the capital city of Iraq). After receiving education in his own city, he acquired further knowledge from the renowned scholars of 'Demascus', 'Himas' and 'Antaakya'. ⁽²⁾ 'Balazuri' was a trustworthy associate of the Abbaside Caliph, Al-Mutawakkil. He also remained a close friend of the Caliph, Al-Mustaeen. Similarly, he gained honour and prestige at the period of Al-Mu'taba. Thus he held a venerable status in the courts of the afore said three reputed Caliphs. He died in 279 H. ⁽³⁾

According to the biographers of Ahmad Bin Yahya, he was named 'Balazuri' because of eating a particular fruit, called 'Balazur' (Anacardium) which maddened him and ultimately caused his death. His contemporaries were greatly shocked by his death and thenceforth they began to call him 'Balazuri'. ⁽⁴⁾ In view of this statement, it becomes evident that Ahmad Bin Yahya began to be known as 'Balazuri' after his death. He was known by his real name, Ahmad Bin Yahya as long as he remained alive.

'Balazuri's fields of study and research consisted of History, Geography and Genealogy. The traditions and narratives collected by him very distinctly reveal his proficiency in these subjects.

'Balazuri's book, 'Ansaab-ul-Ashraaf' does not contain any preface or foreword which could help the readers know and understand the principles followed by him in connection with the composition and compilation of his book. It is quite probable that the writing of preface or foreword was not usual at that time. Nevertheless, the deep and thorough study of 'Ansaab-ul-Ashraaf' can help one realize some of his critical principles which reveal his capability and proficiency to differentiate the authentic and reliable narratives and traditions from the false and absurd ones.

'Ansaad-ul-Ashraf' is a comprehensive history of the 'Arabs'. The contents of the book have been listed in the order of families and tribes, keeping in view their social superiority, status and veneration. The book begins with the description of 'Banu Hashim', the family of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW). In this connection, the author has recorded valuable collections regarding the life and mission of the Holy Prophet (SAW). The first volume of the book has entirely been allocated for this purpose.

The author has written all the events and occurrences in a proper chronological order. His mode of narrating the events is quite similar to that of Muhaddithin (Specialist in Hadith). He clearly indicates the authority and source of the events. However, he has not amalgamated the 'Sources' and 'Traditions' with one another like his contemporary writers. ⁽⁵⁾ He describes various 'traditions' pertaining to a particular event and then he quotes the most preferential one at the end. ⁽⁶⁾

Since he was a proficient Genealogist, he tells the family background of all the persons who participated in an event and, as such, it becomes very easy to understand and comprehend the details of the concerned incident. ⁽⁷⁾

While writing about the life and engagements of the Holy Prophet (SAW), first of all he resorts to the Holy Quran. He has very distinctly quoted the concerned verses of the Holy Quran in connection with the Maghazis, the routine life, manners and behaviours of the Holy Prophet (SAW), etc. ⁽⁸⁾ Sometimes, he also makes use of the poetic verses for the sound and cogent explanation of an incident. ⁽⁹⁾ When the 'Chain of narrators' is deficient in certain cases, he begins the traditions with the terms 'Qaala' or Qaloo' (Said the two people or more than two). ⁽¹⁰⁾ Similarly, he begins the 'Sourceless traditions' merely by the names of the prominent 'Seerat-Writers'; such as, 'Qaala Al-Waaqidi', 'Qaala Al-Madaayeni' (Said Al-Waqidi or Said Al-Madaayeni) ⁽¹¹⁾, etc. Nevertheless, such traditions are very few in number.

'Balazuri' has described the war of 'Badar', 'Ohud', 'Ahzaab', 'The Treaty of Hudaibia' and the conquest of Makkah in detail, while all the other battles have been narrated in brief. Discussing the Holy battles, he records the dates and times of the occurrences as well as their root-causes. ⁽¹²⁾ Thus, it is evident that his book: 'Ansaab-ul-Ashraaf' is an invaluable document which provides the details of the conquests of the preliminary stages of Islam as well as the political, social and propagatory activities during the life of the Holy Prophet (SAW). The book is deemed to be an authoritative source for the Seerat-Writers'.

But, in spite of all this, it is too much surprising that the book does not discuss certain important events like the visits of the delegations of various tribes to Madina, the letters of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) addressed to the rulers of various countries, etc. Similarly, there is nothing regarding the sad demise of the Holy Prophet (SAW) in this book.

Findings:

1. Balazuri has written all the occurrences and events in a proper chronological order.
2. His mode of narrating the events is quite similar to that of 'Muhaddith' (scholars of hadith).
3. He describes various traditions regarding a particular event and then highlights the most significant ones at the end.
4. Being a proficient genealogist, he gives a complete genealogical record of all those persons who had taken part in a particular event.
5. Besides giving the most reliable and authentic details of the life and mission of the Holy Prophet (SAW), he also highlights the social, political and preaching activities during the Holy life of the Holy Prophet (SAW).

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