

## **CC-7 : HISTORY OF INDIA(c.1206-1526)**

### **I.INTERPRETING THE DELHI SULTANATE:**

#### **SURVEY OF SOURCES: PERSIAN TARIKH TRADITION; VERNACULAR HISTORIES; EPIGRAPHY**

Compared to the history of ancient India, a large number of reliable sources are available to provide good deal of insight and knowledge about the conditions of Medieval Indian history. There are plenty of written records available which deals with the art and architecture, literature, agriculture and industry, commerce and trade, culture and civilisation, philosophy and religion of that time.

The period between the 1206 and 1526 is termed as the period of Delhi Sultanate in India. For interpreting the Delhi Sultanate various sources are available which could be categorised into different categories such as Archaeological Sources (Epigraphic, Numismatics, Monument,), Literary Sources, Chronicles, Foreign Traveller's Account.

Archaeological sources include inscriptions, coins, monuments, paintings, weapons and other antiquities. They are of immense value in the reconstruction of the socio-cultural and political history of Medieval India. Inscriptions gives us a diversified picture of society and are more reliable primary source of information about the people in this period of time.

There are many Sanskrit inscriptions, which were inscribed by mercantile community during the reign of various Sultans of Delhi. They had mainly one central concern and that was recording of gift and patronage. However, these inscriptions were slightly different from contemporary chronicles and did not deal with political aspects only.

There are a number of remarkable 13th century epigraphs in Delhi, which have largely composed by the merchant families of the area e.g., the well-known Palam Baoli inscription of AD 1276. The inscription is in Sanskrit and was authored by Pandita Yogisvara. It contains the genealogy of Thakkura Uadhara a Purapati in Siriyoginipura (Delhi). He has been credited with having constructed numerous dharamshalas and wells to the East of Palam. The

inscriptions also mention the contemporary rulers of Delhi, starting with Siyah-ud-din and coming up to Ghiyas-ud-din Balban.

The literary sources during the Medieval India are classified as Persian and non-Persian i.e. Sanskrit and Regional Literature. The diversity and volume of source material suddenly increases for the 13th and 14th centuries. This was largely because of the fact that during this period of Delhi Sultanate, there is large availability of Persian texts. Persian sources of the Sultanate period are regarded as historical record and have a chronological narrative style and provide us with an accurate description of statecraft of the kings and his subordinates, politics and events of the period.

The Delhi Sultans patronised learning and literature. Many of them had great love for Arabic and Persian literature. Learned men came from Persia and Persian language got encouragement from the rulers. Besides theology and poetry, the writing of history was also encouraged. Some of the Sultans had their own court historians. The most famous historians of this period were Hasan Nizami, Minhaj-us-Siraj, Ziauddin Barani, and Shams Siraj Afif. Barani's *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* contains the history of Tughlaq dynasty. Minhaj-us Siraj wrote *Tabaqat-i-Nasari*, a general history of Muslim dynasties up to c.1260 CE.

Minhaj-us-Siraj, author of the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, was born in 1193. He entered government service in the reign of Iltutmish, and served as the Chief Qazi of Delhi in the middle of the thirteenth century. He was a judicial officer as also a courtier and necessarily exercised political discretion in writing his history. The *Tabaqat* is a compendium of Islamic history from the days Adam to the year 1260 when it was completed. It was named after the reigning Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud. That portion which deals with the history of the Sultanate is important because the author was a contemporary in close contact with the events of the period and took pains to collect information from different quarters. What he has left is valuable as a work on purely political history. It describes the careers of most of the prominent nobles of Muhammad of Ghur and Iltutmish

Amir Khusrau (c.1252-1325 CE) was the most famous Persian writer of this period. He wrote a number of poems. He experimented with several poetical forms and created a new style of Persian poetry called *Sabaq-i-Hind* or the Indian style. He also wrote some Hindi verses. Amir Khusrau's *Khazain-ul-Futuh* speaks about Alauddin's conquests. His famous work, the *Tughlaq Nama*, deals with the rise of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq. Much of his writings were in form

of poems though some of them were written in prose as well. Put together, his writings provide us good historical source-material. It was with his long, unique poem, *Qiran-us-Sa' dain*, written with ceaseless labour of six months, at the age 36 that Khusrau became the poet-laureate of King Kaiqubad at Delhi. This poem is soaked in his love for Delhi: he also writes on the mutual love between Hindus and Muslims there.

Sanskrit and Persian functioned as link languages in the Delhi Sultanate. Zia Nakshabi was the first to translate Sanskrit stories into Persian. The book *Tutu Nama* or the *Book of the Parrot* became popular and was translated into Turkish and later into many European languages. The famous *Rajatarangini* written by Kalhana belonged to the period of Zain-ul Abidin, the ruler of Kashmir. Many Sanskrit works on medicine and music were translated into Persian. In Arabic, Alberuni's *Kitab-ul-Hind* is the most famous work. Regional languages also developed during this period. Chand Bardai was the famous Hindi poet of this period. Bengali literature had also developed and Nusrat Shah patronised the translation of *Mahabaratha* into Bengali.

Apart from poetry a strong school of history writing in Persian developed in India during the period. The most famous historians of the period were Zia-uddin Barani, Shams-i-Shiraj Afif and Isami.

Isami's family lost royal favour during the Tughlaq regime and migrated to Deccan at the time of the transfer of capital to Devagiri. This fact introduced an element of personal bias into Isami's account of Muhammad Tughluq's reign. His *Futuh-us-Salatin* is a work in Persian verse, on the model of Firdausi's *Shahnamah*. It deals with the history of the long period from the rise of the Yaminiis of Ghazni to the reign of Muhammad Tughluq. However, he gives important details about the reigns of the Mameluk and Khalji Sultans. One special feature of his work is that it provides interesting glimpses of social and cultural life.

Barani's *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*, named after Firuz Shah Tughlaq, is the most valuable historical work written during the period of the Sultanate. It begins with the first year of Balban's reign (1266), leaving a clear gap of six years after the close of the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, and ends with the sixth year of Firuz Shah Tughlaq's reign (1357). Barani wrote another book, *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*, which

is a compendium of instructions on state affairs emphasising the Islamic ideal of government. It can claim no depth or even practical wisdom.

One special method used by Barani is to record dialogues or 'discourse'. The authenticity of these portions of his narrative is open to grave doubt. It was, however, not an unusual practice for historical writers of those days; instances are available in the compositions of Amir Khusrau, Isami and Ibn Batuta. The most important feature of Barani's Tarikh is his interest in administrative matters, particularly those relating to revenue and prices of commodities. Here, he breaks new ground; instead of confining his attention, like other medieval historians, to rulers, courts and campaigns, he turns also to those aspects of history which are of special interest to modern historians.

Shams-i-Siraj Afif belonged to a family of officials. Moreover, he was employed by Firoz Tughlaq in the revenue department. His object was to complete Barani's unfinished work. Though his Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi was named after his patron, it was written after his death—indeed after the virtual fall of the Tughluq dynasty as a result of Timur's invasion. Afif's work begins where Barani's narrative ends; it is a systematic first hand account of Firuz Shah Tughluq's reign. Being confined to a single reign, the work provides a concentrated narrative; moreover, it gives many details on administration as also on the biographies of the principal nobles.

Yahya bin Ahmad Sirhindi's work, Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi, named after Sultan Mubarak Shah of the Sayyid dynasty begins with the reign of Muhammad of Ghur and ends in 1434.

Valuable historical material is available in some works of the famous Indo-Persian poet, Amir Khusrau. One of his prose works, the Khazain-ul-Futuh, is a very important source of information about the reign of Ala-ud-din Khalji. Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq wrote a brief account of his reign in a book entitled Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi. Another anonymous work, entitled Sirat-i-Firuz Shahi, was written probably under his patronage and at his dictation.

There is no contemporary work on the history of the Lodis. But three historical works written in the seventeenth century—Tarikh-i-Salatin-i-Afghana by Ahmad Yadgar, Makhzan-i-Afghana by Niamatullah, and Tarikh-i-Duadi by Abdullah deal exclusively with the history of Afghan rule in India. The history of the Sultanate is also dealt with by later historians like Nizamuddin, Badauni (sixteenth century) and Ferishta (seventeenth century).

Some of the other important Persian works include the Chach-Nama which was originally written in Arabic. Later on, it was translated into Persian by Muhammad Ali bin Abu Bakar Kufi in the time of Nasir-ud-din Qubacha. This work gives a history of the Arab conquest of Sindh and is our main source of information of that subject. The Sirat-i-Firozshahi was written around the year 1370. It is a contemporary account which was very useful for the reign of Firuz Tughlaq. The Tarikh-i-Muhammadi was Completed in 1438-39 by Muhammad Bihamad Khani. The author did not belong to the Ulema class but was a member of the military class. It also contains the history of the Sultans of Delhi, Timur, biographies of Saints and the struggles of the Sultans of Kalpi with their Hindu and Muslim neighbours.

The accounts of foreign travellers throw interesting light on the political and socio- economic conditions in different parts of the country. They came from different countries and usually wrote with detachment about what they saw, but they often made mistakes because they were ignorant of Indian languages. There was a continuous stream of these travellers from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. The Italian traveller Marco Polo visited south India towards the close of the thirteenth .The best known of all the foreigners who visited India during the pre-Mughal period was the Moroccan traveller Ibn Batuta who lived in India for eight years in the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq. His account bears the stamp of authenticity.

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