



STUDIES ON LITERARY SOURCE OF INDIAN MEDIEVAL HISTORY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ZIAUDDIN BARNI'S TARIKH-I- FIROZ SHAHI

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Abstract

The first great historian of the Indian medieval period is Ziauddin Barni. He was a muslim political thinker of Delhi sultanate located in present-day north India during Muhammad bin Tughlaq and Firoz Shah's reign. Most of the events covered in his history were fresh during his time. Barni had a high conception of History and considered it to be an essential duty to record honestly the whole truth. As he had ample opportunity of knowing the details, his history is the most important source of information for the Indian medieval period. He was best known for composing the Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi, a historical work on medieval India, which covers the period from the reign of Ghiyasuddin Balban to the first six years of reign of Firoz Shah Tughlaq and the *Fatwa-i-Jahandari*. In narrations of old history, official history has an important place, as it narrates the history of governments or their desires. There are various works with this approach; meanwhile people are given a place in some official historiographies. This way he has started a new type of historiography in which the focus is changing from government to people. His work Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi details about the role of people in government's strengths and weaknesses Indian medieval history. He had serious notation to social problems to guide the governors to reform in society and his cause and effect search in social and economic occurrences could be a sign of his analysis from effective factors in social changes. Though there are a large number of literary sources of Indian medieval history moreover the contribution of Ziauddin Barni's Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi is a milestone in Indian historical knowledge.

Key Words: Ziauddin Barni, Literary Source, Medieval History, Tarikh-I- Firoz Shahi, India.

Introduction: Ziauddin Barni was born to a Muslim family in 1285 in which his father, uncle, and grandfather all worked in high government posts under the Sultan of Delhi¹. His family were natives of Meerut and Bulandsahar. His maternal grandfather Husam-ud-Din, was an important officer of Ghiyasuddin Balban and his father Muwayyid-ul-Mulk held the post of *naib* of Arkali Khan, the son of Jalaluddin Firoz Khilji. His uncle Qazi Ala-ul-Mulk was the *Kotwal* (police chief) of Delhi during the reign of Ala-ud-Din Khilji. Barni never held a post, but was a *nadim* (companion) of Muhammad bin Tughlaq for seventeen years. During this period he was very close to Amir Khusro. After Tughlaq was deposed, he fell out of favor. In 'Exile' he wrote two pieces dealing with government, religion, and history, which he hoped would endear him to the new sultan, Firoz Shah Tughlaq. He was not rewarded for his works and died in 1357. His gravestone lies in the courtyard of Nizamuddin Auliya's dargah in Delhi, at the entrance of the *dalan* of Mirdha Ikram, and near the tomb of Amir Khusrau. The *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* or *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* (Firoz Shah's History, 1357) was an interpretation of the history of the Delhi sultanate up to the

then-present Firoz Shah Tughlaq. Then interpretation noted that the sultans who followed the rules of Barni had succeeded in their endeavors while those that did not, or those who had sinned, met the Nemesis¹. Barani was an unfair narrator and generally considered a very unreliable source. But, though Barni refers many times to the sources of information, he did not consult his contemporary works. This resulted in the sketchy description of Alauddin Khilji's wars in Chittor, Ranthambhor and Malwa and the Deccan campaigns of Malik Kafur.

The later medieval historians, Nizamuddin Ahmad, Badayuni, Ferishta and Haji-ud-Dabir depended upon the *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* for their account of history of the period covered in this work. Abdul Haq Dehlvi in his *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar* depended upon the work for the biographical sketches of Nizam-ud-Din Auliya and the other Sufi saints². Barani categorized the law into two kinds, the Shariat and the Zawabit. The Zawabit were the state laws formulated by the monarch in consultation with the nobility in the changed circumstances to cater to the new requirements which the Shariat was unable to fulfill. The Zawabit, he said must be in the spirit of the Shariat and enumerated four conditions for its formulation as guidelines. They are-

- The Zawabit should not negate the Shariat, it must increase the loyalty and hope among common people towards the Sultan.
- Its sources and inspiration should be the Shariat and pious Caliphs, if at all it had to negate the Shariat out of exigencies, it must follow charities and compensation in lieu of that negation.

There are a number of literary sources of India medieval history which are detailed here-

1. Taj-ul-Masir: It was written by Sadruddin Mohammad Hassan Nizami in Turki language. Hassan Nizami took up this and described the events of the period between 1191 to 1217 A. D. Hassan Nizami was witness of those events which he described and, therefore, his account has been regarded quite authentic³.

2. Tabkat-i-Nasiri: It was written by Minhajuddin Siraj in Persian. Sultan Iltutmish took Minhajuddin Siraj under his service in 1228 A.D. Tabkat-i-Nasiri is a detailed text Minhaj described in it not only the events of the period of rule of the Sultans. Therefore, this description has been accepted fairly reliable and later historians like Ziauddin Barni used Tabkat-i-Nasiri for their own writings⁴.

3. Works of Amir Khusrau: Abul Hasan Yaminuddin Khusrau was one of the best scholars and poets of his age. He was a witness to the reign of Sultan Balban and got patronage of the Khilji rulers and even that of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq. His important writings were *Qiran-us-Sadain*, *Miftah-ul-Futuh*, *Ashiqqa*, *Tughlaqanama*, *Tarikh-i-Alaie* etc⁵. 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.

4. Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi by Shams-i-Siraj Afif: Afif also wrote several texts. Among them, *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* written by him has been regarded as a good historical source-material. Afif gave a vivid account of the events, administration, society and cultural life of

the people during the period of Sultan Firoz Tughluq⁷ and, therefore, Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi written by him has been regarded much useful.

5. Futuh-at-i-Firoz Shahi: It is a small text written by Sultan Firuz himself. The primary purpose of Sultan Firoz Shah in writing this text was to justify himself as an ideal ruler. Therefore, he did not describe his activities for the extension of the Empire as the title of the text signifies but his efforts for the propagation of Islam among his subject⁸. The text provides useful information concerning the administration of Sultan Firoz Shah.

6. Futuh-us-Salatin: It was written by Kwaja Abdulla Malik Isami who was a contemporary of Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq. He described the history of the dynasty of Mohmmad of Gazni to the rule of the dynasty of the Tughlaqs. Much of the material of Futuh-us-Slatin has been regarded useful historical source material particularly the contemporary history of the Deccan⁹. Several later historians like Badayuni and Farista took help for their writings.

7. Rehla: One of the important chronicles of this period is the description of the African traveler, Ibn Batuta who remained in India for fourteen years. He wrote the account of his travels which, afterwards, were published under the title Rehla. Therefore, his writing (Rehla) has been regarded as an authentic source-material of the then Indian history¹⁰.

8. Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi: It was written by Yahya bin Ahmad of Sirhind who enjoyed the patronage of the Sayyed ruler, Mubarak Shah. He took help of several texts for writing Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi which is the only contemporary literary source material for knowing the history¹¹ of the rule of the Sayyeds.

09. Tarjkh-i-Salatin-i-Afghana or Tarjkh-i-Shahi: Its author was Ahmad Yadgar. Primarily, it is a history of the Afghan rulers of Delhi and describes in detail the events of the reigns of the Lodi and Sur Sultans of Delhi. The text begins with the rule of Sultan Bahlol Lodi and ends with the death of Hemu¹².

10. Tuzuk-i-Babri: It is the autobiography of the Mughul emperor, Babur written in Turki. It was translated by several persons in Persian during the period of the Mughals. Afterwards, it has been translated into several European languages including English and French. Among these modern translations, the one translated by Madam Beveridge in English from the original Turki- text has been regarded as the best. The Tuzuk-i-Babri has been praised by all modern historians. However, with certain limitations, the Tuzuk-i-Babri has been regarded as a useful and authentic source material of contemporary history¹³.

11. Tarikh-i-Rashidi: It was written by Mirza Mahammad Haider Dughlah who was a cousin of Emperor Babur. It was written in Persian. Tarikh-i-Rashidi was divided into two parts by him. In the first part of it, he described the history of the Mughal emperors between the period 1347-1553 A.D. and, in the second described the events of his own life

up to 1541 A.D. The text of the second part has been regarded more useful for the students of history¹⁴.

12. Humayun-nama: It was written in Persian by Gulbadan Begum, the daughter of Babur and real sister of Prince Hindal. It was written during the reign of Akbar at his instructions. She described the later events of the rule of Babur and the events of the reign of the emperors but emphasized on the character, personalities and family relations of the Emperors¹⁵. Therefore, the historical importance of the text is reduced.

13. Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi or Tauhfa-i-Akbar-Shahi: It was written by Abbas Khan Sarwani in Persian at the instruction of Akbar. Only a part of it is available. He mentioned in the text so that its readers might not doubt the authenticity of his writing. However, the text suffers from one weakness. The dates of different events have not been mentioned in it. Moreover, it has been regarded as an authentic source-material¹⁶.

14. Waqiyat-i-Mustaqi: Shaikh Rizakullah Mushtaqi wrote it in Persian. Mushtaqi did not write elaborately concerning Sher Shah though he certainly described the important events of his reign. He also described those circumstances which led to the establishment of the Mughal empire in India¹⁷ for the second time. Therefore, his text provides useful information concerning Sher Shah, his successors and Humayun.

15. Tarikh-i-Farishta: Farishta wrote this text while he was in the service of Adil Shah II, the ruler of Bijapur. His text is a history of India during the medieval period. Farishta consulted several Persian texts while preparing his text¹⁸. Tarikh-i-Farishta has been regarded as a renowned historical text and an authentic one.

16. Akbar-nama: It was written by Abul-Fazal in Persian. It has been divided into three parts. The first part deals with the history of the Mughals from the reign of Amir Timur up to the reign of Humayun. In the second and the third parts has been given the history of the rule of Akbar up to the year 1602 A.D. He glorified the personalities of Babur, Humayun and particularly that of Akbar and belittled their enemies particularly Sher Shah and Islam Shah.

17. Ain-i-Akbari: It has also been written in Persian by Abul-Fazal. In it Abul-Fazal has not described the political events of the reign of Akbar but his administration, laws, rules, regulations, etc. It has also been divided into three parts. The Ain-i-Akbari has been regarded a precious source- material of knowing the culture and administration during the reign of Akbar¹⁹.

18. Tabaqat-i-Akbari: It was written by Khvaja Nizam-ud-din Ahmad. It has been divided into three parts. In its first part, he described the beginning of the Muslim rule in India and the history of the Sultans of Delhi. In its second part, he described the history of the Mughal emperors in India beginning from the rule of Babur to thirty-ninth year of Akbar's reign and in the third part, he narrated the history of provinces. Therefore, the

Tabaqat-i- Akbari provides extensive knowledge concerning a large portion of medieval history and has been regarded as an important literary source material.

19. Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh or Tarikh-i-Badauni: Its writer was Abdul Qadir Badauni who was a scholar of Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit language during the reign of Akbar. He had been a fellow- student of Abul-Fazal. Yet, it helps modern historians in understanding the other side of the reign of Akbar. Therefore, the Tarikh-i-Badauni has been regarded as a useful source material.

20. Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri: It is the autobiography of Emperor Jahangir. Jahangir wrote the events of his reign beginning from his accession to the throne to the seventeenth year of his reign. He described the climate, the beauty of the nature, birds, animals, flowers etc. of the places he visited. These all provide useful information concerning the history and culture of India during the reign of Jahangir to modern historians²⁰. Therefore, though the Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri suffers from certain weaknesses, yet it is a valuable, historical document.

21. Iqbal-nama: It was written by Mutamid Khan who wrote the later part of the biography of Jahangir for nearly two years. The text has been divided into three parts. In its first part, he described the history of the family of Amir Timur including the history of the reigns of Babur and Humayun. In the second part, he narrated the history of the reign of Akbar. In the third part, he narrated the history of the rule of Jahangir. Yet, the Iqbal-nama has been regarded as a good source material.

22. Padshah-nama: Written by Muhammad Amin Qazuini Shahjahan ordered Qazuini to write the history of his reign. He wrote the history only of the first ten years of Shahjahan's reign. Qazuini divided his texts into three parts. In its first part, he described the life and career of Shahjahan from his childhood to his accession on the throne. Second part covers the history of the first ten years of the reign of Shahjahan and in the third part, he gave a list of contemporary scholars and saints. His text has been found useful by modern historians.

23. Padshah-nama was written by Abdul Hamid Lahauri: When Muhammad Amin Qazuini was asked to discontinue the writing of the history of the reign of Shahjahan. He divided his text into two parts. In the first part, he described briefly the history of Mughals from the period of Amir Timur to the first ten years of the reign of Shahjahan. In the second part, he narrated the history of the next ten years of the reign of Shahjahan. It provides useful information to modern historians.

24. Padshah-nama of Muhammad Waris: When Abdul Hamid Lahauri became old, the responsibility of completing the history of the rest of the period of Shahjahan was assigned to his disciple Muhammad Waris. He wrote the history of these ten years in good detail. His text has been regarded as a good source-material of knowing the history of the reign of Shahjahan.

25. Muntakhan-ul-Lubab or Tarikh-i-Khafi Khan: Its author was Hashim Khafi Khan. Beginning with the attacks of Babur on India, it described the history of the Mughals to the first fifteen years of the rule of later Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah. Khafi Khan described the events of the reign of Aurangzeb in detail. Yet the Muntakhab-ul-Lubab of Khafi Khan has been regarded as a good source material of contemporary history.

26. Tarikh-i-Firoz shai written by Ziauddin Barni: Barani belonged to a family which had been close to different Sultans of Delhi. Yet, Barni remained close to throne and the court for long years and, therefore, was witness of the events of his time. Besides, Barni was a great scholar. Therefore, his works have been regarded fairly reliable. Barni wrote several texts, e.g., Inayatnama-i-Ilahi, Hasaratnama, Fatwah-i-Jahandari, Tarikh- i-Firoz Shahi, Salvat-i-Kabir (The Great Prayer), Sana-i-Muhammadi (Praises of Prophet Mohammad), Hasratnama (Book of Regrets), Tarikh-i-Barmaki, Inayat Nama-i-Ilahi (Book of Gods Gifts), Maasir Saadat (Good Deeds of the Sayyids), Lubbatul Tarikh, Fatawa-i-Dindari. Among them Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi has been regarded as the best historical source-material. In it, Barni narrated the events from the period of accession to the throne by Sultan Balban to the first six years of reign of Sultan Firoz Shah⁶. Barni preferred to be a court- writer, did not want to annoy any Sultan, did not give his account in chronological order. Therefore, his account has not been considered fair. Yet, it has been regarded as a good source-material of history because Barni described the contemporary policy, economy, society etc. in quite detail. Even W. H. Moreland and Dr. I. H. Qureshi found him to be very useful for the agrarian, economic and administrative history of the period. Hasan Barni and Prof. Sheikh Abdur Rashid also regarded him as a great historian who is not merely informative but critical. It is only Prof. Peter Hardy of London University who thinks that Barni does not rise to the stature of a great historian, but he measures a historian of the fourteenth century with the yardstick of the twentieth century. Barni took the writing of history seriously and aimed at contributing some inspired literature based upon reality and experience. He felt sincerely that history had a significant purpose to serve, namely to guide humanity on the right path. He was inclined towards didactic history. Thus, both from his personal experience, his family position, his wide contacts and his link with the court he was ideally suited to write history. Moreover, a reflective mood, an inquisitive mind, a fearless temperament, and a critical faculty added further qualification to his gift of good style, lucid exposition, and clarity of thought. His motives in writing history were practical because he believed that he was offering to God something which would open the eyes of mankind to god, and the Sultan something which would benefit him in this world and in the next. He was quite proficient in the theological studies of his time. To Barni, History was true religion. It was an indispensable study for a good life in the world. It warns the readers to avoid the base and prompts them to adopt the noble. He lists seven benefits in the study of history:

- It introduces us to the lives of great men, prophets, saints, thinkers and sultan.
- It opens us to the wisdom of the past.
- It excites in us reason and judgment by the study of the experiences of the past.

- It comforts us in our misfortune and adversity; it prevents us from worrying about hypothetical dangers, it offers us warnings of dangers ahead; and it offers us warnings of dangers ahead; and it prompts us to be sober at times of success and glory.
- It encourages patience and resignation.
- It provokes respect for the righteous and contempt for the wicked.
- It is the strongest foundation of truth. It is the depiction of the drama of right and wrong, justice and oppression, obedience and rebellion and virtue and vice.

Thus Barani is a didactic and fearless historian who writes as if he had a mission in life. He insists that a true historian must speak the truth without fear or favor. He aims at achieving this goal in history through the depiction of his characters in their role of rise and fall. His history is a record not merely of events, episodes, and personalities but also of rules, regulation, precepts, principles and prescriptions. Although he did not deal with causes, conditions, and processes he has dealt at length on events and consequences. He calls History 'the Queen of Sciences'. Barani had a technique of his own in the treatment of history. He puts his ideas into the mouth of some of the historical personages. Secondly, Barani has fixed in his mind certain concepts for an ideal monarch and he found them in Firoz Shah, who was, according to him, a personification of those concepts. He is harsh on Mohammed bin Tughlaq, obviously for his inconsistent policies. Even today Mohammed bin Tughlaq appears to be a puzzle to us, a bundle of contradictions and a mixture of opposites. Barani rages in fury at some of the suicidal policies of this Sultan. In Firoz Shah, he finds a divine redemption and creates an impression that the affairs in this world are conditioned by laws of nature which justly offer rewards to the good and retribution to the bad. In short, Barani had a profound philosophy of his own, which merely said that actions of men cannot escape divine judgment. He looks the past as the battleground between good and evil and men are combatants who are destined to get what they deserve. Having treated history scientifically, he leans in the end towards philosophy which prompts Dr. Hardy to remark that Barani treats history as a branch of theology.

Conclusion: The 'Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi' is considered to be an extremely important piece of literature that throws light on the medieval Indian period. The name of its author is Ziauddin Barani, a historical and political thinker who was patronized by the likes of Mohammed bin Tughlaq and Firoz Shah. 'Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi' covers the period from the ruling years of Balban to the first six years of Firoz Shah Tughlaq's reign. Because of its historical accurateness, this work is considered to be a valuable source material on the medieval Indian period by scholars and researcher. Many scholars regard the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) as the first firmly established Muslim kingdom on the Indian subcontinent. When researching this kingdom, Ziauddin Barani's *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi* ('History of Firoz Shāh'), assumed to have been completed shortly before the author's death around 1357 cannot be ignored. As *Tārīkh-i Fīroz Shāhī*, which examines the reigns of at least eight sultans, is the only existing historiographical text covering the period between 1266-1355, it has become the premise for all modern historical works on that topic. Barani's text has survived in several manuscripts, the oldest known copies dating back to the fifteenth century. Among these manuscripts, two recessions were identified, both differing from each other in several ways. While the second recession was edited in 1862 and partly translated into English, the first recession has remained unedited and untranslated until today.

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