MULTI - ETHNIC RULING CLASS OF DELHI
SULTANATE (1290-1388)

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The present decade is an attempt to analyze the composite ruling class as the last decade of the 13th century witnessed an important political change which overthrew the Turkish ascendency and the Kingship went to non-Turks Khaljis, which had direct impact on the composition of the ruling class that was drawn from different social groups who belonged to non-Turkish races. The paper also highlights the various ethnic groups like Indian elements both Muslims as well as non-Muslims, Foreigners, Afghans and Mongols. The present work also discusses the key posts held by them.

With the establishment of Delhi sultanate in India during the early period of 13th century, nobles occupied an important position in the political setup. Most of the Maliks and Amirs of this period were of Turkish origin and belonged to different tribes like Khita, Qara Khita, Qipchaq, Qargit etc. and majority of them belonged to the category of slaves. However, on the basis of information provided by Minhaj Siraj we found some names like Izzuddin Salari, Alauddin Jani, Saiuddin Kuchi and Nizam ul Mulk Junaidi, the wazir of Sultan Itutmish, who belonged to Tazik stock. Later on, they were massacred by Turkish Amirs of Sultan’s slaves. During the reign of Razia, she got due promotion to non-Turkish nobles like Jamal ud din Yaqut, the Abyssinian (Habashi) who was promoted to the post of Amir-i-Akhtar (Master of Horses), however, it was resented by all Maliks and Amirs of Ghorian and Tajik nobles. Ballan’s attitude towards Turkish nobles is well to be repeated here. Despite some elements of non-Turkish races in nobility, however, the nobility was considered as the preserve of certain strata of Turkish slaves, Ghorian and Khalji elements.

The last decade of the 13th century of Delhi Sultanate witnessed new political developments which affected politics, ideas, economy, etc. The passing of Sultanate throne from Turks to non-Turks was itself a drastic change which has been termed as Khalji revolution. The rise of Khalji’s to power in 1290 brought important changes in the political structure of the Delhi Sultanate which had its explicit impact on the composition of the ruling elite of the state. They sought the support of non-Turkish nobles as well as Indians to occupy the throne. The new establishment of Khalji’s were supposed to derive them from those classes who could not be hostile to them of being as superior class on the lineage ground, hence it was an deliberate attempt not to give precedence to lineage, meanwhile the Khaljis had not any aristocratic background and did not make it any criteria for the running of the system. When Ala ud din came to power in 1296, he seems to have taken much pragmatic approach for the formation of the ruling class by broadening their social base and gave due share to different non-Turkish sections of the society viz, Afghans, non-Muslims and neo-Muslims.

INDIAN ELEMENTS:
By the 13th century many Indians had started occupying positions in the Sultanate ruling class. Tabaqat-i-Nasiri of Minhaj Siraj mentions about the persons of Indian origin who had been inducted into the nobility. We also have many Persian chronicles like Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi by Ziauddin Barani, Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi by Afif, Futuh-us-Salatin by Isami, Tarikhi-i- Mubarakshahi by Yahya Sirhindi, Khaza'in-ul-Futuh by Amir Khusrau and the Rehla of Ibn Battuta which provide invaluable information about the officers who were of Indian descent.

Among the persons of Indian origin mention may be made of Imaduddin Raihan, who was Indian and entered into the Sultanate administration under Ilutmish’s successors and performed a key role in the history of this period. He along with the Turkish nobles hatched the conspiracy and successfully ousted Ulugh Khan Ballan from his office.

Kamal Mahiyar an Indian Hindu slave was Mahiyar’s son. He had contacts with the higher officials like Malik Alauddin Kashli Khan, Amir-i-Hijab and Malik Nizamuddin Vakildar. Sultan Ballan appointed him as the Khwajgi (post of accountant) of Amroha. When Ballan came to know that he was a low-caste Hindu slave, it enraged him and he scolded the nobles for having recommended his name to the post of Khwajgi. Ballan warned them to be careful while recommending the persons to the post of Khwajgi, Mushrif (officer Incharge of keeping account) and Barid (intelligence officer appointed by the state to collect information) regardless of their high qualification. But after Ballan the same Kamal Mahiyar was appointed to the post of a Malik (second highest grade officer after the Khans) by Sultan Kajqubad.

In the like manner, with the advent of Khalji’s to power, Malik Ain ul Mulk Ainul Mulik is the name by which he is generally referred in the Persian chronicles. He was a brilliant noble of Indian descent from Multan. He was a well-known administrator and an able commander under Sultan Alau-udin Khalji. During the reign of Firoz Shah Tughluq he was assigned the post of post of Ashraf-i-Manalik (Auditor General). He was transferred to Multan. Like his father Ain-ul-Mulk, Malik Azzuddin also held a good post in the administration. He was the Dabir-i-Manalik (Chief Secretary for the whole kingdom) under Alauddin Khalji.

An outstanding general and able administrator under Ala ud din Khalji was Malik Kafur or Kafur Hazar Dinar, who was a Hindu eunuch and had no family and as recorded he was then purchased by Ala ud din Khalji for one thousand Dinar, he was given the name of Kafur because of his resemblance to ambergris. Initially he was on the post of Vakil-i-dar (incharge of the royal
household) and then was promoted to the post of Malik Naib Vice regent of the Sultan. Under Alau-ud-din Khalji he led successful military campaigns against the, Rama Deva of Devagir and Warangal.

Another official who belonged to the Indian descent and popularly known by the name of Khusrau Khan, Hasan was originally a Hindu from Baradu or Parwari tribe of Gujarat. Having been brought to Delhi along with his brother in 1305, they got converted to Islam and adopted the names of Hasan and Husamuddin. Hasan got much fame and name under Qutbuddin Mubarak Shah Khalji (1316-1320). The Sultan was very much happy with him and the promoted him to the position of Malik Naib regent of the kingdom and also conferred upon him the title of Khusrau Khan. So, he slowly started coming close to the Sultan. Ultimately, he showed his disloyalty by planning and then killing the Sultan and then himself ascended the throne in 1320. But his period as a Sultan was cut short by the ambition of a noted and influential noble Ghiyasuddin who killed him. Khusrau Khan’s brother Husamuddin occupied an important position in the administration. He was appointed by Mubarak Khalji as the Muqta of Gujarat.

Muhammad bin Tughlak gave a new direction to the process of the selection of officers for running the state administration. He did away with the practice of appointing bureaucrats on the basis of their noble descent. He kept just one criterion for appointment viz. competence. In this way many Indians from the lower strata of society found place in his administration. Malik Maqbul, Khan-i-Jahan was a Hindu convert to Islam from Telingana. His original name was Kanu, and was a very wise and intelligent man. He had also served as the minister in the Telingana kingdom but he did not knew Persian. It was later that Firoz Tughluq found a brilliant minister in him. Muhammad Tughlq appointed Aziz Khummar, a man of low descent as the governor of Amroha, because of his sincerity and dedication to his task he was very much appreciated by the Sultan. Later the administration of Dhar and Malwa was also handed over to him.

Non-Muslims in Nobility and Bureaucracy:

With the establishment of Turkish rule in India both literary as well as non-literary sources suggest the recruitment many non-Muslims in the Sultanate polity. From the inception of the Ghaznavid rule in India, we have many references which suggest the non-Muslims in the political setup established in the Muslim. Non-Muslims are found in both military as well as civil administration. Minhaj has mentioned the Hindu Khan, the only non-Turk from Mathura among the twenty-five Maliks of Itutmish. The process of joining of non-Muslims did not get any halt, during the reign of Khalji’s and Tughluqs, rather, a large number of them were inducted in Sultanate polity, with less number during Khalji’s and large number under Tughluq’s especially under Mohammad bin Tughluq as is evident from the both literary as well as non-literary sources. Epigraphic evidence supplemented by some textual references found in Sanskrit texts shows the process of subordinate offices particularly during the reign of Sultan Ala ud din Khalji 1296-1315 and more importantly during Muhammad bin Tughluq 1325-51. Sultan Jalal ud din upheld the policy of appointing anti-Muslims in higher posts, as is evident from the fact that, the Sultan appointed his Hindu assitant as Naib Vakiladar to Malik Khurram, with a salary of 100000 jital. During this period many Jains were employed in the service of state. Nain, a Jain, was an officer under Sultan Jalal ud-din Khalji whose son Dusaju served in Meru Taman under the Tughluqs. Same view is held by Satish Chandra about the Rajput chiefs into the service of Delhi Sultans from 13th & 14th century onwards. Similarly, Barani has mentioned a large number of Hindu military personal, whom he named as Bandagan-i-Nayak Slaves, who held some status and position like of their Turkish counterparts, these Bandagan-i-Nayak were Hindus. According to Barani, Malik Nayak, who held the office of Akhur-bek Maisarah, with the territory of Sumana was certainly a Hindu. Similarly, on the basis of epigraphical evidence we come across with Thakura Pheru who was a mint officer of Alau-ud-din Khalji.

During the brief reign of Qutbuddin Mubarak Khalji, we come across with many Hindus, who dominated the court, however Barani has not mentioned the key position they held at court. During the reign of Qub-ud-din Mubarak Khalji Thakura Pheru is said to have occupied his previous position of a mint officer. Qutbuddin Mubarak Shah invited Samar Shah to Delhi and appointed him his Vsyayahar commissioner. Similarly, Samar Singh received royal patronage by Sultan Ghiyas ud din Tughluq and treated him as his son and Sultan Muhammad treated him as his brother and appointed him as the governor of Talang. It was only during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq that, we come across with many non-Muslims, who held higher positions both in civil and revenue administration. In this regard mention may be made of Hindu Sai Raj as the wazir of Muhammad Bin Tughluq that is evident from the Chunar inscription dated 1333 A.D. Similarly, Barani, Isami, and Ibn Batutta has mentioned number of Hindu and Jains, who held the key position in the administration of Muhammad bin Tughluq. Nithu Sodal is one among them, who according to Barani held the post of Hajib-i-Khas under Muhammad bin Tughluq, he referred him as Nayak Bacha. He is blamed to have cooperated with Khwaja Jahan for installing a child, claimed to be the son of Muhammad bin Tughluq on the throne.

Another Hindu noble was Amir Gulchand who was the deputy of Amir Halajun of Daulatabad. Likewise, Dhara Hindu Noble was assigned the post of Naib Wazir of Deogir. Among the most talented and intelligent of Hindu nobles appointed by the Sultan was Rattan as the Governor of Swistan. Both Barani as well as Isami have mentioned Bahran Rai, a Hindu as the governor of Gulbargah. Similarly, according to Barani, Muhammad Tughluq has appointed the mean of meanest namely Kishan Bazran Indri, as the governor of Awadh. Pira the gardener who was the most ignoble and wicked person among the wicked and the ignoble of Hind and Sind was assigned the Diwan-i-Wizarat. Similarly, among the Hindu nobles Barani has mentioned Mehta as the Mustasari of Karnal. While as, Ibn Batutta while praising about the law-abiding Hindus who lived in towns and villages has mentioned their occupations as well among whom he has mentioned as accountants, clerks, and revenue officers. Similarly, Firoz Tughluq seems to have adopted a more liberal policy towards non-Muslims in recruiting them in the administration. According to Affi, several numbers of the Bhati clan rose to important positions, in the service of Firoz Tughluq. Rai Bhairo who was a relative form his maternal side was among the loyal officers. Barani has given a vivid description of Hindus in the administration of Firoz Tughluq, according to Fatwai-i-Jahandari, they (Hindus) are held in the greatest respect and esteem and are honored highly, they enjoyed the insignia drums, Standards, Bejeweled and Brocade.

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Foreigners in the Nobility:

Barani has given an account of many nobles of Jalal-ud-din Khalji who are believed to have come from foreign countries especially from the west. During the reign of Jalal-ud-din Khalji, we come across with Malik Muid Jajarmi and Saad-ud-din Amir Bahar which is of foreign origin. Similarly, during the reign of Ala ud-din Khalji, Sharif Qaini who held the post of Naib-i-Wazirat is said to be of foreign origin. The reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq is known for the induction of foreigners in large numbers and the patronage given to them. The foreigners included in the higher offices came from countries like Khurasan, Iraq, Mawar un Nahar, Khwarezm, Sistan, Heart, Egypt and Damascus. According to Ibn Batutta, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq preferred foreigners due to his generosity towards them. Mention may be made of some foreigners who enjoyed higher positions in the administration of Muhammad bin Tughluq were Malik-ul-Tujjar governor of Cambay. Shaikhzada Bistami was entrusted with the governorship of Iqta-i-Kara. Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq held the foreigners in high esteem and dignity. Pertinently almost all the officials, courtiers, ministers of the state, judges were of foreign origin, he had also decreed that the foreigners be called by a special title of Aziz Honorable, this gives us a sense as to the status of foreigners in his administration. Foreigners would also get royal robes from the Sultan on the eve of festivals. Similarly, according to Ibn-Batutta, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq appointed Amir Bakht as the in charge of Chanderi, and was entitled as Sharaf-ul-Mulk. Other foreigners who held very high appointments under him were, Shaikhzada Bistami and Malik Sanjar Badakhshani. According to Ibn Battuta, the Sultan assigned the Iqta of Malwa, Gujarat, and Naharwala to Amir Ghada. Ibn Batutta says that he belonged to the land of Arab. During the reign of Firoz Shah Tughluq neither Barani nor Afif has mentioned the powers and positions of foreigners.

Afghans Elements in Nobility:

With the advent of Balbani to sovereignty the Afghans seem to have increased in number as well as position and dignity. Though averse to the policy of employing non-Turkish low-born persons in government service, Sultan Balban could not ignore the less cultured Afghans who were well for their martial capability, consequently Afghan Sawars and Amirs were placed in sizeable numbers at strategic places in the Empire. Amir Khusrau has mentioned a large number of Afghan contingents employed by prince Muhammad Khan in Multan. The Afghans, who had come and settled in India long before got much accustomed in Indian administrative system, by the time of Ala ud-din Khalji a new generation of Afghans had come to the forefront and got adjusted in the political system of the Sultanate and got prominence in his period and were recruited in ruling class, mention may be made of Ikhtayar ud din Mal Afghan who got prominent place in the administration, his younger brother also got space in the list of ruling elite. He continued to hold the position of respect during the reign of Sultan Qutb-ud-din Mubarak Shah Khalj and made his mark in the expeditions against Mabar led by Khusrau Khan. Barani, Amir Khusrau, and Ibn Batutta have also mentioned Afghans who got high positions in the administration. However, it should be born in mind that we have not been informed about the post and position by held by them during the Khalji era. However, their number increased considerably and held important positions during Tughluq period. Malik Afghan and his younger brother was sent by Ghiyas ud din to the expeditions against Warangal in 1321 under the leadership of his son prince Ulugh Khan. Other notable Afghan nobles of Muhammad bin Tughluq were Malik Khatta Afghan, Jallu Afghan, Tughun-ud-Afghan, Bahram Afghan, Mandi Afghan and last but not least Malik Shahou lodi. Sultan Firoz Shah's attitude towards the Afghan nobles was also sympathetic, he seems to have given them space in higher strata of administration. Malik Bir Afghan was appointed as the Muqta of the Vilayat of Bihar, and was later succeeded, on his death by his son, Daud Khan. In the like manner Muhammad Shah Afghan was entrusted with the charge of the newly-constructed fort of Tughlaqpur formerly Akhal to keep a watch on turbulent Zamindars of the Vilayet of Etawah. Later on, after his death, the Sultan allowed his sons, Sirhali Khan and Mahmud Khan to hold their father's Iqta though the former was thrown into prison after some time. Malik Khattab also seems to have continued as the Muqta of Rapri.

Mongols in Nobility:

The Mongols were given royal patronage during the reign of Jalal-ud-din Khalji. Many of these people retained their earlier positions which they had during the times of Ilbair’s. Alghu Khan who was Chengiz Khan’s grandson came to the Sultan along with some Mughal Amiran-i-Hazarah and Amiran-i-Sadah and they all accepted the Islam here and thus became Muslims. Thereafter they joined the services of Alau-ud-din Khalji. During the reign of Alau-ud-din Khalji, he put them under swords and none among the Amiran-i-Sada remained alive. Many neo-Muslims find mention in the list of nobles of Jalal-ud-din. Prominent among them were Malik Umar Surkha, Malik Targhi Sarjandar, Malik Taju Sarishtadar, Malik Ulughchi Muqti of Kol. However, many of them got inducted in Sultan’s second year of reign. In its wake many other Amir-i-Hazarah Amiran-i-Sada converted to Islam and then settled in Delhi. Their salaries were fixed by Jalal-ud-din and also provided them villages in Inam and Iqta. Then they went to the mohallas of Indarpat, Kilokhari and Gayaspur to settle there.

According to Barani, it was during the last years of Muhammad bin Tughluq’s reign that several Mongols, Amirs of Sadah and Amirs of Tomans, Amirs of Hazaraz, and important dignitaries would turn up from Mongolia to the Sultan’s court and offered to join his services. Among them some joined the royal services and others left back. The Sultan showered upon them crores of money, jewellery, pearls equal to mans, gold, and horses of royal breed. These men would also receive Iqta and Vilayats provinces. According to Barani, Amir Qutbughra was a great amir of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq who was a descendant of Chengiz Khan, a great Mongol leader. During Firoz Tughluq, the descendants of Chengiz Khan, namely Amir Qutbughra and Amir Ahmad Iqbal upheld the position and post received by them under his predecessors. Thus, we found the Mongol descendants among the nobility of Khaljis and Tughluqs, though in insignificant numbers.
Thus, the study shows that the ruling class of Delhi Sultanate during 13th and 14th centuries belonged to different socio-ethnic groups who held important portfolios both in court as well in the provinces. The study also shows that the numerical strength of all the social class increased especially under Muhammad bin Tughluq.

2. ibid., p. 127.
4. ibid., p. 17, fn. 95.
5. ibid., p. 20.
6. ibid., p. 21.
15. ibid., p. 229.
22. ibid., p. 242.
40 Barani, Tarih-i-Firoz Shahi, Eng., tr., p.332.
41 Ibid., p.334.
46 Barani, Tarih-i-Firoz Shahi, Eng.,tr., p. 311.; Siddiqui, Authority & Kingship, p.139.
47 Ibid., p. 310.
48 Ibid., p. 321.
52 Hussain Mahdi, Tughluq Dynasty, p.337.
53 Nigam, Nobility, p.112.
54 Ibid., p.112.
55 Barani, Tarih-i-Firoz Shahi, Eng., tr., pp. 174-75.; Nigam Nobility, p. 112.
60 Ibid., p. 595.
61 Ibid., p. 663.
64 Ibid., p. 686.
65 For the list of nobles of Firoz Shah Tughluq by Barani, see Barani, Tarih-i-Firoz Shahi, Eng., tr., p. 324.; Afif, Tarih-i-Firoz Shahi, Eng., tr., Jauhri R.C, pp. 218-55.
68 Barani, Tarih-i-Firoz Shahi, Eng., tr., p. 244.; Iqtadar Hussain Siddiqui, Afghan nobility, p. 252.
69 Irfan Habib, Medieval India, Vol. 1. p. 38.
70 Ibid., p. 39.
71 Barani, Tarih-i-Firoz Shahi, Eng., tr., p. 275.
73 Ibid., p.140., fn.7.
74 Ibid., p.140.
75 Ibid., p.140.
76 Ibid., p.142.
77 Nigam, Nobility, p. 110.fn. 26.
78 Barani, Tarih-i-Firoz Shahi, Eng., tr., p. 135.
79 Ibid., p. 197.
80 Nigam, Nobility, p. 111
82 Ibid., p. 358.
83 Ibid., pp. 358-59.