4. REFLECTION OF INDIAN SOCIETY IN OTHER ACCOUNTS

It is important to understand just what information is available to us written during the sultanate period in addition to the Persian *malfuzaat*. To try and learn about medieval Indian society without first referring to the *Kitab-ul Hind* of Alberuni is like visiting Agra without seeing the Taj Mahal. Alberuni was the first scientific Indologist, and one of the greatest of all times.\(^1\) The original name of *Kitab-ul Hind* of Abu Raihan Muhammad bin Ahmad Alberuni is *Kitab fi Tahqiq maa lil Hind min Maqala Maqbool fil Aql ao Mardhula*. In this book he has covered almost all the important aspects of Indian society of his time. But unlike the *malfuz* writers, he deals with topics related to scholarly discussion such as soul, paradise and hell, *moksha* (salvation), judicial system, and taxation. He also discusses the political situation at the time of his patron Mahmud Ghazni’s invasion of India.

Similarly other medieval writers like Minhaj Siraj, Zaiuddin Barani, Shams Afif and Futuhat Isami deal on topics related to academic parlance and political interests of the ruling dynasty. For example, Zaiuddin Barani’s accounts so focused on court issues, that they cannot be relied on for

\(^1\) S.K. Chatterji, ‘Al-Beruni and Sanskrit’, Alberuni Commemoration Volume, 1951. Quoted by Qeyamuddin Ahmad, India by Al-Biruni, p.xvi
comprehensive socio-cultural detail of the period. In contrast to the sympathetic attitude of the Sufi saints towards the deprived sections of society, in Barani’s *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*\(^2\) and *Fatwah-i-Jahandari* we encounter an insensitive and unsympathetic attitude towards these same people. Barani was so critical of the lower classes, that he did not deem them even fit for proper education.

The condemnation by Ziauddin Barani of Indian converts to Islam, or those who descended from the early converts, suggests that these converts had started competing with members of the aristocratic families of early immigrants from Central Asia and other Islamic countries for posts in the State service. Advancing that the Sultan employ people with aristocratic backgrounds, Barani advises that the children of lowborn converts to Islam should not be admitted into *madarsahs* because this education would qualify them for government jobs\(^3\). Further he implies that only noble families had been chosen by God to rule mankind, and that their existence was necessary for the maintenance of justice and stability in society.\(^4\)

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\(^2\) I am highly grateful to Dr. A.A. Ahan who gave me his personal collection of Persian manuscripts including the manuscripts of Ziauddin Barani’s *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*

\(^3\) Barani, Ziauddin, *Fatwah-i-Jahandari*

\(^4\) Afser Beghum and Muhammad Habib’s article on *Fatawa-i-Jahandari* in Medieval Indian Quarterly, Aligarh, 1958.
When Barani makes mention of the commoner, they are discussed in a patronising manner, and an *alim* by practice, Barani would have been well aware of the egalitarian teachings of the Prophet. A promoter of the elite class, he is full of praise for Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban for his considering noble birth a prerequisite for State service, citing the case of a certain Kamal Mahiyar whom the nobles took to the Sultan as a candidate for the Khwajgi (post of accountant) of Amroha. The Sultan rejected him because his father had been a low-caste convert to Islam.\(^5\) This shows the thinking pattern of the elite society.

Though Alberuni did not show such critical and unsympathetic attitude towards the second classes, his writing definitely concentrated on topics related to the elite. Alberuni learnt Sanskrit at Banaras to help him understand subjects related to Brahmins, and one can find chapters dedicated to Patanjali's concept of *moksha*. Regarding the concept of *moksha* (liberation), Alberuni states the general Hindu belief that ignorance is the one thing that holds people back from knowledge, and therefore the Brahmin can only attain *moksha* through knowledge.\(^6\)

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5 Barani, Ziauddin, *Tarikh-I-Firoz Shahi*, p.36.

6 India by Alberuni, translated by Edward C. Sachau's,
In the *Tabqat-i-Nasari*, Minhaj Siraj writes history from the time of the Prophet Muhammad until Nasiruddin Mahmud, son and successor of Iltutmish. He talks about the reorganization of administration, and discusses Bakhtiyar Khalji’s capture of Lakhnuti in the reign of Muizzuddin Ghori. He praises him as “a man of impetus, enterprising, intrepid, bold, sagacious and expert in warfare”. His account is replete with such incidents but one finds little related to the masses.7

Since these authors were historians employed by the court, they wrote in accordance with the interests of the Sultan. Shams Siraj Afif, a historian in the reign of Firoz Shah Tughlaq, dedicated much writing to his employer Firoz Tughlaq’s irrigation project and digging of canals, and he describes in detail the fruits of the Sultan’s canal project. In the same way, Barani discusses trade and its effect on the State treasury. Foreign merchants who came in caravans over the land routes with merchandise for sale in India returned loaded with Indian products. This boost in trade encouraged diversity in tastes and suggested ideas for the modification and improvement of old and indigenous crafts.8 There was a strong school of history writing in Persian at that time but it was confined to historians of the Barni and Afifi school of thought.

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7 Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: From Sultanate to Mughal*, p.43
Alberuni who had come with the army of Mamud Ghazni\textsuperscript{9}, gives a detailed account of the taxation and judicial system, which was prevalent in India at the time of his visit. He says that written complaints containing the well-established proof of the justice of the suit were generally demanded by the judges. In case there was no written document, the contest was settled by means of witnesses. The number of witnesses must not be less than four\textsuperscript{10}. If the suitor was not able to prove his claim, the defendant must swear. There were many kinds of oaths, in accordance with the value of the object of the claim. In the absence of witnesses, the accused were given poisonous drinks or thrown into a river, or red-hot piece of iron was placed in his hand. If he were not a culprit he would remain unharmed in all these cases.\textsuperscript{11}

These kinds of historical texts do mention women, marriage and widows, but in the context of the elite class. The following is an excerpt from Alberuni's *Kitab-ul-Hindm* where he writes about marriage, but this system of marriage was taken from the Brahminical text and is applicable to only a few.

"The Hindus marry at a very young age; therefore the parents arrange the marriage for their sons. On the occasion the Brahmanas perform the rites

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\textsuperscript{9} Mahmud Ghazni was a ruler of Ghazni who plundered India several times.

\textsuperscript{10} "India by Alberuni", translated by Edward C. Sachau's, p. 243.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, p. 244.
of the sacrifices, and they as well as others receive alms. The implements of the wedding rejoicings are brought forward.\textsuperscript{12}

Husband and wife can only be separated by death, as they have no divorce.\textsuperscript{13}

A man may have one to four wives. He is not allowed to take more than four; but if one of his wives dies, he may take another one to complete the legitimate number. However he must not go beyond it.\textsuperscript{14}

According to their marriage law it is better to marry a stranger than a relative. The more distant the relationship of a woman with regard to her husband the better. It is absolutely forbidden to marry related women both of direct descending line, viz. a granddaughter or great granddaughter, and of the direct ascending line, viz. a mother, grandmother, or great-grandmother. It is also forbidden to marry collateral relations, viz. a sister, a niece, a maternal or paternal aunt and their daughters.\textsuperscript{15}

If a wife loses her husband by death, she cannot marry another man. She has only to choose between two things - either to remain a widow as long as she lives or to burn herself; and the latter eventually is considered the preferable, because as a widow she is ill-treated as long as she lives.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, p.239
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, p.240
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, p.240
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, p.240
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p.240
Regarding the wives of kings, they are in the habit of burning them, whether they wish it or not, by which they desire to prevent any of them by chance committing something unworthy of the illustrious husband. \(^\text{17}\)

All the above mentioned social codes are related to *divja* \(^\text{18}\)* (twice-born), and only refer to a select group of people. Barani’s book talks a lot about astrology, astronomy and other Vedic maths, which were not practised by the common people. In the *malfuzaat*, the Shaikh discuss topics of relevance to everyone. In the previous chapter, Nizamuddin and Nasiruddin were discussing the problem regarding the marriage of girls from poor families, where Alberuni’s marriage discussion is confined to rituals related to marriage only. The way they look at a problem is interesting to note. One is dealing about the issue at a socio-economic level where as the other is dealing on a religious level. Alberuni is dealing with a Brahmin problem from a religious point of view and telling us about the various forbidden and permissible matches marriage. He says that ‘more distant the relationship of a woman with regard to her husband the better’.

Alberuni also talks about idol worship. He says that image worship was universally prevalent and there were numerous temples and sacred tanks all

\(^{17}\) Ibid, p. 240
\(^{18}\) According to the Brahmanical scripture, a man born twice, one at the time of coming on this earth and other at the time of initiation to the Brahmanical fold through. They wear *janew*, a sacred thread. In the beginning all the three upper caste but now only Brahmans use it.
over the country. He has admired the superb stone-terraces around sacred tanks. He refers to the practice of killing sheep and buffaloes by the worshippers. The idols, according to him, were constructed according to certain measures determined by idols fingers for every single limb. Here he is not only talking about 'idol worship' but telling about superb stone-terraces around the tanks. This is a typical elite mentality. It also shows his concern of structures rather than people, more interested in noting the temples and beautifully curved out idols, than the idol worshippers themselves. He chose not to write about people dying of hunger, rather about sacrifices of sheep at temples. He gives minute details like 'measures determined by idols fingers for every single limb'. He has also discussed in detail about the political condition of India at the time of his arrival.

Alberuni says that the whole country was divided into a number of states often at war among themselves. The leading kingdoms according to him were Kashmir, Sind, Malwa and Kanauj. Speaking about the Hindu Sahiya dynasty, he mentions that it had by that time become extinct and of the whole house there was no longer the slightest remnant in existence. In the words of Alberuni, "we must say that in all their grandeur, they never slackened in the

19 "India by Alberuni", translated by Edward C. Sachau’s p 125.
ardent desire of doing that which is good and right, they were men of noble sentiment and noble bearing."20 Referring to the absence of political revolutions, he observes “The philosophical and religious spirit of the Hindu made him supremely indifferent to political revolutions, consequently deprived him of that energy and capacity for practical action”. The vast bulk of the Indian people, therefore allowed their numerous invaders to pass, and when the Muslims came to India people adopted an attitude of similar indifference. The warrior class of India, unrivalled in the history of the world, for its chivalry and devotion to war, truth and honour, was torn by dissensions and could never present a united front to the foreigners.

With the advent of the Khaljis in Delhi, far reaching changes took place in state policies with regard to the recruitment of officers. The Khalji Sultans had no protections to noble lineage or past glory. This became a cause of criticism by contemporary historians. Barani was especially harsh in his writings during this period, as the doors of official opportunity were thrown open to all, and race, birth and even creed ceased to be all-important criteria.21

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20 Ibid., p.167.
Under Sultan Jalaluddin Khalji (1290-1296), a Hindu chief who belonged to the Mandahar tribe was honoured with the post of Vakili-I-dar (Minister in charge of arranging ceremony at court). Alauddin Khalji continued and even extended the policy introduced by his uncle Jalaluddin Khalji. Alauddin Khalji’s reign can be divided into three phases, and Barani says that the last phase was dominated by lowborn officers.

"The last part of the Alauddin’s reign lasted for four or five years. In these years the Sultan remained unwell, and the whole administration was conducted by Malik Kafur. All the important posts were held by incident and lowborn persons... With the ascendancy of low-born shiqdars and officers, the whole administration was disturbed and the people suffered." How can one rely on Barani about true story of the society as he always spoke against gave him.

It is interesting to note that Sultan Balban’s son, Prince Muhammad, who held the trans-Sutlej territories under his charge, valued knowledge and talent

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22 Jalaluddin Firoz Khalji replaced Kaiqubad, grandson of Balban, in 1290 and led the foundation of the Khalji dynasty. Alauddin Khalji assassinated him in Kara in 1296. He was a very liberal and kindhearted ruler of the Sultanate period.
23 Barani, Ziauddin, Tarikh-I-Firoz Shahi, pp.194-5.
24 Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316) was the greatest Khalji Sultan. Being a visionary and highly ambitious, he introduced market policy to control the market so that he can maintain huge army. He also introduced cash payment to the army personal so that they can concentrate on their assignment properly.
more than anything else, and noble birth reputedly had no significance for him.\textsuperscript{26}

Balban's immediate predecessor, his grandson, Sultan Kaikubad (1287-90), also seems to have no prejudice against people on the ground of birth, for Barani includes Kamal Mahiyar's son in the list of the high nobles of his reign.\textsuperscript{27}

With the employment of people from the lowborn people, social mobility started. The mobility in the rank of lowborn people created tension among the elite class. Social mobility's effect was so high that an Indian convert Muslim become king of the Delhi Sultanate. This incident has been recorded by historians of that period with anger. Finally in 1320, Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq removed and killed him. When everyone was opposing him, Nizamuddin stood with him by accepting his gift. In fact the social stratification that had resulted from the political domination of Muslim immigrant families, which monopolized key positions both in the civil and military administration, could not last long. The progress of learning, expansion and consolidation of the central authority, cultural influences and such as those of the Sufis, and employed skilled craftsmen in the royal \textit{karkhanas}, paved the

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, p. 68
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, p. 68.
way for the rise of people from unprivileged families of the society. The consolidation and expansion of the Sultan’s authority in the provinces created the need for a large number of educated people to carry on administrative work. The old aristocratic families could no longer supply sufficient officers to meet these needs.

As we can see, on the pages of historical text things related to palaces and nobles have been covered in detail. Whereas in malfuzaat, things related to public consumption have been covered. Under the influence of saints and with the demand of the time, the ministerial posts of a religious and quasi-religious nature, such as those of the chief qazi (chief justice), called Quzzat-I-Mamalik, and Sadr-us Sudur (Minister for theological affairs), called Sadre-I-Jahan, could be entrusted to the charge of those educated people who had no claim to noble descent, although these posts had been the exclusive privilege of the members of certain old respectable families of Shaikh and Saiyids. These steps of liberal kings have been criticised severely by historians.

Criticizing Alauddin Khalji’s policy with regard to the appointment of officers, Barani suggests that the offices of Quzzat and Sadr-i-Jahan could only be held by learned men belonging to certain noble families who commanded respect in the country for their piety and learning. Sultan Alauddin Khalji had
followed this tradition in the beginning of his reign; Qazi Sadruddin Arif, the father of the Daud Malik and grandson of the daughter of Sadr-i-Jahn Minhaj Juzjani (the author of Tabaqat-I-Nasari) was given joint charge of both offices. But by that time he realized that to rule country he needed to include everyone. In reading Barani, one can ascertain that he was disappointed with the way that Alauddin Khalji broke away from the tradition in the later part of his reign. He says that ‘during the last phase of Sultan Alauddin Khalji’s reign, the Quzzat of the empire that was in every way an important and lofty position and for which no one but the member of a well-established family of noble descent, traditionally known for learning and religiosity could be considered fit, was entrusted to Malik-ut-Tujjar (Chief of the merchants), Hamiduddin Multani. The latter had serves in the royal household as Pardahdar (in charge of curtain) and Kuliddar (keeper of the keys). Any mention of this Malik-ut-Tujjar (Hamid Multani) is not worthy of space in history. Nobody had courage to point out (to the Sultan) that only education and knowledge were not sufficient grounds for appointment to this position.

It is of interest that Nasiruddin Chiragh-I-Delhi, the contemporary Chishti, had a different and better opinion of the same minister’s good qualities.

28 Ibid, p. 351.
Hamiduddin is said to have been helpful to scholars and other deserving persons as Sadr, and to have performed the functions of chief justice with honesty and integrity.³⁰ Nasiruddin prays Hamiduddin as a scholar where as Barani did not find a single word of praise for him.

In spite of the opposition from the orthodox, the opportunity of education spread, and this helped to undermine the social barriers created by Muslim immigrant families in the early days of the Delhi Sultanate.

It is also noteworthy that elevation of members of unprivileged families and slaves to higher positions in the army and the administration created favourable conditions for the entry of others of the same class. For example, appointment of Khusrau Khan Parwari as the Naib-I-Sultanat under Sultan Mubarak Shah Khalji (1317-20) paved the way for short-lived ascendancy of the Hindu Parwaris of Gujrat at the imperial court.³¹

The most important period in this respect, marked by a remarkable example of upward mobility in the nobility, was during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq (1325-51). Barani mentions many lowborn persons whom Muhammad bin Tughlaq raised to important positions in the empire. The

³¹ Barani, Ziauddin, Tarikh-I-Firoz Shahi, p. 409.
nature of the officers and the posts assigned to them indicates that many of them were educated.

There is a passage in the *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* which shows how social mobility resulted from the Sultan’s unorthodox attitude. Najib, the musician of obscure origin was so highly regarded that superseded the status many of the old nobles and was assigned the charge of Gujrat, Multan and Badaun. Like him, Aziz Khummar and his brother were favoured, and Firoz the barber, Mankah, the cook, Masud Khummar (liquor-brewer), Ladha, the gardener, and many other base and mean people were elevated to important posts and assigned *iqtas*. Shaikh Babu, son of Nayak, the weaver, was made a royal associate.

From the above, we can see that political chronicles, although interesting, were helpful only to a point in terms of reconstructing the cultural history of the period. Their specialties were by and large confined to writing about taxation, military campaigns and other state related information, than the concerns and highlights of the common person. As is exemplified through Barani’s reservation against the lowborn people, his accounts highlight the economic condition of the Sultanate period. He has written in detail about the market reform of Alauddin Khalji citing one reason, for which we find a
counter reason in Nasiruddin’s *Khair-ul-Majalis*. These historians appear to not only have meager information on the masses, but very little interest on these people. That these writers largely came from Brahmin and noble classes, it is no surprise that they were unconcerned with those ‘under’ them. This discriminative attitude was deep seated during the sultanate period, and the following chapter discusses the Sufi and Bhakti movements in a comparative light, and it will be seen that both movements provided an opportunity for the emancipation of these deprived people.