

Obsession of rationalism: Muhammad Bin Tughluq's interpretation of the religious texts

MOHD KAZIM

Doctoral candidate

Department of History and Culture

Jamia Millia Islamia, India

Abstract

History is witness to the fact that the people who, in the matters of religion, try to interpret the religious texts in their own views while ignoring Taqlid (Discipleship), usually face the big difficulties. Muhammad Bin Tughluq tried his level best to convince the people of his age on his understandings of the religious texts but could not succeed. Sometimes he did one thing and on the other occasion he performed its opposite thing. Furthermore, Muhammad Bin Tughluq was having a very strong belief in rationalism that, sometimes, may lead to the extreme. Same happened with the Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq.

This paper attempts to explore the tendencies of Muhammad Bin Tughluq towards the religion while trying to connect it with the politics of that time. He in his unique style, tried to resolve it, as it was a very serious problem before Muslim community at that time when Muslim Caliphate was rumbled in a very small territory in Egypt.

Keywords: Muhammad Bin Tughluq, Interpretation, Religion, Rationalism, Discipleship

INTRODUCTION

Muhammad Bin Tughluq has been a very important figure among the Sultans of Delhi. According to Barani, the Sultan was, specially, adorned with kingship and administration and the crown and throne

were made for him only.¹ He was having different capacities in different fields as was mentioned by the contemporary historians. In the field of religion, he was having a free thinking that sometimes may lead to someone to the extreme. Muhammad Bin Tughluq thought on the connection between religion and politics and he, in his unique style, tried his level best to resolve it, as it was a very serious problem before Muslim community at a time when Muslim Caliph was crumbled in a very small territory in Egypt but Sultan could not succeed resulting the disintegration of his empire.

These failures were because of two things- First the circumstances of that time and second the character of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq that made the things more difficult. The nature gifted him many things e.g. valor, generosity, knowledge, intellectual thinking, the best calligraphy and many more but deprived him of tolerance and the knowledge of the temper of the human beings. When the people could not come to the deep of his planning and could not carry out his orders and commands properly, he filled with anger and said 'I am distraught because of the people. As much as they oppose me, I will kill them.'² Henceforth he remained busy in punishing his subject mercilessly.

Very unfortunately, the circumstances vitiated his temper and his temper did the same with circumstances. In this game of the actions and reactions he entrapped thoroughly, could not come out of this cover in all his reign and was understood a tyrant in the eyes of his subject. He was called Namrud, Zihak and Hajjaj.³ After listening his name, a reign of terror came in front of the sights.

It is the mordant truth that the people who, in the matter of religion, try to interpret the religious texts in their own views, usually face the big difficulty. Same happened with Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq but as we see that he was having his own theory to explain the religious texts. Therefore, the group of Ulama took a different route from him. Some say him to be heretic. The people were influenced by the anger of the Ulama as well as were unable to understand his new schemes.

¹ Barani, Ziauddin. *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*. Translated by. Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015), p. 282

² Barani, Ziauddin. *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*. Translated by. Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli. (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015), p.320

³ Isami, *Futuhu's Salatin*. (ed.) by Agha Mahdi Husain. (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1977), p. 765

Actually, we see three contemporary historians in the time of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq and all have seen the actions and sayings of the Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq. Barani who had been living in Sultan's company for more than seventeen years but he had a big deviation from the thoughts of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq. Actually, Muhammad Bin Tughluq had a very strong view of rationalism while ignoring the other aspects of the religious texts.⁴ The Sultan used to think the ordinary people from the low background suitable for the high posts as the latter were very obedient of the Sultan and would not interfere in the opinions or orders of the former. They, usually, would follow the orders according to the Sultan while neglecting the pros and cons of them. Therefore, the Sultan would like their company for his personal interpretation of the religious texts. He opened the doors of his royal services to all while ignoring the backgrounds of the new people.

On the other hand, Barani had a deep faith in transmitted knowledge and the genealogy of the high and low born. As we see Barani, on some points, seems to be correct while on the other hand he seems to be very ignorant and frustrated. Although he, himself, admits his own faults on many points, he seems faltering on many occasions.

Being a great traveler, Ibn Batuta came from Morocco and reached in India in 1333, in the reign of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq. He did a very deep study of the character of the Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq. Sultan also gave him many special inspirations and paid a very kind attention to him.⁵ Ibn Batuta tells about the generosity of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq and the gifts or the money given to the foreigners by the Sultan. He would respect the foreigners very much. Ibn Batuta tells about the meeting of the Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq with Yogis.⁶ Furthermore, Ibn Batuta was very influenced by the justice of the Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq and says that the Sultan, even, did not spare his close relatives from the punishments in the matter of a crime.

⁴ Barani, Ziauddin. *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*. Translated by. Ishtiyag Ahmad Zilli. (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015), p. 311

⁵ Madan Gopal, *Ibn Battuta Ki Bharat Yatra (Hindi)*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1996), p. 140

⁶ Madan Gopal, *Ibn Battuta Ki Bharat Yatra (Hindi)*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1996), p. 179

On the other hand Ibn Batuta was very surprised on the killings of the people by the Sultan. Very surprisingly, Ibn Batuta was also imprisoned by the Emperor for sometimes after a suspicion of meeting with Shaikh Shihabuddin who was killed by the royal order after many inflictions.⁷ Ibn Batuta understood or could not understand the double character of the Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq, therefore he, himself, did not accept the service of the Sultan again and started his journey again.

Isami was sixteen years old when he with his very old grandfather aging above 90 years, was ordered to go to Daulatabad (Devgiri) from Delhi. They even did not reach Daulatabad when his grandfather died in the way.⁸ Isami got a severe jolt and by this calamity he filled with hatred for Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq forever. When Bahmani Kingdom was established in South Hindustan, his sympathy was with the groups of the rebels. He also devoted his book naming, "Futuh-us-Salatin" to the Sultan Alauddin Bahman Shah, the founder of the Bahmani Kingdom, therefore, he legalized the Sultan Alauddin's rebellion against Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq.⁹

Due to the behavior of the Sultan, the hospice (khanqahs) of Delhi vanished from the arena as is evident from the Malfuz (sayings) of some Sufis.

Actually, there are many more writers who wrote about Muhammad Bin Tughluq. Shihabuddin Al Umari, although, he never visited Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq or Hindustan, he wrote the account of India as well as of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq after listening from the different people. Very surprising, he did not mention the atrocities of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq but praises him many times on the basis of the Sultan's generosity and gifts distributed among the foreigners and travelers.¹⁰ Badr-I Chach, being a court poet, he automatically praises Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq. Therefore, we can unearth the image of Muhammad Bin Tughluq by analyzing main three contemporary writers.

⁷ Ibid. pp. 163

⁸ Isami, *Futuhu's Salatin*. (ed.) by Agha Mahdi Husain. (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1977), p. 678

⁹ Ibid. pp. 906-907

¹⁰ Al Umari, Shihabuddin. *Masalikul Absar Fi Mamalikul Amsar. The History of India as told by its own historians*.

Edited by. Elliot and Dowson. Vol. 3rd. (London: Trubner and Co, 1871), p. 580

Muhammad Bin Tughluq and Rationalism: Although that was the time of decline of the Motazillites Movement, rationalism was still having its influence in all over the Muslim world. Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq was also fond of the rationalism. Barani criticizes this rationalism, "It was because of the rationalism of the philosophers, which is in fact a source of cruelty and hardness of heart, held complete sway over his thought and no place was left in his heart for the transmitted knowledge of the revealed books and the traditions of the prophets. Hardly did a day or week pass that the blood of some Muslims would not be shed and a stream of blood would not be caused to flow before the palace gates. It was in fact due to the hardness of heart caused by belief in the rational sciences and lack of faith in transmitted knowledge that led to his killings of Muslims."¹¹

Barani says that in his initial time Muhammad Bin Tughluq had a long company of some irreligious people like Sa'ad, the metaphysician, Obaid, the poet and many more. Because of these people, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq approximately, had lost his true belief in transmitted knowledge and the Prophet's sayings.¹² In his time, once he said before Shaikh Shihabuddin 'Haqgo' that his mind did not accept the termination of the prophet hood. After listening these words, Shaikh Shihabuddin threw the shoe to the Sultan. The Emperor became angry and the Shaikh was thrown from the heights.¹³

Sultan Muhammad was having a deep obsession and the interpretations of the religious texts and in his unique style he was trying to resolve it. There were so many intellectual and learned personalities in his court but all had to remain silent before the advices of Sultan. In another occasion, he says to Qazi Shamsuddun, the brother of Qutlugh Khan that, "Should someone say that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was not a prophet but I am? How would you convince him?"¹⁴ Qazi gave the answer in his style to defend his position before Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq.

¹¹ Barani, Ziauddin. *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*. Translated by. Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli. (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015), p. 286

¹² Barani, Ziauddin. *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*. Translated by. Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli. (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015), p. 286

¹³ Mandawi, Muhammad Ghausi Shattari. *Gulzar-I Abrar*. Translated by Fazl Ahmad. (Lahore: Maktaba Sultan-I Alamgir, 2005), p. 46-47

¹⁴ Husaini, Sayyid Muhammad Akbar. *Jawamiul Kalim*. Translated by. Mueenuddin Dardayi. (Delhi: Adbi Duniya Matiya Mahal, 2000), p. 316-317

Reverence of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) by Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq: Sultan inscribed the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the last Prophet and the reviver of the Sunnah of the Prophet on his coins.¹⁵ When he received the Manshoor (Decree) from the Abbasid Caliph, he took the allegiance from every person after putting the Holy Qur'an before them.

Religious knowledge of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq: Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq had a vast knowledge of religious texts. He would usually discuss the religious matters with Ulama. Sometimes it was very difficult for them to defend their position. Many times when it was the time to advise the people, he would quote from the Holy Qur'an. Ibn Batuta tells about the incident of debt occurred to him. Sultan made Ibn Batuta understand that we should not be extravagance.¹⁶

Punctuality in the religious affairs: Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq seems to be very punctual in the matter of religion. He offered Namaz five times a day. He, even, had the fast of Aashura (the first month of Hijri Era) at the time of Thatta in Sind, his last expedition.¹⁷ Although Isami accuses him to be an enemy of Islam who stopped the prayers of Fridays and Ids.¹⁸

Very surprisingly, Barani says that when Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq would hear the voice of Azan (the call of the prayer), he would stand up and kept on standing until Azan ended.¹⁹ Furthermore, he would recite many religious words after the prayer in the morning. He showed himself to be very cautious in the matter of religion. If he knew about the inaccuracy of the sacrifice of an animal, he would make it throw out.

After ascending the throne, he did not take or accept any big title or name for himself as Qutbuddin or Muhiuddin etc. but opted

¹⁵ Nelson Wright p. 120

¹⁶ Madan Gopal, *Ibn Battuta Ki Bharat Yatra (Hindi)*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1996), p. 157

¹⁷ Barani, Ziauddin. *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*. Translated by. Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli. (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015), p.322

¹⁸ Isami, *Futuhu's Salatin*. (ed.) by Agha Mahdi Husain. (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1977), p. 765

¹⁹ Barani, Ziauddin. *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*. Translated by. Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli. (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015), p. 311

the very simple name Muhammad, the highest name in human being for the true believers. On one occasion, Barani informs us that Sultan had an idea in his mind to visit the house of the Al-Mighty (Ka'ba) in Makkah after handing over the affairs of the state to Firoz Shah, Malik Kabir and Ahmad Ayaz.²⁰ Unfortunately he could not get the chance to do so as the situation of the Empire was not normal.

Furthermore, he was very pious in his private life. According to Barani, he neither indulged in adultery and sodomy nor did he see forbidden things.²¹ He would not play Chess and any other forbidden game in the sight of Islam. When he wanted to enter the Harem, Khwaja-I-Sara was ordered to remove or replace all the strange women or girls, so that Sultan might not get the glimpse of them as it was considered very bad actions in the eyes of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq.²² Sultan would make a very respectful manner towards his mother and he would obey all the orders given by his mother who was seen by Ibn Batuta in her old age while having the title of 'Makhdum Jahan'.²³

Qutluq Khan, who had been a tutor of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq in his young age, was revered very much by Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq. Sultan would respect him such a manner that would be astonished by the people.²⁴

On the other part of the story, it is very interesting that Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq was having a very deep interest in seeing the dance and the listening the songs. Twelve hundred singers were appointed in his court with additional one thousand slave singers.²⁵ Sometimes he would listen to these singers in his private meetings. Ibn Batuta informs us that there would be many singers as well as dancing girls at many occasions in the royal court.²⁶ It seems that due to the interest of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq in

²⁰ Ibid. p.320

²¹ Barani, Ziauddin. *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*. Translated by. Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli. (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015 p. 283

²² Ibid. p. 311

²³ Madan Gopal, *Ibn Battuta Ki Bharat Yatra (Hindi)*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1996), p. 136

²⁴ Barani, Ziauddin. *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*. Translated by. Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli. (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015), p. 311

²⁵ Al Umari, Shihabuddin. *Masalikul Absar Fi Mamalikul Amsar. The History of India as told by its own historians*. Edited by Elliot and Dowson. Vol.3rd. (London: Trubner and Co, 1871), p. 579

²⁶ Madan Gopal, *Ibn Battuta Ki Bharat Yatra (Hindi)*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1996), p. 77

listening the songs, there was a habitat of the singers at the bank of Hauz Khas, which was known and had become famous as Tarabad (House of the singers). Ibn Batuta, further, tells that Tarabads (houses of the singers) were also populated in Daulatabad.²⁷

Ban on the liquor: Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq neither took wine nor would he like his maliks and amirs to drink wine. Shihabuddin Al Umari tells us that none could consume liquor in public or in the private.²⁸

Punctuation of Namaz: Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq emphasized on the congregation of the prayers most. Ibn Batuta tells us that the king was having a very stern order to perform the prayers and he, who missed the congregation prayer, would be punished. In this regard, one day nine people were killed for not offering the Namaz (prayer) and, among nine of them, one was a singer.²⁹ Many people were appointed to perform the duty to capture the person who was not present in the masjid at the time of Namaz (prayer). It was a general order to all that all should learn Namaz and the knowledge of Islam, which resulting the people learning in the markets and made the ayahs (sentences of the Holy Qur'an) write on the papers.³⁰

It seems that this was the first time in the history of Delhi Sultanate, that orders were issued by the state to persecute the people in the matter of Namaz (prayer). Actually we see many changes in the behavior of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq. It is necessary for the reader to observe the environment of that time. In 14th century, when Muslim Caliphate was shrieked in a very small territory, the writings of Imam Ibn Taimiyya was taking a different approach to the minds of the people. Actually it was the time of fiqh (Muslim jurisprudence). Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq was also influenced with it very much as he was having a very deep interest in fiqh.

²⁷ Madan Gopal, *Ibn Battuta Ki Bharat Yatra (Hindi)*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1996), p. 186

²⁸ Al Umari, Shihabuddin. *Masalikul Absar Fi Mamalikul Amsar. The History of India as told by its own historians.* (ed.) by Elliot and Dowson. Vol. 3rd. (London: Trubner and Co., 1871), p. 581

²⁹ Madan Gopal, *Ibn Battuta Ki Bharat Yatra (Hindi)*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1996), p. 95

³⁰ Ibid pp. 95

Ibn Batuta informs us that a disciple of Ibn Taimiyya, naming Imam Abdul Aziz Dabeeli came to Hindustan. Sultan kissed his feet in the reverence³¹ and this shows that Sultan was having some influence of Ibn Taimiyya on his personality. Furthermore, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq was very concerned to connect the religion with the politics. Actually it was a very serious problem before Muslim community at a time when Muslim Caliphate was shrunk into a small territory in Egypt.

Although the name of Caliph was alive, he was not having any strong power in his hand as the invasions of the Mongols crushed, approximately, all the Muslim Empire except Egypt and Hindustan. Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq, at this critical times, seems to be a mujtahid (the reviver of the true religion) therefore, he compelled the Sufis to accept the royal service. Both the group of the people took a different route to achieve their own purposes. Chisti saints would think that the contact with the rulers was the death of their spirituality. On the other hand Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq sought the example of Khulafa-i-Rashidin in his attempts and produced the example of Hazrat Abubakar (razi.) when Chisti saints denied to connect with the state.

He forced them to do the royal service therefore, the Chisti chain of the Sufis got a severe jolt and after sometimes they disappeared from the arena. Even more surprisingly, he would say," what Abubakar, Umar, Usman and Ali (razi.) had done, what could not have been done by us? Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq was very fond of Muslim Fiqh as he memorized the Holy Quran as well as Hidaya, the law book, which expounds the principles of the school of Abu Hanifa (rah.).

CONCLUSION:

Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq passed all his time on the throne with many difficulties as he could not solve the problems of his empire. Understanding himself as a mujtahid (great lawmakers of early Islam according to Sunni school of thought) he tried and explained the religious texts before the Ulama and the learned

³¹ Madan Gopal, *Ibn Battuta Ki Bharat Yatra (Hindi)*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1996), p. 83

personalities but this trend of his could not help him in consolidating his own image as well as his empire. On the other hand he also attempted to connect religion with politics as it was not considered proper by some groups of religious people. Chisti Saints would understand that the connections with the royal court was the death of the spirituality of the Sufis therefore, they remain themselves isolated from the court. On the contrary, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq would understand it necessary to be served the state by the pious people therefore he compelled them to the royal service.

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