



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development



IJMIRD 2015; 2(3): 778-781
www.allsubjectjournal.com
Received: 12-03-2015
Accepted: 29-03-2015
e-ISSN: 2349-4182
p-ISSN: 2349-5979
Impact Factor: 3.762

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Mohammad-Bin-Tughluq: The right side of the wrongly presented innovator

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Abstract

Mohammad-Bin-Tughluq, 'the wisest fool' as some historians wrongly call him was actually a man much ahead of his times. He always moved on to look out fresh and new innovative ideas. We call such experiments today as being creative and innovative. Md.Tuglaq was in fact the first Sultan to think on the new concept of token currency that too far back in the 14th century. He also was the one who came up with the innovative idea of keeping proper record of the provincial and state expenditure and income. In Tughlaq there was always that unique streak of intellectual creativity that is to be admired and the historians just have to look on broader prospective to observe it. It can't be doubted that Md.Tuglaq was a man of extraordinary personality of clear foresight. The historians did injustice in writing about him and were too grave in jumping to a conclusion. Analyzing his qualification and his visionary talent combined with burning desire to rework the governance and increase his influence in areas of territorial and diplomatic achievements, he must be tagged as an innovator.

Keywords: Misinterpretation, intellectual creativity, token currency, streak, innovative

1. Introduction

Few months before I went through the article by John Maxwell who is American Expert on Leadership. He came up with as many as 21 irrefutable Laws of Leadership. When I compared those to that of Md.Tuglaq, he had few but in spite of that the Sultan can be called a leader keeping in mind the then time, the then mindset of people and the contemporary science and traditions. Steve Jobs once said that 'the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who actually do'. It is to be kept in mind that there is a thin line between the talent of doing unconventional and madness. I don't know why the early historians misjudged the extraordinary vision of Md.Tuglaq to madness. He was extremely intelligent who cannot be compared to anyone owing to the separate timelines of existence but in fact underwent a judgmental course in the History text books by different historians and was wrongly made synonymous with stupidity and madness respectively. His ideas and ideologies were in many ways in those times really well thought of but not well executed.

Muhammad bin Tuglaq was a sultan with great vision and surprising Insight. A learned having deep knowledge of philosophy, mathematics and even medicine. He also had knowledge of Arabic, Turkish and Sanskrit. He was certainly a 'Man of visionary ideas'. Mohd. Tuglaq was a multitalented man, a warrior, a thinker, an innovator but often misquoted as 'wisest fool' by few historians. His innovations and policies often failed to get properly implemented and unfortunately doubled the miseries of his subjects. Muhammad Tughlaq was rarely satisfied with the traditional, stereotypical and the so called tried and tested solutions. He was one of the first sultans to develop the vision to look forward to the Indian subcontinent as a single unit. He wanted to make it politically and administratively strong. At the moment of his accession, there was too much political disturbance in Central Asia. Muhammad Tuglaq observed that the king of a potentially powerful India can become the leader of Asia.

Muhammad Tuglaq believed in having good relations with his neighbors. He regularly sent ambassadors to Khurasan, Egypt and China. The rulers preceding him never cared and tried on any inclination towards it. Muid Tuglaq tried to change this tradition. Envoys from other states too came to India from Persia, China, and Syria. This brought a new development in the cultural and bilateral relationship. Md. Tuglaq often shocked the nobility with his rationalism. As per his philosophy he overlooked things as race, caste and even nobility. Sometimes he appointed the low born people on even the highest of stairs in the hierarchy.

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Md. Tuglaq was one of the sultans to patronize the Hindus and their language. Even though he knew that this would not win him friends from the Persian and Afghan race. I don't know why few of the early renowned historians gave him the epithet of 'Pagla Tughlaq', the mad Tughlaq.

During the early years of his reign, Md. Tughlaq started to show keen interest in the field of taxation. He issued directions for proper compilation of the land revenue and exact expenditure of each and every province under his kingdom. This farman clearly meant that the appointed governors of his provinces were supposed to send regularly all relevant details and accounts including any other legal information supporting their records. As a result the revenue ministry calculated the exact revenue, source of revenue and details of expenditure of each province. Consequently the not so efficient revenue system started working smoothly. Md. Tuglaq displayed a great sense of balanced judgment in the fertile Doab area between the Ganga and Yamuna. Md. Tuglaq fairly concluded with the suggestion of his ministers that the farmers of this doab region were rich so they could afford to contribute more revenue than those farmers of less fertile areas. The logic was sound enough for the execution but it back fired.

Revenue was increased and the sultan also stressed in reviving old revoked revenues in the doab. The step was taken at the time when the doab area came in the grip of a famine. As a result thousands died and the farmers started running away from their homes. Now the question arises as to who was responsible? Everyone knows that it takes time for the king and his ministers to work out and come up to a conclusion. When Md. Tuglaq started working on the revenue extraction from doab, the conditions were fine but it was hard luck that the time when it was implemented there came the famine, that too the severe one. Md. Tuglaq took every step to cope up but it was in vain. I don't think Md. Tuglaq must be blamed for the failure of the taxation plan as history is the proof that no king has control on weather and many great policies have failed due to bad weather. It happens till today.

One other step taken by Md. Tuglaq was to bring more and more land under cultivation. This was indeed a brilliant idea which never came before in any sultan's mind. Md. Tuglaq was no doubt a visionary. This step is amply taken care by the democratic governments of today. A large piece of land of about 60sq.mts was chosen and brought under cultivation. About two years passed costing state treasury 7,000,000 rupees. Finally the experiment proved to be failure. Now again how can Md. Tuglaq be blamed for this. History itself is the proof that such type of experiments only has brought revolutions. Failure of an experiment doesn't prove a sultan wrong or even 'pagla' as claimed by few early historians. What is surprising is that the later historians simply followed what was wrong and continued the tradition of copying out history books.

Md. Tuglaq did experiments like transfer of capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, the reason behind the same that the Deccan can be controlled better meanwhile keeping Delhi safe from foreign invasions. It can be clearly observed and analysed that the concept of shifting capital in itself was never fundamentally wrong. The choice of Deogir i.e. Daulatabad was also not wrong but the implementation didn't work out humanely and properly thereby resulting in failure. As recorded the entire army, courtiers and the royal household were ordered to move out from Delhi and settle in for Daulatabad. The Sultan went all along and did his possible best for establishing his new capital. But the people were reasonably hesitant to go so far with all their belongings with

uncertain future. The long distance tolled many lives and many died due to exhaustion. Now by the time the whole convoy reached Daulatabad, Md. Tuglaq had changed his mind and concluded that the plan had not worked. Thus he ordered a retreating march which resulted in further loss of life. The ultimate consequences for Delhi were pathetic. Delhi lost her age old prosperity and grandeur. Sultan did his best possible efforts to make amendments and gave invitation to scholars and artistes to come and settle in the city. Ibn Batuta, the famous Moroccan traveler came to Tuglaq's Delhi in 1334 found many parts of the capital still deserted.

It seems that the Sultan was having a foresight which was not digested by the blunt ministers. If he would have got an able minister of his foresight then history would have been different.

Md. Tuglaq also brought eventual change in the coinage system and tried to introduce new varieties of coin. In order to safeguard the valuable silver and gold coins, he came up with visionary idea of introducing token currency. History is the proof that this token currency is the currency of today. Introducing token currency or even thinking of that in that age was really an utopian idea for rest of the people. He introduced brass coins as an experiment and these were supposed to have value equal to that of the silver coins. Idea was brilliant but the mint was not much technical so many started counterfeiting the token currency and finally seeing the abundance of fake currency in the market the whole policy was withdrawn. The state treasury suffered great loss.

Once again it was a failure of proper execution and in no way the foresight of the Sultan can't be questioned. Such a brilliant idea can't be framed by any other sultan. Md. Tuglaq has not received the credit he deserves in history. The early historians were a bit rude in interpreting him wrong. Instead he was a man of visionary power and extra ordinary foresight. A sultan who never hesitated in doing experiments. In fact he was having brain and courage far greater than contemporary rulers. Md. Tughlaq also came up with an idea of developing a fifth city in parameters of Delhi named 'Jahanpanah' or 'Refuge of the world'. He planned to combine the three cities of Delhi i.e. Purani Dilli, Tughlaqabad, Siri and the newly established Jahanpanah in single boundary wall. Gradually he realized that the expenditure would come heavily on the state treasury and then gave up the idea. We can see few remains of Jahanpanah scattered near the busy lanes of south Delhi's area of Panchsheel Park.

I am sure that no better work can be done in the field of Indian historical research other than to rewrite the medieval history of India with a clear view to omit the misunderstandings that have till now become a part of mainstream history. This research paper is written with the mindset to do away with the existing beliefs. Muhammad bin Tughluq is indeed an important character of all the Islamic rulers in the Indian subcontinent and also one of the most misunderstood one. It is just hard luck that no official record of his rule exists and the source of information is his Autobiography which is vague and insufficient. What is further unfortunate is the basic fact that Muhammad Tughluq had the unsympathetic chroniclers who always took prejudiced view of his works. Ibn Battuta is the most genuine chronicler from which we can have much information about Tughlaq's time but he too was biased.

This is clear from the study of the contemporary chroniclers, Rihala and Futuh-us-Salatin. Ibn Battuta's mind for some unknown reasons was positively set against him. He out rightly rejected service under Mohammad and overlooked a proposal to go to China as member of embassy. After the

unfortunate incident of shipwreck he didn't meet him even after invitation. In place of going to Delhi he proceeded to Malabar which had been the rebel's headquarters. Out of twenty two rebellions in Md. Tuglaq's reign, the Malabar rebellion was the one of them which he failed to curb and this was one of the events which marked the disintegration of his empire. It is to be noted that 'Futuh-us-Salatin' has made it much easier to know the sources of the allegations conferred by Ibn Battuta. The Futuh-us-Salatin is a chronological poetic history compiled by Isami during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq. This book is in fact dedicated to Sultan Ala-ud-din Hasan who is better known as the founder of Bahmani dynasty. He was a rebel against the Tughluq Empire. It was definitely written to appease Md. Tuglaq's enemies. It alleges him for his uprising against Islam and for developing a common stand with the Hindus. He is also alleged for joining hands with the Jogis which was put forward by none other than Ibn Battuta. If we pick up one of the incidents like the plan which Sultan Muhammad is alleged to have made with Ahmad Aiyaz to assassinate his father, Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq. 'Futuh-us-Salatin' presented the same story as is found in kitab-ul-Rihla. In the incident of inhuman treatment done by Sultan Muhammad to Baha-ud-din Gushtasp (as alleged his dead body was cooked and given to the royal elephants), it shows little difference with Futuh-us-Salatin.

The basic reason on working on the work of Ibn Battuta and Isami is only to make analyse the authenticity Ibn Battuta. It's an open secret that Isami was hostile to Mohd. Tuglaq. The importance of Futuh-us-Salatin historically as a contemporary source will only be informative when it is studied along with Muhammad Tuglaq's autobiography. It is observed that the autobiography authenticates the claims of Isami attached to the Sultan's actions against Islam. The autobiography also throws light to the difficulties faced by Mohd. Tuglaq as the Sultan of India. It also helps us to form an estimate of the situations that led to the eventual decline of the empire and the basic difficulties that confronted the Sultan. Two Sanskrit inscriptions of 1327-28 AD provide the much needed information of the religious policies of Muhammad Tughluq. Tughluq Namah is an attempt to present a realistic view of the life and policies of Mohd. Tuglaq of whom Barani has claimed as an enemy of Islam and close to Hinduism. In this volume the doubts related to chronology of the Sultan's reign have been removed up to a certain extent. Certain passages in Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi related to his temperament, his public policies, his so called cruelty and his undoubted devotion to philosophy have been clearly explained. The much spread stories of Tarma shirin's invasion, also of the imposition of oppressive taxes in Ganga-Yamuna Doab and the man hunting have been equally discussed.

Common conclusions have been forged in each and every case after a deliberate twisting of the facts and highlighting the factors which underline the structure of history writing. Muhammad bin Tughluq suffered for his free thought and rational approach. Tughluq proved himself of revolutionary thought and it was his life which helped Barani to claim that the preceding Sultans had been little influenced by the Persian approvals and acceptance. Barani therefore regarded Firoz Shah Tughluq as the first true Islamic Sultan of India. The historian had his own records of justification. The conduct of the sultans was better than the demand of Islamic law. Barani shares theory put forward by Iltutmish which his successors especially Balban regarded as utopian. According to this an Islamic Sultan should always promote Islam, criticize idolatry and humiliate the kafirs (Hindus). A sultan should curb every

heresy from the Muslims and appoint them on all responsible posts especially those of the judiciary. A sultan should do his best to administer justice impartially. Even a liberal king like Jalalluddin Khalji opposed this theory and criticized them in debates as impracticable. Jalal graphically described the privileges which the Hindus had freely enjoyed under Muslim rule. He said that "All along the course of history the Hindus have been publicly practicing idolatry and have been freely celebrating their religious rites every day. I hear them playing their music under the walls of my own palace along the banks of the Jumna." For many reasons Jalalluddin refused to change his liberal attitude towards Hindus. Ziauddin Barani writes an incident in which Jalalluddin Khalji was wounded by a Hindu Mandahar but refused to take revenge.

Ibn Battuta describes a story how a Hindu noble put forward an allegation in Qazi's court against Sultan Muhammad Tughluq and surprisingly the latter was summoned and legally tried. The case was properly put under trial and decision was in favour of the Hindu plaintiff. This clearly reflects that the Hindus under sultan were having space of redressal. Ibn Battuta writes that Hindus lived in good condition. Gul Chand a Hindu was minister under Amir Hulajun, the governor of Lahore. Ratan, one more Hindu was appointed as a governor of Sind by Muhammad Tughluq. The Sultan was known to have patronised many Hindus. Farishta writes about one Bhiran Rai, the commandant of the Gulbarga fort who was the trusted officer in the royal court of Muhammad Tughluq. Barani writes that the Hindu nobles moved shoulder to shoulder with the Muslim officers. They had access of royal horses, had splendid houses and dressed lavishly. Even Muslim servants were found under their service. The Hindus had freedom to study their religious books publicly and also to study and teach Sanskrit. The normal use of Sanskrit mantras and chants on occasions is approved by the Sanskrit inscriptions.

It must be observed that Muhammad was an extraordinary brilliant visionary scholar. One flaw in his personality was that he always acted in haste and sometimes even without assessing risks and consequences of the new plans and its execution. Md. Tuglaq even when he assessed the unforeseen eventualities that may come up while on the midway, failed to rework on the same. It is said that he lacked the ability to foresee his plans properly and have their logical conclusion. This is completely absurd. It is well known that a single person can't be a good planner and by the same time a good implementer. Now a day it can be easily observed a team working for proper planning and a different team for its proper execution. How can this be expected from a Sultan that too in medieval age. It can't be doubted that Md. Tuglaq was a man of extraordinary personality of clear foresight. The historians did injustice in writing about him and were too grave in jumping to a conclusion. Analyzing his qualification and his visionary talent combined with burning desire to rework the governance and increase his influence in areas of territorial and diplomatic achievements, he must be tagged as an innovator.

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