
An Analysis of the Persian Influence on Balban's Socio-Political Policies

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Abstract

In this content we will discuss about the Persian influence on Balban. As we know that, amongst the Sultans of the slave dynasty, Ghiasuddin Balban was the most popular sultan. Balban did many changes or improvements in his kingdom and life during his reign. Some of them are as follows:

Balban's theory of kingship, organization of great grand "Durbar", restoration of law and order, Reorganization of army, Change in his personal life, Rise of Persian literature, relation with Afrasiab Dynasty and celebration of festival of "Noraj", maintained discipline in his court and the names of his grandsons.

Keywords: *Balban, Slave Dynasty, Zil-i-Ilahi, Noraj*

Introduction

Balban was the greatest ruler of the slave dynasty. During his reign 1266A.D.-1286A.D., he made appreciable contributions of Delhi sultanate. The famous historian A.B. Pandey is rightly in saying that,

"If a man of Balban's genius, experience, tact and determination had not been the master of Delhi, the very existence of the Sultanate might have been jeopardized."¹

His original name was Bahauddin. He belonged to *Ilbari* clan of Central Asia. His father was the chief of this tribe. In his youth he fell into the hands of the Mongols and was sold as a slave to a trader of Basra, Khwaja Jamaluddin.

There he got good education. After some time he again was sold to sultan of Delhi Iltutmish in 1232 A.D. There, due to an ugly appearance firstly he was appointed as a Bhisti (one who carries water). In a very short period he impressed the sultan with his ability and loyalty. Hence, Iltutmish greatly impressed by him and appointed him as a *Chahalgani*. He also married one of his daughters to Balban. After this, Balban became straight and forward and kept getting promotion from one rank to another.

¹¹ A.B. Pandey, *Early Medieval India* (Allahabad:1986), p.86

He occupied many ranks and titles in his life like, "*amir-i-shikar* (head of the royal hunt), "*amier-i-akhur* (head of court), *Ulugh Khan*, *naib-i-mamlakat* (the deputy sultan). As described above that Balban did many changes and improvements under the influence of Persia.

Zil-i-Ilahi: The Shadow of God

"Balban's theory of kingship was akin to that of the divine rights of kings as professed by the Tudor and Stuart monarch of England".² He adopted the title of *Zil-i-ilahi* which means shadow of God. It has been said by some historians that his theory of kingship was organized due to influenced by Persia. As Dr. K.A. Nizami writes, "*Balban's theory of kingship derived its form and substance from Sassanid Persia, where kingship had been raised in the highest possible level and its supernatural and divine character was publically accepted.*"³ According to Balban, the position of king on earth was most divine or high. He said that the only person became a ruler who was blessed by God that's why he was not answerable to any worldly authority. The king can do anything he want. He was unquestionable. Nobody could put a question mark on him or on his workings.

Adopting Persian Court Culture to Strengthen Legitimacy

There were many aspects in Balban's life which were adopted due to influenced by Persia. *He organized a grand Durbar on the Persian model which became famous throughout Central Asia for its pomp and magnificence*⁴; all that the imaginations could conceive of royal splendor was embodied in it.

*Balban established a grand court and implemented the rules and regulations of the Iranian court.*⁵ His countries were bound to do "*Sijda*" to the king or to greet the king by led down on the earth.

Balban sat on a huge throne, bedecked with rich drapery and precious diamonds which dazzled the eyes of the onlookers. He was guarded by his bodyguards with bare swords and spectator's eyes used to get twinkle by the brightness of the swords. Nobody was allowed to laugh in the Durbar and nobody could directly to the Sultan, in Balban's court. Only his prime minister was allowed to have direct contact with him. This strict discipline, whereas raised the respect of the king, also led to considerable increase in the status of kingship.

Changes in his Personal Life of Emperor Balban

After becoming a king, Balban converted his personal life to that of an emperor. People observed a radical change in his dress, social behavior and manners. *According to Barani, He never established intimacy with friends and unquaintpersons, because according to him this could bring disgrace to the royal honor and grandeur.*⁶ He assumed a serious and reserved posture towards to all, put on magnificent royal costumes and was always by the imperial paraphernalia. He utilized most of his time in the administration of the empire and

² MEHTA. J.L, *Advanced study in the history of Medieval India*; pp.116

³ Mann.M.S, *History of Medieval India* (2001)pp.76

⁴ Mehta.J.L, op.cit., pp.117

⁵ Neelam Publishers, *Muslim rule in India*; pp.91

⁶ Ibid, pp. 91

whenever he found some time, he also spent his time for praying or sitting in the company of the learned and saints.

It is also said that he was so crazy of the feeling of dignity of the kingship that used to come even before his servants in royal dress only. *Barani writes that after his accessions to the throne, even the domestic servants of Balban never saw him without royal apparel, socks and the headgear.*⁷

Rise of Persian Literature in Delhi Sultanate

Balban was great patron of culture and attracted scholars not only from India but also from abroad. A number of Muslim scholars who were compelled to leave their countries due to Mongol inventions took refuge at Balban's court.

As a result, a new epic in the history of Persian literature in India started under Balban. Balban's eldest son Muhammad (also known as *khan-i-shadid*) was also a patron of learning and many eminent poets lived that his court. The famous Persian poets Amir Khusrau and Mir Hassan Dehlvi started their poetic career under him⁸

Relationship with Afrasiab Dynasty

After became the ruler of slave dynasty he was afraid from non-acceptance of non Turkish by Turkan-i-Chaliha (the group of forty Turkish sardars). After Iltutmish his all successors were killed by this group of forty. Therefore he many works that could safe his kingship. To connect himself with one of the most high and great dynasty of Persia, Afrasiab dynasty. Many historians are also accepting this fact as written forward - "He starting relating himself to Afrasiab Dynasty of Iran and stuck coins in the name of late *Khalifa*."⁹

Festival of Noroj

Noroj is a Persian festival. Balban introduced it to Delhi sultanate for the first time. He started celebrating *Noroj* with great pomp and showed an enthusiasm each year.¹⁰ *Noroj* is actually celebrated as New Year in Persia and people of Persia are very much enthusiastic about this. *Noroj* actually represents people sentiment and emotions. In Persia, *Noroj* was and is National Festival. Balban want the legitimacy from Persian dynasty. Indeed he wants to attach the sovereignty of Delhi Sultanate to Persian Grandeurs and indelible court culture that's why he adopted the festival *Noroj* as a prime festival of his reign.

Balban's need of adoption of Persian Culture and Traditions

Balban was the head of *Turkan-i-Chaliha*, which was the group of forty Turkish talented Sardars consolidated by Iltutmish for the betterment of the state, before becoming a sultan. After Iltutmish this group of forty killed all the non-Turkish rulers of this dynasty. At last Balban became the ruler of this dynasty and he didn't want that anybody could claim him or do any revolt against his kingship. That's why he killed another 39 members of *Turkan-i-Chaliha* and started to adopt Persian culture and traditions. So he adopted the title of *Zil-i-*

⁷ Barani, Tsrih-i-Firoze Shahi; pp.100

⁸⁸ <http://www.google.co./search?acr=o&source...> Persian literature and balban-google search

⁹ Mann.M.S,op.cit.,p72

¹⁰ Ibid,pp.77

Ilahi, changed his personal and as well as official life, started to relate himself with the Afrasiab dynasty of Persia. He said that he was the shadow of the God so he was not answerable to any worldly authority.

Conclusion

Undoubtly, Balban was one of the greatest rulers of the Delhi sultanate. At a time when its integrity was in danger, he consolidated the Delhi sultanate. After became a sultan we can see many changes his personal and royal life. On the basis of above study it's easy to say that most of the changes in Balban's life were came due to Persian life.

First of all instead of a Muslim, his adaptation of title "*Zil-i-ilahi*". There are many evidences which prove that this title was adopted due to Persian effect. Next his organization of great grand Durbar was also Persian influence on Balban. Instead of that points we can see Persian influence in his personal life also, like a great change in his dress up, living style, nature, his behavior with everyone and standard of life. The rise of Persian literature only under the reign of Balban. His relation with Afrsiab dynasty.

The main reason behind adaptation of Persian culture and traditions was to safe his kingship from Turkan-i-Chaliha. Another one was that he was not ready to share his power with anyone, not even with his family members. Therefore he poisoned his cousin, Sher Khan.¹¹ He wants an unquestionable life. Therefore he relates himself with Afrasib dynasty of Persia. Adopt the title of *Zil-i-ilahi*. Change his personal life.

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¹¹ Chandra. Satish, *Medieval India from Sultanat to Delhi*, p.54