BARANI’S EVIDENCE ON TUGHLUQ SHAH’S DEATH

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In the preface to his *Tarikh-z Firoz Shahi*, Ziya'uddin Barani cites Truth as one of the seven 'excellences' of History. A historian, he says, must be truthful and must write nothing but the truth. "It is an essential to history writing and a religious duty of the historian," observes Barani, "that while narrating the virtues, munificence, justice and generosity of a king or a notable personage, he should not omit to mention his offences and evils. He should not write history as a courtier. If it is safe, he may write (of their evils) openly, otherwise he should communicate his meaning by suggestion and allusion, for (the benefit of) intelligent readers."¹

One wonders whether, in narrating the circumstances of Ghiyath-uddin Tughluq Shah's death, Barani was himself confronted with the situation indicated in the concluding sentence of the passage cited above from his preface. The Sultan's death occurred at Afghanpur near Dehli, when a pavilion, freshly built up for his reception, collapsed, trapping him underneath.² A controversy has ranged since on the question whether or not the old Sultan's son and crown prince, Ulugh Khun, who succeeded to the throne with the title of Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325—51 C.E) was responsible for his father's death. Let us, for argument's sake, suppose that this was a case of parricide: could Barani then have expressly mentioned this in his *Tarikh* without incurring the wrath of Firoz Shah (1351—88 C.E), the reigning monarch to whom the work was dedicated with hopes of royal favour?³ ¹

Firoz Shah's regard for his imperial cousin, Muhammad bin Tughluq, is attested to by several sources, including Firoz's own

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² The event took place in 725/1325 C.E. The month assigned to the event by various modern authorities ranges from February to July. I prefer the date worked out by Professor Hodivala (see below for fuller reference), namely Jamadi I, corresponding to April, 1325 C.E.

³ The force of this argument was recognized long ago. Nizamuddin Ahmad, a widely respected and judicious chronicler says, "It is evident that the author of *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* which was written in the reign of Sultan Firoz who had great regard for Sultan Muhammad, was reticent about the matter, out of regard for the
Futuhat. While he may not have minded the adverse comments with which Barani's account of Muhammad bin Tughluq is dispersed, Firoz could not have stomached an open charge of murder against him. Such a charge would have been in the nature of a calumny against the whole Tughluq house. The only way for Barani (supposing parricide did take place) was to mention it indirectly and circuitously.

The death of Tughluq Shah, after a remarkably successful reign of five years, was an event of obvious importance: its impact was enhanced by its dramatic suddenness. Barani's brevity in the account of the Afghanpur tragedy is, therefore, all the more surprising. He gives no reason why the pavilion unexpectedly collapsed. His famous sentence, sa'iqa-ibala-i asmani bar zaminiyan nazil shud, was for long a centre of controversy, but it is now generally agreed that the precedence of sa'iqa before bala ensures that sa'iqa was used as a metaphor,

4. Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi, British Museum 'MS, Or. 2039, f. 304b. Also see the Aligarh edition of the Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi with translation and notes, ed. Sh. Abdur Rashid (Aligarh. n. d.), pp. 19-20, tr., pp. 27-28. Further evidence on this point has been brought together by the present writer in his thesis on Firoz Shah (unpublished, 'Aligarh 1946). Dr. Agha Mahdi Husain's contention about a reconciliation between Muhammad bin Tughlaq and Firoz 'presumably preceded by an estrangement' (Rise and Fall of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, p. 210) is in fact based on a misinterpretation of Barani's words 'Sultan Muhammad az . . . Firuz . . . ba ghayat razi gasht' which only mean that the Sultan was very much pleased with Firoz (for his having devotedly tended the former during his last illness). Barani, p. 532.

6. Agha Mahdi Husain's contention (pp. 68-69) that the
interchange of the words *sa’iqa* and *bala* would make no difference to meaning of the sentence is surprising.

So the sentence is to be translated as 'the thunderbolt of calamity [and not 'the calamity of a thunderbolt'] descended from the heavens upon the people of the earth.' The juxtaposition of sky and earth, a Persian figure of speech, further confirms that the sentence is metaphorical. This sentence, however, gives no clue to the circumstances of Tughluq Shah's death. But a few stray passages in Baram's *Tarikh*, put alongside certain known facts, make one suspect that he had something more to say which he was trying to communicate circuitously to 'intelligent readers.'

To make this clear, we will first give our own suggested reconstruction and then discuss the evidence for it. The people in general accepted and welcomed the rule of Tughluq Shah, but there was a small minority of malcontents and detractors who were secretly opposed to his regime. The malcontents comprised mainly two groups: First, those who had received land grants and cash rewards from the usurper Sultan Nasiruddin Khusrau (reigned 1320 C.E); their lands had been resumed and they had been called upon to refund the money they had accepted from Khusrau; some of them readily complied with the demand, but most of them procrastinated or refused to pay, inviting thereby the Sultan's wrath and punishment upon themselves (Barani, *Tarikh*, pp. 432-33, 439). And, second, those who were dissatisfied with the modest and small rewards which the Sultan was wont to give, and which appeared to them petty and stingy. All these people remained unreconciled to the rule of Tughluq Shah and they desired to have in his place someone inferentially like Muhammad bin Tughluq who would be generous with his money and give extravagant rewards. So they desired his destruction. That is as far as Barani's evidence, direct and indirect, goes. That, perhaps, was as much as he could say 'without getting into trouble. But he said enough to imply that the old Sultan's death occurred by design and not by accident.

Now let us turn to the passages which bring out clearly that there were certain groups or cliques (*tawa’if*) who, for reasons of their own, could not bear to see a just and moderate Sultan like Tughluq Shah on the throne and desired to have someone else in his place.

(A) Barani's *Tdrikh-i Firoz Shahi*, printed text, pp. 436-37, British Museum Ms. Or. 2039 ff. 216 b-17 a
For the purpose of this paper, I examined the manuscript of Ziyauddin Barani’s *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi in the British Museum*, Or. 2039 (see Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian MS at the British Museum*, III 919-20) This is one of the oldest manuscripts of the work. Rieu says it was apparently written in the 15th century. The seals of Hamida Bano Begum, Akbar’s mother, and of the librarians of Emperor Shah Jahan and prince Dara Shikuh, add to the value of the manuscript. Written
in beautiful naskh, it is in an excellent state of preservation. Notwithstanding all this, the MS is a disappointment. Apart from several gaps pointed out by Rieu, there are innumerable instances of words and phrases missing or miswritten in the MS. A close reading of the MS leaves little doubt that either the scribe was, despite his excellent hand, an extremely ignorant person or he transcribed from a very defective and inaccurate copy of the work. One Instance of the kind of errors with which this imposing MS is replete, is given here by way of illustration:

Printed text, p. 437 —

Ms, f 217a —

The many omissions and errors in the manuscript, however, in no way modify the general sense of the passages under discussion. The crucial phrases and sentences (which have been italicized in the translation) are indeed identical in the printed text and the manuscript. It would be futile to note down all the omissions and mis-writings. J have, therefore, contented myself to noting down variants only where (he reading in the manuscript has proved helpful in correcting errors in the printed text.

8- in MS but not in printed text.
9- in printed text ; MS has حريصان which fits in better and also occurs in several parallel passages.
10- in MS, printed text.
Translation

(A) Those who obtained treasures and wealth without any semblance of right to it, and those avaricious, greedy and treacherous people whose greed is not satiated even with thousands and lakhs, could not tolerate, and did not hesitate to speak ill of a ruler who was so just, moderate and benevolent as Sultan Tughluq Shah. They found fault with him just as they had done with a king like Sultan Jalaluddin Khalji, who was so firm a Mussalman and so fair-minded (lit. cognizant of right or claim) a king, because that (fault finding) is the chief characteristic of avaricious and greedy persons—persons who are inordinately fond of gold and silver and are lovers of tankahs and jitals. They could not tolerate seeing at their head a king who desired to see justice firmly established, who distinguished the rightful from the wrongful and suitable from the unsuitable occasion (for doing a thing), who followed the principle of ‘doing a thing at its proper occasion,’ and did not shower gold and wealth all at once on the greedy ones and the lovers of this world. These cliques (Tawa’if) wanted over them a king who would be a bestower and (at the same time) a spoiler, who would shed blood and give treasures, who would unlawfully take "away from thousands (of men) and give thousands to the undeserving, who would destroy long-established families, who would make paupers prosperous without any reason, who would exalt (the position of) mean, worthless, undeserving, incompetent, cruel and godless persons and give them high ranks and dignities, who would kill, destroy, harass and degrade those worthy of greatness, deserving of power, of virtuous character and possessed of pure morals, and who would immerse one in wealth and make another an object of ridicule before others. Men who hanker after the riches of this world and become its slaves, and the mean, the base-born and the wretched ones do not like and favour such a king (as Tughluq Shah) and never open their lips to praise him or his achievements. On the contrary, such men are the friends of a king who exalts the mean, the low-born and the worthless, who does not consider meanness of character a disqualification, and does not object (to it), who is agreeable to infidelity (kufr), atheism, heresy, wickedness and sin and who permits the open practice of grossly sinful deeds, who turns a blind eye on rightful claim and qualification, whose entire energies are spent on the satisfaction of carnal desires and who is, by his very nature, the
enemy of nobility, high birth and accomplishments.

(B) The covetous, the greedy, the irreligious and the dishonest spoke ill of such a well-wishing, fair-minded, right-practicing, just and world-protecting sovereign. And because they had received undeserved wealth without any right from Qutbuddin [Mubarak Khalji] when he was in a state of intoxication and passion, and from the infamous traitor Khusrau Khan [Nasiruddin] during the moments of his desperation and at the time when infidelity and unbelief held sway, these dishonest traitors maligned Tughluq Shah, and grumbled against such a just and fair-minded ruler; they awaited the downfall of his regime and significantly winked at each other; they uttered words which only ungrateful and unrighteous persons would utter and attributed miserliness to such a kind-hearted and generous man.

(C) The greedy, the avaricious, the unrighteous and the ungrateful, the stomachs of whose cupidity and the limits of whose greed would not be satiated even with the wealth of Korah, were tired of the government of such a king and had complaints against him and had an eye on the destruction of such a sovereign.

In the first instance, it needs to be pointed out that these passages, especially the first one, stand so awkwardly and so incongruously in Barani’s narrative, and the description therein of the qualities of the person whom the cliques (tawa’if) had in mind as an alternative to Tughluq Shah, is so entirely uncalled for that the whole thing demands an explanation.

It will be seen that in the first of these passages, the character of the person whom the cliques wanted to supplant Tughluq Shah, is so delineated as to bear pointed resemblance to the personality of Muhammad bin Tughluq as sketched by Barani himself. With one exception, every trait of character ascribed to the ruler desired by the tawa’if can be found in Barani’s description of Muhammad bin Tughluq. The Sultan’s propensity for shedding blood, his indiscriminate conferment of rewards on the deserving and the undeserving, the inordinately big size of his rewards, his association with skeptics and heretics, his favours to men of low origin whom he appointed to high and responsible posts, placing them in authority over men of high birth—all find frequent mention in Barani’s chapter on Muhammad bin Tughluq (Barani, pp. 459, 460, 461, 465, 472, 499, 505-06). The single exception indicated above relates to moral corruption. Nowhere in his narrative has Barani accused Muhammad bin Tughluq of this; nay, he has positively praised the Sultan for the purity of his moral character (Barani, p. 460). One wonders whether this single variation was introduced by Barani as an
escape-clause, in case the incriminating passage landed him into trouble. The likening of Tughluq Shah to Jalaluddin Firoz Khalji is also not without significance, for the latter too had a party of opponents and, further, he too fell a victim to a plot organized by his own kith and kin.

The conclusions to which one is led by this scrutiny of Barani's evidence can be summed up as follows: first, there was a party or a set of cliques (tawa'il) who desired the destruction of Ghiyithuddin Tughluq Shah. Secondly, this party wanted to have in his place someone like Muhammad bin Tughluq, inferentially Muhammad bin Tughluq himself. Thirdly, the party was numerous and important enough to receive such extended and repeated mention by Ziyauddin Barani. It is also clear from his account that members of this party were in touch with one another in the pursuit of their objective. Whether this party brought about the old Sultan's death, or whether its wishes were fulfilled providentially, still remains a moot point. The rancour and bitterness with which Barani denounces Tughluq Shah's enemies again and again, makes one suspect that he was speaking out of the anguish of knowing secretly that they had succeeded.

This paper is focused on Barani's evidence on Tughluq Shah's death, and in particular on certain passages in the Tarikh-i Firoz Shdhi which have so long been altogether ignored. A discussion of the question of Muhammad bin Tughluq's responsibility for the event in the light of evidence drawn from different sources is beyond the scope of this paper. The matter has been discussed in detail by three well-known scholars, Dr. Ishwarl Prasad, Dr. Agha Mahdi Husain and Dr. S. Moinul Haq. Nevertheless some brief comments on the subject may relevantly be made here. Dr. Ishwari Prasad strongly suspects "the prince's complicity in the parricidal plot." According to him the evidence, contemporary and later,

13, A query may here arise as to why these passages in Barani's Tarikh remained unnoticed for so long. The most likely explanation is their non-inclusion in Elliot anb Dowson's History of India (London, 1887). This, in any case, does explain why these passages do not figure in Hodivala's Studies in liulo-lu$tim History and its Supplement.

and the various attendant circumstances "lend support to the theory that the Sultan's death was the result of pre-meditation and conspiracy and not of accident". Dr. Prasad's theory, it will be seen, comes strikingly close to the inferences arising from Barani's above cited passages, but he too has ignored those
passages. Dr. Agha Mahdi Husain has forcefully argued Muhammad bin Tughluq's innocence. That his approach is not unbiased is shown by the extent of reliance he has placed on the evidence of an ‘arz-dasht in the Insha’i Mahru, written in the name of Shihnbuddaula, Governor of Badayun, to Muhammad bin Tughluq to condole with him upon the death of the late Sultan and also to felicitate him on his accession. It passes comprehension how a provincial governor, writing an official ‘arz-dasht, could at all say anything even remotely suggestive of parricide. Rather, the very emphasis in this document on 'the strength and durability of the palace' arouses suspicion. The explanation given in this document should indeed be taken as the official version of the Afghanpur tragedy.

I also beg to differ from the construction put by Dr. S. Mo’inul Haq on a verse of ‘Isami. After describing the collapse of the pavilion that resulted in the Sultan's death, the poet says:

[Tr. One who is mature in age and has an eye for the metaphorical meaning), would make a different surmise from the story in the following manner], and then goes on to give an account of the event in a manner as to place the responsibility for it on the prince. This verse has been taken by Dr. Haq to mean that the poet "does not only exonerate the prince of the charge of conspiracy but definitely lays down that the story of the alleged plot is a guess-work of some clever minds", an interpretation which in fact would have been the farthest from the poet's own mind. Indeed the poet clearly indicates that he himself shared the surmise of those who suspected a plot behind the event, in the opening verses of his account of Muhammad bin Tughluq's accession.

(Tr. When the ill-natured prince was free from his father's burial (rites), outwardly he pretended to mourn, inwardly he started
making merry.)

To sum up, it seems certain that there was a plot to do away with Tughluq Shah. Whatever may be the final verdict on the extent of his son's connection with the plot, a close look into the foregoing passages in Ziauddm Barani's Tarikh does raise the question as to why this contemporary chronicler described the qualities of the person whom the opponents of Tughluq Shah wanted to see on the throne in such a way as to evoke the image of Muhammad bin Tughluq. And if he was the plotters' candidate for the throne, as may reasonably be inferred, is it far-fetched to presume that they were acting with his knowledge and consent? 18

18. Futiifi in Salatin p. 408.