

Comparing the Imperial Vision of State in Fazl and Barani.

Gracy Khattiya¹, Dr Shilipi Singh²

¹*Indian Political Theory, Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi*

²*Guide, Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi*

Abstract—In this paper I have tried to identify the common grounds and the contrasts that exists in Baranis and Abul Fazl political thought. While the common grounds on which both agree are requirement of a stable and competent army, a stable and reliable administration, their belief in upholding the sociopolitical hierarchy and Justice etc. Abul Fazl and Barani clearly differ on the grounds of their approach to the dilemma of separation of politics from the realm of religion. While Barani takes a conservative route Fazl takes a liberal and secular discourse to answer this dilemma. For instance, for Fazl the kingship is divine while for Barani there is nothing inherently divine in kingship king like any other creation of God can either be. Barani ideal state is a theocratic in nature while Fazl's ideal state is secular and liberal in nature. While Barani advocates the strict adherence to sharia, we see Fazl establishing the divine kingship above and beyond any religion or religious laws like Sharia.

Index Terms—Sovereignty, Kingship, secular, political expediency, justice, equality, social hierarchy

I. INTRODUCTION

Ziauddin Barani and Abul Fazl are undoubtedly the two most prominent thinkers of medieval India. They were well known historian and political thinkers during the Islamic rule in India. They are known for works like *Fatwah-I-Jahandari* and *Ain-I-Akbari* respectively. Both were insiders of the ruling dispensations of their times: Barani was the companion of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq and Fazl was friend and companion of Akbar. Such an insider's view was crucial in shaping their political thought and at the same time influence of their writings in the respective regimes was also prominent. However, both belonged to two different eras and political contexts. Their political thoughts are said to

be quite different as they were mere answers to the questions of socio-political context that existed during their lifetime. For instance, Barani saw frequent change of regime during his life time in the Delhi sultanate. He lived in a period when Islam was still finding its roots in India. Population was still hostile to Islamic rule and there existed clear antipathy to all local religions. He closely witnessed the massive violence and turmoil that followed frequent regime change. Thus, the main focus of his writings was the stability of the empire and secondly to strike a right balance between following the Sharia religiously and dealing with the challenge of statecraft in establishing a Muslim rule in a non-Muslim state. In answer to this dilemma Barani took a very conservative stance and put forward ideas like establishment of a theocratic state, religiously following the Sharia, crushing and suppression of the infield philosophers and the rationalist, Dynastic succession etc. Although his advice might sound conservative in the first stance but his teachings were very pragmatic according to his time. This was evident in his advice to the ideal king in the form of Hidayats where he asks the king to follow the life style of Iranian kings who kept their subjects in awe and fear of their pomp and splendour. Although this might seem unislamic but ruler was advised to do so out of sheer political expediency. Barani in his teachings talks about Zawabits -practical and secular state laws that are formulated for cases not covered in Sharia. Barani although advises the emperor to follow Sharia in his personal and political life however he clearly makes an exception for his political life.

In contrast Abul Fazl responds to this dilemma through a secular and liberal discourse which was based on the peaceful and stable sociopolitical context that existed during Akbar's reign. For Fazl both the temporal and

the Spiritual sovereignty lie in the emperor. This was further justified through the divine theory of light which argues that the emperor who receive the divine light of sun has an illuminated soul filled with goodness who represents God on earth. Thus, for his subjects the king himself is their spiritual guide. Further building on his liberal thought he talks about sovereignty as a service wherein the sovereign is supposed to protect the 4 essences of his subjects that is life, honor, religion and property in return for which he demands political obligation and collects taxes as a wage for protection. For Fazl religious tolerance social harmony and absolute peace was the key features of an ideal state which was reflect in his ideas of Sulh-I-Kul. I compare and contrast Barani and Fazl based on their conceptualization of the ideal state through interpretations of their works by scholars like Irfan Habib, Qureshi, MP Singh, VR Mehta.

II. SOVEREIGNTY

Fazl emphasizes on a social contract theory as the basis of sovereignty. He says before the origin of kingship the society was in a complete state of anarchy wherein kingship arose out as a punitive institution with monopoly to use coercive force to punish the trouble makers and protect the virtuous. Thus, the key duty of king was to protect 4 essences of his subjects that is life property honor faith and in return for which he demands allegiance and taxes as wage for protection. However, Fazl's origin of sovereignty cannot be considered completely based on social contract but can be more appropriately said as semi-divine theory. This is because the Kingship as an institution according to Fazl is Divine in origin. This is based on the divine light theory inspired form the Ishraq theory of Suhrawardi. According to which King is the highest in order of objects receiving light from God and hence the king is the possessor of illuminated wisdom representing God on earth. Thus, the emperor is a perfect man (Insaan-I Kamil) and subjects do not have right to check the conduct of the king and neither to question him.

While on the other hand nowhere does Barani even remotely hint at a social contract which might originally have given rise to the kingship or any such obligations arising out of it. For Barani, force is the only source of royalty and it is only the ruler's self-interest, custom and religion that shall either constrain

or guide his actions. Moreover, his conception of divine theory of kingship differs from Fazl greatly. Although Barani believes that king is a wonderful creation of God however like any other creation of God, he may be good or bad. Thus, according to Barani there is nothing inherently divine in kingship.

III. NATURE OF STATE

Barani in his political thought conceptualizes a theocratic state in which Sharia is the guiding principle of the realm. An Ideal sultan according to him was advised to protect the dignity of Islam and ensure that sharia was enforced properly. This was to be ensured through the appointment of Mutasibs or censors who were entrusted with the responsibility of enforcement of Sharia across the empire. Sharia was to be followed in both personal and the political life of the ruler.

While on the other hand Fazl tries to establish a liberal and secular state through the ideas like sulh-i-kul characterized by social harmony, religious tolerance and absolute peace. In fact, the divine king was said to be above any religion or sect. He was freed from the dictates of the theologians and in some instance was allowed to interpret the sharia. Neither was the ruler under any obligation to protect and propagate and religion or follow any religious rules like sharia.

Thus, according to Barani temporal sovereignty of the king was subordinate to religion and the religious laws of sharia. On the other hand, Fazl's ideal king was the one in whom vested both the temporal and spiritual sovereignty and thus the king was above any religion.

IV. IMPORTANCE OF ISLAM AND THEOLOGIAN IN THE GOVERNANCE

For Barani ideal state was a theocratic state wherein the state was governed under the dictates of the sharia. For Barani Caliphate was no more the political center of political power in Muslim state, it was the king who was entrusted to expand and protect the ideal of sharia and Islam. According to Barani the kings, in order to administer the affairs of the government, should consult the Prophets, the experienced officers and the well-wishers. Barani's advice indirectly designates the idea that the kings, however great and knowledgeable they are, should have the moral quality of humility to listen to the views of the good, wise and experienced persons and Prophets of his kingdom.

On the other hand, for Fazl religious tolerance and social harmony was very important which was evident in the idea of Sulh-I-Kuhl. According to Fazl the divinely ordained king was the one with illuminated wisdom and was above any religion or sect. He was freed from following the dictates of the theologians Ulema and in fact had the right to interpret the Sharia himself in some instances.

V. SCIENCE AND RATIONALITY

Barani is against any rationality that goes against the Quran in fact Barani equated the rationalist and philosophers as enemies of Islam worthy of being killed and suppressed. For Barani the Hindu Brahmins in India were the rationalist and killing them would ensure the successful establishment of Islamic rule in India. Although animosity to secular sciences and rationalism was quite widespread it nevertheless survived under the patronage of Sultans (like Muhammad Bin Tughlaq) whose interest in medicine and astronomy kept science alive but in a limited sphere. However, Fazl accepted rationality in the affairs of the government. For him all subjects are equal in claim for benevolence and rationality. Thus, it was the key duty of the kingship to promote rationalism and logic.

VI. VIEWS ON RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

Barani considered the Hindus/non-believers as the enemy of Islam who were worthy of suppression and killing. In Fatwa Mahmud who is the follower of Shafi Mazhab believes that Hindus were either killed or are to be converted to Islam. However later on Barani agrees due to what is to judge in the interest of the state himself Hindus are to be tolerated. In fact, in his own days people of different religion Mongols, Hindus, polytheist infidels were respected and made to sit on Mansad. The Hindus particularly merely by paying the poll and land tax (Kharaj and Jizya) have their temples ride horse kept Muslims as servants. etc.

In fact, in Tarikh we see Barani himself considers giving concessions to the Hindu rural aristocracy and employment of Hindu officials at high positions as reasonable.

However, Fazl believed in religious tolerance and social harmony. He in fact advocated for the eradication of Jizya prevalence of Sulh-I-Kul. He

persuaded us that Akbar's conquests were not motivated by spiritual or religious differences but rather by the need for justice because Indian politics was founded on fairness and tolerance, which he referred to as Dar-ul-Sulh.

VII. REALISM

Barani was quite pragmatic and realistic in his teachings. For Barani, king was allowed to follow unislamic means in order to ensure political expediency. For instance, Barani advised the king to follow the principle of dynastic succession followed by the ancient Iranian Kings. This was because Dynastic succession brought certainty and stability to the empire when it came to matters of succession. Although for Barani non adherence to the Islam or Sharia is a sin -he says Kings can commit such sin for the good of the realm. Provided they remain loyal and obedient to God especially in later years of his rule. Because of his breaking many Islamic principles to maintain his state, he should pray for forgiveness and blessings of God/Allah.

Similar pragmatic advices that I have already discussed are Zawabits. In fact, Barani pays special attention to matters of taxation and welfare measure to be undertaken by the King. Maintaining price stability checking weights and a strict check on measures on corrupt practices like hoarding was key to ensure welfare and stability in the empire. To substantiate this argument, he gives the example of ancient Iranian rulers who collected grain as taxes and kept it in reserve to keep the prices down and avoid scarcities. In fact, Barani advice on suppression of the ignoble philosopher's rationalist etc. was quite radical. However later on Barani himself agrees to the fact that due to what is judged to be in the interest of the state itself Hindus had to be tolerated.

While on the other hand Fazl is quite idealistic and utopian in his conceptualization of an ideal state or ideal kingship. For Fazl the ideal king who was ordained with the divine light emanating from God (Far-i-Izadi) Is 'Pad shah' 'Pad' meaning stability and 'Shah' meaning ownership. He is the divinely ordained reflection of God on earth who does not need the help of theologians to interpret the sharia. For him Monarch is endowed with magical powers and it was impossible to stand against him. Therefore, his authority becomes indispensable. There is in fact no

mention of options to people to change the king in case he becomes tyrannical cruel and unjust. Only Just sovereign will honor the contract with power and Divine guidance/blessings. Thus, there is no guarantee that King will honor the contract. For him King was the perfect man who was divinely ordained who shall guide become the spiritual guide to his subjects and establish Sulh-I-Kul. However, his secular approach was not realistic and thus it was not followed after Akbar. For instance, Aurangzeb chooses to follow the supremacy of sharia.

Yet on the other hand the conception of Din E Ilahi which was developed by Akbar and Fazl had some pragmatic undertones. Din -I-Ilahi was a syncretic religion promulgated by Akbar in 1582 by mixing and synthesizing the elements taken from multiple religion and belief systems. It emphasizes on morality Piety and kindness. As for rituals it made fire sun objects of divine worship. This religion has no scriptures no priest no prophet or any specific God. This naturally then king becomes spiritual guide to the nation who promotes a secular path separate from any faith or religion. He created a cult of loyalty where all disciples pledge absolute obedience to his majesty. Thus, it was quite established that Din-I-Ilahi was more of a pragmatic political device rather than a spiritual novelty.

Yet we can find various common grounds among-st the two. For instance while comparing their views on social hierarchy we can observe that both Barani and Fazl believed in the importance of establishing and maintain a strict hierarchy in the society.

Barani never believed in the concept of equality. In fact, he empirically believes that though all individuals are equal in appearance they differ in characteristics. This inequality according to him is ordained by God at the beginning of the time. Thus, he had a clear contempt against the low born joining the nobility or King promoting the interest of the low born. He conceived human beings as unequal in nature and thus it was the key duty of the ruler to uphold this hierarchy. Just as Plato conceived of a society based upon the principle of division of functions, Abul Fazl too arrived at a similar order. In similar lines Fazl too divide the society in 4 parts. He assigned the warriors and rulers the first position in society. The second position as accorded to the scholars, astronomers, philosophers and all those from whom flows wisdom. Third place was accorded to the artisans and the

merchants and the labourmen and husbandmen were accorded last place in this hierarchy. In this scheme there were not 4 classes but four different party of hierarchy in which principle of rule and subordination would prevail.

Also, we find some common ground between Fazl and Barani regarding their emphasis on a strong and loyal army to ensure stability of the empire. According to Barani the fundamental component of good governance or a good king was to maintain well organized and disciplined armed forces. The ideal king is supposed to ensure the welfare and interests of the army are met because the well-being of the army is the critical to his ability to maintain his position of power. Army's requirements and provisions should be satisfied to the extent possible so that troops and other dedicated employees can become self-sufficient in terms of their material requirements. This will allow them to dedicate all of their energies to advancing the state and the kingship. An army commander-in-chief should also be competent. The commanders of such an army and the leaders of such a dedicated workforce should be nice and compassionate individuals". They should be well-versed in the subject matter. It is vital for the king to thoroughly investigate these characteristics before selecting him as Commander or Commander-in-Chief of the army. Abul Qasim was regarded as "one of Sultan Mahmud's most capable commanders. Sultan Mahmud lavished tens of thousands of rupees on Abul Qasim's well-being". He further states that "Mahmud invaded India on numerous occasions and subdued multiple kings and rajas of Sind and Hind due to Abul Qasim's noble traits.

In similar vein Fazl too emphasizes the need for a long-standing loyal army in a very elaborate manner in Ain-I-Akbari. He talks about a Mansabdari system which in essence is a system of combined administrative and military rank, position and associated duties and responsibilities. A Mansabdars rank was indicated by 2 numbers: Zat number denoting the civil rank and the Sawar number indicating the military rank by. His remuneration was either paid in cash or was a given as a jagir corresponding to his rank to collect revenue in which he kept a part of it as salary and the rest was used for upkeep for the forces under them. The Mughal army was made up of "cavalry, infantry, artillery, elephants, and camels, among other things".

Moreover, in ideas of both Barani and Fazl we find reference of a just ruler as the ideal ruler. For Fazl the ideal ruler/king is the just sovereign receiving the divine light from God and thus is ordained with the divinely vision to see the truth and act justly without nay discrimination among his subjects based on religion or status. Rule of an ideal king according to him is one which is long standing just and peaceful wherein the justice is the highest virtue of an ideal ruler. It was the king's responsibility to provide justice to his subjects, always punish those who wronged them, and guarantee that justice was used to benefit the innocent. He believes that “a king should be kind and harmonic during administering justice and regard his subjects as his children and himself as their father.

In similar lines Barani’s conceptualization of an ideal rule is the Adil or the ruler who is just and ensures justice. According to him the prime duty of the ruler is to dispense justice based on the principles of equality. Being a just ruler according to him involves 2 kinds of equality seeking conduct first is (Khas) ruler tenders’ justice between contending parties be it high or low by treating them strictly as equals. The second is (am)the ruler who seeks equality in life within his indigent subjects. However, one must be careful and not misinterpret Barani’s quest for justice based on equality as similar to the modern notion of equality that exists today. Barani argues that unless a king is morally righteous, he cannot ensure justice for his people. Observing that both ancient and modern intellectuals regarded ‘religion’ and ‘justice’ as twins, Barani says, “No religion, which is founded on Divine Commandments (ahkam), can do without justice”. He contends that the attribute of justice enables the king not only to protect the people from the evil forces of “tyranny and oppression” but also to safeguard “the money, property, women and children of the weak, the obedient, the helpless, the young, the submissive, and the friendless”. Therefore, Barani wants every ruler to possess the moral value of justice as his innate quality and to enforce this priceless quality among people

In addition, Fazl’s Ain- I-Akbari Akbar’s Administration is discussed in great detail. The Mughal government of Akbar was divided into fifteen administrative units known as Subhas, viz., Delhi, Agra, Ajmer, Lahore, Kabul, Multan, Ahmedabad, Ahmednagar, Malwa, Khandesh, Berar, Allahabad, Oudh, Bihar and Bengal. He placed a governor named Subahdar in charge of each Subah. He was to be held

responsible to the emperor for the maintenance of peace and order within the Subah. Each Subah was again divided into a number of small administrative units known as Sarkars. The officer in charge of a Sarkar was known as Faujdar. Both in the center and in the provinces, there was an elaborate staff of bureaucratic officials. The most prominent among them were the Dewar, in charge of revenue department, the Bakshi in charge of pay department, the Mir Babar in charge of shipping, ports and ferries, the Wakia Navis in charge of the Record Department, and Sadar, in charge of the Ecclesiastical Affairs. The military administration of Akbar is also praiseworthy. Mughal Akbar reformed the existing military organization by introducing regular gradation of military officers called Mansabdars. They were divided into 33 grades. They received fixed pay from the state and were required to render such military duties as were entrusted to them from time to time.

Abul Fazl had a strong belief in hierarchy, but he was more concerned about the need of talent for the kingdom. He did not bother about the social background of a talented person. It is for this reason that he stated that Akbar was moved by the spirit of the age, for he knew the values of talent, honored people of various classes with appointments in the rank of army and raised them from the position of a common soldier to the dignity of a grandee.

Similarly, in the Delhi sultanate Nobility was the monarchy’s second important component. The nobles were the chosen individuals to whom the Sultan granted the right to levy revenue in specific territories known as Iqta. It was the fundamental unit of landed property, and its owners comprised the majority of landed proprietors. Because the Iqtas were frequently tranfered from one person to another, they were not hereditary. The revenue resources generted by the appropriation of the peasant surplus were distributed among the ruling classes, the Iqtadars being the most important component. They were also members of the royal consultative council, which provided policy advice to the king. The Sultan's selection of such people was thus critical, for which Barani established guidelines and advised the king to exercise caution. The criteria were twofold: first, the people to be chosen should be noble-born with personal and political loyalty to the Sultan; and second, they must have the ability to render sound political advice to the monarch while considering the prospects and

contradictions of the impact of the policies to be implemented. Fear of God, historical knowledge, lack of greed, and practical knowledge of state affairs must all be present in advisers.

Another necessary component of the Sultanate was the bureaucracy, whose basic function was to measure the land and fix and collect taxes for its distribution among its beneficiaries. It operated on three levels: the centre, the province, and the village. At the apex of the revenue department was the Diwan-i Wazarat, which was led by a wazir (the head of revenue and finance, also known as the prime minister) and assisted by a naib, Musharif-i-Mamalik, Mustawfi-i-Mamalik, and dabirs. The administration was headed by muqtis or wallis at the provincial level, which corresponded to it. Below him was the Diwan (ministry of revenue) provincial wazir, who was the central wazir's counterpart but had more or less independent charge and was accountable to the central wazir. The Muqaddam (the village headman), Chaudhari, and others were in charge of revenue collection and fixation at the local (sarkar, pargana, village) level, with the patwari serving as the village accountant and record keeper. The revenue was collected based on an estimate prepared for each locality based on their revenue-paying capacity, and the staff's salary was paid from this revenue based on their status. He cautioned that the king should remember all instability and evil comes from bad nobles and corrupt officials. Thus, they should be God fearing sincere and dedicated and whose personalities should develop in conformity with the demands of Sharia.

Upon critical analysis it is evident that Fazl's ideas were very utopian in nature be it the idealistic conceptualization of a perfect moral king or his ideal polity in lines with the idea of Suhl-I-Kul. Fazl's cosmopolitan philosophy and Din-e-ilahi could only be partially successful in India. Policies like Sulh-I-Kul and Din-I-Ilahi gave strength to his governance and administration, but these new experiments were not as successful as Akbar hoped. Inconsistency in the theory of social contract and in his theory of divine origin of sovereignty since the two theories are not logically compatible with each other. Indeed, he may be said to have tried to combine the two, but certain logical inconsistencies remained.

On the otherhand Barani was misunderstood and some scholars labelled him a fundamentalist, an orthodox and a bigot for promoting Islam and discriminating against Hindus. Although not true, but this was a result

of his often conflicting and contradicting writings on the surface. However, it is important to note that underlying this contradiction that we see in his writings the inherent goal to establish a stable Islamic rule. For instance, not following the Sharia was a sin however Barani advises the King to follow unislamic practices like the Iranian kings. Although this might sound contradictory but it was important according to Barani to ensure political expediency. A major criticism for Barani stands that his theories and ideas was out of sync of his time and context and was not really followed in the Delhi sultanate. For instance, Balban kept theologians and theorist Ulama at a distance dismissing them as narrow-minded seekers of worldly gain. Muhammad Bin Tughlaq irrespective of the advice of Barani accorded high positions to Hindus during his rule. For Iltutmish waging a war against all the infields (as advised by Barani) was meaningless. It is because of the conservatism that his ideas were out of sync of the real politick of the Delhi Sultanate.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Thus, I come to a conclusion there exists several common grounds between Abul Fazl and Ziauddin Barani like need for a strong army, reliable administration and relevance of sociopolitical hierarchy and justice. Yet in the other hand I examined several political issues on which Fazl and Barani disagree. For instance, their religious views. However, what I could conclude from such differences and similarities is the fact that both of their philosophies were mere answers to their sociopolitical context and time in which they lived. Thus, we see that while Barani advocates a conservative stance and talks about dynastic succession and strict adherence to sharia one must take note that this was the time when Muslim rule was taking roots in India and was encountering a very hostile population. Thus, religious consolidation and measures to ensure stability of the empire were deemed essential according to Barani. On the other hand, secular and liberal undertone of Fazl's political ideas was embedded in a context wherein Islamic rule saw relative stability. Thus, this was a very opportune moment not only to consolidate and expand the Islamic empire by propagation religious toleration and at the same time propagation ideas like Din-I-Ilahi the emperor established himself as the supreme entity above any religion.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abu'l Fazl, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 1, H. Blochmann, Trans. Calcutta: G. H. Rouse, 1873, pp. 47–57.
- [2] Barani, Z., *Fatāwā-i Jahāndārī*, M. Habib and A. Afzal al-Din, Trans. Aligarh, India, 1960.
- [3] Habib, I., "Barani's theory of the history of the Delhi Sultanate," *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 7, nos. 1–2, 1980–1981.
- [4] Habib, I., *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception*. New Delhi, India: Tulika, 1995.
- [5] Habib, I., "Two Indian theorists of the state: Barani and Abul Fazl," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, pp. 15–39, 1998.
- [6] Habib, I., "Ziya Barni's vision of the state," *The Medieval History Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 19–36, 1998.
- [7] Habib, M., and A. U. S. Khan, *The Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate*. Allahabad, India: Kitab Mahal, 1957.
- [8] Habib, M., and K. A. Nizami, Eds., *A Comprehensive History of India*, vol. 5, *The Delhi Sultanate*. New Delhi, India: People's Publishing House, 1970.
- [9] Habibullah, B. M., *The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*. Allahabad, India: Central Book Depot, 1976.
- [10] Lal, K. S., *History of the Khaljis*. New Delhi, India: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1980.
- [11] Mehta, V. R., "The imperial vision: Barani and Fazl," in *Foundations of Indian Political Thought*. New Delhi, India: Manohar, 1992, pp. 134–156.
- [12] Qureshi, I. H., *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*. Karachi, Pakistan: Oriental Book Corporation, 1979.
- [13] Singh, M. P., *Indian Political Thought*. New Delhi, India: Dorling Kindersley (India), 2011.