

The Political and Social Impact of Mongol Invasions on the Delhi Sultanate During the 13th and 14th Centuries

Abstract

The present article examines the Political and Social Impact of Mongol Invasions on the Delhi Sultanate during the 13th and 14th Centuries. All information in this regard is based on Primary Sources of the period such as *Tabqat-i Nasiri* by Minhaj-us-Siraj, *Tarikh-i-Jahan Gushan* by Ata Malik Juwaini and *Jami-ut-Tawarikh* by Rashiduddin Fazlullah. All these sources have commented elaborately on the Mongol invasions during the 13th and 14th centuries, the destruction caused by them as well as their effects on posterity. The writers of the period highlight mostly the negative effects of these invasions. There were, however, some very significant positive effects of the Mongol invasions on the Sultanate of Delhi which are generally ignored by these historians. The present article tries to highlight the positive side of the Mongol invasions which helped in strengthening the foundations of the Delhi Sultanate and helped Iltutmish to lay the foundations of the empire on a firm basis.

Keywords: Chengiz Khan, Delhi Sultanate, Central Asia, Mongols, Buffer State.

Introduction

The sultanate of Delhi and the rise of the Mongols in Central Asia took place simultaneously. At the beginning of the thirteenth century Sultan Iltutmish was establishing the Turkish rule in Hindustan, while in Central Asia the Mongol ruler Chengiz Khan was conquering the Central Asian lands to strengthen the Mongol Empire. For the early Turkish rulers of the Delhi Sultanate, the news of the Mongol conquests was very alarming specially when the Sultanate was still in its early stages of formation and establishment and hence for all the rulers of the early Turkish period from Iltutmish to Balban; the Mongols were the only people who were a constant source of dangers for the sultanate through out the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, sometimes become menacing while at other times receding to the background but always an alarming factor for the Delhi Sultans. The Mongol problem, therefore, needed the immediate attention of the early Turkish rulers as it was two questions of the survival of the Turkish rule in India.

One major source of information for the early Turkish is "*Tabaqat-i Nasiri*" written by Minhaj-us Siraj. Minhaj although quite accurate in certain respects presents somewhat narrowly focused view of events specially events of trade and friendly relations between the Delhi Sultans and the Mongols as he considered Mongols to be infidels and any sort of healthy relationships with the infidels was great sin in the eyes of Maulana Minhaj. However, a large portion of his *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* titled 'Irruption of the Infidels into Islam', is devoted to the early Mongol rulers. This is perhaps the most interesting portions of the author's work and it contains much information regarding the Mongol activities in Sind and Punjab and throws additional light on the early Mongol invasions of Northern India. But at the same time we find that Minhaj suppresses facts about the occupation of certain border territories of strategic importance in North-west frontier of India by the Mongols as they were not palatable to his patron ruler¹. It is also interesting to note that wherever there is even a slight evidence of any defeat of the Mongols, Minhaj furnishes it with great satisfaction. Fortunately we find information regarding this in other contemporary work being written in Central Asia like Ata Malik Juwaini's "*Tarikh-i Jahan Gushan*" and the Mongol historian Rashiduddin Fazlullah's "*Jami-ut-Tawarikh*". The Mongol problem attracted the attention of most of the historians of that period whether they were Persians, Chinese or Indians, all of them have commented very elaborately on the rise of the Mongols,



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the extent of destruction by them and their success as well as their effect on posterity.

Ilutmish and Chengiz Khan

Ilutmish the real founder of the Delhi Sultanate dealt with the Mongols with great tact and skill. Prof. K.A. Nizami gives three distinct phases of Ilutmish's policy towards the Mongols². In the beginning when Chengiz Khan was causing havoc in Central Asian lands Ilutmish remained aloof to the politics of that region. But when the Mongol danger loomed large on the Indian horizon Ilutmish adopted the policy of appeasement. The authors of *Jami-ut Tawarikh* and *Tarikh-i Jahan Gushan* are unanimous in saying that both Jalaluddin Manqbari the fugitive Khwarazmian prince and Chengiz Khan sent their envoys to Sultan Ilutmish. Even Minhaj in his *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* says, "For a period of three months Chengiz Khan halted in the Gibari territory and the Koh-Paya, and from thence the Chengiz Khan dispatched envoys to the presence of the august Sultan Shams-ud Dunya wa-ud-din Iyat-tumish³. May he rest in peace as he was entertaining the design of conducting his army towards Hindustan and of returning by way of the Koh-i kara-chal and Kamrud, to the country of Chin⁴." The Khwarazmian Prince Jalaluddin Manqbari also sent his envoy to the Delhi Sultan and wrote, "The vicissitudes of fortune have established my right to approach thy presence and quest of my sort arrive but rarely. If, therefore, the drinking place of friendship upon either side and the Cups of fraternity filled to the brim and we bind ourselves to aid and assist one another in weal and woe then shall all our aims and objects be attained; and when our opponents realize the concord that exists between us, the teeth of their resistance will be blunted⁵". And he requested a place of abode in Hindustan.

Now the valour and bravery of Sultan Jalaluddin were famous everywhere and his great might and prowess were the talk of the town. When, therefore, Sultan Ilutmish heard of his message, he brooded over the matter for several days. We do not know what treatment was given to the Mongol envoy but considering the evil consequences it was said that "an attack was made on Ain-ul-Mulk (the Khwarazmian envoy) in Delhi and he was killed"⁶. In return Sultan Ilutmish sent a messenger with offerings of food worthy of such a guest but excused himself from providing a place of abode on the grounds that nowhere in that region was there a suitable climate nor any locality such as would we fit for a king. In this way by not providing asylum to the enemy of the Mongols Ilutmish appeased the Mongol ruler.

Prof. Nizami is of the view that probably Ilutmish utilized this opportunity for entering into a non-aggression pact with the Mongols according to which no enemy of the Mongols could be given asylum by the Sultan of Delhi and in return the territorial integrity of the Turkish empire was to be respected by the Mongols⁷. The third phase of Ilutmish's policy started soon after the death of Chengiz Khan so long as Chengiz Khan was alive Ilutmish followed a very cautious policy and did not try to consolidate his position and extend his empire in

the north-west frontier region. But soon after his death he seemed to have changed his policy and started showing resistance towards the Mongols. He marched upto the north-west frontier and after defeating Qubacha and Yalduz established his firm control over the Sind and Punjab regions. This situation remained unchanged till the death of Ilutmish in 1236 A.D.

During the lifetime of Ilutmish only, a buffer state was created under the Qarlughs between the Delhi Sultanate and the Mongol empire⁸ and in order to understand the Indo-Mongol relations it is necessary to analyse the Qarlugh-Mongol relations which will give us an insight into the developments that were taking place in the diplomatic circles of Delhi and Central Asia. Whenever allied with the Qarlughs these Mongols became a greater danger for the Delhi Sultans. These alliances and counter-alliances between the Mongols and the Qarlugh rulers make the Mongol problem a menacing problem especially during the time of Sultan Raziya and her brother Sultan Muizuddin Bahram Shah. But if we look at the very nature of the Mongol invasions of this period we find that the conquest of Northern India was never a Mongol objective at this time as they were busy conquering Eastern Europe. But since plundering was the regular source of income of the Mongols they began to carry on predatory incursions into the border territories of India, looted property and made people captives⁹. The Qarlughs seemed to have joined the Mongols in 1241 when they invaded Hindustan under Bahadur Tair¹⁰.

The Successors of Sultan Ilutmish and Mongol Invasions

During the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud (1246-66) we find that the overall control of the Delhi Sultanate is in the hands of Ulugh Khan and his family. The diplomatic attitude of Sultan Ilutmish is maintained by Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud, the last of the successors of Ilutmish. There is a reference in *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* that during Nasiruddin's reign, Ulugh Khan, the *Naib-i Mamlakat* (Office of the Regent) tried to develop diplomatic relations between the Mongols of Persia and the Delhi Sultan. Minhaj furnishes interesting information with details of the arrival of emissaries from the court of the Ilkhanid ruler Hulaku to Delhi in 1259 A.D. The Sultan of Delhi accorded a royal reception to them. "More than two lacs footmen and fifty thousand horsemen lined up the entire route from the town of Kulugarhi to the royal palace, while twenty rows of spectators and officials assembled there to welcome the emissaries"¹¹. Minhaj, in order to placate the reigning Sultan would have as believe that all this was done to impress the Mongols with the glory and greatness of the Sultan but if we supplement his account with the chroniclers of the Persian writer Juwaini we will find that the desire to please and placate the Mongol ruler was an equally strong reason for the welcome given to them.

This gesture of the Sultan of Delhi had the desired effect and Hulaku reciprocated it by warning his soldiers "If the hoof of your horse enters the dominion of Sultan Nasiruddin all the four legs of the horse shall be cut off"¹². The Sultan was a puppet in the hands of his nobles and there was always a tussle between the two rival factions of the nobility. If one

group succeeded in winning over the Sultan the other would seek protection and alliance of the Mongols. Hence Mongols became the only resort of the flying princes and nobles¹³. This attitude of rebellious Indian gave rise to the establishment of Mongol vassal states of Lahore, Multan and Sind¹⁴.

The Mongol problem assumes greater dimension during the reign of Sultan Ghyasuddin Balban and it was the Mongol threat that forced Balban to follow a defensive policy towards the Mongols. Balban openly confesses that but for the Mongols he would have followed an expansionist policy¹⁵. It was the Mongol danger that made Balban realize for the first that it was necessary for Delhi Sultans to fortify the fortresses of the North-west frontiers¹⁶.

Impact of the Mongol Invasions on the Sultanate of Delhi

While discussing the impact of the Mongol invasions on Indian politics and society it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Mongol problem influenced the fortunes and the policies of the Delhi Sultans. It determined their theories of kingship, limited their expansionist policies, moulded their economic policies and exercises far reaching influence on the administrative structure of the Delhi Sultanate.

One very important factor which is generally ignored sight of is that notwithstanding all the destructive and negative role that the Mongols played in Indian politics, the Sultanate of Delhi would never have come into existence but for the Mongol pressure in Central Asia which pushed into this country large numbers of trained administrators from Central Asian lands. Not only administrators but even intellectuals and scholars came and settled in India during this time. Very soon the situation changed so completely that instead of Indian Muslims going to other lands for intellectual guidance, Muslims from different parts of Ajam began to visit India¹⁷.

Another important aspect which is generally ignored is that the Mongols and the early Turkish Sultans both permitted trade relations to continue. It appears from medieval records¹⁸ that merchants came to India in large numbers. The general impression that the Mongols upset all commercial contacts and rendered all trade routes unsafe is not correct. In 1241 A.D. during the sack of Lahore by the Mongol general Bahadur Tair, the merchants of Lahore indirectly extended cooperation and support to him. Thus trade and commerce was not affected by these repeated Mongol incursions during this period.

One more factor which strengthened the Sultanate of Delhi after the Mongol invasions was that inspite of so many rivals, Sultan Iltutmish could maintain his throne and even consolidate and strengthen it. This was the result of the Mongol danger. Barani's account of Iltutmish's period say "In the reign of Shamsuddin (Iltutmish) the fear inspired by the slaughter and ravages of Chengiz Khan, caused many renowned *Maliks* and *Amirs* to rally round the throne of Shamsuddin.

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Conclusion

The Mongol invasions of Northern India during the 13th and 14th centuries had a great impact on the fortunes of the Delhi Sultanate. It was this Mongol problem which determined the theory of kingship of the Delhi Sultans. It limited their expansionist policies, moulded their economic policies and exercised far reaching influence on the administrative structure of the Delhi Sultanate. In the words of Barani "In the reign of Shamsuddin (Iltutmish) the fear inspired by the slaughter and ravages of Chengiz Khan, caused many renowned *Maliks* and *Amirs* to rally round the throne of Shamsuddin"²⁰. Thus it was the impact of the Mongol invasions that inspite of so many rivals, Sultan Iltutmish could maintain, consolidate and strengthen the Delhi Sultanate.

The impact, therefore, was both negative as well as positive that helped the early Turkish rulers to establish the Sultanate of Delhi on firm grounds.

The Mongol problem during the early Turkish period was one of the most baffling problems of that period and it left it's impact on every aspect of life-social, economic and political but apart from the negative effects of the Mongol invasions, the positive aspects of these do have an important role to play in building and strengthening the Sultanate of Delhi.

References

1. Minhaj is silent about the repudiation of alliance by Hasan Qarlugh to Iltutmish in favour of the Mongol ruler because it was not palatable to his patron.
2. K.A. Nizami, Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the 13th Century.
3. Iltutmish
4. Tabaqat-i Nasiri, Eng. Trans. Raverty, Vol.II, p.1045.
5. Tarikh-i Jahan Gulshan, Eng. trans. By J.A. Boyle, Vol.II, p.412.
6. Ibid., p.413.
7. K.A. Nizami, Some Aspects of Religion and Politics 13th Century.
8. Cf. I.H. Siddiqui's article "The Qarlugh Kingdom in North-West India during the thirteenth century", Islamic-Culture, Vol. LIV, No.2, 1980.
9. Isami, Futuh-us Salatin, p.26.
10. Minhaj in his account of the Mongols in the year 1239-40 A.D. states that Hasan Qarlugh had had previously accepted the overlordship of the Mongol Khan with a promise to pay an annual tribute (Mal) to him.
11. Tabaqat-i Nasiri, pp.317-319.
12. Cf. K.A. Nizami, Some Aspects of Religion of Politics India During the 13th Century.
13. Tabaqat-i Nasiri, Eng. trans. by Raverty, Vol. II, pp.699-700. History of India ed. by Karl Jahn, 1965, p.72. The first Delhi Prince who paid a visit to the court of Mangu Khan was Prince Jalal, son

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of Iltutmish who fell out with Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud in 1248 and fled away from his iqta of Sambhal and Badaun to Central Asia. Minhaj omits his going to the court to Mongol ruler at Qaraqorum but Rashiduddin Fazlullah gives additional information saying that the Prince fled to Qaraqorum in 1253 A.D. He was soon followed by Sher Khan Sungar. Mangu Khan treated Prince Jalal with honour and ordered his general Sali Bahadur to help him against the Delhi Sultan. Thus helped by the Mongols the fugitive Prince established himself at Lahore and became a Mongol vassal.

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15. Barani, Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, trans. Elliot & Dowson, Vol. 3.
16. Ibid., Balban had the fort of Lahore reconstructed in 1270 A.D.
17. K.A. Nizami, Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the 13th Century.
18. Tabaqat-i Nasiri, Eng. Trans. Raverty, Vol. II, p.1133.
19. Ibid., p. 1135.
20. Barani, Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, Eng. trans.Elliot & Dowson, Vol. III, p. 98.