

# Mohammad Bin Tughluq: A Despot or A Victim of Nemesis

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## Abstract

The functioning of an autocratic state depends on the personality of an autocratic ruler and early Sultans of Delhi Sultanate, also, were not the exceptions of this general trend. However, in India, later Sultans of Delhi Sultanate, like Khaljis and Tughluqs, came from the ordinary families, acceded the throne because of their ability and some of them ruled over the people successfully. Although, the post of a king or a sultan was not a bed of roses in those days, everyone wanted to be a sultan. There were dangers upon a sultan from every direction and he used to live in doubts and mistrusts. A king had to live cautiously from his own sons, brothers, viziers and even from his beloved queen. Mohammad Bin Tughluq became the Sultan of Delhi in these circumstances after the sudden death of his father, Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughluq. This paper tries to present the image of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq whether he was a despot or a victim of nemesis as he seems very kind on one occasion but very cruel on the other. Here, we will observe and examine how the different sources show the image of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq.

**Keywords:** Autocratic, Delhi Sultanate, Khalji, Tughluq, Image, Mohammad Bin Tughluq, Sultan.

## Introduction

While observing the image of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq, it seems to be controversial since no contemporary writer gives the full picture of it. The foreign writers draw a very positive picture of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq while ignoring the tumults and rebellions in the empire of the Sultan. They listened to the events of the reign of sultan from the others and furthermore, the sultan was very amicable for them. First allegation against the Sultan was that he was a parricide. After observing so many contemporary sources, we come to this conclusion that Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq was not a parricide; as he was the heir apparent, himself presented in the wooden palace and, furthermore, the spy system was very strong in the reign of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughluq. The accusation of being parricide might be the reaction of the learnt people who were treated very badly by the hands of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq. But the accounts of the pious saints put us in doubts as they were also the men of trust, who would live a life as the benefactor

for all the humanity. These pious saints presented a very harsh image of the Sultan as they faced very difficulties by the hands of the Sultan.

The initial years of the reign of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq seem to be peaceful but the latter years of his reign were full of disturbances and rebellions. Ulama took a different route against Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq as the latter treated them very harshly, aroused the foreigners to the high posts in place of native Ulama and himself, behaved like a mujtahid (a new interpreter of the religious texts).

Many other Sultans, also, faced many problems just as Sultan Alauddin Khalji but the latter diagnosed the problem well and, at last, came to its solution. On the other hand, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq could not find out the reason of the tumult, therefore, he had to face the disintegration of his empire. Although, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq found the royal treasury full of gold and silver, never faced a financial crisis and tackled the failure of token currency perfectly within one or two years, since Ibn Battuta, even, did not mention it after his arrival in India in 1333.

The famine, in his empire, occurred due to the increase in the revenue as the peasants left the cultivation in response. The boundless generosity, also, could not make him compel to be less extravagant as he never faced any lack of treasury. It seems that the main fault, in the character of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq, to have thought himself to be a man of perfect opinion, therefore, he would never consult with anybody and issued many impractical orders which were impossible to be implemented by his officials but Sultan would take their inactions as their disobediences and disloyalty resulting Sultan meted out heavy punishments on his own officials and ministers.

His behavior with Ulama, when they refused to accept the royal service, also made the people restive, who would have a very deep reverence for the clerical class. Although, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq got the investiture with a great reverence from the Caliph, who was living in Egypt, this act, also, could not help him in consolidating his empire. Sultan would appoint many incapable persons on the high posts while knowing very well the disability of them. He made Ibn Battuta the Qazi of Delhi, who belonged to Maliki jurisprudence and was unknown to Persian language.

Furthermore, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq appointed Aziz Khammar in Malwa to suppress the rebellion of Amir-i-Sadah, although Sultan was well known about the ability of Aziz Khammar who, eventually, was killed by the rebels. Sultan also made a big mistake when he removed Qutluq Khan from Deccan, called him back in Delhi and appointed Qutluq's brother there but this new governor could not control the situation and a large part of Deccan became free. Ulama do not seem the root cause of the problem in the empire of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq as the formers would not want to have a relation with the royal court.

Shaikh Nasiruddin Chirag Dilli is thought to be a conspirator to topple the throne of Muhammad Bin Tughluq but the Shaikh would bear the hardships given by Sultan silently and say nothing to follow the instructions of his mentor, Shaikh Nizamuddin Awliya. Muhammad Bin Tughluq, in his unique style, removed old and experienced officials and brought new people on the important posts which caused a great panic in his empire. It is very clear that the policy of the tolerance, for the people of other faith, was adopted by Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq as the latter knew very well that Hindus were having majority in India. He adopted the policy of tolerance, for the people of other faiths which later on, were followed by many Mughal Emperors. Although, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq felt so much anger on the failure of the token currency, he did not punish anyone as the forgers were, mostly, Hindus who minted the copper coins in their houses. Sultan would, also, behave very well with Jaina Community as the latter were controlling the minting system in those days. The nature of Sultan seems the main cause for the disintegration of his empire; otherwise he was a very able ruler who, in his initial years, could control a large empire.

But his own policies alienated him from the loyal amirs who were with the Sultanate from the reign of his father. Sultan's preference for the foreigners, over the native Indian, led to stand a bulwark in the matters of administration of Delhi Sultanate. Only for some extent, we can assume that the condition of India needed a powerful despot at that time when lenient rulers would lose their lives; therefore, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq took a very strong stand in the matter of kingship. In his young age, prince Jauna (Sultan Muhammad in young age) would visit the khanqahs of the pious Sufis and pay the reverence for them but on being the king, he adopted a rationalist approach while putting religion as an inherited thing. He made diplomatic and commercial relations with other countries. Furthermore, he established blood relation with the foreigners.

Very unfortunately, many of his courtiers misled Sultan by supporting all the legal or illegal actions of the later. Barani, himself, accepts his fault by supporting Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq in every action of the latter. In spite of all this, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq had to take an investiture from the Caliph who, even though, was living at the expenditure of the ruler of Egypt, because of the influence of Ulama on public opinion as they were the opponents of the state policy of Sultan. On many occasions, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq shows himself to be very serious on the matter of administration. He tried to connect religion with the policies of state but the means and methods; he used for this purpose, were inhumane as the Sufis as well as the khanqahs faced a severe jolt and vanished from the scene. Sultan would say that State and religion were twins.

On the other hand, Chishti Saints would think the death of their spirituality after joining the state service. Thus, this conflict led to the stain relations of Sultan Muhammad with the Chishti Saints as they refused to accept the royal service of Sultan resulting the latter treated them very harshly. Unfortunately, circumstances of that time vitiated his temper and his temper did the same with the circumstances. In this game of action

and reaction, Sultan trapped fully and could not come out of it. Actually, the people who try to interpret the religious texts on his own level of knowledge, usually, face the great problems in the society, same happened with Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq. He had been facing the opposition from the clerical class since the beginning of his reign as they stood against the policies of Sultan Muhammad. Although, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq memorized the Holy Qur'an and Hidayah, would take a deep interest in fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence), sometimes, he seems to have thought himself to be a mujtahid, therefore, he would think his opinion to be the best one and listen to none.

While observing the accounts of some Sufis, we come to this conclusion that Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq wanted to connect north part of India to the south part of it as he ordered all Ulama, scholars and Sufis to migrate from Delhi to Daulatabad. Although, this step of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq caused many untold miseries to the people of Delhi, south became prosperous and the Islamic culture and civilization started flourishing there. This great change, in South, was not possible, if Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq had not taken this revolutionary step of transferring the people from Delhi to Daulatabad. Even, Isami, a severe opponent of Sultan praised the gardens and prosperity of Daulatabad after the arrival of the learned people there. Actually, his inhuman punishment, unpractical projects and the failure of his administration reforms made the foundation of his empire weak. The provincial governors of far-off areas would think about the independence from the central authority as the means of communication were very limited and the roads were not safe.

In his initial years, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq, even, did not think to take the investiture from the Caliph living in Egypt but when the rebellions broke out in every part of his empire; Sultan tried his level best to obtain the investiture. Although, he obtained the investiture with a great reverence, this could not help him in consolidating his empire and the people did not give up to rebel. The disloyalty for Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq had spread day by day, which led to the disintegration of his empire. Very surprisingly, Sultan was, also, disturbed as is evident from his conversation which was done with Barani. Surprisingly, Barani wanted to say to Sultan that conciliation, not the revenge, could be the only solution for the rebels but, unfortunately, the former was having no courage to say so, since Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq would not listen to anyone.

While having grim determination, a feeble state of mind, lacked statesmanship, a mind without sympathy and wrong judgment brought one failure after another but Sultan could learnt nothing from them. His nature to execute the plans in a ruthless manner and his terrible anger for the enemies and lack of diplomacy were responsible for his failure. None could understand the real character of the Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq as on one occasion, he was very cautious for the Sharia Law but on the other hand, he neglected the canon law by killing the innocent people and levying extra taxes which were contrary to Sharia. Sometimes, it seems a struggle between philosophical rationalism and the orthodox clerical class until the death of Sultan



Muhammad Bin Tughluq. This conflict came to an end as Sultan Firoz Shah reverted this policy after coming to the throne.

Very surprisingly, Sultan Muhammad was very amicable for the foreigners who were given money and high posts in the Sultanate of Delhi but soon they broke the confidence of the Sultan as, on many occasions, they would favor the rebels. On the other hand, native officials and amirs neglected by Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq, were not loyal any more, therefore, the foundation of the Sultanate of Delhi became weak within two decades. As soon as, he reigned, he applied his authority with full severity. Having found an inherited and prosperous empire from his father, Sultan Muhammad Tughluq spent a large number of money without limit and never faced any bankruptcy but the sultanate tumbled rapidly. Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq would think royalty and the sedition to be the main issues of his empire; therefore, he never sat down calmly.

Actually, we see Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq by performing different actions which contradict his sayings, his actions and character. He would have thrown the zabiha (sacrificed animal), which he feels not appropriate in the view of sharia but, himself, takes part in the festival of holi. He warns Kabiruddin Dabir not to respect in such a submissive manner which could be an un-Islamic act, when the latter keeps the shoes of his mentor, in his armpit but Sultan Muhammad, himself, washes the feet of Jinaprabhu Suri. On one hand, he killed nine persons for not performing the Namaz (the prayer) in one day but on the other hand, himself, stopped the prayers of Juma (Friday) and Ids (Muslim festival) without consulting with the clerical class. Sultan inscribed Khatimun Nabiyyeen (the last Prophet among the Prophets) on his coins but, himself, proclaimed before the famous Islamic scholars that prophet hood does not seem to be ended. Many un-Islamic taxes and the pictures of living things in the royal palace were removed by Sultan Firoz Shah after ascending on the throne of Delhi.

The inflictions and the atrocities of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq were, also, having no limit like his generosity, therefore, Sultan Firoz Shah had to take a letter of forgiveness for the former from the relatives of the victims, who were tortured, mutilated and killed by Sultan Muhammad for the stability of the Sultanate of Delhi. Sultan Muhammad, sometimes, would punish the guilty very severely with the latter's innocent relatives, an act which was, clearly, against the principles of the prophetic traditions. There are so many acts of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq, which, were sharply against the principles of Islam, therefore, we come to this conclusion that a clear picture of the character of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq is very difficult to draw as none of the account of any historian provides the full details of the life of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq. Some modern historians tried to draw a different picture of Sultan Muhammad by showing him a very able ruler who, ever, adorned the throne of Delhi, although they do not have any other source to prove their claim. Thus, we can say that the real character of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq had been an enigma since beginning and has been till now.

The circumstances vitiated his temper and the temper did the same with circumstances. In this game of action and reaction, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq trapped fully and could not come out from it through all his reign. Therefore, he was given different accusations, notorious names and the tyrannical image.

Very surprisingly, Sultan, who was the severe opponent of a group of the Ulama, Islamic scholars and the Sufis and would kill them mercilessly, was very kind and affectionate towards the law-abiding Jains and Hindus and gave them all types of protection. Isami says that Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq crushed the Muslims in the attempt to appease the Hindus. According to a Jain account, the Jains were the bankers of Sultanate of Delhi and were holding the minting system of Sultanate. The Jains would be invited to the royal court with due respect and some of them were having very influential positions in the royal court.

However, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq is the most important ruler of Tughluq dynasty. Barani says that the character of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq seems to be the main cause of the latter's troubles and of the disintegration of his kingdom. His association with the philosophers diminished his beliefs in the sacred books and he took no warning from them while killing the people. He would issue the orders which were impossible to be implemented for the officials of the concerned areas. Furthermore, he would listen to none and the influential amirs would remain silent as they knew the nature of Sultan very well.

Being arrogant by nature, the sultan was not habitual of listening the opposite views against him, and therefore, the courtiers would praise the every action or order of Sultan. Although, many times, he issued such types of orders which resulted disastrous for his own empire. If the governors of the provinces or the officials of the areas did not implement the royal orders given by Sultan, the latter would take them as disobediences and insolences which resulted, indiscriminately, punishments on the people by the emperor. Even, Barani, himself accepts his fault to have told the unauthentic traditions of the Prophet to Sultan as the historian was having no courage to speak the truth before the strange Sultan.

A historian says that the emperor was having the animal like anger which is the basic cause of man's downfall. The ferocious anger of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq was brought him to the destruction but the chroniclers could not diagnose it properly. They depicted the emperor as the proverb of five blind men who found an elephant, touched its body parts differently and described the image of the elephant according to their understanding. He says that the lack of balance and the absence of the moderation in his nature were also the chief causes of Sultan's decline. Had he found a small empire like Sultan Iltutmish or Balban, his authority might have been long lasting. The means of the communicating with his people could not help him to maintain the dominion of Delhi over very large areas. Consequently, the emperor was compelled to make Daulatabad as the second capital. The historians mention another cause of the tumult in his empire to be the preference of the foreigners over the native Indians by Sultan and this habit of him deprived the empire from a loyal class of the governors and the officers.

As a result, some will call him a tyrant who would kill his own people as his natural enemy only on the suspicion or on the basis of very minor reason. This type of harsh attitude of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq, towards the people, was necessary at that time as the weak and the lenient rulers would lose their lives in medieval India, opine some modern historians. Some will prove him to be visionary who would make new plans regularly. The emperor made many plans which were very good for the people but they could not understand the thought of their king and became unhappy with the latter. Some will think him to be the victim of the circumstances which did not do justice with the emperor who did something and got other thing.

## Conclusion:

In the last, some historians give their verdict in favor of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq by saying that he was neither a visionary; nor impractical, nor a parricide, nor unsound; nor were his drafted schemes beyond the imagination of the people's possibility. Sultan was beyond from his time and he could not take the undue advantage by using the religion for consolidation of his empire. He, contrary to the former Sultans of Delhi, provoked the group of Ulama and made the right arm of his empire paralyze. Some historians state that Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq was a mixture of opposites; he was the wisest but at the same time the most foolish, the most respectful and the most disrespectful, the most humane and humiliating and the cruelest and the insolence, the most merciful and liberal but at the same time the most ruthless and tyrannical.

If we analysis deeply, we find that the character of Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq was the chief cause for all the disturbances occurred in his empire. After his death, the empire regained the health like a sick patient after a prolonged fever and the troubles vanished as the waves after a storm.

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