

BOOK REVIEW

Medieval India: Essays in Diplomacy and Culture

EDITED BY: IQTIDAR HUSSAIN SIDDIQUI

PUBLISHER: ADAM PUBLISHER AND DISTRIBUTORS, NEW DELHI

YEAR: 2009

The book is basically a collection of articles on medieval Indian history. Ten out of fifteen articles of this book have been written by the editor himself. Professor Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqui is a prolific writer with a number of articles and books to his credit and his approach in writing history has always been innovative. He always comes up with original and thought provoking ideas. Likewise in this book, his article 'The Qarlugh Kingdom in the Thirteenth Century: Liaison Between Mongols and Indian Rulers' provides some new information regarding the diplomatic relations between the Delhi Sultanate and Mongol rulers of Central Asia and Iran and the extent of the Mongol influence in India during the 13th century along with the interesting role of the Qarlugh kingdom as a buffer state between the Mongol empire and the Delhi Sultanate. One more hitherto untouched aspect that has been highlighted in this article is regarding Mongol policies towards their vassals. By putting some evidence, the writer proves that the Mongol rulers did not require their vassals to issue coins in their

own names or have their names along with that of the vassals inscribed on the coins.

In another article 'India's Relations with Central Asia and other Countries from the Reign of Sultan Firuz Shah', he presents the position of Delhi Sultanate during the reign of Firoz Shah Tughlaq. Through some evidences, he proves that even after the disintegration of the Delhi Sultanate, Abbasid Caliph, the Mamluk Sultan of Egypt and the Emperor of China, recognised only Sultan Firoz Shah of Delhi as a legal sovereign and maintained relations only with him whereas the sultans of Bengal and Bahmani kingdoms were never treated in similar manner although they were more powerful at that time than the Sultan of Delhi. The Emperor of China is said to have sent to the Sultan of Delhi, the imperial documents with the royal seal as a special work of honour. Apart from the political relations, the cultural relations between India and Ottoman Turks during the sultanate period are also mentioned in this article.

The book also contains two articles, viz. 'The Role of Sufis in the making of

Medieval Punjab' and 'Social and Political Philosophy of Amir Khusrau', on the philosophy of Sufis. The positive role of the Sufis in bringing communal harmony and peace among the Hindus and Muslims appears as the major theme of these articles. In this effort, the writer discarded the view of Peter Hardy who calls Amir Khusrau "the first communalist in India". He provides sufficient evidence to prove Amir Khusrau's religious tolerance and his appreciation of the spirit with which Hindus worshipped the idols. Amir Khusrau also appreciated yogic sciences, particularly breathing control.

Furthermore in another article, 'Nuqtavi Thinkers at the Mughal Court: A Study of their Impact on Akbar's Religious and Political Ideas', he discusses the Mughal polity which also contributed to the maintenance of peace and amity in the Indian society. Emperor Akbar, like a modern statesman, always considered the state above religion and eliminated all the discrimination against citizens on the basis of religion.

Apart from the editor, some other historians who have presented their

ideas in this book are also well known scholars and their works are quite original. For instance, the relevance of Professor I.A. Zilli's article 'Mughal-Iranian Relations: Early years of Akbar's Reign' is based on correspondence and letters which have not been used by any scholar so far in writing of Mughal-Iranian relations.

Dr Peter Hardy's contribution 'Unity and Variety in Indo - Islamic and Perso-Islamic Civilisation: Ethical and Political Ideas of Ziya al-Din Barani and Nasir'al-Din Tusi' is also remarkable. The comparison of Zia'al-Din Barani with some other early medieval Muslim writers of Central Asia and Iran is quite relevant from the historical point of view. After a detailed comparison, he comes to the interesting conclusion in finding out the difference of opinion between Barani and others. Hardy brings out that Barani is in favour of using more force against people under the garb of state welfare.

Overall this book is quite useful for the scholars of medieval Indian history as all the articles emerge from original and primary sources.

Ajaz Shuja
Associate Professor
Department of History
Dayal Singh College
University of Delhi
Delhi 110 003