



Nobility of Delhi Sultanate and their Literary Pursuits: A Case study of Minhaj al Din Siraj Juzjani

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the literary patronage extended by the nobility during the Sultanate Period of medieval India, with a particular emphasis on the contributions of Minhaj-i-Siraj, the author of *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* (1259-60). Minhaj-i-Siraj, a renowned Persian historian of the 13th century, holds a significant place in the annals of medieval Indian historiography. The paper begins by contextualizing the socio-political milieu of the Sultanate Period, highlighting the emergence of a vibrant courtly culture characterized by the patronage of scholars, poets, and historians and production of literary works within the noble circles. It aims to delineate Minhaj-i-Siraj's distinctive approach, thematic emphasis, and narrative style that individualized him from other historians of that time like Barani, Ibn Batuta, and Ferishta. From the portrayal of rulers and court intrigues to the depiction of societal norms and religious dynamics, this paper illuminates the distinctive historiographical landscapes crafted by Minhaj-i-Siraj. Furthermore, paper explores the life, works, and contributions of Minhaj-i-Siraj, shedding light on his invaluable role as a chronicler of his time. It strive to illuminate Minhaj-i-Siraj's enduring influence on our understanding of medieval Indian history and his significance as a luminary of Persian historiography.

Keywords: Minhaj Siraj al-Din Juzjani, *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, Delhi Sultanate, Nobility.

Introduction

The sultanate period was not merely concerned with political activities but was engaged in different cultural and developmental work. The Sultan as well as nobles contributed very much in the field of literature. Nobles during sultanate period made a remarkable contribution in the field of literature. They patronize other scholars as well who belong to different literary fields. As a result, literature on different subjects like Indian tales, *masnavi*, *qasida*, history, *insha*, *tafsir*, *farhang*, *tibb*, astronomy, astrology, mathematics, geology, architect, numismatic, music, mining and metallurgy was composed and compiled. They were expert in medical science and thus contribute a lot in this field also.

Nobles during this period composed literature in different languages. As they belong to differently socio-cultural background thus its impact was shown in their work. Many of them were foreigner and many were of Indian background. So literature was compiled in different languages as well as in different style. They composed in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, *Awadhi*, *hindwi* and the transcultural exchanges and influences that shaped Sultanate literature, particularly the fusion of Persian, Arabic, Indian, and Central Asian literary

traditions.¹ A lot of work was composed and compiled for administrative purpose. Nobles were expert in their respective field and thus their work has been preserved in several administrative works which act as guide manual. Their works help in forming laws in different field such as judiciary, military, revenue and civil administration. By their efforts and interest in literature a lot of work has been composed and compiled which contribute in the field of literature as well as history writings.²

Most prominent nobles who composed different work in different fields were, Ibn Batuta's *Rehla*. Maulana Raziuddin Hasan ala Saghani's *Mashriq-ul-Anwar*, a collection of *Hadith*, Sadr-i-Ala Ahmed Hasan Abdusi's *Basatin-ul-Uns*, Qazi Rukkuddin Samarqandi's *Hauz-ul-Hayat*, Yahya Bin Ahmad Sirhindi's *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi* Masand-i-Ali Mian Bhua's *Tibb-i-Sikandar Shahi* Malik Ainu l-Mulk's *Trassula-i-Ain-ul-Mulk* commonly known as *Insha-I Mahru*, Rafi's *Dastur-ul-Afazil-fi- Lughat-il- Fazail*. Maulana Ziauddin Sunnam's work *Nisab al- Ihtisab* (related to censure of Public morality), Thakur Pheru's *Dravyaparikkha*, *Vastusara*, *Rayanaparikkha* Minhaj Siraj's *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* and many more.³ This paper focus on Minhaj al Din Siraj Juzjani a famous *muwarakh* (historian) and his literary work (*tawarikh*) *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*. In writing the paper, numbers of primary as well as secondary sources were used. Primary sources included are Minhaj Siraj's *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, Zia uddin Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi*, Sadid al-Din Awfi's *Lobab al Albab*, Abdul Qadir Ibn -i-Muluk Shah, Al- Badauni's *Mutakahab-ut-Tawarikh*, Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Ferishta's *Gulshan-i-Ibrahimi* also known as *Tarikh-i-Ferishta* and many more.

The paper analyze the first half of Minhaj's life in Afghanistan, focusing on his childhood upbringing, education, patrons, and political activities before departing for Hindustan. The second part examines Minhaj's relocation to Hindustan in 1227, where he spent the rest of his life as a Muslim scholar serving as judge, imam, administrator, and sometimes a wanderer. At last it analysis various themes of his work *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* in context of Delhi Sultanate.

Biographical History

Beginning with a biographical sketch, the paper delves into the life of Minhaj Siraj, tracing his origins, education, and the socio-political context in which he flourished. Born in the early 13th century in the region of Ghur, Minhaj Siraj received a rigorous education in Islamic sciences, which laid the foundation for his later scholarly pursuits. Minhaj Siraj al-Din Juzjani (fl. 1193–1260) whose full name is Abu Umar bin Usman bin Muhammad al Minhajbin Siraj al Juzjani⁴ is probably best known as the author of the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, a universal Islamic history (*tarikh*) in Persian. His most famous work, the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, is a detailed chronicle covering Islamic dynasties from the Ghaznavids up to his time in India. A large portion of his work focuses on the Delhi Sultanate's early history, including military conquests, political intrigues, and social life.⁵ It contain twenty-three chapters (*tabaqat*) with mythical and historical information on various Biblical-Islamic prophets and kings, pre-Islamic Iranian kings, early Islamic community and its leaders in Arabia, and Umayyad and Abbasid caliphal dynasties. It also contain regional and local dynastic histories of a variety of medieval Islamic sultanates, including biographical accounts of their ruling houses, military, political, and administrative classes such as the Perso-Turkic Muslim slaves of the Delhi Sultanate.⁶

Despite the recognition of the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* as an important text of medieval Islamic history, our knowledge about its author is poor, as *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* is the only source which provides information about his early life in Central Asia. As early life of Minhaj was considered he offers vivid descriptions of himself and his family, and people with whom he associated for over a half-century in Afghanistan and Hindustan. In the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* he highlights the social and political contexts he operated in, including rich details about the social and political processes of his time, and the familial and professional networks within which he lived and worked. Minhaj portrays the history of his family within the emerging worlds of the Ghaznavid and Ghuri dynasties in Afghanistan during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and during the second half of the thirteenth century when he himself grew up as a Muslim scholar.⁷ He locates the beginning of his family history in the eleventh century by pointing to the human, religious, political, and geographical pasts of Imam Abdul Khaliq, his great-great-grandfather. He first identified Imam Khaliq, the patriarch of the family, in early eleventh-century Juzjan, then a major historical stronghold in eastern Khurasan (pre-Islamic Tukharistan).⁸ He described the

¹ Nabi Hadi, *Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1995, pp, 11-12.

² Fazeela Shahnawaz, *Socio Cultural Life of Nobility under Delhi Sultans*, Aligarh, 2015, p. 123.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 122-129

⁴ Maulvi Abdul Muqtadir, *Catalogue of the Persian and Arabic Manuscript, History*, Vol, VI, Patna, Bihar, 1918, p.5.

⁵ Khalique Ahmed Nizami, *On History and Historians of Medieval India*, Munshiram Manohar Lal Publishers Pvt. ltd New Delhi, 1985, pp, 76-77

⁶ Jawan Shir Rasik, The many lives of a medieval Muslim scholar: An introduction to the life and times of Minhaj Siraj al-Din Juzjani, 1193–1260 CE, *Afghanistan*, Vol 3, , Edinburg University Press, United Kingdom, 2020, pp. 116-117

⁷ Hadi Nabi, 'Minhaj Siraj and his *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*', *Indo-Iranica*, Vol XXVII, 1974,

⁸ Jawan Shir Rasik, The many lives of a medieval Muslim scholar: An introduction to the life and times

movement of Abul Khaliq from Juzan to Ghazni in the form of a story, how he was urging by a heavenly voice to leave Juzan and move to Ghazni when he was sleeping. Khaliq then moved to Ghazni and married to the daughter of Ghaznavid sultan, Sultan Ibrahim, (1055-1099), one of the longest reigning Ghaznavid Sultan.⁹ However, we do know that this half century of Ghaznavid history in Afghanistan under Sultan Ibrahim was quite protean: great social and political transformations were occurring all across Khurasan, particularly in localities like Ghur and Juzjan, which witnessed the influx and movement of new elite individuals and groups, including military and literary families, and new nomadic or semi-nomadic confederations. They all sought to make their own careers under the Great Saljuq and Ghaznavid sultans.¹⁰

The Ghuris (c. 1150–1215), who later became the main patrons of the Juzjanis, also emerged during this period as a leading military-political confederation in Khurasan. The Ghuris, who subsequently replaced the Ghaznavids and Saljuqs as the dominant power in the eastern Islamic lands, formed parallel alliances through patronage and marriages with each of these two dynastic houses, and with various scholarly, artisanal, and mystical Sufi families, including bringing in the Juzjanis to Ghur as a prominent scholarly bureaucratic family. Minhaj's story about the movement of 'Abdul Khaliq from Juzjan to Ghazni makes sense in light of these political transformations. At the same time, there is no other evidence that makes Minhaj's story about Imam Khaliq meaningful, if not completely true in history, regarding his movement from Juzjan to Ghazni. The Ghaznavid sultans, beginning with Subuktigin (d. 997), had a particularly long history of intermarriage and political alliances with the Faraighunids, the local ruling house of Juzjan. This great local alliance through marriage and political enactments between the Ghaznavids, as supreme imperial sultans, and the Faraighunids, as their local subject rulers in Juzjan, continued through more marriages and clientelism, which seems to have defined the alliances between various Ghaznavid sultans and local rulers, scholarly families, and mystical communities and included the integration of the Minhaj into the Ghaznavid state. The movement of Imam Khaliq from Juzjan to Ghazni and his marriage into the royal family of the Ghaznavids must therefore have taken place in this context. Indeed, although other sources are thin on other members of the Juzjani family, we know about his father both from Minhaj himself and one other contemporary source Sadid al-Din Awfi's *Lubab al-Albab* (c. 1221), the oldest anthological biography written in Persian.¹¹ Minhaj himself emphasizes various historical events involving his grandfather and father in political history of Central Asia. These range from his father's initial residence and service as a military judge in Lahore under the Ghaznavids to his presence there during its conquest by the Ghuris in 1186.¹² Minhaj's approach as a historian was determined by his family background and the circumstances of his life. Many political, social and religious factors had gone into the making of his personality and had conditioned his attitude towards religious and political problems of the period. His family had a long background of loyal relations with the Khilafat at Baghdad; his ancestors had matrimonial relations with the ruling houses of Ghur and Ghaznavids; the members of his family were known for their diplomatic finesse and were often employed as envoys and last, but not the least, the family enjoyed a reputation for its religious scholarship and piety.¹³

Minhaj was born in Ghur in circa 589/1193, i.e., two years after the battle of Tara'in. His father was appointed Qazi of the Ghurid army stationed at Lahore after its occupation by Shihabu'd-din in 582/1186-7. But in 591/1194, at the invitation of Sultan Baha-u'd-din Sam, he went to Banian and Tukharistan and accepted Qaziship of the region¹⁴. When Khwarazm Shah defeated the troops of Caliph Nasir and the latter sent some envoys to Ghur and Ghaznin to enlist support in his favour, Minhaj's father was one of the emissaries sent to the Caliph's court. Siraj-u'd-din, however, was killed on the way by robbers.¹⁵ Sadid al-Din Awfi also praises Minhaj's father's scholarly fame among his contemporaries, and has cited several of his works in *Lubab al-Albab*. Awfi also attributes two poems to Minhaj's father.¹⁶ After his father's death, he seems to have grown up prosperous and well-educated in Ghur. His mother and uncles, who worked as judges and assistants to various Ghuri princes and princesses, seem to have played a direct part in his early upbringing. Minhaj mentions that his mother was not only serving in the harem of a local Ghuri princess, but also she and the princess Mah

of Minhaj Siraj al-Din Juzjani, 1193–1260 CE, *Afghanistan*, Vol 3, , Edinburg University Press, United Kingdom, 2020, pp. 116-117

⁹ No other historical source—apart from the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*—has documented anyone by the name of Imam Abdul Khaliq from Juzjan and his movement to Ghazni.

¹⁰ Raverty, Henry George (tr.). *Tabakat-i-Nasiri: A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia, including Hindustan; from A.H. 194(810 A.D.) to A.H. 658 (1260 A.D.) and the Irruption of the Infidel Mughals into Islam*, 2 vols. London: Gilbert & Rivington, 1873. pp. 105.

¹¹ Henry George Raverty (TR.). *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, Vol 1, pp. 277-288

¹² Jawan Shir Rasik, *Many Lives*, pp. 120-22

¹³ Khalique Ahmed Nizami, *On History and Historians of Medieval India*, Munshiram Manohar Lal Publishers Pvt. Ltd New Delhi, 1985, pp, 76-77

¹⁴ Maulvi Abdul Muqtadir, *Catalogue of the Persian and Arabic Manuscript, History*, Vol, VI, p.5.

¹⁵ K.A. Nizami, *On History and Historian*, pp. 77-78

¹⁶ Awfi, *Lubab-al-albab*, Ed, Edward Browne and Mirza Mohammad Qazvini, Tehran, 1982. p.839-840

Malik¹⁷ were “foster-sisters and schoolmates” (*ham shir wa ham maktab*).¹⁸ She played as an important figure in Minhaj’s *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*.

Later on Minhaj moved to Zaranj, capital of Sijistan, and remained there for some time. In 617/1220 he stayed at Tulak. For about four years he participated in defensive campaigns against the Mongols. In 618/1221, the year in which Chingiz crossed the Jihun into Khurasan, Minhaj married at the age of twenty-seven into a noble (*akabir*) family of his relatives in Gaur. In 621/1224 he fought against the Mongols at Tulak¹⁹. In 1224, he got his first job as an envoy for Malik Taj al-Din Hasan, a local ruler in Ghur. According to Minhaj, Malik Taj al-Din Hasan Salar Kharput asked him to go to Quhistan to negotiate with the leaders of Nizari Ismailis there to open a secure commercial route to Ghur that would be safe from the Mongols who had ravaged other known routes, bringing famine to Ghur and other regions of Khurasan. In 1226, he was again sent to Quhistan. It was a political assignment for Minhaj from Malik Taj al-Din, who ordered him to go to Quhistan on a peace-making deal, which apparently ended in failure. When he was asked to make another trip, he refused. Consequently, Malik Taj al-Din imprisoned him for forty-three days. Minhaj walked out of prison only after Malik Rukn al-Din Marghani, his other local Ghuri patron, intervened and requested his release. He wrote a long panegyric poem for Malik Rukn al-Din for his intervention.²⁰ In 1227 he leave for India by way of Ghaznin and Banian, reached Uchch by boat.

Minhaj Siraj in Hindustan 1227-1260

Minhaj commenced his official career in Hindustan in Sindh in 1227 when he escaped from the Mongols. He took the charge of Madrasa-i Firuzi in Uchch under the patronage of Malik Nasir al Din Qabaccha. He also offered him post of a military judge (*qadi-‘askari*). His life and career in Sindh were disrupted four months after his arrival. His patron Malik Nasir al-Din Qabacha committed suicide by drowning in the Indus after losing faith in his chances of victory against the rival slave-sultan of Hindustan, Sultan Shams al-Din Iltutmish (r. 1211–1236). Iltutmish received Minhaj as a learned man (*mawlana*) of Ghur, and brought him along to Delhi.²¹ It was at Delhi that Minhaj found a favorable atmosphere for his genius to flourish and he attained a stature in the cultural and political circles of the capital. For ten years during the reign of Iltutmish he quietly and efficiently performed his duties as *Imam*, *Qazi*, and *Khatib* etc. Proximity with the Sultan and close relations with the ruling elite provided him with an opportunity to study the political developments in all their details and dimensions. He accompanied Iltutmish to Gwalior in 1231 and the next year, after the conquest of the fort, he was made *Qazi*, *Imam* of Gwalior under governor Rashid-u’d-din ‘Ali.²² After the death of Iltutmish, Razia Sultana assumed throne and Minhaj left Gwalior and came to Delhi. Here he was placed in charge of the Madrasa-i Nasiriyya while also holding on to his judicial positions in Gwalior.²³

After Bahram Shah (r. 1240–1242) unseated his half-sister Sultan Razia, he promoted Minhaj to the position of chief judge of Hindustan for siding with him. Minhaj seems to have played a critical part in boosting some sort of support for Bahram Shah against Razia. He even wrote a long poem for Bahram Shah, and gave rallying speeches in his support.²⁴ After Bahram Shah was deposed, the Perso-Turkic soldiery and scholar elites who defeated the sultan with help of Wazir Khawaj Muzzahib-ud-Din sent a party of assassins after Minhaj. He provides a dramatic description of the attempted assassination.²⁵ The attackers apparently came after Minhaj when he was leading Friday prayer in Jama Masjid but somehow escaped unhurt. When Ala-ud-din Masud Shah reappointed Khwaja Muhazzab-u’d-din as Wazir in 640/1242, Minhaj resigned from his post as it became quite difficult for Minhaj to stay there due to uncertainty and chaotic situations. He decided to leave the city during the early part of the spring in 1243.²⁶ But this time he went further east in Hindustan, first to Awadh, and then to Lakhnauti in Bengal, the eastern-most ‘Islamic’ frontier in Hindustan and stayed there for about two years.²⁷ After two years, in Delhi, Ulugh Khan (the future Sultan Balban) had risen to prominence, being appointed as Amir-i Hajib (lord chamberlain). After almost two more years wandering and traveling in Lakhnauti. He returned to Delhi on 11 July 1245 after hearing that Ulugh Khan has firm control in state affairs.²⁸ As Minhaj was his staunch supporter, just after three days in Delhi, Ulugh Khan bestowed upon Minhaj all his old positions. He was once again awarded with leadership of the Madrasa-i Nasiriyya, a judgeship of

¹⁷ She was the eldest daughter of Sultan Ghias al-din Ghuri. (1163-1203).

¹⁸ Jawan Shir Rasik, , *Afghanistan*, pp. 121

¹⁹ K.A.Nizami, *on history and historians of medieval India*, p. 79.

²⁰ Jawan Shir Rasik, *Afghanistan*, pp, 121-122.

²¹ K.A.Nizami, *On History and Historians*, pp. 77-78.

²² *Ibid*, pp. 78-79.

²³ H.G.Raverty, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, pp.541-542.

²⁴ Jawan Shir Rasik, *Afghanistan*, p.127

²⁵ H .Raverty, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, pp. 555-556.

²⁶ K.A.Nizami, *On History and Historians*, p. 79-80

²⁷ R. Eaton, *Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996. p.411

²⁸ K.A.Nizami, *On history and Historians*, pp. 79-80

Gwalior, the position of lead-imam of the Friday mosque in Delhi, and his post of chief judge. Additionally, he received a robe of honor and gifts, including a caparisoned horse.²⁹ Minhaj was also the first authority to paint Ulugh Khan as one of the most important slave-commanders (*bandagan*) in the Delhi Sultanate.³⁰ For his loyalty and friendship to Ulugh Khan, Minhaj also received abundant political and material protection and was made a trustee of the new Sultan of Delhi, Sultan Nasir al-Din (r. 1246–1266), a grandson of Iltutmish. Minhaj dedicates the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* to both Nasir al-Din and Ulugh Khan.³¹ In 1252, when Imad ud Din Raihan assumed power, he removed Minhaj from his position as Chief Judge of Hindustan. In 1254, when Balban came to power, the title of *Sadr-i-Jahan* or chief of all religious affairs, charities, and endowments were conferred upon him.³²

Minhaj is less forthcoming about the final years of his life in Hindustan. He documents several historical events concerning the rapid rise to power of Ulugh Khan during the years between 1255 and 1260, including the Balban's principal role in defense of Hindustan against further Mongol intrusions.³³ But we hear almost nothing about Minhaj's own life during this period. He is silent in the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* about his activities, movements, and interactions, and how they may have impacted his very last years of life and work in Delhi. He appears fatigued when we read closely the very end of *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, which he finished writing it in 1259–60 at the age of 66–67.

Table 1 Minhaj Siraj al-Din Juzjani's Career Peregrinations in Khurasan and Hindustan*

Khurasan			
Place	Period	Activities	Associated Person/s
Firuzkuh, Ghur	1193–1211	Upbringing	Ma Malik (adopted mother)
Timran, Ghur	1216	Marriage	Malik Naser al-Din Abu Bakr
Tulak, Ghur	1221	Fighting (Mongols)	X
Quhistan, Kirman	1224	Commercial Envoy	Malik Rukn al-Din Marghani
Khaysar, Ghur	1225	X	X
Quhistan, Kirman	1226	Political Envoy	Marghani, and Malik Taj al-Din
Nimruz, Sistan	1226	Prisoner	Marghani, and Malik Taj al-Din
Tulak, Ghur	1226	Fighting (Mongols)	Relatives (e.g., uncles, brother)
Hindustan			
Uch, Sindh	1227	Judge, Teacher	Malik Naser al-Din Qabacha
Delhi	1128–1231	X	Sultan Iltutmish
Gwalior	1231–1236	Judge, imam	Sultan Iltutmish
Delhi-Gwalior	1237–39	Teacher, Judge	Zia al-Din Junaydi, Sultan Razia
Delhi	1241	Chief Judge	Sultan Bahram Shah
Awadh	1242	Peregrinating	X
Lakhnauti	1242–44	Wanderer	X
Delhi-Gwalior	1244–1249	Waqf Official, and Judge	Ulugh Khan
Uch	1245	Fighting (Mongols)	Ulugh Khan
Kanauj	1247	Fighting (Rajputs)	Ulugh Khan
Hansi	1249	Revenue Farming	Ulugh Khan
Multan	1250	Trading	Khwaja Hakim Balkhi
Delhi	1250	X	Ulugh Khan
Delhi	1251–52	Chief Judge of Hindustan	Nasir al-Din Mahmud
Delhi	1253	X	X
Delhi	1254	Chief of Waqf Department	Ulugh Khan
Delhi	1255–58	Hindustan Chief Judge	Ulugh Khan
Delhi	1259–60	Writing <i>Tabaqat-i Nasiri</i>	Ulugh Khan, Nasir al-Din Mahmud

These two timeline tables are based on Minhaj's own information in the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*. "X" represents the unknown.

²⁹ H.G. Raverty, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, pp. 578-581

³⁰ Sunil Kumar. "When Slaves were Nobles: The Shamsi Bandagan in the Early Delhi Sultanate." *Studies in History* 10, no. 1 (1994), 23–52.

³¹ Sunil Kumar. *The Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007. pp. 55-56

³² Maulvi Abdul Muqtadir, *Catalogue of the Persian and Arabic Manuscript, History*, Vol, VI, p.6.

³³ K.A.Nizami, *On History and Historians*, pp. 78-79.

Historical Significance of Minhaj's Work in context of Delhi Sultanate

Tabaqat-i Nasiri, as a work of universal Islamic *tarikh*, contains in its twenty-three chapters (*tabaqat*) mythical and historical information on various Biblical-Islamic prophets and kings, pre-Islamic Iranian kings, early Islamic community and its leaders in Arabia, and Umayyad and Abbasid caliphal dynasties.³⁴ Literally the word '*Tabaqat*' means a 'layer'. Broadly speaking Minhaj deals with the following six themes:

- (1) Patriarchs and Prophets
- (2) Prophet of Islam, Pious Caliphs, the Omayyads and the Abbasids
- 3) The 'Ajami dynasties:'
 - (a) The Pesh-Dadan (b) The Kaianian (c) The Ashkanian (d) The Sasanian (e) The Akasirah
- (4) The Minor Dynasties and other Muslim dynasties,
- (5) The Sultans of Delhi and their nobles,
- (6) The Mongols

It is one of the most important text of medieval Islamic history For the first portion of the book, he cites as his source the following books: 1, *Salami* ; 2, *Takmilat-u'bLata'if* ;3, *Tarikh-UBaihaqi* ; 4, *Adas-u' z-Zaman* ;5, *Sunan-i-Abu Da^ud Sijistani*; 6, *Muqaddis Al-Badv-wa'lTarikh*; 7, *Tarikh-e-Yamini*; 8, *Qanun-al Mashidi*; 9, *TarikhA-Majdul*; 10. *Kitab-i-Aghani*; 14. *Sabi*³⁵ .Minhaj presents himself variously in his work as a "weak servant" (*band-i zaif*) of God; "prayer-giver to Muslims" (*da'i, du'a' -guy-i muslimanan*)³; a judge "in the court of law" (*diwan-i mazalim*); a "leader" (*imam*) in mosque, and so forth. Juzjani uses these titles throughout the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* to identify himself in relation to specific social and historical spaces, times, contexts, and peoples.³⁶

Minhaj gave detail descriptions of Shamsi nobles. His *tabaqat* contain account of about twenty five nobles and also mention relation of Iltutmish with these nobles.³⁷ Regarding Iltutmish's attitude towards them, Minhaj remarks:, "(they) were objects of his regard and affection; and they all looked upon him as a kind and loving father."³⁸ Minhaj's account gave details about the racial and tribal background of the nobles, their training in the household, appointment to different offices, role in internecine struggles, responsibilities as iqta holders, transfers, promotions and demotions, personal qualities and administrative achievements. Minhaj's silence about some of the outstanding nobles shows that political consideration. He identified himself completely with the interests of the Turkish oligarchy in India. His relation with Turkish nobility particularly relations with Balban —determined his choice and rejection of data. He does not include Qutb-u'd-din Hasan Ghuri in this *Tabaqat*, though, according to Barani, others had written volumes about him. As Balban got him ruthlessly massacred. Isami gave full detail of his murder and involvement of Balban, but Minhaj was silent on this subject. ³⁹ If any Sultan, disgusted with the recalcitrant activities and machinations of the Turkish nobles, sought to create a counter-nobility of non-Turkish elements, Minhaj reacted to it sharply and deliberately distorted facts. When Ulugh Khan (future Balban) want to curb the power that forced Sultan Nasir-u'd-din Mahmud to dismiss him and appoint Tmad-u'd-din Raihan in his place. Better organization and unity among Turks ultimately succeeded in creating a situation in which Nasir-u'd-din had to dismiss Raihan and to entrust the entire administrative machinery to Balban and seek an escapist's refuge in his prayers and penitence. Minhaj justify this action of Balban in his *tabaqat* and this influenced even other historians like Amir Khusrau and Zia ud Din Barani. Nasir-u'ddin Mahmud was painted as man of the other-world-more interested in vigils, fasts, penitences etc.—and not fit for administration. Thus Balban's assumption of power could automatically be explained as a 'Necessity of the situation' and no reader would ever hold Balban responsible for manipulating a 'situation.'⁴⁰

Minhaj's approach and perspective has other short-comings also. He gave details of Turkish campaigns of North India but did not give any detail of resistance made by local rulers. Even Sadr-u'd-din Hasan Nizami makes it abundantly clear that Rajput resistance was stiff and determined. He was completely silent about its aftermath, how it effect local population, changes in administration by Turks, cultural changes etc. He gave detail about Iltutmish Campaigns but not discuss how he made effective administration. He even skipped the architectural development that take place during that time buildings like Quwwat-u'l-Islam Mosque, Qutb Minar, Hauz-i-Shamsi etc.,— which heralded the dawn of a new era in the cultural history of Delhi, have been skipped over. ⁴¹

³⁴ Jawan Shir Rasik, Afghanistan, pp. 123-24

³⁵ K.A.Nizami, On History and Historians of Medieval India, p. 79

³⁶ Jawan Shir Rasik. "Early Islamic Ghur, 10th-12th Centuries: Rereading the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*." Ph. D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2019 pp. 210-211

³⁷ K.A.Nizami, *History and Historians*, p. 79

³⁸ H.G.Raverty, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, p.729

³⁹ Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi*, p.113

⁴⁰ K.A.Nizami, *History and Historians of Medieval India*, p.85

⁴¹ MumtazAli Khan, *Some Important Prose Writings of the 13th Century A.D. in India*, Aligarh, 1970. P. 198.

The last chapter of his *Tabaqat* was on Mongols. He had first-hand knowledge of the Mongols before he stepped into India and subsequently also he went on collecting information about them from reliable sources. Despite of his hatred toward Chingiz Khan, he describe his qualities as an administrator. He gave a vivid picture of their military prowess and ruthless tactics. He portrays them as formidable adversaries, skilled in the art of warfare and relentless in their pursuit of conquest. Their swift and merciless campaigns left a trail of destruction as cities were razed, populations decimated, and civilizations upended. He gave detail description of Mongols attack in North India but did not gave much importance to how Indian rulers gave resistance to them. Minhaj's main interest lay in the military operations and the political maneuvers of the period but lacked in chronological sequence and systematic cataloguing of events. As a historian, Minhaj seems to have been least interested in the working of the administrative institutions. The institution of *iqta* which was the linch-pin of the administrative system of those days has very little or indirect explanation in his work.⁴²

The age of Minhaj saw the influx of a very large number of '*ulama and mashaikh* into the country. Some of them gained eminence as founders of academic institutions, others as founders of *silsilahs* and centres of spiritual activity. It was the age of Shaikh Mu'ia-u'd-din Chishti, Shaikh Qutb-u'd-din Bakhtiyar Kaki, Shaikh Farid Ganj-i-Shakar, Shaikh Baha-u'd-din Zakariyya, Qazi Hamid-u'd-din Nagauri and others.⁴³ Minhaj speaks about refugees from Muslim lands in general terms, but does not say a word about their role and contribution to contemporary society. Even historians of latter time were surprised and raised concern as why Minhaj did not discuss their contributions in Indian society.⁴⁴

In spite of all shortcomings in his work as a historian, Minhaj had an individuality of his own. He is well-versed in religious sciences, an erudite scholar, and an eloquent speaker who could change the views of his audiences as in case of Balban. He had close contact with the nobles and the Sultans on one side and with the mystics and the '*ulama* on the other. At a time when the relations between the '*ulama* and the *sufis* were far from cordial, Minhaj was respected by both. As *Sadr-i-Jahan* he was directly in touch with the ulama, while as Principal of the Nasiriya Madrasah, he was looked upon as the most outstanding 'alim of the period. He was esteemed highly in the mystic circles and Shaikh Nizam-u'd-din Auliya used to go every week to listen to his religious discourses.

Minhaj was also one of the great poets. His poem on Ulugh Khan's victory of Talsandah, entitled *Nasiri Nama*, was appreciated both by the Sultan and the Ulugh Khan. The Sultan gave him a permanent yearly grant, while Ulugh Khan conferred upon him a village in Hansi.⁴⁵ Balban was a patron and supporter of Minhaj whose devotion to him is well-known. He writes panegyric (qasida) on him whenever got an opportunity. But it may be of interest to know what Balban thought of him. According to Sarur-u's-Sudur, Balban once said:

"I have three qazis. One of them does not fear me but fears God, He is Qazi-i-Lashkar. The other one does not fear God but fears me. He is Fakhr Naqila. The third one neither fears me nor God. And he is Minhaj".⁴⁶

Conclusion

The Sultanate period in medieval India witnessed a flourishing literary culture, fostered by the patronage and support of the ruling elite, particularly the nobility in shaping literary discourse and preserving the cultural heritage of the Islamic world. Minhaj Siraj one of the prominent noble of that time and his work *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* is one of the significant source of medieval history. The paper explores his approach to historiography, emphasizing his reliance on primary sources, oral traditions, and personal observations ranging from historical narratives to poetic compositions. His great attention to detail, coupled with his impartiality and critical analysis, distinguishes him as a prominent historian of his time. It also examines Minhaj Siraj's portrayal of political dynamics, cultural exchanges, and religious developments in medieval India. Through his narrative, Minhaj Siraj highlighted the complex interplay between various dynasties, religious communities, and socio-economic forces, offering valuable insights into the historical forces shaping the Indian subcontinent. It endures significance of Minhaj Siraj's contributions to Indian historiography. His '*Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*' remains an indispensable source for scholars for understanding medieval Indian history and culture. Minhaj Siraj's scholarly rigor, narrative finesse, and holistic perspective continue to inspire and inform our understanding of India's past, which also place his work on highest place in the annals of history.

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⁴² Optic, pp. 86-87.

⁴³ Hadi Nabi, Minhaj-i-Siraj and his *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, *Indo Iranica*, p. 123

⁴⁴ Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*, p.103.

⁴⁵ H.G.Raverty, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, pp. 680-688.

⁴⁶ Al SaeediQazi Hameeduddin Nagori, *Sarur-us-Sudur*, (673 A.H.1274 A.D) 21/168, MS. Habib Ganj Collection, Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh. p. 24.

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