

## A study on military system on Muslim historians in Saltanta age

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### Abstract

The army of the early Turkish Sultans formed one of the strongest pillars of the government. According to a contemporary historian Z. Barani, the strength of the government of the Sultans rested on their armies.<sup>1</sup> There is hardly any book on the army of the early Delhi Sultanate unlike the books on the army of the Mughal times e.g. William Irvine's 'The Army of the Indian Mughals' and Abdul Aziz's 'The Mansabdari System and the Mughal Army', though there is no dearth of material available in political and administrative works on the Delhi Sultanate. There are some monographs, however which deal with specific aspects of the army organization and institutions of the early Turkish sultans. Military historiography in India was initiated with the start of studies on medieval Indian history during the 1860's. It appears that the British administrative objectives and political developments after 1857 shaped the nature of military historical writings. The foundation of Turkish rule was described as Muslim rule and as a linear process of foreign domination in Indian history. But the true nature of Turkish rule eluded discussion, and ideological frays started generating historical debates among scholar. The history of the early Turkish rule in the northern India has been written, primarily, in political and military terms projecting dauntless armies fighting heroic battles.

If we take a deep insight into the works of 20<sup>th</sup> century, no true British-Indian school of military historians emerged. Muslim scholars- Mohammad Habib, Jadunath Sarkar, Jagdish Narayan Sarkar, K.A. Nizami, A.L. Siddiqui, deal with certain aspects of army. The present chapter aims to study and assess the works written and issues discussed by the British and Indian historians about the army of the early Delhi Sultans.

**Keywords:** Mohammad Habib, Jadunath Sarkar, Jagdish Narayan Sarkar, K.A. Nizami, A.L. Siddiqui

### Introduction

I.H. Qureshi in the Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi discusses military organization under the Chapter VII entitled "The Army". He says that the internal and external armed struggle of the early Turkish Sultans forced the need of organizing the army of the Sultanate: There was a ministry for war called diwan-i-ard with its head known as the ard-i-mumalik, who was responsible for its efficiency and entire administration. The ard-i-mumalik was responsible for the recruitment of troops, inspection of troops, promotion and degradation of the soliders, recommendation of assignments, payments of troops, and preparations of waar campaigns, and he would accompany the army in all important wars and saw the commiserate of supply and transport <sup>[1]</sup>. I.H. Quershi further illustrates the methods of Dagh and Huliyah adopted by Alauddin Khalji. The army was distributed and posted according to the need and strategic importance of the area concerned <sup>[2]</sup>. He divides the troops under two heads: (i) hashm-i-qalb which consisted of Khash Khail (household brigade), jandars (royal slaves & guards) and afwai-i-qalb (troops directly under the royal command); (ii) hashm-i-atraf (Garrisons in the provinces) <sup>[3]</sup>. He further discusses the cavalry, elephants, infantry, firearm, siege engines, forts, provisions, engineers, battle array, scouts, ambulances and quarkhanah (repository of royal standards) and zarradkhanah (arms storehouse). The army personnel were so well-balanced alongs tribal lines that no race or group could be predominant to post threat to the ruler. <sup>4</sup> The army was organized on

decimal basis from on individual soldier to Khan, between them were Sar-i-khail, Sipah-salar, Amir and Malik. In the end, he elaborates the variance in the soldier's salaries, in number and efficiency of the army.

A.B.M. Habibullah's the Foundation of Muslim Rule in India" has a separate chapter entitled "The Fighting Forces (pp. 262-270) were he states that normally all Muslims were members of the state's fighting forces. Professional soldiers in the state's employment manned the army which seems to consist of four classes: (i) the regular soldiers under Sultan's direct control and in permanent employment, (ii) the troops permanently maintained by the provincial governors on the same footing as those of the kind (iii) special recruits in times of war and expeditions, and (iv) volunteers, ordinarily Muslims, who were expected to bear their own arms and enrolled, for no pay but a share in the booty, for participating in what was called Jihad.

A.B.M. Habibullah discusses the office of ariz-i-mamalik, qalb-i-Sultani (royal standing army), jandars, garrisons, shamsi iqtadars of cavalry and infantry. In a decentralized state of the Mamluks, authority over provincial troops was limited and the force was the muqti's own; details of its maintenance were his own concern and the ariz-i-mamalik could exercise little interference. Ariz-i-mamalik had naib-i-ariz (muqti's ariz) stationed in the iqtas. The instances from the Mamluk period throw insufficient light on army divisions and their composition. He also writes about the description of the battle array, quoting Adabul Harb.

Muhammad Aziz Ahmad's Political History and the Institutions of the Early Empire of Delhi (1206-1290) focused on the various aspects of the early Turkish rule. He treated the themes of slave trade, career of Sultan Shihabuddin, Turkish government, medieval kingship, new form of monarchy introduced by Shihabuddin and his military commanders, Turkish officers and the workers of Balban in a descriptive manner but failed to solve the real problems of usage of sources. According to him, the Turkish government of the 13<sup>th</sup> century was composed of several elements, borrowed from various countries<sup>[5]</sup>. The early Turkish rulers of adopted the Mongol's decimal system pattern for the organization of their army.

Ahmad described the ministry of was (Diwan-i-Ardid-i-Mamalik) in chapter IX, "Central Organization of the Empire of Delhi (1206-1290)"<sup>[6]</sup> The minister of war styled himself with such titles as Imad-ul-Mulk, Kutlugh Khan and Rawat-i-Arid. He quotes another important officer called Bah-ul-Hasham (Marshal of the Retinue) to assist the minister in the management of the department. He also talks of other army officers Sar-i-Lashkar (commander of a campaign), Hakim (governor), Bakhshi (paymaster), Naib (regent), and Wails (governors). Some of his observations were mere speculation, and researchers after the 1950's updated the knowledge and facts on the early Turkish rule in northern India.

Muhammad Aziz Ahmad in his article "the Central Structure of the Sultanate of Delhi" says<sup>[7]</sup>. "The whole army whether stationed at the capital or in province was under the direct control of the central government and was paid in cash, revenues and lands were rarely assigned for military services before the reign of Sultan Firuz Shah". M. Akram Makhdoome in the article "The art of War in Medieval India"<sup>8</sup> dwells upon the art of warfare in medieval India. Lashkar (Commander of the army), magdis-e-maliki (Council of maliks), horses and elephants, the office of ariz, horsemen, weapons, fighting and war spoils constitute te contents of this paper. A.L. Srivastava in "Warfare in Medieval India," studies organization of the army improved greatly and so also the system of warfare." K.S. Lal's article "The Striking power of the Army of the Sultanate" is a very informative piece of writing on the army of the medieval India. The army organization of the Delhi Sultanate forms the focus of this paper. K.S. Lal discusses the men, the mound, the weapons, organization and weakness of the army organization of Delhi Sultanate.

Majid Khadduri in his book: the Law of War and Peace (London 1941) throws light on the theoretical aspects of warfare in the medieval times in general. The author elaborates the war should be conducted, the arrangement of armies in battlefield and the role of various commanders in battles and sieges. There are some articles on the laws of war in medieval India. M. Hamidullahs in his article<sup>[9]</sup> presents a study of Muslim public and international law, consisting of the laws of war, peace and neutrality together with precedents from orthodox practice. S. Sahabuddin in the paper "conduct of Strategy and Tactics of War during Muslim Rule in India, illustrates all aspects of ware,g, officers, planning of war, divisions of army, methods, weapons, tactics etc.

An attractive variant of nationalist viewpoint was put forward by the modern Indian Muslim historian, Mohammad Habib.

Following his Marxist proclivities, he claimed that the Muslim conquent of India was the result of an urban revolution which brought together as allied the new Muslim rulers and the previously under privileged Hindu city workers. In this view, Islam had liberated India from the shackles of the Hindu caste-system. A mild version of Mohammad Habib's research was highlighted by K.A. Nizami. He says that the real cause of the defeat of Indians lay in their social system and the invidious caste distinction which weakened their military organization and honeycombed their social structure. That patriotic fervour in which every citizen instinctively lays his hand on the sword-hilt in moments of national crisis was killed by these caste distinctions. K.A. Nizami further narrates that the bulk of the India population was apathetic towards the fortunes of the ruling dynasties. No appeal from the Rajput governing classes could possibly receive sympathetic response from the vast mass of Indian population because there was no unifying bond, no idea of 'social owners', no spirit of 'common citizenship' and no 'national consciousness' The caste system had played havoc with the military efficiency, fighting remained profession of the selected few, recruitment confined to particular casted, physical contamination overburdened soldiers which marred his efficiency. K.A. Nizami, through lacked Mohammad Habib's imaginative and foresight nature, gave a general view of the early Turkish successes. Such views make more than the briefest notice of military organization superfluous<sup>[10]</sup>.

Another crucial factor, which was earlier highlighted by K.A. Nizami and later by Peter Jackson and I.H. Siddiqi, paved the way for success of Turkish arms in northern India was the tactics and stratagem adopted by Muhammad Ghuri. In fact, his failure at Tarain, made him think of changing his military Strathy and tactics, writes Siddiqui, and then he was able to retrieve his honors. He was naturally cautious this time. In order possibly to gain time for completing his preparations and to layout a well-planned strategy, he had sent Qiwamul Mulk Ruknuddin Hamza ahead from Lahore to demand Prithviraj's submission. It was a crucial step. Muhammad feint o throw Prithviraj off his guard which succeeded remarkably well and was aken full advantage of. That same night the Sultan made his preparation for battle, and after the dawn of the morning, when the Rajputs had left their camps for the purpose of obeying the calls of nature, and for the purpose of performing their ablutions, he entered the plain with his ranks marshaled. The Rajputs were caught napping. Thrown into confusion, they could not make a stand, and Prithviraj decided to run away. But he was captured and killed. Nizami was thereby led assume that these tactics were instrumental in winning for Islam the north Gangetic Plain<sup>[11]</sup>.

Irfa Habib<sup>[12]</sup>, perhaps following the example of Saiyid Ahmad Khan, the founder of the Aligarh Muslim University, who was deeply impressed by modern science, stimulated research into medieval technology developments. He suggested that the tenor of life in India was greatly changed during the period of the Delhi Sultanate by the introduction of several important mechanical devices. The evidence is scanty and ill-preserved, but Irfan Habib has been applying to it lines of research suggested by JosephNeedham's massive history of science in China and Lynn White's brief essays on medieval European technology<sup>[13]</sup>.

Irfan Habib has made out a fairly strong case for the introduction, in India during this period, of the spinning wheel and of the bowstring device for carding cotton, both of which had previously been considered Indian inventions of almost immemorial antiquity. Inevitably the stirrup is brought up later in Habib's inquiry and perhaps more interestingly, the horseshoe. There is clear contemporary evidence that the Muslim conquerors of the Delhi Sultanate possessed the horseshoe at the time of conquest: while the Persians and central Asian Turks, whose cultural heirs they were, had already used stirrups for some centuries. Habib admits that the true stirrup is shown on late 13<sup>th</sup> century Indian sculpture, but suggested that it may only have been introduced in India in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century by the Muslim conquerors. Such a late adoption of the stirrup would be surprising from several points of view. The earliest attestation of the use of the sure-heel or toe-stirrup had been in northern India, which also bordered upon lands where the true stirrup came early into use, from which a flourishing trade in horses imported into India has existed for centuries.

During the 1930's, M.A. Makhdoomee and A.Z. Nadvi paid much attention to the weapons which were used in the Sultanate of Delhi. Makhdoomee in his article "Gunpowder Artillery in the reign of the Sultan Iltutmish of Delhi", elaborates the use of gunpowder technology during the times of Iltutmish. Nadvi in his article "Use of Cannon in Muslim India, discussed the use of cannon and says that during the siege of Ranthambhor in 699 A.H. (A.D. 1299-1300), Sang-i-Maghribi" was violently gushing out (stones) from the fort and a stone fell upon Nusrat Khan, who was severely wounded. Akram Makhdoomee and Abu Zafar Nadvi, both claimed, on the basis of incorrect translation of problematic Persian nomenclature, that cannons were introduced by the Turks and were first used during the early Turkish rule. These historians have sought to substantiate his view by citing evidence derived from contemporary as well as later Persian texts. M. Akram Makhdoomee has also used two of the Persian dictionaries compiled in India during the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. However, the interpretation of both these historians, often suffer from one basic flaw. To some of the terms used for missile-throwing instruments in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century texts, they have attributed meanings which were attached to them in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, while interpreting the evidence derived from 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century sources, they have often tended to ignore the process of gradual transfer of many of the terms denoting missile-throwing instruments like the cross (tufak or tufang) and the mangonel (maghribe) to different kinds of firearms that came to be used in India during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This serious weakness in the methodology of M. Akram Makhdoomee and A Zafar Nadvi has rendered their studies highly misleading<sup>[14]</sup>. Iqtidar Alam Khan in *Gunpowder and Firearms: Warfare in Medieval India* studies the earliest use of gunpowder and early firearms in India. Indeed, thanks to the careful studies of Iqtidar Alam Khan, who followed Needham's breathtaking findings on Chinese gunpowder technology, it appears that from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, improved varieties of gunpowder played a prominent part in sieges, albeit through various kinds of flame-throwers and fire-lances erupting so

called 'co-vocative' projectiles. His careful studies bore fruit and he had arrived at significant conclusions that gun powder came to India from China through varied agencies and channels of which, perhaps, the most northwestern Indian during the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Mongol deserters also appear to have introduced into this region around 1300 A.D. the use of gunpowder-based devices resembling huo pao and huo chiang. It is possible that a rocket propelled by gunpowder (hawai/ban) was also introduced in northwestern India through contact with the Mongols in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. By 1336 A.D., this device came to be adopted as a weapon of war in the Delhi Sultanate, the Vijayanagara Empire, as well as in the Bahamani kingdom. This rocket seems to have acquired greater striking power from the introduction of an iron-casting some time before the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It met with wide acceptability in India and continued to be used as a weapon of war on a large scale even after the coming of artillery and muskets.

The contributions of historians like Mohammad Habib, Jadunath Sarkar, Jagdish Narayan Sarkar, Simon Digby, Sidney Toy, Burton-Page, Peter Jackson, Andre Wink, Iqtidar Alam Khan, I.H. Siddiqui and Irfan Habib, while charting the progress of Muslim arms during the early Turkish rule opened new avenues. Deficiency of contemporary Hindu narrative sources and vague references in the Hindu inscriptions are few hindrances in proper understanding of the military history of the early Turkish Empire. Muslim writers on the early Turkish rule provide fragmental data and use misleading terminology. Although there is an abundance of information on military events, there is hardly any insight into the most relevant details concerning, for example, weaponry, tactics, or logistics. Indeed, most of the Indo-Persian texts present literary and normative models rather than trustworthy descriptions of the events that matter. For example, much of the official Indo-Persian works teem not only with excessive violence towards the enemy but also with boundless love and praise for the ally. At best, we know which battle took place at what moment and who was involved for what reason but we are kept more or less ignorant about how exactly these numerous battles and sieges took place. We have to move patiently, to read all the well and lesser-known Indo-Islamic *tawarikh* and *fathnamas* and to collect and compare all the relevant military data so far ignored. We would have to start and move with the right questions, interpretations and would have to take closer look at what has been achieved so far in the field of historiography. A monograph is in wanting on the military system of the early Delhi Sultans which would discuss some of these important issues and form a consensus among historians about the 13<sup>th</sup> century military activities.

## Reference

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6. Ibid., 323-365.

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