

FINDING OUT ABOUT THE PAST

How do we find out exactly what happened in the past? If it's something we've actually seen, then we know it must be true. But suppose we were not there to witness the incident? We get to know of hundreds of events all over the world without seeing them happen - through books, magazines, newspapers, TV and radio. But do you believe that everything you read is true? Do you sometimes wonder if the reports in newspapers or on TV about a certain incident are correct, or may only be a partial coverage? With many aspects not covered at all? Perhaps, if you later got to know about those aspects which were left out, you may even change your opinion about the incident or the persons involved.

This problem of how to find out what happened and what did not happen confronts historians all the time. Let us see how historians write about what happened in the distant past, about incidents they have never seen.

When we read about the age of kings and *samantas*, we referred to many old stone inscriptions and copper plates. It is from these inscriptions that we got to know about towns and villages of that time. Stone inscriptions helped us a lot in learning about what happened in those times. How do we get information about the Sultanate? In those days people did not put up so many inscriptions. By then, people had begun writing chronicles and there are several books containing the history of that period. These books give details about what happened in the reign of each sultan.

Usually, we come across more than one historian writing about a particular period. They might even write different things about the same sultan. For example, one might say a certain sultan was a very good and virtuous man and that his subjects lived in peace and harmony. Another might say that this same sultan was a wicked and evil man and that his subjects suffered oppression. Now, which one of these two historians should we believe? Who could be speaking the truth?

For example, suppose we want to reconstruct the history of Sultan Muhammed Bin Tughluq. Two chroniclers have written about this period. They are Zia Barani and Isami.

If we read the books written by these two historians, we come to know that Muhammed Tughluq had issued an order in the year 1328 to all the citizens of Delhi to leave Delhi and settle down in Daulatabad in the Deccan.

- *Underline the sentence which refers to the order of Sultan Muhammed Bin Tughluq.*
- *Locate Daulatabad and Delhi in the map on page 240? (Also locate other cities mentioned later in this chapter on the map)*

Why did Sultan Muhammed Tughluq act in this manner? What exactly happened when the people shifted from Delhi to Daulatabad? Barani and Isami, both describe this event in their books. Let us read their accounts to find out what happened.

ZIA BARANI

Zia Barani writes in his book *Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi*:

"The Sultan set his heart on a plan to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, because Daulatabad was situated in the middle of his empire. Delhi, Gujarat, Lakhnauti, Telang, Mabar, Dwarasamudra and Kampila were all more or less equidistant from this city. He did not seek the advice of anyone else while taking this decision. He ordered his mother, all the high officials of his kingdom, the generals along with their assistants and confidantes to set out for Daulatabad. The court elephants, horses, the treasury and other priceless treasures were also dispatched to Daulatabad. Next came the turn of the sufi saints, the alims (Islamic scholars) and other eminent and respected citizens of Delhi. They were all sent to Daulatabad. Those who went were well rewarded by the sultan with immense wealth.

"A year later, the sultan returned to Delhi. He ordered all the citizens of Delhi and the surrounding areas to be sent in caravans

to Daulatabad. He bought over all their houses in the city and paid the owners the price of their houses from the royal treasury so that they could build new houses when they reached Daulatabad. In compliance with the royal order, all the people of Delhi and the neighbouring areas were sent to Daulatabad. The city was emptied in this way. All its doors remained closed - not even a dog or a cat could be found in the streets.

"The inhabitants of Delhi who had lived in the city for many years underwent tremendous hardships. Many died on the way because of the rigours of this long journey. Even those who reached Daulatabad did not remain unaffected. Many of them could not bear the sorrow of separation from their motherland. They died in their yearning to return. No doubt, the sultan had well rewarded those who had left Delhi, yet they could not withstand the perils of an alien land.

"The sultan now brought alims, sufis and eminent people from other regions and settled them in Delhi. But the city could not be repopulated in this way.



"About ten years later, the sultan passed another order stating that those who wished to return to Delhi were free to do so. Some people did return, but many families remained in Daulatabad."

- *After reading this account of the historian Barani what kind of a king do you consider Muhammad Tughluq to be?*

Despotic/mistrustful/one who planned for the well being of the sultanate/vengeful/one who acted without seeking advice from anyone.

- *Why did Sultan Muhammed Tughluq shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad? What are the apparent reasons?*
- *Did the Sultan want his people to undergo various hardships when they left Delhi?*

ISAMI

Isami writes in his book *Futuh us Sanlatin*:

"The Sultan was suspicious about the people of Delhi and his mind was set against them. He secretly hatched a despicable plan to destroy the city within a month. He proclaimed a notice saying: 'All well wishers of the sultan should proceed to Daulatabad. Those who follow this order will receive ample wealth. Those who disobey will be beheaded.'

"He ordered Delhi to be set on fire and all its inhabitants driven out of the city. Women in purdah and sufis living in solitude were dragged by the hair from their houses. In this way were people made to leave Delhi.

"My grandfather, too, lived in that city. He was 90 years old. He was one among the many sufis living in solitude. He never ever ventured out of his house. He died on the way and was buried in the first camp itself.

"Everyone, the aged, the youth, women and children were forced to undertake the journey. Many young infants died for lack of milk. Many died of thirst. After facing unimaginable hardships only a tenth of this caravan of people reached Daulatabad. Thus did the sultan destroy a well populated city.

"When no one remained in Delhi, its doors were shut. It is said that this despotic and cruel emperor then called in people from the outlying villages and repopulated the city. After driving nightingales and parrots from the garden, he brought in crows.

"One doesn't know why the sultan became suspicious of these innocent people, why he uprooted them from the soil of their ancestors and why, till today, he is bent upon destroying their offspring."

- *After reading this account of the historian Isami, what opinion have you now formed of Sultan Mohammed Tughluq:*

despotic/distrustful/one desiring the good of the people/one who planned for the wellbeing of the sultanate/one who acted without seeking advice from anyone.

- *Why did Sultan Muhammed Tughluq shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad? What were the apparent reasons?*
- *Did the sultan want his people to undergo various hardships when they left Delhi?*
- *You had formed an opinion of Muhammed Tughluq after reading the extract from Barani's book - the kind of king he was and what his desires were. Refer back to your opinion once again. Have you now changed your opinion after reading Isami's account?*
- *If your answer is "Yes," then why did you change your opinion?*

You might have noticed that some aspects of Muhammed's plan are referred to in the books of Barani as well as Isami. For example, both refer to the fact that the sultan ordered the people to shift from Delhi to Daulatabad.

But in describing the exodus from Delhi to Daulatabad, Barani mentions several aspects which are not touched upon by Isami. For example, Barani says that the sultan wanted to establish his capital in the centre of his kingdom. That it was for this reason that he emptied Delhi of its people.

However, according to Isami, the sultan wanted to subject his people to hardships. That is why he emptied Delhi of its people.

This raises a problem for us. Which one of them should we believe? How are we to know what the sultan actually had in mind? We cannot really decide the matter one way or the other.

We are often faced with such difficult situations where we have to decide which is the truth and which is not.

Several statements are given below. Read them carefully, then identify those statements which were made by both Barani and Isami. Also, identify those statements made by either one of them.

- 1. The sultan rewarded the people who went to Daulatabad.*
- 2. The people faced considerable hardships in going from Delhi to Daulatabad.*
- 3. The sultan's family and administrative officials were the first to be sent. Then followed the sufi saints and scholars. The ordinary people were sent a year later.*
- 4. Those who refused to go were executed.*
- 5. The houses of those who agreed to go were bought up.*
- 6. People whose families had lived for several generations in Delhi were also sent.*

7. Delhi was repopulated with new inhabitants.

- Among these seven statements, how many are common to both historians? Read out these statements one by one.*

We can assume that the statements common to both must certainly be true. But we cannot assume that those statements made by just one of them are totally correct.

- Let any one student now read out those statements made by either Barani or Isami, but not by both of them.*

When historians of today write about the past, they usually have to contend with such difficulties. We can be certain about some events of the past. But there are many aspects which we can never be certain about.

OTHER ACCOUNTS

Sometimes we get new evidences which help us reach nearer to the truth. For example, take the case of Muhammad Tughluq again. We get some more information about the episode of sending the people of Delhi to Daulatabad. This information is provided to us by an African traveller, Ibn-Batuta who had come to India around that time and by some contemporary stone inscriptions. It is interesting to note that the information provided by these sources is quite different from that of Barani and Isami.

Ibn-Batuta had come to India six years after people were sent to Daulatabad from Delhi. He had visited Delhi and gives us a description of that city as a very lively and prosperous place. That means people were living in Delhi at that time.

Some stone inscriptions have also been found from Delhi. These are in the Sanskrit language and are dated 1328 AD only. These inscriptions praise Muhammad Tughluq in no uncertain terms and tell us about a well which some brahmins and traders of Delhi had dug

for the inhabitants. Through these inscriptions we come to know that Delhi had a large population and there was no decrease in trade or religious activities at that time.

Not just this, we also know that coins were being minted in Delhi at that time which carried the statement "Dehli - the capital".

Then, can we conclude that what Barani and Isami say are all wrong? This raises a problem for us. It is quite possible that their descriptions are neither fully correct nor fully wrong. It might be possible that Muhammad Tughluq wanted to establish a second capital in Daulatabad to control south India. For this he might have forced many important families of Delhi to migrate to Daulatabad. The members of those families would have made out that the sultan had ordered the whole town to migrate. Both Barani and Isami belonged to these important families. They did not think about the rest of the town which consisted of ordinary people like the artisans, soldiers, traders, etc. Thus, we can come to the conclusion that both Barani and Isami have given a biased and inflated description of that episode.

Generally, all descriptions are biased. Every human being describes any particular event according to his/her understanding and liking. So, to find out the truth we should not depend upon any one kind of description. As far as it is possible we should form our views on the basis of many different evidences.