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Female Muslim Sovereign of 13th century India-Razia Sultan

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Female as a sovereign and a monarch remain an interesting subject of history of Europe but this chapter is hardly enclosed on the pages of Indian history due to the male dominant historiographical trends. Indian history was the domain of kings, warriors and knights and women in general and monarchs in particular are missing due to gender biases and un-ending debate of Islamic laws where woman as monarch and head of state does not acceptable. Even the case of United State of America is still under sway of male president where female sovereign is not acceptable by the conservatives. The case of queen Raziya is the same as one of most important source of Delhi sultanate did not mention her name as a queen. Queen Raziya was a female sovereign of Delhi sultanate who embarked the throne in the presence of the legal heirs of her Father Sultan Iltutmish. Although her rule could not sustain due to the dominant Turkish hierarchy of Forty Umarhs in which Sultan Balban was the most treacherous. This research focus upon the Sultan Raziya bold steps which she took to transformed herself as a female sovereign and her strategies to improve the rules of kingship in India. It also deals with the comments of contemporary historian about Raziya which shows the male mentality of Indian historiography having dual standards in history writing.

Key Words: Kotwal, Rajput, Bazar, Purdah Muizzi, Kaba, Kulla.

Introduction:

Turks derived their heritage from the Arabs and the Abbasids and eventually they brought it to Indian sub-continent. It seemed that women occupied a respectable position among them, and they played a pivotal role in politics. Ladies took keen interest in intellectual sphere, but they were not encouraged in Indian society. They contributed a lot in the field of fine arts, education and other fields of expression. The practices, traditions and customs of the royalty, nobility & Turkish soldiers, modified under the impact of indigenous conditions. Harems are the common feature of elite life

of Muslim Sultans, and it had a considerable impact of sultan on the main stream politics of Muslim rule. Royal ladies enjoyed high prestige in politics and were also given high titles due to their influence. But it was for the first time that based on sheer competence; even a woman asserted to be on the throne of Hindustan was honored. It indicates robustness and liberalism of the Turkish tradition in 13th century which gave consideration to the talent and virtues of an individual irrespective of her gender (as it was criterion for the appointment of a Muslim sovereign). Sultan Raziya, the only women in India crowned as queen in her own right. She was de jure the fifth Muslim ruler of Delhi but de facto the third, two predecessors, one of them her brother, having been short-lived and not worthy of note.

For some reason, historians have by and large ignored this very important era of the beginning of Muslim rule which started a new chapter in Indian History. The early reference of a woman who took active part in politics in early Sultanate was Khudavanda-i-Jahan Shah Turkan, by origin she was a Turkish slave who captured in war and brought to harem. She rose to the status of Chief Queen of Sultan Iltutmish. Shah Turkan decided to manage the nobility in favor of her own son Rukn-ud-din Firoz Shah irrespective of Sultan Iltutmish desire to appoint his daughter as his successor. After the death Sultan Iltutmish she asserted her claim in many ways, she became the most dominant in harem and nobility. She behaved ruthlessly and due to her cunning nature, she manipulated the political situation in the favor of her own son.

The woman who played a significant role in the politics Sultanate period was Raziya. Her accession to the throne of Hindustan in year 1236 A.D. as a sultan was the unprecedent act in the history of India. This office of Sultan which was generally considered the right of males shifted to the hands of a woman. Raziya, claimed this position due to her talent and merits. Raziya used the general discontent of her masses as a tool against the rule of Shah Turkan, her step mother. She clads herself in red garment customary for the revolution showed herself in the Friday prayer and she appealed for help from the public of Delhi as they knew her father the late Sultan Iltutmish. Isami, a known poet historian mentioned that Raziya entered in an agreement with her subjects, "she was to be given a chance to prove her abilities and if she did not prove herself better than a man, her head was to be struck off".

Raziya's own historian, Minhaj-us-Siraj Jurjani, was a remarkable man and a good historian, although it must be admitted that he has not done justice to her. In a monumental work tracing the history of Muslim kingdoms from the inception of the world according to Islam, in the late 13thcentury. He has devoted a total of only 12 pages to her reign. Raziya,s political sagacity was a significance land mark in the history of Delhi Sultanate. Sultan Firoz Shah Tughluq did not give her space in the list of Muslim Sultans, and the only reason was her gender. This deliberate omission of the name of Raziya in the list of sultans by Sultan Firoz Shah cannot under-mine her contribution in stabilizing the Turkish Empire in India. Raziya stands firmly as a female

sovereign as she wielded royal power and change the course of history during the Sultanate period.

She was a crowned with the title of Sultan, with the royal suffix of Duniya waud-Din and in a position to make full use of the state machinery she had used during the time of her father, when she lived with him in the Kushk-i-Firuzi (royal palace), where her stepmother, Shah Turkan had been the chief queen of the realm. Soon after Raziya's accession Nur-ud-Din, a Turk, who was known as Nur the Turk, revolt against the new sovereign in Delhi. A secret pact of loyalty was signed between Nur Turk and the members of this sect who openly denounced the Ulema as Murji (procrastinators) and Nasibi (setters-up) whipped up the populace into a frenzy of rage against the ecclesiastical groups. On Friday, 6th of Rajab, 634 H (March 1237) about 1000 armed heretics entered the Jamia Masjid Delhi to revolt against Razyia. They came in two groups, one entering the mosque from the north and other entered from cloth merchants' bazaar (Bazar-a- Bazazan) and 3rd entered into the Muizzi College mistaking it for the mosque. In the melee a number of people were killed by the swordbearing intruders while many others were trampled underfoot. However, the rebellion was soon suppressed.

Furthermore, though Raziya had managed to restore normalcy after the chaos created by her brother Rukn-ud-Din, a number of Amirs (bureaucrats) ranged themselves against her. Chief among these was the Nizam-ul-mulk Muhammad Junaidi who with other Amirs, such as Malik Ala-ud-Din Jani, Malik Saif-ud-din Kuji, Malik Izz-ud-din, Kabir Khan-i-Ayaz, Malik Izz-ud- din and Muhammad Salari all gathered at the gates of Delhi and started hostilities against her. At her command, Malik Nusrat-ud-din Ta-yasai, the feudatory of Awadh, marched to her aid but after he crossed river Ganga, the hostile Malik who tried to besiege Delhi moved towards his camp and capture him. He appeared as he was suffering from an illness as he received the Sultan's command ad he was so succumbed to the disease shortly died.

This siege of Delhi continued for some time and then Raziya came out Delhi and pitched a camp on the banks of the Jamuna where battles took place between her enemies and those who were royals to her. Maliks Izz-ud-Din Muhammad Salari and Izz-ud-Din Kabir Khan-Ayaz switched allegiance to her, and in a joint secret conclave decided that the Maliks Jani, Saif-ud-din Kuji and the Nizarn-ul-Mulk Muhammad Junaidi summoned to her presence, captured, and imprisoned so that the rebellion could be crushed. Getting a hint of this the Maliks fled, but were chased by the royal horsemen and eliminated by being killed in battle, or perhaps by strangulation in prison. Ala-ud- Din Jani's head was cut off and brought to the Delhi, but the Nizam-ul-Mulk managed to escape to hilly area where he died a natural death.

With the rebellion thus subdued, peace returned to the kingdom and Raziya began the task of appointing important office bearers of her state. Khwaja Muhazzab,

the former deputy to the Nizam-ul-Mulk, now became Wazir and title of Nizam-ul-Mulk was given to him. Malik Saif-ud din was appointed as the in charge of royal army as Raziya herself as a Sultan was the head of royal army, l-bak-i-Bihaq, got the title of Kutlugh Khan, while Malik Izz-ud-Din Kabir Khan-i-Ayaz appointed as the head of Lahore. All the Amirs in the empire extended their loyalty to the Sultan and paid homage to her.

All seemed well when suddenly the Commander of the Army, Malik Saif-ud-Din, l-bak-i-Bihaq, position was given to Malik Qutb-ud-Din Hasan (in certain places he is called Husain) after his death. Almost immediately after his appointment, he was sent to relieve the fort of Ranthambore to which the Rajputs had laid siege soon after the death of Iltutmish. He freed the fortress, destroyed the works and marched back to the capital, making no effort to secure the stronghold.

In the meantime, the Sultan had appointed Malik-i-Kabir Ikhtiyar-ud-Din Aetkin to the important post of Amir-i-Hajib showed favor to Malik Jamal-ud-Din Ya-kut who was known as the*Habashi* (Ethiopian) because of his country of origin, who held this post of in charge of Lord of the stables (Amir-i- Akhur). At the same time, Raziya decided to wear a male costume and to come out of*purdah* riding unveiled through the streets so that everyone could see change in her which was necessary to the throne. She did it without the help of the forty, powerful Turkish nobles who had emerged as king makers freed Raziya from the constraint of feeling obligated to them or being, in any way, afraid of them. She had seen the manner in which her father and brother, or rather her step-mother had behaved towards them, always being deferential and heaping favors on them to keep them on their side and she now felt strong enough to go her own way and show favor to non-Turks in an effort to curb their arrogance and power. Her lack of success in this direction was due to causes that were in no way related to her sex.

Another important consideration which Raziya had in her mind while she appointed governors was that the concentration of power should not be in the hands of a particular section of nobility. Raziya took a daring step to patronizing non-Turkish nobility on whom she could trust at a time of political turmoil. Thus, the inclusion of non-Turkish nobles in her Bur oracy to create a new force to serve her political objectives. Jamal ud-din Yaqut, an Abyssinian slave, was the first who received special favor as a non-Turk. The prestigious office of Amir-i-Akhur (the master of horse) was betowed upon him which was entirely the right of Turk nobles. Raziya strategy to favor non-Turkish nobles received great opposition from Turkish nobility who considered themselves the most suitable candidate for the core posts of sultnate. This political move of Raziya was initiated to stabilize the Sultan,s administration, but her entire effort later on was proven the death knell of her regime. Yaqut assisted her, advised and accompanied her on every occasions as he was a well-wisher of his queen. شیندم غلامے زجنس حبش بدی درسواری بر مر کیش گرفتے بیک دست و بازوے او بدادی سوارش هی گفت و گو

Yaqut helped Raziya to ride the horse and lifted her to its saddle by holding her arm. Farishta also led the attack on the same lines and reason out his position made him (Yaqut) suspicious in the eyes of Umarhs as well as historians. The nobles resented her not because of her sex but because she had managed to outmaneuver them, reaching the throne on her own, while they were still engaged in trying to defeat her brother. Ultimately she failed not because of being a woman, but because the powerful provincial governors had no hand in her elevation to the throne, which was brought about by the central army, officers and the citizens of Delhi. Being thus deprived of their role as king makers the powerful Turkish coterie felt humiliated and ignored and became bent on bringing about her downfall." Rather, it was to Raziya's great credit and a tribute to her powers of statesmanship that she managed to stay on the throne as long as she did, rather than a discredit to her that her reign was so short.

This, perhaps, increased the sense of insecurity of the Turkish king makers, since firstly, she dared to show favor to a non-Turk and then she appeared in a manly garb, no doubt with the idea of impressing on them the fact that she was no retiring female but a woman who could deal with men on their own terms. The change of garb actually consisted off a tunic and turban like a male, which was the only difference between the dress of men and women at that time, the rest of the garments being exactly the same, but even that was enough to underscore her defiance of traditions specifying the role of women. Raziya introduced a few revolutionary changes in her style of wearing to break the stereotypes of monarchy. She wore Kullah and Qaba instead of her usual female dress. For these changes Isami criticized her in these words:

شیندم که از پرده بیرون فتاد گزشت از خیال دل شوخی نهاد

I heard that she (Raziya) discarded of Purdah

She adopted vulgarity by rejecting pious virtues.

بیو شید روزے تباہ کلاہ برفت آمد از کاخ کیواں پناہ

She wore Kaba and Kullah and came out of Shelter (Purdah)

This act was extremely shocking for the feudalistic mindset to discard *Purdah* in public and assumed political authorities as a ruler especially for female. Next, Raziya sent her troops to Gwalior. The city had already had a governor appointed by Iltutmish and Minhaj was the Qazi. When the 'fortress had been relieved by her forces earlier, the governor had died and a new feudatory, Amir-i-Dad Ziya-ud-

Din Junaidi had been appointed. But being a kinsman of the rebel Wazir he may have been suspected of disloyalty and was recalled to Delhi along with some other persons, including Minhaj, who probably did not relish leaving the city because he uses the phrase, "disobedience and disloyalty was not required, this servant of the victorious kingdom came out of the fortress and returned to Delhi the capital." This has led writers to assume that he was under some sort of a cloud, but when he reached Delhi, he was appointed head of the Nasiriah College in Delhi the capital as a Oazi of Gwalior. But, Raziya like her father was never to be left in peace. In 637 H (1239 AD) Malik Izz-ud-Din, Kabir Khan-i-Ayaz, the feudatory of Lahore, rebelled. The Sultan herself, at the head of her army, advanced into the Punjab against the rebellious Malik who retreated before her advance, going towards the Indus until he reached Shahdarah (Lahore) and could go no further for fear of falling into hostile hands. He made his submission after the royal army had crossed the Ravi but was deprived of the fief of Lahore receiving the charge of Multan instead, the feudatory of the latter city, Malik Ikhtiyar-ud-Din Karakush Khan being sent to Lahore. After this arrangement, Raziya returned to Delhi.' Raziya capitalized on the impotence of her brother Rukn-ud-din Firoz and appealed to the people of Delhi. She was accepted probably as the ruler of Hindustan.

The next rebellion was that of the feudatory of Tabarhindah, Malik Ikhtiyar-uddin Altuniah, Raziya set out to confront the new rebel. The Turkish nobles rose against her when she reached Tabarhindah. They killed Yakut and imprisoned her in the fortress of Tabarhindah. Muiz-ud din Bahram Shah was placed on the throne as the news of her improsment reached Delhi within no time. The Maliks and Amirs, who were against Raziya and betrayed her returned to Delhi. They paid public respect to the new ruler and pledged their allegiance only on one condition that the deputyship was conferred to Malik Ikhityar-ud-din. Wazir, Nizamul-mulk, deputy the Khwaja Muhazzab-ud-din Muharnmad-i-Iwaz, the Mustaufi, took the control of all state affairs. This intrusion of all these ministers in the state affairs began to irk the Sultan Bahram Shah, especially after the divorced his sister to the Sultan, the deputy assumed all the prerogatives like the triple Naubat (Kettledrums and instruments sounded at stated periods of the day before the gates of sovereigns and great men for which he had requested permission) and to keep an elephant at the entrance of his palace to which he had no right. Altuniah to revolt against Raziya, in a way he could be said to have deserved his fate.

In the meanwhile, Raziya made a surprise move, while in jail in Tubarhindah she had married Altuniah. Now allied matrimonially and politically, the two moved out of the fortress with a large number of army and headed towards Delhi to recapture her throne. Maliks Izz-ud-Din Muhammad Salari and Karakush rebelled against Bahram Shah and left Delhi to join Raziya and Altuniah. Bahram Shah as a head of his army moved out of the capital city Delhi to meet the advancing troops. As has happened so often during the course of Indian history, the troops of the rebels deserted and joined the Sultan's army. When they reached Kaithal, the newly married couple captured by the Hindus and was killed. The date of the defeat was the 24th of the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal in 638 H (13th October 1240). Raziya had been queen of Hindustan for a period of 3 years, 6 months and 6 days.

Ibn Batuttah mentioned the description of Raziya's death in his travel account, "Raziya was completely defeated and surrendered, dying with hunger and collapsed by fatigue, she dressed herself as a man crying for food. When she got the bread, she ate and then she slept like an exhausted solider. When the peasant Kithal found her in a male dress, and he perceived that the garment had gold and pearls on the upper tunic which was trimmed. As he realized she was a woman they killed her and had stolen all her valuables, put her dead body on the horse and buried in the field. They sold her valuables in the market. When the dealers have seen these valuables they took him before the Magistrate, who first asked him and after silence he was beaten by people. The peasant then confessed that he killed that woman and told the guards about her burial place. They recovered her dead body, washed it and fullfill all the rituals of dead person for the burial. They buried her on the same place. A small shrine was erected on her grave. People visited this shrine and considered a place of sanctity. It situated on the banks of the Jamuna. How far Ibn Batutta is correct in his account is problematic.

Since his account of Raziya's life, --"She was eventually suspected of intimacy with one of her slaves, an Abyssinian by birth, and the people resolved upon deposing her and giving her a husband. So, she was deposed and married to one of her relations and her brother Nasir-ud-din obtained the supreme power. But Raziya and her husband revolted against him." -- is hardly noted for its accuracy."

The city of Shahjehanabad (old Delhi) was her burial place at the distance of a dilapidated marble tomb. Raziya knew the problems of her kingdom and handled them very tactfully especially Lakhnavati, Lahore, Gwalior and Multan. Since Raziya had decided to become an autocrat ruler, Turkish nobility was the main hindrance in her personal rule. Turkish nobility created a new office of "Naib-ul-Sultanat" to check the administrative policies of the Sultan. Her ambitious nobility gave her tough time. The appointment of Yakut on the key post of kingdom scandalized whole of her regime.

The revolt of Altuniya (governor of Tabarhindah) Raziya faced this very courageously, till her death. She used all methods for her revival as a queen of Hindustan. Even she accepted the marriage proposal of Altuniya as it seems that it was her political move. But all her attempts to regain her lost power proven useless. Raziya was a taloned woman her realm who possessed the sharpness of a politician. She was courageous solider, benefactor of the Muslim kingdom. Having a sheer sense of justice. All her qualities proven her the remarkable personality as well a queen but her sex faded all credit abilities.

Raziya was a lady endowed with remarkable talent. Minhaj writes about her, Sultan Raziya had all the abilities of a Muslim sovereign. She patronized learned people, she was very generous and tried her level best to provide justice to her masses, she cared her subjects, she commanded army. Irrespective of her talent and sagacity one demerit of being a woman overshowed her political career and her place in history. Farishta writes, "Raziya Begum was possessed all qualities which normally were the credit of princes but those who analyzed her abilities on the basis her gender find it very difficult to praised her. She read the Koran with the correct pronunciation. He goes on to speak of her being princess and gave her the tasks of government affairs just to train her for future responsibilities, a disposition which gave her wisdom to face in her regime "He goes on to speak of her being named her father's heir because the latter said, she "though a woman had a man's head and heart."

However, a study of Raziya's reign proven that her gender never made her handicap to perform her duties as sovereign. Two of her brothers, one preceding and one succeeding her, fared much worse than she did and lasted for a lesser time than her. She suffered not because of her gender, but because she was determined to curb the power of the Turkish nobles who had become king makers and were constantly intriguing to keep them predominant, and were therefore opposed to any sovereign, male or female, who was in any position to threaten their power. Iltutmish lasted because of his even temper and the fact that he never made a show of supremacy. In fact in the eyes of his peers his greatest quality must have been his diffidence in their presence.

Raziya, on the other hand, acted and behaved like a sovereign. The "favor" shown to Yakut, which was made much of by later historians, amounted to nothing more than trying to counter the power of the arrogant Maliks. Certainly Minhaj never makes the faintest suggestion of any impropriety between her and the Ethiopian. Later historians, who felt that" no woman could remain unmarried and immune to male attraction, created such a lasting myth of romance between the mistress and the slave, that even today when Raziya's name is mentioned the response is automatic. "She had an affair with Yakut."

Thomas says, love was common luxury of harem and queen Raziya was able to enjoy it as she may had chosen the prince or man of elite class as it did not revealed in the dark places of harem, but her choice was different as she preferred a man who got her favor in spite of his low background and all Turkish nobles have resentment on his appointment.

Farishta & Badauni have said that when she mounted an elephant or horse she leaned upon yakut. This act was not suitable for a Muslim woman especially a Muslim sovereign. Tabakat-i-Akbari mentioned that when Raziya used to go on riding the slave always accompanied to her not only as a slave but as the master of the office of stables which bestowed upon him in special favor. He helped her "mount by taking her under the armpit, meaning, perhaps that she leant on his arm or shoulder in mounting. It could have been the routine duty and privilege of the Amir-i-Akhur to help the sovereign to mount. No reference of such thing is however made by Minhaj us Siraj her cotemporary historian.

Elphinston, says "But her intelligence and piety were not sufficient to protect the weakness of being female. She appointed an Abyssinian slave on the key post of state and that sin chased her even after her death". It was completely her political move to break the hierarchy of the Turkish nobles. It was so easy to scandalize a woman with an affair of a male, but the nature of male polygamous sultan never narrated as the demerit of his gender.

Her coming out of *purdah* could have been a shock to the Muslim sense of decorum, but *purdah* was only loosely observed until the Mongol invasion when girls and women were mercilessly raped and taken into slavery. After that it became more rigid. And, after all even before ascending as queen she had 'shown herself' at the Friday mosque appealing to the people to give her a chance to prove her worth as their sovereign. So it can be assumed that she observed *purdah* only by name. Sultan Raziya's reign may have been short and turbulent but it was notable in many respects. Instead of being handicapped on account of her sex Raziya's rule set many precedents: -

She was the only woman ever to become a ruler in India in her own right. That is, she did not replace a deceased husband or proxy as regent for a son or nephew. She was not a queen, but a crowned king and was therefore styled Sultan and not Sultana.

For the first time in the history of the Delhi Sultanate the people of Delhi decided a succession issue on their own initiative, ignoring Mahmud of Ghazni's injunction that subjects should be mere bystanders watching the deeds of kings, and never participants. She always had the people's support and, as long as she remained in capital, no revolution could succeed against her. Moreover, she promised her subjects that if she did not fulfill their expectations they were free to depose her. In that way her rule was contractual and proved by the principle of democracy.

Raziya's independent nature was perhaps a product of her race. Raziya's accession also shattered the myth of the second position of women in Islam. The Turks, of course, were only newly converted to Islam and, therefore, followed many of their tribal customs but there was not a single protest from the ecclesiastical community over the coming of a woman ruler on the plea of it being contrary to the precepts of Islam.

An interesting effect of the fact of Raziya's gender is the way she has been dealt with by Minhaj-us- Siraj. Apart from the fact that she was Iltutimish's eldest daughter a very little information about her on the pages of history. Other Amirs are described according to their physical appearance." Qutb-ud-din Aibak "possessed with the inherent nature of bravery and loyalty which made him the rule of Hindustan. " Iltutmish was endowed with " intelligence, courage and bravery to a great extent, but no words about Raziya indicate the male sense of history which was produced, written, interpret and distort by the males.

Conclusion:

Raziya Sultan was the female sovereign of 13th century India who ascended to the throne of Delhi with her legitimate right. She took the vote of confidence from the public of Delhi and ruled as a queen. Popular narrative of Indian historian did not undermine her place and contribution in history. Her scandal with black slave and its popular depiction could not caste negative spell on her personality. If piousness and purity were the condition for Muslim Sultan than no Muslim king and sovereign would eligible for the Kingship. Every historian made every possible effort to narrate king as divine creature with multiple wives and concubines but no effort was made to investigate this so called drama of Ethiopian slave of Yaqut. The personal and public life of sultan only highlighted in case of Raziya, the other sultans were exempted because they were males. The next woman ruler followed the legacy of queen Raziya and her political sagacity was the trend setting for woman monarch in the world.

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