

The Status and Identity Evolution of Indian Slaves during Delhi Sultanate

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Keywords: Delhi sultanate, India, Slave, Identity evolution

Abstract: The establishment of the Muslim regime during Delhi Sultanate made Indian slavery appear some different characteristics. The slaves of wide sources had an improved status than other periods in Indian history. Due to the outstanding performance, part of the elite slaves had been removed from slavery and successfully ranked among the ruling classes. Some slaves became artisans or artists, and powerfully promoted the development of social economy. However, the vast majority of slaves still lived in the lowest level of society, although they converted to Islam and got rid of the Hindu caste oppression, they achieved the transformation of identity, but their status did not change in nature.

1. Introduction

The slave is the special labourer who completely loses his or her personal freedom and entirely belongs to the slave owners. There are few historical manuscripts which recorded the situation of ancient Indian slaves. According to the "The Law of Manu", which was written in 1st century BC, slaves can be donated, traded, exchanged as part of the private property and can also be inherited. The ancient slaves mainly came from as the captives of war, the poor who lived hard, and the free people who were banished to slavery for violating the code. Slaves have no property of their own, and their labours are all owned by the slave owners. The situation of medieval Indian slaves was similar to that of ancient times, but it also presented some new features. One is the diversity of the sources of slavery. During the period of the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526), the Muslim rulers kept on waging war and expanding their territories to preserve their ruling order in the Indian subcontinent, which caused a large number of civilians to be enslaved by successive wars. Many of the Sudra and the Untouchable who were living in the lowest strata of Indian society have voluntarily converted to Islam to get rid of caste oppression. In addition to India's indigenous slaves, the number of slaves from abroad also increased markedly during this period. The second is that the status of slaves has improved in comparison to ancient times. The slaves of the Delhi Sultanate were better than the slaves of ancient times in terms of their social status and quality of life to the extent that the vast majority of the slaves were even deemed, free people. The Sultan and the Muslim aristocracy usually give a certain right and social status to some of the slaves who perform well, and the slaves sometimes get the corresponding labour remuneration or even a larger amount of wealth. The third is that it had broken away with the concept of identity of imprisonment captioned by slogan like "Slave for a day is Slave for life". Some slaves were freed from slavery by their masters and were elevated as feudal nobles, military chiefs, religious saints, craftsmen, court artists or literati. The War of Islam to conquer the world has provided an opportunity for able-bodied slaves, and the development of the social economy in the Middle Ages has further refined the division of labour, which provides the possibility of realizing this evolution of the slave status. Studying the situation of slaves in this period helps us to understand the situation of all strata of Indian society under Muslim rule, and the original conflict and blending of Islamic culture and Indian native culture in the subcontinent have certain practical significance.

2. The Sources of the Slaves

The origin of slaves during Delhi Sultanate was more complicated than that in ancient India and had presented a pluralistic characteristic. This is mainly due to the fact that Muslims have been

entering the Indian subcontinent since the 8th century, further opening up the sea lanes between India and Central Asia and Africa, and the international slave trade becomes more convenient and frequent. The Mahmud army from Central Asia at the end of 10th century and thereafter the Muhammad Ghori army opened the Indian subcontinent for many years of the Northwest portion, war and the conflict between different religions created a more pluralistic culture of the Indian subcontinent, the Slaves in the period of Delhi Sultanate is the result of this war and conflict. Slaves of this period mainly came from the following sources;

2.1 Trading in International Markets

In the Middle Ages, the slave trade was a very common social phenomenon throughout the Islamic world. Baghdad was the most active city in the slave trade, and many slaves were taken to the slave market in Baghdad and sold from here to the rest of the world. In addition to Baghdad, Ghazni and Delhi of this period also have a world-renowned large-scale slave trade market. Muslim nobles and military chiefs often select able-bodied slaves from these slave trading markets to enrich their armies and engage in war to conquer the world. Qutb-ud-din Aibak, the founding man of the so-called "Slave Dynasty" (1206-1290) of the Delhi Sultanate, was the owner of Muhammad Gours's purchase from the Ghazni slave market. In addition to the Middle East and Central Asia, India also imported slaves from Africa, the Malay Peninsula and China.

2.2 War Capture

In the War of foreign expansion of Islam, many prisoners of war and civilians in conquered areas lost their personal liberty and became the private property of Muslim conquerors, who were either taken to the international market by their owners to sell their goods or were banished followed by their master. The reign of Gour Dynasty and Delhi Sultanate often measured the fruits of war by the number of slaves they had received. According to the medieval historian Hassan Nizami, in 1217, when Qutb-ud-din Aibak attacked Gujarat in 1195, he gained about 20,000 slaves, while the 1202 attack on Kalinga earned about 50,000 slaves. Barani(*Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī*), a Muslim historian of the same age, also said in 1357 that Sultan Alā' ud-Dīn Khaljī dispatched Malik Kafur to carry out a large expansion in the Daccan , with an estimated number of "horses and slaves" became a trophy. According to Barani, the number of slaves and livestock brought back by Balban in the attack on the Doab region was so large that it led to a fall in the price of slave prices in the Delhi market.

2.3 Selling Themselves to Become a Slave

Because of the strict hierarchy-caste system in Indian society, the low caste of the Sudra and the untouchable people who were living at the lowest level of society, they are oppressed, exploited, and their religious life is often limited by the high caste. Because of the lack of life and the inability to repay debts, many people are forced to sell themselves as slaves and lose their personal liberty, becoming the private property of high caste and the ruling class. The establishment of the Muslim regime in the Indian subcontinent, for these people living at the bottom of the society to provide another way out of the oppression of caste, attracted by the idea of equality of Islam and the preaching of the Sufi saints, many of the Sudra and the untouchable have renounced the original religious belief and the original caste, expecting to convert to Islam, To become slaves to the privileged Muslim class to improve their social status . During the reign of Balban and Khilji, many civilians who were not taxed were forced to sell themselves as slaves, and according to Ibn Battuta, the Sultan Firoz Shah ruled that the jobless could be sold as slaves on a voluntary basis.

2.4 A Tribute or Gift

The number of slaves in this part is limited. Many of the vassal kings who surrender to the Delhi Sultan, in addition to handing out a large number of tributes each year, will also dedicate slaves from all over the country, especially the young and beautiful slave girls to the Sultan. Sultan made provisions that if the landowners of the country are to lay slaves to the sultan, they can reduce their tribute accordingly. Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq loved slaves, so kings and officials everywhere sent slaves from their own lands to court to please the Sultan. In addition, slaves are often treated as

expensive gifts between friendly neighbours, according to Ibn Battuta Records, the Chinese Yuan Emperor's ambassadors had brought 100 slaves to Muhammad Tughluq, as a friendly response, Sultan also selected the dancing men and women slaves each 100 as a return. In fact, this tribute or gift to slaves was very common in medieval India.

3. The Status of Slaves

Slaves since their inception, has been living in the lowest level of society, the loss of personal freedom, like goods by the owner of the free trade, they usually bear heavy physical labour, often by the owner of the lash, abuse, many even tortured to death. The same applies to the slaves of the Delhi Sultanate period, as owners of private property, they are completely under the control of their masters in all aspects of life, without the permission of their masters, they cannot marry, assemble or contact their relatives, and when the slaves die, their property is inherited by their masters, not the sons of the slaves. However, if the Indian slaves under Muslim rule have no status or rights at all, it may be biased. Native Indian slaves serving the Sultan and the Muslim aristocracy often gave up their original religion and materialized the change in their religious belief. As the Quran says, once a slave converts to Islam, he has the same rights as everyone else. If he had belonged to a lower caste, the improvement of his position at this time was inevitable. In fact, the status of slaves in the Delhi Sultanate was very different. The majority of the slaves were not changed in history, they were oppressed, exploited, and some of the slaves were significantly elevated, especially the elite slaves from the Central Asian Turks, who, after the establishment of the Muslim regime, showed obvious superiority in political status. They have become the backbone of the feudal aristocracy or the ruling class, and very few slaves have succeeded in winning over the top of power. For those native Indian slaves captured on the battlefield, the Lord often judged whether they were fit to March to war to determine their future destiny, based on their age and physical condition. The vast majority of adult prisoners will be killed, those who left were to enrich the army of slaves into the hands of the Muslim military leader, and some were killed in war in the hand of the killing tools. A handful of good slaves were recognized by their owners, becoming military leaders at all levels, and being a privileged class. The slaves from the conquered areas were first chosen by the Sultan, the remainder distributed among the nobles, the vast majority of adult male slaves were banished, and some of the young and beautiful slave girls were placed in the harem of the Sultan and the nobles as a tool of their wanton amusement.

3.1 Official Slaves

The official slaves mainly served the sultan and his relatives and the Muslim aristocracy. In medieval Muslim societies, owning slaves was a common phenomenon. Up from the Sultan himself to down to the dignitaries, all possessed a considerable number of slaves. slaves serving the Sultan and the Muslim aristocracy were largest in number and their source of origin were so wide. Sultan Alā' ud-Dīn Khaljī has about 50,000 slaves, and Sultan Muhammad Ibn Tughluq has so many slaves that Sultan has to devote one day a week to the signing of the instruments for their slave status and the designation of their marriages. The number of slaves in Firoz Shah Tughluq period rose to 200,000 people from about 50,000.

According to the nature of the work they are engaged in, the official slave can be divided into two categories, one is to be enriched in the army to engage in war at all levels of the sergeant, the other is directly for Sultan and the nobility of the service of the family slaves. The former forms the main body of the Muslim army, while the latter undertakes a lot of housework, handicraft production and so on. A large number of home slaves owned by the Sultan and nobles during this period has far exceeded the actual needs, and they have had to place slaves in different places and give different jobs. Some slaves were fortunate enough to receive training in literature, music, dance and religion, to become court writers, entertainers and religious sages, and some slaves were trained as craftsmen or craftsmen through skills training. The sultan has about 12,000 artisans and craftsmen.

The Sultan and the nobles treated them differently according to the degree of loyalty and ability

of the slaves. The good slaves who served the Sultan were often freed from slavery after some time and were sometimes given high status or even military rank. Most of the slave status is low, in addition, to bear all kinds of heavy labour, but also often be the owner of lashing, abuse, But in general, the status of official slaves in the Delhi Sultanate was higher than that of ordinary folk slaves and the vast majority of free people. The official slaves because of the close contact with the ruling class, the opportunity to be liberated and promoted, in the court, their work will often be shared with a large number of servants and court servants, so the intensity of Labor will not be particularly great. Moreover, although a free man has a higher social status than a slave in law, in fact, their life is often unsustainable, often starving and frozen, while the official slaves in the court are more comfortable living with food and clothing. The official slaves also had the opportunity to join the feudal ruling class and serve the feudal regime, but there were few opportunities for the free people.

3.2 Folk Slaves

During the period of Delhi Sultanate, the number of slaves were expanding through war and trade, and the slaves were also very popular in the Indian folk. Although Islam advocates equality before Allah, it also acknowledges the legality of the existence of slaves: owners can have slaves and have the right to inherit or trade. Not only the Muslim privileged class, the Hindu aristocracy, even the ordinary civilians, could have a number of slaves. Sultan Razia, a Sufi sage named Nur Turk, who had no financial resources and had a life of embarrassment, had a slave to work in a gin house and to feed himself on his income. In the Deccan region, even the senior prostitutes also employ slaves for their services.

There are two main types of folk slaves. One is the household slaves engaged in housework and fieldwork, the other is a sex slave for the amusement of the host. The former is often sent to heavy physical labour, suffering from all kinds of torture and oppression, the latter relatively gain more attention by the host, the individual performance of the slave girl even in the family occupies a more important position. The domestic slave was mainly engaged in household work, and some were also used for agricultural production, and some were arranged for handicrafts and commerce, which could be regarded as the result of labor surplus and economic development.

Slaves had no right to be free to contact their loved ones, including husbands, who were often traded, exchanged or presented to others as gifts, and sometimes even sold their slaves abroad for profit. For most sex slaves, the situation is extremely tragic. Slave girls often become the object of wanton sexual assault of male masters and become the plaything of their hands and the means to entertain and amuse themselves. It is noteworthy that, regardless of whether their host is Muslim or Hindu, their social status and quality of life are significantly lower than those of the official slaves, and their chances of obtaining status emancipation and advancement are very small.

3.3 The Price of a Slave

During the period of Delhi Sultanate, a large number of slaves poured into the towns resulting into a situation of oversupply of slaves in the market which brought down the prices. During the Sultan Alauddin Khilji period (1296-1316), the price of an adult male slave is only slightly higher than that of a milk-producing buffalo, and the lowest price of slaves in domestic work is almost equal to the price of a buffalo used for slaughter, and the price of a boy engaged in domestic work is slightly higher than that of a buffalo. The slave girls who meet the sexual needs of their owners are the most expensive, which means that the young slaves are the best.

When Ibn Battuta arrived in Delhi in 1333/34, Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughlaq's Wazir,(the equivalent of the Prime Minister) gave him 10 local slaves in the form of gifts captured locally. Their prices are very low, even for trained slaves. The slave trade was not very active during this period, and few people wanted to buy slaves. In the Delhi market, the price of an average slave girl is no higher than 8 tan.

4. Evolution of the Slave Identity

The invasion of India by the Muhammad Gour's army in a late 12th century and the subsequent establishment and expansion of the Delhi Sultanate have had a significant impact on Indian slaves. Successive wars and clashes between Islam and Indian native religions have led to a dramatic increase in the number of slaves during this period, and Sultanate has provided a possibility for the transformation of its identity by assigning different slaves to different kinds of labour and giving them different social status according to the needs of the rule. Whether the official slave or the folk slave, whether the elite slaves or the ordinary slaves, it was driven by the social and political economic development, gradually differentiated and diverted to different levels of society, thus forming a different status, professionally different social strata.

Since the 13th century, the elite slaves of the Central Asian Turks, after gaining victory over the Indian subcontinent, gradually emerged from their slave status and began to occupy most of the prominent positions of the Delhi regime, all of which were derived from these slaves or their descendants. During the Razia Sultana period, "The Group of Forty" was a political group constituted of former Sultan Iltutmish's slaves who enjoyed a high status at court. After the death of Iltutmish, the "The Group of Forty" did not comply with the Sultan's order to let his daughter Razia inherit the throne, but kingmaker Iltutmish's son Rukn Ud Din Firuz succeeded to the throne. After the court struggle, Razia formally succeeded to the throne and became sultan, but these aristocracy whose origins are from the slaves, often interfere in the court affairs, and finally relying on a conspiracy to overthrow the Razia rule, executed Razia himself and her husband. During the Khilji dynasty and the era of the Ghazi Malik, India's indigenous elite slaves began to occupy a high position, Ghazi Malik was born in India, he was the slave of Sultan Balban, and by virtue of his outstanding achievements, became the sultan in 1320, established the famous Tughlaq dynasty. Jahan was also a native Indian slave and became Prime Minister of the Sultan Firoz Shah. The Turks appeared to have ceased to dominate the elite slaves from the time of the Firuz Shah Tughlaq, while the deputy of Alauddin Khilji, Malik Kafur was probably the last senior slave from Central Asia. On the whole, after the reign of Tughlaqs, the slaves-born nobles, both in numbers and in strength, have been unable to pursue the prominence they gained in the early days of Delhi Sultanate reign, when the new Muslim aristocracy, born in India, was dominant in the court. Although the slaves of the Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq battled for the throne after his death, they could only be regarded as a brief episode, and no more slaves had ever coveted the throne thereafter.

We can analyze the above phenomena in two aspects. One is that from the end of the 12th century to the beginning of the 14th century, as time passed, the elite slaves from Central Asia gradually aged, died and withdrew from the stage of history, and was replaced by the new Indian native slaves, which is the inevitable history. On the other hand, the emancipation of the slaves in the early Delhi Sultanate, the privileged class and the transformation of their identities were achieved in the course of the establishment of the Muslim regime, successive battles and the historical background of the Muslims in the Live of the Indian subcontinent. Once the Muslim rule is stable and mature, the emerging Muslim aristocracy began to occupy a prominent position in the court, the possibility of ordinary slaves wanting to be a privileged class has become very small, their living and development space is very limited, so it is impossible to have a fundamental impact on the direction of history and change. It should be said that Delhi Sultanate from the Khilji dynasty to truly establish its status in northern India, and the so-called "Slave Dynasty" is only the Muslim regime to a mature transition.

In addition to the above-mentioned elite slaves related to kingship, many ordinary slaves, though humble, often receive recognition and reuse from the Lord because of their excellent performance. Inside and outside the court, there emerged a large number of proficient buildings, craftsmen and craftsmen of the skills of forging, weaving and dyeing, as well as scholars and entertainers who are familiar with religion, literature, music, dance, art, etc., who, in their long life practice, gradually get rid of their slave identities and become fatigues of different social strata, the development of

social and economic culture in medieval India was strongly promoted. For the vast Indian native slaves attached to the Sultan and the Muslim aristocracy, abandoning their original religious beliefs and caste and converting to Islam became Muslims, while the change brought about a change of identity, but from the lower caste to the bottom of the Muslim community, their social status did not change materially.

5. Conclusion

Many medieval Indian slaves were the product of war, serving the Sultan and the Muslim aristocracy and playing an important role in the establishment and consolidation of the Muslim regime. The status of slaves in the Delhi Sultanate state showed upward mobility towards the privileged class. The background of the war-themed era provides a practical opportunity for such “mobility”. Moreover, the objective reality of the lives of the newly arrived Muslim rulers in the Indian subcontinent, as well as the “acclimatized” to the local religion, culture and natural environment, provide the possibility of such “mobility”. Finally, the development of social economy and the further refinement of the social division of Labor have also strongly promoted the transformation of this status. Indian slaves in the Delhi Sultanate era seemed to have improved in terms of social status and living standards, but from a social class standpoint, they were still oppressed and exploited classes. The emergence of a large number of slaves objectively promoted the growth of the Muslim population of India and promoted the development of social production, but nourished more of the unearned, thus deepening the oppression and exploitation of the workers and exacerbating the social contradictions. Although a handful of slaves succeeded in achieving their status and status changes, for the vast majority of slaves, they still lived at the bottom of society, and they were still the object of exploitation.

Acknowledgements

This article is supported by the Xi'an International Studies University Research Fund (project number: 19XWD21).

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