Ziauddin Barani: 
The Khaljis in Love (Persian)¹

Commentary and Translation by Saleem Kidwai

Barani was employed as a companion to the Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughlaq (1325–51) and had this job until the Sultan’s death. In the change that followed he was briefly imprisoned, his property was confiscated, and he ended his last days in penury, living off charity at the dargah (shrine around the tomb) of Shaikh Nizamuddin Chishti. His burial expenses were paid from charity.

In the following extracts, Barani does not condemn male attachments on grounds of either shari'ah or zawabi't.² He condemns Sultans who lost their better judgment over male lovers and thus surrendered the crucial instruments of power—fear, grandeur, and majesty. He also blames them for losing their senses to the point where they would not listen to warnings of wise counselors. The beloveds of the Sultan are reviled not just because they were murderers but also because they belonged to other groups that Barani hated. In this section of Sultanate history, Barani added two more groups—eunuchs and those involved in anal sex—to those he already blamed (the “low-born,” the converts, the Hindus, rationalists, merchants, and others who were not “true-born Turks”) for the misfortunes of the original elite.

The following extracts refer to events in the reign of two rulers of the Khalji dynasty. Ala'uddin Khalji (1296–1316) was one of the most powerful Sultans. He was despot, created a huge and successful army, enforced wide-ranging economic reforms, and expanded the Sultanate southward. During an early invasion of Gujarat, he captured a eunuch slave, Malik

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¹ Translated from Zia ud Din Barani, Tarikh i Firuz Shahi, ed. Saiyid Ahmad Khan, Bibliotheca Indica series (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1862). All page numbers refer to this edition.

² The state-promulgated secular laws that Barani agreed were necessary for effective rule since the institution of kingship was itself un-Islamic. For a study of Barani’s thought, see M. Habib, Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate (Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1960).
Kafur, among other booty. Malik Kafur joined Alauddin’s army and came to be called Hazardinari (one who cost 1,000 gold coins). It has been suggested that the merchant from whom he had been taken had paid that price for him. This price is very unlikely and the description was obviously a metaphorical compliment to Malik Kafur.

Alauddin Khalji appointed Malik Kafur deputy ruler (Malik Naib). Describing the last years of Alauddin’s life, Barani says: “In those four or five years when the Sultan was losing his memory and his senses, he had fallen deeply and madly in love with the Malik Naib. He had entrusted the responsibility of the government and the control of the servants to this useless ungrateful, ingratiating, sodomite.” (337)

Malik Kafur tried to remove all nobles from important positions and imprisoned or blinded all of Alauddin’s sons, mostly with the Sultan’s knowledge.Enumerating the four factors he thinks were responsible for decline of the Khalji state and dynasty, Barani says: “The third reason was that the Sultan loved the Malik Naib very much. He made him the commander of his army, a minister. He raised him above all the others. The heart of this sodomite beloved of his was soon corrupted.” (368)

Describing the last days of Alauddin, Barani says: “It was now that Alauddin was summoned and he began his journey from this world. Some people even say that the Malik Naib, chopped in front and torn at the back, killed him during his illness.” (369)

Malik Kafur raised a six-year-old son of Alauddin to the throne and in spite of being a eunuch, married the boy’s mother, a widow of Alauddin, and became the regent. Malik Kafur was assassinated a few months later. As an obituary, Barani comments: “This ignorant man did not know that to be castrated, to be addicted to the vice of being sodomized and to be faithless are the worst vices. He did not know that the necessities and rules of kingship require a person to be exceptional, independent, fearless, generous and strong. The few days of power intoxicated him” (375).

Qutubuddin, another son of Alauddin, became the next ruler at the age of seventeen in April 1316. The end of Alauddin’s reign also ended the fear that the late emperor had created in the city. According to Barani, people started enjoying themselves again in an atmosphere of freedom, unwatched by Alauddin’s efficient spy system. “Beloveds and liquor” and “slaves and boys” reappeared in the life of the city (383). The new emperor wrote poetry and was interested in music.

The whole world became given to leisure. The ways of the world changed. Fear of the monarchy began disappearing from the hearts of the people. Many people gave up their abstinence and said farewell to virtuous lives. The interest in worship that people had developed also lessened. Even obligatory duties began to be ignored. Mosques began losing their congregations. Since the emperor was constantly and flagrantly involved in impiety and immorality, the people followed his example. New young men began to make their appearance. All the beautiful singers returned to the city. The price of young