

Mind over Matter

Essays on Mentalities in Medieval India

edited by
D.N. JHA
EUGENIA VANINA

Mind over Matter



100544
V2.G(9P)



T
Tulika Books

- Proceedings of the Epigraphical Society of India, Third Annual Session held at Udupi (Mysore): Epigraphical Society of India.*
- Mathell, I.W. (1969), 'Desarga', *Journal of South Eastern History*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 207-23.
- Narayana M.G.S. (1975), 'The Vedic-Sastra-Parānic Elements in the Saugam Literature', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 36th Session, Aligarh.
- _____ (1986), *Permana of Kerala* (Calicut: published by the author).
- _____ (1977), 'The Ceremonies of Honour', in *Reinterpretations of South Indian History* (Trivandrum: College Book House).
- Narayana, M.G.S. and Kesava Velutha (1978), 'The Bhakti Movement in South India: an S.C. Malik (ed.), *Indian Movements: Aspects of Dissent, Protest and Reform* (Simla: Institute of Advanced Studies).
- _____ (1981), 'The Temple in South India', paper presented at the symposium on 'The Socio-Economic Role of Religious Institutions in India', Indian History Congress, 42nd Session, Bodhgaya.
- Peryapattanam* (1974), edited by K. Subrahmanyam (Srivasthiantham: Kumarapuram Sangam).
- Rao, T.A. Gopinatha (1953), *History of Srivasthavas (Madras: Madras University)*.
- Sastri, K.A. Mahakavi (1953), *The Pandyan Kingdom* (London: Luzac and Co.).
- _____ (1955), *The Cola Madras: University of Madras*.
- _____ (1972), *The Sangam Literature: Its Cults and Cultures* (Madras: Swathi Publications).
- _____ (1978), *South India and Southeast Asia* (Mysore: Geetha Book House).
- Schwinder, Gary J. (1957), 'Speculations on the Theme of Śiva as Tripurānaka as It Appears in the Reign of Rājāraja I in the Tanjāpur Area, c. ad 1000', *Asiatica*, Vol. 17, pp. 163-78.
- Sharma, R.S. (1991), *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (Delhi: Manish Bhandars)
- Sivaramamurti, C. (1955), *Royal Conquests and Cultural Migration in South India* (Calcutta: Indian Museum).
- Spencer, George W. (1945), 'Religious Networks and Royal Influence in Eleventh Century South India', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 42-56.
- _____ (1984), 'Heirs Apparent: Fiction and Function in Coja Mythical Genealogies', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 415-82.
- Srinivasan, K.R. (1991), 'The Peruvudaiyar (Brihadisvara) Temple of Tanjāpur: a Study in Indian Archaeological Heritage' (Shri K.V. Soundararajan Festschrift), Vol. II (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan).
- Stein, Burton (1980), *Feudal State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press).
- Subrahmanyam, T.N., ed. (1965), *Third Pallava Copper Plates* (Madras: Tamil Varaharu Kazhagam).
- Tanjāpuravudaiyār Kōṭi: Kāṭiṅgaṅgaṅṅā* (1972), edited by R. Nagaswami (Madras: Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamil Nadu).
- Velutha, Kesava (1978), 'Royalty and Divinity: Legitimation of Monarchical Power in South India', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 39th Session, Hyderabad.
- _____ (1979), 'The Temple of the Bhakti Movement in South India', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 40th Session, Walhair.
- _____ (1993), *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India* (Delhi: Orient Longman).
- _____ (2002), 'The Temple and the State: Religion and Politics in Early Medieval South India', in R. Champakalakshmi, Kesava Velutha and T.R. Venugopalan (eds), *State and Society in Pre-modern South India* (Thiruvur: Cosmo Books).

Two Indian Theorists of the State

Barani and Abū'ī Fazl

Irfan Habib

The pre-modern Indian state has been the subject of discussion in much recent writing, the various theories ranging from the concept of Oriental Despotism to that of Segmentary State. The state's taxation capacities, the extent of centralized control, and the degree of systematic administration tend to be assessed and re-assessed. While these concerns were generally not present in medieval writings on the state (except for the role of despotic authority), there were at least two writers, who, some two and a half centuries apart, provided reflections sufficient in scope and consistency to be given the designation of 'theorists'. I propose to deal with them separately, since their premises and conclusions appear in sharp contrast to each other. At the end, I would try to sum up what these contrasts tell us about both the circumstances of the times and the intellectual traditions which produced them.

1

Barani has been much studied and commented upon as a historian, and since the work of Mohammad Habib and Afsar Khan in the 1950's,¹ his position as a political theorist has also been recognized. The following pages thus partly represent the re-visiting of explored ground; such verification may perhaps perform some service, even where it confirms what was previously known: and, therefore, one may proceed to one's task without a long apology. I begin with a brief reconstruction of Barani's life, and then go on to analyse his political ideas.

Ziyā Baranī,² was born in 1285, presumably at Baran (mod. Bulandshahr.

¹ Mohammad Habib and Afsar Umar Salim Khan (eds), *The Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate*, Allahabad, n.d.

² I write Ziyā Baranī because he is uniformly styled himself thus. But Ziyā'ud-dīn Baranī would be equally legitimate; this is how he would have been called by others. Amir Khwand accordingly styles him Ziyā'ū'l Millat wa'd-dīn; cf. *Siyar-i Awliya*, Delhi, an 1302, pp. 312-13. Apparently, the custom of the time inhibited one from using the full name, which would sound pretentious from one's own lips (Ziyā'ū'd-dīn meaning 'Light of the Faith'). Baranī's own precursor in the narration of the history of the Delhi Sultanate, the author of the *Zahraṅ-i Mubīn*, s.d. 'Abdu'l Hai Habibi, Vol. 1, Kabul, 1963, pp. 6, 64, 127, etc. calls himself Minhāj-ūl-Salā, but Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Firuz-shāhī*, ed. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, W. Nassau Lees and Kabir al-Din, Bib. Ind., Calcutta, 1869-62, pp. 20-21, calls him Minhāj-ud-dīn Sirāfī, as did, much earlier (AD 1329), Shakh

religion). For such a task no wages or taxes could be too high, but 'just sovereigns do not take more than what suffices for their task and do not soil their hands by desiring more.'¹¹⁵

This doctrine justifies temporal sovereignty, but assumes two classes of sovereigns, just and unjust. How a just sovereign should be identified and how he should function are matters that Abū'l-Faḡl takes up immediately at the beginning of the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*.

In this discussion, a third element enters, the influence of the *ishrāq* theory. Developed by Shihābū'd-Dīn Suhrawardī Maqṣūdī (d. 1191), whose writings were universally read in the Islamic world, its origins went back to Plato's *Republic*, where the Good is presented under the symbol of the Sun. The Sun becomes for the *ishrāqīs* a symbol of God-derived spiritual lights, the *anwār-i qāhira*, each of which 'from degree to degree, illumines the presence of each lower degree' (H. Corbin).¹¹⁶ Abū'l-Faḡl uses the imagery, if not the terminology of the *ishrāq* tradition, when he puts temporal sovereignty at the highest station in the hierarchy of objects receiving spiritual light: 'To the Unique Almighty, there is no higher station than that of the King (*Pādshāh*)... Royalty is a light from the Inimitable Almighty and a ray from the world-illuminating Sun, the essence of the books of perfection, the assemblage of excellences. In the language of the day it is called *farr-i izīdī* (divine light); in the ancient [Iranian] language, *kāhān-khwura* (world-illuminating light)'.¹¹⁷ Thus even if the office of sovereign is not a product of any religion, he yet has authority from God. Abū'l-Faḡl refrains from using the conventional Muslim adjective for the ruler, *Zill-i ilāhī*, 'God's shadow'. The sovereign is not a shadow, but rather a recipient of divine light, possessor of illumined wisdom, and the reflector of the light received.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ *Ā'in*, I, pp. 290–91, for the original text from which this and the previous paragraphs are drawn. The reader must be warned against depending for these passages on H. Jarrett's translation (*Ā'in-i Akbarī*, II, revised by Jadunath Sarkar, Calcutta, 1949, pp. 54–56), which is particularly inapt here.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in R. Arnaudet, *ISHRĀQ: Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed., IV, Leiden, 1978, pp. 119–20. J.F. Richards has already drawn attention to the connection between the *Ishrāqī* ('Persian Neoplatonic') theory of Illumination and Abū'l-Faḡl's play on Light (J.F. Richards, ed., *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, Madison, 1978, pp. 260–67; cf. Richards, ed., *Mughal Empire*, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 45–47).

¹¹⁷ *Ā'in*, I, p. 2. Abū'l-Faḡl surely has in mind here the passage in Shihābū'd-Dīn Suhrawardī's *Purān-nāma* ('Book of Radiance', ed. and transl. Hossein Ziai, Costa Mesa, Calif., 1998, p. 84): 'Whoever knows wisdom and is assiduous in praising and revering the "Lamp of Lights" (*Nūr-i Anwār*), as we have stated, they give him the "kingly light" (*Āhura-i Kayfān*) and bestow upon him the "luminous ray" (*farr-i nūrānī*); and the "Illuminating-flashing (cloud) of God" (*abāriq-i ilāhī*) clothes him in the robe of authority and status' (my own rendering). Can one say that Abū'l-Faḡl has in fact inverted *shihābū'd-dīn*'s assertion? Whereas the latter argued that the person with spiritual attainment receives the supreme status, marked by the possession of 'kingly light', for Abū'l-Faḡl it is the just king who possesses not only the 'kingly light', but also the highest spiritual attainments.

¹¹⁸ We have seen above how Abū'l-Faḡl calls the just sovereign, *paḡzānda-i farr-i izīdī* (*Ā'in*, I, p. 290).

But not all worldly sovereigns receive such light. We have seen that Abū'l-Faḡl, in speaking of just rulers, implies another category, that of unjust sovereigns. He now blames the simple-minded ones (*sālim-dīnān*) for not distinguishing the 'godly ruler' (*farmānarmā-i haqīqī*) from the self-seeking aspirant for authority (*pasht-i-ū-i khwārd-kān*), since both have at their command treasure, army, subjects, scholarly servants, numerous craftsmen, and personal attendants. Only the enlightened ones could discriminate between the two: the rule of the 'godly' rulers is long-lasting and marked by peace, justice, etc.; that of the selfish ones is short-lived and marked by terror, cruelty, theft, etc.¹¹⁹

It was clearly the just ruler to whom the title of *Pādshāh* was appropriate and who could be the recipient of God's light. As a counter and, perhaps, sincere admirer, Abū'l-Faḡl held Akbar to form a class by himself, and when he speaks of *Pādshāh* and accords him a special station near God, he surely has Akbar as a unique ruler in mind. The concept of 'Perfect Man' in the Ibn 'Arabī tradition could certainly be invoked here, as Badā'ūnī suspected;¹²⁰ but there was another possible source for justifying the exaltation of a particular individual, namely, the doctrines of Mahmūd Pasikhwānī (d. 1427–28), the originator of the *Wahīdiya* or *Nuḡlawīya* sect.¹²¹ These doctrines certainly had reached Akbar at the critical moment when he was fashioning his new ideas in association with Abū'l-Faḡl. In 1577 Sharīf Amulī, after a chequered career, joined Akbar's court, and he was a follower of Mahmūd Pasikhwānī.¹²² Mahmūd believed in a kind of metaphysics through the meeting of the physical elements of a former body or bodies to create a new one, this being in his case, 'a more perfect being' than Muhammad, whose elements came together in him.¹²³ One could similarly claim for Akbar an eminent status on the basis of these speculations.¹²⁴ It is, however, fair to say that if Mahmūd's theory of great spiritual souls born at particular periods exercised any influence on Abū'l-Faḡl, he does not himself either directly or indirectly give any evidence of it, though he seems to have maintained good relations with the Iranian Nuḡlawīs.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ *Ā'in*, I, p. 2.

¹²⁰ Badā'ūnī, II, pp. 258–9. The central position of *al-insān al-kāmilī* in the realm of existence was particularly defined and elaborated by Saḡūrī 'adn Qūnawī, the major disciple of Ibn 'Arabī (IV C. Chittick, 'Saḡūr al-Dīn Qūnawī', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., VII, Leiden, 1993, p. 754, col. 2).

¹²¹ A fairly extended account of the founder and his sect is given in Mobsad (c. 1655), *Dabistān* I–I *Maghābi*, ed. Qazi Ibrahim, Bombay, n.d. 1292, pp. 243–47. See also H. Algar, 'Shukriyyā', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., VIII, Leiden, 1993, pp. 114–17.

¹²² See Badā'ūnī, II, pp. 247–8. Badā'ūnī claims to have read, and been revolted by, Mahmūd's treatise, thirteen in number. For *nuḡlawīs* at Akbar's court other than Sharīf 'Amulī, see *Ibid.*, III, pp. 204–07, 378–79.

¹²³ *Dabistān*, p. 244.

¹²⁴ Saḡūrī Khān Kifawī, for example, is said to have invoked Mahmūd Pasikhwānī's predictions for fixing on AH 990 (AD 1582) as the year when 'the promised person' (*shākh-i mā hūd*) would appear (Badā'ūnī, III, pp. 206–7). This would have suited Akbar.

¹²⁵ In a *farman* to the Nuḡlawī scholar Saḡūrī 'adn Ahmad Kashī Akbar refers to Abū'l-Faḡl's favourable opinion of Darwish-Khusrau, the principal Nuḡlawī leader in Iran

The use of 'godly' king was rather to be recognized by the functions that he carried out. We may dispense with the display of qualities of strong will, God-worship, quickness in giving relief to seekers, etc., which Abū 'l-Faḡl enumerated. The two important functions that Abū 'l-Faḡl assigns to such a sovereign, and which, though suiting Akbar were in a remarkable manner the very opposite of the functions that, under the *Shar'ī'a*, Barani had assigned to the State.

The first such function says Abū 'l-Faḡl, is 'the fulfilling [by the sovereign] of the obligations of being father (*pidārī*) to mankind: Different kinds of persons receive comfort from his benevolence and out of the diversity of religion the dust of dualism does not rise forth'.¹²⁶ This is the tolerance of conflicting faiths, which Abū 'l-Faḡl subsumed in the term he and his master so often used, *viz.*, *Sulh-i kul*, 'absolute peace'.¹²⁷ Again, this concept invoked Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy. The higher form would be *muhabbat-i kul* ('absolute love'), when presumably the transcendental unity would be absolutely recognized. For those who could not achieve it, the path of *sulh-i kul*, the tolerance of all diversity, was prescribed.¹²⁸ *Sulh-i kul* was doubtless something to be pursued and achieved by an individual; in his autobiography Abū 'l-Faḡl lists his success in 'attaining *sulh-i kul* through the favour of His Majesty's attention'. This consists 'sometimes' of turning to speech to silence, sometimes making friendship (*ashti*) with good men of all communities (*harātīfā*), and ultimately, 'accepting excuses, shake peace (*masāliḥā*) with the bad'.¹²⁹ For the ruler, this meant a policy of tolerating all religions (and other) differences. Abū 'l-Faḡl describes how, beginning from 1578-79, Akbar taking the position of *sulh-i kul*, opened a discourse with leading men of all religions (including Christians and Brahmans) and appointed men of different faiths to high offices (such as the Shi'ite Iranis, the Sunni Turanis and the Hindus) and quietly faced up to the uproar of denigration and denunciation that arose from the orthodox.¹³⁰

Since *sulh-i kul* was a philosophical principle difficult for many to follow, Abū 'l-Faḡl also offered a more popular, let's-leave-it-to-God argument which he

(copy printed in Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Akbar and Religion*, Delhi, 1989, pp. 379-80). The *farman* is dated 4 Azar 94, where 94 must be a mistake for 34 [1574], and the date of issue is therefore 26 November 1589. Darwish-Khusrav was executed by Shah 'Abbas I in 1593, and Ahmad Kāshī not long afterwards.

¹²⁶ *A'in*, I, pp. 2-3.

¹²⁷ Cf. M. Athar Ali, 'Sulh-i Kul and the Religious Ideas of Akbar', *Studies in History*, New Delhi, IV(1)(1962), pp. 27-39; and Iqbal Alam Khan, 'Akbar's Personality Traits and World Outlook - a Critical Reappraisal', *Akbar and his India*, ed. I. Habib, Delhi, 1997, pp. 79-96.

¹²⁸ *Farman* of 26 November 1590 to A'zam Khan, in respect of Jains (Mohantal Dehband Desai, *Jain Sahitya Samakshipti Itihās, place[?]*, n.d. reprod. of *farman* [copy], facing p. 545). The *farman* bears all the marks of Abū 'l-Faḡl's penmanship.

¹²⁹ *A'in*, II, p. 279.

¹³⁰ Akbarānā, III, pp. 271-72. And not only from the orthodox Muslims. Fr. Monserrate, member of the first Jesuit mission, accompanying Akbar to Kabul in 1581, says distinctly that Akbar 'caused little that in allowing every one to follow his own religion, he was in reality violating all religions' (*Commentary*, p. 142).

put into the regulations (*dashtān-i 'amāl*), drafted for the Emperor some time after 1584. Here all officials were enjoined:

to be vigilant in that royalty and authority mean the giving of protection; they should not object to (the practising of) the faith and religion of the people, for when a wise man does not risk loss in this mortal world, why should one risk loss in the realm of religion which is eternal? If the truth (*haqq*) is on his side, you will be opposing and objecting to the truth; if the truth is with you, and he has, out of ignorance, chosen a position opposite to it, he is a hapless victim of the disease of ignorance, he deserves compassion and assistance, not objection and opposition. Remain friendly (therefore) with the good people of every sect (*har guruh*).¹³¹

There is no doubt that the urge for the pursuit of *sulh-i kul*, as state policy, owed much to the position of the Mughal empire, situated in a multi-religious country. It accorded closely with the patriotism for 'Hindustan', which both Akbar and Abū 'l-Faḡl were so frankly encouraging.¹³² The religious tolerance which to Barani had seemed to be an unworthy compromise, could now be proclaimed as an essential function of the state, required by the highest principles of mystic truth.

The second function of the state is given, in such a brief sentence, that it tends to be missed: The just sovereign 'shall not seek popular acclaim through opposing reason (*'aql*)'.¹³³ Despite Abū 'l-Faḡl's extensive use of sufi concepts and beliefs, he remained steadfast in his allegiance to reason and science. One major factor here was the opposition that rationalism offered to orthodox traditionalism. Abū 'l-Faḡl includes among Akbar's 'happy sayings' the following:

The case for pursuing reason (*'aql paizāh*) and rejection of traditionalism (*taqlid*) is so clear that it does not need any argument from me. If tradition is to be held excellent, all prophets would have just followed their ancestral customs.¹³⁴

Abū 'l-Faḡl himself gives a spirited condemnation of *taqlid* when he lists reasons why Indian beliefs and culture had not been more closely studied by Muslims:

Fifthly, the blowing of the heavy wind of *taqlid* (tradition), and the dimming of the lamp of *kufr* (reason, wisdom). Of old, the door of 'how and why' has been closed, and questioning and enquiry have been deemed fruitless and the act of a pagan (*kufī*). Whatever one received from one's father, teacher,

¹³¹ *Dashtān-i Abū 'l-Faḡl*, p. 61.

¹³² Cf. M. Athar Ali, 'The Perception of India in Akbar and Abū 'l-Faḡl', in *Akbar and his India*, op.cit., pp. 215-224. But *sulh-i kul* was not seen as a doctrine solely applicable to India. Obviously disturbed by 'Abbas I's religious persecutions, Akbar wrote in a letter (January 1595), drafted by Abū 'l-Faḡl, urging him to practice *sulh-i kul* (*Dashtān-i Abū 'l-Faḡl*, p. 31; Akbarānā, III, pp. 659-60).

¹³³ *A'in*, I, p. 3.

¹³⁴ *A'in*, II, p. 279.