

POLITICS AFFECTED BY ULEMA UNDER THE DELHI SULTANS AND MUGHAL EMPERORS: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

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Abstract

Ulema is the Muslim scholars in the Islamic world. Ulema played an important role in the polity, society and culture during the Medieval Indian History. The contribution of Ulema attracted in social, religious and intellectual dynamisms in medieval India. The Ulema played an important role in the Muslim society to learn the literature, law, and doctrines of Islam. They were the judges, jurist, priests, leaders, scholars, teachers, readers of Quran and Hadith, recitals of traditions, Sufis, functionaries of mosque and madrasa in the medieval Indian society. Ulema helped to carry on the teaching of Islam, enforced its moral, upheld its law, proclaimed its doctrines, suppressed corruption and vice. The present study analyse the role of Ulema in medieval India. This paper focuses on the contribution of Ulema in the Slave Dynasty, Khilji Dynasty, Tughlaq Dynasty, Sayyid Dynasty, Lodhi Dynasty, and at the reign of Mughal rulers such as Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shahjahan, and Aurangzeb. This paper also focuses on the fatawa literature imposed by Ulema on the Muslim society during the medieval India.

Keywords:Ulema;Medieval India;Islam;Muslim community;Fatawa.

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Introduction

The word 'Ulama' termed as 'Scholar' or 'a learned person' or 'a person of knowledge'. According to Encyclopaedia of Islam (2000), in its original meaning of Ulama "denotes scholars of almost in all the disciplines". In the context of Sunni Islam, Ulama is regarded as "the guardians, transmitters, and interpreters of religious knowledge, of Islamic doctrine and law". According to the Muslim tradition, the Ulema are educated in a religious institution such as *Maktabs* and *Madrasas*. In this institution, mostly those subjects are taught which deals with religious culture such as the Quran, *Sunnah* (authentic hadith), *qiyas* (analogical reasoning, for Sunni Islam) or *'aql* (dialectical reasoning for Shia Islam), *ijma* (juridical consensus) are the sources of traditional Islamic law. In spite of these subjects, the traditional scholars of Islam are becoming prominent actors in contemporary Muslim societies and politics.¹ These madrasas were the sacred place of learning which provided the boarding and lodging to the students and salaries to the teachers. These madrasas are merely run by the grant of state or *vakf* property or collection of money through the Muslim community. Ulema were the Judges, jurists, priests, leaders, scholars, teachers, readers of Quran, and recitals of traditions, Sufis, functionaries of Madrasas and Maktabs during the medieval period. Ulema has the many types of specialization such as *Hafiz* (who learned the whole Quran by heart), *Sheikh-ul-Hadith* (who learned the Hadith by heart and also interpret the Hadiths), *Qazi* (who have the knowledge of Islamic juridical consensus) and Mufti (who have the knowledge to deliver *fatawa*), etc. These Ulema have the power of the Almighty God to serve the people with their knowledge in this world and the post-world. Ulema was played an important role in the polity, society and cultural life during the Medieval Indian History. The founder of Islamic philosophical ethics was Ibn Miskawayh (932–1030 AD). He combined Aristotelian and Islamic ethics, explicitly mentioning the Nicomachean Ethics and its interpretation by Porphyry of Gaza as the foundation of his philosophical thoughts.² The Islamic theology also termed as 'Ilm-al- kalam' or 'the science of discourse' which explain and defend the doctrine of Quran and Hadith.³

Importance of Ulema in the Islamic World

In medieval India, there were two groups of Muslim elite: first, the warriors or ruler who were fighting for the throne and, expansion and consolidation of Islamic rule and second, Ulema who were struggling for the propagation of Islam with the support of Muslim ruler. With the division

in the Islamic world, the Sunni Caliph came to hold political power, delegating temporal powers to an *Imam*. Therefore, the warriors became a political faction under the Caliphate and later, under the Sultans, while the latter rallied under the patronage of the *Imam* and focused on the *Shariat* as their base. The Ulema controlled over the ruling class in the religious concept and some political aspects which were they had got the charitable grants from the ruling class for themselves and for the religious work. They built up their position in the court of ruler by repeatedly harking to the frequency of the root ‘ilm’ or (knowledge of Islam) in the Quran and Hadith. Originating as the reciters of the Quran, they soon took up the responsibility of guarding Islam against the reaction of defeated people of other religions.⁴ A scholar’s (Ulama) ink will outweigh a martyr’s blood on the Day of Judgement.⁵ This Ulema kept themselves in the elaboration of Islamic law (*fiqh*), jurists (*fuqaha*), community consensus (*ijma*) and the Islamic traditions (*Hadith*), etc.⁶ The education system in medieval India was the same as that in any other Islamic country and totally controlled by the Ulema in such institution like Maktabas and Madrasas which run with the financial grant by the ruling class.⁷ Abu-al-Darda in the late 7th century conveyed the following tradition attributed to the prophet Muhammad: “Scholars (Ulama) are the heirs of the prophet who has endowed them with knowledge as a legacy. He who has chosen knowledge has taken a generous share and he who has taken a path towards the acquisition of knowledge, for him God will smooth a path to paradise.”⁸ These Ulema are heirs of the Prophet Muhammad because they transmit his message abound in the religious texts produced in India over the centuries. These statements are universal in the Islamic world and transcend regional, linguistic, and ethnic frontiers.⁹ Hasan Nizami, the author of *Taj-ul-Masir* states that “Ulama’ a gem in the ring of *Shariat*” while Fakr-i-Mudaabbir states that “Ulama have a place below the prophet but above the ruler”. Some of the points are showing the importance of Ulama in the Islamic world:¹⁰

1. Ulama is the heirs of Prophet.
2. If there were no Ulama, the people would have loitered like wild animals.
3. The best rulers are those who go to the door of the Ulama and the worst Ulama are those who go to the door of the rulers.

Ulema was divided into two categories during the medieval period:¹¹

1. Ulama-i-Akhirat (the Ulama of the Ultimate End)
2. Ulama-i-Duniya (the Ulama of the Visible World)

In continuing the position of Ulama in the Islamic world, state patronage was focussed on this class through royal charities in various forms: cash stipends (*wazifa*) and land grants (*inams*). Some of the Ulama have got the title of ‘*Shaikh-ul-Islam*’ was bestowed on an ‘*alim*’ possessing a high statue in the world of learning. The *Shaikh-ul-Islam* became the link between the religious class and quasi-religious officers held by *qazis*, *muftis*, and *muhtasibs* on the hand and the ruler on the other. State patronage to the Ulama was also possibly promoted by the Turko-Afghan and Mongol theory of distribution of wealth accumulated as a result of the conquest of lands known as the ‘*ghanimah*’ of the ‘*umma*’.¹² According to K.A. Nizami, during the Sultanate period, the Ulama played a second fiddle to the Sultans. The political authorities tried to harness them to the state chariot in order to woo public support through them, but they were not allowed to determine the course of political developments.¹³ Under the Mughal period, the department of the *Sadr* played a significant role in the selection of the Ulama for significant offices and for grant of *madad-i-maash* (tax-free land or the revenue of taxable land) which were the allowance to the pious *Saiyids* and to the *Shaikhs*.¹⁴

Development of Fatawa theory during the medieval period

The development of strict orthodoxy was one result of the fact that the Indian Muslims lived in the midst of a non-Muslim, and in their eyes, idolatrous and polytheistic population. Religious law is an undoubtedly one of the most important expressions of Islamic civilization.¹⁵ The tradition of Fatawa compilation by a board of Ulama originated in the same period. There is some evidence that suggests that the Sultans of Delhi and Mughal ruler were very much interested in finding out *Shariat's* attitude towards many problems of state and society as they used to discuss them with the ‘Ulema’ who commanded expertise in the Islamic law. It is established by the historical facts that the Delhi Sultans associated ‘Ulema’ and scholars with their courts because of their learning and knowledge. Most of the Sultan’s had their daily routine included an exchange of ideas with the Ulama and other scholars on legal or juridical and religious matters.¹⁶ These meeting with Ulema called *mahzar*. In the reign of Iltutmish and Tughlaq, the *mahzar* was called to discuss the issue of *sama* in the light of the *Shariat*. Sometimes, ulema has compiled the Fatawa against the ruler, for their unlawful practices in that state.¹⁷ The origin and developments of Fatawa (*fiqh-work*) compilation during medieval India

apart, it is a well-established fact that under the Delhi Sultans, a number of comments and condensation of earlier famous works of Islamic jurisprudence were prepared and original contributions to the same were also made. In the medieval period, the most popular way of contributing to Islamic jurisprudence was a collection of Fatawa (verdicts) of the well-known jurists and their arrangement under the usual chapters of the text-books of *fiqh*.¹⁸ Fatawa signifies legal opinions and verdicts of jurists or *muftis* on any point of law. The act of seeking a legal opinion as well as the query itself is called *istifta*. The *fiqh*-works, especially of the *Hanafi* jurists are generally divided into three broad categories: *Usul*, *Nawadir*, and *Fatawa*.¹⁹ Most of the Fatawa-collection was compiled in medieval period are as follows:²⁰

1. Fatawa-i-Ghiyasiah
2. Fatawa-i-Tatarkhaniah
3. Fatawa-i-Firuzshahi
4. Fatawa-i-Ibrahimshahi
5. Al-Fatawa-al-Alawiyah
6. Fatawa-i-Ameeniyah
7. Fatawa-i-Barahnah
8. Al-Fatawa-al-Hammadiya
9. Al-Fatawa-al-Naqshbandiya
10. Fatawa-i-Majma-al-Barakat
11. Al-Fatawa-al-Alamgiriya (Fatawa-i-Alamgiri)
12. Muntakhab-al-Fatawa
13. Fatawa-i-Muhammadi

All these Fatawa collections show their relevance to the problems of society prevailing in their period.

Ulema affected the society in different periods of the medieval India

1. Ghaznawid State – It laid the foundation of Muslim rule in India and this was the first attempt to keep the state administration in reasonable conformity with the *Shariat*. Lahore was the capital of Ghaznawid state and most prominent Ulama came here was *Shaikh Ismail Bhukhari (1056 A.D)* who laid the foundation of classical, largely imitative and compiled study of *Hadith* in India. He was also one of the first missionaries of Islam in India.²¹

2. **Ghori's Reign** – At the reign of Muhammad Ghori, it had developed their own pattern of relationship between the ruler and the Ulama. The Ulama appropriated the *Sunni* orthodoxy either in the *Shafi* or *Hanafi* sect probably the former from under an *alim* Wahid-al-din marvarudhi. Mostly, *Hanafi* sect was found as the official religion as well as that of the Muslim majority at that time. Ulama has mostly followed the *Hanafi* sect in medieval India. So, the history of the Ulama in India is predominantly the history of *Hanafi* Ulama.²²

3. **Slave Dynasty** – At the reign of Iltutmish, a group of Ulama led by Qazi Wajih Uddin Kashani came to the court of Iltutmish for enquiring of manumitted and they should become his actual supporters to help him in the extension of his political power. Iltutmish created the office of *Shaikh-ul-Islam* to deals the religious matter. At the Raziya time, most of the Ulama were unhappy due to her entry in court without *Hijab*. They came to the Raziya court after some compromise which led the political principle of the Sultanate. An '*alim*' Qutb-al-din who was *Shaikh-ul-Islam* under the rule of Bahram Shah had as notorious a reputation as *sughra* and was even accused of treason. In Balban reign, Ulama was unhappy due to his *Zaminbos* and *Pabos* policy. But the Ulama of the realm gave total and unqualified support to all such actions of the Sultan. The Ulama gave legal sanction to *Zawabits* as *Shariat* laws without any qualms.²³

4. **Khilji Dynasty** – At the reign of Khiljis, Alauddin Khilji imposed conformity on his Muslim subjects, was himself illiterate and no patron of Ulama who does not seem to have thrived very much under the Khilji Dynasty, at least not as much as in the periods before and after it. Alauddin Khilji's conversation with Qazi Mugeez-ud-din was famous worldwide on the political matter.²⁴

5. **Tughlaq Dynasty** – During the reign of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq and Muhammad bin Tughlaq, they did not want any type of interfere in political aspects by the Ulama. But the reign of Firozshah Tughlaq was the golden period for the Ulama. He did not perform any work without the assistance of Ulama. Two most important Fatawa were compiled during his reign; Fatawa-i-Firuzshahi and Fatawa-i-Tatarkhani. These Fatawa are landmarks in the history of juristic compilation in India. The first Persian commentary on the Quran was written by *Shihab-al-din Dawlatabadi* in the reign of Firozshah Tughlaq.²⁵

6. **Sayyid and Lodi Dynasty** – During the Sayyid period, the role of Ulama was not so much published but Ulama played an important role in polity, society, and cultural life. At the reign of Sikandar Lodi, an upsurge of the prestige of the Ulama, though counterpointed by that

Sultan's tendency towards Scholastics rationalism. The contribution of the Ulema in Delhi Sultanate was very considerable to political and to theological literature.²⁶

7. **Mughal Empire** – Many Ulema of Lodi period were continued to hold influential officers under the rule of Babur and Humayun, such as *Abd-ullah Tulanbi (Makhdum-ul-Mulk)*.²⁷ Under the reign of Akbar, the department of Sadr played a role in the selection of Ulama for religious offices and for grant of *madad-i-maash*. Akbar wants to keep the orthodox theologians at a distance and never giving them any political power in the hands of Ulema. Some of the Ulema and orthodox Muslims did not approve many of Akbar's policies towards religion. Sadr *Makhdum-ul-Mulk* and *Abd-un-Nabi* were discarded by the Akbar for their unlawful matter. An Ulama of Jaunpur had given the Fatawa against the Akbar for their doing against *Shariat*. Akbar started *Ibadat Khana* and the latter issue of Mahzar, also that type work which could Ulema unhappy. Ulema could not assemble enough support from the members of Mughal nobility.²⁸ The power of Ulema which Akbar reduced was never again restored to the same degree as earlier under the Delhi Sultanate.²⁹

Jahangir was also acted like his Father Akbar, he also did not want any interfere of Ulema in his political matter. Despite the impact of that Ulema who devoted their energy and moral regeneration of the community, especially the *Naqshbandis*, to support the ideological structure of Islam.³⁰ Shahjahan was more religious than his predecessors, but the Ulema did not have any interfere in his politics of the state. An '*alim*' *Abd-al-Hakim Siyalkoti* was the most eminent and learned Ulama in his period. Shahjahan had weighed him in gold. Shahjahan and his wazir sad-Ullah Khan were requested to Siyalkoti for write what is now regarded as one of the most outstanding works, the *Durrat-al-thamina*.³¹

Aurangzeb reign was known for conquest and imposition of the Islamic system. It is also known that Aurangzeb depended on the Ulama: qazis and theologians, and always consulted them before taking decisions. The Ulema who were usually kept at a distance by his predecessors began to interfere in Aurangzeb's reign resulting in the demoralization of Mughal bureaucracy.³² Ulema was always helped to Aurangzeb in bringing about the executions of his brothers Dara Shikoh and Murad Baksh. Similarly, Ulema attached to the support of his son Akbar supplied that prince with juristic rulings to rebel against his pious father accusing him of irreligion. The

most important work by a group of Six Ulema under the supervision of Shaikh Nizam was made by Aurangzeb was to set the *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri (Fatawa-i-Hindiyya)* which is the most comprehensive juristic work compiled in India; and also, incidentally, the theoretic crystallization of Aurangzeb theocratic policies.³³

Conclusion

The contribution of Ulema in medieval India was much splendour. Ulema affected the social, religious, political and intellectual parts of society in the medieval India. Ulema always include their contribution in the ruler's practices and pressure upon them to spreading the Islam. So, Ulema played an important role in politics during the medieval India.

Notes

¹ [http:// en. Wikipedia. Org/w/index.php? title = Ulama&oldid = 788385293](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ulama&oldid=788385293). Retrieved on 01/07/2017

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bhatia, M. L. (2006). *The Ulama, Islamic Ethics, and Courts under the Mughals: Aurangzeb Revisited*. Manak Publications, p. 33.

⁵ Alvi, S. S. (2012). *Perspectives on Mughal India: Rulers, Historians, 'ulamā' and Sufis*. Oxford University Press, p. 10.

⁶ [http:// en. Wikipedia. Org/w/index.php? title = Ulama&oldid = 788385293](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ulama&oldid=788385293). Retrieved on 01/07/2017

⁷ Alvi, op. cit., p. 10.

⁸ Encyclopaedia of Islam, new edition, E.J. Brill, Leiden q.v. Ulam, p. 802.

⁹ Alvi, op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁰ Bhatia, op. cit., p. 34.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 35.

¹² Ibid, p. 36.

¹³ Nizami, K.A., *Religions and of politics*, P.V., Introduction; *Futuh-us-Salatin by IsamiI*, pp.925-26.

¹⁴ Bhatia, op. cit., p. 41.

¹⁵Eaton, R. M. (Ed.). (2003). *India's Islamic traditions, 711-1750*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 51.

¹⁶Islam, Z. (2005). *Fatawa literature of the Sultanate period*. Kanishka publ..., p. 2.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.4.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 8.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 18.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 21.

²¹Ahmad, A. (1970). *The role of ulema in Indo-Muslim history*. *Studia Islamica*, (31), 1-13, p. 1.

²² Ibid, p. 2.

²³ Bhatia, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

²⁴ Ahmad, op. cit., p. 5.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid, p. 6

²⁸ Bhatia, op. cit., pp. 41-42-43.

²⁹ Ahmad, op. cit., p. 7.

³⁰ Bhatia, op. cit., p. 44.

³¹ Ahmad, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

³² Bhatia, op. cit., p. 45.

³³ Ahmad, op. cit., p. 9.