



The Comparative Analysis of Firishta and Barani's Accounts on the Meos and Mewat: Uncovering Historical Perspectives and Narratives

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper aims to analyze and compare the accounts of Meos and Mewat as presented by two prominent medieval historians, Firishta and Barani. The Meos and Mewat, who were a significant community in the Indian subcontinent, have been the subject of historical narratives by various scholars. Firishta and Barani, in their respective works, provide insights into the social, cultural, and political aspects of the Meos and Mewat during the medieval period. This paper will critically examine the historical perspectives and narratives presented by these historians, shedding light on the differences and similarities in their accounts. By delving into the primary sources, this study seeks to uncover the historical context, biases, and interpretations that shaped Firishta and Barani's writings on the Meos and Mewat. The comparative analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of historical representation and the diverse experiences of the Meos and Mewat in medieval India.

Keywords: Firishta, Barani, Meos, Mewat.

Introduction:

The Meos and Mewat, historically significant in the Indian subcontinent, have been the subject of scholarly interest due to their social, cultural, and political relevance during the medieval period. The region of Mewat corresponds to the ancient Kingdom of Matsya, which was the shelter place of the Pandawas of Mahabharata with their capital at Virat Nagar, modern Bairath. Mewati language is the chief dialect of the region and is a variant of Haryanvi and Rajasthani dialects of Hindi. It is notable that Hindu inhabitants of Mewat, though belonging to the same Kshatriya castes to which the Meos belonged before conversion to Islam, are not called Meos. Thus, the word "Meo" is both region-specific and religion-specific. Meos are the inhabitants of Mewat, particularly from the Muslim community. Mewat has the dominating majority of the Meos and they own the major part of the agricultural land of Mewat for centuries.

Two prominent historians, Firishta and Barani, have provided accounts of the Meos and Mewat in their respective works, offering valuable insights into their historical context. This research paper aims to undertake a comparative analysis of Firishta and Barani's accounts, with the goal of uncovering the historical perspectives and narratives presented by these historians. The Meos and Mewat have been the subject of historical narratives by various scholars, with Firishta and Barani's accounts standing out as significant contributions to the understanding of these communities. This research paper has employed a comparative analysis approach, examining Firishta and Barani's accounts of the Meos and Mewat to identify the historical perspectives and narratives presented by these historians.

Being in the close proximity of Delhi, this area suffered a lot the atrocities and plunder of invaders in the past. How and when a large number of them embraced Islam is shrouded in legends and matter of research, and the author has tried his level best to describe this topic for another chapter to this book. It is, however, noteworthy that the area of Mewat had a glorious past and resisted almost all invaders and maintained the cordial relations with the native rulers. It is said that Raja Mangal of Mewat, a Yaduvanshi or Jadon Rajput, married the famous Prithvi Raj's wife's sister. Sultan Balban thoroughly conquered this wild country, and established police outposts in its various parts.

Firishta's Account on Meos and Mewat

Mohammad Kasim Hindu Shah, surnamed Firishta, a Persian historian, was a historian and writer who is best known for his work "*Gulshan-e-Ibrahimi*" and "*Tarikh-i-Firishta*." He was born in born at Astrabad on the borders of Caspian Sea in c. 1570. He came to Bijapur in 1589 and spent the remainder of his life under the protection of the Shah Ibrahim Adil II, who appointed him to write a History of India. Firishta is considered one of the most important historians of the Deccan region. Firishta's works provide valuable insights into the history and culture of the region during the medieval period. Firishta is reputed as one of the most trustworthy of the Oriental historians. His work has come to be regarded as a classic and still maintains a high place as an

authority. His writings are highly regarded for their detailed accounts of the political, social, and cultural developments of the time. Firishta's work continues to be studied and respected by historians and scholars today. Firishta died at Bijapur in about 1611.

Firishta has provided detailed accounts of the political and social dynamics of the Meo community and Mewat region in his work "*Tarikh-i Firishta*." The Mewat region which lies to the south of Delhi surrounding several hill ranges of Arawali Mountain was mostly inhabited by the Meo community. The Meos or Mewatis were by nature, very brave, warring, and hard-working people representing the Rajput characteristics from which they claim their origin. The Meos are from many centuries famous for their predatory character, who at all times gave great trouble to the Turk, Pathan, Mughal, and British rulers at Delhi. The Mewat region is important and rather source of attraction to the scholars of all over the world, due to its rich historical background as well as cultural and traditional peculiarity and complexity. The Arab and Persian chroniclers have given much importance to the people of this area. Perhaps Meos, the inhabitants of this area, has no parallel in the Indian history regarding their fight for independence as well as for their retribution by the rulers.

Mewat Expedition 1247:

Ulugh Khan later known as Ghiyasuddin Balban, the Wazir of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud, and governor of Hansi and Rewari, in which office he distinguished himself in several actions against the inhabitants of Mewat. Firishta writes that it was in 1247, Wazir marched with an army to Ranthambhor and the mountains of Mewat. After chastising the refractory inhabitants returned to Delhi.¹ Firishta don't give more details of this expedition but it is certain that he defeated the rebellious chiefs of Ranthambhor and Mewat. As Mewat is very close and adjoining to Delhi and in route to Ranthambhor, Balban might have faced much resistance in Mewat region. Both the rebellious Mewatis and royal armies must have met a heavy loss.

Mewat Expedition 1260:

Firishta says that Ulugh Khan or Balban, by the King's command, led an army into the mountainous country of Siwalik, and also towards Ranthambhor, where the rajas and rajputs of Mewat had begun to create disturbances; and having collected a numerous body of horse and foot, plundered and burnt the country. At the Wazir's approach, they retired into strong posts among the mountains, where, being attacked and routed, the Wazir continued to ravage their country four months with fire and sword. The rajputs (Mewatis), thus rendered desperate, collected all their forces, and rushed down from the mountains on the Mohammadans. The Wazir, who saw the storm descending, had scarcely time to make his arrangements for receiving them. The attack was violent and terrible, and it was not without much difficulty that the Vizier kept his men together; but as the assaults of the enemy became more feeble towards midday (till which time the Mohammadans had acted only on the defensive), the Wazir caused his troops to attack in their turn, and before evening he succeeded in driving the enemy, with great slaughter, back to the hills. The loss of the Mohammadans in this action was considerable, and many brave officers were killed. Of the Hindus (Mewatis), above 10,000 fell, and 200 of their chiefs were made prisoners, besides a great number of common soldiers. The Wazir having by this action relieved the fort of Ranthambhor, which had been besieged for some months, returned victorious to Delhi. The captive chiefs were ordered to be put to death, and their followers condemned to perpetual slavery.²

Mewat Expedition 1265-66:

Firishta writes about another expedition of Mewat by Ulugh Khan in 1265-66. In the course of this year, an army was ordered to extirpate a plundering banditti of Mewatis, who had occupied an extensive tract about eighty miles south-east of the capital, towards the hills, from whence they used, in former reigns, to make incursions even to the gates of Delhi. It is said, that in this expedition above 100,000 Mewatis were put to the sword; and the army, being supplied with hatchets and other implements, cleared away the woods for the circumference of 100 miles. The tract thus cleared afterwards proved excellent arable land, and became well cultivated.³

Barani's Account on Meos and Mewat

Ziauddin Barani was a 14th century Indian historian, political thinker, and Islamic scholar. He was born in present-day Baran or Bulandshahar in Uttar Pradesh, India, and served as a high-ranking official in the Delhi Sultanate under several rulers. Barani is known for his important historical work "*Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*," which provides a detailed account of the reign of Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq. Barani's writings are valued for their insights into the political and social history of the Delhi Sultanate, as well as his perspectives on governance and statecraft. His work is considered an essential source for understanding the political dynamics and administrative policies of the medieval Indian subcontinent. In addition to his historical contributions, Barani was also a prominent figure in the intellectual and literary circles of his time, and his ideas continue to be studied and debated by historians and scholars interested in the medieval history of India.

Ziauddin Barani, offered his perspectives on the socio-political landscape of medieval India, including the Meos and Mewat, in his writings such as "*Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*" and "*Fatwa-i-Jahandari*." "*Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*" is very much quoted by subsequent authors, and is the chief source from which Firishta draws his account of the period. He had provided detailed accounts of the political and social dynamics of the Meo community and Mewat region in his work "*Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*". Ziauddin Barani, the author of this history, and an earnest well wisher of the Mohammadans, declares that what he has written upon the life and actions of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban he himself heard from his father and grandfather, and from men who held important offices under that sovereign.

Mewat Expedition 1265-66:

Barani mentions the Balban's third expedition and by his writings it seems that Barani was unaware of Balban earlier expedition of Mewat. He says that towards the end of the first year of his reign (1265-66) Ghiyasuddin Balban employed himself in routing out Mewatis, whom no one had interfered with since the days of Shamsuddin. The turbulence of the Mewatis had grown in the neighbourhood of Delhi, through the dissolute habits and negligence of the elder sons of Shamsuddin, and the incapacity of the youngest, Nasiruddin. At night they used to come prowling into the city, giving all kinds of trouble, depriving the people of their rest; and they plundered the country houses in the neighbourhood of the city. Barani says that the daring of the Mewatis in the neighbourhood of Delhi was carried to such an extent that the western gates (*Darwazae Simte Qibla*) of the city were shut at afternoon prayer, and no one dared to go out of the city in that direction after that hour, whether he travelled as a pilgrim or with the display of a sovereign. At afternoon prayer the Mewatis would often come to the *Sar Hauz*, and assaulting the water-carriers and the girls who were fetching water, they would strip them and carry off their clothes. These daring acts of the Mewatis had caused a great ferment in Delhi.⁴

Barani further mentions that in the year of his accession, the Sultan felt the repression of the Mewatis to be the first of his duties, and for a whole year he was occupied in overthrowing them and in scouring the jungles, which he effectually accomplished. Great numbers of Mewatis were put to the sword. The Sultan built a fort at Gopalgarh and established several posts in the vicinity of the city, which he placed in the charge of Afghans, with assignments of land (for their maintenance). In this campaign one hundred thousand soldiers of the royal army were slain by the Mewatis (*Yak Lakhi Bandaee Khas Sultan As Mewan Shaheed Shud*), and the number of Mewatis were also killed by the royal forces. From this time the city was delivered from the attacks of the Mewatis.⁵

The Afghan soldiers, who were appointed for maintenance of law and order and administration in Mewat region, also cleared away the jungles around Delhi. The tract thus cleared was considerable and became well cultivated. Balban gave the town and areas to the distinguished chiefs with the direction to lay waste and destroy the villages of the marauders, to slay the men, to make prisoners of the women and children, to clear away the jungle, and to suppress all lawless proceedings. The noblemen set about the work with strong forces, and they soon put down the daring of the rebels.

Conclusion:

This examination provided insights into the socio-cultural and political dynamics of the Meos and Mewat as portrayed by these historians, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities of historical representation and the diverse experiences of these communities in medieval India. This study contributed to a nuanced understanding of the complexities of historical representation and the diverse experiences of the Meos and Mewat in medieval India, shedding light on the socio-cultural and political dynamics of these communities during that period.

References:

1. John Briggs (1829). *History of the Rise of the Mohammadan Power in India, Till the Year 1612*, (Eng trans. of *Tarikh-i-Firishta* by Mohammad Qasim Hindu Shah Firishta, reprint at Low Price Pub. New Delhi), Vol. I, London, p. 131. (Haig mentions that it was the year of 1249, when Balban was employed in chastising the turbulent people of Mewat, the district to the south of Delhi, and in an unsuccessful attempt to recover Ranthambhor, which had been restored by the Hindus since it had been dismantled by Raziya's troops, and was now held by Nahar Deo. Wolseley Haig (1928). *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III, Cambridge, p. 67.)
2. Briggs Firishta, *op. cit.* p. 135. (Haig mentions two expedition in the same year 1260. He says that the Meos of Mewat, to the south of the capital, were in revolt and the latter had carried off a large number of Balban's camels, without which the army could hardly have taken the field. In 1260 the Meos expiated by a terrible punishment a long series of crimes. For some years past they had infested the roads in the neighborhood of the capital and depopulated the villages of the Bayana district, and had extended their depredations eastwards nearly as far as the base of the Himalaya. Their impudent robbery of the transport camels on the eve of a projected campaign (around 1258) had aroused Balban's personal resentment, and on January 29, 1260, he left Delhi and in a single forced march reached the heart of Mewat and took the Meos completely by surprise. For twenty days the work of slaughter and pillage continued, and the ferocity of the soldiery was stimulated by the reward of one silver *tanga* for every head and two for every living prisoner. On March 9 the army returned to the capital with the chieftain who had stolen the camels, other leading men of the tribe to the number of 250, 1-12 horses, and 2,100,000 silver *tangas*. Two days later the prisoners were publicly massacred. Some were trampled to death by elephants, others were cut to pieces, and more than a hundred were flayed alive by the scavengers of the city. Later in the year those who had saved themselves by flight returned to their homes and ventured on reprisals by infesting the highways and slaughtering wayfarers. Balban, having ascertained from spies the haunts and movements of the bandits, surprised them as before by a forced march, surrounded them, and put to the sword 12,000 men, women and children. Wolseley Haig, *op. cit.* pp. 72-73.)
3. *Ibid.*, p. 142. (Haig narrates the story that the Meos had recovered from their severe chastisement and infested the jungle which had been permitted to grow unchecked round Delhi. They plundered travelers on the roads, entered the city by night, and robbed the inhabitants in their houses, and even by day robbed and stripped water-carriers and women drawing water from the large reservoirs just within the city walls, so that it became necessary to shut the gates on the western side of the city immediately after the hour of afternoon prayer. During the year following his accession Balban was occupied in exterminating the robbers. The jungle was cleared, the Meos lurking in it were put to death,

a fort was built to command the approaches to the city from the west, and police posts were established on all sides. Wolseley Haig, *op. cit.* pp. 72-73.)

4. Elliot & Dowson (1871), *History of India, as told by its own Historians, The Mohammadan Period*, (Eng. Trans of *Tarikh-i-Firozshahi* of Ziauddin Barani), Vol. III, London, pp. 103-4; Sayed Muinul Haque (2004). Urdu trans. of *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* of Ziauddin Barani, Lahore, p. 104.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5; Sayed Muinul Haque (2004). Urdu trans. of *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* of Ziauddin Barani, Lahore, p. 104.