Timurid Concept of Sovereignty

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The principles defining the role and standing of a monarchy in a polity may be referred to as the theory of kingship. A study of these principles is important for understanding the basic character and inner working of a monarchical state. However, there exist few studies of this nature regarding the despotic states of Medieval India. One such study is found in R.P. Tripathi's, Some Aspects of Muslim Administration.1

The absolute traditions of sovereignty and the combination of spiritual and temporal rulership were developed at many courts as a defence mechanism in support of king's authority. The concept of kingship and deification of sovereigns are reflected with the beginning of system of monarchy. Although the literature of ancient and medieval central Asia gives enough information in this respect.2

In almost all the states of orient, faith and kingship are interdependent as is well certified by Persian sources. The concept of sovereignty which was developed by the Sasanids in West and Central Asia appreciated and adopted in India by Balban. Under the Samanids, the ruler was a "despotic, absolute and autocratic who was answerable to God." The Sasanids believed that the rightfull rulers are endowed with divine effulgence or farr-i-yazdis.3

Changez tried to enjoy unlimited powers unlike the Muslims(all over the Islamic world) whose autocracy was certified by sharia urf - o- ada (holy law and customary practices). He combined in himself the temporal and spiritual authority and described by the chroniclers as "scourage" or "flial" of God on the one hand and a perfect example of "universal generosity", on the other hand like the Persian concept of Mobid- i Mobidan. He was given the title of Ssuto Bogda (Highly lofty God) and his image used to be hung on the camp doors.4

The divine theory of Kingship started with the beginning of the Persian - Islamic and Turco-Mongol sovereignty from ninth to seventeenth century.5 There are evidences of divine theory of sovereignty in the declaration of changez as the representative of God on earth and that he transferred sovereignty to his descendants. The Secret History mentions several instances of divine intervention in Changez khan's early cases.6

It appears that the Mongols like most nomadic people, believed in ancestral worship which became all the more sacred and fervent in case of changez due to his military and political achievements. Juvaini refers to the human sacrifices offered to changez khan's spirit.7 The concept of divine kingship existing both in the Turkish domain of the 6th and 7th centuries and in pre-Mongol steppe domain as reflected from orkhon inscriptions has also influenced chingiz's ideals of sovereignty. It was also declared by Shaman Kokchu that the blue sky (Mongo kekok Tengri) has made Changez his representative.8

The laws of changez khan were important in the sense that it were compulsory for the people. These laws were very severe and draconian and its enforcement regardless of the victims status can be expressed in Juvaini's own words. "Their obedience and submissiveness is such that if there be a commander of hundred thousand between whom and the khan there is distance of sunrise and sunset and if he commits some fault the khan despatches a single horse man to punish him after the manner prescribed; if his head has been demanded, he cuts it off, and gold if required, he takes it from him."9

3. Ibid. P.21.
4. Ibid, P.17.
It shows that such an undeniable submission was inherent in Mongol concept of sovereignty. Minhaj says that" if you obedient to my mandates, it behoveth that if I should command the sons to slay the fathers you should all obey." 10 Timur claimed Alan Qua and her celestial paramour as common ancestors with Changez Khan. Belonging to this lineage he believed himself heir to Changez khan and projected himself as the guardian of the divinely commanded empire. He did not claim sovereignty in his own name but acted as an agent of a puppet pretender to the throne of a renewed and reunited Mongol empire. However,he presented himself as the executive agent for the changez khanid mandate to rule, this status involved a form of sovereignty which was transmitted to his descendants, who ruled in their own names. 11

In this regard, Timur and his descendants manipulated the complex social, political and cultural traditions of their Turco-Mongol heritage to provide an atmosphere of legitimacy for their rule. He issued his orders and had the khutba read on Friday in mosques in the name of a descendant of changez khan. He followed the adherents of changez khan's code of law, the shrewd political maneuver. 12

Timur's theory of sovereignty and views regarding the methods of administration are well mentioned in the comments given in various sources. Yezdi has also tried to glorify Timur as one with divine status. So he wanted to legalise his political action through the use of the concept and traditions of the Mongol empire. He also used the traditions of Islam and Islamic culture as an instrument of the consolidation of his power. As Barthold observes: " The empire established by Timur was a unique combination of the Turco-Mongolian political and military system with elements of Muslim mainly Persian culture." 13 Timur supported the establishment of a centralized authority but allowed the continuation of the privileges traditionally held by the tribal aristocracy of Central Asia. Prawdi also confirms that Timur established" his empire upon two different and mutually hostile elements of population and upon two conflicting law books" that is Yasa of Changez khan and the sharia. 14

Timur and his successor's deep faith in Tura was a result of his liking of Changiz's political leadership and his own ambitious plans for power. It was the great symbol of high statesmanship, the Tura continued to serve as a beacon to Timur and his successors even in the xiv th-xvth centuries. In spite of his faith in Islam he continued to be great follower of the Turah. In fact from the very beginning of his rule, he organized the administration of his state in accordance with the principles of Yasa. 15 The principles given in Tura were more suitable to Timur's personal ideology who had adopted changizid institutions. 16 A code of conduct and certain laws and regulations were framed by Timur in the style of Changiz khan. 17 Changez has announced to his people that he had made the Yasa to rule them. The Yasa was his code of law, a combination of his own will and the most expedients of tribal customs. It did not contain any religious element and dealt mainly with the political principles and organization of the government, civil and military administration of their state in accordance with the principles of yasa. 18

There was the significance of the Mongol customs and traditions which can not be ignored. In this reference the Tura - i changezi which was considered a constitutional code by the Mughals is important. The influence of the Yasa on the Timurid state can be seen from the observation made by Babur in his account :"My fore fathers and family had always sacredly observed the rules of Changiz. In their parties, their courts, their festivals and their entertainments, in their sitting down and rising up, they never acted contrary to the Tura-i Changezi. It certainly had no divine authority, so that
   
   any one should be obliged to conform to them; every man who has a good conduct ought to observe it. If the forefather had done what is wrong, the son ought to change it for what is right."18

   Several other references in the contemporary sources to the observance and respect for the Tura in the royal court, administrative procedure and social etiquette that confirm to the fact that the impact of the Mongol traditions and law was indelible on the Mongol empire.19 Turko-Mongol theory was based on the ideas and traditions left by Timur the Turk and Changez Khan the Mongol. The king, in the Mongol traditions was considered some thing higher than simply a leader. The Mongols believed in the semi-divine origin of the family of changez khan. It was the popular belief that he was the son of light.20

   The Great khan - Mughal khan was different from the Khalifa of the Islamic theory. The Great khan purely a political and military leader with no religious obligations binding on him. It was no part of his duty to enforce a unchangeable code of divine or quasi divine system of law as was the case with khalifa. The Mughal sovereign had no such limitations. He was a political sovereign pure and simple. The theory had gained reality from the traditions and conventions among the Mughals which oriented towards greater centralization.21

   As changiz had taken his divine theory of some thing from the uighurs, the Mongols believed in the absolute power of the khan which is also proved from the following words of Mongol khan," In the sky there can only be one sun or one moon; how can there be two masters on earth." The concept of sovereignty continued even under Timur who pronounced that whole expanse of the inhabited part of the world is not worthy of two kings; since God is one, therefore the viceregent of God on earth should also be one." At another place Timur had declared that" as a women can not have two husbands and empire should also have only one sovereign".22 The king's authority in the Timurid polity was not subject to the sanction of any outside power. Timur did not consider to recognize the legal authority of the caliph. It does not however mean that he exercised the absolute power. He himself showed considerable regard for his nobles and officials and has emphasized the importance of consulting the wise.23

   He was firm believer in absolutism and never gave undue importance to Kurultai (the Mongol consulting assembly). His own decisions were final and unequivocal.24 During the early years of Timur there were several factors which made the existence of puppet khan of political necessity. The chaghtai nobles had largely supported Timur but the Mongols refused to give assistance.25 He continued to call himself an Amir of the Turk or the Shah of Muslims rather than desiring to be addressed as the khan of the Mongols.26

   After the death of Mahmud, Timur did not care to appoint any other khan and at the end of his reign money was coined in the name of the dead khan.27 The only royal prerogative enjoyed by the khan was the mansur of Timur used to be issued in the name of these khans.28 Some of the farmans are in the name of Timur. The title khaqan appears in these farmans along with the name of Timur. But he never adopted this title, the authenticity of such farmans is rather doubtful.29

25. Mirza Haider Doughlat, Tarikh-i Rashidi, op.cit, vol, i, PP.83-84.
26. Ibid.
27. V.V. Barthold, op.cit., v, ii, P.25.
in reality prisoners" and kept cloistered in Samarqand."31This view is further supported by Ibn - Arab Shah.32 A close study reveals that the removal of the name of puppet khans from the khutba and coins and mansurs had started much earlier. The only successor of Timur, Khalil Sultan was the first Timurid ruler who adopted the title of khan. The coins were also issued in his name.33 The names of the puppet khan did not appear frequently by this time on the Timurid coins and in the khutba. How ever some of the mansurs of Ulugh Beg issued mention the name of a certain Satuq khan. Tarikha-i Rashidi and Abdullah Nama refer to the deposition of this khan by Ulugh Beg in 1428.34

From the facts recorded in the various sources one may conclude that Timur had continued to maintain his supremacy over the khan. All the affairs of the state were carried out by Timur independently. The treasury and the army which are the real strength of the king were also controlled by Timur himself.35 In dealing with external powers Timur always behaved like a Supreme despot. The Ottoman Sultans always addressed him as khan-i Muazzam in his letters and made no reference to the puppet khans.36

It should be noted here that Timurid had simultaneously used both (sharia and Tura) alternately in accordance with the political need of the situation.37 The Timurid concept of sovereignty reflects the divine concept of sovereignty also. The king declared himself to be the temporal head as well as a spiritual leader and a defender of Islam and a" shadow of God on earth."38 But unlike Timur, Shahrukh regarded himself as an Islamic ruler for whose actions the rule of the sharia were practiced and not the Mongol traditions.39 Ibn Arab Shah recorded that Shahrukh repealed the laws and customs of Changez khan and ordained that they should make his rule flow along the streams of the laws of Islam.40 Contradictory information is given by Haider Doughlat that Tura and Tuzuk were followed.41

In practice the Timurids enjoyed full powers and were sovereign in their own jurisdiction, although in theory they had left the fiction of the ultimate sovereignty of the Great khan. It was only with the accession of Abu Said Mirza, the grand son of Timur introduced a great change in the policy of Timur. He gave rude shock to the Mughal sovereign Yunus khan" the old orders of things had been changed ,you must lay aside all your pretensions that is to say, the mandates will be issued in the name of the dynasty" (of Timur) because"I am padshah in my own right."42 In fact he remained contented with the title of Sultan Mirza.43 This shows that after the formal discarding of the sovereignty of the khan, Timurid rulers did not adopt the title of khaqan.44

It appears that the practice of installing puppet khan was merely a political game. The step had been taken by Timur and his successors to mobilize the support of forces and to use them finally to establish their own power and to

30. V.V. Barthold, op.cit, ii, P.85.
32. Al Hasan Arabi, Anthony the Armenian, purchase and pilgrims, Glasgow, vol. xi, PP.45-68.
33. V.V. Barthold, op.cit, ii, P.25.
34. Mansura Haider, The Sovereign, op.cit,P.74.
35. V.V. Barthold, op.cit, vol, ii P.25.
36. Ibn-i Arab Shah, op.cit, PP.91-93.
40. Ibn -i Arab Shah, op.cit, P.229.
42. Ibid, vol, PP.83-84.
44. Iqtidar Alam Khan, op.cit, P.109.
legitimize their rule over a territory which was usurped from the Mongols. The existence of these puppet khans could not however, influence the basic structure of the Timurid state and absolute positions of its rulers.45 As Berthold observes in the empire founded by Changez khan the principle in force was that 'the empire belonged not to the ruler, but to the ruling family.'46 The sentence attributed to Berthold is actually an observation of Juvaini. The context in which this sentence appears only gives stress of the need of an absolute sovereign, while at the same time assuring a proper division of the territory for the benefit of the others in the family. It appears that Changez had not only appointed one of his son as khan but had also emphasized the need for a sovereign whom all others should obey.47

Soon after under the old Mongol custom of diving tribes among the princes was transformed into a territorial division of the empire.48 All those who claim descent from Changez khan would be included in the royal family in accordance with the Mongol code. This would naturally make the circle of persons of royal lineage and thus sharing sovereignty in a Mongol state very large.49 Apparently the empire and rulership belong to only one person who was the khan, the fact was that all the sons, grandsons and uncles of the khan shared the reaches and the country. In this regard Berthold himself writes that "one single political administration, acting in the name of Great khan, prevailed throughout the whole empire."50

As regards Babur, he took the notion of sovereignty from Abu Said Mirza and assumed himself the high and distinctive title of Padshah.51 He himself regarded sovereign in his own right and did not require to legalise his position from outside authority. He also followed the rules of the Great Mongol chief for the etiquette to be observed when meeting relations and the ceremonies to be observed at the time of setting out on a campaign.52 He was out of his ancestry and believed in the inherent right of the Timurids to rule. He was believer in the hereditary right to sovereignty. In his letter to Sultan Said regarding the succession to the authority in Badakhshan he laid emphasis on the 'hereditary rights' of their heir.53 Babur's claim to the title of khaqan after 1526 was the tendency on the part of Timurids to revive certain Changezi traditions which has been disappeared since Timur's time.54

The above facts and discussions indicate that Timurid sovereignty is absolutism which had been taken into consideration by Timur in the polity. The fact is that the power enjoyed by Timur with a nominal counterpart were those of a sovereign despot and therefore absolutism had remained an important factor of his idea of sovereignty developed himself.

45. Mansura Haider, The Sovereign, op.cit. P. 5
47. Mansura Haider, The Sovereign, op.cit. P. 75.
50. Mansura Haider, The Sovereign, op.cit. PP.75-76.
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