

Hello there,

This is me Dr. Brian Mendonca, Assistant Professor, Carmel College for Women, Nuvem, Goa. I'll be with you on this session of travel writing where we will focus on this beautiful text, 'The Court of Muhammad bin Tughlaq' by Ibn Battuta (1304-1369).

I'm sure you must have heard of so many travel writers. I'm a travel writer myself. But to listen to the works and to read what people have written before you is something that is literally an out of the world experience.

We have to travel back to the 14th century to look at the writings of Ibn Battuta. There are other travelers who come to mind like Fa Hien (337-422) and Hiuen Tsang (602-664). When you look at the effort they made to travel across continents, braving so many perils you have great admiration for them.

I'm sure all of us are travel writers. I'm sure all of us love traveling, don't we? Which is why. therein lies the logic of introducing this paper called travel writing. Isn't it exciting?

In this module the sequence will be as follows.

- a few opening comments on travel writing
 - a glimpse into the life of Ibn Battuta.
 - then we dip into some very brief pages from Battuta on Delhi.
- Section 1 is pages 11 to 13, followed by Section 2, Section 3
- the conclusion

INTRODUCTION

It is pertinent to note that *The City Improbable: Writings on Delhi* is edited by Khushwant Singh. It is a collection of beautiful samples of writings on Delhi. We have to put Ibn Battuta in this perspective.

I'm sure many of us have visited Delhi. And there is a saying which goes that if there is paradise on earth in Persian, the saying goes '*Hamin-asto, hamin-asto hamin-asto*' means 'It is here, it is here, it is here.'

On to our exploration of Delhi. The learning outcomes would be:

- to appreciate Battuta's account as an example of travel writing.
- to become sensitive to Battuta's perspective of medieval India.
- to evaluate 'The Court of Muhammad bin Tughlaq' as an expression of its time
- to always be constantly aware that travelers look at places in a different way.

If you pause to consider the genre of travel writing it is comparatively new. Have you ever thought that there is value in traveling for its own sake? We are always so much in a hurry to get to our destination. But there is a saying which goes: *Jo maza safar mein, voh manzil mein nahin*. [The pleasure to be found on the journey, is not there in the destination.] Travel writing gives you an opportunity to discover various cultures and places. It doesn't depend on secondary material. It depends on your first hand account of what you see. Today, particularly travel writing has wide acceptability on social media platforms. We must understand that travel writing allows us to move across time and space.

IBN BATTUTA

Ibn Battuta was born in 1304 in Tangiers, Morocco. Interestingly, for all the traveling he did, he was born and died in the same place. In 1325, he begins his travels and goes to Mecca. This is the overland route via North Africa and Egypt. He arrives in Delhi in 1334. At a time, when historians say, Delhi was depopulated following a diktat of the Sultan to get away from Delhi. Let us see why.

Being a mercurial king, Battuta was always in fear of Tughlaq, so he left Delhi on some pretext to go to China in 1341. He returned in 1354 to Morocco, where his Sultan asked him to write an account of his travels in Arabic. It is important to note that Ibn Battuta is giving us an account from the perspective of a Muslim. It was his endeavor to understand how Muslims across the world were living their lives, were continuing their practices, and most importantly, continuing their worship of their faith.

Now over to Muhammad bin Tughlaq. He was Sultan of Delhi from 1325 to 1351. When Battuta arrives in Delhi, he has extensively traveled in Syria, Iraq, Persia, Oman, and East Africa. Can you imagine the wealth of experience that Battuta brings to his writing? So at this moment, we are confronted with an issue. Are we interested in Tughlaq or are we interested in Battuta?

Because Ibn Battuta's writing is so compelling I would suggest we focus on both. It was Tughlaq, who was impressed by Battuta's scholarship and made him a *qazi*. He worked for no less than seven years for the Sultan till 1341.

THE COURT OF MUHAMMAD BIN TUGHLAQ

Now we dive straight into the three sections which the excerpts contain. In the first section of the text under study, the location is Delhi and the theme is the grandeur of Delhi. Delhi is stated to be the largest city in the entire Muslim Orient. So this is a meticulous documentation of the Muslim world, and in this section you also notice how Battuta compares the Qutub Minar to be the best or the biggest in the

entire Muslim Empire.

How would he make a statement like that? He does so because he has traveled to the various Muslim enclaves. He has traveled to the Empire where the Muslims held domination and so he brings us the comparative analysis of Delhi with other places in the world.

He goes on to say that there are four cities of Delhi and for some of you who have traveled to Delhi, you can enjoy the ambience, and the historic city, and the mystery of these ruins even today. It was the old city (i) which was captured in 1188. Siri Fort (ii) is as bustling as ever even if you see it today. The name given was 'Abode of the Caliphate.' Tughlaq Abad (iii) on the outskirts of modern Delhi was founded by Sultan Tughlaq, the father of Mohammed bin Tughlaq. Jahanpanah(iv) is the residence of Muhammad Shah.

As we proceed further in our first section, the description of the cathedral mosque is given. That seems to be a bit of an oxymoron, because a cathedral belongs to a different faith and a mosque belongs to a different faith. But that is how it is explained here, and we have to understand the limitations of translation due to his writing in Arabic - and this is a translation of the Arabic.

As we move on, you have the description of the reservoir of Sultan Lalmish. 'The court of Muhammad bin Tughlaq' then moves on to the second section where you have an inkling of what goes on within the court of the king. You have a description of what goes on in the court of the king. The location is the court and the theme is a description of the grandeur of the palace and the arrangements therein. In particular, we are enlightened as to their description and placement of Dar Sara and the function of three doors. You might shiver when you notice that the first door is where the executioners and the flute players sit.

The second door of the Dar Sara provides the entry to the Audience Hall. Finally, nothing is possible without the media, so the third door is the door which entertains, the scribes or the people who document what is going on in the court of Muhammad bin Tughlaq. Which also alerts us to the fact that travel writing allows us a documentation of things which would otherwise be under erasure, things that people might forget. The Audience Hall and the protocol of entry are then described, the customs of receiving the donors, and the description of fanfare at the Sultan's return from the journey.

In the final section of 'The Court of Muhammad bin Tughlaq' the location is Daulatabad. Daulatabad today falls in central Maharashtra. You would be wondering how come we have shifted our location? Well, it was Muhammad bin Tughlaq who - in what people consider a maverick move - orders his subjects to move from Delhi to Daulatabad. This was in 1329, -the subject of which has also been a play. A drama by the renowned Kannada playwright Girish Karnad. His play *Tughlaq* speaks about this move of the Sultan. The inhabitants were forced to leave Delhi. Because of this, some sent the Sultan insults. This enraged him.

He insisted that they leave in three days. Those who didn't had to face the consequences. One blind man was dragged from Delhi to Tughlaqabad. Nothing really remained of him.

CONCLUSION

We conclude this foray into the fragment of Muhammad bin Tughlaq by saying that the descriptions of Delhi and Tughlaqabad

We conclude by saying the fragments which we see gives us a description of Delhi and Tughlaqabad. Batuta is important for his objectivity, his censure and his vivid description. Today we continue to read him because we want to know something of the past and the perspective of the Muslim world - the *Rihla* - which only he could provide. I leave you with the references which you might find useful in your journey in discovering Ibn Battuta and Muhammad bin Tughlaq. Thank you and all the best.

Rihla: (Arabic) Medieval Islamic notion of a written account of 'travel in search of knowledge.'