State Failure and Successful Leadership in Medieval India

Vasileios Syros

Abstract
State failure has been an enduring topic in the history of political thought. This article will revisit modern debates on the characteristics of state failure and the factors conducive to successful leadership by focusing on political ideas that evolved in fourteenth-century India. I will discuss two works with the same title, i.e., Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī (The History of Fīrūz Shāh) of the distinguished historians of the Delhi Sultanate period Žiyāʾ al-Dīn Barānī (ca. 1285–1357) and Shams Sirāj ʻAfīf (d. 1399) about Sultans Muḥammad b. Tughluq and (his successor) Fīrūz Shāh as instantiations of state failure and good governance, respectively. The deployment of the concept of state failure has often been construed as an effort to impose a political straitjacket; the examination of authors like Barānī and ‘Afīf demonstrates the value of reflecting on lessons from history and exploring how societies in the past evolved their own patterns of thinking about effective or failed leadership.

Keywords
State failure, successful leadership, medieval India, Delhi Sultanate, Žiyāʾ al-Dīn Barānī, Shams Sirāj ʻAfīf, Muḥammad b. Tughluq, Fīrūz Shāh

The phenomenon of state failure has been an enduring topic in the history of political thought. This article will revisit modern debates on the characteristics of state failure and the factors conducive to successful leadership by focusing on political ideas that evolved in fourteenth-century India. I will discuss two works with the same title, that is, Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī (The History of Fīrūz Shāh) of the distinguished historians of the Delhi Sultanate period Žiyāʾ al-Dīn Barānī (ca. 1285–1357) and Shams Sirāj ʻAfīf (d. 1399) about Sultans Muḥammad b. Tughluq

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Barānī came from a family with long-standing ties to the Delhi sultans and dignitaries. He served as boon companion (nadīm) and confidant of Sultan Muḥammad b. Tughluq (ca. 1290–1351, r. 1325–51) for approximately 17.5 years and was an integral actor in the political life of the Delhi Sultanate. His main works also include the Fatāwā-i Jahāndārī (Precepts of [World] Rulership), a manual of statecraft. In the History of Fīrūz Shāh, Baranī acknowledges Muḥammad b. Tughluq’s greatness as a leader and enumerates some of his exceptional qualities: he projects him as being generous, ambitious, keen to implement innovations in terms of administrative regulations and the management of government affairs, having good judgement, being perceptive,

1 Mohammad Habib, ‘Life and Thought of Zīyā-uddin Baranī’, Medieval India Quarterly 3 (1958): 197–252; represented in Mohammad Habib and Afsar Umar Salim Khan, The Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate (Including a Translation of Ziauddin Barani’s Fatawa-i Jahandari, Circa, ad 1358–59) (Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, [1961]), 117–72, and in Politics and Society during the Early Medieval Period: Collected Works of Mohammad Habib, ed. Khaliq A. Nizami, vol. 2 (New Delhi: People’s Pub. House, 1981): 286–366. On Baranī as a historian, see M. Athar Ali, Mughal India: Studies in Polity, Ideas, Society, and Culture (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), ch. ‘The State in Islamic Thought in India’, 119–28, esp. 122–4; Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, Perso-Arabic Sources of Information on the Life and Conditions in the Sultanate of Delhi (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1992), ch. ‘Baranī’s Account of the Sultans of Delhi in the First Version of Tārīkh-i Firuzshahi’ (151–66); idem, ‘Fresh Light on Diyā’ al-Dīn Baranī: The Doyen of the Indo-Persian Historians of Medieval India’, Islamic Culture 63 (1989): 69–85; Peter Hardy, ‘Didactic Historical Writing in Indian Islam: Ziyā al-Dīn Baranī’s Treatment of the Reign of Sultan Muhammad Tughluq (1324–51)’, in Islam in Asia, ed. Yohanan Friedman (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 38–59; idem, ‘The Muslim Historians of the Delhi Sultanate: Is What They Say Really What They Mean?’ Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan 9 (1964): 59–63; idem, Historians of Medieval India: Studies in Indo-Muslim Historical Writing (London: Luzac, 1960; repr. 1966), 20–39; ‘Baranī’s Theory of the History of the Delhi Sultanate’, Indian Historical Review 7 (1981): 99–115; Harbans Mukhia, Historians and Historiography During the Reign of Akbar (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1976), ch. ‘Historiography During the Sultanate Period’, 1–40; Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, ‘Ziya-ud-Din Barani’, in Historians of Medieval India, ed. Mohibbul Hasan (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1968), 37–52; Syed Moinul Haq, Barani’s History of the Tughluqs (Being a Critical Study of the Relevant Chapters of Tārīkh-i Firuz-Shahi) (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, [1959]). On Muhammad b. Tughluq’s rule, see Peter Jackson, The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 255–77; A Comprehensive History of India, vol. 5: The Delhi Sultanat (s.d. 1206–1526), ed. Mohammad Habib and Khaliq Ahmad Nizami (Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1970), 484–565; and, in general, Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, Religion and Politics in India During the Thirteenth Century (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

2 For further discussion, see, for example, Vasileios Syros, ‘Baranī’s Fatāwā-i Jahāndārī, the Diseases of the Body Politic, and Machiavelli’s accidenti’, Philosophy East and West 62 (2012): 545–73; Muzaffar Alam, The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200–1800 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 31–46; as well as Nilanjana Sarkar, ““The Voice of Maḥmūd”: The Hero in Ziyā Barani’s Fatāwā-i Jahāndārī”, Medieval History Journal 9 (2006): 327–56; idem. The Political Identity of the Delhi Sultanate, 1200–1400: A Study of Ziyā al-Dīn Barani’s Fatāwā-i Jahāndārī (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2005); Irfan Habib, ‘Ziyā Baranī’s Vision of the State’, Medieval History Journal 2 (1999): 19–36; Peter Hardy, ‘Unity and Variety in Indo-Islamic and Perso-Islamic Civilization: Some Ethical and Political Ideas of Diyā’ al-Dīn Baranī of Delhi, of al-Ghazālī and of Naṣīr al-Dīn Tūsī Compared’, Iran 16 (1978): 127–35.
able to read people, eloquent, and displaying valor and unique military skills. But he also describes all the manifestations of political failure caused by the Sultan’s flimsy character, egregious miscalculations and ill-conceived plans. Muḥammad overreached himself and waged wars that eroded the economic foundations and military prowess of the Sultanate. Baranī’s History features a detailed narrative of the first 6 years of the reign of Fīrūz Shāh (1309–88, r. 1351–88), Muḥammad’s successor: this work reads as an enthusiastic praise of Fīrūz Shāh’s qualities as the agency that sought to redress the catastrophic failures of his predecessor and restore domestic tranquillity and order.

Baranī offers a concise and perspicuous description of the ripple effect that Muhammad’s autocratic style of government had on the social fabric and the economy of the Delhi Sultanate. He registered and analysed a series of policy decisions, blunders and gross errors in judgement that caused unending unrest and dissonance in the Indian society. His work is the distillation of a well-articulated corpus of reflections on the indices and correlates of what could be perceived as utter state failure due to Muḥammad’s lack of restraint and moderation, which led to unnecessary and excessive violence: Baranī writes that famines, epidemics, insurgencies, exorbitant punishments and popular resentment threw India into political and social convulsion. Those events wreaked havoc on the various constituents of society, including the higher strata, the common folk, scholars, mystics, clerks, soldiers, merchants, farmers and workers, as well as those without employment. A great number of people died due to epidemics, lack of foodstuffs, excessive punishments and mass executions. A large part of the population was compelled to flee to distant provinces and other countries, and others went into hiding in the jungles of mountains.

Following Fīrūz Shāh’s ascendancy, Baranī faced charges of being involved in a conspiracy against the new sultan and was detained for a short period. His critique of Muḥammad b. Tughluq’s failings and his narrative about Fīrūz Shāh was motivated by the effort to regain Fīrūz Shāh’s favour. Baranī’s laudatory presentation of Fīrūz Shāh’s leadership style is complemented by the work with the same title (Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī) of another major historian of the Delhi Sultanate period, Shams Sirāj ‘Afīf, which covers the entire period of Fīrūz Shāh’s rule. The scion of a prominent family with close links to the court of the Delhi sultans, ‘Afīf was, like Baranī, deeply enmeshed in the power structures of the Delhi Sultanate and an acute observer of the political scene. ‘Afīf highlights

3 [Zia-i Barani] Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, trans. Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli (Delhi: Primus Books, 2015) (henceforth cited as Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi), 281–6.
4 On Fīrūz Shāh’s reign, consult Jackson, The Delhi Sultanate, 296–306; Ramesh C. Jauhri, Firoz Tughluq (Agra: Shiva Lal Agarwala, [1968]).
5 Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, 350–1.
6 The literature on ‘Afīf’s life and works is sparse. See Ramesh C. Jauhri, Medieval India in Transition—Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi: A First Hand Account (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 2001) (henceforth cited as Medieval India in Transition), Part III ‘Making of a Historian: Afīf and His Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi’ (279–93); idem, ‘Shams Siraj ‘Afīf and His Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi: A Study in [sic] Persian Tradition of Writing History’, in Indo-Persian Cultural Perspectives: Prof. Bhagwat Saroop
the skills and successes of Fīrūz Shah as a political reformer. He provides a vivid testimony to the measures taken by the sultan to alleviate dismay and heal the state from the social pathology that had afflicted Indian society during Muhammad’s tumultuous reign. ‘Affī’s account revolves around the vision of Fīrūz Shāh as the embodiment of all the virtues requisite for salutary royal rule. In this regard, his work shares a number of important features with mirrors of princes and political advice literature, like Baranī’s Precepts of World Rulership. At the same time, ‘Affī’s History lends itself to a different reading as a blueprint that elaborates upon the various techniques employed in the process of reconstructing a failed state. Lastly, a central facet of ‘Affī’s work is the endeavour to illustrate the hazards of war and to emphasize the need for the sovereign to prioritize the welfare of his realm.

Modern Discourse on Failed States

The concept ‘failed state’ emerged in the 1990s in the aftermath of the political crises and military confrontations that broke out after the end of the Cold War. While initially applied to Somalia and the former Yugoslavia, it gained traction and was gradually brought to bear upon various states around the world. The USA-based non-profit organization ‘Fund for Peace’ has proposed a set of general features that pertain to failed states: loss of physical control of its territory or of the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force; erosion of legitimate authority to generate collective decisions; lack of capacity to offer reasonable public services; and an inability to interact with other states as a full member of the international community.

The notion of ‘state failure’ has become increasingly contested in recent scholarship. In addition to the lack of scholarly consensus about a comprehensive...
definition of state failure, there is a tendency to conflate state failure and
government failure: failure of government signifies the general impotence
and limited capacity of a government to guarantee the desirable level of goods and
services for its constituency or to successfully respond to outside (e.g., economic)
pressures. That was the case with the governments of the so-called Portugal, Italy,
Greece and Spain (PIGS) during the Eurozone crisis. Over the past 40 years, there
have been 20 federal government shutdowns in the USA. In the period between
December 2018 and January 2019, the USA experienced the longest shutdown
in its entire history and a prolonged period of political stalemate. But these
developments certainly do suffice to characterize the USA a failed state. After
all, even in the most ‘advanced’ or ‘happiest’ countries, it is possible to detect
symptoms and variations of state or government failure in certain sectors, which
would, nevertheless, not justify subsuming them under the ‘failed state’ rubric.

As Susan Woodward has shown, the notion of the failed state is flawed from
a theoretical, empirical and political point of view. As a conceptual construct, it
is too vague or limited; due to lack of a clear and precise definition, its empirical
underpinnings are disputable; a third problem concerns its use and application in
political terms: its use by centres of power, especially in connection with poorer
nations in the Global South, has elicited negative reactions, since it has been
construed as an attempt to denigrate other countries or send a subtle warning about
a potential intervention. In addition, it has often been deployed as a rhetorical tool
in political debates in countries, which, according to annual rankings, are afflicted
by political or economic malaise and characterized as failed states.9

Charles Call proposed alternatives to the notion of the ‘failed state’ and
cogent concepts, such as ‘fragile’, ‘troubled’ and ‘failing’ state, and challenged
the validity of global evaluations and rankings of failing or fragile states. Call
recommended three alternative categories, that is, capacity gaps, security gaps
and legitimacy gaps, which can occur in a specific state, although not necessarily
simultaneously. A capacity gap arises when the institutions of the state are unable
to supply a minimum of public goods and services to the population. It is, however,
not related to the extent to which a state is characterized by good governance and
democratic politics. A vacuum in security indicates that the state no longer has
the capacity to guarantee a modicum of security in the context of internal armed
conflicts with organized rebel groups. Finally, lack of legitimacy arises when a
substantial part of its political elites and civic body oppose the rules related to the
exercise of power and the accrual and distribution of wealth.10

The purpose of this article is to take a fresh look at these issues and analyse a
set of historical sources that treat the phenomenon of state failure in fourteenth-
century India. While not oblivious to the controversies surrounding the use of

9 Susan L. Woodward, The Ideology of Failed States: Why Intervention Fails (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2017), esp. ch. 2 ‘What’s in a Name?’ (10–25).
10 Charles T. Call, ‘Beyond the “Failed State”: Toward Conceptual Alternatives’, European Journal of
International Relations 17 (2010): 303–26; idem, ‘The Fallacy of the “Failed State”’, Third World
Quarterly 29 (2008): 1491–1507.
the concept, I employ the term ‘state failure’ to refer to a political entity that, due to misgovernment or maladministration, has a limited capacity to deliver basic goods and services to a large portion of its population and has lost what the German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) identified as the quintessence of the state, that is, the monopoly of the legitimate and licit application of physical force within a certain territory (Gewaltmonopol). Although I insist on the use of the term ‘failed state’, I advocate a more eclectic approach that draws upon the conceptual categories introduced by Charles Call. Lacunas in capacity, security and legitimacy are key predictors and indicators of state failure, although, as Call rightly notes, they can occur in different phases of a government or ruler’s tenure and not concurrently. Moreover, Call’s effort to dissociate these categories from the existence of a system of democratic governance is a salutary step towards expanding the analytical framework for the study of state failure that can encompass diverse regime forms and defy the limitations of the nation state paradigm.

Premodern Indian and Islamic political theory contains a wealth of ideas about these topics that relate to diverse projects for large-scale empire-building under rulers like Ashoka and Akbar.

For further discussion, see, for example, Rajeev Bhargava, ‘Forms of Secularity Before Secularism: The Political Morality of Ashoka and Akbar’, in Worlds of Difference, ed. Said Amir Arjomand and Elisa P. Reis (London: SAGE, 2013), 94–120; idem, ‘The “Secular Ideal” before Secularism: A Preliminary Sketch’, in Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age, ed. Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 159–80.
with the grim realization that the ideal of the perfect caliphate was irrevocably lost, and that a regime based on brute force was preferable to social chaos. Baranī declares that the legitimacy of royal authority, as well as of the power and majesty associated with rulership, derives from the need to uphold equity and order. Kings, by virtue of the power and reputation they enjoy, have the resources to prevent the strong from oppressing the poor and vulnerable. Baranī also explains that thanks to their proximity to the Prophet Muḥammad’s time, the first caliphs were able to align their conduct with the traditions of the Prophet. The rulers who succeeded them, however, had to deviate from the dictates of the sunna. For their political survival, they had to resort to brute force in order to punish miscreants, erase discord and uphold the elevated status of kingship. They embraced the lifestyle and practices employed by the ancient Iranian emperors, having come to the realization that following the Prophet Muḥammad’s example did not suffice for effective government. Baranī’s theory is premised on the idea that there is a sharp contrast between prophethood and temporal/worldly power: prophethood aims at the perfection of religion and necessitates submission to God and, by extension, humility, poverty and self-abasement. Kingship, on the contrary, focuses on enhancing good fortune in this world and is predicated on such qualities as power, pride, material abundance, decisiveness and greatness, which pertain to God. Baranī prioritizes royal authority and asserts that kings as the deputies and vice-regents of God cannot embrace the ideal of submission; instead, they need to imitate ancient emperors in promoting and protecting the faith.

A key concern informing Baranī’s works and the writings of other Islamic authors—like Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) and later Abū’l-Fażl (1551–1602), who wrote in the context of large imperial polities founded on military conquests—was the need to outline a model of government that would provide political stability, societal harmony and economic prosperity. All this presupposed an inclusive system of political organization that would guarantee the fair and equitable dispensation of justice and an administrative apparatus manned by able and righteous office-holders appointed to the various sectors of the administration with a sagacious ruler at the top enjoying a special status as a divinely anointed holder of legitimate political authority. As such, exceptional circumstances and emergencies posing a threat to the personal security of the ruler often called for a drastic response and the use of brute force, and unrest and revolts in the capital and the rest of the realm had to be suppressed.

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14 On the following, see Vasileios Syros, ‘The Origins of Human Society and Justice in Early Modern Islamic Political Thought’, ISTORIYA 11:97 (97) (2020), https://history.jes.su/s207987840012893-1-1/ (circulation date: January 11, 2021).
Baranī on Muḥammad b. Tughluq’s Failed Leadership

In the Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī, Baranī declares his intention to record the most important events that occurred during Muhammad’s rule and the duration and outcome of his military expeditions. During his reign, Muḥammad subjugated and incorporated numerous kings and peoples from different parts of India. Baranī observes that Muhammad conceived a series of overly ambitious projects that would allow him to bring the entire inhabited world under his control. But he let power go to his head and was convinced that he had made the right decisions. In executing his plans, however, he triggered a cycle of events that rocked the foundations of the Delhi Sultanate, exasperated his subjects and squandered the wealth of the state.

Baranī describes Muhammad’s reactions in light of these events: the sultan felt aggrieved and became ruthless and unscrupulous, venting his anguish in acts of delusion and cruelty. He gradually lost control of most of the distant provinces of his realm, except for Gujarat and Deogir, whereas the core territories that were dependent on Delhi were afflicted by prolonged and virulent rioting. These developments had ravaging effects on the general populace. Faced with mounting discontent, Muhammad realized that his grand designs were ineffectual. As a result, he felt even more vexed and began to commit unprecedented acts of violence. All of this gave rise to deep resentment and public outcry. Muhammad did very little to allay domestic discontent and placate the people. His insensitive response to the sufferings of his subjects drove the Delhi Sultanate into a condition of chronic disarray. Muhammad’s excesses depleted the state reserves and exacerbated the state of the already ailing economy: the delivery of revenues collected from the distant provinces was disrupted, and a large number of government officials and soldiers were left with no access to resources.

Muḥammad devised and imposed oppressive levies and did not relax taxation until the peasantry sank into destitution. One of his first policies was to introduce an additional 10% or 5% tribute from the Doab region, which fuelled public

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15 The following section on Baranī’s account of Muhammad b. Tughluq’s rule builds upon Vasileios Syros, ‘Evil Lords, Benign Historians: Strongman Politics in Medieval India and Renaissance Florence’, Intellectual History Review 29:1 (= special issue ‘From Ancient Theology to Civil Religion’, ed. Francesco Borghesi) (2019): 11–34.
16 Tarih-i Firoz Shahi, 287–8, 290.
17 Ibid., 290–1. On the outbreak of violence during Muhammad b. Tughluq’s reign, see Tilmann Trausch, ‘Rewriting Baranī? The Description of the Delhi Sultanate in the Riḥla of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa/Ibn Djuzayy and the Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī of Dīyā’ al-Dīn Baranī’, Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques 64 (2010): 139–72. Consider also Blain Auer, ‘Concepts of Justice and the Catalogue of Punishments under the Sultans of Delhi (7th–8th/13th–14th Centuries)’, in Public Violence in Islamic Societies: Power, Discipline, and the Construction of the Public Sphere, 7th–19th Centuries ce, ed. Christian Lange and Maribel Fierro (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 238–55; David Waines, ‘Ibn Baṭṭūṭa on Shedding of Blood in the Delhi Sultanate’, Al-Masaq 24 (2012): 279–92; idem, ‘Ibn Baṭṭūṭa on Public Violence in the Delhi Sultanate’, in O ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture in Honour of Remke Kruk, ed. Arnoud Vrolijk at al. (Boston: Brill, 2007), 231–46.
18 Tarih-i Firoz Shahi, 290.
dissatisfaction. The property owners rose up in open rebellion against the central government, the countryside was ruined and the cultivation of the land subsided. Upon hearing the news about the uprisings in the Doab, peasants in the distant provinces, driven by the fear of having to face similar evils, took refuge in the jungles. Agriculture ground to a halt, and the disruption in the delivery of victuals caused a devastating famine in Delhi and its environs, as well as a sharp increase in the price of corn. The people’s misery was compounded by a severe drought, which lasted several years, causing thousands of deaths and the desolation of entire towns and villages, while dealing a fatal blow to the legitimacy of Muḥammad’s regime.19

The second project led to the destruction of Delhi, the capital of the Delhi Sultanate, and was related to Muḥammad’s decision to move the entire capital to Daulatabad. Without proper preparation and prior advice, Muḥammad proceeded to the implementation of the plan, thus wreaking havoc on Delhi. A large number of troops were forced to migrate together with their families and dependents, and many perished during the long journey. Those who arrived and settled down in Deogir could not endure the pain of exile. Although Muḥammad displayed generosity towards the settlers, both during the journey and after their arrival, the favours and privileges he bestowed upon them did not suffice to assuage their plight. He also arranged for learned men, merchants and landholders to be transferred to Delhi from other towns, but many of them perished there or eventually returned to their native towns, and Delhi remained in a desolate condition.20

The third project, which was designed by Muḥammad, caused the debasement of the currency and a prolonged economic crisis with serious implications for the relations between the Muslim and Hindu communities. In order to expand his dominion and fund his various expeditions, and due to the large deficit in the public finances caused by fiscal profligacy, Muḥammad introduced copper coins as the new currency and decreed that they should be used like gold and silver coins. Muḥammad’s edict gave the Hindus in various regions the opportunity to mint enormous amounts of copper coins, which they then used to pay taxes to purchase horses and arms and to indulge in a luxurious lifestyle. The peasants, landowners and village headmen grew richer, but the public treasury remained in an impoverished state.21 Soon, the distant provinces followed suit and used copper tangas. As a consequence, there was an overproduction of copper coins, and due to its scarcity, the value of the old coin rose by four or five times. The immediate outcome was the disruption of trade activities, and the depreciation of the copper coins forced the sultan to repel his edict, reinstate the old currency and order all copper coins to be returned to the treasury in exchange for gold and silver coins. As a result, the treasury was inundated with copper coins, and suffering and social unrest ensued.22

19 Ibid., 291; Jackson, The Delhi Sultanate, 265–6.
20 Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, 291–2. See also Jackson, The Delhi Sultanate, 258–60.
21 Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, 292; Jackson, The Delhi Sultanate, 261–2.
22 Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, 292–3.
Another heavy burden on the ailing economy of the Delhi Sultanate resulted from Muḥammad’s decision to embark on a major military campaign to conquer Khorasan (in present-day Iran) and Iraq. The sultan spent inordinate sums of money to win over and co-opt leading officials and dignitaries in those countries. Muḥammad’s efforts bore no fruit, and he ended up losing part of his realm and eroding the financial basis of the state. Furthermore, in his attempt to take over Khorasan, Muḥammad spent substantial amounts of resources on creating a large military force, which, however, remained idle for an entire year, while receiving public money for its sustenance and engaging in pillage and plundering. As the army was stranded, it slowly disintegrated and dissolved a year later due to a lack of supplies.

The final blow to the military prowess of the Delhi Sultanate, was Muḥammad’s plan to capture the Qarachil mountains (in present-day Himachal Pradesh), in order to facilitate the passage of soldiers and horses. Muhammad organized and equipped a new expeditionary force under the command of some of his best military commanders and dispatched it to take over the entire mountain. The army marched into the mountain and encamped at various locations. But the local Hindu population blocked the passages and hindered its retreat. As a result, the entire force was destroyed; only 10 horsemen survived and returned to Delhi bringing the devastating news about the destruction of their army.

Baranī and ‘Afīf on Fīrūz Shāh’s State-Building Efforts

Baranī exalts Fīrūz Shāh’s success in restoring order, promoting prosperity and unifying the Delhi Sultanate. He mentions that in the history of India, since the Muslim conquest, there had been no ruler after the Ghūrid sultan Mu‘izz al-Dīn Muhammad b. Sām (r. with his brother 1173–1202, solo 1202–06), who had been more benign, modest, compassionate and graceful, and endowed with such great character traits and virtues than Fīrūz Shāh. More importantly, though, the ascendancy of a new ruler typically involved the outbreak of violence and the suppression of the families who held political power and had influence just as old plants need to be uprooted so that fresh and newly sown plants can strike root and blossom. For the aides and attendants of the previous rulers were unlikely to support the new rulers. That was often the case with hereditary kingdoms and even more with royal regimes that had been established by force. As a result, the new rulers had to remove all those attached to their predecessors in order to feel secure and have a firm grip on power. Moreover, new rulers are frequently compelled to order executions to suppress sedition, implant fear in their subjects, strengthen their authority, and deter malefactors and evil-doers from wreaking

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23 Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, 293; Jackson, The Delhi Sultanate, 260–5.
24 Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, 293–4; Jackson, The Delhi Sultanate, 263–5.
25 Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, 294; Jackson, The Delhi Sultanate, 261–2, 264–5, 268–9.
26 Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, 336–7.
havoc. Baranī adduces in this context the example of Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish (r. 1211–36), who was not able to assert his authority and had to eliminate a number of family members of the previous ruler and several Ghūrid amirs appointed by Mu'izz al-Dīn Muhammad. Baranī's narrative about previous Delhi sultans indicates how a series of conflicts brought about the succession of five sultans during the 30-year period between Iltutmish’s death and Ghiyāth-al-Dīn Balban’s (r. 1266–87) accession. After becoming the sultan, Balban dismissed numerous dignitaries, and there was a protracted period of conflict with the old families and large-scale bloodshed. One of the most cruel episodes associated with his rule was the military campaign against Tughrīl Khān, who had proclaimed himself the Sultan of Bengal and rebelled against Balban. Balban personally led a massive military campaign against Tughrīl Khān, and in the aftermath of Tughrīl Khān’s crushing defeat and death, his family and supporters were slaughtered. Subsequent sultans operated in the same manner, but cruelty under Muḥammad b. Tughlaq’s rule reached an unprecedented level.27

Unlike all other rulers of the Delhi Sultanate, who used brute force to augment their power and impose their rule, Fīrūz Shāh was more balanced in the exercise of power and did not have to put potential challengers to death. At the beginning of his reign, he had to eliminate a small number of disaffected and disloyal person who rebelled, including certain kitchen staff members who had been involved in subversive activities. But even in those cases, the sultan made sure that their families and relatives would not be injured and fall victims to vengeance.28 Baranī also points out how the way in which Fīrūz Shāh treated the two pillars of the state, that is, the military and the subjects, set him apart from his predecessors: the army registers were kept up to date, and the soldiers received their stipends in instalments, in cash or in the form of draft, but they were not expected to engage in hunting or perform other tasks without being remunerated. As long as the nobles and clerks fulfilled their tasks properly, there were no irregularities in the payment of the troops’ salaries. During his rule, the sultan refrained from military adventures. The soldiers were never reassigned to distant posts from which they could not return home for a year or two.29

The common folk enjoyed an unprecedented level of prosperity, there was abundance of material goods and commercial transactions increased exponentially. The subjects had reached self-sufficiency, and everyone had acquired affluence proportionate to his status and rank. The people, who worked in the market, attained unprecedented living standards and wealth to build houses and satisfy all their needs. The sultan offered generous salaries for the various courtiers, office-holders and confidants, and benefits for their families and servitors. The

27 Ibid., 337–8.
28 Ibid., 338–9.
29 Ibid., 339. In the Fatāwā-i Jahāndārī, Baranī takes a different approach to the question of warfare, as he considers hegemonic ambitions to be integrally linked to good rulership and invokes the examples of Alexander the Great and earlier Muslim rulers. See Afsar Aftzal ud-din, ‘The Fatawā-i-Jahandari of Zia ud-din Barnī, Translation with Introduction and Notes’ (Diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, 1955), 27, 56, 65, 350, 353–7, 361–2, 466.
grandees of the court were exempted from mandatory continuous attendance. The nobles were granted special privileges and enjoyed power, authority and comfort. One of the sultan’s top priorities was to upgrade the status of his favourites: he pledged to protect them against any kind of provocation or humiliation. He never entrusted them with exorbitant tasks that could make them feel uncomfortable, and he sought to relieve both the nobility and the common people from burdens.\footnote{Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, 340–1.}

A large number of people received stipends, subsistence allowances, villages and lands according to their merits. Since Fīrūz Shāh’s rise to the throne, especially during the first 2–3 years of his rule, officers of the Dīwān-i risālat relayed to the sultan requests of religious scholars, Sufis, landholders, poor and other vulnerable members of society on a daily basis. Thanks to Fīrūz Shāh’s munificence and generosity, those who did not have a steady source of income were granted financial aid. As a result, those receiving assistance from the public treasury had all their wants and needs met, and the entire population lived in prosperity. No one suffered from hardships or penury, as the rich had their assets protected, and the poor were empowered and led a self-sufficient life.\footnote{Ibid., 342–4.}

Fīrūz Shāh saw it as one of his paramount concerns, right from the beginning of his reign, to sponsor the construction of buildings of unique beauty and magnificence, such as the Jāmi’ Masjid, the Madrasa-i Alai, a palace in Balāband and the fort of Fīrūzābād built on the banks of the Jamuna River.\footnote{Ibid., 344–7.} He also financed a variety of irrigation projects in barren wastelands and depopulated areas. The sultan’s long-term objective was to promote the creation of new cities and villages, provide a stable environment and favourable conditions for trade and agricultural production, and, thereby, contribute to the fall in commodity prices.\footnote{Ibid., 348.}

Moreover, the sultan laid down new guidelines and laws, the implementation of which was crucial for the restoration of domestic order. Thanks to the sagacity of the sultan as manifested in the new laws, the tensions and upheavals that had broken out due to the tyrannical and repressive style of Muḥammad were healed. Famines, epidemics, uprisings, excessive punishments and popular discontent had devastated the entire population. A large number of people perished to natural calamities and were forced to migrate to other regions. Fīrūz Shāh sought to address these problems by re-establishing order, developing enduring political structures, upholding tranquillity and peace, boosting demographic growth and replenishing the land. One of his first priorities was to annul the severe punishments and terminate executions that resulted in population growth, especially in Delhi.\footnote{Ibid., 350–1.}

The sultan’s flawless enactment of justice, affability, compassion and dedication to the public good prompted many people with skills and expertise to flock or return to the Delhi Sultanate, and those groups that had earlier rebelled were mollified. The second regulation stipulated that taxes (kharāj and jizya) would
be adjusted to be commensurate with the actual produce, and all other forms of additional tax were abolished. People were expected to pay only those taxes that reflected their real income. Corruption and oppression were erased, measures were taken so tax inspectors would not overrate potential profits, taxes were paid on time, and no one was ever humiliated or disgraced by being inflicted unfair penalties, like imprisonment. The third regulation concerned the recruitment and appointment of the courtiers, governors, public officials and tax agents. The sultan selected just and upright persons and excluded corrupt and wicked persons from government posts.

Baranī’s account of Fīrūz Shāh’s achievements is complemented by ‘Affīf’s narrative about how Fīrūz Shāh’s rule contributed to general prosperity not only in the capital but also across the entire realm. ‘Affīf stresses that after Fīrūz Shāh’s death, the capital was ravaged, and all those who survived felt nostalgia for his auspicious and bountiful reign. Previous rulers, like ‘Alā’-al-Dīn Khaljī (r. 1296–1316), managed to regulate prices and ensure that all commodities were affordable. ‘Alā’-al-Dīn Khaljī subsidized the merchants by granting them pecuniary benefits, gold and stipends. Fīrūz Shāh achieved similar results without having to invest any additional resources: all commodities, including grain, sweets and cloth, were sold at a low price, and the population never experienced food shortages. If there was an unexpected increase or fluctuation in prices, that would only be temporary, and then the prices would fall again. Low prices and the abundance of commodities were a driver of substantial demographic growth. During Fīrūz Shāh’s reign, none of the villages was depopulated, no region ever suffered from crop failure and 50 new settlements were created. The same applied to all other regions of the Delhi Sultanate. The sultan was so immersed in the administration of state affairs that he rarely travelled for pleasure and thought that any trips that were not strictly related to administrative tasks were incompatible with the royal duties, and he pursued cost-cutting efforts. Fīrūz Shāh undertook a currency reform and issued coins with various designations, including coins of half and quarter jitals to ensure that the poor received change when purchasing goods, and the balance was so small that no coin could cover it.

One of Fīrūz Shāh’s major accomplishments was, according to ‘Affīf, the ability to guarantee the equity and the well-being of the entire population. His rule signalled a long period of great prosperity, and whenever the sultan visited a part of his realm, he was warmly received by the local noblemen. In order to elicit the allegiance of the nobles, the sultan assigned various administrative units, towns, villages and pieced of land to them. Thanks to the benefits awarded by the sultan, almost all nobles had a carpet room. Every local governor had a collection of high-quality and expensive carpets. Whenever senior office-holders travelled

35 Ibid., 352.
36 Ibid., 353.
37 Medieval India in Transition, 169–70.
38 Ibid., 155–6.
39 Ibid., 180.
40 Ibid., 195.
around the realm, they had access to cheap food supplies and commodities without fearing any punishment from the sultan. If for some reason a soldier was away, he would strive to be present for duty during an expedition. But his remuneration and maintenance grant were never put on hold while he was absent. The military commanders distributed all kinds of commodities among the subjects, and every section of the military enjoyed unprecedented prosperity. As a consequence, none of the archers ever asked to leave the army, and the soldiers were never concerned with the well-being of their families.\footnote{Ibid., 167–8.}

The kotwal enjoyed great respect, displayed courage, dispensed justice among the people of Delhi and fulfilled his tasks with great efficiency and caution. The sultan asked the kotwal to arrange for all residents in Delhi who were unemployed to appear in court. The kotwal conducted a general investigation across the entire city in order to track down and gather intelligence about the condition of those persons of noble descent who were unemployed, since those persons were reluctant to divulge their identity, and at the opportune moment presented them before the sultan. The sultan was able to recognize them on the basis of their lineage and assigned them to various occupations according to their skills and expertise. If any of the men of the pen was under financial duress, he was appointed to the royal workshop. Competent clerks were referred to the Minister, Khān Jahān, and the provincial governors. And those who were unemployed were assigned a permanent occupation.\footnote{Ibid., 189–90.}

ʻAfīf also reports a conversation between Fīrūz Shāh and Khān Jahān regarding the legitimacy and potential outcomes of a military operation, in which the minister persuaded the sultan not to engage in war. Khān Jahān’s rationale was that good governance has two objectives: the sound management of the kingdom and welfare and protection of the people, and the elimination of infidels and wicked individuals and territorial expansion. The minister advised against engaging in campaigns of conquest, since the sultan had an unparalleled success at organizing the kingdom, securing the well-being of the population, enhancing the defence of the state and managing state affairs, and at repelling outside threats and ensuring for the upgrade of the Delhi Sultanate’s military capabilities. Accordingly, he saw no compelling reason for the sultan to invade other countries. Khān Jahān enumerates the challenges associated with military enterprises, particularly the loss of many innocent lives, all the hardships and mischief inflicted upon the civilian population and the domino effect they can trigger leading to the proliferation of military conflicts.\footnote{Ibid., 154–6. For an evaluation of Khān Jahān’s tenure as minister, see ibid., 221–5.}

An interesting precedent to these ideas can be found in the Chachnāma (The History of Chach), a work which narrates the history of Sind from AD 680 until the Arab–Muslim conquest in AD 711 and was originally written in Arabic and was
translated into Persian by Alī b. Ḥāmid b. Abī Bakr Kūfī in 1226. As indicated by its title, the work refers to Chach (seventh century AD), the local Brahmin king of Sind, who repelled the first Arab invasion through the sea. A salient feature of Kūfī’s account of Chach’s reign is the emphasis on the need for mutual understanding among political entities with shared borders. The *Chachnāma* specifically mentions that Chach, upon taking over power, made sure to demarcate the eastern boundary of his domain. He arranged for two young plants, that is, a white poplar and a fir, to be cultivated on the border with Kashmir on the banks of a stream. He stayed there until the branches of the trees interspersed each other and left after declaring that as the border with Kashmir and stipulating that none should cross it. Moreover, he endeavoured to secure the western frontier with Makrān. Accompanied by his army, he encamped near a small river that ran between Kirmān and Makrān and drew the eastern boundary by having date palms planted on the banks of the river.

Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim, the Umayyad military commander, who conquered Sind, followed Chach’s example when marching out with his soldiers to the territory bordering Kashmir. When he reached the spot where Chach had planted trees to designate the frontier, he made a new boundary marker.

Similar ideas occur in a *farmān*, which was drafted by the famous poet Amīr Khusrow (1253–1325) at the behest of the Delhi Sultan ‘Alā’-al-Dīn Khaljī and was intended for Prince Farīd Khān. The document cautions against the unscrupulous use of violence in the enactment of justice and recommends that the sword should be used as little as possible.

The *farmān* also contains a set of prescriptions regarding the administration of newly won territories that are comparable to Niccolò Machiavelli’s (1469–1527) ideas on this topic: the Florentine writer suggests in *The Prince*, Chapter 8, that a ruler who attempts to take over a state should ponder all the acts of violence, which he needs to commit, but implement them all at once, so that he will not need to have recourse to compulsion or spread fear. Then, he should seek to win the people over by conferring rewards and benefits, but he should proceed slowly to ensure that the

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44 *The Chachnamah, an Ancient History of Sind: Giving the Hindu Period Down to the Arab Conquest*, trans. from the Persian Mirza Kalichbeg Fredunbeg (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyyat-i Delli, 1900; repr. 1979). On the following, see also Manan Ahmed Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2016), 65–67; Peter Hardy, ‘Is the *Chach Nama* Intelligible to the Historian as Political Theory?’ in *Sind through the Centuries*, ed. Hamida Khuuro (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1981), 111–7. Asif has challenged the assumption that the work derives from an earlier Arabic version and argues that it was written in Persian in the thirteenth century.

45 *The Chachnamah*, 30. See further the point on this by Ahmed Asif, *A Book of Conquest*, 65–67.

46 *The Chachnamah*, 38.

47 Ibid., 192.

48 Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources of Information*, 171–87. Consider also the brief comments in Raziuddin Aquil’s review of this book in *Indian Historical Review* 24:1–2 (1997/1998): 187–9; and, in general, *The Reign of ‘Ala’uddin Khalji*, translated from Zia-ud-Din Barani’s *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī* by Abraham R. Fuller and Abdul Khallaque (Calcutta: Pilgrim Publishers [1967]).

49 Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources of Information*, 177–8.
favours can be tasted better and have a more lasting impact. The farmān, likewise, stipulates that in lands that have been conquered through military expansion and are inhabited by foreign and unruly populations, the men of letters should take over from the army. Seasoned and able officials who are learned and skilled in the use of both the pen and sword should be appointed in order to cultivate the goodwill of the local population. In this sense, the pen should perform the function of the sword just as the Mercury sheds light on the earth when the Sun is absent.50

Fīrūz Shāh maintained three audience halls: Vine Palace, which was used for meeting with important persons, governors and prominent intellectual figures; the Nightingale Wooden Palace, which was intended for meetings with princes and other favourites; and the Public Audience Hall (known as the Central Court), where meetings with all other people took place.51 He established a charity house for the weddings of the daughters of the poor to entertain their concerns about arranging marriages due to the lack of resources. The sultan decreed that all poor people who had daughters of marriageable age should reach out to the Office of Charity and report their situation to the Dīwān-i khayrāt. The sultan instructed the personnel of the Dīwān-i khayrāt to carefully verify the condition of those, who approached them and solicited aid, and to grant them the necessary amount according to their real needs. People in need and widows from the entire realm flocked to Delhi and registered the names of their daughters and received financial support that allowed them to finance the marriages. As a result, thousands of marriages took place, and a large number of people found employment.52

In addition, Fīrūz Shāh sponsored the creation of a hospital for all patients, rich and poor, old and young, city residents and travellers, and donated property for their upkeep. He followed the practices of benign, sagacious and insightful rulers, who solicitous of the well-being in the whole of their domains, took special care for the treatment of the sick and vulnerable members of society and created hospitals and provided aid to the needy. Socrates and Hipppocrates contended that distinguished rulers of the past reserved resources for the medical treatment of the sick. The mythical Iranian king Jamshīd consulted with his ministers and councillors about the most important task pertaining to good governance. They all agreed on the point that a top priority for any king should be to relieve the pain and sorrow of those afflicted by diseases.53 The sultan recruited competent and experienced physicians, offered them incentives to provide the best possible treatment to the patients and allocated adequate funds for the payment of their wages, as well as for the procurement of food and medical supplies. Patients from all parts of the Delhi Sultanate were encouraged to visit the hospitals, and upon reaching them after a long trip, they were warmly received by the hospital staff, who treated them with affection and obtained the necessary medicine.54

50 Ibid., 173–4.
51 Medieval India in Transition, 161–2.
52 Ibid., 197–8.
53 Ibid., 200–1.
54 Ibid., 202.
Firūz Shāh introduced similar policies regarding the remuneration of religious scholars, the reciters of the Qurʾān and the shaikhs. A large number of stipends were distributed among the entire population, and, thereby, almost 40,000 people, who were destitute, received stipends from the royal treasury.55

ʻAfif stresses that Firūz Shāh maintained 36 royal workshops. He ensured that all necessary supplies were available, and that each workshop was provided with all kinds of expensive commodities, and that all materials were adorned with precious metals such as gold, silver and jewels. Some of the workshops had a fixed grant. Those included the kitchen, various (elephant, cavalry, camel, etc.) stables and the water supply division. For the workshops without a fixed grant—such as the wardrobe store, the royal flags, furniture, tents and carpets—commodities were ordered on an annual basis. The supervisors for each workshop were appointed by the sultan. The transactions and accounts of all the workshops were monitored by a separate authority (Divān-i-majmūʿa), which had been set up for that purpose. The superintendents were expected to submit their accounts to the finance department, which audited the accounts of the workshops just as it did with the accounts of the provinces.56

ʻAfif also records that Firūz Shāh supported numerous architectural projects. No previous ruler of Delhi, however successful he might have been in the conduct of war and territorial conquests, had ever exhibited such great generosity, zeal and commitment to the implementation of building programmes as Firūz Shāh. New cities, royal palaces and residences, fortresses, mosques, dams and various types of buildings proliferated throughout his realm. In each city, which was created under the auspices of the sultan, special care was taken to build palaces and forts that were intended for comfort and adornment, made of stone and survived for a long period of time.57 In addition, the sultan funded the construction of royal palaces in various cities and locations, as well as of dams, resting places and inns for travellers and pilgrims. In Delhi alone, 120 hospices were built as part of the sultan’s plan to invite pilgrims from around the world, who would be treated as royal guests for 3 days and state guests for an entire year and receive complimentary accommodation.58 In order to pursue his various building projects, the sultan recruited top-quality and dedicated staff for the Public Works Department and arranged for its chief to receive high remuneration. The sultan also appointed a head for every team of masons, and the stonecutters, woodcutters, ironsmiths, carpenters and all other personnel involved in the construction of buildings were under the supervision of a superintendent.59 During Firūz Shāh’s reign, building activities were never interrupted. Before the implementation of an architectural project, the vizier’s office generated a comprehensive list of the necessary materials, and the required funds were allocated to the building department.60

55 Ibid., 202–3.
56 Ibid., 191–2.
57 Ibid., 186–7.
58 Ibid., 187.
59 Ibid., 187–8.
60 Ibid., 189.
State Failure and Political Reform in Medieval India

In this article, I engaged with academic discourse on the meaning and manifestations of state failure. The tension between the endeavour to formulate a generic definition of state failure and the awareness of the various cultural, social, economic or religious factors operative in the political organization of diverse societies is compounded by the fact that previous scholarships have often been oblivious to precedents in the more distant past. Also, in the study of political ideas, there is often a tendency to place a premium on order, organization and the constituents of a stable society rather than unrest and internecine conflict. The sources analysed in this article prompt us to look at the evolution of Indo-Islamic thought against the background of the various phenomena of state and failure that afflicted medieval India. Strategies for rebuilding a society in the aftermath of economic crises, natural calamities and military defeats remain a tantalizing problem, which was no less acute for political authors of the Delhi Sultanate period, in particular Baranī and ‘Affīf. Baranī’s work yields deep insights into the tumultuous reign of Muḥammad b. Tughluq for over 25 years and provides a vivid description of the sultan’s intemperate leadership style, cavalier attitude and brutalities: mass starvation, decimation of the population, depletion of the state budget and the destruction of the Delhi Sultanate’s military power. On the other hand, the rule of Fīrūz Shāh, Muḥammad b. Tughluq’s successor, is celebrated by Baranī and ‘Affīf as a success story and a major interlude of political and societal stability for a period of nearly 40 years. Muḥammad’s ruthless suppression of rebellions and his military conquests led to a volatile situation and contrasted sharply with Fīrūz Shāh’s mild approach to the exercise of political power and his commitment to the public weal through infrastructure development and other projects intended to provide succour to the people.

Baranī’s History of Fīrūz Shāh also features a masterful narrative of Fīrūz Shāh’s state-building efforts: it emphasizes that he dramatically reduced the number of executions, ensured fiscal responsibility, guaranteed general prosperity, reorganized the army, sponsored a number of architectural projects and implemented an overhaul of the entire administration by promulgating new guidelines and regulations. Baranī’s sentiments are echoed by ‘Affīf, who provides a fulsome praise of Fīrūz Shāh as the harbinger of a period of affluence, demographic growth, righteous rule, military might, a variety of activities intended to improve the infrastructure and support the vulnerable sectors of society, and sponsor large-scale building programmes. Towards the end of his life, ‘Affīf must

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61 For a comparative investigation of state failure and similar occurrences across different historical eras and civilizations, consider The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations, ed. Norman Yoffee and George L. Cowgill (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1988).

62 For a recent challenge to this trend and an effort to shift the focus to the role of domestic conflicts as a driving force in human history, see David Armitage, Civil Wars: A History in Ideas (New York: A. Knopf, 2017).

63 Francis Fukuyama, State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).
have felt strong disillusionment with the decline of the Delhi Sultanate and Timur’s (1336–1405) invasion of India and sack of Delhi in 1398. Given that ‘Afīf was in the service of Fīrūz Shāh as well as of prominent members of his family, one of the ulterior motives behind the composition of his History would have been to glorify his patron’s rule and criticize Muḥammad’s style of leadership. But, on the other hand, it is reasonable to assume that having experienced the conquests of Timur, he genuinely entertained a nostalgic view of Fīrūz Shāh’s era as opposed to Muḥammad b. Tughluq’s volatile reign and his failure to permanently establish the Delhi Sultanate’s power in the south.

Baranī and ‘Afīf dealt with the political and economic reforms introduced by Fīrūz Shāh, but each focuses on different aspects of them. Baranī points to a series of episodes in the history of the Delhi Sultanate to demonstrate how political contestations and violence had become endemic in Indian society. ‘Afīf’s History gives greater weight to the public buildings and palaces constructed under the auspices of the sultan. But an important insight guiding both Histories of Fīrūz Shāh is that a successful ruler aspiring to lay the foundations for a harmonious and unified polity should carefully ponder the risks of war and territorial expansion. The analysis of historical examples and political or historical writings that proposed diverse processes of rebuilding and restoring failed countries can make up for the lack of critical distance and detachment when examining recent or current events. The deployment of the concept of state failure has often been construed as an effort to impose a political straitjacket; the examination of authors like Baranī and ‘Afīf demonstrates the value of reflecting on lessons from history and exploring how societies in the past evolved their own patterns of thinking about effective or failed leadership.

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