

**Ethical Leadership in Ziauddin Barni's
Fatwa-e-Jahandari:
A Timeless Guide for Governance and Justice**

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Abstract

Ziauddin Barni, a distinguished historian and political thinker of medieval India, authored Fatwa-e Jahandari as a comprehensive manual for ethical governance. This seminal work emphasizes the moral and administrative virtues essential for rulers to ensure justice, peace, and the wellbeing of their subjects. Barni outlines twenty-four principles for good governance, encompassing qualities such as unshakable faith in God, humility in consultation, adherence to justice, honesty, and the establishment of truth and mercy. These ethical precepts are deeply rooted in religious teachings, historical anecdotes, and Barni's insights into governance. Despite being written in the 14th century for Muslim kings, the ideals proposed by Barni remain profoundly relevant in contemporary political and administrative contexts. This paper highlights Barni's ethical

guidelines, illustrating their applicability to modern-day leadership, where the erosion of moral values in politics often leads to exploitation and societal disharmony. By revisiting Barni's principles, this paper underscores the need for ethical leadership to foster a society characterized by justice, harmony, and prosperity.

Keywords

Ziauddin Barni, Fatwa-e Jahandari, ethical governance, justice, moral leadership, medieval Indian history, Islamic political thought, ethical principles, leadership qualities, contemporary relevance.

Introduction

Ziauddin Barni was a descendant of renowned officials, who held good positions under the regime of different Sultans. His father Muidul Mulk enjoyed important posts during the reign of Jalaluddin Khalji. Barni himself held a high position under the rule of Khlji. According to Wilayat Husain, Barni was "the Nadim (born companion) of Muhammad bin Tughlaq,"¹ and therefore, he flourished during the reign of Tughlaq. Barni is acclaimed as one of the great Indian historians, and he has authored several great works. Two of his most popular works are Tarikh-e Firozshahi and Fatwa-e-Jahandari, which record the history of that period. In his Fatwa-e-Jahandari, Barni presents an analysis of various ethical qualities, which a morally good king is required to develop.

A kingdom or nation is said to be great and noble when it is characterized by the noble qualities of justice, peace, harmony and

happiness of the subjects. A nation, in order to possess such noble qualities, should have ethical leadership. That is, it should be governed by the ruler, who is honest and morally righteous. Only those rulers, who possess moral attributes, can render to his people the ethical leadership. When a ruler practices the ethical principles in his life and offers morally and lawfully good governance, the nation or the society, which is ruled by him or her, produces rich fruits of security, goodness and wellbeing of people. Many intellectuals and writers have recommended various qualities, which are prerequisites for excellent leadership. Ziauddin Barni strongly believes that if a king or a ruler's regime should be good, just and moral, he should, first, have moral qualities. This belief is concretely exhibited in his work, *Fatwa-e Jahandari*, wherein he outlines and illustrates twenty four advices as the basic principles of good administration and Government. This paper highlights some of those ideals, which fall in the light of ethical principles, which are essential for ethical leadership.

Faith in God as the Foundation of Governance

Barni's advice on the 'effects of the good faith of the king' unveils an ethical relevance. Barni is of the opinion that a king is required to have unshakable faith in God for making his kingdom free from any harm: "If the king's faith in religion of the Prophet is firm and unshakable, then there is no harm."² He feels that the values such as good deeds, virtuous qualities and devotional practices spring from a faith-protecting king.³ It designates that when a king or ruler has a tremendous faith in God, he will follow the ethical principles

put forth by God, and will provide righteous administration and governance for his subjects.

Humility and the Value of Consultation

Barni's advice to the rulers on 'the blessings of consultation and advice' demands the kings to possess the quality of humility to seek the advice of the wise and experienced men of the government and the kingdom. He asserts that God Himself gave the ensuing order: "And consult them in your affairs."⁴ In several ethical systems, humility finds a significant place as a moral quality. Humility is believed to be "the ultimate self-sacrifice" and "the sacrifice of one's ego," and "raising humility to the status of a virtue is the ultimate inversion of morality."⁵ From Barni's point of view, the kings should have the humble attitude of consulting the Prophets, the experienced officers and the well-wishers for administering the affairs of the government.

Justice: The Cornerstone of Ethical Governance

Justice, according to Barni, is a fundamental prerequisite of a good government. It is a cardinal ethical quality, which every human being is expected to practise. It is the foundation of not only any "social organization" but also "civil rights."⁶ In Fatwa-e Jahandari, Barni presents his fifth advice on 'king's justice. Speaking of the significance of justice in a kingdom or society, he says that "...justice is the balance in which the actions of people, good or bad, are weighted. The distinction between righteous and wrongful claims is clarified by justice. Justice exposes cruelty, oppression, forceful

misappropriation and plunder.”⁷ In his Fatwa-e Jahandari, Barni strongly believes that justice is a primary quality of an ideal ruler. He affirms that the ethical quality of justice enables the king not only to safeguard his subjects from the evils of “tyranny and oppression” but also to safeguard “the money, property, women and children of the weak, the obedient, the helpless, the young, the submissive, and the friendless.”⁸ Therefore, Barni wants every ruler to possess the moral value of justice as his innate quality and to enforce this priceless quality among people.

Barni’s distinction between “special equality” and “universal equality”

In fact, Barni’s twelfth advice, which is centred on ‘the administration of justice,’ is an addition to his fifth advice, ‘on king’s justice.’ Barni feels that a good ruler should possess an innate sense of justice. He recognizes a distinction between ‘special equality’ and ‘universal equality.’ According to him, ‘special equality’ is associated with the situation wherein the caliph or king or anyone who is assigned with the power of making decision “enforces equality between the accuser and the accused,” and “treats them equally during the trial with reference to their speeches and actions, and (the privilege of) sitting and standing before him, and does not give preference to either party for any cause.”⁹ Furthermore, in his task of administration of justice, the ruler always “looks with same eye at relations and strangers, the distinguished and the ignoble, the employed and the unemployed, officers and citizens, rich and poor, nobles and commons, supporters and opponents, friends and foes.”¹⁰

Barni states that ‘universal equality’ stems from the perfection of piety and it has ended with Abu Bakr, ‘Umar-i-Khattab, ‘Usman and ‘Ali Murtaza.¹¹ He also claims that it is not possible for Muslim kings to attain ‘universal equality.’ However, he admits that they can attain ‘special equality’ and therefore, he instructs the kings to take efforts to obtain ‘special equality.’ As justice forms a part of important ethical values, both the rulers and the subjects should put this value into practice in their lives.

Honesty as a key attribute for fostering trust in leadership

Honesty, as observed by Barni, is another prerequisite of an ideal ruler. Barni’s emphasis on the moral quality of honesty is very explicit in his sixth advice, ‘on the grading of officers and notables,’ wherein he insists the rulers to be fair and honest in making the gradation of officers and notables in their kingdoms. He feels that it is the moral responsibility of the rulers to “confer rewards in recognition of every merit.”¹² According to him, the rulers should be honest in the creation of the grades and ranks, and in recognizing and rewarding the persons of merit. While discharging their obligations, the good kings should always look at “everyone with the same eye.”¹³ It implies that the good kings are always honest and treat his subjects in a fair way.

Truth : Promoting righteousness and countering evils

Truth is another quality which is underscored by Barni. ‘The Establishment of truth at centre’ is one of the primary duties of an ideal king or a ruler. This quality, according to Barni, is very essential

for administering the affairs of the government in a right way, and for attaining spiritual progress and salvation. He admits the reality of the presence of the opposing elements in the world such as truth and falsehood, peace and disorder, the good and the evil, devotion to God (i.e., goodness) and sinfulness, obedience and disobedience, day and night, and so forth. He is also well aware of the fact that it is impossible to completely uproot the negative forces and the evils from the world. For, if it were possible to eliminate all the evil forces completely from the world, all kingdoms would have been “united into one state and all false creeds overthrown.”¹⁴ But it is not practically feasible.

Therefore, Barni accepts the limitation of the impossibility of complete overthrow of evils. However, he strongly believes that “...the real meaning of ‘truth being established at the centre’ is that truth shall overpower falsehood and falsehood shall not overpower truth, so that the honour of truth and the greatness of Islam may be vindicated through the humiliation and disgrace of polytheism and infidelity.”¹⁵ Therefore, he insists the kings to take efforts to establish truth in his kingdom so that it could overpower falsehood and promote righteousness.

Forgiveness and Mercy in Leadership

The value of forgiveness has a notable place in the domain of morality. It is to be remembered that “justice without mercy is tyranny.”¹⁶ Barni looks at the ethical values of forgiveness and mercy in the light of Quranic commandments. That is why, in his advice on ‘king’s mercy and punishment,’ he authentically claims that since

“God is the forgiver of sins, the acceptor of repentance and strict in His punishments,”¹⁷ the king’s behaviours should be in accordance with this Quranic verse, and must be merciful and have the forgiving heart. He adds that God-fearing kings have strongly believed that “Kingship cannot be properly established without forgiveness and punishments,” and therefore, a far-sighted king always “knows well the correct occasions for forgiveness and punishment.”¹⁸ It is the ethical or moral duty of a king to establish peace and happiness of his subjects in his country.

Conclusion

The prerequisite qualities of an ideal king that have been discussed are a significant contribution of Ziauddin Barni, and they form an important part of ethical values. These values recommended by him in his Fatwa-e Jahandari are unquestionably relevant to the societies of all times. Accordingly, they are pertinent to the contemporary society as well. In today’s world, the rulers, who are devoid of ethical values, seek to exploit, deceive and plunder the common people and the public money for gratifying their selfish motives. If politics lacks ethical values, the well-being of the nation and the people will be ruined. But most unfortunately, today’s politics is devoid of ethical values. Hence, it is the need of the hour to pay attention to the practice of ethical values particularly in political and government administration. It is in this context that Barni’s Fatwa-e Jahandari is highly relevant to today’s world because it evidently teaches and illustrates the important ethical values that should be practised by the rulers and the people in power.

Barni's central intention of writing his book, *Fatwa-e Jahandari*, was to teach the rulers particularly the Muslim kings the principles of kingship and kingdom from ethical, political, economic and administrative viewpoints. In order to fulfill his objective, he made use of ancient anecdotes, historical events, Quranic verses and the commandments of Almighty God in order to enrich the ethical values in a kingdom or society. Even though Barni's *Fatwa-e Jahandari* was written in the 14th century A.D. specifically for Muslim kings, it has immense relevance to contemporary society. It is a wonderful archive of the essential morals that are required in every ruler, and therefore, it is reliable and more relevant to the rulers and the people of the present times. Any nation which is governed by the rulers, who practise the ideals recommended and explicated by Barni, will be blessed with the beautiful attributes of safety, affluence, harmony and the wellbeing of people. It is a wonderful gift to live in such a nation.

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