

This project was not the first time I have written history research projects, however it was one of the hardest ones I have done. This research was a testament to my academic prowess, and when I first embarked, I was scared. It originated from a question I had after completing a reading assignment for a class on the history of Medieval and Mughal India: does Amir Khusrau, the court poet of Sultan Alauddin Khilji of the Delhi sultanate, have a positive relation with his boss? As a court poet, Khusrau is obligated to write positively about his Sultan as poetry was used as propaganda at the time. The reading was depicting tensions between Alauddin and the Sufi Pir Nizamuddin Aulia, where the author depicts Khusrau's writings used to prove religious superiority of the sultan in Delhi, being that Khusrau was a follower of Aulia. When asking professor Dhavan about it, she affirmed my suspicions and this opened a new line of thought for me: if Khusrau genuinely likes his boss, then the way we view his work on Alauddin should be different, as the incentive to create it is what he believes, and not just monetary gain.

I initiated the research process by searching for secondary sources, as I wanted to have background information before formulating the basis of my arguments. I got some ideas for sources regarding Khusrau's ethical perspective through *Islamic Tolerance: Amir Khusrau and Pluralism* by Alissa Gabbay by the recommendation of professor Dhavan, which would prove valuable in demonstrating that Khusrau's opinions on religion did not clash with Alauddin's religious policies. She also recommended to me the poetry collection *In the Bazaar of Love* which had multiple poems by Khusrau, including Duval Rani Khizir Khan, a short narrative fiction written a few years after the death of Alauddin. The last line of the narrative is regarded as a critique to Alauddin's reign, and is also the only recorded critique from the poet to the sultan that I was able to find. I had to dispel this notion, as not only did I find it to be an extremely weak argument, if I completed such a task successfully there would be no clear evidence of dislike from Khusrau towards the Sultan. I also contacted the history department's librarian, Theresa Murdock, who taught me to use the library's advanced search engine to conduct keyword searches such as "Alauddin Khilji" AND "culture." Through this method, I was also able to find Treasures of Victory, a narrative account of Alauddin's military campaigns in southern India written by Khusrau. This search specifically led me to "Cultural Activity During the Reign of Alauddin Khilji" by K. S. Lal, which greatly aided in understanding the development of artistic productions in Alauddin's reign and supplemented my analysis with its section on Khusrau. Professor Dhavan also recommended to me Peter Jackson's *The Delhi Sultanate: a political and Military History*, a general history textbook that covers the Delhi sultanate period of India, and in this book I noticed a pattern present in most secondary sources, that being the over reliance on Ziauddin Barani.

There are few primary sources that cover this time. Most books covering the Alauddin regime rely on a historian called Barani, who is considered an untrustworthy source. Barani was extremely critical of Alauddin, thus secondary sources that rely on him echo the same sentiment. I now changed my thesis to have two positions: 1. Khusrau had a positive relation with Alauddin, thus, 2. His works can be effectively used as a primary source. As such, my search strategy involved finding links between primary sources and the events or policies taking place in Alauddin's reign described in secondary, and mold my arguments around this connection. When Barani was involved, I would then point out his flaws as a source in the specific section, as seen when discussing Alauddin's court in the section on artistic prosperity in Alauddin's reign. When writing on the *Duval Rani Khizir Khan*, I noticed that Alauddin does not

play a big role in the story, and with my background knowledge on previous Sultans, I was able to argue that the critique was aimed at unstructured successions that lead to conflicts at the end of sultanate reigns. This method had a clear problem: in some cases the secondary data acquired was unreliable. This happened when I quoted Faizan in the section on Alauddin's religious policies, where after submitting my rough draft professor Dhavan mentioned that Faizan was not the most reliable source. To fix this problem I went directly to the section Faizan was quoting and I analyzed it with the background knowledge I had of Barani. By pointing out his favoritism towards Muslim religious scholars, the fact that Barani was not present at the discussion since he was not a member of Alauddin's court, and that the conversation is transcribed word for word through eight pages, I was able to point out Barani's clear bias to the scholar, as well as his unreliability in regards to the conversation as a whole. Although I could not find evidence of Alauddin and Khusrau directly agreeing in the treatment of Hindus in the Sultanate, I noticed that his policies were not in contradiction with Khusrau's opinions, as presented by Gabbay. These analyses allowed me to formulate my argument.

This research project made me think about history in a manner that I haven't before. To question the methods of the scholars that I, an undergraduate, was going for knowledge was frightening, as I felt that they knew of something that I was overlooking, or the simple fact that they knew more of this time period than I did also did not aid in my confidence. However, I was able to overcome these hurdles and produce a piece that I am truly proud of, and which stands to point to my success as an academic.