

“Succession of the Sultans of the early
Delhi Sultanate in India.”

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The succession of the sultans is one of the main points of dispute in Islamic history, because of the vagueness of the Islamic law of succession. In the case of the Sultanate of Delhi, some Indian scholars, discussing this subject rather abstractly, have classified the succession into such categories as election, nomination, heredity and revolution. It is quite necessary, however, to analyze the succession with reference to the power relation between the sultans and the nobles on the one hand and between the nobles themselves on the other. Such an analysis, throws light on the nature of the kingship, the aristocracy, and the structure of the sultanate.

This article is my first analysis for the period of the so-called “Slave Dynasty.” The main conclusions are that: 1) Actual power was the fundamental criterion in deciding the succession. 2) Albari Turks enjoyed the definite advantage over other tribal elements. (The Khilji revolution was important, because it broke this tradition.) 3. Powerful sultans like Iltutmish and Balban were usually succeeded for a time by their direct descendants. 4) Still, from the cases of Raziya or Kaikhusrau-Kaiqbad it is clear that even when powerful sultans had nominated their successors, the fundamental form of the election by the nobles could supercede this decision. 5) The relative power of factions in the nobility was one of the most important factors. Behind the weak, hereditary successors of Iltutmish there was a sort of balance of powers within the nobility of the “Chehalgani” (the Fourty), and when Balban gained the ascendancy and the balance was lost, the direct heirs of Iltutmish could no longer retain their position.