

## CHAPTER 8

# Medieval India (B) The Delhi Sultanate



### SYLLABUS

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Sources: Inscriptions; Qutub Minar.

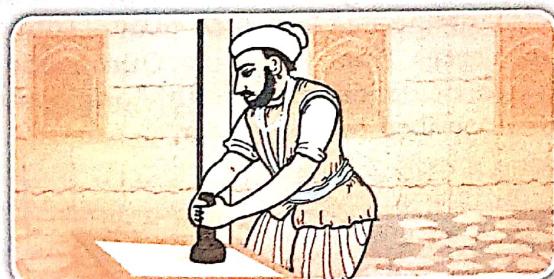
Political history and administration  
(Qutbuddin Aibak, Alauddin Khilji and  
Muhammad Bin Tughlaq).

The period between 1206 and 1526, when five dynasties successively ruled from Delhi is known as the period of *Delhi Sultanate*. It was so called because the rulers of various dynasties ruled from their capital at Delhi and were called the Sultans.

### SOURCES

There are a number of official records, administrative manuals, biographies, autobiographies, court histories, chronicles, foreign travellers' accounts and private correspondence which provide much information for reconstructing the history of the Delhi Sultanate. The 'histories' (*tawarikh*), written in Persian constitute an important place among the sources about Delhi Sultanate. These histories were written by learned men like secretaries, administrators, poets and courtiers, who both recollect events and advised the

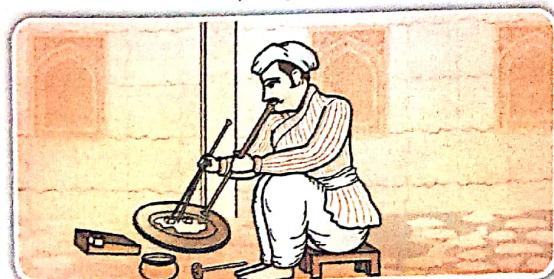
By the 10th and 11th centuries, numerous small kingdoms had emerged in North India because of the absence of a powerful central government. These kingdoms were constantly at conflict with one another. This lack of political unity was largely responsible for quick victories of the Turks, who began their conquests in the 11th and 12th centuries. However, their Empire was established in the 13th century.



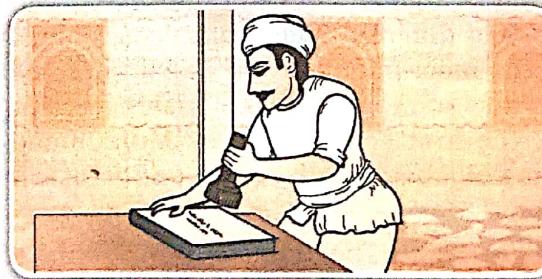
1. Preparing the paper



2. Writing the text

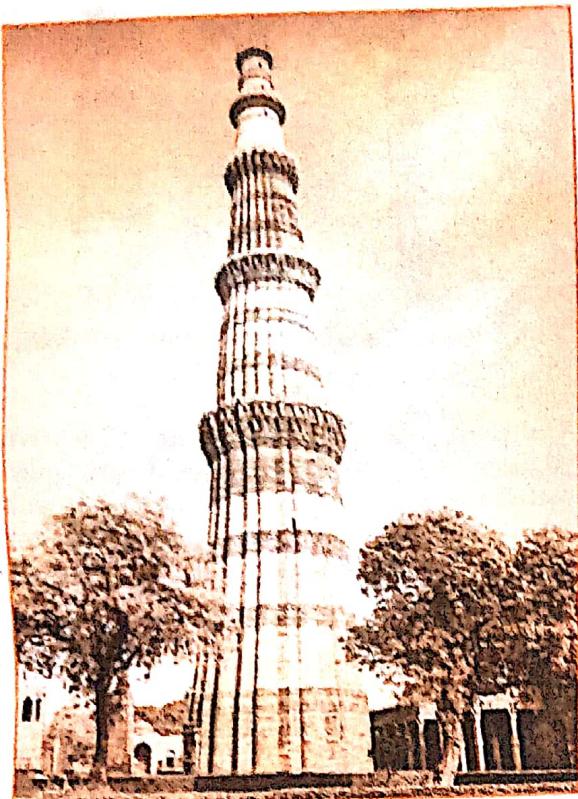


3. Melting gold to highlight important words and passages.



4. Preparing the binding.

Four stages in the making of illuminated manuscript



Qutub Minar

rulers. However, these authors often wrote for the Sultans in the hope of getting rich awards. These handwritten works were decorated with gold or silver to highlight important words and passages and were called *illuminated manuscripts*.

The important source of information about the Delhi Sultanate are:

**1. Inscriptions:** Inscriptions are valuable supplements and not the sole sources of information on the Delhi Sultanate. The inscriptions are found on coins, monuments, milestones and tombstones. Many inscriptions record land-grants made by various rulers and chiefs; others are descriptions of battles or eulogies to rulers. Together, these inscriptions provide act as a good source of information on the history of different rulers and local chiefs. Some of the inscriptions are in Sanskrit, some in Arabic and some in both the languages. For example, the first coin issued by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji bears both Arabic and Sanskrit inscriptions.

**2. Monuments:** The rulers of Delhi Sultanate built many monuments which reveal not only the cultural trends of the period but also the

living conditions, faiths and beliefs as well as the socio-cultural outlook of the rulers.

The most significant of these monuments is *Qutub Minar* in Delhi.

**Qutub Minar:** It was started by Qutub-ud-din Aibak and was dedicated to the Sufi saint, *Qutb-ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki*, who was greatly venerated by the people of Delhi. The structure was completed by Iltutmish. Its special features are:

- (a) When originally completed, it rose to a height of 71.4 metres with four storeys. The tower was damaged by lightning in 1369, and in the course of repairs and renovations Feroz Shah Tughluq further raised its height.
- (b) It has five storeys tapering as they ascend. Each storey is separated from the other by projecting balcony.
- (c) The entrance is through the doorway on the northern side.
- (d) The Minar is a circular tower about 13.8 metres in diameter at the base and tapers to the width of around 3 metres at the summit. It has a circular stairway of 379 steps leading to the top.
- (e) Red sandstone, marble and grey quartzite were used to construct the tower.
- (f) Each of the towers has a projecting balcony. These balconies are supported in such a way that the whole structure takes the load of weight. No wonder that such an old building has lasted so many centuries.
- (g) Verses from the Holy Quran and some intricate carvings with floral motifs are inscribed on this tower.



Qutub-ud-din Aibak

## THE SLAVE DYNASTY

There were five successive ruling dynasties, namely, the Slave, Khilji, Tughlaq, Sayyid and Lodhi dynasties.

Muhammad Ghori defeated Prithviraj Chauhan at the Second Battle of Tarain in 1192. Delhi passed into the hands of these rulers later. From Delhi the Turkish rule was extended into the Gangetic plains and to Bihar and Bengal. The victorious Turks before leaving for Afghanistan left behind a slave general Qutub-ud-din Aibak as viceroy of the conquered lands.

### QUTUBUDDIN AIBAK

He is regarded as the founder of the Slave dynasty. The early rulers of this dynasty were called the 'Mamluk' Sultans. The word Mamluk is an Arabic word that means 'owned'. Since these Sultans were earlier either the slaves of the Turks or were the sons of the slaves, they were called Mamluk Sultans.

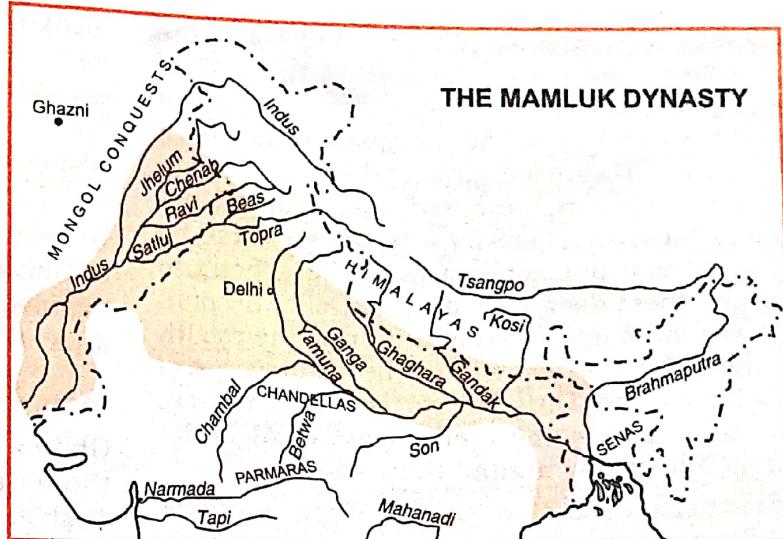
To complete his master's work Qutubuddin Aibak embarked on a series of conquests and captured the fort of Kalinjar in Bundelkhand and Anhilwara (capital of Solankis) in Gujarat.

Besides being a brave and capable military general, Qutubuddin Aibak was a man of letters. Scholars like Hasan Nizami and Fakhre Mudir adorned his court. Because of liberal distribution of money, he earned the title of 'Lakhbaksh'.

Qutubuddin Aibak laid the foundation of Qutub Minar in Delhi, after the name of the famous Sufi saint Khwaja Qutub-ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki, which was completed by Iltutmish. In 1210, Aibak died of a sudden fall from a horse at Lahore while playing *chaugan* or polo.

Qutubuddin Aibak's son Aram Shah had succeeded him. Since Aram Shah was an incapable ruler, he was overthrown by Iltutmish, the slave and son-in-law of Aibak.

Iltutmish did not consider his sons as capable of becoming a Sultan. He therefore, nominated his daughter, Razia as his successor. But many Turkish nobles opposed this move because they considered it below their tradition to be ruled by a woman. So they crowned Iltutmish's son Ruknuddin as the new Sultan. But within seven months Ruknuddin was removed from



the throne and Razia became the first woman ruler of Delhi Sultanate.

### THE KHILJI DYNASTY

The last ruler of the slave dynasty was murdered in 1290 and there arose a new line of rulers called the *Khiljis*.

Jalaluddin Khilji was the founder of the Khilji dynasty, who came to the throne after killing Kaikubad, the last king of the slave dynasty. He was murdered by his nephew Alauddin Khilji, who proclaimed himself as the Sultan.

### ALAUDDIN KHILJI

On ascending the throne, Alauddin had to face a rebellion of Mongols who had earlier settled near Delhi. When Alauddin heard of the rebellion he got many of the Mongols massacred. After that Alauddin conquered all the territories of Malwa, including Ujjain, Dhar, Chanderi and Mandu. By 1305, Alauddin conquered most of the northern India. He had a strong army and started paying his soldiers in cash.

**Market Regulations:** Alauddin is best known in history for his *market regulations*. He fixed the cost of all commodities such as foodgrains, sugar and cooking oil. For this purpose, he set up three markets at Delhi— one market for food grains, the second for costly cloth, and the third for horses, slaves and cattle. Each market was put under the charge of a controller of market (*shahna*). Very strict punishments were prescribed for cheating and underweighing goods.

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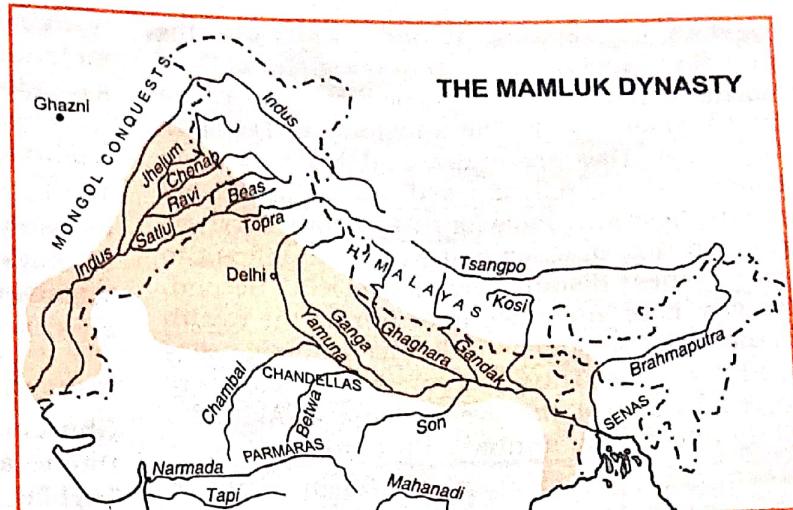
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**Deccan Expedition:** Alauddin Khilji was the first Sultan who, after conquering the bulk of northern India, sent an expedition to Deccan under Malik Kafur. The kingdoms of Devagiri, Warangal, Dwarasamudra and Madurai were conquered but not annexed. Alauddin did not annex these kingdoms for two reasons. First, he realised that practically it would be difficult to control these distant lands from Delhi. Second, he was more interested in acquiring the wealth of these Deccan kingdoms for the maintenance of his huge army. Thus, the rulers of Deccan were forced to accept the overlordship of Alauddin Khilji and to pay annual tribute to him.

**Measures against Nobility:** When Alauddin Khilji came to the throne, he had to face a series of rebellions from the nobles. So he took a number of measures to crush their power.

- (i) The Nobles were not allowed to hold parties or festivities or to form marriage alliances without the permission of the Sultan.
- (ii) The use of wine and intoxicants was banned.
- (iii) Gambling was forbidden and gamblers were severely punished.
- (iv) He stopped paying the soldiers in land and introduced cash salaries.
- (v) He established an efficient spy system to keep a check on the activities of the nobles.

**Military Reforms:** Alauddin Khilji was the first ruler of Delhi who laid the foundation of a permanent standing army. He imported quality horses and started the system of branding horses (*dagh*) so that the soldiers could not replace them with inferior quality horses. He also introduced the system of *chehra*, i.e., giving a kind of identity card for every soldier. He himself approved all recruitments to the army and paid cash salaries to the soldiers from the royal treasury.

**Revenue Reforms:** Alauddin Khilji introduced a number of important measures to get maximum revenue. He brought all the land of the empire under his direct control. He introduced the practice of measuring the land and fixing the state share accordingly. He increased the land revenue from one-third to one-half and demanded it to be paid in cash and not in kind. He appointed special officers to collect land revenue.

Towards the end of his life he was dominated by Malik Kafur, his commander. After many

intrigues the Khilji dynasty finally came to an end when Ghazi Malik, the Governor of Dipalpur ascended the throne.

### **TUGHLAQ DYNASTY**

The ascension to the throne by Ghazi Malik had its own ups and downs. In 1320 he took the title of Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq Shah and began the Tughlaq dynasty. He died during the collapse of a pavilion built in his honour in 1325.

#### **MUHAMMAD BIN TUGHLAQ**

Ghiyas-ud-din's son Jauna Khan ascended the throne and took the title of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq.

Muhammad Bin Tughlaq was one of the most remarkable rulers of his age. He was a great scholar. He had great interest in religion and philosophy. He had also mastered mathematics, astronomy, logic and physical sciences. He was a lover of Persian literature, music, fine arts and calligraphy.

**Transfer of Capital:** During Muhammad Bin Tughlaq's reign the empire had also spread to the south. He shifted his capital to Devagiri near modern Aurangabad and renamed it *Daulatabad*. He did it for the following reasons:

- Daulatabad was centrally located from where he could control the Deccan territories;
- Delhi was in the grip of severe famine; and
- Delhi was constantly threatened by the Mongol invasions.

He ordered the people of Delhi including religious heads to shift to Daulatabad. On realising the gravity of the threat from north-west he decided to shift the capital back to Delhi. This caused lots of hardships to the people.

**Token Currency:** Another controversial step which Muhammad Bin Tughlaq took was the introduction of the "token currency". It meant introduction of bronze tanka in place of silver tankas. This was done because of the shortage of silver. But this experiment failed due to the circulation of counterfeit or fake coins on a very large scale, which caused chaos in trade and commerce. Consequently, he withdrew the token currency.

**TAXATION IN DOAB:** Muhammad Bin Tughlaq wanted to conquer territories not only in India but also in Central Asia. For this he required a large army and, therefore, large amounts of money to pay for the army. So in order to get more revenue, he increased the land tax in the fertile region of Ganga-Yamuna doab. At the same time, a severe famine broke out in the area and the people refused to pay the extra taxes and rose in rebellion. But the tax collectors showed no mercy and took stern measures to collect the taxes. This made some of the peasants abandon their lands and flee to jungles.

Muhammad Bin Tughlaq took effective steps to fight the famine and save the situation. He ordered free distribution of grains, advanced loans to the peasants, improved irrigation facilities, etc. But it was too late and a number of people were starved to death as agriculture suffered a heavy setback in the doab area.

**PLAN OF CONQUESTS:** Muhammad Bin Tughlaq dreamt of conquering the world. So he organised a huge army and paid one full year's salary in advance to his soldiers. He then decided to conquer Khurasan, Persia (Iran) and Iraq. But after a year, and following the failure of the token currency, Muhammad Bin Tughlaq abandoned the project and disbanded the army.

## SULTANATE ADMINISTRATION

The State set up by the Turks towards the end of the 12th century in northern India gradually developed into a powerful and highly centralised state. The Sultan was the supreme executive, legislative, judicial and military authority. The Sultan kept an eye on revenue and expenditure. He was assisted by a number of ministers. The key figure in administration was the *wazir*, who acted as the Prime Minister. The *wazir*

supervised the work of the other officials. The final decisions were always taken by the Sultan.

The minister in charge of the army was called '*ariz-i-mumalik*'. The *ariz* was not the commander-in-chief of the army, since the Sultan himself commanded all the armed forces. The special responsibility of the *ariz*'s department was to recruit, equip and pay the army.

There were two other important departments, namely, the *diwan-i-risalat* and the *diwan-i-insha*. The *diwan-i-risalat* dealt with religious matters and was presided over by the Chief *Sadar*, who was generally a leading *qazi*. The *qazi* was the head of the department of justice and advised the Sultan on civil and religious matters. The *diwan-i-insha* dealt with state correspondence.

During the Sultanate the empire was divided into provinces called '*iqtas*'. Each province was placed under officials called '*muqis*'. To facilitate local administration, provinces were further divided into '*shiqs*', and '*parganas*' or districts. The village was the lowest administrative unit. The officials who worked at the village level included the '*muqaddam*' (the village headman), the '*patwari*' (the record-keeper) and the '*mushrif*' (the village accountant). Each village also had a panchayat to settle local disputes.

**Nobles:** The nobles formed an extremely powerful group as they held positions of provincial governors and military commanders.

During this period, the practice of giving grants of revenue from a territory came to be known as the '*iqta system*'. Those who were given *iqtas* were called '*iqtadars*'. Out of this grant, the *iqtadars* had to maintain themselves, their families and some soldiers for use by the Sultan during war. When the central authority became weak, many of these *iqtadars* functioned as independent rulers of the territories under their command.

## EXERCISES

### I. Multiple-Choice Questions

A. Choose the correct answers to the questions from the given options.

1. Who among the following was not involved in the construction of the Qutub Minar?
  - (a) Qutubuddin Aibak
  - (b) Iltutmish
  - (c) Alauddin Khilji
  - (d) Feroz Shah Tughluq

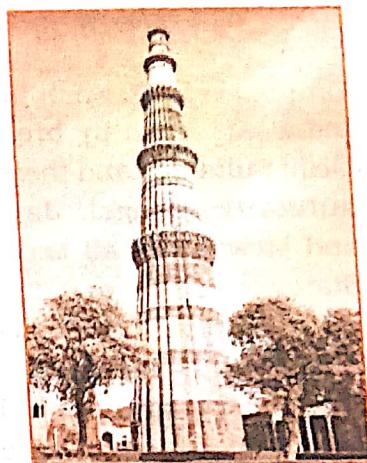
- 2.** Which is the chronological order of the dynasties of the Delhi-Sultanate?  
 (i) Khilji (ii) Slave (iii) Lodhi (iv) Sayyid (v) Tughlaq  
 (a) (ii); (iii); (iv); (v); (i) (b) (ii); (i); (v); (iv); (iii)  
 (c) (ii); (i); (iii); (iv); (v) (d) (ii); (i); (v); (iii) (iv)
- 3.** Alauddin Khilji is best known for his market regulations which amongst the following was not one of the markets set up by him?  
 (a) Costly cloth (b) Horses, Slaves and Cattle  
 (c) Gold, Silver, Copper (d) Food grains
- 4.** Name the first ruler of Delhi to lay the foundation of a permanent standing army.  
 (a) Alauddin Khilji (b) Shihabuddin Masud  
 (c) Muhammad Bin Tughlaq (d) Jauna Khan
- 5.** Complete the analogy with reference to Khilji administration  
 Market controller : Shahna :: Identity card : \_\_\_\_\_  
 (a) Dagh (b) Chehra (c) Tanka (d) None of the above.
- 6.** Complete the following analogy with respect to the Sultanate administration  
 diwan-i-risalat : religious matters :: diwan-i-insha : \_\_\_\_\_  
 (a) army (b) state correspondence  
 (c) land grants (d) provincial administration
- B. Read the two statements given below and select the option that shows the correct relationship between (A) and (B).**
- 1.** (A) It was during the 10th and 11th centuries that Turks began their conquests in India.  
 (B) By this period a number of small kingdoms emerged in North India, who were constantly at conflict with one another.  
 (a) (B) contradicts (A) (b) (B) is the reason for (A)  
 (c) (A) is true but (B) is false (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.
  - 2.** (A) Qutub Minar was dedicated to the Sufi saint, Qutb-ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki.  
 (B) The construction of Qutub was started by Iltutmish.  
 (a) (B) contradicts (A) (b) (B) is the reason for (A)  
 (c) (A) is true but (B) is false (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.
  - 3.** (A) Iltutmish nominated his daughter, Razia as his successor.  
 (B) Iltutmish knew that his sons were incapable to rule.  
 (a) (B) contradicts (A) (b) (B) is the reason for (A)  
 (c) (A) is true but (B) is false (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.
  - 4.** (A) Alauddin Khalji was the founder of the Khalji dynasty.  
 (B) On ascending the throne, Alauddin had to face a rebellion by the Mongols  
 (a) (B) contradicts (A) (b) (B) is the reason for (A)  
 (c) (A) is true but (B) is false (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.
  - 5.** (A) Alauddin Khilji was the first ruler who laid foundation of a permanent standing army.  
 (B) He also started the system of Chehra, i.e., giving a kind identity card.  
 (a) (B) contradicts (A) (b) (B) is the reason for (A)  
 (c) (A) is true but (B) is false (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.

## **II. Short Answer Questions**

1. Who was the founder of the Slave dynasty in India? Give the other name for this dynasty.
2. Why was Qutubuddin known as Lakhbaksh? List any two of his qualities.
3. State any two architectural features of Qutub Minar.
4. Mention any two military reforms introduced by Alauddin Khilji.
5. How did Alauddin Khilji expand his empire?
6. Mention the two controversial steps taken by Muhammad Bin Tughlaq.
7. Who was the commander-in-chief of the army during the Sultanate period? Name the department which dealt with state correspondence during the Sultanate period.
8. What was the iqta system?

## **III. Structured Questions**

1. With reference to the Khilji dynasty, answer the following questions:
  - (a) What were the steps taken by Alauddin Khilji to regulate prices?
  - (b) What were the methods adopted by Alauddin Khilji to crush the power of the nobility?
  - (c) What measures did Alauddin Khilji take to increase the revenue?
2. With reference to the reign of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq, explain the following:
  - (a) His attempts to transfer the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad.
  - (b) Introduction of token currency.
  - (c) Increased taxation in Doab and its consequences.
3. With reference to the administrative system of the Delhi Sultanate, give the functions of each of the following officials:
  - (a) Ariz-i-mumalik
  - (b) Wazir
  - (c) Diwan-i-risalat
4. Study the picture and answer the following questions:
  - (a) Who began erecting this monument? Who completed it? Where is it located?
  - (b) Name the saint after whom the monument is named. What information do the monuments of the Sultanate period provide about the Sultanate era?
  - (c) Mention any four architectural features of the monument.



## **IV. Thinking Skills**

1. Besides the lack of political unity in northern India by the 13th century, what were the other factors that made it possible for the Turks to establish their empire in northern India?
2. Imagine that you are transported in a time-machine to Alauddin Khilji's reign. You visited a number of markets. Write what you saw about the commodities being sold, the price regulations and punishments meted out to the sellers for cheating the consumers. Do you think that the market regulations at present match up to Alauddin Khilji's reign or are better or need some changes?
3. Suppose you met a person belonging to Muhammad Bin Tughlaq's reign, who had to shift to Daulatabad when the capital was shifted there. Write down what he described about the circumstances that forced him to shift, the difficulties which he and others like him faced while moving from Delhi to Daulatabad.

