

The Delhi Sultanate

Important terms

1. **Mercenaries:** hired persons who work for money
2. **Bigot:** a blind follower of one's religion or creed
3. **Puritanical:** practising strict religious or moral behaviour
4. **Feudal:** a social system which existed during the Middle Ages in Europe in which people had to work on a nobleman's land
5. **Theocratic:** a form of government claimed to be guided by God. This type of government is based on one religion.
6. **Despot:** a ruler with great power, a cruel ruler
7. **Garrisoned:** put soldiers in a place to defend it from attack
8. **Theology:** the study of religion and beliefs or a set of religious beliefs

The whole Arab empire including Arabia, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, North Africa and Spain had been once dominated by the Islamic rulers.

ARAB INVASION OF SIND

Around the beginning of the 8th century, the Arabs spread their influence to the shores of India. The Arab general **Muhammad-bin Qasim** attacked Sind in 712 AD and defeated Dahir, the Hindu Raja of Sind, but he could not advance further. Thus this invasion, which is known as the Arab invasion of Sind, did not leave any political impact.

TURKISH INVASIONS

The Turkish tribesmen and mercenaries started to dominate the political life of Islam everywhere in the West and Central Asia around 1000 AD. They were newcomers and extended the Muslim frontiers substantially.

MAHMUD OF GHAZNI

By the end of 10th century, the Turks had risen to power in Central Asia. The Turkish generals of the Abbasid Caliphate had proclaimed their rule over many

territories. Ghazni in Afghanistan also came under the rule of Mahmud, one of the most outstanding of them. He moved his capital to Ghazni, and thus came to be known as Mahmud Ghaznavi.

Mahmud required huge resources to make his empire prosperous and strong. He had heard about the temples of north and south India which were famous for their wealth. As soon as he ascended the throne of Ghazni in 998 AD, he decided to pursue a policy of aggressive warfare against India. Between 1000 and 1025 AD, he invaded India 17 times and **plundered the north Indian temples** of Mathura and Kannauj and also the Somnath temple in Gujarat in 1025 AD. He looted immense wealth, precious stones and jewellery which he took to Ghazni. He carried away 6.5 tonnes of gold from the Somnath temple alone. Even the beautifully carved sandalwood gateways of Somnath temple were taken to Ghazni.

Mahmud's raids exposed the weakness of Indian rulers, which encouraged other invaders to invade India.



Mahmud of Ghazni



Invasion of India by Mahmud of Ghazni



Somnath Temple—on his 16th invasion
Mahmud looted 20 million dinars worth of
wealth from the treasures of the temple



City, Tower and Fort of Ghazni

MUHAMMAD GHORI

After a gap of 150 years, India was invaded again. Muhammad Ghori, the ruler of a small kingdom of Ghor in Afghanistan, captured Ghazni in 1173 AD and turned his attention to India. He was very ambitious and wanted to establish a big empire. His primary aim was not plunder but the conquest of India.

In his first invasion in 1190 AD, Muhammad Ghori occupied Peshawar, Lahore and Sialkot. The small kingdoms of India had not learnt any lessons even after Mahmud Ghaznavi's raids. Ghori easily defeated the Ghaznavi ruler of Punjab, but was defeated by the ruler of Gujarat.

Ghori then turned to the Gangetic Plain. However, he was defeated in 1191 AD in the **First Battle of Tarain** by **Prithviraj Chauhan**, the ruler of Delhi and Ajmer. Ghori himself was badly wounded. But he made full preparations for avenging the defeat and met Prithviraj again at Tarain the next year.

This time, although Prithviraj received some help from other rulers of the north, he was defeated and killed. This **Second Battle of Tarain** (1192 AD) and the victory of Muhammad Ghori on the Indian soil proved to be a turning point in the history of India. It was a decisive contest which ensured the ultimate success of Ghori against Hindustan. It also paved the way for the **defeat of Jaichand of Kannauj in the Battle of Chandawar** in 1194 AD. After finally annexing Kannauj in 1198 AD, Ghori returned to Afghanistan.

Establishment of Delhi Sultanate

Before leaving, Muhammad Ghori made his trusted slave and commander Qutbuddin in-charge of his conquests.



Muhammad Ghori



Prithviraj Chauhan

Causes and Consequences of the Success of the Turks

1. Disunity among the Rajput rulers was the most important cause of Muhammad Ghori's success. As a result of this disunity, Islamic rule in India was established for the next more than five centuries.
2. The Indian rulers did not learn any lessons from their failure against invasions time and again. The Indian rulers continued to quarrel among themselves.
3. The Turks enjoyed military supremacy in terms of armour, planning and strategy as well as swift horses. The Indian rulers failed to realise that their slow moving elephants and poorly equipped soldiers were no match to the Turks. Neither did they try to modernise their army nor give any serious thought to planning.
4. An important cause of the success of the Turkish invaders was their religious zeal.

As a result of the success of the Turks, a period of Muslim rule started in India. In 1206 AD, Qutbuddin Aibak laid the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate under a dynasty, popularly known as the Slave Dynasty. It is known as Sultanate as all the rulers during this period were known as Sultans.

The rule of the Delhi Sultanate lasted about 320 years from 1206 to 1526 AD, during which five dynasties ruled: Slave dynasty (1206-1290 AD), Khilji dynasty (1290-1320 AD), Tughlaq dynasty (1320-1414 AD), Sayyid dynasty (1414-1451 AD) and Lodi dynasty (1451-1526 AD).

THE SLAVE DYNASTY (1206-1290 AD)

Qutbuddin Aibak (1206-1210 AD)

Initially, Qutbuddin Aibak was the slave of Muhammad Ghori and many of Qutbuddin's successors were also slaves or the sons of slaves. Hence, this dynasty is known as the Slave Dynasty. It is also known as the *Mamluk* dynasty, because in Persian, *mamluk* means slave or the son of a slave.



Qutb Minar

Being a slave, Qutbuddin had difficulty in overcoming the resistance of the nobles of his time and suppressing internal revolts and external invasions simultaneously. For this reason, he could not make any conquests as a ruler. But he was a great military leader, who possessed a high degree of courage.

Interesting Fact

It is normally believed that Qutb Minar was named after its builder Qutbuddin Aibak. In fact, he had built it in the memory of the renowned Sufi saint Qutb-ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki.

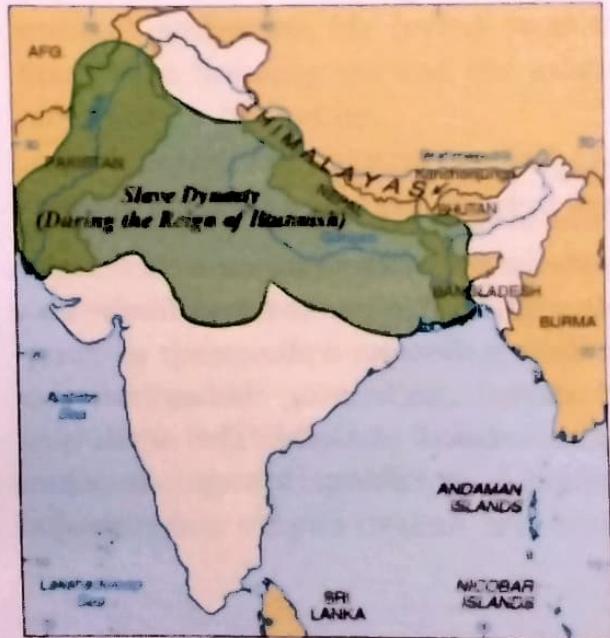
He built two mosques, one at Delhi, known as the **Quwwat-ul-Islam**, and the other at Ajmer, known as **Dhai Din Ka Jhonpara**. He also started the construction of the **Qutb Minar**, which was completed by Iltutmish. He was a generous king and for his generosity he was known as **Lakh Bakhsha** (giver of lakhs). He died of injuries received as a result of a fall from his horse while playing polo in November 1210.

Iltutmish (1211-1236 AD)

Qutbuddin Aibak was succeeded by his son, Aram Shah, but the nobles conspired against him. He was replaced by Iltutmish.

Iltutmish was a slave of Aibak and later became his son-in-law. Since there was resentment in a section of the nobles against his accession, he appointed a group of forty trusted nobles known as '*Chalisa*', to help him in suppressing his enemies. Moreover, he secured approval of the Caliph of Baghdad for his accession. This won him the support of a large section of Muslims and also strengthened his position. He faced threat from two governors Nasiruddin Qubacha, the ruler of Multan and Tajuddin Yalduz, the ruler of Ghazni. He suppressed the revolts in the Gangetic valley and firmly established the Turkish rule. He made Delhi his capital and set out for conquests. He defeated the Rajput rulers of Gwalior, Malwa, Ujjain and Mandu. Thus, he was able to extend the Delhi Sultanate up to the banks of Narmada.

Iltutmish showed his farsightedness in dealing with Genghis Khan (Changez Khan) and saved the Delhi Sultanate from Mongol invasion.



Slave Dynasty



Quwwat-ul-Islam



Dhai Din Ka Jhonpara

Iltutmish was the first Turkish ruler to introduce purely Arabic coins. Finding his sons incompetent to rule, Iltutmish declared his daughter Raziya his successor. The credit for consolidating the empire established by Qutbuddin Aibak goes to Iltutmish. For this contribution he is regarded as the real founder of the Turkish empire in India.



Tomb of Iltutmish

Raziya Sultan (1236-1240 AD)

Iltutmish had nominated his daughter Raziya as his successor. Raziya was brave and powerful, but the Turkish nobles could not tolerate being ruled by a woman. Moreover, Raziya dressed herself like a man, rode on horseback and also transacted business in an open court. This also was not to the liking of the Turkish nobles. They started conspiring against her. She was defeated by Malik Altuniya, the governor of Sirhind and the leader of the rebels. Later, she married Altuniya to recover the throne. The nobles, however, plotted against her and put her to death in 1240 AD.



Raziya Sultan

Nasiruddin Mahmud (1246-1266 AD)

Raziya was succeeded by her brother Nasiruddin Mahmud, who was weak. He left the administration in the hands of Balban.

Ghiyasuddin Balban (1266-1287 AD)

After Nasiruddin Mahmud's death in 1266 AD, Balban occupied the throne. He had also been a slave and had risen to the highest position because of his capabilities.

To restore the prestige of the Crown, he adopted a policy of sternness and severity, known as the policy of 'blood and iron'. He regulated the court and made very strict rules which every noble had to follow. Balban destroyed the group of 'forty' which had become very powerful and had started challenging the authority of the Sultan. He established order in the neighbourhood of Delhi. The north-west frontiers were garrisoned strongly because of the continuous Mongol invasions from there. By his policies, Balban consolidated the Turkish empire and provided it a firm base. He died in 1287 AD.

THE KHILJI DYNASTY (1290-1320 AD)

Balban's successors were very weak. Kaiqubad, a grandson of Balban, was murdered in 1290 AD and the Sultanate passed into the hands of the Khiljis.

Jalaluddin Khilji (1290-1296 AD)

He was the founder of this dynasty. He was old and unambitious. He entrusted the task of conquests to his nephew Alauddin, who later became his son-in-law. Alauddin was highly capable as well as ambitious. He got Jalaluddin killed and captured the throne.

Alauddin Khilji (1296-1316 AD)

He was a brilliant general and an able administrator. His policy to keep the nobles under control was even stricter than Balban's. Having analysed the causes of rebellions in his kingdom, he issued four important ordinances to prevent their recurrence. Then he started a career of conquests.

Alauddin Khilji was ambitious and dreamt of becoming the **second Alexander**. His conquests included annexation of Gujarat and Malwa in 1297, Ranthambhor in 1301, and the fort of Chittor in Mewar in 1303. It is with his Chittor campaign that the story of Rani Padmini (the beautiful queen of Rana Ratan Singh) is associated. To protect their honour, the Rajput women performed *Jauhar* by perishing themselves in the flames rather than submitting to the enemy. Alauddin brought under his control almost all the rulers of Rajasthan. They were allowed to rule, on the condition that they paid taxes to Alauddin.

Alauddin required huge sums of money to maintain a large army to fulfil his military ambitions. He levied taxes on wealthy people and introduced two new taxes—the **housing tax** and the **grazing tax**. He also kept watch on the revenues collected by his nobles.

A market control system was introduced by which the market was regulated and the prices of all the commodities were controlled. It was just like the modern **rationing system** or the public distribution system. Although this was done to benefit the army, the general public also got its advantage.



Tomb of Alauddin

Alauddin laid the foundation of a permanent standing army. The soldiers were directly recruited by the army minister. He also started the practice of recording the descriptive roll (*huliya*) of individual soldiers in the army minister's register and introduced the system of branding of horses (*dagh*).



Alauddin Khilji's Empire

Alauddin was the first ruler of Delhi who conquered the Deccan. He sent Malik Kafur to conquer Deccan. Malik Kafur plundered the conquered regions and took away large amount of gold, silver and other precious gems as also elephants and horses. The local rulers were allowed to rule on the promise of payment of tribute regularly.

Thus, Alauddin ruled over a vast kingdom. The Mongols raided the Delhi Sultanate many times during his rule. But he was successful in keeping them under check.

Alauddin took interest in building monuments. He built *Alai Darwaza* as an extension of the *Quwwat-ul-Islam* mosque at Delhi.

Khusro Khan was the last ruler of the Khilji dynasty. He was murdered by his own general, Ghazi Malik, who occupied the throne of Delhi and laid the foundation of the Tughlaq dynasty.



Alai Darwaza

Case Study

THE TUGHLAQ DYNASTY (1320-1414 AD)

Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq (1320-1325 AD)

After putting an end to the Khilji dynasty, Ghazi Malik took the title of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq Shah and ascended the throne in 1320 AD. He conducted campaigns against Warangal, Orissa (Odisha) and Bengal to expand his kingdom. He was a kind ruler and a patron of learning. He died in 1325 AD, when a pavilion built for a public reception in his honour, collapsed.

Muhammad-bin Tughlaq (1325-1351 AD)

Ghiyasuddin was succeeded by his son Muhammad-bin Tughlaq. He is known for his various projects.

Taxation in Doab

The territory between Ganga and Yamuna is known as Doab and is naturally very fertile. In order to increase his revenue, Muhammad increased the rate of tax on this fertile land. But in the meantime, a famine broke out and the people were unable to pay taxes.

Interesting Fact

Doab: *Ab* means water. Doab means area lying between two water sources or rivers. This is the most fertile area.

Transfer of Capital

In 1327 AD, the Sultan decided to transfer his capital from Delhi to Devagiri in the Deccan since Devagiri was situated in the middle of his kingdom. He ordered all his nobles, officials, learned men and many others to shift to the new capital, which was renamed Daulatabad.



Muhammad Tughlaq's Empire

Although many arrangements were made for the convenience and comfort of the public, the distance of 1500 km was too long for them to bear the hardship of the journey. Many of them died either on the way or on reaching there. As soon as the Sultan realised that the scheme had failed, he ordered the people to return to Delhi. The people again suffered on their backward journey. It added to their misery and many more died.

Introduction of Token Currency

Muhammad introduced token currency in brass and copper in place of gold and silver. He issued an order that people should only use and accept these coins in all transactions just like gold and silver coins. As a result, gold and silver coins soon disappeared from the market and forged coins minted by the goldsmiths at their homes came into circulation. People insisted on gold and silver coins while taking payments but while giving they forced the coins manufactured by themselves. Trade



Brass & Copper coins

came to a standstill, businesses collapsed and confusion prevailed. This compelled the Sultan to withdraw the token currency. It emptied the treasury and the prestige of the empire also suffered.

Plans of Conquests

Muhammad-bin Tughlaq also made plans to conquer Persia and China. A huge army was recruited and paid salaries in advance. For about a year, he went on making preparations but ultimately had to abandon the project. This put a heavy strain on the treasury once again.

Assessment of Muhammad Tughlaq

Muhammad's personal life was marked by a high standard of morality. He was a man of profound learning and the only Sultan to have received good education. He had a lot of imagination but lacked practical judgement. When judged as a ruler and administrator, he was a complete failure. That is why historians like Elphinstone believed that he suffered from some degree of insanity. Ibn Batuta, a traveller who visited his court, has portrayed him as a mixture of opposites, who was very cruel and kind at the same time. Dr. Ishwari Prasad finds him as an amazing compound of contradictions.

Some historians are of the opinion that there was nothing wrong in him; he failed because the people were backward and prejudiced, who could not understand the importance of his projects. Dr. Aga Mahdi Husain is also of the opinion that Muhammad Tughlaq was way ahead of his time.

The result of his failure was that although he had inherited a vast kingdom, but at the time of his death it was considerably reduced in size. His policies expedited the disintegration of Delhi Sultanate.

Firoz Shah Tughlaq (1351-1388 AD)

Firoz, a cousin of Muhammad, succeeded him in 1351 AD. He faced a difficult situation because the empire had already started breaking. The army, the nobles and the Ulema (the religious class) all wished to have a greater say in the administration. Firoz, though a distinguished military leader, lacked courage and determination. Hence, he tried to appease his officers and the Ulema by giving them authority and sharing power with them. He also did not make any significant plans of conquests. Thus, his reign was a reign of peace. Welfare of the people was his prime concern. He got the old canals repaired and dug a number of new ones. He built towns and forts and ruled strictly according to the Islamic laws. Therefore, he reduced the taxes so as to bring them at a level sanctioned by the Holy law. He proclaimed himself as a true Muslim king. Through the imposition of the Jaziya tax, he turned his Hindu subjects against him.

Firoz was a patron of learning and scholars. He himself was a scholar and wrote his autobiography *Futuhat-i-Firozshahi*. He built many schools or madrasas. Madrasa built at Hauz Khas in Delhi was considered to be the largest and best equipped centre of Islamic learning in the world.



Firoz Shah Tughlaq



Madrasa built by Firoz Shah Tughlaq at Hauz Khas in Delhi

(Ziauddin Barni and Shams-i-Siraj Afif wrote their historical works under his patronage)

Firoz's Successors

Firoz Shah's successors were weak and incompetent. They became puppets in the hands of ambitious nobles. This led to civil wars among the rival claimants to the throne. Provincial governors and other ambitious chiefs raised the flag of revolt everywhere.



Firoz Shah's Tomb

Invasion of Timur (1398 AD)

Firoz Tughlaq had neglected the defence of the North-West frontier. Ten years after his death Timur (famous as Timur Lang or Timur the Lame), who had risen to power in central Asia, invaded Delhi. Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud Tughlaq, the then ruler of Delhi, offered no resistance. Timur could easily capture Delhi. His victory was complete. Timur ordered a general plunder and massacre which lasted for several days. He stayed at Delhi for fifteen days. On his way back, he again sacked and plundered the other cities of northern India mercilessly.

Timur had no desire to stay in India or to rule over it. But his invasion completed the dissolution of the Tughlaq kingdom, although it somehow managed to continue till 1413 AD.

Interesting Fact

Timur had lost his leg during a battle and thereafter became famous as Timur the Lame. It is said that once a blind mendicant (darvesh) came to his court, whose name was Daulat (meaning wealth). Timur made fun of him saying "can 'daulat' be blind?" The darvesh immediately replied: "had daulat not been blind how a lame person (meaning Timur) could amass it".

Comparative Study between the Khiljis and Tughlaqs

We have read about two powerful dynasties of Delhi Sultanate—the Khilji dynasty and the Tughlaq dynasty. We find a number of differences between the two.

1. The Khiljis ruled for the shortest period whereas the Tughlaqs ruled for the longest period.
2. The Khiljis expanded the Sultanate far and wide upto the south, but in the times of the later Tughlaq rulers the Delhi Sultanate was confined to Delhi and some adjoining areas.
3. The Khiljis gave a stable administration but the Tughlaqs were not able to maintain peace and prosperity.
4. The Khilji Sultan Alauddin was an example of success whereas Muhammad Tughlaq represented failure. Alauddin has so many remarkable achievements to his credit by which he alone took the Khilji dynasty to great heights, but none of the Tughlaq rulers could match his achievements.

5. The rule of the Khiljis was the period of the ascendance of the Sultanate whereas the rule of Tughlaqs was marked by disintegration.
6. The buildings of the Khilji period are full of Muslim architectural ideas. Alauddin was a great builder whose buildings are full of splendour and grace. But the buildings of the Tughlaq period lack that grace and beauty for two reasons. Firstly, the Tughlaq rulers had a religious outlook and their tastes were puritanical. Secondly, the Tughlaq Sultans were hard pressed for money, especially after the expensive projects of Muhammad Tughlaq. Therefore, they could not afford to spend large sums on buildings.

THE SAYYID DYNASTY (1414-1451 AD)

Timur had entrusted the governance of Multan, Lahore and Dipalpur to his deputy Khizr Khan, who became the ruler of Delhi in 1414 AD. He laid the foundation of the Sayyid dynasty. Khizr Khan was the most able ruler of this dynasty. However, his reign was not marked by any striking success in spite of his attempts to regain some lost territories of the kingdom.

Khizr Khan died in 1421 AD and was succeeded by his son Mubarak Shah who hardly made any attempt to recover any of the lost provinces of the kingdom. Yahiya-bin Ahmad Sirhindi has given a detailed account of his reign in his book *Tarikh-i-Mubarakshahi*.

Mubarak Shah was succeeded by Muhammad Shah, who was a grandson of Khizr Khan. His reign was marked by rebellions and conspiracies. He died in 1445 AD and was succeeded by his son Alauddin Alam Shah. Bahlol Lodi, an Afghan governor of Lahore and Sirhind, removed Alam Shah from the throne and captured power in 1451 AD. The rule of Sayyids may not be credited with any worthwhile contribution in any field.

THE LODI DYNASTY (1451-1526 AD)

(Bahlol Lodi (1451-1489 AD)

Bahlol Lodi asserted his authority over neighbouring areas and proceeded against the chiefs of Mewar, Sambhal and Aligarh. His greatest military success was against the ruler of Jaunpur. He then proceeded against Raja Man Singh of Gwalior who was forced to make peace with the invader. Bahlol Lodi was taken ill and died in 1489 AD.

Bahlol was very shrewd. He knew that he could succeed only if the Afghan nobles were kept satisfied. He treated the nobles as his equal and tried to win their confidence by generous gifts and large tracts of land as jagirs. With their help, he ruled for 38 years.)

Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517 AD)

Bahlol was succeeded by his second son Sikandar. He is said to be the greatest of the Lodi kings. He suppressed rebellious chiefs and moved the capital from Delhi to **Agra** in order to keep closer control over the eastern provinces. During his rule, the prices of food and other goods were very low. However, he was a bigot and is known for his open hostility to the Hindus. He destroyed some Hindu temples and imposed restrictions on certain religious practices. He collected the *Jaziya* from the Hindus with severity.

Ibrahim Lodi (1517-1526 AD)

Sikandar was succeeded by his eldest son, Ibrahim. Ibrahim's greatest achievement was the capture of the fortress of Gwalior. He, however, could not recover from the crushing defeat at the hands of Rana Sanga of Mewar. His Afghan and Turkish nobles were not happy with him. Daulat Khan Lodi, the Governor of Punjab, invited **Babur**, the ruler of Kabul, to invade India and overthrow Ibrahim. Babur was waiting for such an opportunity. He defeated Ibrahim Lodi in the famous **Battle of Panipat** in 1526 AD and laid the foundation of Mughal empire in India.



Tomb of Sikandar Lodi



Battle of Panipat between Babur and Ibrahim Lodi