



# Bengal Dynasties Overview

## Brief Overview

This note covering **Indian medieval history** was created from a PDF presentation (40 pages). The content examines **dynastic transitions** through **historical analysis** and **political strategies**.

## Key Concepts

- **Pala Dynasty** and its Buddhist patronage
  - Understanding **Sena Dynasty**'s shift to orthodoxy
  - **Military adaptation** to Turkic cavalry warfare
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## The Predecessors in Bengal 🏰

### Pala Dynasty

- **Founding**: Gopala elected by local chiefs to end the chaotic *matsyanya* period.
- **Chronology**: Ruled Bengal and Bihar for ~four centuries (c. 8th–12th CE).
- **Key Rulers**:
  - **Dharmapala** and **Devapala** – expanded power to northern India, contested Kannauj.
- **Religion & Culture**:
  - Patrons of **Mahayana Buddhism**.
  - Established world-famous universities:
    - *Somapura Mahavihara* (present-day Bangladesh)
    - *Vikramashila* (Bihar)
- **Administrative Traits**: Practised **religious tolerance**; Hindu officials and Brahmin scholars held high posts.
- **Decline**: Post-11th century internal disputes and external invasions weakened the dynasty, creating a power vacuum.

### Sena Dynasty

- **Origin**: Founded by **Samantasena** (Karnata region, South India).
- **Expansion**:
  - **Hemantasena** secured western Bengal (Radha) ~1095 CE.
  - **Vijayasena** (c. 1097–1160 CE) unified Bengal for the first time.

- **Cultural Policy:** Promoted strict **orthodox Hinduism**; introduced **Kulinism** (rigid social hierarchy).
- **Literary Contributions:**
  - **Ballala Sena** (c. 1160–1178 CE) authored *Danasagara* and *Adbhutasagara*.

**Comparison: Pala vs. Sena**

Aspect	Pala Dynasty	Sena Dynasty
Founding Figure	Gopala (elected)	Samantasena (Karnata)
Religious Patronage	Mahayana Buddhism	Orthodox Hinduism (Kulinism)
Major Institutions	Somapura Mahavihara, Vikramashila	Sanskrit literary works
Territorial Reach	Bengal & Bihar, contested Kannauj	Unified Bengal under Vijayasena
Decline Factors	Internal disputes, invasions	Focus on religion, limited military innovation

## The Reign of Lakshmana Sena 👑

- **Court:** Nadia (Nabadwip) became a hub of **Sanskrit culture** and devotional literature.
- **Military & Administration:**
  - Early successes gave way to **declining administrative control** and **military vigilance**.
  - Regional chiefs (e.g., **Dommanapala** in the southern delta) asserted independence, exposing central weakness.
- **Strategic Shortcomings:**
  - Failure to adapt the army to **Turkic cavalry warfare**; elite focus remained on literature and religion.
- **Outcome:** By the time **Bakhtiyar Khalji** arrived, the Sena empire was **politically fragile** and **militarily outdated**, facilitating swift conquest.

## Ghurid Conquest of Hindustan ⚔️

- **Policy Difference:** Unlike Mahmud of Ghazni’s raid-for-plunder, **Mu‘izz al-Din Muhammad** pursued systematic **territorial expansion**.

- **Key Campaigns:**
  1. Captured **Multan (1175)**; eliminated Ghaznavid hold in **Lahore (1186)**.
  2. **First Battle of Tarain (1191)** – defeat vs. Prithviraj Chauhan.
  3. **Second Battle of Tarain (1192)** – decisive victory, consolidating northern India.
- **Administration:** Delegated frontier consolidation to **Turkic slave-generals (mamluks)**; chief was **Qutb al-Din Aibak**, appointed viceroy of Delhi.
- **Legacy:** After Mu'izz's assassination (1206), Aibak founded the **Delhi Sultanate**, embedding Ghurid imperial structures in India.

## Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji



*The illustration shows Bakhtiyar Khalji in traditional attire, emphasizing his status as a frontier commander within the Ghurid framework.*

## Frontier Commander

- **Ethnicity:** Member of the **Khalaj tribe**, originally Turkish, long settled in Afghanistan; over time became “**Turko-Afghans**.”
- **Status within Ghurids:** Considered lower-rank; the elite looked down on Khalajis, fueling a strong desire to prove themselves.
- **Early Struggles:**
  - Rejected by armies in **Ghazni** and **Delhi** due to his **short, thin stature and unusually long arms** (per historian Minhaj-i-Siraj).
  - Gained a foothold after impressing **Malik Hushamuddin**, governor of Oudh, who granted him a **jagir** in **Bhagwat** and **Bhiuli**.

## Subjugation of Bihar (c. 1200–1203 CE)

1. Launched raids from Oudh, exploiting Bihar’s post-political disorder.
2. **1203 CE:** Captured the **Buddhist mahavihara of Odantapuri**, mistaking it for a fort; acquired vast wealth.
3. **Destruction of Buddhist Institutions:**
  - Odantapuri and **Vikramashila** were razed.
  - **Nalanda**’s fate remains debated; early sources omit direct blame, suggesting pre-existing decline.

## Invasion of Bengal (c. 1204–1205 CE)

- Chose a **surprise forest route** through Jharkhand tribal lands, bypassing the main Sena defenses.
- Arrived at **Nadia (Nabadwip)** with only **18 horsemen**, masquerading as traders, and entered without resistance.
- **Lakshmana Sena** was caught during lunch, fled barefoot to **Vikramapura** in eastern Bengal.
- Bakhtiyar proceeded to **Lakhnauti (Gaur/Lakshmanavati)**, the true administrative capital, which fell **without resistance**, evidencing the Sena collapse.

## A New Administration

**iqta** – a land grant assigned to a military officer for tax collection, troop maintenance, and law enforcement, without full ownership.

- Divided conquered Bengal into **iqtas**, assigned to trusted **Khalji officers (muqtas or iqtadars)**.
- **Religious Infrastructure**: Built **mosques**, **madrasas**, and **khanqahs** to attract scholars and Sufis from Central Asia and Persia.
- **Political Legitimacy**: Continued to read the **Friday khutbah** in the Ghurid Sultan’s name.
- **Coinage**: Minted bilingual coins: Arabic inscription bearing the Sultan’s titles on one side; Sanskrit in Nagari script reading **“Gauda Vijaye”** (“Conqueror of Gaur”) on the other.

## Tibet Expedition (1206 CE)

- Planned a **strategic incursion** into Tibet, aiming to secure trade routes and possibly extend influence; the expedition ultimately **failed**.

## Key Terms

**Kulinism** – a rigid social hierarchy introduced by the Sena dynasty, emphasizing strict Brahminical orthodoxy.

**Muqtas / Iqtadars** – military officers granted iqtas; responsible for revenue collection and local governance under the Khalji regime.

## Chronological Overview (Selected Events)

Year	Event
c. 1095 CE	Hemantasena establishes Sena foothold in western Bengal
1203 CE	Bakhtiyar Khalji captures Odantapuri (Bihar)
1204 CE	Khalji’s surprise march through Jharkhand into Bengal
1205 CE	Capture of Lakhnauti (Gaur); Lakshmana Sena flees
1206 CE	Failed Tibet expedition; Bakhtiyar assassinated later

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These sections provide a concise yet comprehensive snapshot of Bengal's transition from **Sena rule** to **early Muslim governance** under **Bakhtiyar Khalji**, setting the foundation for subsequent Bengal Sultanates.

## **Bakhtiyar Khalji's Tibet Expedition (1206 CE)**

- **Objective:** Control the trans-Himalayan trade routes (tea, horses).
- **Force:** ~10,000 horsemen, guided by **Ali Mech**, a local tribal chief.
- **Route:** North from **Devkot** into the Himalayan mountains.

*Guerrilla tactics* – hit-and-run attacks used by Tibetan forces exploiting narrow passes.

- **Challenges**
  - Harsh weather, thin air, treacherous terrain.
  - Cavalry trained for plains warfare became ineffective in mountain passes.
  - Soldiers suffered hunger, cold, exhaustion, and constant enemy attacks.
- **Retreat**
  - Ordered after realizing victory was impossible; the retreat proved more disastrous.
  - Tibetans pursued relentlessly.
  - On re-entering **Kamrup (Assam)**, the bridge was destroyed by the Kamrup king, trapping the army.
  - Almost the entire force perished; Bakhtiyar escaped with only a few dozen survivors.

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## **Khalji Successor & Power Struggle (1206 CE)**

- **Khalji's Return:** Back to Devkot, ill and vulnerable after the failed expedition.
- **Assassination:** Senior commander **Ali Mardan Khalji** killed him while he was bedridden.
- **Key Claimants**
  1. **Ali Mardan**
  2. **Muhammad Shiran Khalji**
  3. **Husamuddin Iwaz Khalji** (later **Sultan Ghiyasuddin Iwaz Shah**)

- **Resulting Conflict**

- Internal warfare for control of **Lakhnauti**.
  - **Delhi Sultanate** intervened but could not impose lasting authority.
  - Husamuddin Iwaz Khalji strengthened administration and local support, effectively ruling Bengal as a quasi-independent state.
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## Bengal Sultanate Overview



**Founder: Fakhr al-Din Mubarak Shah (1338-1349)**



*The sepia-toned portrait shows Fakhr al-Din with a distinctive mustache and bald head, emphasizing his regal bearing as the first independent Sultan of Bengal.*

- **Previous Role:** *Silahdar* (armoury officer) under Tughlaq governor **Bahram Khan**.
- **Independence:** Declared after Bahram Khan's death (1337); founded the first independent Muslim Sultanate in **Sonargaon**.
- **Royal Title on Coins:**

“Al-Sultan al-Azam Fakhr al-Dunya wa’l-Din Abu’l-Muzaffar Mubarak Shah” –  
The Great Sultan, Pride of the World and Faith.

## Foundation of Muslim Rule (1204-1325)

Period	Key Figure	Main Action	Outcome
1204-05	<b>Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji</b>	Surprise attack on Bengal; defeated King Lakshmanasena at Nadia	Established rule at <b>Lakhnauti</b> , distributed <i>iqtas</i> , minted coins in Ghurid name
1206	<b>Bakhtiyar’s Death</b>	Power vacuum	Khalji Civil War among commanders (Muhammad Shiran, Ali Mardan, Iwaz Khalji)
1212-27	<b>Husamuddin Iwaz Khalji</b> (Sultan Ghiyasuddin Iwaz)	Declared independence	Defeated by Delhi Sultan <b>Iltutmish</b> (1227); Bengal re-subjugated

*Iqta* – a land grant given to military officers in exchange for service and revenue collection.



## Delhi Sultanate Control (1227-1325)

- **Status:** Bengal functioned as a rebellious province rich in fertile lands and revenue, enabling governors to raise strong local armies.
- **Pattern of Rebellion:** Governors often stopped tribute and declared independence, especially during Delhi’s preoccupations (Mongol invasions, internal strife).
- **Notable Rebellion:**
  - **Mughisuddin Tughral Khan** (1268-81) – former slave of Sultan Balban; declared himself Sultan, defeated two Delhi armies;



ultimately executed in 1281 after Balban's personal campaign.

- **Balban's Response:** Appointed his son **Nasiruddin Bughra Khan** as governor; Bughra Khan later declared independence after Balban's death (1287).
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## **Tughlaq Strategy: Divide to Control (1325-1338)**

- **Division of Bengal into Three Iqlims**
    1. **Lakhnauti** – Northern Bengal
    2. **Satgaon** – Southern & Western Bengal
    3. **Sonargaon** – Eastern Bengal
  - **Governors Appointed by Muhammad bin Tughluq**
    - **Tatar Khan (Bahram Khan)** – Sonargaon
    - **Qadar Khan** – Lakhnauti
    - **Izzuddin Yahya** – Satgaon
  - **Imperial Turmoil:** Capital shift to Daulatabad, failed token currency, heavy taxation → economic distress and revolts, weakening central authority and creating space for Fakhr al-Din's rise.
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## **Sultan Fakhr al-Din Mubarak Shah (1338-1349)**

- **Consolidation**
  - Seized administration after Bahram Khan's death.
  - Secured loyalty of local military before proclaiming independence (1338).
- **Conflict with Delhi**
  - Muhammad bin Tughluq dispatched Qadar Khan and Izzuddin Yahya to suppress him.
  - Initial defeat forced Fakhr al-Din to abandon Sonargaon.
- **Turn of Events**
  - Qadar Khan misappropriated captured wealth, alienating his troops.
  - Fakhr al-Din exploited monsoon season and naval strength, offering Qadar Khan's soldiers the treasury in exchange for assassinating their commander.
  - Troops assassinated Qadar Khan; Fakhr al-Din regained Sonargaon.
- **Resulting Political Map**

1. **Sonargaon** – Fakhr al-Din Mubarak Shah
  2. **Lakhnauti** – Alauddin Ali Shah
  3. **Satgaon** – Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah
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## Achievements of Sultan Fakhr al-Din

- **Conquest of Chittagong (1340)**
    - Route through **Noakhali**; defeated the king of **Tripura**.
    - Sufi support: prominent saint **Badr Pir** participated.
    - Annexed the strategic port, expanding Bengal's maritime trade.
  - **Administrative Expansion**
    - Appointed a **naib** (deputy) to govern newly acquired territories.
    - Controlled modern **Comilla**, **Noakhali**, and parts of **Sylhet**.
  - **Infrastructure Projects**
    - Built a trunk road from **Chandpur** to **Chittagong** – vital for trade and military movement.
    - Constructed mosques, tombs, and raised embankments for flood control.
  - **Coinage as Sovereignty**
    - Issued gold and silver **tankas** from the mint at "*Hadrat Jalal Sonargaon*".
    - Coins bore full regnal titles (e.g., *Yamin Khalifat Allah*), signaling independent authority.
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## Dozakh-i-Pur Niamat – Ibn Battuta's Account (1346)

"*Bengal is Dozakh-i-Pur*" – a vivid description by the Moroccan traveler **Ibn Battuta** in his **Rihla**, portraying the region's harsh, fiery climate and tumultuous political landscape.

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## Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah 🌟

### Patronage & Religious Policy

- Actively **supported Sufis and holy men**; they were exempt from river-transport fees and received free provisions.
- Any arriving **fakir** was granted a small allowance of *half a dinar*.
- This patronage served **both piety and political strategy**, helping Fakhruddin legitimize his rule and integrate influential Sufi networks into the administration.
- Ibn Battuta noted the **presence of slavery** in Bengal, recounting his own purchase of an enslaved woman, *Ashura*, in an open market.

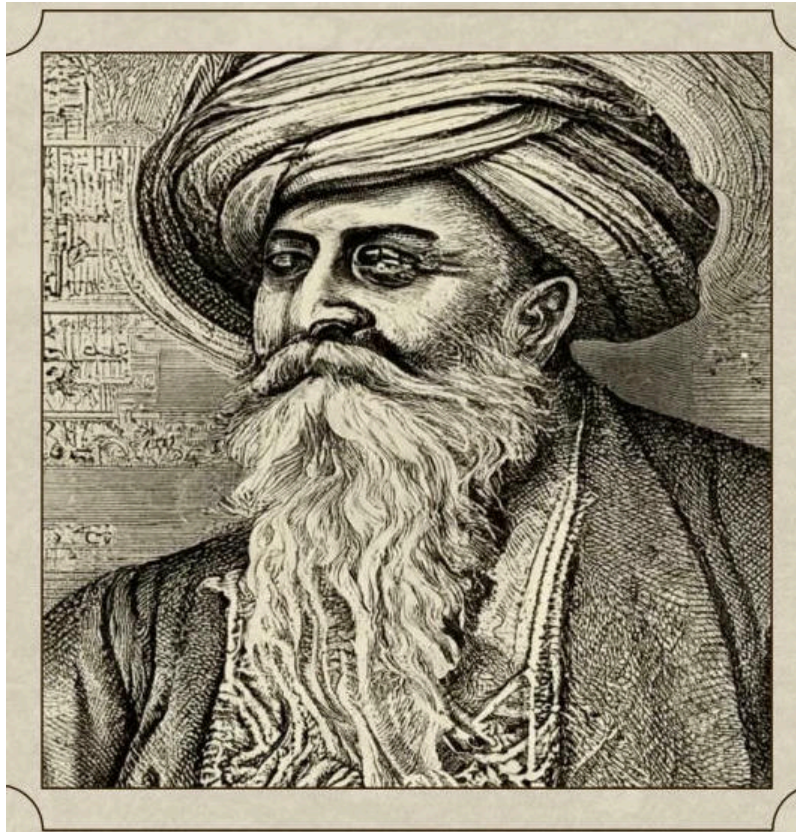
## Legacy & Unification of Bengal

- Died in **1349** after an eleven-year reign; succeeded by his son **Ikhtiyaruddin Ghazi Shah (1349–1352)**.
- Ghazi Shah lost the strategic port of **Chittagong** to the king of Arakan.
- In **1352**, **Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah** invaded Sonargaon, defeating and killing Ghazi Shah, ending the Mubarak Shahi dynasty.
- This victory **unified** the three Bengal regions—**Lakhnauti, Satgaon, and Sonargaon**—under a single ruler for the first time.

### Impact of Fakhruddin's reign

*Transformed Bengal from a rebellious province into a stable, independent state; demonstrated that an autonomous Bengal with control of eastern Bengal and maritime trade through Chittagong could be prosperous; laid administrative, political, and economic foundations for successors; initiated a distinct Bengali-Muslim political and cultural identity that shaped the region for centuries.*

## Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah



*The illustration depicts the founder of the independent Bengal Sultanate, emphasizing his regal bearing and the historic significance of his rule.*

## Rise to Power

- Initially served the **Delhi Sultanate** under **Malik Firuz**.
- Entered the service of **Izzuddin Yahya**, governor of Satgaon.
- In **1338**, after Izzuddin Yahya's death, Ilyas Shah seized Satgaon and proclaimed independence, adopting the royal title **Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah**.
- To secure popular legitimacy, he **dedicated a mosque** to the renowned Sufi saint **Shaikh 'Ala al-Haq** in **1342**, signaling religious endorsement.

## Unification Campaign

1. **1339-1342** – Defeated **Alauddin Ali Shah** of Lakhnauti, crowned himself Sultan in **1342** and controlled North and South Bengal.
2. **1352** – After nearly a decade of conflict, defeated **Ikhtiyaruddin Ghazi Shah** of Sonargaon, completing political unification and establishing the **independent Sultanate of Bengal** with **Pandua** as capital.

## Standoff with Firuz Shah Tughlaq

- **1353**: Delhi dispatched ~**70,000** troops to re-assert control.
- Ilyas Shah retreated to **Ekdala Fort**, neutralizing Delhi’s cavalry advantage.
- Delhi records claim a victory outside the fort, but **Bengal remained independent**; the war concluded with a peace treaty setting the **Kosi River** as the border and exchanging gifts between the rulers.

## Major Military Campaigns

Target (Region)	Year(s)	Key Objectives & Events	Significance
Tirhut (Bihar)	1344–1350	Occupied region; founded fortified city of <b>Hajipur</b>	Secured western frontier; launchpad for North-Indian campaigns
Nepal (Kathmandu Valley)	1349–1350	First Muslim invasion of Kathmandu	Returned with immense wealth
Jajnagar (Orissa)	1353	Neutralized Eastern Ganga dynasty	Weakened rival; acquired 44 elephants
Delhi Sultanate	1353–1354	Defended against Firuz Shah’s invasion	Delhi retreated; treaty acknowledged Bengal’s de facto independence
Kamarupa (Assam)	1357	Secured northeastern frontier; captured <b>Guwahati</b>	First Muslim ruler to conquer Guwahati

## Statecraft & Cultural Impact

- Unified former provinces (Vanga, Gauda, Pundra, Samatata) under the single name **Bangalah**, referring to its people as **Bangali**.
- Adopted grand titles **Shah-i-Bangalah** (King of Bengal) and **Shah-i-Bangaliyan** (King of the Bengalis).

- Coins bore the inscription **Sikandar al-thani** (“The Second Alexander”) to signal imperial ambition.
  - **Persian** remained the court language, yet political stability fostered a flowering of **Bengali literature and culture** under his successors.
  - His reign established a strong, independent **Bengal Sultanate** lasting nearly **200 years** and laid the foundations for a distinct **Bengali-Muslim culture**.
  - Died in **1358**; buried in **Hajipur**.
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## Pre-Ilyas Shahi Bengal (1325–1338) 📜

- **Division**: Delhi Sultan **Ghiyas-uddin Tughlaq** split Bengal into **Lakhnauti, Satgaon, Sonargaon**; each governor soon declared independence due to geographic distance and administrative difficulty.
  - **Economy**: Extremely fertile land supported a robust farming sector and the renowned **fine muslin cloth** industry.
  - **Demographics**: Majority **Hindu** population organized by caste; a growing **Muslim** presence among rulers, traders, scholars, and converts.
  - **Religious Landscape**: **Sufi saints** played a pivotal role, spreading spiritual teachings and fostering a culture of **religious harmony**.
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## Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah 👑





*Depicts the later Sultan of Bengal, illustrating the continuity of regal iconography in the Sultanate's history.*

*Further details on his reign are not provided in the transcript.*

## Ala-ud-din Husain Shah: The Founder of the Hussain Shahi Dynasty 🏰

- **Reign:** Late medieval Sultan of Bengal, founder of the Hussain Shahi dynasty.
- **Rise to Power:** Assassinated the Abyssinian Sultan *Shams-ud-Din Muzaffar Shah* while serving as his wazir.
- **Legacy:** Regarded as one of the greatest medieval Bengali rulers; his period is termed the “**golden age**” of the Bengal Sultanate.

*Golden Age:* A historical epoch marked by political stability, economic prosperity, cultural flourishing, and territorial consolidation.

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## Power Vacuums & Political Chaos (1414–1494) ✂

### House of Ganesha (c. 1414–1435)

- **Raja Ganesha**: Powerful Hindu landlord from Bhaturia and Dinajpur; exploited weakened Ilyas Shahi successors.
- **Tensions**: Conflict with Muslim nobility and Sufi saint **Shaikh Nur Qutb Alam**, who called for Jaunpur's invasion.
- **Conversion Strategy**: Ganesha's son **Jadu** converted to Islam, becoming **Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah**.
- **Outcome**: After brief Ganesha resurgence, Jalaluddin ruled independently until his death in 1433.

### Restoration of Ilyas Shahi (c. 1435)

- **Shamsuddin Ahmad Shah**: Unpopular son of Jalaluddin; murdered, prompting the return of Ilyas Shahi under **Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah**.

## The Abyssinian Interregnum (1487–1494) 🔪

Year	Ruler	Key Event
1487	<b>Shahzada Barbak</b> (Habshi commander)	Assassinated Sultan Jalaluddin Fateh Shah
1487–1489	<b>Saifuddin Firuz Shah</b> (Malik Andil)	Executed Barbak; ruled justly before mysterious death
1489–1490	<b>Mahmud Shah II</b> (child, regent Habash Khan)	Murdered by <b>Sidi Badr</b>
1490–1494	<b>Shamsuddin Muzaffar Shah</b> (Sidi Badr)	Ended with overthrow by <b>Sayyid Husain</b> (wazir)

- **Result**: Violent succession of four Habshi rulers, culminating in the rise of **Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah** and the end of Habshi domination.

## Restoration of Power and Prosperity ✨

- **Discipline**: Executed ~12,000 mutinous troops who looted the capital.



- **Administrative Reform:** Merit-based appointments, ignoring ethnicity or birth; officials included Turks, Arabs, Afghans, and native Bengalis.
- **Key Hindu Officials:**
  - *Rupa Goswami* (Sakar Mallik) – court scholar, later Vaishnava theologian
  - *Sanatana Goswami* (Dabir-i-Khas) – private secretary
  - *Gopinath Vasu* – minister
  - *Mukundadas* – royal physician
  - *Keshav Khan Chhatri* – chief of bodyguards

## Military Campaigns and Geopolitical Strategy 📜

Conflict	Period	Opposing Power	Key Leaders & Events
Delhi Sultanate	1495	Sultan Sikandar Lodi (Delhi)	Hussain Shah gave refuge to ex-Jaunpur ruler; diplomatic resolution
Kamarupa-Kamta (Khen Kingdom)	1498–1502	Khen Kingdom (Western Assam)	General <b>Shah Ismail Ghazi</b> captured territory up to Hajo; son <b>Shahzada Danyal</b> appointed governor
Orissa (Gajapati Kingdom)	early 1500s	King Prataparudra Deva	Forces under <b>Ismail Ghazi</b> raided deep into Orissa
Tripura & Arakan	c. 1500s	Kingdom of Tripura (Dhanya Manikya) & Arakan (Myanmar)	Generals <b>Paragal Khan</b> and <b>Chhuti Khan</b> led campaigns for Chittagong and surrounding regions

## Economic Prosperity and Trade 💰

- **Agricultural Boom:** Fertile delta produced surplus rice, sugar, and other staples.
- **Maritime Hubs:** Ports of **Chittagong** and **Satgaon** became major Indian Ocean trade nodes.
- **Export Goods:** Fine textiles—**muslin** and **silk**—reached Persia, Ottoman Empire, Malacca, and Ming China.
- **Portuguese Arrival:** Early 16th-century Portuguese mission highlighted Bengal's global trade stature; contemporary accounts described Bengal as one of Asia's richest lands.

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## The Hussain Shahi Renaissance

- **Language Policy:** Elevated **Bengali** alongside Persian in administration and literature.
  - **Literary Achievements:**
    - *Vijaya Gupta* – **Manasavijaya**, praising the Sultan as heroic, likening him to **Arjuna** and **Krishna**.
    - **Mahabharata Translations:** *Kavindra Parameshvar* and *Shrikar Nandi* produced Bengali versions under patronage of **Paragal Khan** and **Chhuti Khan**.
  - **Cultural Pluralism:** Court welcomed Muslims and Hindus; fostered a shared Bengali identity transcending religious divisions.
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## Policy of Pluralism ✨

- **Administrative Inclusion:** Hindus appointed to high offices; no **jizya** tax imposed on non-Muslims.
  - **Vaishnava Bhakti Support:** Sultan protected **Chaitanya Mahaprabhu**; officials instructed to ensure his safety and freedom to preach (as recorded in *Chaitanya Charitamrita*).
  - **Overall Impact:** Under **Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah** and his son **Nasiruddin Nasrat Shah**, Bengal enjoyed stability, prosperity, and a flourishing arts scene—solidifying the “golden age” narrative.
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