

7th - History - The Delhi Sultan I



Earlier we read we saw that regions like the Kaveri delta became the centre of large kingdoms. Did you notice that there was no mention of a kingdom with Delhi as its capital? That was because Delhi became an important city only in the twelfth century. Delhi first became the capital of a kingdom under the Tamara Rajput, who were defeated in the middle of the twelfth century by the Chauhans (also referred to as Chahamanas) of Ajmer. It was under the Tomaras and Chauhans that Delhi became an important commercial centre. Many rich Jaina merchants lived in the city and constructed several temples. Coins minted here, called Delhiwal, and had a wide circulation. The transformation of Delhi into a capital that controlled vast areas of the subcontinent started with the foundation of the Delhi sultanate century. The Delhi sultans built many cities in the area that we now know as Delhi. Muslim rule in India was established by Mohammad Ghori in the 12th century CE. In this, Ghori was helped by his general, Qutbuddin Aibak. Ghori appointed Aibak as the viceroy of his Indian conquests. Mohammad Ghori died in 1206 CE. As he left behind no descendants, his viceroys declared themselves independent rulers of the regions they governed. Qutbuddin Aibak claimed the Indian the Indian territories, which included Punjab, Sind, the indo-Gangetic plains, and present - day Bihar and Bengal. He established his capital at Delhi. With the accession of Qutbuddin Aibak to the throne of Delhi begins the history of Delhi of the Delhi sultanate in India. It lasted for more than 300 years---from 1206 to 1536 CE. The rulers during this period called themselves sultans; hence their rule is known as that of the Delhi sultanate. Five successive dynasties ruled over northern India during the reign of the Delhi sultans. They were:

- The slave dynasty (1206-1290 CE)
- The Khaljis (1290-1320 CE)
- The Tughlaqs (1320-1399 CE)
- The Sayyids (1414-1451 CE)
- The Lodis (1451-1526 CE)

Finding Out about the Delhi Sultans: Although inscriptions, coins and architecture provide a lot of information, especially valuable are “histories”, Tarikh (singular)/Tawarikh (plural). Written in Persian, the language of administration under the Delhi sultans. The authors of Tawarikh were learned men: secretaries, administrators, poets and countries, who both recounted events and advised rulers on governance, emphasizing the importance of Justs rule. The authors of Tawarikh lived in cities (mainly Delhi) and hardly ever in villages. They often wrote their histories for sultans in the hope of rich rewards. These authors advised rulers on the need to preserve an “ideal” social order based on birthright and gender distinctions. In 1236 sultan litutmish’s daughter, Raziyya became sultan. The chronicler of the age, Minhaj- i- Siraj, recognized that she was more able and qualified than all her brothers. But he was not comfortable at having a queen as ruler. Nor were the nobles happy at her attempts to rule independently. She was removed from the throne in 1240.

The Slave Dynasty: These slaves often rose up the political and military ladder to become rulers of their land. The dynasty established by Aibak was therefore, also known as the slave dynasty.

From Garrison Town to Empire: The Expansion of the Delhi Sultanate

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In the early thirteenth century the control of the Delhi sultans rarely went beyond heavily fortified towns occupied by garrisons. The sultans seldom controlled the hinterland of the cities and were therefore dependent upon trade, tribute or plunder for supplies. Controlling garrison towns in distant Bengal and Sind from Delhi was extremely difficult. Rebellion, war, even bad weather could snap fragile communication routes. Delhi's authority was also challenged by Mongol invasions from Afghanistan and by governors who rebelled at any sign of the sultan's weakness. The sultanate barely survived these challenges. Its expansion occurred during the reigns of Ghiyasuddin Balban, Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq. The first set of campaigns' along the "internal frontier" of the sultanate aimed at consolidating the hinterlands of the garrison towns. During these campaigns forests were cleared in the Ganga- Yamuna Doab and hunter- gatherers and pastoralists expelled from their habitat. These lands were given to peasants and agriculture was encouraged. New fortresses and towns were established to protect trade routes and to promote regional trade. The second expansion occurred along the "external frontier" of the sultanate. Military expeditions into southern India started during the reign of Alauddin Khalji and culminated with Muhammad Tughluq. In their campaigns', sultanate armies captured elephants, horses and slaves and carried away precious metals. by the end of Muhammad Tughluq's reign, 150 years after somewhat humble beginnings, the armies of the Delhi sultanate had marched across a large part of the subcontinent. They had defeated rival armies and seized cities. The sultanate collected taxes from the peasantry and dispensed justice in its realm.



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Qutbuddin Aibak (1206-1210 CE): Qutbuddin Aibak was originally a slave and a native of Turkistan. He rose to become a trusted general of Mohammad Ghori. Aibak was the prime force behind Ghori's victory in the **second battle of Tarain** and his captures kannauj, Bihar and Bengal. On Ghori's death, Aibak declared himself sovereign of the newly conquered Indian territories. He became the first sultan of Delhi.

Qutbuddin conquered Ajmer, Jhansi, Delhi and Meerut. He used marriages to strengthen his position. His generosity earned him the title of Lakh-baksh or the giver of lakhs. He built two mosques--- the Quwwat ul Islam mosque in Delhi and the Dhai din ka Jhopra in Ajmer. He started work on the Qutb Minar, but did not complete it. He died after an accidental fall while playing polo in 1210 CE.

Iltutmish (1210-1236 CE): A former slave and later son - in- law of Aibak, Iltutmish took over the throne amidst great opposition in 1210 CE. Iltutmish crush the revolt of the nobles and defeated yaldo. He attacked and defeated Qabacha, the governor of Sind. He then subdued the Rajput chiefs of ranthambor, Ajmer and Gwalior.

Razia Sultana (1236-1240 CE): Razia was the first and last woman who sat on the throne of Delhi. She was a woman in a 'man's world'. She also faced opposition from the 'group of forty' Turkish nobles. The refusal of the nobles to accept a woman as their ruler finally led to her downfall.

