

7th - History - The Delhi Sultan II



The Masjid: A mosque is called a Masjid in Arabic, literally a place where a Muslim prostrates in reverence to Allah. During prayer, Muslims stand facing Mecca. In India this is to the west. This is called the qibla. The Delhi sultans built several mosques in cities all over the subcontinent. These demonstrated their claims to be protectors of Islam and Muslims. Mosques also helped to create the sense of a community of believers who shared a belief system and a code of conduct. It was necessary to reinforce this idea of a community because Muslims came from a variety of backgrounds.

Administration and consolidation under the Khaljis and Tughliqs: The consolidation of a kingdom as vast as the Delhi sultanate needed reliable governors and administrators. Rather than appointing aristocrats and landed chieftains as governors. The early Delhi sultans, especially Iltutmish, favoured their special slaves purchased for military service, called Bandagan in Persian. They were carefully trained to man some of the most important political offices in the kingdom. Since they were totally dependent upon their master, the sultan could trust and rely upon them. The Khaljis and Tughluqs continued to use Bandagan and also raised people of humble birth, who were often their clients, to high political positions. They were appointed as generals and governors. However, this also introduced an element of political instability.

Slaves and clients were loyal to their masters and patrons, but not to their heirs. New sultans had their own servants. As a result the accession of a new monarch often saw conflict between the old and the new nobility.

The patronage of these humble people by the Delhi sultans also shocked many elites and the authors of Persian Tawarikh criticized the Delhi sultans for appointing the “low and base-born” to high offices. Like the earlier sultans, the Khalji and Tughluq monarchs appointed military commanders as governors of territories of varying sizes. These lands were called iqta and their holder was called iqta5dar or mu5qti. The duty of the Muqtis was to lead military campaigns and maintain law and order in their Iqtas.

In exchange for their military services, the mu5qtis collected the revenues of their assignments as salary. They also paid their soldiers from these revenues.

Control over Muqtis was most effective if their office was not inheritable and if they were assigned Iqtas for a short period of time before being shifted.

These harsh conditions of service were rigorously imposed during the reigns of Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq. Accountants were appointed by the state to check the amount of revenue collected by the Muqtis. As the Delhi sultans brought the hinterland of the cities under their control, they forced the landed Chiftains- the Samanta aristocrats- and rich landlords to accept their authority. Under Alauddin Khalji the state brought the assessment and collection of land revenue under its own control. The rights of the local chieftains of levy taxes were cancelled and they were also forced to pay taxes.

The sultans’ administrators measured the land and kept careful accounts. Some of the old chieftains and landlords served the sultanate as revenue collectors and assessors. There were three types of taxes:

(1) on cultivation called Kharaj and amounting to about 50 percent of the peasant’s produce. (2) on cattle and (3) on houses.



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It is important to learn that large parts of the subcontinent remained outside the control of the Delhi sultans. It was difficult to control distant provinces like Bengal from Delhi and soon after annexing southern India, the entire region became independent. Even in the Gangetic plain there were forested areas the sultanate forces could not penetrate. Local chieftains established their rule in these regions. Sometimes rulers like Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq could force their control in these areas but only for a short duration. The Mongols under Genghis Khan invaded Transoxiana in north- Iran in 1219. Mongol attacks on the Delhi sultanate during the reign of Alauddin Khalji and in the early years of Muhammad Tughluq's rule. This forced the two rulers to mobilize a large standing army in Delhi which posed a huge administrative challenge. A Delhi sultan planned a campaign to capture Mongol territory. Unlike Aladdin's defensive measures, Muhammad Tughluq's measures were conceived as a part of a military offensive against the Mongols.

Ghiasuddin Balban (1266-1286 CE): Balban was a stern man who believed in ruling with 'iron and blood'. In 1241 CE, the Mongols attacked Lahore. Balban held the Mongols away with a clever mix of force and diplomacy. In 1260 CE, Balban also entertained an envoy from Hulagu, a grandson of Chengiz Khan. Balban died in 1287 CE and was succeeded by his grandson. Soon a new dynasty came to power in Delhi—the Khaljis.

The Invasion of Timur: In 1398 CE, during the rule of the last major Tughlaq ruler, Mohammad Tughlaq, the Delhi Sultanate was attacked by Timur. Timur was a Central Asian Turk who had embraced Islam and set up a Kingdom in Samarkand. Timur entered Delhi, and the city was destroyed and left in ruins. Timur also ransacked Meerut and Jammu.

The Sayyids and Lodis (1414-1526 CE): The rule of the Tughlaqs was followed by that of the Sayyids and the Lodis. Their rule lasted for a little more than a century—from 1414 to 1526 CE. Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517 CE) was one of the better known rulers of the Lodi Dynasty. Under him the Delhi Sultanate extended from present day Punjab to Bihar. He shifted the capital of the Sultanate from Delhi to Agra. Ibrahim Lodi (1517-1526 CE) was the last sultan of the Delhi Sultanate. He has been described as an arrogant man who treated the Afghan nobles with little respect. He defeated and killed Ibrahim Lodi in the first Battle of Panipat in 1526 CE.

The Sultanate in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: After the Tughluqs, the Sayyid and Lodi dynasties ruled from Delhi and Agra until 1526. By then, Jaunpur, Bengal, Malwa, Gujarat, Rajasthan and the entire south India had independent rulers who established flourishing states and prosperous capitals. This was also the period which saw the emergence of new ruling groups like the Afghans and the Rajput. Some of the states established in this period were small but powerful and extremely well administered. Sher Shah Suri (1540- 1545) started his career as the manager of a small territory for his uncle in Bihar and eventually challenged and defeated the Mughal emperor Humayun (1530-1540, 1555- 1556). Sher Shah captured Delhi and established his own dynasty. Although the Suri dynasty ruled for only fifteen years (1540- 1555). Sher Shah's administration became the model followed by the great emperor Akbar (1556- 1605) when he consolidated the Mughal empire.

