

The Delhi Sultans Class

Delhi first became the capital of a kingdom under the Tomara Rajputs, who were defeated by Chauhan (also called Chahamanas) of Ajmer.

The transformation of Delhi into a capital that controlled a vast area of the subcontinent started with the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate at the beginning of the 13th century.

Rulers of Delhi

Tomars: Early 12th century 1165.

Chauhans: 1165-1192 Prithviraj Chauhan: 1175-1192
Under the Tomaras and Chauhans, Delhi became an important commercial centre.

Slave Dynasty: 1206-1290

In 1236, Razia, the daughter of Sultan Iltutmish, became the Sultan of Delhi. She was removed from the throne in 1240.

Khilji Dynasty: 1290-1320

External frontier was the next phase of expansion which started with Alauddin Khilji in southern India. Alauddin Khilji, the most important ruler of Khilji dynasty, introduced the system of market control and administrative measures in order to maintain a large standing army.

Tughlaq Dynasty: 1320-1414

External frontier culminated with Muhammad-bin-Tughluq and he introduced three projects – Shifting of capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, the introduction of token currency, raising the land tax in the Doab region to fifty per cent—all of which failed and weakened his position.

Sayyid Dynasty: 1414-1451 (It was the only Shia dynasty)

Lodi Dynasty: 1451-1526

Finding out about the Delhi Sultans

- Inscriptions, coins and architecture provide a lot of information.
- Further valuable sources 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 courtiers who both recounted events and advised rulers on governance, emphasizing the importance of the just rule.

From Garrison Town to Empire

- In the early 13th century the control of the Delhi Sultans rarely went beyond heavily fortified towns occupied by garrisons.
- Delhi's authority was challenged by Mongols and by governors who rebelled at any sign of the Sultan's weakness.
- The expansion of Delhi Sultanate took place under the reign of Balban, Alauddin Khilji and Muhammad- Bin-Tughlaq.

Administration and Consolidation

- To have reliable governors the early Delhi Sultans, especially Iltutmish' favoured their special slaves purchased for military service called 'Bandage' in Persian.
- The Khiljis and Tughluqs continued to use Bandage and also raised people of humble birth, who were their clients, to high positions like governors and generals.
- The Khiljis and Tughluqs appointed military commanders as governors of territories of varying sizes.
- These lands were called iqta and their holder was called muqti or iqtadar. The duty of muqtis was to lead military campaigns and maintain law and order in their iqtas.
- In return, muqtis collected the revenues of their assignments as salary. They also paid their soldiers from this revenue.
- Under Alauddin Khilji and Muhammad, Tughluq accountants were appointed to check the amount collected by the muqtis.
- As Delhi Sultans brought the hinterland of the cities under their control, they forced the samants and the rich landlords to accept their authority.
- The attack of Mongols under Genghis Khan forced Khiljis and Tughluqs to mobilise a large standing army in Delhi.

The Sultanate in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

- The Tughluq, the Sayyid and Lodi dynasties ruled from Delhi and Agra until 1526.
- By then Jaunpur, Bengal, Malwa, Gujarat, Rajasthan and entire South India had Independent rulers who had established flourishing states and prosperous capitals.
- New ruling dynasties like the Afghans and Rajputs also arose during the period.
- In 1526, Mughals established their empire.
- Sher Shah Suri challenged and defeated the Mughal emperor Humayun. He captured Delhi and established his own dynasty. Although, he ruled

for only fourteen years (1540-1555) but his administration became the model followed by the great Mughal emperor Akbar (1556-1605), when he consolidated the Mughal Empire.

Delhi became the capital of a kingdom under the Tomara Rajputs.

It was only under the rule of the Tomars and Chauhans that Delhi flourished as an important commercial centre.

The city was inhabited by many Jaina merchants who also constructed a number of temples.

Coins, known as dehlival, were minted here and had a wide circulation.

Delhi Sultanate played the most vital role in the transformation of Delhi into a capital which controlled vast areas of the subcontinent.

Inscriptions, coins and architecture provide a lot of information but especially significant are "histories", Tarikh (singular)/tawarikh (plural), written in Persian, the language of administration under Delhi Sultan.

Tawarikh were written by learned men, secretaries, administrators, poets, and courtiers who lived in cities (mainly Delhi). They were written for the Sultans with anticipation of rich rewards. They also advised rulers on governance, emphasizing the importance of just rule based on birthright and gender distinctions, not shared by everyone.

Raziyya, the daughter of Sultan Iltutmish, became the Sultan of Delhi in 1236 but she was dethroned only in 1240 only for being a woman and was unacceptable to the nobles. Even a famous chronicler of the age, Minhaj-i Siraj, recognized her as more able than all her brothers but was not comfortable with her, only for her being a lady.

In the early thirteenth century, there was no significant expansion of Delhi beyond heavily fortified town occupied by garrisons, it was only during the reigns of Ghiyasuddin Balban, Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq that Delhi saw expansion for the first time.

The expansion was initiated with the internal frontier. Forests were cleared in the Ganga-Yamuna doab and hunter-gatherers and pastoralists expelled from their habitats and these lands were given to the peasants in order to promote agriculture. Regional trades were also promoted.

External frontier was the next phase of expansion which started with Alauddin Khalji in southern India and culminated with Muhammad Tughluq.

The armies of Delhi Sultanate had marched across a large part of the subcontinent till the reign of Muhammad Tughluq. They defeated rivals, seized cities. The Sultanate collected taxes from the peasantry.

The early Delhi Sultans favoured the appointment of their slaves purchased for military service as governors to control the administration of the vast empire. These slaves were totally dependent upon their master and so they were more reliable and trustworthy. They were called bandagan in Persian.

The Khaljis and Tughluqs continued the use of bandagan and also raised people of humble birth, usually their clients, to high positions and appointed them as generals and governors. However, this also gave rise to political instability as there was often a conflict for succession.

This system was criticised by the elites and authors of tawarikh, because for them the new high class people were in fact 'low and base-born'.

Khalji and Tughluq monarchs, like their predecessors, appointed military commanders as governors of territories of varying sizes. These territories were called iqta and their holders were called iqtadar or muqti.

Muqtis were responsible for leading their military campaigns and maintaining their iqtas.

Accountants were appointed by the state to check the amount of revenue collected by muqtis who were not allowed to collect revenue more than that prescribed by the state nor were they allowed to keep soldiers more than the number prescribed by the state.

Delhi Sultans had complete control over the hinterland of the cities, and so the samanta aristocrats were forced to accept their authority. During Alauddin Khalji's regime the state brought the assessment and collection of land revenue under its control.

There were three types of taxes : (1) on cultivation called kharaj and amounting to about 50 per cent of the peasant's produce; (2) on cattle; and (3) on houses.

As the large part of the subcontinent was outside the control of Delhi Sultan, it was difficult to control distant provinces like Bengal from Delhi. Hence, soon after annexation of southern India, the entire region became independent. The local chieftains established their rule in these regions.

The Mongols led by Genghis Khan invaded Transoxiana in north-east Iran in 1219. Such attacks frequented during the reign of Alauddin Khalji and in the early days of

Muhammad Tughluq's rule. This forced the two rulers to mobilize a large standing army in Delhi. It posed a huge administrative challenge.

After Tughluqs the Sayyid and Lodi dynasties ruled from Delhi and Agra until 1526. By that time Jaunpur, Bengal, Malwa, Gujarat, Rajasthan and entire south India had independent rulers who established flourishing states and prosperous capitals. It was during this period that some new ruling groups like the Afghans and the Rajputs emerged.

Some small but powerful and extremely well-administered states also emerged. Sher Shah Sur (1540–1545) was the most powerful of them all. He even challenged the Mughal emperor Humayun and captured Delhi. In a very short period of fifteen years (1540-1555), he introduced many reforms and a lot of welfare works. His administration became the model followed by the great emperor Akbar (1556–1605) when he consolidated the Mughal Empire.

The Rulers of Delhi

Dhaliwal: The place where coins were minted.

Tarikh: History.

Tawarikh: Plural of Tarikh.

Birthright: It refers to the privileges claimed on account of the birth.

Gender distinctions: Social and biological differences between men and women.

Hinterland: It refers to the land adjacent to a city or port that supply it with goods and services.

Garrison town: It refers to a town which is fortified with soldiers.

Mosque: It is called a masjid in Arabic, and literally means a place where a Muslim prostrates in reverence to Allah.

Namaz: It refers to the prayer offered by a Muslim.

Imam: The spiritual leader of the Muslims.

Khutba: Sermon.

Client: Someone who is under the protection of another, a dependent or hanger-on.

Iqta: The territories under the military commanders were known as iqta.

Kharaj: The tax on cultivation was known as Kharaj.

Bandagan: The early Delhi Sultans especially Iltutmish favoured their slaves purchased for military service. These slaves were known as bandagan in Persian.

Early twelfth century – 1165: Reign of Tomara Rajputs.

1175-1192: Reign of Prithviraj Chauhan.

1206-1210: Reign of Qutbuddin Aybak.

1236: Raziyya became Sultan.

1240: Raziyya was dethroned.

1296-1316: Reign of Alauddin Khalji.

1324-1351: Reign of Muhammad Tughluq.

1351-1388: Reign of Firuz Shah Tughluq.

1414-1421: Reign of Khizr Khan belonging to Sayyid dynasty.

1451-1489: Reign of Bahlul Lodi.

1540-1555: Sher Shah ruled over Delhi.