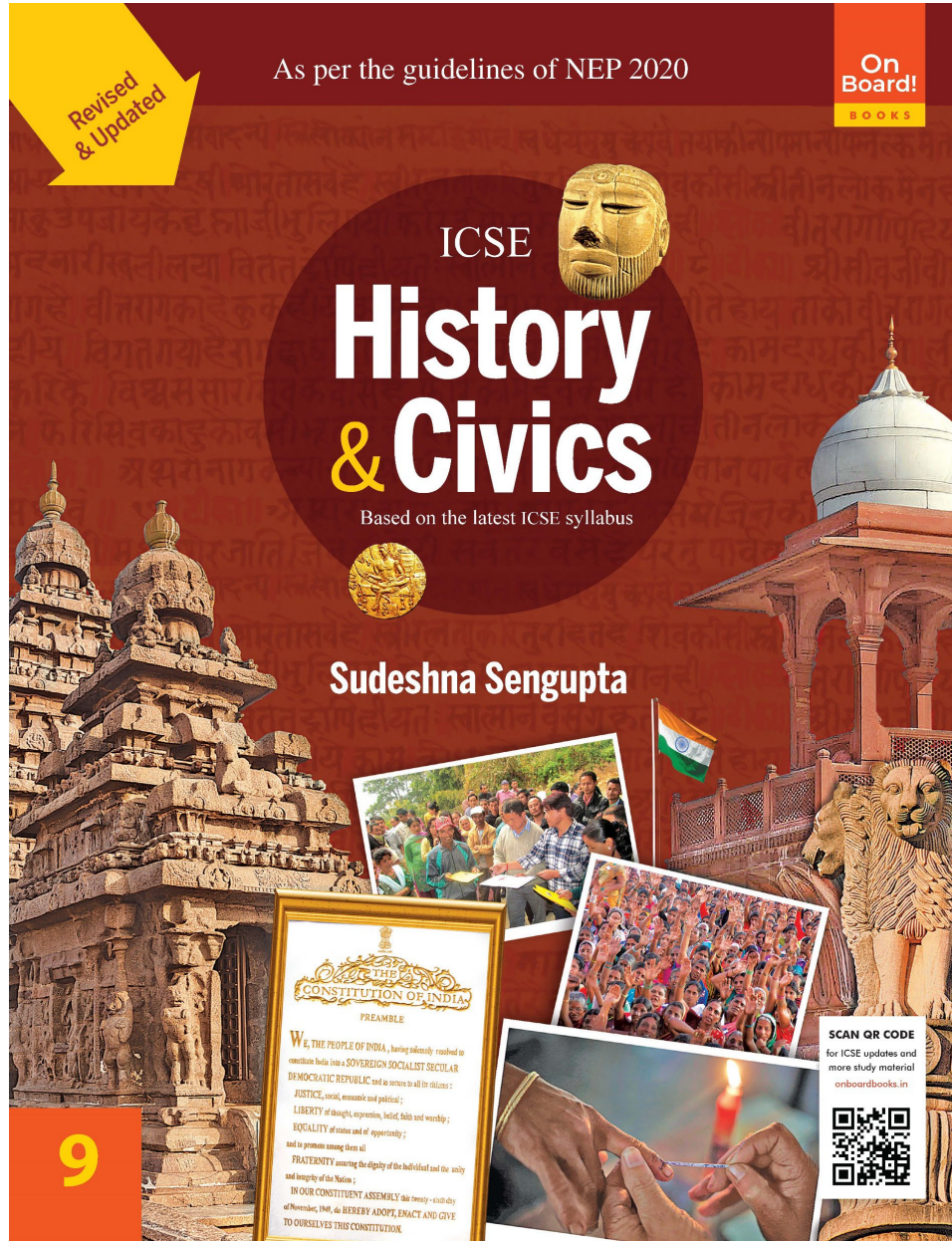


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Chapter 8: The Delhi Sultanate

The Arabs brought Islam to India. They were followed by the Turks. From AD 1000 onwards, India witnessed a number of Turkish invasions. The two famous invaders were Mahmud of Ghazni and Muhammad Ghori. While Mahmud of Ghazni had no imperialistic ambitions vis-a-vis India, Muhammad Ghori wanted to establish an empire in India.

Between AD 1175 and AD 1194, Muhammad Ghori conquered nearly the whole of northern India. Soon a Sultanate with Delhi as its power centre was established. After Muhammad Ghori's death in AD 1206, his generals divided the empire among themselves. Qutb-ud-din Aibak, the general of Ghori's Indian provinces, began to rule independently. This may be regarded as the beginning of the Delhi Sultanate.

The dynasties that came to power during the Sultanate period were the:

- Slave Dynasty (AD 1206–1290)
- Khalji Dynasty (AD 1290–1320)
- Tughluq Dynasty (AD 1320–1414)
- Sayyid Dynasty (AD 1414–1451)
- Lodi Dynasty (AD 1451–1526)

Sources

Archaeological sources include inscriptions, coins as well as monuments. The early inscriptions are in Persian and Arabic. Some of the inscriptions are also in Sanskrit and regional languages. One of the magnificent monuments belonging to this period is the Qutb Minar.

THE SLAVE DYNASTY (AD 1206–1290)

The early Sultanate rulers were called Mamluks or the slave rulers. Qutb-ud-din Aibak was the first ruler of this dynasty.

Qutb-ud-din Aibak (AD 1206–1210)

Qutb-ud-din Aibak was the founder of the Delhi Sultanate. He was a kind-hearted and generous man and was called 'Lakh Baksh' or giver of lakhs. He built the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque in Delhi. Aibak also started the construction of the Qutb Minar in Delhi to honour Qutb-ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki, the famous Sufi saint of Delhi.

Iltutmish (AD 1211–1236)

Qutb-ud-din Aibak was succeeded by Iltutmish. He is regarded as 'the real founder of the Sultanate'. He shifted his capital from Lahore to Delhi. Iltutmish consolidated his position by suppressing the rebellions of his nobles and the Rajput chiefs. He also successfully averted a possible Mongol invasion led by Chinghiz Khan. Iltutmish introduced several reforms.

Raziya Sultan (AD 1236–1240)

Iltutmish, finding his sons incompetent to sit on the throne of Delhi, nominated his daughter Raziya as his successor. But the nobles put Rukh-nud-din Firoz Shah on the throne. He, however, did not prove to be an effective ruler and was deposed by Raziya. Raziya's reign was short and full of problems. The orthodox nobles opposed her as she was a woman. She angered the nobles further when she tried to reduce their power and began taking decisions without consulting them. The nobles got together and revolted against her. She was deposed in AD 1240. After Raziya, a number of less important sultans came to the throne. Ghiyas-ud-din Balban was one of them. Balban was the leader of the powerful group of forty nobles, called the Chalisa.

Balban (AD 1266–1286)

Balban was the most powerful ruler of the Slave Dynasty. Balban reorganized and strengthened the army. With its help, he restored law and order throughout the empire. He fought against the local rulers and defeated many of them. He fortified the north-western borders against Mongol raids. Many new forts were built and old ones were repaired. Balban also crushed the power of the Chalisa to prevent it from revolting against him.

After Balban's death in AD 1286, his successors failed to keep the empire intact. In AD 1290, the Slave Dynasty came to an end. The throne of Delhi passed into the hands of the Khalji rulers.

THE KHALJI DYNASTY(AD 1290–1320)

The first Sultan of the Khalji Dynasty was Jalal-ud-din Khalji. He ascended the throne in AD 1290, but was murdered and succeeded by his ambitious nephew Ala-ud-din Khalji in AD 1296.

Ala-ud-din Khalji (AD 1296–1316)

Ala-ud-din was the most powerful ruler of the dynasty.

Military conquests Ala-ud-din conquered Gujarat and Malwa in AD 1297. Victory over Gujarat gave him control of the sea ports in the west. During AD 1301–1303, he conquered Ranthambhore and Chittor in Rajasthan. His attack on Chittor has been described vividly in various Rajput sources. Further, he not only defeated the Yadava, Kakatiya, Hoysala and the Pandya rulers but also extracted a hefty tribute from them. These kingdoms, however, were not annexed as it would have been difficult to administer them from Delhi. Thus the kings were released on payment of tribute to him.

Reforms: Ala-ud-din introduced several sweeping reforms in the field of revenue system. These were:

- Measurement of all land under cultivation.
- Fixing the state's demand at one-half of the produce, especially in the Doab region.
- Bringing more land under state control by abolishing small iqtas.
- Ensuring that the peasants paid the revenue only to the king. This saved the peasants from paying extra taxes to the local nobles or the middlemen.

Ala-ud-din also introduced the market control policy. For this purpose he fixed the prices of various commodities, established separate markets for specific commodities, under the charge of Shehna-i Mandi or Controller of Market. He appointed special officials to keep a check on the shopkeepers. He prescribed strict punishment for those who flouted the rules and indulged in cheating.

Ala-ud-din died in AD 1316. After his death, the Khalji Dynasty could not survive. The last Khalji ruler, Khusraw Malik, was replaced by the Tughluqs.

THE TUGHLUQ DYNASTY (AD 1320–1414)

Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq was the first ruler of the dynasty. He was an efficient military commander. He suppressed rebellions and consolidated the Sultanate. He was succeeded by Jauna Khan, who took the title of Muhammad-bin Tughluq.

Muhammad-bin Tughluq (AD 1325–1351)

He thought of many ambitious schemes and unique experiments. However, he did not implement his ideas properly. That is why most of his experiments failed.

- The first project was the transfer of capital from Delhi to Devagiri (in Aurangabad, Maharashtra) in AD 1327. But the project failed because of two reasons. First, he ordered the entire population to shift to Daulatabad. This caused great hardship to the people. Second, it was impossible to keep a close watch on the northern frontiers from Daulatabad. So he ordered a re-shift of the capital.
- The second project was the introduction of token currency in AD 1329. This project failed on account of the circulation of counterfeit coins on a very large scale, which disturbed trade and commerce.
- To increase revenue collection, the sultan raised taxes on the peasants of the Doab region. The measure proved to be ill-timed, as the Doab was then facing famine. The discontentment among the people forced him to withdraw his order.

Muhammad-bin Tughluq's desire to conquer Khurasan, Iraq as well as Tibet met with failure as severe winter, plague and monetary considerations forced him to abandon the project.

Muhammad-bin Tughluq became very unpopular because of his schemes. He lost the trust of the common people, his nobles and the ulema (scholars of Islamic learning). Revolts broke out.

Firoz Shah Tughluq (AD 1351–1388)

One remarkable feature of Firoz Shah's reign was his interest in public works. He constructed dams, canals, rest houses, mosques and madrasah and laid about 1200 state managed fruit gardens. He founded new cities like Hissar, Ferozpur, Jaunpur and Firuzabad. Firoz Shah Tughluq also built many educational institutions. Many Sanskrit texts were translated into Persian and Arabic during his reign.

Firoz Shah's death in AD 1388 was followed by a war of succession. Taking advantage of this, many regions became independent. Soon, the Sultanate was reduced to Delhi and its surrounding areas.

The final blow to the Tughluq Dynasty was the invasion of Timur in AD 1398. He was the ruler of Balkh in Central Asia. He invaded India during the reign of Nasiruddin Mahmud, the last ruler of the dynasty. He plundered many towns on his way to Delhi. He looted Delhi and ordered a massacre in which thousands of people, both Hindus and Muslims, were killed. Before leaving Delhi, Timur had appointed Khizr Khan as his deputy in India. Khizr Khan established the Sayyid Dynasty in AD 1414.

THE SAYYID DYNASTY (AD 1414–1451)

The Sayyid sultans ruled for a brief period. There were four Sayyid kings.

Khizr Khan (AD 1414–1421)

Khizr Khan was known to be an able administrator and was very soft natured. It was his kind and docile nature that did not let him acquire many kingdoms during his reign. He defeated the locals of Doab, Kalithar and Chandwar since they had stopped paying tributes.

Mubarak Shah (AD 1421–1434)

After the death of Khizr Khan, his son Mubarak Shah succeeded him to the throne. Like his father, Mubarak Shah was a wise man and an efficient ruler. He used his resources carefully and to the fullest. He was a devout Muslim and cared for his subjects. The nobles, however, were against him. Most of his time was, therefore, spent in controlling his nobles. The city of Mubarakabad was founded by him in AD 1433.

Muhammad Shah (AD 1434–1443)

Muhammad Shah succeeded Mubarak Shah in AD 1434. He was not an able ruler. During his reign, the nobles became very powerful.

Alam Shah (AD 1443–1451)

After the death of Muhammad Shah, his son succeeded the throne under the title of Alam Shah. He lost Delhi to Bahlul Khan Lodi in AD 1451. With this, the brief rule of the Sayyid kings came to an end.

THE LODI DYNASTY (AD 1451–1526)

The Lodi Dynasty was established by the Ghizlai tribe of the Afghans. There were three main rulers in the history of Lodi Dynasty.

Bahlul Khan Lodi (AD 1451–1489)

Bahlul Khan Lodi was the founder of the Lodi Dynasty in India. He was the first Afghan ruler of Delhi. Bahlul Khan seized the throne without much resistance from the then ruler, Alam Shah. After becoming the ruler, he removed rebellious governors and appointed loyal Afghan nobles as governors of important provinces. His territory was spread across Jaunpur, Gwalior and northern UP.

Sikandar Lodi (AD 1489–1517)

After the death of Bahlul Khan, his second son succeeded him as the king. He was given the title of Sultan Sikander Shah. He was an able ruler. His empire extended from Punjab to Bihar. He founded a new town where the modern day Agra stands. He was known to be a kind and generous ruler who cared for his subjects. He also initiated many public welfare measures.

Ibrahim Lodi (AD 1517–1526)

Ibrahim Lodi succeeded Sikandar Lodi. The Afghan nobles rebelled against him. He, however, defeated them. To prevent such revolts in future, Ibrahim Lodi replaced senior nobles and governors by younger men. Some senior nobles led by the governor of Lahore, Daulat Khan Lodi, conspired against Ibrahim Lodi. They invited the ruler of Kabul, Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur to invade Ibrahim's kingdom. Ibrahim Lodi was defeated and killed in the First Battle of Panipat in AD 1526 by Babur.

To Remember

Slave Dynasty—Qutb-ud-din Aibak: He was the founder of this dynasty, built the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque in Delhi, Iltutmish: He is regarded as the real founder of the Delhi Sultanate, reorganized the nobility, divided his empire into iqta, introduced silver coins called tanka, Raziya Sultan: Raziya's reign was short and full of problems, nobles opposed her, she was deposed in AD 1240, was succeeded by Nasir-ud-din Mahmud, he was weak and a puppet in the hands of his noble, Balban, Balban: He was the most powerful ruler of the Slave Dynasty, repaired old forts, exalted the position of kingship, destroyed the Chalisa, his successors could not keep the empire intact.

Khalji Dynasty—Jalal-ud-din Khalji was the first ruler of the dynasty, Ala-ud-din Khalji: He was the most powerful ruler, engaged in military conquests, adopted the title of Sikandar Sani, Reforms: He stopped intermarriages between nobles, introduced sweeping changes in land revenue, introduced the market control policy.

Tughluq Dynasty—Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq was the first ruler of the dynasty, Muhammad-bin Tughluq: He thought ahead of his times, his projects like transfer of capital, increasing the revenue in Doab region and the introduction of the token currency failed, these made Muhammad-bin Tughluq unpopular, was succeeded by Firoz Shah Tughluq, Firoz Shah Tughluq: He appeased the nobles and ulema, constructed dams, canals, founded new cities like Ferozpur, Jaunpur, Timur's invasion in AD 1398 dealt the final blow to the Tughluq Dynasty.

Sayyid Dynasty—It was founded by Khizr Khan, Khizr Khan: He was known to be an able administrator, Mubarak Shah: Most of his time was spent in controlling his nobles, Muhammad Shah: He was not an able administrator, Alam Shah: He lost Delhi to Bahlul Khan Lodi.

Lodi Dynasty—There were three main rulers, Bahlul Khan Lodi: He was the first Afghan ruler, removed rebellious governors and appointed loyal Afghan nobles, Sikandar Lodi: He was an able administrator, initiated many public welfare measures, Ibrahim Lodi: He replaced senior Afghans by younger men, angry nobles led by Daulat Khan Lodi invited Babur, who defeated Ibrahim Lodi in the First Battle of Panipat in AD 1526 and thus ended the Lodi Dynasty.

Thank You