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## Chapter 3

### The Delhi Sultans

#### ❖ The emergence of Delhi

- Delhi first became a capital city under the Tomara Rajputs. Later, the Chauhans gained control by defeating the Tomaras. During this time, Delhi became a commercial centre.
- Jain merchants inhabited the city and built many temples. Coins minted in Delhi, known as *dehliwal*, had a wide circulation.
- The foundation of the Delhi Sultanate made Delhi an important centre of political power. The dynasties of the Delhi Sultanate were as follows:
  - Turkish rulers
  - Khalji dynasty
  - Tughluq dynasty
  - Sayyid dynasty
  - Lodi dynasty

#### ❖ Information about the Delhi Sultans

- Inscriptions, coins and architecture are the sources of information on the Sultans of Delhi. 'Histories', called *tarikh/tawarikh*, were written in Persian, the language of administration under the Delhi Sultans.
- The authors of *tawarikh* were learned men, secretaries, administrators, poets and courtiers who also advised the ruler on matters of governance and social issues.
- In 1236 AD, Iltutmish's daughter Raziyya, became Sultan. However, she was removed from the throne in 1240 AD as the nobles were unhappy under the authority of a lady.
- The chief chronicler of the period, Minhaj-i Siraj, recognized her abilities. However, he too was uncomfortable with her rule.

#### ❖ The expansion of the Delhi Sultanate

- In the thirteenth century, the control of the Sultans of Delhi did not extend beyond the fortified town occupied by garrisons.
- Delhi's authority was frequently challenged by the Mongol invasions from Afghanistan and by governors who rebelled at any sign of the Sultan's weakness. Such factors made expansion of the Sultanate very difficult.
- The expansion of the Delhi Sultanate occurred during the reigns of Ghiyasuddin Balban, Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq.
- The first set of campaigns along the "internal frontier" of the Sultanate was directed towards consolidating the hinterlands or the adjoining regions of the

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garrison towns. During these campaigns, forests were cleared in the Ganga-Yamuna doab and hunter-gatherers and pastoralists expelled from their habitat.

- The second expansion occurred along the “external frontier” of the Sultanate. Alauddin Khalji started military expeditions into southern India which culminated with Muhammad Tughluq. In these campaigns, Sultanate armies captured elephants, horses, slaves and looted precious metals.
- By the end of Muhammad Tughluq’s reign, the Delhi Sultanate had gained control over a large part of the subcontinent.

#### ❖ **Administration and consolidation under the Khaljis and Tughluqs**

- Iluttmish preferred to use the services of *bandagan* or special slaves, who were trained to occupy sensitive political and administrative positions. They were trustworthy as their dependence was wholly upon their master.
- The Khaljis and Tughluqs also used *bandagan* and raised people of humble birth, who were often their clients, to high political positions.
- The accession of a new monarch saw conflicts between the old and the new nobility as the loyalty of the slaves was bound to their masters and not their heirs.
- The importance accorded to the slaves attracted the criticism of many authors of *tawarikh*.
- The Khalji and Tughluq monarchs were appointed *muqtis* or *iqtdars* of *iqtas* or territories of varying sizes. The appointees were military commanders, whose duty was to lead military campaigns and maintain law and order in their *iqtas*.
- The Sultans forced the aristocratic *samantas* 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 three main types of taxes were as follows:
  - Taxes on cultivation called *kharaj*, which was 50 percent of the total produce.
  - Taxes on cattle
  - Taxes on houses
- Large parts of the subcontinent were still outside the control of the Sultanate. It was difficult to control distant provinces like Bengal from Delhi and soon after the annexation of southern India, the entire region became independent.
- After the Mongols invaded Transoxiana in north-east Iran in 1219 AD, the Delhi Sultanate had to face their attacks during the reign of Alauddin Khalji

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and Muhammad Tughluq. This forced the two rulers to mobilize a large standing army in Delhi which posed a huge administrative challenge.

- Measures by Alauddin Khalji to counter Mongols included raising a standing army, construction of the garrison town of Siri, tax from peasants at 50 percent of the yield, paying soldiers their salaries in cash and controlling the prices of goods in Delhi.
- Measures by Muhammad Tughluq included raising a standing army, converting the old town of Delhi-i Kuhna into a garrison, levying additional taxes apart from collecting produce and paying soldiers their salaries in token currency.
- Alauddin Khalji's measures were defensive in nature and successful, while Muhammad Tughluq's measures, like the campaign in Kashmir, were offensive and met with failure.

#### ❖ **The Sultanate in the Fifteenth and the Sixteenth Centuries**

- After the Tughluqs, the Sayyid and Lodi dynasties ruled from Delhi and Agra until 1526. Various independent states came up like Jaunpur, Bengal, Malwa, Gujarat, Rajasthan and the entire south India. New ruling groups like the Afghans and the Rajputs also began to make their presence felt.
- The Afghan warlord, Sher Shah Sur eventually challenged and defeated the Mughal emperor Humayun. The administration of the Suri dynasty borrowed elements from Alauddin Khalji and made them more efficient.
- Sher Shah's administration was the model followed by the great emperor Akbar when he consolidated the Mughal Empire.