

The Delhi Sultans

Key terms

Tarikh (singular)/ tawarikh (plural): accounts of history written in Persian. Provides important information about the period.

Doab: The fertile land between two rivers is called Doab.

Masjid: masjid or mosque is the worship place of the Muslims. The Delhi sultans built several masjids during their reign.

Iqta: A designated piece of land that was administered by an iqtadar or mukti.

Delhiwal: coins minted in Delhi under the reign of Tomaras and Chauhans

Things to answer after reading the context:

- Who do you think were the Sultans?
- What happened to the temples when the Sultans came to India?
- Do you think they initiated a peaceful method to rule India?
- What is an invasion? How is the word invasion associated with the Sultans?

The Start Of The Medieval History of India: Delhi Sultanate

With the arrival of the Mongol and the Afghan invaders, the period of medieval history started. The invaders like Ghori never wanted to rule India, they just wanted to plunder the riches and use them for their lives in their own land. The period of Delhi Sultanate started in 1206 with the Slave Dynasty and Ibrahim Lodi being the last of the rulers in 1526. We gather a lot of information through major sources like the architecture and coins along with the written documentaries called the “Tawarikh”, which was written by learned men of the court.

The Rise Of Delhi Sultanate In Delhi

The Delhi sultanate has been one of the most prominent ruling dynasties of Indian medieval history. Delhi has always been one of the most wanted regions because of its central location and excellent connectivity. The popularity of the city grew in the 12th century and it became one of the most predominant centers of trade and culture. The city of Delhi gained popularity in the 12th century. Under the tomaras and chauhans, it grew as a popular center of trade and commerce. The commercialization of the city led to several Jainas moving to Delhi for business. Several Jain temples

were constructed during this phase. Soon Delhi emerged as the capital of the tomara kingdom and this led to several rulers placing their eyes on the capital.

Razia Sultan: The Bravest And The Only Woman Sultan

The tawarikh were authored by learned secretaries and poets. They penned down events and accounts of governance and administration. These scholars lived in Delhi and wrote in praise of the administration in anticipation of rewards from the monarch. In 1236, Iltutmish's daughter, Razia Sultana inherited the throne since none of her brothers were qualified enough to become the king. However, this led to lots of agony among the brothers and the queen was finally dethroned and killed in 1240. The whole idea of dethroning Razia Sultan was because the court and her brothers could not stand a woman leading the empire and ordering the men of the court. Even Minaj-i-Siraj felt that she was not supposed to be on the throne, as women were made to be the sub-ordinate of men, and that it does not qualify her to be the one who should be ordering men, which led to her execution and dethronement.

- Was the Delhi sultanate always stable?
- Who were the enemies of the Delhi sultanate?
- Do a small research on Razia Sultan and try to find out the problems she faced during her tenure? Was she really worth the throne?

Delhi Sultanate:

Well, with success comes enmity. The prosperity of the kingdom of Delhi was reaching greater heights during this phase. Due to this, the Mongols from the west had a constant eye on the kingdom of Delhi. In the early 13th century, Delhi was just confined to fortified walls. The city heavily banked upon trade and trade was in turn dependent on trade routes. However, the trade routes often closed down due to bad weather. Under the reign of Gyassudin Balaban, the Mongols almost overpowered the Delhi sultanate. However, with Alauddin Khilji and then Mohammad Tughlaq taking over the throne, the Delhi Sultanate was strengthened again. The two kings successfully conquered neighboring areas and cleared the Ganga Yamuna doab. The military frontier of the Delhi sultanate then waged war against several arch-rivals and managed to win the battles, hence leading to the expansion of the Delhi sultanate.

- How was the economic status of the people of the Delhi sultanate?
- What was society like?
- How do you think the Delhi Sultanate reached from rags to riches?

Administration System Under The Delhi Sultanate

The Delhi Sultanate had expanded exponentially and covered a major part of the subcontinent. Due to the vast stature of the kingdom, the administration was considerably tough. Iltutmish, one of the first few rulers of the Delhi sultanate did not favor the governor system. He had uncommon slaves

called bandagans in Persian. The bandagans were militants who handled the administration. Further, the Khiljis and the Tughlaqs continued the use of these bandagans. Khilji and Tughlaqs appointed leaders of military frontiers as governors of lands of dynamic sizes (these territories were termed as iqtas). The leaders of the iqta were called iqtadar or mukhtis. The mukhti had to ensure the security of their iqta and in turn collected revenue from people belonging to their iqta. The position of the Mukhti was not inheritable and a new one was appointed regularly.

Tax Collection And Expenses Of The Empire

The taxes in the Delhi sultanate were of three types:

The cultivation tax, called kharaj. This included 50 percent of the produce.

On cattle

On houses

These were the major taxes collected by the Delhi Sultans, they were all together responsible for the expenses of the empire. These expenses included, expenses on military and arms. Other expenses were that of construction of monuments and structures. The Delhi Sultanate had one of the first organised tax systems. However, later on there were several reforms in the tax system with the coming of Mughals. We shall touch upon that in the next few chapters. In the 14th century, Genghis Khan, a Mongol ruler, gained power. He attacked the northwest parts of the subcontinent. This posed a great threat to the sultanate and hence, Khilji mobilized a large army to prevent any threats of invasion.

The Fall Of The Delhi Sultanate

Histories are evident that even the greatest of empires succumbed and the Delhi Sultanate was no exception. The Sultanate had enjoyed enough success as they ruled Delhi till the early 15th century. By this time, the rulers of India had diversified and many small kingdoms broke out. Ruling dynasties such as the afghans and Rajputs rose during this period. In 1526, the Mughal dynasty rose as they overthrew the sultanate. However, another brilliant king, Sher Shah Suri, originally a manager of a minuscule territory emerged. He overthrew the Mughal dynasty from Delhi in 1540 and established his own dynasty in Delhi.

As we see, Delhi has had a vibrant past with several rulers keeping an eye on it. Delhi has seen several battles and rulers. All these dynasties and rulers have shaped the city to what it is today! It was after the defeat of the last Sultan, Ibrahim Lodi by Babur at Panipat, that the era of Mughal dynasty started. We will learn about them in the next chapter.