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Delhi Before the Twelfth Century

In earlier chapters, regions like the Kaveri delta were centres of large kingdoms, but Delhi was not yet a capital city. Delhi rose to prominence only in the twelfth century, initially under the rule of the Tomara Rajputs.

Early Rajput Rule in Delhi

Delhi first became the capital of a kingdom under the Tomara Rajputs, who ruled until the mid-twelfth century. They were succeeded by the Chauhans (also called Chahamanas) of Ajmer. Under these Rajput dynasties, Delhi developed as an important commercial

centre. Wealthy Jina merchants lived in the city and built several temples. The coins minted here, known as *dehliwal*, circulated widely.

Establishment of the Delhi Sultanate

The transformation of Delhi into a capital controlling vast areas of the subcontinent began with the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate in the early thirteenth century. Five dynasties ruled the Sultanate over time: the Slave (Mamluk) dynasty, the Khalji dynasty, the Tughluq dynasty, the Sayyid dynasty, and the Lodi dynasty.

Sultanate Cities of Delhi

The Delhi Sultans built several fortified cities in the area now known as Delhi. These include:

- Delhi-i Kuhna (Old Delhi)
- Siri
- Jahanpanah
- Firuzabad (with Firuz Shah Kotla)
- Tughluqabad
- Adilabad

These cities were administrative, military, and cultural centres, often fortified with walls and gates. Water reservoirs such as *Hauz Khas* and *Hauz-i Sultani* were constructed to supply water. The famous *Qutb Minar* was also built during this period.



Map 1
*Selected Sultanate
cities of Delhi,
thirteenth-fourteenth
centuries.*

Q: Name three important cities built by the Delhi Sultans and explain their significance.

A: Delhi-i Kuhna, Siri, and Jahanpanah were important fortified cities built by the Delhi Sultans. They served as administrative and military centres and helped in controlling the region around Delhi. These cities also had palaces, mosques, and water reservoirs, reflecting the urban development of the period.

Rulers of the Delhi Sultanate

The rulers of Delhi from the twelfth to the sixteenth century belonged to various dynasties:

Dynasty	Ruler	Period of Rule
Rajput Dynasties	Tomaras	Early 12th century to 1165
	Ananga Pala	1130–1145
	Chauhans (Prithviraj Chauhan)	1165–1192
Slave (Mamluk) Dynasty	Qutbuddin Aybak	1206–1210
	Shamsuddin Iltutmish	1210–1236
	Raziya Sultan	1236–1240
	Ghiyasuddin Balban	1266–1287
Khalji Dynasty	Jalaluddin Khalji	1290–1296
	Alauddin Khalji	1296–1316
Tughluq Dynasty	Ghiyasuddin Tughluq	1320–1324
	Muhammad Tughluq	1324–1351
	Firoz Shah Tughluq	1351–1388
Sayyid Dynasty	Khizr Khan	1414–1421
Lodi Dynasty	Bahlul Lodi	1451–1489

Exam Question

Q: Which dynasties ruled the Delhi Sultanate and what was the significance of the Khalji dynasty?

A: The Delhi Sultanate was ruled by the Slave (Mamluk), Khalji, Tughluq, Sayyid, and Lodi dynasties. The Khalji dynasty expanded the Sultanate's territory and introduced important military and administrative reforms.

Administration under the Delhi Sultans

The Delhi Sultanate required a strong administrative system to govern its vast territories. Early Sultans, especially Iltutmish, appointed trusted slaves called *bandagan* as governors and military commanders. These slaves were loyal to the Sultan and helped maintain control.

The Khalji and Tughluq dynasties continued this practice and also promoted people of humble birth, often their clients, to high positions. This sometimes caused political instability due to conflicts between old and new nobility.

Exam Question

Q: Why did the Delhi Sultans prefer appointing slaves and clients to important positions instead of aristocrats?

A: Slaves and clients were completely loyal to the Sultan as they depended on him for their status and power, unlike aristocrats who had their own power bases. This helped the Sultan maintain control over the administration.

Land Revenue and Taxation

The Delhi Sultans controlled land revenue collection directly, reducing the power of local chieftains. Under Alauddin Khalji, land was measured and carefully assessed. Taxes included:

- **Kharaj:** Tax on cultivation, about 50% of the produce.
- **Tax on cattle and houses.**
- **Khums:** One-fifth of war booty, mines, and treasure.
- **Zakat:** Religious alms tax collected from Muslims.
- **Jizyah:** Tax on non-Muslims (zimmis).

Accountants ensured that taxes were collected properly and that military salaries were paid from these revenues.

Exam Question

Q: What were the main types of taxes under the Delhi Sultanate and who paid the jizyah tax?

A: The main taxes were kharaj (land tax), khums (war booty tax), zakat (alms tax on Muslims), and jizyah (tax on non-Muslims). The jizyah was paid by non-Muslims who were protected by the state.

Local Chieftains and Fortifications

Many local chieftains fortified themselves in difficult terrain such as mountains and dense bamboo forests, which served as natural defences. These areas were hard to conquer and often remained outside the Sultanate's control.

According to the traveller Ibn Battuta, these forests were so dense and strong that even fire could not destroy them, making military campaigns challenging.

Exam Question

Q: How did local chieftains defend themselves against the Delhi Sultanate's armies?

A: They fortified themselves in rugged terrain and dense bamboo forests that were difficult for armies to penetrate. These natural defences protected their cattle, crops, and people.

Mongol Invasions and Military Challenges

The Delhi Sultanate faced repeated invasions from the Mongols during the reigns of Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq. These invasions forced the Sultans to maintain a large standing army in Delhi, which was a significant administrative challenge.

Exam Question

Q: What impact did the Mongol invasions have on the Delhi Sultanate?

A: The invasions compelled the Sultans to maintain a large standing army to defend the Sultanate, increasing administrative and financial pressures on the state.

The Sultanate in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

After the Tughluq dynasty, the Sayyid and Lodi dynasties ruled Delhi and Agra until 1526. During this period, many regions such as Jaunpur, Bengal, Malwa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and South India had independent rulers who established prosperous states.

The Afghans and Rajputs emerged as new ruling groups. Sher Shah Sur, an Afghan ruler, captured Delhi and established the Sur dynasty (1540–1555). His administration was efficient and influenced the later Mughal emperor Akbar.

Exam Question

Q: Who was Sher Shah Sur and what was his contribution to administration?

A: Sher Shah Sur was an Afghan ruler who established the Sur dynasty after defeating Mughal emperor Humayun. He introduced an efficient administration system that influenced later rulers like Akbar.

Understanding Delhi under the Sultans

Histories during the Delhi Sultanate were written in Persian and called *tarikh* (singular) or *tawarikh* (plural). These were authored by secretaries, administrators, poets, and courtiers who recorded events and advised rulers on governance, emphasizing just rule.

The concept of the **circle of justice** explained the relationship between the king, soldiers, peasants, and revenue. A king needed soldiers, soldiers needed salaries, salaries came from revenue, and revenue depended on prosperous peasants.

However, these authors often lived in cities and supported social orders based on birthright and gender distinctions, which were not universally accepted.

Exam Question

Q: What is the circle of justice and why was it important for governance?

A: The circle of justice is the idea that a king's survival depends on soldiers, soldiers depend on salaries, salaries come from revenue, and revenue depends on prosperous peasants. It highlights the importance of just governance for a stable kingdom.

Queen Raziya and Gender Distinctions

In 1236, Sultan Iltutmish's daughter, Raziya, became the ruler of Delhi. Chronicler Minhaj-us-Siraj acknowledged her abilities but noted that nobles were unhappy with a female ruler. She was removed from the throne in 1240.

Minhaj-us-Siraj believed that women were meant to be subordinate to men and questioned how Raziya could rule despite this. Other female rulers like Rudramadevi of Warangal and Didda of Kashmir also ruled but faced challenges related to gender norms.

Exam Question

Q: Why was Raziya Sultan's rule controversial and what challenges did she face?

A: Raziya's rule was controversial because it challenged the prevailing social order that men should rule. Nobles opposed her independent rule, and gender biases made it difficult for her to maintain power.

Administration under the Khaljis and Tughluqs

The Khalji and Tughluq dynasties continued to appoint slaves (*bandagan*) and clients to important positions. These officials were loyal to the Sultan but their appointments sometimes caused political instability.

Sultan Muhammad Tughluq appointed people from humble backgrounds, such as a wine distiller and a barber, to high offices, which was criticized by contemporary chroniclers as poor judgment.

The Sultanate was divided into territories called *iqta*, governed by *muqtis* who led military campaigns and maintained law and order. They collected revenue as salary and paid

soldiers from it. Strict rules prevented hereditary succession of these posts to maintain control.

Exam Question

Q: What was the iqta system and how did it function?

A: The iqta system divided the Sultanate into territories governed by muqtis who were military commanders responsible for law and order. They collected revenue as salary and paid soldiers, but their office was not inheritable to prevent power concentration.

Practice Set

Easy

- Who were the first rulers to make Delhi their capital?
- Name two cities built by the Delhi Sultans.

Moderate

- Explain the circle of justice as described by Fakhr-i Mudabbir.
- What were the main taxes collected under the Delhi Sultanate?

Challenging

- Discuss the political challenges faced by Sultan Muhammad Tughluq due to his appointments.
- Compare the rule of Raziya Sultan with that of Rudramadevi in terms of gender and governance.

Answer Key

- Tomara Rajputs were the first rulers to make Delhi their capital.
- Delhi-i Kuhna and Siri are two cities built by the Delhi Sultans.
- The circle of justice explains the interdependence of king, soldiers, revenue, and peasants for a stable kingdom.
- Main taxes included kharaj, khums, zakat, and jizyah.
- Sultan Muhammad Tughluq faced criticism for appointing low-born officials, causing political instability.
- Raziya ruled openly as a woman and faced opposition, while Rudramadevi disguised herself as a man to rule.

Solved Examples

Example 1

Question: Why did the Delhi Sultans prefer appointing slaves and clients to important positions?

Answer: Slaves and clients were loyal only to the Sultan as they depended on him for their status and power. This loyalty helped the Sultan maintain control over the administration and reduced the risk of rebellion from powerful aristocrats.

Example 2

Question: What role did the Yamuna River play in the development of Sultanate cities?

Answer: The Yamuna River provided a crucial water source for the Sultanate cities. The Sultans built reservoirs like Hauz Khas and Hauz-i Sultani to supply water, which supported urban life and the construction of fortified cities along the river.

Quick Reference

- **Delhi Sultanate:** Muslim kingdom established in Delhi in early 13th century.
- **Bandagan:** Slaves trained as military and administrative officers.
- **Iqta:** Land assigned to military commanders for revenue collection.
- **Kharaj:** Land tax on peasants.
- **Jizyah:** Tax on non-Muslims.
- **Circle of Justice:** Concept linking king's power to prosperity of peasants.

Glossary

Bandagan

Slaves trained for military and administrative service under the Delhi Sultans.

Circle of Justice

A theory describing the interdependence of the king, soldiers, peasants, and revenue for a stable kingdom.

Iqta

A land grant given to military commanders for administration and revenue collection.

Jizyah

A tax levied on non-Muslims living under Muslim rule.

Kharaj

A land tax collected from peasants, usually about half of the produce.

Tarikh/Tawarikh

Historical chronicles written in Persian during the Delhi Sultanate period.