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Bachelor of Arts in History (Honours)
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SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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History of India- II
(From 10th to 18th Century CE)
Course Code: SGB24HS305MC
Semester- V

Four Year Undergraduate Programme
History (Honours)
Major Discipline Core Course
Self Learning Material
(with Model Question Paper Sets)



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Major Discipline Core Courses
for FYUG Programme in History (Honours)

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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Four Year UG History Programme offered by Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Established in September 2020, our university aims to provide high-quality higher education through open and distance learning. Our guiding principle, 'access and quality define equity', shapes our approach to education. We are committed to maintaining the highest standards in our academic offerings.

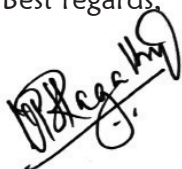
Our university proudly bears the name of Sreenarayanaguru, a prominent Renaissance thinker of modern India. His philosophy of social reform and educational empowerment serves as a constant reminder of our dedication to excellence in all our academic pursuits.

The Four Year UG History Programme covers all relevant areas aligned with historical studies and research methodologies. We have incorporated the latest trends in historical analysis to ensure a comprehensive and up-to-date curriculum. Moreover, the programme encompasses flexible options for learners to choose from a range of Ability Enhancement Courses, Multi-disciplinary Courses, Value Added Courses, and Skill Enhancement Courses, complemented by discipline-oriented Advanced and Additional Advanced Courses.

Our teaching methodology combines three key elements: Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling, and Virtual modes. This blended approach aims to provide a rich and engaging learning experience, overcoming the limitations often associated with distance education. We are confident that this programme will enhance your understanding of historical studies, preparing you for various career paths and further academic pursuits.

Our learner support services are always available to address any concerns you may have during your time with us. We encourage you to reach out with any questions or feedback regarding the programme. We wish you success in your academic journey with Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Best regards,



Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-08-2026

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BLOCK

Concept of Medieval India and Sources



1

UNIT

Sources of Delhi Sultanate

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- recognise why literary works and early records matter for reconstructing the history of the Delhi Sultanate
- compare the historical reliability of Persian, Turkish, and vernacular sources
- understand how travellers' accounts, court chronicles, and surviving monuments are used to write history

Prerequisite

Muhammad bin Tughlaq, a ruler of the Delhi Sultanate's Tughlaq dynasty, is remembered in Indian history as "the Wise Fool." Despite real achievements, many of his administrative experiments failed for want of careful planning, earning him this reputation. Our knowledge of this period comes from a mix of sources — literature, archaeology, and other records — with especially valuable material drawn from Persian and Turkish historical writing as well as assorted vernacular texts.

Keywords

Sultan, Delhi Sultanate, Sources, Literary Sources, Chronicles, Travelogues

Discussion

1.1.1 The Growth of Historical Writing in Medieval India

The main distinction between ancient and medieval Indian history is the abundance of modern literary sources that are available for medieval Indian history as opposed to ancient Indian history. Writing about the Prophet and the Caliphs was regarded as pious and was praised under Islam, and the invention and widespread use of paper also made writing easier. These are the reasons for the rise in historical writing during medieval India.

The rulers of this time period also took a personal interest in historical writing and supported writers and poets in their courts. When the Arabs conquered Sindh in the eighth century (712 C.E.) and added it to the Turkish Empire, that is when the literary sources of medieval India first appeared. Several biographies, memoirs, court histories, chronicles, tales of foreign travellers, and private correspondence provide details on the Delhi Sultanate's history. The Delhi Sultanate controlled North India from 1206 C.E. to 1526 C.E., since Delhi was their capital (the seat of their empire) and the emperors were known as Sultans.

There are both literary texts and archaeological materials that provide valuable insights into the history, culture, and administration of the Delhi Sultanate. The historical and literary works were written in Turkish and Persian, as well as other vernacular records in the form of biographies, memoirs, court histories, chronicles, tales of foreign travellers, and private correspondence. For example, the *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, a significant work that provides a description of the political, social, and economic circumstances that

prevailed in India at the time, was written by Ziauddin Barani. Chand Bardai wrote the epic poem *Prithviraj Raso*. The poem describes Prithviraj Chauhan's valiant deeds and the conflict that erupted between him and Muhammad Ghori. However, there are also drawbacks to these literary sources. Such writings lack authenticity. As a result, several myths and false facts concerning the period are propagated. The works of the Indian medieval authors were mostly focused on the rulers, and they did not discuss the role and contributions of the general populace.

1.1.2 Literary Sources

A significant period in history began with the advent of the Turks and Mongols, and their quick conquests and expansion over the regions of Central Asia and the neighbouring lands during the tenth and thirteenth centuries. Its effects on India were immediate, noticeable, and extensive. These massive nomadic expeditions had distant antecedents in the Ghorian invasions (Ghor and Ghazni are both in Afghanistan) and Mahmud of Ghazni's conquests of India at the end of the eleventh century. The Delhi Sultanate, which emerged in the early thirteenth century, refers to the Turkish rule over large parts of Northern India governed from their capital, Delhi. The Sultanate built political, social, and economic institutions during the course of its more than two centuries of existence that, while significantly different from earlier ones, were a special synthesis of what the Turks brought with them and what they learned in India.

The Delhi Sultans valued education and literacy. Many of them were huge fans of Persian and Arabic literature. Persian texts from the Sultanate era are recognised as



historical records since they are written chronologically and give us an accurate account of the statecraft of the kings and their advisers, politics, and historical events. In addition to theology and poetry, history writing was also promoted. Some of the sultans had their own historians working for them. Hasan Nizami, Minhaj-us-Siraj, Ziauddin Barani, and Shams Siraj Afif were the most well-known historians of this era. The Tughlaq dynasty's history may be found in Barani's *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*. *Tabaqat-i-Nasari*, a broad history of Muslim dynasties up to around 1260 CE, was written by Minhaj-us-Siraj.

Our principal sources of the Sultanate period are primarily in Persian and Arabic. These are divided into the following categories: Chronicles, *Malfuzat* and Travelogue.

1.1.2.1 Persian Tarikh Tradition

The written accounts of historical events in the order in which they occurred are called chronicles. The Sultan, according to Persian court chronicles, was God's messenger. The sultans and Padshahs didn't assert that they were God's subsequent manifestations. However, Persian court histories referred to them as "the shadow of God". Let's check some of the available documents in this segment.

♦ **Imam Ibn al Athir's *Kamil-ut-Tawarikh*:** The *Kamil- ut-Tawarikh* of Ibn al Athir provides us with a wealth of knowledge regarding the history of Central Asia and the ascent of the Shansabani Dynasty of Ghor. In 1230, the book was completed. Many of the incidents described in the author's last two volumes occurred during his lifetime. He exercised critical judgement while using his sources of information, and as a result, his narrative has only sometimes been found to be inaccurate. Regarding

his reports of Indian affairs, they are remarkably accurate in terms of the dates and crucial details. However, it is true that those are founded on rumours. The author is valuable in this context because he corroborates other sources while also offering unique explanations or details that are absent from other accounts.

♦ **Ata Malik Juwaini's *Tarikh-i-Jahan Gusha-i-Juwaini*:** Ata Malik Juwaini finished writing his *Tarikh-i-Jahan Gusha-i-Juwaini* in 1260. The book is important for understanding Central Asian history during the first part of the thirteenth century. Under Mongol ruler Hulagu, the author had a prominent administrative post in Baghdad and had access to official Mongol papers. He provides a thorough and accurate description of the Mongol conquests in Western Asia in his writings. Although the author holds a pro-Mongol perspective, his account remains accurate. However, he rarely mentions India and only does so in relation to the Shansabanis or the Khwarizmi Prince, Jalaluddin.

♦ ***Tarikh-i-Guzidah* of Hamdullah Mastaufi Qazwini:** Hamdullah Mastaufi Qazwini finished the *Tarikh-i-Guzidah* in 1329. It is regarded as the East's best general history. It gives a succinct but largely accurate history of the Ghaznavids, Shansabanis, and Delhi Sultans. The author provides fascinating information regarding the Ghorides. The book largely serves as corroboration.

♦ **Genealogies of Fakhruddin Mubarakshah:** Denison Ross's discovery and editing of the book of *Fakhruddin Mubarakshah*'s genealogies, known as *Fakhre Mudabbir*, yielded a historical section that is extremely useful for understanding the early history of the invasion. In the courts of Ghazni and later Delhi, the author was a renowned scholar. He also composed a poetic history of the Ghorides.

- ◆ **Nuruddin Muhammad Aufo's *Jawami-ul-Hikayat*:** The preface of Nuruddin Muhammad Aufo's *Jawami-ul-Hikayat* gives information about the military operations that Iltutmish carried out against Qubacha in 1227. The author witnessed those events personally.
 - ◆ ***Chachnama*:** The author of *Chachnama* remains unidentified. *Chachnama*'s real name is *Fatahnama*. Arabic was the original language of *Chachnama*. Muhammad Ali-bin-Abu Bakr Kufi translated it into Persian during the reign of Nasir-ud-din Qubachah. This work provides a description of the Arab conquest along with information about Muhammad bin Qasim. As a result, this text is regarded as the founding document of medieval Indian history.
 - ◆ ***Tarikh-ul-Yamini*:** The *Tarikh-ul-Yamini*, also known as the *Kitab ul Yamini* written by Utbi. *Tarikh - ul- Yamini* is an Arabic history of the reigns of Sebuktigin and Mahmud written in a vivid, flowery rhetorical rhymed style. Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Jabbaru-l 'Utbi was a historian (or al-Utbi). Sebuktigin's entire rule, up to 410 Hijra era, and a portion of Mahmud's reign are covered in his writings (1020 C.E.). The *Tarikh-ul-Yamini* has thorough coverage of both Sultan Mahmud's journeys and the demise of the Samanid Empire. Al-Utbi served as Mahmud's secretary and did not accompany the sultan on his travels, which resulted in his writing being limited and openly orthodox. Additionally, he claims that he purposefully omitted a number of unusual or weird events that did not match the goals he had outlined in the introduction.
 - ◆ ***Tarikh-i-Hind*:** The author of *Tarikh-i-Hind* is Abu Rehan Al-Biruni. It is also known as *Kitab-ul-Hind*. This work has been written in Arabic. This book describes Indian civilisation and culture between 1018 C.E. and 1030 C.E. Al-Biruni was an army officer of Mahmud Ghaznavi travelled to India. He studied Sanskrit in order to gain a better understanding of Indian civilisation and culture. He established the practice of writing Indian history chronologically.
 - ◆ ***Tabqat-i-Nasiri*:** This work was written by Minhaj-us-Siraj. It details the conquest of India by Muhammad Ghori and the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate by the Turks. Minhaj-us-Siraj served as both the principal *Qazi* of Delhi and the leader of Nasiriya Madrasa during the reign of Nasir-ud-din-Mahmud. In his book, he first used the term "Bihar." The information in this book spans Muhammad Ghori's rule through Nasir-ud-din's rule.
 - ◆ **The Muhammad Bihamad Khani's *Tarikh-i-Muhammadi*:** Muhammad Bihamad Khani finished the *Tarikh-i-Muhammadi* in 1438–1439. He belonged to the military class rather than the scholarly *Ulema*. Patriarchs and prophets are discussed in the text, covering the life of the Prophet Muhammad, the Caliphs, Umayyads, Abbasids, Ghaznavids, Saljuqs, Sanjarids, Shansabani Sultans of Ghori and Ghazni, Shamsi Sultans of Hind, etc. Additionally, it details the struggles of the Sultans of Kalpi with their Muslim and Hindu neighbours as well as the histories of the Sultans of Delhi and Timur.
- The Prophet's life story and the early Caliphate's history are presented in the *Tarikh-i-Muhammadi* as annals. It is a chronological account of events, focusing primarily on military affairs. The biographies of the saints are filled with praise and admiration. Without discussing or criticising the preceding histories, the author has paraphrased them. He cites the *Tabqat-i-Nasiri*, *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* by Barani, and *Tazkirat Al-Auliya* by Farid-al-din-Attar among other works.

what he himself witnessed or learned from trustworthy observers.” He serves as “our most original authority” for the 35-year period between 1400 and 1435. He also adds to Shams-i-Siraj Afif’s scant knowledge beginning around 1380.

- ♦ **Zia ud-din Barani’s *Fatawah-i-Jahandari*:** Zia-ud-din Barani wrote the *Fatawah-i-Jahandari*, which was completed in the 14th century. The author expresses his personal opinions regarding the Sultan’s secular and reef policies. The book provides a glimpse into the ideal political structure that the author wanted Muslim kings to adhere to.
- ♦ **Ahmad Yadgar’s *Tarikh-i-Salatin-i-Afaghana*:** Ahmad Yadgar is credited with authoring the *Tarikh-i-Salatin-i-Afaghana*. It covers the Afghan dynastic history in India. It is incredibly helpful for the Lodi Dynasty’s dominance. With Bahlol Lodi’s ascension in 1451, the author started writing. The final chapter discusses Hemu’s defeat and capture in 1556. The author pays little attention to dates and “gives whimsical and occasionally ludicrous anecdotes towards the end of the reign of each Afghan King.”
- ♦ **The *Makhzan-i-Afghani* by Niamatulla:** It is a broad history of the Afghan people from the time of Adam in 1612. It was written during Jahangir’s reign in the 17th century. This work gives a genealogical account of several Afghan tribes. It also includes the autobiography of Khan-i-Jahan Lodi, one of Jahangir’s best generals. At the Court of Jahangir, the author served as a *Waqia Navis*. Though he does not reference Ferishta in his writings, he was a contemporary, commencing his work in the same year Ferishta concluded (1593).
- ♦ **The *Tarikh-i-Daudi* of Abdulla:** This is an another work from the seventeenth century. The Lodi and Sur dynasties are

discussed. It provides numerous anecdotes but is short on dates. Although no specific dates are provided, Jahangir, who ascended the throne in 1605 is mentioned incidentally, and the work survives only in fragments. The Lodi dynasty’s history can be found in the *Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi* or *Tohfa-i-Akbarshahi*.

1.1.2.2 *Malfuz* Literature During the Sultanate Period

Malfuz literature, or hagiography, refers to spoken words. The term is used to describe the discussions that sufi saints have at their tables in general usage. One of the most significant literary achievements of medieval India is *Malfuz* writing. Amir Hasan Sijzi, a student of Sheikh Nizam-ud-din Auliya, is credited with giving this art a clear direction and making it prominent in the nation’s religious communities. Amir Hasan Sijzi, a renowned poet of the Khalji era and a close friend of Amir Khusrau, decided in 1307 to compile the teachings he had received from his mentor, Sheikh Nizam-ud-Din Auliya. This choice was historic, as it ushered in the *Malfuzat* school of mysticism, a new branch of literature. *Malfuz* literature provides a vivid picture of the saints’ gatherings as well as a window into everyday life in the Middle Ages. However, a significant flaw in *Malfuz* or hagiographic literature is that facts and myths are frequently mixed. They are exceedingly difficult to utilise as historical sources because they involve miracles and myths.

1.1.2.3 Vernacular Histories During the Medieval Period

Considerable literature was also composed in Sanskrit at this time. Sanskrit literature was fostered by Hindu kings, particularly those of Gujarat, Warangal, and the Vijayanagara kingdom. Numerous professionals produced high-quality works in philosophy and religious commentary, as well as poetry,



prose, and theatre. Numerous monarchs supported Sanskrit scholars and encouraged their publications, including Hammir Deva, Prataprudra Deva, Basantraja, Virupakaya, Narsingh, Krishnadevaraya and others.

At the palace of Prataprudra Deva, Agastaya, a brilliant scholar, wrote the *Prataprudradeva- Yasobhusan* and the *Krishna Charita*. The *Rukmani-Kalyan* was written by Vidya Chakravartin, who served at the court of Hoysala ruler Vira Ballala III. During this time, Vaman Bhatt Bana, a renowned scholar, published works in poetry, prose, and drama. His only well-known contribution was the *Parvati-Parinaya*.

In addition to numerous other works, Vidyapati was another outstanding scholar who wrote the *Durga Bhakti Tarangini*. The *Sankar-Vijaya* was written by another scholar, Vidyaranya. Divakara, Kirtiraja, and Srivara were other well-known Sanskrit experts. The *Hammir-Kavya* was written by the Jain scholar Nayachandra. Along with a few others, King Virupaksha wrote the *Narayanvilas* and Krishnadevaraya wrote the *Jambavati-Kalyan*.

Parthasarathi published several works on the *Karma-Mimansa*, while the famous Bhakti saint Ramanuja produced a commentary on the *Brahmasutra*. The *Gita-Govinda* was written by Jayadeva, the *Hammir-Mada-Mardana* by Jai Singh Suri, and the *Gangadas Pratap Vilas* by Gangadhar. The *Rajatarangini* was written by the eminent Kashmiri historian Kalhana, and Jonaraja and Srivara added to it in the *Rajatarangini*'s second and third iterations, respectively.

The *Mitakshara*, one of the most well-known works on Hindu law, was authored by Vijnanesvara and Bhaskaracharya, a renowned astronomer who also flourished during this period.

1.1.2.4 Hindi, Urdu and Other Regional Languages

The introduction of literature in many regional Indian languages was the only novelty of this period in the literary sphere. The majority of western Uttar Pradesh's speakers of the Khari-boli and Braj-bhasa laid the foundation for the development of Hindi literature. The *Prithviraj Raso* of Chand Bardai, the court poet of Prithviraj Chauhan, and the *Alha-Khanda* created by Jagnayaka are just a few of the well-known Hindi compositions published during this time.

Amir Khusrau has earned recognition as a Hindi and Urdu writer. Towards the end of the fourteenth century, Vidyapati Thakur, who wrote in Sanskrit, Hindi, and Maithili, supported the development of Maithili literature. The saints of the Bhakti movement who delivered their sermons in the native tongues of the populace contributed to the development of several regional languages and, in turn, their literatures. Thus, during this time, almost every regional language of India, including Bengali, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Sindhi, Gujarati, Marathi, Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, etc., began to develop.

During this period witnessed the expansion of the Marathi literary canon. The first Marathi poets and writers were Chakradhar, Bhaskar, Bhatt, and Mukandaraya. After that, Bhakti saints made significant contributions to the development of Marathi literature. A commentary on the *Gita* by Saint Jnaneswar, was written in Prakrit Marathi. The majority found it to be very appealing. During this time, Gujarati literature also advanced. Several Jain monks contributed to its development.

The writings of Vidyapati and Chandidas in Bengali served as an impetus for the development of that language's literature.

Bengali was also patronised by a number of Bengali rulers. While Sultan Hussain Shah commissioned Maladhar Vasu to translate the *Gita* into Bengali, it was Sultan Nusrat Shah of Gaur who had him translate the *Mahabharata*. Kavindra Parmeswar translated the *Mahabharata* into Bengali at the request of one of Hussain Shah's nobles. Following that, Chaitanya and his followers contributed songs and Bhajans to the Bengali literary canon. The Bhakti movement of the 13th and 14th centuries in the South gave Tamil literature a boost. The Vijayanagara rulers encouraged the development of Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, and other languages.

1.1.3 Archaeological Sources

The above sections address historical sources that include literary materials from many languages. Let us now proceed to the archaeological part, which includes monuments and other antiquities. The inscriptions on antique coins, historical monuments, and tombstones are the primary sources of information for the Delhi Sultanate. Archaeological and literary materials are equally important. Similarly, coins provide information about the economy, the name of the ruler, the date, and religious beliefs.

The two most significant archaeological sources are monuments and coins. There are inscriptions about the Delhi Sultanate on coins, structures, markers, and gravestones. Some of the inscriptions are in Arabic, while others are in Sanskrit. For instance, the first batches of coins produced by Bhakhtiyar Khalji have Arabic and Sanskrit writing on them. The monuments erected by the Sultans provide information on the lifestyle, worldviews, and state of science and technology at the time. The four primary architectural elements of Turkish art were domes, minarets, arches, and peaked roofs.

The Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque and Qutb Minar, both in Delhi and constructed by Qutb-ud-din Aibak, were notable structures erected during this time. At Ajmer, he also constructed Adhai din ka Jhopra. The Qutb Minar and Iltutmish's tomb were constructed by Iltutmish himself. Alauddin Khalji constructed the Alai Darwaza, Siri Fort, Hauz Khas, and Jamat Khana Masjid in Delhi. One of the most impressive buildings built in medieval India is the Qutb Minar. Qutb-ud-din Aibak initiated the construction of the Qutb Minar, and it was later completed by Iltutmish.

The dome and the pointed arch were two architectural concepts that the Sultanate popularised. Islamic buildings used the dome as a decorative element that was quickly adopted by other types of buildings as well. The type of arches that were being built in the nation earlier was completely different from the pointed or rounded arch that was introduced at this time. The traditional Indian method for building arches involved first setting up two pillars. The pillars would subsequently be divided into sections to make room for "plug-in" projections. A series of squares that gradually get smaller in size would form an arch. This was accomplished by designating the central stone as a key stone and distributing the weight of the other stones among the two pillars.

Originally an old Islamic monument with Arabic inscriptions, Qutb Minar is the highest minar in India, and it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The iron pillar also bears some Brahmi inscriptions. The Qutb Minar is a structure in Delhi built of marble and red sandstone. The tower's stairs have 379 steps, a base diameter of 14.3 metres, a height of 72.5 metres (237.8 feet), and a width of 2.7 metres at the top floor. Qutb-ud-din-Aibak began construction in 1192, and Iltutmish completed it.



The Qutb-ud-Din Aibak, the founder of the Mamluk Dynasty, built the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque. Following Muhammad Ghori's murder in 1206, Qutb-ud-Din Aibak ascended to the throne of Delhi Sultanate and proclaimed himself the Sultan of the Mamluk Dynasty. The mosque is well-known for having a tower of victory that commemorates the Mughals' victory over India. The red sandstone, white marble, and grey quartz were used to construct the monument. The nearby iron "Pillar of the Law" served as a major source of inspiration.

Khan-i-Jahan, the Prime Minister of Firoz Shah Tughluq, built the Begumpuri Mosque in the 12th century. It accurately tells the tale of well-known Begampur, which previously served as a madrasa, a place of prayer, and a seat of government. The mosque is now deserted and one of Delhi's unusual places to visit. With its founding tale, the monument effectively illustrates the growth of the Delhi Sultanate. Lime plaster was used to cover the grey quartzite and mortar structure. The mosque's walls are rather large, and some of them even feature rooms. Weapons and other military gear were kept in these rooms.

The Alai Darwaza was given its name in 1311 C.E. in honour of Ala-ud-Din Khalji, the first ruler of the Khalji dynasty. The Alai Darwaza gate was constructed with a red sandstone dome-shaped gate, magnificent features made of white marble, and historic inscriptions. The Alai Darwaza, one of the key structures built during the development of the Delhi Sultanate, is also regarded as the first monument to display real Islamic architecture. The monument was built to make it easier to access the courtyard of the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque from the entrance pathway. One of the first structures in India to be constructed in the Islamic architectural style, it was also the oldest gate.

1.1.4 Coins of Delhi Sultanate

The history of coinage with pictures gave way to the so-called Islamic style of coins, which had no pictures on them. Arabic writing was inscribed on both sides of Islamic-style coins, which provided more information than their equivalents from antiquity. Information both religious and secular is provided.

It is known that Alauddin Khalji's successor, Qutb-ud-Din Mubarak (1316–1320 CE), minted coins in gold, silver, billon, and copper. He introduced a significant alteration to the coin's inscription by proclaiming himself as the Caliph and changed the name of the Abbasid Caliph to Khalifullah (the Caliph of Allah) and *Khalifah Rabbil Alamin* (the Caliph of the Lord of the World). Additionally, he took on the name 'Sikander uz Zaman'.

Bronze token currency was first created by Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325–1351 CE). It weighed about 10 grams, and the Sultan requested to accept this bronze tanka at the market price for a silver tanka. The coins bear an appeal that says, on one side, "Muhr shud tanka raj dar rajgar banda -e-umidwar Muhammad Tughluq" (sealed as a tanka current in the reign of slave, hopeful Muhammad Tughluq), and, on the other, "man ata as-sultan faqad ata rahman" (he who obeys the king, obeys God).

Recap

- ◆ The Delhi Sultanate governed North India from 1206 to 1526 CE.
- ◆ Both textual and archaeological evidence inform our understanding of the period.
- ◆ Historical works appear in Turkish, Persian, and regional languages, in the form of biographies, memoirs, court histories, chronicles, travel accounts, and letters.
- ◆ Monuments and coins are the two principal categories of archaeological source material.
- ◆ Over more than two centuries, the Sultanate built lasting political, social, and economic institutions.
- ◆ Persian and Arabic texts form the core of the primary sources for this period.
- ◆ A chronologically arranged record of events is called a chronicle.
- ◆ Abu al-Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni (Alberuni) was a noted scholar attached to Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni's court.
- ◆ Substantial literature also continued to be produced in Sanskrit during this era.
- ◆ The Marathi literary tradition began to take shape in this period.
- ◆ Inscriptions on coins, monuments, and tombstones remain key primary evidence for the Sultanate.

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote *Tabqat-i-Nasiri*?
2. Who commissioned the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque and began construction of the Qutb Minar in Delhi?
3. In whose court did Minhaj-us-Siraj serve?
4. Who authored *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi*?



5. During which dynasty's rule was *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi* written?
6. Who compiled the teachings of Sheikh Nizam-ud-Din Auliya in 1307?
7. What literary tradition emerged from this 1307 compilation of Sufi teachings?
8. Amir Hasan Sijzi was a close associate of which famous poet?
9. Whose teachings were recorded in the earliest Malfuzat compilation?
10. What does the title *Yamin-ul-Khilafat*, adopted by Alauddin Khalji, mean?

Answers

1. Minhaj-us-Siraj
2. Qutb-ud-din Aibak
3. Iltutmish
4. Yahya ibn Ahmad Sarhindi
5. Sayyid Dynasty
6. Amir Hasan Sijzi
7. Malfuzat literature
8. Amir Khusrau
9. Sheikh Nizam-ud-Din Auliya
10. "The right hand of the Caliph"

Assignments

1. Explain the importance of literary sources for reconstructing the history of the Delhi Sultanate.
2. Assess Amir Khusrau's contribution to the historiography of the Delhi Sultanate.

3. Discuss how archaeological evidence supplements our understanding of the Delhi Sultanate.
4. Critically examine the limitations of depending solely on Persian court chronicles as historical sources.
5. Discuss the value of foreign travellers' accounts in reconstructing the social and cultural life of the Delhi Sultanate.

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2

UNIT

Sources of Mughal Period

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- identify and classify the major categories of source material available for studying the Mughal period
- assess the reliability and limitations of Mughal sources, particularly those produced under royal patronage
- compare Mughal-era sources with those of earlier or contemporaneous periods

Prerequisite

The Taj Mahal, an ivory-white marble mausoleum on the southern bank of the Yamuna at Agra, was commissioned by Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. Construction of the mosque, guest house, and main gateway began in 1632 and finished in 1648, with the outer courtyard and cloisters completed by 1653. Widely regarded as the pinnacle of Indo-Islamic architecture, it is celebrated for its balance of solid and open space, its curved and flat surfaces, and its play of light and shadow, enhanced by arches and domes. While the Taj Mahal offers rich insight into Mughal power, it is primarily an architectural source. A fuller picture of the empire requires examining chronicles, foreign travel accounts, coinage, monuments, royal orders, correspondence, religious literature, and inscriptions.

Keywords

Battle of Panipat, Indo-Persian architecture, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, *Manzil-abadi*, *Muntakabat-i-Tarikhi*

Discussion

1.2.1 The Mughal World: Histories, Monuments and Memory

The Mughal Empire is considered as one of India's most prosperous and longest governing dynasties, controlling significant parts of the Indian subcontinent at its peak. They were Central Asian Muslims who used Persian as their court language. Their intermarrying with Hindu rulers and forging strong connections with the subcontinent's numerous peoples resulted in profound cultural, artistic, and linguistic interactions.

The Mughal Empire claimed Mongol ancestry ("Mughal" is from the Arabic translation of "Moghol," or Mongol). The Mughal kings were among India's greatest art patrons, building some of the nation's most impressive structures, including the Taj Mahal and the palaces at Delhi, Agra, and Lahore (in modern-day Pakistan). It was founded by Babur, a ruler of Fergana province, presently situated in Afghanistan. Indian culture, sculpture, and religion were profoundly impacted in many ways by the Mughal Empire.

There is no scarcity of material sources of Mughal History. In the Mughal era, the terrain for writing history became more interesting and disputed, and the variety of sources increased. The sources include chronicles, accounts of foreigners, coins, monuments, royal orders, historical letters, religious literature, and inscriptions.

In addition to this, ballads and bardic chronicles from Rajput literature provide a significant source pertaining to Mughal India. For information on the latter Mughal era, we can also rely on the Marathi chronicles. Similar to this, the famed *Granth Sahib* and

other *Gurumukhi* writings provide useful information about the period.

During the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, India was frequently visited by traders, tourists, and missionaries from Europe. Portuguese travellers such as Barbosa (1500–1516), Ralph Fitch, Jerome Xavier, Tavernier, Francois Bernier, and Manucci are extremely significant among these foreigners.

Compared to the Sultanate era, this period has a significantly higher number of monuments. In addition, several coins, inscriptions, artworks, and buildings have been discovered. They are an invaluable resource for comprehending the nation's creative, cultural, and even economic past. Let's now examine each of the sources listed above in more detail.

1.2.2 The Literary Sources of the Mughal Empire

There are a huge amount of literary sources available from the Mughal period. They range from the autobiographies of emperors to contemporary musical works. The major source of this period is written in Persian as well as in Arabic. In addition, the Mughal era offers linguistic sources in both European and regional vernacular languages.

1.2.2.1 The Persian Literary Culture

The Persian sources can be categorised into many features or types based on their characteristics, writing style, and content. It contains autobiographies of Mughal rulers, court histories, accounts, letters, inscriptions and coins, and so on. Two of the Mughal emperors' autobiographies, such as Babur's autobiography, were published in Turkish, while Jahangir's *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* was written in Persian.



Babur-namah

Babur-namah is an autobiography written by Muhammad Babur in Turkish. During Akbar's reign, Abdul Rahim Khan Khana produced the first Persian translation from Turkish. After that, Annette Beveridge translated it into English in the nineteenth century. Babur, who had a significant impact on Indian history, presents a comprehensive account of India, political and social conditions, as well as its flora, fauna, and architecture. He dedicates a page and a half to a prose description of the sculptures from the Gwalior temples. In reality, *Babur-namah* is a political history that details Babur's conflict with the Rajputs and how the Afghans ultimately vanquished them. He also spoke about the various farming practices and crops used in India.

Humayun-namah

Some claim that Humayun dictated the *Humayun-namah* to one of his slaves or servants, Jahar Aftab-achi. The use of phrases such as "I did" and "I did not" suggests a first-person account; however, the text appears to have been authored by someone other than Humayun himself, making its authenticity somewhat questionable.

Humayun-namah was written by Gulbadan Begum from the *harem*. Unfortunately, there are some chronological issues. She also commented on the political developments of the time, though this focus offers limited insight into the daily life of the *harem*. The book *Humayun-namah* is divided into two parts. Babur's life history is presented in the first section, followed by details on Humayun's rule. She has provided extensive details of Humayun's military campaigns. In addition to political matters, she gives detailed information on social conditions, including marriage customs and *harem* rituals.

Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri

It was believed that Jahangir, the Mughal Emperor, wrote his autobiography in *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* or *Jahangir-nama* (1605-1627 C.E.). It goes by many names, including *Waqiat-i-Jahangiri*, *Karnama-i-Jahangiri*, *Tarikh-i-Salimxahi*, and *Jahangir-namah*. It is the most significant work for reconstructing the history of the Mughal Empire under Jahangir. Although Akbar, Jahangir's father, initiated plans for the conquest of Bengal, it was Subahdar Islam Khan Chishti who is credited with successfully completing the conquest during Jahangir's reign. As a result, the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* is a crucial source for understanding the history of Mughal expansion in Bengal.

The *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* is perhaps the most fascinating, as Jahangir wrote in detail about his commitment to justice, most notably describing how he hung the golden chain of justice outside his palace, allowing anyone to seek justice directly from him. He was remarkably detailed and shared his personal views on a wide range of subjects, including fruits and flowers.

1.2.2.2 History Writing During Akbar

From the time of Akbar, court chroniclers in Mughal India gained prominence, and even during the reign of Aurangzeb, they were respected. Abul Fazl's *Akbar-namah* and *Ain-i-Akbari* were the two most notable historical works produced during Akbar's reign. The *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* was written by Abdul Qadir Badauni, a courtier of Akbar, and it covered topics like the Emperor's religious beliefs. In addition, official histories such as the *Padashahnama*, *Alamgir-namah*, and *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, as well as Khafi Khan's *Muntakhab-al-Lubab*, are important as sources for the later Mughal period.

The reign of Akbar was the most important time in terms of presenting and recording history from a historiographical perspective. Usually, it took the form of court documents. During this period, history writing attained a new level in terms of approach. This was made possible by the assistance of a remarkable person: Abul Fazl, the court historian of Akbar.

The two most important court chronicles from Akbar's reign were authored by Abul Fazl and Badauni. Sheikh Mubarak, Abul Fazl's father, taught him to read and write. He was attacked by the mullahs because of his liberal views. He was forced to move from place to place until Akbar eventually offered him refuge. Some believe that Abul Fazl's opposition to the mullahs stemmed from this very perspective. His entire historical philosophy is rooted in Akbar's views, based on two key principles. The first is *Sulh-e-kul*, or universal tolerance, the acceptance of all religions. The second, more controversial yet deeply significant, is his assertion that the foundation of all religions lies in reason rather than faith.

Akbar-namah: Abul Fazl's *Akbar-namah* is a remarkable example of medieval historical writing and serves as an invaluable reference for understanding Akbar's India. It is a masterfully crafted political and administrative history that delves into a wide array of subjects previously untouched by earlier historians. Abul Fazl states that his purpose in writing history is not merely to serve his contemporaries, but to enlighten the intellectuals of future generations.

Akbar-namah begins with a political history. Even within the confines of medieval historiography and his position as a court historian on the imperial payroll, Abul Fazl managed to break free from the hagiographic or idealised biographic mould. He incorporated analytical methods into historical writing and formulated a theoretical

framework for understanding the functioning of the Mughal state.

The first volume of the *Akbar-namah* covers the circumstances surrounding Akbar's birth, Timur's family history, Babur and Humayun's reigns, and the Suri sultans of Delhi. The second volume contains a thorough history of Akbar's rule from 1556 to 1602, as well as a chronicle of the occasions that occurred during that period. Additionally, it relates how Hemu, an Indian fighter, was defeated by Bairam Khan and Akbar during the Battle of Panipat. The third volume, known as the *Ain-i-Akbari*, gives a description of the Empire's organisational system.

Ain-i-Akbari

The *Ain-i-Akbari*, or "Administration of Akbar," is a 16th-century detailed document published in Persian by his court historian, Abu'l Fazl, detailing the Mughal Empire's administration under Emperor Akbar. It is frequently regarded as a separate document, but it was actually the third or final book of *Akbar-namah*. The book was intended to be an imperial gazetteer detailing Akbar's court, government, and army, as well as the revenues and topography of his empire. Abul Fazl also gives an explanation of the caste system prevalent during this period. He records details about each caste, including their names, social status, and assigned duties. This text contains a theory of state formation similar to Hobbes's *Social Contract*. Abul Fazl argues that there is a social contract between the ruling and the ruled.

The *Ain-i-Akbari* consists of five books. The first volume, *Manzil-Abadi*, discusses the imperial home and its maintenance, while the second, *Sipah-Abadi*, discusses the emperor's servants, civil and military duties. The third portion deals with imperial administration, which contains rules for the court and the executive. Science, social norms, Hindu philosophy, and literature are all covered in



the fourth portion. The fifth volume includes Akbar's sayings as well as information on the author's ancestors and life.

The entire administrative framework of the Mughal Empire, including palace and *harem* officials, their organisational structure, economic information on skilled and unskilled workers, pricing, provincial lands, revenue figures, the number of towns, villages, and zamindars, as well as the size of the military was meticulously documented in the three volumes of the *Ain-i-Akbari*, a work that has been translated into English multiple times.

1.2.2.3 Other Literary Sources

- ◆ **Habib-us-Siyar:** Khondmir was the author of *Habib-al-Siyar*. This book provides details about the Mughal Empire between 1521 and 1529 C.E. It provides a thorough explanation of the overall history of the medieval world.
- ◆ **Tarikh-i-Rashidi:** The author of *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* was Mirza Haidar Ali Dughlat. It provides details on the Turks and Mughals of Central Asia. It sheds light on Central Asia's political situation. He also provides thorough details regarding Babur's ancestors and Humayun's military prowess.
- ◆ **Qanun-i-Humayuni:** Khondmir is the author of *Qanun-i-Humayuni*. He started writing this work in 1533 and finished it in 1534. He offers insights into the laws, beliefs, cultural practices, and rituals that Humayun implemented in his court. Humayun has received several titles from him, including 'shadow of God' and 'Sikandar-i-azam'.
- ◆ **Tarikh-i-Shahi:** Ahmad Yadgar authored *Tarikh-i-Shahi*, which begins with the reign of Bahlol Lodi and concludes with the rule of Hemu. His father served as the *Wazir* in Shehzad Mirza Askari's court.
- ◆ **Tarikh-i-Akbari :** Arif Quandhari was the author of *Tarikh-i-Akbari*. The book details the advancements made under Akbar. In his view, the most effective policy Akbar implemented was his approach toward the Zamindars.
- ◆ **Padshah-namah:** *Padshah-namah* is Jahangir's first official document. The work is a joint effort by three authors, Muhammad Amin Kazwini, Abdul Hamid Lahori, and Muhammad Waris and provides an in-depth account of Jahangir's reign.
- ◆ **Tarikh-i-Shahjahani:** Sadiq Khan penned the *Tarikh-i-Shahjahani*. The book provides thorough information about Shahjahan's reign and the conditions prevailing in the Mughal Empire. The author was a mansabdar with a mansabdari of 6000.
- ◆ **Alamgir-namah:** Mirza Muhammad Kazim wrote the book, *Alamgir-namah*. It primarily deals with Aurangzeb's reign. He discusses the economic situation, the rise in commodity prices, the collapse in agriculture, and natural disasters such as floods.
- ◆ **Futuh-at-i-Alamgiri:** Ishwardas Nagar wrote the *Futuh-at-i-Alamgiri*. It describes Aurangzeb's relationship with the Rajputs.

1.2.3 Accounts of Foreign Travellers

During the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, India was visited by several foreign travellers. Additionally, their publications serve as significant sources for the Mughal era. There are several notable accounts, including *Travels of Ralph Fitch*, *Early Travels in India of William Hawkins*, *William Finch*, *Nicholas Withington*, *Thomas Coryat*, and *Edward Terry*, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to India* (1615–19) (edited by W. Foster), the *Travels of Peter Mundy*, and *Travels in*

the Mogul Empire (1656–1688) by Bernier ; *Travels in India* by J.B Tavernier, etc. These accounts, along with numerous more like them, discuss not only the Mughal court but also basic social norms, habits, and attitudes. These reports cannot be taken at face value, as some historians notes that some of them are just bazaar gossip and others are tainted by racial, religious, and national prejudices. Nevertheless, these reports are a valuable source of knowledge about the Mughal period.

In addition to chronological accounts of the Emperors' activities, there are a multitude of official documents on regional administration and statistical data. While many historical accounts highlight the virtues of the emperors, it is undeniable that they also offer valuable insights into the sequence of events and various administrative details, which can be systematically examined and organised.

Another significant source for the period is the royal grants and orders. There are sizable collections of poems from that historical period that shed light on the social, economic, and religious circumstances of the day. Numerous literary works about the lives of famous individuals, including saints, also depict everyday life.

1.2.4 Archaeological Sources

Nearly all of the archaeological sources have been catalogued, and the important relics have undergone thorough examination and restoration. Detailed studies of the numismatic sources were also conducted by archaeological surveys. A lot of people, including Edward Thomas, Lane-Poole, Nelson, Whitehead, Dames, and Rodgers, have contributed to the accurate gathering and explanation of numismatic evidence. The artefacts of the era's architecture attest to the heights of excellence attained by the

great Mughals. Huge palaces, substantial forts, magnificent mausoleums, and magical cities like Fatpur Sikri, among others, are spectacular examples of Mughal architecture and provide important hints about how the Mughal drama played out. Babur's impressive structures have been destroyed by the passage of time, but his tomb in Kabul is spectacular.

The architecture of Fatehpur Sikri, which has been dubbed a "romance in stone, unthinkable and unattainable at any other time or under any other circumstances," bears the lasting imprint of Akbar, a brilliant builder. Shah Jahan's Taj Mahal, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, is fervently adored by all and serves as an illustrative example of the art and architecture of the time. The Mughal painting, which peaked under Jahangir's rule, is more evidence of the Mughals' great accomplishments in the fine arts. The artwork of Percy Brown and Moti Chand sheds a ton of information on Mughal painting technique.



Recap

- ◆ The Mughal Empire was among India's most prosperous and longest-ruling dynasties.
- ◆ The dynasty claimed descent from the Mongols.
- ◆ The Mughals were major patrons of art, responsible for structures such as the Taj Mahal and the palaces of Delhi, Agra, and Lahore.
- ◆ Mughal rule left a deep and lasting imprint on Indian culture, sculpture, and religion.
- ◆ A vast body of literary material survives from the Mughal period.
- ◆ Persian sources can be grouped by their style, content, and distinguishing features.
- ◆ These include royal autobiographies, court histories, and administrative accounts.
- ◆ *Babur-namah* is essentially a political history detailing Babur's conflicts with the Rajputs and their eventual defeat by the Afghans.
- ◆ *Humayun-namah* offers rich detail on social life — including marriage customs and harem practices — alongside political events.
- ◆ *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* is the key source for reconstructing the history of Jahangir's reign.
- ◆ Akbar's reign marked the high point of historical writing under the Mughals.
- ◆ The two most important chronicles from Akbar's reign were written by Abul Fazl and Badauni.

Objective Questions

1. What was the official language of the Mughal court?
2. Who wrote the *Akbar-namah*?
3. Name a Portuguese traveller who visited India during Jahangir's reign.

4. In which language did Jahangir compose the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*?
5. Who produced the first Persian translation of the *Babur-namah*?
6. Which work contains a detailed description of the sculptures at the Gwalior temples?
7. Who wrote the *Humayun-namah*?
8. The *Ain-i-Akbari* forms part of which larger historical work?
9. Whose administration does the *Ain-i-Akbari* describe?
10. Who authored *Tarikh-i-Akbari*?

Answers

1. Persian
2. Abul Fazl
3. Barbosa
4. Persian
5. Abdul Rahim Khan Khanan
6. *Babur-namah*
7. Gulbadan Begum
8. *Akbar-namah*
9. Akbar
10. Arif Qandhari

Assignments

1. Outline the importance of the *Akbar-namah* as a source for Mughal history.
2. Explain how European travel accounts help us understand the Mughal Empire.



3. Discuss the role of administrative records in reconstructing Mughal history.
4. Compare the writings of Babur and Jahangir as historical sources.
5. Examine the limitations of literary sources for studying Mughal history.

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UNIT

Court Chronicles

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ trace the origins, expansion, governance, and other dimensions of Mughal history as recorded in court chronicles
- ♦ identify key figures who documented Mughal-era events through chronicle writing
- ♦ recognise court chronicles as both historical records and instruments of political ideology

Prerequisite

Consider the following scenario: a ruler conquers a territory and establishes his authority there. His successor, who speaks a different language from his subjects, invites scholars from his homeland to assist in governing. These scholars compose detailed accounts of the ruler's reign — accounts that blend genuine history with myth and legend, partly because the authors hoped to win royal favour.

If this describes the founding of the Mughal Empire in India, what should we call the type of history produced by these court scholars?

Such writings are known as court chronicles, and their authors as courtiers. Court chronicles offer rich detail on kingdoms, court life, administration, and sometimes even the daily lives of ordinary people. While some carry the political leanings of their authors, many were composed with scholarly care, making them more dependable than casual travel accounts or oral folklore.

This unit examines Mughal court chronicles — who wrote them, how, and what they reveal about the empire's political, social, and cultural life — alongside vernacular literature that offers additional regional perspectives on Mughal rule.



Keywords

Court Chronicles, Paper Empire, Memories, *Ain-i Akbari*, *Tarikh*, *Masnawi*, *Akbar-namah*

Discussion

1.3.1. Court Chronicles in the Sultanate Period

Unlike ancient Indian traditions, where historical consciousness was often vague and not strictly chronological, the Delhi Sulthanate placed strong emphasis on chronology and factual recording. Influenced by established traditions from Arab, Persian, and Turkish cultures, these rulers and scholars in medieval India fostered a deliberate practice of historical writing. This form of historiography became a key cultural expression following the Turkish conquest of the subcontinent.

Much of the historical literature produced during this period closely mirrored styles prevalent in the broader Islamic world. Chronicles were often commissioned by rulers or written by court officials aiming to gain royal favour. Initially, these works attempted to cover vast timelines and broad themes, reflecting a global or pan-Islamic outlook. Over time, however, historical writing began to adopt a more localised focus, especially under the Mughal Emperor Akbar, who intentionally sought to distance India's cultural identity.

1.3.1.1 Ziauddin Barani

Barani's *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*, completed in 1357 when he was 74 years old, reflects the deep sense of disappointment and disillusionment he felt in his later years. Coming from a noble lineage that had held significant influence under successive Delhi Sultans, Barani had also served closely as a confidant to Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq

for over seventeen years. However, after the Sultan's death in 1351, Barani's fortunes declined, he lost his position, wealth, and social standing. This personal downfall left him embittered, especially toward the new wave of officials from humble backgrounds who began to dominate the court. His resentment toward this emerging class is evident throughout his chronicle, where his writings often reveal a strong bias against the lower social groups.

Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi is structured around dynastic narratives and the reigns of individual rulers. Serving as a continuation of Minhaj's *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, Barani's work traces the rule of nine sultans, from Balban up to the early years of Firuz Tughlaq, effectively capturing a crucial phase in the history of the Delhi Sultanate.

The chronicle opens with brief mentions of Iltutmish's reign and highlights the recurring threat of Mongol invasions. Barani then shifts focus to a pivotal transformation in medieval Indian history, the emergence of Khalji imperial ambitions. He explores this period in depth, examining its military strategies, economic policies, and cultural shifts. Although he criticises Alauddin Khalji for ignoring Islamic law (*Sharia*), Barani is deeply impressed by his market reforms, even describing them as nearly miraculous in their effectiveness.

One of the most insightful portions of the *Tarikh* is Barani's portrayal of Muhammad Tughlaq. His observations provide a detailed, nuanced view of the Sultan's personality, governance style, and

administrative decisions. His interest in state mechanisms, especially land revenue systems and economic structures, adds immense value to the historical narrative. More than just a political chronicle, Barani's work also serves as a cultural repository, offering rich lists of contemporary intellectuals, including historians, poets, philosophers, physicians, saints, and spiritual leaders.

1.3.2 Court Chronicles in Mughal India

One of the early modern era's most powerful political systems was the Mughal Empire. Because of the vast amount of writing that the Mughal Empire generated, it has been called a "paper empire." It also includes "unofficial" works such as biographical dictionaries of notable people, treatises on religion, medicine, philosophy, and jurisprudence, as well as literary compositions. Examples of official records of government dealings, epistolary exchanges, and administrative manuals are included.

Our main source of knowledge regarding the history of the Mughal Empire is the imperial court chronicles (*ta'rikh*). Scholarly descriptions of kingdoms, their courtiers, and the daily lives of common people are referred to as "court chronicles." The majority of kings had court chroniclers who meticulously recorded the events that occurred throughout their reign. Chronicles were essentially a compilation of thorough, written, and chronologically organised court reports. Although prose or verse were used regularly, there was no attempt to be literary in the writing. They contain historical information about past occasions as well as the authors' and viewers' historical, political, and cultural viewpoints. These histories illustrate the legacy that an emperor wanted to leave for future generations and serve as the official account of a reign.

1.3.2.1 General Features of Court Chronicles

Persian as an Appropriate Linguistic Medium: Persian had been frequently used since the Delhi Sultanate period (c. 1200–1526), and it continued to be the primary language for court chronicles during the Mughal era. However, Persian was utilised to facilitate communication with remote provinces, each of which had its own vernacular language, as well as the movement of people and ideas throughout the greater Islamic world. Since the beginning of the fifteenth century, an increasing number of Hindus from the scribal castes, particularly Kayasthas and Khatri, had mastered Persian, a necessary skill for obtaining a job as *munshis* (clerks) in the rapidly growing governmental apparatus.

Mythical Nature: The chronicles depict the legacy that an emperor wanted to leave for future generations and serve as the official account of a reign. Therefore, some (not necessarily common) traits stand out in each of these works. They open with a list of the current ruler's dynastic ancestors and predecessors. Mythical backdrops were employed for that.

Summary of Key Events: The primary part of the work is an in-depth year-by-year history of the reign. This comprises a summary of the key events, such as military campaigns, administrative actions, festive occasions, promotions and rewards given to officers, as well as other noteworthy events. It also occasionally includes commands given to tributary chiefs and copies of diplomatic communication with other rulers, as well as excerpts from panegyric lyrics written by court poets in the emperor's honour.

Official in Nature: Finding someone who was skilled in the craft of graceful prose



composition was a difficult task in writing the official history. Although it came with a lot of responsibility, it yielded handsome rewards. The leading intellectuals of the empire vied for this prestigious position and offered the emperor examples of their writings in an effort to win his favour.

1.3.2.2 Court Chronicles and Memoirs Before Akbar

Babur, who established the Mughal dynasty, passed away just four years after he conquered north India. His autobiography, the *Tuzuk-i-Baburi* or the *Babur-namah* (also known as “The Book of Babur”), demonstrates how thoroughly he absorbed the sophisticated Persianate culture of the time. It gives a detailed description of his turbulent life, from his formative years as a young Timurid prince striving to cling to his ancestors’ ancestral kingdoms to his heroic ambitions to establish an empire outside of his own country. In an effort to preserve the memory of its monarchs, Mirza Haidar Dughlat, Babur’s younger maternal cousin, wrote the *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, a history of the Mughals.

Nasir al-Din Muhammad Humayun (1508–1556), the son and successor of Babur, inherited his father’s intellectual preferences and carried on the custom of supporting academics. At the emperor’s request, learned historian Mir Ghiyas al-Din Muhammad Husaini, also known as Khwandamir, wrote the *Qanun-i-Humayuni* (“The Laws of Humayun”), which, while not quite a chronological history in the traditional sense, gives a clear account of the intricate administration and ceremonial operation of Humayun’s court as well as some of the novel structures he built.

1.3.2.3 Court Chronicles During Akbar's Reign

The imperial Mughal court chronicle project was carried out on a very vast scale

during the lengthy rule of Akbar (1542–1605), the third and most illustrious ruler of the Empire. Akbar’s courtiers created an extensive collection of narrative works, primarily chronicles. Abul Fazl (1551–1602), the emperor’s official historian and trusted confidant, played a pivotal role in this initiative.

Although the first signs of a resurgence in historical interest can be found in the composition of a narrative poem (*masnawi*) commemorating Akbar’s conquest of Gujarat in 1572 and in Arif Qandhari’s *Tarikh-i-Akbari* (*History of Akbar*), which was presented to the emperor in 1577–1578, a number of historical works appeared in quick succession in the years that followed. The *Tarikh-i-Khandan Timuriya* (*History of the Clan of Timur*), credited to an unknown author, provided an account of Timur and his successors up until Akbar. The *Tarikh-i-Alfi* (*Tales of Akbar*), a general history of the Muslim world since the death of Muhammad, with illustrations by artists of the imperial atelier, was completed by a group of officially nominated writers in 1588–1589.

The *Akbar-namah* (*The Book of Akbar*) by Abul Fazl is the primary official history of Akbar’s reign and possibly the most significant chronicle from the Mughal era. It is thought to be made up of three *daftar*s (registers or books), the first of which was split into two sections and finished in 1596. The first focuses on Akbar’s birth and provides a Timurid family tree as well as information on Babur and Humayun’s reigns, while the second moves the story forward to the sixteenth year of his rule. The forty-sixth year of the author’s life is covered in the second *daftar*. The third *daftar*, sometimes referred to as *A’in-i-Akbari* (also known as *The Regulations of Akbar*), covers empire administration and statistics.

The *Akbar-namah* presents Akbar as a superior, divinely inspired man who received

esoteric knowledge and power higher than that of even the most successful individuals due to his close connection to God. It links Akbar to charismatic historical figures of the medieval world, Genghis Khan and Timurlane, giving him an unquestionable dynastic legitimacy. It traces Akbar's ancestry all the way back to Adam, passing through Biblical prophets and Alanquwa, a mythical queen of Mughalistan who was miraculously impregnated by a ray of light. The *Akbar-namah* is a spectacular feat in the art of historical composition, setting a standard for entire generations of following writers to aspire to, despite the very partisan nature of the work, which has been noted by critics ever since its completion.

Abul Fazl

Abul Fazl (14 January 1551 - 22 August 1602), was the grand vizier and court historian of Akbar. The *Akbar-namah*, a thorough account of Akbar's reign, was written by him. It includes *Ain-i-Akbari*, which discusses the policies and procedures of the various state administrative agencies. Abul Fazl outlines the Mughal idea of kingship in *Ain-i Akbari*. He asserts that the ultimate dignity in God's eyes is that of royalty. Abul-Fazl refers to monarchy as "the divine light" because it instills in kings a paternal affection for their subjects and a greater faith in God.

The views of Akbar serve as the foundation for Abul Fazl's entire historical philosophy on two counts. One is what he refers to as *Sulh-e-kul*, which is the acceptance of all religions. The second was problematic and is far more significant. He made it abundantly evident that all religions are founded on reason, not faith. It's interesting to note how Abul Fazl explains his motivation: he wants readers to grasp history through learning about Akbar's reign.

He continues by saying that he is writing history for the intellectuals of the next generation rather than for the benefit of the

current age. Abul Fazl succeeded in avoiding the hagiographic or the idealised biographical mould, even within the constraints imposed by medieval historiography and the fact that he was a court historian employed by the imperial court. He developed a theoretical framework for the operation of the Mughal state in addition to introducing analytical approaches into the writing of history.

According to Abul Fazl, there were two separate approaches to historiography in the *Akbar-namah*. He began with Adam and advanced one stage, reaching Akbar. He did this by treating the rule of each ruler as a single period that lasted till the accession of Akbar. Abul Fazl began to use a year as a unit during the reign of Akbar. If another occurrence happened in the middle of the unit, he would describe it in detail before returning to the unit. Therefore, Abul Fazl's writings follow a certain style of history writing.

In *Ain-i-Akbari*, he adopted a different but challenging approach. He initially separates it into two sections - one which he claims deals with this worldly side of the emperor and the other the cultural worldly side of the emperor. He further split this side of the empire into *Manzilabadi* (imperial administration), *Sipahabadi* (army administration), and *Mulqabadi* (provincial administration). Most notably, he provides all figures in statistical data presented in tabular form, using tables with rows and columns rather than merely written numbers. This includes prices, wages, yields, and rates of land revenue. This demonstrates his concern that this should remain extremely exact.

According to Abul Fazl, a legitimate king has the authority to reform outmoded social norms and traditions, as Akbar did when he outlawed child marriage and the Hindu community's practice of *sati* (burning widows alive). The king possesses this authority, in accordance with Abul Fazl, because God provides him with guidance. The king treats



Badauni

Islam was naive and intimate to Badauni. He regarded people who had a different image of what Islam stood for as misguided heretics and unbelievers because he was overconfident in the accuracy of his own understanding of what Islam stood for. He assailed the ulema, charging them with casting doubt on the Prophet and the imams, while also harbouring hatred for Abul Fazl and Faizi.

The extensive list of Badauni's writings on a variety of topics attests to his skill for adaptability. He translated several existing literature, including the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Atharva Veda*, etc., under Akbar's orders. His first original composition, "Kitab-ul-Hadees," discussed the benefits of engaging in holy combat and archery. However, little is known about it. The *Najat-ul-Rashid*, a socio-ethical treatise with stories and dialogues interlaced, was the second. Without mentioning the Emperor or any of his allies, he blatantly aired his opinions and hypothetically analysed the issues with Akbar's rule.

This was a covert attempt to criticise and attack Akbar's "un-Islamic" behaviour. The *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, Badauni's third and major work, is supplemented by the book. The *Muntakhab* was an effort to undermine the trust of the Sunnis in Akbar, but the *Najat-ul-Rashid* restated the fundamentals on which traditional Sunnism might be rebuilt.

According to Badauni, he did not write in order to obtain the favour of any significant individuals. The “Selections of Histories” or *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* was authored in secrecy. Badauni claims that in order to document the “real” history of the time, he had to write this book in secret due to his displeasure with the changes occurring under Akbar’s rule, which he could only partially protest against publicly. In order to provide an alternative to modern history, he composed the *Muntakhab* because he was troubled by what he perceived to be an organised weakening of Islam by Akbar. However, Badauni claims in another place that he translated the “infidels’ writings” and composed the *Muntakhab* as an act of penance as retribution.

The *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* is incredibly important as a source for historical study. It offers a wealth of data for the time period and does it from a unique perspective. Badauni



provides comprehensive information on the administrative structure of Akbar's empire in addition to information about battles, uprisings, conquests, etc. He discusses, for instance, the development, operation, and ultimate failure of the *karori* system. Additionally, he offers his own account of how the relevant interests were impacted, but with the intention of harming Akbar's reputation.

With the exception of the *Ain-i-Akbari*, the general structure of Badauni's history is identical to Abul Fazl's, even if history is treated in a different way. For the Badauni, history is "a noble science," an important field of study, and a magnificent art for individuals with wisdom and understanding. Beginning with the assumption that only historians whose adherence to the *Shariat* is deeply ingrained should be considered seriously and that everyone else is "shortsighted" or "misguided," Badauni lays significant restrictions on how history is conceived of and treated.

1.3.2.4 Court Chronicles of Akbar's Successors

Nur-ud-Din Muhammad Salim known by his imperial name Jahangir, Akbar's son and successor (1569–1627), was a scholarly man with high aesthetic sensibilities, even though his political and military achievements fell short of those of his predecessor. The *Jahangir-namah* or *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (*The Regulations of Jahangir*), his autobiography written in Persian, is the main source for information on his reign. It served as inspiration for Mutammad Khan's *Iqbalnama-i-Jahangiri* (*Felicitous book of Jahangir*), which was finished in the emperor's fifteenth year of rule (1619–1620) and afterwards continued till his death. Babur and Humayun, Akbar and Jahangir, and correspondingly, are the subjects of each of the three volumes of this masterpiece.

Jahangir's reign also witnessed the

creation of other significant works that were inspired by the imperial court chroniclers and devoted to prominent nobles rather than the emperor. One of these was the extensive *Ma'asir-i-Rahimi* ("The illustrious acts of Rahim") written by Abd-ul Baqi Nahawandi for his master, Abdul Rahim Khani Khanan, who during the course of his protracted career in the Mughal service developed a reputation as a seasoned statesman and a generous patron of literature. The book *Tarikh-i-Khani Jahani wa Makhzani Afghani* (*History of Khani Jahan and repository of the Afghans*) by Khwaja Ni'matallah al-Harawi, which is devoted to the author's patron, the powerful Afghan Amir Khani Jahan Lodi (1587–1631), likely had a similar motivation.

Shah Jahan, the son and successor of Jahangir, ruled from 1592 to 1666, and during his time, a significant amount of history was composed. Abdul Hamid Lahori was given the task of writing the *Padshah-namah* (*The Book of the Emperor*), the official court chronicle (other contemporary works with similar titles also exist).

The *Padshah-namah* is a great illustration of how an emperor's ideological preferences, religious beliefs, or even just personal preferences had a significant impact on how the official chronicles were produced. Shah Jahan decided that each decade of his rule would be portrayed as a separate volume shortly after assuming power because he thought the number 10 to be fortunate.

The victor of the dispute of succession between Shah Jahan's four sons was crowned Abul Muzaffar Muhi al-Din Muhammad Aurangzeb Alamgir (1618–1707), the sixth and final of the great Mughal emperors, towards the conclusion of Shah Jahan's rule. The official account of Aurangzeb's first ten years in reign is found in Muhammad Kazim's *Alamgir-namah* (*Conqueror of the World*). It is a traditional court chronicle that is partisan in nature and critical of



of Vijayanagar, in large part because of the inspiring presence of Madhvacharya and Sayanacharya. The Tuluva and Aravidu rulers, the Nayakas of Tanjore, and the chiefs of Travancore and Cochin continued to favour Sanskrit after 1565.

The historical ‘Kavyas’ and ‘Natakas’ written during the 18th century provide a glimpse into the social perception of Sanskrit writers. Tirumalamba’s *Varadambika Parinayam* is considered one of the most beautiful ‘Champus’ of the later period. Mahakavyas based on the life of Shivaji and his son are also important sources for Maratha history. Muslim rulers were also included in historical Kavyas. The decline of Sanskrit literature in South India was attributed to the rise of vernacular literature, which was inspired by the Bhakti movement and drew on the instant response of the common people and the aristocracy. Annambhatta, Vyasaraya, Vijayendra, and Dalpati all contributed to *Dvaita* philosophy. However, the bulk of the works were on technicalities of form and commentaries on existing texts or grammar.

1.3.3.2 North Indian Literary Tradition

Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi were the three main languages in which literature was produced in north India during this time. The Hindi language developed over a long period of time, with dialects from Braj Bhasha, Awadhi, Rajasthani, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Malawi, etc. The origins of Hindi date back to the 7th and 10th centuries, when it was evolving out of Apabhransha. The form of poetry which developed during the subsequent period was devotional (*Bhakti*). Tulsidas wrote *Ramcharitamanas* in 1574, and his philosophy of 'Bhakti' touched the lives of common men. He inspired other writers to compose the *Bhakta*, a well-known account of the Vaishnava saints dating back to the ancient period.

Sanskrit lost its status as the official language of the imperial court during this time, but the Mughal Emperors like Dara continued to support Sanskrit scholars. As a result, Sanskrit never recovered its former prominence in northern India. Sanskrit literature was still favoured by the kings



Ashtachapa, a set of eight disciples of Vallabhacharya, propagated devotion to Krishna as the highest incarnation of the Supreme being. Mirabai became the heroine of many romantic legends, and her songs addressed Krishna as a lover. Sufi poets used popular tales to explain their mystic messages. Muslim poets belonging to the 17th and 18th centuries included Osman Shaikh Nabi, Kasim and Muhammad. Literature in Braj Bhasha flourished under the patronage of Akbar and was enriched by poets and musicians.

Dakhni literature was derived from the Turki Urdu and developed by drawing its form and themes from Persian literature. It flourished in Gujarat, Bijapur, Golconda, Aurangabad and Bidar. The oldest writer was Sayyid Bande Nawaz Gisu Daraz, and two important poets were Shah Ali Mohammad Jan and Sheikh Khub Muhammad. The Qutb Shahi Sultans of Golconda were major patrons of Dakhni literature. The most important poets of the period were Hindu Brahmins Nusrati, Rusthmi, Wajhi, and Wali Dakkani. Nusrati wrote *Alinama* and *Gulshani Ishq*, Rustami's *Rustami Khawar Nama*, Mulla Wajhi's *Qutb Mushtari*, and Wali Dakkani brought the Urdu ghazal in line with Persian traditions. Mina Daud also contributed to the literature of the period. After Aurangzeb's conquest of the Deccan, Dakkani fell out of favour, and by 1750, Urdu had established itself firmly in the Delhi region.

The Punjabi language evolved from Sauraseni Prakrit and has the same grammatical base as Brajabhasa and Rajasthani. Guru Nanak's *Adi Granth* is the best model for medieval literature, composed as hymns set to Ragas. Bhai Gurdas's devotional poetry and prose writings spread the Sikh faith, while romances derived from Muslim writers emerged. Sultan Bahu, Shah Hussain, and Bulleh Shah were all Sufi poets who contributed to Punjabi literature.

1.3.3.3 Other Literary Traditions

Sri Chaitanya's mystic preachings inspired Bengali language and literature, leading to the emergence of a new genre of Vaishnava biographies. These include Vrindavan Dasa's *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, Krishnadas Kaviraj's *Chaitanya-Charitamrita*, Jayananda and Lochan Das' *Chaitanya Mangal* and Gouranga Vijaya by Chudamani Das. *Padavali* is an important branch of Vaishnava literature, featuring the romance of Radha and Krishna. Mangal Kavyas, derived from the Puranas, propagated the importance of local cult-deities and transformed Puranic gods like Shiva and Vishnu into household deities.

Muslim writers also wrote in Bengal. Daulat Qazi was the first notable writer from Arakan due to the close association between Bend and Arakan. Alaol, the son of a Muslim governor of lower Bengal, was captured by the Portuguese pirate and sold as a soldier for the Arakan army. Alaol's translations of Persian poetry and other romances into Bengali instilled a secular theme in Bengali literature.

The 17th century in Tamil literature was marked by a number of philosophical works, commentaries, literary texts and ranas related to Shaivism and Vaishnavism. These include *Irusamaya-vilakkam*, *Sivadarumothram*, *Saiva-Samayaneri*, *Kamalai Nanaprakami*, *Niramba Alagiya Desikar*, *Madai Tiruvengadanathar*, *Cidambarapuram*, *Ariccandira Puranam*, *Sundara Pandiyan*, *Kandapuram*, *Palanittalapuranam*, *Ga Navalar*, *Naidadem*, *Lidambarapattigal*, *Maran-Alankaram*, *Ilakkanavilakkam*, *Nigandu-cudamoni*, and *Kodayram*.

Telugu literature flourished during the reign of Krishnadeva Raya (1509-1529) of Vijayanagar. His most celebrated works were *Amuktamalyada*, *Svarocisha Samhhava*, *Paruatapaharana*, *Vasucharitra*,



Harischandra-Nalopakhyanam, *Raghavo-Pandaviya*, and *Krishnadevaraya Vijaya*. Tenali Ramakrishna is remembered for his *Panduranga Mahatmya* and Molla wrote the popular Telugu version of the *Ramayana*. Quli Qutb Shah was a patron of Telugu literature. Large-scale translations of works from one language into another made them more accessible to the common people.

1.3.4 Travelogues

A travelogue is a book or an illustrated lecture about the travels or destinations seen by a traveller. A travelogue is a straightforward, first-person account of a person's travel adventures. Because they give the perspective of an outsider who will notice the contrasts in the local culture, attire, food, administration, etc., Travelogues are important historical sources. Travelogues are offering insights often overlooked or omitted by official records. Travelogues frequently compare various locations, which helps historians by providing an excellent point of reference. The travel literature during the medieval era is one of the strongest sources for reconstructing the socio-cultural components of the time.

Travelogues offer valuable historical insights because travellers, being outsiders, provide impartial and unbiased accounts of the places they visit. Unlike court chronicles, which may be influenced by political motives, travel narratives tend to be more objective and include detailed observations that official records often overlook. Moreover, travelogues help fill gaps in history left by court chroniclers and sometimes challenge their versions, for example, Bernier disputed the claim that Jahangir's reign was entirely prosperous.

One major drawback of travelogues is that a visitor's stay is often too brief to fully understand the culture or society of a place, so their account may be incomplete. Additionally, many travelogues tend to

exaggerate events or descriptions. Since travelogues are usually written in various languages, translating them accurately can be very difficult. Finally, because travellers are outsiders and not true members of the community, they may fail to capture an authentic picture of the society they describe.

1.3.4.1 Traveller's Accounts During the Sultanate Period

Shihabudin Abbas

Ibn Fadlallah al Umari, also known as Shihabuddin Abbas, lived in Damascus. He was recognised as one of the most eminent professors of his day. Even though he never visited India, he acquired a lot of information about the nation from informed tourists he met, merchants, and other publications. After carefully examining and scrutinising the information acquired, he published his acclaimed book *Masalik-ul-Absar*. He was a contemporary of Mohammad bin Tugluq. The book gives information on the reign of the Tughlaq dynasty. Shihabuddin makes no mention of Ghiyasuddin Taghlaq's personality or his murder. But he went into great depth about Mohammad bin Tughluq's government, his courtiers, the Iqtas and grades, the army's organisation, the *Dak* arrangements, and the spy system. He has described the Sultan's regal sponsorship of poets, scholars, musicians, and artists, among others. He cited examples of the Sultan's charity, kindness, and patronage.

Ibn Batuta

Ibn Batuta visited India, and he was an expert in the theology and law of Islam. He left a helpful description about the circumstances in India at the time of his visit behind. Tangier (Morocco) was the birthplace of Ibn Batuta. He left Tangier at the age of 21 and arrived in Sind in 1333 CE after stopping in Mecca, Alexandria, Cairo, North Africa, Arabia, Constantinople, Persia, Samarkand, Khurasan, Balkh, and



other places. From there, he proceeded to Delhi and, in March 1334, visited the court of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq. Ibn Batuta's scholarship greatly impressed Muhammad bin Tughluq, who made him the *Qazi* of Delhi. He held this position for nearly eight years, but unfortunately, he was charged with corruption and dishonesty and sentenced to prison. However, he was soon released and, in 1342, was appointed as Muhammad Tughluq's ambassador to China.

He spent almost fourteen years in India, where he amassed a wealth of knowledge. His travel journal, *Kitab-ul-Rehla*, was written in Arabic. Its importance for the description of India has been acknowledged. It serves as the main historical source for Mohammad bin Tughluq's reign. It provides first-hand information about India's topography as well as a description of the people's social circumstances and way of life. He also gives a brief overview of the administrative agriculture system and the economic condition. He provides a description of Indian trade, industry, agriculture, roads, shipping, weights, and measurements.

His account provides details on Sultan Mohammad Tughluq's qualities as both a military and civilian leader, along with insights into the roles of the courtiers and Ulema, as well as the structure of military and provincial administration. Additionally, he provides a thorough account of some political developments, such as the uprisings that Sultan Mohammad bin Tughluq faced and how he handled them. A good summary of the Sufi saints of the time was found in the *Rehla*. He talks about the Sufi saints he visited, their beliefs, devotion to God and music, etc.

Nicolo Conti

Nicolo Conti, a Venetian traveller, made his home there and became a merchant. His passion for exploration and adventure took him to the eastern nations of China,

India, Ceylon, Sumatra, and Java. He went to southern India in 1420 and travelled to the heart of the Deccan and sailed down the Malabar coast. His account gives us a few glances into the Vijayanagara Empire and sheds a great deal of light on the socio-economic situation in southern India. Nicolo has written specifically about the people's religious lives. He also praised the wealth of the Vijayanagara Empire and wrote about its military strength.

Abdur Razzaq

Abdur Razzaq was a Persian scholar born in Herat in 1413. As he grew older, his father, Jalaluddin Ishaq, served as Sultan Shah Rukh of Khurasan's Qazi of Samarqand. In 1437, following the passing of his father, Abdur Razzaq enlisted in the Sultan's service. In 1442, he was dispatched as an envoy to the Vijaynagar court. He was in Deccan from January 1442 until January 1445, which is around three years. He chronicled Vijaynagar in great detail in his work *Matla-us-Saadain wa Majma Ul Bahrain*. He has shed light on the political and governmental structure of the Vijaynagar Empire.

Al-Biruni

One of the gems in the court of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni was Abu al-Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al-Biruni, often known as Al-Biruni, a distinguished philosopher, mathematician, and historian. He visited the Indian continent and wrote an analysis of Indian culture. He wrote *Kitab-ul-Hind* or *Tahqiq-i-Hind (History of India)*. Most academics, including Al-Biruni, were brought to Ghazni, the seat of the Ghaznavid dynasty, in 1017 C.E. while Mahmud of Ghazni was in power. He acquired comprehensive knowledge about India there. He studied Sanskrit, Indian philosophy, and the socio-economic condition of this country since he appreciated the culture of India.

He uses specific passages from the *Gita*, the *Upanishads*, *Patanjali*, the *Puranas*, the



Doctorate of Civil Law in India. He was more knowledgeable and experienced than Bernier, and he held strong opposition toward the Portuguese, the Jesuits, and Aurangzeb. His style is vivacious and full of vivid narration, and he is seldom guilty of prurience or lubricity. He extracts from the chronicles of Mughal officials for the reigns preceding that of Shahjahan, which are often met with skepticism.

English Travellers

Father Thomas Stephens was one of the earliest Europeans to take an interest in Oriental languages and wrote a poem in Konkani. Ralph Fitch was one of the earliest English travellers and traders to visit Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, India and South East Asia. His experience was valued by the founders of the East India Company.

William Finch was an English traveller who wrote a firsthand account of Indian history and its rich variety of people and products. John Mildenhall was the first to make an overland journey to India and reached Lahore in 1603. William Finch was the companion of William Hawkins and reached Lahore on 4th February 1611. William Hawkins (1585-1613) was the first Englishman to write about the *Mansabdari* system and to have conveyed some idea of it to his countryman. Nicholas Withington (1612-1616) was an English adventurer who came to India with Captain Thomas Best, whose victory over the Portuguese was said to have marked the first rising of a British star in the East.

Cesare Federici was an Italian merchant and traveller who left Venice in 1563 to explore the Eastern parts of the world. He was captured and carried by the Portuguese to their Coastal enclave at Diu in Gujarat. He explored India's interior and found intriguing features of the societies and cultures. He published his account in 1587, which was almost immediately translated into English by T.Hickok. He reached India in 1656 and is known for his voluminous writing on Shahjahan and Aurangzeb.

His account, *Storia Da Mogor or Moghal India*, provides a vivid picture of the last six years of Sultan Ali Pasha's reign. Gemelli Careri was a lawyer and was awarded a

Thomas Coryat (1577-1617) was an English traveller and writer of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean age. He is remembered for two volumes of writings he left regarding his travel through Europe and parts of Asia. Sir Thomas Roe (1581-1644 C.E.) was an English diplomat of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. He was



an accomplished scholar, a patron of learning and of upright character. Sir Thomas Roe was elected as the Member of Parliament for Tamworth in 1614 and was appointed ambassador to Jahangir. He arrived at Surat in September 1615 and became a favourite of Jahangir. His “Journal of the Mission to the Mughal Emperor” is a valuable contribution to the history of India in the early 17th century. Edward Terry was sent to India with Roe and remained as his Chaplain for two and a half years. His travel account, “A Voyage to the East Indies”, is widely known today.

Peter Mundy (1596-1667 CE) was an English merchant who spent much of his youth travelling in various countries. He was closely associated with the East India Company in 1627 and visited India thrice between 1628 and 1656. His account, “Travels in Europe and Asia, contains a number of mistakes, but his descriptions of Agra, its markets, and its houses are vivid and picturesque.

Henry Lord was a Chaplain to the East India Company in Surat (1624-1629) and ensured himself a permanent and unique place in the history of Zoroastrian literature. Lord’s *A Display of Two Foreign Sects in the East Indies* is the first significant work written in English on Indian religion, Indologists, and cultural historians. Sir Thomas Herbert is one of travellers of the Mughal period and wrote a description of his travels. His account contains a fair picture of the closing years of Jahangir’s reign and of the operations that placed Khurram on the throne. Herbert also gets confused with unfamiliar Indian names.

John Ovington was an English Clergyman who came to India during the reign of Aurangzeb (1658-1707). He wrote an account of India, *A Voyage to Surat in the Year 1689*. Sir William Norris’ travel account, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzeb (1699-1702)*, is a valuable contribution to

the historical literature from 1699 to 1702. His mission was to report the progress of his mission and to record the customs, manners, policies and interests of the Mughals. His lack of familiarity with Indian customs and languages often led to mistakes, but his observations were free from racial prejudice or religious intolerance.

French Travellers

Jean Baptiste Tavernier was a French traveller to India from 1630 to 1668. He became a friend of Bernier and travelled to Bengal with him. His account *Travels in India* is one of the most important works for the economic history of the Mughal period. He presents events as they happen without offering interpretation, yet his account of the Mughal Empire’s precious stones and of Aurangzeb is considered trustworthy.

Francois Bernier’s account of *Travels in the Moghul Empire* is the most popular of all European travellers during the time of Shahjahan and Aurangzeb. He was a French physician and natural philosopher who visited Palestine, Syria and Egypt before coming to India. He was patronised by Danishmand Khan and consulted European merchants, ambassadors, counsels and interpreters. He observed the defects in the military system of the Mughals and his tribute to the Taj.

Thevenot also visited a number of countries in Europe and Asia. Thevenot and Abbe Carre were two leading French travellers during the Aurangzeb period. Thevenot’s account, *Voyages*, is a valuable work of abiding interest. Carre’s journal, “The Travels of the Abbe Carre, in India and the Near East, 1672 to 1674”, is based on his dispatches between 16th March 1672 and 26th October 1674. His observations on European travellers in Southern India are particularly valuable, as most European visitors in the seventeenth century focused mainly on Western and Northern regions of the country.



Portuguese Travellers

Antonio Monserrate (1536-1600 C.E.) travelled with fellow Jesuits to the imperial court of Fatehpur near Agra in 1579. He wrote an excellent Latin treatise, *Commentary on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*, which ranks as one of the principal authorities for the reign of Akbar. After two years, he joined Akbar's punitive expedition across North India and the Punjab against Mirza Muhammad Hakim in Kabul. He recorded his observations about Akbar's tolerant behaviour towards different religions.

Fray Sebastian Manrique (1585-1669 C.E.) was a Portuguese missionary traveller who visited India during the time of Shahjahan in 1640. He wrote in Spanish and published his work in 1649. He made valuable observations on the political and socio-religious condition of Bengal, the Mughal fertility of the Gangetic plain, the richness of the people, the fertility of the soil, and the abundance and cheapness of food items.

Recap

- ◆ The Mughal Empire was a powerful political system founded in 1526 by Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur.
- ◆ Imperial court chronicles (*tarikh*) remain our chief source of knowledge about Mughal history.
- ◆ Persian was favoured over Arabic, Turkish, Sanskrit, or Hindavi owing to its long tradition of scholarly refinement.
- ◆ Persian also enabled communication with distant provinces and connected the Mughal world to the wider Islamic sphere.
- ◆ Babur founded the Mughal dynasty; his autobiography, *Waqi'at-i-Baburi*, gives a detailed account of his eventful life.
- ◆ Other notable works composed independently include *Tabaqat-i-Baburi*, *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, and *Qanun-i-Humayuni*.
- ◆ Humayun bestowed the title *Amir-i-Muwarrikh* on Mir Ghiyas al-Din Muhammad Husaini (Khwandamir), author of *Qanun-i-Humayuni*.
- ◆ Abul Fazl's *Akbar-namah* is the principal official history of Akbar's reign and arguably the most significant chronicle of the Mughal era.
- ◆ Both Perso-Islamic and Mongol historiographical traditions influenced writing during Akbar's reign.
- ◆ Badauni came from an orthodox Sunni family with modest ties to the imperial nobility and a strong grounding in traditional and rational sciences.

- ◆ European interest in India, drawn by its wealth, dated back to classical antiquity.
- ◆ Numerous European travellers — including Gemelli Careri, Ralph Fitch, William Finch, John Mildenhall, Nicholas Withington, Thomas Coryat, Sir Thomas Roe, Edward Terry, Peter Mundy, Henry Lord, Sir Thomas Herbert, John Ovington, Sir William Norris, Jean Baptiste Tavernier, and Francois Bernier — recorded their impressions of Mughal India.

Objective Questions

1. During whose reign did Fray Sebastian Manrique visit India?
2. In which year did Manrique visit India?
3. From which country did Jean Baptiste Tavernier travel?
4. For which aspect of Mughal history is Tavernier's account particularly valuable?
5. What is the title of Bernier's celebrated account?
6. Al-Biruni visited India during the reign of which ruler?
7. What is the name of Babur's autobiography?
8. In which language did Ibn Battuta write his travel account?
9. Who authored *A Voyage to Surat in the Year 1689*?
10. Name Babur's autobiography.

Answers

1. Shah Jahan
2. 1640
3. France
4. Economic history
5. *Travels in the Moghul Empire*



6. Mahmud of Ghazni
7. *Tuzuk-i-Baburi* (or *Babur-namah*)
8. Arabic
9. John Ovington
10. Babur-namah

Assignments

1. Analyse the role of Persian in the court chronicles of medieval India and explain why it was preferred over other languages.
2. Critically evaluate the historical value of Ziauddin Barani's *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* as a reflection of the political and social climate of its time.
3. Compare the portrayal of kingship and legitimacy in any two court chronicles from the medieval period.
4. Using examples from Amir Khusrau, Barani, or Abul Fazl, discuss how court chronicles reveal their authors' biases.
5. Examine the narrative techniques used in the *Akbar-namah* and *Ain-i-Akbari*, and how they blend history with imperial ideology.

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BLOCK

Society and Economy under Delhi Sultanate



UNIT

Emergence of Delhi as Centre of Power

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the foreign invasions of early medieval India
- ◆ trace the phases of Muhammad Ghori's conquest of North India
- ◆ distinguish the motives behind Mahmud of Ghazni's raids from Muhammad Ghori's campaigns of political conquest
- ◆ analyse the impact of Mahmud of Ghazni's repeated raids on North Indian kingdoms, especially the Rajput states

Prerequisite

You may already be familiar with Mahmud of Ghazni and Muhammad Ghori from earlier studies — let's revisit some essentials of their invasions of India.

In the early 11th century, Mahmud of Ghazni invaded India chiefly to plunder its wealth, withdrawing to his homeland after each campaign. Muhammad Ghori, on the other hand, came to India seeking to expand his own territory and eventually succeeded in founding a lasting rule there — a distinction crucial to understanding India's medieval history.

Mahmud's early raids were driven mainly by the desire for plunder; after looting and destroying temples and towns, he returned home without establishing permanent control. Ghori, in contrast, aimed at conquest and territorial expansion, and his efforts eventually resulted in the founding of a new political order — a major turning point central to the beginnings of medieval Indian history.



Keywords

Turkish Invasions, Mahmud of Ghazni, Muhammad Ghori, Battles of Tarain

Discussion

2.1.1 Medieval India in the Era of Turkish Incursions

The invasion of the Turks from Central Asia at the turn of the eleventh century had far-reaching consequences for Indian history. The Turks established political and military control over major regions of the country and introduced Islam and nurtured Islamic culture in all spheres. These factors resulted in the formation of the community, which had its own religion and socio-cultural moorings. Unlike the ancient Indian invaders, the Turks and Indian converts to Islam retained their distinct religio-cultural identity. To understand the reasons for the Turkish invasions and the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, it is necessary to examine the socio-economic and political conditions that existed in India on the eve of the invasions.

On the eve of these invasions, north India was divided into a number of independent states. The Hindushahi kingdom existed on India's border, stretching from the Punjab to Kabul. Waihind was its capital. The prominent rulers were Jayapala and his son Anandapala. The Hindu Shahi dynasty, also known as the Kabul Shahi dynasty, ruled over Kabul and the old province of Gandhara from the 3rd to the 9th century. They were divided into two eras, the Buddhist-Shahi and the Hindu Shahi in 870 C.E. The term 'Hindu Shahi' was a royal title of the dynasty, not its actual clan or ethnological name. The Hindu Shahi dynasty succeeded from the third quarter of the ninth century to the first quarter of the eleventh century, when they were reduced

by the Ghaznavids, Zubils, and Kabul Shahis as occupants of the frontier of India.

Kashmir was an independent state ruled by the Lohara dynasty, with family ties to the Hindu Shahis. Rajyapala, the Gurjara Pratihara king, ruled over Kannauj. Bengal (Pala dynasty), Gujarat (Solanki dynasty), Malwa (Paramara dynasty), and Bundelkhand (Chandella dynasty) all had independent kingdoms. The later Chalukyas and Cholas had powerful kingdoms in the south. The Lohara Dynasty (1003-1171 C.E.) emerged after the decline of the Utpala Dynasty in Kashmir. Queen Didda of Lohara became queen in 980 C.E. She was a good administrator and a strong leader, removing high officials and forming alliances with Hindu Shahis in Afghanistan and Punjab. She died in 1003 C.E. and was succeeded by Sangrama Raja. Sangrama Raja, Queen Didda's nephew, supported Hindus against Muhammad Ghazni and aided Hindu princes in battles.

The Solankis, also known as the Chalukyas of Gujarat or the Solanki Rajputs, were a line of kings that controlled regions of Gujarat and Kathiawar in India between 950-1300 CE. They were a significant force in the Indian Ocean and had a capital at Anhilwara (present-day Patan, Gujarat). The Solankis never claimed a common descent or relationship with the first Chalukya line, the Chalukyas of Badami, and never used the term "Chalukya" to represent themselves. Solanki rulers included Mularaja, who established a free realm with his capital in Anahilapataka in 940-941 C.E.



2.1.1.1 Ghazi Inroads in North-Western India

The history of Islamised Turks in Central Asia is marked by constant skirmishes and wars between different groups of Islamised Turks. These Turks exhibited good military skills and competed for power. Factors contributing to their success against Indian monarchs included the availability of the finest breeds of horses in Central Asia, which were imported to Arabia and India due to their inferior native breeds. The region of Ghur, one of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan, was rich in metals, especially iron, making it easy for Turkish warriors to obtain war implements and materials. The Ghur people specialised in producing weapons and war equipment, exporting them to neighbouring lands.

The Ghazi spirit, which was first employed in West Asia, was deployed against the non-Turkish nomadic warriors called Turkmen or Turkomans. The Ghazi spirit was later deployed against the "unbelievers" in India, where Mahmud Ghazni, a plunderer from Afghanistan, embodied and displayed the same spirit in his raids in India. His triumphs were popularised all over the East, and 20,000 warriors came to him from the land beyond the Oxus, praying and urging him to fight for the Islamic faith.

Alptigin, a commander of the Samanid rulers in Kurasan, marched towards Ghazni in 963 C.E. and declared himself an independent ruler. The Hindu Shahi kings of Afghanistan allied with former Samanid governors of Ghazni, Bhatti emperors near Multan, and the Muslim Amir of Multan to protect their borders and territories. By the end of the 10th century, Zabulistan and the Amu Darya River were conquered, which laid the foundation for Turkish inroads in India. Mahmud Ghazni, also known as Sultan Mahmud bin Sabuktigin, continued Ghazi raids from 999 C.E.

2.1.1.2 Mahmud Ghazni

Sabuktigin's son was Mahmud of Ghazni, renowned as the first independent ruler of Ghazni. He continued the Ghazi invasions starting in 999 C.E. The title "Mahmud Ghazni" is not found on his coins, which simply designate him as Amir Mahmud. Mahmud, a bold warrior with great military capabilities and political achievements, led his troops to conquer the small state of Ghazna/Ghazni/Ghaznin. He was a patron of Persian literature and a centre of Persian learning, attracting poets and writers like Firdausi, Alberuni, Uzari, and Unsuri. His state's grandeur was made possible by his wealth amassed from plundering raids in India.

He fought a furious battle against Jayapala (Pala Dynasty) in 1001 C.E. Jayapala was severely routed by Mahmud's forces, and his capital of Waihind/Peshawar was devastated. Jayapala was succeeded by his son Anandapala, who continued to challenge Turkish raids in his territory. Before entering Punjab, Mahmud still had to contend with Anandapala's forces near the Indus. Anandapala lost the battle and suffered much financial and territorial loss. This was his last resistance to Mahmud. However, in 1015 C.E., Mahmud even annexed Lahore to extend his empire up to the Jhelum River. Multan was also conquered despite Anandapala's alliance with him. This is how Mahmud made his way towards India by conquering eastern Afghanistan and then Punjab and Multan. He made two more raids in the Ganga valley in 1019 and 1021 C.E.

Next in line was his aim to acquire wealth through his raids in the Gangetic plains. The first one was to break a Rajput alliance in the Gangetic valley. Towards the end of 1015 C.E., he marched along the Himalayan foothills and defeated a local Rajput ruler at Baran or Bulandshahar with the help of some feudatory rulers. Mahmud defeated both the



Hindu Shahi as well as the Chandela rulers. The Rajput king of Gwalior had provided help to the Hindu Shahi emperor against Mahmud. Such expeditions in north India were not aimed at expanding Mahmud's empire beyond Punjab. They were only to plunder the wealth of the states on one hand and make the upper Ganga doab a neutral territory without any powerful local stronghold on the other. The wealth looted and earned from plunders in India helped him against his enemies in Central Asia.

Mahmud's raid on Mathura, a historic centre of Hindu worship, led to the destruction of several temples. The city was filled with colossal golden and silver idols. The town wall was built of hard stone and had two gates raised to protect it from floods. The city was ravaged and plundered, resulting in the loss of five gold idols and over a hundred silver images. Many temples were left standing, possibly due to their beauty, magnificence, and exuberance.

2.1.1.3 Attacks on Somnath

In 1025 C.E., Mahmud invaded Gujarat, pillaging the Somnath shrine and destroying its jyotirlinga. In retaliation for the conquest of Somnath, Anhilwara was invaded. According to some historians, there are records of temple visits in 1038 C.E. that do not mention any damage to the structure.

Mahmud's final invasion of Gujarat occurred in 1025-1026 C.E., and he cemented his victory by robbing the incredibly wealthy Somnath temple. The well-known Linga, a pillar-stone covered in brilliant jewels and lit gem candelabra, could be found in the garbhagriha. When the Ghazni temple gates were opened, the invader-troop plunderers who had accompanied him on his vengeful journeys to India and beyond received a reward of one million pounds in treasure.

Despite facing challenges such as perfidious guides and a scarcity of water,

he managed to defeat the Jaats of the Salt Range. Mahmud built a fleet at Multan and placed 20 archers with naphtha bombs on his 1,400 boats, sinking or burning their vessels. Despite the lack of boats and the mountain tribes' naval skills, Mahmud returned to Ghazni in 1030 C.E., where he died four years later.

2.1.1.4 Fall of the Ghaznavids and Rise of the Ghurids

Mahmud Ghazni, despite the wealth plundered from India, was unable to become a good ruler due to his lack of lasting institutions and tyrannical rule outside Ghazni. This led to the rise of the Ghurids in the 12th century, an isolated province between the Ghaznavid Empire and the Seljukids. The Ghurids were humble pastoral chieftains who tried to make themselves supreme by intervening in Herat when its governor rebelled against the Seljuqid king.

Ghiyasuddin Muhammad, who became ruler of Ghur in 1163 C.E., made his younger brother Muizzuddin Muhammad the king of Ghazna, focusing on central and west Asian matters. Ghori followed the same route to India as the Ghaznavids, conquering Multan in 1175 C.E. and moving on to Neharwala in Gujarat.

2.1.1.5 Political Condition During Ghorian Invasions

In the 12th century, north India saw the same disunity between different Rajput states that was evidenced in the 11th century during Ghaznavid raids. The Chahmanas or Chauhans were a powerful state during this time period. They attempted to expand their territory into Delhi, Mathura, Gujarat, Rajputana, and other areas. In 1151 C.E., the Chauhan king Vigraharaj conquered Chittor and Delhi from the Tomar monarchs, and attempted to annex the area between Delhi and Hansi, which was a disputed zone

between the Tomars and the Ghaznavids. The Chauhans were subjected to Ghaznavid raids.

Prithviraj III, also known as Prithviraj Chauhan or Rai Pithora in folklore, was the dynasty's most prominent and reputed ruler. He ascended to the throne at the age of 16 and quickly expanded his Rajputana Empire. Many of the minor Rajput states were defeated. He also led an expedition to the Khajuraho and Mahoba Chandelas. As seen in the 11th century, the Chandelas formed the most powerful state spanning India's north and central regions. They had a proud history of challenging even the Ghaznavids. The famous warriors Alha and Udal died fighting to save Mahoba from the Chauhans. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the Chandelas were soundly defeated by the Chauhans. The Gahadwalas ruled over the northern plains, with their capital at Kannauj. Rivalry between the two political powers may have been primarily due to Prithviraj's desire to annex the Ganga plains. The northern and central states of India were divided to unify against the foreign invader Muizzuddin Mohammad Ghori.

2.1.1.6 The First Battle of Tarain(1191)

The Ghurids, led by brothers Muhammad Ghori and Ghiyas al-Din, expanded their empire into Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. They sought to expand into northern India, which was a mix of loose states and powerful dynasties. Muhammed Ghori sent an envoy to Prithvi Raj Chauhan, but he refused. The first battle of Tarain was one of many battles fought during the Arab and Turkish invasions of India. In 1178, Ghuri marched his army to the Chalukya kingdom but was defeated by the Chalukya army. Ghori continued to build up his forces and defeated the Ghaznavids, opening the way for his attack on Prithvi Raj Chauhan's kingdom.

In 1191, Muhammad Ghori captured the important fort of Bathinda in India, leading Delhi forces into action. Prithviraj Chauhan's army, numbered at 50,000, faced Muhammad Ghori in the First Battle of Tarain. The Ghurid army had an advantage in cavalry archers, but the Rajput forces had strength in numbers and elephants. The battle opened with a probing assault by Ghurid archers, but Prithviraj Chauhan countered with a full-scale offensive. The Rajputs pursued the retreating horse archers, but the Ghurid army held firm.

Muhammad Ghori realised that close-quarter fighting was advantageous to the Rajputs, leading to their retreat. The Rajput army pursued the Ghurids for nearly 40 kilometres before laying siege to the fort at Bathinda, which fell in 1192. This battle marked the beginning of Ghurid incursions into India, and the subsequent battles would prove detrimental to Indian history.

2.1.1.7 The Second Battle of Tarain (1192)

After being defeated by Prithviraj Chauhan in the First Battle of Tarain in 1191, Muhammad Ghori returned to Ghazni. He restructured his forces, emphasising firepower, mobility, and discipline. In 1192, Ghori marched with 52,000 cavalry soldiers, half of the Ghurid army. After a month, Rajput forces captured Bhatinda fort, and Ghori requested Prithvi Raj Chauhan to accept his suzerainty. The Second Battle of Tarain began when the Rajputs realised the Ghurids had already established a battle formation.

According to historical sources, Muhammad Ghori directed a light cavalry force of 10,000 mounted areas divided into four divisions, surrounding the Rajput forces on four sides. He instructed all the soldiers not to engage in combat when the enemy advanced to attack and instead feigned a retreat to exhaust the Rajput elephants,



horses, and infantry. Muhammad Ghori changed his tactics; he employed a tactic that had been the mainstay of horse archers for centuries, which is the feigned retreat. The Ghurid forces emerged victorious, and Muhammad Ghori got his revenge from the earlier battle.

2.1.2 Reasons for Turkish Victory and Rajput Defeat

The defeat of the Rajputs and the Turks' victory in India can be attributed to various factors. British historians initially focused on the military power and expertise of the Turks and the pacifist nature of the Rajput rulers.

Turkish success has also been attributed to the Indian social structure and the newly created Islamic social system in India. Sarkar emphasised the characteristics imparted by Islam to Muslim groups like the Arabs, Pathans, and Turks, which prepared the foundation of their victory in India. Mohammad Habib argued that the caste system impaired the military effectiveness of Hindu kingdoms and discounted the social unity of Hindu society vis-à-vis its Muslim counterpart.

The Turks' military tactics and technology were also seen as a major factor behind their victory. The central Asian regions like Ghur were renowned for their metal deposits and weapons, and the use of iron stirrups and crossbows was known to the Turks. The good breed of central Asian horses vis-à-vis Indian horses also contributed to the Turks' military efficiency.

Satish Chandra argued that the Rajputs lacked proper organisation and leadership, as their armies did not have a unified command. Turkish sultans were used to maintaining large standing armies, paid in cash or through the Iqta system. He also argued that the lack of a strategic perspective from the Rajputs

led to long-term repercussions, with the Turkish conquest being the first but not the last consequence.

2.1.3 Battle of Chandawar

Another expedition against Jayachandra of Kanauj was led by Muhammad Ghori in 1194. On the Yamuna River between Eatwah and Kanauj, Muhammad and Jayachandra engaged in combat close to Chandawar. The battle resulted in King Jayachandra's defeat and death.

Following successful campaigns, Muhammad assigned one of his slaves, Qutubuddin Aibak, the task of consolidating the conquests in India. Ghori general Muhammad-bin-Baktiyar Khalji oversaw a risky military campaign against Bengal and Bihar. He attacked Odantapuri between 1202 and 1205, destroyed the universities of Nalanda and Vikramasila, and overpowered Bengal's Lakshmansena in the process. Qutubuddin Aibak expanded his master's conquests in India, taking Aligarh, Bulandshahr, Meerut, and other cities before establishing Delhi as the nation's capital in 1193.

2.1.4 Comparison Between Mahmud Ghazni and Mohammad Ghori

Satish Chandra, a medieval historian, acknowledges the distinction between the two invaders by discussing their differences in the context of their invasions and activities in India. He extols Mahmud as a better general than Muizzuddin Muhammad Ghori, as he had never seen a defeat in India. However, Chandra praises Muizzuddin for being a tough fighter whose spirit was not defeated even after facing defeats. Chandra exemplifies his argument with Muizzuddin's defeat at Anhilwara, which led to his shift from Rajasthan to Punjab. He also credits Mahmud for laying the foundations on which

Muizzuddin could build and achieve his mission in India. Chandra's close study helps distinguish Mahmud from Muizzuddin rather than only seeing them as invaders with similar missions and activities in India.

2.1.5 Delhi Sultanate

The Delhi Sultanate was a 320-year-long empire based in Delhi that ruled over large parts of the Indian subcontinent. The Delhi Sultanate was ruled by five dynasties in succession: the Mamluk (1206-1290), the Khalji (1290-1320), the Tughlaq (1320-1414), the Sayyid (1414-1451), and the Lodi (1451-1526). It occupied large areas of modern-day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, as well as parts of southern Nepal.

2.1.5.1 Mamluk Dynasty

Qutb al-Din Aibak, a former slave of Mu'izz ad-Din Muhammad Ghori, was the first ruler of the Delhi Sultanate. His dynasty, known as the Mamluk dynasty, was of Cuman-Kipchak origin and was known for his generosity. Aibak's rule was precarious, with Muslim amirs challenging his authority. The Mamluk dynasty ruled over Delhi in the 13th century. Mamluk was a powerful military class soldier of slave origin who converted to Islam.

Qutb ud-Din Aibak was given the charge of Ghori's Indian possessions after 1192. When Ghori was assassinated, Aibak declared himself Sultan of Delhi in 1206. He started the construction of the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque in Delhi. This is one of the first Islamic monuments in northern India. He began the construction of Qutub Minar in Delhi. He was also known as 'Lakh Bash' (Giver of Lakhs) for his generosity. He was said to have been trampled to death by a horse in 1210. He was succeeded by Aram Shah.

The death of Qutb ud-Din Aibak in 1210 highlighted the Sultanate's shortcomings in controlling provincial governors and

partisan nobles. The Turkish nobles of Delhi chose Iltutmish, the slave and son-in-law of Qutb ud-Din Aibak, as the next Sultan. Iltutmish held the fiefs of Gwalior and Baran and was appointed as the governor of Badaon. He faced difficulties with Aram Shah, Turkish amirs, and powerful rivals like Tajuddin Yaloz and Nasiruddin Qabacha. In 1217, Iltutmish sent an army to conquer Lahore, which Qabacha reoccupied. His son, Nasiruddin Mahmud, appointed him as the Governor. The external threat to the Delhi Sultanate came from repeated Mongol invasions through the north-western frontier, which began in 1221.

Iltutmish nominated Raziya as his successor, and after her father's death, the Turkish nobles chose her as the next Sultana. Raziya's diplomacy strengthened her position and increased the monarchy's prestige. She distributed state offices among supporters and appointed non-Turkish nobles to higher posts. Altunia, the governor of Bhatinda, raised a revolt against Raziya, and she was captured and imprisoned in Bhatinda, marking the end of her reign.

Balban, a member of the elite 'Group of Forty', rose to power during Nasiruddin Mahmud's reign. Balban's rise to power was influenced by Nasiruddin Mahmud, who allowed him to exercise unrestricted power and authority. Balban's success sparked jealousy among the nobles, especially the non-Turkish amirs. Balban promoted the Turkish nobility and maintained a grave demeanor in the court. He suppressed the 'Group of Forty' and promoted junior Turks to important positions. He administered justice impartially and appointed secret news writers to keep himself informed of dynastic events. Balban reorganised the army to safeguard his personal security and the state. The Mamluk Dynasty ended when Muiz-ud-din Muhammad Qaiqabad was removed by the Khalji ruler Jalaluddin Firuz Khalji.



2.1.5.2 Khalji Dynasty

The Khalji dynasty, founded by Jalaluddin Firuz Khalji, was the second dynasty to rule the Delhi Sultanate, covering large parts of the Indian subcontinent for nearly three decades between 1290 and 1320. It was of Turko-Afghan origin and was initially a Turkic people who migrated with the Hunas and Hephthalites from Central Asia into the southern and eastern regions of modern-day Afghanistan as early as 660 C.E. The Khaljis slowly inherited many Afghan habits and customs and were treated as Afghans by the Turkic nobles of the Delhi Sultanate. Contemporary historians clearly distinguish the Khaljis from the Turks. The Khaljis were vassals of the Mamluk dynasty of Delhi and served the Sultan of Delhi, Ghiyas ud din Balban, as a minor part of the Muslim nobility.

Jalaluddin Firuz Khalji succeeded in overcoming the opposition of the Turkish nobles and ascended the throne of Delhi in January 1290. During his six-year reign, Jalal-ud-din suppressed the revolt and executed some commanders. He used an Afghan enclave in the suburb of Delhi, Kilokhri, as his de facto capital.

Alauddin Khalji, the nephew and son-in-law of Jalaluddin, raided the Deccan peninsula and Deogir, then the capital of the state of Maharashtra. He returned to Delhi in 1296, murdered Jalaluddin, and assumed power as Sultan. He defeated a major Mongol invasion at the Battle of Jaran-Manjur, consolidated his power and prestige, and ascended the throne of Delhi. He conquered Rajputana, conquered Jaisalmer, Ranthambore, Chittorgarh, Malwa, Gujarat, and plundered Devagiri. He withstood two Mongol raids.

In 1308, Alauddin's lieutenant, Malik Kafur, captured Warangal, overthrew the Hoysala Empire south of the Krishna River, and raided Madurai in Tamil Nadu. He looted

the treasury in the capitals and temples of south India, including Warangal, which included the largest known diamond in human history, the Koh-i-Noor. Malik Kafur returned to Delhi in 1311, laden with loot and war booty from the Deccan peninsula, which he submitted to Alauddin Khalji.

Alauddin Khalji enforced four taxes on non-Muslims, including *jizya*, *kharaj*, *ghari*, and *chari*. He also confiscated all landed property from his courtiers and officers and collected revenue from the central administration. Alauddin Khalji's taxation methods and increased taxes reduced agricultural output and led to massive inflation. To compensate for these cuts, he introduced price controls on all agricultural produce, goods, livestock, and slaves, as well as controls on where, how, and by whom these could be sold. The price control system collapsed shortly after Khalji's death, with prices of various agricultural products and wages doubling to quadrupling within a few years.

In 1316, Malik Kafur lacked support from the amirs and was killed within a few months. Over the next three years, another three Sultans assumed power or were killed in coups. Shihab-ud-din Omar became Sultan, and Qutb ud din Mubarak Shah was appointed as regent.

2.1.5.3 Tughlaq Dynasty

The Tughlaq dynasty was the third dynasty to rule the Delhi Sultanate in medieval India. It commenced in 1320 in Delhi when Ghazi Malik assumed the throne under the title of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq. The dynasty expanded its territorial reach through a military campaign led by Muhammad bin Tughluq and reached its zenith between 1330 and 1335. The dynasty's origins are debated among modern historians due to different sources providing different information regarding its origin.

Muhammad bin Tughluq, the ruler of the Delhi Sultanate from 1320 to 1351, temporarily expanded the empire to most of the Indian subcontinent, its peak geographical reach. He attacked and plundered various kingdoms, leading to rebellions and increased taxes on non-Muslims. He ordered the forced migration of the Muslim population of Delhi to Daulatabad, aiming to enroll them in his mission of world conquest.

Revolts against Muhammad bin Tughluq began in 1327 and continued throughout his reign, with the Vijayanagara Empire emerging in southern India as a direct response to attacks from the Delhi Sultanate. By 1339, the eastern regions under local Muslim governors and the southern parts led by Hindu rulers had revolted and declared independence from the Delhi Sultanate. Muhammad bin Tughlaq did not have the resources or support to respond to the shrinking kingdom, leading to the Bahmani Sultanate becoming an independent and competing Muslim kingdom in the Deccan region of South Asia.

The Tughlaq dynasty was known for its architectural patronage and infrastructure projects. After ascending the throne, Firuz Tughlaq was confronted with the challenge of averting the impending disintegration of the Delhi Sultanate. To address this, he pursued a policy aimed at appeasing the nobles, the military, and the theologians, while focusing on maintaining control only over regions that could be effectively governed from the central administration. The Tughlaq dynasty's power faded after Feroz died in 1388.

2.1.5.4 Sayyid Dynasty

The Sayyid dynasty was the fourth dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate, ruling from 1414 to 1451. Khizr Khan, a Timurid vassal of Multan, conquered Delhi in 1414 and proclaimed himself the Sultan of the Delhi Sultanate under Mubarak Shah. The dynasty ruled the Sultanate until they were displaced

by the Lodi dynasty in 1451. Khizr Khan was a Punjabi chieftain who was sent to Timur as an ambassador and negotiator from the Punjab. He later became the power holder in Delhi, despite being expelled from the city by the Muin tribes under Sarang Khan.

Khizr Khan was a prominent Indian noble who participated in Timur's invasion and defied the authority of Delhi. After Timur's sack of Delhi in 1398, he appointed himself as deputy of Multan (Punjab) and held Lahore, Dipalpur, Multan, and Upper Sindh. He captured Delhi on 28 May 1414, establishing the Sayyid dynasty. After his death, his nephew, Muhammad Shah, ascended the throne and named himself Sultan Muhammad Shah. Alauddin Alam Shah, the last ruler of the Sayyids, was defeated by Bahlol Lodi, who established the Lodi dynasty.

2.1.5.5 Lodi Dynasty

The Lodi dynasty ruled the Delhi Sultanate from 1451 to 1526. It was the fifth and final dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate and was founded by Bahlul Khan Lodi, who replaced the Sayyid dynasty. Bahlul was the nephew and son-in-law of Malik Sultan Shah Lodi, the governor of Sirhind in Punjab, India. He was the most powerful Punjab chief and a vigorous leader, holding together a loose confederacy of Afghan and Turkish chiefs. The most important event of his reign was the conquest of the Jaunpur Sultanate, which he annexed.

Sikandar Khan Lodi, the second son of Bahlul, succeeded him after his death on 17 July 1489 and was crowned Sultan on 15 July 1489. He patronised trade, commerce, and poetry and was a reputed poet. Sikandar's greatest achievement was the conquest and annexation of Bihar from the Sharqis.

Ibrahim Lodi, the last Lodi Sultan of Delhi, faced numerous rebellions and was engaged in warfare with the Afghans and



the Timurid Empire. The Lodi dynasty's political structure dissolved due to abandoned trade routes and a depleted treasury. Ibrahim Lodi faced challenges from Pashtun nobles and his uncle, Alam Khan, who supported his brother Jalaluddin. Ibrahim gathered military support and defeated his brother by the end of the year. He arrested those who opposed him and appointed his own men as the new administrators. The lack of an apparent successor led to uprisings against Ibrahim. He was defeated in 1526 at the Battle of Panipat, marking the end of the Lodi dynasty and the rise of the Mughal

Empire in India led by Babur.

The Battle of Panipat in 1526 marked the beginning of Babur's ambitions. He gathered 24,000 men and aided the Janjua Rajputs in defeating their enemies, the Gakhars. Babur pressed his advantage from the start, and Ibrahim perished on the battlefield in April 1526. After Ibrahim's death, Babur named himself emperor over Ibrahim's territory, leading to the establishment of the Mughal Empire in India. The remaining Lodi territories were absorbed into the new Mughal Empire.

Recap

- ◆ The 11th century Turkish invasions brought about far-reaching changes in Indian history.
- ◆ The political and socio-economic conditions prevailing in India before these invasions facilitated Turkish success.
- ◆ North India was divided into several independent states, including the Hindu Shahi kingdom, Kashmir under the Lohara dynasty, and others.
- ◆ Gujarat's Solanki (Chalukya) dynasty was a notable maritime and trading power.
- ◆ Factors favouring Turkish victories included superior horse breeds, Afghanistan's rich metal resources, and the "ghazi" warrior ethos.
- ◆ By the close of the 10th century, the conquest of Zabulistan and the Amu Darya region paved the way for Turkish expansion into India.
- ◆ Mahmud of Ghazni (Sultan Mahmud bin Sabuktigin) resumed raids from 999 CE, conquering eastern Afghanistan, Punjab, Multan, and parts of the Gangetic plains.
- ◆ The 1194 Battle of Chandawar resulted in Jayachandra's defeat and death; Muhammad Ghori subsequently tasked Qutubuddin Aibak with consolidating Indian conquests.
- ◆ The Delhi Sultanate was a roughly 320-year Islamic polity based in Delhi, ruling over large parts of the Indian subcontinent.

- ◆ Five dynasties ruled in succession: the Mamluk (1206–1290), Khalji (1290–1320), Tughlaq (1320–1414), Sayyid (1414–1451), and Lodi (1451–1526).
- ◆ The Mamluk dynasty, of Cuman-Kipchak origin, was noted for its generosity but faced repeated challenges from Muslim amirs, eventually giving way to Aram Shah.
- ◆ Qutbuddin Aibak's death in 1210 exposed the Sultanate's difficulty in controlling provincial governors and factional nobles.
- ◆ Balban, a member of the elite "Group/Corps of Forty," rose to power during Nasiruddin Mahmud's reign.
- ◆ The Khalji dynasty, founded by Jalaluddin Firuz Khalji, was the second dynasty to rule the Sultanate.
- ◆ The Tughlaq dynasty began in 1320 and expanded through Muhammad ibn Tughluq's military campaigns.
- ◆ The Sayyid dynasty, the Sultanate's fourth ruling house, was founded by Khizr Khan, a Timurid vassal of Multan.
- ◆ Ibrahim Lodi, the last Lodi Sultan of Delhi, faced numerous revolts and conflicts with the Afghans and Timurids.
- ◆ His defeat at the Battle of Panipat (1526) ended Lodi rule and paved the way for Babur's Mughal Empire.
- ◆ Disrupted trade routes and a depleted treasury contributed to the collapse of the Lodi dynasty's political structure.

Objective Questions

1. Over which region did the Solanki dynasty rule?
2. Which dynasty succeeded the Utpala dynasty in Kashmir?
3. With which region was the Chandella dynasty associated?
4. Who was the notable queen of the Lohara dynasty?
5. In 1178, Muhammad Ghori was defeated by which dynasty?
6. Which battle marked the start of Ghurid incursions into India?
7. Which fort did Muhammad Ghori capture in 1191?



8. The Battle of Jaran-Manjur was fought against which invading force?
9. Who was Alauddin Khalji's lieutenant who led campaigns into the south?
10. In which year did Malik Kafur capture Warangal?

Answers

1. Gujarat
2. Lohara dynasty
3. Bundelkhand
4. Didda
5. Chalukyas
6. First Battle of Tarain
7. Bhatinda
8. Mongols
9. Malik Kafur
10. 1308

Assignments

1. Discuss the factors that led to Delhi's emergence as the capital of the Delhi Sultanate.
2. Examine Delhi's role in the military strategies and campaigns of the Sultans.
3. Describe the impact of Mongol invasions and internal rebellions on Delhi's growth and fortification.
4. Assess the decline of Delhi towards the end of the Sultanate period and the rise of regional powers.
5. Analyse the contributions of Qutb-ud-din Aibak and Iltutmish in establishing Delhi as a centre of power.

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UNIT

Nature of Nobility and Rural Gentry

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the character of the nobility under the Delhi Sultanate
- ◆ analyse agrarian relations during the Sultanate period
- ◆ understand the administrative, socio-economic, and cultural aspects of medieval India
- ◆ explain the emergence and functions of the rural gentry (zamindars, taluqdars, etc.) and their relationship with the state and local peasantry

Prerequisite

Society under the Delhi Sultanate was in transition. Taxation was heavy, and agriculture formed the principal source of state revenue, alongside industries such as gold and silver jewellery-making, embroidery, textiles, and dyeing. The nobility was organised into three ranks — Khans, Maliks, and Amirs — and the emerging class of zamindars, along with other administrative functionaries, was also drawn into the ruling elite. Most nobles were of Turkish and Persian Muslim descent, though Indian Muslims featured as well. The respected upper stratum of society was known as the Ashraf, reflecting a clear pattern of social stratification. Nobles led lavish, comfortable lives befitting their status and wealth, and many warrior-nobles gradually became patrons of culture. Political alliances between Turkish rulers and Rajputs were also common. This unit explores whether a distinct form of social stratification existed within Delhi Sultanate society.

Keywords

Nobles, Zamindars, Diwan-al-kharaj, Diwan-ul-dhiyyal, Dihli-i Kuhna, Corps of forty

Discussion

2.2.1 Delhi Sultanate

Administrative and institutional structures are the extensions of the state in all political formations, extending political control from a core area to the outer reaches of the kingdom or empire. Political control in the early phases of the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate was often tenuous, with uprisings and challenges to royal authority being frequent. The political foundation of the Sultanate stabilised after over 100 years, and the central government was the important instrument of political control over the outlying areas of the Sultanate.

Islam spread outside Arabia since the time of the Pious Caliphs, with newly conquered territories governed by the governors appointed by the Caliph. The beginning of dynastic monarchy can be traced to the establishment of Umayyad power, which was marked by the dominance of Arabs and the unity of Muslims. The Abbasid period saw the ascendancy of Persians in the administration and the gradual shrinking of territorial control of the Caliphate.

The Fatimid Caliphate of Egypt emerged as a rival and posed a threat to the Abbasids. During the Abbasid period, an elaborate administrative system was established. The Turkish Sultans of Delhi adopted this pattern when the Caliphate began to decline and distant provinces became independent kingdoms.

Under the Ghaznavids, both ability and heredity influenced succession to the throne, but under Mahmud, the practice of

division of the kingdom and nomination of the successor outside the royal house did not gain acceptance. The Ghorids, who traced their ancestry to ancient families of Turan and Iran, influenced the issue of succession.

2.2.2 Sultan and the Capital City

The Sultan, the ruler of the entire realm, held absolute power and was the supreme commander of the army. His officers who led armies to conquer other areas made him the head of the administrative system there. The capital city and surrounding areas were areas where direct central control was prevalent, with the ruler, nobles, court, royal architecture, trade, and urbanisation being more focused on these regions. This created the core area of political control, where most people lived as non-agriculturists. These classes and groups had to be sustained from the produce of other areas of the empire, and surplus produce had to be collected from the agriculturists through taxation measures introduced by the centre.

Delhi's historical study often mentions the presence of several cities, including Shahjahanabad, Firuzabad, Dīnpanah, Siri, Jahanpanah, Dihli-i Kuhna, and Tughlakabad. However, the reasons behind the number of cities and capitals in the riverine plain of Delhi have not received much historical attention. Scholars usually provide commonsensical assumptions about a shortage of water due to a burgeoning population, strategic considerations of security, and the ostentatious display of power by newly arrived insecure Sultans.



Post-Tughluq Sultans continued to invest in construction activity in the interior of the Delhi plain, with Mubarak Shah Sayyid building his new capital at Mubarakpur, not on the banks of the Yamuna but inland to the north of Siri. The Tughluqs, later Lodis, and Surs also patronised construction activity on sites very distant from the riverfront. Delhi's urban settlements may warrant a further look at the reasons behind the construction of so many cities and armed encampments in the riverine plain. The structures of Sultanate politics that had a significant impact on the longer duration and have received little historiographical attention remain relatively stable through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, helping to place more eventual episodes of city construction within larger contexts.

The emergence and impact of Dihli-i Kuhna, the area around Qutb Delhi, on Sultanate politics and the political and social structuring of the regime in Iltutmish's lifetime cast a long shadow on a significant part of the thirteenth century. The area around Dihli-i Kuhna had been an important garrison town of Qumb al-Din when he was a Ghurid military commander. It was initially chosen as the capital because it was conveniently distant from the turbulent politics of Ghazni and the Punjab. The city's geo-political advantages were even more apparent once the north-west tracts suffered Khwarazmi invasions and the fearful Chinggisid onslaught (1221). The Punjab and Haryana belt then became an extremely useful buffer against marauders from the north-west.

Iltutmish did not spend too much time considering Dihli-i Kuhna as a second choice. Through the course of his reign, his interest in the old Ghurid dominions was replaced with greater investment in Sindh, Punjab, Haryana, northern Rajasthan, central India, and the Yamuna-Ganga riverine belt. He moved energetically to consolidate his position, besting the residual Ghurid commanders and

his Qutbi peers in Delhi, Lahore, Multan, Uchch, Bayana, and Avadh.

The most immediate and apparent intervention came from the construction of a formidable military force around a nucleus of old and tested slave military commanders, the *bandagan-i-khas* (elite slaves of the Sultan). The Shamsi Bandagan were the dominating element in the central core of the army. Interpersonal ties of this nature served to weld distant garrison outposts in Bengal and Sindh to Dihli-i Kuhna, populating the city with a military elite who would cast a long shadow on the politics of Delhi and north India.

Iltutmish also moved energetically to refinish Dihli-i Kuhna in a way that might reflect its arrival as a significant player in the politics of north India. The devastation of the Persianate world of Transoxiana, Khurasan, and Afghanistan by the Chinggisid marauders and the rush of immigrants that flooded north India from the 1220s helped in this transformation. Dihli-i Kuhna became a sanctuary for traders, literati, and artisans. In an incredibly short space of time, Iltutmish and the conjuncture of events surrounding his reign gained for Dihli-i Kuhna a significance missing in other Sultanate cities.

2.2.3 Nobility

The nobles were a very powerful class during the Delhi Sultanate period. Most of them belonged to Turkish origin. All the high ranks in the Sultanate, like military commanders or provincial governors, consisted of the noble class. The nobles occupied a place next to the Sultan and played a great role in the administration of the state. Nobles consisted of the aristocracy and belonged to different tribes and countries, such as Turkish, Persian, Arabic, Egyptian, and Indian Muslims. The Hindu nobles in the Sultanate period were negligible. They had important functions in the Empire:

- ◆ They helped the Sultans in expanding the empire.
- ◆ They also helped the Sultans in suppressing the rebellions of the Hindus.
- ◆ They assisted the Sultan in the smooth functioning of the empire.
- ◆ They also played a crucial role in the choice of Sultan.

The Corps of Forty was the council of 40 Turkic and non-Turkic nobles that was administered under the Delhi Sultanate. It was formed by Qutb-al-Din Aibak but later modified by Sultan Iltutmish. It was the first ministerial body formed in India. After Iltutmish, the Corps became powerful, raising Rakhn-ud-Din Firoz to the throne instead of Razia.

However, Razia tried to free herself from the clutches of Turkish nobles and organised a group of non-Turkish and Indian Muslim nobles under Yakut, who ultimately murdered Razia and Yakut. Balban's stern measures against Turkish nobles included confiscating jagirs and prescribing strict court etiquettes. Alauddin Khalji realised the nobility was responsible for the unrest and took several measures to crush the power of nobles.

2.2.4 Administration of Delhi Sultanate

All administrative decisions during the Sultanate of Delhi were made in accordance with Muslim laws, also known as *Sharia*. The Sultans and nobles were primarily responsible for adhering to *Sharia* or Islamic regulations in matters of government. It was correctly stated that religion had a significant impact on the Sultanate government.

2.2.4.1 Central Administration

The central administration of the Delhi Sultanate followed a very systematic and

well-planned administrative procedure that was overseen by various ministers who were assigned specific tasks. There were also several other departments, and the Sultan assigned specific officers to them.

- ◆ *The Sultan* was the head of state and had unrestricted power in all areas of state activity.
- ◆ *Naib* held a position comparable to that of the Sultan.
- ◆ *Wazir* - the state's Prime Minister and oversaw the financial department.
- ◆ *Diwan-i-arz* - Military Department.
- ◆ *Diwan-i-Risalat* - Department of Religious Affairs.
- ◆ *Amir-i-Majlis-Shahi* - The minister in charge of the state's festivals, as well as all public conveniences and arrangements during festive seasons.
- ◆ *Diwan-i-Insha* - The minister in charge of the local correspondence of various offices.

2.2.4.2 Military Administration

Ariz-i-Mumalik oversaw the army. Each soldier's descriptive role was kept in his office. He was in charge of assigning different tasks to soldiers and also of military personnel transfers. His office paid salaries to court officers who held military ranks. He was the army's Collector General rather than its Commander-in-Chief. He wielded considerable power over the state.

2.2.4.3 Judicial Administration

The Sultan used to convene at least twice a week to hear complaints about state officials. *Qazi-i-Mumalik* used to consult with the Sultan on legal matters. The *Shariah* was



used to make decisions. Non-Muslims' cases were decided in accordance with their own religious laws.

2.2.4.4 Provincial Administration

During the Sultanate period, the Sultanate was divided into *iqtas* (regions). The leader of *iqtas* is known by several names, including *Muqti*, *Wali*, and *Nazim*. The main responsibility of the *Muqtis* was to keep the peace, establish and extend government authority, and recover state dues. Governors in charge of larger or more important provinces wielded greater power.

2.2.4.5 Local Administration

Local administration was vague and undefined, with a largely traditional system. The provinces were divided into six sections, each led by a *Shiqdar*, with the main function of maintaining law and order and protecting people from zamindar oppression, as well as performing military duties. The *Shiqs* were further subdivided into *parganas*, each with its own set of officials.

2.2.4.6 Revenue Administration

The state got five main types of revenue, according to the *Shariyat*. The specifics are as follows:

- ◆ *Uchar*: A tenth-of-a-percentage-point tax on agricultural production paid by Muslim residents.
- ◆ *Kharaj*: Non-Muslim citizens pay a tenth-of-a-percentage-point tax known as *Kharaj*.
- ◆ *Jizya*: A tax imposed on non-Muslims for living under the protection of a Muslim state.
- ◆ *Zakat*: Muslims pay a religious contribution known as *Zakat*.
- ◆ *Khams*: The name given to 20% of the plunderer's wealth paid to the state is *Khams*.

2.2.4.7 Revenue System

During the Sultanate period, the revenue administration in India was poorly organised, with limited fiscal resources. Alauddin Khalji, aimed to collect the maximum revenue for the state to maintain a strong army and combat Mongol danger. He introduced several changes, such as measuring lands and fixing the government's share at 53%.

However, the revenue administration lost efficiency under his successors, Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, who softened the rigours of Alauddin's revenue policy and administration. He fixed the state share at one-tenth of the total produce and paid attention to the welfare of peasants. Mohammad bin Tughlaq, the successor, introduced important reforms in the revenue administration, such as preparing a comprehensive register of income and expenditure to introduce a uniform standard of land revenue and bring every village under assessment.

Muhammad Tughlaq's experiment with increasing land revenue in the Doab, an area known for its fertile lands, led to widespread famine and widespread suffering for the people. He established the department of agriculture, *Diwan-i Kohi*, and increased the taxation in the Doab, but this was met with criticism from scholars.

Firoz Tughlaq, who succeeded Muhammad Tughlaq, found the revenue system chaotic and focused on improving the revenue administration. He reduced the state's share of land revenue, provided *taqavi* loans to cultivators, and provided greater facilities for irrigation. He also increased the salaries of revenue officers to prevent exploiting poor peasants. Firoz Tughlaq levied only four taxes sanctioned by the Quran: *Kharaj*, *Zakat*, *Jizya*, and *Khams*. These taxes were

levied on the land, the *Jizya*, *Zakat*, and irrigation taxes on agriculturists who used water resources.

2.2.5 Iqta System

The Arabic word “iqta” refers to a kind of regional administrative unit. Generally speaking, it is compared to a province. In the early 13th century, Turkish rulers made revenue assignments (*iqta*) to their nobles, known as *muqti* and *wali*. These assignments collected revenue from areas, defrayed expenses, paid troops, and sent surplus *fawazil* to the centre. The Delhi Sultans initially divided their empire into a number of “Iqtas,” or provinces or spheres of influence, and placed them under the command of officials known as “Iqtadars” (governors). Their administration was not consistent. Other names for the heads of an Iqta, besides “Iqtadar,” included Naib Sultan, “nazim” might, or “wali.” Each “Iqta” was commanded by a seasoned general who was typically a member of the royal family or a notable “Amir” (noble) and close confidant of the Sultan.

2.2.5.1 Duties and Powers of the Iqtadar

- ◆ He was under the supervision of the Central government and carried out orders of the Sultan.
- ◆ He enjoyed the same powers in the province as the Sultan enjoyed in the empire.
- ◆ He maintained large armies and was required to send the same when asked by the Sultan.
- ◆ He maintained order in the territory under his charge and protected the life and property of the people.
- ◆ He appointed soldiers in his army.

- ◆ He collected revenue from the people of his territory.
- ◆ From the revenue thus collected, he administered expenditure on the maintenance of his army, his pay and other administrative expenditure and deposited the rest in the state treasury.
- ◆ He sent a yearly report of his income and expenditure to the centre.

2.2.5.2 Restrictions on the Iqtadar

- ◆ The *Iqtadar* did not always enjoy hereditary powers. The Sultan could take back *Iqta* from him whenever he pleased.
- ◆ The *Iqtadar* was liable to be transferred from one place to another.
- ◆ He could not engage himself in wars of extension without the prior approval of the Sultan.
- ◆ He was required to send a part of the booty to the Sultan.
- ◆ The elephants and the members of the royal family captured during wars were to be sent to the Sultan.
- ◆ He was not allowed to hold his own court.
- ◆ He could not use a canopy or royal emblem.
- ◆ He could not mint coins in his name.
- ◆ He could not read ‘Khutba’ in his name. During the rule of a weak Sultan, the ‘Iqtadars’ were tempted to enjoy more powers. They even kept elephants as an exclusive privilege of the Sultan.



various modes of transportation. As was customary for a man of higher status at the time, many of the nobles also kept a large *harem* (of women). The upper classes wore costly jewels and ornaments, which were worn by both men and women. Daughters were not given a share of their father's estate because the emperor reserved the right to divide a noble's property among his heirs (or/and according to his preference), rather than on the basis prescribed by Islamic law. The procedure for distributing a deceased noble's property caused significant delays and harassment to the dependents (particularly of the detested noble). During Mughal rule, it was a rule that the properties of a noble who owed no money to the state could not be attached and that, in any case, a portion of the property of a deceased noble should be made immediately available to his dependents.

The term 'zamindar', which was first used in the 14th century and became popular in the 17th century, referred to a wide range of rights and privileges in various parts of the country. A zamindar was the owner of the land, he cultivated. However, during the Mughal era, the term was used to describe someone who owned (*malik*) the lands of a village or township (*Qasba*) and was also involved in agriculture. The right to own land was determined primarily by succession. Members of the respective villages were those who established a new village or cultivated wastelands. The villagers took ownership of the lands. A large number of zamindars had the hereditary right to collect land revenue from the villages in which they lived. This was referred to as his 'Taluqa' or 'zamindari.' In exchange for collecting the land revenue, the zamindars received a share of it, which could reach 25%.

The zamindars did not always "own" the lands over which they collected land revenue. The zamindars had their own armed forces (to collect land revenue) and generally lived

in forts, which served as a refuge as well as a status symbol. The peasants who lived with the zamindars had caste, clan, or tribal ties to the zamindars. They also possessed a wealth of local knowledge regarding land productivity. In comparison to the nobles, their income was limited; the smaller ones may have lived more or less like peasants. However, the living standards of the larger zamindars may have been comparable to those of petty rulers or nobles.

The majority of the zamindars appeared to be rural dwellers, forming a loose, dispersed local gentry. It would be incorrect to see zamindars solely as those who fought for land control and exploited the cultivators in the areas they ruled. Many zamindars had close caste and kinship ties with the land-owning cultivating castes of the *zamindari*. These zamindars not only established social norms but also capital and organisation for the establishment of new villages or the expansion and improvement of agriculture.

2.2.8 Agricultural Production and Peasants

Agriculture flourished during the Delhi Sultanate due to technological advancements, forest clearing, fertile land exposure, improved tools, irrigation, and the use of fertilisers. New crops were introduced, and the agricultural produce could easily go to the market, creating market viability. This surplus production enhanced non-agricultural production, leading to the development of an empire.

During the 12th–13th centuries, land was plentiful, as much of the Ganga-Jamuna Doab remained covered in forest. Peasants took refuge in the Doab to escape state atrocities, and the tools used by peasants were similar to those of the 19th century. Irrigation was mainly through wells, with *kuccha* type or mud wells being the main source. Canals became popular in certain



expensive, while hardier Rabi crops like gram and barley fetched low prices. The farmers were known to produce crops that were convenient to grow with rainwater, resulting in a strong economy.

The agrarian relations during this period are difficult to understand from the available sources. The peasants were not able to claim property rights due to the abundant land and the fear of not possessing a piece of land. They were considered bonded labour and were extorted by the maliks, who ensured they did not run away from the land. The peasants were close to semi-serfs and could possess seeds, cattle, and tools.

The rural aristocracy was not uniform, with the chiefs being called rais and ranas. The rawats were lower in position to the rais and ranas, but they were not in a position to resist the Sultans of Delhi. The conquest initially did not create much change in social hierarchy, and the upper echelon of the aristocracy enjoyed much of the earlier importance. The peasants had a set of heads, one appointed by the Sultan as the governor and the other the ranas, who, on behalf of the governor, collected tax. In case the rana was unable to collect the tax, the governor would enforce his force to collect tax. The position of the rais and ranas was reduced but not abolished.

In the 14th century, the process of abolition of the earlier rural aristocracy was completed, and the new class was absorbed from the older ones. The term 'chaudhuri' was believed to be the new set of intermediary classes, essential for the collection of land revenue. The land revenue system divided the subjects into two groups: peasants and the zamindars, who became the blanket term for all rural aristocracy.

As a result, the rural aristocracy possessed hereditary rights and was able to exert control over the peasantry. They could collect taxes arbitrarily after paying the centre if



the centre's vigilance weakened. The centre, however, did not directly control the social life of the villages, and thus the existing caste system always gave the rural aristocracy an advantage.

Recap

- ◆ Administrative and institutional structures extend a state's political control from a core area to its outer territories.
- ◆ The Delhi Sultanate's political foundations stabilised only after more than a century, with the central government becoming the principal instrument of control over outlying areas.
- ◆ Nobles, predominantly of Turkish origin, played a central role in the Sultanate's administration.
- ◆ Central administration followed a systematic procedure, with ministers assigned to oversee specific departments.
- ◆ The Sultan held unrestricted authority over all state affairs and convened at least twice a week to hear grievances against officials.
- ◆ The traditional administrative framework included six provincial divisions, five categories of revenue, and the iqta system for governance and revenue collection.
- ◆ Medieval India's ruling class was broadly divided between the nobility (representing royal and central authority) and landed elites, or zamindars (representing local power).
- ◆ The ruling class enjoyed a standard of living comparable to that of the Islamic world in West and Central Asia.
- ◆ Agriculture flourished under the Sultanate owing to improved tools, forest clearance, irrigation, and the use of fertilisers.
- ◆ New crops and surplus production boosted non-agricultural activity, contributing to empire-building.
- ◆ These economic conditions carried over into both the Delhi Sultanate and, later, the Mughal Empire.
- ◆ Irrigation relied mainly on wells, though canals became more common in parts of North India; genuine silk production developed in the 14th and 15th centuries.



- ◆ The state took care to secure a steady flow of agricultural revenue; living standards improved, though tax burdens remained heavy, and fruit cultivation formed a significant part of the economy.

Objective Questions

1. Which group formed the dominant section of the nobility during the Delhi Sultanate period?
2. Which Sultan is credited with forming the Corps of Forty (Chalisa)?
3. Which ruler took strong measures, such as confiscating jagirs, to curb the power of the nobles?
4. Which department was headed by the Diwan-i-Arz?
5. Which minister was responsible for religious affairs?
6. What was the function of the Shiqdar in local administration?
7. What share of war booty was claimed by the state as “Khams”?
8. When did the term “zamindar” become more widely used?
9. What term described the territory over which a zamindar held hereditary revenue rights?
10. What percentage of collected land revenue did a zamindar typically retain?

Answers

1. Turkish nobles
2. Qutb-ud-Din Aibak
3. Balban
4. Military
5. Diwan-i-Risalat

6. Military commander and law enforcer
7. 20%
8. 17th century
9. Taluqa or zamindari
10. 25%

Assignments

1. Discuss how patronage and political loyalty shaped the rise and fall of nobles during the Sultanate period.
2. Assess the nature and role of the rural gentry (zamindars) during the Sultanate period, and their interaction with the central administration.
3. Examine the origin, composition, and role of the Turkish nobility under the early Delhi Sultans, and how their identity shaped the Sultanate's political and administrative structure.
4. Discuss the iqta system and its significance in the formation and functioning of the Sultanate nobility.
5. Analyse the relationship between the Sultan and his nobles, and how loyalty and control were ensured.

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UNIT

Industry and Trade

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ examine the development of industry, trade, and the emergence of new cities during the Sultanate period
- ◆ evaluate the considerable increase in the size and number of towns
- ◆ assess the significance of trade during the Sultanate period
- ◆ analyse the marked rise in craft production and the corresponding expansion in commerce

Prerequisite

Among the most significant towns of medieval India were Thanjavur, Vijayanagar, Calicut, Agra, Cochin, Bijapur, Fatehpur Sikri, Lahore, Patna, Shahjahanabad (Delhi), Madurai, Hampi, Surat, Somnath, Kanchipuram, Ajmer, and Masulipattanam — most of which rose to prominence during the Sultanate era.

Arab historian Ibn Khaldun regarded royal authority and dynastic continuity as central to urban planning and growth, viewing a dynasty's duration as directly affecting a town's development. Medinah, the archetypal Islamic city, was considered the “city of knowledge” because of its influence on urban growth. Let us now examine in depth the development of trade, commerce, and economic life in medieval India.

Keywords

Urbanisation, Urban Revolution, Technology, Rural surplus, Iqta system, Urban Decay.

Discussion

2.3.1 Medieval Urbanisation

The urban economy was low before the Ghorian conquest, with towns being smaller and fewer in number. The higher ruling class moved around, while the lower ruling class was ruralised. R.S. Sharma's theory of 'urban decay' is supported by archaeological data. Sluggish trade and the disappearance of gold and silver currencies indicate low-scale foreign trade. The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate led to the growth of towns and increased commerce, leading to Muhammad Habib's theory of 'Urban Revolution'.

R.S. Sharma's 'urban decay' theory posits that cities face decline in infrastructure, economic opportunities, and quality of life due to population growth, economic stagnation, and poor planning. He emphasises revitalisation through government intervention, stakeholder involvement, political instability, and community participation. Sharma advocates for coordinated action and sustainable development, integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations. While some scholars praise his holistic approach, critics argue it lacks clear guidelines. Further research and practical examples are needed to refine and test the theory in different contexts. It looks at the strongly held belief of Mohammad Habib that before Turkish rule in India, workers, artisans, and craftsmen were not permitted to live inside the city walls. His theory makes the case that various occupational groups, whose services were crucial for the growth and development of

towns, lived within the city precincts on the basis of primary archaeological sources, particularly excavation reports and epigraphic data.

A debate on medieval Indian cities began with Mohammed Habib's argument on the sudden spurt of labour in North India, followed by an 'urban revolution' triggered by the conquest of Mohammed Ghori. He attributed the labour process to an external factor, political conquest by Mohammed Ghori, who removed discrimination against city-workers and allowed them to convert to Islam. The religion of Islam attracted city-workers, who sustained it for over 500 years.

Irfan Habib criticised the explanation of the labour process in medieval India, arguing that it was primarily due to changes in technology, gold and silver, and the formation of a new ruling class that appropriated a large chunk of rural surplus through the new land revenue system and spent it in towns. He maintained that slave labour or unfree labour was vital in almost all domains of production in the Indian towns of this period.

Scholars like B.D. Chattopadhyaya and R. Champakalakshmi have traced the origins of medieval Indian towns back to the ninth century onwards. They have highlighted the emergence of townships in the Indo-Gangetic divide, the Upper Ganga basin, and the Malwa region thanks to the forces emitted by trade. They also examined several towns of varying size and nature in Chola territory that appeared during the period between the ninth and thirteenth centuries thanks to the stimulus from external trade.



The binary opposite of town and countryside has been a tool of analysis for several historians who examined the socio-economic processes of medieval India. Some scholars have focused on the main features of major towns in north India and their linkages with economic progress. Shireen Moosvi focuses more on the major manufacturing towns of north India, which then experienced intense labour processes. Stephen Blake studies Shahjahanabad as a “sovereign city” and argues that it was personal, familial, and guided by the desires of the patrimonial bureaucratic emperors.

In the medieval period in India, two types of urbanism emerged: commercially charged urbanism, which emerged in major manufacturing-cum-exchange centres due to economic forces, and politically charged urbanism, where power processes emitted necessary forces for urbanisation. Delhi was the principal politically charged urban centre, while Daulatabad, Gulbarga, Gaur, Agra, Lahore, Bijapur, and Golconda emerged later as significant political towns. The revival of trade in the 10th-11th centuries stimulated urban dissemination, with Islam and the *iqtdari* system accelerating urban dissemination. *Sufism* and *Bhakti* movements evolved as cultural motors of urbanism, providing cohesion, meaning, and a new identity for artisans. By the 15th and 16th centuries, these movements evolved into religious movements catering to the spiritual, social, and psychological issues of urban dwellers.

2.3.2 Growth of Towns

A town is a settlement with a population of 500 or above and an overwhelming majority engaged in occupations other than agriculture. The economic growth of urban centres is evident in contemporary sources, including major towns like Delhi, Multan, Anhilwara, Cambay, Kara, Lakhnauti, and Daulatabad. Although archaeological evidence is limited

from the 13th-14th centuries, literary evidence suggests that some towns were large enough by contemporary standards. Ibn Battuta visited Delhi in 1330 and described it as the largest city in the Islamic East. New towns, such as Jhain in Eastern Rajasthan, were established during this period.

Urban expansion in the 13th century involved the ruling class staying at their *iqta* headquarters, which were a concentration of cavalry, hangers-on, and their households. These towns emerged as camp cities, providing food and resources for the ruling class. By the 14th century, a cash nexus developed, with revenue from peasants selling their produce. Merchants catered to the needs of towns, risking induced trade. The ruling class sought leisure and comforts from different cultural backgrounds, leading to the immigration of skilled artisans, musicians, dancers, poets, physicians, astronomers, and servicemen.

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate led to a significant increase in urban craft production. The ruling class remained town-centred, spending large amounts of land revenue in towns on services and manufacturers. This led to a mass market for ordinary artisanal products. Technological devices, such as silk weaving and carpet weaving, also contributed to urban manufacturing. The building industry was a major sector of employment, with Alauddin Khalji employing 7,000 craftsmen for his buildings.

The organisation of production was unclear, but it is assumed that the tools of production were simple and mainly made of wood and iron. Some artisans hawked or hired out their services, while others worked at their homes, with some working for wages. If raw materials were expensive, craftsmen were often employed in *karkhanas* under supervision. Sultans and high nobles



maintained *karkhanas* where production was tailored to their needs, rather than for the market.

2.3.3 Trade and Commerce

During the 13th-14th centuries, flourishing towns and townships emerged, requiring food and raw materials for craft production. The cash nexus developed, and the ruling class claimed most peasant surplus. This led to the development of inland trade, where peasants sold surplus produce to pay land revenue in cash, while merchants facilitated trade in newly emerged towns for agricultural products.

2.3.3.1 Inland Trade

Inland trade developed at two levels: short-distance village-town trade in bulk commodities and long-distance inter-town trade in high-value goods. The village-town trade was a result of the emergence of towns and land revenue realisation in cash. Urban centres relied on the supply of food grains and raw materials from surrounding villages, while villages sold agricultural products to meet land revenue demand. This one-way trade was a continuous drain on the rural sector, making towns dependent on villages. The inter-town trade mainly involved luxury articles and transported manufactures from one town to another. Long-distance inter-town trade also carried goods from other countries' exit points, such as Multan, which served as a centre of re-export, and Gujarat port towns like Broach and Cambay.

2.3.3.2 Foreign Trade

During the Sultanate period, overland and overseas trade flourished in India. Seaborne trade was a significant aspect of the Sultanate's economy, with ports like Hormuz and Basra connecting the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. These ports allowed goods to be transported to Damascus, Aleppo, and Alexandria, as well as the Mediterranean

Sea with linkages to Europe. Gujarat's main export was coloured clothes, which were in demand in these places. The port of Malacca, situated at the Malacca Straits and Bantam and Achin in the Indonesian archipelago, was also a significant port for Gujarat's merchandise.

The port of Cambay, which was connected to the Persian Gulf and Red Sea, was important for shipping goods to Damascus, Aleppo, and Alexandria. The trade pattern of "spices for coloured clothes" continued even after the Portuguese advent in the Asian waters. The ports of Bengal had trading relations with China, Malacca, and the Far East, with exports of textiles, sugar, and silk fabrics. Sindh, another region, had close commercial relations with Persian Gulf ports, exporting special clothes, dairy products, and smoked fish.

Overland trade was a significant aspect of the Sultanate's economy, with the Multan-Quetta route connecting India to Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Persia. They mainly exported grain and textiles, with some Persian Gulf regions relying on India for their food supply. Additionally, slaves were exported to Central Asia and indigo to Persia, along with various other commodities.

2.3.4 Arrival of the Portuguese

Despite brisk trading activities, Indian merchants' share in overseas trade was negligible. Only a small section of Gujarati Banias, Chettis of the South, and domiciled Indian Muslims participated. The Portuguese arrived in Calicut in 1498 C.E., imposing commercial hegemony over Asia, including the Indian seas. This curtailed the Arabs' share of Indian trade, but they survived in the Eastern part, especially at Malacca.

The Portuguese took Goa in 1510, which became their headquarters, and later took Malacca in 1511. Goa developed as a major

centre for import and export, but its possession was unfavourable to other Western Indian ports. The Portuguese policies controlled sea routes, cargo types, and introduced the system of issuing cartaz, which adversely affected the seaborne carrying trade of Indians and Arabs.

2.3.5 Commercial Classes

The Delhi Sultanate had two main merchant groups: *Karwanis* or *nayaks* and *Multanis*. *Karwanis* were those who carried grains and were organised in groups with their headman called *Nayak*. *Multanis* were involved in usury and commerce and were generally Hindu or Muslim. Other merchant groups, such as slave merchants and pious men from Central Asia, also traded in the Sultanate period.

Another important commercial class that emerged during the Sultanate period was the *dallals* (brokers), who worked as a link between buyers and sellers and took commission from both parties. They were instrumental in raising market prices and were dealt with severely during Alauddin Khalji's reign. By Feroz Tughluq's reign, they regained their position, and even if a deal failed to materialise, brokers were not supposed to return commission money.

Sarrafs were another merchant group with a significant economic role. They were money changers, testing the metallic properties of

coins and establishing the exchange ratio. The introduction of paper by the Turks in India accelerated the institution of the bill of exchange, and *Sarrafs* naturally charged his commission. Both brokers and *sarrafs* occupied pivotal positions in the commercial world of their period, being the custodians of several basic economic institutions.

2.3.6 Transport

It appears that goods were shipped on bullock carts as well as by pack animals. Perhaps the pack animal portion was greater than the latter. From Amroha to Delhi, 30,000 mans of grain were reportedly carried on the backs of 3,000 bullocks, according to Ibn Battuta. According to Afif, bullock carts were also used to transport passengers for a fee. Of course, the pack oxen were a cheap mode of transportation that moved slowly, grazed along the way, and travelled in large herds, which reduced the cost of transportation, especially along the routes through the desert. According to Ibn Battuta, the empire had highways that were denoted by minarets spaced at specific intervals. Based on the author of the *Masalik al Absar*, Shahabuddin A. Umari, who testified, we can assume that efforts were made to foster trade-friendly conditions. At each stage, inns were constructed. Bulk goods were transported by boats on riverine routes while seaborne trade was conducted on large ships.

Recap

- ◆ Urban economic activity was limited before the Ghori conquest, with towns fewer in number and smaller in size.
- ◆ R.S. Sharma's "urban decay" theory holds that cities decline in infrastructure, opportunity, and quality of life owing to population pressure, economic stagnation, and poor planning.
- ◆ Medieval Indian towns grew through the combined forces of trade,



Islam, and the iqtadari system, with Sufi and Bhakti movements providing cultural cohesion and identity.

- ◆ The 13th–14th centuries saw the flourishing of towns and townships, fostering the growth of both inland and foreign trade.
- ◆ Inland trade functioned at two levels — village-town exchange and inter-town trade — with the Sultanate’s economy playing a central role.
- ◆ The Portuguese reached India in 1498 CE, though Arab traders retained influence in the eastern trade networks, particularly at Malacca.
- ◆ The Sultanate’s two principal merchant groups were the karwanis and the Multanis, with dallals (brokers) and sarrafs (money-changers) serving as key commercial intermediaries.
- ◆ Transport of goods relied chiefly on bullock carts and pack animals.

Objective Questions

1. Who proposed the theory of “urban decay” in early medieval India?
2. Who is associated with the idea of an “Urban Revolution” following the Turkish conquest?
3. Which traveller described Delhi in 1330 as the largest city in the Islamic East?
4. Where did artisans typically work when raw materials were expensive?
5. Which town served as a re-export centre in north-western India?
6. What was the primary export from Gujarat that was in high demand abroad?
7. Which port did the Portuguese capture in 1511, after taking Goa?
8. Which document system did the Portuguese introduce to control sea trade?
9. Who were the “Karwanis” in the Delhi Sultanate?
10. What was the function of “Sarrafs” during the Sultanate period?

Answers

1. R.S. Sharma
2. Mohammad Habib
3. Ibn Battuta
4. Karkhanas
5. Multan
6. Coloured clothes
7. Malacca
8. Cartaz
9. Grain carriers
10. Coin testers and money changers

Assignments

1. Discuss the role of artisans and craftsmen in the Sultanate economy.
2. Examine the role of the state in promoting or controlling trade during the Sultanate period.
3. Describe the impact of Turkish rule on Indian urban crafts and production centres.
4. Evaluate Alauddin Khalji's economic reforms and their impact on trade and industry.
5. Trace the rise of urban centres and their connection to industry and trade during Sultanate rule.



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UNIT

Market Regulations of Alauddin Khalji

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ Examine the causes that led Alauddin Khalji to introduce market reforms
- ◆ Analyse the strategies underlying his market control measures
- ◆ Evaluate these measures and their overall impact on state and society

Prerequisite

Alauddin Khalji introduced sweeping market reforms, regulating food-grain prices and establishing dedicated shopping centres in Delhi. Separate markets were set up for different categories of goods, run by both permanent traders and travelling merchants. A Superintendent oversaw each market, and Alauddin issued royal orders to keep food prices under control. This policy served the needs of his large standing army while also benefiting the common people. Let us now examine in detail the economic administration of the Sultanate and the market regulations introduced by Alauddin Khalji.

Keywords

Market Control, *Ser-i-adl*, *Mandi*, *Sher-i-Adl*, *Diwan-i-Riyasat*, *Amir-i-Tuzuk*

Discussion

2.4.1 Alauddin Khalji

Alauddin Khalji was a ruler from the Khalji dynasty who ruled the Delhi Sultanate from 1296 to 1316 C.E. He was a nephew and son-in-law of his predecessor Jalaluddin, who became the Sultan of Delhi after deposing the Mamluks. Alauddin was appointed as *Amir-i-Tuzuk* and later became the governor of Kara and Awadh. He successfully fended off Mongol invasions from the Chagatai Khanate, resulting in victories against the Mongols near the Ravi river bank and later ransacking Mongol territories in present-day Afghanistan.

Alauddin's early life was marked by his involvement in the rebellion against Jalaluddin, who was considered weak and ineffective. To finance his plan to dethrone Jalaluddin, Alauddin raided neighbouring Hindu kingdoms, including Bhilsa, to gain the confidence of the Sultan. He formed a provisional government at Kara and promoted existing Amirs to Maliks. Alauddin's goal was to change political opinion by portraying himself as someone with huge public support.

Alauddin consolidated power by making generous grants and endowments, appointing many people to government positions, and increasing the strength of the Sultanate's army. He also gifted every soldier the salary of a year and a half in cash. Alauddin's first year as the Sultan was the happiest year the people of Delhi had ever seen. However, his authority was limited to areas east of the Ravi River, and the region beyond Lahore suffered from Mongol raids and Khokhar rebellions. In November 1296, Alauddin sent an army led by Ulugh Khan and Zafar Khan to conquer Multan, which was later seized by Nusrat Khan.

Alauddin also conquered the Chittor Fort in Rajasthan and the Kakatiya capital Warangal. He also led an army to conquer Chittor, the capital of the Guhila kingdom ruled by Ratnasimha. After a lengthy siege, Alauddin ordered a massacre of 30,000 local Hindus.

2.4.2 Administrative Reforms

Being the most powerful ruler of his dynasty, Alauddin Khalji undertook large-scale reforms to maintain a large army and weaken those capable of organising revolts. His revenue reforms were based on his conception of fear and control as the basis of good government and his military ambitions. Some of Alauddin's land reforms were continued by his successors and formed the basis of later rulers such as Sher Shah Suri and Akbar.

During Alauddin's reign, the countryside and agricultural production were controlled by traditional Hindu authorities, who faced resistance and conspiracies. To address these issues, he took away all landed properties of his courtiers and nobles and cancelled revenue assignments, ensuring the support of his army and food supply to his capital. He also ordered rules and regulations for grinding down the Hindus and depriving them of wealth and property that fostered rebellion.

Alauddin brought a large tract of fertile land under the directly governed crown territory, eliminating iqta's, land grants, and vassals in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab region. He imposed a 50% *Kharaj* tax on agricultural produce in a substantial part of northern India, which was the maximum allowed by the Hanafi school of Islam. This taxation

system lasted the longest, surviving into the nineteenth or even the twentieth century.

To enforce these land and agrarian reforms, Alauddin set up a strong and efficient revenue administration system, recruiting accountants, collectors, and agents. He imposed the *jizya* tax on non-Muslim subjects and imposed taxes on residences and grazing, which were not sanctioned by Islamic law. Alauddin demanded a four-fifths share of the spoils of war from his soldiers instead of the traditional one-fifth share.

2.4.2.1 Market Reforms

According to Stanley Lanepool, British Orientalist and Archeologist. Alauddin's economic reforms, in addition to administrative and agrarian reforms, are regarded as "miracles of history," His Price Control Policy was a distinguishing feature of his economic reforms, ensuring his place in the annals of the socio-economic history of the times. Alauddin Khalji was the first ruler who looked at the problem of price control in a systematic way and was able to keep prices stable for a long time. This policy of Alauddin Khalji has always been admired by historians of various stripes from all eras. According to Stanley Lanepool, "what distinguished Alauddin from other Delhi monarchs was his Price Control Policy." Alauddin implemented price control measures for various market goods, aiming for public welfare and maintaining a large army. He appointed market supervisors and spies and enforced price control through government-run granaries and transport workers' re-settlement along the Yamuna River. Prices were not allowed to increase during Alauddin's lifetime, and shopkeepers who violated or circumvented these regulations were punished severely.

Historians disagree on the reasons for Alauddin's Price Control Policy. According

to *Tarikh-i-Feroz Shahi* by Zia ud din Barani, it is completely impractical to maintain a large and permanent army on such a low pay scale. Horses, arms and accountants, as well as the soldier's wife and family, cannot be provided for a trifle. If the necessities of life could be purchased at a low cost, the idea of maintaining a large army at a low cost could be carried out, and all fear of the Mughals' great forces would be removed. The Sultan then consulted his most experienced ministers, who informed him that the necessities of life would never be affordable until the price of grain was fixed.

Grain's low cost is a universal benefit. As a result, some regulations were enacted, which kept the price low for several years. According to Barani, Alauddin implemented such a policy in order to maintain a large army due to the threat of Mongols, increase royal grandeur, achieve economic stability, and eliminate social injustice. Historian K.S. Lal, on the other hand, believes that "the need for controlling the prices of necessities of life in Delhi was this: the Mongols repeatedly invaded the country, and their target was Delhi." Targhil Khan, a Mongol invader, stopped all supplies from reaching the city in 1303 C.E. by capturing the roads surrounding it as well as the Jamuna forts.

A situation like this would have resulted in a scarcity of food grains in the capital, as the then-rudimentary means of transportation would have collapsed under the strain of the blockade. Alauddin Khalji decided to overcome transportation and food shortages by stockpiling food in the capital on the one hand and fixing their prices on the other. For this purpose, he implemented a number of measures that are worth investigating because they demonstrate that, as far back as the fourteenth century, the principles of increased levies, price control, and rationing were perhaps as understandable as they are today.



The primary motivations for this policy, according to Shaikh Hamid Uddin Qalandar, were altruistic and philanthropic. Alauddin desired that all of his subjects have access to all necessary items in sufficient quantity and at a reasonable price. As a result, he set the prices for all items. However, historians such as L.P. Sharma believe that Alauddin's Price Control Policy was motivated by inflation. According to him, "Alauddin had lavishly distributed wealth among his subjects, lowering the market value of the currency." As a result, Alauddin was forced to reduce the salaries of his soldiers as well as the market prices of goods.

2.4.3 Steps Taken for the Implementation of Price Control Policy

The Price Control Policy of Alauddin and its effectiveness was a cause of wonder to contemporaries. This policy comprises different steps which are as follows:

2.4.3.1 Fixation of Commodity Prices

Medieval rulers were expected to ensure that necessities of life, particularly food grains, were available to city dwellers at fair or reasonable prices. This was because cities were the sinews of power and authority throughout the Islamic world. Alauddin also fixed the prices of almost all commodities in life. The Sultan did not fix prices arbitrarily, nor was his price structure based on fluctuating supply and demand, good or bad weather, or speculative trends of the business community who raised or lowered prices in order to maximise profits. Instead, Alauddin based goods prices on the progressive principle of "production cost."

2.4.3.2 Food Grain

The staple food, to which the Sultan gave his first and undivided attention. The

government set maximum prices for a variety of commodities. Basic foodstuffs such as wheat (*hintā*), barley (*jaw*), rice (*shālī*), pulse (*mash*), and cloth, sugar, sugar-cane (*nabat*), fruit, animal fat (*rawghan-i suture*), and wax (*raughan-e chiragh*); and slaves, horses, and livestock were included. The following food prices were established:

2.4.3.3 The Royal Granaries

Alauddin built large granaries that were owned by the state and where the grains were stored before being distributed to market dealers. As a result, everything was available to the common man and there was no black marketing. No merchant, farmer, or dealer was allowed to sell it for a higher price. Barani claims that there was hardly a *Mohalla* that did not have two or three royal stores filled with food, which were distinct from shops. These were actually grain granaries where grain was stored to be released in times of emergency.

2.4.3.4 Central Grains Market (Mandi)

Alauddin established the Central Grain Market (*Mandi*) under the *Zabita* system, which fixed monthly cereal prices for wheat, barley, rice, pulses, and gram. The market maintained price stability, with *Makkul Ulughkhani* as its controller. *Khalsa* towns were required to pay *Kharaj* in kind, resulting in multiple grain storage houses in Delhi's *mohallas*. Agents were established for collecting grains from merchants, and grain hoarding was outlawed. Defaulters were punished harshly, and the grain used in transactions was confiscated. Peasants had to sell their grain at a predetermined price to an authorised agent, either at the open market or directly to the king's agent. Alauddin appointed *barid* and *munhiyas* to keep meticulous records of market actions, ensuring honesty and transparency in the market.

2.4.3.5 Sher-i-Adl (Cloth Market)

The *Sher-i-Adl* operated in the same way that a supermarket does for manufactured goods. This market also sold items purchased outside of the country. All products costing between 1 and 10,000 tankas must be transported to *Sher-i-Adl* and sold at a fixed price, according to the Sultan's decree. The market sold clothing and high-end items. The Sultan had enacted laws and regulations to ensure that the market functioned properly. All merchants should be registered with the *Diwan-i-Riyasat* for trade control. Multani merchants were given subsidies because they transported expensive fabric over long distances and sold it to the general public at a lower price. *Parwana Rai*, a permit officer, oversaw the sale. He used to grant people permission to buy clothes.

2.4.3.6 Market of Slaves, Cattle and Horses

Alauddin established a regulation for markets selling slaves, cattle, and horses, focusing on quality and eliminating middlemen. He removed brokers and supervised them, with personal reviews conducted regularly. Horses were sold under a broker's supervision, with prices ranging from 100 to 120 tankas for first-class horses to 80 to 90 tankas for second-class horses and 60 to 70 tankas for third-class horses. The Sultan authorised brokers to continue their business at a fixed fee. The city's general market included vegetables, candies, fish, and slave prices.

2.4.3.7 Strict Punishment for Hoarders

Hoarding and regrating were strictly prohibited. The hoarders were dealt with an iron fist and severely punished. This rule was so strictly enforced that no corn dealer, farmer, or anyone else could secretly hold

back a maund or half a maund of grain and sell it for a dang or a dirham more than the fixed price. If found, the hoarded grain was forfeited to the state, and the regrator was fined.

2.4.3.8 Espionage System

The market regulations promulgated by Alauddin Khalji were enforced through a highly organised intelligence system. The Sultan received daily reports on market rates and goods transactions from three distinct sources: the market controllers, the barids, and the munhijas. If there was any discrepancy in these reports, the Sultan hauled the defaulters up. The Sultan himself took pains to ensure, via his slave boys and maid-servants, that shopkeepers did not defraud the poor, illiterate people and children by selling them short weights; flesh was cut off the haunches of those who engaged in this practice.

2.4.4 Diwan-i-Riyasat

Alauddin introduced *diwan-i-riyasat*, the ministry of commerce to oversee all general markets in the Sultanate, including the office of the *nazir*, the superintendent of weights and measures. Alauddin Khalji established this ministry through the appointment of Malik Yaqub, a man of honesty and integrity. He was given command of all the Shahnas in the various markets. As a result, the *diwan-i-riyasat* was ultimately held accountable for the successful implementation of economic regulations throughout the empire.

2.4.5 Rationing

During times of scarcity, Alauddin also implemented a rationing system. During a good season, people could buy as much grain as they wanted. Rationing was used to control the consumption of these items during times of scarcity. Every day, a quantity of corn sufficient for the daily supply of each *mohalla* in the capital was consigned to the



local corn dealers (*baqqals*) from the government stores, and half a maund was allowed to ordinary market purchasers. There were droughts and shortages, but no large-scale famines or deaths from starvation occurred during the reign of Alauddin Khalji. Only wise economic reforms and strict government control of the markets could have made it possible. Alauddin Khalji's rationing system was a novel idea, and Barani claims that no famine occurred in Delhi as a result of the various regulations.

The Alauddin Khalji's Policy of Price Control was implemented throughout the empire, ensuring equal prices for articles in Delhi. This innovative market system saved peasants from profiteering and speculation while fostering a market economy in villages and a stronger connection between towns and the countryside. However, the policy had flaws, such as preserving artificial cheapness during droughts but causing oppression. This led to cold fear, reduced trade interest, and stifling freedom in trade and commerce. Alauddin Khalji's market reforms were temporary, and his regulations ended with his death.

2.4.6 Impact on Society

The price-fixing of almost every commodity, especially at such a low price, along with the harsh stance implemented against merchants and traders, left no room for

traders and industry to thrive. Merchants were forced to give under coercion, and the fear of a minor weight deviation resulted in offering more than the real weight. However, the merchant or trade class went through a period of frustration, although they remained an important force in the state's economic development.

All these experienced a financial blow since price reductions prompted them to minimise raw material payments, including skilled labour. The manufacturer suffered greatly because, despite all rules, the merchant was always able to find ways to obtain goods at a lower cost, transferring the greatest amount of financial risk to the producers and workers.

Farmers and cultivators, who constituted the backbone of the agricultural sector, were the most affected. The Sultan's revenue control was intended to crush the rich intermediaries, not the impoverished farmers. However, the majority of them lived outside of Delhi, and the price control hypothesis was only used in Delhi and its environs. Farmers had to pay extra to buy grain that they had sold at a lower price to merchants and state officers in an emergency since no farmer could afford the time or money to travel to Delhi on a regular basis to make his necessary purchases.

Recap

- ◆ Alauddin Khalji was the nephew and son-in-law of Jalaluddin, who became Sultan of Delhi after deposing the Mamluks.
- ◆ As a powerful ruler, he carried out large-scale reforms to sustain a large army and weaken forces capable of organising revolt.
- ◆ Alauddin confiscated landed properties, cancelled revenue assignments, and imposed a 50% kharaj tax on agricultural produce.

- ◆ He established a strong and efficient revenue administration system.
- ◆ Alauddin Khalji's economic reforms — administrative and agrarian alike — have been described as “miracles of history.”
- ◆ His Price Control Policy was central to ensuring stability and public welfare while sustaining a large army and enhancing royal prestige.
- ◆ The policy aimed to guarantee fair and reasonable prices for necessities of life, particularly food grains.
- ◆ It encompassed several markets, including the Central Grain Market (Mandi), the Sher-i-Adl, and the market for slaves, cattle, and horses.
- ◆ The Sultan enforced these regulations through an organised intelligence network and appointed Malik Yaqub to oversee all Shahnas.
- ◆ During times of scarcity, Alauddin introduced a rationing system, ensuring daily grain supply and preventing large-scale famine or starvation.
- ◆ The policy sought to guarantee equal prices for goods throughout Delhi, preventing profiteering and speculation.
- ◆ Though temporary, these reforms affected merchants, traders, artisans, manufacturers, and craftsmen, shifting much of the financial risk onto producers and workers.
- ◆ Farmers and ordinary people bore the greatest impact of these reforms.

Objective Questions

1. Before becoming Sultan, Alauddin Khalji served as the governor of which region?
2. Who led the army sent by Alauddin to conquer Multan in 1296?
3. Which Rajput stronghold did Alauddin Khalji conquer after a lengthy siege?
4. Alauddin's land revenue reforms imposed a kharaj tax of what percentage?
5. Which region saw the elimination of iqta holders under Alauddin's rule?



6. Who described Alauddin Khalji's price control policy as a "miracle of history"?
7. Which spy and record-keeping officers were appointed to enforce market regulations?
8. Who was appointed controller of the Central Grain Market (Mandi)?
9. In Khalsa towns, how was Kharaj paid under Alauddin's rule?
10. What type of market was the Sher-i-Adl?

Answers

1. Kara and Awadh
2. Zafar Khan and Ulugh Khan
3. Chittor
4. 50%
5. Doab (Ganga-Yamuna region)
6. Stanley Lane-Poole
7. Barids and Munhiyas
8. Makkul Ulughkhani
9. In kind
10. Supermarket for cloth and luxury goods

Assignments

1. Explain how Alauddin Khalji maintained a stable price for essential commodities.
2. What role did spies (*barids*) and market inspectors (*shahna-i-mandi*) play in the market regulation system?

3. How were weights and measures standardised during Alauddin Khalji's reign?
4. Discuss the impact of Alauddin Khalji's market reforms on urban life and military provisioning.
5. How did Alauddin Khalji's price control policies reflect his political and military objectives?

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UNIT

Social Life

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the social stratification of the Sultanate period
- ◆ examine the lifestyles of households, the aristocracy, merchants, peasants, and slaves during the Sultanate period
- ◆ evaluate the social order and the position of women in society during the Sultanate period

Prerequisite

Most nobles during the Sultanate period were of Turkish and Persian Muslim origin, though Indian Muslims gradually gained prominence as well. Ashraf nobles enjoyed a life of luxury, and warrior-nobles gradually evolved into patrons of culture. Political alliances between Turkish rulers and Rajputs became increasingly common, with Qazis serving as judicial officials. The purdah system spread widely, with women in the upper classes kept secluded while women of the lower classes retained greater freedom. Muslim society itself was divided along ethnic and racial lines, marked by economic inequality and limited intermarriage among Turks, Iranians, Afghans, and Indian Muslims.

Keywords

Iqtadar, Mansabdar, Slavery, Purdah, Physical Segregation, Khanqah, Dhunia, Kagazi.

Discussion

2.5.1 Urban Society

Urban society in the medieval period was marked by a new ruling elite, *bhakti* and sufi movements, new technologies, and a fusion of two distinct cultures. This period saw the expansion of trade and commerce, the urban character of the ruling elite, and the commercialisation of agriculture. Cities like Delhi emerged as the centre of cultural activities in the Islamic world, with the turmoil in Central Asian and Persian polities leading to large-scale migration of men of letters. The growth of the money economy in towns during this period led to a distinct town-centred culture, known as the “urban revolution.” The ruling elite was largely urban-based, with musical concerts, poetic recitations, and religious festivals becoming the lifeblood of city culture. The city and court also acted as a school of manners. The ruling elite was not divided on religious lines, and Delhi emerged as the chief centre of the liberal literary tradition.

2.5.1.1 Ruling Elites

Iqtadar and *Mansabdar* were two major ruling estates during the Sultanate and Mughal periods. *Iqtadars* were responsible for collecting revenue and sending surplus to the state, while *mansabdars* were responsible for maintaining law and order in the territory. *Iqtas* were not hereditary and were transferable, but Firuz Tughluq made them hereditary and permanent. *Mansabdars* were a dual category, with *zat* determining personal pay and status in the hierarchy, and *sawar* indicating the number of horses and horsemen to be maintained by the *mansabdar*. Granting *mansabs* was the emperor’s prerogative, with lineage and performance being major criteria for promotion. The most preferred category was *khanzada*, who were paid in the form of *jagir*,

which were neither hereditary nor permanent. *Jagirdars* often appointed agents to collect revenue, but imperial officials maintained strict vigilance to prevent oppression of peasants. Bernier (1656-68) mentions that peasants often fled to the Rajas due to the oppression of *jagirdars*.

K. M. Ashraf divides the nobility into *ulema* (intelligentsia) and *umarah* (soldiers), emphasising the importance of the sovereign’s personality. Early Turkish nobility was organised through joint family organisation, with most recruits being Turkish. Tughluq nobility encouraged all racial groups, including foreigners, Hindus, Mongols, Khurasanis, and Arabs. Mughal nobility had a large number of foreign nobles, with Turks being largely slaves and Tajiks being free-born. Iranis, Khorasanis, Iraqis, Afghans, Hindu elites, and Marathas played significant roles in Deccan affairs.

The new ruling elite in India enjoyed immense wealth, power, and status due to their proximity to power. During Shah Jahan’s reign, mansab holders of 500 and above held 61.5% of the total *jama*, while those of 2500 and above enjoyed 37.6%. These nobles often engaged in overseas trade, maintaining large *karkhanas* and participating in public welfare activities. They built havelis, sarais, mosques, tombs, gardens, tanks, and other structures. Historian Jan Qaisar argues that there is a linkage between social values and the building activities of the Mughal ruling elite, with social prestige and the desire to be remembered by posterity being the major factors behind these large-scale building activities. The Mughal nobles were also involved in establishing new towns and markets, such as modern Faridabad near Delhi.



2.5.1.2 New Social Groups

The medieval period saw the emergence of new social groups, including the *Qaim Khanis*, *Mewatis/Meos*, *Sipahis*, *Nayaks*, and *Deswali Muslims*. These groups were formed due to clan affinity, political patronage, material gains, or willing conversion. The degree of Islamisation was influenced by the upper classes, who were closer to Islamic culture, while the lower classes were graftons. Some social groups accepted Islam due to clan affinity, while others followed a Muslim lifestyle. The Qaim Khanis married daughters of non-Qaim Khani Hindu Rajputs but faced challenges in marrying among non-Qaim Khani Hindu Rajputs. The Mewatis/Meos, Qasbati Sipahis, Nayaks, and Deswali Muslims were also converted to Islam due to their proximity to Agra and Delhi. The emergence of these new social groups reflects the changing nature of Islam and the influence of new faiths on individuals and societies.

The middle class emerged in Europe in the fourteenth century, consisting of merchants, professionals, and lower bureaucrats who worked independently of state control. During the medieval period in India, the middle class consisted of people in various professions, including medicine, learning, literature, art, music, and lower bureaucracy. The existence of the middle class has been debated, with some arguing that there was no middle class under the Mughals. In 1944, C. W. Smith's article "The Middle Class in the Mughal Empire" highlighted the presence of numerous groups of merchants, bankers, and professionals.

The medieval period saw the emergence of new classes of professionals, including medical practitioners, artists, and petty bureaucrats. Kayasthas emerged as skilled scribes and revenue record keepers, while Khatris emerged prominently in the Punjab-Delhi region. These professionals were

employed by the Mughal state in large numbers, and their salaries varied from Rs. 3,600 per annum to Rs. 100,000 per annum. Physicians and *jarrahs* also earned their livelihood by treating people, and the class of astrologers and astronomers became so common that Niccolao Manucci mentioned the presence of this class in nobles' households.

2.5.1.3 Trading Group

In the medieval period, merchants and peddlers were prevalent in Cambay, annexed to the Sultanate in 1304-5. These merchants had beautiful mansions and mosques and enjoyed power and prestige during Muhammad Tughluq's period. They established charitable institutions, such as *khanqah*, where travellers received free food and alms. There was a hierarchy among merchants, with *fariyas* being retailers, *bichhayats* being itinerant, *bypari* being outsiders, and *mahajans* being local merchants. *Sahukars* dealt in wholesale transactions and ensured a continuous supply of grain to urban markets. They maintained *kothas* and *bhakharis* for the storage of commodities. The state viewed them differently, with separate taxes imposed on them. Wealthy merchants lived in double-storied houses with beautiful terraces.

2.5.1.4 Artisans

The establishment of the Sultanate by the Turks and Mughals brought significant changes to the existing social structure, particularly due to the new ruling class's demands for new products and the introduction of new technologies and services. This urban revolution led to the expansion of artisans and trading castes, with a majority of the artisans in Punjab being Muslims. The rise of new social groups, such as the Khammar caste, led to the emergence of new forms of industries, specialisation, and division of labour.

The introduction of the cotton gin and cotton carder's bow during the Turkish period led to the emergence of a new class of Dhunia, later a caste. The introduction of paper during the thirteenth century also led to the emergence of a distinct caste, Kagazi. Teli were mostly Muslims in Punjab, but they were mostly Muslims before the Turkish conquest. The introduction of separating zinc from ore in the fifteenth century led to the emergence of a class of tinsmiths (Qalaigars), who used zinc to protect copper vessels from caustic acid reactions. There was a distinct hierarchy among the artisan class, with the position of *ustad* being considered superior and respectable in society. Caste and clan affiliations also played a role in social interactions, with Hindus being divided based on castes, while Afghans were divided into biradaris.

2.5.1.5 The Priests

The priests were another important class of people in society. Among the Hindus, they were the Brahmins, and Ulemas among the Muslims. They were given grants of tax-free land for their maintenance and were often very powerful. The Ulemas wielded great influence over the Sultans and often influenced their policies. But at other times, like during the reign of Alauddin Khalji, they were even ignored. Sometimes, the priests were not interested in religious affairs but were more interested in worldly affairs.

2.5.2 Urban People

The wealthy merchants, traders, and artisans lived in towns. The nobility, officers, and soldiers all lived in towns that served as administrative and military hubs. Places where Sufi and *Bhakti* saints lived, as well as important temples and mosques, had become pilgrimage destinations. The artisans lived in separate quarters. In reality, weavers lived in a weaver's colony, goldsmiths in a goldsmith's colony, and so on. This was the norm for all

artisans and craftsmen. These people supplied luxury goods, which were also traded abroad. Large workshops known as *karkhanas* were kept running to supply royal households and government departments with provisions, goods, and equipment. The *karkhanas* not only served as manufacturing agencies but also as technical and vocational training centres for young people. The *karkhana* strained and directed artisans and craftspeople from various branches, who later established their own independent *karkhanas*.

2.5.2.1 Peasants

Peasants lived in villages and were paid massive land taxes to the state. Their lives were unaffected by dynastic changes. Inter-caste marriages and inter-dining were strictly forbidden under the rigid caste system. However, there was a large exchange of ideas. Those who converted to Islam did not abandon their previous practices. As a result, ideas and customs were exchanged. Many Hindu customs were adopted by Muslims, while many Muslim customs were adopted by Hindus, including food, clothing, music, and many others.

2.5.2.2 Slaves

A significant segment of the urban population comprised enslaved individuals and household attendants. The institution of slavery was deeply rooted not only in India but also in regions like West Asia and Europe for centuries. *Hindu Shastras* laid out distinctions among slaves: those born within the family, those bought, those obtained by other means, and those passed down through inheritance. Both Arabs and later the Turks integrated slavery into their social systems. Capturing people during warfare remained the predominant way to acquire slaves. The *Mahabharata* itself portrayed it as acceptable to enslave prisoners taken in battle. The Turks practiced this method extensively during their military campaigns both within India



and beyond its borders. Markets trading men and women existed in India as well as West Asia, where slaves from Turkey, the Caucasus, Greece, and India were highly prized. A limited number were also brought in from Africa, especially Abyssinia. Such individuals were mostly purchased to serve in households, to provide companionship, or for specific talents they possessed. Highly skilled slaves, attractive young boys, and beautiful girls could command significant sums. Some skilled slaves attained influential positions, as evidenced by those who served under Qutbuddin Aibak.

Slave raiding was widespread across West and Central Asia, with *ghazis* often capturing people from Central Asia and forcibly converting them. This practice was maintained by early Turkish rulers in India like Aibak. For example, in his 1195 Gujarat campaign, Aibak reportedly enslaved 20,000 people, and another 50,000 during his Kalinjar expedition. However, such massive enslavement is not recorded for Alauddin Khalji's campaigns, although enslaved people still formed part of the spoils of war. In many instances, prisoners of war were executed rather than enslaved, with only select captives brought back for servitude. During operations meant to subdue rural regions, however, large groups of men, women, and children were captured and sold in Delhi's slave markets. The buying and selling of slaves was so ordinary that historian Barani noted slave-girls and handsome boys being priced alongside livestock. In contrast to Central Asia, where Turkish captives were trained for military roles, enslaved individuals traded in Delhi primarily filled domestic roles. The practice was so widespread that even lower-level officials employed slaves at home. Slaves rarely received training as artisans, but female servants were commonly tasked with spinning, and there are accounts of sufi mystics subsisting on the income generated by their enslaved workers.

Firuz Tughlaq broke away from the earlier custom by issuing specific orders to his leading nobles, instructing them to seize captives during their military campaigns and select the most capable individuals to be sent to serve the Sultan. This directive extended to the subordinate rulers under his authority as well. Through this policy, a total of 180,000 captives were amassed. A portion of these individuals received training in religious education, while around 12,000 were instructed in various crafts and then allocated across different *paraganas*, indicating a significant lack of skilled craftsmen within urban centres at that time. These captives were also organised into a body of armed guards. Yet, the attempt to replicate a Janissary-style corps, similar to the well-known Turkish model, did not succeed. After Firuz's death, this slave corps attempted to assert itself as a deciding force in the succession struggle but was ultimately overcome and scattered.

2.5.2.3 Caste, Social Customs and Position of Women

During the Sultanate period, the basic framework of Hindu society remained largely intact, showing almost no structural transformation. Authors of the *smritis* of this era persisted in placing Brahmans at the top of the social hierarchy, yet they harshly criticised those within their own ranks who failed to live up to the expected standards. One perspective that emerged suggested that Brahmans could cultivate land not merely as a last resort but even under ordinary circumstances, as the ritual duties like performing sacrifices no longer guaranteed a sustainable livelihood during the Kali Yuga.

The legal texts continued to uphold that it was the prime responsibility of the Kshatriya to discipline evildoers and support the virtuous, and that bearing arms to safeguard the populace was a privilege

exclusive to this warrior class. As for the Shudras, the manuals mostly reiterated their prescribed functions and roles. Serving the higher castes remained their foremost duty, but they were permitted to pursue any trade or craft except those involving alcohol and meat. Although Shudras were still barred from studying and chanting the Vedas, they were not forbidden to listen to Puranic recitations. Some orthodox thinkers went so far as to advise total avoidance of dining with Shudras, cohabiting the same residence, sharing a bedstead, or even accepting sacred teachings from a well-versed Shudra, though these ideas can be seen as extremely rigid interpretations as Satish Chandra noted. The harshest prohibitions, however, were reserved for interactions with the Chandalas and other communities deemed 'untouchable.'

Women's status within this social order remained mostly unchanged. Traditional directives mandating child marriage for girls and the duty of unwavering loyalty and service to their husbands persisted unchallenged. In rare cases, for instance, if the husband abandoned his wife or contracted a repulsive disease, dissolution of marriage was permitted, although not all authorities agreed with this leniency. Widows were generally barred from remarrying during the Kali Age, though this restriction appears to have mainly targeted women of the three higher varnas. Regarding *sati*, some commentators endorsed the practice wholeheartedly, while others accepted it only under certain stipulations. Various foreign travellers recorded its widespread occurrence in different parts of the subcontinent. For example, Ibn Battutah graphically described, with a sense of dread, witnessing a widow immolating herself on her husband's pyre amidst loud drumming. He also noted that such an act required prior approval from the sultan.

With regard to inheritance, the legal scholars of the time supported the widow's

entitlement to her deceased husband's property, so long as the estate in question was separate and not undivided joint family property. In such cases, the widow did not merely act as a caretaker of these assets, she held full authority to manage and even alienate them as she deemed fit. This development indicates that under Hindu law, women's proprietary rights saw a measure of advancement.

In this era, it also became common among elite families to confine women indoors and insist they conceal their faces from strangers, a custom known as *purdah*. This system of shielding women from public view, particularly among high-caste Hindus, was not unique to India alone but could be traced to ancient civilizations like Iran and Greece. The Arabs and Turks later adopted similar practices and introduced them to India, where the custom took deeper root, especially across northern regions. One explanation for the widespread adoption of *purdah* is the fear that women might be abducted during invasions, as they were often treated as spoils of war during periods of unrest. Even so, the primary reason for its expansion seems to have been social in nature: *purdah* came to represent status and respectability among the upper strata, prompting many who wished to be regarded as respectable to imitate it. In addition, religious rationales were offered to legitimise this practice. Regardless of its origins, the spread of *purdah* significantly restricted women's freedom and increased their dependence on men.

Another prevalent custom among Hindus, especially the Rajputs, was *Jauhar*. Typically observed in situations where defeat in battle seemed inevitable, Rajput women would perform Jauhar, a practice of self-immolation, to avoid the dishonour and humiliation that might follow at the hands of the enemy. When Hamir Deva, the Chauhan ruler of Ranthambhor, recognised the futility of resisting Alauddin Khalji's forces, he chose



to end his life through Jauhar. The act of Jauhar carried out by the Rajput women of Ranthambhor was vividly recorded by Amir Khusrau, who accompanied Alauddin Khalji during the campaign.

Under the Sultanate, Muslim society was far from homogenous and remained segmented by ethnic and racial lines. It also displayed pronounced economic inequalities. Marriages between Turks, Iranians, Afghans, and native Indian Muslims were infrequent, and these groups developed a kind of exclusivity that mirrored Hindu caste barriers. New converts from the lower rungs of Hindu society faced discrimination within the Muslim community as well.

At the same time, the upper echelons of Hindu and Muslim societies maintained limited social interaction. This was partly due to a sense of superiority harboured by the Muslim elite, and partly because orthodox Hindus upheld religious prohibitions that

prevented inter-dining and inter-marriage with Muslims. In effect, the same social restrictions that Hindu upper castes imposed on shudras were applied to Muslims too. Still, this did not imply that meaningful contact between Hindus and Muslims was absent. Hindu warriors frequently found employment in Muslim armies, and many high-ranking officials employed Hindus as confidential managers or stewards. Much of the local administrative framework remained firmly under Hindu control.

Therefore, opportunities for both communities to interact were numerous. The notion that Hindus and Muslims lived in complete social isolation from one another is inaccurate and not supported by historical records. Even so, clashes of interest and differences in customs, faith, and social codes did generate friction and hindered deeper cultural integration and understanding.

Recap

1. The Delhi Sultanate marked a significant shift in Indian society, bringing urbanisation and the diversification of industries and crafts.
2. The ruling elite, at the heart of an “urban revolution,” thrived on city culture, with musical concerts, poetic recitations, and religious festivals central to urban life.
3. The medieval period saw the emergence of new social groups, such as the Qaim Khanis, Mewatis/Meos, Sipahis, Nayaks, and Deswali Muslims.
4. The establishment of the Islamic Sultanate by the Turks and Mughals brought significant change to the social structure, expanding artisan and trading castes; wealthy merchants, traders, and artisans lived in towns, supplying luxury goods that were also traded abroad.
5. Slavery under the Delhi Sultanate existed in various forms, from elite/military to domestic/menial roles, without fixed economic, racial,

linguistic, or cultural connotations.

6. Slavery was a legal status making one person the property of another, distinguishing enslaved people from other socio-economic groups.
7. Mughal cultural development built upon foundations laid by the Sultans of Delhi.
8. Hindu social life remained relatively stable, though growing prosperity allowed nobles and Sultans to become patrons of literature.
9. Schools and colleges were established in Delhi and other provincial capitals, with the *sadr-i-jahan* granting tax-free land for religious education.
10. Women's rights were an important marker of civilisation; Muslim women generally received more liberal treatment in matters of inheritance than their Hindu counterparts.
11. Some women attained prominent positions in society owing to political, aristocratic, or religious connections.

Objective Questions

1. Which city emerged as a chief centre of the liberal literary tradition during the medieval period?
2. Who made the *Iqta* system hereditary and permanent?
3. What did the term “mansabdar” primarily refer to?
4. What was the primary function of *karkhanas* in medieval towns?
5. Which profession became significant with the introduction of paper in the 13th century?
6. Who were the *Kayasthas* during the Mughal period?
7. Which charitable institution did merchants often establish?
8. Who was India's only crowned Muslim queen?



Answers

1. Delhi
2. Firuz Tughluq
3. Revenue administrator and military officer
4. Manufacturing and training
5. Kagazi (papermakers)
6. Skilled scribes and record keepers
7. Khanqah
8. Razia Sultana

Assignments

1. Write a short note on the position of women during the Delhi Sultanate period.
2. Describe the status of artisans and craftsmen during the Delhi Sultanate.
3. Explain how Persian culture influenced social life in the Delhi Sultanate.
4. Explain the role of Sufi saints in shaping the social and religious life of the people.
5. Outline the main features of urban society under the Delhi Sultanate.

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BLOCK

Mughal India: Polity and Society



UNIT

Consolidation and Establishment of Mughal Administrative System

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the founding and consolidation of the Mughal state in India
- ◆ Identify the defining features of the Mughal administrative system
- ◆ examine the circumstances that made the rise of the Mughal state possible
- ◆ recognise the resistance offered by indigenous rulers against Mughal expansion

Prerequisite

Central Asia has seen countless empires and rulers rise and fall over the centuries. The region spanning present-day Uzbekistan, Iran, and Turkey — including Asia Minor, largely modern Turkey — passed through the hands of successive dynasties, among which the Timurid Empire, founded by the famed conqueror Timur (Tamerlane), was one of the most prominent. Like every empire before it, however, Timurid power could not endure forever, and by the mid-fifteenth century (roughly the 1450s) it had begun to crumble.

The fall of one empire usually creates an opening for rivals, and in this case three powers — the Safavids, the Uzbeks, and the Timurids — competed for control of Central Asia. Out of this unsettled environment emerged Babur, a descendant of both Timur and Genghis Khan, who was determined to carve out an empire of his own. This unit traces how Babur emerged victorious from that contest and led an eastward campaign that culminated in the founding of the Mughal Empire in India.

Keywords

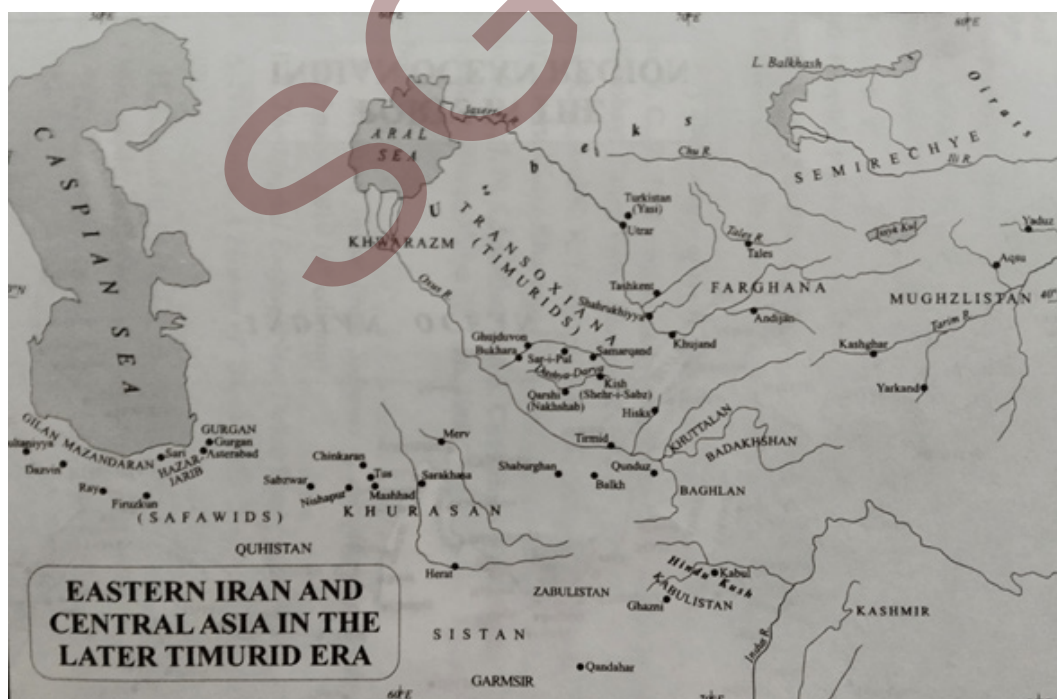
Pargana, Artillery, Gunpowder, Tuzuk-i-Baburi, Mughal polity, Administration

Discussion

In Central Asia, after the disintegration of the Mongol empire, Timurids had established a united empire under the able leadership of Timur. He controlled a large territory which included Asia Minor (Turkey), Iran, Transoxiana, Afghanistan, and a part of Punjab. After his death, the empire sustained intact for half a century and then started to decline. There was infighting among the principalities which paved the way for new elements. The Uzbeks from the north infiltrated into Transoxiana. Iran was then dominated by a new tribe called Safavids. The mutual rivalry of the *Shia* Safavids and the *Sunni* Uzbeks also made matters

worse in Central Asia during this period. The growing power of Ottoman Turks also added tension in the Central Asian region. It was during this period Babur succeeded to the throne of Fargana, a small territory in Transoxiana.

In 1494, the twelve-year-old boy became the ruler when the Timurids were engaged in fights. Babur, too, soon became a part of it. After frequent invasions of the neighbouring territories, Babur managed to overpower the Timurid possessions in Central Asia. In 1504, he moved towards Kabul. After repeated attempts and failures to capture the



(Courtesy: History of Medieval India by Satish Chandra, Orient Blackswan, 2013, Map A Appendix)



Iranian provinces and Samarqand, Babur decided to concentrate his attention on India.

3.1.1 Babur's Conquest of India

Babur was greatly enchanted by the fabulous wealth of India, which was famous for gold and riches. He was also influenced by the tradition of his ancestor Timur, who had carried immense booty from India. The Indian region of Punjab was, for a long time, under the sway of the Timurids. When Babur conquered Kabul, he thought that he had a claim over Indian territories for the sake of his ancestor, Timur. The reduction of income from Kabul was another reason that prompted Babur to invade India. The existing political system in north-western India was another reason that facilitated Babur's invasion of India. After the death of Sikandar Lodi in 1517, the Afghan chiefs and Rajput princes were alarmed at the attempts of Ibrahim Lodi to build up a strong empire. Though he had an ardent desire to conquer India, he did not get a suitable opportunity to do so. When Sikandar Lodi died in 1517, the north-western region became vulnerable for Babur. Sikandar's successor, Ibrahim Lodi, tried to create a strong empire, which alarmed the Afghans and the Rajputs.

The use of Gun powder is said to have introduced by the Chinese around the first millennium CE. It might have travelled to India due to the Buddhist contact. The credit of using gun powder for war purposes for the first time in India goes to Babur in the battle of Panipat (Haryana).

In 1519, Babur initiated the first step towards the expedition to India by capturing the frontier fort of Bhira. He then sent messages to Daulat Khan and Ibrahim Lodi to cede those territories which were parts of

the Turkish empire previously. When Babur returned to Kabul, Daulat Khan recaptured the fort of Bhira and expelled Babur's agents posted there. Babur, once again, crossed the Indus and captured Bhira and Sialkot, which were considered as the gateways of India. After a year, he received emissaries from Daulat Khan Lodi and Rana Sanga, who invited him to Hindustan and requested him to displace Ibrahim Lodi. Babur, who was looking forward to conquering the north-western part of India, started the conquest of Hindustan in 1525, expecting the support of Rana Sanga and Daulat Khan.

3.1.1.1 First Battle of Panipat (1526)

In April 1526, Babur marched towards Delhi to confront the forces of Ibrahim Lodi. Both the armies of Babur and Ibrahim Lodi met at the battlefield of Panipat (modern Haryana). Babur, with his army, confronted the army of Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat in 1526 CE. Though inferior in military strength, Babur had good knowledge of war tactics which he learned from the Ottoman Turks. The use of guns gave him an upper hand in the battle along with the service of Ottoman master gunners. Though the use of gunpowder was known in India, its use for artillery was introduced by Babur. Though Ibrahim Lodi's army fought valiantly, he, along with his 15,000 army men, lay dead at the end of the battle.

The Battle of Panipat, fought between Babur and Ibrahim Lodi, also known as the first battle of Panipat by historians, has great importance in the history of India. It brought the Lodi rule to an end and helped Babur to control the area up to Delhi and Agra. The war booty helped Babur to get rid of his financial crisis. He had two more opponents in this region, namely Rana Sanga of Mewar and the Afghans. The Battle of Panipat inaugurated a period of struggle for domination over northern India. Babur's decision to stay back



his ill health and developments in Central Asia, he made peace with the Afghans and Nuzrat Shah and returned. On his way to Kabul, he died in Lahore.

Though Babur could not rule Indian territories after the conquest, his advent on Indian soil had far-reaching results of great significance. Once again, Kandahar and Kabul became an integral part of northern India. Control of these two important towns at the meeting point of trade routes from China in the east and Mediterranean seaports in the west led to the development of India's foreign trade. It helped to prevent any more invasions of India for the next 200 years. The power of the Lodis and the Rajputs was crushed by Babur. This destruction of the balance of power in the region was the first step in the establishment of a pan-Indian empire. Babur introduced a new mode of warfare in India, i.e., a skilled combination of artillery and cavalry. It led to the rapid popularisation of gunpowder and artillery in India.

3.1.2 Humayun

Humayun succeeded Babur in 1530 with a number of problems. The unconsolidated territories and financial difficulties were the most important problems to tackle. He had to face his greedy brothers and the Afghans alike. The ruler of Gujarat, Bahadur Shah, posed another threat for Humayun. He managed to defeat the Afghans in eastern UP and besieged the fort of Chunar, the gateway of eastern India. Sher Khan, who had possessed the fort, accepted his overlordship, and Humayun now turned his attention towards Gujarat. As Humayun moved to Gwalior, Bahadur Shah made a treaty with Rana Sanga against Humayun. Meanwhile, Sher Khan became powerful in Bihar and strengthened his position. Humayun was defeated by Sher Khan in the battle of Chausa in 1539 and at Kannauj in 1540, and Humayun was forced out of India.



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In 1542, during his exile, Akbar was born to him at Amarkot. With the support of the Iranian ruler, Humayun was able to conquer Kandahar and Kabul. Soon he came to know about the war of succession among the descendants of Sher Shah and

decided to attack Delhi. He captured Lahore in 1555. In the same year, he was successful in recapturing Punjab and Delhi after defeating Sikandar Sur. Humayun died in 1556, after a fall from the staircase of his library.

Recap

- ◆ Babur, ruler of a small principality in Trans-Oxiana, conquered north India, regarding it as his rightful inheritance from his ancestor Timur.
- ◆ The First Battle of Panipat (1526) was a watershed event that marked the beginning of Mughal rule in India.
- ◆ Babur had to fight several further battles before his authority over Hindustan was firmly established.
- ◆ Babur's son and successor, Humayun, struggled considerably to retain his father's territories.
- ◆ Humayun faced sustained opposition from both the Afghans and the Rajputs.
- ◆ Sher Khan, ruler of Bihar, defeated Humayun and forced him into temporary exile.
- ◆ After Sher Khan's death, Humayun took advantage of the succession dispute among his sons to return to India and reclaim control of the north-western subcontinent.

Objective Questions

1. Where did Babur originally come from?
2. Which battle is considered to have laid the foundation of Mughal rule in India?
3. Who ruled Mewar at the time Babur invaded India?
4. Whom did Babur defeat at the First Battle of Panipat?
5. Which Gujarat ruler posed a threat to Humayun?
6. Which Bihar-based ruler defeated Humayun?



7. Where was Akbar born?
8. In which year did Humayun recover his lost Indian territories?
9. In which year did Humayun die?
10. In which present-day Indian state is Panipat located?

Answers

1. Fargana in Transoxiana
2. First Battle of Panipat
3. Rana Sanga
4. Ibrahim Lodi
5. Bahadur Shah
6. Sher Khan
7. Amarkot
8. 1555 CE
9. 1556 CE
10. Haryana

Assignments

1. examine the political and military conditions in India that allowed Babur's invasion and eventual success.
2. assess the importance of the First Battle of Panipat in founding the Mughal Empire in India.
3. discuss the challenges Babur faced after establishing his rule in Delhi.
4. describe the circumstances leading to Humayun's defeat by Sher Khan and its consequences.
5. discuss how the early struggles of Babur and Humayun shaped the later consolidation of Mughal power under Akbar.

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UNIT

Mughal Nobility and the Concept of Sovereignty

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

1. Explain how Mughal sovereignty was consolidated in India
2. Identify the factors that gave the Mughal state a firm foundation
3. Assess Akbar's qualities and conduct as a conqueror
4. Examine the factors that allowed Akbar to unify fragmented territories into a single empire

Prerequisite

History is far more than a record of dates and battles — it is equally the story of people and their influence on the world around them. Akbar the Great stands out as one such figure in the history of medieval India. While many people first come across him through the popular Akbar-Birbal tales prized for their wit, his lasting legacy lies in how he reshaped the course of Indian history. As Babur's grandson and Humayun's son, Akbar came to the throne at a time when the Mughal Empire was weak, fragmented, and burdened by the difficulties his father had left behind. Through shrewd leadership, decisive action, and an ability to win people's trust, Akbar not only preserved the empire but expanded and strengthened it considerably. This unit examines how Akbar consolidated power, managed his nobility, and redefined the concept of kingship, or sovereignty, in India.

Keywords

Nobility, *Farman*, Sovereignty, Rajputs, Panipat, Conquest

Discussion

3.2.1 Early Years of Akbar's Reign

In 1542, when his father Humayun was struggling against rivals, Akbar was born in the small town of Amarkot, where the local ruler, the Rana of Amarkot, offered them shelter. A few years later, after many battles and defeats, Humayun fled to Iran, and young Akbar briefly came under the care of his uncle Kamran. Luckily, Kamran treated him well, and soon Akbar was reunited with his family after the capture of Kandahar. When Humayun died in 1556, Akbar was just 13 years and 4 months old, stationed at Kalanaur in Punjab to control Afghan rebels. It was there that Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar, popularly known as Akbar the Great, was crowned emperor.

But the situation was far from easy. The empire faced threats from Afghan forces regrouping under a capable leader named Hemu, who was working for Adil Shah, the successor of Sher Shah Suri. Hemu was no ordinary soldier; he was bold, intelligent, and had risen through hard work. He had already captured Agra and was advancing towards Delhi with a strong army. Akbar had only Punjab in his possession, which he had retained as a governor at the age of 13.

While Akbar came to power, the major powers were the Afghans, the Rajputs, and powers like Khandesh, Golkonda, Ahmednagar, and Bijapur of Deccan and South India. The north-western region was controlled by some tribes. Besides Kandahar

and Kabul, the territories under him were dissatisfied with him. Akbar dismissed Bairam Khan, his mentor cum tutor, and began to manage the administration all by himself in 1560 CE.

Akbar was able to avoid the threat of Hemu in the Second Battle of Panipat in 1556 and facilitate his succession. At this time, he had Punjab and a small area around Delhi under his possession. He subsequently recovered Mankot, Gwalior, and Jaunpur and relieved northern India from Afghan domination.

3.2.1.1 The Second Battle of Panipat (1556)

In this critical moment, Akbar's guardian and regent, Bairam Khan, took charge. He quickly organised the Mughal army and met Hemu's forces at Panipat in November 1556. The battle was fierce. Although Hemu's side had the upper hand, his fortunes changed when an arrow struck him in the eye, rendering him unconscious. Without their leader, his army lost heart, and the Mughals secured a decisive victory. Hemu was captured and executed, and with this, Akbar had to reconquer his empire almost from scratch.

3.2.1.2 Conquest of Rajput Region

The following year, he conquered Malwa and made Atgah Khan his Prime Minister. He also occupied the fort of Chunar, which was coveted by Humayun. Akbar married the



daughter of Raja Bharmal, King of Amber. He proved to be a capable ruler by consolidating the conquered territories. The Narmada valley and the northern parts of modern Madhya Pradesh constituted Gondwana, which was composed of Gonds and Rajputs. In 1564, Gondwana was attached to Mughal territories but was allowed to exist as a subordinate independent state under the Mughals. Other Rajput kingdoms also surrendered without much opposition. However, to defeat Chittor, he had to besiege it for almost six months before it fell in 1568 CE. Within a period of fifteen years, the Mughal empire extended from the upper Gangetic Valley to Bihar, Bengal, Gujarat, Malwa, and Gondwana.

3.2.1.3 Conquest of Gujarat (1572)

After consolidating his position in central India and the Rajput region, Akbar turned his attention towards Gujarat, which was then a group of principalities fighting among themselves. Akbar was attracted to Gujarat for its commercial as well as agricultural importance. It had a number of potential ports. Sultan Muzaffar Shah was the most powerful ruler in Gujarat. Akbar invaded Ahmedabad, which was taken without much opposition. Soon, he conquered all the principalities and brought the region of Gujarat under his sway, placing it under Mirza Aziz Koka. Though there were subsequent revolts, Akbar was able to suppress them successfully.

In 1574, Akbar marched to Bihar and conquered Hajipur and Patna. By 1576, Bengal was also subjugated. Around 1592, Raja Man Singh brought the region of Orissa under Mughal rule. There were frequent rebellions and revolts in Bengal, Bihar, Gujarat, and the north-western parts of India. However, Akbar was able to suppress them with the help of his able commanders, Raja Todar Mal, Sheikh Farid Bhakshi, Aziz Koka,

Shahbas Khan, and Man Singh.

In the north-west, Kabul was annexed by Akbar. He suppressed the revolts of the Roshanais in the north-west, during which he lost one of his trusted generals, Birbal. Akbar had been waiting for a long time to annex Kashmir, for which he employed Raja Bhagwan Das. By 1586, Mughal forces were able to defeat Kashmir and annex it to the Mughal empire. Thatta in Sindh was also remaining outside Mughal control during this period. Akbar asked the governor of Multan, Khan-i-Khanan, to conquer that area. Soon, Thatta came under the province of Multan. Finally, by 1595, the entire north-west of India was consolidated under Mughal rule.

Following his conquest of Gujarat, Akbar cast his eyes on Bijapur, Golkonda, and Ahmednagar, the Deccan kingdoms. He wanted the rulers of these states to accept his overlordship. The rebels expelled from the Mughal territories were often taking refuge in these Deccan states, which also prompted Akbar to bring these states under his control. There were also internal troubles in these states. Akbar also wanted to protect the trade routes that ran from the south through these states to the ports of Gujarat. By this time, the Portuguese had grown into a formidable power along the western coast, and Akbar wanted to drive them away from the western coast.

After the conquest of Malwa in 1561, Akbar demanded the surrender of some territories from the governor, Pir Muhammad. There were initial setbacks for the Mughal army in the Deccan. However, Akbar was able to defeat them soon. He married the daughter of the ruler of Khandesh and received some territories as dowry. After 1590, Akbar made some plans to bring the Deccan states under his control. These states were troubled with internal turbulence and political disturbances. He sent four diplomatic missions under his able ministers to the Deccan. Except for the

ruler of Khandesh, no one else accepted the overlordship of Akbar. Therefore, Akbar himself led an army against the Deccan states in 1595, and there was continuous

struggle for the following years. In 1598, Ahmednagar was defeated. By 1600, the adjoining regions were also defeated.



Fig.3.2.1 Subahs of Akbar

Courtesy: <https://universalcompendium.com/tables/xfam/indexes/lands/mughal%20empire/images/mughal-empire-map-india-golconda-bijapur-bengal-bay.jpg>

During the unrest caused by Bairam Khan's revolt, nobles and their pressure groups had become active. Akbar's stepmother, Maham Anaga, and her son, Adham Khan, were also part of it. Adham Khan continued in active politics. He was removed from his office due to his high-handed behaviour. He wanted to

be the *wazir* and stabbed the existing *wazir*. Akbar, furious at this betrayal, personally had Adham Khan executed by throwing him from the fort's ramparts in 1561.

Another serious challenge came from the Uzbek nobles who controlled parts of eastern India. A powerful section of the nobility was

the *Uzbeks*, who also held important positions in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Malwa. They had thwarted the threat of the Afghans and soon became very arrogant. They started disobeying the orders of young Akbar. Several rebellions took place in the region against Akbar. However, he successfully suppressed them all and each time excused them. He became irritated and vowed to root them all out in 1569. Simultaneously, there were also advances from the Mirzas and Timurids. Akbar's half-brother, Mirza Hakim, took control over Kabul and marched to Punjab. He was supported by the Uzbeks. Akbar was now in a crisis. Yet he managed to march to Lahore and forced Mirza Hakim to retire. The rebellion of the Mirzas was crushed, and they fled to Gujarat. Akbar returned to Uttar Pradesh and crossed the river Yamuna, attacking the Uzbek nobles by surprise in 1567. The Uzbek leaders were killed in the battle, and thus the prolonged period of the noble revolt came to an end. Meanwhile, Akbar's half-brother Mirza Hakim, ruling Kabul, attempted to invade Punjab but was swiftly defeated. These crises tested Akbar's leadership and strengthened his control over the nobility and empire.

The nobility, who were a privileged class, formed a part of the ruling class under the Mughals. The majority of the Mughal nobles were from India and the neighbouring lands like Tajikistan, Khurasan, or Iran. During Babur's time, the Afghans were inducted into the nobility. Under Akbar, Hindus of elite origin were also considered part of the noble class, the majority of which included Rajputs. The best examples can be seen in the cases of Raja Man Singh and Raja Birbal. The Rajputs who were considered nobles were either *rajas* or nobles by birth. The nobility provided a platform for the promotion of persons from the lower sections of society. Some of the *Kayasthas* and the *Khatri*s who were employed in the central and provincial levels were later promoted to

the class of nobility. Even some persons of humble origin were later raised to the status of *mansabdars*. Both Akbar and Shah Jahan showed keen interest in the organisation of Mughal nobility (*mansabdars*). Mughal nobles were paid handsome salaries. The best practices followed by the Mughal rulers in terms of faith and political stability seem to have attracted a number of persons from outside India to the Mughal court. Thus, there were immigrants to India during the medieval period who assimilated Indian culture and became absorbed into the Indian population. Under Jahangir and Shah Jahan, Marathas also rose to the status of nobles. Among them was Sahji, father of Shivaji.

Though they were paid well, they had high expenses as well. Each of them had a large number of servants and assistants and maintained large stables of horses and elephants. Many of them imitated their monarchs by keeping a number of women and providing *harems* from them. They led a luxurious life, living in expensive mansions with gardens and orchards. They wore the finest clothes and a lot of ornaments. They also had to make a present to the emperor twice a year. They also received presents from the emperor in return.

3.2.2 The Concept of Sovereignty and *Badshahship*

The Mughals believed that sovereignty or *Padshahi* was not just a matter of political control or military power. It was seen as a sacred duty, given by divine will. The emperor, or *Badshah*, was regarded as God's representative on earth, responsible for maintaining justice (*Adl*), order, and the well-being of the people. This idea was especially promoted by Akbar, who used both Islamic and Persian traditions to present himself as a ruler who stood above religious divisions. His idea of *Sulh-i-Kul* (universal

peace) reflected this thinking. Sovereignty, in the Mughal context, wasn't only about land and wealth. But it was also about moral authority and the ability to bring together a diverse empire under one rule.

The Mughal nobility played a crucial role in maintaining this concept of sovereignty. Nobles held ranks and were expected to serve both militarily and administratively. Loyalty to the emperor was crucial. In return, they

received *Jagirs* and enjoyed high status in court. But they could not claim independent power, their authority always flowed from the emperor. The emperor's power was symbolised through elaborate court rituals, royal orders (*farmans*), and coinage bearing his name. All these elements reinforced the central idea that the emperor was the ultimate source of power, and sovereignty rested firmly in his hands.

Recap

- ◆ The Second Battle of Panipat proved to be a decisive turning point in Indian history.
- ◆ Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar, remembered as Akbar the Great, was the chief architect of the consolidated Mughal Empire.
- ◆ Bairam Khan served as Akbar's tutor and regent, managing the administration during Akbar's minority, when he ascended the throne at age 13.
- ◆ At Akbar's accession, Mughal authority was confined to a small territory, while other regions previously held by Humayun stood on the verge of revolt.
- ◆ Rajput states outside Mughal control were brought under Mughal suzerainty through a mix of warfare and marriage alliances.
- ◆ The rival principalities of Gujarat were subdued and absorbed into Mughal territory.
- ◆ The north-western region, including Kashmir, was likewise conquered and integrated into the empire.
- ◆ Subduing the Deccan states required years of sustained effort, concluding only in 1598.
- ◆ Early in his reign, Akbar had to confront and put down a rebellion among his own nobles.

Objective Questions

1. In which year was the Second Battle of Panipat fought?
2. Who served as Akbar's tutor and mentor during his minority?
3. Who was entrusted with the expedition to annex Kashmir?
4. Which of Akbar's generals died while suppressing the Roshanai revolt?
5. Who brought Orissa under Mughal control in 1592?
6. Who was the most powerful ruler in Gujarat at the time Akbar planned its conquest?
7. Which kingdom included the Narmada valley and parts of present-day Madhya Pradesh?
8. Who opposed Akbar at the Second Battle of Panipat?
9. From what year did Akbar begin handling the administration independently?
10. Who was placed in charge of Gujarat's administration once the principalities were unified?

Answers

1. 1556
2. Bairam Khan
3. Raja Bhagwan Das
4. Birbal
5. Man Singh
6. Sultan Muzaffar Shah
7. Gondwana

8. Hemu
9. 1560
10. Mirza Aziz Koka

Assignments

1. Trace the founding and consolidation of the Mughal Empire.
2. Examine why the conquest of the Deccan states mattered to Akbar.
3. Write a note on Akbar's conquest of Rajputana.
4. Prepare a short account of Akbar's conquest of Gujarat.
5. Write a brief note on the rebellion of nobles under the Mughal Empire.

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SGOU



UNIT

Evolution of Administrative Institutions

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ identify the administrative institutions that developed under Mughal rule
- ◆ understand the nature and character of the Mughal state and its administrative structure
- ◆ grasp the Mughal conception of statehood

Prerequisite

Although Babur established Mughal rule in India, it was Akbar who truly built and consolidated the empire. At Akbar's accession, Mughal authority was largely confined to the region around Delhi, but under his leadership it expanded eastward, southward, and westward until it covered a vast stretch of the subcontinent. Akbar overcame considerable obstacles before he could secure his holdings and turn a scattered territory into a strong, unified empire. Administrative practices inherited from the Sultanate period and from Sher Shah Suri's reign continued to shape Mughal governance, and Akbar drew heavily on these precedents while introducing innovations shaped by his close engagement with the scholars, administrators, and thinkers at his court.

After conquering Gujarat, Akbar turned his attention to reorganising the empire's administration. The systems established earlier by Sher Shah had fallen into disarray, and Akbar set about rebuilding and improving them, focusing on the civil, revenue, and judicial machinery needed to govern such a vast empire. This unit traces the evolution of administrative institutions under the Mughals.

Keywords

Zabti, batai, kankut, Polaj, parauti, chachar, banjar, Amil, taccavi

Discussion

3.3.1 Revenue Administration

Akbar decided to follow the system of deciding the revenue followed by Sher Shah. It was the practice of measuring the cultivable land and fixing the revenue as per the crop rate (*ray*). However, it soon led to disparities as the peasants had to pay a large share of the product. Akbar reverted the system and changed it into an annual assessment system as per the report of the local officials called *qanungos*. They would give a report of the actual produce, state of cultivation, and the existing local price. However, the dishonest *qanungos* created problems in many places. Thus, Akbar appointed officials called *karoris* all over North India for the collection of revenue. Later on, parganas with the same productivity were grouped into separate assessment circles.

3.3.1.1 Zabti System

The land was assessed as soon as it was sown, with the help of bamboo linked with iron rings so that the peasants were aware of the revenue to be paid. The system of measurement of land and assessment based on it was known as the *zabti* system. This system was introduced in areas from Lahore to Ahmedabad, Gujarat, and Malwa. The *Dahsala* system was an extended form of *zabti*. In 1580, Akbar created the system called *dahsala* under which the average produce of different crops, as well as the average prices of the last ten years, were calculated. One third of the average produce

was the state share. It could be modified by the state. The *Zabti* system was known as the contribution of Raja Todar Mal.

Akbar also followed other systems of assessment too. The oldest one was *batai* or the *galla-bakshi* system. Under this system, the crop was equally divided between the peasant and the state. In specific situations, like crop failure or bad seasons, the peasants were permitted to select between these two systems. Under *batai*, the peasants could pay in cash or in kind. Crops such as cotton, indigo, oil seeds, and sugar cane were paid in cash and were known as cash crops.

There was a third system of revenue collection called *nasaq*. It was the calculation of the peasants' share according to the share given in the previous year. It was also known as *kankut*. The land was also categorised according to the continuity of production. The standardised unit of measurement of land was called *Ilahi Gaj*. Akbar introduced the definite measurement of *Bhiga* of land. *Bhiga* was roughly half an acre. Land which was cultivated every year was called *Polaj*. When the land was left uncultivated, it was called *Parauti*, which means fallow. When the land was left uncultivated for two to three years, it was called *chachar*; when it was uncultivated for an even longer period, it was termed as *banjar*. The government took an interest in bringing the uncultivated or fallow land under cultivation. Land was also classified into good, middling, and bad according to its production capacity. The state share of revenue varied according to the productivity and the assessment.

The cultivators were encouraged by Akbar to expand the cultivation. *Amils* (revenue collectors) were instructed to be lenient towards the peasants in their dealings. He introduced a type of loan for agricultural purposes, which was called *taccavi*. The peasants often utilised this fund to purchase seeds, implements, animals, etc. They paid back the loan in installments. The zamindars had a share of the cultivation as per the tradition. The peasants were also not supposed to be evicted from a portion of their land as long as they paid the rent.

As stated earlier, Raja Todar Mal was the brain behind the revenue system of Akbar. He had served under Sher Shah and joined Akbar's service. He was promoted to the office of Imperial Diwan in 1580.

3.3.2 Administrative System

By the period of Aurangzeb, there were twenty-one provinces under the Mughal empire. The Mughals developed a well-knit administrative system which helped them to control the whole empire with minimum flaws. There was a central, provincial or state government, military system, and a financial administrative system functioning under him efficiently.

The empire was divided into provinces or *Subahs*, which were subdivided into *Sarkars* (districts) and *parganas* (tehsils). A number of villages constituted a *pargana*.

At the central level, Akbar was the Badshah (king) who was the head of administration. He distributed duties among different officials. Wakeel was the head of advisors to the king. There were two types of ministers who were called *diwan*. They were the *mansabadars* and the *Mir Bakshi*, who were in charge of payment of officials. ***Sadar-i-Sadr*** was the head of the religious advisory board. He was responsible for maintaining harmony among different religious groups.

Khan-i-Saman was in charge of the royal store. He would look after the provisions for the royal kitchen and the upkeep of the palace and convene social gatherings. The royal counsellor ***Muhatib*** was in charge of the upkeep of Muslim ethics and culture. ***Kotwaal*** led the intelligence and postal department, which kept records of new immigrants.

At the provincial level, there was also an efficient group of officials who looked after the administration. Each province had a *nazim* (governor), *diwan*, *bakhshi*, *sadr*, and *qazi*. The chief executive of the province or the governor was also called *subedar* (head of a *subha*). In some cases, a single governor was appointed for more than one province. The *Nazim* or *Subedar* was responsible for the civil administration, commanded the army, and also had lots of judicial powers. He was in charge of all imperial forces in his territory, and he also appointed men into the police force for the maintenance of law and order. He was also in charge of the defence of the province. He assisted the *diwan* in the collection of revenue. His court was the highest court of appeal from the local *qazis* and *amils*. He also undertook all public welfare activities, like the construction of public water tanks, hospitals, schools, and charity homes.

There was also a *diwan* at the provincial level, who was appointed by the imperial minister with the approval of the emperor. He had an equal rank with the *subedar* and sometimes even higher. The provincial *diwan* maintained the accounts of expenses and income from revenue. Both the *subedar* and the *diwan* exercised a check on each other. The *diwan* submitted a monthly statement to the central government. Similarly, there were *bakshis* also at the provincial level, who had charge of military affairs. He kept the roll of the soldiers and disbursed salaries to them. He was also in charge of

the construction and maintenance of the forts in the province. At the provincial level, there was a systematic spy network. News writers and spies were posted by an officer called *Waqaya Nawis*. In some provinces, *Bakshi* acted as *waqaya nawis* also. There was also another official called *kotwal* at the provincial level. He was in charge of the urban centres, including the capital city. He was appointed by the governors. He created a local militia to maintain law and order. He enjoyed magisterial powers and kept a close watch on those who were notorious anti-socials. In the municipal administration, he looked after the hygiene of the urban areas. He also controlled the market and the trading posts. His office guaranteed peace and security in towns during the Mughal period.

Mughal rulers also had an efficient administration at the local level. It was also a continuation of the system followed by Sher Shah, with adequate updates during the period of Akbar. The *subhas* or the provinces were divided into *sarkars* or districts, and districts into *parganas* or tehsils under a *shiqdar* (*shiqdar-i-shiqdaran*) or *faujdar*. He was also joined by other officials like *amalguzar* and *kazandar*. There were also many other minor officers, too. *Faujdar* administered the district with the assistance of a small troop of militia and rendered his service to the *subedar* in the maintenance of peace and order. He ensured peace and security and established a spy network at the local level. *Amalguzar* was in charge of revenue collection. He disbursed loans (*taccavi*) to the peasants in cases of poor crops caused by floods or drought. The *bitik-chi* was the official who kept the records for the revenue collection and the service details of the other officials, such as the tax collectors, inspectors, the *qanungos* and the *patwaris*, and ensured their regular payment of salaries. He kept the settlement registers, too. *Khazandar* was the treasury officer of

the district who was responsible for the safe custody of the royal treasury. He shared the responsibility with *amalguzar*.

Tehsils or *parganas* were administered by *shiqdar*, *amil*, *fotdar* and *qanungo*. *Shiqdar* was the chief executive, *amil* was the judicial officer of revenue and civil disputes. He had wide powers in discharging justice. *Fotdar* was in charge of the treasury at the local level.

3.3.3 Jagir and Madad-e-Maash

The *Jagir* system was a way for the Mughal Empire to pay its officials, especially those in the *Mansabdari* system. Instead of giving them cash, the emperor would assign them the right to collect revenue from a piece of land, called a *Jagir*. The officer or noble who received it was called a *Jagirdar*. However, the land itself still belonged to the emperor. The *Jagirdar* only had the right to collect taxes from the peasants and manage the area temporarily. These assignments were regularly rotated, so *Jagirdars* could not build long-term control over any region.

There were different types of *Jagirs*. For example, *Tankha Jagirs* were given as salary, while *Watan Jagirs* were hereditary and usually granted to Rajput or local rulers in their home regions. Some *Jagirdars* had to move every few years, which discouraged them from improving the land or helping local farmers. The Mughal administration kept strict control over them. Officials like the *Diwan* and *Amil* were responsible for supervising *Jagirdars* and making sure they followed imperial laws. If needed, military officers like the *Faujdar* were sent to support tax collection.

Apart from *Jagirs*, the Mughal state also gave out tax-free land grants called *Madad-e-Maash*, mainly to scholars, saints, poets, and religious teachers. These grants helped such

people focus on their religious, educational, or cultural work without worrying about income. In return, they played an important role in maintaining social peace and spreading

moral values. These grants were usually small, non-transferable, and often continued within families for generations.

Recap

- ◆ The Mughal revenue system built upon the framework laid down earlier by Sher Shah.
- ◆ Akbar used the zabti, batai, and nasaq methods to assess and collect revenue.
- ◆ The measurement and assessment of land under this framework was known as the Zabti system.
- ◆ Careful survey and classification of land made revenue collection more efficient.
- ◆ Officials responsible for collecting revenue were called Amils.
- ◆ Government loans extended to farmers were known as taccavi.
- ◆ Raja Todar Mal was the chief architect of Mughal revenue policy.
- ◆ For administrative purposes, the empire was divided into Subahs, Sarkars, Parganas, and villages.
- ◆ A capable bureaucracy operating at the central, provincial, and local levels produced a cohesive administrative system.

Objective Questions

1. What was the name given to the agricultural loans issued to peasants under Akbar?
2. What term described the system of land measurement and assessment?
3. Who headed the religious advisory council?



4. Which officer administered the tehsils?
5. What were the duties of the kotwal?
6. How was the Mughal state organised for administrative purposes?
7. Which officer was responsible for the treasury at the local level of administration?
8. Which official supervised the royal stores?
9. Who was the chief architect of the revenue system in Mughal territories?
10. Which officer maintained the muster-roll of soldiers?

Answers

1. Taccavi
2. Zabti
3. Sadr-i-Sadr
4. Shiqdara or Shiqdar-i-Shiqdaran
5. To take care of urban centres
6. The empire was divided into Subas, Subas into Sarkars, Sarkars into Parganas, and Parganas into villages.
7. Khazandar
8. Khan-i-Saman
9. Raja Todar Mal
10. Bakshi

Assignments

1. Examine the revenue divisions of the Mughal Empire.
2. Give a short account of the administrative divisions established under Emperor Akbar.
3. Write a brief note on the Zabti system of land revenue assessment during the Mughal period.

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UNIT

Mansabdari System and The Mughal Army

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand how the Mansabdari system functioned under Mughal rule
- ◆ comprehend the composition and structure of the Mughal army
- ◆ identify the principles underlying the operation of the Mansabdari system

Prerequisite

Akbar's reign is remembered not only for conquest and courtly anecdotes but for the distinctive administrative reforms he introduced. Every successful military campaign depended on a carefully organised system for moving troops, managing officials, and running the administration — and it was precisely this efficient structure that enabled Akbar to both expand and consolidate his empire. Among his many contributions, the Mansabdari system stands out as especially significant. It was a ranking system for officials and soldiers that allowed the Mughal state to keep track of positions and troop responsibilities, while also letting the emperor keep powerful nobles in check by assigning them defined rank and duty.

This unit explores how the Mansabdari system worked, how it linked to the Mughal army, and why it became central to Mughal governance, offering insight into how medieval rulers managed vast empires and armies without modern technology or communication systems.

Keywords

Zat, Sawar, Mansabdari system, Army, Administrative system, Cavalry, Infantry

Discussion

3.4.1 Mansabdari System

No empire ever survived on revenue collection alone. Akbar knew he needed a dependable army and a loyal, organised nobility. Akbar inherited an administrative system that was introduced by Shershah. The civil and military functions in the Mughal state were not separated under Akbar. He was able to maintain a good administrative system with the help of a strong army and an efficient bureaucracy. The soldiers carried out the duties of the police force, simultaneously defending the boundaries, protecting the forts, and fighting wars. During peacetime, they ensured the safety of the public roads and protected them from highway robbers and thieves. It was necessary to organise the military and the civil service. Akbar evolved a system of imperial services in his empire, which became popularly known as the mansabdari system. The system introduced by Akbar continued during the reign of his successors. From the available sources, it seems that Akbar started *mansabdari* in 1577 with a good deal of controversy. Simultaneously, he renewed the revenue system and introduced *zat* and *sawar*.

Under the mansabdari system, every officer was awarded a rank (*mansab*). The ranks ranged from 10 to 5000 for the nobles. Later on, the highest end of rank was fixed as 7000, which was achieved by nobles like Raja Man Singh. It continued as such until the reign of Aurangzeb. The whole system unfolded gradually. Initially, there was only one rank, *mansab*, which was later divided into two—*zat* and *sawar*. *Zat* stood for the status of a person and his due salary. The *sawar* rank was an indicator of the number of cavalymen that a person was required to maintain. A person who was required to

maintain as many *sawars* as his personal rank (*zat*) was placed in the first category of that rank. If he maintained more or fewer *sawars*, his rank changed. In this way, there were three categories in every rank.

Great care was taken in the quality of the *sawars* recruited. To ensure this, a roll of all soldiers called *chechra* was maintained, and his horse was branded with imperial marks. The imperial marking system of horses was called *dagh*. Periodic inspection of the contingent was conducted. Arabic and Iraqi breeds of horses were employed to ensure quality. Thus, every ten cavalymen had to maintain twenty horses. The Mughal contingent was a mixture of all branded groups—Mughals, Pathans, Hindustanis, and Rajputs. Besides cavalymen, bowmen, musketeers, sappers, and miners were also recruited to the army. The average salary of a *sawar* was rupees 20 per month. For infantrymen, it was 3 per month. The due salary was added to the salary of the *mansabdar* by assigning him a *jagir*. However, possession of a *jagir* did not grant any rights to the holder other than that of revenue collection of the area.

Historians do not find any parallel of *mansabdari* outside India. But some trace it to the decimal division of the army by Chengis Khan. There was also Mongol influence in the organisation of the *mansabdari* system. Persons holding rank below 500 *zat* were *mansabdars*, between 500 and 2500 were called *amirs*, and those who held beyond 2500 were called *amir-i-umda* or *amir-i-azam*. The term *mansabdar* was a generic term used for all three categories. Persons who were generally appointed as low *mansabdars* would gradually be promoted according to their merits. A *mansabdar* of low status would go up in category if he



proved himself and was favourable to the emperor. If a person of high category was not performing well, he would be de-promoted. Careers were based on talent.

From his salary, a *mansabdar* had to meet the expenses required for the elephants, horses, camels, mules, and carts. For example, a *mansabdar* having a *zat* of 500 rank had to maintain 340 horses, 100 elephants, 400 camels, 100 mules, and 160 carts. The horses and elephants were categorised, and later they were maintained centrally, but only from the salary of the *mansabs*. Horses were categorised into six groups, and elephants into five. Great care was taken in selecting the horses and elephants, as they formed the basis of the military. In those days, transport corps were also very important since they made the movement of the army easier. Artillery was becoming more important in those days. However, the *mansabdars* were paid well by the Mughal emperor. Though they spent their salary mostly to meet the expenses of the army, it is said that they were the highest-paid service in the world.

3.4.2 Mughal Army

Cavalry constituted the most important part of the Mughal army. A number of cavalymen were kept for the protection of Akbar as bodyguards called *walashahis*. There was also a set of gentleman troopers called *ahadis*. They received higher payment compared to the ordinary troopers. Clerks

of the imperial offices, painters of the court, and the foreman of the royal *karkhanas* were included in *ahadis*. There were also some nobles of great trust to the emperor who were answerable only to the emperor. They received a salary of rupees 800 per month. They had a separate muster-master. There was also infantry consisting of footmen called *piyadgan*, including porters, news-runners, swordsmen, wrestlers, and slaves.

Akbar had a great interest in fine breeds of horses, elephants, and guns. His royal stable had some fine breeds of horses and elephants. There were two sections of guns: heavy siege guns used for defence or assault, which were so heavy that they had to be pulled by 100 or 200 oxen and several elephants. The other section was a strong park of light artillery with the emperor. A number of Ottomans and Portuguese were employed in the artillery section. It was the strong army of Mughals that helped them to conquer the mainland of India and administer it for a long period. It is estimated that the Mughal army during Shah Jahan consisted of 2 lakh cavalymen and around 40,000 infantry. According to Bernier, Mughal infantry was ill-organised and not disciplined. The use of the flint-gun in the 17th century made it formidable for the enemies to win. By the time of Aurangzeb, artillery had improved a lot and foreigners were not employed in the artillery section as in the days of Akbar.

Recap

1. The growth of the Mughal Empire owed much to its disciplined army and sound administrative machinery.
2. Akbar relied on the Mansabdari system to structure both the army and the nobility.
3. Considerable care went into organising the army and selecting quality horses and elephants.

4. Akbar maintained a soldiers' register, known as the chehra.
5. Contingents raised by the nobles were drawn from diverse communities such as Mughals, Pathans, Rajputs, and Hindustanis.
6. The army included cavalry, archers, musketeers, sappers, and miners.
7. Pay for the sawars was not uniform and varied by rank.
8. A mansabdar's merit was the decisive factor in determining promotion or rank assignment.
9. During Akbar's reign, horses were branded under a system called dagh.
10. Mughal mansabdars were among the most highly paid officials anywhere in the world at that time.

Objective Questions

1. What name was given to the system of imperial service devised by Akbar?
2. What term described the horse-branding practice under the Mughal Empire?
3. In which year was the mansabdari system introduced?
4. What was the register of soldiers maintained under the Mughals called?
5. Who were the ahadis?
6. What were officials holding rank between 500 and 2500 known as?
7. Who qualified for the title amir-i-azam?
8. Which Mongol chief had earlier followed a decimal system comparable to mansabdari?
9. What was the average monthly salary of a sawar?
10. Which category of army personnel earned a monthly salary of three rupees?

Answers

1. Mansabdari system
2. Dagh
3. 1577
4. Chehra
5. Gentleman troopers
6. Amirs
7. Persons holding rank beyond 2500
8. Chengis Khan
9. 20 rupees
10. Infantryman

Assignments

1. Discuss the Mansabdari system of the Mughal Empire, describing its main features.
2. Analyse how the Mughal army was organised under Emperor Akbar, discussing its structure and major features.

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UNIT

Features of Mughal Society

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ Understand the composition of society during the Mughal period
- ◆ Comprehend the factors that shaped social formation in the Mughal era
- ◆ Understand the religious policy followed by Akbar

Prerequisite

Discussions of Akbar the Great often bring up figures such as Mahesh Das (Birbal), Raja Man Singh, and Tansen — a reminder that the Mughal Empire was a diverse, multi-religious society bringing together people of different backgrounds, cultures, and faiths. Akbar continues to be fondly remembered across communities in India, largely because of his policy of religious tolerance and his concern for the welfare of all sections of society. Rather than favouring any single group, he sought to treat people of different religions and communities fairly, drawing scholars, artists, warriors, and administrators from diverse backgrounds into his court and fostering a rich, inclusive social environment. This unit explores how Akbar achieved this, the policies he introduced to preserve harmony, the important figures at his court, and how mixed and diverse Mughal society had become during his reign. Let us look into the features of Mughal society.

Keywords

Zamindars, banjar, khudkasht, muzarin, kamin, Taccavi, Peasants

Discussion

Medieval Indian society, which was feudal in character, continued to exist during the Mughal rule. A feudal social structure seems to have existed even during the Mughal rule, with certain exceptions. Unlike the medieval rulers, the Mughal ruler was wealthy and all-powerful. Mughal society had three classes based on their economic status: rich, middle, and poor classes. The top layer of society was occupied by the rich class, who lived with maximum permissible luxuries and resources. The middle class was a feature that appeared during the Mughal period. The most neglected section of society was the poor class. These three sections differed from each other in terms of living standards and livelihood. Though the technologically agricultural sector was not developed, it contributed much to the growth of trade and commerce.

3.5.1 Social Organisation

The village society was organised unequally. The peasants who owned the land they cultivated were called *khudkasht*. The tenants called *muzarian* generally paid high revenue. The original settlers of the village called *khudkasht* belonged to dominant caste or castes. These castes dominated and were exploited by the zamindars, and in turn, they exploited weaker sections of society. The peasants cultivated diverse crops like cotton, indigo, *chay* (the red dye), sugarcane, oilseeds, etc., which could be locally processed and sold. They also cultivated food crops like wheat, rice, gram, barley, pulses, bajra, etc. The cash crops were cultivated

for the purpose of paying off the revenue, which was at a high rate. The Mughal state provided loans and incentives called *taccavi* to the peasants. In urban centres, the artisans, craftsmen, servants, soldiers, and manual workers constituted the largest section of society. This section was poor and afflicted mostly.

The ruling classes consisted of nobles and zamindars. The Mughal nobility was the privileged class. They were both Indians and foreigners. Under the Mughals, Hindus were also included in the nobility. They lived luxuriously with high salaries, and lent money to traders for interest, and participated in trading activities. They sometimes resorted to unfair means of exaction of services and illegal trading. The nobles represented different localities and religions. They patronised painters, musicians, poets, and scholars and promoted a composite culture.

The right of ownership of land was hereditary. Traditionally, anyone who owned land was primarily considered the owner of the land. An enterprising group of people utilised the cultivable land *banjar* and brought it under cultivation. Some *zamindars* possessed a certain portion of land which was traditionally under their custody, from where they collected revenue. The zamindars had their own armed forces, and they usually lived in *garhs* or forts.

The middle strata of society consisted mainly of traders and shopkeepers who were neither too rich nor too poor. However, some



of the merchants were very rich and enjoyed certain rights and privileges, traditionally. Yet they did not have administrative duties. The middle strata of society also included small *mansabdars*, minor shopkeepers, and small master craftsmen. Besides the musicians, artists, historians, scholars, *qazias*, theologians, and petty officials also constituted the middle class.

3.5.2 Standard of Living

From the accounts of the foreign travellers and traders, we get a picture of the standard of living during the Mughal Period. They have vividly depicted both extremes of Mughal social life: the rich and their extravagant lifestyle, the poor and their miserable existence. The ordinary people included peasants, artisans, and the labour class. Babur mentioned the *langotis* worn by men and the *sari* worn by women. He observed the poor condition of the common people. The same was attested by Ralph Fitch, a merchant from London who visited India by the end of the 16th century. Poor people went around barefoot, as leather was a costly material. Village people generally lived in mud huts. They used bamboo mats,

cots, and utensils made by the village potters. The bell-metal and copper plates and utensils were expensive.

The staple food of the villagers consisted of millets, pulses, and regional varieties. In the coastal areas of Bengal, fish was used, while in South India, meat was consumed. In the north, people used *chapatis* made of wheat and coarse grains with green vegetables. Ghee and oil were much cheaper than food grains and formed a part of the poor man's diet. Sugar and salt were more expensive. They were able to keep more cattle, which provided more milk and milk products. The account of the poor standard of living could be traced to the scarcest income. The absence of liquid money was a reason for this. Income was never fixed. The village artisans were paid in the form of commodities, which were fixed by customary practices. Those who could not afford agricultural implements often tilled the land of the landlords. Landless peasants and labourers were considered untouchables or *kamin*. The most afflicted section was the peasants and the village artisans who had to pay a high revenue in spite of their scarce income.

Recap

- ◆ Society in medieval India retained a feudal structure.
- ◆ Backed by considerable wealth and power, the Mughal rulers sustained this economic base.
- ◆ Social inequality was clearly visible even at the village level.
- ◆ Tenant cultivators known as Muzarins bore the heaviest revenue burden.
- ◆ Cotton, indigo, red dye, sugarcane, and oilseeds were among the principal cash crops grown.
- ◆ Peasants received taccavi loans from the state as an incentive.

- ◆ The ruling class was made up of zamindars and nobles.
- ◆ Nobles possessed sufficient wealth to patronise art and architecture.
- ◆ While the wealthy led a lavish lifestyle, the peasantry lived simply.

Objective Questions

- ◆ What term describes the character of medieval Indian society?
- ◆ What were the three classes into which Mughal society was divided?
- ◆ On what basis was Mughal society socially divided?
- ◆ Which group bore the highest rate of land revenue in Mughal society?
- ◆ What food crops did the peasants cultivate?
- ◆ What was the name of the state loan extended to peasants?
- ◆ Where did the armed retainers of the zamindars reside?
- ◆ What term was used to denote the untouchable classes?
- ◆ What were peasants who cultivated their own land called?
- ◆ Name the London merchant who visited India towards the end of the 16th century.

Answers

1. Feudal
2. Rich, middle, and poor class
3. Economic status
4. Muzarin
5. Wheat, rice, barley, pulses, and bajra



6. Taccavi
7. Garhs (forts)
8. Kamin
9. Khudkasht
10. Ralph Fitch

Assignments

1. Examine the composition of Mughal society.
2. Outline the important features of social life during the Mughal period.

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UNIT

Marathas under Shivaji

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the origins and growth of the Maratha kingdom
- ◆ identify the factors behind the emergence of Maratha power
- ◆ become familiar with the administrative system Shivaji established

Prerequisite

Even before the Mughals extended their reach into the Deccan, the region was already home to established local powers, among them the Marathas — a warrior community native to the hills and plateaus of present-day Maharashtra. For years, Maratha chiefs and soldiers had served under the Deccan Sultanates of Ahmadnagar and Bijapur, and prominent Maratha families such as the Mores, Ghatages, and Nimbalkars controlled small territories, but no single leader had ever united them. This changed in the seventeenth century with the rise of Shivaji Bhonsle, who, through military skill, shrewd diplomacy, and an intimate knowledge of the local terrain and people, brought the scattered Maratha groups together into a strong, organised kingdom. Under his leadership, the Marathas rose to become a major regional power, challenging the Deccan Sultanates and posing a threat to Mughal ambitions in the south.

This unit examines how the Marathas rose to prominence under Shivaji, focusing on the political strategies, military tactics, and administrative systems he used to strengthen his kingdom.

Keywords

Sardeshmukhi, Chauth, Ashtapradhan, Administration, Shivaji, Treaty of Purandar

Discussion

3.6.1 Shivaji's Early Conquests and Expansion

Shivaji, son of Shahji, who was the ruler of Poona *Jagir* and Jija Bai, was born in 1630. When his father passed away, he was a minor and was placed under the care of his guardian and mentor, Dadaji Kondadeo. He managed to capture a number of hill forts like Raigarh, Kondana, and Torna during the years 1645-47. After the death of his mentor, he became the sole master of his father's *jagir*. He captured Jalvi from the Maratha chief Chandra Rao More. He thus became the undisputed leader of the region. Firstly, he entered into negotiations with Aurangzeb, and then he changed sides and conducted raids in Mughal areas. While Aurangzeb concentrated in the north, Shivaji became busy consolidating his possessions in the Deccan. He managed to defeat the Bijapuri noble Afzal Khan treacherously, in retaliation for the latter's treachery. He thus managed to conquer the fort of Panhala and marched to the south Konkan and Kolhapur districts.

Shivaji's growing power and reputation attracted many young warriors and administrators from across the region. Alarmed by his rise, Aurangzeb dispatched his maternal uncle, Shaista Khan, as governor of the Deccan. Shaista Khan had some initial victories; he occupied Poona in 1660, and the conquest of Konkan followed. In 1664, Shivaji occupied Surat, the most important Mughal port on the western coast, and looted it.

3.6.1.1 Treaty of Purandar

Following the Mughal defeat, Raja Jai Singh was appointed the general of the Mughal army to defeat Shivaji. He was given unlimited authority over the army to subdue the Maratha forces under Shivaji. Jai Singh tactfully moved and alienated Shivaji from his neighbouring states, marched on Poona, and invaded the Fort of Purandar, where Shivaji had lodged his family. He besieged the fort to pressurise Shivaji. Thus, Shivaji was forced to open negotiations with the Mughal Commander Jai Singh. They reached a mutual agreement on the following conditions: The Treaty of Purandhar signed in 1665 included the following:

1. Twenty-three forts, which were located in rich revenue-yielding areas, were to be ceded to the Mughals, and only the remaining 12 forts with less income were to be under Shivaji.
2. High revenue-generating territories in the Bijapur-Konkan area would remain under Shivaji, and Balaghat, the territory which he was about to conquer, was also granted to him. In return, he had to pay an annual sum of forty lakhs *huns* in installments to the Mughal court.

Shivaji requested exemption from personal service to the Mughals, and his son Sambaji was given a *mansab* of 5000.



Shivaji agreed to join the Deccan campaign of the Mughals. However, Aurangzeb was dubious about the Mughal-Maratha attack on Bijapur. Yet Jai Singh wanted to keep him closer to the Mughals in the Deccan invasion, which resulted in failure. The differences between the emperor and Shivaji increased day by day, and the emperor wanted to teach him a lesson in spite of Jai Singh's lenient attitude. Shivaji still managed to escape Mughal arrest and kept quiet for two years. The befriending of Shivaji proved fatal for Aurangzeb and was considered one of the

diplomatic mistakes he made.

3.6.2 Shivaji's Administration and Achievements

Shivaji was crowned *Chatrapati* at Raigarh in 1674. Being the most powerful Maratha chief, he assumed a position similar to that of the Deccan Sultans. He started acting as an independent ruler rather than a *jagirdar*. He established marital relations with other chiefs and strengthened his position.

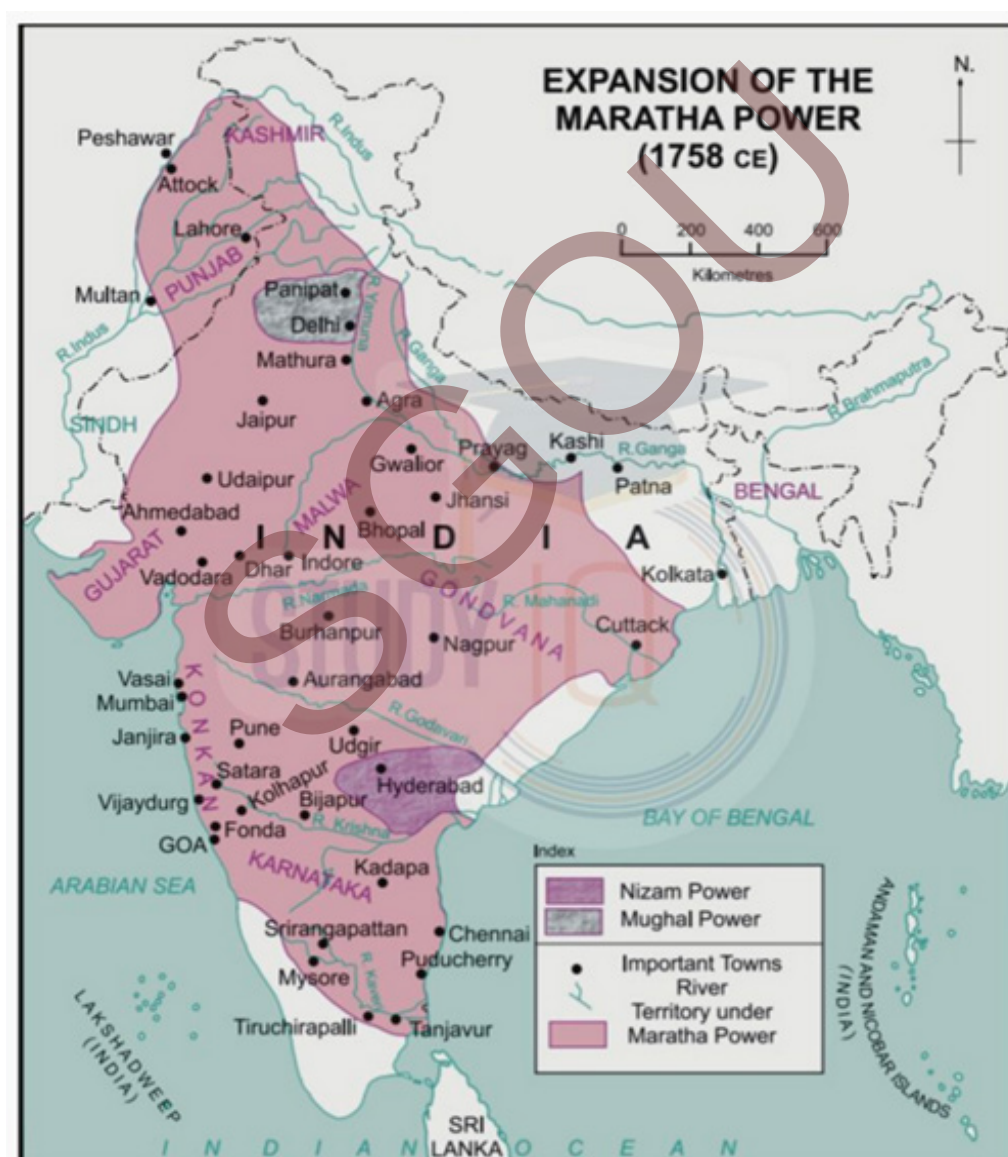


Fig 3.6.1 Extend of Maratha Empire. <https://www.studyiq.com/articles/maratha-empire/>

The priests proclaimed him as high class *Kshathriya* in a formal function. With the help of his brothers Shivaji invaded Bijapur and Qutab Shah signed an agreement with him whereby he agreed to pay Five lakh rupees to Shivaji. The treaty was unfavourable for Qutab Shah and Shivaji refused to share the spoils of his Karnataka expedition with him. It was the last major expedition of Shivaji. He passed away in 1680 CE.

The administrative system founded by Shivaji was influenced by those of Deccani Sultans. He had a council of ministers who were called *Ashtapradhan*. Each minister was responsible to the king directly. The minister in charge of general administration and finance was called *Peshwa*. Then there was *sar-i-naubat* or *senapati* which was a highly respected position. It was vested with a leading Maratha Chief. The accountant was called *Majumdar* and intelligence, posts and household affairs were the department was under the control of *wakenavis*. The minister in charge of correspondence was *surunavis* or *chitnis*. All ceremonies were conducted under the supervision of *dabir* who was also in charge of foreign affairs. *Nyayadhis* and *Panditarao* looked after the affairs of justice and charitable grants.

Shivaji was well known for his revenue system. General mode of payment was cash payment while there were also examples of revenue grants *saranjam*. The army was strictly trained and well disciplined. The

plunder was subjected to strict accounts. There were 30000 to 40000 cavalry for the regular army which was called *paga* which was placed under *havalgars* who were paid regularly. Mavali foot soldiers and gunners were appointed to protect the forts.

The revenue system of Shivaji seems to have been inspired by that of Malik Amber. A new revenue system was introduced by Annaji Datto in 1679. Shivaji did not abolish the *zamindari* system, instead strictly supervised the *mirasdars* who had hereditary rights over the land. Gradually this section became powerful and had forts and castles of their own. However, Shivaji suppressed this section and destroyed their mansions. To generate additional income, he introduced a contribution on the neighbouring Mughal land which became known as *Chauth*. *Sardeshmukhi* was another tax introduced by Shivaji.

Shivaji reduced the power of *Deshmukhs* and concentrated power on himself. He had great vision in organising the army which moved rapidly at his orders. The payment of the army depended largely upon the spoils of war with neighbouring states. His state was a regional state with a popular base. Shivaji was an expert in guerrilla warfare techniques. He represented the assertion of the will of the people in local areas encroached by the Mughals.

Recap

- ◆ Shivaji subdued neighbouring territories and emerged as the most formidable Maratha chief of his time.
- ◆ In 1664, he captured and plundered Surat, the Mughals' most important western port, dealing a significant blow to Mughal prestige.
- ◆ Shivaji concluded the Treaty of Purandar with the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1665.



- ◆ Shivaji was formally crowned Chatrapati at Raigarh fort in 1674.
- ◆ Among his Ashtapradhan council, the Peshwa held the most important position.
- ◆ The council also included the Senapati, Majumdar, Chitnis, Nyayadish, and Panditarao.
- ◆ Shivaji built and maintained a well-organised revenue system.
- ◆ Chauth and Sardeshmukhi were two new taxes he introduced.
- ◆ He curtailed the authority of the Deshmukhs, concentrating power in his own hands.

Objective Questions

1. Who acted as Shivaji's mentor?
2. Who was the Mughal ruler contemporary with Shivaji?
3. Which treaty did Shivaji sign with the Mughals in 1665?
4. What name was given to Shivaji's Council of Ministers?
5. Which important Mughal port did Shivaji attack and plunder in 1664?
6. Who held the most important position among Shivaji's Council of Ministers?
7. Which minister was in charge of accounts under Shivaji's administration?
8. Who introduced a new revenue system under Shivaji in 1679 CE?
9. What title did Shivaji adopt for himself?
10. What was the tax Shivaji introduced on neighbouring Mughal territories called?
11. What did the Sardeshmukhi tax, introduced by Shivaji, involve?



Answers

1. Dadaji Kondadeo
2. Aurangzeb
3. Treaty of Purandar
4. Ashtapradhan
5. Surat
6. Peshwa
7. Majumdar
8. Annaji Datto
9. Chatrapati
10. Chauth
11. An additional tax of 10% collected from neighbouring Mughal territories, over and above the Chauth

Assignments

1. Trace the early career and accomplishments of Shivaji.
2. Write a detailed note on the Treaty of Purandar (1665), describing the circumstances that led to this treaty between Shivaji and the Mughal Empire.
3. Describe the administrative system established by Shivaji.



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BLOCK

Economic and Social Life Under The Mughals



UNIT

Village Life and the Mass

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the life of common people under Mughal rule
- ◆ identify the challenges faced by the village population under the Mughals
- ◆ recognise the factors that affect village life under a certain political system

Prerequisite

The Mughal period is often remembered through its emperors, Babur, Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan, and associated with wealth and cultural splendour. Yet the majority of the Indian population at the time lived in villages, working the land under local customs and administrative arrangements quite distinct from the world of the imperial court. Rural society during this period was organised around cultivation, tax collection, and social structures of caste, religion, and gender, all of which shaped daily life away from the palaces and battlefields typically associated with Mughal history.

Keywords

Zamindars, Kamin, Chronicles, Raiyat, Khud-kasht, Pahi-kasht, Begar, Muqaddam, Jangli

Discussion

4.1.1 Village Life and the Masses under the Mughals

We get information about village life during the Mughals and their settlements from the sources left by European traders and travellers. These accounts give a vivid description of the lifestyle of the ruling class and the nobles. Works like Baburnama and the chronicles and documents from the Mughal courts give a picture of the grinding poverty at the grass-roots level.

4.1.1.1 The Peasantry and Agricultural Production

The peasant at the village level was called the *raiyyat*, whom we have mentioned as *Mazarin* earlier. They were also called *kisan* or *asami*. There were two kinds of peasants: *khud-kasht* and *pahi-kasht*. Those who lived on the land they tilled and cultivated were called *khud-kasht*. The *pahi-kasht* were contractual peasants who cultivated a tract of land outside their village of residence. Not every peasant possessed animals for cultivation or agricultural implements or tools. The peasants generally depended on the monsoon to cultivate rice, and then wheat and millets were cultivated. Along with the monsoon, irrigation was also needed for some crops.

At the village level, there was diversified production of food crops, which included wheat, rice, gram, barley, pulses, bajra, etc. The raw materials produced and processed locally included cotton, indigo, natural dye, sugarcane, oilseeds, etc. These were called cash crops, as they paid the revenue at a high rate and in cash. During this period, silk and tusser cultivation became widespread in Bengal. Tobacco and maize were cultivated from the 17th century onwards. As long as a peasant paid the rent, he could possess

land. The land was also transferable. The ownership of the land was hereditary. The life of a peasant was controlled by the seasons and the social conventions and customary dues. The condition of the landless and the menials was even more pathetic.

4.1.1.2 Village Administration

The village was administered by the headman and the village *panchayat*. Elders with hereditary rights over the land were the members of the *panchayat*. The village headman was called *muqaddam* or *mandal*. There was an assistant called *patwari*, who assisted the headman in preparation of village accounts. There was also a caste *panchayat* or *jati panchayat*.

4.1.1.3 Income, Wages, and Inequality

The standard of living was determined by income and wages. Since there were hardly any monetary transactions at the village level, it is hard to comprehend the income graph of the large masses. Village artisans were paid in kind, which was customary. Those peasants who could not afford their own agricultural implements and tools tilled the land of the *zamindars*. The landless peasants and labourers were often called the untouchables (*kamin*). There were frequent famines. The land-owning group often paid the land revenue at customary rates. They used to give their bullocks and ploughs in rent to the poor tenants, who would pay a high rate of customary dues. The *khud kasht* and the *mazarian* groups were the largest groups at the village level. Inequality prevailed at the village level. These caste groups exploited the weaker sections. They were exploited by their superior groups, the *zamindars*.



4.1.1.4 Food, Clothing, and Housing

There was a scarcity of clothes for the common people. *Langota* was worn by men and *sari* by women. The observation of Babur had been attested by European travellers and scholars like Ralph Fitch. Common people moved around barefoot. The common people lived in mud houses thatched with palm leaves or straw. The walls of the mud houses were either made from a mixture of bamboo and mud or with natural sheets prepared from coconut branches. Their furniture was also nature-friendly. They used cots, bamboo mats, and earthen vessels for domestic purposes for storing grains or keeping water. The floor was polished with a cow dung and charcoal mixture. They also used brooms made from reeds or grass. The use of copper and bell metals was unfamiliar to them.

The staple food of the common people consisted of rice, millet, and pulses. In coastal areas, fish was used, and in the southern peninsula, meat was also consumed. In the northern region, *chapatis* made of wheat or coarse grain were prepared for meals, which they ate along with leafy vegetables. The common people had their food in the evening, and during the day they chewed pulses or other parched grain. Ghee and milk were produced widely and were cheaper. Salt and sugar were more expensive. The availability of pastoral lands prompted them to keep more and more cattle, leading to the production and consumption of milk and milk products.

4.1.1.5 Gender Roles and Social Practices

Both men and women were part of production activities. While men did work like tilling the land and ploughing, the womenfolk engaged in sowing, weeding, harvesting, and threshing. However, the

taboos related to women's biological functions continued to exist. Menstruating women were not permitted to touch the seeds or plough. They were also entrusted with spinning yarn, preparation of clay for pottery, and stitching and embroidery work. However, women's mortality rates seem to be lower in society due to a variety of reasons. Such a situation led to other practices like bride price and remarriages. Women also possessed property rights and the right to inherit property.

The village community was characterised by caste and discrimination. Though the resources were abundant, the majority of the village community was relegated to poverty on a caste basis. Among the Muslim community, those who were engaged in scavenging work were given residences outside the village. Caste, poverty and social status were interrelated at the lower level of society compared to the middle strata. There existed unpaid services or *begar* which were imposed by the superior castes on the lower castes. There were artisans of different types at the village level during this period. There were potters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, and carpenters who were paid by a share of the harvest or by a piece of land by the villagers. Such plots of land were called *miras* or *watan* in some places.

4.1.1.6 Tribal Communities

The forest areas of different regions of India were inhabited by forest tribes who lived in tune with pristine nature. They were termed as *jangli*. They earned their livelihood by collecting forest resources. They followed seasonal livelihood activities. In the spring, they collected forest products, and in the summer, they took to fishing. The dues they had to give to the state often included elephants too. They also collected honey, nuts, fruits, wax and medicinal plants from the forests. Tribes were under chieftains, who sometimes became zamindars. Tribes



recruited an army from their own lineage.
By the 16th century, the process of transition from the position of a tribal head to the king became fully developed.

Recap

- ◆ The peasants were called raiyats.
- ◆ There were two kinds of peasants called khud-kashtand pahi-kasht.
- ◆ Common people led a simple lifestyle.
- ◆ They used rice, millets, and pulses for food.
- ◆ The largest group at the village level was called Mazarin.
- ◆ There was inequality at the village level.
- ◆ The plots given to the potters, carpenters, blacksmiths, and goldsmiths were called miras or watan.
- ◆ Cash crops were cultivated in India during this period.
- ◆ Various crops were cultivated by the peasants at the village level.
- ◆ The forest land was inhabited by the tribes who followed seasonal livelihoods.

Objective Questions

1. Name the term used to denote the peasants at the village level.
2. Which were the two types of peasants under the Mughals?
3. What were the major food items cultivated by the people?
4. What were the major cash crops cultivated?
5. Who were Muqaddams?
6. Who was Jangli?
7. Who assisted the village headman?



Answers

1. Raiyat
2. Khud-Kasht and Pahi Kasht
3. Wheat, rice, gram, barley, pulses, and bajra were the major items of cultivation.
4. Cotton, indigo, natural dye, sugarcane, and oil seeds were the major cash crops of the period.
5. The village headman was called muqaddam or mandal.
6. The tribes residing in the forest areas were called Jangli.
7. Patwari assisted the village headman.

Assignments

1. Discuss the socio-economic condition of the peasantry in Mughal India.
2. Describe the food habits, clothing, and housing patterns of the common people during the Mughal period.
3. Examine the role of women in agricultural and domestic production activities in Mughal villages.
4. How was the village administration organised under the Mughals?
5. Write a short note on the tribal communities during the Mughal period.

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UNIT

Land Rights and Revenue System

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the revenue structure during the Mughal period
- ◆ assess the impact of revenue policies on society during the Mughal reign
- ◆ discern features of Mughal revenue policies

Prerequisite

The term zamindar is generally associated with large landownership, a figure familiar from folk tales and local histories. During the Mughal period, zamindars did not cultivate land themselves; rather, they controlled it and collected revenue from those who worked it, holding a privileged position often tied to caste and social standing. Land revenue formed the financial backbone of the Mughal Empire, and the system of land rights and revenue collection it established was later retained, with modifications, under British rule. It is a central feature of Mughal administration and its later colonial transformation.

Keywords

Ray, Amil-Guzar, Hasil, Jama, Karoris, Dahsala, Bigha, Pargana, Zabti, Galla-Bakshi, Kankut, Batai, Nasaq, Polaj, Parati, Chachar

Discussion

4.2.1 Land Revenue Administration under Akbar

Revenue was the major source of income for the public treasury. Payment of revenue was an indicator of subjugation, while non-payment was considered a symbol of revolt. Throughout the Mughal period, the majority of land under them was agricultural. The population consisted of common men who lived in villages. They depended directly on agriculture. Akbar followed a revenue policy that was similar to that of Sher Shah Suri in content and in spirit. It was in 1582 that Raj Todar Mal introduced a revenue system in Mughal territories, namely the *Ain-i-Dahsala* or ten years revenue settlement. The system dealt directly with cultivators (*ryots*), which is why later British administrators likened it to a Ryotwari-type system. The same was later adopted by the English East India Company for the revenue settlement of South India with certain modifications.

Initially, the system was introduced in eight provinces like Malwa, Allahabad, Agra, Oudh, Ajmer, Delhi, Lahore and Multan. The settlement consisted of a process of five stages such as assessment of the land, its classification, assessment of the government demand in kind, conversion of the government demand into cash, and the mode of collection. A uniform method of land assessment was adopted based on a standard unit of assessment. The exact boundaries of the assessed village were traced, and the exact area of the land to be assessed was measured. Thin bamboo strips joined by tightly clipped iron rings were used for the assessment of land.

Land revenue constituted the major economic base of the Mughal empire.

Therefore, it was necessary to ensure the regular incoming of revenue to the royal treasury. However, it was a tedious task to assess and fix the revenue for the fast-expanding empire. Akbar was able to solve this problem to an extent. A team of officers under the office of the *diwan*, consisting of the revenue officials and the record keepers, became agents in shaping agrarian relations in medieval India. There were two tasks before Akbar; the first was the assessment of the land area, and the second was the actual process of collecting the revenue. He adopted the system followed by Sher Shah and modified it to fit the changed conditions. The amount assessed was called *hasil* whereas the amount collected was called *jama*. The revenue collection was vested with the *Amil-guzar*.

The revenue was preferred in cash, but it could be paid in kind, too. Though maximum revenue was ensured by the assessment, excuses were made considering the local situations. The process of measurement and assessment continued during the period of successive rulers, too.

The *qanungos*, the hereditary holders of the land, were asked to brief the local conditions and report the actual produce, state of cultivation, existing prices, and related matters. However, the deceit of the *qanungos* created a mess of the system in many places. It also created many problems for the cultivators, too. Akbar appointed officials called *karoris* who were responsible for the collection of revenues and supervision of the *qanungos*. They submitted a fair report on productivity, local prices, and actual produce.



4.2.1.1 The *Dahsala* or Ten Year Settlement System

Akbar then started a new system called *dahsala* in 1580. Under this system, the average produce of different products for the current year and the average prices of the last ten years were calculated. The state share was fixed as one-third of the total share. The state share was calculated in *maunds* and stated in cash. On the basis of the average prices, the state demand was fixed as one rupee per *bigha*. *Parganas* with the same productivity were grouped into separate assessment circles. Therefore, the peasants had to pay on the basis of both local prices and local produce. In case of natural disasters, the peasants were given omissions for revenue payments. As stated earlier, the system of measurement of land and assessment was known as the *zabti* system.

4.2.1.2 Revenue Collection Methods under Akbar

Akbar followed different systems for collecting revenue. *Galla-bakshi* or *batai* was the oldest practice of revenue settlement followed by him. It was the practice of dividing the produce equally between the peasant and the state. The assessment was taken when the crop was still in the field or just after cutting or after the process of threshing. Though this was a fair system, it needed a fair army and a team of honest officials who would do the assessment fairly. Under *batai*, the revenue could be paid in cash or in kind. The peasants were given a choice between *zabti* and *batai*. Since the demands in the case of crops like cotton, indigo, oil seeds, and sugarcane were in cash, they were

called cash crops. Another system followed by Akbar was *nasaq*. Under this, based on the past payments, a rough calculation of the payable amount was made. According to some scholars, it was calculating the dues of a peasant, while others think that it was both the assessment of the crops and the past experience and then fixing the rates. This system was also known as *kankut*.

4.2.1.3 Land Classification and Agricultural Incentives under Akbar

Continuity of cultivation was an important factor in calculating the revenue of a specific area of land. The land that was continuously cultivated was called *polaj*, while the uncultivated land was called *parati* or fallow. Land that was left fallow for two to three years was called *Chachar*, and if not all cultivated after that, it was called *banjar*. The land was also classified into good, middling, and bad. One-third of the actual produce was demanded as revenue. However, it underwent revision on the basis of productivity and assessment.

The state undertook measures to expand cultivation, especially under the rule of Akbar. He instructed the revenue collectors not to pressure the peasants. The needy peasants were given incentives for agriculture called *taccavi* for purchasing implements, seeds, and animals. The loan was recovered in installments. This helped the peasants to bring larger areas of land under cultivation. The peasants also enjoyed some traditional rights over the land like the zamindars. The land could not be sold as long as they paid revenue. The *dahsala* was a permanent settlement with a provision to modify it.

Glossary

<i>Term</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>Bigha</i>	A traditional measure of land area in South Asia, varying locally from about 1/3 to 1 acre.
<i>Maund</i>	A traditional unit of weight, commonly used in India, roughly equal to 37 kilograms.
<i>Dahsala System</i>	A ten-year average revenue settlement introduced by Akbar in 1580, fixing state demand based on the average produce and prices over ten years.
<i>Zabti System</i>	A method of revenue assessment based on careful measurement and classification of land, where tax was fixed in cash based on average productivity.
<i>Batai (Galal-bakhshi)</i>	Revenue collection method where the produce was divided between the cultivator and the state, usually on a 50-50 basis (either in kind or cash).
<i>Nasaq (Kankut)</i>	A revenue system that roughly calculated revenue demand based on past collections and estimates, often used for convenience.
<i>Polaj</i>	Land under regular, continuous cultivation.
<i>Parati</i>	Fallow land temporarily left uncultivated.
<i>Chachar</i>	Land left fallow for two to three years.
<i>Banjar</i>	Land left uncultivated for more than three years or abandoned.
<i>Amil-guzar</i>	Revenue collector responsible for collecting the assessed land tax from cultivators.
<i>Qanungo</i>	Hereditary revenue officer who maintained records of land, crops, and assessment details at the local level.
<i>Karori</i>	Officials appointed by Akbar for supervising revenue collection and overseeing the work of Qanungos.
<i>Taccavi</i>	Agricultural loans given by the state to needy peasants for buying seeds, implements, or animals; repaid in easy installments.

Recap

1. Revenue was the major source of income for the Mughal empire.
2. Akbar followed the traditional system of assessment and collection of revenue.
3. Raja Todar Mal was the brain behind the organisation of the revenue system.
4. A team of officials under the office of *Diwan* was responsible for the recording and collection of taxes.
5. The amount calculated was called *hasil* and the amount collected was called *Jama*.
6. Revenue collection was vested in the office of *Amal Guzar*.
7. The traditional landholders were called *qanungo*, who were responsible for reporting price, status of cultivation, existing prices, and related matters.
8. *Karoris* were responsible for revenue collection and supervised the *qanungos*.
9. Under the revenue settlement of the Mughals, the average produce of different crops in a year was fixed as one rupee per *bigha*.
10. The system of land revenue and land assessment was known as the *zabt* system.
11. The entire land was divided into *polaj*, *parati*, *chachar*, and *banjar*.
12. The needy peasants were given incentives in the form of agricultural loans called *taccavi*.
13. The oldest practice of revenue collection under Akbar was called *Galia-Bakshi* or *batai*.

Objective Questions

1. Which revenue settlement was introduced by Raja Todarmal in 1582?
2. Whose revenue settlement was followed by Akbar with some modifications?
3. Which office was responsible for collecting the revenue?
4. Which terms were used to denote the assessed tax and collected tax?
5. What was the uncultivated land called during the Mughal period?
6. What name was given to the land which was continuously cultivated?
7. What was the land called if it was cultivated for two or three years and then left fallow?
8. If the land was not at all cultivated after two to three years, what was it known as?
9. Who were the Qanungos in the Mughal revenue administration?
10. Name the agricultural loan that existed during the period of Akbar.
11. The oldest system of revenue collection under Akbar was termed as ?
12. The revenue collection based on the rough calculation of the past payments under Akbar was called?

Answers

1. Ain-i-Dahsala or Ten year settlement
2. Sher Shah Suri's
3. Office of Diwan
4. Hasil and Jama
5. Parati
6. Polaj



7. Chachar
8. Banjar
9. The traditional land holders who were responsible in reporting price, status of cultivation, existing prices and related matters.
10. Taccavi
11. Galla-Bakshi or Batai
12. Nasq

Assignments

1. Examine how the land revenue influenced the administration and agrarian society of the Mughal Empire.
2. Discuss the Dahsala system introduced by Akbar. What were its key features, and how did it attempt to address the challenges of land assessment and revenue collection?
3. Explain the different methods of revenue collection under Akbar.
4. Assess the role of revenue officials like the Diwan, Amil-guzar, Qanungos, and Karoris in the Mughal revenue administration.
5. Analyse the classification of agricultural land under the Mughal empire.

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UNIT

Zamindari System

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the nature of the zamindari system under the Mughals
- ◆ familiarised themselves with the land relations during the Mughal period
- ◆ made aware of the nature of the economic structure of Mughal society

Prerequisite

The Zamindari system is often associated with British India and its treatment of farmers, but it predates British rule, having existed from the Mughal period onward. Zamindars functioned as local intermediaries between the state and the village, collecting land taxes from cultivators and remitting them to the ruling authority. In return, they held considerable power, wealth, and privilege within their regions, generally without cultivating land themselves. This system of intermediary control over land and revenue was a defining feature of medieval Indian administration and later influenced tax-collection methods adopted by the British.

Keywords

Zamindar, Zamindari System, Mughal Revenue Administration, Hereditary Rights, Land Revenue, Peasants, Raiyati Land, Milkiyat, Revenue Collection

Discussion

4.3.1 Zamindari System under the Mughals

4.3.1.1. Origin and Meaning of the Term 'Zamindar'

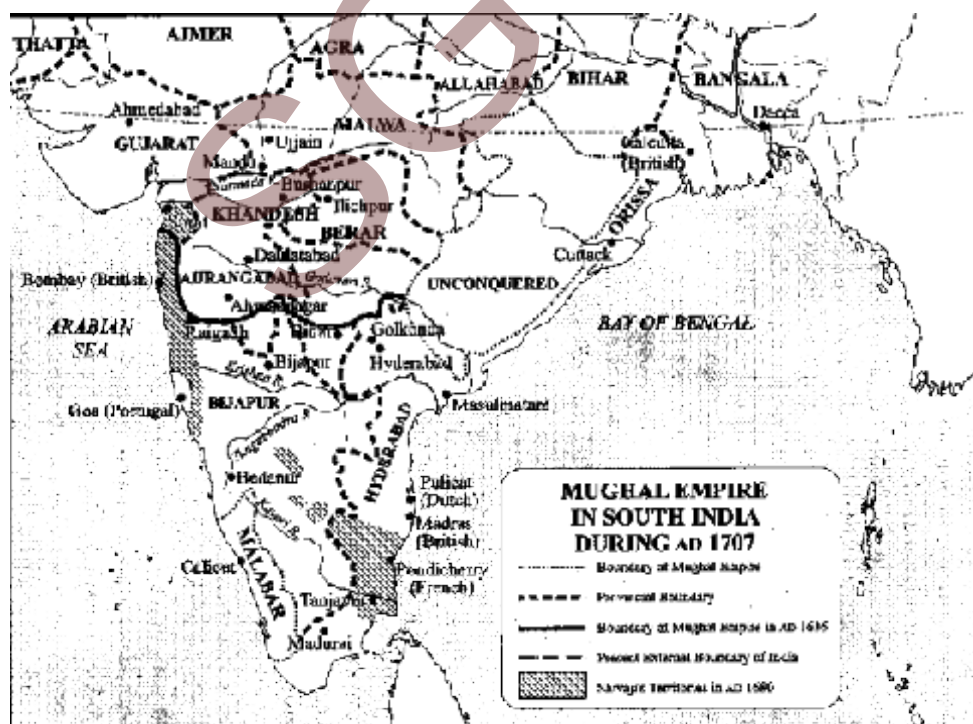
Traditionally, a *zamindar* was a person who occupied a *zamin* or land. In fact, it is the combination of two Urdu words, *zamin* and *dar*, originally coming from the Persian language. Under Turkish and Iranian rulers, the term was coined and became widely used by the time of the Mughal rule. The Mughal rulers found it feasible to collect revenue from the people with the help of *zamindars*.

It is widely accepted that the term *zamindari* was used in the fourteenth century. During the Mughal period, especially during that of Akbar, the term stood for 'anyone who had a hereditary claim over a portion of the

peasant's products.' There were also areas without *zamindars*, in which case the land was called *raiyyati*. The Mughals maintained their economy so well with the support of the *zamindari* system that existed in the empire. The system was responsible for revenue and military administration and maintained law and order.

4.3.1.2 Role of Zamindars

The personal ownership of the land by a class of revenue collectors was a system that existed in India from ancient periods onwards. Under the Mughals, the descendants of old ruling families possessed small portions of their ancestral land. There were Rajputs and other ruling families who had controlled their principalities on their own. They collected revenue from individual peasants and kept up to twenty-five percent for themselves. The difference between the revenue collected



Source: Fig. Expansion of Mughal Empire in South India during 1667, Satish Chandra, History of Medieval India, Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2007, p.369.



and the share remitted to the government was his personal income. When the peasant's share reached its maximum, a deduction of 10 percent was fixed as the peasant's share. Besides the fiscal claim, the zamindars also extracted turban tax (*dastar shumari*) and house tax (*khana shumari*).

The *zamindars* under the Mughals formed a part of the nobility. They were a privileged class. The ownership rights were hereditary in India. According to tradition, anyone who brought the land was considered its owner. The surplus provided by the peasants was shared between the King, the nobles, and the *zamindars*. The *zamindars* enjoyed considerable influence over economic life-agricultural production, handicrafts, and trade activities. Large areas of waste land (*banjar*) were brought under cultivation, and the owners of such lands became *zamindars* and collected revenue from the peasants. Such a right was called the *taluka* of the *zamindar* or *his zamindari*. The peasants who actually tilled the land and cultivated it could not be dispossessed as long as they paid the revenue. Both the *zamindars* and the peasants enjoyed traditional rights over the land. The *rajas* who ruled over them were also called *zamindars* according to Persian writers. However, they held a more prestigious position than those who collected the land revenue. The *zamindars* maintained their own armed forces. They lived in forts called *garhs*, which were both a place of refuge and a symbol of status. The *zamindar's* power was symbolised by these forts. As landed nobility, they held the highest rank in India's social order.

The *zamindars* had connections with the people of their locality. They had a clear-cut idea about the productivity of the land. Their *zamindari* area was inhabited by a number of people belonging to different castes, clans, and tribes. The section of *zamindars* could be found all over the country. However, their name differed according to the region.

They were also known as *deshmukh patil*, *nayak*, etc. Thus, they formed an integral part of medieval society and could not be undermined at any cost. Compared to the other sections of the nobility, *zamindars* had less income. Nothing can be specifically said about their standard of living.

The *zamindars* acquired their pre-eminent position by virtue of their caste and the services they rendered for the state. The land possessed by the *zamindars* was known as *milkiyat*. This land was cultivated with the help of hired labourers, and the land could be mortgaged as they liked. Since they were entrusted with the tax collection, they were powerful politically and economically. They had control over the military, and it served as another source of power. Some of them had their own fortresses, which added to their power. They also possessed cavalry, artillery, and infantry. In the Mughal system, they only formed a narrow group. According to some of the medieval sources, they belonged to the upper caste groups. The combination of Brahmana-Rajput groups dominated the rural societies.

4.3.1.3 Types of Zamindars and Regional Variations

The *zamindars* might have originated by conquering the weaker people by a powerful chieftain. The state usually approved the *zamindari* by an order and attested the expansion of *zamindari* (the control area under a *zamindar*). However, there was also gradual possession of landed areas by *zamindars* with proper documentation, which was more legal. It happened through land grants, occupation of new lands, transfer of rights, and by the order of the state. There was also a lineage-based process of becoming *zamindars*. The case of *Jats* and *Rajputs* may be cited as examples. In central and south-western India, the agro-pastoralists (*Sadgops*) became powerful *zamindars* in this way.

The occupation and settlement of new areas were promoted by the *zamindars*. They encouraged the cultivation and settlement of peasants in new areas by extending them cash loans. The sale and purchase of *the zamindaris* increased the pace of monetisation. Besides, the *zamindars* also sold the products from their private land (*milkiyat*). There are examples of markets established by the *zamindars* where the peasants also sold their products. Though there are not many examples of the exploitative nature of the *zamindars*, the relations between the peasants

and the *zamindars* were of reciprocity, paternalism, and patronage.

In eastern Rajasthan, *zamindars* were called *Bhomia*. The *zamindars* were, in a way, intermediaries between the ruler and the peasantry. They collected revenue in the interest of the state and exercised control over the local areas. Most of the wings of the army were at the call of the *zamindars*. Being the landed nobility, they had a prominent position in the social hierarchy.

Recap

- ◆ The word *zamindar* is a combination of two Urdu words *zamin* and *dar*.
- ◆ In the areas where *zamindar* was not present, the peasants were called *raiya*.
- ◆ During the period of Akbar, the *zamindar* was anyone who had the hereditary right of receiving a portion of the peasants' products.
- ◆ The Rajputs and other ruling families collected revenues and controlled their principalities on their own.
- ◆ The private land possessed by the *zamindars* was known as *milkiyat*.
- ◆ In central and southwest India, the agro-pastoralists or *sadgops* became powerful *zamindars*.
- ◆ The *zamindars* worked as intermediaries between the king and the peasants.
- ◆ The combination of Brahmin-Rajput families controlled the rural areas.
- ◆ The *zamindars* were also known as *Deshmukh*, *Patil*, and *Nayak*.
- ◆ The *zamindari* system was also responsible for revenue and military administration and maintained law and order.

Objective Questions

1. What were the other terms used for zamindars ?
2. Name the private land possessed by the zamindars .
3. Name the forts in which zamindars lived.
4. What was the waste land called during the Mughal period?
5. What was the right of a zamindar to collect revenue from his area known as?
6. What were zamindars called in eastern Rajasthan?
7. Who helped in the cultivation of the land?
8. Who exercised considerable influence on economic life under the Mughals?
9. Under whose rule was the term zamindar coined?
10. Name some taxes extracted by the zamindars other than the revenue.

Answers

1. Deshmukh Patil and Nayaks
2. Milkiyat
3. Garh
4. Banjar
5. Taluqa or zamindari
6. Bhomia
7. Hired labourers
8. The zamindars
9. Turkish rule
10. Turban tax (dastar shumari) and house tax (khana shumari)

Assignments

1. Describe the role and functions of zamindars during the Mughal period. How did they contribute to both revenue collection and Mughal administration?
2. Explain the hereditary nature of zamindari rights under the Mughals.
3. Discuss the socio-economic relationship between the peasants and the zamindars in Mughal India.

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SGOU

4

UNIT

Peasant Economy

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ discern the condition of the peasants under the Mughal rule in India
- ◆ explain the factors that contributed to the condition of peasants in Medieval India
- ◆ compare the condition of peasants in different parts of the Indian sub-continent during the Medieval period

Prerequisite

The word “peasant” derives from the Old French *païsant*, denoting a rural cultivator of modest social standing. In the Mughal Empire, peasants were the principal producers of food and the primary source of state revenue through land taxes. Villages formed the smallest yet most essential administrative units of the empire, and the imperial treasury depended heavily on their agricultural output. Peasant life was shaped by policies set at distant centres of power such as Agra, Delhi, and Lahore, which determined tax rates, land measurement, and cultivators’ rights and obligations. Despite the central importance of agriculture to imperial prosperity, peasants regularly faced high taxation, drought, famine, and local exploitation.

Keywords

Peasant *Economy*, *Khud-kasht*, *Pahi-kasht*, *Zabt* system, Mughal agriculture, Cash crops, *Aini-i-Akbari*

Discussion

4.4.1 Peasants and the Agricultural Practices

Peasants formed an important element of economic life under Mughal rule. The vast areas under the Mughals were brought under cultivation by a number of farmers who were settlers of the land they tilled. They were engaged in agricultural activities throughout the year, seeding, sowing, harvesting, weeding, or threshing. Generally, they settled in a village and carried out their agricultural production. However, there were other people who were also peasants, but not settled. The areas that were cultivated were fertile lands. There are uncultivated tracts of land more in area than the cultivated land. We get valid information about the peasants during the Mughal period from sources like *Ain-i-Akbari* by Abul Fazl.

A notable feature of the cultivation method of the Mughal peasantry was their method of irrigation to supplement the monsoon and flood. The irrigation for agriculture was mainly dependent on the seasonal rains. Tanks and canals were constructed to ensure a regular supply of water to the fields. They used different devices to carry water from the wells and tanks into the channels in the field. The most common method was the use of a wooden scoop called *dhenkil* working on the lever principle. Major food crops of the period were rice, wheat, maize, and millets. Major crops cultivated for the purpose of commerce included indigo, cotton, sugarcane, and silk. Tobacco, which was cultivated in Gujarat, slowly spread all over the country. Cultivation methods were primitive, but they were based on traditional methods and knowledge systems.

The Mughal government was particular about the promotion of agriculture, for which

irrigation facilities were introduced on a large scale. It led to the spread of agriculture. The availability of plenty of uncultivated land resulted in the promotion of agriculture by the Mughal rulers, especially Akbar. The traditional rights of zamindars over their land and their right to collect revenue from the land made them powerful and allowed them to exercise control over the peasants. Such an area under them was their zamindari or *talluqa* (from which perhaps the present term *Taluq* was derived). The land revenue *zabt* by Akbar replaced the tribute system. The revenue varied according to the price of the cash crops. The state claimed 1/3 of a year's average produce, which was payable in cash.

4.4.2 Stratification within the Peasant Community

The term used to refer to peasants in Indo-Persian sources was *raiyyat* or *muza-rin*. There were also terms like *kisan* and *asami* used widely to denote the peasant. Seventeenth-century sources make it clear that there were two types of peasants called *khud-kasht* and *pahi-kasht*. The peasants who resided on the land which they cultivated were called *khud-kasht* and those who were from outside the village and did not stay on the land where they cultivated were called *pahi-kasht*. The second type might have been contractual labourers. As seen before, they became *pahi-kasht* either by choice or by chance. From the description of terms like *taccavi* or the agricultural incentive or loan, we can understand that not all the peasants were in possession of the agricultural implements or animals like bullocks. Since they could not afford the expense, they worked on others' land or required loans.

The peasants must have utilised traditional



knowledge for cultivating. In the coastal areas, they used dry fish as manure. Their knowledge about the rotation of crops also helped to maintain the fertility of the soil. They used iron ploughs similar to those used in Europe with slight differences. In some cases, they used wooden ploughs to plough the vulnerable Indian soil. They also used the seed drill to sow the seeds.

The residential peasants who lived in their own village and cultivated their land with their own implements (*Khud-kasht*) and who paid the revenue at a concessional rate became a part of the local governing body. Terms used to describe them varied locally. For example, they were called *mirasdars* in Maharashtra and *gharu-hala* in Rajasthan. Similarly, *pahi-kasht* were those peasants who cultivated rented land by residing there or coming from the neighbouring villages. However, they did not have the rights and privileges of the *khud-kasht* peasants. There were also peasants who did not possess any land or implements or traditional rights,

though they belonged to the village where they cultivated. They cultivated rented land with loaned implements and often depended on the *khud-kashts*. They were called *Paltis* in Rajasthan. There was a section of agricultural labourers called *majurs*.

Thus, the peasants under the Mughals were highly classified and stratified based on their land holdings, residence, or traditional rights over the land. The peasant economy under the Mughals was based on diversified crop cultivation. Cultivation of crops was introduced during this period. Cash crops like cotton, indigo, red dye, sugarcane, and oil seeds brought in much revenue to the royal treasury. Tobacco, maize, potato, and red chillies were introduced in the 17th and 18th centuries. Food grains were also exported during the Mughal period. Thus, the Mughal economy was largely dependent on agriculture and the rural peasantry during this period for a strong economic base of the empire.

Recap

- ◆ We get to know about the socio-economic conditions under the Mughals from sources like *Baburnama* and *Ain-i-Akbari*.
- ◆ The agricultural activities depended on monsoon and irrigation facilities provided by the state for draining the crops.
- ◆ Agriculture was well promoted by the state.
- ◆ The major crops cultivated by the peasants were of two types: food crops and cash crops.
- ◆ Those who could not afford the expenses for agricultural implements and tools became labourers in the fields of landed peasants.
- ◆ Residential peasants were called *Khud-Kasht*.
- ◆ The peasants who cultivated rented land were called *Pahi-Kasht*.



- ◆ Cash crops like cotton, indigo, red dye, sugarcane, and oil seeds began to be cultivated.
- ◆ Tobacco, maize, potato and red chillies were introduced in India during the 17th and 18th centuries with contacts with European companies.

Objective Questions

1. Who was the author of Ain -i-Akbari?
2. What term was used to mention peasants in Indo -Persian sources?
3. What were the peasants who cultivated rented land called in Rajasthan?
4. What was the land under the control of a zamindar known as?
5. Who were Khud -kasht?
6. Who were majurs?
7. Which were the major food crops of the period?
8. Which crops were introduced by the European companies in India during the 17th and 18th centuries?
9. Which major source provides us with information about Mughal peasantry and agriculture?
10. What was used as fertilizer in coastal areas?

Answers

1. Abul Fazl
2. Raiyat or Muzarin
3. Paltis
4. Zamindari or talluqa
5. Residential peasants or peasants who lived in the land they cultivated
6. A section of agricultural labourers

7. Cotton, indigo, red dye, sugarcane, oil seeds
8. Rice, wheat, millets maize, potato and red chillies
9. The Ain-i-Akbari by Abu'l Fazl
10. Dry fish

Assignments

1. Discuss the different categories of peasants under the Mughal Empire.
2. Explain the major irrigation methods and traditional agricultural practices used by Mughal peasants.
3. Analyse the role of zamindars in the rural economy and revenue administration during the Mughal period.
4. Describe the stratification within the peasant community under Mughal rule and the factors that determined the status of a peasant.

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UNIT

Trade and Commerce - Trade Routes - Foreign Trade

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ discern the features of trade and commerce under the Mughals in India
- ◆ explain the inland commercial relations and external ties that promoted economic security for the empire
- ◆ locate the medieval trade routes which connected the Mughal empire with West Asia and Europe
- ◆ evaluate the components of the trading activities of the Mughals

Prerequisite

Several crops now closely associated with Indian cuisine, including potatoes, chillies, and papaya, were introduced from other parts of the world during the Mughal period. The expansion of agriculture and the spread of cash crops underpinned a prosperous Mughal economy, with surplus produce and craft goods feeding into both domestic and international trade. The Mughal state actively encouraged commerce, and an extensive network of land and sea routes connected India to West Asia, Central Asia, and Europe, carrying goods such as spices, cotton, indigo, sugar, and precious stones.

Keywords

Farman, Trade, Commerce, Urbanisation, Ports, European Companies

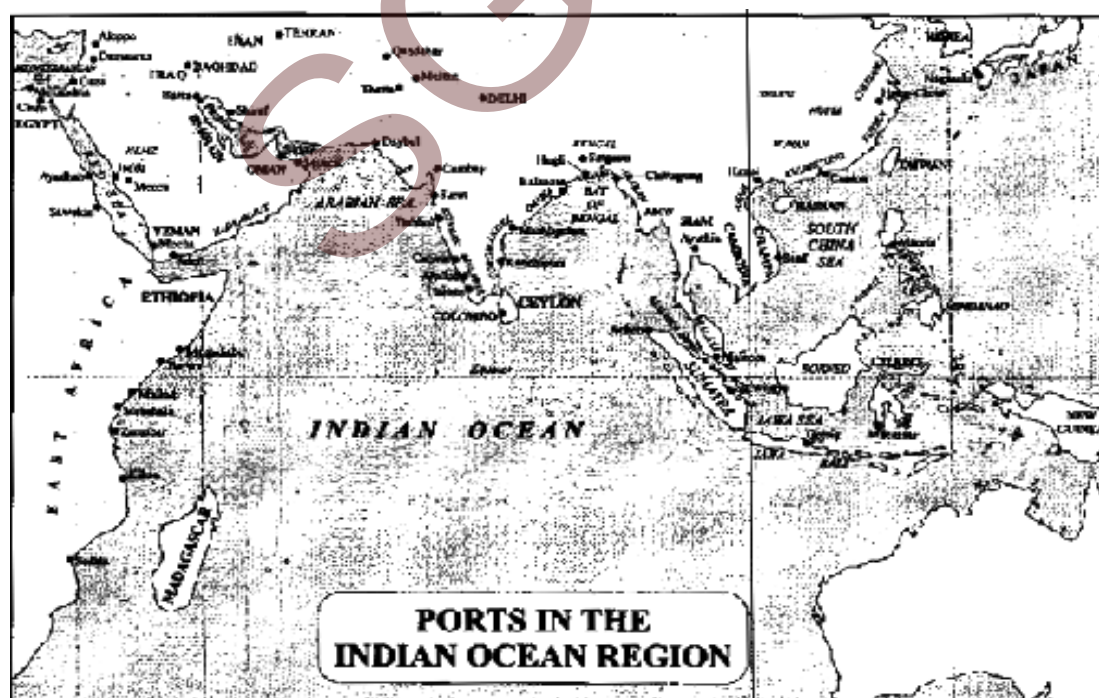
Discussion

4.5.1 Trade and Commerce under the Mughals

The vast Mughal empire was administered and maintained with the support of a large amount of revenue derived from agriculture and trade and commerce. The urban centres that sprouted during this period were also centres of manufacturing and production of export-quality cloth and exotic materials. Agriculture and industries gained much progress during this period. With the improvement of transport and communication systems, these activities flourished, linking India to different parts of the world.

4.5.1.1 Ports, Trade Routes and Major Imports and Exports

There were a number of ports in India during the reign of the Mughals. These ports were connected with the towns of different parts of the subcontinent. Major items imported were gold, silver, ivory, perfumes, horses and precious stones. Items like spices, opium, textiles and indigo were exported to different parts of the world. Besides, Indian textiles also played a major role in international trade, which made India a manufacturer for the Asian world. The import of gold and silver increased remarkably during the 17th century. After the advent of the Portuguese to India, there came the



Source: Fig. Satish Chandra, *History of Medieval India*, Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2007, p 386

Dutch, the English and the French. However, Portuguese power started to decline by the middle of the 16th century, and the Dutch established their sway at Masulipatam, besides their overseas trading regions in Java, Sumatra and the Spice Islands. The cheapest and finest quality cloth was produced from the Coromandel coast.

Long-distance trade was supported by improved conditions of the transport systems. One of the most significant industries of the Mughal era was the cotton cloth-making industry. The textiles of India were in high demand in the international and domestic markets. The fabric of Bengal was famous everywhere, especially its fine silk and cotton materials. The growth of the textile industry also led to the development of the dye industry. During the reign of Akbar, the weaving industry produced fine quality carpets and shawls for export. Though the period did not have many maritime explorations, the shipbuilding industry also continued to exist.

4.5.1.2 The European Trading Companies

The English who came to the east could not make much fortune from the Spice Islands. Therefore, they decided to concentrate on India. Their first factory was established at Surat in 1612 CE. This factory was attested by the *farman* from Jahangir obtained by Captain Hawkins. The English wanted to join the Indian trade with the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf ports. They captured Ormuz from the Portuguese in 1622 with the help of Persian forces. By the first half of the 17th century, the Dutch and the English gained control over the overseas trade of India, giving a setback to the Portuguese. However, for a long period, the foreign traders were not able to break the monopoly of the Indian products in the international markets.

There was great demand for Indian goods in England itself. For the Indian merchants

knew the trends in the Indian and foreign markets as far as the textile industry was concerned. The English and the Dutch traders searched for articles which could be exported from India to Europe. Other than pepper, the English aimed at the export of Indigo, which was used as a natural dye. Gradually, the supply of Indigo became insufficient for export purposes, which prompted the English to search for cloth produced in Agra and nearby towns. They also exported Indian calicoes. Gradually, the whole Coromandel coast was set apart for the production and export of cloth by the English. Their chief ports were Masulipatam and Fort St. George at Madras.

4.5.1.3 Internal Trade and Trade Networks

The development of the currency system was another factor that promoted trade and commerce during the Mughal period. The regions under the Mughals had prospering trade relations with several other countries of the world. A significant part of the Mughal economy was based on income from trade and commerce. However, land routes were not that safe during this period. Therefore, the cargoes used to be transported through riverine routes and oceanic routes.

Along the western coast, the pepper trade was in practice for long. Different regions of the Indian subcontinent were dominated by different groups. In the north, *Punjabi* and *Multani* traders had a monopoly over long-distance trade, whereas the *Bhats* managed trade in the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan. The state coordinated the trade activities within the empire. During this period, the exports exceeded the imports. Along the Ganga-Yamuna doab up to Delhi, active trade and commerce existed. Raw silk and sugar were imported to Delhi from Patna and Bengal, along with butter, rice, and wheat from the east. Salt was also an important item of trade. The best saltpetre



was available in Bihar. Wheat, sugar, and silk were transported to Gujarat from Agra. The development of transport and communication systems also promoted trading activities. The arrival of European traders also gave a thrust to international trade and commerce. Foreign traders like the English East India Company started establishing warehouses at commercial centres in peninsular India. Exotic foreign items like scented oils, perfumes, dry fruits, precious stones, wines, corals, and velvets were consumed by the rich class only.

The inflow of gold and silver and the linking of Indian markets with the foreign markets had far-reaching consequences. The Mughal period witnessed the development of stable trade centres and commercial points. The Mughal period in India can be compared to the 'Pax Romana' of India as far as trade and commerce are concerned.

There was great demand for the handicraft goods produced in India abroad. Thus, there was an increased production of handicraft materials in India during this period at the village level. Srinagar, Multan, Khambat, Surat, Ujjain, Patna, Chitgaon, Dhaka, Hoogli, and Murshidabad developed as prosperous urban trade centres.

The pre-eminent position of India was supportive of the rise of new port towns along the Indian coast during the 17th and 18th centuries. From the interiors of the Indian subcontinent, goods used to travel through rivers and through local routes branching out of the old *dakshinapatha* and reach the western and eastern coasts of India in small boats. The Arabian Sea provided vast possibilities for Indian traders and businessmen and later for the English and the Dutch East India companies, as well.

Recap

- ◆ A number of port towns came up during the Mughal period, enhancing overseas trade.
- ◆ The cash crops cultivated led to extensive trade activities during this period.
- ◆ European companies started exploring possibilities to have overseas trade with India.
- ◆ With the decline of Portuguese power, the Dutch and the English gained prominence.
- ◆ The export items included spices, fine silk, and cotton materials.
- ◆ Fine quality carpets and shawls were also exported.
- ◆ During the Mughal period, shipbuilding industries continued to exist.
- ◆ The first factory was founded at Surat in 1612 by the English.
- ◆ The chief ports of the period were Masulipatam and Fort St. George at Madras.

Objective Questions

1. What were the major items exported from India during the Mughal Period?
2. Name the major imports of the Mugal period.
3. Who obtained a farman for founding a factory at Surat?
4. When and where was the first factory established by the English in India?
5. Which Mughal ruler issued a farman for founding a factory at Surat?
6. Who captured Hormuz from the Portuguese in 1622?
7. Which were the chief ports of the eastern coast during the Mughal period?
8. Which route was favoured by the traders in the 17th and 18th centuries?
9. Name some of the important trade centres of the period.
10. Which were the exotic goods consumed by the rich during the Mughal period?

Answers

1. Spices, opium, textiles and indigo
2. Gold, silver ivory, perfumes, horses and precious stones
3. Captain Hawkins
4. At Surat in 1612 CE
5. Jahangir
6. The English
7. Masulipatam and Fort St. George at Madras



8. Ocean and riverine routes
9. Srinagar, Multan, Khambat, Surat, Ujjain, Patna, Chitgaon, Dhaka, Hoogli and Murshidabad
10. Scented oils, perfumes, dry fruits, precious stones, wines, corals and velvets

Assignments

1. Briefly describe the trade and commerce during the Mughal Period.
2. Analyse how the geography of India assisted the rise of many port towns under the Mughals.
3. Describe the major imports and exports of India during the Mughal period. How did these trade activities connect India to the global market?
4. Discuss the role of the English East India Company and other European trading companies in the overseas trade of Mughal India.
5. Name any five important urban trade centres of the Mughal period and describe the trade activities they were known for.

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UNIT

Urban Centres, Craft and Technology

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ identify the key features of urban development during the Mughal period
- ◆ describe the major crafts and industries that flourished in Mughal India
- ◆ assess the role of artisans, traders, and moneylenders in sustaining urban life and the economy of Medieval India
- ◆ evaluate the impact of foreign trade and European trading companies on Indian industries and urban centres during the 17th and 18th centuries

Prerequisite

The Taj Mahal, built by Shah Jahan in memory of his wife Mumtaz, exemplifies the artistic and architectural achievements of the Mughal period, and its construction depended on an extensive base of skilled labour, craft production, and urban economic activity. Cities such as Agra, Delhi, Fatehpur Sikri, Lahore, Surat, and Murshidabad functioned as political capitals as well as centres of trade, industry, and culture during Mughal rule. Skilled artisans produced textiles, weapons, jewellery, and luxury goods valued both within India and abroad, supported by state patronage, while growing contact with European trading companies gradually reshaped the country's craft economy.

Keywords

Urbanisation, Artisans, Trade, *Bidriware*, *Meenakari*, European Trading Companies, Commerce

Discussion

4.6.1 Industries and Craftsmanship

The Mughal period marked one of the most vibrant phases of urban growth in India's history. We learn about urban development under the Mughals from a variety of sources, both foreign and indigenous. It is often called the third urbanisation in India during the Turko-Afghan rule. This period witnessed the rise of numerous towns and cities with flourishing markets, industries, and trade networks, both inland and overseas.

In the urban areas, a larger section of the population consisted of poor people. The masses included artisans, servants, slaves, soldiers, and manual labourers. According to the travelogues of Europeans, the salary of the lowest grade servant was two rupees per month. They had a balanced diet, but the expenses on clothes and sugar were higher. The emperors promoted the growth of numerous industries for manufacturing armaments, court equipment, silks, and carpets. Cities like Agra, Delhi, Fatehpur Sikri, Ahmedabad, Lahore, and Murshidabad had markets for jewellery, precious stones, and other exotic goods generally used by the higher classes. Ralph Fitch, who visited Fatehpur Sikri in 1585, attests that it was larger and more populous than London.

The Medieval period was, as such, a period of great development in the field of art and craft. The period saw the development of inlay work, glass engraving, carpet weaving, brocades, enamelling, and other such methods of artwork. The famous peacock throne of the Mughals can be cited as the best example of craftsmanship and metalwork. The Mughal rulers encouraged trading activities along with the promotion and development of the jewel craft. India also exported jewellery made of precious

stones and attractive designs. Two of the most sought-after Mughal jewellery types were branded as *Bidriware* and *Meenakari*. Bidri's craftsmen were well-known for the inlay work done on copper and silver. Bidri metalwork was known all over the world for its elaborate motifs on its surface. *Meenakari* was a type of continuous art of enamelling by melting in fire, traditionally practised in India. Major gold enamelling centres were Varanasi, Delhi, Multan, Shang, and Kangra, whereas Bahawalpur, Kashmir, and Kulu were popular for silver enamelling.

4.6.2 Trade, Markets and Urban Centres

During the Mughal period, Delhi grew as a great emporium of art and craft. It is said that there were 120 cities and numerous towns of commercial and administrative significance. Some towns were famous for their markets, while others thrived because of religious pilgrimages or as centres of learning. Surat, located on the western coast, stood out as one of the busiest and most important ports of the time. Ships from distant lands like China, West Asia, and Europe would anchor at Surat, bringing in foreign goods and taking away Indian textiles, spices, precious stones, and other products. The exchange was done in cash or in the form of finished goods. According to foreign accounts, the best quality clothes were available in India.

As time went on, Indian merchants expanded their trade networks towards European markets. Many set up storehouses and trading centres along coastal towns, ensuring a steady flow of goods for export. Some of the most active commercial centres in India included Patna, Allahabad, Jammu, Ajmer, and Khandesh. These towns became hubs where traders, moneylenders, and



artisans gathered, giving rise to vibrant marketplaces filled with all sorts of goods, from silk and spices to weapons and jewellery.

India's long coastline played a crucial role in its trade activities. Several ports on the western and eastern coasts became gateways for overseas trade. Ports like Calicut, Cochin, Pulicat, Goa and Nagapattinam were constantly busy with ships arriving from and departing to various parts of the world. These ports not only helped in the movement of goods but also facilitated cultural exchanges, as traders, travellers, and sailors from different countries mingled there. Through these ports, India exported a range of highly valued products such as fine textiles, spices, dyes, and precious stones. In return, the country imported luxury goods, horses, wines, and metals from abroad. These coastal towns boosted the economy and contributed to the growth of urban centres nearby, supporting artisans, traders, and markets that depended on overseas trade.

The Mughal era saw the rise of several wealthy and influential merchants and financiers. These individuals played a major role in shaping the economy of their time by controlling large parts of both domestic and overseas trade. Among the most famous was Virji Vora of Surat, known for his massive trade networks that extended to West Asia and Europe. He was so powerful that even the European trading companies relied on his financial support at times. Other significant merchants included Santidas Jawahari of Ahmedabad, Manohardas, and Malaya Chetty. These businessmen not only managed trade in textiles, spices and precious stones but also invested in industries, temples, and public works. They were often influential figures in their localities and maintained strong ties with the Mughal court, further

enhancing their status and reach.

4.6.3 Artisans and Production Centres

Artisans formed the backbone of India's manufacturing industries during the Mughal period. The urban centres which were well known for industrial activities needed constant financial support, which led to the rise of moneylenders. Famous moneylenders belonged to the group of *Sahukars*, *Mahajans* and *Sarrafs*. The artisans of the period were mainly of two types:

1. **Rural artisans:** Rural artisans were part-time artisans who could not be distinguished from the regular cultivators. These included oil-pressers, indigo and saltpetre workers, and people who were engaged in minor handicraft works. They possessed a small plot for cultivation and often sold their surplus in the market.
2. **Professional artisans:** These were those who were living in towns and villages. With the development of manufacturing industries, the traders used the method of extending loans to the artisans and controlling them. Naturally, the artisans turned out to be the wage earners who were destined to work under the traders and moneylenders. The *Ustad* or the master craftsman was economically and socially sound and influential during this period. Under the Mughals, they were placed just below the nobles. The textile and leather industries were in need of labourers the most. The villages in India continued with the traditional crafts and also developed localised centres of production.

4.6.4 European Trading Companies and the Decline of Indigenous Industries

It was the name and fame of the Indian goods and articles that attracted the foreign companies to India in the 17th and 18th centuries. The arrival of European trading companies in India during the 17th and 18th centuries brought significant changes to the country's economy and trade. At first, these companies, like the British East India Company, came merely as traders looking for spices, textiles, and other Indian goods to sell in Europe. They managed to secure special trade concessions from Mughal

emperors like Jahangir and Shah Jahan, allowing them to establish trading posts in important port towns.

However, as their wealth and influence grew, these companies gradually took control over the monopoly of Indian goods in both domestic and international markets. They interfered in local industries and restricted Indian merchants and artisans from competing fairly. Over time, this led to the decline of India's traditional art, craft, and indigenous industries, as many skilled artisans lost their livelihoods. It marked the beginning of a period when India's economic independence started to weaken, paving the way for eventual colonial control.

Recap

- ◆ According to the foreign travellers, the lowest employees in the bureaucracy did not have much salary.
- ◆ The mass of Mughal urban centres included artisans, craftsmen, slaves, soldiers, and hired labourers.
- ◆ Cities like Agra, Delhi, Fatehpur Sikri, Ahmedabad, Lahore, and Murshidabad had markets for jewellery, precious stones and other exotic goods.
- ◆ Inlay work, glass engraving, carpet weaving, brocades, enamelling, and other such methods of art work developed during the Mughal period.
- ◆ Bidriware and Meenakari were the two artworks brands famous overseas.
- ◆ India was famous for gold and silver enamelling.
- ◆ Famous moneylenders belonged to the group of Sahukars, Mahajans and Sarrafs who supported industrial growth.
- ◆ There were professional and rural artisans during the Mughal period.
- ◆ The villages in India continued with the traditional crafts and also developed localised centres of production.

Objective Questions

1. Which foreign traveller visited Fatehpur Sikri in 1585?
2. According to foreign accounts, how much was the salary of the lower grade servants?
3. What can be cited as the best example of craftwork and metalwork during the Mughal period?
4. Who were the famous money lending groups that existed during the Mughal period?
5. Who were the major exporters and importers of the period?
6. Name the famous crafts work brands of India during the late medieval period.
7. Which were the major ports through which overseas trade was carried out?
8. Who was the master craftsman of the period?
9. Which were the two types of artisans of the period?
10. During whose rule the third urbanisation in India took place?

Answers

1. Ralph Fitch
2. Two rupees
3. The Peacock throne
4. Sahukars, Mahajans and Sarrafs
5. Virji Vora of Surat, Santidasa Jawahari of Ahmedabad, Manohardasa and Malaya Chetty
6. Bidriware and Meenakari

7. Calicut, Cochin, Pulicat, Goa and Nagapattinam
8. Ustad
9. Rural artisans and professional artisans
10. Turko-Afghan rule

Assignments

1. Describe the social composition of the urban population under the Mughal Empire.
2. Discuss the major industries and crafts that flourished during the Mughal period. Give examples of centres known for particular crafts.
3. Who were the two main categories of artisans under the Mughal rule? Briefly explain their roles and working conditions.
4. Explain the role of major Indian merchants like Virji Vora and Santidas Jawahari in the overseas trade network during Mughal times.
5. Assess the impact of European trading companies on the Indian economy and artisanal production in the 17th and 18th centuries.

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BLOCK

Cultural Synthesis in Medieval India



UNIT

Religious Ideas

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the historical evolution of Sufism and its interaction with Islamic theology and politics
- ◆ compare major Sufi orders like the Chishti and Suhrawardi in terms of beliefs, practices and relations with the state
- ◆ analyse Sufi contributions to religious tolerance, cultural exchange and social harmony in medieval India

Prerequisite

Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, developed within a broader Islamic world already shaped by philosophical and religious currents from India, Central Asia, and Persia, offering a personal and mystical path to divine union. As rationalist schools such as the Mutazilites declined, Sufi orders gained influence and spread across the Islamic world, including India. Among the most prominent in medieval India were the Chishti and Suhrawardi orders, which shared a devotional foundation but differed markedly in their attitudes toward wealth, political engagement, and relations with non-Muslim communities, differences that shaped how each order interacted with the state and the wider public.

Keywords

Sufism, Chishti, Suhrawardi, *Silsilah*, Islamic Mysticism, *Khanqahs*, *Futuh*, *Firdawsiyya*, Quran

Discussion

5.1.1 Historiographic Analysis

Historiography placed in this unit critically examines key academic contributions and research themes concerning the development of India's composite culture, with a focus on its historical evolution, socio-cultural dynamics and contemporary relevance. The literature reveals that India's composite culture is the result of sustained processes of cultural synthesis and integration over several centuries, resulting in a rich, pluralistic and dynamic civilisational ethos.

Foundational to this discourse is the work of Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, who extensively explored the profound influence of Islam on the Indian cultural landscape. Chand underscores the harmonious confluence of Islamic and indigenous Indian elements across various domains such as music, literature and architecture. He argues that this cultural synthesis was characterised not by coercion but by reciprocal exchange, thereby enhancing the vibrancy and adaptability of Indian civilisation.

Further insights are offered by Richard M. Eaton, *A History of India, 1200-1800*, particularly in his analysis of the Persian cultural impact on the Indian subcontinent. Eaton delineates how Persian language, literary traditions and administrative institutions deeply informed the socio-political and cultural system of medieval India. He attributes this influence to sustained interactions between Indian and Persianate elites, whose engagement fostered the emergence of a cosmopolitan cultural milieu. Eaton contends that this amalgamation of diverse traditions played a pivotal role in shaping a distinctive Indian identity grounded in pluralism and syncretism.

Catherine B. Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India (The New Cambridge History of India)*, highlights the synthesis of Persian, Indian and Central Asian styles in Mughal architecture, emphasising its dual function as a symbol of aesthetic sophistication and imperial ideology. She argues that this fusion reflects cultural negotiation and royal patronage, offering deeper insights into the relationship between power, identity and artistic expression.

Annemarie Schimmel and John Stratton Hawley explore the spiritual dimensions of India's composite culture through the Bhakti and Sufi traditions. Schimmel, *The Empire of the Great Mughals: History, Art and Culture*, focuses on Sufi mystics like Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, who promoted interreligious harmony, while Hawley highlights the egalitarian and inclusive ethos of the *Bhakti* movement through figures like Kabir and Mirabai. Both scholars emphasise the role of these traditions in fostering a shared spiritual and cultural space, reinforcing India's pluralistic identity.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Rila Mukherjee explore the critical roles of migration and trade in facilitating cross-cultural interactions and the evolution of composite cultural forms. Mukherjee underscores the integrative role of the Indian Ocean as a conduit for the circulation of goods, people and ideas, which enabled sustained cultural exchange and the emergence of a pluralistic socio-cultural milieu in early modern India. Subrahmanyam, focusing on the Portuguese Empire, illustrates how commercial networks fostered a confluence of European, African and Asian cultural elements. Both scholars emphasise that economic exchanges were not merely transactional but deeply transformative, shaping a dynamic and interconnected cultural landscape.



Arjun Appadurai and Dipesh Chakrabarty offer critical insights into the interplay between globalisation, historical consciousness and the persistence of composite cultural values in contemporary contexts. Appadurai examines how processes such as migration, transnational media flows and cultural exchange reshape local perceptions of identity and cultural integration. He emphasises the fluidity and hybridity of cultural identities within a globalised framework, underscoring the adaptability of composite culture amidst shifting boundaries. Chakrabarty, through a postcolonial lens, challenges Eurocentric historical narratives and advocates for the inclusion of indigenous epistemologies in historical interpretation. He explores how marginalised cultural histories are reclaimed and how postcolonial critique destabilises Western hegemonic discourse, thereby influencing present-day identity politics.

As Satish Chandra states, religious traditions are deeply intricate and often approached with strong personal and communal sentiments. Each religion tends to emphasise its own distinctiveness and assert freedom from external influence. However, maintaining such strict boundaries becomes challenging, especially in regions where diverse religious communities coexist. Interactions, conversions and the movement of people, particularly spiritual figures and travellers, have historically served as conducive forms for the exchange and blending of religious ideas.

Islam emerged as the last of the major, well-structured religious traditions during the early medieval period. Its formative phase, extending approximately until the end of the 9th century, unfolded in the context of dynamic interactions with older and influential civilisations, including the Iranian, Greco-Byzantine and Indian. While scholarly debates persist regarding the precise extent and nature of these intercultural influences, the imprint of Greek

philosophy on Islamic intellectual traditions is particularly pronounced. Iranian and Byzantine contributions are notably evident in the realms of governance and architectural development. India's influence, especially in the domains of religion, philosophy and science, remains more contested; nevertheless, substantial evidence attests to sustained and meaningful cross-cultural exchanges during this period.

In the regions of Central Asia and Khurasan, Indian religious traditions, most notably Buddhism, continued to coexist with Nestorian Christianity and Manichaeism well into the tenth century. The enduring presence of temples, scholarly communities and Sanskrit manuscripts in these areas attests to a vibrant and ongoing cross-cultural and intellectual interaction. By the ninth century, a significant corpus of Indian texts had been translated into Arabic, covering a wide array of disciplines including Buddhism, astronomy, medicine, ethics, logic and military science. This phase of intellectual receptivity is exemplified in the works of prominent Arab scholars. Figures such as Al-Kindi engaged analytically with Indian religious thought, while others, most notably Al-Nadim, Al-Ashari and Shahrastani, systematically incorporated Indian philosophical frameworks into their broader epistemological and theological inquiries.

One of the most prominent examples of such intercultural scholarship was Al-Biruni, who travelled to India in the 10th century. He translated the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali into Arabic and observed parallels between Sufi and Yogic thought. Some modern scholars even suggest that Indian concepts, such as the atomic theory from the *Nyaya-Vaisheshika* school, influenced aspects of Islamic philosophy. Despite this receptiveness to foreign ideas during its early development, Islam retained its foundational principles rooted in the *Quran* and the teachings and

practices of the Prophet Muhammad (*Hadith*). While open to external knowledge, Islamic thought remained firmly grounded in its core religious texts.

5.1.2 Sufism

The 10th century CE marked a critical juncture in the historical trajectory of the Islamic world, defined by significant political realignments and intellectual shifts. The weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate during this period enabled the ascent of Turkish powers, which altered the prevailing structures of authority and introduced new modalities of political governance. Intellectually, the decline of the rationalist Mutazila school signalled a broader epistemological shift toward orthodox theological traditions grounded in the *Quran* and *Hadith*. Simultaneously, the expanding influence of Sufism as a mystical and devotional movement enriched the spiritual landscape of Islam, fostering diverse forms of religious expression across the Islamic world. Sufism, the ascetic and mystical dimension of Islam, emerged during the formative period of the religion and subsequently evolved into a diverse tradition encompassing a wide array of devotional practices, doctrinal interpretations, artistic expressions and institutional structures.

While numerous texts on Sufism, including dynastic histories composed from Sufi perspectives, were produced, these works remained largely confined to the specific social, linguistic and cultural contexts in which they were written. As such, they do not adequately capture the internal diversity or the broader historical development of the Sufi tradition within Islam. References made by Sufi authors and teachers to their predecessors may offer insights into the genealogies of thought and practice within particular lineages, yet they fall short of presenting a comprehensive account of the origins, evolution and spatial-temporal

dynamics of Sufism as a whole.

Supported by earlier Abbasid rulers, the Mutazilites sought to interpret religious doctrine through logic, delving into subjects such as the nature of God, human free will and the origin of the *Quran*. They controversially claimed that the *Quran* was a created text, challenging traditional views of its divine, uncreated nature. However, their rationalist approach sparked strong opposition from orthodox theologians, who viewed their teachings as dangerously speculative. Critics accused the Mutazilites of undermining the core distinction between God and creation, seeing their philosophy as bordering on heresy due to its monistic undertones.

Eventually, resistance from traditional scholars and religious authorities, combined with state-backed repression, led to the fall of the Mutazilite movement. This paved the way for orthodox jurisprudence to gain prominence, culminating in the formalisation of four main schools of Islamic law. Among these, the Hanafi school became especially influential in the eastern Islamic regions, including among Turkic peoples who later expanded into South Asia. The diminishing influence of the Mutazilites also contributed to the emergence and spread of Sufism. With its focus on personal spiritual experience and mysticism, Sufism began to flourish as an alternative path to understanding and experiencing the divine.

The rise of mysticism in Islam began quite early, with devout individuals reacting strongly against the material excesses and moral decline that followed the formation of the Islamic empire. These early spiritual seekers, later known as Sufis, pursued an intense inward journey toward God, distancing themselves from worldly distractions. Among the most notable was Hasan al-Basri, whose teachings deeply influenced Rabia al-Adawiyya, a woman known for her ascetic lifestyle and



unwavering devotion to God. Her profound piety and renunciation of earthly pleasures earned her respect far beyond her immediate surroundings.

During this formative phase, the mystics adopted a simple woollen cloak, symbolic of their rejection of luxury and imitation of the prophets and early Christian ascetics. One of the influential figures, Dhu al-Nun al-Misri from Egypt, developed ideas around mystical unity with the divine through deep meditation. Though some accused him of deviating from Islamic orthodoxy, he avoided condemnation. However, the idea of fana, spiritual annihilation of the self into God, sparked controversy with mainstream scholars, who viewed it as a threat to established doctrine.

Bayazid Bastami, a mystic with Zoroastrian heritage, exemplified this spiritual intensity. His ecstatic declarations, uttered during moments of transcendental experience, such as proclaiming his own majesty or describing the 'Kaaba' as circumambulating him, provoked religious authorities. Unlike him, Mansur al-Hallaj, a later figure based in Baghdad, paid a much higher price for similar mystical expressions. He travelled extensively and reportedly engaged with Hindu Vedantist thinkers in Sindh, although such ideas were already present in Iranian spiritual circles.

Al-Hallaj's famous statement "Ana al-Haqq" (I am the Truth/God) represented the mystical belief in the soul's union with the divine, not an assertion of divinity itself. Still, his refusal to retract this expression led to his execution. His martyrdom, however, elevated the Sufi movement, casting its followers as selfless seekers, immune to worldly temptations and driven by pure spiritual love. Over time, what began as a quiet, inward-looking movement rooted in devotion and reflection evolved into a more ecstatic and emotional form of spirituality. In this transformed state, Sufism sometimes

transcended conventional religious practices and societal expectations, prioritising love and unity with the divine above all else.

By the 10th century, Sufism had already taken root across much of the Islamic world, establishing itself not only as a spiritual movement but also as a structured system with distinct practices. Over the next two centuries, Sufi thought evolved through a combination of philosophical inquiry and physical discipline. Practices like breath control, fasting and penance became widespread and the development of organised communities, such as *khanqahs* (spiritual lodges), reflected this maturation. These institutions didn't arise in isolation; they were informed, in part, by existing monastic frameworks from Buddhist and Christian traditions, which influenced how Sufis organised their communal and spiritual lives.

Interactions between Sufis and Indian ascetic groups, particularly the Nath Panthi yogis based in Peshawar, further enriched Sufi practice. These yogis, known among Muslims as Jogis, introduced Sufis to elements of hatha yoga. Such cross-cultural exchanges were not merely theoretical; key texts like the *Amrit Kund*, a foundational Sanskrit treatise on hatha yoga, were translated first into Arabic and later into Persian, facilitating deeper engagement with yogic disciplines and enhancing the physical-spiritual repertoire of Sufi mysticism.

During this flourishing of Sufi spirituality, Persian poetry emerged as a powerful medium for expressing mystical experience and divine love. Poets such as Sanai, Attar, Iraqi and Rumi became iconic voices of this movement. Their verses transcended doctrinal boundaries, appealing to the shared human longing for unity with the divine. Their work resonated widely, including in India, due to its humanistic tone and inclusive spirit. Sanai's poetry, for instance, emphasised the unity of all seekers, regardless of their

religious background, reflecting a vision of God that surpassed sectarian confines.

Within Sufi practice, music also played a transformative role. Certain Sufi groups endorsed *sama*, spiritual gatherings involving music and rhythmic chanting, as a way to induce ecstatic states and facilitate divine communion. However, these musical practices were not universally accepted. Conservative religious scholars, or the orthodox ulama, often criticised *sama* as un-Islamic, highlighting a tension between institutional religion and mystical expression that has persisted across many religious traditions.

Al-Ghazali, who died in 1112, is a widely respected figure among both Islamic scholars and Sufi mystics. His major contribution was bridging the gap between orthodox Islam and the more esoteric practices of Sufism. He rejected the idea that reason alone could uncover the divine essence or attributes of God. Instead, he emphasised that such truths are accessible only through divine revelation, highlighting the *Quran's* centrality not just for legalists but also for mystics.

During this era, Sufi practitioners began to organise themselves into spiritual lineages known as *silsilahs*. Initially, there were about twelve such groups, though this number was never fixed; some vanished while new ones emerged over time. These *silsilahs* offered a cohesive structure that helped Sufis preserve and transmit their spiritual teachings, especially when facing opposition from conservative religious scholars. Each order usually revolved around a spiritual leader or guide who lived in a communal setting called a *khanqah*, surrounded by devoted followers.

At the heart of these orders was the deep connection between the spiritual master, or *pir* and his disciples, referred to as *murids*. This relationship was foundational to Sufi practice. Each *pir* would designate a successor, called

a *khalifa*, to maintain and continue the order's mission. Regional representatives known as *walis* were appointed to guide and inspire local communities.

Sufi orders were typically classified into two broad streams. The first, known as *ba-shara*, adhered closely to Islamic legal frameworks. The second, called *be-shara*, operated outside the formal boundaries of religious law. In India, both types took root. The *be-shara* path, often practised by wandering dervishes known as *qalandars*, did not always form formal orders. Yet, many of these mystics became beloved figures, drawing reverence from both Muslims and Hindus alike.

5.1.2.1 The Chishtis

During the Sultanate era in India, two major Sufi lineages, the Chishti and Suhrawardi, rose to prominence, each establishing a distinct spiritual influence in different regions. The Chishti order became deeply rooted in and around Delhi, extending its presence into areas like Rajasthan, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. In contrast, the Suhrawardis primarily focused their activities in Punjab and Sindh. Over time, both traditions expanded further into regions such as Bengal, Bihar, Gujarat, Malwa and eventually reached the Deccan plateau.

Meanwhile, in Kashmir, the Kubrawiya order established its own following, operating independently from the more dominant Chishti and Suhrawardi traditions. Despite their differing origins and spheres of influence, there was a general sense of mutual respect among Sufi orders. Interactions between saints from different lineages were marked by hospitality and spiritual friendship. For instance, Suhrawardi saints received a warm welcome in Delhi and likewise, Chishti saints were cordially hosted when they visited Multan.

This mutual goodwill among Sufi orders stemmed from a shared understanding of



spiritual jurisdiction. It was common for saints to define the boundaries of their influence and to defer to fellow Sufis operating in adjacent regions. A notable example involves Baba Farid, a revered Chishti figure, who advised a travelling musician to seek blessings from Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya, a Suhrawardi saint in Multan, explaining that his own spiritual reach ended at a particular landmark, a symbolic gesture of respect for the established territory of another Sufi master.

The Chishti order, as established in India by Muinuddin Chishti, took on a distinctly local character, diverging significantly from its origins in Chisht, a town in present-day Afghanistan where the order had effectively faded. Details of Muinuddin Chishti's early life and teachings are scarce, as he left no writings or formal compilations of his spiritual guidance. Much of what is known about him stems from biographical works composed roughly a century and a half after his death. These later narratives often include legendary tales, such as confrontations with the Rajput king Prithviraj Chauhan and accounts of miraculous deeds, which are now understood to be embellishments rather than historical facts.

Recent scholarship suggests that Muinuddin arrived in India after the decisive victory of Muizzuddin Muhammad Ghuri over Prithviraj Chauhan. His relocation to Ajmer took place around 1206, by which time Turkish political control was firmly in place. The town already had a growing Muslim population, comprising both Turkish warriors and individuals who had been converted through conquest. Ajmer's relative distance from Delhi's political unrest made it an appealing place for Muinuddin, who valued peace and withdrawal from worldly affairs as essential to a spiritual path.

Choosing simplicity and asceticism, Muinuddin married but remained deeply committed to a life centred on devotion and

humility. He did not prioritise converting others to Islam; rather, his aim was to help Muslims cultivate a more devout and introspective faith. In keeping with this ethos, his student Hamiduddin also settled in a modest Rajasthani town, Nagaur, which, like Ajmer, had a meaningful Muslim presence but was far removed from political centres. This intentional separation from the power structures of the time highlighted the Chishti order's commitment to inner transformation over external expansion.

After Muinuddin Chishti's passing in 1235, his spiritual influence continued to grow. His grave in Ajmer attracted attention and devotion from many, including Muhammad Tughlaq, who made a pilgrimage to the site. Several decades later, Mahmud Khalji of Malwa added architectural significance by constructing a dome over the tomb and building a mosque nearby. It was during Emperor Akbar's reign, however, that Muinuddin's reputation reached its zenith. Akbar's personal devotion to him and the strategic importance of Ajmer in the empire made Muinuddin not only a revered spiritual figure but also a stabilising force. His message of inclusivity across religious lines resonated during a time of delicate political and social dynamics.

Among Shaikh Farid's disciples, Khwaja Ziauddin Nakhshabi stands out for his literary brilliance and Sufi insight. Originating from Nakhshab and likely migrating to Nagaur during the Mongol invasions, Nakhshabi gained renown for his Persian prose infused with Sufi poetry and storytelling flair. His key work, *Silku's-Suluk*, outlines Sufi principles across 151 brief chapters, emphasising the supremacy of divine unity (*Tawhid*) and Shari'a over mere intellectual or emotional pursuits. He distinguished scholars (*ulama*) as intellectuals and Sufis (*faqirs*) as lovers of God, asserting that only prophets could master both domains. Nakhshabi promoted humility, prayer before misfortune and

sparing speech, often quoting the *Qur'an*. He categorised humanity into four moral-spiritual types, elevating Sufis as the ideal. He also urged mutual respect and learning between scholars and mystics, warning that imbalance rendered both ineffective. His retelling of the Sanskrit *Shukasaptati* in the *Tuti Nama* adapted the tale with a Sufi moral ending and his *Lazzatu'n-Nisa'*, based on *Rati Rahasya*, reflects Hindu influences on love and sexuality. Nakhshabi envisioned Islam as a balanced path and, though he died in 1350–51, his works secured his legacy.

In Delhi, the roots of the Chishti order were firmly planted by Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, who arrived from Transoxiana in 1221. People were excited about his arrival because he was already famous in the city as a Sufi saint. At that point, Delhi was becoming a prominent Islamic hub, largely due to the influx of intellectuals and rulers fleeing the Mongol invasions. Bakhtiyar Kaki managed to solidify the Chishti presence despite resistance from both conservative religious scholars and rival Sufi groups like the Suhrawardis. The orthodox ulema accused him of heretical practices, particularly his use of music in religious gatherings (*sama*). However, Sultan Iltutmish dismissed these claims, seeing value in aligning with the spiritual influence of the Chishtis to counterbalance the power of the orthodox clergy. Bakhtiyar Kaki became so popular that, despite his intentions to move to Ajmer, strong public support compelled him to remain in Delhi. In contrast, the Suhrawardis, who followed stricter rules, didn't gain the same public affection.

One of the most well-known spiritual heirs of Bakhtiyar Kaki was Baba Fariduddin Ganji-Shakar. Initially residing in Hansi, now part of modern-day Haryana, he eventually relocated to Ajodhan, situated on the banks of the Sutlej River along the important trade and travel route connecting Multan to Lahore.

Baba Farid strongly advocated for a life of asceticism, promoting detachment from material possessions, rigorous self-discipline through fasting and austerity and a humble lifestyle grounded in serving others. His spiritual teachings were so inclusive and resonant that several poetic compositions attributed to him found a place in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs. Although linguistic studies suggest these compositions may have been penned by his disciples, the themes unmistakably reflect Baba Farid's worldview.

Among Baba Farid's spiritual successors, Nizamuddin Auliya stood out prominently, especially in Delhi, where he became the most venerated figure of the Chishti Sufi order. His presence in the city spanned five decades marked by dramatic political changes from the end of Balban's rule, through the rise of Alauddin Khalji and into the chaotic transition to the Tughlaq dynasty. Nizamuddin managed to navigate this instability by strictly adhering to the Chishti principle of maintaining distance from political authority. He refused to form associations with royalty or seek courtly favours.

Nasiruddin Chiragh Delhi, who passed away in 1356, was the last prominent Chishti saint in Delhi. He had a close association with the Tughlaq dynasty and played a role in helping Firuz Shah Tughlaq ascend to the throne. Firuz highly revered him, often visiting him while in Delhi. Despite this, Nasiruddin distanced himself from politics and maintained his focus on spirituality. He chose not to appoint a successor, believing that no one met his standards. Instead, he had his personal belongings buried with him, marking the end of his direct influence on the Chishti order.

The Chishti Sufis were characterised by a profound commitment to a life of simplicity and humility, oriented entirely



toward devotion to God. They consciously rejected materialism, often residing in modest dwellings such as mud huts and wearing patched garments, willingly embracing hardship and, at times, hunger. Their spiritual discipline included rigorous ascetic practices, such as prolonged fasting and breath control, intended to subdue sensory desires and cultivate inner purity. Central to their teachings was the renunciation of worldly attachments, including wealth, official positions and indulgence in sensual pleasures. However, this renunciation did not equate to social withdrawal. For exemplars such as Muinuddin Chishti, the highest expression of devotion lay in acts of compassion—relieving the suffering of others, feeding the hungry and serving the marginalised. Similarly, Nizamuddin Auliya emphasised altruism, asserting that assisting others held greater spiritual merit than the mere performance of obligatory rituals. While many Chishti saints entered marriage and led family lives, they maintained a careful balance between worldly responsibilities and spiritual pursuits, viewing marriage as permissible so long as it did not compromise their devotion to the divine.

The Chishtis categorised people into four distinct groups. At the top were the mystics who not only practised spirituality themselves but also guided others. Their followers formed the second group. The third group consisted of rulers and scholars, while the fourth was made up of the common folk who lacked both spiritual aspiration and formal education.

For their disciples, the Chishtis advised earning a living through professional work. While agriculture and business were acceptable, the Chishtis warned against amassing wealth beyond daily necessities. Ethical practices in business, such as honesty and fairness, were highlighted and family responsibilities were acknowledged, though they should not hinder spiritual development.

They emphasised patience, controlling anger and maintaining kindness, with a strong preference for love and tolerance over violence. However, their stance should not be mistaken for advocating non-violence, which was seen more as a governmental issue.

The Chishtis were known for their non-discriminatory attitude, treating people equally regardless of wealth, religion, or social standing. In an era when the Turk rulers had largely abandoned the Islamic ideal of brotherhood and often looked down on the common people, the Chishtis' inclusive approach won them widespread admiration. Nizamuddin Auliya's *Jamaat-khana*, for example, was always open to people seeking advice or support. While the primary concern of the Sufi saints was improving the condition of Muslims, they did not disregard Hindus. Hamiduddin Nagauri, a disciple of Muinuddin Chishti, even adopted a vegetarian lifestyle, encouraging others to follow suit as a sign of respect for Hindu beliefs.

The Chishti saints maintained close interactions with Hindu and Jain yogis, engaging in conversations that often revolved around yogic practices and spiritual exercises. While they were open to people converting to Islam, they believed that simply preaching was not as impactful as leading by example.

Despite their open-minded approach, the Chishti saints recognised the deep-rooted strength of Hinduism. According to Satish Chandra, a mystic once remarked that those critical of Hindu idolatry should also learn from their worship practices. On another occasion, while walking with the poet Amir Khusrau, Nizamuddin Auliya witnessed a group of Hindus in worship and expressed his admiration for their devotion. He remarked that each community followed its own faith and worship practices, underscoring his acceptance of diverse paths.

This spirit of tolerance contributed significantly to the Chishti order's success in the largely non-Muslim Ganga Valley. However, different Sufi orders held varying views on issues such as poverty and tolerance towards non-Muslims. For instance, the Qubrawiya order in Kashmir, while maintaining cordial relations with Hindus, had a controversial stance on temple desecration, which they both encouraged and carried out.

5.1.2.2 The Suhrawardis

Although both the Suhrawardi and Chishti Sufi orders were grounded in Islamic mysticism, they diverged significantly in their practices and ideological orientations. Bahauddin Zakariya, who established the Suhrawardi order in India, consciously departed from the Chishti emphasis on asceticism, particularly the practices of self-mortification and voluntary starvation. Instead, he promoted a balanced and moderate lifestyle, characterised by the consumption of regular meals and the wearing of conventional attire. Zakariya did not view material wealth as inherently detrimental to spiritual life; rather, he regarded it as a valuable resource for aiding the impoverished. In contrast to the Chishtis, who consistently rejected state patronage, Zakariya and his followers accepted royal endowments, including *iqtagrants*, for the maintenance of their *khanqahs* (Sufi hospices). This acceptance of state support enabled Zakariya to maintain a relatively comfortable standard of living, which he defended by emphasising the enhanced capacity it afforded him to perform charitable and philanthropic acts.

In matters of religious observance, Bahauddin Zakariya placed importance on adhering to the formal aspects of Islam, such as daily prayers and fasting. He combined scholarly pursuits with mysticism, valuing knowledge alongside spiritual practice. While he did occasionally partake in *sama*

(musical gatherings), it was not a regular part of his routine. Despite his moderate stance, Zakariya faced opposition from the orthodox *ulema*, who were critical of his more lenient approach. However, after his death, his successors continued to lead the Suhrawardi order across regions such as Punjab, Sindh, Gujarat, Bengal and Kashmir, spreading their influence over the next century and a half.

The Suhrawardis also had a different perspective on religious practices compared to the Chishtis, especially in their stance toward Hindu customs. They opposed certain practices embraced by the Chishtis, such as bowing before the shaikh or the tonsure of new followers. The Suhrawardis were more focused on conversion and, in some cases, resorted to forceful measures. For instance, Satish Chandra states that Shaikh Jamaluddin, a Suhrawardi saint in Bengal, was known for forcibly converting Hindus and even demolishing a Hindu temple at Devatalla to establish his *khanqah*.

5.1.2.3 Firdawsiyya Sufi Order

The Firdawsiyya order, an offshoot of the Suhrawardiyya tradition, was introduced to the Indian subcontinent by Khwāja Badru’ d-Dīn Samarqandī, but attained durable influence primarily in Bihar rather than in Delhi. Its spiritual genealogy extends to Shaykh Saif-u’ d-Dīn Bakharzī, a former critic who, after accepting the guidance of Najm-u’ d-Dīn Kubrā, emerged as a respected Sufi authority and even persuaded the Mongol khan Berke to embrace Islam, an achievement that conferred considerable legitimacy upon the order. Although Badru’ d-Dīn maintained cordial relations with Chishti luminaries such as Nizām-u’ d-Dīn Awliyā’, his successors occasionally provoked tensions with other mystical lineages.

The order's reputation reached its zenith under Shaykh Sharaf-u’ d-Dīn Aḥmad Yahyā Munyarī, an ascetic mystic who combined



stringent devotional discipline with an ethos of compassion, humility and interiority. Despite benefiting from state patronage, Sharaf-u'd-Dīn carefully eschewed political entanglements, insisting that genuine jihād is waged internally against the lower self (*nafs*) and cautioning his disciples about the moral dangers posed by worldly-minded *ulama*.

Shaikh Sharaf-u'd-Dīn's spiritual influence was most powerfully expressed through his writings and letters, which were widely copied and compiled by disciples across India. These letters addressed key Sufi themes, *Tawhid* (divine unity), *Shari'a*, *Tariqa* and renunciation and upheld the balance between religious law and mystical truth. Sharaf-u'd-Dīn denounced sufis who neglected prayer under the guise of divine union and rejected claims that *ulama* were inherently superior to sufis. He promoted the idea of the perfect *pir* as one divinely illuminated and wholly detached from worldly desires. His teachings, deeply rooted in *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being), were passed down through prominent disciples like Shaikh Muzaffar and Shaikh Husain, who helped spread his message through a network of khanqahs from Bihar to Bengal. His legacy endures through preserved letters, compilations like *Ma'danu'l-Ma'ani* and a widespread spiritual following that bridged legalism and mysticism.

5.1.2.4 Suhrawardi and Chishti Ideologies and Practices

When it came to their relationship with the state, the Suhrawardis and Chishtis had opposing views. The Chishtis maintained a policy of detachment from political affairs, believing that engagement with the government could distract a mystic from their true spiritual goal. Their stance was aligned with thinkers like Imam Ghazali, who argued that government income derived from unlawful sources, making service in such a context impermissible. Ghazali emphasised

that a true believer should neither engage with nor support political authority or its representatives.

Islamic thought on governance was not monolithic. Although some traditional scholars highlighted the un-Islamic features of state structures after the first four Caliphs, others, including certain Sufi groups, maintained that rulers were divinely appointed by God. Therefore, they argued that disrespecting or disobeying rulers was forbidden in Islamic law. They cited the Prophet's teachings that obeying the ruler equates to obeying God and such obedience was linked to salvation.

The Suhrawardi Sufi tradition, led by figures like Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, supported this view and did not dismiss state service. Suhrawardi himself maintained connections with the Caliph, delivering sermons in Baghdad with state backing and continuing to serve in governmental roles. Similarly, Bahauddin Zakariya, who established the Suhrawardi order in India, embraced this approach, believing that royal courts offered opportunities for saints to advocate for the poor and address their grievances. He saw no reason why the sultan and his court should be denied spiritual guidance from the saints.

In terms of political involvement, Suhrawardi saints actively participated in affairs of state. Bahauddin Zakariya, for instance, openly supported Iltutmish, even inviting him to expand his territory by removing Qubacha from Sindh. This action was significant, as Zakariya had previously enjoyed full support from Qubacha. Both orthodox scholars and many Sufis held a mixed or ambivalent attitude towards the state, often viewing it as a necessary evil. Still, they expected rulers to act justly and protect the poor.

This shows that even the Chishtis expected compassion and fairness from rulers and



were not hostile to the state. According to Satish Chandra, some modern historians have wrongly portrayed the Chishtis as champions of the masses and opponents of the ruling elite, suggesting that any association with the state meant siding with exploiters. However, this view is flawed. While Chishti saints stayed close to the people, they were not more representative of the masses than the official clergy. Unlike in Central Asia, where Sufis came from various working-class professions like perfumers, cotton workers, butchers and blacksmiths, most Indian Sufis, except a few like Nasiruddin Chiragh, came from clerical backgrounds.

The Chishtis, who rejected land grants, largely relied on *futuh*, or unsolicited donations, mainly from nobles and merchants. The latter were especially significant, with many of the *khanqahs* located near important trade routes. However, neither merchants nor nobility would have extended *futuh* unless the ruler maintained a favourable attitude toward the Sufis. Broadly speaking, rulers sought the support of Sufis, believing that their blessings and connection to the people would not only boost their prestige but also legitimise their rule. Sufis, as agents of social harmony, helped mitigate social unrest and ease popular dissatisfaction.

The Chishti Sufis were not entirely against holding positions in government, as is often suggested. Only those who had received spiritual authority and were tasked with guiding others in the mystical tradition were expected to refrain from such associations. Regular disciples, however, were not as strictly prohibited from working in government. Shaikh Nasiruddin Chiragh Dehlavi emphasised that serving in the government did not necessarily interfere with one's spiritual practices, such as meditation. The Chishtis mainly promoted labour, particularly crafts and agriculture, as central to their teachings.

What the Chishti saints most strongly

advocated was a separation from direct involvement with the state and its rulers, while still fostering an environment that allowed the state to function in a more humane and just way. Although there were differences in approaches, the interests of the state and the Sufis did not inherently conflict. The Sufis believed that a well-functioning state was essential for spiritual peace and their efforts toward social harmony contributed to the consolidation of both state and society.

The Chishti saints promoted tolerance between various religious communities, providing a space in their *khanqahs* for people of all faiths. Their benevolent attitude, collaboration with Hindu and Jain Yogis and use of Hindavi in their gatherings created a shared atmosphere between Hindus and Muslims. This approach also somewhat softened the harsher aspects of Turkish rule and the interpretations of Islam held by some Turkish rulers and orthodox scholars. However, to suggest that they sparked a full-scale social or cultural revolution would be an exaggeration. Real social transformation required structural changes that were beyond the saints' capacity. Across India, Sufi traditions varied widely, with some being liberal, others orthodox and some a mixture of both, warranting nuanced study without over-generalisation.

The deep reverence given to saints sometimes led to a form of image worship, especially after a saint's death when their tombs became revered. This reverence sometimes encouraged a culture of unquestioning obedience to the saints, leading to sycophantic behaviour. For this reason, some wandering minstrels and qalandars opposed the established order of the *khanqahs*.

In addition to traditional book learning, Sufis criticised philosophy, associating it with rationalism. One account, found in the biography of Nizamuddin Auliya, recounts how a philosopher approached a Caliph,



carrying books and explained that the heavens' movements could be categorised into three types: natural, voluntary and involuntary. He argued that when a stone is thrown, it falls due to natural forces. Human movement, however, was voluntary. In contrast, involuntary motion occurred beyond human control and, according to this philosopher, the motion of the heavens was involuntary.

In response to this, Shaikh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi confronted the philosopher's

view, insisting that the involuntary movement of the heaven was the result of angels acting under divine orders. He presented a supernatural view of the angels as the divine agents moving the heavens. The growing influence of Sufism led to an increasing scepticism towards science and scientists, particularly in relation to their teachings about the natural world. Consequently, philosophy and natural sciences faced challenges in Central and West Asia, as well as in India, during the years that followed.

Recap

- ◆ Religious exchange flourished through cultural encounters
- ◆ Islam absorbed and integrated diverse philosophical and cultural ideas
- ◆ Early mystics reacted against materialism, seeking divine union
- ◆ Sufism emphasised spiritual love and personal divine experience
- ◆ Sufi practices drew from Hindu and Buddhist monasticism
- ◆ Persian poetry powerfully conveyed Sufi mystical messages
- ◆ Music (sama) in Sufism drew both reverence and criticism
- ◆ Al-Ghazali harmonised orthodoxy with mystical spiritual practice
- ◆ Chishti order emphasised humility, service and social detachment
- ◆ Suhrawardis accepted state patronage, wealth and political ties
- ◆ Sufi orders evolved structured networks and spiritual lineages
- ◆ Chishtis valued ethical work and social responsibility
- ◆ Interfaith tolerance defined Chishti outreach and community building
- ◆ Sufi shrines sometimes encouraged excessive saint veneration
- ◆ Sufi suspicion of rationalism hindered scientific advancement
- ◆ Firdawsiyya thrived in Bihar, blending Suhrawardi-Chishti ideals
- ◆ Sharafu'd-Din emphasised humility, justice and spiritual discipline
- ◆ His letters and disciples spread enduring Sufi teachings

Objective Questions

1. Who established the Chishti order in India?
2. Which Sufi order accepted royal grants and iqta?
3. Which saint was executed for proclaiming “Ana al-Haqq”?
4. Who translated the Yoga Sutras into Arabic?
5. What concept describes union with the divine in Sufism?
6. Which mystic inspired Rabia al-Adawiyya?
7. Which Indian town was a spiritual hub for Muinuddin Chishti?
8. Which Sufi group was known for tolerance and cooperation with Hindus?
9. Who was the first major mystic to speak of fana (spiritual annihilation)?
10. Which Suhrawardi saint in Bengal was known for forced conversions?
11. Who was responsible for introducing the Firdawsiyya Sufi order to India?
12. Which spiritual concept did Shaikh Sharafu’ d-Din deeply emphasise and write about?

Answers

1. Muinuddin Chishti
2. Suhrawardi
3. Mansur al-Hallaj
4. Al-Biruni
5. Fana
6. Hasan al-Basri
7. Ajmer
8. Chishtis
9. Bayazid Bastami
10. Shaikh Jamaluddin
11. Khwaja Badru’ d-Din Samarqandi
12. Wahdat al-Wujud (Unity of Being)



Assignments

1. How did the interactions between Sufi mystics and Indian religious traditions such as Yogic and Hindu practices shape the development of Sufism in India?
2. Analyse the role of Sufi saints like Muinuddin Chishti and Nizamuddin Auliya in promoting communal harmony in a diverse society.
3. Describe the concept of futuh and explain its significance to the Chishti order.
4. Compare and contrast the Chishti and Suhrawardi approaches to wealth, state relations and spiritual practice.
5. Describe the life and teachings of Nizamuddin Auliya. How did he maintain spiritual authority during periods of political instability?

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SGOU



2

UNIT

Bhakti Movement and Monotheism

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the historical development and philosophical foundations of the Bhakti movement in India
- ◆ compare Bhakti traditions in North India and South India
- ◆ evaluate how Bhakti challenged caste hierarchies, promoted inclusivity and provided spiritual platforms for marginalised communities
- ◆ examine how saint-poets contributed to regional literatures, spreading spiritual teachings through local languages and poetic forms

Prerequisite

The Bhakti movement marked a significant shift in Indian religious life, from ritualistic worship toward personal, emotive devotion. Rooted philosophically in Vedic and Upanishadic thought, it took shape through regional traditions emphasising spiritual egalitarianism and a direct relationship with the divine. It first gained prominence in South India through the Alvars and Nayanars, whose vernacular devotional poetry challenged caste hierarchies and ritual orthodoxy, with thinkers such as Ramanuja and Basava reinforcing its inclusive character. The tradition later extended into North India amid political decentralisation and sustained contact with Islamic thought, where saints such as Kabir, Guru Nanak, and Ramanand rejected sectarian boundaries, ritual formalism, and caste-based discrimination.

Keywords

Bhakti, Ramanand, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Chaitanya, Surdas, Tulsidas, Mirabai, Alvars, Nayanars, Tantric, Nathpanthi sects, Tamil Literature

Discussion

The *Bhakti* tradition in India emerged as a distinct spiritual path centred on personal devotion and an intimate, experiential relationship with the divine. Well before the advent of Sufism in the Indian subcontinent, notions of inner realisation and emotional surrender to a supreme being had already been deeply embedded in the indigenous religious consciousness. These ideas are not novel innovations but can be traced to the earliest layers of Vedic literature, wherein certain hymns convey a profound sense of awe and reverence toward the divine, emphasising introspective engagement over ritual formalism. This inward, contemplative orientation was further elaborated in the Upanishadic corpus, which articulated metaphysical insights aimed at transcending the material realm in pursuit of ultimate spiritual truth.

As Indian religious life evolved beyond the Vedic period, the idea of worshipping personal deities like Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva began to gain prominence. Alongside this, the notion of *Bhakti*, or devotion to a personal god, began to solidify. Movements like the Bhagavata cult, which centred on Vasudeva (an early form of Krishna), emerged during the post-Mauryan period. Similarly, sects such as the *Pashupatas*, dedicated to Shiva, became active in expressing divine love and surrender. Even in Buddhism, there appeared a compassionate image of the Buddha, a figure who postponed his own enlightenment to ease human suffering, resonating with *Bhakti* ideals.

Epic texts like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, particularly the *Bhagavad*

Gita, were instrumental in promoting the values of devotion (*bhakti*), knowledge (*jnana*) and action (*karma*) as valid paths to spiritual liberation. Among these, *bhakti* stood out for its emotional accessibility, especially for ordinary people. Within *bhakti*, the ideal of *prapatti*, or total surrender to the divine, became central, encouraging a relationship based on humility and trust rather than ritual or scholarly knowledge. This inclusivity allowed individuals from all social backgrounds to engage deeply in devotional practice.

As *bhakti* evolved, its focus shifted from a formal expression of faith to a more personal and emotionally charged connection with the divine. Stories like that of Prahlada illustrated the ideal of lifelong, unwavering devotion. Over time, this devotion became more passionate, often taking on a romantic dimension inspired by the love between Krishna and Radha as portrayed in the *Bhagavata Purana*. This text, dating to the 9th century, helped shape a form of *bhakti* centered on divine love, drawing people into an intimate and emotionally rich spiritual experience.

Between the 6th and 10th centuries, a dynamic form of *bhakti* began to flourish in South India, especially under the Pallava, Pandya and Chera kingdoms. This devotional movement, articulated through Tamil-speaking saints like the Shaiva Nayanars and Vaishnava Alvars, emphasised personal love for the divine and rejected rigid caste and gender hierarchies. Saints like Andal, a female poet-devotee, embodied this inclusive



ethos, presenting the relationship with the divine in deeply personal and emotional terms. Speaking in the vernacular, these saints drew large followings by offering a spiritual alternative to the increasingly ritualistic and austere paths of Buddhism and Jainism. Their emotionally resonant teachings and use of local folklore made *bhakti* accessible and relevant to the broader population.

As *bhakti* gained ground, local rulers, notably the Pallavas, began supporting these popular movements for both spiritual and political reasons. Temples evolved into powerful centers of religion and economics, receiving royal patronage and reinforcing state authority through Brahmin endorsement. This alliance sidelined Buddhist and Jain institutions, sometimes through violent suppression. Philosophers like Adi Shankaracharya further weakened Buddhism's hold through *Advaita Vedanta*, arguing for the illusion of worldly diversity and the unity of all existence. Later, Ramanuja in the 11th century revived the original inclusive *Bhakti* spirit by bridging emotional devotion with Vedic tradition. He insisted that divine grace, not birth or intellect, was the key to salvation and welcomed disciples from all castes helping reshape South Indian religious life into a more accessible and unified spiritual tradition.

In contrast to these reformist efforts within the bounds of Vedic tradition, the 12th century saw the rise of a more radical movement in Karnataka, led by the Vira Shaivas or Lingayats. Revived by Basava, a Brahmin who served as a minister under the Chalukyas, the Lingayat tradition focused on intense personal devotion to Shiva and rejected ritualistic norms. Their spiritual ideals placed love for God and the guidance of a personal guru at the core of religious life, discarding fasting, pilgrimages and elaborate ceremonies.

What set the Lingayats apart was their clear break from both Brahminical orthodoxy and Buddhist-Jain influences. They promoted a strong vision of social equality, rejecting caste distinctions and advocating shared meals and inter-caste marriages within the community. The sect also supported progressive social norms such as the acceptance of divorce and widow remarriage while discouraging practices like child marriage. Through these reforms, the Lingayats fostered a deeply inclusive spiritual community rooted in ethical living and personal devotion.

5.2.1 Bhakti Movement in North India

Although expressions of devotion began surfacing in northern India during the early periods, the widespread emergence of the *bhakti* movement actually took root in the southern regions. Historians often trace the northern phase of the movement, which gained momentum in the 14th and 15th centuries, back to earlier developments in the south. Cultural exchanges between the north and south were ongoing and spanned various religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. One prominent example of this interaction is the 9th-century scholar Sankara, who is said to have travelled northward to participate in intellectual debates, part of a broader effort to formulate and unify philosophical systems across the subcontinent.

Despite the early rise of devotional tendencies in the north, it took several centuries for *bhakti* to evolve into a collective, mass-driven force there. This long delay of roughly half a millennium was largely shaped by differing historical and cultural dynamics between the two regions. In the south, *bhakti* became a form of resistance to the growing dominance and perceived rigidity of Buddhist and Jain ideologies. In contrast, the influence of Buddhism and Jainism had already waned in the north by

the time the Gupta Empire came to power, as its rulers championed Hinduism with renewed fervour.

The decline of Buddhism continued through the reign of Harsha, who, despite his devotion to Shiva, remained tolerant towards Buddhist communities. In the aftermath of his rule, the political landscape in the north fragmented into a network of regional kingdoms known as the Rajput states. The Rajput identity itself emerged from a mosaic of sources ranging from upper-caste groups and tribal chieftains to even foreign elements. Originally associated with professions like horse trading, many of these groups eventually gained territorial control and military status. Their ascent was supported by the brahmins, who conferred upon them the title of kshatriya in return for land, patronage and temple-building funds.

This close-knit relationship between Rajput rulers and brahman elites had a significant cultural and political impact. Brahmins received land grants, financial aid and high-ranking positions within the state apparatus, including advisory roles and diplomatic assignments. They were also granted tax relief on land revenue, a privilege that persisted well into the modern era in certain regions. As a result, the brahman-Rajput alliance dominated both the social hierarchy and the cultural landscape of northern India until the advent of Turkish rule shifted the balance of power. The wealth and influence of temples during this era reflected the strong position of brahmins in society and underscored their central role in shaping the cultural identity of the Rajput domains.

During a significant phase in Indian history, the Rajput rulers entered into a strategic partnership with the Brahman elite. This alliance reinforced the rigid caste hierarchy, upholding the traditional *varna* system that privileged the Brahmins and supported a

deeply stratified social order. Any groups or ideologies that opposed this framework faced not only religious condemnation but also political suppression.

As a result, although early expressions of the *bhakti* movement emerged in northern India, they struggled to gain momentum. Despite ongoing literary contributions in Sanskrit celebrating *bhakti*, these spiritual stirrings did not evolve into a widespread movement at the time. Meanwhile, on the ground, alternative religious trends began to take shape, often in quiet resistance to the dominant order.

Among these were the Tantric and Nathpanthi sects, which attracted followers from marginalised communities, including individuals of lower castes and both men and women. The Tantric tradition emphasised goddess worship and the pursuit of supernatural powers through ascetic practices. These groups openly rejected the Brahmanical social codes and rituals, sometimes adopting practices like consuming taboo foods or promoting nonconventional ideas like free love as a path to enlightenment.

Given their radical departure from accepted norms, these groups frequently became targets of both religious and political hostility. To protect themselves, some adherents resorted to cryptic, symbolic language understood only by insiders. Although the Nathpanthis projected a more austere and moral image, they too faced accusations of immorality and subversion from the Brahman class. Nevertheless, the Nathpanthis expanded their reach significantly, establishing a stronghold in Peshawar and travelling widely across regions as distant as Central and West Asia.

During the time of the Turkish invasions, northern India witnessed significant political and cultural upheaval. Numerous Rajput rulers were defeated, temples were desecrated and religious icons were destroyed, acts that deeply destabilised both the ruling classes and



spiritual bond between teacher and disciple and the idea of union with the divine, all central to Sufi practice, resonated strongly with earlier currents in Indian religious life.

Rather than being purely reactive, the *Bhakti* movement represents a period of mutual reinforcement between different traditions. This phase of cultural synthesis emphasised overlapping values rather than focusing solely on theological borrowing, which often invites contentious debate. Maharashtra appears to be one of the earliest places in northern India where this spiritual reawakening began to take shape. The 12th-century mystic Jnaneshwar made significant contributions by writing a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* that gave equal importance to knowledge, action and devotion. Importantly, he chose Marathi, the vernacular of the people, over Sanskrit, signalling a shift toward inclusivity.

His legacy was carried forward by Namdev in the 14th century, whose devotional songs overflowed with deep emotional reverence for God. Namdev is known to have travelled extensively and engaged in dialogue with Sufi mystics in Delhi, indicating a rich interfaith exchange. Another pivotal figure, Ramanand, born in Prayag (modern-day Allahabad), propagated the worship of Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu. A disciple of the philosopher Ramanuja, Ramanand challenged caste restrictions by preaching devotion as accessible to all, regardless of social background.

He actively rejected orthodox customs that barred people of different castes from sharing food or communal spaces. His inclusiveness is evident from his followers: Ravidas, a cobbler; Kabir, a weaver; Sena, a barber; and Sadhana, a butcher, all from marginalised groups. Namdev, too, was known for embracing disciples from diverse social strata, reflecting a radical openness that helped democratise spiritual life in India.

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Among the spiritual figures who championed the *Bhakti* movement and challenged orthodox religious practices, Kabir and Guru Nanak stand out for their radical teachings. Both figures openly criticised the ritualistic elements of religion, rejected caste-based discrimination and emphasised harmony between Hindus and Muslims.

5.2.1.1 Ramanand

Ramanand (c. 1400–1470), a Brahmin from North India, is traditionally regarded by his followers as the fifth spiritual successor to the philosopher-saint Ramanuja. As noted by scholars such as Richard Burghart, anthropologist and David N. Lorenzen, British-American historian and scholar of religious studies, his formative years were marked by ascetic practice, deep study and spiritual discipline, culminating in his relocation to Varanasi. There, he immersed himself in Vedic texts, internalised Ramanuja's 'Visishtadvaita Vedanta' and adopted yogic techniques. Over time, Ramanand developed his own identity as a spiritual teacher. A defining feature of his approach was his willingness to accept disciples regardless of caste, a stance most controversially expressed in his disregard for caste restrictions during communal meals. This inclusivity led to tensions with orthodox Brahminical circles, prompting Ramanand to formally separate and establish a distinct sect, later identified as the 'Ramanandi sampradaya'.

While Ramanand preserved the core principles of Ramanuja's *bhakti*-based theology, he also introduced key modifications that reflected his egalitarian vision. He moved away from the exclusive use of Sanskrit, advocating instead for religious instruction in Hindi to reach a wider audience, an approach that democratised spiritual knowledge. His teachings attracted a diverse spectrum of followers, including figures such as Ravidas, a leatherworker; Kabir, a Muslim mystic;

and possibly a female disciple. However, as Lorenzen points out, the absence of explicit references to Ramanand in their own writings has raised questions among scholars about the veracity of these affiliations. Moreover, the historical continuity between Ramanand's individual teachings and the later, institutionalised Ramanandi monastic order, clearly visible only from the 17th century, remains a topic of academic debate. Nevertheless, the Ramanandi tradition endures as the largest Vaishnava monastic community in northern India, its legacy shaped by both devotional inclusiveness and layers of historical reinterpretation. Sir George Grierson, a leading Indologist of the early 20th century, once described Ramanand as the figure behind one of North India's most transformative religious shifts.

5.2.1.2 Kabir

Kabir's origins remain cloaked in mystery. According to popular lore, he was born to a Brahmin widow but was raised by a Muslim family of weavers. Growing up in Kashi (now Varanasi), he found himself immersed in a diverse religious landscape that included both Hindu mystics and Sufi saints. His spiritual outlook was also deeply shaped by the Nath yogis.

In his teachings, Kabir advocated the oneness of the divine, invoking various names, Rama, Hari, Allah, Govind and others to express the same spiritual truth. He vehemently opposed external religious expressions like idol worship, pilgrimage rituals, ceremonial bathing and prescribed forms of prayer such as *namaz*. For Kabir, a meaningful spiritual life did not require renouncing household responsibilities or engaging in ascetic practices. He dismissed the importance of bookish learning and physical austerities, arguing instead that inner realisation was the true path to enlightenment.



Kabir directed his strongest criticisms at religious figures from both Hindu and Muslim communities. He saw them as manipulators who exploited people's faith while flaunting their superficial knowledge of sacred texts. To him, this hollow display missed the real meaning of spirituality and distorted the purpose of religious practice.

Believing deeply in a single, all-encompassing divine presence, Kabir saw all humans as inherently equal. This conviction led him to challenge the rigid social hierarchies of his time. He stood firmly against those who took pride in their wealth, land ownership, caste, or family heritage, seeing such pride as a barrier to true spiritual understanding. Since political institutions helped maintain this unfair social order, Kabir warned spiritually inclined individuals to keep their distance from royal courts and power structures. He believed spiritual integrity was compromised when intertwined with worldly authority.

Kabir's idea of divine unity extended to religion itself—he viewed different faiths as varied paths leading to the same destination. As such, the divisions between Hinduism and Islam seemed petty and irrelevant to him, rooted more in ritual than in true devotion. Though he was not formally educated and did not write down his teachings, Kabir's thoughts spread orally and were later transcribed. Over time, his original ideas were mixed with later interpretations, making it hard to separate his voice from later additions. His aim was not to reform society directly but to inspire individuals to lead righteous lives, believing that a just society would naturally follow.

Many scholars have offered differing perspectives on the extent to which Kabir shaped the religious consciousness of both Hindus and Muslims. Although he voiced powerful messages that challenged prevailing norms, the established practices within both

religious communities largely remained intact. Likewise, the caste structure persisted without substantial disruption.

Over time, those who embraced Kabir's teachings formed a smaller group known as the Kabir Panth. While this sect didn't grow to dominate the religious landscape, Kabir's broader legacy endures. His work laid the groundwork for ideas that transcended his era—advocating for social equality, communal harmony and a rejection of hollow rituals and pretentious piety. In essence, Kabir came to embody a moral vision that questioned orthodoxy and championed a more inclusive human spirit.

5.2.1.3 Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak, the spiritual figure who laid the foundation for Sikhism, was born in 1469 in Talwandi, a village situated near the Ravi River (now known as Nankana Sahib). Although his family expected him to follow a conventional path in commerce and trained him accordingly, Nanak's interests diverged early in life. He was deeply introspective and drawn to spiritual discourse, often spending time with wandering holy men.

Despite marrying young and receiving formal education in Persian, Nanak gradually distanced himself from worldly obligations after experiencing a profound spiritual awakening. He chose a life devoted to divine contemplation and expressed his insights through devotional songs, which he performed with the help of his companion Mardana, who played a stringed instrument called the *rabab*.

Nanak's spiritual journey took him across the Indian subcontinent and beyond. His travels reportedly extended as far south as Sri Lanka and westward to Islamic holy cities like Mecca and Medina. During these extensive journeys, he shared his teachings, attracting followers and gaining renown as a spiritual leader before his death in 1538.



Central to Nanak's philosophy was the belief in a single, formless God accessible to all, irrespective of caste, creed, or religious affiliation. He encouraged meditation on God's name as the path to liberation. At the same time, he stressed ethical living, insisting that a person's character and actions were essential in seeking closeness to the divine.

Rejecting ritualism and idol worship, Nanak challenged many formal religious practices of his time. He encouraged a balanced life, one that allowed for spiritual growth while fulfilling one's social and familial responsibilities. His approach bridged the divide between renunciation and worldly engagement, offering a new spiritual framework rooted in compassion, simplicity and moral clarity.

Guru Nanak did not set out to create a separate religious tradition. His outlook was inclusive, aiming to ease tensions between Hindus and Muslims and foster a sense of unity and shared humanity. He stood firmly against social discrimination, especially the rigid caste system and emphasised values such as compassion and equality. In his view, many political leaders of his time lacked spiritual integrity and ruled with oppression.

While Kabir too denounced sectarian divides and social hierarchies, Nanak envisioned an ideal society led by a just and enlightened ruler, one who governed with moral integrity and ensured justice for all. This notion highlighted his vision for not only spiritual harmony but also ethical governance.

Meanwhile, mystical thinkers like the liberal Sufis and the *nirguna Bhakti* poets challenged entrenched dogmas within both Islam and Hinduism. Their teachings stirred discomfort among conservative factions, prompting reactions that ranged from resistance to reluctant reform. These ideological battles shaped much of the intellectual and religious discourse

from the 1500s onward. Throughout this transformative period, voices like Nanak's and Kabir's resonated widely, playing a pivotal role in questioning orthodoxy and encouraging a more inclusive spiritual path. Their legacy contributes meaningfully to the evolution of religious and social thought in the subcontinent.

The Vaishnavite Movement

In northern India, the *bhakti* tradition expanded significantly through devotion to Rama and Krishna, revered avatars of Vishnu. The playful and romantic episodes from Krishna's youth, particularly his bond with Radha and the milkmaids of Gokul, were embraced by a group of mystic poets. These stories were used symbolically to explore the soul's longing and connection with the divine.

5.2.1.4 Chaitanya

Chaitanya, a native of Nadia, a centre of Vedantic philosophy, underwent a spiritual transformation during a visit to Gaya at the age of 22. After being initiated into Krishna worship by a hermit, he became deeply immersed in devotional practice, dedicating himself completely to chanting Krishna's name with fervent passion. Chaitanya played a pivotal role in spreading devotional spirituality through music, especially by organising kirtans, intense, collective singing sessions centred on divine names. These musical gatherings created a deep emotional atmosphere that helped participants detach from everyday concerns and immerse themselves in spiritual experience.

He is believed to have travelled across India, with his visit to Vrindavana holding special significance, where he revitalised devotion to Krishna. However, much of his life unfolded in Gaya, which became a centre for his activities and influence. His teachings resonated strongly in eastern India and drew followers from a wide range of backgrounds.



Notably, his inclusive appeal extended beyond caste and religious boundaries, welcoming low-caste individuals and even some Muslims into his spiritual fold. While he embraced religious texts and practices like idol worship, Chaitanya's approach was refreshingly distinct from orthodox traditions. His emphasis on heartfelt devotion over rigid rituals set him apart from conventional paths without directly opposing them.

5.2.1.5 Tulsidas, Surdas and Mirabai

Tulsidas, who lived during the 16th and early 17th centuries, stands as one of the most influential figures in the devotional traditions of North India. He is best remembered for composing the *Ramcharitmanas*, a poetic retelling of the Ramayana in the Awadhi dialect. This vernacular adaptation stirred controversy among orthodox Brahmins but resonated deeply with the masses, who saw in Tulsidas a spiritual successor to the sage Valmiki. The text became a foundational spiritual guide for millions, often serving as their principal religious text.

The historical details of Tulsidas's life remain elusive, though it's likely he studied Sanskrit and later made Varanasi his spiritual base. His literary contributions include several major and minor texts, among which the *Vinaya Patrika* and *Kavitavali* stand out alongside his magnum opus. Rather than adhering rigidly to any single philosophical school, Tulsidas synthesised elements from both *Advaita Vedanta* and the devotional monism of Ramanuja. Unlike earlier reformers such as Kabir and Ramanand, Tulsidas did not reject traditional Hindu frameworks; instead, he sought to renew them from within, emphasising devotion or *bhakti* as the unifying force that transcended caste and sectarian lines.

In his theology, Tulsidas portrayed the relationship between devotee and deity through the lens of servitude and loyalty.

His works are marked by a profound moral clarity and abstain from sensuality, offering a contrast to the passionate narratives found in Krishnaite poetry. This approach shaped the character of Rama devotion in North India for generations, casting Rama as both divine and supremely compassionate. Even the antagonists in his narrative, like Ravana and Kaikeyi, are ultimately portrayed as transformed through divine grace. For Tulsidas, devotion was a universal path, accessible to all, regardless of background or station in life.

In his poetry, Tulsidas expresses a deeply personal and humble connection with Rama. Through vivid imagery and emotional candour, he portrays himself as an unworthy soul who is still embraced by divine love. This notion that the divine welcomes even the most humble seekers highlights his inclusive message and enduring appeal.

Tulsidas revitalised devotion to Rama at a time of great religious flux, reinforcing moral and ethical values in the everyday lives of believers. His reaffirmation of *Sanatana Dharma's* core tenets provided cultural cohesion amidst growing external and internal challenges. His influence can be seen not just in literature and ritual but also in political movements. For instance, Mahatma Gandhi invoked Rama's name at the moment of his death, testifying to the profound emotional and spiritual hold Tulsidas's vision had on Indian society.

Surdas holds a distinguished place in the *Bhakti* movement of North India during the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Though born into a Brahmin family, he was visually impaired, which did not deter him from achieving literary and spiritual eminence. He became closely associated with the devotional tradition initiated by Vallabha, a major proponent of the *Pushtimarg* (Path of Grace) and is regarded as one of Vallabha's most eminent disciples.

His primary engagement was as a devotional singer and poet, closely linked to the temples in Agra and Mathura, two key centres for Krishna worship. Despite his blindness, he demonstrated a remarkable sensitivity to sound and sentiment, crafting verses that are both musically rich and emotionally resonant. He claimed inspiration from the *Bhagavata Purana*, a foundational text in Vaishnava literature, which heavily shaped the themes and style of his compositions.

Surdas is best remembered for his vast collection of lyrical poems, known as the *Sursagar* (Ocean of Sur), a work that focuses on various aspects of Krishna's life, especially his childhood and his amorous episodes with the gopis. These songs are not merely devotional; they offer vivid portraits of Krishna as a playful child, a divine lover and a cosmic presence. His poetic images often draw comparisons to the miniature paintings of Rajasthan from the same period, both reflecting a deep affection for village life and the charm of everyday scenes imbued with divinity.

While Tulsidas may overshadow him in terms of popularity and epic narrative scope, Surdas's genius lies in his lyrical intimacy and aesthetic refinement. His compositions are marked by emotional depth, ranging from tenderness to longing and an understated devotion that avoids overt sensuality. There is a quiet compassion in his portrayal of the divine that extends to all living beings, making his work resonate across devotional and poetic traditions alike.

Mirabai (fifteenth–sixteenth centuries) is arguably the most renowned female poet in the *bhakti* movement. Most of her life story has been pieced together from the bhajans attributed to her, which were passed down orally over generations. These accounts suggest that she was a Rajput princess from Merta in Marwar, married against her will

to a prince from the Sisodia clan of Mewar, Rajasthan. She defied the expectations of her marital role, refusing to conform to the traditional duties of wife and mother and instead devoted herself to Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, whom she regarded as her divine beloved. Her in-laws, displeased with her independence, allegedly tried to poison her, but she managed to flee and live the life of a wandering saint, composing deeply emotional devotional songs.

Some narratives mention that her spiritual teacher was Raidas, a leather worker, which reflects her rejection of rigid caste norms. After leaving behind the luxuries of royal life, she is said to have taken on the white garments of a widow or the saffron robes of a renunciate. While Mirabai did not form a sect or gather formal disciples, her life and poetry have inspired generations. Her songs continue to resonate, especially among marginalised communities and women in Gujarat and Rajasthan, who see in her a voice of devotion.

In different parts of India, poet-saints such as Narsinha Mehta in Gujarat, Meera in Rajasthan, Surdas in western Uttar Pradesh and Chaitanya in Bengal and Orissa gave rise to a rich devotional tradition. Their compositions were marked by intense emotional depth and an all-encompassing love for the divine and disregarded societal divisions such as caste or religious background. These figures fostered a devotional community that welcomed all seekers of truth, without discrimination.

While these saint-poets worked within the broader framework of Hindu spiritual thought, they were deeply influenced by Vedantic ideas, particularly a belief in the unity of the divine and the material world. Among the many Vedantic thinkers, Vallabha, a Brahmin from Telangana who lived between the late 15th and early 16th centuries, had a lasting impact on their philosophy. These poets approached spirituality with a focus



on universal human values, celebrating love, beauty and inner devotion over ritualistic practices. Though they challenged social hierarchies like caste through their teachings, the broader system remained largely intact. Still, they offered a powerful alternative for those marginalised by social norms, granting them dignity and spiritual status both in the eyes of God and within their devotional circles.

During the 15th century, a profound exchange of spiritual ideas took place between the saint-poets of the *Bhakti* tradition and the Sufi mystics in India. This period witnessed the increasing influence of the metaphysical views of Ibn Arabi, an Arab philosopher who championed a non-dualistic worldview. His belief that all forms of existence stem from a single divine source stood in stark contrast to orthodox interpretations, which led to widespread opposition and persecution of his followers. Arabi's concept, known as the Unity of Being or "Wahdat al-Wujud," emphasised the idea that all religions are essentially different expressions of the same truth.

As these philosophical notions gained traction in India, they found resonance among many Sufi thinkers. Influenced by their interactions with yogis and Hindu ascetics, Indian Sufis became more receptive to pantheistic beliefs and began engaging with local cultures more deeply. Many of them turned to indigenous languages such as Hindi and Sanskrit, not only for communication but also for literary expression. Figures like Mulla Daud and Malik Muhammad Jaisi even composed devotional works in Hindi.

The emotional and spiritual intensity of *Bhakti* poetry, especially the verses of Vaishnavite saints, appealed strongly to the Sufi sensibility, often more so than the classical Persian verse. This cultural and linguistic synthesis led to an unprecedented mingling of devotional traditions. A

prominent example is the work of Abdul Wahid Bilgrami, who authored *Hagaiq-i-Hindi*, a treatise that sought to interpret common Hindu religious imagery and figures like Krishna, Radha and the Yamuna in terms of Sufi mysticism.

By the late 15th and early 16th centuries, this confluence of ideas had laid the foundation for a shared spiritual ethos. *Bhakti* and Sufi leaders cultivated a space where individuals from diverse faiths could engage in meaningful dialogue, breaking down sectarian barriers and nurturing mutual understanding. This fusion contributed to a more inclusive religious environment in the subcontinent.

5.2.2 Alvars and Nayanars Movement

Between the sixth and ninth centuries, the Tamil region witnessed a major spiritual and cultural revival through the rise of the *bhakti* movement. This movement was spearheaded by deeply devoted followers of Shaivism and Vaishnavism, known respectively as the Nayanars and Alvars, who travelled to sacred sites, expressing their unwavering devotion through devotional hymns. Their poems, often centred on Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu, were both spiritual offerings and literary contributions.

Among the Shaiva saints, Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar, revered as the "trio" or *muvar*, gained immense popularity for their poetic works. Another influential figure, Manikkavacakar, also made a lasting impact. The sacred compositions of these saints were systematically gathered into an eleven-volume anthology by Nambi Andar Nambi around the end of the tenth century. The first seven volumes, later called the *Tevaram*, contain the verses of the *muvar*. Subsequent volumes include Manikkavacakar's poems, philosophical works like Tirumular's and hymns by a

wider circle of composers active from the sixth to the eleventh centuries.

Building upon this literary and spiritual foundation, Sekkilar, a minister under a Chola ruler Kulottunga II, authored the *Periyapuranam* in the 12th century. This detailed biographical account of the 63 Nayanars was added as the twelfth book, completing what came to be known as the *Tirumurai*. Although only seven of these Nayanars left behind hymns, the others were celebrated for their spiritual devotion. Sundarar, one of the muvar, even referenced the full group of 63 saints, including himself, in his writings during the early ninth century, though some historical details about these individuals remain uncertain.

The devotional hymns attributed to Vaishnava saints such as Periyalvar, his foster daughter Andal, Tirumangaiyalvar and Nammalvar were later gathered into a comprehensive anthology titled the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*. This compilation, consisting of four thousand verses, was organised by Nadamuni, a priest serving at the Ranganatha temple in Srirangam, sometime around the late 9th or early 10th century. Although fourteen poets contributed to this body of work, only twelve among them were ultimately honoured with the title of Alvars and formally canonised. In contrast to the 63 Nayanars, who included non-poets, all twelve Alvars contributed to this literary and spiritual legacy through poetic compositions, although the volume of their work varied significantly.

The concept of *bhakti*, or devotional love for a personal deity, has early roots in northern Indian texts like the *Bhagavad Gita*, but it was in the Tamil regions under the Pallava dynasty from the 6th century onward that it matured into an organised movement. This southern evolution coincided with the spread of Brahmanical Hinduism, temple worship and Puranic traditions,

often seen as part of the “Aryanisation” of the south. However, *bhakti* in Tamil-speaking areas also drew deeply from indigenous cultural sources, particularly the emotional intensity of classical Tamil Sangam poetry, especially the aham genre, infusing devotional practice with personal and poetic depth and transforming it into a popular spiritual movement.

The *Bhakti* movement marked a cultural and religious continuity in South India, as seen in the way *bhakti* poets travelled to sacred sites composing hymns for local deities, echoing the earlier Sangam tradition of bards praising kings through Puram poetry. Though their aims differed, spiritual devotion versus royal praise, their shared poetic and geographic practices bridged historical eras. Amid the dominance of Jainism and Buddhism during the Satavahana rule and in post-Sangam Tamil regions, Hinduism eventually reasserted itself through the inclusive and emotionally resonant *bhakti* tradition, which drew from both northern and southern spiritual influences.

Early Tamil literature like the *Paripatal* and *Tirumurukarruppatai* from the fifth and sixth centuries introduced the idea of a universal divine presence, represented by deities such as Vishnu (Mal or Mayon) and Murugan (Subrahmanya), highlighting temples as their earthly abodes. This marked the beginning of a new devotional movement in Hinduism that would eventually overshadow older religious traditions. In the early medieval period, religious identities were less rigid, with worshippers often venerating goddesses outside strict sectarian boundaries. Leslie Orr’s research on Tamil Nadu goddess worship between the eighth and thirteenth centuries reveals that devotees did not strictly associate goddesses like Parvati, Ambika, or Bhagavati with particular traditions such as Shaivism, Jainism, or Vaishnavism. Drawing from various sources, Orr argues for a more fluid and inclusive understanding of divine



River. Though accounts suggest he achieved spiritual liberation at the age of eighteen alongside his royal companion Cheraman Perumal, his long life and body of work suggest otherwise. Known for his close relationship with Siva, he earned titles such as “The Lord’s Friend” and “The Bold Devotee.” His compositions often reflect a dynamic, almost playful dialogue with the divine, including requests for worldly favours and interventions in his personal life, including his marriages.

Manikkavasagar, whose name implies speech as precious as rubies, emerged from the town of Tiruvadavur on the banks of the Vaigai River. Initially serving as a minister to the Pandyan ruler Arimarttanar, he later abandoned his position to pursue a spiritual path as a poet-saint. He lived after Sundarar's time and represents a shift toward the more introspective and philosophical *Saiva Siddhanta* tradition. His principal work, the *Tiruvasagam*, is hailed as a pinnacle of devotional literature, weaving themes of mysticism, longing and divine love. Among his notable compositions is the deeply emotional poem "Longing for Union," which captures the yearning of the soul for spiritual oneness.

The *Periyapuranam* presents a vast collection of devotional tales centred on the lives of the Nayanars, many of whom were not poets but deeply spiritual individuals. Among these revered figures is Nandanar, also known as Tirunalai-povar. He belonged to the Paraiya community and earned his livelihood by crafting drums from animal hides. Despite his social marginalisation, Nandanar's devotion to Lord Siva was unwavering. He longed to set foot in the sacred city of Chidambaram but found himself repeatedly deferring the journey. After much delay, he finally arrived at the temple, only to be denied entry due to his caste. Overcome with sorrow, he wept outside the temple gates. It is said that in a

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miraculous turn, Siva appeared and instructed the temple authorities to allow Nandanar in. Before entering, he passed through a ceremonial fire, emerging unscathed. As he stepped into the inner sanctum, he vanished beneath the raised foot of Siva's dancing form, signifying divine union.

Another powerful account features a hunter named Tinnan, who lived in the Kalahasti region. Despite lacking formal ritual training, he devotedly offered his daily catch to a Siva linga perched on a hill. His worship was simple but sincere. One day, seeing the linga's eye bleeding, he tried to heal it by removing one of his own eyes and placing it on the idol. When the other eye started bleeding, he prepared to sacrifice his remaining eye as well. At that moment, Siva appeared, called him "Kannappa," and restored his sight. This profound act of devotion earned Kannappa a revered place among the 63 Nayanars.

Turning to the Alvars, Periyalvar stands out as one of the most celebrated among the twelve. A Brahmin hailing from Sriviliputtur, he lived during the ninth century, in the reign of the Pandyan ruler Maravarman Srivallabha. His poetic compositions are widely cherished in Vaishnava traditions and are still recited in religious ceremonies today. Most of his verses celebrate the childhood exploits of Krishna, reflecting a deep emotional connection with the divine child. His hymns notably influenced later movements such as Vallabha's worship of Balakrishna.

The story of Andal, a prominent female saint in the Tamil Vaishnava tradition, unfolds with a striking beginning; she is discovered as an infant in the garden of Periyalvar, who chooses to raise her as his own child. As she matures and her devotional fervour takes a unique form: she envisions herself not just as a devotee of Krishna, but as his bride. This divine love shapes her hymns, which are rich

with yearning and spiritual intimacy. She dreams of marrying Ranganatha, the deity of the Srirangam temple and resolutely declines any earthly suitor. Tradition holds that in a mystical culmination of her devotion, she was united with the divine, her form merging into the idol of Ranganatha in the temple's inner sanctum. Her wedding hymn, derived from a dream and recounted to a friend, remains an enduring part of Tamil Vaishnava matrimonial ceremonies.

Another influential figure in the Tamil devotional movement is Nammalvar, hailed as perhaps the greatest among the twelve Alvars. Born in Kurugur (present-day Tirunelveli district), he belonged to the Vellala community and lived around the late ninth to early tenth century. According to spiritual legends, Nammalvar spent sixteen years in deep silence beneath a tamarind tree before attaining a divine vision of Vishnu. His poetry, especially the *Tiruvaymoli*, encapsulates complex theological ideas and is said to distil the essence of the four Vedas, making profound philosophy accessible through Tamil verse.

David D. Shulman highlights how South Indian devotional narratives blend northern Sanskritic influences with traditional Tamil customs. For instance, despite the spiritual reverence for figures like Nandanar, an untouchable devotee, caste-based restrictions remained, as shown by Nandanar's limited temple access through a vision via fire. Shulman also examines the story of Kannappan, a hunter whose fervent devotion to Shiva involves offering raw meat and sacrificing an eye, reflecting the passionate and sacrificial themes of ancient Tamil Sangam literature. These tales, found in texts like the 12th century *Periyapuranam*, illustrate a distinct Tamil religious sensibility that maintained its unique character even while integrating broader pan-Indian religious ideas.



Historians M.G.S. Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat argue that the *Bhakti* movement was not primarily a challenge to caste hierarchies but rather a unifying force that brought together various social groups, including dominant communities like the Vellalas and Brahmins in support of existing political structures. Royal patronage played a key role, with rulers such as the Pallava and Pandya kings embracing *Bhakti* to reinforce their authority through temple building and ritual integration. The rise of the Chola dynasty further consolidated this devotional geography, as they promoted Shaiva worship and temple construction to strengthen their rule. Scholars like Burton Stein view *Bhakti* as an ideological alliance between Brahmins and landowning communities, fostering political and social stability. Over time, divisions emerged within religious groups, with Brahmins leaning toward Vedantic orthodoxy and Vellalas developing Tamil *Saiva Siddhanta*, influenced by the decline of Buddhism and Jainism and the changing social landscape after the tenth century.

5.2.3 Impact of Bhakti Movement

The *Bhakti* Movement emerged in medieval India as a profound religious and social reform initiative, shifting focus from elaborate rituals and priestly control to personal devotion to a chosen deity. R.C. Majumdar highlights that this transition played a critical role in democratising religion by promoting vernacular languages over Sanskrit, enabling people from various castes and communities to directly engage with devotional practices. Scholar David Shulman reinforces this by pointing out that *bhakti*'s emphasis on emotional and personal experiences transcended social hierarchies, creating a more spiritually inclusive environment.

This sense of inclusivity was reflected in the diverse backgrounds of *bhakti* saints.

While a significant portion were Brahmins, others came from rulers, officials, merchants, artisans and socially marginalised groups such as cowherds, washermen, toddy-tappers, hunters and even former bandits. Saints like Nandanar and Tiruppan Alvar, considered 'untouchables,' epitomised the transformative power of devotion. Yet, their need for supernatural intervention to gain temple access exposed ongoing societal resistance to true equality, revealing that spiritual openness often clashed with entrenched social norms.

Challenging the caste system was one of the movement's most radical social interventions. Saints like Kabir and Ravidas, emerging from marginalised communities, preached the essential unity of all beings before God. Romila Thapar and Eleanor Zelliot both argue that such teachings undercut Brahmanical dominance and ritual purity, expanding religious spaces to include lower castes and women. *Bhakti* thus became both a platform for social protest and a vehicle for spiritual upliftment.

Despite these progressive ideals, the movement was also closely entangled with existing social and political hierarchies, especially in South India. *Bhakti* language mirrored feudal structures: deities were addressed with royal titles like *udaiyar* or *perumal*, temples were styled as palaces (*koil*) and rituals mimicked courtly procedures. The devotee-deity relationship paralleled vassal-lord allegiances, with worshippers identifying as *adiyar* (servants), reflecting the broader feudal social pyramid. Sundaramurthi's *Tiruttondattogai* underscores this alignment with Brahmanical temple institutions.

Temples, as centres of *Bhakti* activity, played multifaceted roles, religious, economic and administrative. Kings such as Mahendravarman Pallava, Nedumaran of the Pandyas and Chola ruler Koccenganan actively supported the movement, recognising

its potential to legitimise their rule. This mutual alliance benefitted both the saints and monarchs, facilitating the movement's expansion and helping it assert dominance over rival religious traditions.

D.D. Kosambi, along with historians like D.N. Jha, M.G.S. Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, view the *Bhakti* movement as part of the feudal order, where temples functioned as landed magnates and devotional ideology paralleled the loyalty-based ethos of feudalism. However, such a view risks oversimplification. While *Bhakti* did reflect aspects of feudal socio-political life, it also challenged orthodoxy by expanding sacred access and encouraging spiritual participation from society's margins.

Women's roles within the movement were limited in its early stages. Though saints like Andal and Karikkal Ammaiyar are remembered, female leadership was rare and mathas excluded women. It wasn't until the 11th and 12th centuries, under Ramanuja's influence and the rise of the Virashaiva movement, that women began playing a more prominent role in devotional life.

Bhakti's ideal of spiritual egalitarianism remained a powerful counter-current to

social inequality. Hymns celebrating the *bhaktakulam* or *tondaikulam* (devotional community) often envisioned a society bound by love and devotion rather than caste or class. Though unevenly applied, this vision laid an ethical and emotional foundation for inclusive spiritual belonging.

Culturally, the movement left a profound legacy. The poetic works of Tulsidas, Meera Bai and Namdev enriched regional literatures and laid the groundwork for modern Indian languages. A.L. Basham observes that these literary traditions shaped regional identities, while Sheldon Pollock notes that *Bhakti*'s vernacularisation of religious discourse helped integrate popular and sacred culture, fostering vibrant artistic expression across the subcontinent.

In its broader impact, the *Bhakti* movement fostered a sense of unity in a politically fragmented landscape. Historian Satish Chandra asserts that *Bhakti* provided emotional cohesion during times of upheaval, functioning as a precursor to modern nationalism. Romila Thapar adds that its ideals of devotion, equality and collective identity anticipated later social and political movements seeking justice and integration across India's complex social fabric.

Recap

- ◆ Bhakti emphasised personal devotion over priestly ritual
- ◆ Saints emerged from diverse social and caste backgrounds
- ◆ Use of vernacular languages democratised spiritual expression
- ◆ Bhakti challenged caste, uplifted marginalised voices
- ◆ Women saints were few but influential
- ◆ Saints like Kabir criticised hollow ritualism



- ◆ Guru Nanak promoted unity and ethical living
- ◆ Temples became religious, economic and political centres
- ◆ Royal patronage helped institutionalise Bhakti traditions
- ◆ South India nurtured earliest organised Bhakti movements
- ◆ Alvars and Nayanars shaped Tamil devotional literature
- ◆ Mirabai and Andal voiced female spiritual longing
- ◆ Bhakti inspired emotional poetry, accessible to all
- ◆ Bhakti intersected with Sufi and Islamic ideas
- ◆ Movement laid the groundwork for an inclusive spiritual society
- ◆ Scholars debated bhakti's reformist versus feudal ideological roles

Objective Questions

1. Who is regarded as the founder of the Ramanandi sect?
2. Which Bhakti saint rejected both Hindu and Muslim orthodoxy and emphasised the equality of all humans?
3. Which Bhakti saint emphasised the name of God (Naam Simran) as the path to liberation?
4. Which saint is traditionally associated with promoting Krishna devotion through music and kirtans?
5. Name the author of Ramcharitmanas.
6. Which poet-saint was visually impaired and authored the Sursagar?
7. The Periyapuram is a hagiography of which group?
8. Which female Alvar composed wedding hymns for her divine beloved?
9. Which Bhakti saint wrote commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita in Marathi, promoting vernacular spirituality?
10. Who compiled the Tevaram, the hymns of the Nayanars?

11. Who is regarded as the founder of the Lingayat (Vir Shaiva) movement?
12. Which movement emphasised emotional devotion and rejected caste and gender hierarchies in South India?
13. Who was the composer of Tiruvasagam?
14. Who emphasised Bhakti as an ideology well-suited for feudal society?
15. Which female saint-poet is known for defying royal expectations and composing devotional bhajans for Krishna?

Answers

1. Ramanand
2. Kabir
3. Guru Nanak
4. Chaithanya
5. Tulsidas
6. Surdas
7. Nayanars
8. Andal
9. Jnaneshwar
10. Nambi Andar Nambi
11. Basava
12. Alvars and Nayanars
13. Manikkavasagar
14. D.D. Kosambi
15. Mirabai

Assignments

1. Discuss the evolution of the Bhakti Movement in South India and North India.
2. How did the Bhakti Movement address issues of caste, gender and social inclusivity?



Suggested Reading

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UNIT

Literature - Persian and Urdu

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the linguistic and cultural shift from Arabic to Persian in medieval India
- ◆ analyse Dara Shikoh's intellectual and spiritual pursuits
- ◆ explore the creation and artistic innovation of the Razmnama
- ◆ assess the broader historical impact of cross-cultural exchanges through literature, translation projects and court patronage of syncretic thought

Prerequisite

Persian became the dominant literary and administrative language in India following the arrival of Turkish and Central Asian rulers, replacing Arabic in courtly and secular contexts under the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire. Influenced by classical poets such as Firdausi and Sadi, Persian literature in India developed a distinct regional character, exemplified by Amir Khusrau, who blended Persian forms with Indian themes and vernacular elements. Numerous Sanskrit texts, including the Mahabharata and Ramayana, were translated into Persian during the Mughal period, notably under Akbar and Shah Jahan, and scholars such as Dara Shukoh similarly rendered the Upanishads into Persian. Urdu emerged later from the interaction of Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and local dialects, inheriting Persian poetic forms such as the ghazal and qasida and eventually developing into a major literary language in its own right.

Keywords

Persianisation, Amir Khusrau, Dara Shikoh, *Majma-ul-Bahrain*, *Sirr-i-Akbar*, Vedantic Islam, Syncretism, *Razmnama*

Discussion

In the medieval period, Arabic was the cornerstone of Islamic scholarship and theology throughout the Muslim world, though in India its impact was largely confined to religious communities. In contrast, Persian, which had gained prestige as the official and literary language in Iran and Central Asia by the 10th century, became dominant in India with the arrival of the Turks.

Persian quickly replaced Arabic for governance and cultural expression. Though Islamic legal texts were originally compiled in Arabic, many were later translated into Persian with local scholarly support. Notable among these legal works are the *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri* and *Fiqh-i-Firuzshahi*, prepared under the reigns of Aurangzeb and Firuz Tughlaq respectively.

The adoption of Persian led to a literary flourishing. Influenced by renowned Persian poets like Firdausi and Sadi, Turkish rulers promoted Persian in courts and administration. Lahore emerged as a significant hub for Persian culture. Early Indian Persian writers like Masud Sad Salman expressed deep emotional connections to their Indian surroundings.

The adoption of Persian led to a literary flourishing. Influenced by renowned Persian poets like Firdausi and Sadi, Turkish rulers promoted Persian in courts and administration. Lahore emerged as a significant hub for Persian culture. Early Indian Persian writers like Masud Sad Salman expressed deep emotional connections to their Indian surroundings.

One of the most celebrated Persian poets in India was Amir Khusrau, born in 1252. Deeply proud of his Indian identity, Khusrau praised the land, its climate and intellectual traditions. He represented a turning point where Turkish elites began embracing Indian cultural identity, indicating growing integration between rulers and the native population.

Khusrau's contribution to Persian literature was immense. He created a uniquely Indian Persian style (*sabaq-i-Hindi*), experimented with diverse poetic forms and incorporated local languages like Hindavi into his works. Though some Hindi verses appear in his writings, the *Khaliq Bari*, often linked to him, was likely penned by someone else. Khusrau was also a notable musician and a close disciple of Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya, dying shortly after his mentor.

Besides poetry, Persian became the medium for historical writing, with historians like Barani, Minhaj Siraj and Isami producing significant works. This literary growth helped deepen India's cultural ties with Iran and Central Asia. Over time, Persian became entrenched as the language of the elite and governance across much of India, both in the north and the south.

Sanskrit and Persian emerged as major scholarly languages. Initially, there was little crossover, but figures like Zia Nakhshabi began translating Sanskrit texts into Persian, such as the *Tuti Nama* and the *Kok Shastra*. During the reigns of Firuz Shah and Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin of Kashmir, many Sanskrit



works on medicine, music and even the Mahabharata were translated, fostering cross-cultural literary exchange.

5.3.1 Dara Shikoh

Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Emperor Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal, was born on March 20, 1615, in Ajmer. As part of the Mughal royal lineage, he was entrusted with military responsibilities early in life, a standard practice for princes of his status. Rather than dedicating himself solely to military exploits, Dara Shikoh immersed himself in the study of various religions and philosophies. He developed a genuine interest in spiritual teachings beyond his own Islamic background, engaging deeply with both Hindu and Christian doctrines. He learned Sanskrit and undertook the significant task of translating the Upanishads into Persian, making their philosophies accessible to a broader audience.

Dara was not just a scholar but also a poet and mystic. His philosophical leanings were heavily influenced by Sufism and he advocated for religious harmony and inclusiveness. He maintained a respectful and friendly relationship with Guru Har Rai, the seventh Sikh Guru. These progressive views endeared him to the general public but alienated more conservative elements within the Mughal court and religious elite.

Dara Shikoh stood out as a deeply committed thinker, not merely content with surface knowledge but driven by a sincere quest for spiritual truth. Unlike many royal figures of his time, he immersed himself in rigorous intellectual and mystical pursuits. His devotion to understanding the essence of all religions led him to explore the idea that beneath the outward differences, all faiths shared a common foundation. This belief inspired him to use his pen with remarkable clarity and purpose, advocating for unity and mutual respect across religious boundaries. He viewed writing not just as a scholarly

endeavour but as a form of devotion, channeling his insights into texts that aimed to reconcile divided spiritual traditions.

Rather than rejecting Islam, he offered a more expansive and inclusive interpretation of it. Dara Shukoh believed Islam had the potential to embrace the universality of all religions. His vision challenged rigid interpretations by suggesting that the divine transcended boundaries and could be reflected in every faith. For him, true belief wasn't confined to dogma but was a recognition of the divine in all humanity. Through this lens, he hoped to heal the rifts caused by sectarian divisions and bring about a more compassionate understanding between people of different backgrounds.

Dara Shukoh's literary journey can be divided into two major phases. Up to the year 1647, his focus was largely centered on Sufi teachings, especially the pantheistic traditions that emphasised the unity of all existence. After this point, he shifted his attention to a comparative study of Judaism, Christianity and Hinduism. His aim was to uncover the shared spiritual truths within these traditions and relate them to the teachings of Islam. This phase marked a deepening of his pluralistic philosophy and a broader embrace of interfaith dialogue.

During this period of exploration, Dara Shukoh became a student of the mystic Sarmad, a Jewish saint, who introduced him to the spiritual aspects of Judaism. Alongside Sarmad's disciple, Abhai Chand, they translated parts of the Torah into Persian. This project allowed Dara to engage with sacred Jewish texts firsthand, highlighting his commitment to understanding religious scriptures beyond his own tradition. His knowledge of the 'Pentateuch' (as Jews call the Torah) also influenced his contemporary, the author of the Dabistan, who admired Dara's broad-minded approach.

Christianity was more accessible to him, largely because of the existing Jesuit

presence in India, especially in cities like Agra. Dara welcomed discussions with Christian missionaries and enjoyed listening to theological debates. He respected the Christian clergy for their intellectual rigour and even developed personal relationships with several Jesuit priests from Europe. These interactions deepened his knowledge of Christian doctrines and reinforced his belief that truth could be found in many forms. His willingness to learn from diverse sources set him apart as a seeker of wisdom rather than a promoter of division.

Prior to the arrival of Islam in India, traces of Hindu philosophical ideas had already begun to influence aspects of Islamic mysticism. Scholars such as Alberuni in the 11th century and Abul Fazl in the 16th century helped introduce Muslim intellectuals to the foundational schools of Hindu thought. Their efforts made Hindu philosophy more accessible to those interested in exploring parallels between the two traditions.

During Emperor Akbar's reign, there was a cultural and intellectual shift that encouraged engagement with Indian traditions. Akbar promoted an inclusive approach to religion by translating key Hindu scriptures, such as the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Atharva Veda* into Persian. However, these works often reached a narrow audience: primarily the Persian-speaking Hindu aristocracy who had assimilated into Mughal court culture.

Badauni, who held sway among orthodox circles, viewed translating Hindu religious texts as a dangerous compromise. His understanding of Hindu customs was superficial, focusing on practices like ancient burial traditions and beef consumption. He also noted an interesting similarity between a verse in the *Atharva Veda* and the Islamic declaration of faith, based solely on phonetic resemblance.

Prince Dara Shukoh, however, took a more profound interest in bridging the intellectual

gap between Islam and Hinduism. Rather than merely sponsoring translations, he actively engaged with primary texts, aiming to unveil the philosophical depth of Hinduism to a Muslim audience. One of his major contributions was a Persian translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which he titled "Battle between Arjun and Durjodhan." This text was divided into 18 chapters and included thoughtful marginal notes.

Dara also commissioned translations of other significant works. The allegorical play 'Prahodh-Chandrodaya' authored by Krishna Misra, is a significant Sanskrit play composed in the 15th century that was adapted into Persian as "Gulzar-i-Hal" with the help of Banwalidas and Bhawanidas. He also oversaw the translation of the 'Yoga Vasishta' (a syncretic philosophical work of Hinduism, dated to the 11th to 14th century CE) resulting in a Persian manuscript titled *Tarjama-i-Joga Vashishta*, a profound dialogue on metaphysical themes.

In addition to these translations, Dara authored several important works in Persian that document his spiritual journey and evolving understanding of Sufism. His first book, "Safinat-ul-Awliya," written in his mid-twenties, contains biographical sketches of Muslim saints and reflects his early interest in Sufi teachings. The work is marked by sincere spiritual inquiry and emotional intensity.

His second book, *Sakinat-ul-Awliya*, completed a few years later, reveals a more mature spiritual perspective. It focuses especially on the saint Mian Mir of Lahore and outlines Dara's deeper involvement with the Qadiriya Sufi order. He discusses mystical experiences, stages of spiritual development and the miracles attributed to his spiritual mentors.

Dara's third and most introspective work, *Risala-i-Haqnuma* or "The Compass of Truth," was intended as a guide for Sufi



initiates. Written during a deeply emotional period marked by his wife's long illness, the book is structured as a conversation between a spiritual guide and seeker. Despite its personal tone, Dara distances himself from traditional Sufi hierarchies by addressing the seeker as "friend" rather than "disciple." The text originally had four chapters corresponding to spiritual realms but was later expanded to include two additional chapters on the nature of Truth.

Dara Shikoh, like many spiritually inclined Muslim thinkers of his time, was strongly shaped by the ideas of Neo-Platonism. Rather than claiming originality, he openly states that his insights stem from what he absorbed through his Sufi mentors and classical texts. Expecting a detached, analytical approach from someone so deeply immersed in mystical thought would be unrealistic. His work, *Risala-i-Haqnuma*, reflects both his virtues and shortcomings, painting a sincere picture of who he was. To appreciate it fully, one must approach it with spiritual sensitivity. Within a relatively brief composition, he presents the principles of Sufism in a manner that is both engaging and accessible, a rare achievement among his contemporaries.

5.3.2 Majma-ul-Bahrain

Dara Shikoh's most notable literary work was *Majma-ul-Bahrain*, 'The Confluence of the Two Seas', reflecting his intellectual engagement with spiritual traditions across cultures. Rather than a simple translation or theological argument, it is a deeply reflective text that seeks to harmonise Sufi Islamic philosophy with the core tenets of Vedantic Hinduism. He chose the title deliberately to suggest an intentional fusion between two vast oceans of spiritual thought.

In this book, Dara draws parallels between the mystical dimensions of both faiths, emphasising that they converge in their understanding of the divine. He compares

Islamic angels such as Jibrail, Mikail and Israfil with Hindu deities like Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, suggesting that the symbolic representations in both religions point toward a shared metaphysical truth. His interpretations extend to connecting concepts like Allah with Om and avatars with Islamic manifestations of divine will.

Dara portrayed himself as a seeker of hidden knowledge, adopting the identity of a mystic rather than a traditional prince. His scholarly pursuits included studying Indian religious scriptures, particularly those that emphasised the unity of God. This led him to translate texts like "Jug Bashist" and various Upanishads into Persian, thereby attempting to bridge cultural and linguistic divides. His Persian rendition of the Upanishads, *Sirr-i-Akbar*, became a cornerstone of his syncretic project.

However, Dara's liberal outlook and philosophical leanings sharply contrasted with those of his younger brother Aurangzeb, who was more orthodox and militarily skilled. Their father, Shah Jahan, had shown clear favouritism toward Dara, which intensified the succession struggle. The conflict escalated when Shah Jahan fell seriously ill, prompting a power contest among his sons.

In the decisive Battle of Samugarh in 1658, Dara was defeated by Aurangzeb, who then took steps to consolidate his authority by removing rivals. Despite a brief attempt to seek refuge in Sindh, Dara was betrayed by a local Afghan leader and handed over to Aurangzeb. He was ultimately executed on August 30, 1659, marking a tragic end to a life that had aspired to spiritual unity and cultural understanding.

Dara Shukoh's *Majma' al-Bahrain*, or "The Mingling of Two Oceans," stands as a pioneering endeavor in comparative religious philosophy, aiming to bridge Islamic and Hindu spiritual traditions. Though its exact date of authorship is debated, scholars

generally place its composition between 1650 and 1656. The text opens with a traditional Islamic invocation, affirming Dara's continued commitment to Islamic theology and reverence for the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. This introduction suggests that the author did not abandon Islamic orthodoxy, despite his unconventional intellectual explorations.

Through sustained engagement with Hindu scholars and texts, Dara Shukoh arrived at a striking conclusion that the perceived divisions between Islam and Hinduism largely arise from differences in terminology and conceptual frameworks, rather than from fundamentally opposing theological beliefs. The work collects foundational metaphysical ideas shared by both religious traditions, particularly those relating to the origins of the universe and the divine.

Dara saw himself as addressing an elite readership of individuals capable of grasping the nuances and common threads between these complex traditions. He dismisses those lacking intellectual depth, asserting that only spiritually perceptive individuals from both communities could appreciate and benefit from his comparative study. This intellectual elitism, however, underlines the exclusivity of his intended audience.

In attempting to synthesise elements from two distinct spiritual heritages, Dara embarked on an ambitious scholarly project. Though constrained by his limited command of Sanskrit and his dependence on Hindu scholars, who themselves often disagreed in their interpretations, Dara nonetheless laid important groundwork. His initiative marked one of the earliest deliberate efforts to forge understanding between Hindu and Muslim thought systems. In contrast to earlier figures like Al-Biruni, Dara lacked the same linguistic precision and critical detachment, which sometimes led to generalisations and strained parallels.

However, *Majma' al-Bahrain* remains a significant historical and intellectual artefact. Its central argument that the cosmogonic visions in Islamic and Hindu texts share substantial similarities, opened the door to a more nuanced appreciation of Indian spiritual pluralism. While some of his analogies may appear simplistic by modern standards, the work's underlying intention to promote harmony through understanding resonates strongly in a contemporary context where interreligious dialogue remains essential for cultural and national cohesion.

Dara Shukoh's most profound literary effort was his Persian translation of 52 Upanishads, titled *Sirr-i-Akbar*, meaning "The Great Secret"- a name that resonates with the essence of these philosophical texts. He began this work with a spiritual preamble, expressing a mystical understanding of God as an indivisible, all-encompassing presence. This project reflected Dara's deep commitment to exploring the idea of divine unity, or Tauhid, a quest that led him beyond Islamic sources to the esoteric heart of Hindu wisdom.

Dara interpreted a Quranic verse to suggest that the "hidden book" mentioned was actually the Upanishads, challenging the usual belief that it referred to Jewish or Christian scriptures. Though this idea was controversial and debated, it reflected his broader aim to bridge Islamic and Indian philosophies. To realise this vision, Dara collaborated with Hindu scholars and ascetics in Benares, then the epicenter of Vedic learning. With their guidance, he completed the translation in a remarkably short time, even choosing to remain in Delhi during a deadly summer outbreak rather than abandon his work, despite his father's illness.

In describing his method, Dara claimed to have translated the texts faithfully, word for word, without adding or omitting meaning. Occasionally, he used Sankara's



commentaries to clarify difficult passages and made slight adaptations to better suit a Muslim readership unfamiliar with Hindu terminology and cosmology. His effort went beyond mere translation, it was an act of cultural bridging, rendering complex Hindu ideas in a form that resonated with Islamic traditions.

Dara's intellectual endeavour marks an early and significant contribution to comparative religion and mythology in medieval India. By aligning Hindu deities with Islamic figures like identifying Mahadev with the angel Israfil, he opened a pathway for interfaith understanding that extended beyond linguistic translation to theological synthesis. His work remains a rare and sincere attempt to harmonise two rich spiritual traditions through scholarship, empathy and philosophical insight.

Abul Fazl

Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* presents a broad exploration of Indian traditions and spiritual practices, comparable in scope to the 11th-century studies of Alberuni. Although Alberuni's work is often considered more detailed and analytical, an opinion supported by translator Jarrett, Abul Fazl's account is still important because it uses new sources and focuses on describing. While Alberuni pursued critical insight, Abul Fazl aimed at compiling and documenting.

Abul Fazl relied heavily on verbal testimonies, especially from knowledgeable Brahmans and Jains with whom he engaged closely. A major cultural initiative at Akbar's court saw the translation of Sanskrit literature into Persian, a movement that began around 1575-76 with the arrival of Shaikh Bhawan, a Brahman convert. Among the first texts translated was the Atharva Veda, a complex endeavour complicated by linguistic challenges and Shaikh Bhawan's interpretive bias. Though Badauni later dismissed it as a failure, Abul Fazl recognised the work as a valuable translation.

5.3.3 Razmnama

A landmark in the translation project was the rendering of the *Mahabharata* in 1582. Badauni, alongside figures like Naqib Khan and Shaikh Faizi, worked on this ambitious effort. The translation moved from Sanskrit to Hindi and then into Persian, culminating in the richly adorned *Razmnama*. Akbar championed the work, distributing copies to courtiers and arranging public readings. However, Badauni was censured in 1595 for introducing Islamic theological elements, like the concept of final judgment, which conflicted with Hindu doctrines such as reincarnation. Subsequent projects included the *Ramayana*, which Badauni claimed to have translated solo between 1584 and 1591. He produced both concise and extensive versions, navigating religious tensions with care. The final product, like the *Razmnama*, featured detailed illustrations and was well-received despite initial hesitations.

Several other texts were adapted into Persian, including the *Yogavasishtha*, translated before 1605 with scholarly collaboration, the *Harivamsa*, attributed to Mulla Shiri though the manuscript is missing and scientific treatises like Bhaskaracharya's *Lilavati*, translated by Faizi. Another notable project was the adaptation of an astronomical text possibly based on Nilkantha's *Tajikanilkanthi*. The historical chronicle *Rajatarangini* by Kalhana was translated by Shah Muhammad Shahabadi, later revised in idiomatic Persian by Badauni.

Despite ideological clashes and personal grievances, Badauni continued to contribute to Akbar's translation campaign, earning patronage for his work. His final assignment involved reinterpreting a Persian history of Kashmir initially produced during Sultan Zainul Abidin's rule. Although some translations were lost or left incomplete, Akbar's cultural initiative stands out as a monumental scholarly pursuit. The central

focus on texts like the *Mahabharata* likely influenced the growing stature of Vaishnavism at the Mughal court during this era.

By the late 16th century, Emperor Akbar's efforts to consolidate his rule over the religiously diverse Mughal Empire led to significant cultural and administrative reforms. He integrated non-Muslim communities, especially Hindus, into state structures by removing discriminatory taxes, engaging in strategic marriages and promoting inclusivity within the bureaucracy. These initiatives cultivated an environment of relative tolerance and religious pluralism during his long reign.

In 1574, Akbar founded a translation bureau at Fatehpur Sikri, commissioning Persian versions of key Sanskrit texts such as the *Ramayana* and the *Rajatarangini*, as well as Islamic and Central Asian works. These translations not only made Hindu literary culture accessible to Persian-speaking elites but also advanced Akbar's goal of establishing Persian as the lingua franca of the empire's bureaucracy, thereby strengthening a shared administrative identity across sectarian lines.

Among the most ambitious of these translation projects was the conversion of the *Mahabharata* into Persian, begun in 1582. Due to the epic's immense length, the *Razmnama* ("Book of War") took the form of an abridged illustrated manuscript. The initial imperial version, completed by 1586, was followed by another illustrated copy between 1598 and 1599. While long believed to be a non-imperial work due to its more modest execution, evidence from artist signatures suggests it was created within the Mughal court, likely as a diplomatic or noble gift.

Akbar's intention behind the *Razmnama* was political as much as cultural. The preface, penned by his court historian Abu'l Fazl, emphasised the value of shared religious

insights and the translation's potential to promote mutual understanding and reduce sectarian strife. The participation of conservative scholars like Bada'uni in the translation effort highlighted Akbar's effort to strike a balance between religious reform and maintaining the support of orthodox circles.

The actual process of translation involved intricate cooperation between Hindu scholars and Muslim courtiers. Since the supervising Muslims lacked proficiency in Sanskrit, Brahmanical experts first explained the text, which was then interpreted into Persian prose and verse by court figures like Faizi. An introductory illustration from the 1598–1599 edition visually represents this interfaith collaboration, showing the translators, visually similar yet distinguishable by subtle religious markers, working together harmoniously.

Illustrating the *Razmnama* was challenging due to the lack of a visual tradition for the *Mahabharata*. Artists created original designs rather than repeating earlier versions, possibly due to courtly innovation or time and budget constraints. Despite these limits, the 1598–1599 copy featured creative elements, such as dramatic tones and geometric forms, influenced in part by European engravings introduced by Jesuit missionaries, especially in depictions of mythic and supernatural scenes.

While many illustrations required novel approaches, others were adapted from well-established Mughal visual repertoires. Battle scenes, for example, were easily modeled on illustrations from Persian epics like the *Shahnama* or imperial histories such as the *Akbarnama* and *Baburnama*. This stylistic continuity made it easier for court artists to execute such scenes without requiring new visual frameworks.

Some episodes, like the gods escorting King Ikshvaku to heaven, relied heavily



on standard Mughal settings and visual motifs, incorporating familiar architectural elements and costume styles. In such cases, the innovation lay in specific details like the rendering of divine figures or symbolic motifs such as a departing soul.

Other paintings demonstrated both homage and reinterpretation. The image

of gods and demons churning the ocean of milk, for instance, drew inspiration from an earlier Ramayana illustration but featured notable compositional shifts that reflected the artist's aesthetic judgment. The Razmnam also reflects Akbar's vision of a syncretic empire.

Recap

- ◆ Persian dominated India's administration and literature deeply
- ◆ Persian replaced Arabic in courts; key Islamic texts were translated faithfully
- ◆ Persian literary culture flourished under rulers influenced by Persian poetry
- ◆ Amir Khusrau pioneered the Indian-Persian style; merged poetry with the Hindavi language
- ◆ Persian became the language of history; the elite embraced cultural synthesis actively
- ◆ Sanskrit-Persian translations began, enabling literary bridges during tolerant reigns
- ◆ Dara Shikoh embraced Hindu and Christian teachings alongside Islamic Sufi thought
- ◆ He translated the Upanishads into Persian and believed all religions shared spiritual unity
- ◆ He advocated inclusivity, earning public support but alienating religious conservatives deeply
- ◆ Dara produced multiple works reflecting mysticism, interfaith ideals and deep empathy
- ◆ Majma-ul-Bahrain compared Islamic Sufism and Hindu Vedantic thought sincerely
- ◆ Akbar established a translation bureau promoting Persian access to Hindu scripture

- ◆ The Razmnama (Mahabharata) showcased interfaith literary and visual collaboration innovatively
- ◆ Illustrations reflected Mughal styles, symbolising harmony and imperial syncretic ideals

Objective Questions

1. Which language replaced Arabic for governance in medieval India?
2. Who compiled the Fatawa-i-Alamgiri?
3. Who was the most famous Persian poet in India during the medieval period?
4. What literary style is attributed to Amir Khusrau?
5. Which Mughal prince translated the Upanishads into Persian?
6. What is the title of Dara Shikoh's translation of the Upanishads?
7. Which book by Dara Shikoh attempts to harmonise Islamic and Hindu philosophy?
8. Who defeated Dara Shikoh in the Battle of Samugarh?
9. What was the title of the Persian adaptation of the Mahabharata?
10. Which emperor established the translation bureau at Fatehpur Sikri?
11. Which scientific treatise was translated by Faizi?
12. Which Jewish mystic influenced Dara Shikoh?

Answers

1. Persian
2. Aurangzeb



3. Amir Khusrau
4. Sabaq-i-Hindi
5. Dara Shukoh
6. Sirr-i-Akbar
7. Majma-ul-Bahrain
8. Aurangzeb
9. Razmnama
10. Akbar
11. Lilavati
12. Sarmad

Assignments

1. Discuss the role of Persian as a language of administration and culture in medieval India.
2. Evaluate Dara Shikoh's philosophical and religious outlook.
3. Examine the objectives and outcomes of Akbar's translation bureau at Fatehpur Sikri.
4. Explain the significance of Majma-ul-Bahrain in the context of comparative religion.
5. Assess the importance of the Razmnama project in Mughal India.

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4

UNIT

Music and Painting

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ examine the contributions of Amir Khusrau, Tansen, Basawan and Mansur in shaping India's artistic legacy
- ◆ identify how Persian, Arabic and Indian music traditions blended under rulers from the Sultanate to the Mughals
- ◆ examine how emperors like Akbar and Shah Jahan supported and institutionalised music and painting
- ◆ describe the development of Mughal miniature painting and its Persian, Indian and European influences

Prerequisite

Music and painting flourished during the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal periods as expressions of a broader synthesis of Persian, Central Asian, and Indian artistic traditions. In music, figures such as Amir Khusrau introduced genres like qawwali and integrated Persian ragas into Indian musical forms, while court patronage under rulers such as Akbar and Muhammad Shah supported musicians including Tansen and Sadarang. Painting evolved from Persian miniature traditions into a distinct Mughal style marked by naturalism and narrative detail, beginning under Humayun and institutionalised under Akbar's imperial atelier, which produced works such as the Hamzanama and Akbarnama. The tradition reached its height under Jahangir, known for his interest in botanical and zoological accuracy, before continuing in modified form under Shah Jahan and later regional courts.

Keywords

Amir Khusrau, Qawwali, Sitar, Tabla, Ragadarpan, Tansen, Drupad and Khayal, Hamza Nama, Miniature painting, Akbar's atelier

Discussion

The evolution of music and painting during medieval India reflects the broader currents of cultural synthesis that defined the period. With the arrival of the Turks and the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, India witnessed a vibrant exchange between indigenous and foreign artistic traditions. Instruments like the *rabab* and *sarangi* were introduced, while influential figures such as Amir Khusrau bridged Persian and Indian styles, creating new ragas and musical forms like qawwali. Under the Mughals, musical patronage reached its zenith, with rulers like Akbar and Muhammad Shah fostering artistic innovation and courtly refinement, giving rise to classical traditions that continue to influence Indian music today.

Similarly, painting flourished as a dynamic and syncretic art form, especially under Mughal patronage. While rooted in ancient Indian visual traditions and enriched by Persian techniques, the Mughal school of painting developed a distinct identity. Emperors like Akbar institutionalised the art by founding imperial ateliers that brought together artists from various religious and social backgrounds. Masterpieces like the *Hamza Nama* and the *Akbar Nama* reflected not only royal power but also a maturing aesthetic that merged realism, portraiture and narrative depth. Though later rulers like Aurangzeb withdrew patronage, the legacy of Mughal painting persisted, evolving into regional styles across Rajasthan and the Punjab hills, thereby securing its place in the cultural heritage of India.

5.4.1 Music

The movement toward cultural unity extended beyond religious practices and rituals, also influencing areas like literature, architecture and most notably, the fine arts, especially music. When the Turks entered India, they brought with them a musical heritage rooted in Arab traditions, which had evolved further in places like Iran and Central Asia. Alongside this legacy came new musical instruments like the *rabab* and *sarangi*, as well as unfamiliar tonal systems and musical structures. It is possible that Indian musical influences had already reached the courts of the Abbasid Caliphs in Baghdad, but more structured exchanges took place within India during the time of the Delhi Sultanate.

One of the significant cultural arenas where Hindus and Muslims found common ground was music. By the 14th century, Indian music had become a prominent part of life at the Sultanate courts and even conservative leaders like Firuz Tughlaq offered support to musicians. One of the most significant figures in this cross-cultural synthesis was Amir Khusrau. Renowned for his deep knowledge of musical theory and performance, he earned the title “nayak.” He introduced Persian-Arabic melodies, ragas such as *aiman*, *gora* and *sanam* into the Indian musical framework. Khusrau is often credited with the creation of the qawwali form and is sometimes linked with the invention of the sitar, although solid evidence for the



latter is lacking. The tabla, also associated with him, likely emerged much later, between the late 1600s and early 1700s.

This blending of musical traditions continued under Sultan Firuz Shah's reign. During his rule, the classical Indian text *Ragadarpan* was translated into Persian, symbolising growing accessibility across cultural lines. Musical performances became more widespread, no longer limited to Sufi circles but embraced by royal courts. One major patron was Sultan Husain Sharqi of Jaunpur, while Pir Bodhan, a revered Sufi mystic, was recognised as another leading musical figure of that period.

Gwalior emerged as a notable regional center for musical development. Under the patronage of Raja Man Singh, the influential text *Man Kautuhal* was compiled, cataloguing numerous musical forms introduced by Muslim musicians. Although it is unclear when exactly the divergence between northern and southern Indian musical traditions took root, the northern styles clearly absorbed many elements from Persian and Arabic sources.

Kashmir, too, witnessed the evolution of a unique musical identity, heavily shaped by Persian influence. Following the conquest of Jaunpur, Sikandar Lodi continued to support music generously, setting a precedent that the Afghan rulers would maintain. One such Afghan leader, Adali, descendant of Sher Shah Suri was himself a skilled musician. However, it was under the Mughals that music found its golden age, flourishing with state patronage and artistic refinement.

As regional kingdoms gained power in the 15th and 16th centuries, music continued to flourish under royal patronage. Raja Man Singh of Gwalior, known for his musical talent, created numerous new melodies compiled in a text titled *Man Kautuhal*. Music was not confined to palaces, it also thrived in Hindu temples and among Sufi

mystics. Swami Hari Das of Vrindavan was a revered music lover and it is said Emperor Akbar once attended his performance in disguise. Many bhakti poets composed their spiritual songs using specific ragas and melodic patterns.

Among Delhi's rulers, Adali, the son of Islam Shah Sur, was known for his skill in playing the pakhavaj and his deep appreciation for music. Akbar's fascination with music began early in his life. His court historian, Abul Fazl, claimed Akbar's musical knowledge rivaled that of trained professionals, particularly in instruments like the 'naqara'. His passion led him to invite Tansen from Man Singh's court to join his own. Tansen rose to prominence as Akbar's chief vocalist, composing numerous Hindi songs and inventing new *ragas*, many still performed today. He popularised the dignified drupad style of singing, which originated in Gwalior.

Shah Jahan also embraced music and is believed to have become quite skilled himself. Even Aurangzeb, known for his later conservatism, played the veena and supported musicians during the early years of his reign. However, his shift toward stricter religious views eventually led him to expel vocalists from court, although instrumental music survived. Satish Chandra mentions, ironically, that despite Aurangzeb's disdain for music, numerous treatises on the subject were produced during his rule, including the renowned *Tuhfat-ul-Hind*, written for his grandson Jahandar Shah. Music found continued support among nobles and royal women, even in the imperial harem.

The reign of Muhammad Shah (1719–1748) marked a vibrant era for musical development. Esteemed vocalists like Niamat Khan Sadarang and Firuz Khan Adarang dominated his court. Though rooted in the traditional drupad genre, they trained students in the more expressive and romantic khayal

style, which gained immense popularity. Muhammad Shah himself composed in this genre, writing under the pseudonym *Rangila Piya*. During this time, many courtesans earned fame for their musical and dance talents. The tabla and sitar also gained popularity, although their exact origins remain uncertain.

5.4.2 Painting

The Mughal painting tradition gradually earned its place as a unique and influential art style. Drawing from earlier artistic legacies, it flourished and reached its artistic zenith during the 17th century. Even after the decline of Mughal power, this style endured in various regional forms across India.

Indian visual art has deep roots, with references in Sanskrit literature and the striking murals of Ajanta highlighting its ancient brilliance. Although this tradition weakened after the 8th century, it never fully vanished surviving in illustrated Jain manuscripts on palm leaves. The adoption of paper in the 13th century revitalised the art form. Artists gained more freedom with colour and space, allowing miniature paintings to evolve in refinement, particularly in Gujarat and Malwa.

There are no surviving illustrated texts from the Sultanate period, although Amir Khusrau mentioned that painting was popular among the nobility. Sultan Firuz even had his palace murals removed. At the same time, a vibrant painting scene was growing in Shiraz, Persia, which had absorbed Chinese artistic influences. During the 15th century, painters and scholars from Shiraz migrated to Indian courts such as Gujarat, Malwa and Jaunpur. This cultural exchange shaped a hybrid style, well-illustrated by the *Niamat Nama* created in Mandu, combining Indian figural features with Persian botanical motifs.

The Mughal school began taking shape during Humayun's exile in Persia and Afghanistan. He encountered Bihzad, a famed

Persian artist and welcomed his pupils Mir Saiyid Ali and Abdus Samad into his court. These painters later followed Humayun to Delhi. In 1567, Akbar commissioned a lavishly illustrated version of the *Hamza Nama*, an epic tale. This massive project, involving over a hundred artists from diverse Indian regions, took fifteen years and included more than 1,400 illustrated pages. It became a formative workshop for many Indian painters.

This artistic boom extended to other major works, including the *Anwar-i-Suhaili*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and various historical chronicles like the *Akbar Nama* and *Genghis Nama*. Many of these illustrated texts have been lost or dispersed across collections in Europe and the United States, making research on Mughal painting both fragmented and challenging.

Akbar had a deep appreciation for the visual arts, especially painting, which he developed into a formal department under the imperial administration. From a young age, he supported and promoted this craft enthusiastically. His court historian, Abul Fazl, noted Akbar's consistent efforts to uplift the art of painting. Artists from diverse religious and social backgrounds, both Muslims and Hindus were welcomed into the imperial atelier. Interestingly, most of the artists recorded by Abul Fazl were Hindus, including some from lower social groups, such as Daswant, who originally worked as a palanquin bearer before Akbar recognised his talent and mentored him.

Painters working under Akbar were provided with regular incomes and often received additional rewards for their work. Their completed artwork was presented to the emperor, who personally evaluated it. Essential materials and tools were supplied by the state and efforts were made to enhance the quality of colour mixtures, reflecting a serious investment in improving artistic technique and output.



Although some conservative Islamic scholars criticised painting as contrary to religious teachings, Abul Fazl defended the practice. He argued that the act of capturing life on canvas made artists more aware of the divine, as only God could truly bestow individuality upon living beings. The subjects chosen by artists were broad, including battles, hunting expeditions, fantastical figures and architectural projects. Portraiture gained popularity, Akbar even had likenesses made of his nobles and sat for his own portraits.

One artist, Basawan, stood out for his skill in capturing facial features and portrait painting in general. Still, the painting process remained largely collaborative rather than specialised. It wasn't unusual for multiple artists to work on a single piece, one might sketch the layout, another applies colour and a third complete the facial details. This rotation of roles showcased both versatility and teamwork. In time, Akbar's successor, Jahangir, claimed he could identify the individual contributions within such collective artworks, demonstrating the distinct styles that emerged despite the joint efforts.

During Akbar's era, painting gained a solid footing and evolved beyond the strict, flat style typical of Persian art by incorporating the more rounded and lifelike qualities found in Indian painting, creating a sense of depth and volume. Elements such as Indian flora, architecture and distinctive colours like peacock blue and Indian red were introduced into the artworks. Mughal painting reached its peak during Jahangir's reign, who had a keen artistic sense. Along with the usual depictions of hunting, battles and court life, Jahangir's

period saw significant advancements in portraiture and detailed renderings of animals and plants, with Mansur being a prominent artist in these areas.

European painting techniques arrived at Akbar's court through Portuguese missionaries and their influence led to the adoption of perspective methods like foreshortening, which aimed to show spatial depth. However, Indian artists never fully grasped these perspective rules, often representing distant subjects vertically rather than in proper perspective. The earlier bird's-eye view style, which allowed multiple levels of action within a single scene, was replaced by compositions with circular arrangements. Although Mughal painters created lively studies of wildlife, they generally did not focus on nature independently; instead, trees, birds, streams and hills frequently served as backdrops, characterised by softly rounded tree trunks.

Painting continued to receive patronage during Shah Jahan's reign, but his artistic tastes did not match Jahangir's refinement, resulting in an abundance of court scenes and extensive use of gold ornamentation. Aurangzeb's disinterest in painting caused many artists to disperse across the country, which contributed to the growth of regional styles in Rajasthan and the Punjab hills. The Rajasthan style blended Mughal techniques with themes and traditions from western Indian or Jain painting schools, expanding the subjects to include mythological stories such as Krishna's romantic episodes with Radha, the twelve months (*Barah-masa*) and musical ragas. The *Pahari* school carried on these traditions further.

Recap

- ◆ Turkish influence introduced new instruments, tonal systems and musical forms
- ◆ Amir Khusrau blended Persian melodies into Indian musical traditions
- ◆ Qawwali developed; sitar attribution to Khusrau remains historically debated
- ◆ Firuz Shah's reign promoted translations and cross-cultural musical growth
- ◆ Gwalior became a music center under Raja Man Singh
- ◆ Music flourished in temples, Sufi spaces and royal courts
- ◆ Tansen, Akbar's court singer, popularised the drupad singing style
- ◆ Aurangzeb banned vocal music but tolerated instrumental forms briefly
- ◆ Muhammad Shah patronised khayal style and famous vocalists emerged
- ◆ Miniature painting revived after paper replaced palm leaf manuscripts
- ◆ Akbar's atelier included diverse artists, regardless of religion or caste
- ◆ Hamza Nama became a milestone of collaborative Mughal artistry
- ◆ Jahangir elevated portraiture and botanical detail to artistic heights
- ◆ European techniques introduced perspective; Indian artists adapted selectively
- ◆ Decline of Mughal art led to regional painting schools

Objective Questions

1. Who is credited with introducing Persian-Arabic melodies into Indian music?
2. Which musical form is Amir Khusrau often credited with creating?



3. During whose reign was the Ragadarpan translated into Persian?
4. Which regional ruler compiled Man Kautuhal, a key music text?
5. Who was invited by Akbar to join his court and became the chief vocalist?
6. What style of singing did Tansen popularise?
7. Which Mughal emperor expelled vocalists from his court due to conservative views?
8. Which genre did Niamat Khan Sadarang help popularise during Muhammad Shah's reign?
9. Which Mughal emperor established a formal painting department in his administration?
10. The Hamza Nama project was initiated under which emperor?
11. Which artist is known for excellence in portrait painting during Akbar's reign?
12. Which school of art is known for continuing Mughal painting traditions in hill regions?

Answers

1. Amir Khusrau
2. Qawwali
3. Firuz Shah
4. Raja Man Singh
5. Tansen
6. Dhrupad
7. Aurangzeb
8. Khayal
9. Akbar
10. Akbar
11. Basawan
12. Pahari

Assignments

1. Discuss the role of Amir Khusrau in the evolution of Indo-Islamic music.
2. How did Mughal emperors contribute to the patronage and development of music in India?
3. Explain how the Mughal school of painting evolved under Akbar and Jahangir. Discuss the stylistic developments, artist collaborations and thematic diversity.
4. In what ways did Persian and Indian artistic traditions merge in the development of miniature painting?

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UNIT

Architecture

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ identify and describe the key architectural features and innovations introduced during the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal periods
- ◆ trace the evolution of Indo-Islamic architecture
- ◆ explain the socio-political and cultural factors that shaped architectural styles under different dynasties
- ◆ compare architectural developments across dynasties noting the transition from utilitarian and fortress-like structures to more ornate and symbolic designs

Prerequisite

Medieval Indian architecture, spanning the Delhi Sultanate to the Mughal period, reflects a fusion of Islamic and indigenous Indian styles shaped by political ambition and religious expression. Early Sultanate structures such as the Qutb Minar and Quwwat al-Islam Mosque reused temple materials and marked early experimentation with Islamic architectural forms, while subsequent dynasties, including the Khaljis, Tughluqs, and Lodis, refined features such as arches, domes, and geometric ornamentation. The Mughals built on this foundation, combining Persian, Timurid, and Indian elements in forts, mosques, gardens, and mausoleums, culminating in the Taj Mahal. Regional traditions from Gujarat, Bengal, and the Deccan were also absorbed into this evolving architectural vocabulary.

Keywords

Medieval Architecture, Qutb Minar, Taj Mahal, Alai Darwaza, Humayun's Tomb, Fatehpur Sikri, Sher Shah Suri tomb, Persian influence, Chhatris, Pietra dura, Buland Darwaza, Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque

Discussion

5.5.1 Sultanate

The architecture of the Delhi Sultanate (13th–16th centuries) evolved through various dynastic phases, reflecting a synthesis of Islamic design principles with indigenous Indian styles. Initially driven by the need for expedience and symbolic dominance, Sultanate architecture gradually matured into distinct regional styles. Key features included arches, domes, minarets and extensive use of decorative motifs, alongside a practical adaptation of local building materials and techniques.

The earliest phase of Islamic architecture in India, especially under the Mamluks, was shaped by adaptation. The Quwwat al-Islam Mosque in Delhi, established by Qutb-ud-din Aibak, exemplifies this phase, using pillaged temple columns and constructing corbelled arches instead of true ones. The Qutb Minar, a minaret nearby, drew stylistic inspiration from Ghazni, introducing Islamic verticality.

Under the Khaljis, particularly Alauddin Khalji, architecture started to adopt more coherent Islamic forms. The Alai Darwaza at the Quwwat al-Islam complex marked the first true use of the voussoired arch and horseshoe arch in India, using quarried stone rather than reused materials. Surfaces were richly ornamented with geometric patterns, calligraphy and white marble inlays, signaling a transition toward more integrated Islamic design.

The Tughluqs introduced a fortress-like architectural style, favouring simplicity and

strength over ornamentation. Structures like Tughluqabad Fort and Ghiyasuddin Tughluq's tomb featured sloping walls (*batter*) and restrained decoration. Practicality dominated form; red sandstone and rubble masonry were common, domes were shallow and arches were pointed but often austere. Firuz Shah Tughluq encouraged renovation and some experimentation, such as intersecting vaults and sloped *chhajjas* (eaves).

Following Timur's sack of Delhi, architecture became more conservative. Octagonal tombs became prominent, such as those of the Sayyids, combining dome construction with elements like *chhatris* (dome-shaped pavilions) and tiled decoration. The Lodis further diversified architectural vocabulary, introducing square tombs with multi-tiered facades and blending features like recessed arches, decorative tilework and refined calligraphy. The Lodi Garden tombs in Delhi exemplify this era's evolving sophistication.

Under the Sultanate, provincial styles flourished. In Gujarat, artisans developed a richly ornamented style using local stone and indigenous techniques, leading to structures like the Jami Masjid in Ahmedabad, notable for its screen work and richly carved minarets. In Malwa, domes on high drums and minimal ornaments were common, as seen in Hoshang Shah's tomb at Mandu. Bengal's architecture, constrained by material availability, used terracotta and brick, with curved cornices and intricate tile decoration, as found in Adina Mosque at Pandua.



Fig. 5.5.1 Quwwat al-Islam Mosque
Source : Asian Historical Architecture

In the Deccan, sultanates like the Bahmanis and Adil Shahis introduced innovations influenced by Persian styles, such as stilted arches, monumental domes and decorative tilework. The Gol Gumbaz in Bijapur showcases the monumental ambition and engineering prowess of late Sultanate architecture.

5.5.1.1 Qutb Minar

Qutb Minar, constructed from red and buff sandstone, is the tallest tower in India.

The foundation of the minar was laid in 1199 CE by Qutbu'd-Din Aibak, who built the first storey to serve as a platform for the mu'azzin (crier) to call the faithful to prayer. His successor and son-in-law, Shamsu'd-Din Iltutmish (reigned 1211–1236 CE), added three more storeys. Each level features a projecting balcony supported by intricately carved stone brackets, especially ornate in the first storey with a prominent honeycomb design.



Fig. 5.5.2 Qutb Minar Source : BBC

The minar is adorned with numerous inscriptions in Arabic and Nagari scripts, which detail its history. These inscriptions indicate that it was repaired by Firuz Shah Tughlaq (1351–1388 CE) and Sikandar Lodi (1489–1517 CE). In 1829, Major R. Smith also undertook restoration work on the structure.

Adjacent to the minar, to the northeast, stands the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque, commissioned by Qutbu'd-Din Aibak in 1198 CE. It is the oldest surviving mosque built by the Delhi Sultans and features a rectangular courtyard surrounded by cloisters.

The mosque was later expanded by Shamsu'd-Din Iltutmish and Alau'd-Din Khalji, who also added a lofty arched screen. In the mosque's courtyard stands the Iron Pillar, which bears a Sanskrit inscription in Brahmi dating to the 4th century CE. The inscription credits the pillar as a Vishnudevajra (standard of the god Vishnu) erected in honour of a powerful king named Chandra. A deep socket atop the capital suggests it once held a figure of Garuda.

The tomb of Iltutmish, constructed in 1235 CE, is a simple square chamber made of red sandstone. Its entrances and interior are richly decorated with inscriptions, geometric and arabesque patterns in the Saracenic style, with some motifs like the wheel and tassel echoing Hindu artistic traditions.

The Ala'i Darwaza, the mosque's southern gateway, was built by Alau'd-Din Khalji in 1311 CE, as stated in its inscription. It is the first structure to incorporate pure Islamic architectural principles and ornamental design. To the north of the Qutb Minar stands the Ala'i Minar, begun by Alau'd-Din Khalji with the ambition of building a tower twice the size of the Qutb Minar. However, only the first storey was completed, which currently rises to a height of 25 meters. The Qutb Complex also includes various other historical structures such as

madrasas, graves, tombs, mosques and other architectural fragments, reflecting the rich cultural and architectural legacy of the early Delhi Sultanate.

5.5.2 Mughals

The Mughal emperors were known for their grand architectural endeavours, constructing an array of impressive structures such as forts, palaces, gateways, rest houses, public baths, mosques and stepwells. One of their distinctive contributions was the development of well-planned gardens featuring flowing water, which often extended into royal residences and leisure retreats. Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, had a particular passion for landscaping and established several gardens around Agra and Lahore. However, only a few of these historical gardens still exist today, among them, Nishat Bagh in Kashmir, Shalimar in Lahore, Pinjore near Kalka and the Arambagh near Agra. These surviving sites offer a glimpse into Mughal garden design, with their structured terraces and water channels.

Although Babur had refined aesthetic sensibilities, his architectural legacy in India remains minimal due to limited time and resources. Most of the buildings attributed to him have not withstood the test of time. His appreciation for order and proportion in design led him to critique the architectural styles he encountered in India, particularly those associated with the Lodis in cities like Delhi, Agra and Lahore. The mosques linked to Babur in Ayodhya and Sambhal were likely remodeled versions of existing structures and do not fully represent his architectural ideas.

Among the prominent constructions of the time were those commissioned by Sher Shah Suri, especially in Sasaram and Delhi. The mausoleums at Sasaram were inspired by the octagonal tombs of the Lodi period, with Sher Shah's own tomb standing out as

a masterpiece. Positioned in the middle of a large reservoir, the reflection of the structure creates a dramatic visual effect, enhancing its grandeur. The tomb is built on a high square platform with elegant chhatris (domed kiosks) at each corner and an encircling veranda adds depth and rhythm to the structure. The dome rises majestically in layers, topped by a lotus-shaped finial, embodying both power and stability. Elements of Sher Shah's architectural style, such as the solid geometry and layered design, would later influence the design of the Taj Mahal, although the latter emphasises delicacy and ethereal beauty in contrast to the sturdiness and strength of Sher Shah's mausoleum, reflecting the character of its patron.

The structure known as Purana Qila, or the Old Fort, was constructed under Sher Shah Suri and possibly incorporated elements of Humayun's former city, Jahanpanah. Built of grey stone, the fort boasts towering walls and an eye-catching entrance made from red sandstone, embellished with white marble and touches of blue glaze.

Outside the fort stands the Khair-ul-Majalis, a mosque and madrasa combination, which was built in 1561 by Maham Anaga. The only intact building within the fort is the Qila-i-Kuhna mosque, serving as the royal place of worship. Its architecture is marked by a well-proportioned five-arch façade, with each arch set in a rectangular frame. The central arch stands out in size and is flanked by smaller ones on either side. Notably, three of the arches feature oriel windows in a style reminiscent of Rajasthan.

The mosque's ornamentation is subtle, using white marble inlay and coloured glazed designs. Slender turrets beside the central bay and on the rear corners give the building structural strength and visual symmetry. The flat roof, a hallmark of Lodi architecture, marks the culmination of that style and hints at a new era in design.

The true advent of Mughal architecture began under Akbar, who not only had the resources but also a deep interest in monumental construction. Like his grandfather Babur, Akbar had a refined aesthetic sense and took a hands-on approach to building. He was especially committed to merging the diverse architectural traditions found across India into a unified, grand style.

During Akbar's rule, architectural styles evolved by merging diverse influences. Two distinct streams were prominent, one inspired by Persian design, which Humayun had embraced during his exile in the Persian court. This influence is evident in Humayun's tomb, commissioned by his widow Haji Begum around 1564. The monument, built on a raised platform with red sandstone and capped by an elegant white marble dome, demonstrated a refined blend of form and function. Historians suggest it reflected Timurid sensibilities while also showcasing a uniquely Indian reinterpretation of Persian ideas.

A signature element of Persian architecture found in the tomb was the double dome. Though not new to India, it had previously appeared in the tomb of Sikandar Lodi, it achieved a more sophisticated execution here. This structure offered both a pleasing exterior silhouette and a harmonious interior. The internal layout also followed Persian models, featuring interconnected rooms along corridors rather than a single central chamber. Still, such spatial arrangements had roots in earlier Indian designs as well. Adding to the architectural fusion, Indian elements such as formal garden layouts and ornamental gateways became central. Minarets supporting the dome mirrored Gujarat's architectural norms, while domed kiosks resembled Rajasthani motifs. Decorative arches and delicate white inlay work further enhanced the tomb's visual impact, blending multiple regional styles.



While construction on Humayun's tomb progressed in Delhi, Akbar focused on establishing new imperial landmarks. One of his major undertakings was the fort at Agra, begun in 1565 and finished in eight years. It featured imposing red sandstone battlements, fortified gates with twin octagonal towers

and would become a blueprint for forts later built in Lahore, Ajmer and Allahabad. Shah Jahan's famed Red Fort in Delhi also drew inspiration from this design.

Within the Agra Fort, Akbar erected numerous structures, blending Bengal and



Fig. 5.5.3 Agra Fort

Source: Archaeological Survey of India

Gujarat architectural styles, according to court chronicler Abul Fazl. Although many of these buildings were later demolished by Shah Jahan, surviving remnants like the Jahangiri Mahal reveal the aesthetic sensibilities of Akbar's era. These palaces had flat roofs supported by intricately carved pillars and bore resemblance to Gwalior's Man Mandir. Red sandstone brackets and balconies featured motifs of peacocks and serpents, while staircases and walls showcased carvings of birds, flowers and mythical creatures, illustrating a rich synthesis of indigenous and foreign artistic traditions.

Construction began at Sikri in 1568-69, around the time the Kachhawaha princess was pregnant with Salim. Following Akbar's triumph in Gujarat, the area was renamed Fatehpur. Over the next fifteen years, numerous royal and public structures were built on a hill overlooking a man-made lake.

Surrounding the elevated palace complex, a defensive wall was constructed on the plain below, though many of the original structures have since vanished. Historian Percy Brown mistook the palace compound for an urban settlement, claiming it lacked organised planning an error echoed by S.K.Saraswati, critic and an Indian historian of art and architecture.

Visitors entered the palace through Naubat Khana, a three-arched gateway, passing the royal workshops and mint, now in ruins, before reaching the expansive courtyard of the Diwan-i-Am. Adjacent to it stood the Diwan-i-Khas and a treasury intended mainly for storing gems. Beyond the public courtyard was Akbar's private residence, the Khwabgah, a double-storeyed structure once separated from the rest by a now-vanished wall. Directly in front lay the Anup Talao, a pool with a central platform used for philosophical discussions and musical

performances. Scholars would sometimes be hoisted on costs to speak from the upper floor of the Khwabgah.

Near Anup Talao (a symmetrical square tank made of red sandstone) a finely carved red sandstone pavilion inaccurately referred to as the Turkish Sultana's house unlikely to have served as a royal residence due to its public location. The royal women's quarters (*haram*) were positioned beside the emperor's palace, enclosed by a wall and guard post, both now lost. Behind the palace complex was the Jama Masjid, which could also be accessed from the lower city. The palace layout was carefully planned, with water from the artificial lake raised to feed fountains and supply running water.

Sikri's buildings were categorised into two-secular or religious as mentioned by Satish Chandra. The secular ones predominantly featured trabeated architectural forms. According to Satish Chandra "One of the palaces within the haram is called the Jodha Bai's Palace though according to the Jodhpur Rajya ki Khyat, Jodha Bai was the daughter-in-law of Akbar, not his wife. The palace may have housed the Emperor's Hindu Wives." It followed a traditional residential layout with rooms surrounding a central courtyard and included a shrine or prayer room. The columns reflected temple architecture. Three other structures in the *haram* complex are noteworthy, especially the so-called Birbal's Palace, a two-storey building with entry porches topped by angular, tile-covered roofs. S.K. Saraswati praised it as an exemplary piece of residential architecture, notable for its balanced design and harmonious blend of structural and decorative elements.

One of the notable structures at Fatehpur Sikri is the modest yet richly adorned palace attributed to Salim's mother, Mariyam. This palace stands out for its artistic interior, which was originally decorated with expansive mural paintings, some of which

have been partially recovered. Among its detailed carvings, one on the northern side portrays the deity Rama being venerated by Hanuman. Additional brackets feature carvings of living creatures such as geese and elephants, motifs that would have been frowned upon by religious conservatives of the time.

Another significant structure is the Panch Mahal, originally part of the secluded area designated for the royal women. Though the boundary that separated it from the public spaces has vanished, the building itself is still impressive. It features five tiers of flat-roofed platforms, each supported by intricately carved columns with unique patterns. This architectural form allowed royal women to enjoy the outdoors in privacy after male visitors were cleared from the premises.

Among the more experimental designs of the complex is the structure commonly referred to as the Diwan-i-Khas. This hall is centered around a massive stone pillar that supports a circular platform. From this central point, stone bridges stretch out to corner galleries suspended above the floor. The design of the central pillar with its decorative brackets and detailed shafts, resembles wooden styles from Gujarat. Outside the hall, friezes feature mythical beasts, contributing to the eclectic artistic expression of the building.

The architectural jewel of the area, however, is the Jama Masjid. This grand mosque boasts an unusually expansive courtyard and a sanctuary with arched entrances and domes topped by pillared kiosks. The surrounding cloisters feature a wide variety of columns and ornamental elements, displaying masterful craftsmanship. Architectural historian Percy Brown praised the precise execution of the mosque's design as the reason behind its distinguished appearance. Within the courtyard lies the marble tomb of Shaikh Salim Chishti, enclosed by finely carved screens. The



marble veranda surrounding it was a later addition by Emperor Shah Jahan.

Beside the mosque stands a towering entrance known as the Buland Darwaza, constructed by Akbar in 1573 to mark his conquest of Gujarat. This monumental gateway, built in the form of a split dome, presents a dramatic façade while incorporating smaller entryways at the back. This architectural innovation, inspired by Persian design, eventually became a common trait in Mughal structures. Above the main arch, a decorative railing is lined with domed kiosks that punctuate the skyline. Although its grand scale can seem disproportionate to the rest of the complex, the gateway succeeds in evoking awe and grandeur.

As the Mughal Empire grew stronger, its architectural style evolved into a more refined expression. Toward the close of Jahangir's reign, the use of white marble became prominent, along with ornate floral inlay work using semi-precious stones, a technique known as *pietra dura*. This craftsmanship is best exemplified in the tomb of Itimad-ud-Daula, a modest yet elegant structure. The building features octagonal corner towers

topped with delicate domes, while its flat roof is adorned with intricate perforated screens. In contrast to earlier tombs, it does not rely on a central dome, showcasing a subtler and more detailed design approach.

5.5.2.1 Taj Mahal

The Taj Mahal stands as a brilliant example of Mughal architecture, harmoniously blending styles and features perfected over generations. Key elements, such as placing the tomb within a geometrically laid-out garden crossed by waterways, elevating the main structure on a raised platform and using a half-dome gateway came together to create both grandeur and serenity. At the heart of its visual appeal is the enormous white marble dome, complemented by four elegant minarets. Rather than being lavishly adorned, the monument relies on subtle details: intricately carved marble screens, detailed stone inlay work and small domed kiosks that enhance its elegance without overwhelming it.

Although myths suggest the Taj was designed by an Italian named Geronimo Veroneo, evidence supports the idea that



Fig. 5.5.4 Taj Mahal Source : UNESCO

which fused Indigenous Indian and Turko-Iranian architectural and decorative motifs, persisted through the 18th and early 19th centuries. This influence extended to regional palaces and forts. For example, the Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar, rebuilt several times, was constructed following the arch and dome principles and incorporated many Mughal design features.

Importantly, these architectural achievements did not attempt to create a

communal identity separating Hindu and Islamic elements. Instead, rulers selectively adopted whatever artistic features they found appealing and practical. This blending reflected both their refined aesthetic sensibilities and the expertise of Indian craftsmen, resulting in harmonious and elegant structures.

Recap

- ◆ Delhi Sultanate architecture fused Islamic styles with indigenous Indian elements
- ◆ Qutb Minar showcased verticality, inscriptions and reused temple materials originally
- ◆ Alai Darwaza introduced pure Islamic arches and decorative marble inlays
- ◆ Tughluq architecture focused on strength, simplicity and fortress-like design
- ◆ Lodi tombs combined domes, chhatris and decorative tilework innovatively
- ◆ Gujarat architecture emphasised intricate carvings and screen work in stone
- ◆ Bengal structures used terracotta, curved cornices and local brick styles
- ◆ Deccan sultanates developed domes, arches and tilework with Persian influence
- ◆ Mughal gardens featured symmetry, water channels and layered terraces beautifully
- ◆ Humayun's tomb blended Persian double dome with Indian garden layout
- ◆ Akbar's Fatehpur Sikri used trabeated forms and richly carved brackets
- ◆ Panch Mahal allowed royal women private views with layered platforms

- ◆ Taj Mahal harmonised marble, minarets, pietra dura and symmetrical planning
- ◆ Jama Masjid's scale, minarets and domes showed Shah Jahan's vision
- ◆ Mughal architecture fused Indigenous Indian, Persian and local styles seamlessly

Objective Questions

1. Who laid the foundation of the Qutb Minar?
2. Which monument introduced the first true horseshoe arch in India?
3. Which Sultan attempted to build a minar twice the size of Qutb Minar?
4. Which Mughal emperor started construction of the Agra Fort?
5. What was the main purpose of the Panch Mahal at Fatehpur Sikri?
6. What style of garden did Babur introduce to India?
7. Which distinctive artistic technique is prominently featured in the tomb of Itimad-ud-Daula?
8. Which building was constructed to commemorate Akbar's Gujarat conquest?
9. Who was the master designer of the Taj Mahal's calligraphy?
10. What styles are merged in the distinctive architectural features of the Mughal period?

Answers

1. Qutbuddin Aibak
2. Alai Darwaza
3. Alauddin Khalji

4. Akbar
5. Royal women's seclusion
6. Geometrically laid Persian-style garden
7. Pietra dura inlay work
8. Buland Darwaza
9. Amanat Khan Shirazi
10. Indigenous Indian and Turko-Iranian elements

Assignments

1. Describe the architectural features of the Qutb Minar. How does it reflect the early Islamic architectural adaptation in India?
2. Discuss the evolution of Indo-Islamic architecture under different dynasties of the Delhi Sultanate.
3. Explain the regional variations in Sultanate architecture. Compare the styles seen in Gujarat, Bengal and the Deccan with examples.
4. Examine the role of Akbar in shaping Mughal architecture.

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UNIT

South Indian Architecture

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ identify and describe key architectural features of South Indian temples
- ◆ understand the cultural and religious significance of temple architecture
- ◆ evolution of Dravidian architectural styles from the Pallavas to the Cholas
- ◆ trace the architectural evolution under the Chola dynasty, distinguishing between early, middle and late Chola temple styles

Prerequisite

Dravidian temple architecture emerged in South India under the Pallavas and reached its most developed form under the Chola dynasty (9th–13th centuries CE). Characteristic features include the vimana, a tower above the sanctum, pillared mandapas, and gopurams, or gateway towers, enclosed within boundary walls that framed sacred space. These temple complexes served not only as sites of worship but also as centres of administration, education, and cultural patronage. Under Rajaraja I and Rajendra I, temples such as those at Thanjavur and Gangaikonda Cholapuram introduced innovations in scale and iconographic complexity, reflecting the influence of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy and the Bhakti movement, with ornamentation including carved friezes, sculpture, and bronze icons produced through the lost-wax casting technique.

Keywords

Dravidian Architecture, Chola Temples, Vimana, Gopuram, Garbhagriha, Shaiva Iconography, Bronze Sculpture, Bhakti Movement, Temple Urbanism

Discussion

The Bhakti movement found formal architectural expression under the Chola dynasty, though temple construction had already begun under the Pallavas and Pandyas. Early Chola rulers promoted Shaiva devotional practices by building temples with features like *vimanas*, *ardhamandapas* and *astaparivaralayas*, as noted by M.A. Dhaky, architectural and art historian. Later Chola temples grew in scale, exemplified by the towering complexes at Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram, which K.R. Srinivasan, Indian archeologist and historian described them as “cathedral temples” for their monumental spatial design.

This period also saw the emergence of symbolic temple layouts aligned with Saivasiddhanta philosophy. According to William Curtis, architectural historian, elements like gopuras and prakaras signified the spiritual journey from the mundane to the divine. Early Chola shrines featured ekatala vimanas with stone bases and brick shikharas, housing Shaiva imagery in devakoshtas. Dakshinamurti, a distinctly South Indian Shaiva icon, was often depicted in meditative or musical postures, reflecting a Brahmanical response to Sramanic traditions. The icon of *Ardhanari*, discussed by Bertrand Goldberg, an architect, symbolised Shiva-Shakti unity, while Lingodbhava imagery replaced Vishnu in key niches to reinforce Shaivite dominance.

Queen Sembiyan Mahadevi’s patronage expanded Shaiva iconography with dynamic depictions of Nataraja, Bhiksatana and Kalantaka. Temples from this era, like

Nagesvarasvamin and Brahmapurisvara, introduced the antarala to link sanctum and hall, enabling more complex deity arrangements. Sepulchral temples, such as Kodandamesvara, culminated in the Rajarajesvara temple, which aligned royal authority with divine presence. As Champakalakshmi notes, it was envisioned as Dakshina Meru, with vast courtyards, a towering 200-foot vimana and rich iconography including frescoes of Tripurantaka, Dakshinamurti and Nataraja observed by Rajaraja I. This temple’s 55 inscriptions, analysed by James Heitzman, historian, record generous royal endowments, including temple guards, dancing women and ceremonial provisions. Performances like the Rajarajanatakam, referenced by Nilakanta Sastri, once dramatised these myths on-site.

The Rajendracholisvara temple followed similar designs, though M.A. Dhaky and Noboru Karashima highlight a shift in patronage from Thanjavur to Gangaikondacholapuram under Rajendra I. In Sri Lanka, Seneviratna, Sri Lankan scholar, attributes Siva Devale No. 2 in Polonnaruwa to this era, noting its minimalist ekatala vimana.

Later masterpieces like Airavatesvara (built by Rajaraja II) and Kambaharesvara (by Kulottunga III) feature ornate sculptural programs and chariot-like porches, as noted by R. Nagaswamy, an Indian historian, archaeologist and epigraphist and K.R. Srinivasan respectively. From the 11th century onward, temples added Amman shrines, as Srinivasan notes—typically



positioned to the north and facing south, symbolising divine femininity and linked to Kamakoti/Kamakshi in Kanchipuram.

Temples also housed portable bronze icons, crafted using the lost-wax (*madhuchchista-vidhanam*) method. The Chola state's patronage of high-quality bronze artisans led to their relocation to sites like Swamimalai, cementing the legacy of South Indian temple art.

5.6.1 Dravidian Temple Architecture

A typical Dravidian temple is enclosed by a protective wall and accessed through a prominent gateway called a *gopuram*. This entrance tower is richly adorned and leads into the temple's sacred space. The main sanctuary, or *vimana*, rises as a stepped pyramid with precise geometrical proportions. At the very top, South Indian temples often feature a small domed structure known as a *stupika* or an octagonal cupola, which functions similarly to the *amlak* and *kalasha* seen in northern temples. Guardians, known as *dvarapalas*, are commonly depicted in sculpture at the entrances, symbolising protection. Many temples also include a substantial water tank or reservoir within the grounds, used for ritual purification.

Additional shrines, sometimes smaller and placed either within the main temple compound or outside it, serve to house other deities or aspects of the primary god. Unlike in the north, the idea of multiple-spired towers grouped together did not take root in the southern architectural tradition.

The sanctum sanctorum, or *garbhagriha*, is generally the oldest and most sacred part of the temple. It is often modest in scale and crowned with the smallest tower. As temple complexes expanded over time, accommodating growing populations and devotees, new, taller perimeter walls were added. The Srirangam temple in Tiruchirapalli

is a notable example, featuring seven layers of concentric rectangular walls, each marked by a *gopuram*, with the outermost structure being the most recent and the innermost housing the ancient sanctum.

Between the 8th and 12th centuries, temple towns in Tamil Nadu, particularly Kanchipuram, Thanjavur, Madurai and Kumbakonam emerged as hubs of urban development. These temples were not only places of worship but also served as administrative centers, managing extensive landholdings and shaping the regional economy and governance.

Dravidian temple architecture follows five primary ground plans: square, rectangle, ellipse, circle and octagon. The form and design of both the temple and its central tower (*vimana*) often reflect the symbolic requirements of the main deity. However, this categorisation is not rigid. Over time and in various locales, builders creatively combined shapes, giving rise to regionally distinct architectural expressions.

Instead of the classic base moldings found in early Dravidian styles, later temples incorporated sculptural friezes. These included detailed carvings of elephants, lions, *hamsas* (mythical swans), *makaras* (mythical sea creatures), horse-mounted warriors and flowing plant motifs. Above these, the *vimana* walls were adorned with two-foot-high relief sculptures of deities, wrapping around the structure in a continuous display of divine imagery.

5.6.1.1 The Chola Temples

The temples built by the Cholas are primarily located in southern India, particularly in and around the Tanjore region. Their architectural legacy can be broadly divided into two phases, marked by dynastic changes. The early phase spans from the mid-9th to the early 11th century, while the later phase extends from the early 11th



to the early 13th century. Scholars of art history often categorise Chola temple art into three stylistic periods, early (850–985), middle (985–1070) and late (1070–1270), each featuring distinct characteristics and developmental stages.

Emerging from the artistic foundation laid by the Pallavas, the Cholas embarked on building grand stone temples across their dominion. However, by the close of the 10th century, this architectural flourish waned, likely due to resource constraints and changing regional dynamics. In Pudukkottai district, several early Chola temples showcase this shift, illustrating how Pallava architectural elements gradually evolved into a distinct Chola aesthetic. A notable example is the Vijayalaya-Cholesvara temple at Narttamalai, attributed to Vijayalaya's reign in the mid-9th century. This structure includes a *vimana* (tower) and a pillared hall (*ardhamandapa*) and its sanctum is circular, housing a linga and yoni, encircled by six subsidiary shrines. The western entrance is guarded by two *dvarapalas*, while the outer walls remain largely unadorned and lack the sculpted deity niches found in later temples.

Characteristic features of early Chola temples include intricately designed pilasters that reflect Chola-specific styles. The exterior walls often display a band of carved goblin-like figures (*bhūtas*) beneath a curved cornice and lion motifs (*vyālas*) appear above. Miniature shrine models, known as *panjarams*, decorate both the ceiling and lower levels of the *vimana*. Despite these innovations, some elements, like the *mandapa* pillars, still resemble those used in Pallava temples, featuring a raised middle section with minimal ornamentation. At the entrance, a finely carved floral motif hangs above, accompanied by *dvarapalas* with twisted torsos. Encircling the main temple are seven smaller stone shrines, all oriented inwards. The Balasubrahmanya temple in Kannanur shares this stylistic approach, with

elephant sculptures replacing the traditional *nandis* at the corners of the *vimana*'s roof and beneath its crowning dome (*Sikhara*).

The Nagesvara temple at Kumbakonam is notable for its distinctive carvings adorning the outer walls. The main wall niches contain images of deities like Ardhanari, Brahma and Dakshinamurti, while other niches house finely sculpted male and female figures in full relief, these may represent local nobility or patrons of the temple. Below the sanctum, the plinth is adorned with shallow relief panels depicting mythological narratives, crafted with a style reminiscent of detailed metalwork or woodcarving.

In Srinivasanallur, the Koranganatha temple, constructed under the rule of Parantaka I, marks a significant architectural progression. The structure spans 50 feet in length, with the sanctum measuring 25 feet and a rectangular *mandapa* (25 by 20 feet) in front. Inside, there is a small, pillared hall, a vestibule and a corridor leading to a 12-foot-square sanctum. The columns follow the typical Chola design but differ from the earlier Pallava style by incorporating a capital with a neck moulding and an enlarged abacus plank. Externally, niches hold traditional images of deities such as Dakshinamurti, Vishnu and Brahma, each rendered in high relief with exceptional craftsmanship.

The third major development in Chola temple design came during the time of Shembiyan Mahadevi, a prominent royal patron of temple construction during the reigns of her husband Gandaraditya (949–957 CE), her son Uttama Chola (969–985 CE) and early Rajaraja I. This era saw a transition from older brick temples to more permanent stone edifices. However, the sculptural art from this phase often appears rigid and less dynamic, reflecting a shift in stylistic conventions. One such example is the Agastyeshvara temple in Anangapur, which was dedicated to Shembiyan Mahadevi's patronage.



Fig.5.6.1 Muvarkoil Temple

Source: TN Temple Project

The Muvarkoil temple complex at Kodumbalur stands as a testament to the Chola dynasty's early architectural finesse. Constructed in the latter part of the 10th century by Bhuti Vikramakesari, the complex housed three central sanctums, each measuring 21 feet per side and spaced approximately 10 feet apart. These shrines, associated with a large monastery under the leadership of Mallikarjuna, included architectural features such as an *ardhamandapa*, *mahamandapa*, *nandi pavilion* and a raised platform. Encircling the main sanctums was a cloister with fifteen minor shrines arranged symmetrically along the walls, two near the entryway, four each on the northern and southern flanks and three at the rear along the eastern side.

The compound was further enclosed

by a towering stone wall, with its primary gateway, or *gopura*, facing west and a smaller passage located in the northeast. Notably, the three primary shrines were fashioned in the *padmakosha* (lotus bud) style. Along the cornices ran a captivating frieze of *ganas*, each figure uniquely rendered in varied moods and stances by different artisans. The outer walls of the *vimanas* displayed an array of intricate sculptures portraying multiple manifestations of Shiva such as *Ardhanari*, *Gangadhara* and *hakasura Samharamurti* and others including deities like *Vishnu*, *Brahma* and celestial figures like *Chandra*, *Surya* and *Mohini*.

During the initial reign of *Rajaraja I*, temple building surged in both volume and artistry. His and his son *Rajendra's* military and cultural achievements heavily influenced

temple architecture across the empire. Among the noteworthy structures from this era is the Tiruvalishvaram temple in Brahmadesham, acclaimed for its masterful sculptural details. The sanctum is square and bordered by a decorative yali frieze, while a well-crafted gana band beneath the cornice shows celestial figures dancing and celebrating. The cornice itself is richly adorned with creeping foliage, arches and lion-faced motifs. The vimana's upper tier contains significant images, including Nataraja, Gangadhara and Devi on the southern side and depictions of Lingodbhava, Vishnu and Brahma to the west.

The vimana temple in Tanjore, stands on an octagonal base and supports a shikhara with eight ribs, structured in a gridded pattern. Its second tier reflects the decorative aesthetics of the sanctum below, repeating motifs like the gana and yali friezes. Four sculpted bulls rest at the corners of this upper storey, all oriented outward. While the temple's *ardhamandapa* dates to the original construction, the *mahamandapa* appears to have been added during Rajendra's rule. The shrine dedicated to the goddess was likely a later addition from the 13th century. Among Rajaraja's smaller religious projects are the Uttara Kailasa at Tiruvadi, the Vaidyanatha shrine in Tirumalavadi, dual temples at Dadapuram honouring Shiva and Vishnu and Shivadevale No. 2 in Polonnaruwa. The grand temples at Tanjore and Gangaikondasholapuram epitomise the zenith of Chola architectural development.

The Shiva temple in Thanjavur, completed around 1009 under the patronage of Rajaraja Chola, stands as a monumental testament to his era's architectural accomplishments. As the tallest and most expansive temple of its time in India, it exemplifies the grandeur of southern temple design. The main tower

(*vimana*), along with the entrance hall (*ardhamandapa*), great hall (*mahamandapa*) and the pavilion housing the sacred bull (*nandi*), are symmetrically laid out within a vast, rectangular walled courtyard measuring 500 by 250 feet. A prominent gateway (*gopura*) links the sub-shrines positioned at the four cardinal directions and along the perimeter, while a secondary gateway leads to an even larger outer enclosure. The main *vimana* soars close to 200 feet above the sanctum, commanding attention with its elegant, no-frills design solid square base, a steeply tapering body and a rounded finial at its summit. A massive cornice runs horizontally, splitting the structure into two visual levels and the exterior is adorned with ornamental columns and sculptural elements. The crowning dome features recesses on all four sides, softening the profile and adding visual interest.

At the heart of the temple lies the inner sanctum, a square space measuring 45 feet on each side, encircled by a narrow corridor just nine feet wide. Within this sacred chamber stands a towering Shiva lingam, once named Rajarajeshvara and now revered as Brihadisvara. The sanctum has two vertical tiers and is surrounded by a crosswise hall, the *garbhagriha* and the *ardhamandapa*. The main shrine's threshold is flanked by two imposing guardian figures (*dvarapalas*) set into niches. The cross hall features two parallel rows of four pillars each, providing structural support and rhythm. Both the entrance halls and the Nandi pavilion rise to two stories and are enriched with sculpted columns and inset niches. The outer façade of the *ardhamandapa* showcases intricate carvings of deities, representing a high point in both religious symbolism and artistic execution. The entire complex is notable for combining immense solidity with a balanced, refined elegance.



Fig. 5.6.2 Brihadisvara Temple

Source : Britannica

The temple at Gangaikonda Cholapuram, initiated by Rajendra Chola, the son of Rajaraja, was conceived to be a rival and exceed his father's creation. Built around 1030 and set amidst open terrain, the temple complex lies within a townscape and near a large man-made lake. Though shorter than the Brihadisvara temple, it surpasses it in spatial layout, stretching 340 feet in length and 110 feet in width. The sanctuary is encased in a heavy stone wall, likely serving a dual function of protection and boundary. The eastern entrance opens to the *mahamandapa* sprawling hall supported by over 150 columns. These are arranged in a grid-like pattern across a raised platform, with a central wide aisle flanked by narrower walkways along the edges. Between this large hall and the sanctum lies a transverse section containing north and south doors and two rows of large square pillars, eight in total, anchoring the structure and enhancing its architectural beauty.

The architectural design of the *vimana* shares similarities with the one at Tanjore, though it features eight levels and a gently inward-curving form. These subtle curves

enhance their aesthetic appeal but somewhat diminish the commanding presence typical of earlier designs. A smaller shrine dedicated to Chandeshvara stands to the north, built in the same style and era as the main temple. Nearby, a separate temple for the goddess, moderate in size bears a *vimana* strongly influenced by the Tanjore prototype, likely constructed shortly after the primary sanctuary.

Chola artistry flourished for over a hundred years, culminating in a remarkable collection of temples. Notable examples include the Airavatoshvara temple in Darasuram and the Kampaharesvara temple near Kumbakonam, both celebrated as architectural triumphs. The Chola legacy is also marked by its remarkable bronze sculptures and temple statuary. Though inscriptions mention sacred bronze icons linked to Saivism, many have been lost. However, museums and temples across South India still house exquisite representations of deities such as Siva, Vishnu, Rama, Sita and Krishna, among others. These works stand on par with the finest stone carvings from other classical traditions.





Fig. 5.6.3 Gangaikonda Cholapuram

Source : *Indian- Heritage. org*

Sculptors of the 11th and 12th centuries enjoyed considerable creative liberty, producing works of elegance, scale and refined taste. Among these, the depictions of Nataraja, the cosmic dancer stand out as particularly emblematic. This divine figure is portrayed in dynamic motion, holding a tambourine, symbolising the allure of universal rhythm. In his left hand, he bears a flame, representing both the creation and destruction of worlds within the cosmic cycle. One-foot presses down on a demon, signifying triumph over ignorance.

This divine performance takes place upon the remnants of the past, symbolising regeneration through destruction. Nataraja's smiling visage encompasses the full spectrum of existence, joy and sorrow, death and renewal. Through its form and motion, the sculpture embodies philosophical depth: the poised torso represents eternal substance, while the whirling limbs capture the transient energy of existence. Together, these elements present a powerful visual metaphor of cosmic balance and divine rhythm.

Recap

- ◆ Cholas expanded temple architecture with towering vimanas and vast courtyards
- ◆ Gopurams marked sacred entry, symbolising journey to the divine
- ◆ Vimana towers featured symbolic shapes and sculpted deity images throughout
- ◆ Antarala linked sanctum and hall, enabling complex iconographic programs
- ◆ Temples functioned as ritual, administrative and economic power centres
- ◆ Rajaraja's Brihadisvara symbolised royal divinity and Chola architectural zenith
- ◆ Gangaikonda Cholapuram echoed Thanjavur's layout with greater spatial grace
- ◆ Chola temples blended artistic excellence with structural innovation
- ◆ Sembiyan Mahadevi's patronage enriched Shaiva iconographic tradition
- ◆ Muvarkoil complex reflected early mastery in spatial organisation
- ◆ Nataraja bronzes expressed cosmic rhythm and philosophical depth
- ◆ Water tanks within complexes ensured ritual purity and symbolism

Objective Questions

1. Which dynasty is most associated with the monumental expression of South Indian Bhakti architecture?
2. Which queen was a prominent patron of Shaiva iconography during the Chola period?
3. Which temple was built by Rajaraja Chola I?
4. What is the typical layout form used in the Srirangam Temple?



5. What structure links the sanctum and the hall in Chola temples?
6. Who built the Gangaikondacholapuram temple?
7. Who referred to large Chola temples as “cathedral temples”?
8. Which temple is referred to as “Dakshina Meru” by historians like Champakalakshmi?
9. Which temple town in Tamil Nadu has seven concentric enclosures?
10. Which architectural style did the Cholas evolve from?

Answers

1. Cholas
2. Sembiyan Mahadevi
3. Brihadisvara Temple, Thanjavur
4. Concentric rectangular walls
5. Antarala
6. Rajendra I
7. K.R.Srinivasan
8. Rajarajesvara Temple
9. Srirangam
10. Pallava

Assignments

1. Discuss the architectural features of early Chola temples.
2. Discuss the evolution of Chola temple architecture from the early to the later period.
3. Compare the architectural features of the Rajarajesvara temple at Thanjavur and the Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple.

4. Describe the evolution of sculptural art in Chola temples with special reference to the Nataraja icon.
5. How did the Bhakti movement influence temple architecture and iconography under the Cholas?
6. Examine the contributions of scholars such as M.A. Dhaky, K.R. Srinivasan, William Curtis, Champakalakshmi, James Heitzman to the understanding of Chola temple architecture.

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BLOCK

Regional Powers In India



1

UNIT

Growth of Rajput Kingdom

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ identify the historical origins and rise of Rajput clans from the 6th to 12th centuries CE
- ◆ explain the socio-political conditions that led to the emergence of Rajput kingdoms after the decline of the Gupta Empire and Harshavardhana's rule
- ◆ analyse the contributions of Rajput kingdoms
- ◆ examine the nature of warfare during the Rajput period

Prerequisite

Indian political history has often been shaped by dynastic successions, with each ruling lineage constructing its own genealogies and claims to legitimacy. Scholarship on early Indian polities frequently frames this history in terms of centralisation versus decentralisation, cohesive imperial administration on one hand and regional autonomy on the other. Following the decline of Harsha's empire in the seventh century, several regional states emerged across northern India, the Deccan, and the south, with no single northern polity able to reconsolidate control over the entire Ganga valley. Between 750 and 1000 CE, major states such as the Palas, Pratiharas, and Rashtrakutas dominated the north and Deccan; despite frequent conflict among them, each contributed to regional stability, agricultural expansion, and patronage of the arts and temple architecture, with the Rashtrakutas exercising the longest and most influential rule.

Keywords

Palas, Senas, Rashtrakuta, Gurjara-Pratihara, Chalukya, Pallava, Rajputs

Discussion

6.1.1 Nature of Early Medieval State

Before entering into the historiographical debates, it is important to briefly discuss the issue of periodisation. British colonial historians, starting with James Mill, divided Indian history into three broad periods: Hindu, Muslim, and British. This division, based on religion, reflected an Orientalist perspective that tended to remove political context from Indian history and assumed that major changes occurred mainly due to foreign invasions. Nationalist historians later adopted this same framework but gave it a more openly communal interpretation. The Hindu, Muslim, and British phases were equated with the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern periods, with the ancient period often portrayed as the peak of Indian or specifically Hindu civilisation. From the 1950s onward, Marxist approaches began to influence Indian historiography. This led to new efforts at periodisation based on structural changes in society and economy. New terms like 'early historical' and 'early medieval' were introduced to better reflect these shifts. The early medieval period, seen as a transitional stage, generally refers to the time from the decline of the Gupta empire to the beginning of Muslim rule in parts of eastern India, approximately between the 6th and 13th centuries. The question of periodisation remains a contested and unresolved issue in Indian historiography. There is still no scholarly consensus regarding the precise moment, underlying causes, or defining characteristics that mark the transition from the ancient to the medieval period.

In the early medieval period, social organisation was closely linked to how land was owned and controlled. In both the Pala and Gupta kingdoms, land was often held by more than one person, creating a system of shared or layered ownership. This system shaped the rural economy and placed landlords, landowners, and cultivators into a clear social hierarchy based on their rights to the land. These rights were not just legal or economic but were given meaning through a moral and religious order known as *dharma*. A central part of this order was *varnadharma*, which divided society into ranked social groups and provided a model for how people related to one another. This system also supported the king's authority, presenting him as both the highest landholder and the main protector of *dharma* and *varnadharma*. Importantly, this social and agrarian order could not exist without the presence of a kingdom. The king's role, both relying on *dharma* and standing above it, was key to the idea of lordship in early medieval India.

Historians have suggested that the early medieval Indian state was made up of a chain of feudal power structures, arranged in a clear hierarchy. Each feudal chieftain had authority over others below them while also being under the control of someone above. In this system, modern terms like 'centralisation', 'decentralisation', 'bureaucracy', and 'administration' do not fully explain how power worked. The idea of a feudal structure included political, economic, and ideological roles, and it shaped all aspects of social life. In this kind of polity, political power was deeply connected to everyday society,



reaching further into people's lives than is usually seen in modern capitalist systems.

6.1.2 Historiography

From the latter half of the 19th century, Indian scholars began engaging with the study of Indian history. However, it was not until the early decades of the 20th century that a distinct departure from dominant British historiographical narratives emerged. Historians associated with this shift are collectively referred to as 'nationalist historians'. This designation does not signify a unified school of thought but rather denotes a particular mode of historical writing shaped by the political and intellectual context of colonial India.

Like their British counterparts, nationalist historians were deeply influenced by contemporary developments. While colonial historians were invested in legitimising the British Empire, nationalist historians were intellectually aligned with the anti-colonial struggle. Their historical writings reflected the impact of the national movement. Rather than formulating entirely new theories, these scholars offered powerful reinterpretations of India's ancient past.

R.C. Majumdar's historiographical contributions exemplify the enduring influence of the nationalist tradition in Indian historical writing. His two-volume monograph on the history of Bengal, first published in 1943, is marked by a distinctly eulogistic tone that aligns closely with the broader nationalist narrative. In 1971, he reissued the first volume with only minor revisions, preserving both the interpretive orientation and structural composition of the original work. A decade later, as the editor of an expansive series on Indian history, Majumdar reiterated this narrative style in the sections devoted to the early medieval period, thereby reinforcing the central themes and methodological approach of his previous writings.

A comparable tendency can be observed in the work of Jhunu Bagchi, who, though not as prominent as Majumdar, followed a similar historiographical trajectory. In his doctoral dissertation on the history of the Pala dynasty, Bagchi adopts a comparable tone and interpretive framework, further reflecting the persistence of nationalist historiography in scholarly treatments of early medieval India.

6.1.3 The Origin of Rajput Kingdoms

The term *Rajput* originates from the Sanskrit root *rajaputra*, signifying "son of a king." Its linguistic evolution is evident in its Prakrit derivatives, *rawat*, *rauta*, *raul*, and *rawal*. From the 7th century CE onward, a discernible shift in the semantic scope of the term occurred, as it began to appear in literary sources with connotations extending beyond royal lineage to denote members of the landed aristocracy.

During the ninth and tenth centuries, numerous Rajput clans emerged as influential and autonomous political entities, founding independent kingdoms across northern and western India. The origins of the Rajputs have been the subject of considerable scholarly debate. Earlier historiographical interpretations posited that the Rajputs may have descended from Central Asian groups such as the Hunas or the Gurjaras. However, these theories have largely been discredited in contemporary scholarship, with most historians now rejecting such lineage-based explanations in favour of more nuanced understandings of Rajput identity formation.

In *Harshacharita* by Banabhatta, the term is used to refer to nobles or landholding chiefs. Similarly, in *Kadambari*, it designates individuals of aristocratic descent appointed by the monarch to serve as local administrators or regional rulers. In such capacities, these



figures likely governed extensive territories and played a significant role in the political and administrative apparatus of the state. By the 12th century CE, *Rajatarangini* utilised the term *rajaputra* in the context of landownership, accompanied by a reference to the Thirty-Six Rajput clans. This reference underscores both the crystallisation of Rajput identity and the formal recognition of these clans within the socio-political landscape of the period.

Contemporary understandings of Rajput identity focus more on the broader historical shifts of the time, particularly the trend of families from diverse social backgrounds rising to political prominence. Some of these lineages claimed descent from Brahmins, often those who had been granted land by earlier monarchs. Such families adopted the title of *brahmakshatra*, a term used for those who combined Brahmin lineage with the roles and responsibilities typically associated with Kshatriyas. This fusion of priestly and warrior identities was not new and had been seen in parts of the Deccan and the south in earlier centuries.

Historians have raised different perceptions regarding the origin of the Rashtrakutas. B.N.S. Yadava, in his work *Society and Culture in Northern India in Twelfth Century*, has examined the emergence of early Rajput clans in Rajasthan and Gujarat within the broader context of political instability and social dislocation that followed the decline of the Gupta Empire. This period, marked by economic regression and the disruptive impact of foreign invasions and settlements, provided fertile ground for the rise of feudal structures. Yadav argues that the growing feudal tendencies facilitated the ascendance of a landed aristocracy closely tied to agrarian control and military power. Within this framework, he traces the origins of prominent martial lineages, such as the Gurjaras, Guhilots, Chahamanas, and Chapas in northern India between 650 and 750 CE.

While these clans initially emerged during this transitional phase, their consolidation as autonomous ruling entities can be more definitively located in the 8th century CE, with the Gurjara-Pratiharas representing the earliest among them to establish political dominance, particularly through their control over Kanauj and adjacent regions in northern India.

D.C. Sircar, in his influential work *Studies in the Political and Administrative Systems in Ancient and Medieval India*, interprets the usage of the term *rajputra* in Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* as indicative of a landowning status rather than connoting direct royal descent. He argues that by the early 12th century CE, the *rajputras* had evolved into a distinct socio-political class. This group derived its identity and legitimacy from claims of descent from thirty-six Rajput clans, suggesting that these lineages had already attained a degree of consolidation by this period. According to Sircar, the emergence of the *rajputras* as a landed aristocracy reflected broader processes of social stratification and feudalisation in medieval Indian society.

B.D. Chattopadhyaya, in *A Study of Rajput Origins in Early Medieval Rajasthan*, conceptualises the emergence of the Rajputs not as a uniform phenomenon but as a historically contingent process that varied across different regions and periods. He cautions against interpreting Rajput identity solely through the lens of ancestry, emphasising instead the socio-political dynamics of early medieval India. In his analysis, the term *rajputra*, as employed in literary texts and inscriptions of the period, referred to a heterogeneous group comprising predominantly petty landholding chiefs, rather than a homogeneous aristocratic lineage.



6.1.3.1 Rise of the Rajput Polity: From Feudatories to Regional Powers (7th–12th Century)

Gurjara-Pratiharas

Between the 7th and 12th centuries, the Rajput polity emerged within a context of political fragmentation that followed the decline of Harsha's empire. The Gurjara-Pratiharas, initially subordinate feudatories under Harsha with a power base in Ujjain, were the first among the nascent Rajput lineages to establish political and military autonomy. Their subsequent consolidation of power in Kannauj and adjacent regions of northern India illustrates the centrality of military strength and political assertion in the formative phase of Rajput dominance.

Many historians posit that the dynasty originated from the Gurjaras, a community traditionally associated with pastoralism and martial prowess, traits comparable to those attributed to the Jats. In their formative phase, the Pratiharas established a network of subordinate principalities across central and eastern Rajasthan. They were frequently engaged in military confrontations with the Rashtrakutas, particularly over strategically vital regions such as Malwa and Gujarat, and subsequently over Kanauj, which had by then become emblematic of political supremacy in the upper Gangetic valley. The Pratihara ascendancy can be traced to the reign of Nagabhata I, under whose leadership the dynasty successfully repelled the expansionist incursions of the Arab rulers of Sind, who sought to extend their influence into Rajasthan, Gujarat, and the Punjab.

The Arabs launched a major offensive towards Gujarat but were soundly defeated by the Chalukya ruler of the region in 738 CE. Although minor Arab raids continued for some time, they no longer posed a significant threat after this defeat. The early Pratihara

attempts to assert control over the upper Ganga valley and Malwa were thwarted by the Rashtrakuta kings, Dhruva and Gopal III. The Rashtrakutas defeated the Pratiharas in 790 and again in 806-07, but then retreated to the Deccan, allowing the Palas to take advantage of the situation. It appears that the Rashtrakutas were primarily interested in securing control over Malwa and Gujarat. The true architect and most illustrious ruler of the Pratihara dynasty, however, was King Bhoja.

Details about Bhoja's early life and the exact date of his accession are unclear. However, by around 836 CE, he had successfully reestablished the Pratihara empire and recaptured Kannauj, which remained the imperial capital for nearly a century. Bhoja attempted to expand eastward but was thwarted by the Pala ruler Devapala. Shifting his focus to central India, the Deccan, and Gujarat, Bhoja reignited hostilities with the Rashtrakutas. In a fierce battle on the banks of the Narmada, he managed to retain control over significant parts of Malwa and parts of Gujarat, although he was unable to advance further into the Deccan. He later redirected his efforts northward, and an inscription records that his dominion stretched as far as the western banks of the Sutlej River.

According to Arab travellers, the Pratihara rulers maintained the finest cavalry in India, with the import of horses from Central Asia and Arabia being a main component of Indian trade at the time. After the death of Devapala and the decline of the Pala empire, Bhoja expanded his dominion eastward. His name became legendary, possibly due to his early struggles, the gradual reconquest of lost territories, and his ultimate success in regaining Kannauj. A devout follower of Vishnu, Bhoja assumed the title *Adivaraha*, which appears on some of his coins. To distinguish him from the later Bhoja Paramara of Ujjain, he is often referred to as 'Mihira Bhoja'.



Bhoja passed away around 885 CE and was succeeded by his son, Mahendrapala I. Ruling until approximately 908–909 CE, Mahendrapala preserved the empire built by his father and expanded it further into Magadha and northern Bengal. He engaged in conflict with the ruler of Kashmir and was compelled to cede some of the territories in Punjab that Bhoja had previously conquered. The Pratiharas thus maintained their dominance over northern India for more than a century, from the early 9th to the mid-10th century.

Al-Masudi, a traveller from Baghdad who visited Gujarat in 915–916 CE, reported that the empire of Juzr (a distorted form of Gurjara) encompassed 180,000 villages, towns, and rural settlements, spanning roughly 2,000 kilometres in both length and breadth. According to him, the king maintained a massive army divided into four sections, each comprising between 700,000 and 900,000 soldiers. The northern division engaged in battles against the ruler of Multan and allied Muslim forces, while the southern army fought the Rashtrakutas, and the eastern division confronted the Palas. Although the king had only 2,000 war elephants, his cavalry was considered the finest in all of India.

The Pratiharas were notable patrons of learning and literature. The renowned Sanskrit poet and playwright Rajashekhar flourished at the court of Mahipala, the grandson of Bhoja. Under Pratihara rule, Kanauj was adorned with impressive buildings and temples. During the eighth and ninth centuries, several Indian scholars accompanied embassies to the Caliph's court in Baghdad, where they introduced Indian knowledge, particularly in mathematics, algebra, and medicine, to the Arab world. The names of the Indian kings who sent these embassies remain unknown. Although the Pratiharas were known for their hostility toward the Arab rulers of Sind, cultural and

commercial exchanges between India and West Asia appear to have continued during this time, with scholars and goods moving between the regions.

Between 915 and 918 CE, the Rashtrakuta ruler Indra III launched an attack on Kanauj, inflicting severe destruction on the city. This significantly weakened the Pratihara empire, and Gujarat likely came under Rashtrakuta control, as Al-Masudi notes that the Pratiharas no longer had access to the sea. The loss of Gujarat, a crucial centre for overseas trade and the primary outlet for north Indian goods to West Asia, dealt a major blow to the Pratiharas. Later, around 963 CE, another Rashtrakuta king, Krishna III, invaded northern India and defeated the Pratihara ruler, leading to the swift decline and eventual disintegration of the Pratihara empire.

The Palas

The period following the death of Harsha was characterised by significant political instability and territorial fragmentation. In this context, Lalitaditya, the ruler of Kashmir, momentarily asserted his authority over parts of north India, including the Punjab region and the strategically significant city of Kanauj. Since the time of Harsha, Kanauj had come to represent the symbolic centre of political sovereignty in north India, a position that would, in later centuries, be assumed by Delhi. The control of Kanauj conferred dominance over the upper Gangetic valley, a region noted for its agrarian productivity and commercial vitality.

Lalitaditya further extended his military campaigns into Bengal (Gaud), where he reportedly defeated and killed the reigning monarch. Nevertheless, his political influence waned with the emergence of the Pala dynasty in the east and the Gurjara-Pratiharas in the west. These two regional powers soon became embroiled in a protracted struggle over the



resource-rich and politically significant corridor extending from Banaras to southern Bihar, an area steeped in imperial traditions. Concurrently, the Gurjara-Pratiharas engaged in recurrent conflicts with the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan, further intensifying the contest for supremacy in early medieval India.

The Pala dynasty was established around 750 CE by Gopala, who was elected by local chiefs to restore order amidst prevailing anarchy. Gopala did not belong to a high or royal lineage; his father is believed to have been a soldier. Despite his humble origins, Gopala successfully unified Bengal and extended his control into Magadha (modern-day Bihar). He was succeeded in 770 CE by his son Dharmapala, who ruled until 810 CE. Dharmapala's reign was marked by a tripartite struggle among the Palas, the Pratiharas, and the Rashtrakutas over control of Kanauj and northern India.

During this conflict, the Pratihara ruler launched a campaign into Gaud (Bengal), but before any decisive outcome, he was defeated by the Rashtrakuta king Dhruva and forced to flee to the deserts of Rajasthan. Dhruva then returned to the Deccan, clearing the way for Dharmapala to assert dominance. Dharmapala occupied Kanauj and held a grand assembly attended by vassal rulers from regions like Punjab and eastern Rajasthan. Contemporary sources claim that his authority extended to the northwestern frontiers of India and possibly included regions such as Malwa and Berar, suggesting that local rulers in these areas acknowledged his suzerainty.

The period of Dharmapala's military ascendancy can be broadly situated between circa 790 and 800 CE. Nevertheless, his efforts to establish enduring hegemony over northern India proved to be tenuous. The resurgence of Pratihara power under Nagabhatta II culminated in Dharmapala's withdrawal and eventual defeat in the vicinity of Monghyr. The territories of Bihar and the

region corresponding to present-day eastern Uttar Pradesh emerged as zones of protracted contestation between the Palas and the Pratiharas. Despite these persistent hostilities, the Pala dynasty was largely successful in maintaining its dominion over Bihar and Bengal. The reversals encountered in the northern theatre subsequently compelled the Pala rulers to reorient their political and military strategies toward alternative regions.

Devapala, the son of Dharmapala, ascended the throne in 810 CE and ruled for approximately 40 years. During his reign, he expanded the Pala Empire to include Pragjyotishpur (present-day Assam) and parts of Odisha, and possibly extended his influence over portions of modern-day Nepal. As a result, from the mid-8th to the mid-9th century, the Palas maintained dominance over eastern India, with their control reaching as far west as Varanasi at times.

The power and extent of the Pala dynasty during the mid-ninth century is corroborated by the Arab merchant and traveller Sulaiman, who recorded his observations during a visit to India. He referred to the Pala kingdom as "Ruhma," a term likely derived from "Dharma," in reference to Dharmapala. Sulaiman observed that the Pala monarch was engaged in hostilities with neighbouring powers, namely the Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas. He asserted that the Pala army surpassed those of its adversaries in scale, claiming the presence of 50,000 elephants and a contingent of 10,000 to 15,000 personnel dedicated exclusively to laundering garments. While these figures are plausibly exaggerated, they nevertheless indicate the existence of a substantial military establishment. However, it remains uncertain whether this force constituted a permanent standing army or was primarily composed of feudal contingents mobilised during times of conflict.

Supplementary insights into the Pala dynasty are derived from Tibetan chronicles,



although these accounts were composed much later, in the seventeenth century. Despite their temporal distance from the events they describe, these sources consistently portray the Pala rulers as devout patrons of Buddhism and as significant contributors to the advancement of Buddhist education. Dharmapala is credited with the revival of the eminent Nalanda University, to which he is said to have endowed approximately 200 villages for its maintenance and operational costs. Additionally, he is attributed with the founding of Vikramasila University, which emerged as the second most prominent centre of Buddhist learning after Nalanda. Located on a hill overlooking the Ganga River in the Magadha region, Vikramasila was renowned for its tranquil and picturesque setting. Under Pala patronage, numerous viharas (monastic complexes) were also constructed, serving as residences for substantial communities of Buddhist monks and reinforcing the dynasty's role in the proliferation of Buddhist scholasticism and monastic life.

The Pala rulers cultivated enduring cultural and religious ties with Tibet, exemplified by the transmission of Buddhist thought through eminent scholars such as Santarakṣita and Dipankara Srijnana (also known as Atisa), who were invited to Tibet and played pivotal roles in the establishment of a reformed Buddhist tradition. This intellectual exchange fostered a steady influx of Tibetan monks and scholars to prominent centres of learning such as Nalanda and Vikramasila. Although the Palas are chiefly remembered as major patrons of Buddhism, their support extended to Brahmanical traditions as well, including Saivism and Vaishnavism. The dynasty granted land and resources to a significant number of Brahmins, particularly those migrating from northern India into Bengal. These Brahmin settlements were instrumental in promoting agrarian expansion and contributed to the socio-economic transformation of the region by facilitating the sedentarisation of pastoral

and food-gathering communities into settled agricultural livelihoods.

The growing prosperity of Bengal under the Pala dynasty facilitated the expansion of maritime trade networks and cultural exchanges with various regions of Southeast Asia, including Burma, Malaya, Java, and Sumatra. Commerce with these areas proved highly profitable and contributed substantially to the economic affluence of the Pala Empire, as evidenced by the increased influx of gold and silver into the region. The Buddhist Sailendra dynasty, which held sway over territories encompassing Malaya, Java, Sumatra, and adjacent islands, maintained robust diplomatic relations with the Pala court. Several embassies were dispatched by the Sailendras to secure royal permission for the establishment of a monastery at Nalanda. In response, Pala ruler Devapala granted five villages for its endowment and upkeep. This diplomatic exchange underscores the depth of cultural and religious affinity between the two polities and illustrates the Pala Empire's prominent role in the transregional Buddhist ecumene of the early medieval period.

Senas

The Senas were a Kshatriya clan originating from Karnaṭa (Karnataka) in the Deccan region, who migrated to Bengal during the campaign of the Chalukya king Vikramaditya VI against Bengal, Assam, and other northern territories. They initially settled in Radha, in present-day West Bengal. The first significant ruler of this dynasty was Vijaya Sena, who defeated the Pala king Madanapala and established his control over Bengal. His territorial expansion reached into Assam and Mithila, and possibly parts of Magadha, although some regions of Magadha continued under Pala rule.

Vijaya Sena was succeeded by his son Ballala Sena, a formidable ruler who ultimately brought Mithila under his control. Renowned for his learning, Ballala Sena



authored several notable works and implemented important social reforms that left a lasting legacy. His son, Lakshmana Sena, took the throne in 1178 CE, having received military training through active participation in the campaigns of his father and grandfather in regions like Kamarupa and Kalinga.

Lakshmana Sena, the son of Ballala Sena, ruled around 1178–1179 CE, although some scholars propose an earlier accession date and even regard him as the founder of the Lakshmana Sena Era, starting in 1119 CE. Prior to becoming king, he appears to have gained administrative experience serving as a Viceroy or military governor in a district of Kalinga. As a ruler, he earned distinction for both his military accomplishments and cultural patronage. He claimed victories in Kalinga, subdued Kamarupa, and defeated the king of Benares, identified as the Gahadavala ruler of Kanauj. His court became a centre of literary excellence, hosting renowned poets such as Jayadeva, author of the *Gita Govinda*, and Dhoyi, author of the *Pavanaduta*, which provides a vivid portrayal of the Sena capital.

Despite its achievements, the Sena dynasty could not withstand the advance of Muslim invaders following the collapse of the Gahadavala. Lakshmana Sena, often equated with Rai Lakhmaniya, was compelled to flee before the advancing forces of Malik Ikhtiyar-ud-din Muhammad Khalji in the late 12th or early 13th century. His sons, Visvarupa Sena and Kesava Sena, continued to resist the Muslim incursions, referred to as the “Garga Yavanas” (invaders from the Kabul region), and managed to maintain control over parts of Eastern Bengal until the latter half of the 13th century.

The Rashtrakutas

While northern India witnessed the ascendancy of the Palas and the Gurjara-Pratiharas, the Deccan plateau came under the dominion of the Rashtrakutas—a distinguished

dynasty noted for its succession of militarily adept rulers and capable administrators. The dynasty was founded by Dantidurga, who established his capital at Manyakhet (present-day Malkhed near Sholapur), from where the Rashtrakutas rapidly consolidated their control over northern Maharashtra. They were engaged in recurrent conflicts with the Pratiharas, primarily over the strategically and economically significant regions of Gujarat and Malwa. Although the Rashtrakutas’ military campaigns into the Ganga valley did not yield enduring territorial gains, these expeditions nonetheless augmented the dynasty’s wealth and considerably elevated its political prestige within the subcontinental power matrix.

The Rashtrakutas were consistently engaged in military conflicts with several prominent southern polities, including the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi (located in present-day Andhra Pradesh), the Pallavas of Kanchi, and the Pandyas of Madurai. Among the most illustrious rulers of the dynasty were Govinda III (r. 793–814) and his successor Amoghavarsha I (r. 814–878). Following his successful campaign against Nagabhata of Kanauj and the annexation of the Malwa region, Govinda III redirected his military focus toward the southern peninsula. In response to a rebellion, the Ganga rulers of Karnataka were captured, imprisoned, and executed. In a further assertion of imperial authority, the Rashtrakutas extended their reach to the island of Lanka, where the reigning monarch and his minister were apprehended and brought to Halapur. As a symbolic demonstration of Rashtrakuta supremacy, two statues of the Lankan king were subsequently erected before a Shiva temple at Manyakhet, serving as enduring commemorations of their military triumph.

Amoghavarsha I, whose reign spanned 64 years, was distinguished more by his patronage of religion and literature than by military ambition. A celebrated patron



of the arts, he is credited with composing the earliest extant treatise on poetics in the Kannada language. He also undertook significant architectural and urban development projects, notably transforming Manyakheta into a capital city renowned in contemporary accounts for its magnificence, likened to the celestial realm of Indra. Despite the cultural efflorescence of his reign, the Rashtrakuta dynasty was beset by recurrent rebellions in its peripheral provinces. Although these revolts were temporarily suppressed, they resurfaced following Amoghavarsha's death. His grandson, Indra III (r. 915–927), played a pivotal role in reasserting imperial dominance. In 915 CE, after defeating Mahipala and sacking Kanauj, Indra III emerged as the preeminent ruler of the subcontinent. The Arab traveller al-Masudi, who visited India during this period, referred to the Rashtrakuta sovereign whom he identified as Balhara or Vallabharaja, as the most powerful monarch in India, noting that numerous regional rulers acknowledged his supremacy and sent embassies in tribute. Al-Masudi also highlighted the vast military resources commanded by the Rashtrakutas, including large standing armies and an extraordinary number of war elephants. Krishna III (r. 934–963) is regarded as the last notable ruler of the Rashtrakuta dynasty. His reign was marked by a series of ambitious military campaigns, including expeditions against the Paramaras of Malwa and the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi. He also directed his forces against the Cholas, who had previously supplanted the Pallavas as the dominant power in Kanchi. In 949 CE, Krishna III achieved a significant victory over the Chola monarch Parantaka I, capturing the northern territories of the Chola kingdom. His conquests extended as far south as Rameshwaram, where he commemorated his triumph by erecting a pillar of victory and constructing a temple. Despite these accomplishments, the Rashtrakuta empire began to unravel following his death, as opposing regional powers coalesced against

his successors. In 972 CE, the imperial capital at Malkhed was invaded, looted, and set ablaze, marking the decisive collapse of Rashtrakuta hegemony in the Deccan.

The Rashtrakuta dynasty governed the Deccan region for nearly two centuries, concluding their rule towards the end of the tenth century. Distinguished by their religious pluralism, the Rashtrakuta sovereigns extended patronage to a range of religious traditions, including Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Jainism. A monumental testament to their architectural and religious vision is the rock-cut Shiva temple at Ellora, commissioned by King Krishna I in the 9th century—an enduring symbol of their cultural legacy. His successor, Amoghavarsha I, is widely regarded as a devout adherent of Jainism, although he continued to extend support to other religious communities, reflecting a broader policy of inclusivity. The Rashtrakutas also facilitated the presence of Muslim traders within their domains, permitting them to settle, practice Islam freely, and construct mosques in various coastal urban centres. These policies of religious tolerance and commercial openness not only fostered a climate of cultural coexistence but also significantly bolstered maritime trade, thereby contributing to the economic prosperity of the Rashtrakuta empire.

The Rashtrakuta monarchs were notable patrons of art and literature, fostering a vibrant intellectual and cultural milieu within their courts. In addition to attracting scholars of Sanskrit, their patronage extended to poets and writers composing in Prakrit and Apabhramsha, vernacular literary traditions that would eventually evolve into several modern Indian languages. Among the prominent literary figures associated with the Rashtrakuta court was the celebrated Apabhramsha poet Svayambhu, who, along with his son, is believed to have enjoyed royal patronage, reflecting the dynasty's commitment to linguistic and literary pluralism.



The Chalukyas (Solanki Rajputs)

Around 940 CE, Mularaja, the founder of the Chalukya dynasty of Gujarat—later referred to as the Solanki Rajputs, established an independent polity by asserting control over the Sarasvata region, situated along the Saraswati River. He founded his capital at Aṇahilapataka, corresponding to present-day Patan. While certain historians have attempted to trace the lineage of this Chalukya branch to the earlier Chalukyas of the Deccan, such claims remain speculative, given the distinct origin narratives preserved by each lineage. Following the consolidation of his authority, Mularaja extended his dominion into eastern Saurashtra and the region of Kachchha (modern-day Kutch). However, his territorial expansion provoked resistance, culminating in a two-front invasion: one from the north, led by the Chahamanas ruler Vigraharaja, and the other from the south, orchestrated by Barappa, a subordinate of the Rashtrakuta king Taila II and a military commander in the Lata region. After suffering defeat, Mularaja retreated to Kutch, while Vigraharaja advanced through his territories, conquering even the Lata region and reaching the banks of the Narmada River. Once Vigraharaja withdrew, Mularaja swiftly negotiated a peace agreement and turned his attention southward, defeating and killing Barappa. However, peace was short-lived. The Paramara king Munja soon invaded, forcing Mularaja to seek refuge in Marwar. Though he managed to reclaim his throne, he was later defeated again, this time by the Kalachuri ruler Lakshmanaraja.

By the end of Mularaja's rule, the Chalukya (Solanki) kingdom stretched south to the Sabarmati River and northward to include Santhore in present-day Jodhpur. His son and successor, Chamundaraja, continued to face challenges from the Paramaras and Kalachuris before his own death in 1008 CE.

King Bhima, who had earlier fled to Kutch in fear of Sultan Mahmud's advance, returned

to his capital only after the invader had withdrawn. Though he lacked the courage to confront the Muslim forces, Bhima directed his military ambitions toward nearby smaller states. He successfully annexed Mount Abu and Bhinmal, both under the control of Paramara branches. His joint campaign with Kalachuri Karna to conquer Malava, and their eventual fallout, has been discussed earlier. However, the claims made in literary texts about Bhima's victorious campaigns to distant regions like Sindh, Kashi, and Ayodhya are generally dismissed as exaggerations. In 1064 CE, Bhima abdicated the throne in favour of his son Karna.

Karna initially achieved success in Malava but was later defeated by Udayaditya and Jagadeva. He also launched a campaign into southern Marwar, only to be repelled by the Chahamanas of Naddula. Upon Karna's death around 1094 CE, his son Jayasimha was still a minor. During this period, Karna's widow, who was the daughter of the Kadamba ruler of Goa, served as regent on behalf of the young prince.

Jayasimha, who adopted the regal title 'Siddharaja', stands out as one of the most distinguished rulers of the Chalukya dynasty. His reign was marked by a series of successful military campaigns that expanded his influence in all directions. He defeated the Abhira chief of Saurashtra, captured him, and incorporated the region into his kingdom. Similarly, he overpowered the Paramaras of Bhinmal and took control of their territory.

In addition, Jayasimha achieved military success against the powerful Chalukya ruler Vikramaditya VI. Although the Paramaras of Malava and the Chahamanas of Naddula eventually regained their independence toward the end of his reign, Jayasimha had established a vast and influential empire, elevating the stature and authority of the Chalukyas to unprecedented levels.



Despite his numerous military campaigns, Jayasimha was also deeply committed to promoting scholarship and intellectual life. He founded institutions dedicated to the study of astronomy (Jyotisha), logic (Nyaya), and the Puranas. His court was enriched by the presence of the illustrious Jain scholar Hemachandra, whose extensive literary contributions are well recognised. Jayasimha Siddharaja passed away around 1143 CE or shortly thereafter. As he had no heir of his own, he had nominated Bahada, the son of his minister, as his successor. However, following Jayasimha's death, Kumarapala, distantly related to Bhima, managed to take control of the throne sometime between 1143 and 1145 CE.

Kumarapala ascended the throne in 1150 and soon consolidated his authority over neighbouring regions, including bringing the Chahamanas of Naddula and the Paramaras of Bhinmal under his control. Between 1160 and 1162 CE, he also extended his domain by conquering the Konkan region. Kumarapala stands out as a significant figure in the Jain historical narratives of Gujarat. Influenced deeply by the renowned Jain scholar Hemachandra, whose guidance he greatly valued, Kumarapala embraced Jainism sometime before 1164 CE. Though he continued to honour Lord Shiva, the deity worshipped by his family, his commitment to Jain principles was profound. As part of his reforms reflecting Jain ethics, he outlawed animal slaughter throughout his kingdom, a ban that extended even to the territories governed by his vassals. This decree was so stringent that even Brahmins were required to replace animal sacrifices with offerings of grain in their rituals. In another notable act of governance, he also prohibited gambling within his realm, underscoring his efforts to instil moral discipline and religious values in society.

After Kumarapala's death around 1171–72 CE, a succession conflict broke out between

his nephew from his sister's side and another from his brother's lineage. The Jain community supported the former, while the Brahmins backed the latter, Ajayapala, who ultimately ascended the throne. Jain sources portray Ajayapala as hostile to their faith, possibly due to this political rivalry.

During his reign, Ajayapala repelled an invasion by the Guhila ruler Samantasimha and also engaged in successful campaigns against the Chahamanas of Sakambhari. However, his rule was short-lived; he was assassinated by a member of the Pratihara clan around 1176 CE. Following his death, his young son Mularaja II was declared king. Since the boy was still a minor, his mother, Queen Naiki, daughter of the Kadamba ruler Paramardin of Goa, assumed regency. Not long after, in 1178 CE, Gujarat faced a serious threat when Shihabuddin Muhammad Ghori launched an invasion. In a bold and inspiring act, Queen Naiki, carrying her son in her arms, personally led the army and defeated the invading forces near Mount Abu. This remarkable military success became a celebrated episode in the history of Gujarat, even though the kingdom of Malwa used the turmoil to break away and reassert its independence.

Mularaja II passed away in 1178 CE and was succeeded by his younger brother, Bhima II, who went on to rule for an extended period of sixty years. Unfortunately, the early years of his reign reveal a lack of political foresight among the country's elite. Despite having just endured the serious threat of a Muslim invasion, instead of uniting to reinforce the state's defences, many upper-class factions used the moment of vulnerability to pursue their own ambitions. In the very first year of his reign, Gujarat was overrun by Alauddin Khilji's forces.

The Chalukyas of Badami

From the mid-sixth century onward, the political landscape of peninsular India was



marked by intense rivalry among three dominant powers: the Chalukyas of Badami, the Pallavas of Kanchipuram, and the Pandyas of Madurai. For nearly three centuries, these kingdoms were locked in a struggle to control the agriculturally rich regions of the south.

The Chalukyas initially emerged as vassals under the Kadambas but soon asserted their independence. Their stronghold was in northern Karnataka, centred at Vatapi (modern-day Badami) and nearby Aihole. From this base, they expanded northward, absorbing territories once ruled by the Vakatakas in the Upper Godavari region. They also gained control of parts of the western coastline, likely due to its growing importance in overseas trade across the Arabian Sea.

One of the most celebrated moments in Chalukya history was the defeat of the northern emperor Harsha by Pulakeshin II near the Narmada River, a victory proudly commemorated in many of their inscriptions.

Meanwhile, the eastern portions of the former Satavahana realm, particularly the fertile Krishna and Godavari deltas, had fallen under the rule of the Ikshvakus in the third century CE. This dominance, however, was short-lived, as the Pallavas later conquered these lands. The Pallavas were also instrumental in bringing down the Kadambas and annexing their territory, which lay just south of the Chalukya domain.

Recap

- ◆ Land ownership and control played a central role in early medieval social organisation
- ◆ From the 9th–10th centuries, many Rajput clans emerged as autonomous powers, establishing kingdoms across northern and western India
- ◆ The Rajput polity developed between the 7th–12th centuries, following the decline of Harsha's empire, amid increasing political fragmentation
- ◆ The Gurjara-Pratiharas, initially feudatories under Harsha based in Ujjain, were among the first Rajput lineages to gain political and military independence
- ◆ The Pala dynasty was founded by Gopala around 750 CE.
- ◆ Dharmapala, controlled Kanauj and held a grand assembly attended by regional vassals from Punjab and eastern Rajasthan
- ◆ The Senas, a Kshatriya clan from Karnata (Deccan), migrated to Bengal during Chalukya king Vikramaditya VI's campaigns
- ◆ Vijaya Sena was succeeded by Ballala Sena, who expanded control to Mithila.
- ◆ The Rashtrakutas frequently clashed with other southern powers like the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi, the Pallavas of Kanchi, and the Pandyas of Madurai

- ◆ Notable rulers: Govinda III (r. 793–814) and Amoghavarsha I (r. 814–878)
- ◆ Around 940 CE, Mularaja, founder of the Chalukya dynasty of Gujarat (later Solanki Rajputs), established an independent kingdom along the Saraswati River
- ◆ The Chalukyas of Vatapi (Badami) originally served as vassals under the Kadambas, later asserting sovereignty in northern Karnataka, with centres at Vatapi and Aihole

Objective Questions

1. Who was the author of the work Harshacharita?
2. Who was the founder of the Pala dynasty?
3. What was the initial political status of the Gurjara-Pratiharas under Harsha?
4. Which city served as the early power base of the Gurjara-Pratiharas?
5. Who succeeded Gopala as ruler of the Pala dynasty?
6. Dharmapala's reign witnessed a tripartite struggle over which important city?
7. From which region did the Senas originate?
8. Who was the first significant ruler of the Sena dynasty?
9. Which three powers dominated the political landscape of peninsular India from the mid-sixth century onward?
10. What was the primary stronghold of the Chalukyas?

Answers

1. Banabhatta
2. Gopala
3. Subordinate feudatories
4. Ujjain



5. Dharmapala
6. Kanauj
7. Karnata (Deccan region)
8. Vijaya Sena
9. Chalukyas, Pallavas, Pandyas
10. Vatapi (modern-day Badami)

Assignments

1. Discuss the political conditions in northern and western India that facilitated the rise of Rajput kingdoms between the 7th and 12th centuries CE.
2. Compare the administrative structures of prominent Rajput kingdoms like the Pratiharas, Chauhans, and Paramaras. What common features and regional variations can be identified?
3. Analyse the cultural contributions of Rajput rulers in the fields of literature, temple architecture, and patronage of the arts.
4. Discuss the interaction of Rajput states with contemporary powers such as the Palas, Rashtrakutas, and early Turkish invaders. How did these interactions shape their military and diplomatic strategies?
5. Examine the role of religion and temple patronage in legitimising Rajput authority. How did temples serve both sacred and political functions?

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2

UNIT

Chola Administration and Local Self Government

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ describe the central administrative structure of the Chola Empire
- ◆ explain the efficient system of revenue collection, military organisation, and provincial administration under the Cholas
- ◆ identify the different administrative divisions of Cholas
- ◆ evaluate the contributions of Pallavas and Pandyas in shaping regional identities in Tamilakam

Prerequisite

Between the sixth and eighth centuries, South India was home to several powerful kingdoms, including the Pallavas and Pandyas in present-day Tamil Nadu, the Cheras in present-day Kerala, and the Chalukyas in the Deccan. The Pallavas and Pandyas maintained strong naval forces that extended their economic, religious, and cultural influence to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and China. In the ninth century, the Chola kingdom rose to prominence, unifying much of southern India and building one of the most powerful navies of its time, which enabled conquests as far as Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The Chola period is generally regarded as the high point of South Indian political and cultural expansion.

Keywords

Chola, Kurram, Ur, Mandalam, Pallava, Pandya

Discussion

6.2.1 The Cholas

The Chola kingdom was founded by Vijayalaya, who initially served as a vassal under the Pallavas. Around 850 CE, he seized control of Tanjore, laying the foundation for Chola power. By the close of the ninth century, the Cholas had overcome the Pallavas of Kanchi (Tondaimandalam) and significantly weakened the Pandyas, bringing much of southern Tamil Nadu under their rule.

However, maintaining this dominance wasn't easy. The Cholas faced serious challenges from the Rashtrakutas. At one point, Rashtrakuta ruler Krishna III defeated a Chola king and annexed the northern part of their territory, delivering a major blow to the Cholas. Despite this setback, the Cholas managed to bounce back, especially after Krishna III's death in 965 and the eventual decline of the Rashtrakuta Empire, which opened the door for Chola resurgence.

Among the most prominent Chola rulers were Rajaraja I (985–1014) and his son Rajendra I (1014–1044). Rajaraja proved to be a formidable military leader; he crushed the Chera fleet near Thiruvananthapuram, launched attacks on Quilon, and took control of Madurai, capturing the Pandya ruler. His ambitions extended beyond the Indian subcontinent; he led a successful campaign in Sri Lanka, annexing its northern regions, largely driven by the goal of dominating trade routes with Southeast Asia. At the time, the Coromandel and Malabar coasts served as major hubs for Indian maritime trade with the East. Among his notable naval victories was the conquest of the Maldives. On land, he expanded his empire by seizing parts of the Ganga kingdom in Karnataka and advancing into Vengi.

Rajendra I, who had been groomed for leadership while his father was still on the

throne, brought both administrative skill and battlefield experience to his rule. He continued Rajaraja's expansionist policy, subjugating the Pandya and Chera territories entirely and incorporating them into the growing Chola kingdom. The Chola campaign in Sri Lanka culminated in a decisive victory, during which the royal crown and insignia of both the king and queen were seized in battle. Following this defeat, Sri Lanka remained under Chola domination for the next five decades, unable to reclaim its independence.

Rajaraja I and his son Rajendra I celebrated their military achievements by commissioning the construction of numerous temples dedicated to Siva and Vishnu across their empire. Among these, the most iconic is the Brihadishwara Temple at Tanjore, completed in 1010 CE. The Cholas also began a tradition of inscribing detailed records of their conquests and accomplishments on temple walls, offering historians valuable insights into their reign, far more than what is available for earlier dynasties.

One of the most notable campaigns during Rajendra I's rule was a northern expedition in 1022 CE. Leading his forces through Kalinga and into Bengal, his army crossed the Ganges and defeated two regional rulers. This daring campaign retraced the path once taken by Samudragupta, but in the opposite direction. In honour of this victory, Rajendra adopted the title *Gangaikondachola*, meaning "the Chola who conquered the Ganga." To further commemorate the triumph, he founded a new capital near the Kaveri River, naming it *Gangaikondacholapuram*, "the city of the Chola who conquered the Ganga."

Perhaps the most striking achievement during Rajendra I's reign was the ambitious naval campaign against the resurgent Srivijaya empire. By the 10th century, Srivijaya had reestablished its dominance



across Southeast Asia, encompassing regions like the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, and nearby islands. The empire also maintained control over crucial maritime trade routes connecting India to China.

The Srivijaya rulers, belonging to the Buddhist Sailendra dynasty, had long enjoyed friendly relations with the Cholas. In fact, one of the Sailendra kings even constructed a Buddhist monastery at Nagapattinam, and Rajendra I supported its upkeep by granting a village for its maintenance.

The breakdown in relations between the Cholas and the Srivijaya empire seems to have stemmed from the Cholas' determination to eliminate barriers hindering Indian merchants and to strengthen their trade ties with China. This drive for greater control over regional commerce led to a series of naval campaigns, resulting in the capture of key locations like Kadaram (modern Kedah) and several other parts of the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra.

During this period, the Chola navy emerged as the most powerful maritime force in the region, dominating the Bay of Bengal so thoroughly that it was often described as a "Chola lake." The Cholas not only expanded their influence through military might but also through diplomatic outreach, dispatching multiple embassies to China. These missions, which served both political and commercial purposes, reached China in 1016 and 1033.

One notable mission took place in 1077, when a delegation of 70 Chola merchants reached the Chinese court. According to Chinese records, they were given a substantial return, 81,800 strings of copper coins, which would have amounted to over four lakh rupees, for goods presented as "tribute." These goods included luxury items like glassware, camphor, rich textiles, rhinoceros horns, and ivory. Though termed "tribute" by the Chinese, these items were essentially part of commercial exchanges.

6.2.1.1 The Chola Administration

The early medieval kingdoms of South India occupied a middle ground in terms of state power; they were neither as centralised and dominant as K.A. Nilakanta Sastri portrayed, nor as weak and fragmented as Stein argued. These states had functioning administrative systems centred around the royal court, where key roles were held by advisers and religious figures.

Chola records frequently mention high-ranking Brahmins such as the *purohita* (royal priest) and the *rajaguru* (spiritual advisor to the king). Similarly, the Pallavas and Cheras maintained councils of ministers to assist in governance, while Pandya inscriptions refer to *mantrins*, or ministers, who may have formed a formal advisory body.

Apart from these clearly defined roles, early medieval courts also included officials like the *adhikari*, *vayil ketpar*, and *tirumandira-olai*, whose specific responsibilities remain unclear but who were evidently closely connected to the king and the functioning of the court.

The study by Karashima, Subbarayalu, and Matsui, which compiled personal names, titles, and honourifics from Tamil inscriptions, offers valuable insight into the structure of early South Indian administration. Their research points to a range of officials linked to the central bureaucracy. Among them, the title *araiyan* was often used to denote individuals of high rank or influence.

Some members of the royal court bore titles like *udaiyan*, *velan*, and *muvendavelan*, suggesting they were landholders and possibly derived their authority from both administrative roles and property ownership. At the regional or locality level, known as the *nadu*, officials held designations such as *nadu-vagai*, *nadu-kakaninayakam*, *nadu-kuru*, and *kottam-vagai*.

While the exact responsibilities of many of these posts remain unclear, evidence

suggests that their functions frequently overlapped. Additionally, there are signs that administrative positions may have been hereditary in some cases, indicating a degree of continuity and familial control in governance.

6.2.1.2 Revenue

The Chola administration maintained a sizable revenue department, but its primary focus was on keeping detailed records rather than directly assessing or collecting taxes. The actual process of revenue collection was largely managed by local institutions such as the *ur*, *nadu*, *sabha*, and *nagaram* as well as by regional chieftains, who then forwarded the collected revenue to the central authorities.

A significant shift occurred during the reign of Rajaraja I in the early 11th century, when the state launched an extensive land survey and assessment campaign. This effort also led to the reorganisation of the empire into administrative divisions called *valanadus*. Later, under Kulottunga I, two more land surveys were undertaken, reflecting the continuing importance of accurate revenue assessment. In the period following Rajaraja's rule, the revenue department came to be known as *puravu-vari-tinaikkalam* or *shri-karanam*, highlighting its evolving role within the state machinery.

6.2.1.3 Military Campaigns

The frequent military campaigns undertaken by early medieval South Indian rulers point to a reasonably well-structured army, though detailed information about its organisation remains limited. Royal bodyguards, closely tied to their kings or chieftains through bonds of personal loyalty, often came from families with a tradition of military service. These guards were likely rewarded with land grants, suggesting that their roles were both hereditary and economically supported.

There appears to have been a standing army maintained by the state, with high-ranking officers like the *senapati* and *dandanayakam* playing key roles in military command. Inscriptions from the Chola period reference various military units, indicating a fairly elaborate defence apparatus. During times of large-scale conflict, this core force was reinforced by levies provided by subordinate chieftains.

Notably, large overseas expeditions such as Rajaraja I's campaign in Sri Lanka and Rajendra I's venture into Southeast Asia are often cited as proof of a functioning Chola navy. However, it remains unclear whether the Cholas maintained a regular, specialised naval force or if these missions involved temporary arrangements for transporting troops by sea.

Judiciary

When it comes to the judicial system of early South India, historians like Nilakanta Sastri have proposed that there was a central royal court known as the *dharmasana*. However, this appears to be more of a theoretical construct, reflecting the idea that the king was the ultimate authority in legal matters. In practice, the responsibility for resolving disputes and administering justice seems to have rested largely with local institutions, particularly assemblies like the *sabha*. These grassroots bodies likely played a far more active role in handling everyday legal affairs than any centralised royal court.

6.2.1.4 The Local Self Government under the Cholas

During the Chola period, the king stood at the centre of the administrative system, holding supreme authority. Although he wielded immense power, he was assisted by a council of ministers who provided guidance on important matters. Chola rulers often travelled across their kingdom to personally inspect the functioning of the government.



The Cholas maintained a powerful and well-organised military force, comprising three main branches: elephants, cavalry, and foot soldiers, often referred to as the “three divisions” of the army. The infantry typically carried spears as their primary weapons. Kings were also protected by personal bodyguards who pledged unwavering loyalty and were ready to sacrifice their lives for the ruler’s safety. Marco Polo, a Venetian traveller who visited Kerala in the 13th century, claimed that these royal guards would immolate themselves on their king’s funeral pyre, a dramatic account that may have been an overstatement. In addition to their land forces, the Cholas possessed a formidable navy. This maritime strength allowed them to assert control over the Malabar and Coromandel coasts, and for a period, extend their influence across the Bay of Bengal.

The Chola Kingdom was a blend of centrally governed regions and territories managed with a degree of local autonomy. It included areas inhabited by tribal groups and communities living in hilly terrains. At the grassroots level, the core administrative unit was the *nadu*, which comprised clusters of villages often linked by kinship and mutual economic interests.

As irrigation projects, like the construction of ponds, tanks, and wells expanded, more land was brought under cultivation, leading to the creation of new *nadus*. In many cases, forest-dwelling or tribal populations were integrated into the agrarian system, gradually becoming settled farmers. Generous land grants to Brahmins and temples also played a crucial role in agricultural expansion.

Several *nadus* were grouped together to form a *valanadu*, and the larger administrative landscape was divided into four main provinces known as *mandalams*. Sometimes, members of the royal family, especially princes, were entrusted with the governance

of these provinces. Government officials were typically rewarded not with salaries but through land grants that entitled them to collect revenue. The Cholas also developed an extensive network of royal roads, which greatly facilitated both military movements and commercial activities across the empire.

Trade and economic activity thrived during the Chola period. Large and powerful merchant guilds played a key role in overseas trade, maintaining active trade links with regions like Java and Sumatra. Alongside their focus on trade, the Cholas invested heavily in improving agricultural infrastructure, especially irrigation. Rivers such as the Kaveri were harnessed for irrigation, and numerous water tanks were constructed to support farming.

To streamline revenue collection, some Chola rulers conducted detailed land surveys, aiming to assess and determine the state’s share of agricultural produce, though the exact proportion claimed by the state remains unclear. Beyond land revenue, the Chola administration generated income from trade duties, professional taxes, and, at times, through the spoils of military conquest.

In Chola times, villages often had two key assemblies: the *ur* and the *sabha* or *mahasabha*. The *ur* was a general body representing the whole village, but it is the *mahasabha* that offers more insight into how local governance functioned, especially in Brahmin settlements known as *agraharams*, where land was typically tax-exempt.

These Brahmin villages enjoyed a significant degree of independence. Their affairs were overseen by an elected executive body, typically made up of well-educated, land-owning adult men. Selection to this body was either done through drawing lots or by a system of rotation, and members served for fixed terms of three years. In addition to this, there were several other groups assigned specific responsibilities,



such as tax collection, judicial matters, law enforcement, and most notably, irrigation management.

Among these, the tank committee played a vital role in regulating water distribution to agricultural fields. The *mahasabha* also had the authority to allocate uncultivated land, manage village finances, raise loans, and impose local taxes when needed. This model of self-rule was highly sophisticated and effective, especially in Brahmin villages, and to some extent influenced governance in non-Brahmin villages as well. However, the rise of feudal structures gradually reduced the independence these village assemblies once enjoyed.

6.2.2 The Pandyas

In recent times, a significant volume of new archaeological and inscriptional evidence has emerged, offering deeper insights into the history of South India, especially the Pandyan dynasty. Despite this, there has been little effort to present a coherent and scholarly account of the Pandyas' historical development. Many early inscriptions are written in the Grantha script for Sanskrit and the Vatteluttu script for Tamil. Vatteluttu gradually gave way to the modern Tamil script, a transition that likely took place following the Chola conquest of the Pandya region, which occurred around the late 10th or mid-11th century CE.

6.2.2.1 Pandyas of the Sangam Age (Early Pandyas)

Palyagasalai Mudukudumi Peruvaludi is recognised as the earliest known ruler of the Pandyan dynasty. Succeeding him as the fourth ruler was Neduncheliyan I, famously referred to as “Ayyappudai Kadantha Neduncheliyan.” Several generations later, Ayyappudai Kadantha Neduncheliyan, referred to as Neduncheliyan I, emerged as the fourth sovereign in the lineage. His epithet,

‘Ayyappudai Kadantha’, translates to “He who overcame the Aryans.” Neduncheliyan I is mentioned in the *Silappadikaram*, a celebrated Tamil literary classic authored by the Chera ruler Ilango Adigal. The text recounts how, in a moment of rage and without a thorough investigation, the king unjustly sentenced a merchant named Kovalan to death for allegedly stealing a royal anklet, a charge that later proved false. This incident highlights his failure to uphold the principles of justice. Among the early Pandyan rulers, Neduncheliyan II is often regarded as the most prominent. He achieved a significant military victory by defeating a joint coalition of the Cheras and Cholas at the Battle of Talaiyalanganam, which allowed him to expand the Pandyan realm and bring much of the Tamil territory under his control.

Ceremonial references often highlight the “five great Kulus” and the “eight great Ayams” as key symbols of authority. Early records describe the five Kulus as comprising citizens, priests, physicians, astrologers, and ministers. In later interpretations, the group expanded to include military commanders, royal messengers, and intelligence agents alongside ministers and priests. Literature from that era paints a vivid picture of a sophisticated and cultured society, especially in urban centres such as Madurai, where social life had grown remarkably refined.

6.2.2.2 The First Pandyan Kingdom

After the end of the Sangam age, Pandya power waned, and the Kalabhras rose to prominence as the dominant rulers of the region. The specific factors that led to the rise of the First Pandyan Kingdom remain unclear, with historical records offering little concrete explanation. This phase, covering nearly 300 years, from the early 7th to the early 10th century, marked a significant transition in South Indian history. It was Kadungon who,



in the 6th century, successfully ousted the Kalabhras and laid the foundation for the First Pandyan Kingdom. His successors began adopting regal titles such as Maravarman, Sadayavarman (a tribute to Lord Shiva), and Sadaiyan (referring to a matted-haired ascetic). Among the prominent rulers of this revived dynasty was Arikesari Maravarman, who, according to inscriptions, repeatedly defeated the Cheras and even captured the Chera king. The prolonged conflicts with the Chalukyas began during the reign of his son and heir, Kochadaiyan Ranadhiran.

Kochadaiyan Ranadhiran lost his life while engaged in warfare against the Cholas. His son, Maravarman Rajasimha I, succeeded him and went on to secure multiple victories over the Pallava ruler Nandivarman II, eventually gaining control over Pallava territories. His military campaigns also brought triumphs over the Gangas and the Chalukyas. In a move to strengthen political ties, Rajasimha arranged the marriage of his daughter to the Chalukya king Kirtivarman II. The final ruler of this phase of the Pandya dynasty was Maravarman Rajasimha III, who was overpowered by Chola monarch Parantaka I. After capturing the Pandyan capital, Parantaka adopted the title *Madurai konda*, meaning “Conqueror of Madurai.” With the resurgence of Chola power in the 10th century, Pandyan influence steadily declined. Later, Aditya Karikala, son of Parantaka Chola II, delivered a decisive blow by defeating the Pandya king Vira Pandya.

6.2.2.3 Second Pandyan Kingdom

The Pandyas experienced a resurgence of power in the late 13th century with the rise of what came to be known as the Second Pandyan Kingdom. This revival began under the leadership of Maravarman Sundara Pandyan, who forced the Chola ruler Kulothunga Chola III to acknowledge

Pandyan supremacy. The most distinguished ruler of this era was Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan, also referred to as Sendan. He likely succeeded his father, Maravarman, and ruled during the mid-7th century (around 645–670 CE). Celebrated for both his military acumen and just governance, Jatavarman earned the title *Vanavan*, hinting at his triumphs over the Cheras. During his reign, the Pandyan kingdom expanded considerably—he not only conquered regions like Kalinga (modern Odisha) and parts of the Telugu-speaking territories but also carried out successful campaigns in Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka).

After Kulothunga Chola III, the Chola dynasty struggled to contain the growing might of the Pandyas. Despite receiving some support from the Hoysalas, the Cholas steadily lost territory, prestige, and authority. As their influence waned, the Pandyas emerged as the dominant political power in southern India. Maravarman Kulasekhara Pandyan I dealt a decisive blow by defeating the combined forces of the Hoysala ruler and Rajendra Chola III, marking the end of the Chola empire. However, the Pandyan ascendancy was short-lived. A bitter succession conflict between Maravarman Kulasekhara’s sons, Vira Pandya and Sundara Pandya, plunged the kingdom into civil war, hastening the decline of Pandyan rule.

The early historical records of the Pandyas do not provide precise definitions of the kingdom’s territorial limits. References to a clearly demarcated Pandya region are absent from contemporary sources. However, this does not suggest the absence of a political structure. Rather, the state during this time appears to have been centred around a core region, with its boundaries expanding or contracting based on circumstances. The fluid nature of Pandyan territorial control can be inferred from the geographical references found in their inscriptions. For instance, records from the reign of Parantaka Nedunjadayan describe the kingdom’s



extent, from Periyakulam taluk in the west to Paramakudi taluk in the east, and from Aramboli near the Travancore border in the southwest to Tirukkodikkaval near Kumbakonam in the northeast.

Although the presence of a formal, elaborate bureaucratic system is not evident, some inscriptions do mention individuals who served the royal household. Among them, the title *Uttaramantri* stands out, likely referring to a senior ministerial role. Despite the lack of clarity about the administrative hierarchy, the importance of this position suggests it carried significant authority in governance.

6.2.3 The Cheras

The Cheras ruled over the forested slopes of the Western Ghats extending toward the coastline. In early Tamil poetry, they are often described as *Kanaka-natan* (lord of the wooded region) or *Malaiyan* (lord of the hills). In *Purananuru*, the poet Poikeyar, while composing a verse in praise of Cheraman Kotai Marpan, grapples with how best to refer to the ruler. He is unsure whether to call him *natan* for his ownership of fertile plains (*marutham*), *uran* for his control over hilly, forested terrain (*kurinchi*), or *Cheramarpan* due to his command of coastal lands. This ambiguity reflects the ecological diversity of the Chera territory, dominated by hills and forests, yet encompassing plains and coastal zones as well. Another poet, Parinar, also writing in *Purananuru*, highlights the wealth of the Chera land, mentioning both mountain and marine produce under Cheran Senkuttuvan's reign, as well as gold that arrived by sea.

The Cheras have an entire anthology of praise poetry devoted exclusively to them, known as the *Pattuppattu*, specifically, the *Patittupattu* (Ten Idylls). This collection originally consisted of ten sets of ten poems, with each set dedicated to a different Chera

ruler. However, the first and last sets have been lost over time. What remains are eighty poems focusing on eight Chera chieftains. These surviving verses offer valuable insights into the lineage of the Cheras, their military achievements, the nature and organisation of their political power, the sources from which they derived their legitimacy, and how authority functioned in what is now Kerala during that period.

Utiyan Cheralatan, also remembered by the epithet *Perumchorru Utiyan*, meaning “Utiyan of the grand rice feasts”, is recognised as the earliest known ruler of the Chera lineage. Although the first set of ten poems in the *Patittupattu* was dedicated to him, that portion of the collection has unfortunately not survived. What we do know about him comes mainly from the verses of the poet Mamulanar in the *Purananuru*. These poems recount Utiyan's defeat at the hands of Karikala Chola in the battle of Venni. They also mention that he suffered a wound on his back, a serious dishonour in that era, as it implied retreat or defeat in battle. To preserve his dignity, Utiyan is said to have undertaken a ritual fast unto death, a tragic end meant to restore his honour in the eyes of society.

Following Utiyan Cheralatan, his son Netum Cheralatan assumed leadership of the Chera dynasty. He is celebrated in the second set of ten poems in the *Patittupattu*, composed by the poet Kannanar. Netum Cheralatan was honoured with the title *Imayavar-Ampam*, which earlier scholars interpreted as “the one whose realm extended to the skies,” though the more accepted meaning today is “beloved of the gods.” During his reign, the region of Kutanaadu came under Chera control.

The poetry of the time glorifies his generosity and military prowess, especially his victories over seven crowned kings, which earned him the distinguished title of *Adhiraja*



(supreme king). Mamulanar notes his triumph over the Kadamba ruler, describing how treasures seized in battle were proudly displayed. Netum Cheralatan is credited not only with subduing the Kadambas, his main rivals, but also with defeating rulers across the land, from Kanyakumari in the south to the Himalayas in the north. Kannanar further praises him for overcoming the Yavanas (Greco-Romans), who were allied with the Kadambas.

Despite his successes, Netum Cheralatan met his end in battle against a Chola king. By that time, his brother Antuvan Cheralatan had also passed away. Antuvan is remembered as a key military ally to his brother and a patron of Brahmanical traditions and Vedic rituals. Another son of Netum Cheralatan, Atukottupattu Cheralatan, is the central figure of the sixth set of *Patittupattu* poems. He, too, died before his father. His name suggests renown in the performing arts, particularly in dance, music, and drumming.

After the death of Netum Cheralatan, his second son Vel Kezhukuttuvan ascended to the Chera throne. He is the central figure in the fifth set of ten poems in the *Patittupattu*, composed by the Brahmin poet Parana. Revered with the title *Kadal Pirakottiya Kuttuvan*, which highlights his maritime strength, he is believed to have driven hostile forces, likely sea pirates, far back into the open ocean. His influence reportedly stretched from the Kollimalai hills in the east to the key western port towns of Tondi and Mantai.

Vel Kezhukuttuvan, also known as Senkuttuvan (“the illustrious one”), holds a prominent place in Tamil tradition. He is famously identified as the elder brother of Ilango Adigal, the reputed author of *Chilappadikaram*. Senkuttuvan is celebrated in legend for his northern expedition to the Himalayas, from where he is said to have brought back a sacred stone to carve an idol

for Kannaki, the heroine of *Silappadikaram*.

Historians have attempted to date Senkuttuvan’s reign by linking him to the Sri Lankan king Gajabahu, placing him in the second century CE. However, historian M.G.S. Narayanan argues that *Chilappadikaram* was likely composed much later, around the late ninth century CE.

Senkuttuvan’s military campaigns were notable; he decisively defeated the Kadambas, despite their receiving naval support from the Yavanas (Greco-Romans). He also subdued the Kongus and overcame a warrior chief named Mokur Mannan. Parana’s verses praise Senkuttuvan’s storming of the Kotukar fort and the destruction of the Kadamba military encampment, marking him as a formidable ruler in Chera history.

Selvakatumko Vazhyatan is celebrated by the poet Kapilar as one of the most distinguished rulers of the Chera dynasty, known for his military success over his Chola and Pandya rivals. Under his reign, Chera influence stretched from the Kollimalai hills in the east to the bustling port towns of Tondi and Mantai on the western coast. He is also referred to as the lord of Pulinadu and Kollimalai. Renowned for his generosity, Selvakatumko is remembered for distributing the wealth gained from his military campaigns among the *panars*, wandering bards and musicians.

His son, Perum Cheral Irumporai, takes centre stage in the eighth set of ten poems in the *Patittupattu*, composed by Arisil Kizhar. He ruled over regions including Pulinadu, Kollimalai, and even the Chola capital of Puhar, according to the poet. Perum Cheral Irumporai is credited with defeating a coalition of forces led by the Pandyas, Cholas, and Atiyaman, the chief of Takatur. Following the destruction of Takatur, he earned the honorific title *Takatur Erinta Perum Cheral Irumporai*, “the great Chera

who razed Takatur.” In addition to his military accomplishments, he is also remembered as a generous patron of Brahmanas and a supporter of Vedic rituals and sacrifices.

Yanaikatcai Mantaran Cheral Irumporai, likely the son and successor of Perum Cheral Irumporai, is believed to be the central figure in the final set of poems in the *Patittupattu*. His reign marks the beginning of the Chera dynasty’s decline. According to tradition, he was defeated and taken prisoner by the Pandya king Nedumchezhiyan. Despite this setback, Mantaran Cheral is said to have escaped captivity and managed to reclaim his territory.

His successor, Kanaikkal Irumporai, is remembered for his fierce campaign against a local chieftain named Muvan. In a dramatic display of victory, he is said to have extracted the defeated leader’s teeth and placed them at the entrance of the port city of Tondi as a warning to others. However, Kanaikkal Irumporai’s rule ended in defeat at the hands of the Chola king Cenkannan. Unable to bear the dishonour, he is believed to have ended his life through *vatakkiruttal*, a ritual fast unto death, a practice seen as a dignified way to face defeat in ancient Tamil culture.

6.2.4 The Pallavas

The origins of the Pallava dynasty continue to be a subject of historical speculation. An earlier theory proposed that the Pallavas were originally Pahlavas or Parthians, who migrated from western India to the eastern coast during the conflicts between the Shakas and the Satavahanas in the 2nd century CE. However, this idea lacks strong evidence, particularly because no records suggest such a southward movement of the Pallavas or Pahlavas.

The earliest known records of the Pallavas come from inscriptions dating back to when they were still a regional power

centred in Kanchipuram. As their influence expanded and they came to dominate much of Tamil Nadu, later inscriptions reflect their emergence as a major political force. This rise in status led some earlier historians to refer to them as the “imperial Pallavas,” recognising their significance in shaping the region’s early history.

One of the early inscriptions mentions a Pallava ruler performing several Vedic rituals, including the *ashvamedha* (horse sacrifice). These elaborate ceremonies, relatively unfamiliar to the local communities at the time, likely served as powerful symbols of royal authority rooted in Sanskrit tradition. In a similar effort to establish control and promote settlement, the Ikshvaku kings are noted for distributing ox-ploughs to cultivate and populate uncultivated lands.

The early Pallavas likely supported agricultural expansion as a way to boost economic returns through increased revenue. Their kingdom gained a reputation for wealth, making it an attractive target for rivals. Pallava inscriptions mention subordinate rulers such as Udayana and Prithvi-vyagraha, identifying them as leaders of the Shabara and Nishada communities, terms commonly used to describe forest-dwelling groups engaged in hunting, gathering, and shifting cultivation, often existing outside the formal caste structure.

This suggests that the Pallava state extended its control into forested regions, possibly converting them into agricultural land or utilising them for valuable natural resources like timber, elephants, and semi-precious stones. The fact that these local chiefs adopted Sanskritised names indicates a degree of cultural assimilation and alignment with the dominant political and religious order promoted by the Pallavas.

Mahendravarman I, who ruled between 600 and 630 CE, played a key role in



strengthening the Pallava dynasty's political influence. Beyond his administrative and military contributions, he also became a significant figure in shaping early Tamil cultural identity. A contemporary of notable rulers such as Pulakeshin II of the Chalukyas and Harsha of Thanesar, Mahendravarman shared their passion for the arts. He was an accomplished playwright and poet, best known for his satirical Sanskrit play *Mattavilasa Prahasana* ("The Delight of the Drunkards"). This connection between kingship and literary talent became a hallmark of elite culture, especially within the Sanskrit tradition.

Mahendravarman's reign also saw the creation of some of the earliest and most refined rock-cut temples, notably those at Mahabalipuram (also known as Mamallapuram). According to tradition, Mahendravarman was initially a follower of Jainism but later embraced Shaivism under the influence of the saint Appar. This religious shift is believed to have marked a decline in royal support for Jain institutions across Tamil Nadu. Mahendravarman I's legacy extends far beyond his contributions to literature and temple architecture.

His reign was also marked by significant military challenges. While his northern counterpart, Harsha, ruled at a distance too great for direct conflict, the real threat came from much closer: the Chalukyas, under the ambitious Pulakeshin II. Determined to check Pallava expansion and block their influence over the Vengi region, Pulakeshin's resistance ignited a prolonged period of conflict between the Pallavas and Chalukyas, a rivalry that persisted well beyond their reigns and was later continued by their successors.

Pulakeshin II, aiming to expand beyond his Deccan base, first tested his military prowess against southern neighbours like the Kadambas and the Gangas, achieving decisive victories. He then turned his attention

to Andhra and led a successful campaign there as well. His boldest military feat came in the north, where he halted Harsha's advance at the Narmada River and secured the submission of western Indian regions including Lata, Malwa, and Gujarat. On his return to Badami, Pulakeshin launched another campaign, this time targeting Mahendravarman and the Pallavas, which ended in the Chalukyas gaining control of parts of northern Pallava territory. His triumphs were immortalised in the celebrated Aihole inscription, which stands as a prime example of early Indian historical writing and a rich literary record of royal achievement.

The Pallavas did not let their earlier defeat go unanswered. Though Mahendravarman had passed away, his son and successor, Narasimhavarman I, took up the mantle with a fierce resolve to reclaim lost ground. His military campaign proved highly successful; he not only recovered the territories seized by the Chalukyas but also advanced deep into their domain, ultimately capturing their capital city, Vatapi. This remarkable victory earned him the title *Vatapikonda*, meaning "Conqueror of Vatapi."

During his reign, Narasimhavarman also oversaw a flourishing of temple architecture, with Mahabalipuram being adorned further with refined and intricate rock-cut monuments. While a lull in conflict followed, largely due to a twelve-year interruption in the Chalukya line of succession, the Pallavas turned their attention to other endeavours. One such episode saw them engage in naval warfare to assist their ally, the king of Sri Lanka, in reclaiming his throne, a mission that ended in success.

Recap

- ◆ The Chola state emerged under Vijayalaya, who initially owed allegiance to the Pallavas before establishing independent authority.
- ◆ Rajaraja I (r. 985–1014) and his son Rajendra I (r. 1014–1044) stand out as dynamic leaders who expanded Chola influence through land and sea campaigns.
- ◆ Rajaraja subdued rivals including the Chera navy near Thiruvananthapuram, struck at Quilon, and captured Madurai, detaining the Pandya king.
- ◆ The duo expressed their imperial success through monumental temple-building, patronising both Shaivite and Vaishnavite traditions.
- ◆ The Brihadishwara Temple in Tanjore stands as a lasting symbol of their architectural ambition.
- ◆ The Chola administration included a robust revenue office, primarily aimed at record management rather than direct taxation.
- ◆ A professional army was retained, structured into three primary divisions: infantry, cavalry, and war elephants.
- ◆ Senior commanders such as the *senapati* and *dandanayaka* directed military operations.
- ◆ One of the earliest recorded kings of the Pandyas is Palyagasalai Mudukudumi Peruvaludi.
- ◆ The kingdom functioned under hereditary monarchy, and ritual authority was conveyed through symbolic terms like the “five great Kulus” and the “eight great Ayams”.
- ◆ The Chera rulers are uniquely celebrated in a poetic collection titled *Pattuppattu*, notably the *Patittupattu* (Ten Idylls).
- ◆ This compilation originally included ten poetic cycles, each glorifying a specific Chera monarch, though two sets have not survived.
- ◆ The early Pallava rulers likely invested in agricultural growth, seeing it as a means to increase state resources and revenue.
- ◆ Mahendravarman I (r. c. 600–630 CE) was instrumental in establishing the political stature of the Pallava regime.
- ◆ Pulakeshin II initiated a series of military campaigns, first defeating
- ◆ his southern rivals like the Kadambas and Gangas, showcasing Deccan expansionism.

Objective Questions

1. Before founding the Chola empire, Vijayalaya served as a vassal under which dynasty?
2. Which region was brought under Chola control after they overcame the Pallavas?
3. What was the role of the rajaguru in the Chola court?
4. What administrative unit was formed by grouping several nadus together?
5. What was the highest level of provincial division in the Chola administrative structure?
6. What title did Parantaka I adopt after capturing the Pandyan capital?
7. What is the name of the anthology that contains praise poetry for the Chera rulers?
8. How many poems did the original Patittupattu collection contain?
9. Where were the Pallavas initially a regional power?
10. Which northern ruler's advance did Pulakeshin II halt at the Narmada River?

Answers

1. Pallavas
2. Kanchi (Tondaimandalam)
3. Spiritual advisor to the king
4. Valanadu
5. Mandalam
6. Madurai Konda
7. Patittupattu (Ten Idylls)
8. 100
9. Kanchipuram
10. Harsha

Assignments

1. Evaluate the contributions of the Pallavas to art and architecture, particularly in Mahabalipuram. How did their patronage shape early Dravidian temple architecture?
2. Discuss the changing nature of kingship in the Pandya dynasty from early historic times to the later medieval period. How did political, religious, and economic shifts shape royal power?
3. Critically assess the segmentary state theory in relation to the Chola kingdom. Does the evidence from inscriptions and temple records support or challenge this model?
4. Trace the evolution of regional identity in the Chera, Chola, Pandya, and Pallava kingdoms.
5. Examine the role of local assemblies like the ur, sabha, and nagaram under Chola rule. How did these institutions reflect the relationship between the central authority and local governance?

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UNIT

Vijayanagara Administration

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ describe the structure of the Vijayanagara Empire's administration
- ◆ identify the key rulers and their contributions to the strengthening of administrative systems of the Vijayanagara Empire
- ◆ explain the role of the king as the supreme authority and the functions of his council of ministers
- ◆ discuss the role of Nayakas (military chiefs or governors) in the 'Nayankara' system and their responsibilities in maintaining troops and governance

Prerequisite

Scholarly study of the Vijayanagara Empire began with Robert Sewell's *A Forgotten Empire* (1900), a foundation later built upon by historians such as S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, B. A. Saletore, N. Venkataramanayya, and T. V. Mahalingam. The empire is generally understood both as a continuation of earlier regional traditions, particularly those of the Chalukyas of Badami, and as a precursor to later polities such as the Maratha state. Its founding city, established on the banks of the Tungabhadra River in 1340 CE, emerged in the aftermath of Khalji military campaigns into the Deccan in the early fourteenth century, campaigns that destabilised existing regional powers and created the conditions for the rise of a consolidated southern polity.

Keywords

Maharajadhiraja, Mahanta, Rajyas, Mandalams, Nadus, Grammas, Nayaks



Discussion

Several historians posit that Harihara and Bukka, who would later emerge as principal architects of the Vijayanagara Empire, initially served under the Hoysala ruler Vira Ballala III. Following the destruction of the Hoysala capital at Dvarasamudram in 1327 CE, Ballala is reported to have shifted his political centre to Tiruvannamalai in northern Tamil Nadu. It is during this period that he is believed to have initiated the construction of a fortified settlement on the banks of the Tungabhadra River, situated directly opposite Anegundi. This site would, in time, develop into the centre of the Vijayanagara Empire.

Among the early names attributed to this new settlement was *Virupaksha Pattana*, meaning “the city under the protection of Virupaksha,” a form of Shiva whose temple stood at the heart of the area. The governance of the newly established city was entrusted to Bukka and Harihara, who would later emerge as the founders of a powerful South Indian empire.

6.3.1 Origin of Vijayanagara Empire

N. Venkataramanayya offered a different perspective on the origins of Vijayanagara, challenging the commonly held view that Harihara and Bukka rose under Hoysala patronage. Drawing from 17th-century records, he suggested that the two brothers held prominent roles under the Kakatiya ruler Prataparudra. According to this version, when Warangal fell to the Tughlaq forces, the five sons of Sangama, Bukka, Harihara, Kampana, Mudappa, and Marappa were captured and taken as prisoners. They were reportedly converted to Islam and later entrusted by the Sultan to administer the newly conquered region of Kampili.

Central to the legend of Vijayanagara’s beginnings is the dramatic narrative of their

eventual break from Islam. Guided by the revered philosopher and spiritual leader Madhavacharya, better known as Vidyaranya, the brothers are said to have returned to Hinduism and established a new kingdom. Numerous inscriptions reinforce this version, highlighting Vidyaranya’s pivotal role in supporting the Sangama brothers and in the founding of the Vijayanagara empire around 1336.

Historian Hermann Kulke offers a more sceptical interpretation regarding Vidyaranya’s role in the founding of the Vijayanagara Empire. He argues that the association between Vidyaranya, identified with Madhavacharya, a prominent Saiva philosopher, and the early rulers of Vijayanagara only gained real prominence later, particularly around 1374–75 when Vidyaranya became the *mahanta* (head) of the Sringeri Matha.

Kulke contends that the popular narrative crediting Vidyaranya with guiding Harihara and Bukka in establishing the empire was a later construction, a legend that emerged in the 16th century. According to this view, the myth likely developed during a period when the Sringeri Matha was losing royal patronage, which had shifted to the Vaishnava temple at Tirupati under rulers like Krishnadevaraya and Achyuta Devaraya, both strong devotees of Vaishnavism.

6.3.1.1 The Early Phase of Vijayanagara Rule

In its formative years, Vijayanagara steadily expanded into a powerful empire, bringing together a variety of linguistic and cultural communities across southern India. This growth was largely driven by the systematic subjugation of smaller Hindu polities, ranging from local chiefdoms to



established kingdoms. At the same time, the early rulers had to defend their territory from northern threats, particularly the Bahmani Sultanate established by Ala-ud-din Gangu, which emerged around a decade after Vijayanagara's foundation and posed a consistent military challenge.

Sometime before 1340, Harihara and Bukka established their authority in the region around Hampi or Hosapattana, situated on the southern bank of the Tungabhadra River, directly opposite the old settlement of Anegundi. At the same time, Ballala III, who had been engaged in conflict with the Sultanate of Madurai, was killed in battle near Tiruchirappalli in 1342. His son, Ballala IV, appears to have retained control over the northern part of the Hoysala kingdom, likely in cooperation with Harihara and Bukka, until his death around 1345. After Ballala IV's demise, Harihara I assumed sole control, and with the backing of his brothers, began ruling independently from what was likely his base in the Hampi-Hosapattana area.

After Harihara's death in 1357, Bukka ascended the throne. Though the earliest inscription referencing their rule dates to 1336, the name "Vijayanagara" appears for the first time in a 1356 record, possibly reflecting Bukka's efforts to either rebuild Hampi (also known as Hosapattana) or establish a new royal capital. By 1368, an inscription issued by his minister refers to him with the full imperial title *maharajadhiraja paramesvara*, signalling his consolidation of power. During his reign, Bukka's son Kampana led military campaigns in the south, targeting the Madurai Sultanate and the Sambuvarayars in the Kanchipuram region. The Sultanate seems to have collapsed by around 1370. Meanwhile, Vijayanagara's expansion northward into the Raichur Doab and westward toward Goa provoked conflict with the newly established Bahmani Sultanate.

Following the conquest of Goa, Harihara II (1377–1404) extended his dominion by defeating the Reddis of Kondavidu and pushing his influence along the Coromandel Coast. He even sent a military expedition to Sri Lanka. However, threats from the Bahmani kingdom in the north placed pressure on Vijayanagara's heartland. During this time, the empire was divided into four major administrative regions, or *rajyas*, encircling the central core: Udayagiri in the east, Penugonda in the central-east, Muluva in the south, and Araga in the west. Each region was overseen by influential local authorities or nobility.

Later, under Devaraya II, the empire launched campaigns into Kerala and Orissa. To maintain stability in the north, Devaraya forged matrimonial alliances with the Bahmanis. During his rule, the Persian envoy Abdur Razak visited Vijayanagara and reported that the empire's reach extended from Bengal (including Orissa) to Malabar, and from Ceylon to Gulbarga. However, under the weak leadership of his successors, Mallikarjuna and Virupaksha II, Vijayanagara began to lose ground. Kapilesvara Gajapati of Orissa invaded deep into Tamil territory, even beyond Tiruchirappalli, and the Bahmanis reclaimed Goa. Meanwhile, unrest began to stir in the Tamil regions, leading to rebellion.

With the support of Narasa Nayaka from the Tuluva Dynasty, Saluva Narasimha, then in charge of the Chandragiri region in northern Tamil Nadu, was able to regain control of Udayagiri from Kapilesvara, suppress rebellions in the Tamil region, and extend Vijayanagara's borders as far as the Godavari River. He ascended the throne in 1486, marking the beginning of the Saluva dynasty. However, ongoing struggles with both the Gajapatis and the Bahmanis continued to challenge the kingdom. After his death in 1491, Narasa Nayaka stepped in as the actual power behind the throne,



recovering some of the territories that had been lost. Eventually, in 1505, his son Vira Narasimha seized the throne, effectively ending Saluva rule and founding the Tuluva dynasty, the third major ruling line of Vijayanagara.

During the reign of Vira Narasimha (1505–1509), the Bahmani successor state of Bijapur launched an invasion from the north, while a rebellion erupted in Ummathur near Mysore. After his death in 1509, Krishnadevaraya came to power and quickly quelled the Ummathur uprising. He then launched a successful campaign against the Gajapatis, advancing as far as Simhachalam. Aware of the importance of high-quality Arabian horses for his cavalry, Krishnadevaraya maintained favourable ties with the Portuguese, who had seized Goa in 1510. His military successes included the conquest of Raichur Doab from Bijapur. By the tenth year of his reign, the Vijayanagara Empire had reached its greatest territorial extent.

Krishnadevaraya is also remembered as a generous patron of literature and the arts. Poets like Allasani Peddana flourished under his support. He himself composed the *Amuktamalyada*, a celebrated Telugu poem that narrates the life of the Alvar saint Periyalvar and reflects Vaishnava theological themes. The *Rayavachakamu*, a Telugu historical prose text composed later in the court of the Madurai Nayakas, presents itself as an eyewitness account of events during Krishnadevaraya's reign.

The Bahmani kingdom was established in 1347 by Zafar Khan, also known as Hasan Gangu, who had served as a governor in the northern Deccan under Muhammad bin Tughluq. Claiming descent from the legendary Persian figure Bahman, he lent his name to the newly founded state. Initially based in Gulbarga, the Bahmani capital was later shifted to Bidar in the early 15th century. The kingdom found itself frequently

at odds with Vijayanagara in the south and with the Sultanates of Malwa and Gujarat to the north.

In the latter half of the 15th century, Mahmud Gawan, a Persian by origin, rose to the position of Prime Minister (*peshwa*) in the Bahmani kingdom. Under his capable administration, the kingdom extended its reach, seizing key territories such as Goa on the western coast and Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu. This expansion was made possible by the weakening grip of the Vijayanagara Empire after the reign of Devaraya II. However, in 1481, internal strife at the Bahmani court, marked by tensions between local Deccanis and foreign nobles, led the Sultan to order Gawan's execution. His death marked a turning point, triggering the fragmentation of central authority. Regional chieftains asserted their independence, leading to the rise of new sovereign states: Golkonda in the former Kakatiya heartland, Ahmadnagar in the western Deccan, Bijapur to the south near Vijayanagara, and Berar in the Vidarbha region. Meanwhile, a local Bidari lineage assumed control over what remained of the Bahmani domain, rebranding it as the Bidar Sultanate. By the early 1500s, the once-unified Bahmani realm had fractured into five separate successor states.

After Krishnadevaraya passed away in 1529, the Vijayanagara Empire faced political instability due to disputes over succession. With the backing of Saluva Viranarasingaraya Nayaka (commonly known as Saluva Nayaka), Achuta Devaraya took the throne. However, Krishnadevaraya's young son, Rama Raja, who had initially challenged Achyuta Devaraya and Saluva Nayaka for the crown, later reconciled with the new king, only to rebel against him in the southern regions. The rebellion was short-lived, as Saluva Nayaka was captured and subdued.

Achutadevaraya managed to reclaim Raichur from the Bijapur Sultanate, but Rama

Raja gradually grew more powerful and influential at court. When Achutadevaraya died in 1542, another succession crisis emerged. His nephew, Sadasiva, was made king, but real authority shifted into the hands of Rama Raja and his brother, who effectively ran the empire. To manage the threat posed by the five northern Deccan Sultanates, Rama Raja employed a diplomatic strategy based on manipulation and division, keeping them embroiled in rivalries. However, this tactic backfired. Instead of weakening them, it pushed the Sultanates toward unity. This growing alliance among the Sultanates culminated in the decisive Battle of Rakshasa-Tangadi (Talikota) in 1565, where the combined forces defeated Vijayanagara, marking a turning point in the empire's history.

6.3.1.2 Administration

In the Vijayanagara Empire, the king was supported by a council of ministers, made up of powerful nobles who played a key role in advising the king. The administrative structure was hierarchical: the empire was divided into large provinces known as *rajyas* or *mandalams*, which were further broken down into *nadus* (districts), *sthalas* (sub-districts), and *gramas* (villages).

Unlike earlier periods, especially during Chola rule, village-level self-governance saw a noticeable decline. The rise of hereditary *nayaks*, military and administrative elites, gradually reduced the autonomy and decision-making power of local village institutions.

Initially, provincial governors were drawn from the royal family, typically princes. Over time, the posts were also given to nobles and members of subordinate ruling families. These governors enjoyed significant independence in their domains. They ran their own administrative systems, maintained their own armies, held court independently, and even issued low-denomination coins.

They could introduce new taxes or abolish existing ones, and their authority was largely determined by their influence and military strength rather than fixed terms of office.

Each governor was required to contribute a certain number of troops and a fixed amount of revenue to the imperial treasury. Despite the vast wealth of the empire, which is estimated to have generated around 12 million *parados* in revenue, only about half of this amount reached the central administration, indicating the high degree of autonomy enjoyed by provincial rulers.

Within the Vijayanagara Empire, several regions were governed by subordinate rulers, former adversaries who, after being defeated in battle, were allowed to retain control over their territories under imperial oversight. In the areas directly administered by the central authority, the king often allocated tracts of land, known as *amaram*, to military leaders. These lands came with specific revenue obligations and were granted in exchange for military service.

The recipients of these land grants, known as *palaiyagars* (or *palegars*) or *nayaks*, were responsible for maintaining a designated number of troops, including infantry, cavalry, and elephants, to be deployed in service of the empire. In addition to their military duties, they were expected to contribute financially to the royal treasury.

Over time, these military chiefs grew into a powerful class. Their increasing autonomy and the central government's difficulty in keeping them in check became a serious internal challenge. This erosion of centralised control was one of the factors that weakened the empire from within. Following the defeat at the Battle of Bannihatti, many of these *nayaks*, particularly those in Tanjore and Madurai, asserted their independence, accelerating the fragmentation and eventual decline of Vijayanagara rule.



Historians differ in their assessments of how the peasantry fared economically during the Vijayanagara period, largely because foreign travellers of the time, who served as key sources, had limited exposure to rural life and often described it in vague, general terms. Overall, it appears that the daily life of ordinary people remained fairly unchanged. Most villagers lived in simple thatched homes with low doorways, walked barefoot, and wore minimal clothing, especially above the waist. In contrast, wealthier individuals, while also bare-chested, might wear fine footwear and silk turbans to indicate their status.

Jewellery was popular across all social groups; men and women adorned themselves with ornaments on their ears, necks, arms, and other parts of the body. The economic burden on the rural population was heavy, with the land tax supplemented by a variety of other levies, including taxes on property, trade, professions, marriages, and even special military contributions during emergencies.

The 16th century Russian traveller Nikitin noted that while the countryside was densely populated, rural dwellers lived in poverty, whereas the elite led lives of great luxury. At the same time, urban centres thrived. Many towns sprang up around temples, which were not only religious hubs but also economic powerhouses. These massive temples required steady supplies of food and goods for rituals, festivals, and daily offerings. In addition to being wealthy institutions, temples actively engaged in commerce, participating in both local and international trade.

Urbanisation saw a noticeable increase under Vijayanagara rule, and the economic structure began to shift. For this reason, many historians regard the Vijayanagara era as a transitional period, marking the movement from a more traditional agrarian economy to one that showed early signs of

diversification and commercial expansion.

6.3.1.3 Nayaka System

One of the key themes explored by historians of the Vijayanagara Empire is the role and influence of the *nayakas* or military commanders who were assigned control over specific territories. These figures played a central part in the administration and political structure of the empire. Numerous contemporary records from the Vijayanagara period reference the *nayakas* and their responsibilities.

Fernao Nuniz, a Portuguese horse trader who lived in the capital during the reign of Achyuta Devaraya, provides valuable insights into their function. After listing the revenues owed to the royal treasury by the eleven most prominent *nayakas*, Nuniz explains that the kingdom, referred to as Bisnaga (Vijayanagara), was divided among more than two hundred such military captains. The king assigned each *nayaka* a region and assessed their obligations based on the wealth and output of the land they controlled. These obligations included both monetary payments and the maintenance of a fixed number of troops, which were to be supplied when called upon by the central authority. This system reveals the deeply decentralised yet militarised nature of Vijayanagara's governance.

A large part of the Vijayanagara Empire is thought to have been governed through territories assigned to *nayakas*, who acted as military chiefs overseeing these regions. While there is some scholarly disagreement about how to interpret this system, many historians have drawn parallels between the *nayaka* arrangement and the feudal system of medieval Europe, where land was exchanged for military service.

However, historian Burton Stein offered a markedly different perspective. In most of his writings, Stein reserves the term *nayaka* for

the more prominent figures, those in charge of major centres like Senji, Thanjavur, and Madurai. He either downplays the existence of lesser *nayakas* or refers to them using alternative titles like chiefs, magnates, or *poligars*, suggesting that their authority was rooted more in local kinship networks and caste-based social structures than in formal state delegation.

Stein's interpretation is influenced by his broader application of the "segmentary state" model, which views the Vijayanagara Empire not as a centralised monarchy, but as a collection of semi-autonomous local powers that functioned independently and did not always recognise the supremacy of the central ruler. However, epigraphic evidence contradicts this view to some extent. Numerous inscriptions show that many *nayakas* were directly tied to the Vijayanagara court, either as loyal subordinates or as part of a hierarchical chain under more powerful regional *nayakas*.

In Tamil Nadu alone, nearly 500 *nayakas* are mentioned in inscriptions, suggesting their widespread presence and importance. Stein's figure of just 58 appears to be based on a limited survey by A. Krishnaswami and likely underrepresents the actual number. If we expand the scope to include regions like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, the number of *nayakas* would likely be almost twice as high, pointing to a far more complex and integrated administrative system than Stein's model allows.

When it comes to the territories controlled by the *nayakas*, both textual and inscriptional evidence provide valuable insights. Fernao Nuniz makes mention of these land grants, and inscriptions frequently refer to regions under *nayaka* authority using terms like *sima*, *sime*, or *sirmai*, often identified as *nayakatana* or *nayakkattanam*. For instance, an inscription from Manalurpet notes that Surappa Nayaka donated two villages in the

Magada-mandalam region, specifically the area known as Irakuttanallur-sirmai to the Manalur temple. These villages had been granted to him by King Sadasivadeva as *nayakkattanam*.

This and similar records clearly show that it was the king who officially conferred these territories upon the *nayakas*. In return, they were expected to not only manage local administration but also maintain a designated military force on behalf of the crown. Additionally, they were responsible for collecting revenue from their regions and forwarding a fixed share to the royal treasury.

More recent study has revealed that under strong rulers such as Krishnadeva Raya and Achyuta Devaraya, *nayakas* were sometimes reassigned from one area to another, likely a strategic move to prevent them from becoming too powerful in a single region. However, as central authority began to decline, especially after the empire's defeat at the Battle of Rakshasi-Tangadi in 1565, *nayakas* increasingly sought to consolidate their control and act more autonomously. Interestingly, even after the central empire lost much of its strength, the use of the term *nayakatana* continued, indicating the lasting administrative legacy of this system.

Inscriptions, along with the observations of Portuguese travellers like Nuniz and Domingos Paes, reveal that the *nayakas* held a wide range of responsibilities within both the royal court and the broader administrative machinery of the Vijayanagara Empire. Far from being mere local chieftains, they played important roles in governance and military affairs under the authority of the king.

Various titles associated with the *nayakas* give us a glimpse into their diverse roles: *Mahamandalesvara* (ruler of a large region), *Mahapradani* (chief minister or regional governor), *Rajyam-kartar*



(provincial administrator), *Dalavay* (commander of the army), *Vasal* (palace guard), *Adaippam* (royal attendant carrying betel nuts), *Bokkisham* (state treasurer or accountant), and *Kaariyattu-kadava* (official tasked with executing specific royal orders), among others.

This variety of positions makes it clear that *nayakas* were closely integrated into the administrative and military structure of the state, functioning under royal direction rather than operating independently. Their loyalty to the king is also reflected in inscriptions where they seek royal recognition or favour by performing charitable acts or fulfilling important duties, signs of their constant efforts to maintain a strong connection to the central authority.

The inscription highlights the importance of demonstrating loyalty to the king or to one's immediate superior as a means of earning religious merit for both the ruler and Tirumalai Nayaka, who was the superior of Arihara Nayaka. This underscores the deeply intertwined nature of political allegiance and spiritual obligation in the Vijayanagara administrative system.

The inscription from Devikapuram also sheds light on the hierarchical relationship between Tirumalai Nayaka and Arihara Nayaka. While it's not entirely clear which Tirumalai Nayaka this refers to, given that several individuals with that name appear in sixteenth-century records, a separate inscription from Nagalapuram dated 1524 identifies a Tirumalai Nayaka as the governor of Padaividu, a provincial unit that included Devikapuram within its domain. This connection helps us better understand the political structure and regional governance under Vijayanagara rule.

The *nayakas* played a vital role in the fiscal framework of the Vijayanagara Empire, particularly in the collection and management

of state revenue. Numerous inscriptions from the 16th and 17th centuries record instances where *nayakas* waived taxes, such as *pattadai-nulayam* (a levy on artisan workshops) and *kanikkai* (a form of gift or tribute), for the benefit of local communities, including artisans, farmers, and traders.

Historian Noboru Karashima's research highlights the complexity of the Vijayanagara tax system, identifying 631 distinct tax terms in inscriptions from Tamil Nadu, 556 from Karnataka, and 260 from Andhra Pradesh. From the geographic and chronological distribution of these taxes, it is evident that customs duties, *kanikkai*, and *sunkalsungam* (another form of customs tax) were among the most commonly imposed across the empire's different regions and throughout its various phases.

Three levels of authority were responsible for levying taxes in Vijayanagara: the king, the *nayakas*, and local chieftains known as *nattavars*. However, categorising every individual tax according to these levels is challenging due to overlaps and regional variations. That said, taxes like *jodi* (fee) and *sulavari* (a type of tax) were typically associated with the king, as he was the primary authority granting remissions for them.

The *nayakas* seem to have played a central role in overseeing taxation at various levels within the Vijayanagara Empire. Inscriptions indicate that the king often directed *nayakas* to stop collecting specific levies like *jodi* and *sulavari* from temple lands. At the same time, there are records, particularly from South Arcot showing that local leaders (*nattavars*) also intervened in tax matters. In some 16th-century inscriptions, the *nattavars* are seen revoking taxes previously imposed on the Kanmala community and pledging their decision in the presence of the king, the *nayaka*, and his regional officer.

A large number of *nayakas* were assigned administrative control over territories

throughout the Vijayanagara state. Their presence is well-documented in inscriptions, indicating that the *nayaka* system was actively practised from the late 15th century through to the early 17th century. Earlier studies suggest that this administrative model may have had its roots in the Kakatiya regime under Prataparudra II, where a similar structure was already in place.

During the Vijayanagara era, tensions developed between the king and the *nayakas* as the kings frequently transferred these military governors across regions to curb

their rise as local power centres. However, following the defeat at the Battle of Rakshasi-Tangadi, the *nayakas* significantly bolstered their influence. Prominent *nayakas* like those of Thanjavur, Senji, and Madurai in Tamil Nadu, and the Ikkeri Nayaka along the western Deccan coast, began asserting authority in the empire's outer regions. Ultimately, in the mid-17th century, the combined effect of internal revolts led by powerful *nayakas* and external invasions from the Sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda brought about the final collapse of the Vijayanagara Empire.

Recap

- ◆ Sewell's work revived interest in Vijayanagara's forgotten imperial past and legacy
- ◆ Harihara, Bukka consolidated power pre-1340, Hampi region strengthened empire's foundation strongly
- ◆ Bukka succeeded Harihara, first used Vijayanagara name, renovated Hampi capital significantly
- ◆ Krishnadevaraya promoted arts, literature; authored Amuktamalyada, patronised Allasani Peddana
- ◆ Bahmani Sultanate founded by Zafar Khan, claimed Persian ancestry through legendary Bahman
- ◆ Vijayanagara king's council included influential nobles acting as trusted royal state advisors
- ◆ Empire's administration featured nayaka system, commanders governed regions with military authority
- ◆ Nayaka system compared with medieval European feudalism: military service, land tenure connected
- ◆ Vijayanagara's stability partly depended on the council, nayaka system's robust decentralised governance.
- ◆ Sewell's historiography shaped modern research directions on South India's imperial history



Objective Questions

1. Who authored the seminal work A Forgotten Empire (1900), marking the beginning of modern historiography on the Vijayanagara Empire?
2. Harihara and Bukka, founders of the Vijayanagara Empire, are believed to have initially served under which ruler?
3. With which monastic institution did Vidyaranya become associated as mahanta (head)?
4. Where did Harihara and Bukka establish their authority before 1340?
5. On which river's southern bank was the early Vijayanagara located?
6. Who was killed in battle near Tiruchirappalli in 1342?
7. Who were the nayakas in the Vijayanagara Empire?
8. Which foreign traveller provides a detailed account of the nayakas during Achyuta Devaraya's reign?
9. How many prominent nayakas did Fernao Nuniz mention in his account when listing revenue owed to the royal treasury?
10. Who were the natavars in the Vijayanagara taxation system?

Answers

1. Robert Sewell
2. Vira Ballala III
3. Sringeri Matha
4. Hampi or Hosapattana
5. Tungabhadra
6. Ballala III
7. Military commanders assigned territories

8. Fernao Nuniz
9. 11
10. Local chieftains or leaders

Assignments

1. Discuss the central administrative structure of the Vijayanagara Empire. How did the king maintain control over such a vast territory?
2. Examine the role of the Nayaka system in the Vijayanagara administrative framework. What were its strengths and weaknesses?
3. Describe the revenue administration of the Vijayanagara Empire. How were land taxes assessed and collected?
4. How was provincial administration organised in the Vijayanagara Empire? What role did local chieftains and governors play?
5. Analyse the military organisation of the Vijayanagara Empire. What strategies and resources helped maintain a powerful army?

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SGOU

4

UNIT

Concept of Segmentary State

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ define the term Segmentary State and understand its theoretical foundations
- ♦ explain the core features of the segmentary state model
- ♦ identify historical examples, where the segmentary state model is applied to understand patterns of governance
- ♦ analyse the roles of local chieftains, temple institutions, and village assemblies within the segmentary administration

Prerequisite

The segmentary state model, introduced by Burton Stein in the late twentieth century, offers an alternative to conventional views of centralised political authority in early and medieval South Indian kingdoms. According to this theory, states such as those of the Cholas and the Vijayanagara rulers functioned through networks of semi-autonomous local units, with the king exercising largely ritual rather than direct administrative authority across much of the realm, a framework that has generated considerable debate among historians of medieval India.

Keywords

Unitary, Feudatory, Segmentary, *Samantha*, Integrative Model



Discussion

6.4.1 Nature of Medieval South Indian States

6.4.1.1 Centralised Empire

First, the unitary or imperial model, championed by early nationalist historians like Nilakanta Sastri, views the state as a centralised and bureaucratically governed entity. By the mid-ninth century, the Cholas began asserting their dominance in South India, eventually rising to become one of the two major powers in the region by the thirteenth century, the other being the later Vijayanagar empire. Their influence, however, faded during the latter half of the thirteenth century. Historian K.A. Nilakanta Sastri referred to this era as a time of “the balance of two empires,” highlighting the ongoing power struggle between the Cholas and northern dynasties like the Deccan Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas, who successively vied for control over the south. This account follows Sastri’s framework to outline a political landscape defined by rivalry between dominant states. Meanwhile, the social structure of the region began to shift during the tenth to twelfth centuries, laying the groundwork for the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which are better viewed as a transitional phase between two distinct social orders.

Nilakanta Sastri portrayed the Chola empire during the reigns of Rajaraja and his successors as a grand and elaborate monarchy, comparable to the opulence of Byzantium, with its sprawling palaces, layers of bureaucracy, intricate court rituals, and impressive mobilisation of imperial wealth. This stood in stark contrast to the more modest and personal governance style of earlier times. As noted earlier, Rajendra I undertook a naval expedition against the

Srivijaya empire in the Malacca Straits, while Rajaraja I extended Chola control into northern Sri Lanka. Both rulers also sent missions to the Chinese court, aiming to assert influence over the lucrative East-West maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. These actions reveal a deliberate effort by the Chola rulers of this period to build a centralised and powerful state. In doing so, their approach challenges Burton Stein’s “segmented state” theory and lends weight to Sastri’s interpretation of Chola rule as cohesive and imperial in character.

6.4.1.2 The Feudal State Model

Second, the Indian feudalism model, advanced by R. S. Sharma and supported by scholars such as D. N. Jha, B. N. S. Yadava, and R. N. Nandi, emphasises feudal production systems, declining trade, and agrarian fragmentation, ideas rooted in Marxist theory. The feudal state model has opened up valuable pathways for exploring the social and economic history of South India, yet it still demands deeper scrutiny. Many of the theories that emphasise agrarian transformations stem from broader frameworks initially associated with the concept of feudalism. While these approaches often align more closely with the available evidence, the term ‘feudalism’ itself remains a contested label when applied to this phase of Indian history.

Nevertheless, these ongoing debates have helped sharpen our understanding of economic and social shifts during the period. It is important to note that terms like “feudal” or “feudatory” should not be directly mapped onto European contexts without careful consideration, especially since even within Europe, the structure and nature of feudalism varied widely by region. Drawing meaningful comparisons requires

clearly defining how these terms are being applied in relation to the specific historical evidence.

A key area receiving increasing attention is the degree of autonomy enjoyed by local institutions and bodies, an issue often overlooked when political control was seen as concentrated solely in the hands of the ruler. As research continues to uncover the intricate dynamics of agrarian and trade systems, understanding how these were linked to layers of political authority has become a central focus.

Many scholars do not strictly follow any single theoretical model discussed above. Since most of these frameworks were originally shaped by studies focused on different regions, applying them directly to South India requires careful consideration. Even so, these fresh approaches have greatly enriched our broader comprehension of state formation in India. Looking ahead, these models offer useful ideas that can help us re-examine the evolution of states in South India more critically. Encouragingly, some historians from the region have already begun engaging with these perspectives and incorporating them into their research.

6.4.1.3 The Concept of “Segmentary State”

Over the past two decades, the historiography of early medieval India has been significantly enriched by debates surrounding the theory of the segmentary state. Although originally developed to explain the structure of the South Indian Chola state (c. 950–1200 CE), the model has gained considerable traction among scholars of early medieval North India and thus warrants close examination.

The segmentary model received its most comprehensive articulation in 1980 with the publication of Burton Stein’s seminal work, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval*

South India, on the political organisation of South India from the Pallava to the Vijayanagara periods. Drawing upon A.W. Southall’s anthropological research on the Alur society of Eastern Africa, Stein applied the segmentary framework to the extensive epigraphic and textual evidence of medieval South India.

According to Stein, the segmentary state is defined by a dual structure of sovereignty: ritual and political. Ritual sovereignty is concentrated in a singular, symbolically central authority, while political sovereignty is distributed among numerous local centres. These centres are hierarchically arranged in a pyramidal structure, wherein each level possesses equivalent forms of executive authority, differing primarily in the scope of their ritual jurisdiction and the scale of the populations they govern.

This hierarchical configuration implies two key features: first, that political authority at various levels is structurally similar in function; and second, that administrative mechanisms are not confined to a centralised bureaucracy but are instead replicated across multiple levels of the polity. As a result, local regions do not operate as mere administrative units of a central authority, nor can local officials be regarded as conventional bureaucrats. Rather, governance was dispersed across a network of relatively autonomous units, each with its own institutional apparatus and sphere of influence.

The segmentary model of state organisation, as articulated by Burton Stein, conceptualises the polity as comprising three concentric geographical zones, central, intermediate, and peripheral, within which political authority gradually diminishes with increasing distance from the core. In this framework, the kingdom is understood as an integrated entity in which direct political control at the centre progressively gives



way to ritual sovereignty at the margins. This structural pattern, Stein argues, is not confined to the kingdom but is also replicated at smaller scales within each of its constituent segments.

Rather than political integration, Stein identifies ritual integration as the principal mechanism that sustained the cohesion of the segmentary state. The Chola kings, through their religious policies, land grants, and epigraphic practices, actively sought to promote this ritual coherence. A central objective of these efforts was the extension of Chola hegemony via the assimilation of local cults and deities into the royal cult, particularly that of Shiva. In this context, the royal Shaiva cult came to function as the ideological and symbolic cornerstone, the “keystone,” in Stein’s terms of the system of ritual hegemony that underpinned Chola statecraft.

During the 1980s, Burton Stein’s concept of the “segmentary state” stirred significant debate among historians studying political developments in ancient and medieval India, particularly the early medieval period.

Burton Stein described the medieval South Indian state as a “segmentary state,” emphasising that political authority was largely rooted in local contexts. He argued that power structures were confined to clearly defined and enduring ethnic regions, where local leaders typically belonged to the dominant communities of their respective areas. In South India especially, local institutions and collective bodies representing various segments of society were actively involved in governance at the grassroots level.

Stein also highlighted the diversity across peasant regions in medieval South India. These areas varied in their organisation, prosperity, and complexity, largely depending on the natural conditions that influenced

agricultural potential. Regions with reliable water sources for irrigation were the most prosperous and densely populated, supporting more complex social and cultural systems.

While many scholars view segmentary states as early or incomplete forms of statehood, Southall challenges this notion by arguing that such political structures represent a fully developed type of governance. Though his research was rooted in African societies, where the concept of segmentary states first gained traction, he asserts that similar organisational patterns can be found in European and Asian contexts as well. In this model, the state is composed of self-contained, morally cohesive segments that existed before the emergence of a centralised state. What unites these segments is their collective recognition of a sacred ruler whose authority is primarily symbolic and ceremonial rather than administrative.

In Indian scholarship, there has long been acknowledgment of the importance of peasant institutions and the segmented character of local societies. Yet, many researchers have treated these social formations as secondary to overarching systems like caste, Hinduism, and the large monarchies of the pre-modern era. Consequently, ideas like “segmentary” or “tribal” society, or concepts such as “complementary opposition” and “pyramidal segmentation,” which suggest a more fluid and relative social order, are often sidelined in mainstream historical narratives.

Burton Stein challenged Nilakanta Sastri’s long-held view of a centralised state in South India, offering a fundamentally different interpretation. He classified the Chola and Vijayanagara polities as “segmentary states,” where power was not uniformly concentrated in a central authority. According to Stein, these states were composed of multiple, similar regional units or “segments” that revolved around a central core. While the king ruled over the core region, the outlying

segments were governed by local rulers who acknowledged the monarch's supremacy in a largely ceremonial manner. In practical terms, the king's direct political control was confined to the centre, with limited influence over the peripheral areas.

Stein first introduced the idea of the segmentary state in the late 1970s, drawing inspiration from Aidan Southall's studies on African society systems. He later developed the concept more fully in his major works, sparking considerable debate among historians. Critics took issue with Stein's assertion that the king had no real political authority outside his immediate domain. Over time, and particularly toward the end of his life in 1996, Stein nuanced his stance, conceding that royal authority in South Indian kingdoms often blended ritual legitimacy with political control. Yet, despite this adjustment, he stood by the broader segmentary framework, continuing to view both the Chola and Vijayanagara states through this lens.

In Thanjavur, the Chola ruler Rajaraja I commissioned the construction of a grand Shiva temple, where he installed a linga named Rajarajeswara, a clear tribute to himself. This temple was not merely a religious monument but also a powerful symbol of imperial grandeur and royal authority. In this sense, it aligns partly with Burton Stein's concept of ceremonial kingship, suggesting that the temple projected the king's symbolic sovereignty over the broader realm.

However, the temple also reflects the practical and political dimensions of Rajaraja's rule. He endowed it with revenue from forty villages within the Chola mandalam and an additional sixteen villages located in recently conquered areas, including parts of southern Karnataka and Sri Lanka. Detailed records exist for these endowments, particularly for the villages in the core region, including

data on grain contributions, monetary payments, and land measurements. Even the conquered territories, though less thoroughly documented, reveal systematic taxation and contributions.

The segmentary state model becomes problematic primarily due to its rigid distinction between political and ritual authority. It proposes a tripartite structure—central, intermediate, and peripheral zones, where direct political control supposedly diminishes the farther one moves from the centre, giving way to symbolic or ritual sovereignty instead. According to this model, inscriptions are interpreted more as ceremonial declarations than as evidence of concrete political authority.

However, this interpretation overlooks the fact that ritual and political power often overlap; ritual language can serve as a powerful expression of real authority, not just symbolic presence. Developments during the Chola period, for instance, point to a growing centralisation of power that contradicts the segmentary framework. Evidence of this includes the emergence of formalised bureaucratic titles at the upper levels of government, the redrawing of territorial administrative units, greater uniformity in tax practices, and the gradual replacement of traditional local chieftains with appointed officials of high status. These changes suggest a more cohesive and centrally governed state than the segmentary model allows.

The segmentary state model tends to overlook key factors that shaped the political and economic landscape of South India, particularly during the Chola period. For instance, it downplays the role of merchant guilds, many of which operated beyond local administrative boundaries and played a crucial part in regional and overseas trade, especially with Southeast Asia, which generated significant commercial revenue for the state.



Furthermore, while the Tamil bhakti movement and the rise of temple-centred religiosity brought major cultural and religious shifts, temples were far from being politically neutral spaces. They often engaged in competition for royal support and functioned as powerful religio-political institutions. Their active involvement in state affairs contradicts the notion that ritual authority could be separated from political power.

Additionally, the idea that the Chola state primarily enriched itself through military plunder is difficult to support. Although some campaigns had elements of raiding, the sustained prosperity and administrative complexity of the Chola empire clearly rested on a robust revenue system based on both agriculture and trade. A state of such scale and organisation could not have survived on sporadic plunder alone.

We can further broaden the discussion of state formation models by including other noteworthy frameworks. One such model is the patrimonial-bureaucratic state, which S. Blake applied to his study of the Mughal Empire, drawing on Max Weber's theory. This model highlights a system where the ruler's authority is deeply personal yet supported by a structured bureaucracy. Another significant approach is the Brahman oligarchy model developed by M. G. S. Narayanan, which emerges from his analysis of the Cheraman Perumal tradition in Kerala, suggesting a system where Brahman elites held considerable political influence.

Additionally, B. D. Chattopadhyaya's idea of "autonomous spaces" within the state structure shares similarities with L. B. Alayev's "symbiotic state" model, proposed for early medieval South India. Alayev argues that while these polities showed some feudal traits, they cannot be neatly categorised. He describes a complex interaction where royal authority, local chieftains, and community institutions intermingled, forming a

"symbiosis" rather than a sharply hierarchical order. In this framework, the relationships among these actors were fluid and lacked formalised regulation, challenging rigid definitions of statehood.

6.4.1.4 The Processual or Integrative Model

In recent years, a new approach to history writing has gained prominence within Indian historiography. One of its leading proponents, B. D. Chattopadhyaya, views early medieval political formations as part of a continuous process of state formation that began with the Mauryan period and continued thereafter. He describes this process as the expansion of 'state societies' into regions previously inhabited by 'pre-state societies'.

The processual or integrative model brings a more dynamic understanding of state formation, with different scholars emphasising different aspects: Hermann Kulke identifies multiple stages in the state-building process; B. P. Sahu stresses the shifting relationship between central and regional powers; and B. D. Chattopadhyaya focuses on how local elites (*samantas*) were integrated horizontally into the political structure, allowing for the existence of autonomous zones within the state. These competing models reflect a broader academic effort to move beyond rigid definitions of kingship and governance, instead exploring the diverse and complex ways in which power was negotiated and exercised across the Indian subcontinent.

According to Chattopadhyaya, this political expansion must be understood alongside economic, social, and religious developments. These include the spread of rural settlements, the integration of tribal communities into the varna system (a process often referred to as Sanskritisation), and the assimilation of local cults into mainstream religious practices. This perspective moves beyond the conventional binary

of centralisation versus decentralisation. Instead, Chattopadhyaya characterises the early medieval state as a dynamic process of integration shaped by various interactions. What sets this period apart, he argues, is its distinctly regional character. As he notes, despite seemingly conflicting evidence, the most consistent trend in this period is the formation of regional societies.

Hermann Kulke builds upon the model of continuous state formation by offering a more structured framework, which he conceptualises as a “continuum of state formation” comprising three successive phases: the chiefdom, the early kingdom, and the imperial kingdom. These stages broadly correspond to the Sanskrit political evolution from *raja* to *maharaja* and finally to *maharajadhiraja*. Kulke emphasises that this model is intended as a heuristic device, useful for identifying patterns of structural transformation rather than representing discrete or chronologically fixed stages. As he cautions, these phases should not be understood as clearly separated political entities succeeding one another in a linear fashion.

The transition between stages is driven by the gradual expansion of chiefly authority,

initially within a core or nuclear zone, then extending into the surrounding periphery, and ultimately influencing adjacent nuclear regions. More precisely, this progression reflects a movement from *samantaisation* (marking the transition from chiefdom to early kingdom) to *provincialisation* (indicating the shift from early to imperial kingdom).

Kulke’s central concern is to trace the attempts at increasing political and social centralisation within early medieval formations. However, he ultimately concludes that such centralising efforts were largely unsuccessful, suggesting that while the trajectory aimed at integration, the desired consolidation of authority remained incomplete. Both B.D. Chattopadhyaya and Hermann Kulke attribute a legitimising role to the numerous land grant charters issued during the early medieval period. They argue that the horizontal expansion of early medieval social formations necessitated the religious sanctioning of political authority. In this context, Brahmanas and religious institutions played a crucial role by conferring spiritual legitimacy upon temporal power, thereby reinforcing the authority and stability of emerging political structures.

Recap

- ◆ K.A. Nilakanta Sastri presents the state as a highly centralised and bureaucratically administered structure.
- ◆ An alternative perspective is offered by Burton Stein’s segmentary state model, which reached its fullest expression in his influential 1980 work *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*.
- ◆ Stein examines the political organisation of South India from the Pallava to the Vijayanagara period, portraying the state as a loosely integrated structure composed of relatively autonomous segments.



- ◆ B.D. Chattopadhyaya conceptualises the early medieval state as a fluid and evolving process of integration, shaped by multiple forms of interaction.
- ◆ Hermann Kulke proposes a more structured interpretation through his “continuum of state formation” model, which outlines a progression through three successive stages: the chiefdom, the early kingdom, and the imperial kingdom.
- ◆ Both Chattopadhyaya and Kulke recognise the legitimising function of land grant charters in the early medieval period, arguing that the horizontal expansion of social formations during this time required religious endorsement to legitimise political authority.
- ◆ The Indian feudalism model, primarily developed by R.S. Sharma and endorsed by scholars like D.N. Jha, B.N. Yadava, and R.N. Nandi draws upon Marxist theory.

Objective Questions

1. By the thirteenth century, the Cholas and which other empire were the two major powers in South India?
2. When did the influence of the Chola dynasty begin to fade?
3. Which historian described the period as “the balance of two empires”?
4. Who authored Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India in 1980?
5. The segmentary model in Stein’s work focuses on the political organisation of South India during which periods?
6. According to Stein, the segmentary state features a dual structure of sovereignty. What are the two types?
7. Which scholar proposed the idea of “autonomous spaces” within the state structure?
8. What process describes the integration of tribal communities into the varna system as discussed by Chattopadhyaya?
9. Hermann Kulke’s model of continuous state formation comprises which three phases?
10. Burton Stein’s segmentary model divides the polity into how many geographical zones?

Answers

1. Vijayanagara
2. Latter half of the thirteenth century
3. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri
4. Burton Stein
5. Pallava to Vijayanagara periods
6. Ritual and political
7. B. D. Chattopadhyaya
8. Sanskritisation
9. Chiefdom, early kingdom, and imperial kingdom
10. Three

Assignments

1. Critically examine the concept of the segmentary state with reference to the Chola administration.
2. Evaluate the strengths and limitations of Burton Stein's segmentary state theory in understanding early medieval South Indian polity.
3. Compare and contrast the segmentary state model with the centralized bureaucratic model of governance.
4. Explain the role of local chieftains and village assemblies in the segmentary state model.
5. Discuss how the Chola Empire illustrates the features of a segmentary state.



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Suggested Reading

1. Rangachari, Devika. “An Alternative Reading of South Indian History.” *H-Asia*, edited by Sumit Guha, The University of Texas at Austin, Dec. 2009.
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MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS



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QP CODE:

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Model Question Paper- Set-I

FIFTH SEMESTER B.A (Hon.) HISTORY EXAMINATION
MAJOR CORE COURSE
SGB24HS305MC- History of India -II (From 10th to 18th Century CE)
(CBCS - UG)

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

I Answer any 10 questions. Each question carries 1 mark

1. Who wrote Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi?
2. Name the author of Kitab-ul-Rehla.
3. What was Babur's autobiography called?
4. What was the function of the Muqaddam in a Mughal village?
5. What was the lowest rank in the Mansabdari system?
6. Who were the Raiyat?
7. Who assisted the headman in preparing village accounts?
8. What term referred to unpaid labour in Mughal villages?
9. Who established the Delhi Sultanate?
10. What language dominated medieval chronicles?
11. Who was called Khud-Kasht?
12. Name the land revenue system introduced by Akbar based on measurement of land.
13. What was a Jagir?
14. Who was the head of the Panchayat in a Mughal village?
15. Which dynasty ruled over Multan during the Ghaznavid period?

(10 X 1=10 marks)

SECTION B

II Answer any 10 questions. Each question carries 2 marks

16. Differentiate between Pahi-Kasht and Khud-Kasht.
17. What do we understand by the term Jagirdar?
18. What is the Zamindari system?
19. Explain the role of tribal communities in the Mughal rural economy.
20. State any two functions of the Ashtapradhan under Shivaji.
21. What were the key contributions of the Gurjara-Pratiharas?
22. Describe the village economic structure under the Mughals.
23. In what ways did the Chachnama shape early Indo-Islamic historiography?
24. What is Madad-i-Maash?
25. What were the functions of the Mansabdars in the Mughal state?
26. Why are travelogues considered important historical sources?
27. Explain the Dahsala System.
28. Explain the role of the Patwari.
29. How did the Chishti order differ from the Suhrawardi order?
30. Briefly describe the administrative structure of the Chola Empire.

(10X2=20 marks)

SECTION C

III Write short notes on any 5 questions. Each question carries 4 marks.

31. Mansabdari system
32. Jagirdari system
33. Socio-economic life of peasants during the Mughal period
34. Iqta
35. Role of foreign travellers in reconstructing medieval Indian history
36. Din-i-Ilahi

- 37. Role of women in Mughal society
- 38. Guru Nanak
- 39. Rajput kingdoms in early medieval India
- 40. Vernacular historical traditions of medieval India

(5X4=20 marks)

SECTION D

IV Answer any 2 questions. Each question carries 10 marks

- 41. Assess the effectiveness of Mughal land revenue systems in ensuring administrative control.
- 42. Evaluate the sources for reconstructing the history of the Delhi Sultanate.
- 43. Analyse how the Bhakti movement challenged caste and religious orthodoxy in medieval Indian society.
- 44. Assess the military and administrative organisation of the Vijayanagara Empire under Krishnadevaraya.

(2X10=20 marks)



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Model Question Paper- Set-II

FIFTH SEMESTER B.A (Hon.) HISTORY EXAMINATION
MAJOR CORE COURSE
SGB24HS305MC- History of India -II (From 10th to 18th Century CE)
(CBCS - UG)

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

I Answer any 10 questions. Each question carries 1 mark

1. Who authored Kitab-ul-Hind?
2. What was the term for hereditary land owned by village artisans?
3. Who were the opponents in the Battle of Khanwa?
4. Name the 12th-century historian who wrote Tabqat-i-Nasiri.
5. What was the capital of the Solanki dynasty?
6. What is the Dahsala system?
7. Who succeeded Queen Didda of the Lohara dynasty?
8. What term denotes caste-based village service?
9. Name a major cash crop cultivated in Mughal India.
10. Who wrote the Silappadikaram?
11. What do you mean by Iqta?
12. What is the name of the famous water reservoir built by the Cholas?
13. Who defeated Prithviraj Chauhan in the Second Battle of Tarain?
14. What do you mean by Jagir?
15. What was the state land under the Mughal Administration called?

(10 X 1=10 marks)

SECTION B

II Answer any 10 questions. Each question carries 2 marks

16. Write a short note on Baburnama.
17. How did Babur justify his claim to Indian territories?
18. Define Pargana and its administrative function.
19. What was the impact of Mahmud Ghazni's invasions?
20. How did the Ashtapradhan influence Maratha governance?
21. Who were the Qalandars and how did they differ from mainstream Sufis?
22. What role did Persian play in medieval historiography?
23. Prepare a brief note on Abul Fazl.
24. How did artisans contribute to the Mughal village economy?
25. What made the Rajput polity unique during the 6th to 12th centuries?
26. Describe the evolution of Jagirdari as an institution.
27. Explain the significance of the Zabt system in Mughal revenue administration.
28. Explain the significance of the Silsilah system in Sufism.
29. How did foreign trade influence Mughal port towns?
30. What role did Amir Khusrau play in shaping Indo-Persian literary culture?

(10X2=20 marks)

SECTION C

III Write short notes on any 5 questions. Each question carries 4 marks

31. Rajput kingdoms in early medieval India
32. Concept of Segmentary State
33. Nayaka system
34. First Battle of Panipat
35. Influence of Sufism on culture in Mughal India
36. Majma-ul-Bahrain
37. Mughal trade and commerce

- 38. Urbanism in India under Mughal rule
- 39. Market regulations of Alauddin Khalji
- 40. Chalukyas

(5X4=20 marks)

SECTION D

IV Answer any 2 questions. Each question carries 10 marks

- 41. Compare and contrast the administrative systems of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire.
- 42. Describe the rise and consolidation of the Mughal Empire under Babur and Akbar, focusing on military and administrative innovations.
- 43. Evaluate the economic foundations of the Mughal empire with special reference to trade, crafts, and foreign commerce.
- 44. Evaluate the significance of the Chola period in shaping South Indian culture and society.

(2X10=20 marks)

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