

Delhi Sultanate: Slave, Khilji, Tughluq, Sayyid and Lodi Dynasties - An Overview

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study implications of **Delhi Sultanate**; Turkish Sultans of Delhi in the 12th - 16th century. The period between 1206 A.D. and 1526 A.D. in India's history is known as the Delhi Sultanate period. During this period of over three hundred years, five dynasties ruled in Delhi. These were: the Slave dynasty (1206-90), Khilji dynasty (1290-1320), Tughlaq dynasty (1320-1413), Sayyid dynasty (1414-51), and Lodi dynasty (1451-1526). As a successor to the Ghurid dynasty, the Delhi Sultanate was originally one among a number of principalities ruled by the Turkic slave-generals of Muhammad Ghorī (who had conquered large parts of northern India), including Yildiz, Aibek and Qubacha, that had inherited and divided the Ghurid territories amongst themselves. After a long period of infighting, the Mamluks were overthrown in the Khalji revolution which marked the transfer of power from the Turks to a heterogeneous Indo-Muslim nobility. Both of the resulting Khalji and Tughlaq dynasties respectively saw a new wave of rapid Muslim conquests deep into South India. The sultanate finally reached the peak of its geographical reach during the Tughlaq dynasty, occupying most of the Indian subcontinent. This was followed by decline due to Hindu reconquests, Hindu kingdoms such as the Vijayanagara Empire and Mewar asserting independence, and new Muslim sultanates such as the Bengal Sultanate breaking off. In 1526, the Sultanate was conquered and succeeded by the Mughal Empire.

The sultanate is noted for its integration of the Indian subcontinent into a global cosmopolitan culture (as seen concretely in the development of the Hindustani language and Indo-Islamic architecture), being one of the few powers to repel attacks by the Mongols (from the Chagatai Khanate) and for enthroning one of the few female rulers in Islamic history, Razia Sultana, who reigned from 1236 to 1240. Bakhtiyar Khalji's annexations were responsible for the large-scale desecration of Hindu and Buddhist temples (leading to the decline of Buddhism in East India and Bengal), and the destruction of universities and libraries. Mongolian raids on West and Central Asia set the scene for centuries of migration of fleeing soldiers, intelligentsia, mystics, traders, artists, and artisans from those regions into the subcontinent, thereby establishing Islamic culture in India and the rest of the region.

Key words: Slave, Khilji, Tughluq, Sayyid, Islam, Sultanat, Lodi dynasties

Introduction

The initial entry of Islam into South Asia came in the first century after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. The Umayyad caliph in Damascus sent an expedition to Baluchistan and Sindh in 711 led by Muhammad bin Qasim. He captured Sindh and Multan. Three hundred years after his death Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, the ferocious leader, led a series of raids against Rajput kingdoms and rich Hindu temples, and established a base in Punjab for future incursions. In 1024, the Sultan set out on his last famous expedition to the southern coast of Kathiawar along the Arabian Sea, where he sacked the city of Somnath and its renowned Hindu temple.

Muhammad Ghori invaded India in 1175 A.D. After the conquest of Multan and Punjab, he advanced towards Delhi. The brave Rajput chiefs of northern India headed by Prithvi Raj Chauhan defeated him in the First Battle of Terrain in 1191 A.D. After about a year, Muhammad Ghori came again to avenge his defeat. A furious battle was fought again in Terrain in 1192 A.D. in which the Rajputs were defeated and Prithvi Raj Chauhan was captured and put to death. The Second Battle of Terrain, however, proved to be a decisive battle that laid the foundations of Muslim rule in northern India. The context behind the rise of the Delhi Sultanate in India was part of a wider trend affecting much of the Asian continent, including the whole of southern and western Asia: the influx of nomadic Turkic peoples from the Central Asian steppes. This can be traced back to the 9th century when the Islamic Caliphate began fragmenting in the Middle East, where Muslim rulers in rival states began enslaving non-Muslim nomadic Turks from the Central Asian steppes and raising many of them to become loyal military slaves called Mamluks. Soon, Turks were migrating to Muslim lands and becoming Islamicized. Many of the Turkic Mamluk slaves eventually rose up to become rulers, and conquered large parts of the Muslim world, establishing Mamluk Sultanates from Egypt to present-day Afghanistan, before turning their attention to the Indian subcontinent.

It is also part of a longer trend predating the spread of Islam. Like other settled, agrarian societies in history, those in the Indian subcontinent have been attacked by nomadic tribes throughout its long history. In evaluating the impact of Islam on the subcontinent, one must note that the northwestern subcontinent was a frequent target of tribes raiding from Central Asia in the pre-Islamic era. In that sense, the Muslim intrusions and later Muslim invasions were not dissimilar to those of the earlier invasions during the 1st millennium.

By 962 AD, Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms in South Asia faced a series of raids from Muslim armies from Central Asia. Among them was Mahmud of Ghazni, the son of a Turkic Mamluk military slave, who raided and plundered kingdoms in north India from east of the Indus river to west of Yamuna river seventeen times between 997 and 1030. Mahmud of Ghazni raided the treasuries but retracted each time, only extending Islamic rule into western Punjab.

The series of raids on north Indian and western Indian kingdoms by Muslim warlords continued after Mahmud of Ghazni. The raids did not establish or extend the permanent boundaries of the Islamic kingdoms. In contrast, the Ghurid Sultan Mu'izz ad-Din Muhammad Ghorī (commonly known as Muhammad of Ghor) began a systematic war of expansion into north India in 1173. He sought to carve out a principality for himself and expand the Islamic world. Muhammad of Ghor created a Sunni Islamic kingdom of his own extending east of the Indus river, and he thus laid the foundation for the Muslim kingdom called the Delhi Sultanate. Some historians chronicle the Delhi Sultanate from 1192 due to the presence and geographical claims of Muhammad Ghorī in South Asia by that time.

Ghorī was assassinated in 1206, by Ismā'īlī Shia Muslims in some accounts or by Khokhars in others. After the assassination, one of Ghorī's slaves (or mamluks, Arabic: مملوك), the Turkic Qutb al-Din Aibak, assumed power, becoming the first Sultan of Delhi.

Objective:

This paper intends to explore and analyze how under the **sultans of the Delhi**, the empire became an **imperial power** and also their contribution to Indian fine arts , the introduction of Islamic architectural features

Mamluk dynasty

The concept of equality in Islam and Muslim traditions reached its climax in the history of South Asia when slaves were raised to the status of Sultan. The Slave Dynasty ruled the Sub-continent for about 84 years. It was the first Muslim dynasty that ruled India. Qutub-ud-din Aibak, a slave of Muhammad Ghorī, who became the ruler after the death of his master, founded the Slave Dynasty. He was a great builder who built the majestic 238 feet high stone tower known as Qutub Minar in Delhi.

The next important king of the Slave dynasty was Shams-ud-din Iltutmush, who himself was a slave of Qutub-ud-din Aibak. Iltutmush ruled for around 26 years from 1211 to 1236 and was responsible for setting the Sultanate of Delhi on strong footings. Razia Begum, the capable daughter of Iltutmush, was the first and the only Muslim lady who ever adorned the throne of Delhi. She fought valiantly, but was defeated and killed.

Finally, the youngest son of Iltutmush, Nasir-ud-din Mahmud became Sultan in 1245. Though Mahmud ruled India for around 20 years, but throughout his tenure the main power remained in the hands of Balban, his Prime Minister. On death of Mahmud, Balban directly took over the throne and ruled Delhi. During his rule from 1266 to 1287, Balban consolidated the administrative set up of the empire and completed the work started by Iltutmush.

The Khilji Dynasty

Following the death of Balban, the Sultanate became weak and there were number of revolts. This was the period when the nobles placed Jalal-ud-din Khilji on the throne. This marked the beginning of Khilji dynasty. The rule of this dynasty started in 1290 A.D. Ala-ud-din Khilji, a nephew of Jalal-ud-din Khilji hatched a conspiracy and got Sultan Jalal-ud-din killed and proclaimed himself as the Sultan in 1296. Ala-ud-din Khilji was the first Muslim ruler whose empire covered almost whole of India up to its extreme south. He fought many battles, conquered Gujarat, Ranthambhor, Chittor, Malwa, and Deccan. During his reign of 20 years, Mongols invaded the country several times but were successfully repulsed. From these invasion Alla-ud-din Khilji learnt the lessons of keeping himself prepared, by fortifying and organizing his armed forces. Alla-ud-din died in 1316 A.D., and with his death, the Khilji dynasty came to an end.

The Tughlaq Dynasty

Ghyasuddin Tughlaq, who was the Governor of Punjab during the reign of Ala-ud-din Khilji, ascended the throne in 1320 A.D. and founded the Tughlaq dynasty. He conquered Warrangal and put down a revolt in Bengal. Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq succeeded his father and extended the kingdom beyond India, into Central Asia. Mongols invaded India during Tughlaq rule, and were defeated this time too.

Muhammad-Bin-Tughlaq first shifted his capital from Delhi to Devagiri in Deccan. However, it had to be shifted back within two years. He inherited a massive empire but lost many of its provinces, more particularly Deccan and Bengal. He died in 1351 A.D. and his cousin, Feroz Tughlaq succeeded him.

Feroz Tughlaq did not contribute much to expand the territories of the empire, which he inherited. He devoted much of his energy to the betterment of the people. After his death in 1388, the Tughlaq dynasty came virtually to an end. Although the Tughlaqs continued to reign till 1412, the invasion of Delhi by Timur in 1398 may be said to mark the end of the Tughlaq empire.

Although the influence of Persian civilization upon that of northern India under the sultans of Delhi has long been treated as a foregone conclusion, attempts to identify the extent of the processes by which that influence was transmitted involve the historian in a web of hypotheses and generalizations (for the historiography of the sultanate, see Hardy, 1960; Rashid; Hasan; Sarkar; Nizami, 1983). As Carl W. Ernst (p. 6) has expressed it, “‘influence’ is nothing but a rather physical metaphor suggesting a flowing in of a substance into an empty vessel. This is hardly a satisfactory model for the complicated process by which people of one culture interpret

and put to new uses themes and symbols from another culture.” Because of its origins and subsequent history the sultanate provided for three and a quarter centuries a unique opportunity for the continual transmission to India of a broad range of cultural manifestations emanating from the Persian plateau: language and literature, customs and manners, concepts of kingship and government, religious organization, music, and architecture.

Persian influence in northern India before the sultanate. Islam had already entered India via Sind and up the Indus; by the late 10th century Isma‘ili communities had been established in and around Multan, but they were [Carmatians](#) from [Bahrain](#) and probably constituted a wholly Arab element. The seepage of Persian influences into northwestern India resulted, in the first instance, from the transfer of political power on the Persian plateau from ‘Abbasid governors to local dynasts. The early Saffarids Ya‘qūb b. Layṭ (d. 265/879) and ‘Amr b. Layṭ (d. 289/902) exercised a loose sway over what are today the Indo-Afghan borderlands, in which dissidents from the Persian plateau had probably established themselves free from ‘Abbasid surveillance (Bosworth). The Samanids (204-395/819-1005) later extended their hegemony over the same area, including the Kabul valley, Gardīz, Ġazna, and Zābolestān, leading to penetration of these lands by Persian or persianized officials, traders, and adventurers. Under their aegis rebellious slave commanders like [Alptigin](#), Sebūktigin, and the latter’s son Maḥmūd used Ġazna as a base for raids across the Indus and into Hindustan. A century later the Saljuq vizier Neẓām-al-Molk, in his *Sīāsāt-nāma* (p. 147), described these raids, emphasizing that plunder and adventure, as much as piety, had motivated them. The Ghaznavid Maḥmūd himself (388-421/998-1030) may well have viewed these raids as providing the means to play an active role on the Persian plateau, but after the defeat of his son Mas‘ūd (421-32/1031-41) by the Saljuqs at Dandānqān in 431/1040 the fulcrum of Ghaznavid power shifted east into the Punjab, and Lahore became the capital of the rump empire. The later Ghaznavids, though ethnic Turks, were wholly assimilated to Persian culture; Persian was the language of the court, and Ghaznavid Lahore must have been a typical Persian city. The first flowering of Persian poetry on Indian soil took place there, led by [Abu’l-Faraj b. Mas‘ūd Rūnī](#), the panegyrist of Sultan Ebrāhīm b. Mas‘ūd (451-92/1059-99) and his son Mas‘ūd III (492-508/1099-1115), and Mas‘ūd-e Sa‘d-e Salmān (Marek, pp. 714-15). It was also in Lahore that ‘Alī b. ‘Oṭmān Hojvīrī, whose *Kāšf al-maḥjūb* was one of the earliest accounts in Persian of Sufi theory and practice, finally settled and died (ca. 465-69/1072-77; Hojvīrī, pp. x-xi).

Economic policy and administration

Although the ethnic origins of the Ghurid, or Shansabanid, dynasty (ca. 390-612/1000-1215) remain uncertain, there can be no doubt that the conquest of Ġazna by the Ghurids' Turkish *ġolāms* in 545/1150 marked the end of Ghaznavid rule west of the Indus. The last two Ghaznavids, ǲosrow Shah (547-55/1152-60) and ǲosrow Malek (555-82/1160-86), controlled only the Punjab, and under their rule the cities there must have experienced further persianization. In 582/1186 the Ghurid ruler Ġīāt-al-Dīn Moḡammad (558-99/1163-1203) occupied Lahore, where he established a condominium with his younger brother Mo'ezz-al-Dīn Moḡammad, to whom he delegated the eastern and southern possessions of the dynasty. Thenceforth Mo'ezz-al-Dīn was responsible for the extensive conquests in Hindustan. Delhi was captured in 588-89/1192, Ajmer in 589/1193, and Qannauj in 595/1198; Ghurid suzerainty thus extended in a great arc from Mount Abū in Rajasthan through Gwalior to Bundelkhand. Farther east Baḡtīār ǲaljī proceeded into Bihar and Bengal in 599-601/1202-04, capturing the cities of Nadia and Lakhnawti (Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt* I, pp. 422-32). Following the assassination of Mo'ezz-al-Dīn in 599/1206 his territories were partitioned among his principal amirs: Tāj-al-Dīn Yildiz in Ġazna; Nāṣer-al-Dīn Qobāča in Multan, Uch, and Bhakkar; and [Qotb-al-Dīn Aybak](#) in Lahore, Ajmer, and Delhi, the last city being held by his lieutenant Šams-al-Dīn Iltutmīš. In Bihar and Bengal the situation remained fluid: Baḡtīār had either died or been assassinated, and successive commanders endeavored to hold those distant provinces and to determine the basis of their legitimacy by dealing with various power brokers in the northwest (Eaton, 1993, pp. 38-39). Eventually Aybak emerged more or less supreme, though he had had to come to terms with Qobāča and probably, contrary to tradition, never assumed the title "sultan." Nor was his son Ārām Shah able to succeed him after his premature death. His successor was his favorite *ġolām*, the far-sighted and resolute Iltutmīš (607-33/1211-36), who is counted the first and among the greatest of the sultans of Delhi.

The Turkish *ġolāms* of the Ghurids who laid the foundations of Muslim rule in India were no barbarian conquerors; rather, despite their origins in Central Asia, they were effective agents and purveyors of Persian civilization on the subcontinent. Aybak himself had, as a young slave, been educated by a *qāzī* (religious judge) in Nīšāpūr, where he had acquired a reputation as a reciter of the Koran (Jūzjānī, I, p. 416). Iltutmīš had belonged to a learned man of Bukhara, who educated him thoroughly before selling him to a merchant, who took him to Baghdad and thence to Ġazna (Jūzjānī, I, p. 442). Qobāča, too, seems to have been a man of considerable polish; it was in his time that the [Ĉāč-nāma](#) was rendered from Arabic into Persian, and he provided temporary refuge from the Mongols for both [Šadīd-al-Dīn 'Awfī](#) and Abū 'Amr Jūzjānī. He appointed the latter to a position at the Fīrūzīya *madrassa* at Uch, which may have been his own foundation (Jūzjānī, I, p. 420). The biographical notices on prominent amirs of the early Delhi sultanate incorporated into Jūzjānī's *Ṭabaqāt-e nāṣerī* confirm the impression of a cultivated persianized ruling elite. The earliest surviving buildings erected by the sultans of Delhi also reflect Persian antecedents (see ii, below).

The Ghaznavid and Ghurid invaders constituted a well-defined ruling elite, reinforced by adventurers of all kinds from the Muslim lands farther west. Neẓām al-Molk reported that, after news of the booty that Alptigin had acquired in the Indus frontier region became known, men flocked from Khorasan, Transoxania, and Sīstān to serve under him (Neẓām-al-Molk, p. 146). Few of these early invaders would have brought wives with them, relying principally upon Indian slave women to provide for their domestic needs and bear them sons. Apart from soldiers, little is recorded about early migrants from Persia and the borderlands into what later became the Delhi sultanate. There must have been writers from the Ghaznavid court at Lahore and in the late Ghurid period 'olamā' like Jūzjānī. It can be assumed, too, that among immigrants to northern India there were armorers, metalworkers, tentmakers and furnishers, manufacturers of cavalry gear, and other craftsmen, though none is mentioned in the sources. Merchants must have followed the armies to convert the plunder (often unwieldy and practically useless in the hands of common soldiers) into cash; the vast majority of Indian captives must thus have become objects of commerce. Traders and craftsmen alike most probably came from urban centers in the eastern Persian world and, with bureaucrats and 'olamā', provided the nucleus of the free, nonmilitary Persian-speaking population of such centers as Multan, Uch, Bhakkar, Lahore, Dipalpur, and Bhatinda in the Punjab, as well as Delhi.

The dynastic history of the sultanate. Iltutmīš was succeeded by five descendants, the last of whom died in 664/1266, but usurpation and murder more often determined the succession at Delhi. In that year his former *golām* Ġīāt-al-Dīn Balban seized the throne, ruling for two decades (664-86/1266-87) in grim splendor amid the trappings of "Sasanian" kingship (Nizami, 1961, pp. 95-105); after his death his grandson and great-grandson were soon ousted, and the throne was then seized by the Turkish or turkicized Ƙaljīs (689-720/1290-1320; on this dynasty, see Haig; Nigam; Lal, 1967). After the murder of the last of the line, Qotbā-al-Dīn Mobārak Shah (716-20/1316-20), by his favorite the sultanate was restored by Ġāzī Malek, governor of Dipalpur (Punjab), who mounted the throne as Ġīāt-al-Dīn Toġloq and founded the Tughluqid dynasty (720-817/1320-1414), under which the sultanate of Delhi reached its greatest extent but also experienced the beginning of fragmentation into smaller states. Ebn Baṭṭūṭa described Ġāzī Malek as a Qarā'ūnā Turk from southern Afghanistan, though in India the term Qarā'ūnā may have meant descendants of Turks by Indian mothers (Ebn Baṭṭūṭa, III, p. 649). Under the Tughluqids, especially Moḥammad b. Toġloq (725-52/1325-51) and Fīrūz Shah (752-90/1351-88), the Delhi sultanate reached the zenith of its splendor (on the Tughluqids, see Haig; Husain, 1938; idem, 1963). Even before Tīmūr's devastating raid on Punjab and Delhi in 800/1398-99, however, the Tughluqid state had contracted to a mere shadow of its former self, and the adventurers who ruled after Tīmūr's withdrawal, Mallū Khan, Dawlat Khan Lōdī, and Ƙeẓr Khan, had no claims to legitimacy and controlled little more than the countryside immediately surrounding Delhi. Keẓr Khan's successors came to be known as the Sayyed dynasty (817-55/1414-51), probably because of spurious claims to descent from the Prophet Moḥammad; they were eventually swept away by the Lōdīs (855-932/1451-1526), themselves part of a larger infiltration of Afghan tribes into the Punjab and the Ganges plain, from which local dynasties also eventually emerged in

Bengal and Malwa. The most significant legacy of the Sayyeds and Lōdīs was architectural. The last Lōdī sultan was killed at Panipat fighting the invading forces of Bābor.

Persian immigration into India

Although the extent of Persian immigration into India before the 1220s is a matter of guesswork, events during the 13th century undoubtedly contributed to an increase. The garrison towns and administrative centers in the upper Jumna-Ganges plain (e.g., Baran, Etawah, Badaon, Qannauj) must have become even more persianized after the arrival of successive waves of refugees from the west. The first such wave was the result of campaigns by [Čengīz Khan](#) in Transoxania and Khorasan in 616-19/1219-22; he actually reached the Indus in 618/1221 and briefly threatened the Punjab (Jovaynī, ed. Qazvīnī, II, pp. 139-42). Many fugitives sought sanctuary in Delhi during the reign of Iltutmīš and undoubtedly stimulated a greater diffusion of Persian customs and values in lands that had previously been unstable marches on the frontiers of the Islamic world. Jūzjānī is an example, having fled from Tūlak south of Herat, arrived by boat in Uch, where he was warmly received by Qobāča, and then passed on to Delhi, where he enjoyed a moderately successful career in the service of the sultanate (Jūzjānī, I, pp. 420, 447).

The Mongol invasion of Persia continued into the 1250s, and it must be assumed that the exodus also continued, though presumably limited to persons of means or possessing marketable skills. A further stage in the spread of Persian influence must have followed Hülegü's invasion of Persia in 653-56/1255-58; many refugees crossed the Indus during the reign of Sultan Nāṣer-al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shah (644-64/1246-66), and the impetus may have continued during the late 1270s and 1280s after the Negūderis or Qarā'ūnās had occupied Zābolestān in what is now southern Afghanistan, a region that became a bone of contention between Il-khanids and Chaghatayids. The latter successfully asserted their hegemony in the borderlands northwest of the Indus and engaged in protracted internal dynastic struggles between Mongol traditionalists and those newly converted to Islam (e.g., 'Alā'-al-Dīn Tarmašīrīn, 726-34/1326-34). Among the refugees who came to Delhi was the party with which Ebn Baṭṭūṭa traveled in 734/1333. The most prominent member was the *qāzī* of Termeḍ, who was accompanied by his women and children, three brothers and a nephew, and two notables from Bukhara and Samarqand respectively, each with an entourage of servants and hangers-on (Ebn Baṭṭūṭa, pp. 606-07). This group was probably typical of such refugees, representing high Persian culture. Sultan Moḥammad b. Toḡloq was especially renowned for his hospitality to foreigners (see Jackson), among whom the "Korāsānīs" (a term used indiscriminately in Delhi to include refugees from Persia proper, the borderlands across the Indus, and Turkestan) were especially numerous. Ebn Baṭṭūṭa mentioned the sultan's practice "of honouring strangers and showing affection to them and singling them out for governorships or high dignities of state" (p. 595). ". . . Well known is his generosity to foreigners, for he prefers them to the people of India, singles them out for favour, showers his benefits upon them . . . and confers upon them magnificent gifts"

Conclusion

Qutb-ud-din Aibak, who founded the Delhi Sultanate in 1206 under the Mamluk dynasty, the Delhi Sultanate, which would last until 1526, is known as a period of cultural intermixing. A Muslim minority ruled a variety of subjects, the majority of which were of Hindu faith. The nature of the subjugation of Hindus under the Delhi Sultanate is difficult to judge, as one must look at a variety of aspects of the Sultanate's rule to assess their attitude towards the Hindus.

Differing political environments along with religious attitudes, artistic exchanges and the fact that Hindus were an integral part of the Sultanate's economies all influenced how the Sultanate treated their Hindu subjects; which ultimately best characterizes the Sultanate's subjugation of the Hindus as neither liberal nor oppressive, but moderately tolerant. This period helped lay the foundations for a pluralistic India, as the Muslim conquerors entered a relationship with their Hindu subjects in whom they could not afford to be too harsh or too lenient. Hindus ended up being an integral part to the Sultanate's Muslim society, as evidenced by political, artistic, and economic aspects. These factors essentially forced the rulers of the Sultanate to find a balance in administering their rule over the Hindus, as they had to keep the majority of the population in check whilst giving them just enough contentment to ensure that the Sultanate ran smoothly. This policy of moderation reflects the true character of the period of the Delhi Sultanate, as it gave the world its first taste of rich Indo-Muslim culture, and it set the stage for the vast cultural pluralism that defines the modern-day Indian sub-continent.

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