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Distance Learning Programme

UPSC Prelims

Medieval India





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MEDIEVAL INDIA

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The Khilji Dynasty (1290-1320 CE)

The Khilji dynasty was a Muslim dynasty of Turkish origin, which ruled large parts of South Asia between 1290 and 1320 CE. Khiljis were vassals of the Mamluk dynasty (Slave dynasty) of Delhi and served the Sultan of Delhi, Ghiyasuddin Balban. Balban's successors were murdered over 1289-1290, and the Mamluk dynasty succumbed to the factional conflicts within the Mamluk dynasty and the Muslim nobility. As the struggle between the factions raged, Jalaluddin Firuz Khilji led a coup and murdered the 17 years old Mamluk successor Muizuddin Kaikubad – the last ruler of Mamluk dynasty.

The brief period of Khilji rule (1290-1320), saw important changes in the socio-economic and administrative structure of the Delhi sultanate. It also raised important questions regarding the nature of the state and polity in India. The most important consequence of the rise to power of the Khilji was the broadening of the social base of the ruling class.

The early Turkish sultans who are called the Ilbaris on the basis of their tribal origin, or Mamuluks, i.e. slave-officers, believed in the virtual monopoly of important posts in the state by high born Turks. The Tajiks who had formed an important part of the nobility under Iltutmish had been largely eliminated shortly after his death. The presence of an Abyssinian, Yaqut, or an Indian Muslim, Raihan and of the Khiljis in important positions on the frontiers was more in the nature of exceptions rather than the rule.

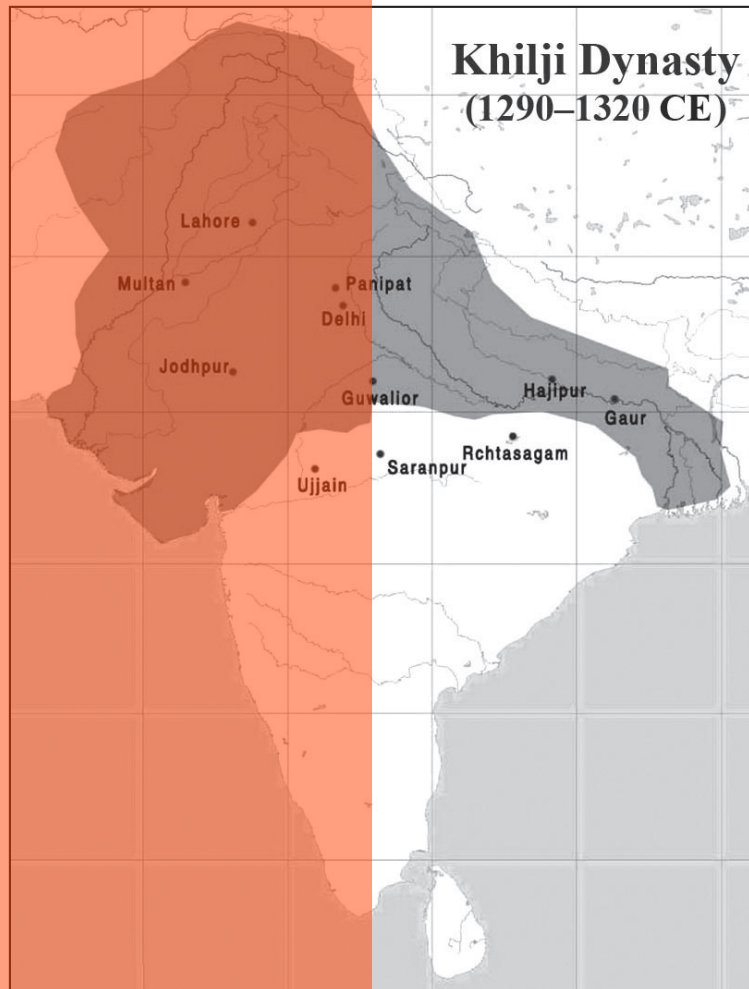


Fig: The extent of Khilji Empire



Jalaluddin Khilji

Jalaluddin Firuz Khilji was the founder and the first Sultan of the Khilji dynasty that ruled the Delhi Sultanate from 1296 to 1320.

He started his career as an officer of the Mamluk dynasty, and rose to an important position under Sultan Muizzuddin Kaikubad. After Kaikubad was paralysed, a group of nobles appointed his infant son Shamsuddin Kayumars as the new Sultan, and tried to kill Jalaluddin. Instead, Jalaluddin had them killed, and became the regent. A few months later, he deposed Kayumars, and became the new Sultan.

As a Sultan, he repulsed a Mongol invasion, and allowed many Mongols to settle in India after their conversion to Islam. He captured Mandawar and Jhain from the Chahamanas king Hammira, although he was unable to capture the Chahamanas capital Ranthambore. During his reign, his nephew Ali Gurshasp raided Bhilsa in 1293 and Devagiri in 1296.

As Jalaluddin was an old man of seventy when he performed his coronation ceremony and declared himself as the Sultan. Sultan's conciliatory temperament, his excellence of character, his justice, generosity and devotion, gradually removed the aversion of the people and earned the affections of the nobles. His extraordinary guileless and sincere heart, his childlike lack of equivocation marked him as a saintly ruler. Disposed to rule without bloodshed and oppression he showed most impolitic tenderness towards criminals and even rebels. This naturally led to a recrudescence of intrigues by the nobles and the authority of the Sultan was not being respected. Jalaluddin was ultimately assassinated by his nephew Alauddin Khilji, who subsequently ascended the throne.

Alauddin Khilji

He was the second sultan of the Khilji dynasty and was the most powerful king of this dynasty. He ruled for about twenty years from 1296 to 1316. He became the sultan of Delhi after killing his uncle and father in law Jalaluddin Khilji, the founder of Khilji dynasty. He was a very ambitious person and a warmonger. He liked to call himself 'The Second Alexander'. He took the title 'Sikander-i-Sani'. During his regime, he expanded his kingdom to a large area. He conquered Gujarat, Ranathambor, Mewar, Malwa, Jalore, Warangal and Madurai. The detailed information on his conquests will be dealt with later.

He is also famous in history for defeating the Mongols many times. He won against the Mongols in the battles of Jalandhar (1298), Kili (1299), Amroha (1305) and Ravi (1306). Behind the success of his war strategies was a slave called Malik Kafur. He discovered Malik Kafur during the conquest of Gujarat. Malik Kafur was a powerful Army Chief. He helped Alauddin to conquer many states.

Alauddin Khilji died in 1316. It is believed that Malik Kafur murdered him.

Alauddin's Agrarian and Market Reforms

Alauddin Khilji's agrarian and market reforms should be seen both in the context of the efforts at the internal restructuring of the sultanate, as also the need to create a large army to meet the threat of recurrent Mongol invasions.



Agrarian Reforms

Bringing Land under Khalisa

The essence of Alauddin Khilji's agrarian reforms was to bring the villages in closer association with the government. In this region (Ganga-Yamuna doab), the villages were to be brought under Khalisa, i.e. not assigned to any of the nobles as iqta. Lands assigned in charitable grants were also confiscated and brought under Khalisa. Further, the land revenue (kharaj) in this area was fixed at half of the produce, and assessed on the basis of measurement.

Barani, who is our main source of information, does not tell us about the method and mode of the measurement of the fields. On the basis of the measurements of the area under cultivation, and a standard of expected production per bisiwa (1/20 of the bigha), the share of the state was determined. Apart from this, no extra cesses were to be levied, except a grazing tax (charai) on cattle and ghari on houses. Both these taxes had been levied earlier and were traditional. The land revenue was calculated in kind, but demanded in cash. For the purpose, the cultivators had either to sell the produce to the banjaras, or take it for sale to the local market (mandi).

Although the Dharmashastras prescribed a land-revenue of one-fourth to one-sixth, which could rise to half in times of emergency, there were a lot of sanctioned taxes in addition to the land-revenue whose incidence is not known. Thus, the formula used for assigning land to nobles was bhaga, bhog, kar, i.e. land-revenue, cesses and taxes. These must have continued under the early Turkish rulers. Whether Alauddin merely consolidated all these taxes into one or raised the total amount payable by the cultivator is something we do not know.

. The bringing of doab under khalisa, and establishing direct relations with the cultivators, did not imply that all intermediaries were removed. Since long there was a hierarchy of intermediaries in the rural areas, with the Rai, Rana, Rawat standing at the top. These were called as chiefs. A chief sometimes controlled a considerable tract of land which was parceled out to his clan and other supporters for collecting land-revenue. At the village level there was the village head, called chaudhari or muqaddam.

As the Turkish sultanate consolidated itself in the doab, the power and authority of the rais and ranas was eroded, and some of them were displaced. In the process, there was the rise of a new set of intermediaries who operated at the pargana or shit (district) level. These apparently, were the people whom Barani called Khutsand for whom the word zamindar is used for the first time by Khusrau. The word zamindar began to be used widely later on for all types of intermediaries.

Alauddin's agrarian reforms implied putting greater pressure for the displacement of the rais or ranas. However, many of the chiefs who paid a lump-sum of money to the state as land-revenue, were not brought under khalisa.

Administrative Reforms

Centralised Administration

Alauddin attempted to translate his theory of Kingship that the king was the representative of God on earth and that he was there to rule, through the administrative practices.



His word was law. He was an absolute despot. He possessed unlimited powers. He was the head, i.e. Commander in Chief of the army, head of the executive, head of the judiciary and the sole authority in enforcing religious matters. All powers of affairs of the state were centralised in him. The prevailing circumstances needed such a strong monarch to run the affairs of the state effectively and without any kind of interference.

Administration Free from the Influence of the Ulemas

Alauddin was opposed to the interference of the Ulemas in matters of state and in this respect he departed from the tradition of the previous Sultans of Delhi. The law was to depend upon the will of the monarch and had nothing to do with the law of the Prophet. This was the guiding maxim of the new monarch.

Role of Ministers

The Sultan appointed trusted ministers to assist him in the running of administration. Their advice was in no way binding on the Sultan. There were 10 ministers to assist him. Next to the Sultan was the 'Wazir', who was both a civil and military officer. Among the ministers, the 'Amir-Kohi' in charge of agriculture and 'Shahana-i-Mandi' and 'Dewan-i-Riyat' looking after markets.

Provincial Administration

The entire country was divided into 11 provinces. Each province was under a governor who enjoyed his position at the pleasure of the Sultan.

Judicial Administration

The Sultan was as relentless and unflinching in administering justice as Balban. The Sultan was the fountain of justice. He was the final court of appeal. Next to him was 'Qazi-ul-Qazat' or Lord Chief justice. Then were other junior judicial officers. The punishments inflicted upon the accused persons were very severe. Mutilation of limbs and torture were very common.

Efficient System of Espionage

The system of espionage organised by Alauddin was very systematic and effective. According to Zia-ud-Din Barani, "No one could stir without his (Alauddin's) knowledge and whatever happened in the houses of the Maliks and Amirs, officers and great men was communicated to the Sultan.

Measures to Check the Power of the Nobles, and their Tendency to Revolt

- After having wide-ranging consultations, Alauddin came to the conclusion that following were the causes of revolts:
- Inefficiency of the spy system, resulting in the ignorance of the Sultan regarding the state of affairs in the country.
- The existence of huge wealth with the nobles resulting in leisure time leading to conspiracies.
- Drinking parties among nobles bringing them close to each other and encouraging them to conspire.
- Social intercourse and intermarriage among the families of nobles making them a compact body dangerous to the state and also forming antagonistic groups among themselves, leading to rivalry.



- For exercising control over the activities of the nobles, the king took the following measures:
 - Organisation of an efficient spy system.
 - Confiscation of jagirs given to nobles, on one pretext or the other.
 - Prohibition of the sale and use of wine and other intoxicating drugs.
 - Restrictions on social gatherings and intermarriage among the nobles.

Organisation of the Postal System

Alauddin established a proper postal system for establishing a regular contact with various parts of the empire. In his book “Medieval Routes in India,” Dr. H.C. Varma writes that Sultan Alauddin posted several horsemen and clerks in the news posts. From the accounts of Ibn Batutah and Barani, it appears that postal system was in good condition during Alauddin’s reign.

Curbing the Influence of Intermediaries

In the area brought under *khalisa*, Alauddin tried to curb the privileges of the *khuts*, *muqaddams* and *chaudharis*. These sections formed the rural aristocracy and, according to Barani, were rich enough to ride Arabi and Iraqi, horses, wear weapons and fine clothes, and indulge in wine drinking and holding convivial parties. Their wealth was based on their holding the best lands in the village. Also, in a system where the village was assessed as a whole (called group-assessment), they often passed on the burden of their share of the land-revenue on to the shoulders of the weak.

Alauddin not only forced the *khuts*, *muqaddams* and *chaudharis* to pay the grazing and house taxes like the others, and through the system of measurement ensured that they could not pass on their burden of land-revenue on to the shoulders of the others. They were also deprived of the *khuti* charges for collecting land-revenue.

Revenue Reforms

Alauddin brought a large tract of fertile land under the directly-governed crown territory, by eliminating *iqta*’s, land grants and vassals in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab region. He imposed a 50% *kharaj* tax on the agricultural produce in a substantial part of northern India: this was the maximum amount allowed by the Hanafi school of Islam, which was dominant in Delhi at that time.

Alauddin also eliminated the intermediary Hindu rural chiefs, and started collecting the *kharaj* directly from the cultivators. He did not levy any additional taxes on agriculture, and abolished the cut that the intermediaries received for collecting revenue. Alauddin’s demand for tax proportional to land area meant that the rich and powerful villages with more land had to pay more taxes. He forced the rural chiefs to pay same taxes as the others, and banned them from imposing illegal taxes on the peasants. To prevent any rebellions, his administration deprived the rural chiefs of their wealth, horses and arms. By suppressing these chiefs, Alauddin projected himself as the protector of the weaker section of the rural society. However, while the cultivators were free from the demands of the landowners, the high taxes imposed by the state meant a cultivator had barely enough for carrying on his cultivation and his food requirements.

To enforce these land and agrarian reforms, Alauddin set up a strong and efficient revenue administration system. His government recruited a large number of accountants, collectors, and agents. These officials were well-paid but were subject to severe punishment



if found to be taking bribes. Account books were audited and even small discrepancies were punished. The effect was both large landowners and small-scale cultivators were fearful of missing out on paying their assessed taxes.

Alauddin's government imposed the *jizya* tax on its non-Muslim subjects, and his Muslim subjects were obligated to contribute *zakat*. He also levied taxes on residences (*ghari*) and grazing (*chara'i*), which were not sanctioned by the Islamic law. In addition, Alauddin demanded four-fifth share of the spoils of war from his soldiers, instead of the traditional one-fifth share (*khums*).

Market Reforms

Alauddin Khilji's market reforms were oriented more towards administrative and military necessities than internal restructuring. Medieval rulers were expected to ensure that necessities of life, especially food-grains, to be available to the city folk at fair or reasonable prices. This was so because the cities were the symbol of power and authority all over the Islamic world.

Alauddin implemented price control measures for a wide variety of market goods. Alauddin's courtier Amir Khusrau and the 14th century writer Hamid Qalandar suggest that Alauddin introduced these changes for public welfare. However, Barani states that Alauddin wanted to reduce the prices so that low salaries were acceptable to his soldiers, and thus, to maintain a large army.

To ensure that the goods were sold at regulated prices, Alauddin appointed market supervisors and spies, and received independent reports from them. To prevent a black market, his administration prohibited peasants and traders from storing the grains, and established government-run granaries, where the government's share of the grain was stored. The government also forced the transport workers to re-settle in villages at specific distances along the Yamuna river to enable rapid transport of grain to Delhi.

Chroniclers such as Khusrau and Barani state that the prices were not allowed to increase during Alauddin's lifetime, even when the rainfall was scarce. The shopkeepers who violated the price control regulations or tried to circumvent (such as, by using false weights) were given severe punishments.

According to Barani, Alauddin set up three markets at Delhi, first for food-grains, the second for cloth and expensive items such as sugar, ghee, oil, dry fruits etc., and the third for horses, slaves and cattle.

Detailed regulations (*zawabit*) were framed for the control and administration for all these markets. He issued a set of seven regulations which came to be known as market control measures. These measures were enacted to regulate the activities of the traders who brought grain to Delhi. The Sultan fixed the prices of all commodities from grain to cloths, slaves, cattle, etc. A controller of market (*shahna -i-mandi*) intelligence officers (*barids*) and secret spies (*munhiyan*) were appointed. The grain merchants were placed under the *Shahna-i-mandi*.

Food Market

- For controlling the food prices, Alauddin tried to control not only the supply of food-grains from the villages, and its transportation to the city by the grain-merchants (*karwanis* or *banjaras*), but also its proper distribution to the citizens.
- Alauddin's first effort was to see that there were sufficient stocks of food-grains with the government so that the traders did not try to hike up prices by creating an artificial scarcity, or indulge in profiteering.

- The task of transporting food-grains from the countryside was generally carried out by karwaniyan or banjaras, some of whom had 10,000 or 20,000 bullocks.. An official (shuhna) was appointed to oversee them. In normal times these banjaras brought so much food-grains into the city that it was not necessary to touch the royal stores.
- Alauddin took strict measures to see that the prices laid down by him were strictly observed. An officer (shehna) with an adequate force was appointed in charge of the market with strict instructions to punish anyone who violated the orders.
- Alauddin also instituted a system of rationing during times of scarcity. Each grocer was issued an amount of grains from the government stores bearing in mind the population of the ward. No individual was allowed to buy more than half a man at one time. But this was not applied to the nobles. If they did not have lands of their own, they were issued grains in accordance with the number of their dependants.
- Barani says that in consequence of these measures, even during times of famine there was no shortage of food-grains at Delhi and the price of food-grains did not increase even by a dam or a dirham. This is supported by Isami, a contemporary of Barani.

Cloth-Market or Sarai-i-Adl

- Alauddin ordered that all cloth brought by the merchants from different parts of the country, including foreign lands, was to be stored and sold only in the cloth market at government rates. If any commodity was sold even at a jital higher than the official price, it would be confiscated and the seller punished. To ensure an adequate supply of all the commodities, all the merchants were registered and a deed taken from them that they would bring the same quantities of commodities to the sarai-adl every year, and sell them at government rates.
- In order to ensure that costly cloth was not purchased by people and given to others who would take it out of Delhi, and sold in the neighbouring towns at four to five times the price, an officer was appointed to issue permits to amirs, maliks, etc for the purchase of these costly commodities in accordance with their income.

Market for Horses, Cattle and Slaves

- The supply of horses of good quality at fair prices was important both for the military department and the soldier. The horse trade was more or less a monopolistic trade, the overland trade being monopolised by Multanis and Afghans. But they were sold in the market by the middlemen or dallals.
- According to Barani, the rich dallals were as powerful as the officials of the market, and resorting to bribery and other corrupt practices. The horse-merchants were in league with the dallals to raise the price of horses. Alauddin took harsh measures against such dallals. They were banished from the town, and some of them imprisoned. Then, with the help of other dallals, the quality and the price of horses was fixed as per quality.

Military Reforms

Alauddin maintained a large standing army, which included 475,000 horsemen according to the 16th-century chronicler Firishta. He managed to raise such a large army by paying relatively low salaries to his soldiers, and introduced market price controls to ensure that the low salaries were acceptable to his soldiers. Although he was opposed to grant lands to his generals and soldiers, he generously rewarded them after successful campaigns, especially those in the Deccan.