

# THE DELHI SULTANATE\*

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\* See Map 7, p. 437.

## Part One

# THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SULTANATE IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY AND THE NATURE OF THE NEW STRUCTURES IN INDIA

*(Riazul Islam)*

## Background

Under the Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmūd and later the Ghurid Mu<sup>c</sup>izz al-Dīn, during the period lasting from the death of Harsha (646–7) to the Turk invasions of northern India, the socio-political configuration was dominated by a number of factors which help to explain the rapidity of the Muslim conquest. First, the feudal-like system clearly favoured the rulers and the ruling classes at the expense of the peasantry. Second, the Rajputs – mostly of foreign origin, but gradually absorbed into the fighting caste of the Hindus – who emerged as a political force after the fall of the Pratīhāras, had a passion for war and often went to war to enhance their prestige. The Rajput political structure, feudal and hierarchic in character and lacking a strong central force, encouraged fissiparous tendencies. The Rajputs' narrow vision, even narrower loyalties, and endless and purposeless internecine fighting, contributed to the military and political particularism which prevented a collective response against foreign invasions during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Third, no strong central authority for the entire subcontinent existed. The Rāshtrakūtas of the Deccan extended their authority to the north; the Pratīhāras, with Kanawj as their seat, from Panjab eastward; and the Pālas from Bengal westward. This led to the formation of three large and separate kingdoms in the Deccan: one in the north, one in the east and one in the west. Much of their strength was wasted in mutual warfare. The predecessors of the Pratīhāras, the Gurjaras who had ruled over Panjab and Marwar, are given credit for stalling the Arab eastward expansion from Sind. The Pratīhāra dominance of northern India, which had acted as a shield against external aggression during the major part of the ninth and tenth centuries, now disintegrated, leaving India exposed to foreign invasions. After the Ghaznavid

and, especially, the Ghurid invasions (see above, Chapters 5 and 8), Islam spread from its foothold in the extreme north-west of the subcontinent into much wider regions.

## Qutb al-Dīn Aybak (1206–10)

Muʿizz al-Dīn Ghūrī's leading slave generals succeeded him: Yildiz at Ghazna, Qutb al-Dīn Aybak at Lahore and Qabācha at Uchch. Aybak was undoubtedly the late sultan's most trusted lieutenant and thus his main successor in India. But his four years of stewardship of the Ghurid Indian dominions were marked by his struggles against Yildiz, the Turkish ruler of Ghazna; against Qabācha, who controlled Sind and Multan; and against the rebellious Hindu Rajahs, who wanted to throw off the Muslim yoke. Aybak's accidental death during a game of polo in 1210 ended a promising career, but his role as lieutenant during Muʿizz al-Dīn's life, and later as his successor, entitles him to an important place in the formative history of the Delhi Sultanate.

## Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish (1210–36)

Iltutmish ascended the throne of Delhi in difficult and markedly uncertain circumstances. The defiant attitudes of the senior slave generals like Qabācha and Yildiz, the revival of resistance among the Hindu ruling classes, and above all, the threat from the growing power of the Chinggisid Mongols across the North-West Frontier, posed great challenges. The Khaljis in Bengal and Bihar withdrew their allegiance. Iltutmish displayed great intrepidity in the face of all these difficulties and showed a shrewd sense of strategy and timing in tackling the various problems. He humbled the hostile Turkish generals; overcame Hindu resistance; re-established his authority in the eastern provinces; and, through a combination of strategy and luck, succeeded in saving his kingdom from the Mongol onslaught.

Iltutmish, the first sovereign ruler of Delhi, is rightly considered the founder of the Sultanate of Delhi. He is given credit for creating durable foundations, organizing the administration and evolving statesmanlike basic political policies. In 1229 al-Mustansir, the ʿAbbasid caliph of Baghdad, conferred a mandate of authority on Iltutmish; this was an event of considerable significance, for it made the Sultanate of Delhi a legally and morally recognized state in orthodox Muslim eyes. Himself a man of piety and learning, Iltutmish maintained cordial relations with the ʿulamā' and the *mashāyikh* (Sufi leaders and saints), thereby achieving acceptability and legitimacy for his new sultanate.

None of Iltutmish's five successors – two sons, one daughter and two grandsons who followed each other in quick succession – proved to be capable leaders. The Mongols kept pressing on the frontier and both Lahore and Multan were subjected to raids and spoliation.

Provincial governors found an opportunity to extend their autonomy and the Hindu rulers, in particular the Rajputs, showed signs of disaffection.

## Nāsir al-Dīn Mahmūd (1246–66) and Ghiyāth al-Dīn Balban (Ulugh Khān) (1266–87)

One of the notable developments in the post-Iltutmish period is the emergence of a group of nobles – all slaves of Iltutmish – called the Ghulāmān-i Chihilgānī (possibly meaning ‘the slave commanders who each commanded forty slaves’), who attained a dominant position in the court. For thirty years the ‘Forty’ held the royal power in commission and reduced the sultan to a figurehead. Among the powerful ‘Forty’, the dominant figure of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Balban emerged. He had gained considerable power even before the accession of Sultan Nāsir al-Dīn Mahmūd, the last ruler of the line of Iltutmish. Shortly after Nāsir al-Dīn’s accession, Balban, now called *nā’ib-i mamlakat* (viceroy), in effect assumed power as regent, reducing the sultan to a titular ruler. During the two decades that he was at the helm as *nā’ib-i mamlakat*, Balban tried to stem the rot that had set in during the decade of anarchy (1236–46).

Having served the sultanate at all levels, Balban had an intimate knowledge of the manner in which it functioned and its sources of strength and weakness. He was thus able to identify its core problem. He believed that the weakness of the crown lay at the root of all the maladies of the state. His ideas on monarchy, government and religion, expressed in his speeches to his sons and nobles, are sometimes labelled his ‘political theory’. The various elements of his thinking, though not elaborate or comprehensive enough to be considered a theory, are nevertheless coherent. Balban displayed great vigour and ruthlessness in crushing political rivals and rebels and punishing refractory governors and local chiefs. The ordinary people, in general, were not affected. With his blind belief in the supreme value of *nasab* (good birth), however, Balban would not employ men of ordinary birth in the army and the administration.

### REORGANIZATION OF THE ARMY

The government depended essentially on force, or the threat of force, in order to preserve its authority. Thus it was natural for the army to receive the utmost attention. With a view to improving its efficacy as a striking force, Balban gave high priority to the reorganization and expansion of the army. There is also an indication that Balban endeavoured to change the payment of the soldiers’ salaries from *iqṭā’*s (assignments of land; what in later, Mughal times were to be called *jāgīrs*) to cash payments.

The decades following the end of Iltutmish's reign saw a marked increase in Mongol pressure on the western frontiers of the Delhi Sultanate. The governors of these regions, ill-supported by the central government, were helpless in the face of Mongol inroads. By the time that Balban came to the throne, large parts of Sind and Panjab were under Mongol occupation. With his reorganized army, Balban made the defence of the frontiers a priority, his contribution here being twofold. First, he cleared Sind of the Mongol adventurers, recovered Lahore and Multan and built a special force to protect the frontiers. Thus he held a firm line against the Mongols. Second, following a realistic defence policy, he compromised by holding a line between the Beas and the Ravi rivers, leaving large parts of western Panjab in Mongol hands. During Balban's reign, the Mongols never attempted to proceed beyond the Ravi and the security of Delhi and the central provinces was never under threat.

## The end of Turkish supremacy: The Khalji revolution

Balban was succeeded in 1287 by his grandson Kay Qubād, who took the title of Mu<sup>c</sup>izz al-Dīn. This young, handsome, pleasure-loving and inexperienced sultan paid little attention to the administration and soon lost all control of the affairs of state. The rising Khalji clan soon replaced the house of Balban, and Jalāl al-Dīn Fīrūz Khaljī, an old officer of Sultan Balban, ascended the throne of Delhi. The Khaljis, too, it is now fairly certain, were originally of Turkish origin, but were Iranized because of their long stay in the steppelands of Afghanistan. (The Turks did not consider the Khaljis their peers.) The fact that the Khaljis did not demonstrate any racial élitism of their own enabled them to build a wider political and social base for their 'new monarchy'. The change in the social base of power was so pronounced as to justify the term 'Khalji revolution'.

## Jalāl al-Dīn Fīrūz Khaljī (1290–6) and <sup>c</sup>Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī (1296–1316)

Jalāl al-Dīn Fīrūz Khaljī's six-year reign was marked by incompetence and pusillanimity. His lenience towards robbers and rebels, his half-hearted fight against the invading Mongols, and his failure to seize the prestigious Ranthambor fortress from the Rajputs, marked him as a ruler unsuited to the times. His ambitious nephew and son-in-law <sup>c</sup>Alī Garshāsp showed little compunction in disposing of his uncle and ascended the throne as <sup>c</sup>Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī.

To understand fully the reign of <sup>c</sup>Alā' al-Dīn, one should look back at the thirteenth century and take note of the salient socio-economic trends. The striking motif is the continuity of the institutions. Not only were the conventional Indian methods of revenue-collection

(mainly a simple produce-sharing system) largely left unchanged by the new rulers, but even the collection agents, the *ra'īs* (chief), the *chaudkrīs* (heads of *parganas*, groups of villages) and the *patwārīs* (village accountants), were mostly retained. The new rulers who had taken over the immense lands were short of manpower and in need of funds; thus they adopted the methods most likely to ensure rapid success. The state's demand for revenue was deliberately kept at a low rate – one-fifth of the produce – and the countryside was largely left undisturbed.

Forewarned by a number of rebellions early in his reign, °Alā' al-Dīn took prompt measures to forestall further trouble. First, in order to keep himself posted of all important occurrences in the capital and the provinces, he strengthened the *dīwān-i barīd* (intelligence department). Next, acting on the idea that 'wealth and rebellion are twins', he adopted measures to extract as much wealth as possible from his subjects. From the rural chiefs he demanded full taxes, while for the peasants the state demand for revenue was increased. Finally, in order to keep the nobles from uniting against him, he issued strict orders forbidding them to assemble or intermarry without royal permission.

In the military sphere, °Alā' al-Dīn's achievements fall into two categories: the war against the invading Mongols and the conquest of the unsubdued Indian territories. During the thirteenth century, the Mongols were so powerful that even a strong ruler like Balban had to adopt a defensive policy and accept a frontier line that was not particularly favourable. °Alā' al-Dīn faced two Mongol attacks on Delhi, including a siege of the city; but on both occasions the Mongols retreated. Other Mongol invasions directed at Panjab and the Ganges valley were also defeated. Hence by the end of the first decade of his rule, he had ensured protection from external aggression for his dominion. The death in 1306 of Duwa Khan, the Chaghatayid ruler of Transoxania and the main inspiration behind these invasions, may have also contributed to the decrease of Mongol pressure on India.

°Alā' al-Dīn's twenty-year reign entailed ceaseless military activity in India. The resulting acquisitions can be classed under three headings: areas recovered, territories freshly conquered and annexed, and states subdued but not annexed. The most noteworthy recovered areas were Jaysalmer, Ranthambor and Malwa. The most substantial and significant newly conquered territory was Gujarat, for its annexation brought the sultanate a province rich in natural resources as well as the benefits of extensive maritime trade. Chitor, too, was conquered and annexed, but after a short period was placed under a loyal Rajput dynast. The states subdued but not annexed include the three kingdoms of the Deccan and southern India: Deogir ruled by the Yadavas; Telingana ruled by the Ganāpatis; and Dwarsamudra ruled by the Hoysalas. °Alā' al-Dīn's main goals regarding these rich kingdoms were to obtain as much tribute as possible and to secure their submission to Delhi's suzerainty.

Otherwise, the Rajahs were left free to manage their internal affairs. The general Malik Kāfūr, who was thrice sent to subdue the three kingdoms, met with unqualified success and °Alā' al-Dīn's policy of establishing imperial hegemony, rather than direct rule, over the distant Deccan proved eminently successful. There is no adequate explanation as to why °Alā' al-Dīn made no attempt to conquer and annex Bengal, which was still ruled by Balban's descendants; but for a reign of twenty years, his military achievements were substantial.

A factor of paramount importance in °Alā' al-Dīn's far-reaching conquests and his success in dealing with the problem of the Mongols was the quality and size of his army. First of all, he did not suffer from the constraints which Balban had imposed in order to limit the strength of the cadre of commanders. Talent and loyalty were the only criteria by which °Alā' al-Dīn judged the men of the armed forces. He increased the strength of the main wing of the army, the cavalry, to 475,000 well-equipped troops who were paid directly from the treasury. Furthermore, he made the rules of annual muster more stringent, thereby ensuring the preparedness of the troops. However, the expense of the salaries for an army with such a large cavalry element would soon have exhausted the treasury. To overcome this problem, °Alā' al-Dīn introduced price controls to ensure that a soldier could live reasonably well on a lower scale of pay.

°Alā' al-Dīn was the first sultan to give serious thought to the reorganization of the revenue system. While devising a plan, he kept in mind the following well-considered objectives: to maximize the government's revenue, to equalize the burden of taxation on the various sectors of the rural population, and to minimize the dangers of a rebellion by the nobles and of rural discontent. He also introduced the rule of measurement of land (which of course was familiar in India); this largely replaced the rule of sharing the produce, known for many centuries as *batā'ī*. Being a realist, he did not impose the rule of measurement on the entire realm, but only on a well-defined and carefully chosen core of the sultanate. Clearly, a fixed and stable rule of measurement was in the government's interests as it helped to ensure a stable level of revenue. *Batā'ī*, on the other hand, favoured the peasants, for under it they paid in proportion to what they produced. By shifting to the land-measurement method, the sultan increased the pressure on the peasants to produce more. Furthermore, he increased the rate of the state's demand to 50 per cent of the *calculated* produce, thereby more than doubling the rate (compared to 20 per cent under Iltutmish and later Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq). However, he also made provisions for revenue exemptions in cases of crop failure resulting from natural calamities. Firmly insisting on the principle that 'the burden of the strong shall not fall on the weak', he lightened the tax burden on the peasants. In effect, he forced the superior rural classes (variously called *kūt*,

*muqaddam* and *chaudhrī*) to pay their taxes themselves rather than pass the burden on to the peasantry. He also abolished all the tax exemptions that they had previously enjoyed. As a result, they were no longer in a position to oppress the peasantry at will. Thus although the peasants lost under °Alā' al-Dīn, they also gained some advantages. The evidence is the fact that, during the two decades of the sultan's reign, no rebellion occurred in the rural areas.

°Alā' al-Dīn's strong rule alone cannot, however, account for the absence of articulated discontent, but recorded cases of harsh treatment and punishment under his administration mostly refer to urban political rebels and corrupt administrators, and not to rural malcontents. In any case, the peasants were left enough of their produce to enable them to survive from one year to the next. The *muqta*<sup>c</sup>s (executive heads of provinces responsible for the collection of revenues) and the staff of the *dīwān-i wizārat* (revenue department) were, if found guilty of laxity or dishonesty in the fulfilment of their duties, treated with marked severity; even governors were not spared physical beatings. As a result, first, the collections became effective and regular; second, the lag between collections and deposits was reduced; and third, the village people were saved from the extortions of the revenue staff.

### IQTĀ<sup>c</sup>S (ASSIGNMENTS OF LAND)

In lieu of salary, an assignment of land, or *iqtā*<sup>c</sup> (sometimes simply a portion of the land revenue), was granted to state employees. It saved the administration from having to keep ready cash for the monthly salary payments, and substantially reduced the amount of paperwork. The sultans of Delhi prior to °Alā' al-Dīn had followed this convenient and simple method. Its main disadvantage, however, was that it enabled the recipients of large *iqtā*<sup>c</sup>s to gain extensive personal influence and thus become an impediment to the operation of state power. It also provided loopholes for recipients to enjoy the benefits of the *iqtā*<sup>c</sup>s without fulfilling their obligations. °Alā' al-Dīn strongly disliked the system. Within five years of his accession, he issued orders for the withdrawal of *iqtā*<sup>c</sup>s, as well as other grants, and their inclusion into *khālisa* (state-administered lands). This was a far-reaching change. Financial benefits aside, it increased the authority wielded by the state over the bureaucracy and the nobility. It seems, however, that the practice of giving *iqtā*<sup>c</sup>s was not completely abandoned, but was now restricted to special cases in which the sultan wanted to emphasize the executive authority of a minister who had been entrusted with an important and difficult task.

## MARKET-CONTROL REGULATIONS

One of °Alā' al-Dīn's most important measures – and one which has attracted a great deal of attention – was the control of prices. It was introduced for the purpose of employing a larger army on a lower scale of pay. Of all the requisites of the troops, the most important single item was food. It therefore constituted the first of the four sectors of price control. The prices of wheat and other commodities were fixed and elaborate arrangements were made to ensure adequate supplies in the markets and to maintain huge reserves. The other three sectors of price control were: (a) horses, ponies, cattle and slaves; (b) cloth and fruit; and (c) articles for domestic consumption and personal use.

The prices of the various items in the four sectors were not changed during the rest of the sultan's reign. Aside from the firmness of °Alā' al-Dīn's administration, other features supported the system. First, prices were only fixed after very careful consideration and were generally reasonable. The price of the most important item, wheat, was fixed at 7-1/2 *jītals per man* (1 *man* of 14 *seers* = approx. 13 kg). From the days of Balban to the reign of Firūz Shāh Tughluq towards the end of the fourteenth century, the price of wheat remained stable, ranging from 7 to 8 *jītals per man* (except during periods of famine). Second, in another controlled sector, we learn that prices were so fixed as to ensure a fair margin of profit for the producer/seller. Both these features, namely the approximation of the fixed price to the normal price and the allowance of profit to the producer, greatly contributed to the stability of °Alā' al-Dīn's market-control arrangements. In addition, the sultan took care to ensure that the market was never short of supplies. During periods of scarcity, rationing was enforced. Through these devices, prices were kept steady at the fixed rate, even under famine conditions. °Alā' al-Dīn also made sure to appoint men of honesty and impartiality to the *hisba* (market control) staff. Apart from the troops stationed in Delhi, the main beneficiaries of the system were men of modest income and of the lower salary group in the capital. This explains the concentration within Delhi of a large number of scholars, craftsmen and men of the various professions.

## Income levels among the ruling and scholarly élites

During the initial phase of conquest, large areas and entire provinces were assigned to the nobles, in order to collect revenue and consolidate the sultan's hold on the territory. The *muqta*'s (assignee-governors of these territories) tended to wield a wide range of powers. Ilutmish rectified the situation by bringing the provincial governors under the central authority and subjecting them to a certain financial control. But in general, the nobles continued to enjoy the benefits reaped from the *iqta*'s. Out of the revenues collected from the

territories assigned to him, the *muqta*<sup>c</sup> kept a portion for himself and his household, used another portion towards maintaining his contingent of troops and sent the balance (*fawādil*) to the central exchequer. The *muqta*<sup>c</sup>'s obligations included maintaining military contingents and placing them at the sultan's service when needed. By the time of °Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī, the *muqta*<sup>c</sup>s had been made fully accountable to the central revenue department, and in general, the nobles were no longer given *iqṭā*<sup>c</sup>s but cash salaries. Subsequently, under the Tughluqids (see Part Two below), the system of *iqṭā*<sup>c</sup>s was revived, but some restrictions were introduced. The nobles lived in great luxury and style. They comprised three main grades: the Khans, who were paid 1 lac of *tankas*, the Maliks, who were paid 50–60,000 *tankas*, and the amirs, who received 30–40,000 *tankas*. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, even soldiers (called *iqṭā*<sup>c</sup>-*dārs*) were given *iqṭā*<sup>c</sup>s; but when it was found that they converted the land into *milk* (private property), the practice was gradually discontinued. Payment to °*ulamā*' and *mashāyikh* was made in various forms: regular stipends, assignments of 'dead land brought to life', assignments of cultivable land and assignments on the *jizya* (poll tax on non-Muslims) of a particular locality. Land not given in assignment and reserved for the state treasury was known as *khālisa*. Specific amounts of land were assigned for the sultan's personal and household needs, but were not treated as royal property.

## Agrarian conditions in the fourteenth century

The evolution of agrarian conditions during the thirteenth century and the agrarian reforms of °Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī have already been noted. Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughluq (1320–5) reverted to the 'produce-sharing' method which, as noted earlier, favoured the peasantry. He lowered the rate of state revenue demand and abolished several agrarian excesses. He mitigated the harshness of °Alā' al-Dīn's measures concerning the *kūts*, the *muqaddams* and the *muqta*<sup>c</sup>s. His short reign probably brought considerable relief to the rural population. The impact of Muhammad b. Tughluq's (1325–51) experiments with the agrarian economy, such as the sudden increase of the rate demanded in the Do'ab, the rotation of crops and the granting of loans to the peasants, was lost in the plethora of revolts; in the agrarian sector, as in other sectors, Muhammad b. Tughluq left only confusion and anarchy. It took Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq (1351–88) six years to survey the entire land and prepare new estimates of revenue. He too decided to adhere to the 'produce-sharing' method. By making a substantial addition to the water supply through canals and innumerable wells, he made an enormous contribution to gardens and cultivable land and thus ensured a substantial increase in the supply of cereals and fruit.

Firūz Shāh made extensive assignments to the nobility, officers, and men and institutions of learning and piety; these inevitably diminished the *khālisa* lands, thereby weakening the state financially. The impression of overall prosperity – in which the village peasants were also beneficiaries – is due to the notable and sustained increase in production and to the long period of general peace. At the same time, it was also a period of lax administration, during which nobles and officers would misappropriate public funds, fail to pay dues and thus become rich and powerful at the expense of the state.

## The political structure of the state

Dynastic monarchy was a structure with which Indians had long been familiar. From 1210, when the Delhi Sultanate was formally founded, the sultans steadily gathered more and more powers; it can fairly be stated that a sultan was generally a more powerful ruler than a Hindu ruler of earlier centuries. The process reached its climax under ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khaljī, who effectively controlled the empire and ran it as if it were a village. Muhammad b. Tughluq, however, went too far and suffered a set-back.

The sultan was assisted by a body of ministers who managed their respective departments under royal orders. The most important departments were those of religion and justice, of the army, of the intelligence service and the imperial post, and of finance and revenue, which was looked after by the most important minister, the vizier. For administrative purposes, the sultanate was divided into provinces, with the executive head of each province serving as governor. His powers were considerable, yet limited by the central government, especially in financial matters. When the government at Delhi was weak, the governors, especially those of the distant provinces, tended to assume more powers and run their provinces autonomously; some were tempted to declare independence. Depending upon the circumstances, a rebel governor might face the gallows or become the founder of a new provincial dynasty.

## Social and economic developments in the fourteenth century: urbanization, crafts, etc.

The trend towards urbanization, which had begun in the thirteenth century, continued apace during the following century. Both the state chronicles and the accounts of foreign visitors such as the Moroccan *‘ālim* (scholar) and traveller Ibn Battūta confirm this. Two interesting pieces of evidence are the constantly increasing size of the congregational mosques and the organization of regular transportation into the city of Delhi, with fixed charges from and

to various points; the latter indicate the growth in the size of the city. Ibn Battūta declared that Delhi was the largest city not only in India, but in the entire Islamic East.

The increase in population and the growth of a large number of cities led to the development and diversification of industries and crafts. Of particular importance were cotton fabrics, silken stuffs, carpets, woollens, ironware, leatherware and sugar-making. Indian hardware achieved great fame, producing damascened steel which had a worldwide reputation. Many other industries and crafts are mentioned in the context of the royal workshops or of the taxes imposed on the industries. The scale of diversification of food production can be grasped from Ibn Fadl Allāh's *Masālik al-absār*, with its mention of 21 varieties of rice and 65 varieties of sweets. In trade and commerce, the most notable groups were the *karwāniyān* (*banjāras*), who distributed large quantities of grain all over the land and are continually mentioned in chronicles and in Amīr Khusraw's historical *mathnawīs*. The merchants, especially the famous Multani merchants, who were concerned with internal as well as foreign trade, also played an important role. They organized the import of fine cloth for ʿAlā' al-Dīn's Saray-i ʿAdl market. The *sāhas* (bankers), the Multani money-lenders and the *sarrāfs* (money-changers) provided banking services which greatly facilitated commercial transactions in the country. The increased pace of production led to certain technological advances. The introduction of the cotton-carder's bow and the spinning wheel, for example, contributed to the expansion of the textile industry. The introduction of the true arch, dome and vault facilitated the construction of large buildings; Diyā' al-Dīn Baranī mentions that ʿAlā' al-Dīn Khaljā employed as many as 70,000 craftsmen for the construction of his buildings.

## Part Two

### THE DELHI SULTANATE, 1316–1526

(C. E. Bosworth)

#### The Tughluqids (1320–1412)

With the murder of Qutb al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh in 1320, the line of the Khalji sultans of Delhi came to an end, and his assassin, his Hindu convert slave Khusraw Khan Barwāri,

ascended the throne as Sultan Nāsir al-Dīn. But his reign was cut short by the rebellion of Ghāzi Malik Tughluq, governor of Dipalpur in Panjab, who had risen to prominence under the Khaljis, utilizing resentment against the ascendancy of the Hindus in the state under Khusraw Khan: in 1320 Nāsir al-Dīn was defeated and killed by Ghāzi Malik, who ascended the throne as Ghiyāth al-Dīn (1320–5). The line of sultans which he inaugurated is conveniently referred to as the Tughluqids, although Tughluq was almost certainly a personal name of Ghāzī Malik rather than a Turkish ethnic or tribal name.<sup>1</sup>

Ghiyāth al-Dīn thus came to power posing as the saviour of the faith from Hindu threats to subvert Islam, although Nāsir al-Dīn's failure had stemmed from his personal incapacity to rule rather than from outraged Islamic sentiment. Hence Diya' al-Dīn Baranī presents Ghiyāth al-Dīn as the paragon of Islamic rulers,<sup>2</sup> although the Sufi hagiographic tradition is less enthusiastic because of the new ruler's differences with the Chishtī mystic Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā'.<sup>3</sup> Ghiyāth al-Dīn's main tasks were to restore internal order and to pull together the empire after the financial chaos and the centrifugal administrative forces at work during the previous reign. These he achieved by recovering land grants (*iqtā'c*s, or *jāgīrs*) which had been lavishly distributed by his predecessor, by campaigning against the Hindu rulers of Orissa and Ma<sup>c</sup>bar (Madura) (this last province conquered in 1323) and by securing the vassalage of the Muslim sultanate of Bengal in 1324. Thus on his death in 1325, the sultanate had been once more consolidated and its frontiers extended considerably beyond those of Khalji times.<sup>4</sup>

Ghiyāth al-Dīn's son, Muhammad b. Tughluq (1325–51), consummated this work of consolidation and expansion during his long reign, and under him the Delhi Sultanate reached its greatest extent; his reign marks a watershed in the history of the sultanate. He is certainly one of the great figures of medieval Indo-Muslim history, yet Professor K. A. Nizami has written of him:

His reign of twenty-six years is a fascinating but tragic story of schemes and projects correctly conceived, badly executed and disastrously abandoned. His ingenious mind was as quick in formulating new plans as it was slow in understanding the psychology of the people. He could never establish that rapport and mutual understanding with his subjects, which was so necessary for the implementation of his schemes.<sup>5</sup>

Historians such as <sup>c</sup>Isāmī and Baranī adopted hostile attitudes to him and stigmatized him as an impractical visionary. Yet Muhammad was in fact a vigorous commander and man of

<sup>1</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, p. 460.

<sup>2</sup> Hardy, 1960, pp. 35–6.

<sup>3</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, p. 482.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 460–83.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 484.

action.<sup>6</sup> In 1327 he embarked on one of his most controversial and innovatory actions, the founding of a second capital of the sultanate in Deogir, renamed Dawlatabad, in the northern Deccan (near modern Awrangabad in Maharashtra province), in which many members of the Muslim administrative and religious élites of Delhi were willy-nilly resettled. In this way Muhammad parted company with the Khalji policy of exercising suzerainty over the Deccan from outside, and, from this new military base, he apparently planned a more activist policy within the Deccan. Whether this was his express intention or not, the policy speedily proved a failure and the division of central authority within the sultanate has been criticized by later historians as having had, in the longer term, an adverse effect on the sultanate's unity and effectiveness.<sup>7</sup>

Soon after Muhammad's accession, the Tughluqid army raided Peshawar and the mountains beyond, but had to retire because of the lack of food and fodder there. It seems to have been this raid which in c. 1329–30 provoked the last major invasion of India by the Chaghatayids, whose territories in the North-West Frontier region and eastern Afghanistan had just been threatened. Under their Tarmashīrīn Khan, the Mongol forces entered Panjab and reached the Jumna. Peace was made, but Muhammad seems to have entertained the grand design of attacking the Chaghatayids in 'Khurasan', a vague term in Indo-Muslim usage of the times. Barani speaks of a campaign against the 'Qarāchīl mountains', which has often been taken to refer to the Himalayan regions of Garwhal and Kumaon but which might well refer to Kashmir, at that time considered to be within the Chaghayatiid sphere of influence; the venture was, at all events, unsuccessful. One side-effect of Muhammad's policy *vis-à-vis* the Chaghatayids was that his realm became a haven for many Turco-Mongol chiefs and soldiers fleeing from Tarmashīrīn's strongly anti-Muslim measures within the Khanate, and contingents of Turco-Mongols appeared in the Tughluqid army later in his reign.<sup>8</sup>

After a certain number of successes, however, a reaction set in and in the latter part of his reign, Muhammad had to deal with no fewer than twenty-two rebellions in different parts of the empire. These involved the permanent loss to the sultanate of several provinces. Bengal and Ma<sup>c</sup>bar (Madura) regained their independence; Multan, Sind and Gujarat were disaffected; above all, the new policy towards the Deccan clearly failed when <sup>c</sup>Alā' al-Dīn Hasan Bahman Shāh constituted the Bahmanid sultanate there after 1347. Hence at

<sup>6</sup> Hardy, 1960, pp. 36–9.

<sup>7</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 506–15.

<sup>8</sup> A. Ahmad, 1964, pp. 17–19; Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 498–500; Jackson, 1975.

Muhammad's death, the sultan of Delhi possessed no authority in central and southern India beyond the Vindhya range.<sup>9</sup>

The causes of this decline are various. Muhammad had clearly aroused discontent in the state by his policy of opening the doors of the army and the administration to new sectors of talent. In pursuit of this broadening of his power base, he did, as mentioned above, encourage dissident Mongol amirs to come to his court. He further admitted converts from Hinduism – as of course had his predecessors – and this was resented by the old Muslim Turkish families and by the *‘ulamā’*, both classes ever jealous of their own positions and interests. The sultan's policy of attracting strangers to India and of honouring them for their capabilities was approved by Ibn Battūta (mentioned above), who reached India in 1333 and the Delhi court in the following year (as an outsider himself, he benefited greatly from it).<sup>10</sup> Muhammad was keen to establish links with the *‘Abbasid fainéant caliphs* now living in Cairo under the tutelage of the Mamluks, receiving their emissaries and placing their names on his coins, presumably in the hope of strengthening the aura of Islamic legitimacy for his rule; but the caliphate was by this time such a pale and ineffectual shadow of its former self that *‘Abbasid approval* does not seem to have brought Muhammad any tangible benefits in the eyes of his contemporaries.<sup>11</sup>

Of more immediate damage to Muhammad's image as a divinely mandated ruler were, first, his strained relations with the religious classes of India (although the accounts by contemporary chroniclers of a decline in religious life at Delhi as a consequence of the move to Dawlatabad are clearly much exaggerated) and, second, his general reputation as a stern, even bloodthirsty ruler, whose anger and violence did not spare recalcitrant religious scholars and Sufis – as Ibn Battūta notes in a fair-sized list of those executed by the sultan.<sup>12</sup> But Muhammad's attempts to encourage agriculture, especially in the wake of a disastrous famine in the Delhi–Do'ab region in 1335–6, to reform the coinage by introducing a low-denomination copper and brass coinage (perhaps in response to heavy drains of precious metal resulting from military campaigning and/or to some economic crisis not made explicit in the sources)<sup>13</sup> and to establish a secure base for the Islamization of the Deccan at Dawlatabad show him as a man of some vision who was trying to follow a

<sup>9</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 523–37.

<sup>10</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 562–5; Ibn Battūta, 1971, p. 671; Nizami, 1985, pp. 115–20; Siddiqui, 1992, pp. 27–8.

<sup>11</sup> Qureshi, 1958, pp. 33–6; A. Ahmad, 1964, pp. 8–9; Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 537–8; Ibn Battūta, 1971, pp. 679–82.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Battūta, 1971, pp. 695–706; Nizami, 1985, pp. 200–1.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, 1922; Wright, 1936; Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 515–19.

coherent policy but was held back by inadequate resources, refractory human material and personal failings.<sup>14</sup>

Muhammad's nephew Fīrūz Shāh (1351–88) had a more pacific and conciliatory temperament and his thirty-seven-year reign gave India a period of general relaxation and peace after the storm and stress of Muhammad b. Tughluq's reign. This newfound tranquillity was signalled by the prohibition, on Fīrūz Shāh's accession, of what Baranī calls *siyāsat*, i.e. the infliction of harsh punishments and torture which the severe and blood-thirsty Muhammad had used with such abandon as instruments of state policy.<sup>15</sup>

The new sultan was nevertheless by no means averse to military glory and success, and aimed at restoring the control lost by Delhi over the provinces. Unfortunately, he lacked military skill and the ruthlessness required of a great commander. His two invasions of Bengal (in 1353–4 and 1359–61) gained virtually nothing. He attacked Hindu rulers in Orissa and at Nagarkot-Kangra and led a long and costly campaign against the Sammā chiefs of Thatta on the Indus and lower Sind and against Gujarat (in 1365–7), asserting the suzerainty of Delhi there; but the whole enterprise was later regretted by the sultan for the losses in manpower and treasure involved. An invitation from discontented elements in the Bahmanid sultanate to intervene in the Deccan was, on the advice of the sultan's veteran vizier, the Khān-i Jahān Maqbūl, wisely refused and Fīrūz Shāh henceforth abstained from military adventures.<sup>16</sup>

In general, Fīrūz Shāh showed himself more concerned with the arts of peace, and this inevitably led to a decline in the organization and fighting qualities of the army during the last twenty years or so of his reign. Much of the army's preparedness and military effectiveness had rested on the periodic reviews (*ard*) of the cavalry, their weapons and their mounts by the official entitled the *rāwat-i ard*. The standards attained were recorded in the registers of the *dīwān-i ard* (military department) of the administration; it was on the basis of performance on these occasions that salaries and allowances were issued.<sup>17</sup> The system had been rigorously upheld by such sultans as 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī, Qutb al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh and Muhammad b. Tughluq, when military efficiency had been the criterion for financial rewards. Fīrūz Shāh, however, granted extensive hereditary *iqtā'*s to the army commanders rather than paying them in cash, a reversal of previous practice; and since the troops now collected their salaries directly from the cultivators, the door was open to extortion, oppression and corruption throughout the countryside, as the state could no longer threaten to withhold salaries in the case of military unpreparedness or inadequate

<sup>14</sup> See on his reign in general, Husain, 1938.

<sup>15</sup> Hardy, 1960, pp. 37–8; Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 576–7.

<sup>16</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 562–600.

<sup>17</sup> Qureshi, 1958, pp. 136 et seq.

training.<sup>18</sup> The sultan, meanwhile, buttressed his personal authority by the acquisition of a large body of personal slaves, the *bandagān-i Fīrūz-Shāhī*: their numbers stationed in the capital and in the provinces were implausibly put by °Afīfī at 180,000.<sup>19</sup> It is true that the more deleterious effects of the new trends in military organization and payment were delayed by the abilities of Fīrūz Shāh’s ministers, who included men of high calibre such as the two Khān-i Jahāns, father and son, and °Ayn-i Māhrū.

The adverse effects of the new system took time fully to emerge. It was only after Fīrūz Shāh’s death in 1388 that it became apparent that the decay of a highly trained, centrally paid, salaried army meant that assignees of lands often had inadequate military force with which to collect the revenues from their *iqṭā’c*s in the face of rebellious provincial governors, recalcitrant Hindu chiefs, and others. For the same reason, the central administration in Delhi could not collect its own share of the *iqṭā’c*s, that proportion which was kept back from the assignees for the expenses of running the state. Hence when the Turco-Mongol conqueror Timur (Tamerlane) appeared in India from Central Asia a decade after Fīrūz Shāh’s death, the Delhi Sultanate’s military and financial resources were totally inadequate for opposing him.

Fīrūz Shāh’s relaxation of central control in several spheres of state activity, and his amelioration of the harsh and oppressive policies of the preceding reign, were meritorious measures, although one consequence of them seems to have been a spread of corruption in the administration once fears of draconian punishment had disappeared. In religion, the sultan held strictly orthodox Sunni views. He deferred to the °*ulamā*’; he was the last Delhi sultan to receive formal investiture from the puppet °Abbasid caliph in Cairo; he destroyed newly erected Hindu temples; he persecuted the extremist Shi°ites and the Isma°ilis; he exacted the *jizya*, albeit at a low rate, from Brahmans, hitherto exempt; and he abolished *mukūs* (pl. of *maks*; non- Qur’anic taxes), although it is reasonable to assume that, as had always happened on previous occasions when these were abolished, the state soon found itself unable to do without the revenue and the old taxes and abuses crept back in.<sup>20</sup>

The sultan’s pacific policies may have brought some beneficial results for the masses of the population, if only because of the decreased need to finance military campaigns. Whether the price of provisions remained stable and affordable during his reign has been disputed by modern historians; prices were certainly much higher than they had been in, for example, °Alā’ al-Dīn Khaljī’s time half a century or so before (see Part One above). It

<sup>18</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 579–81.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 600–1, 619.

<sup>20</sup> Qureshi, 1958, pp. 36–7, 129–30, 244–7; A. Ahmad, 1964, pp. 9–10; Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 578–9, 609–12.

was as a builder of public buildings and endower of charitable institutions that the sultan achieved particular fame. Around Delhi, he laid out many gardens and orchards, and within the city he completed a Friday mosque and the Madrasa-yi Fīrūz-Shāhī in 1352, as well as a Sufi *khānaqāh-cum-madrasa* (convent-cum-college) for the noted Sayyid Najm al-Dīn Samarqandī. In 1359 Fīrūz Shāh founded the city of Jawnpur, possibly named after his kinsman Muhammad b. Tughluq's pre-accession title of Jawnā Khan, and he further built a new city in the Delhi district, named Firuzabad after himself; it did not, however, survive the Timurid onslaught soon afterwards.<sup>21</sup>

After Fīrūz Shāh's death in 1388, the remaining twenty-five years of Tughluqid rule were filled with a series of ephemeral sultans; none save one of the last, Nāsir al-Dīn Mahmūd Shāh II (1394–5; 1399–1412) ruled for more than two or three years. The sultanate was, in fact, in a state of disintegration, racked by disputes over the succession and the allocation of power; thus in 1395 Mahmūd Shāh II was ruling in Delhi while his rival, Nāsir al-Dīn Nusrat Shāh (like Mahmūd Shāh a grandson of Fīrūz Shāh), held power at Firuzabad. By this time, many of the *muqta*'s had achieved virtual independence. The Bahmanid sultanate had flourished under its able second ruler, Muhammad Shāh I (1358–75), and his successors. The Hindu ruler of Vijayanagar in the south-eastern tip of the Deccan had already succeeded in extinguishing the petty Muslim principality of Ma<sup>c</sup>bar (Madura) soon after 1378. The governor of Malwa in central India, Hasan Dilāwar Khan, ceased to forward any tribute to Delhi after 1392. He sheltered the fugitive Tughluqid sultan Mahmūd Shāh II when Timur invaded India in 1398, but in 1401 proclaimed his independence, thus inaugurating the powerful sultanate of Malwa, based on its capital Mandu, which was to endure for over a century until conquered by the sultans of Gujarat. In Jawnpur, the eunuch commander of the sultanate, Malik Sarwar, who already held the title of *sultān al-skarq* (Ruler of the East), was in 1394 sent to Jawnpur to quell disaffected Hindus there; he extended his power over most of the Ganges valley east of Delhi, including Bihar, as an independent ruler. The progeny of his adopted son and successor, Malik Mubārak, founded the principality of the Sharqī sultans which was to last for some eighty years until Sultan Bahlūl Lōdī reincorporated Jawnpur within the Delhi Sultanate. In Gujarat, the sultanate commander Zafar Khan had been sent to restore order there, but first his son Tatār Khan assumed power in 1403 and then Zafar Khan himself in 1407 – at a time when the Tughluqid dynasty was largely impotent, the sultans not having minted coins for six years – assumed independent authority as Sultan Muzaffar I. He reigned in

<sup>21</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 585–9, 601–16.

Gujarat until his death in 1411, after which his descendants enjoyed power for almost two centuries until the Mughal conquest of Akbar the Great in 1583.<sup>22</sup>

The catalyst for all these losses and secessions from the empire, which reduced Tughluqid control virtually to the Delhi region alone, so that it became a capital city without an empire, was Timur's invasion of 1398–9, which culminated in the sack of Delhi and the flight of the sultan.<sup>23</sup> When the Turco-Mongol armies at last withdrew, real power in Delhi lay not so much in the hands of the restored Tughluqid Mahmūd Shāh II as in those of his Afghan minister, Mallū Iqbāl Khan. The former north-western provinces of the empire, including Panjab and Multan, gave their allegiance to Timur and then to his successor Shāh Rukh. The governor of the western frontier region, Sayyid Khidr Khan, was in 1414 to seize power at Delhi and inaugurate the shortlived Sayyid line of rulers there.

## The Sayyids (1414–51)

Mahmūd Shāh II died in 1412, and there was a two-year interlude during which power in Delhi was held by a former Tughluqid commander, Dawlat Khan. Delhi was then captured by Sayyid Khidr Khan, who had since the early 1390s governed the province of Multan and had maintained himself there against Mallū Iqbāl Khan when the latter was governor of Lahore and Panjab; now, in 1405, Khidr Khan defeated and killed Mallū at Ajodhan. As long as a legitimate Tughluqid, Mahmūd Shāh II, reigned in Delhi, Khidr Khan could make no headway, but the sultan's death provided him with an opportunity.

Whether Khidr Khan really was a *sayyid* (descendant of the Prophet) is doubtful. The reference to this status in the near-contemporary *Tārīkh-i Mubārak Shāhī* of Yahyā Sīrhindī is at best vague; in its favour, however, may be Timur's earlier appointment of Khidr Khan as his governor in Delhi, suggesting that he was regarded as a *sayyid*, given Timur's special regard for the descendants of the Prophet. The growth of the claim may have been encouraged by Khidr Khan's undoubtedly benevolent rule (1414–21) and his skill as a military commander.<sup>24</sup>

It is not easy to characterize the Sayyid dynasty, with its four members only, but early fifteenth-century Muslim India clearly shows the transition from a strong centralized rule by the early Delhi Sultanate dynasties to a more diffused system of government, with strong tendencies to particularism and regionalism and a much reduced role of Delhi in Indo-Muslim political and military affairs. The period of the Sayyids was full of military campaigns, often against petty rebels and chieftains who had withheld taxation, but the

<sup>22</sup> Husain, 1963; Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 620–9; *EP*, D̄jawnpūr; Guḍjarāt; Ma<sup>c</sup>bar; Māl̄wā; Sh̄arkīs.

<sup>23</sup> Roemer, 1986, pp. 69–70.

<sup>24</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 635–6; *EP*, Sayyids.

Sayyid rulers showed little vision in extending their power beyond the vicinity of Delhi, the upper and middle Do'ab, with a more tenuous authority over Panjab and Multan. Thus the amount of revenue available to the state depended largely on the success or failure of these punitive expeditions and holding operations, and also on the rulers' ability to control a powerful and ambitious Turkish military nobility which had benefited from the power vacuum at the centre under the last Tughluqids to increase its own influence. The Sayyids were themselves conscious, it seems, of enjoying a lesser status and prestige than their predecessors. Khidr Khan ruled as a Timurid vassal and Shāh Rukh was recognized in the *khutba* (Friday worship oration) and on the coinage of Delhi. Only after 1417, and with the Timurid monarch's permission, did Khidr Khan add his own name to the coinage, previously having been content to restamp the coins of Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq and his successors.<sup>25</sup> Nor did he ever claim the exalted title of sultan but only that of *rāyat-i a'la* (Most Exalted Standard-[bearer]).

Khidr Khan's seven-year reign was full of campaigns localized, however, in the northern Indian plain and on its fringes: against Hindu Rajahs in Katahr (in the later Rohilkhand), Gwalior, Itawa (in the Kanawj region) and Mewat (in Rajasthan); in repelling an attack on Nagawr by the sultan of Gujarat, Ahmad I (1411–42), son of Zafar Khan Muzaffar I; and against rebellious Turkish troops of the sultanate, the *Turk-bachchas*.<sup>26</sup>

Khidr Khan's son and heir, Mubārak Shāh (1421–34), was the ablest ruler of his line. It is clear that he felt himself in a stronger position than his father from the fact that he adopted the title of sultan, placed his own name in the *khutba* and issued coins. Even so, he faced much the same problems, with additional challenges from the Khokars of Panjab (in 1421–2 and 1428), and with further campaigns required against Katahr, Mewat and Gwalior – on more than one occasion, against all of these places. The provincial Muslim kings of India were now strong and ambitious enough to challenge Delhi, and Mubārak Shāh clashed with Alp Khan Hūshang of Malwa (1405–35), who was menacing Gwalior, in 1423; and with the Sharqī ruler of Jawnpur, Shams al-Dīn Ibrāhīm (1402–40), who was threatening Bada'un and Itawa, in 1428. He was successful in repelling incursions of Turco-Mongols from Kabul, instigated by Shāh Rukh's governor there, Mas'ūd Mīrzā, in concert with their Khokar allies (in 1431 and 1433), and in relieving pressure on Lahore. Like certain other previous rulers in Delhi, Mubārak Shāh had the idea of founding a new city on the banks of the Jumna, Mubarakabad, in 1433, but his plans were cut short when he was assassinated in 1434 by partisans of his discontented vizier, the Hindu convert Sarwar al-Mulk.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Wright, 1936.

<sup>26</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 630–40.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 641–58.

The dead sultan's adopted son was raised to the throne in Delhi as Muhammad Shāh (1434–45), but was not given full allegiance by the great men of the state until Sarwar al-Mulk, regarded as the instigator of Mubārak Shāh's murder, had himself been killed. Muhammad Shāh ruled over a reduced, disordered realm with powerful rival princes on its fringes. In 1440 the ruler of Malwa, Mahmūd Shāh I Khaljī (1436–69), marched almost to the gates of Delhi and was only defeated and repulsed with the aid of the governor of Sirhind in Panjab, the Afghan Bahlūl Lōdī. Bahlūl's power was increased by the grant to him of Lahore and Dipalpur, and in the last two years of Muhammad Shāh's reign he rebelled and at one point even besieged Delhi.

When Muhammad Shāh died, his son ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿĀlam Shāh (1443–51) was recognized in Delhi, but with even less power than his father; his inability to control any territories beyond those within a 30-km radius of Delhi led to the witticism, (*az Dihlī tā Pālam/pādshāhī Shāh ʿĀlam*) [ʿĀlam Shāh's rule extends only from Delhi to Palam] (Palam being the site of the modern international airport of Delhi). In 1448 he decided to withdraw to Bada'un, where he had previously been governor, abandoning Delhi. The military leaders then took over power and in 1451 offered the throne to the most vigorous figure in the now truncated sultanate, Bahlūl Lōdī. Since ʿĀlam Shāh was content with the *pargana* of Bada'un, Bahlūl left him there in peace until the former Sayyid ruler died in 1476, when Bada'un was briefly annexed to Jawnpur by the Sharqī Husayn Shāh (1459–79). The Sayyid dynasty thus came to an end after a somewhat unremarkable thirty-seven years, notable only as a further stage in the disintegration of the Delhi Sultanate.<sup>28</sup>

## The Lōdīs (1451–1526)

The Lōdīs sultans represent the first Afghan dynasty ruling in Delhi – the heart of Indo-Muslim authority in northern India – since the time of the Ghurid sultans (originally from Ghur in central Afghanistan) some three centuries previously. Even before the rise to fame in the eastern Iranian lands of these Shansabānī Maliks of Ghur (see above, Chapter 8), Afghans had taken part in the Muslim raids and forays down to the Indian plains, attracted by prospects of rich plunder, and the 'Afāghina' are mentioned among the troops of Mahmūd of Ghazna (see above, Chapter 5). The constituting of the Ghurid empire, transient though it was, brought in its wake large numbers of Afghan soldiers of fortune to India, with especial areas of concentration in the middle Indus valley, Panjab and parts of the Do'ab. They played a role in political and military affairs under the Khaljis and Tughluqids second only to the predominant Turks in the forces of these ethnically Turkish

<sup>28</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 659–63.

sultans. During the Timurid invasions of India, Afghans fought on both sides. Sultān Shāh Lōdī aided the founder of the Sayyid line of Delhi sultans, Khidr Khan, against Mallū Iqbāl Khan and was rewarded with the governorship of Sirhind and its dependencies in Panjab, plus the title of Islām Khan.

During the reign of Sayyid Mubārak Shāh, the Lōdī power base was extended, and after Sultān Shāh Lōdī was killed, his younger son Bahlūl inherited this. Bahlūl managed to fight off an attack by Sayyid Muhammad Shāh's army and was diplomatic enough to conciliate the ruler in Delhi and thereby to retain Sirhind and its adjuncts; and when in 1440 Sultan Mahmūd Shāh I Khaljī of Malwa attacked Delhi (see above), Bahlūl provided a force of 8,000 Afghans and Turco-Mongols to ward him off, receiving in return the title Khān-i Khānān. Nevertheless, Bahlūl shortly afterwards revealed his own designs on Delhi and the heart of the sultanate, fruitlessly besieging the city and assuming for himself the title of sultan. The death of Sayyid Muhammad Shāh and the accession of the even weaker °Alā' al-Dīn °Ālam Shāh facilitated the fulfilment of his ambitions, as recorded above, so that in 1451 Bahlūl was able to ascend the throne in Delhi as Abu 'l Muzaffar Bahlūl Shāh (1451–89), the first in a line of three Lōdī sultans, the first and second of whom enjoyed what were by contemporary standards long reigns.<sup>29</sup>

Initially, Bahlūl's position as sultan was by no means firm. The tribal and social traditions of his Afghan supporters favoured a more diffused allocation of powers in the state rather than a centralized monarchy on the Khalji or early Tughluqid pattern, and Bahlūl had to take this into account; there are, in any case, no indications that Bahlūl wished to be an autocrat, withdrawn from his own folk, and he handled with care the body of permanently ambitious nobles and military commanders around the Delhi court. Moreover, there was still a representative of the Sayyid family at Bada'un as a possible focus of discontent, especially as the Sharqīs in Jawnpur, whose territories marched with those of Delhi, viewed themselves, because of matrimonial links with the Sayyids, as in large measure heirs of the Sayyids in northern India. It thus behove Bahlūl to proceed with caution. He gained an access of prestige from defeating a Sharqī invasion at Narela outside Delhi in 1452 and hostilities with Mahmūd Shāh (1440–57) and Husayn Shāh (1458–79) were to fill the greater part of his reign. His success attracted considerable numbers of Afghan troops from Roh (i.e. the North-West Frontier region and the adjacent mountain regions of eastern Afghanistan), and with these, Bahlūl inflicted a series of defeats on Husayn Shāh in 1479, culminating in the expulsion of the Sharqī ruler from Jawnpur to Bihar and Bengal. Jawnpur was now reunited with the Delhi Sultanate after an independent existence of nearly ninety years. This success allowed Bahlūl to mount an invasion of Malwa and to

<sup>29</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 664–72.

humble various Hindu princes at Gwalior and in the middle and lower Do'ab, such as the ruler of Itawa.

When Bahlūl died in 1489 he had reigned for thirty-eight years and had, by his crafty diplomacy and military skill, placed Lōdī authority on a firm footing. Occupied as he was with frequent wars, he seems to have been content to let the administrative and revenue-collecting system run on the same lines as those of later Tughluqid and Sayyid times; but he did introduce, at a time when gold and silver for minting had already become scarce under the Sayyids, a billon *tanka*, the *bahlūlī*, which remained current until the time of Akbar.<sup>30</sup>

Before his death, Bahlūl had allocated various parts of his realm as appanages for his sons and other Afghan relatives and connections. Thus his son Bārbak received Jawnpur; A<sup>c</sup>zam Humāyūn received Lucknow and Kalpi; Khān-i Jahān received Bada'un; Nizām Khan was given Panjab, Delhi and the upper and middle Do'ab, and so on. It was Nizām Khan who finally emerged on his father's death as head of the Lōdī family, taking the regnal name of Sikandar and ruling for nearly thirty years (1489–1517). His most formidable task was to make his rule acceptable to his numerous relatives, many of whom had their own ambitions for the throne, and to the Afghan military classes at large. This he achieved by campaigns which reduced his relatives to submission, by defeating the dispossessed Sharqī of Jawnpur, Husayn, near Benares in 1494 and by humbling the latter's ally, Husayn Shāh (1494–1519), sultan of Bengal, these successes enabling him to take over the province of Bihar. In the direction of central India, he twice successfully attacked Rajah Mān Singh of Gwalior (in 1501 and 1506). When Malwa was racked by succession disputes on the death there in 1511 of Sultan Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh, Sikandar was tempted in 1513 to intervene on behalf of a rival to Nāsir al-Dīn's successor Mahmūd Shāh II (1511–31) and his Rajput adviser Mēdinī Rā 'ī; but he achieved little beyond the capture of Chanderi (on the borders of Malwa and Bundelkhand).

When Sikandar died in 1517, he left behind a prosperous kingdom with a considerable degree of internal security. Being himself a poet in Persian, with the *takhallus* (*nom de plume*) of Gulrukhi, he was also a patron of scholars and literary men. Among the most tangible legacies of his reign was his re-foundation in 1504 or 1505 of the ancient town of Agra and his decision to turn it into his capital city and military headquarters.<sup>31</sup>

Sikandar's eldest son Ibrāhīm (1517–26) succeeded him, but he could only make firm his power after a succession struggle with his brother Jalāl Khan of Kalpi. The latter had originally been assigned the governorship of the former kingdom of Jawnpur in a

<sup>30</sup> Wright, 1936; Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 673–88.

<sup>31</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 689–701.

power-sharing agreement which Ibrāhīm speedily abrogated, driving Jalāl Khan into Gwalior and Malwa, eventually to be captured and killed. Ibrāhīm's overbearing behaviour soon aroused the fears and resentment of the military nobility, apprehensions strengthened by such arbitrary acts as the sultan's arrest and imprisonment of the respected religious leader Miyān Bhu'ā. Ibrāhīm had already lost much prestige and military *matériel* in a disastrous conflict with the Rajput potentate of Mewar, Rānā Sānga. Various rebellions of the Afghan commanders now erupted. That of Islām Khan, son of A<sup>c</sup>zam Humāyūn Sarwānī, was subdued, but a focus of opposition arose around Bahādur Khan Nuhānī in Bihar, where Bahādur Khan himself assumed the title of Sultān Muhammad and minted his own coins. Further, the commanders of Panjab wrote to the Mughal Bābur at Kabul in 1525, inviting him to invade India. Bābur occupied Lahore and came to face Ibrāhīm on the battlefield at Panipat (the first of three important battles in Indian history there) in April 1526. Despite an inferiority in numbers, Bābur's effective use of his cavalry and of a protective laager of linked carts carried the day and Ibrāhīm was killed on the field, the only Delhi sultan thus to die. The Delhi Sultanate accordingly expired, with the ending of the Afghan line of the Lōdīs (although Afghan domination in northern India was to be briefly revived by the Surīs). It was eventually to be replaced by the Mughal empire created, after some vicissitudes, by Bābur's son Humāyūn and his successors.<sup>32</sup>

The Lōdī sultanate had provided prosperity and stability until Ibrāhīm's failure to work with the Afghan nobility, who provided the military basis for the regime, brought about military defeat and the dissolution of the whole sultanate. There had been a considerable renaissance of learning during Sikandar's reign, including the translation into Persian of Sanskrit works. He had encouraged the Persianization of the administration, which entailed a wider learning of Persian by its Hindu officials, some of whom attained a high degree of proficiency in that language. Sikandar had a particular interest in music. On the other hand, he had a reputation for fierce Sunni orthodoxy and intolerance towards the Hindus, despite the fact that his own mother was a Hindu. He had temples torn down, and erected in their place mosques and other buildings or else he turned them into caravanserais. At Nagarkot, he is said to have had idols broken up and the pieces used as butchers' weights. The chance of securing more general support for the sultanate in northern India, outside the Muslim ruling class, was thereby lost. It was to be the Mughal Akbar who, half a century or so later, was to endeavour to establish a greater community of interest between rulers and ruled.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Habib and Nizami, 1970, pp. 702–9.

<sup>33</sup> cAbdu 'l-Halim, 1961; *EP*<sup>2</sup>, Lōdīs.