

Module -2

From Garrison Town to Empire: The Expansion of the Delhi

In the early 13th century-control of the Delhi Sultans rarely went beyond heavily fortified towns occupied by garrisons. The Sultans seldom controlled the hinterland of the cities-were dependent upon trade, tribute or plunder for supplies-was difficult to control garrison towns in distant Bengal and Sind from Delhi-Rebellion, war, even bad weather caused disconnection of fragile communication routes. Delhi's authority challenged by Mongol invasions from Afghanistan and by governors who rebelled at any sign of the Sultan's weakness. The Sultanate barely survived this challenges.Consolidation occurred during the reign of Ghiyasuddin Balban and further expansion under Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq. The first set of campaigns along the "internal frontier" of the Sultanate aimed at consolidating the hinterlands of the garrison towns-campaigns involved forests being cleared in the Ganga-Yamuna doab and expulsion of hunter-gatherers and pastoralists from their habitats. Lands were given to peasants. Agriculture encouraged.New fortresses, garrison towns and towns were established to protect trade routes and to promote regional trade. The Second expansion occurred along the "external frontier" of the Sultanate. Military expeditions into southern India started during the reign of Alauddin Khalji and culminated with Muhammad Tughluq. In their campaigns, Sultanate armies captured elephants, horses and slaves and carried away precious metals. By the end of Muhammad Tughluq's reign, the armies of the Delhi Sultanate had marched across a large part of the subcontinent,defeated rival armies and seized cities. Sultanate collected taxes from the peasantry and dispensed justice in its realm.

A Closer Look: Administration and Consolidation under the Khaljis and Tughluqs

Consolidation of a kingdom (as vast as the Delhi Sultanate) requires reliable governors and administrators. Early Delhi Sultans, especially Iltutmish did not appoint aristocrats and landed chieftains as governors. They favoured their special

slaves purchased for military service (called bandagan in Persian). The Khaljis and Tughluqs continued to use bandagan and also raised people of humble birth, who were often their clients, to high political positions and appointed them as generals and governors leading to political instability. Slaves and clients were loyal to their masters and patrons, but not to heirs. The accession of a new monarch often saw conflict between the old and the new nobility. Patronage of these humble people by the Delhi Sultans shocked many elites and the authors of Persian tawarikh criticised the Delhi Sultans for appointing the “low and base-born” to high offices.

The Khalji and Tughluq monarchs appointed military commanders as governors of territories of varying sizes (called iqta) and their holder was called iqtadar or muqti. The duty of the muqtis was to lead military campaigns and maintain law and order in their iqtas. In exchange for their military services, the muqtis collected the revenues of their assignments as salary-paid their soldiers from this revenues. Control over muqtis was most effective if their office was not inheritable and if they were assigned iqtas for a short period of time before being shifted. Accountants were appointed to check the amount of revenue collected by the muqtis. As the Delhi Sultans brought the hinterland of the cities under their control, they forced the landed chieftains, the Samantas, aristocrats and rich landlords to accept their authority. Under Alauddin Khalji, the state brought the assessment and collection of land revenue under its own control. Rights of the local chieftains to levy taxes cancelled and were also forced to pay taxes. Some of the old chieftains and landlords served the Sultanate as revenue collectors and assessors.

There were three types of taxes:

- (1) on cultivation called kharaj and amounting to about 50% of the peasant's produce,
- (2) on cattle and
- (3) on houses-Large parts of the subcontinent remained outside the control of the Delhi Sultans-was difficult to control distant provinces like Bengal from Delhi. After annexing southern India, the entire region became independent. In the Gangetic plain, there were forested areas that Sultanate forces could not penetrate. Local chieftains established their rule in these regions. Rulers like Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq could force their control for a short duration in these areas.