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The Slave Dynasty (1206-1290)
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E-text (Quadrant-I)

1. Introduction

The Sultanate of Delhi, said to have been formally founded by Qutb-ud-din Aibak, one of the Viceroys of Muhammad Ghor. It is known as the Sultanate of Delhi because during the greater part of the Sultanate, its capital was Delhi. The Sultanate of Delhi (1206–1526) had five ruling dynasties viz., 1) The Slave dynasty (1206-1290), 2) The Khilji Dynasty (1290–1320) 3) The Tughlaq Dynasty (1320–1414), 4) The Sayyad Dynasty (1414–1451) and 5) The Lodi dynasty (1451–1526). The first dynasty of the Sultanate has been designated by various historians as 'The Slave', 'The Early Turk', 'The Mamluk' and 'The Ilbari'.

2. Slave/Mamluk Dynasty

2.1. Qutb-ud-din Aibak (1206 – 1210)

Qutb-ud-din Aibak was the founder of the Slave/Mamluk dynasty. He was the Turk of the Aibak tribe. In his childhood he was first purchased by a kind hearted Qazi of Nishapur as Slave. He received education in Islamic theory and swordmanship along with the son of his master. When Qazi died, he was sold by his son to a merchant who took him to Ghazni where he was purchased by Muhammad Ghor. He impressed Muhammad Ghor by his courage and other laudable qualities and won the confidence of his master. Due to his extraordinary abilities, he rose to the position of Amir-i-Akhur (the master of the royal stable) and rendered valuable services to his master in the Indian expeditions. In view of his services, Muhammad Ghor nominated him as the viceroy of his newly conquered dominions in India. Aibak played an important role in the expansion of the Turkish Sultanate in India after the battle of Tarain.

2.1.1 Qutb-ud-din Aibak as the Viceroy (1192-1206)

- Aibak completed the work of his master and founded the Muslim empire in India.
- He suppressed a rebellion at Ajmer headed by Hariraja, the brother of Prithviraj.
- In 1993 he captured Meerut, Aligarh and Delhi by defeating the Rajputs.
- In the same year he assisted Muhammad Ghor in the battle of Chandwar against Jayachandra and occupied Kanaaj and Benaras.
- He defeated Sulakshanapala and occupied the fort of Gwalior.
- In 1196 he routed the Hindu confederacy headed by Bhima II and plundered the city of Anhilwad.
Besieged the fortresses of Kalinjar, Mohoba, Badaun.

The most important military achievement of Aibak was the conquest of Bengal and Bihar by his general Bakthiyar Khilji in 1197.

In order to strengthen his position, he concluded matrimonial alliances with other powerful nobles of Muhammad Ghori. He himself married the daughter of Tajuddin Yalduz. He gave his sister to Nasiruddin Qubacha who later declared himself as ruler of Sindh. He also gave his daughter to loyal slave Iltutmish who later succeeded him.

2.1.2. Aibak as a Sultan

Qutb-ud-din Aibak, who was the governor of Ghori’s Indian possessions became independent after his master’s death and began his rule in 1206, with the title Sultan. Aibak as a Sultan had no peace and he had to face too many challenges from in and outside the country. Tajuddin Yalduz, another Slave of Muhammad Ghori succeeded at Ghazni. As the ruler of Ghazni, Yalduz claimed to rule over Delhi as well. This, however, was not accepted by Aibak and from this time, the Delhi Sultanate severed its links with Ghazni. The Rajputs though vanquished in northern India were eagerly waiting for possible recovery. In the face of these difficulties Aibak consolidated his Indian conquest by adding some more victories to his credit.

He established his supremacy over his Turkish nobles of Bengal by following a policy of war and diplomacy. Ali Mardhan Khan the ruler of Bengal became the governor and agreed to pay annual tribute. In his northern campaign he defeated Yalduz and occupied Ghazni. This victory was short lived and later he was driven out by Yalduz. He left his tasks unfinished with his death. In 1210, Aibak died of injuries received in a fall from his horse while playing Chaugan (polo).

2.1.3 Estimate

The credit of establishing Turkish rule in India goes to Qutb-ud-din Aibak. He rose to a high position from the life of a slave. He possessed all qualities of loyalty, generosity, courage, and sense of justice. Because of liberal distribution of money, he earned the title of Lakh Bakhsh. He was a patron of men of letters. Scholars like Hasan Nizami adorned his court.

He constructed two mosques one at Delhi (Quwwat ul Islam) and other at Ajmir (Adhai Din Ka Jhonpra). He laid the foundation of Qutub Minar after the name of famous Sufi saint Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki.

Aibak’s son Aram Shah (1210-1211) ascended the throne but he was incompetent. The people of Delhi refused to accept him as ruler. The powerful governors of different provinces like Qubacha of Multan, Ali Mardhan of Bengal refused to recognize the suzerainty of Aram Sha. At this critical situation, some of the courtiers invited Iltutmish to become the Sultan. He accepted this proposal and captured the throne by defeating Aram Shah.

3. Iltutmish (1211 – 1236)

Iltutmish was one of the able kings of Delhi Sultanate. He was a slave as well as the son-in-law of Aibak. He commenced his career as a Sar-i-jandar (head of the royal body guard). He soon won the admiration of his master and became the governor of Badaun. Since he belonged to the Ilbari tribe, the successors are known as Ilbari Turks. He is regarded as the real consolidator of the Turkish conquests in north India.

At the time of his accession, Ali Mardhan Khan had declared himself the king of Bengal and Bihar, while Qubacha, declared an independent ruler of Multan and seized Lahore and parts of the Punjab. Even some of the fellow officers of Iltutmish near Delhi were reluctant to accept his authority. The Rajputs took advantage of the situation to assert their independence. Thus, Kalinjar, Gwalior and the entire eastern Rajasthan, including Ajmer and Bayana, threw off the Turkish Yoke.
3.1 Achievements

During the first ten years of his reign, Iltutmish concentrated on securing his throne from rivals.

In the meanwhile Chengiz Khan, the Mongol, had become powerful and established a vast empire. In 1221 Chengiz Khan appeared for the first time on the banks of the Indus. He defeated Jalaluddin Mangabarni, the ruler of Khwarizm. Mangabarni sought asylum from Iltutmish. Iltutmish refused to give him shelter in order to save his empire from the onslaught of the Mongols. Fortunately for Iltutmish and Jalal, Chengiz had to turn back his attention to his home region.

The Sultan also suppressed the revolts of the Rajasthan chiefs. Between 1226 and 1231, he conquered Ranathambhor, Ajmer, Sambhar, Nagaur and Gwalior.

Taking advantage of the defeat of Qubacha of Sindh, Iltutmish drove him away, Multan and Sindh were annexed to the Delhi Sultanate in 1228. He reasserted his control over Bihar and Bengal.

In 1234–1235, Iltutmish led an expedition against Malwa and captured Bhilsa. The conquest of Ujjain was followed by the demolition of the ancient Mahakal temple. While he was directing another expedition to punish the Banian Rajputs, he fell ill and died on the way in 1236.

3.2. Estimate

Iltutmish was the greatest ruler of thirteenth century India and a wise statesman. He faced all the challenges boldly. He saved the empire from disruption. In 1229 Iltutmish was solemnly consecrated as Sultan of Delhi by a representative of the Abbasid Khalifa of Baghdad. It gave legal status to Iltutmish’s kingship. Later he nominated his daughter Razia as his successor. Thus the hereditary succession to the Delhi sultanate was initiated by Iltutmish. He was generous to talented people who willingly became pillars of the central administration. Iltutmish organized the nobles in a corporate body, known as Turkan-i-Chahalgani (the Corp of Forty) which was personally loyal to him. This elite corp was very proud of itself. He introduced the Arabic coinage into India and Silver tanka became a standard coin in medieval India.

Iltutmish can be credited with making Delhi the political, administrative, and cultural centre of Turkish rule in India. He patronized many scholars and number of Sufi saints came to India during his reign. Minhaj-us-Siraj, Tajuddin, Nijam ul mulk, Muhammad Janaidi, Malik Qutubuddin Hasan, Fakhrul Mulk Isami were his contemporary scholars who added grandeur to his court. The famous Qutub-Minar near Mehrauli (Delhi) the tallest stone tower in India (238 Feet) was completed in the year 1231. He built magnificent mosque at Ajmer. Thus he made Delhi second Baghdad.

Sultana Razia (1236 – 1240)

Sultana Razia was the first Muslim woman ruler of India. During the last years, Iltutmish was worried over the problem of succession. He considered none of his surviving sons to be worthy of the throne. After anxious consideration, Iltutmish nominated his daughter Razia as his successor, even though it is against the traditions of Islam.

Although Iltutmish nominated Razia as his successor, the Qazi of Delhi and Nazir made the Rukn-ud-din Feroz Sha the eldest son of Iltutmish as Sultan. He was weak, incompetent and indulged in pleasure of life. Hence, his mother Shah Turkan, a vicious woman assumed all the powers. Vexed by her misrule, there broke out internal rebellions in different parts of the empire. When another son of Iltutmish rebelled in Awadh, Rukn-ud-din marched out of the capital to suppress the rebellion. While Ruknuddin had gone out of the city to fight the rebels, Razia took the opportunity to go to the Jama Masjid and appealed to the people of Delhi for their support, alleging that there was a conspiracy to kill her. She succeeded, after
something like a popular revolt in her favour took place. In 1236, Razia defeated her brother with the support of the people of Delhi and ascended the throne.

**Achievements**

Though her reign was just for three years, her bravery, her struggle and her undaunted spirit has been preserved in the treasures of history. The throne which was ascended by Razia was not safe to her. The governors of Multan, Badaun, Hansi and Lahore openly revolted against her. Wazir Muhammad Junaidi and many other nobles refused to reconcile themselves to have a woman as the ruler.

The most formidable enemy for her rule was the famous Forty the Turkish nobles of Delhi. It marked the beginning of a struggle for power between the monarch and the Turkish chiefs, sometimes called the Chahalgani They wanted to install on the throne a puppet whom they could control. They soon discovered that though a woman, Razia was not prepared to play their game. She discarded the female apparel and started holding court with her face unveiled. She even hunted and led the army in war.

The Wazir, Nizam-ul-Mulk Junaidi, who had opposed her elevation to the throne was defeated and forced to flee. She sent an expedition against Ranathambhor to control the Rajputs and successfully established law and order in the length and breadth of her kingdom. But her attempt to create a party of nobles loyal to her and to raise non-Turks to high office led to opposition.

Razia appointed Jamal-ud-din Yaqut, an Ethiopian slave, as superintendent of the royal horses, this aroused resentment in a majority of the already disgruntled Turkish nobles. In 1240, Altunia, the governor of Bhatinda revolted against her. She went in person to suppress the revolt but Altunia killed Yaqut and took Razia prisoner. In the mean while Ilutmish's third son, Bahram, was put on the throne by the powerful Turkish nobles. To save her own head, Razia sensibly decided to marry Altunia, the governor of Bhatinda and marched towards Delhi with her husband. She was defeated by Bahram and the unfortunate couple was put to death the very next day by some robbers near Kaithal.

**Estimate**

Razia was an able ruler, a great administrator and commander. She was the first and last Muslim woman ruler of medieval India. Being an efficient ruler, Razia Sultana has set up proper and complete law and order in her empire. Razia had all the qualities to rule Delhi Sultanate; the only disadvantage was that she was a woman. That was the one of the reasons of her decline.

The contemporary historian Minhaj described her as a great sovereign endowed with all admirable attributes and qualifications necessary for kings Her fall was not primarily due to her unorthodox manner of performing royal duties in violation of Muslim social custom, it was her encroachment upon the monopoly of office and power by the Turkish nobles which ruined her.

**Bahram Shah and Masud (1240-1246)**

Bahram Shah became the Sultan while Razia was alive. The fall of Razia paved the way for the ascendency of forty. In the next six years Bahram and Masud ruled over Delhi. In 1241, the Mongols invaded India and came upto Lahore. In 1242, Bahram Shah was killed. After him, a grandson of Ilutmish named Masud Shah was enthroned as Sultan. But Balban conspired with Nasiruddin Mahmud's mother, Malik-i-Jahan, to overthrow Masud. Consequently Masud was deposed and imprisoned.

**Nasiruddin Mahmud (1246-1266)**

As a ruler, Mahmud was known to be very religious, spending most of his time in prayer and copying the Quran. He patronized the scholars and gave charity to poor and needy. He was an excellent man but he did not fit in the political atmosphere of the period. In august 1249 the
Sultan married Balban's daughter and made him the Malik Naib (regent). He was also awarded the title of Ulugh (great) Khan. Balban was all powerful in administration but he had to face intrigues of his rivals in the royal court. He proved his ability and resourcefulness by saving the Delhi Sultanate from internal eruptions and external invasions. In 1266 Nasiruddin died without issues, That's the end of the line of Iltutmish and starting point of the glorious reign of Balban.

**Balban (1266 – 1287)**

**Early Life**

Ghiyasuddin Balban was the greatest Sultan of the Mamluk dynasty. His original name was Bha-uddin. He was the descendant of an Ilbari tribe of Turkistan. When he was young he was captured by the Mongols and carried to Ghazni and sold to Khwaja Jamaluddin of Basara, a man of piety and learning. The latter brought him to Delhi in 1232 along with the other slaves and all of them were purchased by the Sultan Iltutmish. He was originally appointed as the Sultan's personal attendant. But by dint of sheer merit he became not only an important person but a member of the famous band of Turkish slaves of Iltutmish known as the Forty. Under Sultanate of Razia, he became Chief Huntsman and her successor Bahram. He obtained Revari in Punjab as a Jagir. He was also instrumental in de-throwing Masud Sha and in placing Nasiruddin on the throne of Delhi. Later, he became Minister and the Deputy of Nasiruddin. Finally after the death of Nasiruddin, he ascended the throne of Delhi. Thus Balban was de facto ruler of Delhi for forty years, 20 years as the chief minister (1246-1266) of Nasiruddin and 20 years (1266-1286) as Sultan.

**Problems of Balban**

Balban's experience as the regent made him understand the problems of Delhi Sultanates. The problems faced by Balban are as follows:

- During 30 years that followed the death of Iltutmish, the affairs of the state had fallen into confusion through the incompetence of his successors.
- The treasury of the Delhi Sultanate had become almost empty.
- The forty Turkish nobles became selfish and they became a source of menace to the Sultan. In the north west, the Delhi Sultanate was exposed to the menace of the recurring Mongol raids.
- Powerful Hindu states in Rajputana and Central India had increased their military pressure on the Southern borders of the Sultanate.
- In short Barani writes, the country had fallen into a wretched condition. It was under these circumstances, Balban by his policy of "blood and Iron" got rid of all these problems.

**Creation of Strong Army**

Balban realised that a strong army was an essential requisite for the stability of his government. He therefore set himself to the task of reorganizing the military administration. The military department was separated from the rest of the civil departments. It was removed from the control of Kiazir as well as finance minister (Diwan) and placed under the control of the army minister Ariz-i-Mumalik. He was made responsible for recruitment, training and equipment of the soldiers and acted as the pay master of the army. He looked after the forts and the other defences of the state and deployed the royal forces at strategic places. But the supreme commander of the army was the Sultan.

The basic composition of the army of Balban remained feudal in nature. It implies that Balban had to depend heavily upon the army supplied by the Iqtadars-the provincial governors. The personal interest taken by the sultan and the vigilance of the central govt, the efficiency and the tone of the feudal contingents was considerably improved. It is a fact that Balban was a strong sultan and hence he could maintain his control over army.

**Restoring order in Delhi and Doab regions**
Balban after reorganizing the army turned his attention towards restoring order in the Delhi and Doab regions and the economic nerve centre of the Delhi Sultanate. One of the famous military campaigns of Balbun was against Meo, or Mayo, the people of Mewat who used to plunder the people of Delhi even in the day light. The constant raids of the Mewati into Delhi had made the people’s lives miserable. To deal with these elements, Balban adopted a policy of ‘Blood and Iron’. Robberies were mercilessly pursued and put to death. Balban’s repeated attacks on Mewati strongholds and villages stopped these incursions. Military posts, manned by Afghans were established in those regions and the soldiers were given tax-free lands. The villages belonging to the rebels in the Doab region were destroyed and the peasants were encouraged to settle down to a peaceful life. Balban, thus, restored order and security. The roads became safe for travel and trade and agriculture improved, leading to further urbanization. This enabled the revenue officials to collect the revenue regularly from the peasants and thereby the financial position of the State was increased considerably.

Suppression of the Forty

Balban was one of the famous Forty (Chahalgani) of Iltutmish and he knew very well the havoc played and the power yielded by them. He realized that without destroying Chahalgani he could not make him supreme. Thus he set himself to the task of destroying the Forty. He spared only the obedient nobles and eliminated all others by fair and foul means. In pursuance of his policy of curbing the power of the nobles, Balban tried to regulate the tenure of the lands in the doab enjoyed by them.

Balban decided to destroy the power of the Shami nobles who became the greatest hurdle to improve his strength and solidarity in the Sultanate. In this connection, Balban followed a slow and steady policy to undermine their political status and military power. He sent them out of the capital and assigned some risky and difficult tasks. The military commanders were ordered to suppress the brigands in the Delhi and Doab regions. They were promoted as provincial governors in the northwestern frontier province and also entrusted the duty of checking the Mongol menace. Balban frequently transferred these provincial governors from one province to another so that they may not develop any vested interests and also intimate contacts with the local elite to sap the stability of the state. Balban also adopted stern and severe attitude towards the Shami nobles. He inflicted deterrent punishment even for the minor lapses in the discharge of their official duties.

Spy system

Balban created an excellent espionage system. A large number of news writers and spies were posted throughout the length and breadth of the empire. They were given high salaries and were kept under the direct control of the Sultan. They were expected to report to the Sultan about the important developments that occurred in the areas of their posting and meticulously watched the activities of the nobles, ministers and the members of the royal family. They were punished very severely if they failed to submit correct and prompt reports to the Sultan about the nefarious activities of the nobility.

Suppression of Bengal Revolt

The most serious of all the rebellions was Bengal rebellion. Tugril Khan, one of the trusted slaves of Balban, whom he made governor of Bengal, gave him a rude shock by rebelling. The old age of Balban and the Mongol invasions encouraged him to declare independence in Bengal and assumed the title Sultan and struck coin on his name. But Balban immediately sent a huge army under the command of Amin Khan to Bengal. Tugril Khan not only defeated him but also won him to his side. Balban sent another expedition under the command of Malik Targhi. This was also a failure. Balban, in spite of his failing health, conducted the third campaign personally with the help of a huge army. Tugril Khan was ultimately captured by Balban’s army and his severed head sent to the Sultan. Thus ended the revolt of Tugril Khan and the occupation of Bengal by the Sultan. Balban appointed his second son Bughrakhan as the governor of Bengal.

Balban and Mongols
The Mongol menace became very active during the time of Balban. He always kept ready his army to meet this danger of the Mongol invasions. The Mongols attacked the Delhi Sultanate in 1271, 1279, 1285 and 1286 CE. The Mongol attacks were successfully repelled. However, unfortunately, Prince Muhammad, the son of Balban, was killed in an encounter with the Mongols. It was a mortal blow to Balban. The Sultan with this misery unremittingly discharged his duties, although it is said that he wept throughout the night for his dead elder son. It is to be noted that Balban did not live long after the death of Muhammad.

Balban, thus successfully solved all the problems faced by him. He restored order in the Delhi and Doab region, solved financial crises, and introduced organized administrative setup, neutralized the power and prestige of the Shamsi nobles, destroyed the famous forty, repelled the Mongol attacks and emerged as a double distilled dictator.

**Balban Theory of Kingship**

- Balban’s theory of Kingship was similar to that of the theory of Devine right of kings. He styled himself as the Shadow of God and the Vice regent of God on earth.
- Abul Fazul states Royalty is a light emanating from God, a ray from the sun, the illuminator of the universe, augment of the book of perfection and the receptacle of all virtues.
- Balban constantly sought to increase the prestige and power of the monarchy, because he was convinced that, that was the only way to face the internal and external dangers faced by him. He cast a halo of superiority round monarchy.
- Balban tried to strengthen his claim to the throne by declaring that he was the descendant of the legendary Iranian king Afrasiyab. In order to prove his claim to noble blood, Balban stood forth as the champion of the Turkish nobility. He refused to entertain to anyone who did not belong to a noble family for important government posts. This virtually meant exclusion of Indian Muslims from all positions of power and authority.
- While claiming to act as a champion of Turkish nobility, Balban was not prepared to share power with anyone, not even with members of his own family. He took every keen interest in improving his military strength and there by introduced the element of militarism in his theory of Kingship. At the same time in order to win the confidence of the public, he administered justice with impartiality, not even the highest in the land were to be spared if they transgressed his authority.
- Balban maintained a dazzling darbar to increase the prestige and power of the monarchy and to command respect from the nobility and people. In order to impress the people with the strength and awe of his government, Balban maintained a magnificent court. Whenever he went out, he was surrounded by a large force of bodyguards with drawn swords. He introduced rigorous court discipline. He refused to laugh and joke in the court and even gave away drinking wine so that no one may see him in a non-serious mood.
- Balban introduced the Persian court manners, customs and festivals in his theory of kingship. He introduced Shijda (Prostration) and Paibos (Kissing the feet of the Sultan in the court) as the normal form of salutation of the Sultan. He also introduced the Persian festival of Nauroz to impress the nobles and subjects with his wealth and power. These and many other ceremonies which he adopted were Iranian in origin and were considered un-Islamic.

Balban was undoubtedly one of the main architects of the Sultanate of Delhi, particularly of its form of government and institutions. In conclusion, we may state that Balban became a trend setter in his theory of kingship. But for the security and stability which Balban imparted to the struggling Delhi Sultanate, it would have been impossible for Alauddin Khilji to withstand the Mongol attacks and to achieve conquests in the distant lands and for Muhammad bin Tughlaq to think of new administrative experiments.
Balban had a great love for learning. Amir Khusrau and Amir Hussain were the great literary figures who flourished in his court. It is said that he took delight in dining with the company of learned and pious men and held converse with them on subjects of law and religion.

**Decline of Mamluk dynasty**

When Balban found that his end was fast approaching, he called his son Bugra Khan to stay with him, but he was afraid of the stern nature of his father that he slipped from Bengal. Then Balban proclaimed his grandson Kaiqubad as his successor and died in 1287, but Kaiqubad sank into debauchery and was unable to give up his dissipated lifestyle. He was soon struck with paralysis and was finally killed in a pitiable manner by the Khilji Maliks. Thus the Ilbari rule came to an end.