
UNIT 16. ADMINISTRATION OF THE SULTANATE

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16.0 OBJECTIVES

In the last Block (4) you have studied the territorial expansion and the process of the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. In this Unit, the focus of our study will be on the administrative set up of the Delhi Sultanate. We will take note of the following aspects :

- the contacts that were maintained with the Caliphate,
- the nature of the state,
- the different departments at the central and provincial level,
- the main officials who were involved in the administration, and
- the manner in which the control was exercised.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

You have already studied in Block 4 how in 1206 Qutbuddin Aibak laid the foundation of an independent Sultanate at Delhi and a beginning was made in severing links with Central Asia. We have also dealt with the territorial expansion under the Sultans. In this Unit, our focus would be on the consolidation of the Sultanate. This Unit introduces you to the central and provincial administrative system, the revenue administration and the nature of the Delhi Sultanate.

16.2 THE CALIPHATE AND THE DELHI SULTANATE

The institution of the Caliphate came into existence after the death of Prophet Muhammad when Abu Bakr became the new head (*Khalifa*) of the Muslim community (*Umma* or *Ummat*). Originally, there existed some elements of elective principle in the matter of succession, a practice not much different from the previous tribal traditions.

In the Islamic world, the Caliph was regarded as the guardian of religion and the upholder of political order. He was the leader of the entire community. After the

period of the first four "pious Caliphs" (Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali) dynastic rule became the norm when the Umayyads took over the Caliphate in 661 A.D. from their base at Damascus in Syria. After the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate the Abbasids came to power in the mid-eighth century as Caliphs at Baghdad. However, with the decline of central authority, the centralised institution of Caliphate (*Khilafat*) broke into three centres of power based in Spain (under the rule of a branch of the Umayyad Caliphs), Egypt (under the Fatimids) and the older one at Baghdad — each claiming the exclusive loyalty of the Muslims. Nearer home, towards the north-west, many minor dynasties carved out small states, one of which was based at Ghazna (Ghazni). The significant point to remember is that, theoretically, no Muslim could have set up an "independent" state, big or small, without procuring the permission from the Caliph, else its legitimacy could become suspect amongst the Muslims. And, yet, all this was nothing more than a formality which could be dispensed with impunity.

The recognition of a Caliph by the Delhi Sultans seen in the granting of robes of honour, letter of investiture, bestowing of titles, having the name of the Caliph inscribed on coins and reading of *khutba* in Friday prayer in his name symbolized an acceptance and a link with the Islamic world, though in reality it only meant an acceptance of a situation whereby a ruler had already placed himself in power. The Sultans of Delhi maintained the fiction of the acceptance of the position of the Caliph. Under the Saiyyids (1414-1451) and the Lodis (1451-1526 A.D.), the legends on the coins continued in the sense of a tradition being maintained but it was purely a nominal allegiance. In actual effect, the Caliphate, weakened and far removed as it was, had little direct rôle to play in the Delhi Sultanate.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What was the position of the Caliph?

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2) Who were the four "pious Caliphs"?

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3) Name the three centres of the Caliphate.

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4) What were the symbols of allegiance maintained by the Delhi Sultans with respect to the Caliphate?

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16.3 THE NATURE OF THE DELHI SULTANATE

The early Muslim Turkish State established itself in north India by virtue of conquests. Since the Turks were far fewer in number than the indigenous population over whom they sought to govern and since they also lacked resources, they, of necessity, had to control the resources of the country. This had an important bearing on the nature of the Turkish State.

In a theoretical and formal sense, the Delhi Sultans recognized the supremacy of the Islamic law (*shariah*) and tried to prevent its open violation. But they had to supplement it by framing secular regulations (*zawabit*), too. A point of view is that the Turkish State was a theocracy; in practice, however, it was the product of expediency and necessity wherein the needs of the young state assumed paramount importance. The contemporary historian Ziauddin Barani distinguished between *jahandari* ("secular") and *dindari* ("religious") and accepted the inevitability of some secular features, because of the contingent situations coming up. Thus, the needs of the emergent State shaped many policies and practices not always consistent with Islamic fundamentalism. For example, during the reign of Sultan Iltutmish (1211-1236), a sectarian group (*shafai*) of Muslim divines approached the Sultan and asked him to enforce the Islamic law strictly, that is, giving the Hindus the option of Islam or Death. On behalf of the Sultan, the *wazir*, Junaidi, replied that this could not be done for the moment as the Muslims were like salt in a dish of food. Barani records a conversation that Sultan Alauddin Khalji had with one of his leading theologians, Qazi Mughisuddin, over the question of appropriation of booty. While the Qazi pointed out the legalistic position which prevented the Sultan from taking the major share of the booty, the Sultan is said to have emphasized that he acted according to the needs of the State which were paramount. These instances show that, in practice, the Turkish State was not theocratic but evolved according to its special needs and circumstances despite the fact that the main ruling class professed Islam.

16.4 CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

The central administrative machinery of the Sultanate consisted of the nobles controlling various offices with the Sultan at the helm of affairs.

16.4.1 The Sultan

In the early Islamic world, there was no sanction for the position of the Sultan. With the disintegration of the Caliphate, the Sultan began to appear in the sense of a powerful ruler—an independent sovereign of a certain territory.

The Delhi Sultans could make civil and political regulations for public welfare. *Khutba* and *sikka* were recognised as important attributes of sovereignty. The *khutba* was the formal sermon following the congregational prayer on Fridays wherein the name of the Sultan was mentioned as the head of the community. Coinage was the ruler's prerogative: his name was inscribed on the coins (*sikka*).

The Sultanate witnessed a rapid rise and fall of dynasties. The Sultan, or a contender to the throne, could only keep himself in power with the support of the nobles who were themselves divided into numerous groups. Barani says that Balban stressed the special position of the Sultan as 'shadow of God' (*zill al Allah*) on earth. Balban emphasized courtly splendour decorum and etiquette. He also believed in severe exemplary punishments even to the nobles. All this bore relevance to a situation where the throne was never safe from the ambitions of the nobles, many of whom felt that they had an equal right to rule.

There were many officials to look after the royal household. The *wakil-i-dar* looked after the entire household and disbursed salaries to the Sultan's personal staff. The *amir-i-hajib* functioned as the master of ceremonies at the court. All petitions to the Sultan were submitted through the latter. There were other minor officials also.

16.4.2 The Wizarat (Finance)

The *wazir*, as the head of the *diwan-i wizarat*, was the most important figure in the central administration. Though he was one of the four important departmental heads, he exercised a general supervisory authority over others. The *wizarat* organised the collection of revenue, exercised control over expenditure, kept accounts, disbursed salaries and allotted revenue assignments (*iqta*) at Sultan's order.

There were several officials who helped the *wizarat* such as the *mushrif-i mumalik* or the accountant-general and the *mustaufi-i mumalik* or the auditor-general. During

the reign of Alauddin Khalji, the *diwan-i mustakhraj* was made responsible for the collection of arrears of revenue.

16.4.3 The *Diwan-i Arz*

The *diwan-i arz* or military department was headed by the *ariz-i mumalik*. He was responsible for the administration of military affairs. He inspected the troops maintained by the *iqta*-holders. He also supervised the commissariat duties (supply and transport) of the Sultan's army. During the reign of Alauddin Khalji, some measures were introduced to maintain a check on recruitment and quality. He ordered a descriptive roll (*huliya*) of every soldier to be kept and also ordered the branding (*dagh*) of horses to be done so that horses of poor quality were not brought by the *amirs* or *iqta*-holders to the muster. It seems that the branding of horses was strictly maintained till the reign of Muhammad Tughluq.

The army consisted of troops maintained by nobles as well as the standing army (*hashm-i qalb*) of the Sultan. In the thirteenth century, the royal cavalry, in lieu of cash salary, was assigned the revenue of small villages in the vicinity of Delhi which Moreland calls "*small iqta*". Under Iltutmish, the number of such cavalry was about three thousand. Balban tried to do away with these assignments which led to much dissatisfaction. Alauddin Khalji was successful in doing so, and he started paying his soldiers in cash—a trooper was paid 238 *tanka* while one who brought an additional horse used to get 78 *tanka* more.

Feroz Tughluq gave up the practice of paying his royal soldiers in cash: instead, he gave them a paper called *itlaq* - a sort of draft on whose strength they could claim their salary from the Sultan's revenue officers of the *khalisa* ("Crown" or "reserve" land).

16.4.4 Other Departments

The *diwan-i insha'* looked after State correspondence. It was headed by *dahir-i mumalik*. This department dealt with all correspondence between the Sultan and other rulers, and between the Sultan and provincial governments. It issued *farmans* and received letters from subordinate officials.

The *barid-i mumalik* was the head of the State news-agency. He had to keep information of all that was happening in the Sultanate. The administrative subdivisions had local *barids* who sent regular news—letters to the central office. The *barids* reported matters of state—wars, rebellions, local affairs, finances, the state of agriculture etc. Apart from the *barids*, another set of reporters existed who were known as *munhiyan*.

The *diwan-i risalat* was headed by the *sadr-us sudur*. He was the highest religious officer. He took care of the ecclesiastical affairs and appointed *qazis*. He approved various grants like *waqf* for religious and educational institutions, *wazifa* and *idrar* to the learned and the poor.

The Sultan headed the judiciary and was the final court of appeal in both civil and criminal matters. Next to him was the *qazi-ul mumalik* (or *qazi-ul quzzat*), the chief judge of the Sultanate. Often, the offices of the *sadr-us sudur* and *qazi-ul mumalik* were held by the same person. The chief *qazi* headed the legal system and heard appeals from the lower courts.

The *muhatsibs* (public censors) assisted the judicial department. Their task was to see that there was no public infringement of the tenets of Islam.

16.4.5 Slaves and *Karkhanas*

Slaves were an important feature of the royal household. Alauddin Khalji owned 50,000 slaves, while Feroz Tughluq is reputed to have had 1,80,000 slaves. During his reign, a separate department of slaves (*diwan-i bandagan*) was set up. The slaves were used for personal service and acted as body-guards (the latter numbering 40,000). Afif also records that a large number of Feroz's slaves (12,000) worked as artisans (*kasibs*). Barani describes a large slave market at Delhi, but by the first quarter of the 16th century there is no mention of slave markets.

The needs of the royal household were met through *karkhanas* which were broadly

(*kitabikhana*) was considered as *karkhana*. Under Feroz Tughluq, there were 36 *karkhanas*. Each *karkhana* was supervised by a noble who had the rank of a *malik* or *khan*, and a *mutasarrif* who was responsible for the accounts and acted as the immediate supervisor. A separate *diwan* or accounts office existed for the *karkhanas*.

The *karkhanas* manufactured articles for Imperial household as well as for military purposes. It is said that Muhammad Tughluq had employed about five hundred workers in gold brocade and four thousand weavers to manufacture cloth required by the court and for making robes of honour to be given in gift to the favoured ones. It must be remembered, however, that articles produced in the royal *karkhanas* were not commodities, i.e. not for sale in the market. Nobles, too, maintained their own *karkhanas* (for further details see Block 6).

✓ Check Your Progress 2

1) Examine the nature of Turkish state under Delhi Sultans.

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2) Outline the main functions of the *diwan-i wizarat*.

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3) Write a note on *karkhanas*.

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4) Mark (✓) the right answer : *Khutba* was:

- a) the right to coin money
- b) a robe of honour
- c) the recital of sermon after the congregational Friday prayer.

5) Who were the following :

- a) *mushrif-i mumalik*
- b) *ariz-i mumalik*
- c) *barid*
- d) *qazi-ul mumalik*

16.5 REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

What was the revenue system during the 13th century? We do not get a clear picture; even the exact magnitude of the revenue-demand under the Ilbarite rule is uncertain. Perhaps the old agrarian system continued to function with the difference that the composition of the supreme appropriators of the surplus produce at the centre had changed, that is, the Turkish ruling group had replaced the previous receivers of the land revenue. However, some reconstruction can be made by projecting back the account of Barani about the situation prevailing in this respect under Sultan Alauddin Khalji's early rule. Briefly, we are told of three groups of rural istocracy—*khot*, *muqaddam*, and *chaudhuri*—who collected land revenue (*kharaj*) from the peasants on behalf of the state, and deposited the same with the officials of the *diwan-i wizarat*. For this service, they were allowed perquisites (*haqq-i khoti*) as remuneration by the state which consisted of being exempted from the revenue of a portion of land held by them. Also, they took something from the peasants as their share of the produce which Barani calls *qismat-i khoti*. Besides land revenue (*kharaj*), every cultivator had to pay house tax (*ghari*) and cattle or grazing tax (*charai*). Incidentally, the *chaudhuri* might not have been directly involved in the

collection of the revenue because, according to Ibn Battuta, he was the head of "hundred villages" (*pargana*): this inference is reinforced by the fact that Barani always employs terms like *haqq-i khoti* or *muqaddami*, but never *haqq-i chaudhrai*. W.H. Moreland, however, uses the term intermediaries for all the three groups; and we shall be doing the same henceforth.

What motivated Alauddin Khalji in introducing stern measures is explained by Barani in detail (see Block 6 Unit 20). In short, the intermediaries had become intractable—always in readiness for rebellion. The Sultan levelled the following main charges against them:

- a) They did not pay the revenue themselves on that portion of their land which was not exempted from assessment; rather they shifted their 'burden' onto the peasantry, that is, they realised additional levy from the peasants besides the fixed demand of the state in order to pay their own dues.
- b) They did not pay the grazing tax.
- c) The ill-gotten 'excess of wealth' had made them so arrogant that they flouted the orders of the revenue officials by not going to the revenue office even when summoned to render accounts.

As a result, the Sultan had to strike at their resources for economic and political reasons. The measures taken by him were as follows:

- i) The magnitude of the state demand was set at half the produce of the land. The land was to be measured (*masahat*), and the land revenue fixed on the yield of each unit of the area. The term used was *wafa-i biswa* (*wafa* = yield; *biswa* = 1/20th of a *bigha*). Most probably, it was levied separately on the holding of each individual cultivator.
- ii) The intermediaries and the peasants alike were to pay the same standard of the demand (50%) without any distinction, be they intermediaries or 'ordinary peasant' (*balahar*).
- iii) The perquisites of intermediaries were disallowed.
- iv) The grazing and the house tax were to be taken from the intermediaries also.

It can be seen, then, that one objective was to free the peasants from the illegal exactions of the intermediaries. That is exactly what Barani means when he says that the Sultan's policy was that the 'burden' (*bar*) of the 'strong' (*aqwiya*) should not fall on the 'weak' (*zuafa*). We know that this 50% demand was the highest in the agrarian history of India. On the other hand, though the peasants were protected now from the economic oppression of the intermediaries, the former had to pay a higher rate of taxation than they did earlier. Since the rate was uniform in a sense it was a regressive taxation. Thus the state gained at the cost of the intermediaries, leaving the peasants in the lurch.

Such peasants as were weak and without resources were completely made prostrate, and the rich peasants who had resources and means, turned rebels. Whole regions were devastated. Cultivation was totally abandoned. The peasants of distant regions, hearing of the ruin and destruction of the peasantry of the Doab, fearful that the same orders might be issued for them as for the latter, turned away from obedience and fled to the jungles. The two years that the Sultan was in Delhi (c. 1332—4), the country of the Doab, owing to the rigours of revenue-demand and the multiplicity of *abwab* (additional cesses), was devastated. The Hindus set fire to the grain heaps and burnt them, and drove away cattle from their homes. The Sultan ordered the *shiqdars* and *fajdars* (revenue collectors and commanders) to lay waste and plunder the country. They killed many *khots* and *muqaddams*, and many they blinded. Those who escaped gathered bands and fled into jungles; and the country became ruined. The Sultan in those times went to the district of Baran (modern Bulandshahr), on a hunting expedition; he ordered that the entire district of Baran be plundered and laid waste. The Sultan himself plundered and laid waste from Kanauj to Dalmau. Whoever was captured was killed. Most (peasants) ran away and fled into the jungles. They (the Sultan's troops) surrounded the jungles and killed every one whom they found within the jungles.

1. Ziauddin Barani's account of the oppression of the peasantry during Alauddin Khalji's reign. English translation is from, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I, ed. Tapan Ray Chaudhuri and Irfan Habib, London, 1982, p. 64.

It is true that the intermediaries were eliminated from direct revenue collection, but they were still expected to maintain law and order in the countryside and help the revenue officials without any remuneration or perquisites. The state's direct relations with the peasants resulted in an expansion of revenue officials called variously *'ummāl*, *mutasarrif*, *mushrif*, *muhasilan*, *navisindagan*, etc. Soon, large scale corruption and embezzlements surfaced among the revenue officials for which they were ruthlessly punished by the *naib wazir*, Sharaf Qaini: about 8 to 10 thousand officials were imprisoned. The process for discovering the deceit was simple: the *bahi* or the ledger of the village *patwari* was meticulously scrutinised by the auditors. The *bahi* contained every payment, legal or illegal, made to the revenue collectors, and these payments were then compared with the receipts. Corruption occurred in spite of the fact that Alauddin Khalji had raised the salary of the revenue collectors.

Barani gives an indication of the extent of the area where these measures were operative: it was quite a large area, covering the heart of his empire. But Bihar, Awadh, Gujarat and parts of Malwa and Rajputana are not mentioned. At any rate, it must be borne in mind that these measures were largely meant for the *khalisa* ("crown" or "reserve" land). (Also see MAP at the end of the Block.)

As for the mode of payment, Moreland thinks that ordinarily payment in cash was the general practice during the 13th century, and it had become quite widely prevalent by the 14th century. However, Alauddin himself preferred collection in grain. He decreed that the whole revenue due from the *khalisa* in the *Doab* should be realized in kind, and only half the revenue due from Delhi (and its suburbs) in cash. The reason for his preference for collection in grain was not only to have a large reserve of grain stored at Delhi and other areas for contingencies (such as scarcity owing to drought or other factors), but also to utilize the storage as a lever for his price-fixation measures in the grain market.

Two important changes were introduced by Ghiyasuddin Tughluq:

- a) The intermediaries got back their *haqq-i khoti* (but not *qismat-i khoti*). They were also exempted from the house and cattle tax.
- b) the procedure of measurement (*masahat*) was to continue along with observation or "actual yield" (*bar hukm hasil*).

As for Muhammad Tughluq, there is a confusion that he enhanced the rate of land tax beyond 50%. It is also thought that after the death of Alauddin Khalji, the rate was reduced by the Khalji rulers which was later raised to the previous level by Muhammad Tughluq. Both these views are incorrect: the rate fixed by Alauddin was never sought to be tampered. What Muhammad Tughluq actually did was to impose new cesses (*abwab*) as well as revive the older ones (for example, *charai* and *ghari* on the intermediaries). Apart from this, it seems that measurement alone was retained for assessment purpose. The matter aggravated when assessment in kind (grain) was carried out not on the principle of the "actual yield" but on the officially decreed yields (*wafa-i farmani*) for each unit of the measured area. Again, for payment in cash, commutation was not done according to the market prices but on the basis of the rates as "ordered by the Sultan" (*nirkh-i farmani*). And, then, as Barani says, all these taxes and cesses were to be realized *rigorously*. The area covered under these regulations was the *khalisa* land in the *Doab*. The result was obvious: an unprecedented rebellion of the peasants, led by the intermediaries, occurred which led to bloody confrontations. Feroz Shah claims to have abolished twenty three cesses including *charai* and *ghari*.

Another development that took place, especially under the Tughluqs, was the practice of revenue-farming, that is, the task of collecting the revenue of some areas was sometimes given to contractors who perhaps gave a lump sum in advance for the right of revenue collection for a certain period. Under Feroz Shah, 'water tax' (*haqq-i sharb*) was taken from those cultivators who irrigated their land from the water supplied from the canals constructed by the state. It must be pointed out that in case of bad harvest, the state tried to adjust the land tax, and also gave agricultural loans to the peasants called *sondhar* in Muhammad Tughluq's reign.

What was the total estimated revenue during any period of the Delhi Sultanate? No such attempt seems to have been made before the reign of Sultan Feroz Shah Tughluq. Afif tells us that at the order of this Sultan, Khwaja Hisamuddin Junaid

determined the *jama* (estimated revenue) of the kingdom according to the "rule of inspection" (*bar hukm mushahada*). It took six years to do this job, and the figure arrived at was six *kror* and seventy-five *lakhs tankas* (a silver coin: see Block 6) which continued to be valid for the entire reign of the Sultan. For further details on Revenue Administration during the fourteenth century see Moreland's Appendix 'C': "Some Forteenth Century Passages" in Block 6.

Check Your Progress 3

1) What measures did Alauddin Khalji take to eliminate the intermediaries?

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2) Define the following :

- a) *Khalisa*
- b) *Kharaj*
- c) *Abwab*
- d) *Sondhar*

16.6 IQTA SYSTEM AND PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

The territorial expansion and consolidation of the Sultanate was a process which continued throughout the 13th and 14th centuries. It involved varying kinds of control in terms of territories: those brought under direct administration and those which paid tribute and remained semi-autonomous. The expansion of the Sultanate and the difficulties involved in administering areas that were far away from the centre shaped different kinds of control.

16.6.1 *Iqta* System

The initial Turkish conquests in the early 13th century displaced many local chiefs (whom the contemporary sources refer to as *rai* and *rana*). In order to consolidate, the Turkish rulers made revenue assignments (*iqta*), in lieu of cash, to their nobles (*umara*). The assignees (known as *muqti* and *wali*) collected revenue from these areas, defrayed their own expenses, paid the troops maintained by them and sent the surplus (*jawazil*) to the centre. *Iqta* is an Arabic word and the institution had been in force in the early Islamic world as a form of reward for services to the State. It was used in the Caliphate administration as a way of financing operations and paying civil and military officers. The grant of *iqta* did not imply a right to the land nor was it hereditary though the holders of *iqta* tended to acquire hereditary rights in Feroz Tughluq's reign. These revenue assignments were transferable, the *iqta*-holder being transferred from one region to another every three or four years. Therefore, *iqta* should not be equated with the fief of medieval feudal Europe, which were hereditary and non-transferable. The assignments could be large (a whole province or a part). Assignments given to nobles carried administrative, military and revenue collecting responsibilities. Thus, provincial administration was headed by the *muqti* or *wali*. He had to maintain an army composed of horsemen and foot soldiers.

"They (the *muqtis*) should know that their right over the subjects is only to take the rightful amount of money or perquisite (*mal-i haqq*) in a peaceful manner... the life, property and the family of the subject should be immune from any harm, the *muqtis* have no right over them; if the subject desires to make a direct appeal to the Sultan, the *muqti* should not prevent him. Every *muqti* who violates these laws should be dismissed and punished... the *muqtis* and *walis* are so many superintendents over them as the king is superintendent over other *muqtis*... After three or four years, the *amils* and the *muqtis* should be transferred so that they may not be too strong"

2. A passage from Nizamul Mulk Tusi's *Siyasatnama* on the rights of *muqtis*. English translation from A.B.M. Habibullah, *The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*, Allahabad, 1976 pp. 209-10.

16.6.2 Provincial and Local Administration

As the State became more settled and efforts were made for greater centralization, provincial administration also underwent a change. A separation between fiscal and military responsibilities started evolving. During the reign of Muhammad Tughluq, fiscal responsibilities were partially withdrawn from the *muqtis* or *walis* and placed under central officers. According to Ibn Battuta, the *iqta* of Amroha was placed under two officers, one called *amir* (possibly in charge of the army and administration) and the other as *wali-ul kharaj* (in charge of revenue collection). Muhammad Tughluq also ordered that the salary of the soldiers maintained by *iqta*-holders be paid by the *diwan-i wizarat* to prevent fraud by the officers.

Greater control also came to be exercised over fiscal matters. The *diwan's* office, at the centre, received and examined detailed statements regarding income and expenditure in the provinces. It supervised the work of the revenue officials in the provinces. The provinces had a *sahib-i diwan*, whose office kept books of account and submitted information to the centre. It was assisted by officials like *mutasarrifs*. The entire lower revenue staff was called *karkun*.

By the end of the thirteenth century, contemporary sources refer to an administrative division, known as *shiqq*. We do not have adequate information about the exact nature of *shiqq*. However, by the time of Sher Shah (1540-1545 A.D.) *shiqq* had emerged as a well-defined administrative unit, known as *sarkar*. Administrative officials, mentioned with respect to *shiqq*, were *shiqqdar* and *faujdar*. The demarcation of their duties is not very clear.

According to Ibn Battuta, *chaudhuri* was the head of hundred villages. This was the nucleus of the administrative unit later called *pargana*. The village was the smallest unit of administration. The functioning and administration of the village remained basically the same as it had existed in pre-Turkish times. The main village functionaries were *khot*, *muqaddam* (headman) and *patwari* (see Unit 16.5). The judicial administration of the sub-division was patterned on that of the centre. Courts of the *qazi* and *sadr* functioned in the provinces. The *kotwal* maintained law and order. At the village level, the *panchayat* heard civil cases.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Write a note on *iqta*.

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- 2) What were the functions of the *wali* or *muqti*?

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- 3) What steps were taken to curb the powers of the *muqti* in the 14th century?

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- 4) Define the following:

a) *shiqq*

b) *kotwal*

c) *patwari*

16.7 LET US SUM UP

We have seen how the Delhi Sultanate was shaped by its historical experience of being a part of the wider Islamic world and how it changed and evolved as a result of its needs and circumstances during the 13th century. We have studied the administrative framework of the Sultanate at the central and local levels. The need of maintaining a large army (for defence and expansion) and maintaining an administrative apparatus shaped many of its institutions, such as the *iqta*. Greater centralization brought about changes in the nature of administrative control.

16.8 KEY WORDS

Abwab	: Cesses
Amir	: Officer
Bahi	: Ledger/accounts books
Balahar	: Village menials/ordinary peasants
Biswa	: 1/20th part of a <i>bigha</i>
Charai	: Grazing-tax
Chaudhuri	: Head of Hundred villages or <i>pargana</i>
Dagh	: Branding (of horses)
Diwan-i Wizarat	: Finance Department
Fawazil	: Surplus amount
Ghari	: House-tax
Hashm-i qalb	: Central/royal cavalry
Hasil	: Actual revenue
Idrar	: Revenue-free land grant
Itlaq	: Draft, assignment order
Jama	: Estimated Revenue
Khalisa	: "Crown" ("reserve") land whose revenue was reserved for the Sultan's treasury
Khot	: Village official/revenue collector
Khutba	: A sermon recited in mosques on Fridays wherein the name of the ruler was included
Masahat	: Measurement
Muhasillan	: Revenue collectors
Muqaddam	: Village headman
Muqti or Wali	: <i>Iqta</i> -holder/governor
Mushrif	: Revenue officer
Mutasarrif	: Auditor
Navsindagan	: Clerk
Nirkh-i farmani	: Officially decreed prices
Patwari	: Village-accountant
Qismat-i khoti and Haqq-i khoti	: Perquisites
Rais and Ranas	: Chiefs
Shariat	: Islamic law
Tanka	: Silver coin
Ummal	: Plural of <i>amil</i> (revenue officer)

- Wafa-i farmani** : Officially decreed yields
Waqf : Grants assigned for the maintenance of religious institutions
Wazifa : Stipend
Zawabit : Regulations

16.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sec. 16.2
- 2) See Sec. 16.2
- 3) See Sec. 16.2
- 4) See Sec. 16.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sec. 16.3
- 2) See Sub-sec. 16.4.2
- 3) See Sub-sec. 16.4.5
- 4) a) b) c)
- 5) See Sub-sec. 16.4.2, 16.4.3, 16.4.4

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See-Sec. 16.5
- 2) See Sec. 16.5

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See Sub-sec. 16.6.1
- 2) See Sub-sec. 16.6.1
- 3) See Sub-sec. 16.6.1
- 4) See Sub-sec. 16.6.2

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UNIT 17 FORMATION OF THE SULTANATE RULING CLASS

Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 The Ruling Class at the Time of the Ghorian Invasion
- 17.3 Composition of the Ruling Class
 - 17.3.1 The Ilbarites
 - 17.3.2 The Khaljis
 - 17.3.2 The Tughluqs
- 17.4 *Iqta* and the Dispersal of Resources Among the Ruling Class
- 17.5 Ulema
- 17.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.7 Key Words
- 17.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

17.0 OBJECTIVES

In Unit 16, we have discussed the administrative structure of the Delhi Sultanate. In this Unit we will analyse the nature of the Sultanate ruling class taking into consideration the following :

- its role as an appropriator of surplus,
- the composition of the ruling class,
- changes in the ruling class, and
- the interests that bound it together.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

The most important problem of the Sultanate in its early stages, and even later, was to consolidate the conquered territories. To this end, the ruling class served as an important pivot who shared the resources of the country. The Turks brought with them the institution of the *iqtas* (see Sec. 16.6), which helped in the centralization of authority to a great extent. As greater centralization was sought to be effected, changes could be seen in the institution of the '*iqta*' as well as in the composition of the ruling class.

17.2 THE RULING CLASS AT THE TIME OF THE GHORIAN INVASION

At the time of the Ghorian invasions, north India was divided into a number of principalities ruled by *rais* and *ranas* (local chiefs). At the village level, *khots* and *muqaddams* (village headman) stood on the borderline of the rural aristocracy. In between, the *chaudhuri* can be spotted as the head of hundred villages.

At any rate, we can accept a broad definition of the position of the pre-Ghorian ruling class as one which appropriated the surplus produce of the peasants, by exercising superior rights over land. In analyzing the formation of the ruling class in the Sultanate, some pertinent questions arise : How did the new ruling class supplant this older ruling class? What measures did it adopt for appropriating the surplus revenue? How was it different from the class that it supplanted?

Throughout the thirteenth century, the Turkish armies furthered the political and military control over North India. By the mid-fourteenth century, it spread to the Deccan. A large alien territory had to be pacified and governed and the ruling class had to be maintained and sustained. The early Turkish ruling class was very much in the nature of a co-sharer of political and financial powers with the Sultans. In the beginning, the nobles (*amiran*) were practically independent in distant areas of the conquered territories where they were sent by the Centre as governors. The latter were designated *muqti* or *wali* and their territories were known as *iqtas*. Gradually, the practice began of transferring *muqtis* from one *iqta* to another (a detailed discussion on *iqta* system is given in Unit 16). The pre-Ghorian political structure seems to have continued, with tribute being realised from the *rais* and *ranas*, who were expected to collect taxes as they had done before.

From our contemporary historians, like Minhaj Siraj and Barani, we learn that the most important nobles, and even the Sultans, in the early stages of the foundation of the Sultanate, were from the families of the Turkish slave-officers. Many of the early Turkish nobles and Sultans (such as Aibak and Ilutmish) had started their early career as slaves but they received letters of manumission (*khat-i azadi*) before becoming Sultans. One such was Qutbuddin Aibak. On his death in A.D. 1210, Ilutmish, one of his favoured slaves, seized Delhi and set himself up as Sultan. He created his own corps of Turkish slaves—the Shamsi *maliks*, called by Barani *turkan-i chihilgani* ("The Forty"). Ilutmish's nobility also included a number of *Tajik* or free-born officers. That this element of free-born immigrants continued to form a part of the ruling class is noted by Minhaj at the time of Nasiruddin Mahmud's accession (1246 A.D.). The problem of succession after the death of Ilutmish brought into light the division within the nobles.

In spite of the internal quarrels within the ruling class, there was a basic solidarity which manifested itself in its hostility to outsiders. For example, Raziya's (1236-1240 A.D.) elevation of an Abyssinian, Jamaluddin Yaqut, to the post of *amir-i akhur* ("master of the royal horses") caused great resentment. Similar was the case of Raihan, a Hindu covert to Islam. Thus, the nobility was seen as the preserver of the certain groups, sometimes under the principle of 'high birth', as reflected in the policies ascribed to Balban by Barani.

Now you can understand how an identity of interests bound the dominant groups. Race and perhaps religion, too, played important role in the formation of ruling groups. Actually, the ruling class was not a monolithic organization. There were numerous factions and cliques, each trying to guard their exclusive positions jealously. The Turkish military leaders who accompanied and participated in the Ghorian invasion formed the core of the early Turkish ruling class: they acquired most of the key-posts at the centre and provinces.

17.3.1 The Ilbarites

Qutbuddin Aibak who succeeded to the Indian territories of Muhammad Ghori, had no greater right than the other nobles like Yalduz and Qubacha who asserted their independence and autonomy at Ghazna and Sind respectively. This was to be a feature of the early history of the Sultanate. The Sultans needed the support of the nobility to establish and maintain themselves in power. For instance, Ilutmish came to the throne with the support of the nobles of Delhi. The Turkish nobles played an important part in elevating Sultans to the throne and supporting contenders to the throne. According to Barani, the older Turkish nobility used to tell each other : "What are thou that I am not, and what will thou be, that I shall not be."

The early Turkish nobility sought to emphasize their exclusiveness and their monopoly to rule. Efforts by other social groups to challenge their monopoly were resented and resisted. The nobles of Ilutmish called *turkan-i-chihilgani* ("The Forty") wielded considerable power after his death. They were an important group, and efforts by the Sultans to incorporate other groups were met with much resistance. As already mentioned, Raziya Sultan had to face stiff opposition from the

Turkish *amirs*, when she elevated an Abyssinian, Jamaluddin Yaqut, to the office of *amir-i akhur*. Efforts of Nasiruddin Mahmud (1246-1266 A.D.) to break the vested power of this group by dismissing Balban (who was one of the 'Forty') from the court and replacing him by an Indian convert, Imaduddin Raihan, did not meet with much success. Minhaj voiced the anger of the "Turks of pure lineage" who "could not tolerate Imaduddin Raihan of the tribes of Hind to rule over them." The opposition of the Turkish ruling class forced the Sultan to remove Raihan and reinstate Balban.

On his accession to the throne, Balban (1266-1286 A.D.) took measures to break the power of the *turkan-i chihilgani* by various measures. He himself was the creation of a group of nobles loyal to him. Barani states that Balban had several of the older Turkish nobles killed. This was an effort to intimidate the nobility, who could and did pose, a challenge to the Crown. Balban himself, according to Barani, kept Sultan Nasiruddin as a "puppet" (*namuna*); therefore, he was vary of the leading old nobles.

17.3.2 The Khaljis

In A.D. 1290, the Ilbari dynasty was overthrown by the Khaljis. The coming to power of the Khaljis is seen as something new by contemporary historians. Barani mentions that the Khaljis were a different "race" from the Turks. Modern scholars like C.E. Bosworth speak of them as Turks, but in the thirteenth century no one considered them as Turks, and thus it seems that the accession to power was regarded as something novel because earlier they did not form a significant part of the ruling class. Alauddin Khalji further eroded the power of the older Turkish nobility by bringing in new groups such as the Mongols (the 'New Muslims'), Indians and Abyssinians (for the latter, the example of Malik Kafur is well-known). This trend towards a broadening of the composition of the ruling class continued during the rule of the Tughluqs.

It may be incidentally mentioned here that there was a very small group called *kotwalian* (pl. of *kotwal*) at Delhi during the reign of Balban and Alauddin Khalji. Infact, this was a family group, headed by Fakhruddin who was the *kotwal* of Delhi. This group appears to have played some political role during and after Balban's death.

17.3.3 The Tughluqs

Under Muhammad Tughluq, apart from the Indians and the Afghans, the ruling class became unprecedentedly more heterogenous with the entry of larger numbers of foreign elements, especially the *Khurasani*, whom the Sultan called *aizza* (dear ones). Many of them were appointed as *amir sadah* ("commander of hundred"). Concerning the non-Muslim as well as the converted Indians, Barani laments that the Sultan raised the "low-born" (*jawahir-i lutrah*) to high status. He mentions musicians, barbers, cooks, etc. who got high positions. He gives the example of Peera Mali (gardener) who was given the *diwan-i wizarat*. Converts like Aziz-ud Din *khammar* (distiller) and Qawamul Mulk Maqbul, Afghans like Malik Makh and Malik Shahu Lodi Afghan, Hindus like Sai Raj Dhara and Bhiran Rai were given *iqta* and positions.

The reign of Feroz Tughluq does not give us any clear pattern about the social origins of the nobles. The situation was fluid with a false veneer of peace between the Sultan and the *amirs*. Certain designations were used with reference to the nobles — *khan*, *malik* and *amir*. *Khan* was often used with reference to Afghan nobles, *amir* came to mean a commander, *malik*—a chief, ruler, or king. Along with their titles of honour, the nobles were given some symbols of dignity designated as *maratib* which signified privileges—*khilat* (robe of honour), sword and dagger presented by the Sultan, horses and elephants that they were entitled to use in their processions, canopy of State and the grant of parasol (*chhatri*) and insignia and kettle-drums.

It is significant to note that every Sultan sought to form and organize a group of nobles which would be personally loyal to him. This obviated the necessity of depending upon previous groups whose loyalty was suspect. That's why we find the contemporary historians employing terms like Qutbi (ref. Qutbuddin Aibak), Shamsi

(ref. Shamsuddin Iltutmish), Balbani and Alai *amirs*. But one thing was quite certain: every group tried to capture the attention of the Sultan—whether weak or strong—because all privileges and power issued forth from the sovereign. This, in turn, went to a great extent in strengthening gradually the position of the Sultan himself if he was a man of strong will.

The Afghans were frequently recruited into the feudal bureaucracy of the Delhi Sultanate. With the coming of the Lodis (1451-1526), the Afghan predominance got enlarged.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Examine the composition of the ruling class under the Ilbarites.

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2) What changes were brought about in the composition of the nobility under the Khaljis and the Tughluqs? Write in about five lines.

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3) Mark right (✓) or wrong (×) against the following statements :

- a) In the thirteenth century the Turkish nobles were paid in cash.
- b) Muhammad Tughluq incorporated different social groups into his nobility.
- c) Barani regards the Khaljis as Turks.

17.4 IQTA AND THE DISPERSAL OF RESOURCES AMONG THE RULING CLASS

We have studied the institution of *iqta*, its early history in the Islamic world, and its application in India in Unit 16. The income of the Sultanate was primarily and largely derived from the land revenue. *Khalisa* was the term for the land whose revenue was exclusively meant for the Sultan himself, while the revenue from the land, called *iqta*, was assigned by the state to the nobles. The *muqtis* or *iqta*-holders were required to furnish military assistance to the Sultan in times of need, apart from maintaining law and order in and collecting the revenue from their *iqta*.

These revenue assignments were generally non-hereditary and transferable. In fact, it was through the institution of *iqta* that the Sultan was able to control the nobles. The *muqti* collected land revenue from the peasants of his territory and defrayed therefrom his own salary as well as that of his soldiers. The demand to send the excess amounts (*jawazil*) to the *diwan-i wizarat* was symbolic of the trend towards centralization. The *muqti* had to submit accounts of their realisation and expenditure to the treasury. Auditing was severe to prevent fraud.

Alauddin Khalji also took other measures for controlling his nobility. Regular reports from the *barids* (intelligence officers) kept him posted with the actions of the nobles. A check was kept on their socialising, and marriages between them could not take place without the permission of the Sultan. These measures have to be seen against the background of recurrent incidents of rebellions in which the *muqtis* utilized and appropriated the resources of their areas, to rebel or to make a bid for the throne. This explains the principle of transfer also. Under Muhammad Tughluq (1325-1351 A.D.), the nobles were given *iqta* in lieu of cash salary but their troops were paid in cash by the treasury in contrast to the earlier period. These new fiscal arrangements and the greater control over assignments possibly contributed to the conflict between the Sultan and the nobles since they were deprived of the gains of the *iqta* management. However, during the reign of Feroz Tughluq there was a general retreat from the practice of increased central authority over *iqta*. In practice, Feroz started granting *iqta* to the sons and heirs of *iqta*-holders. The long reign of Feroz Tughluq comparatively witnessed few rebellions but it also saw the beginning of the disintegration and decentralisation. By the time of the Lodis (1451-1526 A.D.), the *iqtadars* (now called *wajhdars*) do not seem to have been subject to constant transfers.

17.5 ULEMA

The *ulema*, the theological class, had an important position in the Sultanate. It was from them that important legal and judicial appointments were made—the *sadr-us sudur*, *shaikh-ul Islam*, *qazi*, *mufti*, *muhtasib*, *imam* and *khatib*. The *ulema* can be seen as an adjunct of the ruling class, maintained by revenue grants from the Sultan, and often by members of the ruling class. The ideological significance of the *ulema* was great as they provided legitimacy to the ruling class. They exercised an influence which was not only religious but sometimes political, too.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Write two main characteristic features of the *iqta* system.

- a)
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- b)
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2) What measures were undertaken by Alauddin Khalji to control his nobility?

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3) Mark right (✓) or wrong (✗) against the following statements :

- a) i) *Iqtas* were hereditary assignments.
 ii) *Iqtas* were the personal property of the nobles.
 iii) Generally *iqtas* were transferable revenue assignments.

- b) i) *Muqtis* were personal body-guards of the Sultan.
ii) *Muqtis* were religious teachers.
iii) *Muqtis* were governors to whom the revenue from the *iqtas* were assigned.
- c) *Fawazil* was :
- i) Extra payment met to the nobles.
ii) Excess amount paid to the exchequer by the *iqtedars*.
iii) Revenue assigned in lieu of salary.

17.6 LET US SUM UP

With the establishment of the Sultanate a new ruling class emerged which was entirely different in its nature and composition to its predecessors. In the beginning, primarily, it maintained its alien (Turkish) character, but, later, as the process of amalgamation deepened, the Sultans started recruiting nobles from other social groups as well. Thus, the nature and the character of the nobility widened greatly and not only the Turks, but Indian Muslims, non-Muslims and even foreigners (Abyssinians, etc.) were incorporated into its fold. The *ulema* can also be seen as an adjunct of the ruling class who were primarily maintained by revenue-free land grants or *wazifa* (cash).

17.7 KEY WORDS

Ami-i akhur	: Master of royal stable/horses
Amir-i sadah	: "Centurians", "Commander of hundred"
Khat-i azadi	: Letter of manumission
Tajik	: a race/"free-born nobles"
Turkan-i chihilgani	: "The Forty" (corporate body of Turkish nobles of Ilutmish)
Ulema	: Theologians
Wajhdar	: Salaried persons/ <i>iqta</i> -holders

17.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sub-sec. 17.3.1
2) See Sub-sec. 17.3.2, 17.3.3
3) a) × b) ✓ c) ×

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sec. 17.4
2) See Sec. 17.4
3) a) (i) × (ii) × (iii) ✓
b) (i) × (ii) ✓ (iii) ×
c) (i) × (ii) ✓ (iii) ×

UNIT 18 PROBLEM, CRISIS AND DECLINE

Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Nature of Kingship
- 18.3 Conflict between the Nobility and the Sultans
- 18.4 Crisis in Revenue Administration
- 18.5 Rise of Regional States
- 18.6 The Mongols
- 18.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.8 Key Words
- 18.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

18.0 OBJECTIVES

The Sultans of Delhi faced many political and administrative problems. With the passage of time, these problems became so critical that they generated political crisis and eventually led to the decline of the ruling dynasties. This Unit attempts to consider the following aspects:

- Nature of kingship,
- Conflict between the Sultan and the nobles,
- Crisis in the Revenue Administration;
- Rise of Regional States, and
- The Mongols.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

During the Sultanate period (1206-1526 A.D.), five dynasties ruled India. Since the Turks came from Central Asia, they, in the initial stage, were unaware of the Indian political and economic system. To maintain their rule, the Turks introduced many administrative practices which, by and large, continued for a long time with some changes. A study of the political history indicates that the rulers had to cope with internal strife and external dangers, especially the running struggle between the nobility and the Sultans which contributed towards the gradual decline of the Delhi Sultanate.

18.2 NATURE OF KINGSHIP

No clear and well-defined law of succession developed in the Sultanate. Hereditary principle was accepted but not adhered to invariably. There was no rule that only the eldest son would succeed (primogeniture). In one case, even a daughter was nominated (for example, Raziya Sultan). At any rate, a slave, unless he was manumitted, that is, freed, could not claim sovereignty. In fact, as it operated in the Sultanate, 'the longest the sword, the greater the claim'.

Thus, in the absence of any succession rule in the very beginning intrigues surfaced to usurp power. After Aibak's death, it was not his son Aram Shah but his slave and son-in-law Iltutmish who captured the throne. Iltutmish's death (1236 A.D.) was followed by a long period of struggle and strife when finally Balban, Iltutmish's slave

of the "Forty" fame, assumed power in 1266 A.D. You have already seen how Balban attempted to give a new shape to the concept of kingship to salvage the prestige of the office of the Sultan, but the struggle for power that started soon after Balban's death confirms again that the 'sword' remained the main deciding factor. Kaiqubad was installed at the throne against the claims of Balban's nominee, Kaikhusrau. Later, even he was slain by the Khalji Malik (1290 A.D.) who laid the foundation of the Khalji rule. In 1296 A.D. Alauddin Khalji, killed his uncle, Jalaluddin Khalji and occupied the throne. Alauddin Khalji's death signalled civil war and scramble for power. Muhammad Tughluq's reign weakened due to the rebellions of *amirs*. Rivalries that followed after Feroz Tughluq ultimately led to the rise of the Saiyyids (1414-51 A.D.).

With the accession of the Lodis (1451-1526 A.D.) a new element—the Afghans was added. The Afghans had a certain peculiar concept of sovereignty. They were prepared to accept the position of a Sultan over them, but they sought to partition the empire among their clans (*Farmulis, Sarwanis, Niyazis, etc.*). After the death of Sultan Sikandar Lodi (1517 A.D.), the empire was divided between Ibrahim and Jalal. Even the royal privileges and prerogatives were equally shared by the clan members. For example, keeping of elephants was the royal privilege but Azam Humayun Sarwani is reported to have possessed seven hundred elephants. Besides, the Afghans entertained the concept of maintaining tribal militia which in the long run greatly hampered the military efficiency of the Central Government. It is true that Sikandar Lodi tried to keep the ambitious Afghan nobles in check, but it seems that the concept of Afghan polity was more tilted towards decentralization that created fissures in the end.

18.3 CONFLICT BETWEEN THE NOBILITY AND THE SULTANS

The political history of the Sultanate period testifies that consolidation and decline of the Sultanate were largely the result of constructive and destructive activities of the nobles (*umara*). The nobles always tried to maximise their demands in terms of the economic and political gains.

Under the Ilbarite rule (1206-90 A.D.), the conflicts usually revolved around three issues: succession, organization of the nobility and division of economic and political power between them and the Sultans. When Qutbuddin Aibak became the Sultan, his authority was not accepted by the influential nobles such as Qubacha (governor of Multan and Uchh), Yilduz (governor of Ghazni), and Ali Mardan (governor of Bengal). This particular problem was inherited by Iltutmish who finally overcame it through diplomacy as well as by force. Later, Iltutmish organised the nobles in a corporate body, known as *turkan-i chihilgani* ("The Forty") which was personally loyal to him. Naturally, other groups of nobles (see Unit 17) envied the status and privileges of the members of the "Forty", but this does not mean that the latter were free from their internal bickerings. At the most they united in one principle: to plug the entry of non-Turkish persons in the charmed circle as far as possible. On the other hand, the "Forty" tried to retain its political influence over the Sultan who would not like to alienate this group, but at the same time would not surrender his royal privilege of appointing persons of other groups as officers. Thus, a delicate balance was achieved by Iltutmish which broke down after his death. For example, Iltutmish had declared his daughter, Raziya, as his successor during his life, but some nobles did not approve her succession after his death, because she tried to organize non-Turkish groups (Abyssinians and Indians) as counterweight to the "Forty". That was one main reason why a number of nobles of this group supported her brother, Ruknuddin whom they thought to be incompetent and weak, thereby giving them an opportunity to maintain their position. This spectacle continued during the reign of Nasiruddin Mahmud (1246-66 A.D.) also, as exemplified by the rise and fall of Imaduddin Raihan, an Indian convert. This episode coincided with the banishment of Balban who was the *naib* (deputy) of Sultan Mahmud (and also belonged to the "Forty") and his subsequent recall.

During Balban's reign (1266-87 A.D.), the influence of the *turkan-i chihilgani* was minimised. Since he himself was a member of the "Forty" before his accession, he was fully aware of the nobles' rebellious activities. Therefore, he eased out the "tallest poppies" amongst them through assassin's dagger or poisoning, even including his cousin. On the other hand, he formed a group of loyal and trusted nobles called "Balbani". The removal of many members of the "Forty" deprived the state of the services of veterans and the void could not be fulfilled by the new and not so experienced "Balbani" nobles. This situation inevitably led to the fall of the Ilbarite rule, paving the way for the Khaljis.

The reign of Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316 A.D.) saw a broadening in the composition of nobles. He did not admit of monopolisation of the state by any one single group of nobles. State offices were open to talent and loyalty, to the exclusion of race and creed. Besides, he controlled them through various measures (see Unit 17). Moreover, the enhancement of land revenue up to 50 per cent of the surplus produce (see Unit 16) must have pacified the nobles because an increase in the revenue of their respective *iqta* would have raised their salary, too. Territorial expansion also provided enough resources towards recruiting persons with *talent*. The case of Malik Kafur, an Abyssinian slave, is well-known. But this situation was shortlived: the death of Alauddin Khalji brought out once again the dissensions and conspiracies of the nobles, leading to the elimination of the Khaljis as rulers.

As for the Tughluqs, you know (see Unit 17) how Muhammad Tughluq made attempts to organize nobles again and again, with turns and twists. But all his efforts failed to put them under check. Even the Khurasanis, whom he used to call "*Aizzah*" (the dear ones), betrayed him. The problems created by the nobles can be gauged from the fact that twenty-two rebellions took place during his reign with the loss of at least one territory, later known as Bahmani kingdom.

The crisis set in motion after Muhammad Tughluq's death seems to have gone out of hands. Under these circumstances, Feroz Tughluq could not be expected to be stern with the nobles. They were given many concessions. They succeeded in making their *iqtas* hereditary. The appeasement policy of Sultan pleased the nobles, but in the long run, it proved disastrous. The army became inefficient because the practice of branding (*dagh*) of the horses introduced by Alauddin Khalji was almost given up. It was not possible, henceforth, for his descendants or later rulers to roll back the tide of decline of the Delhi Sultanate.

Under the Sayyids (1414-51 A.D.) and the Lodis (1451-1526 A.D.), the situation did not appear to be comfortable: the former were not at all fit for the role of saviours. Sikandar Lodi made the last attempt to prevent the looming catastrophe. But dissensions among the Afghans and their unlimited individual ambitions hastened the final demise, actually its murder, with Babur as the executioner.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Critically examine the role of nobility in the disintegration of the Sultanate.

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- 2) How far did the absence of law of primogeniture contribute to the decline of the Sultanate?

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3) Discuss the chief characteristic features of the Afghan theory of kingship.

18.4 CRISIS IN REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

Iluttmish had introduced a sound system of revenue assignments (*iqta*) through which the vast bureaucracy was maintained. Feroz Tughluq's reign, however, saw deterioration in its working. During his reign, revenue assignments tended to be hereditary and permanent. This applied even to the (royal ?) soldiers (*yan-i hashm*). "If a person died," says Afif, "his office would go permanently to his son; if he had no son, then to his son-in-law; if he had no son-in-law, then to his slave; if he had no slave then to his women." Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517 A.D.) stopped to reclaim the balance (*fawazil*). The tendency of the principal assignees to sub-assign their territories also increased greatly during his reign.

All this had deep implications. It meant not only loss of vast revenue resources to the state exchequer but by making the assignments permanent the Sultan allowed the assignees to develop strong local roots which led to wide-scale corruption and turbulence.

18.5 RISE OF REGIONAL STATES

You have already studied that the clashes between the nobles and the Delhi Sultans marred the Sultanate from the beginning of its foundation. But, so long as the centre was powerful to retaliate, the rebellions were successfully crushed. Signs of physical disintegration were witnessed for the first time during Muhammad Tughluq's reign in 1347 A.D. with the establishment of the Bahamani kingdom. But the Sultanate remained intact at least nearly for fifty years when finally the Timurid invasion (1398 A.D.) exposed its weakness. It provided ample opportunity for the nobles to establish their own areas of influence, independent of the Sultan. Governors like Khwaja Jahan (Jaunpur) in 1394, Khwaja in 1394, Dilawar Khan (Malwa) in 1401, Zafar Khan (Gujarat) in 1407, and some regions in Rajasthan also declared their independence during the 15th century. Bengal was already a semi-independent kingdom since the days of Bughra Khan (for details see Block 8). The Sultanate practically shrank to the radius of 200 miles around Delhi. It had deep implications. Loss of the fertile provinces of Bengal, Malwa, Jaunpur and Gujarat curtailed greatly the vast revenue resources of the state. That, in turn disabled the centre to wage long wars and organise campaigns against the refractory elements. The situation became so critical under the Sayyids and the Lodis that even for regular revenue exactions the Sultans had to send yearly campaigns. For example, forces were sent repeatedly to suppress the Katehr and Mewati chiefs with frequent intervals from 1414 to 1432 A.D. Similarly, the chiefs of Bayana and Gwalior also showed their reluctance to pay revenue and, as a result, repeated campaigns followed from 1416 to 1506 A.D. All this shows that the control of the Sultans during the 15th century remained nominal and only minimum efforts would have sufficed to overthrow the Sultanate.

18.6 THE MONGOLS

To what extent the Mongol invasions could be held responsible for the decline of the Delhi Sultanate? As you have read in Block 4, the Mongol danger first appeared

overcome it through diplomacy. Their invasions continued up to the period of Muhammad Tughluq with intervals. Balban, Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq were very much conscious of the Mongol assaults and resisted them successfully. True, much money and time had to be spent and thousands of soldiers were sacrificed, but it does not seem that these invasions enfeebled the Sultanate in any substantial manner. Occasional shocks were awesome but without any visible damage to the economy or the state apparatus.

✓ Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the implications of Feroz Tughluq's policy of making the assignments (iqta) permanent and hereditary?

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- 2) To what extent rise of the regional states led to the decline of the Delhi Sultanate?

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18.7 LET US SUM UP

One political reason for the decline of the Sultanate was the absence of any well-established and universally accepted law of succession. This was in line with the entire history of the Islamic polity. As long as a Sultan was strong and was able to gain the support of some groups of nobles, he could continue with some superficial semblance of dynastic stability. Dissensions and conflicts amongst the ruling groups might remain apparently dormant in such circumstances; but at the slightest opportunity their internal struggle would come to the force often in a violent fashion. Initially, the *iqta* system served the central authority: its elements of transfer and non-permanence ensured the Sultan's power. On the other hand, the gradual disappearance of these principles, especially during Feroz Tughluq's rule, paved the way for the steady dissipation of the state's authority. The upshot was the emergence of autonomous and, then, independent political centres in different regions. The Mongols might have hammered the Sultanate off and on but, on the whole, their forays did not affect the Sultanate's political and economic fortune.

18.8 KEY WORDS

- Aizzah : "Dear Ones" (Khurasani nobles under Muhammad Tughluq)
- Umara : Nobles (plural of *amir*)
- Yaran-i hashm : Soldiers

18.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sec. 18.2
- 2) See Sec. 18.2
- 3) See Sec. 18.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sec. 18.4
- 2) See Sec. 18.5

SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

A.B.M. Habibullah, *The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*.

W.H. Moreland, *The Agrarian System of Moslem India*. (Chapters II & III; Appendices A, B and C).

R.P. Tripathi, *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration*.

K.S. Lal, *History of the Khaljis* (Chapter XI).

Mohammad Habib & K.A. Nizami, *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol V.

Tapan Ray Chaudhuri & Irfan Habib, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol, I, pp. 45-82.)

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APPENDIX

A REPRODUCTION FROM W.H. MORELAND, AGRARIAN SYSTEM OF MOSLEM INDIA

Provincial Governors in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries

The words "Province," and "Governor" are used in Chapter II to represent two groups of terms, which I take to be either precisely synonymous, or else distinguished only by minor differences, of no practical importance for our present purpose. The first group is *wilayat, wali*. The word *wilayat* is used in the chronicles in various senses, which can almost always be recognised with certainty from the context: it may mean (1) a definite portion of the kingdom, that is, a province; (2) an indefinite portion of the kingdom, that is, a tract or region; (3) the kingdom as a whole; (4) a foreign country; (5) the home-country of a foreigner (in which last sense a derived form has recently become naturalised in English as "Blighty"). *Wali* occasionally means the ruler of a foreign country, but the ordinary sense is Governor of a province of the kingdom, that is to say, a localised officer serving directly under the orders of the King or his Ministers.

So far as I know, it has never been suggested that the *Wali* held anything but a bureaucratic position at this period, and the word Governor represents it precisely, as is the case throughout the history of Western Asia. The position is different in regard to the second group of terms *iqta, muqti* (more precisely, *iqta, muqti*). Various translators in the nineteenth century rendered these terms by phrases appropriated from the feudal system of Europe; their practice has been followed by some recent writers, in whose pages we meet "fiefs", "feudal chiefs", and such entities; and the ordinary reader is forced to conclude that the organisation of the kingdom of Delhi was heterogeneous, with some provinces ruled by bureaucratic Governors (*Wali*), but most of the country held in portions (*iqta*) by persons (*Muqti*), whose position resembled that of the barons of contemporary Europe. It is necessary, therefore to examine the question whether these expressions represent the facts, or, in other words, whether the kingdom contained any element to which the nomenclature of the feudal system can properly be applied. The question is one of fact. The nature of the European feudal system is tolerably well known to students: the position of the *Muqtis* in the Delhi kingdom can be ascertained from the chronicles; and comparison will show whether the use of these archaic terms brings light or confusion into the agrarian history of Northern India.

The ordinary meaning of *Iqta* in Indo-Persian literature is an Assignment of revenue conditional on future service. The word appears in this sense frequently in the Moghul period as a synonym (along with *tuyul*) of the more familiar *jagir*; and that it might carry the same sense in the thirteenth century is established, among several passages, by the story told by Barani (60, 61) of the 2000 troopers who held Assignments, but evaded the services on which the Assignments were conditional. The villages held by these men are described as their *iqtas*, and the men themselves as *iqtadars*. At this period, however, the word *iqta* was used commonly in a more restricted sense, as in the phrase "the twenty *iqtas*", used by Barani (50) to denote the bulk of the kingdom. It is obvious that "the twenty *iqtas*" points to something of a different order from the 2000 *iqtas* in the passage just quoted; and all through the chronicles, we find particular *iqtas* referred to as administrative charges, and not mere Assignments. The distinction between the two senses is marked most clearly by the use of the derivative nouns of possession; at this period, *iqtadar* always means an assignee in the ordinary sense, but *Muqti* always means the holder of one of these charges. The question then is, was the *Muqti*'s position feudal or bureaucratic?

To begin with, we may consider the origin of the nobility from whom the *Muqtis* were chosen. The earliest chronicler gives us the biographies¹ of all the chief nobles

¹ T. Nasiri, book xxii, p. 229 ff. I follow the Cambridge History in using the form *Itutmish* for the name usually written *Altamash*.

of his time, and we find from them that in the middle of the thirteenth century practically every man who is recorded as having held the position of *beg* began his career as a royal slave. Shamsuddin Iluttmish, the second effective king of Delhi, who had himself been the property of the first king, bought foreign slaves in great numbers, employed them in his household, and promoted them, according to his judgement of their capacities, to the highest positions in his kingdom. The following are a few sample biographies condensed from this chronicle.

Taghan Khan (p. 242) was purchased by Shamsuddin, and employed in succession as page, keeper of the pen-case,¹ food-taster, master of the stable, *Muqti* of Badaun, and *Muqti* of Lakhnauti, where the insignia of royalty were eventually conferred on him.

Saifuddin Aibak (p. 259) was purchased by the king, and employed successively as keeper of the wardrobe, sword-bearer, *Muqti* of Samana, *Muqti* of Baran, and finally *Vakil-i dar*, apparently, at this period, the highest ceremonial post at Court.²

Tughrii Khan (p. 261) also a slave, was successively deputy-taster, court-usher, master of the elephants, master of the stable, *Muqti* of Sirhind, and later of Lahore, Kanauj, and Awadh in succession; finally he received Lakhnauti, where he assumed the title of king.

Ulugh Khan (p. 281), afterwards King Balban, is said to have belonged to a noble family in Turkistan,³ but was enslaved in circumstances which are not recorded. He was taken for sale to Baghdad, and thence to Gujarat, from where a dealer brought him to Delhi, and sold him to the King. He was employed first as personal attendant, then as master of sport, then master of the stable, then *Muqti* of Hansi, then Lord Chamberlain, and subsequently became, first, deputy-King of Delhi, and then King in his own right.

It seems to me to be quite impossible to think of such a nobility in terms of a feudal system with a king merely first among his territorial vassals: what we see is a royal household full of slaves, who could rise, by merit or favour, from servile duties to the charge of a province, or even of a kingdom—essentially a bureaucracy of the normal Asiatic type. The same conclusion follows from an examination of the *Muqti*'s actual position: it is nowhere, so far as I know, described in set terms, but the incidents recorded in the chronicles justify the following summary.

1. A *Muqti* had no territorial position of his own, and no claim to any particular region: he was appointed by the King, who could remove him, or transfer him to another charge, at any time. The passages proving this statement are too numerous to quote: one cannot usually read ten pages or so without finding instances of this exercise of the royal authority. The biographies already summarised suffice to show that in the thirteenth century a *Muqti* had no necessary connection with any particular locality; he might be posted anywhere from Lahore to Lakhnauti at the King's discretion. Similarly, to take one example from the next century, Barni (427 ff.) tells how Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, on his accession, allotted the *iqtas* among his relatives and adherents, men who had no previous territorial connection with the places where they were posted, but who were apparently chosen for their administrative capacity. Such arrangements are the antithesis of anything which can properly be described as a feudal system.

¹ *Dawat-dar*. The dictionary-meaning of "Secretary of State" does not seem to be appropriate here, for we are told that on one occasion Taghan Khan was sharply punished for losing the king's jewelled pen-case, and I take the phrase to denote the official responsible for the care of the king's writing materials. In later times the Chief *Dawatdar* was a high officer.

² The exact status of the *vakil-i dar* at this period is a rather complex question, but its discussion is not necessary for the present purpose.

³ The chronicler is so fullsome in his praise of Balban, under whom he was writing, that this statement may be merely a piece of flattery, but there is nothing intrinsically improbable in it, having regard to the circumstances of the time. Writing in the next century, Ibn Batuta recorded (iii 171) a much less complimentary tradition; it is unnecessary for me to enquire which account is true, because both are in agreement on the essential point, that Balban was brought to India as a slave.

2. The *Muqti* was essentially administrator of the charge to which he was posted. This fact will be obvious to any careful reader of the chronicles, and many examples could be given, but the two following are perhaps sufficient. Barni (p. 96) tells at some length how Balban placed his son Bughra Khan on the throne of Bengal, and records the advice which he gave on the occasion. Knowing his son to be slack and lazy, he insisted specially on the need for active vigilance if a king was to keep his throne, and in this connection he drew a distinction between the position of King (*iqlimdari*) and that of Governor (*wilayatdari*) a King's mistakes were, he argued, apt to be irretrievable, and fatal to his family, while a *Muqti* who was negligent or inefficient in his governorship (*wilayatdari*), though he was liable to fine or dismissal, need not fear for his life or his family, and could still hope to return to favour. The essential function of a *Muqti* was thus governorship, and he was liable to fine or dismissal if he failed in his duties.

As an instance from the next century, we may take the story told by Afif (414), how a noble named Ainulmulk, who was employed in the Revenue Ministry, quarrelled with the Minister, and was in consequence dismissed. The King then offered him the post of *Muqti* of Multan, saying, "Go to that province (*iqta*), and occupy yourself in the duties (*Karha wa kardarha*) of that place." Ainulmulk replied: "When I undertake the administration (*amal*) in the *iqta*, and perform the duties of that place, it will be impossible for me to submit the accounts to the Revenue Ministry; I will submit them to the Throne." On this, the King excluded the affairs of Multan from the Revenue Ministry, and Ainulmulk duly took up the appointment. The language of the passage shows the position of a *Muqti* as purely administrative.

3. It was the *Muqti's* duty to maintain a body of troops available at any time for the King's service. The status of these troops can best be seen from the orders which Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq issued¹ to the nobles "to whom he gave *iqtas* and *wilayats*." "Do not," he said, "covet the smallest fraction of the pay of the troops. Whether you give or do not give them a little of your own rests with you to decide; but if you expect a small portion of what is deducted in the name of the troops, then the title of noble ought not to be applied to you; and the noble who consumes any portion of the pay of servants had better consume dust." This passage makes it clear that the strength and pay of the *Muqti's* troops were fixed by the King, who provided the cost; the *Muqti* could, if he chose, increase their pay out of his own pocket, but that was the limit of his discretionary power in regard to them.

4. The *Muqti* had to collect the revenue due from his charge, and, after defraying sanctioned expenditure, such as the pay of the troops, to remit the surplus to the King's treasury at the capital. To take one instance (Barni, 220 ff.), when Alauddin Khalji (before his accession) was *Muqti* of Karra and Awadh and was planning his incursion into the Deccan, he applied for a postponement of the demand for the surplus-revenue of his provinces, so that he could employ the money in raising additional troops; and promised that, when he returned, he would pay the postponed surplus-revenue, along with the booty, into the King's treasury.

5. The *Muqti's* financial transactions in regard to both receipts and expenditure were audited by the officials of the Revenue Ministry, and any balance found to be due from him was recovered by processes which, under some kings, were remarkably severe. The orders of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, quoted above, indicate that under his predecessors holders of *iqtas* and *wilayats* had been greatly harassed in the course of these processes, and he directed that they were not to be treated like minor officials in this matter. Severity seems to have been re-established in the reign of his son Muhammad, for Barni insists (pp. 556, 574) on the contrast furnished by the wise and lenient administration of Firuz, under whom "no Wali or *Muqti*" came to ruin from this cause. The processes of audit and recovery thus varied in point of severity, but they were throughout a normal feature of the administration.

This statement of the *Muqti's* position indicates on the face of it a purely bureaucratic organisation. We have officers posted to their charges by the King, and transferred, removed, or punished, at his pleasure, administering their charges under his orders, and subjected to the strict financial control of the Revenue Ministry.

¹ Barni, 431.

None of these features has any counterpart in the feudal system of Europe; and, as a student of European history to whom I showed the foregoing summary observed, the analogy is not with the feudal organisation, but with the bureaucracies which rulers like Henry II of England attempted to set up as an alternative to feudalism. The use of feudal terminology was presumably inspired by the fact that some of the nobles of the Delhi kingdom occasionally behaved like feudal barons, that is to say, they rebelled, or took sides in disputed successions to the throne; but, in Asia at least, bureaucrats can rebel as well as barons, and the analogy is much too slight and superficial to justify the importation of feudal terms and all the misleading ideas which they connote. The kingdom was not a mixture of bureaucracy with feudalism its administration was bureaucratic throughout.

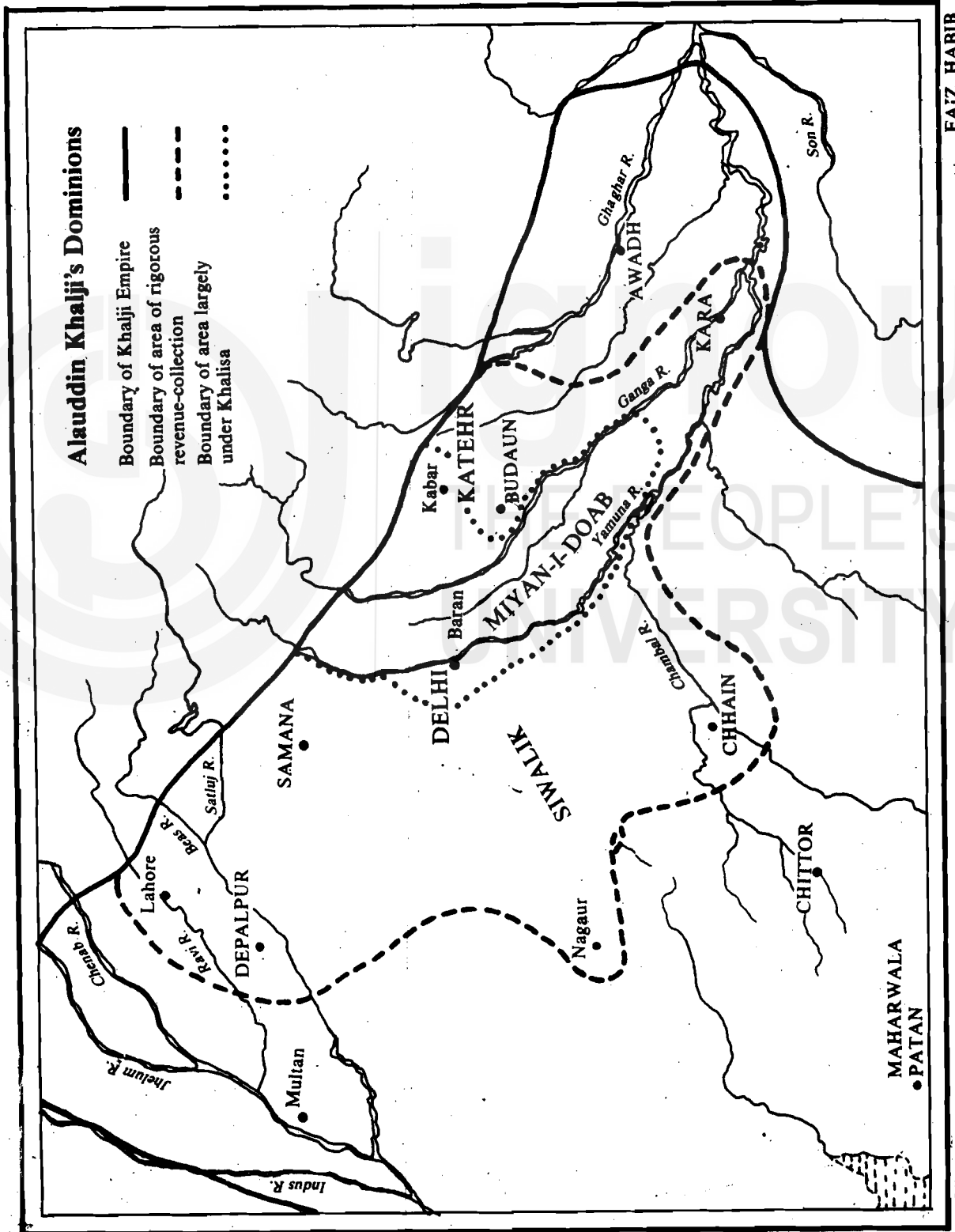
The question remains whether there were differences in status or functions between the Wali and the *Muqti*. The chronicles mention a Wali so rarely that it is impossible to prepare from them a statement similar to what has been offered for the *Muqti*. The constantly recurring double phases, walis and *Muqtis*, or *iqtas* and wilayats, show that the two institutions were, at any rate, of the same general nature, but they cannot be pressed so far as to exclude the possibility of differences in detail. A recent writer has stated that the difference was one of distance from the capital,¹ the nearer provinces being *iqtas* and the remote ones wilayats; but this view is not borne out by detailed analysis of the language of the chronicles. Looking at the words themselves, it is clear that Wali is the correct Islamic term for a bureaucratic Governor; it was used in this sense by Abu Yusuf (e.g. pp. 161, 163) in Baghdad, in the eighth century, and it is still familiar in the same sense in Turkey at the present day. I have not traced the terms *Iqta* or *Muqti* in the early Islamic literature to which I have access through translations, but taking the sense of Assignment in which the former persisted in India, we may fairly infer that the application of *iqta* to a province meant originally that the province was assigned, that is to say, that the Governor was under obligation to maintain a body of troops for the king's service. It is possible then that, at some period, the distinction between Wali and *Muqti* may have lain in the fact that the former had not to maintain troops, while the latter had; but, if this was the original difference, it had become obsolete, at any rate, by the time of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, whose orders regarding the troops equally to both classes, to "the nobles to whom he gave *iqtas* and wilayats."

The chronicles indicate no other possible distinction between Wali and *Muqti*, and the fact that we occasionally read² of the *Muqti* of a Wilayat suggests that the terms were, at least practically, synonymous. The possibility is not excluded that there were minor differences in position, for instance, in regard to the accounts procedure of the Revenue Ministry, but these would not be significant from the point of view of agrarian administration. In my opinion, then, we are justified in rejecting absolutely the view that the kingdom of Delhi contained any element to which the terminology of the feudal system can properly be applied. Apart from the regions directly under the Revenue Ministry, the entire kingdom was divided into provinces administered by bureaucratic Governors; possibly there may have been differences in the relations between these Governors and the Ministry, but, so far as concerns the agrarian administration of a province, it is safe to treat Wali and *Muqti* as practically, if not absolutely, synonymous.

¹ Qanungo's *Sher Shah*, p. 349, 350. Barani, however, applies the term wilayat to provinces near Delhi such as Baran (p. 58), Amroha (p. 58), or Samana (p. 483); while Multan (p. 584) and Marhat, or the Maratha country (p. 390) are described as *iqta*. Some of the distant provinces had apparently a different status in parts of the fourteenth century, being under a minister (Vazir) instead of the Governor (Barani, 379, 397, 454, & C.), but they cannot be distinguished either as *wilayats* or as *iqtas*.

² For instance, T. Nasiri; *Muqti* of the Wilayat of Awadh (246, 247); *Muqti* of the Wilayat of Sarsuti (p. 256). As has been said above, Barani (96) describes the duties of a *Muqti* by the term Wilayatdari.

It may be added that the latter term did not survive for long. In the Tarikh-i Mubarakshahi, written about the middle of the fifteenth century, the title is preserved in summaries of earlier chronicles, but in dealing with his own times the writer consistently uses the term Amir. This term had already been used by Ibn Batuta a century earlier; he speaks of Indian Governors sometimes as Wali, sometimes as Amir, but never, so far as I can find, as *Muqti*; and possibly Amir was already coming into popular use in his time. Nizamuddin Ahmad, writing under Akbar, usually substituted Hakim, as is apparent from a comparison of his language with that of Barni, whom he summarised; Firishta occasionally reproduced the word *Muqti*, but more commonly used Hakim, Sipahsalar, or some other modern equivalent; and *Muqti* was clearly an archaism in the time of Akbar.



FAIZ HABIB