SEVEN

The Delhi Sultanat—II (*Circa 1200–1400*)

THE KHALJIS AND THE TUGHLAQS

After the death of Balban in 1286, there was again confusion in Delhi for some time. Balban's chosen successor, Prince Mahmud, had died earlier in a battle with the Mongols. A second son, Bughra Khan, preferred to rule over Bengal and Bihar although he was invited by the nobles at Delhi to assume the throne. Hence, a grandson of Balban was installed in Delhi. But he was too young and inexperienced to cope with the situation. There had been a good deal of resentment and opposition at the attempt of the Turkish nobles to monopolize high offices. Many non-Turks, such as the Khaljis, had come to India at the time of the Ghurid invasion. They had never received sufficient recognition in Delhi, and had to move to Bengal and Bihar for an opportunity for advancement. They had also found employment as soldiers, many of them being posted in the northwest to meet the Mongol challenge. In course of time, many Indian Muslims had been admitted to the nobility. They also were dissatisfied at being denied high offices, as may be inferred from the manner in which Imaduddin Raihan was put up against Balban. Balban's own example of setting aside the sons of Nasiruddin Mahmud had demonstrated that a successful general could ascend the throne by ousting the scions of an established dynasty, provided he had sufficient support in the nobility and the army.

THE KHALJIS (1290–1320)

For these reasons, a group of Khalji nobles led by Jalaluddin Khalji, who had been the warden of the marches in the northwest and had fought many successful engagements against the Mongols, overthrew

the incompetent successors of Balban in 1290. The Khalji rebellion was welcomed by the non-Turkish sections in the nobility. The Khaljis who were of a mixed Turkish–Afghan origin, did not exclude the Turks from high offices, but the rise of the Khaljis to power ended the Turkish monopoly of high offices.

Jalaluddin Khalji ruled only for a brief period of six years. He tried to mitigate some of the harsh aspects of Balban's rule. He was the first ruler of the Delhi Sultanat to clearly put forward the view that the state should be based on the willing support of the governed, and that since the large majority of the people in India were Hindus, the state in India could not be a truly Islamic state. He also tried to gain the goodwill of the nobility by a policy of tolerance and avoiding harsh punishments. However, many people, including his supporters, considered this to be a weak policy which was not suited to the times. The Delhi Sultanat faced numerous internal and external foes, and for this reason there was a sense of insecurity. Jalaluddin's policy was reversed by Alauddin who awarded drastic punishments to all those who dared to oppose him.

Alauddin Khalji (1296–1316) came to the throne by treacherously murdering his uncle and father-in-law, Jalaluddin Khalji. As the governor of Awadh, Alauddin had accumulated a vast treasure by invading Deogir in the Deccan. Jalaluddin had gone to visit his nephew at Kara in the hope of getting hold of this treasure. He had left most of his army behind and had crossed the river Ganges with only a few followers so that his nephew might not take fright and run away. After murdering his uncle, Alauddin won over most of the nobles and soldiers to his side by a lavish use of gold. But for some time, Alauddin had to face a series of rebellions—some by disgruntled nobles, and some by Alauddin's own relations. To overawe his opponents, Alauddin Khalji adopted methods of utmost severity and ruthlessness. Most of the nobles who had defected to him by the lure of gold were either killed or dismissed and their properties confiscated. Severe punishments were given to the rebellious members of his own family. He resorted to a wholesale massacre of the Mongols, a couple of thousands of them having settled down in Delhi after embracing Islam in the time of Jalaluddin. These new converts had rebelled, demanding a larger share in the loot in Gujarat having campaigned there. Alauddin gave harsh

punishments even to the wives and children of these rebels, a practice which, according to the historian Barani, was a new one and was continued by his successors. Alauddin framed a series of regulations to prevent the nobles from conspiring against him. They were forbidden to hold banquets or festivities, or to form marriage alliances without the permission of the sultan. To discourage festive parties, he banned the use of wines and intoxicants. He also instituted a spy service to inform the sultān of all that the nobles said and did.

By these harsh methods, Alauddin Khalji cowed down the nobles, and made them completely subservient to the crown. No further rebellions took place during his lifetime. But, in the long run, his methods proved harmful to the dynasty. The old nobility was destroyed, and the new nobility was taught to accept anyone who could ascend the throne of Delhi. This became apparent after Alauddin Khalji's death in 1316. His favourite, Malik Kafur, raised a minor son of Alauddin to the throne and imprisoned or blinded his other sons, without encountering any opposition from the nobles. Soon after this, Kafur was killed by the palace guards, and a Hindu convert, Khusrau, ascended the throne. Although the historians of the time accuse Khusrau of violating Islam and of committing all types of crimes, the fact is that Khusrau was no worse than any of the preceding monarchs. Nor was any open resentment voiced against him by the Muslim nobles or by the population of Delhi. Even Nizamuddin Auliya, the famous Sufi saint of Delhi, acknowledged Khusrau by accepting his gifts. This had a positive aspect too. It showed that the Muslims of Delhi and the neighbouring areas were no longer swayed by racist considerations, and were prepared to obey anyone irrespective of his family or racial background. This helped in broadening the social base of the nobility still further. However, in 1320, a group of officers led by Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq raised the banner of revolt. They broke out into open rebellion, and in a hard fought battle outside the capital, Khusrau was defeated and killed.

The Tughlaqs (1320–1412)

Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq established a new dynasty which ruled till 1412. The Tughlaqs provided three competent rulers: Ghiyasuddin,

his son Muhammad bin Tughlaq (1324–51), and his nephew Firuz Shah Tughlaq (1351–88). The first two of these sultans ruled over an empire which comprised almost the entire country. The empire of Firuz was smaller but even then it was almost as large as that ruled over by Alauddin Khalji. After the death of Firuz, the Delhi Sultanat disintegrated and north India was divided into a series of small states. Although the Tughlaqs continued to rule till 1412, the invasion of Delhi by Timur in 1398 may be said to mark the end of the Tughlaq empire.

We shall first examine the remarkable expansion of the Delhi Sultanat from the time of Alauddin Khalji, then the various internal reforms in the Sultanat during the period, and the factors which led to the disintegration of the Sultanat.

I. Expansion of the Delhi Sultanat

We have seen how eastern Rajasthan, including Ajmer and some of its neighbouring territories, had come under the control of the Delhi Sultanat, though from the time of Balban, Ranthambhor, which was the most powerful Rajput state, had gone out of its control. Jalaluddin had undertaken an invasion of Ranthambhor but found the task too difficult for him. Thus, southern and western Rajasthan had remained outside the control of the Sultanat. With the rise to power of Alauddin Khalji, a new situation developed. Within a space of twenty-five years, the armies of the Delhi Sultanat not only brought Gujarat and Malwa under their control and subdued most of the princes in Rajasthan, they also overran the Deccan and south India upto Madurai. In due course, an attempt was made to bring this vast area under the direct administrative control of Delhi. The new phase of expansion was initiated by Alauddin Khalji and was continued under his successors, the climax being reached during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq.

We have already seen how the Delhi Sultanat was gradually geared up for this renewed phase of expansion. At this time, Malwa, Gujarat and Deogir were being ruled by Rajput dynasties, most of which had come into existence towards the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century. Despite the establishment of the Turkish rule in the Ganga valley, these dynasties had hardly changed their

old ways. Moreover, each one of them was contending for mastery over the entire region. So much so, when under Iltutmish the Turks attacked Gujarat, the rulers of both Malwa and Deogir attacked it from the south. In the Maratha region the rulers of Deogir were constantly at war with Warangal in the Telengana region, and with the Hoysalas in the Karnataka area. The Hoysalas, in turn, were at war with their neighbours, the Pandyas in Mabar (Tamil area). These rivalries not only made the conquest of Malwa and Gujarat easier, but tended to draw an invader further and further into the south.

The Turkish rulers had strong reasons for coveting Malwa and Gujarat. Not only were these areas fertile and populous, they controlled the western sea-ports and the trade routes connecting them with the Ganga valley. The overseas trade from Gujarat ports brought in a lot of gold and silver which had been accumulated by the rulers of the area. Another reason for the sultans of Delhi to establish their rule over Gujarat was that it could secure them a better control over the supply of horses to their armies. With the rise of the Mongols in Central and West Asia and their struggle with the rulers of Delhi, the supply of horses of good quality to Delhi from this region had been beset with difficulties. The import of Arabi, Iraqi and Turki horses to India from the western sea-ports had been an important item of trade since the eighth century.

Early in 1299, an army under two of Alauddin Khalji's noted generals marched against Gujarat by way of Rajasthan. On their way, they raided and captured Jaisalmer also. The Gujarat ruler, Rai Karan, was taken by surprise, and fled without offering a fight. The chief cities of Gujarat, including Anhilwara where many beautiful buildings and temples had been built over generations, were sacked. The famous temple of Somnath which had been rebuilt in the twelfth century was also plundered and sacked. An enormous booty was collected. Nor were the wealthy Muslim merchants of Cambay spared. It was here that Malik Kafur, who later led the invasions of south India, was captured. He was presented to Alauddin, and soon rose in his estimation.

Gujarat now passed under the control of Delhi. The rapidity and ease with which Gujarat was conquered suggests that the Gujarat ruler was not popular among his subjects. It appears that one of his

ministers, who had fallen out with him, had approached Alauddin to invade Gujarat, and had helped him. The Gujarat army may not have been well trained, and the administration was probably lax. With the help of Ramachandra, the ruler of Deogir, the ousted ruler Rai Karan, managed to hold on to a portion of south Gujarat. As we shall see, this provided an additional cause of war between Delhi and the Yadavas of Deogir.

Rajasthan

After the conquest of Gujarat, Alauddin turned his attention to the consolidation of his rule over Rajasthan. The first to invite his attention was Ranthambhor which was being ruled by the Chauhan successors of Prithviraj. Its ruler, Hamirdeva, had embarked on a series of war-like expeditions against his neighbours. He is credited with having won victories against Raja Bhoj of Dhar, and the Rana of Mewar. But it were these victories which proved to be his undoing. After the Gujarat campaign, on their way back to Delhi, the Mongol soldiers rebelled, following a dispute regarding the share of the booty. The rebellion was crushed and a wholesale massacre followed. Two of the Mongol nobles fled for refuge to Ranthambhor. Alauddin sent messages to Hamirdeva to kill or expel the Mongol nobles. But Hamir Deva, with a high sense of dignity and obligation to those who had sought refuge with him, and being confident of the strength of his fort and his armies, sent haughty replies. He was not far wrong in his estimation, for Ranthambhor was reputed to be the strongest fort in Rajasthan and had earlier defied Jalaluddin Khalji. Alauddin despatched an army commanded by one of his reputed generals but it was repulsed with losses by Hamirdeva. Finally, Alauddin himself had to march against Ranthambhor. The famous poet, Amir Khusrau, who went along with Alauddin, has given a graphic description of the fort and its investment. After three months of close siege, the fearful *jauhar* ceremony took place: the women mounted the funeral pyre, and all the men came out to fight to the last. This is the first description we have of the *jauhar* in Persian. All the Mongols, too, died fighting with the Rajputs. This event took place in 1301.

Alauddin, next, turned his attention towards Chittor which, after Ranthambhor, was the most powerful state in Rajasthan. It was,

therefore, necessary for Alauddin to subdue it. Apart from this, its ruler Ratan Singh had annoyed him by refusing permission to his armies to march to Gujarat through Mewar territories. Chittor also dominated the route from Ajmer to Malwa. There is a popular legend that Alauddin attacked Chittor because he coveted Padmini, the beautiful queen of Ratan Singh. Many modern historians do not accept this legend because it is mentioned for the first time more than a hundred years later. It was embellished later by a Hindi poet, Malik Muhammad Jaisi. In this story, Padmini is the princess of Singhaldvipa and Ratan Singh crosses the seven seas to reach her and brings her back to Chittor after many adventures which appear improbable. The Padmini legend is a part of this account. That the sultan could have demanded to see the face of a queen who was the wife of another ruler is also as unthinkable as the idea that the proud Rana would have agreed to show her, even through a mirror. Such a suggestion would have been an insult to the Rajput sense of honour for which they willingly sacrificed their lives.

Alauddin closely invested Chittor. After a valiant resistance by the besieged for several months, Alauddin stormed the fort (1303). The Rajputs performed *jauhar* and most of the warriors died fighting. Padmini, and the other queens, also sacrificed their lives. But it seems that Ratan Singh was captured alive and kept a prisoner for some time. Chittor was assigned to Alauddin's minor son, Khizr Khan, and a Muslim garrison was posted in the fort. After some time, its charge was handed over to a cousin of Ratan Singh.

Alauddin also overran Jalor which lay on the route to Gujarat. Almost all the other major states in Rajasthan were forced to submit. However, it seems that Alauddin did not try to establish direct administration over the Rajput states. The Rajput rulers were allowed to rule but had to pay regular tribute, and to obey the orders of the sultan. Muslim garrisons were posted in some of the important towns, such as Ajmer, Nagaur, etc. Thus, Rajasthan was thoroughly subdued.

Deccan and South India

Even before completing the subjugation of Rajasthan, Alauddin had conquered Malwa which, says Amir Khusrau, was so extensive that

even wise geographers were unable to delimit its frontiers. Unlike Rajasthan, Malwa was brought under direct administration, and a governor was appointed to look after it.

In 1306–07, Alauddin planned two campaigns. The first was against Rai Karan who after his expulsion from Gujarat, had been holding Baglana on the border of Malwa. Rai Karan fought bravely, but he could not resist for long. The second expedition was aimed against Rai Ramachandra, the ruler of Deogir, who had been in alliance with Rai Karan. In an earlier campaign, Rai Ramachandra had agreed to pay a yearly tribute to Delhi. This had fallen into arrears. The command of the second army was entrusted to Alauddin's slave, Malik Kafur. Rai Ramachandra who surrendered to Kafur, was honourably treated and carried to Delhi where, after some time, he was restored to his dominions with the title of Rai Rayan. A gift of one lakh *tankas* was given to him along with a golden coloured canopy which was a symbol of rulership. He was also given a district of Gujarat. One of his daughters was married to Alauddin. The alliance with Rai Ramachandra was to prove to be of great value to Alauddin in his further aggrandisement in the Deccan.

Between 1309 and 1311, Malik Kafur led two campaigns in south India—the first against Warangal in the Telengana area and the other against Dwar Samudra (modern Karnataka), Mabar and Madurai (Tamil Nadu). A great deal has been written about these expeditions partly because they struck the imagination of the contemporaries. The court poet, Amir Khusrau, made them the subject of a book. These campaigns reflected boldness, self-confidence and a high degree of a spirit of adventure on the part of the Delhi rulers. For the first time, Muslim armies penetrated as far south as Madurai, and brought back untold wealth. They provided first-hand information about conditions in the south though they hardly provided any fresh geographical knowledge. The trade routes to south India were well known, and when Kafur's armies reached Virachala in Mabar, they found a colony of Muslim merchants settled there. The ruler even had a contingent of Muslim troops in his army. These expeditions greatly raised Kafur in public estimation, and Alauddin appointed him *malik-naib* or vice-regent of the empire. Politically, however, the effects of these campaigns were limited. Kafur was able to force the

rulers of Warangal and Dwar Samudra to sue for peace, to surrender all their treasures and elephants, and to promise an annual tribute. But it was well known that to secure these tributes an annual campaign would be needed. In the case of Mabar, even this formal agreement was not forthcoming. The rulers there had avoided a pitched battle. Kafur had plundered as much as he could including a number of wealthy temples, such as those at Chidambaram. But he had to return to Delhi without being able to defeat the Tamil armies.

Despite the troubles following the death of Alauddin, within a decade and a half of his death, all the southern kingdoms mentioned above were wiped out, and their territories brought under the direct administration of Delhi. Alauddin himself was not in favour of direct administration of the southern states. However, the change in this policy had begun in his own lifetime. In 1315, Rai Ramachandra, who had remained steadily loyal to Delhi, died and his sons threw off the yoke of Delhi. Malik Kafur quickly came and crushed the rebellion and assumed direct administration of the area. However, many outlying areas, declared themselves independent while a few remained under the control of the descendants of the rai.

On succeeding to the throne, Mubarak Shah a successor of Alauddin, subdued Deogir again, and installed a Muslim governor there. He also raided Warangal, and compelled the ruler to cede one of his districts, and pay an annual tribute of forty gold bricks. Khusrau Khan, a slave of the sultan, made a plundering raid into Mabar and sacked the rich city of Masulipatnam. No conquests were made in the area.

Following the accession of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq in 1320, a sustained and vigorous forward policy was embarked upon. The sultan's son, Muhammad bin Tughlaq, was posted to Deogir for the purpose. On the excuse that the ruler of Warangal had not paid the stipulated tribute, Muhammad bin Tughlaq besieged Warangal again. At first, he suffered a reverse. Following a rumour of the sultan's death in Delhi, the Delhi armies were disorganized, and the defenders fell upon them inflicting heavy losses. Muhammad bin Tughlaq had to retreat to Deogir. After reorganizing his armies, he attacked again, and this time no quarter was given to the rai. This was followed by

the conquest of Mabar which was also annexed. Muhammad bin Tughlaq then raided Orissa, and returned to Delhi with rich plunder. Next year, he subdued Bengal which had been independent since the death of Balban.

Thus, by 1324, the territories of the Delhi Sultanat reached up to Madurai. The last Hindu principality in the area, Kampili in south Karnataka, was annexed in 1328. A cousin of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, who had rebelled, had been given shelter there, thus providing a convenient excuse for attacking it.

The sudden expansion of the Delhi Sultanat to the far south and to the east, including Orissa, created tremendous administrative and financial problems which had to be faced by Muhammad bin Tughlaq. We shall now turn to a study of the manner in which he tried to cope with these problems, and the strains which it imposed on the Sultanat itself.

II. Internal Reforms and Experiments

By the time Alauddin Khalji came to the throne, the position of the Delhi Sultanat was fairly well consolidated in the central portion of the empire, i.e., the portion comprising the upper Ganga valley and eastern Rajasthan. This emboldened the sultans to undertake a series of internal reforms and experiments, aimed at improving the administration, strengthening the army, gearing up the machinery of land revenue administration, taking steps to expand and improve cultivation and providing for the welfare of the citizens in the rapidly expanding towns. Not all the measures were successful, but they mark important new departures. Some of the experiments failed on account of lack of experience, some because they were not well conceived, or on account of opposition of vested interests. They do, however, show that the Turkish state had now acquired a measure of stability, and that it was no longer concerned merely with warfare and law and order.

Market Control and Agrarian Policy of Alauddin

For contemporaries, Alauddin's measures to control the markets was one of the great wonders of the world. In a series of orders after his

return from the Chittor campaign, Alauddin sought to fix the cost of all commodities from foodgrains, sugar and cooking oil to a needle, and from costly imported cloth to horses, cattle, and slave boys and girls. For the purpose, he set up three markets at Delhi—one market for foodgrains, the second for costly cloth, and the third for horses, slaves and cattle. Each market was under the control of a high officer called *shahna* who maintained a register of the merchants, and strictly controlled the shopkeepers and the prices. Regulation of prices, especially foodgrains, was a constant concern of medieval rulers, because without the supply of cheap foodgrains to the towns, they could not hope to enjoy the support of the citizens, and the army stationed there. But Alauddin had some additional reasons for controlling the market. The Mongol invasions of Delhi had pinpointed the need to raise a large army to check them. But such an army would soon exhaust his treasures unless he could lower the prices, and hence lower their salaries. To realize his objectives, Alauddin proceeded in a characteristically thorough way. In order to ensure a regular supply of cheap foodgrains, he declared that the land revenue in the doab region, that is, the area extending from Meerut near the Yamuna to the border of Kara near Allahabad would be paid directly to the state, i.e., the villages in the area would not be assigned in *iqta* to anyone. Further, the land revenue was raised to half of the produce. This was a heavy charge and Alauddin adopted a number of measures, which we shall note later, to cope with the situation. By raising the state demand, and generally obliging the peasants to pay it in cash, the peasants were forced to sell their foodgrains at a low price to *banjaras* who were to carry them to the towns, and to sell them at prices fixed by the state. To ensure that there was no hoarding, all the *banjaras* were registered, and their agents and their family were held collectively responsible for any violations. As a further check, the state itself set up warehouses and stocked them with foodgrains which were released whenever there was a famine or a threat of a shortfall in supply. Alauddin kept himself constantly informed of everything and very harsh punishment was given if any shopkeeper charged a higher price, or tried to cheat by using false weights and measures. Barani tells us that prices were not allowed to be increased by a *dam* or a paisa even during the time

of famine. Thus, wheat sold at 7½ *jitals* a *man*, barley at 4 *jitals*, good quality rice at 5 *jitals*.[1] Barani says: 'The permanence of prices in the grain market was a wonder of the age'.

Control of the prices of horses was important for the sultan because without the supply of good horses at resonable prices to the army, the efficiency of the army could not be maintained. The position of the supply of horses had improved as a result of the conquest of Gujarat. Good quality horses could be sold only to the state. The price of a first grade horse fixed by Alauddin was 100 to 120 *tankas*, while a *tattu* (pony) not fit for the army cost 10 to 25 *tankas*. The prices of cattle as well as of slaves were strictly regulated, and Barani gives us their prices in detail. The prices of cattle and slaves are mentioned side by side by Barani. This shows that slavery was accepted in medieval India as a normal feature. Control of the prices of other goods, especially of costly cloth, perfumes, etc., was not vital for the sultan. However, their prices were also fixed, probably because it was felt that high prices in this sector would affect prices in general. Or, it might have been done in order to please the nobility. We are told that large sums of money were advanced to the Multani traders for bringing fine quality cloth to Delhi from various parts of the country. As a result, Delhi became the biggest market for fine cloth, the price of which was fixed and traders from all places flocked to Delhi in order to buy it and sell it at a higher price elsewhere.

Realization of land revenue in cash enabled Alauddin to pay his soldiers in cash. He was the first sultan in the Sultanat to do so. A *sawar* (cavalryman) in his time was paid 238 *tankas* a year, or about 20 *tankas* a month. It appears that he was expected to maintain himself and his horse and his equipment out of this amount. Even then, this was not a low salary, for during Akbar's time, when prices were far higher, a Mughal cavalryman received a salary of about 20 rupees a month. Actually, a Turkish cavalryman during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was almost a gentleman, and expected a salary which would enable him to live as such. In view of this, the salary fixed by Alauddin was low, and the control of the market was, therefore, necessary.

1 48 *jitals* made a *tanka*. Alauddin's *man* was about 15 kg of today. Thus, a citizen of Delhi could buy for a *tanka* (almost equivalent to a silver rupee) 96 kg wheat, 144 kg rice, and 180 kg barley.

The historian Barani thought that a major objective of Alauddin's control of markets was his desire to punish the Hindus since most of the traders were Hindus and it was they who resorted to profiteering in foodgrains and other goods. However, most of the overland trade to West and Central Asia was in the hands of Khurasanis who were Muslims, as also Multanis, many of whom were Muslims. Alauddin's measures, therefore, affected these sections also, a fact which Barani does not mention.

It is not clear whether the market regulations of Alauddin were applied only to Delhi, or also to other towns in the empire. Barani tells us that the regulations concerning Delhi always tended to be followed in other towns also. In any case, the army was stationed not only in Delhi but in other towns as well. However, we do not have sufficient information to be certain in the matter. It is clear that while the merchants—Hindus and Muslims—might have complained against the price control, not only the army but all citizens, irrespective of their religious beliefs, benefited from the cheapness of foodgrains and other articles.

Agrarian Reforms

Apart from the control of the market, Alauddin took important steps in the field of land revenue administration. He was the first monarch in the Sultanat who insisted that in the doab, land revenue would be assessed on the basis of measuring the land under cultivation. This implied that the rich and the powerful in the villages who had more land could not pass on their burden to the poor. Alauddin wanted that the landlords of the area—called *khuts* and *muqaddams*, should pay the same taxes as the others. Thus, they had to pay taxes on milch cattle and houses like the others, and forgo other illegal cesses which they were in the habit of realizing. In the picturesque language of Barani, 'the *khuts* and *muqaddams* could not afford to ride on rich caprisoned horses, or to chew betel leaves and they became so poor that their wives had to go and work in the houses of Muslims'.

The policy of direct collection of land revenue by the state, based on measurement could only succeed if the *amils* and other local officials were honest. Although Alauddin had given these elements sufficient salaries to enable them to live in comfort, he insisted that

their accounts should be audited strictly. We are told that for small defaults, they would be beaten and sent to prison. Barani says that their life had become so insecure for them that no one was willing to marry their daughters to them! No doubt this is an exaggeration because, then as now, government service was considered to be prestigious and those who held government offices, whether they were Hindus or Muslims, were eagerly sought as marriage partners.

Although Barani writes as if all the measures mentioned above were directed solely against the Hindus, it is clear that they were, in the main, directed against the privileged sections in the countryside. But these can hardly be considered as socialistic measures. They were basically designed to meet an emergency situation, viz., the danger posed by the Mongols. Perhaps, it would have been better for Alauddin to have controlled only the price of essential commodities, such as food-grains, etc. But, as the contemporary writers, Barani, says, he tried to control the price of everything, from 'caps to socks, from combs to needles, vegetables, soups, sweetmeats to *chapatis*.' These led to vexatious laws which were sought to be violated and led to drastic punishments and resentment. Alauddin's agrarian policy was certainly harsh and must have affected the ordinary cultivators also. But it was not so burdensome as to drive them into rebellion, or flight.

The market regulations of Alauddin came to an end with his death, but it did achieve a number of gains. We are told by Barani that the regulations enabled Alauddin to raise a large and efficient cavalry which enabled him to defeat the subsequent Mongol onslaughts, with great slaughter, and to drive them beyond the Indus. The land revenue reforms of Alauddin marked an important step towards closer relationship with the rural areas. Some of his measures were continued by his successors, and later provided a basis for the agrarian reforms of Sher Shah and Akbar.

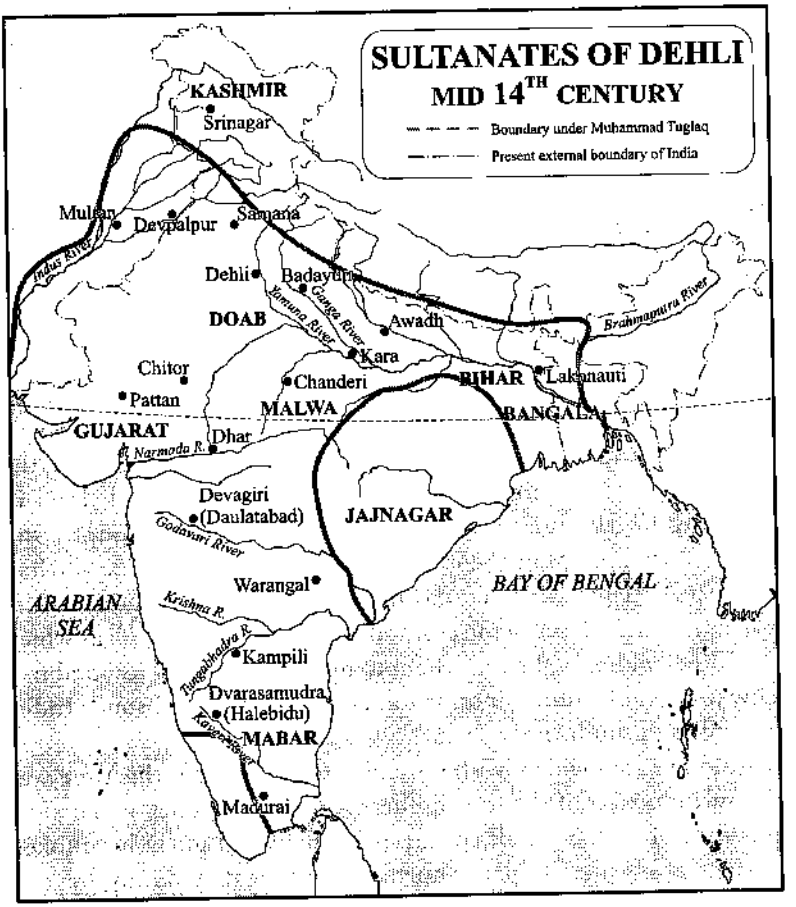
Muhammad Tughlaq's Experiments

Next to Alauddin Khalji, Muhammad bin Tughlaq (1324–51) is best remembered as a ruler who undertook a number of bold experiments, and showed a keen interest in agriculture.

In some ways, Muhammad bin Tughlaq was one of the most remarkable rulers of his age. He was deeply read in religion and philosophy, and had a critical and open mind. He conversed not only with the Muslim mystics, but also with the Hindu yogis and Jain saints such as Jinaprabha Suri. This was not liked by many orthodox theologians who accused him of being a 'rationalist', that is, one who was not prepared to accept religious beliefs as a matter of faith. He was also prepared to give high offices to people on the basis of merit, irrespective of whether they belonged to noble families or not. Unfortunately, he was inclined to be hasty and impatient. That is why so many of this experiments failed, and he has been dubbed an 'ill starred idealist'.

Muhammad Tughlaq's reign started under inauspicious circumstances. Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq was returning to Delhi after a successful campaign against Bengal. A wooden pavilion was erected hastily at the orders of Muhammad Tughlaq to give a fitting reception to the sultan. When the captured elephants were being paraded, the hastily erected structure collapsed, and the Sultan was killed. This led to a number of rumours—that Muhammad Tughlaq had planned to kill his father, that this was a curse of the heavens and of the famous saint of Delhi, Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, whom the ruler had threatened to punish, etc.

The most controversial step which Muhammad Tughlaq undertook soon after his accession was the so-called transfer of the capital from Delhi to Deogir. As we have seen, Deogir had been a base for the expansion of Turkish rule in south India. Muhammad Tughlaq himself had spent a number of years there as a prince. The attempt to bring the entire south India under the direct control of Delhi had led to serious political difficulties. The people of the area were restive under what they felt was an alien rule. A number of Muslim nobles had tried to take advantage of this situation to proclaim their independence there. The most serious rebellion was that of a cousin of Muhammad Tughlaq, Gurshasp, against whom the sultan had to proceed personally. It appears that the sultan wanted to make Deogir a second capital so that he might be able to control south India better. For this purpose, he ordered many of the officers and their followers and leading men, including many Sufi saints, to shift


SULTANATES OF DEHLI
MID 14TH CENTURY
Boundary under Muhammad Tuglaq
Present external boundary of India
KASHMIR
Srinagar
Multan
Devalpur
Samana
Indus River
Dehli
Badayun
Yamuna River
Ganga River
DOAB
Awadh
Brahmaputra River
Kara
Chitor
Chanderi
BIHAR
Lakhnauti
Pattan
MALWA
BANGALA
GUJARAT
Dhar
Narmada R.
Devagiri
(Daulatabad)
JAJNAGAR
Godavari River
Warangal
ARABIAN SEA
BAY OF BENGAL
Krishna R.
Tungabhadra R.
Kampili
Dvarasamudra
(Halebidu)
MABAR
Madurai

to Deogir which was renamed Daulatabad. It seems that a good deal of official pressure was exerted on these sections to migrate. Liberal grants were also provided to them, and arrangements made for their stay at Daulatabad. No attempt was made to shift the rest of the population. Delhi remained a large and populous city in the absence of the sultan. Coins minted in Delhi, while the sultan was at Deogir, testify to this. Though Muhammad Tughlaq had built a road from Delhi to Daulatabad and set up rest houses on the way to help the travellers, Daulatabad was more than 1500 km away. Many people died due to the rigours of the journey and the heat, since this movement took place during the summer season. Many of those who reached Daulatabad felt homesick, for some of them had lived for several generations in Delhi and looked upon it as their home. Hence, there was a good deal of discontent. After a couple of years, Muhammad Tughlaq decided to abandon Daulatabad, largely because he soon found that just as he could not control the south from Delhi, he could not control north India from Daulatabad.

Though the attempt to make Deogir a second capital failed, the exodus did have a number of long-range benefits. It helped in bringing north and south India closer together by improving communications. Many people, including religious divines who had gone to Daulatabad, settled down there. They became the means of spreading in the Deccan the cultural, religious and social ideas which the Turks had brought with them to north India. This resulted in a new process of cultural interaction between north and south India, as well as in south India itself.

Another step which Muhammad Tughlaq took at this time was the introduction of the 'token currency'. Since money is merely a medium of exchange, all countries in the world today have token currencies—generally paper currency, so that they do not have to depend upon the supply of gold and silver. There was a shortage of silver in the world in the fourteenth century. Moreover, Qublai Khan of China had already successfully experimented with a token currency. A Mongol ruler of Iran, Ghazan Khan, had also experimented with it. Muhammad Tughlaq decided to introduce a bronze coin which was to have the same value as the silver *tanka*. Specimens of this coin have been found in different parts of India, and can be seen in

museums. The idea of a token currency was a new one in India, and it was difficult to induce the traders as well as the common man to accept it. Muhammad Tughlaq might still have been successful if the government had been able to prevent people from forging the new coins. The government was not able to do so, and soon the new coins began to be greatly devalued in the markets. Finally Muhammad Tughlaq decided to withdraw the token currency. He promised to exchange silver pieces for bronze coins. In this way many people exchanged the new coins. But the forged coins which could be found out from tests were not exchanged. These coins were heaped up outside the fort and, Barani says, they remained lying there for many years.

The failure of these two experiments affected the prestige of the sovereign, and also meant wastage of money. However, the government quickly recovered. The Moroccan traveller, Ibn Battuta, who came to Delhi in 1333, could not see any harmful after-effects of these experiments. A far more serious problem with which Muhammad bin Tughlaq had to contend was that of the security of the frontiers. Administration, especially revenue administration, and his relations with the nobles also presented some serious problems.

We have seen in an earlier section the serious problems posed to the Delhi Sultanat by the steady expansion of the Mongol power into the Punjab, and their assaults on Delhi. Although the Mongols had by then become weak due to their internal dissensions, they were still strong enough to threaten the Punjab and the areas near Delhi. In the early years of Muhammad Tughlaq's reign, the Mongols under their leader Tarmashrin burst into Sind, and a force reached up to Meerut, about 65 km from Delhi. Muhammad Tughlaq not only defeated the Mongols in a battle near the Jhelum, but also occupied Kalanaur and for some time his power extended beyond the Indus upto Peshawar. This showed that the sultan of Delhi was now in a position to go over to the offensive against the Mongols. After coming back from Deogir, the sultan recruited a large army in order to occupy Ghazni and Afghanistan. Barani says that his object was to occupy Khurasan and Iraq. We have no means of finding out the true objective of Muhammad Tughlaq. Maybe his objective was to reestablish what has been called the 'scientific frontier', viz., the line

formed by the Hindukush and Qandahar. Many of the princes and others who had fled from Central Asia and taken shelter at the court of Muhammad Tughlaq may have thought that it was a good opportunity to oust the Mongols from the area. After a year, and following the failure of the experiment of establishing a token currency, and improvement of relations with the Mongols, the army was disbanded. Meanwhile, the situation in Central Asia changed rapidly. In due course, Timur united the entire area under his control and posed a fresh threat to India.

The effects of the Khurasan project should not be exaggerated, or confused with the Qarachil expedition. This expedition was launched in the Kumaon hills in the Himalayas, though, according to a modern historian, the expedition was aimed at Kashmir in order to control the entry of horses from the Chinese side, i.e., Sinkiang. However, it never aimed at the conquest of China, as some later historians have suggested. After some success, the armies went too far into the inhospitable region of the Himalayas, and suffered a disaster. We are told that from an army of 10,000, only 10 persons returned. However, it seems that the hill rajas accepted the overlordship of Delhi. Subsequently Muhammad Tughlaq undertook an expedition in the Kangra hills also. Thus, the hill regions were fully secured.

Agrarian Reforms and Nobility

Muhammad Tughlaq undertook a number of measures to improve agriculture. Most of these were tried out in the doab region. Muhammad Tughlaq did not believe in Alauddin Khalji's policy of trying to reduce the *khuts* and *muqaddams* (headmen in the villages) to the position of ordinary cultivators. But he did want an adequate share of the land revenue for the state. The measures he advocated had a long term impact, but they failed disastrously during his reign. It is difficult to say whether the measures failed because of bad planning, or faulty implementation by officials who lacked experience.

Right at the beginning of Muhammad Tughlaq's reign, there was a serious peasant rebellion in the Gangetic doab. Peasants fled the villages and Muhammad Tughlaq took harsh measures to capture and punish them. Historians are of the opinion that the trouble started

due to over-assessment. Although the share of state remained half as in the time of Alauddin, it was fixed arbitrarily, not on the basis of actual produce. Prices were also fixed artificially for converting the produce into money. A severe famine which ravaged the area for half a dozen years made the situation worse. Efforts at relief by giving advances for cattle and seeds, and for digging wells came too late. So many people died at Delhi that the air became pestilential. The sultan left Delhi and for two and half years lived in a camp called Swargadwari, 100 miles from Delhi on the banks of the Ganges near Kanauj.

After returning to Delhi, Muhammad Tughlaq launched a scheme to extend and improve cultivation in the doab. He set up a separate department called *diwan-i-amir-i-kohi*. The area was divided into development blocs headed by an official whose job was to extend cultivation by giving loans to the cultivators and to induce them to cultivate superior crops—wheat in place of barley, sugarcane in place of wheat, grapes and dates in place of sugarcane, etc. The scheme failed largely because the men chosen for the purpose proved to be inexperienced and dishonest, and misappropriated the money for their own use. The large sums of money advanced for the project could not be recovered. Fortunately for all concerned, Muhammad Tughlaq had died in the meantime, and Firuz wrote off the loans. But the policy advocated by Muhammad Tughlaq for extending and improving cultivation was not lost. It was taken up by Firuz, and even more vigorously later on by Akbar.

Another problem which Muhammad Tughlaq had to face was the problem of the nobility. With the downfall of the Chahalgani Turks, and the rise of the Khaljis, the nobility was drawn from Muslims belonging to different races, including Indian converts. Muhammad Tughlaq went a step further. He entertained people who did not belong to noble families, but belonged to castes such as barbers, cooks, weavers, wine-makers, etc. He even gave them important offices. Most of these were the descendants of the Muslim converts, though a few Hindus were also included. There is no reason to believe that these people were uneducated or were inefficient in their jobs. But the office-holders of the earlier period, who were the descendants of old noble families, deeply resented it. The historian, Barani, makes this a main point in his denunciation of Muhammad

Tughlaq. Muhammad Tughlaq also welcomed foreigners to the nobility, a large number of whom came to his court.

Thus, the nobility of Muhammad Tughlaq consisted of many divergent sections. No sense of cohesion could develop among them, nor any sense of loyalty towards the sultan. On the other hand, the vast extent of the empire provided favourable opportunities for rebellion, and for striving to carve out independent spheres of authority. The hot and hasty temperament of Muhammad Tughlaq and his tendency to give extreme punishments to those whom he suspected of opposition or disloyalty strengthened this trend.

Thus, the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, while marking the zenith of the Delhi Sultanat, also saw the beginning of the process of its disintegration.

III. Decline and Disintegration of the Delhi Sultanat: Firuz and his Successors

During the latter half of Muhammad Tughlaq's reign, there were repeated rebellions in different parts of the empire. Rebellions by ambitious nobles, particularly in the outlying areas, were not a new feature. In most cases, the sultans had been able to suppress them with the help of the central army and a band of loyal nobles. Muhammad Tughlaq's difficulties were several. The rebellions took place one after another in different parts of the empire—in Bengal, in Mabar (Tamil Nadu), in Warangal, in Kampili (Karnataka), in West Bengal, in Awadh, and in Gujarat and Sindh. Muhammad Tughlaq did not trust any one, at least not sufficiently. So, he dashed from one part of the country to the other to suppress the rebellions and wore out his armies. The rebellions in south India were the most serious. At first, rebellions in these areas were organised by the local governors. The sultan hurried to south India. After some time, plague broke out in the army. We are told that two-thirds of the army perished in this plague. This was a blow from which Muhammad Tughlaq could never recover. Soon after the return of the sultan from south India, there was another rebellion there, led by two brothers, Harihara and Bukka. They set up a principality which gradually expanded. This was the Vijayanagara empire which soon embraced the entire south. Further north, in the Deccan, some foreign nobles set up a

principality near Daulatabad which expanded into the Bahmani empire. We shall trace the achievements of these two remarkable empires in a subsequent chapter. Bengal also became independent. With a great effort, Muhammad Tughlaq was able to quell the rebellions in Awadh, Gujarat and Sind. While still in Sind, Muhammad Tughlaq died, and was succeeded by his cousin, Firuz Tughlaq.

Muhammad Tughlaq's policies had created deep discontent among the nobles as well as in the army. He had also clashed with Muslim theologians and the sufi saints who were very influential. But the unpopularity of Muhammad Tughlaq should not be exaggerated. Even when he was away from the capital for long periods, the administration in Delhi, the Punjab and other parts of the empire in north India continued to function normally.

After his accession, Firuz Tughlaq was faced with the problem of preventing the imminent break-up of the Delhi Sultanat. He adopted a policy of trying to appease the nobles, the army and the theologians, and of asserting his authority over only such areas which could be easily administrated from the centre. He, therefore, made no attempt to re-assert his authority over south India and the Deccan. He led two campaigns into Bengal, but was unsuccessful in both. Bengal was, thus, lost to the Sultanat. Even then, the Sultanat continued to be as large as it was during the early years of the reign of Alauddin Khalji. Firuz led a campaign against the ruler of Jajnagar (Orissa). He desecrated the temples there and gathered a rich plunder, but made no attempt to annex Orissa. He also led a campaign against Kangra in the Punjab hills. His longest campaigns were to deal with rebellions in Gujarat and Thatta. Although the rebellions were crushed, the army suffered great hardship due to losing its way in the Rann of Kutch.

Thus, Firuz was by no means a distinguished military leader. But his reign was a period of peace, and of quiet development. He decreed that whenever a noble died, his son should be allowed to succeed to his position, including his *iqta*, and if he had no son, his son-in-law and, in his absence, his slave. Firuz abolished the practice of torturing nobles and their officials if any balance was found against them at the time of auditing the accounts of their *iqta*. These steps pleased the nobles and was a major factor for the absence of rebellions by the

nobles, with the minor exception of one in Gujarat and in Thatta. However, in the long run, the policy of making offices and *iqta* hereditary was bound to be harmful. It reduced the chance of competent men being recruited into the service outside a small circle, and made the sultan dependent on a narrow oligarchy.

Firuz extended the principle of heredity to the army as well. Old soldiers were allowed to rest in peace and to send, in their place, their sons or sons-in-law, and if they were not available, their slaves. The soldiers were not to be paid in cash, but by assignments on the land revenue of villages. This meant that a soldier either had to go to the villages to collect his salary and absent himself from service, or to give the assignment to some middleman who would give him half or one-third of its value. Thus, the soldier did not benefit in the long run. The entire military administration became lax, and soldiers were allowed to pass useless horses at the muster by bribing the clerks. In a mistaken view of generosity, the sultan himself once gave money to a soldier to bribe the clerk of the muster.

Firuz tried to win over the theologians by proclaiming that he was a true Muslim king, and that the state under him was a truly Islamic state. Actually, right from the time of Iltutmish's accession to the throne, there was a tussle between the orthodox theologians and the sultans regarding the nature of the state, and the policy to be adopted by the state towards the non-Muslims. As has been stated earlier, from the time of Iltutmish, and especially under Alauddin and Muhammad Tughlaq, the Turkish rulers did not allow the theologians to dictate the policy of the state. They waged *jihad* against the Hindu rulers, whenever it was convenient for them to do so. In order to keep the theologians satisfied, a number of them were appointed to high offices. The judiciary and the educational system, of course, remained in the hands of the theologians.

Despite outer trappings and appearances, Firuz followed the policy of his predecessors in essentials. There is no reason to believe that he allowed the theologians to dictate the state policy. But he gave a number of important concessions to the theologians. He tried to ban practices which the orthodox theologians considered un-Islamic. Thus, he prohibited the practice of Muslim women going out to worship at the graves of saints. He persecuted a number of Muslim sects which were considered heretical by the theologians. It was during

the time of Firuz that *jizyah* became a separate tax. Earlier, it was a part of land revenue. Firuz refused to exempt the Brahmans from the payment of *jizyah* since this was not provided for in the *sharia*. Only women, children, the disabled and the indigent who had no means of livelihood were exempt from it. Worse, he publicly burnt a Brahman for preaching to the people, including Muslims, on the ground that it was against the *sharia*. On the same ground, he even ordered that the beautiful wall paintings in his palace be erased. However, he patronized music, and despite his orthodoxy, was fond of wine.

These narrow views of Firuz Tughlaq were certainly harmful. At the same time, Firuz Tughlaq was the first ruler who took steps to have Hindu religious works translated from Sanskrit into Persian, so that there may be a better understanding of Hindu ideas and practices. Many books on music, medicine and mathematics were also translated from Sanskrit into Persian during his reign.

Firuz also took a number of humanitarian measures. He banned inhuman punishments such as cutting of hands, feet, nose, etc., for theft and other offences. He set up hospitals for free treatment of the poor, and ordered the *kotwals* to make lists of unemployed persons. He provided dowries for the daughters of the poor. It is likely that these measures were basically designed to help Muslims of good families who had fallen into bad times. This, again, shows the limited nature of the state in India during the medieval times. However, Firuz did emphasize that the state was not meant merely for awarding punishments and collecting taxes, but was a benevolent institution as well. In the context of the medieval times, the assertion of this principle of benevolence was a valuable one, and Firuz deserves credit for it.

Firuz was keenly interested in the economic improvement of the country. He set up a large department of public works which looked after his building programme. Firuz repaired and dug a number of canals. The longest canal was about 200 kilometres which took off from the river Sutlej to Hansi; another canal took off from the Yamuna. These and other canals were meant for irrigation purposes, and also for providing water to some of the new towns which Firuz built. These towns, Hissar-Firuzah or Hissar (in modern Haryana) and Firuzabad (in modern Uttar Pradesh) exist even today.

Another step which Firuz took was both economic and political in nature. He ordered his officials that whenever they attacked a place, they should select handsome and well-born young boys and send them to the sultan as slaves. In this way, Firuz gradually gathered about 1,80,000 slaves. Some of these he trained for carrying on various handicrafts, and posted them in the royal workshops (*karkhanas*) all over the empire. From others he formed a corps of soldiers who would be directly dependent on the sultan and hence, he hoped, would be completely loyal to him. The policy was not a new one. As we have seen, the early Turkish sultans in India had followed the practice of recruiting slaves. But experience had shown that these slaves could not be depended on for their loyalty to the descendants of their master, and that they soon formed a separate interest group apart from the nobility. When Firuz died in 1388, the administrative and political problems which had to be faced after the death of every sultan came to the surface. The struggle for power between the sultan and the nobles started once again. The local zamindars and rajas took advantage of the situation to assume airs of independence. A new factor in this situation was the active intervention of the Firuzi slaves, and their attempt to put their own nominee on the throne. Sultan Muhammad, son of Firuz, was able to stabilize his position with their help. But one of his first steps was to break up the power of the slaves, killing and imprisoning many of them and scattering the rest. However, neither he nor his successor, Nasiruddin Mahmud, who ruled from 1394 to 1412, could control the ambitious nobles and the intransigent rajas. Perhaps, the major reason for this were the reforms of Firuz which had made the nobility too strong and the army inefficient. The governors of provinces became independent, and gradually the sultan of Delhi was confined virtually to a small area surrounding Delhi. As a wit said, 'The dominion of the Lord of the Universe (being the title of the sultans of Delhi) extends from Delhi to Palam.'[1]

The weakness of the Delhi Sultanat was made even worse by Timur's invasion of Delhi (1398), Timur, who was a Turk but could claim a blood relationship with Changez, had started his career of conquest in 1370, and gradually brought under his rule the entire

1 A village near the present airport of Delhi.

tract from Syria to Trans-Oxiana and from southern Russia to the Indus. The raid into India was a plundering raid, and its motive was to seize the wealth accumulated by the sultans of Delhi over the last 200 years. With the collapse of the Delhi Sultanat, there was no one to meet this incursion. Timur's army mercilessly sacked and plundered the various towns on the way to Delhi. Timur then entered Delhi and sacked it without mercy; large number of people, both Hindu and Muslim, as well as women and children lost their lives.

Timur's invasion once again showed the dangers facing weak government in the country. It resulted in the drain of large amount of wealth, gold, silver, jewellery, etc., from India. Timur also took with him a large number of Indian artisans, such as masons, stone cutters, carpenters, etc. Some of them helped him in putting up many fine building in his capital, Samarqand. He had adopted a similar policy in the case of many Iranian towns he had captured. But the direct political effect of Timur's invasion of India was small. The invasion of Timur may, however, be regarded as marking the end of the phase of strong rule by the Delhi sultans, although the Tughlaq dynasty itself lingered on till 1412.

The responsibility for the disintegration of the Delhi Sultanat cannot be ascribed to any one ruler. We have seen that there were some persistent problems during the medieval times, such as the relations between the monarch and the nobles, the conflict with local rulers and zamindars, the pull of regional and geographical factors, etc. Individual rulers tried to cope with these problems but none of them was in a position to effect fundamental changes in society to offset these perennial factors. Disintegration of the political fabric was, thus, just beneath the surface and any weakness in the central administration set off a chain of events leading to political disintegration. Firuz was able to contain the chain reactions which had set in due to the over-extension of the empire under Ghiyasuddin and Muhammad Tughlaq. He instituted a series of reforms aimed at appeasing the nobles and the soldiers which, however, weakened the central machinery of administration as we have seen.

The period from 1200 to 1400 saw many new features in Indian life, viz., the system of government, changes in the life and condition of the people, and the development of art and architecture. These will be the subject of another chapter.