UNIT 12 : DOWNFALL OF THE DELHI SULTANATE AND RISE OF PROVINCIAL KINGDOMS

UNIT STRUCTURE

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12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the disintegration of the Delhi Sultanates,
- describe the flaws in the administration that became an important cause for the downfall of the Sultanate,
- discuss the role of the incompetent individual Sultans and their policies that resulted in the decline of the Delhi Sultanate and
- explain the external forces that gave a final blow to the Sultanate.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit we discussed the administrative system under the Delhi Sultanate. The Sultan was the epitome of power under the Sultanate regime. The administration was based on the ideas and principles of Islamic faith. Thus, religion played a definite role in the administration of law and order in the state affairs.

In this Unit, we will be looking into the various factors and causes that pushed

the Sultanate to its end. The Sultanate Empire founded by Qutubuddin Aibaq and consolidated by his worthy successors witnessed its rise to the zenith during the time of Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad bin Tughlaq. However, the empire was brought to dust soon after the fall of the Tughlaqs.

12.3 CAUSES FOR THE DOWNFALL OF THE DELHI SULTANATES

The Sultanate Empire met its downfall largely due to the weakness of the rulers as much as due to the foreign invasion of Timur and Babur. After Firoz Shah's death in 1388 the disintegration of the Sultanate began and it was finally shattered when Timur swooped down on India and raided Delhi after his conquest of Persia and final conquest of Baghdad in 1393 AD. The end of the Sultanate rule came with the defeat of Ibrahim Lodi in the battle of Panipat in 1526 at the hands of Babur who founded the great Mughal Empire.

In the following pages we will be discussing the factors responsible for the downfall of the Delhi Sultanate.

- **Absence of a Strong Ruler**

The downfall of the Delhi Sultanate was brought about by inherent weakness of the Muslim system of government, which was feudal in character. The rule of Delhi Sultans was based on military strength and not on the willing support of the people. However, as it seemed that the administration of the Delhi Sultanate was based on "quick sand", the result was that there was no feeling of nationalism. In this structure of government, the state required a powerful Sultan who was the central authority. When a weak Sultan ascended to the throne, he lost his grip on the powerful nobles and disintegration started. This was the biggest inherent defect of the Delhi Sultanate. With the exception of a few kings like Qutub-ud-din, Iltutmish, Balban and Alauddin Khalji, the history of Delhi Sultanate presents few really able rulers. During the time of the Khaljis, murder and assassination became the order of the day while ascending the throne. Hence, there was always

an internal dissension for the throne which hampered the progress of the kingdom. The absence of a strong ruler led to the deterioration of the law and order situation.

- **Nobility**

The weakness of the Delhi Sultanate ruler strengthened the nobles and the chiefs and the military officers at a time when the central authority was fast becoming weak and incompetent. These nobles became the most trustworthy aide of the Sultans and hence the latter were easily manipulated. It was these nobles who later asserted their independence and hatched conspiracy for bigger share in the crown leading to political murders and deaths. This race for the power for ascendancy to the throne brought a quick disintegration as the government changed frequently and there was no political stability. The absence of a systematic law of succession resulted in the clash between the nobles and officials to raise their puppets which weakened the Sultanate.

The court official and nobles were divided amongst themselves. The nobles belonged to different ethnic backgrounds and mostly the foreigners (Turks, Afghans and Abyssinians) were the first generation immigrants, who had amassed huge fortune and political leverage leaving the Indian Muslims and Hindus at the bottom of the political hierarchy. At times one group became dominant over the other and this resulted in a series of conspiracies due to jealousies and competition. Thus, the court of Delhi became a breeding ground for those petty nobles to fulfill their greed and their lust for power.

- **Internal Conflict**

The continuous struggle for power between the Sultan and the nobles deeply weakened the administration of the Delhi Sultanate. While Sultans like Balban amd Alaudin strongly asserted their divine right to rule over the people, the nobles were not willing to recognise the supreme power of the Sultan whom they regarded as the first among their own ranks. The Ulemas were a powerful class, which demanded the state to be governed as per the law of Shariat.

Similarly, the Sultan had no healthy relation with the local neighbouring rulers, the zamindars and others. The indifferent attitude of the government often alienated the local chiefs leading to the growth of secessionist tendency among them. During the rule of weak Sultans, the local chiefs often revolted against the former which aggravated the crisis of the Delhi Sultanate.

- **Demoralised Army**

The influx of wealth to the Delhi court from different parts of a vast empire resulted in its attendants becoming addicted to wine and women. This led to the gradual degeneration of general character of the official class and even of the soldiers. The result was that when the country was faced with the danger of foreign invasion they could not play the part they were expected to do. The army fell into disorder and confusion and hence were incapable of facing the impending enemy.

- **Administrative Flaws**

The Iqtadari (fief) system also provided another reason for the decline of the Sultanate. Alaudin Khilji had abolished the system of granting *iqtas* and paid the officers in cash but Firuz Shah Tughluq resumed the *iqta* system by making it hereditary. He granted concessions to the nobilities and the army. The soldiers were paid not in cash but they were granted *iqtas* or assignments. The soldiers sold these *iqtas* to the middlemen and as a result the poor people suffered much under them. This led to the growth of ambition and there were revolts and outbreaks every now and then at various parts of the empire which remain unchecked.



LET US KNOW

Iqtadari System: It was a land revenue collection system where the nobles were vested with the responsibility of collecting revenue from their *iqtas.* Initially Turkish nobles were granted *iqtas.*

During the later part of the Sultanate, the number of slaves grew in an alarming proportion. A vast portion of state revenue was spent on them. This contributed greatly to the fall of the Sultanate. Earlier slaves were bought by the Sultans on the basis of merit and trained for succession to the throne of Delhi. Some of the ablest Sultanate rulers who were slaves were Qutbuddin Aibaq, Balban etc. However, towards the later period, slaves were bought but they were incompetent.

- **Contribution of Incompetent rulers**

The responsibility for the downfall of the Sultanate is equally shared by Firuz Shah Tughlaq. Firuj Shah was an utterly incompetent ruler. There was much political corruption in his administration and he wilfully chose to overlook it. He kept himself busy with the policy of appeasing the clergies and the nobilities and it was this quality of Firuz that brought the downfall of the Sultanate. His policy of granting Jagirs was fundamentally a wrong policy. His cancellation of the tax collection on land brought lump sum revenue while the officials became richer at the cost of the state by earning extra collections. His policy of making all army offices hereditary resulted in rising indiscipline and inefficiency in the army. The army became too weak and as a last resort, Firuz had to turn to the provincial jagirdars for support. He was not a military ruler and as a result he made no attempts to recover the lost territories and his expedition against Bengal was futile. He reconciled very easily with the losses he suffered whether in Bengal or in the rise of South. His indifferent attitude in religious matters destroyed the fabric of secularism so long enjoyed during the time of Alauddin and Mummad Khilji.

Besides the general tendency of disintegration, the activity of Muhammad bin Tughlaq hastened the downfall of the empire. His wild projects and the pitiless methods caused untold misery and led to the widespread revolts. His responsibility for the downfall of the Sultanate cannot be denied. He was more of a visionary and his elaborate plans were not based on ground realities. For example, his decision to move his capital to Daulatabad, aimed at the direct rule of South India, proved disastrous resulting in heavy loss of men and money. In the meantime, his policy to

rule South India directly led to the rise of the great kingdoms of the Bahmani and Vijayanagara who stood unchallenged. Also, during his reign, he alienated the Ulemas and the nobility by neglecting their traditional advice in matters of his reform. He paid no heed to their words and it led to the loss of his revenue because towards the later part of his reign, these class of disgruntled men rose in to revolt and much of the treasury was drained in suppressing them.

- **Foreign Invasions**

Under the weak and worthless successor of the Firuz Shah, the power of the Kingdom of Delhi over its immediate neighbourhood was reduced. At a time when the Delhi Sultanate was gradually tottering to her fall, the invasion of Timur gave a serious blow to the existence of the Delhi Sultanate. Amir Timur ascended the throne of Samarqand in 1369 AD, whereupon he began a series of aggressive conquests that brought him to Delhi. On his way to Delhi, he raided Talamba and sacked its wealth and ruthlessly killed its inhabitants. Sultan Mahmud and Mallu Iqbal offered resistance but failed to contain Timur's forces.

During his stay in Delhi, Timur inflicted misery and pain to the people living in and around it. There was destruction and pillage everywhere. Artisans were captured and sent to Samarqand. Timur carried with him huge amount of wealth which affected the economy of Delhi Sultanate. The anarchy and confusion that followed Timur's terrible invasion shattered the empire and many provinces finally declared their independence of Delhi. Besides Delhi, Timur defeated the Hindu force of Hardwar, Kangra and Kashmir.

Lastly, the Sultanate also had to face a series of Mongol invasion. The raids continued for one and a half century and led to wanton destruction of men and property. The long years of trouble wreaked havoc on the resources of the Empire.

Though the Lodi Kings no doubt showed some vigour, but the last of them, Ibrahim Lodi was not competent. His intolerable rule had offended his own men and officers. Daulat Khan Lodi, the governor of Panjab invited

Babur, the king of Kabul to invade India with the hope of getting rid of Ibrahim. But the result was otherwise.

Babur came over to India and inflicted a crushing defeat first on Daulat Khan Lodi and then on Ibrahim Lodi in the first battle of Panipat in 1526 A.D. Ibrahim Lodi was killed in the battlefield and with his death the Delhi Sultanate came to an end.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

1. Daulatabad became the new capital under which Sultanate ruler?

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2. What was the result of the battle of Panipat (1526C.E.)?

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3. Who renewed the Jagirdari system?

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4. Name the ethnic groups into which the aristocratic nobility of the Delhi Sultanate was divided?

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12.4 CONSEQUENCE OF THE DOWNFALL OF THE SULTANATE

The downfall of the Delhi Sultanate after the foreign invasions had far reaching effect as it exposed the inherent weakness of the kingdom. The disintegration of the Sultanate revealed the court politics and the personal ambitions of the nobilities that led to frequent conflicts. Thus, there was no stability in the kingdom or in the power of the throne as the Sultans kept changing at short periods. It also exposed the Indian army in a bad light. They were no match for the armies of the foreign invaders that flooded the Indian cities and villages.

The fall of the Delhi Sultanate also witnessed the growth of feudal

division in the society. The downfall of the Sultanate gave the opportunity to Babur to establish the Mughal kingdom in the heart of India.



12.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this Unit, you have learnt that:–

- the downfall of the Sultanate was a result of many factors and the weakening of the central authority was one crucial factor.
- Individual rulers like Muhammad bin Tughlaq and Firuz Shah Tughlaq were responsible for the downfall due to their policies.
- Timur's invasion of India was the immediate reason and revealed the characteristics of the Sultanate rule.
- Following the invasion of Timur, many provinces asserted their freedom from the Sultanate and independent Sultanates replaced them.



12.6 FURTHER READING

1) Chaurasia, R S. (2002). *History of Medieval India (From 1000 AD to 1707 AD).* New Delhi, India: Atlantic Publication

2) Chandra, Satish. (2006). *From Sultanate to the Mughals.* New Delhi, India: Haranand and Publications Pvt. Ltd.

3) Mazumder, R. C. (1990). *The Delhi Sultanate.* Bombay, India: Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan.

4) Prasad, Iswari. (1940). *History of Medieval India.* New Delhi, India: Indian Press.



12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No. 1: Muhammad bin Tughlaq

Ans to Q No. 2: Ibrahim Lodi was killed

Ans to Q No. 3: Firuz Shah Tughluq

Ans to Q No. 4: Turks, Afghans and Abyssinians

12.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

(A) Very Short Questions (answer within 50 words):

Q.1. Who invited Babur to invade India?

Q.2. What was the most inherent defect of the Delhi Sultanate?

Q.3. What was the consequence of the absence of a systematic law of succession?

Q.4. Who resisted the advance of Timur in Delhi?

(B) Short Questions (answer within 150 words):

Q.1. Write short note on:

Q.a. Slavery

Q.b. Battle of Panipat

Q.c. Court politics and the nobility

(C) Long Questions (answer within 300-500 words):

Q.1. To what extent do you think was Muhammad bin Tughlaq responsible for the downfall of the Sultanate? Give reasons.

Q.2. Discuss the contribution of the external factors in bringing the end of the Sultanate regime.

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