

TURKISH RULE IN INDIA



The Turks established rule in India through a gradual process of frontier conquests, military victories in North India, and the final foundation of the **Delhi Sultanate in the late 12th and early 13th centuries.**

- In medieval Indian history, **“Turks” broadly means Muslim Turkic military entrepreneurs** who came from **Central Asia and Afghanistan**, especially the **Ghaznavids and Ghurids**
- They were **originally slave-soldiers or commanders in larger Persian-Islamic empires**, but later carved out their own dynasties in Ghazni and later in Delhi.

Ghaznavid beginnings: Turkish inroads under Mahmud of Ghazni

The first major Turkish entry into India came under the Ghaznavid dynasty, founded by **Alptigin, a Turkic slave-commander, who took Ghazni (Afghanistan) in 963 CE.**

Under Mahmud of Ghazni (r. 998–1030 CE):

- He launched over **17 raids into India starting from 1001 CE onwards**, mainly targeting Punjab and the north-west.
- He **defeated the Hindu Shahi king Jayapala** at the **Battle of Peshawar (1001 CE)** and later raided rich temples such as Somnath (1025 CE), carrying back vast wealth



Impact on Turkish rule:

- These raids **did not establish permanent Turkish administration over large parts of India**, but they opened the route from Afghanistan into India and weakened several regional kingdoms.
- Over time, the **southern Punjab and parts of Sindh came under Ghaznavid control**, giving later Turks (the Ghurids) a secure frontier base for deeper invasions.

Ghurids replace Ghaznavids in the north-west

By the second half of the 12th century, the Ghurid dynasty (also Turkic in character) from **Ghur (eastern Iran/Afghanistan)** began **to eclipse the Ghaznavids**.

Key events:

- The **Ghurids captured Ghazni (1151 CE onwards)** and made it their **main centre in the east**.
- **Muizz-ud-din Muhammad (Muhammad Ghori)** took over Ghazni and from there launched systematic invasions into India starting around 1175 CE.

This shift is crucial because the Ghurids were Turks but had a clearer political aim: not just loot, but establishing durable rule in India.

By about 1190 CE, the entire Punjab, Sindh, and Multan were under Muhammad Ghori, giving the Turks a continuous Muslim-held frontier from the Indus to the upper Gangetic region.

Battles of Tarain and the fall of Rajput resistance

With the north-west secured, Ghori turned towards the heartland of North India, dominated by the **Rajput confederacy under Prithviraj Chauhan of Delhi and Ajmer**.

Two decisive battles near Tarain (modern Taraori, Haryana) mark the turning point:

- **First Battle of Tarain (1191 CE):**
 - Ghori advanced into Chauhan territory but was defeated by Prithviraj and forced to retreat.
 - This showed that the Rajputs could still resist the Turks militarily
- **Second Battle of Tarain (1192 CE):**
 - Ghori returned with a larger, better-prepared army and decisively defeated Prithviraj, who was captured and later killed.
 - This victory broke the main Rajput power in North India and opened the Gangetic plain to Turkish occupation.

Impact on Turkish rule:

- After Tarain, the Turks occupied Delhi, Ajmer, Meerut, and other strategic centres, laying the geographical base for the Delhi Sultanate.

Turkish conquest of the Ganga–Yamuna Doab and Bengal

Between 1192 and 1206, Ghori's generals—especially Qutb-ud-din Aibak—expanded Turkish control deep into India:

- **Conquest of Kanauj and Banaras:** The powerful **Gahadavala kingdom under Jayachandra** was defeated, first in the **Battle of Chandawar (1194 CE)**; this allowed the Turks to dominate the Ganga–Yamuna Doab, the most fertile and politically key region of North India.
- **Bengal and Bihar:** Generals like **Bakhtiyar Khalji** pushed into Bihar and Bengal, destroying the last major strongholds of Buddhist and Hindu regional powers there.

These campaigns ensured that:

- Turkish rule was no longer confined to the frontier, but stretched from Punjab to Bengal.
- The Turks controlled the core revenue-producing regions of North India, making their rule economically sustainable.

Death of Ghori and foundation of the Delhi Sultanate (1206 CE)

- **Muhammad Ghori was assassinated in 1206 CE** near Jhelum while returning from India, likely by a rival Muslim faction.

With his death:

- **His Turkish slave-commanders (mamluks)** took over the Indian territories.

- The most prominent, **Qutb-ud-din Aibak**, was a Turkic slave-general who had led many of the campaigns in North India.

In 1206 CE, Qutb-ud-din Aibak declared himself the independent ruler of Delhi, founding the Delhi Sultanate (Slave or Mamluk dynasty).

This is taken as the **formal beginning of Turkish rule in India**, later continued by the **Khalji, Tughlaq, Sayyid, and Lodi dynasties**.

EARLY TURKISH RULERS **1206–1290**

Qutbuddin Aybak 1206–1210

Shamsuddin Iltutmish 1210–1236

Raziyya 1236–1240

Ghiyasuddin Balban 1266–1287

KHALJI DYNASTY **1290–1320**

Jalaluddin Khalji 1290–1296

Alauddin Khalji 1296–1316

TUGHLUQ DYNASTY **1320–1414**

Ghiyasuddin Tughluq 1320–1324

Muhammad Tughluq 1324–1351

Firuz Shah Tughluq 1351–1388

SAYYID DYNASTY **1414–1451**

Khizr Khan 1414–1421

LODI DYNASTY **1451–1526**

Bahlul Lodi 1451–1489

SLAVE DYNASTY

Qutb-ud-din Aibak (1206–1210)

- A **Turkic slave-general of Muhammad Ghori**, he led the Turkish conquests in North India after Ghori's death.
- He **shifted the capital from Lahore to Delhi** and **laid the foundation of the Qutb Minar (completed by Iltutmish)**.
- Died in 1210 CE while playing polo (chougan) in Lahore, leaving a weak structure that led to a brief succession crisis.

Shams-ud-din Iltutmish (1211–1236)

- Originally a **slave of Aibak**, he **married Aibak's daughter** and emerged as the **most powerful ruler of the Slave Dynasty**.
- **Key achievements:**
 - Defeated Ali Mardan Khalji (in Bengal) and Yildiz (in Punjab), consolidating the Sultanate.
 - **Received formal recognition (mansur) from the Abbasid Caliph**, which gave Delhi Sultanate religious legitimacy.
 - Introduced **silver tanka** and **copper jital** as standard coins, strengthening the currency system.
 - **Took Raziya as his heir** (later defeated by the nobility), showing his attempt at a strong centralised succession.

Razia Sultana (1236–1240)

- First and **only woman ruler of Delhi Sultanate**; daughter of Iltutmish, trained in administration and warfare.
- Faced strong opposition from the Turkic nobility (Chihalgani) who resented a female ruler.
- She tried to centralise power, promoted merit, and employed non-Turkic administrators, but was eventually deposed and killed in 1240.

Ghiyas-ud-din Balban (1266–1286)

- **Rose from the group of 40 slave-nobles (Chihalgani)** and became effective ruler first under **Nasir-ud-din Mahmud**, then as Sultan.
- **Key measures:**
 - **Crushed rebellions in Bengal, Ranthambhor, and Mewar**, reasserting Delhi's authority.
 - Introduced **strict court rituals (sijda, paibos)** and the **idea of king as "divine-like" (Zill-i-Ilahi)** to strengthen royal prestige.
 - Created a **strong Muslim nobility modelled on the Turkic ideal of chivalry and loyalty**.

Balban's death in 1286 CE and the **weak rule of his grandson Kaiqubad** led to the collapse of the Slave line, and the Khalji **general Jalal-ud-din Khalji** usurped the throne in 1290 CE, ending the Slave Dynasty.

Administrative and military features

- **Centralisation:**
 - Iltutmish and Balban tried to centralise power around the Sultan, reducing the autonomy of provincial governors.
 - Administration was divided into departments (diwans) such as **diwan-i-wizarat (finance), diwan-i-arz (military), and diwan-i-insha (correspondence)**.
- **Nobility and army:**
 - Power rested with the Turkic slave-nobility (Chihalgani), who were bound by loyalty to the Sultan.
 - The army was based on Turkic cavalry, supported by local Hindu troops and garrison forces.
- **Civil projects and culture:**

- **Qutb Minar complex (Qutb-ud-din and Iltutmish)** symbolised Turkic victory and Islamic architecture in India.
- Persian culture, Islamic law (Sharia), and Sufi traditions grew under this dynasty, even though Hindu institutions continued at the local level.

Decline and end of the Slave Dynasty

- After **Balban's death, his son Muiz-ud-din Muhammad (Kaiqubad)** fell into neglect and luxury, and the nobility divided Delhi between rival factions.
- The rising Khalji family, led by **Jalal-ud-din Khalji**, seized the opportunity and defeated **Kaiqubad (killed in 1290), founding the Khalji dynasty.**

KHILJI DYNASTY

The Khilji (Khalji) Dynasty was the second ruling dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate, **ruling from 1290 to 1320 CE**. It is **most famous for Alauddin Khilji**, who transformed Delhi from a regional kingdom into a vast empire and introduced major military and economic reforms.

Origin and period of the Khilji Dynasty

- The Khilji dynasty replaced the Slave (Mamluk) Dynasty in 1290 CE when its **last ruler, Muiz-ud-din Kaiqubad**, was overthrown.
- The dynasty ruled for about **30 years (1290–1320)** and had three main rulers: **Jalal-ud-din Firuz Khilji, Alauddin Khilji, and Qutb-ud-din Mubarak Shah**.
- The Khiljis were of **Turkic–Afghan origin**, and **their rise broke the monopoly of the old “Turkic slave-nobility” (Chihalgani)** of the Slave period.

Founding under Jalal-ud-din Firuz Khilji (1290–1296)

- Jalal-ud-din Firuz Khilji was a **high-ranking Turkish commander under the Slave dynasty** who seized power after the weakness and chaos of Kaiqubad’s court.
- He adopted a relatively **lenient policy compared to the harshness of Balban**, tried to win the support of the local population, and even argued that the state should be based on the **“willing support of the governed”**.
- His rule was short and ended when his ambitious nephew and **son-in-law, Alauddin Khilji**, murdered him in 1296 and proclaimed himself Sultan.

Alauddin Khilji (1296–1316): the great consolidator

Alauddin Khilji is the most important ruler of the Khilji period and among the greatest in Delhi Sultanate history.

Military conquests and expansion

- **North India:**
 - Crushed the **Rajput kingdoms of Chittor, Ranthambhor, Siwana, and Jalor**, often annexing their territories and bringing them under direct control.
 - Created a **strong frontier army to defend against repeated Mongol invasions from Central Asia.**
- **South India (Deccan campaigns):**
 - Sent his general **Malik Kafur (a slave) on multiple expeditions into the Deccan and South India.**
 - Captured **Devagiri (Yadava kingdom)**, Warangal (Kakatiya), **Dwarasamudra (Hoysala)**, and **Madurai (Pandya)**, bringing vast wealth to Delhi.
 - These campaigns made the Delhi Sultanate an “imperial” power, stretching from the Punjab to the far south.

Economic and administrative reforms

Alauddin introduced strict price-control and market-regulation systems in Delhi.

Key measures:

- **Market control system (Diwan-i-Riyasat):**
 - Official markets for grain, cloth, horses, etc., with fixed prices and inspectors to prevent hoarding.
- **Land-revenue reforms:**
 - Raised the state share from one-third to half of the produce in the **kharaj-land (conquered territories).**
 - This funded his large standing army (reportedly 4–5 lakh soldiers) and building projects.

- **Spy and intelligence network:**
 - Maintained a system of spies and agents to monitor the army, nobles, and common people.

Centralisation of power

- He weakened the older Turkic nobility and replaced them with slave-officers (mandarins) loyal only to the Sultan.
- Reduced the power of **iqta-holders by checking land-grants and rents**, thus strengthening central royal authority.

Qutb-ud-din Mubarak Shah and decline of the dynasty

- After Alauddin's death in 1316, **his infant son Shihab-ud-din Omar** was placed on the throne by Malik Kafur, who acted as regent.
- Soon after, **Qutb-ud-din Mubarak Shah (another son of Alauddin)** took power, ruling from 1316 to 1320.
- Mubarak Shah was weak and pleasure-loving, and his court was dominated by his favourite Khusrau Khan, a converted Hindu.
- **In 1320 CE, Khusrau Khan killed Mubarak Shah** and briefly seized the throne, but he was quickly overthrown by **Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq, who founded the Tughlaq dynasty, ending the Khilji rule**

Khilji contributions and legacy

- **Political and military:**
 - Turned Delhi into a pan-Indian empire for the first time, extending control deep into the Deccan.
 - Created a strong centralised monarchy with a powerful army and bureaucracy.
- **Economic:**

- Pioneered large-scale price control and market regulation, a unique experiment in Indian medieval history.
- Increased state revenue through higher land-tax in the conquered territories.
- **Cultural and architectural:**
 - Patronised Persian literature and historiography; his court historian Amir Khusrau composed important works.
 - **Built Alai Darwaza** and **parts of the Quwwat-ul-Islam** complex in Delhi, in a more centralised Indo-Persian style.

TUGHLAQ DYNASTY

- The Tughlaq Dynasty was the third major ruling dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate, ruling **from 1320 to 1413 CE** and giving **Delhi its longest and most ambitious phase of centralised control over the subcontinent.**
- It is especially remembered for the visionary but **often failed experiments of Muhammad bin Tughlaq** and the reforms and **welfare works of Firoz Shah Tughlaq.**

Period, position, and origin

- The Tughlaqs ruled after the Khiljis (1290–1320) and before the Sayyids (1414–1451); their period is usually dated 1320–1414 CE.
- The dynasty was **founded by Ghazi Malik, a Turkic noble and general of the Khilji Sultanate, who defeated Khusrau Khan** (a short-lived usurper) and **took the throne as Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq in 1320 CE.**
- The Tughlaqs are often **described as “Turkic-Indian” in character**, more in tune with Indian conditions than earlier purely Turkic dynasties.

Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq (1320–1325)

- **Ghazi Malik, later Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq**, rose from being a Khilji general to Sultan after defeating the unpopular usurper Khusrau Khan.
- His short reign focused on military consolidation and fortification:
 - **Expanded control over Bengal and parts of the Deccan** that had slipped away from Delhi.
 - **Built Tughlaqabad Fort near Delhi**, a massive citadel to secure the capital.

- He **died in 1325 CE** when the avenue of his palace collapsed as he **returned from a campaign in Bengal**; many chroniclers describe it as accidental, others as suspicious.

Muhammad bin Tughlaq (1325–1351): the “philosopher-king”

Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the eldest son of Ghiyas-ud-din, is the most discussed and controversial ruler of the Sultanate.

Major experiments and policies

Transfer of capital (1327–1330)

- Shifted the **capital from Delhi to Daulatabad (Devagiri)** in the Deccan to better control the southern territories.
- Forcibly moved entire populations; the scheme failed due to distance, lack of water, and resentment, and he later allowed people to return to Delhi.

Token currency (copper and bronze tankas)

- Issued **cheap token coins (copper and brass coins valued equal to silver tankas)** to overcome shortage of silver.
- Produced widespread counterfeiting and economic chaos; the experiment had to be abandoned, and the government reimbursed people at great cost.

Khurasan and Qarachil (frontier) expedition

- Planned a large army of 3 lakh soldiers for an expedition to Khurasan (Central Asia) and another to the Himalayan region (Qarachil), but these failed due to logistical problems and revolts.

Revenue policy in the Doab

- Introduced **harsh land-revenue measures in the Ganga–Yamuna Doab**, including enhanced taxes and severe enforcement, which led to rural revolts, famine, and depopulation in some areas.

Military and territorial reach

- Despite internal troubles, his armies extended Delhi's nominal control into Bengal, Gujarat, Malwa, and the Deccan, sometimes through brutal campaigns.
- **He adopted titles like “Imam and Amir”** and tried to project himself as a **universal Muslim ruler**, but his policies deepened discontent among nobles, peasants, and Sufis.

Firoz Shah Tughlaq (1351–1388): the welfare Sultan

Firoz Shah was a **cousin of Muhammad bin Tughlaq** and is remembered for stability, welfare, and architecture after the chaos of the earlier Tughlaq phase.

Key features of his rule

Reforms and welfare:

- **Reduced harsh taxes** and abolished many oppressive taxes; tried to repair the agrarian economy damaged during Muhammad bin Tughlaq's reign.
- Created welfare institutions like hospitals, orphanages, and **public works departments**, sometimes called ***diwan-i-khiraj*** and ***diwan-i-marab*** (for irrigation and canals).
- **Built canals and tanks in Delhi** and surrounding regions to improve irrigation and water supply.

Administrative and social measures:

- Strengthened the role of orthodox ulema and Islamic jurisprudence, **reversing some liberal policies of earlier rulers.**
- Tried to systematise state charity and employment, giving pensions to the disabled, scholars, and contributors to society.

Architecture and city-building:

- **Founded Firozabad (modern Firoz Shah Kotla)** near Delhi as his new capital complex.
- Built mosques, madrasas, caravanserais, and palaces in Delhi, Hissar, Jaunpur, and other towns, blending Persian and Indian styles.
- **Firoz Shah ruled for about 37 years and managed to restore order after the turmoil of Muhammad bin Tughlaq**, but he also avoided major conquests and allowed some provinces to drift away.

Decline of the Tughlaq Dynasty (1388–1413)

- After Firoz Shah's death in 1388 CE, the dynasty declined rapidly through a series of weak and short-reigned successors:
 - Ghiyas-ud-din II (brief reign),
 - Abu Bakr Shah,
 - **Nasir-ud-din Muhammad Shah** and others whose rule lasted only months or a few years.
- **The Sultanate began to fragment:**
 - Southern governors carved out **independent kingdoms (e.g., Bahmani in the Deccan, Vijayanagara indirectly).**
 - North-western regions also slipped out of Delhi's firm control.
- **In 1398 CE, Timur (Tamerlane) invaded Delhi**, sacked the city, and massacred much of its population; **the last Tughlaq**

Sultan, Nasir-ud-din Mahmud, remained a nominal ruler while real power dwindled.

- The **Tughlaq line effectively ended around 1413–1414 CE**, after which **Khizr Khan (Sayyid dynasty)** took over as Timur's deputy and later established the Sayyid Sultanate.

Tughlaq contributions and legacy

- **Political and administrative:**
 - Brought the Delhi Sultanate to its maximum territorial extent under Muhammad bin Tughlaq, though at the cost of chaos.
 - Introduced new forms of centralised fiscal and military experiments, even if many failed.
- **Economic and infrastructural:**
 - Muhammad bin Tughlaq's token currency and land-revenue experiments and Firoz Shah's canals and welfare works left a mixed but deep impact on the state-craft and economy.
- **Cultural and architectural:**
 - **Developed the Tughlaq style of architecture:** fortified tombs, blocky structures, sloping walls, and use of local grey stone (e.g., Tughlaqabad, Firoz Shah Kotla, Adilabad).
 - **Patronised Persian literature and Sufi traditions,** though with a more orthodox tilt under Firoz Shah.

SAYYID DYNASTY

- The Sayyid (Sayyid/Saiyyid) Dynasty was the **fourth ruling dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate, ruling from 1414 to 1451 CE**—that is, for about **37 years between the collapse of the Tughlaq Sultanate and the rise of the Lodi dynasty**.
- The Sayyids are often described as **caretakers of a declining Delhi Sultanate** rather than as powerful imperial rulers.

Origin and period

- The **Sayyids succeeded the Tughlaq dynasty, which had been fatally weakened by Timur's invasion of Delhi (1398 CE)** and the subsequent fragmentation of the Sultanate.
- The **dynasty was founded by Khizr Khan**, who had been **governor of Multan and Timur's deputy (Rayat-i-Ala) in India**.
- In 1414 CE, Khizr Khan captured Delhi from the last weak Tughlaq remnants and established the Sayyid rule, making them the fourth dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate.

Khizr Khan (1414–1421): a vassal–Sultan

- Khizr Khan was originally a **Timurid governor in Multan** and later **took advantage of the political chaos after Timur's invasion to move into Delhi**.
- He did not assume the full title of Sultan, but **ruled as a "Rayat-i-Ala" (exalted subject) of Timur** and later his son Shah Rukh, signalling that he was still formally a Timurid vassal.
- **His main task was consolidation:** he brought parts of Punjab, Sindh, Delhi, and the surrounding Doab under his control, but lost effective authority over Bengal, Gujarat, Malwa, and the Deccan, which had become independent.

Mubarak Shah (1421–1434): the strongest Sayyid

- On his father's death, Khizr Khan was succeeded by his son **Mubarak Khan**, who took the **title Muizz-ud-din Mubarak Shah**.
- Unlike his father, he declared full independence:
 - Issued coins in his own name and had the khutba (Friday sermon) read in his favour, which signified sovereign status.
- Domestically, he:
 - Suppressed several rebellions, including those of Khokhar chiefs and local Hindu chieftains.
 - **Is noted as the first Delhi Sultan who formally appointed Hindu nobles to important posts, showing a more inclusive administrative approach.**
 - Founded a new town called **Mubarakabad on the banks of the Yamuna** to strengthen his base.
- His reign ended violently: he was assassinated in 1434, likely due to court intrigues, and **his nephew Muhammad Shah succeeded him**.

Muhammad Shah (1434–1443): loss of central power

- Muhammad Shah was a **weak ruler** in a time when Delhi's authority was already sharply reduced.
- The **Sultan's real power was confined to a radius of about 30 miles around Delhi**, while regional nobles and governors controlled the rest of the kingdom.
- One of his few military successes was defeating the ruler of Malwa with the help of **Bahlul Lodi, the governor of Lahore, who earned the title Khan-i-Khanan (chief of nobles)** for his service.
- He failed to reverse the fragmentation of the Sultanate, and the stage was set for the Lodis to take over.

Alam Shah and end of the dynasty (1443–1451)

- **Alam Shah (‘Ala-ud-din Alam Shah)**, son of Muhammad Shah, was the **last Sayyid Sultan**.
- He was weak and disinterested in strong rule, and in **1448 CE he voluntarily abandoned Delhi and retired to Budaun (a smaller town in Uttar Pradesh)**, leaving the capital virtually unguarded.
- This **vacuum allowed Bahlul Lodi, the powerful Afghan noble and governor of Punjab and Lahore, to march on Delhi and seize the throne in 1451 CE**, thus ending the Sayyid dynasty and **founding the Lodi dynasty**.

LODI DYNASTY

- The Lodi Dynasty was **the final ruling family of the Delhi Sultanate**, marking a **significant Afghan-led phase in medieval Indian history**.
- It spanned **1451 to 1526** before falling to Babur's Mughals.

Key Rulers

- **Bahlul Lodi (1451–1489)**: Consolidated power by settling Afghan nobles in India and capturing Jaunpur; known for just governance.
- **Sikandar Lodi (1489–1517)**: The strongest ruler, he **conquered Bihar and Bengal regions, shifted the capital to Agra**, and boosted trade and agriculture despite temple destructions around Mathura.
- **Ibrahim Lodi (1517–1526)**: Faced noble rebellions and Rajput threats due to harsh policies; lost at the First Battle of Panipat in 1526.

Administration and Economy

Lodi rulers relied on Afghan tribal loyalties over the earlier iqta system, promoting agriculture via measurement of land (zamin). They faced regional autonomy issues, like Bihar governors paying tribute independently.

Culture and Decline

Sikandar patronized Indo-Islamic architecture in Agra and learning, while the era saw Sikhism's rise under Guru Nanak. Internal strife and Babur's artillery ended the dynasty, ushering Mughal rule.