

Module - II

Military History of Medieval India



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ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DELHI SULTANATE

The Medieval period dates roughly between 6th A.D and 16th A.D. During this period many dynasties ruled India. The period was marked by several battles which some developments of new weapons and new military strategies. The focus of this lesson will be on the onset of the rule of Delhi Sultanates in 1206 A.D. up until the last of the Mughal rule under Bahadur Shah Zafar and his overthrow in 1857 by the Britishers, which subsequently paved the way for the establishment of Colonial rule in India. The battles were many as were the methods adopted in each of them. The overall objective was to defeat the enemy and win the war.

You will learn that the number of soldiers in battles did not matter; rather it was the strategy and bravery that mattered when it came to victory. Hence the innovations and methods adopted by different rulers during period contributed to an experienced military in different regions of India. In this lesson, you will first learn the developments in military starting with the onset of foreign invasions and then study the major battles that led to consolidation of Muslim rule. You will also learn the major battle field techniques employed and the reasons for their failure.



Objectives

After studying this lesson you will be able to:

- explain the factors responsible for foreign invasion of India and its impact;
- describe the developments in Military system and
- identify the reasons for the weaknesses of Delhi Sultanates.

5.1 Foreign invasions in Medieval India

Do you know when the first foreign invasion into India took place? It was during 5th century BC that the Persian King Darius invaded the North Western part of India, which was then divided into small regional states. The division of India into many principal states and lack of unity among them provided the opportunity for King Darius to invade and annex them. Thereafter invasions from abroad continued. All invaders who came to India aimed at conquering and acquiring wealth.

Each such invasion not only brought destruction but new developments in various fields such as the introduction of new language, different religious beliefs and practices, development of art and culture and most importantly new military organizations, new weapons and tactics as well.

Important of these many foreign invasions is the one by Sultan Shahab -ud -din - Mohammed Ghori. The main reason for his expansion was to gain foot-hold in India and also acquire its huge wealth. His invasion led to setting up of Muslim rule in India for the very first time.



Do you know?

Mohammed Ghori was ruler of a small region called Ghor in today's central Afghanistan. He was originally from Turkey and he desired to expand his empire by turning to neighboring countries including India.

The invasion took place through Khyber Pass, the route that connected Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan and the present day Peshawar in Pakistan. Geographically speaking, the Himalaya mountain ranges act as the natural frontier of India in the North, Northwest and the Eastern part, whereas the oceans cover the Southern part of India. However, at Khyber Pass the mountain ranges are low and hence provided a viable route for foreign invasions to happen. Even so, capturing India and establishing his rule was not an easy task for Ghori since he had to fight twice with the Indian local rulers - in 1191 A.D for the first time, followed by the second invasion the very next year in 1192 A.D. On both occasions he faced the Rajput king Prithviraj Chauhan who was then the ruler of Ajmer and Delhi. These battles are remembered as Battles of Tarain.



Do you know?

The Rajputs were a warrior class and in Sanskrit they were called "son of a king". They dominated much of northern India and were divided into different clans. Loyalty was to the individual clan rather than the king.



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Impact of the invasion

The impact of the invasion not only paved the way for the establishment of Muslim rule but also that the Khyber Pass became the frequent route through which subsequent invasions from abroad became possible. As we will see later, Babur's invasion also came through this route, which led to the establishment of Mughal rule.



Intext Questions

5.1

1. Why did foreign invasions take place?
2. What was the reason for Mohammed Ghori to invade India?
3. Where is Khyber pass?
4. Who were the Rajputs?
5. What was the impact of Ghori's invasion?

5.1.1 The Battles at Tarain and consolidation of Muslim rule

As you have learnt above, it was the battles at Tarain that was remarkable as it provided the initial entry of Muslim rule in India. But soon after that they got involved in dealing with regular threats from Mongol invasions, putting down frequent internal rebellions that arose both within the dynasty as well as from the Rajput chiefs. They also tried to expand territory by conquest of neighboring territories. It is important to note that each of the Delhi Sultanate rulers dealt with these problems in different ways. During the reign of Khilji and Tughlaq dynasty, for example, the empire expanded West and South. The invasion from the Mongols was also effectively stopped by erecting strong defenses.

The first battle of Tarain was fought between Mohammed Ghori and the Indian Rajput King Prithviraj Chauhan in 1191 A.D. at Tarrain near the present day Thaneshwar city in Haryana. Prithviraj Chauhan won the battle. However, it was after defeating the Rajput King at the second battle of Tarrain in 1192 A.D that Mohammed Ghori was able to gain foot-hold in Northern India and thereby establish the Muslim rule. After crossing the Khyber Pass, Ghori reached North Western part of India, the present day Punjab, and attacked and captured the fortress of Bathinda which was the outpost of the Rajput kingdom.

This made Prithviraj counter-attack and recapture Bathinda by fiercely attacking Ghori's forces from both sides called 'the flanks'. The attack was a success for Prithviraj as Ghori's forces could not withstand and hence retreated. Ghori narrowly escaped death and was saved by one of his loyal slave Qutub-ud-din Aibak, who later established the Slave Dynasty in Delhi.



Note

The mistake Prithviraj made was that he did not pursue his enemy further but was satisfied with recapturing the Bathinda fort. Had Prithviraj killed Ghori in the battle then the military history would have been different. Probably, India would have seen a different medieval period without the Delhi Sultanates or even the Mughal rulers. The establishment of Muslim rule brought changes in military structure, military reforms, new weapon systems, strategies and battle field tactics.

In any case, what you should understand is that the success of Prithviraj during the first battle was not capitalised upon. Hence the very next year, Ghori returned with vengeance and attacked Prithviraj's forces in the second battle of Tarain.



Do you Know?

Prithvi Raj Chauhan was an exemplary ruler and military strategist. It is said he had the art of hitting target only on the basis of the sound. He extended his empire by defeating many kingdoms like Chandellas, Gahadavalas etc.. The Gahadavala ruler Jaychandra tried to curb the ambition of Prithvi Raj Chauhan. It is said that Prithvi Raj Chauhan abducted the daughter of Jaychandra, Sanyogita, when he was not invited for the 'Swayamvar' by the latter. This incident has been immortalized by Chand Berrdai in his epic Prithvi Raj Raso.

His major military achievement was the success in the first battle of Terrain in 1191. He forced the army of Muhammad Ghori to retreat. It is said that he did not attack the retreating army to protect the Rajput honour and tradition. Next year, in 1192, Muhammad Ghori again attacked and this time Prithvi Raj Chauhan was defeated. Many of the rulers had turned against him and did not help him in the second battle of Terrain. The defeat of Prithvi Raj Chauhan paved the way for the establishment of the Turkish rule in India which continued for about 300 years.

	When	Where	Between Whom
First Battle of Tarrain	1191 A.D	Tarain, Haryana	Mohammed Ghori and Prithviraj Chauhan Prithviraj Chauhan won.
Second Battle of Tarrain	1192 A.D	Tarain, Haryana	Mohammed Ghori and Prithviraj Chauhan Mohammed Ghori won.

What positive aspects could be noted from the rule of Delhi Sultanates?

- There were changes in military structure
- Military reforms were undertaken
- New weapon system came into being



Note

The second battle at Tarain was significant because during this battle Ghori won the numerically strong Rajput forces. This was possible because Ghori's forces were swift in the use of Cavalry as against that of the Rajputs which were slow, although they were large in numbers. Ghori's forces were well organized with good line of command and control. The horses were fitted with horse shoes that provided high speed and life. Also, new battlefield tactics were used by Ghori by way of tactically retreating his forces which made the Rajputs move towards the centre and thereafter encircling them with their flanks and attacking fiercely. Besides, Ghori's forces were always on the offensive and hence had the option of choosing the place to strike. These techniques led to the victory of Mohammed Ghori who later captured Delhi and Ajmer and established his rule.

Besides the superior battlefield techniques employed by the Turkish forces, the successful penetration and establishment of Muslim rule in India can be attributed to the following:-

- India, at that time, lacked a unified central authority. It was divided among many small Kingdoms such as the Pratiharas and Chauhans in the North, Rashtrakutas in the Deccan or Central India and the Palas in East India.
- Small kingdoms meant less power and weak forces. It was easy for Mohammad Ghori to defeat smaller kings.
- There was frequent infighting within the Rajput clans for supremacy.

From then on, the Muslim dynasty called the Slave dynasty was founded with Qutub-din-Aibak as its first independent ruler in 1206 A.D. He ruled for four years and established Muslim rule by putting down revolts from the surrounding Rajput kings. Because of his bravery and generosity he was called 'Lakh Baksh'. Consolidation of Muslim rule took place during the reign of Iltutmish who ruled from 1210 to 1236 A.D. Further territorial expansion took place during the rule of Alauddin Khilji when Gujarat, Rajasthan, Malwa, Ujjain and neighboring territories were captured. Attempt was also made to expand to the South.



Note



Map 5.1 India (AD 800-1200)



Intext Questions

5.2

1. Who founded the Muslim rule in India?
2. Why was Qutub-ud-din-Aibak called Lakh Baksh?
3. Why did Prithviraj Chauhan lose the second battle of Tarain?
4. What tactics were employed by the Turks that made them victorious?

5.2 Military contributions

During the rule of Delhi Sultanate the military saw new developments. In fact, as and when power shifted to new Kings there were changes in the way the military was organized. Generally, it was the king or the Sultan who was the supreme commander of the armed forces. A new war ministry was created to administer the military

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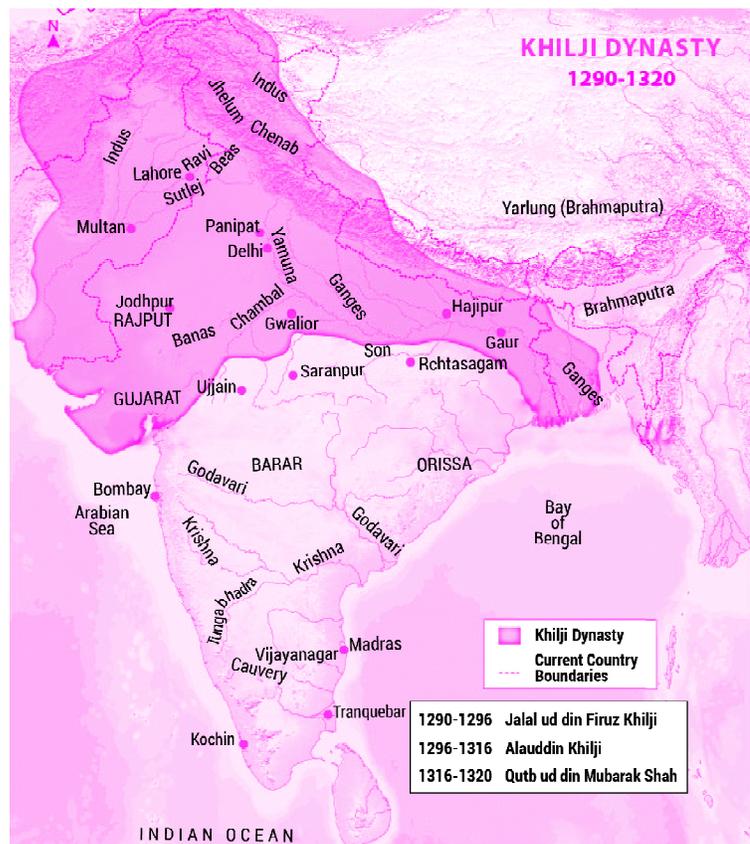
Establishment of The Delhi Sultanate

department and was under the control of a Minister called the 'diwan-i-arz'. He was responsible for recruitment of soldiers, training and maintenance of discipline in the army. Branches of the army consisted of infantry, cavalry and elephants. Loyalty of these branches was ensured through keeping them under the command of experienced and trusted people. The cavalry branch was considered paramount as it had great mobility and proved effective as well.

During the rule of Ghiyas-ud-din Balban of the Slave dynasty a strong central army was maintained to

- (i) put down internal uprisings. The military was reorganized into commands. Each command was responsible
- (ii) for maintaining law and order and provide support to the Sultan during rebellions. Borders were fortified to ensure strong rule and an efficient intelligence or spy system was put in place.

During the days of Khilji dynasty (Map 5.2) under Alauddin Khilji (1296-1316) a large standing permanent army was established for further expansion of the empire as well as to protect his empire from Mongol invasion. The Mongols were using gunpowder and hence it spread to India as well. However, the use of firearms and canons by the Delhi Sultanates was of limited nature and varying degrees during military operations. You will see that it was only during the Mughal rule that the effective use of these weapons was made.



Map 5.2. Khilji dynasty



Intext Questions

5.3

1. What was the name of the Minister under whom the new war ministry was created?
2. How did reorganization of the military take place?



Note

5.3 Weakening of Delhi Sultanates

Weakening of Sultanate Empire took place for several reasons. It started from the Tughlaq dynasty itself. It is important to note that unsuccessful campaigns contributed to the weakening of the empire. For example, the invasion of Timur by the successors of Tughlaq led to desolation and to several regions demanding autonomy from the authority of Delhi. Gujarat, Malwa, Punjab and Rajasthan, which were once annexed and controlled by the Sultans, no longer remained so and they started agitating for more power and autonomous status.

The second reason was frequent internal power struggle leading to revolts from within the Sultanate which threatened internal stability. Many times succession of rulers was not peaceful. Deceit and treachery were common among the royal family where brothers and descendents attempted to capture power by killing and using other treacherous means. In fact, this was a common phenomenon in every dynasty.

The third reason was the problem of maintaining large standing army. Salary and payment issues affected the continuation of large army in due course of time. It placed a financial burden on the state leading to either levying more taxes on the people or collecting taxes from neighboring chieftains who refused to pay at times. So they had to conquer neighboring territories for wealth, which in turn drained their own wealth.

The fourth reason was the failure to control the free-floating mercenaries, who were hired for money. These mercenaries sold their services to whoever paid more money. The availability of such mercenaries led to more rebellions as the smaller kings used these soldiers to rebel against the Sultan.

And finally, internal rebellions contributed to further weakening of the empire. For example at the time of last of the Delhi Sultanate rule under Ibrahim Lodhi (1517 - 1526) rebellions by his own brother Jalal Khan and others elsewhere led to dissatisfaction inviting foreign conquest by Babur who defeated Lodhi at the first battle of Panipat in 1526 and establishing the Mughal rule in India.



Intext Questions

5.4

1. Who are the mercenaries?
2. Explain any three reasons for the weakening of Delhi Sultanate rule.

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Note



What You Have Learnt

- Medieval India was divided among many princely states.
- Rulers lacked unity which invited many foreign invasions.
- The first such invasion was by Mohammed Ghori in 1191-1192 A.D.
- The victory of Mohammed Ghori in the second battle of Tarain, led to establishment of Delhi Sultanates.
- The Rajputs were known for their valour and possessed numerically superior military strength.
- Despite the numerical superiority of the Rajputs the foreign invaders were able to win the battle through efficient military strategy and battlefield tactics and established Muslim rule in India.
- Subsequently, the military underwent organizational changes with the establishment of military commands and a permanent standing army.
- With the arrival of gun powder, new weapon systems such as artillery were introduced.
- The Delhi Sultanates could not sustain their rule due to several reasons primarily internal fighting for capturing the throne.
- Finally, the era of Delhi Sultanates ended with another foreign invasion this time under the Mughal ruler Babur.



Terminal Exercises

1. Give an account of the military tactics employed by Mohammed Ghori at the second battle of Panipat.
2. What were the military reforms undertaken by the Delhi Sultanates?
3. Highlight the military contributions of Balban.
4. Mention any four reasons for the weakening of Delhi Sultanate rule.



Answers to Intext Questions

5.1

1. Unity among the states was lacking and hence it prompted invasions from abroad aimed at conquering and acquiring wealth from India.
2. To gain foot- hold in India and also acquire its huge wealth.
3. Khyber Pass is the route that connects Kabul in Afghanistan and Peshawar in Pakistan.

4. The Rajputs were a warrior class and in Sanskrit term they were called "son of a king".
5. It paved the way for the establishment of Muslim rule in India and also that the Khyber Pass became the frequent route through which subsequent invasions from abroad became possible.

5.2

1. Qutub-ud-din-Aibak in 1206 A.D.
2. He was called Lakh Baksh because of his bravery and generosity.
3. Mohammed Ghori's forces were always on the offensive and employed new battle field tactics which Prithviraj Chauhan did not have.
4. Retreating and drawing the enemy forces to the centre and then encircling them with the help of flanks.

5.3

1. The new war ministry was under the control of a Minister called the 'diwan-i-arz'.
2. The military was reorganized into commands, each of which was responsible for maintaining law and order.

5.4

1. The mercenaries were hired for money and hence they sold their services to whoever paid more money.
2. Frequent internal power struggle; maintenance of large standing army and use of mercenaries who sold their services to whoever paid more money and hence not a dependable force

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