



## THE TUGHLUQ SULTANATE IN DELHI

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Tughluq adopted the title of Ghiyas al-Din Tughluq. He applied himself to putting the administration in order again. He restored public works of utility such as forts and canals. Order was re-established, and severe action was taken against robbers. He encouraged agriculture, planted gardens, and took steps to safeguard the cultivator from the exactions of middlemen and officers. He had to turn his attention to the Deccan when the ruler of Warangal rebelled, and Tughluq's son, Jawna Khan, was sent to bring him back to his allegiance. This expedition, however, failed because a mischievous rumour was spread to the effect that Tughluq had died, which was generally believed in the absence of contradiction from Delhi. The prince, therefore, returned to Delhi. In 723/1323 he was again sent to the Deccan and, after capturing Bidar, he marched on Warangal, reduced it, and annexed the surrounding regions, Telingana.

Bengal was still under the descendants of Balban. Civil war broke out on the death of Balban's grandson, Shams al-Din Feroz Shah, in 718/1318. One of the parties, Nasir al-Din, appealed to Tughluq, who considered this to be an excellent opportunity for intervention. He marched to Bengal and placed Nasir al-Din as a vassal monarch on the throne of west Bengal. East Bengal was annexed and administered as a province. Tughluq then returned to Delhi in 725/1325. Preparations were made, as was normal, to accord the sultan a warm reception. Jawna Khan built a special pavilion to entertain the monarch. When he had just finished the meal, the prince suggested that the elephants brought from Bengal might be paraded. The pavilion collapsed, killing Tughluq. It has been suggested by some later historians that the pavilion was specially designed to cause the monarch's death, which, instead of being an accident, was really parricide on the part of Jawna Khan. The authority for this story is Ibn Battuta, but it seems that there is not much truth in the allegation. Historians of



the period mention it as an unexpected accident, and evidence to the contrary is not convincing. Barani, who fiercely condemns Muhammad b. Tughluq for very much of his policy, makes no suggestion of parricide and sees Tughluq's death as a 'thunderbolt and heavenly calamity'.<sup>21</sup>

Jawna Khan ascended the throne with the title of Muhammad Shah and is generally known to historians as Muhammad b. Tughluq, a style used in contemporary literature and inscriptions. He was well educated and was equally at home in Islamic law, philosophy, mathematics, logic and medicine. He had a sharp intellect, and few could win a point in arguing with him. He had brilliant ideas, but often was blind to difficulties in implementing them. He was impatient, and did not tolerate inefficiency. He looked upon every failure to carry out his orders as wanton disobedience, which he punished sternly. He confused the officials by a succession of orders which they found difficult to enforce, and were sometimes heavily punished for this failure. His punishments were notoriously severe, for he could not see that not every little failure or delinquency was an act of rebellion. The virtue of moderation was absolutely foreign to him. He was not unjust. He had a scrupulous regard for law and justice, yet he was ruthless in punishment, and, once an offence was proved to his satisfaction, he knew no mercy. So great was his regard for justice that he would appear personally in the court of the qazi whose orders he would carry out, even though they were against him. There are at least two occasions on record when he did so. He was liberal in making gifts, but he was unforgiving, and executed a large number of men. He was perhaps embittered by rebellions, and he thought that the only way of dealing with them was inordinate severity. Some of his measures were well conceived, but they failed for the lack of obvious precautions. It also seems that he was not ably assisted, which made him more furious.

As the result of the annexations in the south Muhammad b. Tughluq was convinced that a new imperial centre was needed there. He selected Devagiri

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<sup>21</sup>. For a full discussion, see Syed Moinul Haq, 'Was Mohammad bin Tughlak a parricide?' Muslim University Journal, Aligarh, v/2, (October, 1958), 17-48



which he named Dawlatabad, and decided to establish a metropolis there in 727/13 27. He built a beautiful city with well laid out streets and imposing buildings, and strengthened the rock-built citadel, the circumference of which, about 500 yards, had under the Hindu kings been scarped smoothly, so that scaling was impossible, with a deep ditch dug in the solid rock. This city was intended to be a second capital, or, as some historians assert, to replace Delhi completely as the capital of the empire. Many government officials, scholars and others went to Dawlat abad to settle, and others whose livelihood depended upon the court followed. Anyone who voluntarily decided to settle at Dawlatabad was encouraged to do so. Efforts were made to facilitate the journey by providing food and rest at convenient distances, the two cities having first been connected by a good and shady road. It seems that the sultan was not satisfied with the results of the voluntary migration and, therefore, he used compulsion after two years. Even then the story that Delhi was reduced to utter desolation does not seem to be true.<sup>22</sup> The non Muslim population was not forced to migrate, as this would have been pointless. The sultan's action proved to be extremely unpopular. There is little doubt, however, that, but for his foresight, Muslim influence in southern India would have received a serious setback when the sultanate of Delhi was involved in difficulties and the rise of independent provincial dynasties reduced the extent of its dominions. But for Dawlatabad, there would have been no Bahmani kingdom to check the rising power of Vijayanagara. The sultan's compulsion, however, seems to have embittered his relations with his Muslim officials to such an extent that he was involved in a series of rebellions.

In 729/1329 the sultan raised the state demand on agricultural produce in the Ganges-Jamna Do'ab. Here again it has been stated that the demand was increased tenfold and twentyfold, others have said that it was raised threefold and fourfold. The truth seems to be that the demand was increased by five to

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<sup>22</sup>. A. Mahdi Husain, *The rise and fall of Muhammad bin Tugbluq* (London, 1938), 116 ff.



ten per cent.<sup>23</sup> This increase was resented by the population, who left their holdings and took to robbery. As the thick forests were impenetrable to cavalry it was customary for recalcitrant peasants to leave their hamlets and enter the forest with all their belongings. The sultan sent punitive expeditions, which made it more difficult to restore agriculture in this fertile province, and produced famine in the area right up to Delhi.

The sultan in 731-2/1130-2 introduced a 'forced' currency, replacing gold, silver and bullion coins by tokens of copper and brass. Intrinsically this was not unsound, but he forgot that craftsmen could forge the token coins: there was large-scale forgery, and the entire scheme failed. The sultan redeemed all the token coins at face value, which caused considerable loss to the treasury. It has been suggested that the sultan had grandiose ideas of conquest, and he thought that the introduction of brass and copper coins would give him the means for carrying out his projects. This does not look plausible, because the sultan could not be so ignorant as to imagine that brass and copper could completely replace gold and silver. Another explanation, more credible, has been offered that there was scarcity of specie during this period, but the sultan's ability to redeem both genuine and forged token coins counters this argument.

The sultan had to march to the south from Delhi in 735/1335 because Sayyid Jalal al-Din Ahsan of Kaythal, who had been appointed governor of Ma'bar, had rebelled at Madura. When Muhammad b. Tughluq reached Warangal, an epidemic of cholera spread in the army. The sultan himself was taken ill. The expedition was, therefore, abandoned, and Ma'bar was lost to the sultanate. The kingdom of Ma'bar or Madura lasted to 779/1378, when the dynasty came to an end. It had to fight constantly against its Hindu neighbours, and ultimately was destroyed by the forces of Vijayanagara.

Muhammad b. Tughluq returned to Delhi and was, it seems, hardpressed for funds, the treasury having been emptied by rebellions, lavish grants and

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<sup>23</sup>. For fuller discussion, see I. H. Qureshi, *The administration of the sultanate of Debit* (Karachi, 1954), 115-17.



unwise measures. He therefore started farming out revenues of large areas. Men of no substance, and with little experience of revenue matters, offered unrealistic sums of money, which they were unable to pay. Being afraid of the dire consequences, they rebelled. The resultant deterioration in agriculture was aggravated by the failure of the monsoons in the area around Delhi, where famine conditions prevailed. The sultan first introduced a daily ration of grain to the citizens, and tried to conciliate and encourage the peasants by making grants of money for bringing land back into cultivation. The scheme failed, mostly because of lack of rainfall, but also because by now the peasants were puzzled and had lost confidence. The sultan, therefore, went with his court and a large number of people of Delhi to the fertile province of Oudh (Awadh) which had prospered under the wise administrator, 'Ayn al-Mulk. The sultan established a camp on the west bank of the Ganges about 165 miles from Delhi, a city of straw sheds and walls, which he called Svargadvara, 'the gate of Paradise'. This gave the sultan some respite, but, despite all his difficulties, he had not given up the idea of further conquests. For a considerable time he had kept alive his ambition of conquering Transoxania and Khurasan. When the situation in those areas did not warrant such an undertaking, he thought of bringing the mountain area of Kangra and beyond under his sway. He sent an army of 100,000 horse and a large number of foot into the mountains by way of Kangra. After the conquest of Kangra, the army marched into the mountains beyond and secured considerable success. However, when the rains came, the army was cut off. There was disease among men and horses and it decided to retreat. This was difficult, partly because of bad weather and landslides, and partly because the local population was hostile, and hurled stones when the army was marching through narrow passes and valleys. The army was almost completely annihilated. Some writers have thought that the sultan's intention was to invade China, but there seems to be little justification for this conclusion because the objective is clearly mentioned as Himachal or Qarachal, the



Himalaya or 'black mountains'. The destruction of such a large army and the consequent dwindling of the sultan's prestige now made rebellion even easier.

From many sides came news of risings and rebellions. East Bengal became independent in 739/1338. In 740/1339 an officer 'All Shah Kar rebelled and occupied Bidar after having taken possession of the treasury at Gulbarga. This rebellion, however, was suppressed by Qutlugh Khan who had charge of Dawlatabad. It has been noted that the sultan had established a camp at Svargadvara, where all arrangements were made by 'Ayn al-Mulk. A number of fugitives from the sultan's anger had taken shelter with the governor. The sultan's mind was poisoned, and he decided to transfer firm from Oudh to the Deccan. This was unwise, as 'Ayn al-Mulk was popular because of his good administration, and was reluctant to go to the Deccan, which was in turmoil. But the sultan insisted and 'Ayn al-Mulk was advised to rebel. The sultan, despite his difficulties, gave battle and 'Ayn al-Mulk was defeated. He was carried before the sultan, who, instead of executing him, ordered his imprisonment. Later he was pardoned and reinstated in his government of Oudh. In 741 /13 40 Malik Shadii Lodi, governor of Multan, rebelled, and when the sultan marched against him he fled into Afghanistan. In 743/1343 there was a rebellion in the areas of Sunam, Samana, Kaythal and Guhram in the Panjab. Before it could be properly suppressed there was a rebellion of the amiran-i sada<sup>24</sup> in Gujarat.

The sultan had come to think that the amiran-i sada were responsible for all mischief. Eighty-nine of them were executed by 'Aziz Khammar, the governor of Malwa, under the sultan's instructions. This spread horror among the amiran-i sada of Gujarat and the Deccan. The first to take up arms were those in Gujarat. Muhammad b. Tughluq appointed a council of regency at Delhi and marched towards Gujarat. 'Aziz Khammar in the meanwhile had been defeated and put to death by rebels.

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<sup>24</sup>. Sing, amir-i/ada: literally 'commander of a hundred', is often taken to mean commander of a hundred horse, and misleadingly translated 'centurion'. They commanded small contingents to maintain order in the countryside.



The amiran-i sada in Gujarat were defeated with heavy losses. The sultan ordered the governor of Dawlatabad to send the amiran-i sada of that province to Gujarat. They were despatched, but at the end of the first day's march they decided to rebel. Then they imprisoned the governor, seized the fort and proclaimed Isma'il Mukh sultan of the Deccan under the title of Nasir al-Din Shah. Those amiran-i sada who were imprisoned in Gujarat escaped, and joined Isma'il Mukh. The sultan marched against Dawlatabad, where the citadel held out. In the meanwhile there was another serious rebellion in Gujarat under Taghi, a cobbler, who had gathered around himself a considerable following. The sultan left Dawlatabad and marched against Taghi.

Taghi was a capable leader and the monarch was not able to corner him. In the meanwhile the situation in the Deccan deteriorated. Another amir-i sada, Hasan, had shown greater initiative and Isma'il Mukh abdicated in his favour. This Hasan became sultan under the title of Abu'l-Muzaffar 'Ala' al-Din Bahman Shah. Muhammad b. Tughluq abandoned the idea of recovering the Deccan, and decided to devote his entire energy to Taghi, who escaped to Thattha in Sind, where he joined the local rulers who were also in revolt. The sultan, having summoned reinforcements from Delhi and other places, marched to Sind, and was within a short distance from Thattha when on 10 Muharram 752/9 March 1351 he was taken ill. Ten days later he died.

When Muhammad b. Tughluq was worried because of his growing unpopularity amongst the Muslims, he thought that recognition from the caliph would strengthen his position. Therefore, after making diligent inquiries, he applied for recognition from the 'Abbasid shadowcaliph in Egypt. For three years the Friday prayers and the observance of the two 'Ids were suspended and coin was issued in the name of the caliph. It was in 745/1344 that Hajji Sa'id Sarsari came from Egypt bearing a letter from the caliph. The envoy was received with the utmost respect and the Friday prayers and the 'Ids were restored. Another important event of the reign was the visit of the well-known traveller Ibn Battuta, who was at the court from 734-43/1334-42.





Muhammad b. Tughluq's reign was a complete failure. After initial success, in spite of his great ability and perseverance, his harshness and ill-advised measures ruined the sultanate, which in the early days of his reign had reached its climax. He was a man of great ability, but his genius was of a kind that takes no account of realities. A poor judge of men, he was unbalanced in his views, and knew no compromise. When Muhammad b. Tughluq's army found itself in difficulties in Sind, being left without a leader, it started retreating in disorder, and was harassed both by its Mongol allies and the local population. The sultan's cousin, Feroz, was present in the camp, but he was unwilling to take up the responsibilities of the throne. Ultimately, because of the sad plight of the army, he was persuaded to ascend the throne under the title of Feroz Shah, on 24 Muharram 752/23 March 1351. The minister Khwaja Jahan had proclaimed at Delhi a child whom he called Muhammad b. Tughluq's son, but whose claims are dismissed by the writers of the period. While still on his way he was joined by several important officials from Delhi. One of these was the able Malik Maqbul, a converted Brahman of Telingana, subsequently entitled Khan Jahan Maqbul Telingani. He was appointed wazir. Khwaja Jahan was able to gather little support and came as a suppliant. He was received with kindness, but later was nevertheless killed. Five months after his succession Feroz entered Delhi.

He was confronted with a colossal task. The general dissatisfaction engendered by Muhammad b. Tughluq's policies had to be removed, and the people reconciled. In addition there was the difficulty of suppressing widespread rebellion. Feroz Shah recognized the futility of trying to reconquer all the lost provinces. This proved to be wise, because the sultan could use his forces in consolidating the areas that he controlled.

Feroz Shah made a good beginning by remitting outstanding debts to the state which had been mostly incurred by rash tax-farmers and government servants who had been given advances for the purposes of improvement of agriculture. He did not try to recover even the large sums of money which had





been freely spent by Khwaja Jahan when seeking support for his nominee to the throne. Feroz Shah appointed Khwaja Husam al-Din Junayd for the purpose of making a new assessment of the revenues of the sultanate. This had become necessary because Muhammad b. Tughluq's measures had created chaos in the revenue records. However, with the help of local records, this task was completed in a period of six years, and many unjust cesses which had grown up as the result of the breakdown in administration were abolished. These measures were rewarded with success, agriculture was restored to its original condition, and a greater area was brought under cultivation. The townsfolk were not forgotten, and a number of small but vexatious taxes were abolished. With the increase in productivity prices came down, and maintained a steady level for the greater part of the reign. It is interesting to note that the level was almost the same as in the days of 'Ala' al-Din Muhammad Khalji, which shows that the Khalji monarch's measures were economically sound. The difference was that Feroz Shah did not have to use any extraordinary administrative machinery for the purpose of maintaining prices. Further to improve cultivation, he dug a number of important canals and sank wells. The failure of monsoons during Muhammad b. Tughluq's reign must have brought home to Feroz Shah the necessity of artificial irrigation. Canals had been constructed earlier, especially by Ghiyas al-Din Tughluq, but Feroz Shah's canals" were more important, and some of them have survived even until today.

Feroz Shah was a great builder. He restored a large number of old monuments which had fallen into disrepair, one of these being the famous Qutb Minar at Delhi. He repaired a large number of towns and cities, which, because of rebellions and maladministration, had suffered during the last reign, and he founded several new cities, of which Hisar and Jawnpur are the most famous. The latter became the capital of the Sharqi kingdom, and developed into a great seat of learning. He built a new 'city of Delhi' called Ferozabad, and created south of that Delhi a vast madrasa beside the large reservoir called Hawz Khass. The imposing remains of pavilions and lecture halls are still intact. He



is credited with the construction of three hundred towns, which perhaps is not an exaggeration if the restoration of townships which had suffered under Muhammad b. Tughluq is taken into consideration. In addition, he built four large mosques, thirty palaces, and many other public works and buildings.

Feroz Shah displayed an interest in the past by removing two of Ashoka's pillars. One was re-erected inside the citadel of Ferozabad, and the other set up near Kushk-i Shikar on the Ridge north of Delhi. Around the former was built a double-storeyed pavilion, and the monolithic pillar was mounted on a solid base so that it seemed to the casual observer that it stood on the vaulted roof of the building. It was gilded, and therefore came to be known as Minara-i Zarrin. It is interesting to note that the Brahmans in the reign of Feroz Shah were not able to read the inscriptions, and falsely told the sultan that they contained a prophecy about his coming to the throne, and promised him great success as a monarch.

In the process of conciliation, Feroz Shah had to secure the cooperation of the Muslim 'ulanta' and religious leaders. Many of Muhammad b. Tughluq's difficulties had arisen because of his alienation of this class, first by ordering many of them to migrate from Delhi to Dawlatabad and, later, by punishing some of them heavily because of their reluctance to identify themselves with his measures. Partly because of his own temperament, and partly because of need, Feroz Shah went out of his way to reconcile the religious leaders, and showed the utmost respect to them. Some of his intolerant actions can be ascribed to their influence. Though the sultan abolished discretionary capital punishment, a Brahman was burnt to death for insulting Islam and the Prophet. The accepted practice whereby priests, recluses and hermits of other religions are exempt from paying jhya had been liberally interpreted in India, and no Brahman, however wealthy, was asked to pay the tax. Feroz Shah imposed the tax, in all probability, on those Brahmans who were not engaged in religious work. This measure was unpopular, and a large number of Brahmans assembled in front of the palace, and threatened to burn themselves alive. The



sultan did not relent, and ultimately other Hindus voluntarily undertook to pay the tax on behalf of the Brahmans. He also dealt severely with the Isma'ills, who had become active once again. This animosity was as much due to their reputation for underground political work as to doctrinal differences.

Feroz Shah had no military ambitions, but for the purpose of the consolidation of his empire he had to undertake a number of campaigns. He had extricated Muhammad b. Tughluq's army from a desperate situation with considerable success. He first turned his attention to Bengal, which had become independent. He would perhaps have left that kingdom alone but for the fact that its ruler, Ilyas, who had made himself master of west Bengal in 745/1345 and then annexed east Bengal in 752/1352, invaded Tirhut. Feroz Shah could not tolerate this invasion of his territories, and therefore marched from Delhi in 753/1353 and chased Ilyas away from Tirhut to his capital Pandua, and from there into Ikdala, which stood on an island in the Brahmaputra. As the monsoons would have cut his communications, Feroz Shah retreated and reached Delhi in 755/1354. In 760/1359 he again invaded Bengal. Now the ruler was Sikandar Shah, who had succeeded to the throne in 758/1357 and who, like his father Ilyas, had entrenched himself in Ikdala. Feroz Shah, finding it impossible to reduce Ikdala, ultimately agreed to negotiations which resulted in the recognition of Sikandar as a tributary on the annual payment of forty elephants. On his way back, Feroz Shah led an expedition from Jawnpur into Orissa, which he occupied. The raja of Orissa sued for peace, and was restored as a tributary on surrendering twenty elephants and promising to send the same number annually to Delhi. On the way back the sultan's army lost its bearings in the jungle, and reached Delhi only after considerable hardship.

Khan Jahan Maqbul Telingani died in 774/1372 and was succeeded by his son, who also received the title of Khan Jahan. Next year Feroz's eldest son, Fath Khan, died. After this Feroz Shah was gradually reduced to utter senility, and became incapable of exercising control or judgment. The minister now started on a career of intrigue which ultimately resulted in civil war. Feroz Shah died



in 790/1388 at the age of eighty-three. As the result of a prolonged struggle between the nobles and the princes of the royal family, the dynasty sank into insignificance and all the good work done by Feroz Shah was destroyed. It was in this state of chaos that Timur marched upon Delhi in 801/1398. The forces of the sultanate were decisively beaten in a battle near Delhi, although even in this decrepit state they gave a good account of themselves. Timur won huge booty, not only from Delhi but from the entire area on his route. Internal dissensions had demolished the structure of a mighty empire within a period of less than two decades. The last monarch of the dynasty, Mahmud, earned the satire that 'the writ of the lord of the world runs from Delhi to Palam', Palam being about nine miles from the city.