



TURKISH RULE IN INDIA (SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH) भारत में तुर्की शासन (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

(UG , SEM-4, PAPER MJC-7)

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SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

► Shamsuddin Iltutmish (1211-1236)

On the death of Aibak, the Turkish faction at Lahore supported Aibak's son Aram Shah (there is a good deal of controversy whether he was actually the son of Qutubuddin Aibak or not) while the nobles at Delhi, led by Ismail, who occupied the post of *amir-i-dad* (an important functionary of judicial department), invited Iltutmish to ascend the throne. At that time Iltutmish was the governor of Badaun. He marched towards Delhi.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH

(शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

But before entering the capital he met the army of Aram Shah. He easily defeated Aram Shah, whose rule lasted only for about eight months (1210-1211) and was of no significance.

► Early Life and Career of Iltutmish

Shamsuddin Iltutmish was born of Turkish parents of the Ilbari tribe of Central Asia. He was handsome and intelligent and his father loved him very much. He excited the jealousy of his half-brothers, who deceitfully sold him to a slave-trader while he was yet a child.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

- ▶ After passing through many hands, Iltutmish was finally purchased by Qutbuddin Aibak. Iltutmish proved his worth and rose to higher positions by his own merit. He got promotions one after another till he became *amir-i-shikar* (the master of the hunt). Then he was sent as in-charge of the fort of Gwalior. After that he got the governorship of the iqtas (provinces) of Gwalior and Baran (Bulandshahr). He was married to the daughter of Qutbuddin and, finally, appointed as governor of the iqta of Badaun.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

While fighting against the Khokhars in 1205-06, Muhammad Ghori was deeply impressed with his valor that he advised Aibak to free him from slavery which was subsequently done. After the death of Aibak, the citizens of Delhi felt that the infant Turkish Empire in India required the services of a capable ruler than that of incompetent and unpopular Aram Shah. Therefore, Sipahsalar Amir Ali took the consent of the citizens and Turkish nobles of Delhi and invited Iltutmish to come to Delhi. Iltutmish assumed the reign of government, defeated Aram Shah and, thus, became the ruler of Delhi in 1211.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

► Real Founder of the Delhi Sultanate

Iltutmish was the real founder of the Delhi Sultanate. He made Delhi his capital instead of Lahore and proved to be a very strong and capable ruler who enjoyed a long reign of 26 years. He strengthened the foundations of the infant Turkish state in Northern India by saving it from internal forces of disintegration and external dangers. The centre of political significance shifted from Kannauj to Delhi in 1211, which came to occupy a premier position as the capital of India. Delhi continued to enjoy this privileged status throughout the medieval period for over 500 years.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

► Difficulties and Achievements of Iltutmish

(i) **Rival Turkish Nobles-** The throne of Delhi was not a 'bed of roses' for Iltutmish. The death of Aibek had plunged the Delhi Sultanate into confusion. The weak, and also brief rule of Aram Shah had stimulated the disruptive and rebellious tendencies among the Turkish nobles; it endangered the disintegration of the newly-founded Turkish state in India. In spite of his victory over Aram Shah and the popular support of the Turkish nobles of Delhi, Iltutmish's accession to the throne did not go unopposed.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

The governor of Uchh (Sind) and Multan, Nasiruddin Qubacha, captured Lahore, Bhatinda and even Sursuti as well and declared his independence. Ali Mardan Khalji, who had succeeded to the governorship of Bihar and Bengal on the death of Bhakhtiyar Khalji in 1206, also stopped sending the tribute to Delhi. Tajuddin Yaldoz (the father-in-law of Qutubuddin Aibek), now the sultan of Ghazni, attempted to assert his political dominance over Iltutmish by sending him the *chhatr* (royal canopy) and a *durbash* (baton) at the time of his accession to the throne.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH

(शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

As a shrewd diplomat, Iltutmish accepted them and, thus, pretended to recognize his suzerainty but he never permitted Yaloz to encroach upon his Indian possessions.

- ▶ **(ii) Defeat of Tajuddin Yaloz (1215-16) -** Yaloz claimed overlordship over Iltutmish and asked him to send military help. Iltutmish marched against him to settle his score finally with him. Between 1215 and 1216, Iltutmish gave a crushing defeat to Yaloz in an open battle at Tarain and imprisoned him.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH

(शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

He was first sent to Badaun and killed later on. Iltutmish's gain was two-fold. One was that he had killed the most dangerous rival to his power and, the other, was that it led to the final break with Ghazni. Hence onwards, Delhi Sultanate became an independent state in fact if not legally so far.

- ▶ **(iii) Defeat of Nasiruddin Qubacha (1217) -** After the defeat of Yaldoz at the hands of Iltutmish, Nasiruddin Qubacha once again occupied Lahore. When he was challenged by Iltutmish at the head of a large army, he, however, retreated towards Multan.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

Iltutmish chased him and defeated him at Mansura, on the banks of the river Chenab. However, Iltutmish refrained from marching upon Sind due to his anxiety to defend the North-West frontier in the face of the rapidly deteriorating political situation in Central Asia. Therefore, Qubacha continued to rule over Sind almost as an independent ruler till his death in 1227 .

(iv) Mongols on the North-West Frontier (1220-24) - The Mongol threat was also averted by Iltutmish's tact and diplomacy. The Mongols came in hot pursuit of Jalaluddin Mankbarani, the Crown Prince of Khwarazm, who sought refuge in India.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

This placed Iltutmish on the horns of a dilemma. To help Jalaluddin Mankbarani meant to incur the wrath of Chengiz Khan. And this would have been suicidal for the infant Turkish Empire. To refuse aid bluntly to a fugitive, who had become a hero in the Islamic world, would have alienated the Muslim sentiments. But Iltutmish keeping in view alone the interest of the Turkish Empire followed dilatory tactics which discouraged Jalaluddin Mankbarani who left India in 1224. Close on his heels departed the Mongols who had no immediate design for the conquest of India.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

It is also to be noted that Chengiz Khan died in 1227. Thus, Iltutmish saved his kingdom from the Mongol invasion and also from the ill effects of the politics of Central Asia.

(v) Re-conquest of Multan and Sind (1227-28)

- After the aversion of the threat of Mongols, Iltutmish launched an offensive against Nasiruddin Qubacha from two sides-Lahore and Delhi. Multan and Uchh were captured and Qubacha was besieged in the fort of Bhakkar on the bank of the Indus.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

Surrounded from all sides by the enemy and totally exhausted, Qubacha made his last bid to escape by plunging into the Indus river, and was drowned. The Sumra ruler of Debal principality hastened to acknowledge the suzerainty of Iltutmish soon after. Both Multan and Uchh were occupied by Iltutmish.

(vi) Conquest of Bihar and Bengal - After the death of Qutubuddin Aibak, Ali Mardan had declared himself independent and, therefore, the province of Bengal was lost by the Delhi Sultanate. therefore, Iltutmish turned his attention towards Bengal, which had been a constant source of trouble to Delhi.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

Ali Mardan having been murdered in 1211 was succeeded by Husamuddin Iwaz Khalji, who assumed full sovereign powers. He assumed the title of Ghiyasuddin and proved to be a very successful ruler. It took three campaigns before Bengal could be subjugated and the authority of the central government re-established in this rebellious province. In 1225, the Sultan, led a successful expedition and Bihar was subsequently annexed. Iltutmish forced Iwaz to pay an indemnity and accept the over lordship of Delhi. When Iwaz tried to assert his independence once again Nasiruddin Mahmud, the eldest son of Iltutmish, was assigned the task to suppress the rebellious chief

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

Nasiruddin Malimud defeated and killed Iwaz. He conquered Lakhnauti in 1226. The last campaign was necessitated by a fresh outbreak following the sudden death of Nasiruddin Mahmud. Iltutmish led an army in person. He decisively defeated the rebels. Thus, Iltutmish once again brought the eastern region consisting of the provinces of Bihar and Bengal under the control of Delhi. With the purpose of bringing the region under his effective control, Iltutmish appointed two separate governors, one for Bengal and the other for Bihar.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

(vii) **War against the Rajputs** - The Rajputs presented another problem with which Iltutmish had to grapple. They were making a fresh bid to throw off the yoke of Turkish rule. The security of the Turkish political ascendancy in India demanded the subjugation of the insurgent Rajputs and the recovery of the territories lost to them. Iltutmish achieved this methodically. Ranthambhor was captured from Chauhans in 1226. The victory over Ranthambhor was followed by Nagor next year i.e., 1227 .

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

Gwalior was also brought under the possession of the Delhi Sultanate in 1231 . The campaigns in Rajputana were rounded off by the sack of Bhilsa and Ujjain (1234-35). The Gangetic valley was also pacified, and the Turkish rule was re-established by force in Awadh and the Doab. Iltutmish attempted to bring the khokars under his subjugation in 1235. Exhausted by continuous warfare, Iltutmish fell sick, returned to Delhi and breathed his last in April 1236 . He was buried in Delhi

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

(vii) **Administration of Iltutmish** - Though the Turkish rule was established in North India after the second battle of Tarain (1192), no concrete steps were taken to gear up the existing administrative machinery. Muhammad Ghori had no time to spare for this task, and whatever he initiated was not sufficient enough to provide stability to his newly founded empire. Personally he was available in India only for launching military campaigns. The burden of running the administration was left to the slave-officers. After his death when Qutubuddin Aibek came at the helm of the affairs but there was no appreciable change in the situation

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

It was the arrival of Iltutmish that for the first time the Turkish state thought of understanding the administrative problems with some seriousness. Though, in the beginning, Iltutmish took some time to settle himself, but once he strengthened his position he was not prepared to lower the authority of his office. He believed in upholding the status and dignity of the Sultan. He was not prepared to compromise sovereignty. Therefore, first of all he cleared from his path all those opponents who renounced his sovereignty and tried to get rid of him.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

Once he got of his arch rivals he turned to more concrete measures. As a Sultan he knew that single-handedly he could not perform his task. Therefore, he built around him a group of loyal and trustworthy slaves called *Turkan-i-Chihalgani* (Forty Turkish Slave Officers). They were not only used in conquering the new territories but were assigned the administrative tasks also. It was some sort of a mini but powerful machinery at the personal command of the Sultan. We know that with the establishment of the Turkish rule the empire was divided into many iqtas or the administrative-cum-revenue units.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

These were not of a uniform size. Some Iqtas were quite extensive while the others were small. Those who were assigned the iqtas were known as the muqtai. The muqtai were entrusted with the task of keeping law and order and to collect taxes. Though not much is known about the actual working of Iqtadari system during the reign of Iltutmish, but whatever evidence is available indicates that the system continued to operate more or less smoothly. The medieval historians have shown great appreciation for Iltutmish's care for rendering justice. Long after his death the people remembered his justice.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

Ibn Battuta, who visited India in the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, records that Iltutmish fixed two statutes of lions on the gate of imperial palace. Hanging chains were attached with them and on the other end of the chains a bell was fixed. As soon as an aggrieved person reached the spot he pulled the chain which made the bell ringing. This act was sufficient to draw the attention of the relevant authorities to the person concerned. However, this practice of pulling the chain was usually confined to night alone. But during the day time aggrieved person used the coloured garment for catching the attention of the concerned authorities.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

Besides, Iltutmish saw to it that *amiri-i-dads* were appointed in almost all the important towns of his empire to dispense justice. At the central level there was the chief Qazi who passed judgment on the appeals coming from the lower courts. However, in all important matters relating to justice Iltutmish could directly intervene and pronounce his judgment. Iltutmish made a place for himself in monetary system also. It was during his reign that introduction of the *tanka* (silver coin) and the *jital* (copper coin) took place.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

Commenting on Iltutmish's performance in this field Nelson Wright remarks:

"The reign of Iltutmish stands out as a landmark in the coinage of Delhi..... Iltutmish was a great moneyer. That he established the silver *tanka* and the billion *jital* on a firm footing was in itself a remarkable achievement."

► Estimate of Iltutmish

Iltutmish was not a very good administrator; he created no civil institutions. His was a military dictatorship like that of Aibak but with the difference that all the power was concentrated in his own hands.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

Iltutmish laid the foundation of an absolute monarchy of the Turks in Northern India. He himself appointed central ministers and regional military governors; the *wazir* (prime minister), *sadr-i-jahan* (head of the ecclesiastical affairs) and the chief *qazi* held office during his pleasure, and were responsible to him directly. He did not allow the Turkish nobility to interfere in the state affairs beyond certain limits. The dissatisfied and disobedient *Muizzi* (nobles of Muhammad Ghori) or *Qutbi* (nobles of Qutubuddin Aibek) officers were gradually downgraded or eliminated.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

Iltutmish created an entirely new class of the ruling elite which comprised his own Turkish slave officers, headed by their forty powerful military leaders-nick-named the *Chalisa* (*chihalgani* or *chehalgan*). They held charge of the iqtas, and wielded great influence at the court. Iltutmish secured a deed of investiture from the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mustansir Billah of Baghdad in February 1229, who bestowed the titles of the 'Sultan of Hindustan' and the 'deputy of the leader of the faithful' (*nasir amir ul momnin*). This gave Iltutmish legal claim over Delhi Sultanate as a distinct entity, independent of Ghazni.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

It also strengthened his position and ensured the succession of his descendants to the throne. All those who had previously labelled him as the usurper to the throne and cast accusations on his rule were silenced. Iltutmish was thus the first legal sovereign of the Indian Turks and real founder of the sultanate of Delhi. The investiture ceremony was celebrated in Delhi with great rejoicings.

Iltutmish reinforced the forces of law and order in the state, allowed the local administrative bodies to function as before and administered even-handed justice according to the Islamic standards of those days.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

He introduced a purely Arabic currency of gold and silver. Though orthodox Sunni Muslim and religious minded person, Iltutmish was not a fanatic.

He persecuted the Ismaili Shias of Delhi and his treatment towards the Hindus was harsh but not cruel. He had destroyed the Hindu temples at Bhilsa and Ujjain but he did not resort to idol breaking. He adopted a policy of moderation towards the Hindus as a measure of political expediency and tried to win their cooperation in running the administration.

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH

(शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

Ilutmish was a patron of art and learning. All scholars, members of the ruling families and capable persons who fled from Central Asia and other Islamic states because of Mongol invasions were provided shelter at the court of Ilutmish. Amir Khusrau's father was one of them. The contemporary scholars such as Minhaj-us-Siraj and Taj-ud-din adorned his court. Ilutmish extended liberal patronage to them and enriched the cultural life of the ruling elite. He completed the construction of Qutub Minar and enjoyed his association with the Sufi saints of the day. Ilutmish was a courageous soldier and an experienced military commander

SHAMSHUDDIN ILTUTMISH (शमशुद्दीन इल्तुत मश)

He was a foresighted man. He unified the Turkish leadership under one central authority and saved the infant Turkish kingdom from disintegration. He protected it from the fury of the Mongols and gave a legal and independent status to it in the comity of the Islamic states. He was an empire-builder who endeavored to accomplish the unfinished task of Qutubuddin Aibak in laying the foundations of the Delhi Sultanate.