UNIT 25 STATE, ADMINISTRATION AND ECONOMY IN NORTH INDIA

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25.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will discuss the state, administration, and economy in the Northern States. After reading this Unit, you should be able to learn:

- the characteristic features of the regional states,
- how the succession issue was decided,
- the ways in which the regional kings legitimized their powers,
- about the administrative machinery, and
- what role did the nobles and landed aristocracy in the regional polity play in the revenue and economic set-up.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

In the present Unit, the term North India is used to denote the entire region north of the Vindhyan ranges, i.e. Kashmir in the north; coming down to North-West—the Rajputana, Sind, Multan and Gujarat; the mainland—Malwa and Jaunpur; further in the East—Orissa, Bengal, Kamata and Ahom regions of Assam. Since our focal point is to discuss regional powers, Delhi and its environs, which geographically form very much a part of North India, fall outside the purview of our discussion. In this Unit, an attempt is made to analyse the characteristic features of the regional kingdoms, their administrative structure and the role of nobility in the regional politics.

25.2 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE REGIONAL STATES IN NORTH INDIA

It is generally held that the 'antipathy' that existed during the Sultanate period between the Hindu and the Muslim states heightened the conflicts and clashes during
the 13-15th century. But, as Schwartzberg has rightly pointed out, we find more frequent and fierce struggle between the Muslim-Muslim and Hindu-Hindu rulers rather than between Hindu-Muslim rulers. For example, Gujarat's traditional enemies were Muslim rulers of Malwa and Jaunpur; there was continuous warfare between Kamata and Ahom rulers; Orissa rulers continuously faced the might of the Vijaynagar rulers and in Rajputana quarrels took inter-clan character. They never showed unity even in dire needs. In fact, in framing political alliances, the need of the time and circumstances played more crucial role rather than religion. Mahmud Khalji I of Malwa sided with Ganga Das, the ruler of Champaran, against Mahmud Shah Gujarati in 1450-51; later, Mahmud Khalji joined hands with the Gujarati ruler Qutbuddin against Rana Kumbha of Mewar realizing the latter's strength.

The foremost feature of the 13-15th century polity was 'vertical' penetration rather than the 'horizontal' one, i.e. horizontally the area under their control was smaller compared to the Sultanate but within their area of influence they 'vertically' penetrated deep into the rural areas (for further details see Units 23 and 24).

Under regional rulers, the maximum area lay outside their effective control; even where they exercised a good measure of control, there, too, they often faced some difficulty. On this basis, we can divide their domain into three kinds:

i) Where land revenue was extracted from the peasants directly through revenue officials, the state's influence and control was of a high order.

ii) Areas where revenue was collected through local chiefs, the state's control was still good enough.

iii) The states that were satisfied with the tribute only, the degree of control was minimal. This relationship had direct bearing on regional rulers' relations with the nobles, tributary chiefs or rajas and local aristocracy (the so-called zamindars, muqaddams, etc.). We would take up this aspect in greater detail while dealing with the nature of the ruling class under various regional kingdoms.

25.3 NORTH INDIAN KINGDOMS AS SUCCESSOR STATES

Generally, the regional kingdoms are considered as 'successor' states of the Sultanate. An argument has been presented that the founders of the regional kingdoms at one point of time were either governors of the Sultanate or had served under them in 'some' capacity. You would read in the nextUnits that this was true in some cases but cannot be applied invariably. For example, Zafar Khan, Dilawar Khan and Malik Sarwar, the founders of the regional kingdoms of Gujarat, Malwa and Jaunpur respectively, served as governors under the Tughluq Sultans. Besides, Bengal rulers also had direct and continuous links with the Sultanate. But the Rajputana states, though always a prey to the Sultanate onslaught, never accepted the complete hegemony of the Sultans. As and when the opportunity arose, they threw off the Sultanate yoke and succeeded in maintaining their clannish character. Similar was the case with Sind. Under the Sultanate pressure, the Sind rulers accepted the suzerainty of Iltutmish, Muhammad Tughluq and Feroz Tughluq, but for all practical purposes Sumirah and Sammah rulers ruled independently. As concerned, their development was entirely independent of the Sultanate (for further details see Units 23 and 24).

Since some regional powers emerged on the ruins of the Sultanate, it is generally thought, that structurally their polity bore striking resemblance to the Sultanate. Let us find out to what extent this view is correct.

25.4 SUCCESSION ISSUE

You have already read in Unit 16 about the nature of the Sultanate socio-political system. We have seen that Islam has not provided any rules for succession. As a
The Regional Powers: 13th-15th Century

result, principles of election, nomination and hereditary succession co-existed. In fact, ‘force’ was the main arbiter. Thus, ample opportunity for manoeuvring was available.

Like the Sultanate, in the regional states as well, whether ruled by a Hindu or a Muslim, there were no set rules of succession. Hence, there were always conspiracies and intrigues among various groups in which sometimes women also played a significant role. In Malwa, the principle of nomination took precedence over law of primogeniture. In Jaunpur, ‘force’ was the deciding factor. Husain Shah Sharqi usurped the throne in 1458 after killing his elder brother Muhammad Shah Sharqi. Similarly, in Gujarat, accession of Ahmad Shah was contested by his uncle Maudud Sultan (Feroz Khan). In Bengal, the role of nobles was more important and they acted as kingmakers. Shamsuddin Ahmad Shah was killed by his slaves Shadi Khan and Nasir Khan (1435). They, in turn, were killed by their rivals (1442). By 1487, the power of Abyssinian nobles reached its peak when, Malik Andil, an Abyssinian noble killed Jalaluddin Fath Shah, and usurped the throne.

In Rajputana, too, the law of primogeniture was not strictly adhered to. In the case of the Guhils and Sisodias, we find that after Rana Lakha’s death, instead of Chunda (the eldest son of the Rana), the throne passed into the hands of his minor son Rana Mokal. Similarly, Uda usurped the throne by killing his father Rana Kumbha. Raimal’s accession was also not smooth. He was challenged by Uda’s sons Sahasmal and Surajmal.

In Kashmir, too, no succession rules could develop. As early as 1323, Shah Mir, usurped power following his master’s death. His eldest son Jamshed’s accession (1342), too, was followed by a long-drawn war of succession. Zainul Abedin himself, assumed power after killing his elder brother Ali Shah in 1420.

In Ahom, the council of great nobles—Bar Gohain and Burah Gohain played an important role in appointing and nominating kings. In fact, no one could become king without their approval. It was only in the kingdom of Orissa where succession rules were respected under the Ganga rulers. But, later, when the power was transferred from the Ganga rulers to the Gajapati rulers, there seems to have emerged some lapses: we find that after Kapilendra’s death, his younger son Purushottama usurped the throne by setting aside the claims of his elder brother Hamir.

25.5 LEGITIMIZATION

The King was at the helm of affairs, and he was the final authority in all matters. But, as you have already read, in the Islamic world there was no legal sanction for the Sultan’s authority and it was the Caliph who was the political head of the Muslims. The Delhi Sultans used to recite khutba in Caliph’s name and inscribe his name on their coins to get legal sanction for their authority. For the regional states, the need for legitimization, not only in the eyes of the masses but also their competitors, became more important, for every accession was usually preceded by clashes and wars. For those regional states which were situated too far away to get the legal sanction from the Caliph at Baghdad, the ulama and the sufi were more potential legitimizers.

To pacify the orthodox Muslim opinion, the rulers of Malwa, Gujarat, Bengal and Jaunpur always showed their eagerness to get the support of the ulama and sufi by offering them lucrative offices and revenue-free land grants (madad-i-maash). They also used to pay frequent visits to the khanqahs of the Muslim saints. The legal authority of the Caliph was explicitly recognized by the Bengal rulers Iwaz Khalji, Mughisuddin, Ruknuddin Kaikaus, Shamsuddin Feroz, etc. who all engraved the Abbasid Caliph’s name on their coins. Under Ibrahim Sharqi’s patronage flourished famous Muslim mystics Mahdum Asaduddin Aftab-i Hind, Makhudum Saduddin Chirgh-i Hind, Saiyyid Alaul Haqq of Pandua, etc. The Malwa ruler Hoshang Shah made special efforts to encourage the ulama and mashaikhs to come and settle in Malwa. Hoshang Shah had profound respect for Makhdum Qazi Burhanuddin and
became his disciple (murid). Mahmud Khalji received khilat from the Abbasid Caliph at Egypt. It helped greatly in enhancing the prestige of the Malwa ruler. The famous Sufi Saiyyid Usman, the disciple of Burhanuddin, was greatly respected by the Gujarati ruler Mahmud Begarha. He built a mosque and rauza (tomb) in his memory at Ahmedabad immediately after his death in 1459. Burhanuddin's son Shah Alam also enjoyed great prestige and patronage of the Gujarati rulers. Qutbuddin and Mahmud Begarha. In Kashmir, too, the Sufis enjoyed great honour and favour of the Kashmiri rulers. In Rajputana, the rulers lavishly distributed revenue-free land to the Brahmans to win their favour to justify their various political acts. You have already read in Unit 9 that this was the prevalent trend during the 8th-12th century. The same trend continued during 13-15th century as well.

In Orissa, Lord Jagannath was believed to be the real ruler. Therefore, the Brahmans gained great political influence. They legitimized the usurpation of the Ganga throne by Kapilendra Deva (1435 A.D.), and the accession of Purusottama Deva to the exclusion of Hamir.

Check Your Progress 1
1) What do you understand by 'horizontal' and 'vertical' penetration under the regional states?

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2) Can the regional states may truly be called the successor states of the Sultanate? Comment.

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25.6 ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Since most of the regional states emerged as a result of the disintegration of the Delhi Sultanate, they copied the administrative model of their parent state. Though the states of Kashmir developed independently, there, too, the working was by and large along the Sultanate administrative set-up. In Rajputana and Orissa, however, we find certain changes in nomenclature. The Ahom kingdom also went through an entirely different set-up, primarily because of its tribal nature.

In Malwa, Gujarat, Bengal, Jaunpur and Kashmir, the central machinery was headed by wazir followed by ariz-i mumalik, shaikh-ul Islam and qazi. Besides, there were Hajib, dabir (department of correspondence), amir-i dar (master of ceremonies), amir-i akhur (chief of royal stable; in Kashmir he was known as mahasvasala), etc. For the maintenance of royal household (haram), there was a separate administrative machinery. Kingdoms were divided into a number of provinces. In Bengal, provinces were called iqlim, arsa and diyar. The provincial governors were called sar-i laskhar wa wazir (i.e. in them combined the military and financial powers); while in Kashmir and other regional states they were known as hakim: In Kashmir, these hakims were generally recruited from the royal family.

Provinces were further sub-divided into shiqs (in Bengal), and paraganas with villages forming the smallest unit. Like the centre, in the provinces also qazis dispensed justice, muhtasibs looked after morals, kotwal was for the maintenance of law and
order in the towns, while shiqdar was the overall incharge of the province. At the village level, there were village headmen (muqaddams) and accountant (patwari).

As for their army organisation, the rulers maintained standing army but they largely depended for the supply of armed personnel on their provincial governors and 'chiefs'. Infantry and cavalry was the main fighting force, but elephants, too, had their own role. There were constant efforts on the part of the rulers of Malwa and Jaunpur to maintain regular supply of elephants. In Bengal and Gujarat, navy also formed an important wing of the army.

In Orissa, at the centre there were rajaguru (royal priest), mahapradhans (prime minister), mahasandhiivigrah (secretary for peace and war), mahasenapati (commander-in-chief), mulabhandaramuna mudrahasta (chancellor of the privy purse), mahadandapasi (inspector-general of police), mahamandalika (governor-general) and mahaputra, etc. The kingdom was divided into mahamandalas, which were sub-divided into mandalas and mandalas into nadus or visyas or bhogas. The lowest unit was the village. These divisions were headed by maharanaka, ranaka, visayapati and gramika respectively. To assist the gramika, there were karana (accountant), purohita, dandapasi (policeman), urikavali (village watchman) and gramabhatas (village servant). Towns were headed by puravari. He was assisted by dandanayaka (magistrate) and dandapasi (police inspector). To administer the affairs of the capital, there was a separate official called kalinganagaraadhyaksha.

As for the Oriya military organisation, the members of all castes and communities were asked to render military service at the time of emergency, though the Brahmans seem to have been exempted from compulsory military service. But there were some exceptions, too. The Chatesvara inscription mentions Vishnu, the Brahman minister of Anangabhima III (1211-38), who led an expedition against the Kalachuris. The majority of the soldiers were cultivators who used to cultivate their land during peace time.

The Ahom polity was quasi-feudal with a tribal base. The king was the tribal chief who shared power with his two-member council (patra-mantri). Both were supposed to keep check over each other. The counsellors elected the king and, he, in turn, used to nominate the counsellors. Generally, hereditary rule prevailed in civil appointments, though other persons of knowledge and repute could also be appointed. The male adults of each family had to perform periodic service to the king (state). However, it was difficult for the king to exploit his subjects.

The Ahoms had developed a unique system of militia organisation. The militia was known as paiks. The entire male population between the 15-60 age group was organised in gots (units). Each got consisted of four adult males. The members of each got used to report on duty by rotation. They were supposed to perform at least one man-year of service. An important aspect worth mentioning here is that their services were not confined to military only. For example, one of their important functions was to build and maintain the infrastructure for the wet rice economy. Besides, they also helped in reclaiming cultivable lands from forests and swamps.

### 25.7 REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

Land-revenue was the major source of income of the state. In Kashmir, Malwa, Gujarat, Jaunpur and Bengal, land-tax was known as kharaj. We do not know the exact magnitude of state demand under the regional kingdoms. During contingency, relaxation in taxation was granted. When during Zainul Abedin’s reign, famine struck the kingdom, the revenue demand was reduced to 1/4th, and in some cases to 1/7th. The fixation of revenue demand was done taking into consideration the quality of the soil. In Kashmir, collection was in kind: the grain was first stored in the state granaries and then sold at fixed prices. This helped greatly in reducing the prices of grain. Besides, in times of scarcity regular supply could also be ensured.

Ibu Battuta (14th c.) informs us that land-tax in Bengal was 1/2 of the produce. But the Chinese traveller Wang-ta Yuan, writing about the same time, mentions that the
state demand was 1/5th. Generally, in Bengal, crop-estimation was followed and measurement was not insisted upon. Peasants used to pay directly to the state in (instalments) eight months. In Bengal, there was also a class of majmuaders (revenue-farmers) who used to pay fixed amount of land-revenue to the state after collecting it from the peasants. Tributary chiefs used to pay lump sum to the state. They appointed their own machinery to extract the land-revenue. All the religious endowments were free from the payment of land-revenue and other taxes.

In Orissa, the revenue-demand was 1/6th of the produce. The entire territory was divided into numerous circles known as bisi and khanda. Each division was placed under bisi and khanda-adhipati. The latter, besides revenue collection and keeping the accounts, also possessed police powers. They were assisted by khandait and boimul, the latter being the accountant. Besides these officers, there were high-ranking military officers (mahanayak, bhupati, bhuyan, etc.) who were hereditary chiefs. There were also civil and religious officers like purohit, rajaguru, etc. who were granted extensive unassessed lands as their emoluments. An interesting feature in Orissa and Gujarat was the hereditary religious grants known as bhumichhidrapidhanyaya. The whole village along with craftsmen, workers, etc. were given to the donees. Thus, the artisans and peasants had become semi-serfs. The purohit class generally enjoyed privileges of free lands; only in contingency a tax (tanki) used to be imposed on them. In Orissa, the ownership of land vested in the state. Besides land-tax there were other taxes as well.

The ownership of land, under the Ahoms, vested with the state/clan. The land used to be divided into plots (based on the size of the family) and were distributed amongst individual householders (paiks) in lieu of their services. It was subject to redistribution after their death.

Check Your Progress 2
1) Do you think that the administrative structure of regional states was similar to that of the Delhi sultanate? Write in 60 words.

2) Write five lines on Ahom militia organization.

3) Define the following:
   Majmuadar
   Kharaj
   Bisi
   Bhumichhidrapidhanyaya

25.8 NOBLES AND LANDED ARISTOCRACY

Nobles
The nobles played a very crucial role in the 13-15th century regional politics. They hailed from heterogeneous elements, including both the Hindus as well as the Muslims. They used to receive high sounding titles like khan-i-azam, khan-i-

form of iqta (revenue assignment in lieu of salary); in turn, they maintained law and order, helped in revenue extraction and in times of need supplied armed personnel to the king. Theoretically, their position was not hereditary and they owed their power and position to the king's favour, but gradually their assignments assumed hereditary character. However, Rajputana was an exception where they owed their position primarily to their being the member of the clan: the king's favour was only secondary. You have already seen that these nobles had the tendency to rebel and they used to side with one group or other during the war of succession. On account of their military strength, the king had to depend on them. The power of some of the nobles was such that they became kingmakers, and the kings became tools in their hands (for further details see supra).

Landed Aristocracy
You have already studied in Block 6 about the role played by the landed aristocracy in revenue collection and maintenance of law and order under the Sultanate. In regional kingdoms also there existed such a class. Geopolitically, we can divide them into two categories: (i) landed aristocracy located in the peripheral (frontier) area. In this category come the 'chiefs' or 'rajas'—the so-called intermediary zamindars; (ii) landed class who lived within the mainland— the so-called primary zamindars.

The first category was composed of the most refractory elements. They kept on switching over their allegiance from one state to another.

Landed aristocracy that lived in the mainland was generally under greater pressure and more closer scrutiny. The characteristic feature of the regional state was that mostly the rulers were considered as aliens; they did not have local base. Their prime need was to create a loyal class of rural aristocracy to counterbalance the existing class. Their success in this task would have been the real achievement of the regional powers. Muslim invasions and clan rivalries within the Rajputana kingdoms resulted in large-scale migration of the Rajputs towards Malwa and Gujarat. By 13th century, we find that most of the landed magnates in these states were Rajputs. The rulers of Malwa and Gujarat thus had to face stiff resistance in this process. In Gujarat, drastic changes were brought about by Sultan Ahmad Shah I by introducing the wanta system.

In Bengal, Bakhtiyar Khalji at the outset had distributed all the land among his military commanders and made them muqti. The sufiis and ulema were also encouraged to settle down in rural areas to establish muslim hold for which lavish grants (madad-i-maash) were made to them.

25.9 ECONOMY : GENERAL REMARKS

Agriculture was the backbone of the regional states. Bengal, Assam, Kashmir and Orissa were predominantly rice producing areas while wheat formed the staple crop in Rajputana, Malwa, Gujarat and Jaunpur. Malwa, with rich and fertile soil, produced good quality wheat, paddy, gram, peas, pulses, cotton, excellent betel-leaves, mangoes, etc. These products were supplied to the Delhi Sultanate.

In the medieval economy of Kashmir, Bengal, Assam, Gujarat and Orissa, trade played a very crucial role. The Kashmiri merchants maintained their trade relations with Patna, Banaras, Lhasa, Kathmandu and Peking. Kashmir's trade with Punjab was through the Pir Panjbal ranges. Kashmir was connected with Leh through Zoji-la pass. Salt (from Punjab) and shawl (from Ladakh and Yarqand) were the major imports. Kashmir exported shawls, musk, crystals, silks, saffron and dry fruits. Zainul Abedin took special efforts to encourage silk industry in Kashmir by introducing better techniques and designs. Silk-worms were reared on mulberry leaves. The credit for introducing paper industry in Kashmir also goes to Zainul Abedin. Trade in Bengal was conducted through, both the land and the sea-routes, the latter being more significant. There were two important sea-routes: south-easterly route connecting East Indies and China, and south-westerly route connecting Orissa, Coromandel, and Malabar to Arabia and Abyssinia. Textiles, rice, wheat, silk, sugar, etc. were the chief items of export. Ibn Battuta mentions that eunuch and
slave trade was also conducted in 14th century Bengal. During the Sena rule, trade was in a state of decline. Minhaj Siraj noticed the circulation of sea-shells (kauri) and the absence of metallic currency in the 13th century Bengal. With the establishment of the Sultanate rule, important ports like Saigaon, Sonargaon and Chittagong began to come into existence. Besides, there emerged a number of mint towns like Lakhnauti, Sonargaon, Fathabad, Muhammadabad etc. Thus the Muslim rule created conditions of urbanization in Bengal. The Arab and Persian merchants had complete control over the eastern seas, and the Bengali merchants played a secondary role, mostly as middlemen. Gujarat with a fine sea-coast enjoyed flourishing trade with the Arabian and Persian countries via Red Sea and Persian Gulf. Cambay (Kambayat), Patan, Somnath and Broach were the most important ports. We hear of as much as 84 ports along the Gujarat Coast in the contemporary accounts. Barbosa gives the names of 12 important sea-ports of Gujarat. Varthema, who visited Gujarat in 1506, tells us that about 300 ships of various nations used to come annually to Bengal and supplied Persia, Turkey, Syria and Barbary with silk and cotton stuffs. In Gujarat, both the Hindu and Muslim merchants played important role. Trade formed the chief source of revenue in Gujarat economy. Barter was the main form of exchange in the Ahom economy. Even the bureaucracy received land with a quota of paiks to serve. The villages were self-sufficient but they had to depend for certain items on other regions, e.g. salt. Rice was the staple crop. The Tai-Ahoms had developed excellent technique of wet-rice cultivation which made them distinctly superior to their local counterparts.

Check Your Progress 3
1) Write a note on the nature and structure of the ruling classes under the regional states.

2) Name the major trade-routes in North India in the 13-15th century.

25.10 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have discussed the characteristic features of north Indian regional states. They penetrated 'vertically' deep into the rural areas, though 'horizontally' the area under their control was not very large as compared to the Sultanate. Regional states are represented as 'successor states' of the Sultanate. But it is not true in its strict sense. In their administrative structure, most of the Sultanate features continued to work in the regional kingdoms with some adjustments according to their own needs and circumstances. Local variations and the influence of local culture is evident. Regional states economically and culturally do not present a dismal picture as it is generally projected. We would deal with the cultural development of these kingdoms in Block 8.

25.11 KEY WORDS

Area: province
Bar Gohain and Burah Gohain: originally it was the name of two great officers
appointed by Sukapha who exercised powers second only to those of the king himself. Gradually their office assumed hereditary character and the council came to be known after them.

Diyar : as arsa
Gots : a unit of four adult males
Hakim : provincial governors
Iqlim : as arsa
Paiks : ahom militia/householders
Patra-mantri : council comprises Bar and Burah Gohains
Rauza : tomb
Tanki : nominal tax extracted from the purolhets in contingency.

25.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1
1) See Sec. 25.2
2) See Sec. 25.3

Check Your Progress 2
1) See Sec. 25.6
2) See Sec. 25.6
3) See Sec. 25.7

Check Your Progress 3
1) See Sec. 25.8
2) See Sec. 25.9