UNIT 24 NORTHERN AND WESTERN INDIA

Structure
24.0 Objectives
24.1 Introduction
24.2 Kashmir
24.3 North-West: Rajputana
   24.3.1 The Gohilas and the Sisodias
   24.3.2 The Guhilots of Vagad
   24.3.3 The Rathors of Marwar
   24.3.4 Minor Rajput Principalities
24.4 Gujarat
   24.4.1 Relations with Malwa
   24.4.2 Relations with Rajputana
   24.4.3 Relations with Bahmani and Khandesh
24.5 Sind
24.6 Let Us Sum Up
24.7 Key Words
24.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

24.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will know about:

- the regional powers that emerged in Northern and Western India,
- the territorial expansion of these kingdoms,
- their relationship with neighbours and other regional powers, and
- their relations with the Delhi Sultanate.

24.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding Unit (23) you have seen how regional powers emerged in Central and Eastern India. In this Unit, our focus would be on the emergence of regional powers in Northern and Western India. We will discuss in this Unit the territorial expansion of the regional kingdoms of Kashmir, Rajputana, Sind and Gujarat.

Some of these regional powers were the result of the decline of the Delhi Sultanate while others' development was independent. Kashmir developed independently of the Sultanate while Gujarat was the outcome of its decline. Sind and Rajputana, though all the time were falling prey to the Sultanate and at times even formed part of it, succeeded in retaining their regional features.

24.2 KASHMIR

Geographically, Kashmir valley is surrounded by Pir Panjal ranges in the south and south-west, Kishwar valley in the south-east and the north, and north-east and north-west region is covered by the mighty central and north-western Himalayan ranges. The Kashmir valley mainly consists of, on the one hand, alluvial plains of Jhelum and its tributaries and, on the other, of plateaus. While the alluvial plains are
fertile and extensively cultivated, elevated plateaus are less fertile and either laid waste, or if cultivated yield poor crop. Since the Kashmir valley is surrounded by mountain terrain, passes (Zojila, Banihal, Budil, Pir Panjal and Toshamaidan) occupy great importance and they had great impact on the development of political and socio-economic processes. However, the southern passes remain inaccessible till the time of the Lodis; the northern and western passes (Baramulla, Pakhli and Swat) were always accessible.

The 13th-century Kashmir saw an independent but weak Hindu kingdom of Jagadeva (1198-1212). During his reign, the Damras, a turbulent feudal community, rebelled but were successfully suppressed. But his successors Rajadeva (1212-35), Samgrahdeva (1235-52) and Ramdeva (1252-56) could not assert their power. After the latter's death, the Damra lord, Simhadeva (1286-1301), got the opportunity to usurp the throne. But his dynasty, too, could not continue for long. Interestingly, in spite of the Muslim invasions in India, Kashmir remained for long outside the Muslim sway, for about two centuries. Mahmud Ghaznavi made two attempts in 1015 and 1021, but the mighty Himalaya and Hindukush wasted his designs. The myth of the invincibility of Kashmir could only be shattered in 1320 when the commander Dulacha succeeded in ransacking Kashmir and amassed huge booty. But a severe snow storm dug his grave at Banihal pass itself.

The invasion had its long lasting impact. It paved the way for the establishment of Muslim rule in Kashmir. The way Raja Sahadeva tackled the Mongol problem, and the large-scale destruction and devastation struck by the Mongols, created great dissatisfaction among his subjects. This was exploited well by Rinchan, a Bhautta Prince of Laddakh, to usurp the throne in 1320. Soon after he accepted Islam and assumed the title of Sultan Sadrudin. His subsequent murder was followed by a long period of internal strife. Later, Shahabuddin (1356-74) tried to put the state on strong footing. When Timur (Timurlane) invaded India in 1398, he sent his envoy Faulad Bahadur and Zainuddin to Sultan Sikandar of Kashmir and asked for a huge sum. This resulted in large-scale anarchy till Zain-ul-Abedin ascended the throne in 1420. He ruled the country with utmost vigour for 50 years (d. 1470). He extended his frontiers up to Western Tibet and occupied Ladakh and Shel. But his deeds were soon undone by his successors. His death created internal feuds. Finally, the Saiyyids succeeded in assuming power in the beginning of the 16th century.

No clashes seem to have occurred between the Delhi Sultans and Kashmir rulers till the Saiyyid rule. But strained relations between the two appeared during the reign of Bahlol Lodi. The Tabaqat-i Akbari reports that during the war of succession that followed after Haider Shah’s death (1470-72), Tatar Khan, the governor of Punjab, at the instruction of Bahlol Lodi sided with Bahram Khan, the uncle of Sultan Hasan. Sultan Hasan succeeded in killing Bahram. Tatar Khan’s act to help Bahram antagonised Sultan Hasan. He sent Malik Tazi Bhatt to invade Punjab. Tazi Bhatt not only succeeded in defeating Tatar Khan, but he also occupied Sialkot. Following Sultan Hasan’s death (1484) at the call of Saiyyid Muhammad, the son of Saiyyid Hasan, Tatar Khan again mobilized forces against Kashmir. This time again Tatar Khan had to face defeat at the hands of the united force of the rulers of Jammu and Kashmir.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Analyse the role of geography in the emergence of Kashmir as an independent Kingdom.

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2) Who was Zainul Abedin?

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24.3 NORTH-WEST : RAJPUTANA

The present North-west region of India comprises Rajasthan and a part of Gujarat and Punjab. From the geographical point of view, this region consists of a vast Thar desert in which Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Barmer lie. In the South-west region are the Kutch plains in which Nagar Parkar state flourished. The states of Mewar, Dungarpur, Banswara, Chittor and Ranthambhor flourished at the foot-hills of the Aravalli ranges.

Before the rise of tribal monarchies of the Rajputs, there were local tribes, namely, Bhils, Meenas, Mers and Jats. These tribes spread over different regions. For instance, the Bhils were dominant in Mewar, Dungarpur and Banswara states while Meenas, Mers and Jats were dominant in Jaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner respectively. These local tribes, however, could not succeed in establishing monarchies as subsequently founded by other Rajput tribes who came from the north-west part of India.

The Bhatis of Jaisalmer came from the vicinity of the Sutlej river in Punjab and the Sisodias from the Narmada in South India. The Kachchawahas moved from Central India (Narwar), and the Rathors of Jodhpur and Bikaner had their links with Kannauj region. The immigration of the Rajputs indicates some interesting points. Initially, they settled around the banks of rivers where they had access to water and rich soil for agricultural purposes. When the population grew and disputes over succession or on other matters took place, the weaker section moved to the regions which were sparsely populated and had no political authority to resist the settlement of newcomers in their regions. The newcomers were advanced in warfare technology and political organisation compared to the aboriginal tribes. Since the newcomers were few in numbers, they adopted two-pronged measures to control the local tribes: one was the use of force, and the other was socio-religious measures.

In the coercive method, first they strengthened their position by erecting forts to show their military prowess. The second one is significant from socio-religious point of view. The migrant clans established a practice of putting tika on the forehead of every succeeding chief by a local tribal. For instance, the Bhils of Mewar, the Godara Jats of Bikaner and the Meenas of Jaipur used to put tika on the forehead of the succeeding chiefs of these regions. Without performing this ritual, the succeeding chief was not considered as legal head of the region and its people. Even after the acceptance of the Mughal suzerainty by the Rajput clans in the 16th-17th century, this social function of marking tika by a local tribal continued. However, at the political level, the Mughal emperor exercised this privilege of bestowing succession rights on one of the family members of the ruling clan. But at the local level, the social ritual of putting tika by a local tribal was carried out. It was symbolic in the sense that while the real power rested with the aboriginal tribe, they had delegated this power to a chief whose duty was to protect the region and its people from external aggression and also to look after the welfare of the people. In the beginning, this social custom was followed to assuage the feelings of the local tribes, but with the passage of time it simply became a ritual. Gradually, the Rajputs became de facto and de jure chiefs of the regions and the local tribes simply became peasants. Further, the chiefs in order to maintain soldiers and also themselves extracted surplus from the peasants. A religious colour was given to this act: the surplus was taken as bhog. The word bhog signified religious sanctity: the offering made to a deity was also called 'bhog'. Moreover, the king was considered a representative of God. Therefore, it was the religious duty of the peasants to make offerings (bhog) to the chief and his officials. It further strengthened the authority of the chief and the chances of revolt of the local people were minimised. It became obligatory for a chief to protect his political authority from outside aggression. Thus,
the suzerain power enjoyed by a chief within a certain territory gave birth to the tribal-cum-territorial monarchies.

24.3.1 The Guhils and the Sisodias

The most powerful state which emerged in the north-west was the state of Mewar. During the 13th century, Jaitra Singh (1213-61) consolidated the Guhila power but failed to face the Turkish menace. Alauddin Khalji succeeded in defeating Rana Ratan Singh and occupied Mewar in A.D. 1303. During the 14th century, internal feuds flared up in Mewar that resulted in the victory of Raja Hamir of Sisodia clan. Thus was laid the foundation of the Sisodia rule in Mewar. Hamir's successors extended the domain which included Ajmer, Jahazpur, Mandagarh, Chhapen, Bundi, Nagor, Jalore and Sambhar. But it was under Rana Kumbha (1433-68) that the Sisodia power reached its peak. An interesting development during the early years of Rana Kumbha's reign was the increasing influence of the Rathor clan over the Sisodias. At any rate, the Rana was able to smother the Rathor's hold.

Rana Kumbha expanded his territories far and wide. Almost the whole of Rajasthan was brought under his sway. He occupied Kota, Bundi, Amber, Narwar, Durgapur, Sambhar, Nagor, Ranthambhor, and Ajmer. Many times he repulsed the invasions of the Sultans of Malwa and Gujarat (the details of these clashes would be dealt with in separate sections on Malwa and Gujarat). Rana Kumbha was assassinated by his son Uda who occupied the throne in 1468. During the reign of Uda (1468-73) and his successor Raimal (1473-1508), struggle for power continued unabated till Rana Sanga ascended the throne in 1508.

24.3.2 The Guhilots of Vagad

The Guhilots of Mewar did not confine themselves to Mewar only. During the first half of the 12th century, Samant Singh of Mewar went to Vagad (modern Dungarpur and Banswara) to establish his own principality. But he could not control the region for a long time because of the intervention of Gujarat. When Gujarat's control over Vagad weakened, Jagat Singh, a descendant of Samant, re-established his suzerainty in the region in the beginning of the 13th century. The Guhila hold was consolidated in Vagad during 14th-15th century. They used to have frequent clashes with the Sultans of Gujarat. The rulers of Malwa were also their traditional enemies.

Another branch of the Guhilots led by Rana Mokal's second son, Khem Singh, and his descendant Suraj Mal (1473-1528), shifted to Pratapgarh where an independent state arose towards the end of the 15th century.

24.3.3 The Rathors of Marwar

The Rathors of Marwar migrated from the region of Kannauj to Pali during the mid-thirteenth century. Siha, the Rathor chief, helped the Brahmans of Pali in freeing the region from the incursions of the Mers and the Meenas. Thus, he established his suzerainty over that region around 1243. Asthan and the subsequent Rathor chiefs succeeded in extending their sway over Idar, Mallani, Mandor, Jaisalmer, Barmer, Umarkot and Bhinmal. But the Rathor power reached its climax during the reign of Rao Chunda (1384-1423) and Rao Jodha (1438-89).

Rao Chunda received Mandor (Mandsor) in dowry (1395). Later, he extended his sway over Khattu, Didwana, Sambhar, Nagaur and Ajmer which were under Delhi Sultan's hegemony. To challenge the rising power of Chunda, a coalition was formed by the Bhatis, the Sankhalas and the governor of Multan. They invaded Nagaur and succeeded in killing Chunda in 1423. Under Rao Jodha, the Rathors emerged as a formidable power. He further extended his domain by occupying Merta, Phalodi, Pokharan, Bhadrajun, Sojat, Jaitaran, Siwana, parts of Godwad and Nagaur. Later, during Rao Suja's reign (1492-1515), the Rathor power started showing signs of disintegration. Biran Deo was the first to declare independence. Soon after, the chiefs of Pokaran and Bahadmer also severed their ties with the Rathors.

The Rathor power did not remain confined to the Marwar region only: it extended further towards Jangla (modern Bikaner) under the leadership of Bika, the son of Rao Jodha (1438-89). Bika migrated to Jangla sometime around 1465. He strengthened his position by establishing matrimonial tie with Rao Shekha of Pungal.
who gave him his daughter in marriage. The Jats of that region also surrendered to him. In 1488, he founded the city of Bikaner which, since then, became a centre of power. Bika, after his father's death, strived unsuccessfully to occupy the ancestral gaddi of Jodhpur, although he was able to conquer a part of Punjab. At the time of his death in 1504, a large territory was under his control.

24.3.4 Minor Rajput Principalities

Besides the above mentioned Rajput principalities, there arose a number of small 'chiefdoms' in Rajputana during the 13-15th century. Foremost were the Bhati s of Jaisalmer who migrated from Punjab to the Thar desert in the beginning of the 11th century. Throughout the 14-15th century, Jaisalmer rulers had frequent clashes with the rulers of Mewar, Multan, Umarkot and Bikaner.

Next came the Kachhwahas who migrated to Dhundhar from central India. They were the feudatories of the Gurjara-Pratihara rulers. During the 11th century, the Kachhwaha chief Dulah Rai migrated from Marwar to Eastern Rajasthan where he subdued the Bargujars and laid the foundation of the Dhundhar state (Amber, modern Jaipur). The Kachhwahas controlled Amber, Med, Bairat and Shaikhwat region during the 15th century. However, they rose to prominence during the Mughal period.

We have already seen in Unit 9 that the Chauhans were the main power to reckon with when the Turks came to India. But after Prithviraj’s defeat at the hands of the Turks (1192: second battle of Tarain) the Chauhan power declined. There emerged a number of petty power-centres at Jalore, Ranthambhor, Nadol, Sirohi and Haroti which at one point of time formed part of the Sultanate (see Unit 14) or were too weak to face the onslaught of Mewar and Marwar.

Sometime around mid 13th century, the Hadas succeeded in establishing a principality in the Bundi-Kota region. They were the feudatories of the Rana of Mewar. Samar Singh had defended his territory from the incursion of Balban in 1253-54, but he could not face the might of Alauddin Khalji. He died fighting. His son, Napuj, also faced the same fate at the hands of Alauddin in 1304 A.D. During the 15th century, the Hadas were frequently confronted by Mewar, Gujarat and Malwa. In fact, during 13-15th century the Bundi state existed in name only.

The Yadavas of Karawal and Sodhas of Umarkot and Barmer also rose to prominence during the 13-15th century. However, they could not play a prominent role in the 13-15th century regional power formations.

Check Your Progress 2

1) How did the Rajput tribes succeed in establishing their monarchies in north-west India?

2) Who were the Rathors?

3) Discuss briefly the emergence of Rana Kumbha’s power.
24.4 GUJARAT

You have already read (in Block 3, Unit 9) about the emergence of the Chalukya state in Gujarat during 8-12th century. The Chalukya hold continued over Gujarat throughout the 13th century in spite of the establishment of the Sultanate. You have also seen (Block 4, Unit 15) how in 1299 Ulugh Khan and Nusrat Khan, Alauddin Khalji's generals, succeeded in overthrowing Raja Karna Baghella, the Chalukya ruler and thus laid the foundation of the Sultanate rule in Gujarat. The Delhi Sultans enjoyed supremacy over Gujarat throughout the 14th century. However, symptoms of decline became evident from Feroz Shah’s reign onwards who entrusted the governorship of Gujarat to Shamsuddin Damghani. Timur’s invasion (1398) provided the much sought for opportunity to the governors to break away with the centre. Soon after, in 1407, Zafar Khan (who later assumed the title of Muzaffar Shah), the then Governor of Gujarat, established an independent kingdom in Gujarat.

The Kingdom of Gujarat since its inception had been constantly clashing with its neighbouring territories—Malwa, Rajputana, Khandesh and the Bahmanii kingdoms.

24.4.1 Relations with Malwa

The Malwa rulers were their traditional enemies. In 1408, Muzaffar Shah attacked Malwa and made its ruler Hoshang Shah captive. Though Hoshang Shah had to accept the suzerainty of Muzaffar Shah, he was jealous of the rising power of Gujarat. To undermine its power, the rulers of Malwa used to join hands with the enemies of Gujarat. But Ahmad Shah of Gujarat succeeded in crushing Hoshang Shah’s power. Later during Qutbuddin Ahmad Shah II’s reign (1451-59), Mahmud Khalji of Malwa attacked Gujarat but he was repulsed. Later, Mahmud Khalji allied with Qutbuddin Ahmad Shah II to confront Rana Kumbha of Mewar. But this move was purely a diplomatic one as Mahmud Khalji never left any opportunity to undermine the prestige of the rulers of Gujarat.

24.4.2 Relations with Rajputana

Another formidable power with which the rulers of Gujarat had been constantly at war was Rajputana. The first Rajput kingdom to form part of Gujarat was Idar (1426). Soon, Ahmad Shah overran Dungarpur (1433). Later, Qutbuddin (1451-59) and Mahmud Begarha (1459-1511) had to face Rana Kumbha, the ruler of Mewar. Rana Kumbha, as we have already seen, had occupied Sirohi, Abu and Nagaur, the latter being ruled by Ahmad Shah's uncle, Feroz Khan. As a result, Rana Kumbha had to cope with the combined attack of Gujarat, Sirohi and Nagaur. The final outcome was that the Rana had to sue for peace by paying huge indemnity. But Rana Kumbha retained his capital, Kumbhalgarh in spite of its being besieged two times.

The Rajput state of Champaner also constantly clashed with Gujarat. But finally it was annexed to the Gujarat kingdom by Mahmud Begarha in 1483-84 who renamed it Muhammadabad and made it his second capital. By Mahmud Begarha’s reign other small Rajput kingdoms of Junagarh, Sorath, Kutch and Dwarka were also subdued and the boundary of the Muzaffar Shahi domain reached the remotest corners of the Kathiawar peninsula.

24.4.3 Relations with Bahmanii and Khandesh

The Bahmanii ruler Feroz Shah maintained cordial relations with the Gujarati rulers. But after his death (1397-1422), radical change came about with the accession of Ahmad Bahmani (1422-1436) who formed matrimonial alliance with the ruler of Khandesh. When Rai Kanha of Jhalawar fled (1429), Khandesh and Bahmanii rulers...
Mahmud Begarha also had close ties with the Jam Nizamuddin of Sind. Since he was Mahmud’s maternal grandfather, Begarha rushed to support him when the tribal of Sind rebelled against the Jam.

Mahmud Begarha also maintained friendly relations with the Khandesh rulers, but Adil Khan II ceased to pay tribute and joined hands with Ahmadnagar and Berar. As a result, Mahmud Begarha attacked Khandesh and finally Adil Khan was compelled to accept suzerainty of Mahmud Begarha. But the latter did not annex either Khandesh or Daulatabad; instead, he confirmed their rulers on payment of tribute.

Mahmud Begarha also succeeded in suppressing the rising Portuguese power in Indian waters. He received help from the rulers of Egypt and the Ottoman who sent their generals Amir Hussain and Sulaiman Rais. The combined forces at first succeeded in defeating the Portuguese flotilla at Chaul in 1508 but, later in 1509, Albuquerque completely crushed them. As a result, in 1510 Mahmud Begarha
entered into an alliance with the Portuguese and extracted assurance for the safety of the Gujarati ships in the Arabian sea.

In 1508, the Delhi Sultan Sikandar Lodi sent an embassy to Gujarat. The embassies of Sikandar Lodi and that of Ismail Safavi of Iran greatly increased the prestige of the Gujarati ruler. It also suggests the important place Mahmud Begarha occupied in the contemporary national and international scene.

24.5 SIND

Sind was another independent state on the western border of India. The history of the foundation of Muslim power in Sind goes back to A.D. 712, when Muhammad bin Qasim attacked Sind. The Sumirahs seem to have established their power sometime in the 10th century in Sind. We do not have much information regarding their rule and their relation with the neighbouring states. But stray references suggest that their influence extended as far as Debal and Makran Coast. They also had parts of Kutch under their control. According to the Tarikh-i Jahangusha, the Khwarizmian ruler Jalauddin Mangbarni defeated Chanesar, the Sumirah prince, in 1224 and occupied Debal and Damrilah. During Iltutmish’s region, Nizam-ul Mulk Junaidi, the wazir of Iltutmish, occupied it in 1228 and its ruler Chanesar was sent to the court of Iltutmish. Later, Muhammad Tughluq attacked Thatta in 1350-51 in pursuit of Taghi, the rebel noble.
Later, the Sammahs succeeded in overthrowing the Sumirah in 1351. They ruled for 175 years. The Chachnana mentions Sammahs as residents of Sind even before the conquest of Muhammad bin Qasim. They originally belonged to the Yadava branch of Rajputs and were later converted to Islam. They were mainly agriculturists and held land under the Sumirahs. When Feroz Shah Tughluq in 1360-61, and again in 1362, attacked Jam Jauna and Bandaniya of Thatta, the Jam had to surrender. But soon, after the death of Feroz Shah Tughluq (1388), the Sammahs threw off the Sultanate yoke and became independent under Jam Tughluq. The Jam rulers of Sind maintained cordial relations with the rulers of Gujarat. Jam Nizamuddin had married his two daughters to the Gujarat ruler, and Mahmud Begarha was the son of his second daughter, Bibi Mughli. We have already seen how Mahmud Begarha came all out in 1472, to the help of Jam Nizamuddin when the tribal pirates threatened the latter's authority. Jam Nizamuddin (1460-1508), the greatest of the Jams of Sind, also had close ties with Sultan Husain of Multan. During the closing years of his reign (1493), the Arghuns who were the descendants of the Khans of Persia, threatened Jam's power. But so long as Jam Nizamuddin was alive, the Arghuns' attacks were not successful. After his death (1508), the Arghuns succeeded in establishing their power in Sind in the 16th century.

Your Progress 3

1) Critically examine relations of Gujarat with Malwa rulers.

2) Who were the Sammahs?

24.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have discussed the emergence of regional powers in Northern and Western India during 13-15th century. We have seen that Kashmir as an independent state developed outside the Sultanate. The relations of Kashmir Sultans with the Delhi Sultanate throughout the 13-15th century remained cordial except during Bahlol Lodi's reign. In Rajputana, there emerged a number of small principalities based on clan-organisation, of which the Guhlas, Sisodias and Rathors were more prominent. Gujarat became independent as a result of Sultanate's decline. By early 15th century, it attained a complete independent status. Gujarat was constantly at war with its neighbours—Malwa, Rajputana and Bahmanis. During this period, in the extreme west, Sind under the Sumirah and Sammah rulers was trying to throw off the Sultanate yoke. It could succeed in its designs only after Feroz Tughluq's death.

24.7 KEY WORDS

Bhog : land revenue; offering to a deity.
Gaddi : throne
Jam : title assumed by the Sammah rulers of Sind.
Arghun : descendants of the Khans of Persia.
24.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS
EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1
1) See Sec. 24.2
2) See Sec. 24.2

Check Your Progress 2
1) See Sec. 24.3
2) See Sub-sec. 24.3.1, 24.3.2
3) See Sub-sec. 24.3.3

Check Your Progress 3
1) See Sub-sec. 24.4.1
2) See Sec. 24.5