UNIT 23 CENTRAL AND EASTERN INDIA

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23.0 OBJECTIVES

In the present Unit, we will study about regional states in Central and Eastern India during the 13-15th centuries. After reading this Unit, you would learn about:

- the emergence of regional states in Central and Eastern India,
- territorial expansion of these regional kingdoms,
- their relations with their neighbours and other regional states, and
- their relations with the Delhi Sultanate.

23.1 INTRODUCTION

You have already read (in Block 5, Unit 18) that regional kingdoms posed severe threat to the already weakened Delhi Sultanate and with their emergence began the process of the physical disintegration of the Sultanate. In this Unit, our focus would be on the emergence of regional states in Central and Eastern India viz., Malwa, Jaunpur, Bengal, Assam and Orissa. We will study the polity—establishment, expansion and disintegration—of the above kingdoms. You would know how they emerged and succeeded in establishing their hegemony. During the 13th-15th centuries in Central and Eastern India, there emerged two types of kingdoms: a) those whose rise and development was independent of the Sultanate (for example: the kingdoms of Assam and Orissa) and b) Bengal, Malwa and Jaunpur who owed their existence to the Sultanate. All these kingdoms were constantly at war with each other. The nobles, chieftains or rajas and local aristocracy played crucial roles in these confrontations.

23.2 MALWA

The decline of the Sultanate paved the way for the emergence of the independent kingdom of Malwa. Dilawar Khan Ghori, (d. A.D. 1406), the Tughluq governor of Malwa, assumed independence in the year A.D. 1401-2 and declared himself the king of Malwa. He extended the boundaries of his kingdom by occupying Nimar, Sauyar, Damoh and Chanderi. Dilawar Khan married his daughter to Ali Sher Khalji, the son of Malik Raja Faruqi of Khandesh, and took his (Faruqi ruler's) daughter for his son Alp Khan. These matrimonial alliances helped him in safeguarding his southeastern frontier. By maintaining friendly relations with Muzaffar Shah of Gujarat, he
successfully saved Malwa from attacks. But soon after his death in A.D. 1407, Malwa fell a prey to the imperialistic designs of Muzaffar Gujarati. But in 1408, Hoshang Shah (1406-35) succeeded in regaining control over the Malwa throne (for further details see Unit 24). Very soon he occupied Kherla, and Gagraun. He also had his eyes over Gwalior, but realizing the might of Mubarak Shah, he finally withdrew in 1423 after causing some damage in the countryside. Hoshang Shah had entered into matrimonial alliance with the Muslim ruler of Kalpi to use the latter as buffer between Jaunpur-Malwa and Delhi-Malwa.

Hoshang Shah's successor Muhammad Shah proved incompetent. During his brief reign of one year, the court of Malwa became a hotbed of intrigues leading to disastrous results. The chaos culminated in his murder (1436) by his noble Mahmud Khalji. Thus came the end of the Ghorid rule itself.

At the outset, the position of Mahmud Khalji was threatened by the old Ghorid nobility. In the beginning, Mahmud followed the policy of appeasement and distributed iqta and high posts to them but he failed to elicit their support. He had to face a series of revolts of high ranking nobles. Ultimately, Mahmud Khalji succeeded in tackling the recalcitrant nobles. After consolidating his internal position, Mahmud Khalji now had the time to look for further extension.

Mewar was the foremost state to attract his attention. You would read in Unit 24 that Mewar under Rana Kumbha followed an aggressive policy in subduing and
assimilating the bordering Rajput chiefs into Mewar. This posed a direct threat to the kingdom of Malwa. Mahmud Khalji had to face the mighty Rana as early as 1437. Rana Kumbha promised Umar Khan, son of Hoshang Shah, to install him in place of Mahmud Khalji. In the battle of Sarangpur (1437), Mahmud Khalji was defeated and taken prisoner. Later, Mahmud Khalji took advantage of the confusion that emerged in Mewar after Rammal's death; he attacked Mewar in 1442. He destroyed the temple of Banmata, but he had to retreat without much gains. Since then, Mahmud Khalji undertook almost yearly campaigns against Rana Kumbha. Though Mahmud had occupied Gagraun (1444) and Mandalgarh (1457), Rana Kumbha was able to keep his territory intact and well-defended. This rivalry continued unabated. Kalpi was the bone of contention between Malwa and Jaunpur. Hoshang Shah earlier had helped his nephew Jalal Khan in installing him on the throne of Kalpi. But after Jalal Khan's death (1442), Nasir Khan Jahan succeeded in getting hold over Kalpi. However, he was soon expelled by Mahmud Sharqi. This increased the hold of Jaunpur over Kalpi which was not to the liking of Mahmud Khalji. It resulted in a clash between the two (1444). Finally, a treaty was signed. Mahmud Sharqi agreed to hand over Kalpi to Khan Jahan which resulted in cordial relationship between the two.

Another important power which Malwa rulers had to tackle with was Gujarat. You will read in Unit 24 that Muzaffar Gujarati once succeeded in imprisoning Hoshang Shah.

After Ahmad Shah's death (1442), Mahmud Khalji got an opportunity to occupy Sultanpur and Nandubar (1451) on account of the weak position of Muhammad Shah Gujarati. While Mahmud Khalji was still campaigning against Muhammad Gujarati, the latter died. His successor Sultan Qutbuddin entered into an alliance with Mahmud Khalji. Both parties agreed to respect each other's territorial boundaries. An understanding was also reached between the two to have a free hand in Mewar. However, similar understanding could not be maintained for other areas. Mahmud Khalji's intervention in Bahmani politics was always severely dealt with by Mahmud Begarha (for further details see Unit 28).

Ghiyas Shah (1469-1500), the son and successor of Mahmud Khalji, paid more attention to consolidation rather than conquest. As a result, with the exception of a brief tussle with the Rana of Mewar (1473), the period was of a long peace.

### 23.3 JAUNPUR

‘Afif informs us that the city of Jaunpur on the banks of rīvīr Gomti’ was founded by Feroz Shah Tughluq during his second Bengal campaign (1359-60). This city became a strong power-base, and it soon evolved as a rival to Delhi for some time.

Malik Sarwar, a noble of Feroz Shah Tughluq, took full advantage of the succession tussle among the sons of Feroz and rose to the high position of wazir under Sultan Muhammad Shah (1390-94). Malik Sarwar got the charge of the eastern districts along with the title of Sultan-us Sharq. The invasion of Timur, which virtually shattered the kingdom of Delhi, gave Malik Sarwar an opportunity to declare his independence in Jaunpur. He extended his hold over Koli (Agra), Sambhal and Rapri (in Mainpur district). Malik Sarwar's ambitions led to furious armed clashes with Delhi, Bengal, Orissa and Malwa. Though he did not succeed against them, he brought the rulers of Jajnagar and Gwalior under his sway. Mubarak Shah Sharqi (1399-1401), his son and successor, could hardly get time to consolidate the gains. However, his younger brother and successor, Ibrahim Shah Sharqi (1401-40), efficiently expanded the territories of the kingdom. He took Kanauj in 1406 (which was under Sultan Mahmud Shah Tughluq). This enhanced his prestige greatly and paved the way for further achievements. In 1407, Ibrahim aspired to occupy Delhi, but in spite of initial success, the attempt finally failed. Though he was able to lay his hands on Kalpi (1414), its ruler Qadir Khan continued to create problems for him. Ibrahim also subdued Ganesh, the ruler of Bengal, in 1414. During the closing years of his reign (1437), he again turned his attention towards Delhi and captured some of its neighbouring parganas. The Delhi Sultan Muhammad Shah ultimately
had to sue for peace. He agreed to marry his daughter, Bibi Haji, to Ibrahim's son Mahmud Khan. Ibrahim's energetic zeal and his successes increased the prestige of the kingdom of Jaunpur. The latter earned the title **Shiraz-i Hind**.

During his successors' reigns, Mahmud Sharqi (1440-54), Muhammad Sharqi (1457-58) and Husain Sharqi (1458-1505), clashes with the Delhi Sultans were frequent. Finally, Bahlol Lodi annexed Jaunpur in 1483-84 and placed it under the charge of Mubarak Nohani. Husain Shah did attempt desperately to recover Jaunpur but failed. Bahlol finally placed his son Barbak Shah on the throne of Jaunpur, thus ending the era of the Sharqi rulers.

**Check Your Progress 1**

1) List the achievements of Hoshang Shah.

2) Did the Lodi-Sharqi struggle finally seal the fate of the Sharqi kingdom? Examine in about five lines the decline of the Sharqis in the light of the above statement.

3) Which of the following statements are right. Tick off (√) the correct answers.

   i) Dilawar Khan was the Tughluq governor.
   ii) Gagraun served as buffer state between Malwa and Sharqi rulers.
   iii) Rana Kumbha sided with Umar Khan in his clash with Mahmud Khalji.
   iv) Ibrahim Sharqi earned the title of **Shiraz-i Hind**.

**23.4 BENGAL**

The geopolitical conditions of Bengal, especially the long distance from Delhi, met constraints on its control by the Sultans of Delhi. The governors took full advantage of distance. As the central power weakened or rulers got involved elsewhere, the nobles used to act almost *de facto* rulers in the region. Earlier, Iltutmish had to march in person to assert his authority (1225) and it too, almost three years for Balban in crushing the rebellion of Tughril Beg, the governor of Bengal. To assert Delhi's hold over Bengal, Balban appointed his son Bughra Khan as governor (1281). But after Balban's death, Bughra Khan decided to stay in Bengal rather than contest the Delhi throne (1287). Later, we see Ghiyasuddin Tughluq marching towards Lakhnauti. However, it was during Muhammad Tughluq's reign that more effective policy was adopted. The latter appointed his trusted nobles at Lakhnauti, Sonargaon and Satgaon to establish a balance among various powerful factions. It greatly helped in reducing the power of the local magnates and increased the hold of Delhi. However, Delhi was challenged at various intervals.

* Ilyas Shah (1342-57), who emerged as a powerful ruler in Bengal, occupied Lakhnauti, and Sonargaon, and marched as far as Banaras. Sultan Feroz Tughluq
Again in 1359, Feroz Tughluq marched against Sikandar Shah (1357-89) to break his power. After Feroz Tughluq's death (1388), the Sultanate became too weak to subdue the recalcitrant rulers of Bengal.

Sikandar Shah's son Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (1389-1409) was a popular ruler. He faced the combined attack of the Rajas of Kamata and Ahom and had to surrender the territory beyond Karatoya river. He established diplomatic ties with the Chinese rulers when one of their envoys came in 1406.

After Ghiyasuddin's murder (1409), Bengal had to pass through two critical phases of internal chaos and conflicts (1409-1418; 1435-42). But the matters were set right with the accession of Nasiruddin Abul Muzaffar Mahmud, a descendant of Ilyas Shah. His son Ruknuddin Barbek (1459-74) embarked upon an expansionist policy. As a result, his frontier extended to Barner, north of the Ganges and Jessore-Khulna in the south. The militia of the Abyssinian slaves played a crucial role in the expansion, but Barbek's policy of patronising them later proved fatal. In 1487, the Abyssinian commander Saifuddin Feroz succeeded in occupying the Bengal throne. But he failed to consolidate his position and, in 1493, Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519) got power. He not only succeeded in subduing Abyssinian slaves but also adopted a rigorous expansionist policy. Under him, the Bengal frontiers reached to Saran and Bihar in the north-west, Sylhet and Chittagong in the south-east, Hajo in the north-east and Mandaran on the south-west. In 1495, Hussain Shah had to face Sultan Sikandar Lodi's wrath as he had given shelter to the Sultan's banished son. But the attempt failed and he continued his rule.

MAP 2

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of Jaunpur, Hussain Shah. Later, a non-aggression treaty was signed and Hussain Shah promised not to give shelter to such fugitives.

Check Your Progress 2
1) How far did the geopolitical conditions of Bengal help in maintaining its independent character?

2) What was the role of Abyssinian nobles in the politics of late 15th century Bengal?

3) Match the dates and names by drawing arrows:
   a) Bakhtiyar Khalji 1281
   b) Bughra Khan 1459-74
   c) Ilyas Shah 1357-89
   d) Ruknuddin Barbek 1205
   e) Sikandar Shah 1342

23.5 ASSAM

Geographically, medieval Assam covers the entire Brahmaputra valley as far as river Karatoya in the west, while Mishmi Hills and Patkai Bum formed the north-eastern boundary. The boundary of the state of Burma ran parallel to its east. During the 13th-15th centuries in Assam, a number of tribal polities—the Chutiya, the Tai-Ahoms (or Ahoms), the Koch, the Dimasa, the Tripuri, the Manipuri, the Khasi and the Jaintia—existed. Finally, the Chutiya and the Ahom emerged most powerful. Besides, there also existed the kingdom of Kamata (Kamrup).

23.5.1 Kamata-Kamrup

The medieval Kamata kingdom included Brahmaputra valley (excluding Rangpur), Bhutan, Cooch Bihar, Mymensingh, and the Garo hills. Kamrup (Modern North Guwahati) was the capital of the Kamata kingdom prior to Rai Sandhya’s reign (1250-70). But Kachari expansion forced Rai Sandhya to shift from Kamrup to Kamatapur (in modern Cooch Bihar district): hence the kingdom is called Kamrup-Kamata.

We have already read how in 1206 Bakhtiyar Khalji, one of the commanders of Muhammad Ghori, invaded Kamrup. But the campaign proved disastrous as his army was totally destroyed. Sultan Ghiyasuddin Iwaz also attempted to occupy Kamrup (1227) but met the same fate at the hands of Rai Prithu. Later, however, Iltutmish’s son-Nasiruddin Mahmud succeeded in crushing Rai Prithu’s power. In 1255, Malik Yuzbek attacked Kamrup and succeeded in occupying Kamrup, but later he had to face the same fate as that of Bakhtiyar Khalji. Soon his forces were overpowered; Malik Yuzbek received a severe wound and died soon after (1257). However, during Singhadhavj’s reign (1300-1305), Sultan Shamsuddin Feroz Shah (1301-22), the Sultan of Bengal, occupied Mymensingh and Sylhet across River Brahmaputra in 1305.
The Kamrup kingdom always fell a prey to Ahom imperialistic designs. The Buranji literature records the success of the Ahom King Sukapha (1228-1268) against Kamata ruler Sindhu Rai (1260-1285). The latter is reported to have accepted the suzerainty of Sukapha, but his successor Pratapdhvaj (1300-1305) ceased to pay tribute to the Ahom kings: as a result Sukhangpha (1293-1332) again invaded the Kamata kingdom. After a long-drawn battle and heavy loss, Pratapdhvaj sued for peace and gave his daughter Rajani in marriage to Sukhangpha.

An important feature of the 14th century Kamata kingdom was the great uprising of the Bhuyan chiefs who took advantage of the unstable conditions. A war of succession followed between the two cousins—Dharma Narain and Durlabh Narain. In the beginning, Bhuyan chiefs failed in their designs as Durlabh Narain (1330-50) and Arimatta (1365-85) were more than a match to their power. However, after Arimatta's death (1385), his successors were too weak to face the Bhuyan onslaught and around mid-15th century Rai Prithu's line was supplanted by a new Bhuyan dynasty (Khyan) with Niladhvaj (1440-1460) as its founder. Nilambar (1480-1498) was the most powerful king of the Khyan dynasty who succeeded in extending his frontier from Karatoya to Barnadi. He also took advantage of the political turmoil created in Bengal (Gaur) by the Abyssinians and succeeded in occupying north-eastern part of Bengal. However, later, Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519) was able to crush the power of Nilambar. With this came the end of the Khyan dynasty.

23.5.2 The Ahoms

The Ahoms belonged to the Mao-Shan sub-tribe of the Tais of South-east Asia. In A.D. 1228, they migrated from Mogaung, a principality in upper Burma and Yunan to upper Assam where they finally settled in A.D. 1253 in the Dikhou valley (the modern Sibsagar division) with its capital at Charaideo (it was later changed to Chargua in 1397). Sukapha of Mao-Shan tribe was the first Ahom King (1228-68) who subjugated the Chutias, Morans, Borahis, Nagas, Kacharis and the Kamata kingdom (Kamrup). His son Suteupha (1268-1281) further extended his domain towards the southern banks of Brahmaputra up to Kalang (modern north-Cachar sub-division) by defeating the Kacharis. Under Sukhangpha (1293-1332), the Ahoms became a paramount power in the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley. However, Sukhangpha's death created a void that resulted in the establishment of three interregnums—1364-69, 1376-80 and 1389-97. At any rate, at Sudangpha's accession (1397-1407), the situation stabilized. The latter clashed with the Nara and the Kamata rulers. As a result, the Ahom frontiers reached to Patkai in the north and river Karatoya in the north-east. The boundary extended during Sudangpha's reign continued to form the line of control throughout the 15th century. Later, Suhenpha (1488-93) faced the rebellion of the Nagas and the Kacharis. But the revolts were suppressed. By the close of the 15th century, Supimpha's (1493-97) nobles like Buragohain Khenpung rebelled. Though the rebellion was crushed, it reflected the internal feuds among the nobles that had started since the close of the 15th century.

23.6 ORISSA

On the eve of the Turkish invasion, Orissa was under the control of the Eastern Gangas. The Tabaqat-i Nasiri records that Bakhtiyar Khalji had sent two brothers, Muhammad and Ahmad, to invade Jajnagar (modern Orissa) immediately before his death (1205). At that time, Rajaraja III (1197-1211) was the ruler. The next invasion took place under Ghiyasuddin Iwaz soon after Anangbhima III's accession (1211-38). Though the Tabaqat-i Nasiri applauds the success of Iwaz, the Chatesvara inscription, however, mentions the success of Anangbhima III in the clash. It appears that perhaps Iwaz's invasion was repulsed.

Narasimha I (1238-64) also had to face Ikhtiyaruddin Yuzbek who got success in his first two attacks, but his later attacks were foiled by Narasimha I. The latter also succeeded in extending his frontier to Midnapur, Howrah and Hooghly. However, by the close of the 15th century (1296), Satgaon fell into the hands of the Delhi Sultans. You have already read in Block 4 how during Ghiyasuddin Tughluq's reign (1320-25), Ulugh Khan (later Muhammad Tughluq) captured Jajnagar and made its ruler their tributary.
From Bhanudeva III's (1352-78 A.D.) reign onwards, the power of the Ganga kings started declining. Taking advantage of the situation, the neighbouring states invaded Orissa.

In 1353, Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah of Bengal succeeded in penetrating as far as Chilka lake and took away huge booty, including elephants. Later, the rulers of Delhi, Vijaynagar, Jaunpur and also the Bahmani rulers occasionally plundered Orissa.

Under such disorder and confusion, Kapilendra, the minister of Bhanudeva IV (1414-1435), usurped the throne in 1435 and laid the foundation of the Gajapati rule in Orissa. By 1464-65, the extent of his domain reached the south-Arcot district and eastern part of the Deccan plateau. Kapilendra also inflicted humiliating defeat upon Humayun Shah Bahmani when the former attacked Devarkonda and Kapilendra came to the rescue of Devarkonda chief (1459). After that, the Bahmani rulers never thought of attacking Telengana so long as Kapilendra remained alive. In 1450, Kapilendra also succeeded in defeating Nasiruddin of Bengal (1442-59) and assumed the title of Gaudesvara. In 1453, Rajahmundry also became part of his empire. Thus, by 1462, his frontier extended from Hooghly to Kaveri in the south. However, during the closing years of his reign, the Vijaynagar ruler Saluva Narasimha expelled the Oriyas from the Kaveri basin. Soon after Purushottama’s accession (1467 A.D.), the latter tried to regain the Tamil territory but his exploits remained confined to Kanchi only. Purushottama had to surrender Kondavidu (Konndir) and Rajahmundry to the Bahmani ruler Muhammad Shah III (1463-1482). Saluva Narasimha (later the Vijaynagar ruler) took advantage of the situation and occupied Udayagiri (1476). So long as Muhammad Shah III was alive, Purushottama did not attempt to reoccupy these territories. But soon after his death (1482 A.D.), Purushottama took Rajahmundry, Kondir by 1484, and Udayagiri from Saluva Narasimha (sometime between 1486-91). Thus, he succeeded in extending the frontiers of his empire from Bhagirathi in the north to river Pennar in the south. His son Pratapa Rudra (1497-1540 A.D.), too, like his father, embarked upon an expansionist policy. Most of his military exploits are of early 16th century which fall outside the scope of our study.

Moreover, during his reign, he had to face continuous clashes with the Vijaynagar ruler Krishnadeva Raya and the Bengal ruler Hussain Shah. After his death (1540), his successors could hardly hold the empire intact, and the end of Suryavamsi (Gajapati) dynasty came soon after (1542).

Check Your Progress 3

1) Examine the relations of Bengal rulers with the kingdom of Kamrup.

2) Who were Tai-Ahoms? List the achievements of Sukhangpha.

3) Discuss Kapilendra’s relations with the rulers of Vijaynagar, Bahmani and Bengal.
23.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, you have studied the emergence of independent kingdoms of Malwa, Jaunpur and Bengal. These kingdoms emerged as a result of the decline of the Delhi Sultanate. We have also studied the territorial expansion of each state and their relations with the Sultanate and the neighbouring state. Apart from these kingdoms, we have also discussed the kingdoms of Assam and Orissa. Their development was independent of the Sultanate. In Assam there existed two kingdoms, the Kamata–Kamrup and the Ahoms. The latter was still in the process of state formation and was mainly based on tribal organisation.

23.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1
1) See Sec. 23.2
2) See Sec. 23.3
3) See Sec. 23.2; 23.3

Check Your Progress 2
1) See Sec. 23.4
2) See Sec. 23.4
3) a) 1205  b) 1281  c) 1342  d) 1459-74  e) 1357-89

Check Your Progress 3
1) See Sub-sec. 23.5.1
2) See Sub-sec. 23.5.2
3) See Sec. 23.6
4) To answer these questions (a-f) read Sub-sec. 23.5.1 and Sec. 23.6

4) Fill in the blanks:
   a) Kamata was the capital of
   b) Rai Prithui defeated the forces of and
   c) Assamese literature is called
   d) Foundation of Khyan dynasty was laid down by tribe.
   e) The Ahoms belonged to tribe.
   f) Purushottama surrendered Kondavidu and Rajahmundry to