

## Ques -Examine the nature of the state under the Delhi Sultanate.

**Answer:** The Delhi Sultanate was planted in the Indian soil rather abruptly on the dint of force. Therefore, there are some differing views on the nature of the Delhi Sultanate viz. whether it was a theocratic state, a secular state, or military absolutism. While it professed to be an Islamic State, its character diverged a great deal from it. Similarly, its credentials are also far from secular.

- Historians have different viewpoints about the nature of the Delhi Sultanate because the nature of the Sultanate was not laid down as well as the Mughal Empire through various texts that specifically -and sometimes incidentally- refer to its nature e.g. Ain-i-Akbari of Abul Fazal.
- Was it a theocratic state?
- Theocratic state means a state where God is considered as the only legitimate ruler. His laws are implemented by the clergy. Under the Delhi Sultanate, the Ulema class implemented Sharia law in injustice and governance. A proclaimed policy of the Sultans was to spread Islam and enforce the mic laws.
- But, this approach also shows its limits.
  1. The Ulema class was not organized hierarchical structure that is necessary to systematically implement the religious laws.
  2. Even for the Ulema class, the Sultan was the source of power. The power of the Ulema was checked by powerful rulers such as **Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq** and **Alauddin Khilji**.
  3. Though indispensable in the judicial and governance systems, the Ulema class was merely an agency to organize state power, which the Sultan used in his way.
  4. The governance of the Delhi Sultanate was conducted according to the Sharia. **But**, in view of the circumstances of India, many types of supplementary laws called Zawabit or Urfi were made. Sharia was also interpreted flexibly e.g. some vices not accepted in Sharia were allowed to operate. Harbans Mukhia has tried to prove that the Turkish rulers compromised with the Hindu people due to omic and political reasons.
  5. The Caliph was merely a ceremonial head and gave the Sultan under the Persian model of governance was an absolute sovereign. Titles like the Shadow of God and the Servant of Caliph were merely ceremonial titles.
- Was it a secular state?
- Qureshi Nizami and Muhammad Habib have argued that the nature of the state under the Delhi Sultanate was secular.
- But this argument is also not correct because secularism is a modern phenomenon and a line dividing politics from religion cannot be drawn for a medieval kingdom like Delhi Sultanate.
- After all, a proclaimed policy of the Sultans was to spread Islam and enforce the mic laws.

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- Was it a military state?
- On the ashes of Abbasid, the Caliphate arose the Turkish Sultanates, including the Delhi Sultanate. Their **operation was 'based on the Persian ideals'**. **Power** was an important element in its establishment. As long as Sultana was unassailable, he was safe. Religion didn't save him a coup. Every political action had only one purpose - to attain power. The taxation system was not driven by Sharia but by the needs of the state. The Sultan could only rule with the combined power of soldiers, taxation, and bureaucracy.

In this way, we see that the state under the Delhi Sultanate was neither theocratic nor secular. The government was only nominally under religious authority. The state under the Delhi Sultanate was created to generate an appropriate economic surplus. Power gave it legitimacy; therefore it was a **Military Absolutism**.

