

UNIT 2 POLITY AND ECONOMY IN NORTH INDIA

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit discusses the polity and economy in North India during the 16th century. After going through this Unit you would be able to understand and analyse the:

- nature of political authority exercised by Sikandar Lodi,
- problems faced by Ibrahim Lodi,
- early difficulties of Babur in establishing Mughal rule,
- circumstances in which Humayun was defeated by Sher Shah, and
- administrative set up under the Lodi Sultans as well as the process of urbanisation.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The first half of the 16th century in North India was a period of political turmoil and instability. This period witnessed frequent changes of ruling dynasties and emergence of diverse ruling groups. The most significant event was the Mughal conquest of India. This influenced in a major way the Indian polity, economy and society of coming 200 years. In this Unit we focus our attention mainly on the first half of the 16th century. Our aim here is to familiarise you with the political and economic background in which the powerful Mughal Empire established itself in India.

At first we discuss the political developments during this period. Our discussion starts with the Lodi dynasty of the Afghans. After that we see how the Mughals defeated the Afghans and established their own political power. Next, we discuss the overthrow of the Mughals by the Afghans. The Unit ends with the account of the re-establishment of Mughal power under Humayun. In the sphere of economy, the major developments taking place during this period under the Afghans have been discussed. We hope this Unit will also help you in understanding the subsequent Mughal polity and economy of this period. Let us start with the Lodi empire.

2.2 THE LODI EMPIRE

By the end of 15th century Bahlul Lodi firmly established the Lodi dynasty at Delhi. He succeeded in bringing large area of North India under his control. After his death, his son Sikandar Lodi succeeded him to the throne.

2.2.1 Sikandar Lodi

In the sixteenth century the Lodi Empire, under Sultan Sikandar Lodi, in North India reached its zenith. In 1496, Sultan Husain Sharqi, the ex-ruler of Jaunpur was driven away from south Bihar and the Rajput chieftains in alliance with him were either forced into submission, or uprooted. Their **zamindaris** were brought under the control of the Sultan or reduced to the status of vassal principalities. Likewise, the power of those Afghan and non-Afghan nobles, reluctant to acquiesce to the Sultan's authority, was eliminated in the area around Delhi. In the first decade of the sixteenth century, the annexation of Dholpur paved the way for the expansion of the Afghan rule in the regions of Rajputana and Malwa. The forts of Narwar and Chanderi were annexed while the Khanzada of Nagaur acknowledged the suzerainty of the Lodi Sultan in 1510-11. In short, the whole of North India, from Punjab in the north-west to Saran and Champaran in north Bihar in the east, and Chanderi to the south of Delhi were brought under the Lodi rule.

2.2.2 Ibrahim Lodi

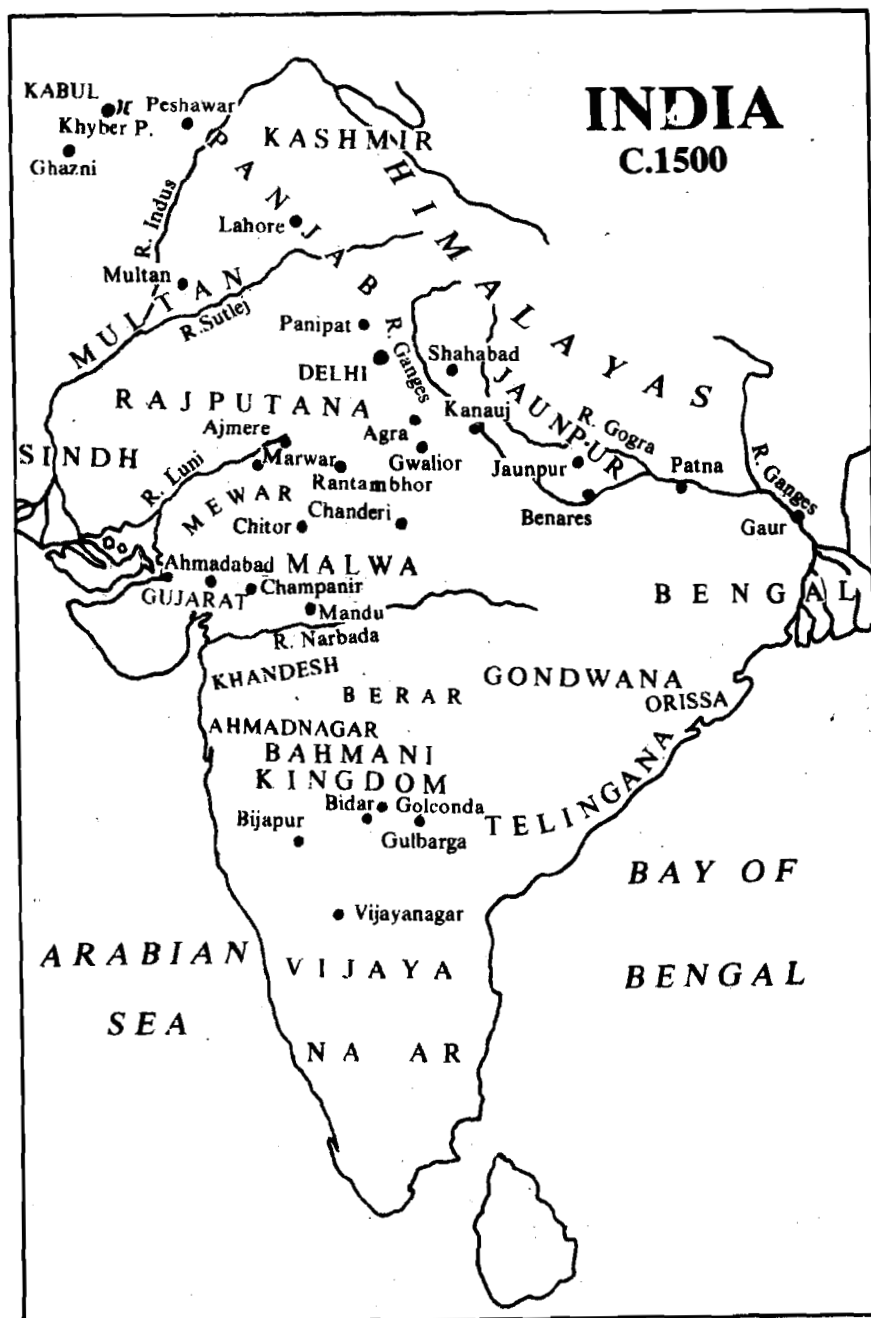
Unlike his father, Sultan Ibrahim Lodi (1517-1526) had to face the hostility of the Afghan nobility soon after his accession to the throne in 1517. He found himself surrounded by powerful nobles bent upon weakening the centre to gain an upper hand for themselves. His father had to fight against his brothers and relatives and was supported by the nobles who wanted to replace the princes in the resourceful provinces. Upon the death of Sultan Sikandar, the nobles decided to divide the Empire between Sultan Ibrahim Lodi and his younger brother Prince Jalal Khan Lodi, the governor of Kalpi.

Sultan Ibrahim was forced by them to accept the division which naturally weakened the centre. Some time later, some of the senior nobles, like Khan Khanan Nuhani, who came from their provinces to do obeisance to the new Sultan, criticised the supporters of division, calling their action detrimental to the Empire. They also persuaded the Sultan to rescind the agreement. On their advice, Sultan Ibrahim sent high nobles to Prince Jalal Khan. Their mission was to persuade him to withdraw his claim and acknowledge his elder brother as the Sultan. The efforts went in vain and this created a succession crisis.

At this juncture Sultan Ibrahim appeared more powerful than his rival brother. Hence, the old nobles rallied round him. However, there were few exceptions like 'Azam Humayun Sarwani, the governor of Kara and his son Fath Khan Sarwani. They stood by Jalal Khan but for some time only. When Sultan Ibrahim marched in person, even these two deserted Jalal Khan and joined the Sultan.

The Sultan deputed Azam Humayun Sarwani against Raja Bikramajit of Gwalior. This was done so because Prince Jalal Khan had taken shelter there. From Gwalior, Jalal Khan fled towards Malwa but was captured by the Gonds and sent as prisoner to the Sultan in Agra. However, his escape from Gwalior made the Sultan suspicious of the loyalty of the old nobles to him. Azam Humayun was recalled and thrown into prison. The Raja of Gwalior surrendered to the nobles and agreed to join the service of the Sultan. He was given the territory of Shamsabad (Farrukhabad district) in **iqta**. It was about this time that the celebrated **wazir** Mian Bhua also lost royal confidence and was put under arrest. The imprisonment of the old nobles sparked off wide-spread rebellion in the eastern region.

The Sultan raised his favourites to key positions at the court and sent others to the provinces as governors. As a result, the old nobles became apprehensive of their future and began to build up their power in the provinces. Darya Khan Nuhani, a powerful governor of Bihar, became a rallying point for the dissatisfied nobles in the east. About the same time, Babur occupied the **sarkar** of Bhera and Daulat Khan Lodi, the supreme governor of the trans-Sulter Punjab, failed to liberate it. When



summoned to the court. Daula Khan did not come and revolted against the Sultan in Lahore. He also invited the uncle of Sultan Ibrahim, 'Alam Khan Lodi (son of Bahlul Lodi), and declared him as the new Sultan under the title of Sultan Alauddin. Both formed an alliance with Babur, the ruler of Kabul, against Sultan Ibrahim. Rana Sangram Singh and Babur also seems to have reached to an understanding against Ibrahim Lodi (for further details see Unit 7).

2.3 ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MUGHAL POWER

Babur, who had invaded with some success the border areas of the north-west frontier, launched a well planned attack with the help of his political allies in India.

In 1526, Babur and his Indian allies fought against Sultan Ibrahim at Panipat. The artillery used by Babur for the first time in north India helped him achieve easy victory. Ibrahim Lodi was killed in the battle and the road to Delhi and Agra was cleared for Babur.

When Babur supplanted the Lodi rule by his own his Indian allies were disappointed. The dissatisfied Afghan and non-Afghan nobles accepted Prince Mahmud Lodi as their Sultan and decided to carry an armed struggle against the Mughals. The fifteen years of combined rule of Babur and Humayun rule is to be treated as an interregnum between the fall of the Lodis and the foundation of Sher Shah Sur's Empire.

Babur (d. 1530) and Humayun adopted the same state system in India that they found existing under the Lodi Sultans. For example, the policy they followed towards the **zamindars** was the age-old tradition set by the Delhi Sultans. Babur mentions that the **rais** and **rajas** were found on all sides and quarters of Hindustan, obedient as well as disobedient to the Muslim ruler. In fact, he was satisfied when the **rajas** paid nominal allegiance to him as they did in the past. The **Baburnama** clearly shows that Babur assigned the charge of territories to the nobles, granting them the right to collect land revenue and carry on the government there on his behalf as was the prevalent system. The **shiqqdars** were posted in the **parganas** under **khalisa**. In short, Babur or Humayun do not seem to have made any important change in the political system in North India.

The Afghan and non-Afghan nobles who fought against Babur and Humayun under the nominal leadership of Sultan Mahmud Lodi, failed to achieve success. This was primarily due to rivalry and dissensions among themselves. Their defeat in 1531 by Humayun finally sealed the fate of the old Afghan nobility. Thereafter, the leadership of the anti-Mughal Afghans was taken over by Sher Khan Sur who, by now, had established his control over the fort of Chunar and the region of south Bihar. The old Afghan nobles fled to Gujarat. This they did to join the service of Sultan Bahadur Shah who wanted to capture Delhi.

Sultan Bahadur Shah of Gujarat was financially as well as militarily the most powerful of the Indian rulers. Some of the coastal towns in Gujarat had already emerged as emporium of international trade. These port-towns were visited by merchants from different foreign countries. Thus, this trade yielded huge revenue to the state exchequer through customs dues. He also possessed a strong artillery.

In 1531, Sultan Bahadur Shah started on an expansionist career. He conquered Malwa and annexed it to his Sultanate. In 1533, he laid siege to Chittor and conquered it. Thereafter, he decided to march to Gwalior against the Mughals. About this time, Rumi Khan, the commander of the Gujarat artillery, secretly entered into alliance with Humayun and assured him of his help. The Gujarat army was completely demoralised by the treachery of Rumi Khan. Finally, Bahadur Shah took shelter in the island of Diu and the whole of Malwa and Gujarat was occupied by Humayun. But this Mughal conquest was short-lived. Soon after his victory in Gujarat, Humayun received the alarming news of the rebellion of Sher Khan Sur who had declared himself as Sher Shah Sur. He seized vast land from the Sultan of Bengal and raided the eastern territories held by the Mughals. Humayun left his brother Askari along with other Mughal nobles in Gujarat and retreated to Agra. On Humayun's departure, Gujarat rose in revolt against the Mughals. Bahadur Shah

came back from Diu and chased the Mughals out from Gujarat and Malwa.

Meanwhile, Humayun made war preparation in a haste and started towards Chunar, a stronghold of Sher Shah. About this time Sher Shah took the impregnable fort of Rohtas from its Raja. Humayun conquered the Chunar fort, and entered Bengal without meeting any serious resistance put by the Afghans. In Gaur (Bengal) there was a period of inactivity on the part of Humayun. Sher Shah took full advantage of the situation. He closed the line of communication between Agra and Gaur and attacked the Mughal forces in the eastern territories upto Benaras. Informed about the deteriorating circumstances, Humayun started on the journey back to Agra. He met the Afghan army near Chausa in 1539 and was defeated with heavy losses. In 1540 Humayun met the Afghan forces under Sher Shah at the battle of Qannauj. He was defeated and fled to Kabul.

2.4 THE SECOND AFGHAN EMPIRE

Finally, after expelling Humayun, Sher Shah became the Emperor of North India from the Indus to the Bay of Bengal in the east and from Himalaya in the north to Malwa in the south. The Biloch chiefs of Multan and upper Sind and Maldeo in western Rajputana and Bhaiya Pura Mal of Raisin were defeated. A centralised political system was again revived by Sher Shah Sur.

With Sher Shah Sur, a new era began in the history of North India. Certain important changes took place in the realm of ideas and institutions.

In 1545 he died in a mine blast. His son and successor Islam Shah (1545-1553) not only retained his system but also took steps towards its improvement whenever necessary. Indeed, there was a personal government that derived its strength and glory from their personal vigour.

Check Your Progress

- 1) Discuss the extent of Sikandar Lodi's Empire.

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- 2) Match the following:

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| 1) Azam Humayun | A) Governor of Bihar |
| 2) Bahadur Shah | B) Governor of Punjab |
| 3) Darya Khan Nuhani | C) Ruler of Gujarat |
| 4) Jalal Khan Lodi | D) Governor of Kara |
| 5) Daulat Khan Lodi | E) Governor of Kalpi |

- 3) Under what circumstances Babur invaded India?

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2.5 ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

A number of new administrative measures were taken during this period. Afghan kingship also shows marked departure from the Turkish concepts. This change can well be seen in the formulation of almost all administrative policies.

The kingship under the Turkish Sultans was highly centralized (See Unit 16, Sub-sec. 16.4.1 of EHI-03). The Sultan's powers were absolute. However, with the rise of the Afghan power, there also followed distinct changes in the monarchy. Afghan monarchy was primarily 'tribal' in nature. For them, king was 'first among equals'. In fact, political expediency also played its own role. Bahlul, being Afghan, could not look towards Turks for support. He had to virtually accept the terms of his fellow Afghans. The Afghan nobles must have enjoyed complete local autonomy. The only bond between them and the Sultan was to render military service when the need arose or required to do so. Such was the position under Bahlul that he neither ever sat on the throne in front of his fellow Afghan nobles, nor did he organised an open **darbar**. He used to call his Afghan nobles **masnad i all**.

However, a distinct change came with Sultan Sikandar Lodi who clearly saw the dangers of an unrestrained nobility. He is credited with having introduced such important changes into the political system of the Empire that transformed it into a highly centralised political entity.

Unlike Sultan Bahlul Lodi (his father), Sultan Sikandar Lodi demanded obedience from his nobles. His military success made the nobility completely loyal and subservient to him. It also suppressed its sentiments of equality with the Sultan. He is reported to have sat on the throne regularly in an open **darbar** where the nobles were required to stand, showing due respect to the Sultan like servants. Even in his absence, his **farmans** were received by high nobles with respect. The noble to whom the **farman** was sent had to come forward six miles to receive it. A terrace was prepared upon which the courier stood and placed the **farman** on the head of the noble who had to stand below. Then all those concerned had to listen to it standing. The nobles who failed to retain the confidence of the Sultan fell into disgrace. According to a contemporary writer, "any one who turned from the path of obedience, he (the Sultan) either got his head severed off the body or banished him from the Empire."

Though, in general the Sultan did not tamper with their autonomy at local level, at times the nobles were transferred and sometimes even dismissed. The Sultan expelled Sultan Ashraf, son of Ahmad Khan Jilawani, who had declared his independence in Bayana after Sultan Bahlul Lodi's death. He also exiled the twenty-two high Afghan and non-Afghan nobles for their involvement in a conspiracy against him in 1500. Jalal Khan Lodi, who succeeded his father as the governor of Kalpi in 1506, incurred the displeasure of the Sultan by not properly conducting the siege operations against the fort of Narwar in 1508, for which he was thrown into prison.

The nobles were also put to more closer scrutiny of their **iqtas**. But, in spite of these changes, the Afghan kingship basically remained unchanged. Some of the offices were made hereditary. The Afghans continued to assume high titles, **Khan-i Jahan**, **Khan-i Khanan**, **Azam Humayun**, **Khan-i Azam**, etc. They also enjoyed freedom to maintain informal relations with the Sultan on playground, marches, hunting etc. Thus, monarchy under Sikandar was more of a compromise between the Turkish and tribal organisations.

The process of centralization accelerated under Ibrahim. He believed that "**kingship knows no kinship**". Under him, the prestige of the Sultan went so high that even the royal tent was considered worthy of respect. However, Ibrahim's policy had severe consequences and proved ruinous to the interests of the Afghan kingdom. The Afghan nobles were not prepared for the master-servant relationship. This led to dissatisfaction and rebellions to the extent that some of them even collaborated with Babur to depose the Sultan. (see *supra*). When the second Afghan Empire was established in India (Surs), they had learnt the lesson well for they never attempted to establish tribal monarchy. Instead, Sher Shah Sur succeeded in establishing a highly centralized autocratic monarchy. With the coming of the Mughals on the scene, one finds the opening up of another chapter — the Mughals who were influenced by both, the Turkish and the Mongol traditions.

2.5.2 General Administration

Sultan Sikandar Lodi is also praised for introducing a sound administrative machinery. He introduced the practice of audit in order to check the accounts of

iqtas and **wallis** (governors). Mubarak Khan Lodi (**Tuji Khan**), the governor of Jaunpur, was the first noble whose accounts came under scrutiny in 1506. He was found guilty of embezzlement and, therefore, dismissed. Similarly, Khwaja Asghar, a non-Afghan officer-in-charge of Delhi, was thrown into prison for corruption. The Sultan also reorganised the intelligence system in order to keep himself well informed about the conditions in the Empire. As a result, the nobles feared to discuss the political matters among themselves, lest the Sultan be displeased.

Interested in the well-being of the general public, the Sultan had charity houses opened in the capital as well as in the provinces for the benefit of destitute and handicapped people. The deserving persons got financial aid from these charity houses. Scholars and poets were patronised and educational institutions were granted financial aid throughout the Empire. He imposed a ban on the use of any language other than Persian in the government offices. This led many Hindus to learn Persian and they acquired proficiency in Persian within a short time. Consequently, they began to look after and supervise the revenue administration. When Babur came to India, he was astonished to see that the revenue department was completely manned by the Hindus.

Likewise, the serious interest taken by Sultan Sikandar Lodi in ensuring impartial justice to all and sundry in his Empire brought peace and prosperity.

Sher Shah seems to have been inspired by the history of Sultan Alauddin Khalji's (1296-1316) reign. He adopted most of the rules and regulations introduced by the Khalji Sultan. However, like Khalji he was not harsh in their implementation. In the **doab** region, the **sarkar** (the successor of **shiqq** under the Khaljis) was the administrative-cum-fiscal unit; while **wilayat**, comprising a number of **sarkars** in the outlying regions, such as Bengal, Malwa, Rajputana and Sind and Multan were retained for the convenience of defence. The **sarkar** comprised a number of **parganas**, each **pargana** consisting of a number of villages. The village was the primary fiscal unit.

The noble posted as incharge of **sarkar** or **wilayat** was not given unlimited powers. He was regularly directed through royal **farman** to implement new rules and regulations. The spies informed the king about the conduct of the officers. Anyone who was found failing in his work was punished, Khizr Turk, the governor of Bengal, was dismissed and thrown into prison because he married the daughter of the ex-Sultan of Bengal without Sher Shah's permission and acted independently.

Similarly, Sher Shah's policy with regard to the planting of Afghan colonies in the territories known for recalcitrant inhabitants also demonstrates the nature of kingship under him, for example, Gwalior was one of the places colonised by the Afghans during Sher Shah's reign. In short, Sher Shah was an absolute monarch for all practical purposes.

In organizing his nobility, Sher Shah took people belonging to different ethnic groups in such a way that his dynastic interest could be safeguarded. No group was strong enough to assume the shape of a pressure group. We find the non-Afghan nobles, Khawwas Khan, Haji Khan and Habib Khan Sultani holding the charge of important provinces with large **iqtas**. This shows that the establishment of a pure Afghan nobility was never a consideration with Sher Shah.

On Sher Shah's death, his second son Prince Jalal Khan ascended the throne under the title of Islam Shah. He overpowered and eliminated many senior and experienced nobles who supported his elder brother Adil Khan. After their elimination, Islam Shah was free to translate his political ideas into practice. He shifted his capital from Agra to Gwalior and also brought his father's treasures from Chunar. Thus Gwalior became the centre of Indo-Muslim Delhi culture.

It is also worth mentioning that Islam Shah went a step further from Sher Shah in centralizing the polity of the Empire. He took away the **iqtas** of the nobles and brought the whole Empire under **khalisa**. The officers were paid in cash instead of **iqtas**. The nobility and army were reorganized into new grades. Officers were appointed from among them to look after and inspect the proper maintenance of soldiers and necessary army equipment by the nobles. The nobles were also denied the possession of war elephants: it was a king's prerogative.

Islam Shah was very harsh in dealing with the nobility but he was benevolent towards the public. He provided people with the security of life and property by holding the officer-in-charge of a territorial unit responsible for the loss of property and life in his jurisdiction. Consequently, the officer in whose territory any crime was committed, went out of his way to arrest the culprit. Like his father, Islam Shah also ensured the administration of impartial justice in the Empire.

Check Your Progress 2

1) In what way did the Afghan polity differ from the Turkish polity?

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2) Discuss the measures taken by the Surs to curb the power of the nobles.

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2.6 ECONOMY

The contemporary and near contemporary writers praise the affluence and low prices of the essential commodities during Sikandar's reign. According to Shaikh Rizqullah Mushtaqi (the author of the **Waqiat-i Mushtaqi**), foodgrains, cloth, horses, sheep, gold and silver which people needed for comfortable living were available in plenty and at low rates. In order to understand the economy in totality we shall discuss its basic components in detail.

2.6.1 Agrarian Structure

The political system depended on the state's share in the surplus of agricultural produce. Sultan Sikandar Lodi formulated a definite agricultural development-oriented policy. This he did because his was a landlocked Empire in which only the reclamation of land for cultivation could augment his financial resources. There was abundance of arable land which could be brought under plough only if the peasants expected to enjoy the fruits of their toil. In an attempt to encourage the peasants to extend cultivation, the Sultan introduced important changes in the administrative system. He prohibited the system of **begar** (forced labour) that the peasants had to render to the landlords and the government officers. The peasants were also encouraged to bring new lands under the plough through other concessions. Rizqullah Mushtaqi states that even an inch of land was not left lying uncultivated. The state share in the agricultural produce was one-third and it was collected with the assistance of the village officials the **patwari**, (**hereditary village officials**) **khot** and **muqaddam** (village headman). The **zakat** tax (Sales and transit tax) was abolished.

The Sultan also allowed the peasants in the Empire to accept freely any one of the three modes of assessment prevalent in those days. The three modes of revenue assessment were crop-sharing (**batai**) measurement (called **zabt** system) and the **kankut** (appraisal). The first two methods were common in north India. The third one also seems to have continued during the Lodi period. Sultan Sikandar was particular about a standard measurement system for its merits. He is said to have introduced the **gaz-i Sikandari** of thirty-two digits for the convenience of the **amin** and **patwari**. It was used at the time of harvest. The **patwaris** were charged with the duty of maintaining the accounts of per **bigha** yields and the measured area of the fields under cultivation.

Sher Shah and Islam Shah also introduced important changes in the agrarian system. They overhauled the revenue administration of the Lodi period. Apart from appointing new revenue officials at the **pargana** and **sarkar** level, Sher Shah curtailed the powers and privileges of the land assignees (i.e. **wajahdars** and **muqtas**). The unruly **zamindars**, who often took to robbery and withheld the payment of land revenue due to the king, were forced into submission. They were also made accountable for every crime committed within the boundaries of their **zamindari**.

The governors (for the **muqtas**) in the provinces, **sarkar** and **wilayats**) were denied a free hand in adopting any of the known methods of revenue assessment at the time of harvest. The methods of crop-sharing and revenue farming were abolished and that of **zabt** (measurement) was enforced everywhere. The extra taxes called **jaribana** and **muhassilana** (fee for measuring the land and revenue collection) were also abolished. The offenders among the officials were punished.

Sher Shah ordered the land under cultivation to be measured every year at the harvest time. The state's share in the produce was determined according to the royal regulation. This system was prevalent throughout the Empire except for the combined provinces of Multan and Sind. The territory of Multan had been ruined by the oppressive Biloch rule. Therefore, Sher Shah directed its governor to develop the region and realize from the cultivators only one-fourth of the produce in accordance with the crop-sharing method. This system had prevailed under the early local rulers i.e. the predecessors of the Biloch chiefs. The state revenue-demand in other provinces was one-third of the agricultural produce.

Abul Fazl tells us that Sher Shah on the basis of fertility of soil divided the lands into three categories, the good, middling and bad. An average produce of these three types of soil was taken as standard yield per bigha. One third of this standard yield was fixed as state share. A **rai** (schedule of crop-rates) was prepared for the convenience and guidance of the revenue collectors. The state share now could be easily converted into cash rates, according to the market prices. Abul Fazl testifies to Sher Shah's achievements in this regard (for further details see Unit 17). According to Abul Fazl, "The revenue demand levied by Sher Khan (Sher Shah), which at the present day is represented in all provinces as the lowest rate of measurement generally obtained, and for the convenience of the cultivators and the soldiery, the value taken in cash money." Thus, it is clear that the state's share was fixed in kind per **bigha** but collected in cash after it had been commuted according to the prevailing prices in the area.

On the death of Islam Shah in 1553, the Empire suffered from chaos and anarchy caused by a mad race that the cousins and relatives of Islam Shah started for the throne. Lasting for two years it took heavy toll of human life. The peasants fled to distant places in order to save themselves from starvation. This provided Humayun with an opportunity to reconquer North India and lay down the foundation of the Mughal Empire a new.

2.6.2 Iqta System

The entire empire was divided into **khalisa** and **iqta**. The **khalisa** was administered by the state directly through, **diwan-i wizarat** i.e. the Revenue Ministry. The revenue collected from the **khalisa** went directly to the state treasury. During the Lodi period, certain **sarkars** and **parganas** were reserved for **khalisa** where the **shiqqdar** carried on the military as well as revenue administration as the Sultan's representative. He was paid his salary and allowances in cash up to twenty per cent of the revenue collected under his charge. Unlike him, the high nobles, to whom the Sultan assigned the revenue of an administrative unit (**parganas** or an entire **sarkar**) had to maintain a larger army contingent than the **shiqqdar**. The assignee was generally a **khan**, holding the rank of 5,000 to 10,000 **sawars** (horsemen). Such an assignee was called either **muqta** or **wajahdar**.

As for the nature of the **iqta**' system under the Lodis (we have discussed **iqta** system under the Delhi Sultans in detail in Blocks 5 and 6 of our Course EHI-03), the nobles to whom the **iqta** was assigned in lieu of cash salary and allowances for his soldiers, was also held responsible for the maintenance of law and order and the defence of the territorial unit under his charge. His revenue accounts were annually checked and settled in the **diwan-i wizarat**. Further, the **iqta** was assigned to the noble was different from the land-grant

made by the state to the men of learning or other deserving persons. The iqta also differed in size. An iqta might comprise a pargana, less than a pargana, or even the entire sarkar. If the revenue collected in the iqta exceeded the amount due to the assignee, the surplus (fawazil) was transmitted to the state exchequer.

Since the iqtas were seldom transferred in practice during the Lodi period, the assignee took keen interest in the economic development of his iqta. The powerful nobles also developed friendly relations with the zamindars of their iqta and were thus able to enjoy the local support against the centre. Such a situation arose after the death of Sultan Sikandar Lodi when conflict of interests took place between the nobility and Sultan Ibrahim Lodi (son and successor of Sikandar Lodi).

To avoid such a situation iqta was made transferable under Sher Shah. Any iqta could be transferred from one to the other noble. For example, Shujaat Khan Sur, one of the senior nobles was transferred four times from Bihar to Malwa to Hardiya sarkar and then to Malwa again.

2.6.3 Urbanisation

It is also worth recalling that economic growth was associated with the growth of urbanisation during this period. As the reign of Bahlul Lodi ushered in an era of peace, new towns were founded in the Panjab and other regions. The process of urbanization accelerated during Sikandar Lodi's reign. The brief references available in the sources to the cities and towns founded during the period suggest that an effort was made in all seriousness by the Sultan and his nobles in this regard. The important towns founded were Sultanpur (in Jallundhar district), Sikandarabad (Bulandshahar district) and Sikandara Rao (in Aligarh district). A number of villages were founded around the village of Pilakhna in the pargana of Jalali (also in Aligarh district) with the result that Pilakhna developed into a township. Construction activities got a boost during this period. The lofty gate of the Pilakhana's Jamaa mosque is suggestive of the characteristic features of the Lodi style of architecture.

The most important city founded by Sultan Sikandar Lodi was the metropolis of Agra. It was built by the architects deputed by the Sultan on a raised ground between the village of Poya and Basih by the bank of the river Jamuna at some distance from the old fortified town of Agra. For the rapid development of the new city, the Sultan made it the headquarters of a newly carved out sarkar (a bigger territorial unit) as well as the seat of his government in place of Delhi. The Sultan and his nobles owned karkhanas in Agra. These attracted skilled artisans from different cities and towns in the country. Likewise, the court-generated trade attracted merchant caravans even from foreign countries, and in due course, Agra became a trading centre of international importance.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Examine in brief Sikandar Lodi's economic measures.

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- 2) Write a note on urbanisation under Lodis.

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

Polity in the first half of the 16th century was mainly dominated by the Afghans—the Lodis. The Mughals also emerged on the scene, but they were still struggling to dominate the Afghan polity. This, in fact, was more a period of instability. The Afghan nobility was not prepared to accept the autonomy of the Sultan. It played a crucial role in determining the political events of the period. As political expediency demanded, Bahlul was virtually dictated by Afghan nobility. Sikandar, who succeeded in exerting his power, did attempt for a compromise. But, Ibrahim and later the Surs established an autocratic centralized monarchy, and made the nobility totally subservient to the Sultan.

In spite of political instability, people enjoyed prosperity and economic stability; prices were low, burden of taxation was reduced by eliminating various cesses. However, under Lodi Sultans *iqtas* became hereditary. Another characteristic of the period was the growth of urbanisation. A number of cities sprang up during this period including the famous city of Agra which was to acquire pivotal role under the Mughals.

2.8 KEY WORDS

Amin	: revenue assessor
Baburnama	: memoir written by Babur (also known as Tuzuk-i-Baburi)
Iqta	: revenue assignments in lieu of salary
Infra	: see the following text
Kankut	: method of revenue assessment in which area was measured and the revenue realized was assessed in grain/kind
Karkhanas	: during this period karkhanas were the places where articles were manufactured for Sultan's and noble's household. Royal store houses were also called karkhanas
Khalisa	: crown land; i.e. land whose revenue was reserved for the imperial treasury
Pargana	: an administrative unit comprising a number of villages
Sarkar	: territorial division consisted of a number of parganas . Between parganas and sarkars were the shiqqs but from Akbar's reign onwards shiqq was not commonly used
Shiqq	: an administrative unit comprising a number of parganas
Supra	: see the preceding text
Wall/Muqta	: provincial governors/ iqta holders
Wazir	: prime minister
Wilayat	: province. Provinces in this period are not well-defined administrative units. The well-defined provinces (subas) emerged for the first time during Akbar's reign in 1580

2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sub-sec. 2.2.1.
- 2) Governor of Kāra, ruler of Gujarat, Governor of Bihar, Governor of Kalpi, Governor of Punjab.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the salient features of Afghan tribal polity; how it was based on decentralization; and compare it with the Turkish polity which was basically a centralized one (see Sub-sec. 2.5.1).
- 2) See Sub-sec. 2.5.2. Discuss the policy of both Sher Shah and Islam Shah.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Sub-sec. 2.6.1, 2.6.2.
- 2) See Sub-sec. 2.6.3.