

HA02 — Medieval India

HA02 · AFCAT General Awareness — History

★ Moderate Yield — 1–2 Questions

Medieval India (700–1800 CE) is where cultures met, sometimes in conflict, sometimes in extraordinary synthesis. The Delhi Sultanate brought new administrative systems and architectural styles. The Mughal Empire became one of the wealthiest and most powerful empires in human history. And running as a counterpoint to political power, the Bhakti and Sufi movements were reshaping Indian society from the bottom up — teaching that God is accessible to every person, regardless of caste, religion, or gender. For AFCAT, this chapter rewards those who learn the key associations: which ruler introduced which policy, which saint taught which idea, which monument was built by whom.

➔ **AFCAT Focus:** Qutb Minar = started by Aibak, completed by Iltutmish; Razia Sultana = only woman ruler of Delhi Sultanate; Alauddin Khalji = market price controls; Muhammad bin Tughlaq = capital transfer + token currency (both failed); Taj Mahal = Shah Jahan (Mumtaz Mahal); Akbar = Mansabdari system + Din-i-Ilahi; Tansen = Akbar's court; Guru Nanak = founded Sikhism; Kabir = Hindu-Muslim synthesis.

PART 1 — DELHI SULTANATE (1206–1526)

1. Five Dynasties of the Delhi Sultanate

The Delhi Sultanate was not one continuous dynasty but five successive ones — each responding to the crises left by the previous. Think of it as a relay race of power: each baton was passed in different circumstances, and each runner had a different style. AFCAT tests the key ruler from each dynasty and their signature policy or achievement.

FIVE DYNASTIES AT A GLANCE — KEY RULER AND DEFINING MOMENT

1. Mamluk (Slave) Dynasty — 1206–1290 **Qutb-ud-din Aibak:** Founder; slave of Muhammad Ghori; generous ("Lakh Baksh");

began **Qutb Minar** and first mosque in India (Quwwat-ul-Islam). Died playing polo (1210).

Iltutmish: Completed Qutb Minar; first pure Arabic coinage; introduced Iqta system; real consolidator of the Sultanate.

Razia Sultana (1236–40): Only woman ruler of Delhi Sultanate; discarded purdah; held open court; overthrown by Turkish nobles who couldn't accept a woman ruler.

Balban: Enforced strict court discipline (Sijda = prostration); broke power of the "Forty" nobles; efficient spy network.

2. Khalji Dynasty — 1290–1320

Alauddin Khalji (1296–1316): Greatest Khalji; expanded empire to its maximum extent; repelled 4 Mongol invasions; famous **Market Control System** — fixed prices for all goods across Delhi; four markets (grain, cloth, horses, slaves); Shahna (market controller) + Barids (spies) to enforce; remarkably effective during his lifetime. Also introduced land measurement and set revenue at ½ of produce.

3. Tughlaq Dynasty — 1320–1414

Muhammad bin Tughlaq (1324–51): AFCAT's favourite Sultan — brilliant but catastrophically impractical. Three famous failed experiments:

- ① **Capital transfer from Delhi to Daulatabad** (Maharashtra) — forced entire Delhi population to walk 1,500 km; reversed after massive death toll
- ② **Token currency** — copper coins to replace silver; people forged them; economy collapsed
- ③ Raised taxes in Doab during a famine — caused rebellion

Contemporary Ibn Batuta visited and wrote *Rihla* about his reign.

Firoz Shah Tughlaq: Benevolent; built canals, hospitals; patronised Amir Khusrau.

4. Sayyid (1414–51) & 5. Lodi Dynasty (1451–1526)

Sayyids: Weak rulers; only controlled area around Delhi.

Lodis: First Afghan (Pashtun) dynasty — *not Turkic*. Sikandar Lodi built Agra city. **Ibrahim Lodi** — last Sultan; arrogant; alienated nobles. Invited **Babur** to invade. Killed at **First Battle of Panipat (1526)** — end of Delhi Sultanate.

2. The Bhakti Movement – A Revolution from Below

While sultans and emperors fought over political power, a quieter revolution was happening in temples and on roadsides. The Bhakti movement taught that God is love, that devotion requires no intermediary priest, and that caste is irrelevant to spiritual worth. Bhakti saints composed in regional languages – Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Bengali – making spiritual wisdom accessible to everyone for the first time. This was one of India's greatest democratising movements.

🌿 KABIR (1440–1518) – THE BRIDGE BUILDER

- ▶ Muslim weaver by birth; disciple of Ramananda (Hindu)
- ▶ Rejected caste, idol worship, and rituals of *both* Hinduism and Islam
- ▶ Composed Dohas (couplets) in simple Hindi; still memorised widely
- ▶ "God is one – whether you call Him Ram or Rahim"
- ▶ Both Hindus and Muslims claim him as their own even today

🌿 GURU NANAK (1469–1539) – FOUNDER OF SIKHISM

- ▶ Born in Punjab; founder of a new religion – **Sikhism**
- ▶ Rejected caste, idol worship, and religious rituals
- ▶ Emphasised one God (Waheguru); equality of all human beings
- ▶ Established Langar (community kitchen open to all)
- ▶ Composed Japji Sahib; followed by nine more Gurus
- ▶ Guru Gobind Singh = 10th and last human Guru

🌿 MIRABAI (16TH CENTURY)

- ▶ Rajput princess; intense devotion to Lord Krishna
- ▶ Composed bhajans in Rajasthani and Braj Bhasha
- ▶ Left royal household to become a wandering devotee
- ▶ Symbol of Bhakti transcending social status and gender norms

🌿 TULSIDAS (1532– 1623)

🌿 SUFI MOVEMENT – ISLAM'S MYSTICAL

🌿 RAMANUJA & CHAITANYA

- ▶ North India; devoted to Lord Rama
- ▶ Wrote **Ramcharitmanas** in Awadhi (vernacular Hindi)
- ▶ Most widely read religious text in North India today
- ▶ Also wrote Hanuman Chalisa – still chanted daily by millions

PATH

- ▶ Sufis sought direct personal experience of God through love and music
- ▶ **Chishti Order** (most popular): Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer; Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi; emphasised love and service to poor; used Qawwali music
- ▶ Sufi dargahs (shrines) became centres of communal harmony
- ▶ **Amir Khusrau:** Disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya; invented Qawwali; pioneer of Hindustani music; wrote in both Persian and Hindi

- ▶ **Ramanuja (11th–12th c.):** South India; Vishishtadvaita philosophy; opened temples to all castes; inspired later Bhakti movement
- ▶ **Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1534):** Bengal; Gaudiya Vaishnavism; kirtans (devotional singing); open to all castes; founder of tradition that later became ISKCON

PART 3 – THE MUGHAL EMPIRE (1526–1857)

3. Six Great Mughal Emperors

The Mughal Empire was one of the wealthiest states in human history – at its peak, it produced about 25% of the world's GDP. But beyond economics, it created an extraordinary cultural synthesis: Persian administrative sophistication merged with Indian artistic traditions to produce some of the world's most beautiful architecture, painting, and music. AFCAT tests specific facts about each emperor – particularly Akbar (most tested), Shah Jahan (Taj Mahal), and the contrasting policies of Akbar and Aurangzeb.

MUGHAL EMPERORS – KEY FACTS AND WHAT AFCAT TESTS

Babur (1526–1530) – Founder **First Battle of Panipat (1526):** Defeated Ibrahim Lodi using gunpowder artillery – first time in India. **Battle of**

Khanwa (1527): Defeated Rana Sanga of Mewar. Wrote **Baburnama** — first autobiography by an Indian ruler; in Chagatai Turkish; candid, literary masterpiece. Died at Agra 1530 after just 4 years in India.

Humayun (1530–1540; 1555–1556) Lost empire to **Sher Shah Suri** (Afghan general) at Battle of Kanauj (1540); spent 15 years in exile in Persia. Sher Shah's brief reign was remarkable: **Grand Trunk Road** (Kabul to Chittagong), standardised silver **rupee**, postal system, land survey. Humayun regained empire 1555; died falling from library steps 1556.

Akbar (1556–1605) — The Greatest Mughal

Second Battle of Panipat (1556): Bairam Khan defeated Hemu for young Akbar.

Mansabdari System: All nobles given numerical ranks (mansabs, 10–10,000); determined salary and military obligation; non-hereditary; gave emperor direct control over all nobles.

Religious Policy: Abolished Jizya (tax on non-Muslims); no pilgrim tax; weekly interfaith debates at **Ibadat Khana** (House of Worship, Fatehpur Sikri). Created **Din-i-Ilahi** (1582) — a personal spiritual movement blending all religions; not forced on anyone; only ~18 members; Birbal was only Hindu member.

Navaratnas: Nine Gems of his court — Birbal (wit), **Tansen** (music), Abul Fazl (historian, Akbarnama), Todar Mal (land revenue reform), Man Singh, Abdul Rahim, and others.

Architecture: Fatehpur Sikri (new capital near Agra), Buland Darwaza ("Gate of Victory"), Agra Fort (red sandstone).

Jahangir (1605–1627) **Nur Jahan** (his wife): Virtually ran the empire; issued coins in her name; real political power. First British trade mission: Captain Hawkins and Sir Thomas Roe visited. Mughal miniature painting reached its peak — exceptionally refined aesthetic sense. Famous for "Jahangir's Chain of Justice" — a gold chain anyone could ring to appeal directly to the emperor.

Shah Jahan (1628–1658) — Golden Age of Architecture **Taj Mahal (1632–53):** Built in memory of wife **Mumtaz**

Mahal; chief architect Ustad Ahmad Lahauri; white marble; 22 years, 20,000 workers; UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Red Fort, Delhi; Jama Masjid; Moti Masjid (Pearl Mosque). Peacock Throne — most jewelled throne ever built (looted by Nadir Shah 1739).

Overthrown by son Aurangzeb; spent last 8 years under house arrest in Agra Fort, reportedly gazing at the Taj Mahal.

Aurangzeb (1658–1707) — Expansion and Beginning of Decline

Greatest territorial extent but also the beginning of the end. **Re-imposed Jizya** (1679) — reversed Akbar's policy; alienated Rajputs, Sikhs, Marathas. **27 years fighting the Marathas in the Deccan** — drained treasury completely; could never decisively defeat Shivaji or his successors. Banned music at court; destroyed some temples. Died 1707 in the Deccan without defeating the Marathas — the empire shattered within 50 years of his death.

4. Shivaji and the Maratha Empire

- **Shivaji (1627–1680):** Founded Maratha kingdom; coronated at Raigad Fort (1674) as "Chhatrapati." Used guerrilla warfare (Ganimi Kava) brilliantly against Mughals. **Ashtapradhan** = Council of Eight Ministers (Peshwa = Prime Minister). Called "Father of Indian Navy." Escaped from Agra in fruit baskets after Aurangzeb's house arrest.
- **Peshwa Era:** Baji Rao I (greatest Peshwa; never lost a battle; expanded to Delhi); Third Battle of Panipat (1761) against Afghan Ahmad Shah Durrani = Maratha setback; three Anglo-Maratha Wars (1775, 1803, 1817) → complete defeat by British (1818)



AFCAT PYQs — Medieval India

Q1. The Taj Mahal was built by Shah Jahan in memory of:

AFCAT PYQ

- (a) Nur Jahan (b) Jodha Bai (c) Mumtaz Mahal (d) Jahanara

✓ Answer: (c) Mumtaz Mahal

The **Taj Mahal** was built by **Shah Jahan** in memory of his favourite wife **Mumtaz Mahal** (Arjumand Banu Begum), who died in 1631 giving birth to their 14th child. Construction: 1632–1653, ~22 years, ~20,000 workers, chief architect Ustad Ahmad Lahauri. UNESCO World Heritage Site. Called "an elegy in marble." Nur Jahan was Jahangir's wife; Jodha Bai was Akbar's Rajput wife; Jahanara was Shah Jahan's daughter. This is one of the most repeated AFCAT history questions.

Q2. The Mansabdari System in the Mughal Empire was introduced by:

AFCAT PYQ

- (a) Babur (b) Humayun (c) Akbar (d) Aurangzeb

✓ Answer: (c) Akbar

The **Mansabdari System** was introduced by **Akbar** as the core of his military-administrative organisation. Every noble (Mansabdar) had a numerical rank (mansab) from 10 to 10,000 — determining their salary, the number of soldiers they had to maintain, and their status. Crucially, mansabs were NOT hereditary — they were personal appointments by the emperor, ensuring all nobles remained loyal to the throne. This brilliant system gave Akbar unprecedented control over his military and bureaucracy. It continued under later Mughals but became increasingly corrupt.

Q3. Muhammad bin Tughlaq's famous but failed experiment of transferring capital from Delhi was to: AFCAT PYQ

- (a) Agra (b) Lahore (c) Daulatabad (d) Lucknow

✓ Answer: (c) Daulatabad

Muhammad bin Tughlaq ordered the capital transferred from Delhi to **Daulatabad** (in Maharashtra, formerly Devagiri) — a 1,500 km journey. His rationale: Daulatabad was more central and safer from Mongol attacks. He forced the entire Delhi population to make the arduous journey — thousands died of exhaustion, heat, and starvation. After reaching Daulatabad, he realised he could no longer manage the north effectively and reversed the decision. The historian Ibn Batuta (who visited his court) described him as "generous but impulsive" — a man whose ambition consistently exceeded his execution.

Q4. Which Bhakti saint is known for composing the Ramcharitmanas?

AFCAT PYQ

- (a) Kabir (b) Mirabai (c) Chaitanya (d) Tulsidas

✓ Answer: (d) Tulsidas

Tulsidas (1532–1623) wrote the **Ramcharitmanas** in Awadhi — a vernacular Hindi dialect — making the story of Rama accessible to ordinary people who couldn't read Sanskrit. It became, and remains, the most widely read religious text in North India. He also composed the Hanuman Chalisa (40 verses in praise of Hanuman), which is chanted daily by millions. Kabir composed Dohas (couplets); Mirabai composed Krishna bhajans; Chaitanya founded Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Bengal through Kirtans (devotional singing).

Q5. Tansen, the legendary musician, was a jewel in the court of: AFCAT PYQ

- (a) Babur (b) Humayun (c) Akbar (d) Shah Jahan

✓ Answer: (c) Akbar

Tansen (Mian Tansen, c.1500–1586) was one of Akbar's **Navaratnas** (Nine Gems) — the most celebrated musician in Indian history. He created many ragas still played today (Miyan ki Todi, Miyan ki Malhar). Legends say his singing could light lamps or bring rain. He is called the Father of Hindustani Classical Music. His tomb is at Gwalior — a pilgrimage site for musicians. The annual Tansen Music Festival at Gwalior continues today, where leading musicians pay homage at his tomb before performing.

Q6. Amir Khusrau is known for which pioneering contribution?

⚡ Tricky

- (a) Writing the Baburnama (b) Inventing Qawwali and pioneering Hindustani music
(c) Creating the Mansabdari System (d) Building the Qutb Minar

✓ Answer: (b) Inventing Qawwali and pioneering Hindustani music

Amir Khusrau (1253–1325) was a disciple of the great Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya. He pioneered **Qawwali** (devotional music used by Sufis) and is credited with creating the khayal form of Hindustani classical music. He also invented a precursor to the sitar and the tabla. He wrote poetry in both Persian and Hindi — creating a synthesis that became the basis of Urdu literature. He is called the "Father of Qawwali" and "the Parrot of India." Baburnama = Babur's own autobiography.

Quick Memory Chart — HAO2

Delhi Sultanate

- ♦ Aibak: founded; began Qutb Minar
- ♦ Iltutmish: completed Qutb Minar
- ♦ Razia Sultana: only woman ruler
- ♦ Alauddin: market price controls; 4 Mongol repulsions
- ♦ Muhammad bin Tughlaq: capital shift + token coin (both failed)

Mughal Rulers

- ♦ Babur: 1st Panipat 1526; Baburnama
- ♦ Akbar: Mansabdari; Din-i-Ilahi; Fatehpur Sikri
- ♦ Shah Jahan: Taj Mahal (Mumtaz); Red Fort
- ♦ Aurangzeb: reimposed Jizya; 27 yrs Deccan war
- ♦ Tansen: Akbar's court; father of Hindustani music

Bhakti & Sufi

- ♦ Kabir: Muslim weaver; Hindu-Muslim synthesis
- ♦ Guru Nanak: founded Sikhism; Langar tradition
- ♦ Tulsidas: Ramcharitmanas; Hanuman Chalisa
- ♦ Amir Khusrau: invented Qawwali; Persian + Hindi
- ♦ Chishti Order: Moinuddin Chishti (Ajmer)



Practice Exercise

E1. The first mosque built in India was the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque at Delhi, built by:

- (a) Muhammad Ghori (b) Qutb-ud-din Aibak (c) Iltutmish (d) Alauddin Khalji

E2. Nur Jahan, who wielded remarkable political power, was the wife of which Mughal emperor?

- (a) Akbar (b) Jahangir (c) Shah Jahan (d) Aurangzeb

E3. The Ashtapradhan (Council of Eight Ministers) was established by:

- (a) Akbar (b) Aurangzeb (c) Shivaji (d) Baji Rao I

Answers:

E1 → (b) Qutb-ud-din Aibak [built 1193 CE using material from demolished Hindu-Jain temples; India's first mosque; within what became the Qutb complex in Delhi] | E2 → (b) Jahangir [Nur Jahan was an extraordinary political force — issued coins in her own name, signed imperial documents, designed gardens; effectively the de facto ruler while Jahangir pursued his artistic interests] | E3 → (c) Shivaji [Ashtapradhan = council of 8 ministers: Peshwa (PM), Senapati (military), Amatya (finance), Mantri (records), Sachiv (correspondence), Sumant (foreign affairs), Pandit Rao (religious affairs), Nyayadhis (justice)]

The pivot to modern history: *HA03 is the most important chapter in AFCAT History — covering the period from 1857 to 1947 when India transformed from a colony into an independent nation. The social reform movements you read about at the end of this chapter (Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission) connect directly to the early national movement. And the Mughal Empire you've just studied effectively ended with the 1857 Revolt, when the last Mughal emperor became a symbolic figurehead of the uprising.*

 **Mock Tests**

 **Subject Quiz**

 **Telegram**

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