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Feroz Shah Tughlaq

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Feroz Shah Tughlaq

Firoz Shah Tughlaq was the last great ruler of his dynasty. He is remembered for canals, towns and welfare, not for conquest. This lesson shows what he built, what it cost, and what exams ask.

At a glance

Four key facts on this topic

01 **Reign**1351–1388.

02 **Taxes**Four kept; irrigation tax added.

03 **Works**Canals and new towns.

04 **Pillars**Two Ashokan pillars moved.

How did Firoz Shah come to the throne, and what did he change?

1 A Gentler Sultan Rises

1.1 How did Firoz Shah become Sultan?

Muhammad bin Tughlaq died near Thatta in 1351. His army was left leaderless and was harassed by rebels for two days. The nobles then urged his cousin Firoz to take the throne.

Firoz was chosen by the nobles and the ulema. He ruled until 1388, a reign of about 37 years. That makes it the longest of the Tughlaq dynasty.


فیروز شاہ تغلق



Firoz Shah Tughlaq, Sultan of Delhi 1351–1388. Indian miniature, British Library. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

1.2 What did he change?

He chose peace and reconciliation. He tried to keep the nobles, the army and the theologians happy. He undid many policies of Muhammad bin Tughlaq.

He gave nobles hereditary succession to their property. He restored rent-free lands to scholars and the weak. He picked Malik Maqbul as his chief minister, with the title Khan-i-Jahan.

> 8. **Think it through:** Why would a new ruler reverse his cousin's policies? See answer ↓

> **Quick check 1.** True or false: Firoz Shah Tughlaq became Sultan in 1351, after the death of Muhammad bin Tughlaq. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in; gktoday.in; anantamias.com

What wars did Firoz Shah fight?

2 Wars with Little Gain

2.1 Where did Firoz fight?

He led two Bengal campaigns, in 1353–54 and 1359–60. Both failed. On the way back he fought the ruler of Jajnagar in Orissa and won.

He damaged the Jagannatha temple and took rich plunder. He made no attempt to annex Orissa.

2.2 What happened at Nagarkot?

In 1360 he besieged the fort of Nagarkot. After six months the fort surrendered. The Raja submitted and was received with honour.

The booty included 1,300 Sanskrit manuscripts. Firoz had some of them translated into Persian.

2.3 Why did he avoid the south?

He wanted to hold only the lands he could govern from the centre. So he did not try to win back south India or the Deccan.

His longest campaigns were against revolts in Gujarat and Sindh in 1362–63. The rebels were crushed, but the army suffered much. One source calls his wars largely a failure.

> 9. **Think it through:** Is a ruler who avoids wars always weak?
>
> See answer ↓

Quick check 2. True or false: Firoz Shah's two Bengal campaigns were successful. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Which taxes did he keep, and how did he help farmers?

3 Taxes and Help for Farmers

3.1 Which taxes did he keep?

He gave up taxes that Islamic law did not allow. One source says he abolished 23 of them, including grazing and house taxes. Another says about twenty.

Only four taxes stayed: kharaj, zakat, jizya and khums. Khums was one-fifth of the war booty. Officers were warned not to ask for more.

The four taxes kept

Tax	What it was
Kharaj	Land tax
Zakat	Tax on Muslims, 2.5 percent of property
Jizya	Tax on non-Muslims
Khums	One-fifth of the booty from war

Added later: an irrigation tax of 10 percent of the produce on lands watered by state canals.

3.2 How did he treat the peasants?

He cancelled the loans given under Muhammad bin Tughlaq. On the advice of his vizier Maqbul, the loan records were destroyed in public.

Merchants were freed from harsh duties. Prices of common goods fell. He also laid out more than 1,200 state fruit gardens.

3.3 Were Brahmins taxed?

Sources say Brahmins were not exempted from jizya. Earlier Sultans had often waived it in practice.

Do not call him the first to do this unless a textbook says so. The sources here only say he did not exempt them.

> 10. **Think it through:** Why would he cancel the peasants' debts?
> See answer ↓

> **Quick check 3.** True or false: Firoz Shah kept every tax that earlier Sultans had imposed. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: drishtiias.com

What canals, towns and pillars did he leave?

4 Canals, Cities and Pillars

4.1 What canals did he build?

Firoz is the great canal builder of the Delhi Sultanate. A double system of canals from the Yamuna to the Sutlej was built in 1355 to serve his new town of Hissar. Books count four or five main canals and name them differently.

The longest ran from the Sutlej to Hansi, about 200 km. He also built dams and tanks. The Yamuna canal was repaired again under Akbar.

4.2 Which towns did he found?

He loved founding towns. Hissar, Jaunpur, Firozabad and Fatehabad are the best known. Fatehabad was named for his son Fatah Khan.

Jaunpur was named in memory of his cousin Muhammad bin Tughlaq. One later historian, Farishta, counts 845 public works in his time. These included canals, mosques, schools and inns.

4.3 How did the Ashokan pillars reach Delhi?

Firoz had two Ashokan pillars brought to Delhi. One came from Topara in Ambala. The other came from Meerut.

He set them up at Firozabad and on the Delhi ridge. He could not read the Brahmi script on them. He saved them out of interest in antiquity.

Firoz Shah's main works

Work	Detail
Hissar-i-Firoza	New town on a canal system, 1355
Firozabad	New city near Delhi on the Yamuna
Fatehabad	Town named for his son Fatah Khan
Jaunpur	Founded during the Bengal campaign
Ashokan pillars	From Topara and Meerut

11. **Think it through:** Why would he move a pillar he could not read? See answer ↓

Quick check 4. True or false: Firoz Shah brought two Ashokan pillars to Delhi. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What welfare did he provide, and what was the slave system?

5 Welfare, Learning and Slaves

5.1 What welfare did he provide?

He set up a hospital, called a dar-ul-shafa, in Delhi to treat all freely. He gave dowries to the daughters of the poor.

A new department, the Diwan-i-Khairat, cared for orphans and widows. He also built rest houses for merchants and travellers.

5.2 How did he support learning?

He backed scholars, poets and historians, such as Barani and Afif. Schools were attached to mosques across the empire.

The madrasas at Firozabad grew into a great centre of study. Some Sanskrit books were translated into Persian.

5.3 What was the slave system?

Firoz kept a huge number of slaves. One source says about 180,000, with 40,000 serving in the palace. They worked in royal workshops.

A department, the Diwan-i-Bandagan, looked after them. Their upkeep was costly. After his death the slaves became a source of trouble.

> 12. **Think it through:** Why did slaves become a danger after his death? See answer ↓

> **Quick check 5.** True or false: Firoz Shah abolished the Diwan-i-Khairat soon after taking the throne. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

How religious was his rule?

6 Strict Faith, Famous Memoir

6.1 How religious was his rule?

Firoz chose to follow the Shariat and took advice from the ulema. His mother was a Hindu princess of Dipalpur, one source adds.

One source suggests he wanted to prove himself equal to pure-blooded Muslims. Sources record that he burned a Brahmin for preaching to Muslims.

6.2 What happened to temples and other groups?

He destroyed the Jagannatha temple in Orissa. Sources add that other temples were pulled down and mosques built.

One source also says he persecuted Shias and some Sufi orders.

6.3 What is the Futuhat-i-Firoz Shahi?

It is a short memoir of his reign. In it he proudly records what he did, including some temple demolitions.

Historians use it with care. A ruler's own account shows what he wanted to be remembered for.

> 13. **Think it through:** Can a ruler be kind to peasants and harsh to others? See answer ↓

> **Quick check 6.** True or false: The Futuhat-i-Firoz Shahi is a memoir of Firoz Shah's reign. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What happened after he died, and what do exams ask?

7 Decline, Verdict and Exams

7.1 What happened after 1388?

His grandson took the throne as Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq II. He was beheaded within a year, on 19 February 1389.

Three more Sultans followed in five years. Slaves rebelled. Nobles fought for power. One source says the Sultanate shrank to a local principality within two decades.

7.2 What did Timur do?

Timur invaded in 1398–99 and entered Delhi on 17 December 1398. The sack lasted fifteen days. The last Tughlaq, Nasir-ud-din Mahmud, fled.

In 1414 Khizr Khan deposed him and founded the Sayyid dynasty.

7.3 How do historians judge Firoz?

He was a man of peace but a poor general. His reign was comparatively prosperous. Yet his wars failed, and the nobles and the slaves grew powerful.

In his last years the chief minister Khan-i-Jahan held real power. The decay that began under Muhammad bin Tughlaq grew faster.

7.4 What do exams ask?

CDS (II) 2021 asked which chronicle has a painted picture of the moving of the Ashoka pillar at Topra. The answer is Sirat-i-Firuz Shahi. See CDS II 2021, Q57.

- Know the dates: 1351 to 1388
- Know the four taxes kept
- Know the pillars came from Topara and Meerut
- Know Timur came in 1398

14. **Think it through:** Why did the dynasty fall so fast after a calm reign? See answer ↓

Quick check 7. True or false: The last Tughlaq ruler was deposed in 1414 by Khizr Khan. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Remember this

- **Reign:** 1351 to 1388; chosen by nobles and ulema near Thatta.
- **Wars:** Bengal failed twice; Nagarkot taken in 1360.
- **Taxes:** four kept; irrigation tax at 10 percent; loans cancelled.
- **Works:** canals, Hissar, Firozabad, Fatehabad, Jaunpur; Ashokan pillars moved.
- **Welfare:** hospital, dowries, Diwan-i-Khairat; about 180,000 slaves.
- **End:** Timur in 1398; Khizr Khan deposed the last Tughlaq in 1414.

Explain it back: Say how Firoz Shah differed from his cousin, and why his rule still weakened the Sultanate.

Practice MCQs

1. Which title did Firoz Shah give to his chief minister Malik Maqbul?

A. Naib Barbak

B. Khan-i-Jahan

C. Amir-i-Kohi

D. Sadr-us-Sudur

See answer ↓

2. Which tax did Firoz Shah add on lands watered by state canals?

A. Grazing tax

B. Irrigation tax of 10 percent

C. Jizya on farmers

D. House tax

See answer ↓

3. About how many slaves did Firoz Shah's state reportedly support?

A. 18 lakh

B. 1,800

C. 180,000

D. 18,000

See answer ↓

4. From which two places did Firoz Shah bring Ashokan pillars to Delhi?

A. Sarnath and Lauriya

B. Sanchi and Allahabad

C. Kausambi and Vaishali

D. Topara and Meerut

See answer ↓

5. Which department did Firoz Shah create to care for orphans and widows?

A. Diwan-i-Khairat

B. Diwan-i-Kohi

C. Diwan-i-Arz

D. Diwan-i-Bandagan

See answer ↓

6. Whose invasion of 1398 struck Delhi long after Firoz Shah's death?

A. Timur

B. Babur

C. Nadir Shah

D. Mahmud of Ghazni

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **B.**
   Malik Maqbul became his prime minister. He got the title Khan-i-Jahan. He had been a Brahmin of Warangal who turned to Islam.
   ↑ Q1
2. **B.**
   He charged an irrigation tax of one-tenth of the produce. Grazing and house taxes were among those he abolished.
   ↑ Q2
3. **C.**
   One source says about 1,80,000 slaves, with 40,000 in the palace. They became a source of trouble after his death.
   ↑ Q3
4. **D.**
   One pillar came from Topara in Ambala. The other came from Meerut. He could not read their Brahmi script.
   ↑ Q4
5. **A.**
   The Diwan-i-Khairat looked after orphans and widows. The Diwan-i-Bandagan looked after slaves.
   ↑ Q5
6. **A.**
   Timur invaded in 1398–99 and entered Delhi on 17 December 1398. The Tughlaq state never recovered.
   ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** The nobles urged him to take the throne when the army was in disorder near Thatta. ↑ 1
2. **False.** Both campaigns, in 1353–54 and 1359–60, were unsuccessful. ↑ 2
3. **False.** He abolished taxes not allowed by Islamic law and kept four. ↑ 3
4. **True.** One came from Topara in Ambala and one from Meerut. ↑ 4
5. **False.** He created it to care for orphans and widows. ↑ 5

6. **True.** In it he records his own works and acts. ↑ 6
7. **True.** Khizr Khan then founded the Sayyid dynasty. ↑ 7
8. **Think it through.** Muhammad's schemes had left the nobles angry and the farmers poor. Firoz needed their support to hold the throne. Reversing the schemes was the quickest way to win it. ↑ 8
9. **Think it through.** Not always. Firoz saved money and kept peace at home. But he also let large regions slip away. The empire he left was smaller and harder to hold. ↑ 9
10. **Think it through.** The loans could not be repaid anyway. Cancelling them cost little and bought goodwill. One source says almost no rebels rose in his rule. ↑ 10
11. **Think it through.** The pillars were old, tall and famous. Placing them in his city made it grander. He treated them as monuments, not as writings. ↑ 11
12. **Think it through.** A large group of people held by the ruler's favour had no other protector. Once he died, they fought for their own place. Some turned to disorder. ↑ 12
13. **Think it through.** His welfare reached the poor of his own community and the farmers. His religious policy was hard on others. Both facts belong to the same reign. ↑ 13
14. **Think it through.** Calm was bought with gifts to nobles and slaves. These groups grew strong. When a strong ruler was gone, they pulled the state apart. ↑ 14

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