Conclusion

The study of the foregoing pages brings to light three distinct phases of the political history of early medieval India. The first phase is covered by the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The scene opens with the country parcelled out into numerous regional kingdoms and principalities, governed mostly by parochial and uncreative rulers and feudal bureaucracy who, with a caste-ridden and ‘self-stultified’ Hindu society as their base, were a poor match for their Turkish adversaries. In two bloody bouts with the crusaders of Islam, their prominent champions of northern India were beaten hip and thigh: the ‘stupéfied’ Hindu masses realised the gravity of the situation only when the Turkish rulers dubbed them as ‘infidels’ and classified them as second-rate citizens of ‘an Islamic state’ while within their own homeland and in occupation of their ancestral hearths and homes. The twelfth century was marked by a grim struggle between the Turkish victors and the middle-level socio-political leadership of the Hindus of northern India in which the former came out successful in the long run; it is in this context that the political-cum-military actions of the ‘slave’ sultans, including Ilutmish and Balban, can be appreciated better. By the end of the twelfth century, the sultanate of Delhi was well-established and Islam firmly planted on the Indian soil. Though only a part of India had fallen into their hands, the clatter of the Turkish arms had been heard across the Vindhyas.

The second phase of political history is marked by the accession of Alauddin Khalji to the throne of Delhi. He embarked upon an ambitious programme of imperial conquests and political unification of the country. He was amply rewarded in the enterprise; even those states, which could not be conquered by him, had to acknowledge the sultanate of Delhi to be the paramount power of the country. The imperial experiment proved successful though only for a shortwhile. It was all set for the consolidation of the imperial rule under the Tughluqs; but, within a decade of his accession to the throne, Muhammad bin Tughluq bungled with the imperial structure and struck a serious blow at the academic as well as military powers of the sultanate: it opened the floodgates of disruption. The shortsighted state policy of Firoze Tughluq sapped the vitality of the sultanate almost completely and his
death signalled the end of the second phase or the imperial history of early medieval India.

The third phase is marked by the disintegration of the imperial government of India and redivision of the country into provincial and regional states and feudal principalities. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, India, apparently, presented, the old political pattern of the eleventh century though there was a marked difference in the nature and character of its polity. Many of the powerful rulers were Muslims. Islam was firmly rooted in the soil and the Muslims constituted a part and parcel of the Indian society as well as polity. An entirely new socio-political order, so to speak, had come into existence. Most of the Indian rulers were enlightened and benevolent monarchs who worked for the welfare and happiness of the subjects and enjoyed their confidence. Like their counterparts of the eleventh century, however, they were usually interlocked with their neighbouring chiefs in mutual conflicts and frittered away their resources; regionalism became, once again, the main theme of the Indian politics. Nevertheless, the Indian polity of the fifteenth century shows comparative maturity in its form and implementation over that of the eleventh century. The princes, whether Hindus or Muslims, were conscious of the fact that India should have a strong central authority albeit the clash of interests between the rival parties stood in the way of achieving that ideal. The political vacuum, thus caused at the central level, was filled in by Babar in the twenties of the sixteenth century.