



HISTORY

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The Administrative System of the
Delhi Sultanate

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The Administrative System of the Delhi Sultanate

The system of administration of the Delhi Sultanate evolved a process that ran parallel to its political progress. There is no single source from where this process of development can be traced. Much of the information is gleaned from Ziauddin Barani's *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* and *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*. The latter book is in fact a valuable source dealing with the royal *fatawas* or orders that were passed by successive sultans bringing about important changes in

the administration. Barani made a collection of these *fatawas* and arranged them with his own comments and critique. He was a contemporary to most of these sultans; hence his commentaries are extremely valuable, although there is the propensity of these comments being one-sided.

Sultanate administration was actually the creation of Iltutmish, effectively the first sultan of Delhi. He made Delhi the seat of government, built up an army, arranged a makeshift effort at revenue collection (*iqta* system), and considered the distant annexed territories as integral parts of the growing empire, organizing administration of these under the supervision of the sultan. He also gave the Sultanate a political agenda and an ideology based upon *Jahandari* and *Zawabit*. *Jahandari* was good government founded on the wisdom, prudence and experience of the ruler and *Zawabit* was the collective body of *Zabita* or ordinances through which the *Jahandari* should work. It is to be noted that Iltutmish ignored the *shariat* in matters of government and was indifferent towards the *ulema* class, who were the proponents of this body of Islamic law. Iltutmish scrupulously separated the state from religion.

The later sultans like Balban, Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq followed the same policy. The Sultanate therefore was in no way a theocracy though some historians like R.P Tripathi and Srivastava would claim so. Historians like Muhammad Habib, Khaliq.Ahmad Nizami firmly believed that the Sultanate as a body politic and its governance were far removed from any religious notion. Nizami is of the opinion that the Turkish sultans of Delhi carried with them the profound impact of Persian culture and tried to 'recreate as much of Persian culture and tradition as possible'. Therefore, every detail of the Turkish administration from theories of kingship to 'names and nomenclature of institutions, of institutions and officers and to army organizations breathed of Persian atmosphere'. The official language of the Sultanate was also Persian though the sultans were Turks while the Lodis were Afghans.

In such a situation, the Sultanate could never strictly be confined within the definitive structure of religion. Nizami further wrote 'so far as the administrative institutions of Delhi were concerned, most of them had evolved and developed in Persian lands and consequently the Persian

stamp was very deep upon them. Even the army was modelled on the armies of medieval Persia'. This according to Nizami is proved by a careful reading of the contemporary account, *Adab-ul -Harb wa - Shuja'at* of Fakhre Mudabbir.

- (Nizami K.A, *Religion and Politics in India in the Thirteenth Century*, Oxford).

Neither was the Sultanate of military nature. Here again Nizami tells us that frequent and regular military operations did not necessarily indicate the fact that the Sultanate depended on the army. There are ample examples of popular support to the government even from among the Hindus.

-(Nizami K.A., *Religion and Politics in India in the Thirteenth Century*, Oxford).

The Sultan

The sultan was at the head of the sultanate government though nominal acknowledgement to the suzerainty of the *Khaliph* was prudently made by most sultans. The exception was Qutubuddin Mubarak Shah, son of Alauddin Khaji.

Otherwise a insignificant sultan, Qutubuddin Mubarak Shah proclaimed the independent power of the sultan claiming that the *Khaliph* had no authority over the sultanate whatsoever. The sultan's power and position had no mention in the *Shariat*. Yet the Sultanate was both a reality and an enforcing political entity. Thus we find medieval theorists like Ghazzali and historians Fakhre Mudabbir and Amir Khusrau and even Barani talked in earnest about the necessity of such a political authority.

I.H Qureshi gives an excellent summary of the duties and responsibilities of the sultan from such medieval works like *Suluk-i-Muluk*, *Nuh Siphir* and *Fatawa-i-Jahandari* which included defence of the faith but also maintenance of law and order and protection of the subjects. Collection of taxes, to patronise and look after the poor and the needy and the learned and devoted religious men, to keep in regular and watchful touch the affairs of the state and the conditions of the people were other responsibilities. Though waging holy war against the non-Muslims was considered a duty, no sultan actually undertook it; at least not in that capacity. Wars against Hindu states were undertaken for

territorial expansion and acquisition of wealth. And in reality all sultans with the exception of Firuz Shah Tughlaq made it a policy to keep the *ulema* at a distance from the affairs of the state. In meting out criminal justice, *Shariat* had to be followed and only in that respect the *qazis* were chosen from the *ulema*.

The sultan's position was not hereditary. They could nominate their successors though. There are at least two instances of nomination. Sultan Razia was nominated by her father Iltutmish to the throne and Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq nominated his cousin Firuz Shah to succeed him after his death. But the sword was the deciding factor and successive *amirs* used their military power and skill in getting to the throne. Jalaluddin Firuz Khalji and later his nephew Alauddin, Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, Bahlal Lodi, all forced their way to the throne in this manner.

The sultans were makers of policies, passed ordinances which had effectiveness of law, like the market regulations of Alauddin and the ambitious projects of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. The sultans never allowed religion to take the

centre stage and always ruled by *Jahandari*. Barani succinctly described the nature of the Sultanate as *duniyadari* for as he said *dindari* or rule of religion was not possible. The sultans had ministers to help them.

The Ministers: *Majlis-i-Khas*

The sultans had to depend on the co-operation, collaboration and advice of a body of ministers known as the *Majlis-i-Khas*. According to K.A Nizami there were four major departments in the Sultanate government under four major ministers who together were clubbed under that name .1) the *Diwan-i-Wazirat*,2) the *Diwan-i-Risalat*.3) the *Diwan-i-Arz*,4) the *Diwan-i-Insha*.

The *Diwan-i-Wazirat* dealt with the policy making and general affairs of the government. The diwan *wazir* who headed this department was the sultans' closest officer. We get the names of *wazirs* like Nizamuddin Junaid in Iltutmish's time and Khwaja Hisamuddin Junaid belonging to Firuz Shah Tughlaq's ministry.

Diwan-i-Arz was the chief of the military department. This department became very important in the time of Alauddin Khalji who introduced many an important innovation in the army like branding (*dagh*) of the horses brought in by the soldiers and also maintaining of descriptive rolls (*chehera*) of the soldiers. Ziauddin Barani had made a very valuable collection of the advice (*wasaya*) of sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban to his son Bughra Khan in his *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*. 'Special attention should be paid towards the recruitment and maintenance of the army...the affairs of the army should be reported to the king everyday. The *Diwan-i-Arz* should be dignified in dealing with the old army men and liberal in the recruitment of the new.' (Nizami., chap III, page 109). Alauddin Khalji also took care to see that his soldiers were happy in their situations. One of the reasons of his introduction of the price control system was to alleviate the economic woes and problems of the soldiers.

The *Diwan-i-Risalat* dealt with foreign and diplomatic correspondence.(Habibullah, *Foundations of Muslim Rule in India*, Lahore, 1945, Nizami, Chapter III p96). This department was most active during Muhammad-bin-

Tughlaq's time, the latter frequently negotiated with the khans of Persia and the Chinese emperor (Kublai Khan).

Diwan-i-Insha was the department of correspondence, records and documents dealing with state matters. Though I.H Qureshi thinks that this department dealt with religious affairs, historians like Nizami and Srivastava think otherwise and consider it mainly as the records department. According to Nizami these departments were all under secular control and thus formed the pivot of the government.

Other Departments and Officers

There were officers from the *amir* and *malik* class like the *kotwals*, *wakil-i-dars*, *sarjandars*, *akhurbegs*, *dabirs*, and *maustaffis* who implemented the Sultanate's policies in various fields. Lesser officers like the *barids* kept the sultans constantly informed about the state of affairs. The chief of the department of the *barids* was *Barid-i-Mamalik*. The person in charge of accounts was *Mushrif-i-Mamalik* and the one looking into the audits was *Maustafi-i-Mamlik*. These two officers were under the *Diwan-i-Wazirat*.

An important department was *Madad-i-Ma'ash*. This department dealt with grants and endowments to religious men, scholars and literary persons and scholars. *Madad-i-Ma'ash* had always been an integral part of the Turkish administration since the days of the *Ummayid Khaliphate*. The Sultans of Delhi adopted it into their government. The department was placed under a member of the *ulema* class, essentially a religious man himself. The post was called *Sadar-us-Sudur*. Two new posts were created in the reigns of Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq respectively. One was the *Diwan-i-Riyasat*—the superintendent of the supermarket *Sarai-i-Adl* and the other was the *Diwan-i-Koh* the officer in charge of the department of agriculture.

Provincial Administration

Ghiyasuddin Balban in his *wasaya* (precepts or advices) to his son described *Wilayatdari* as governorship and *Iqlamdari* as kingship. The distinction was very clear. However *muqti* or *wali* was a particular post in relation to territorial assignments given to *amirs* and *maliks*. These assignments were known as *iqtas*. The *wali*, *muqti* or *iqtadar* as he was variously called was the holder of *iqta*, having had the right

to collect revenue from specific land grants in the Doab region. This was introduced during Iltutmish's time. The assignment also entitled responsibilities of maintaining law and order and protection of that particular *iqta*. As such these assignments had the validity of provinces and gave the *iqtadars* or the *walis*, the claim to provincial governorship. The system was quite complicated. Iltutmish made the system transferable with an additional duty of sending troops to the Sultan's army. During the intervening period between Iltutmish's death and Balban's acquiring of power, the *walis* turned their assignments into hereditary possessions. Alauddin tried to abolish the system and since then the post continued but perhaps with different implications. It may be assumed that the *iqtadar* or the *muqti* or the *wali* now became various names of the provincial governor. The custom perhaps had an earlier beginning as is known from Balban's *wasaya*.

It is very difficult to define provincial administration in the Sultanate period. For example, Lukhnauti or Bangala as it came to be known since Firuz Shah Tughlaq's time would often become independent. In Firuz's time Bangala became

completely detached and till the time of Sher Shah remained an independent principality. Gujarat conquered by Alauddin in 1299 however remained under control despite isolated incidents of revolts. Awadh, Kara, Multan, Sindh, Badaun, Dipalpur in Punjab seemed to have remained within the imperial boundaries. Devagiri in the south was annexed in the time of Qutubuddin Mubarak Shah and Dwarasamudra and Warangal during Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq's reign. But the inclusion of these areas was short lived. It is therefore very difficult to ascertain a definite account of the provincial administration of the Sultanate period. It would not be perhaps wrong to assume thus that there was a certain link between the central government and the distant regions and that link was in the nature of collecting and sending a fixed amount of revenue or tribute to the central treasury. For all other practical purposes the distant conquered regions were more or else ruled in an internal autonomous manner by the so called governors.

Local Administration

Very little is known about the local administration in the Sultanate time. The village or the *deh* was the lowest unit.

The village had its own system of management. The village headman was known as *patwari* and the village police man was the *chowkidar*. Later in the time of the Lodis we come across a new administrative division called the *pargana*. We also hear about such terms as *mouza* and *mahal* in relation to revenue collection. But these divisions became more known in the 16th century in Sher Shah's time. In Alauddin's time Hindu local officers were regularised as *khut*, *muquddam* and *chaudhuri*. They were essentially petty revenue officers. It is not known whether they performed administrative duties as well. The link with the villages was maintained by a central officer called *amil*.

Finances

The Delhi Sultans did perhaps collect the taxes as ensured in the Shariat. These were *ushar*, a land tax, *khiraj* an additional land tax, *zakat* a religious tax collected from the Muslim subjects and *jizya* a non-agricultural tax collected from the non- Muslims. The sultans often made exemptions with regard to this tax. For example most often the Brahmans enjoyed immunity where as exceptions were made for the poor at times or they paid at a reduced rate.

khams was a share of the plunder which the individual soldier had to deposit to the state. Toll taxes collected on highways and river banks and bridges, customs duties on trade and commerce were other resources of the Sultanate treasury.

Land Revenue

Land revenue was an essential part of the administration. The system was set up by Iltutmish by introducing the *iqtadari* system. The lands around Delhi and some parts of the Doab region were considered as *khalisa* or royal lands managed directly by the *amil* with the help of the *khut*, *muquddam* and the *chaudhuris*. While the *iqtadars* were responsible for collecting revenue from their assigned *iqtas* keeping their fixed shares and sending the required amount to the central treasury. Alauddin abolished the *iqtadar's* right to collect revenue. It is not known however how the revenue was collected thereafter. Perhaps the system of extending the *khuts*, *muqaddams* and the *chaudhuris* in these areas was undertaken. Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq undertook to introduce innovative measures, like co-operative farming and extending loans and other facilities to

the *ryots* by establishing a separate agricultural department called the *Diwani-i-Koh*. Because of the corruption and negligence of duties on the part of the *amirs* and also due to his sudden death, the project did not work out. Firuz Shah Tughlaq made elaborate plans for measurement and classification of lands and settling the annual estimate known as *asal jumma tomar*. His plans did not work out because he was too lenient towards negligent and corrupt officers in charge. The corruption in Firuz's time had been elaborately written by Barani. Firuz however made technological improvements in irrigation by digging canals. Punjab particularly was benefited by his irrigational schemes.

-(Muhammad Habib, K.A Nizami, *The Delhi Sultanate*)

Public Works

Most Sultans were concerned with public works. Iltutmish dug *talaos* or tanks for the availability of drinking water in and around Delhi. The project of cleaning the existing tanks and digging new ones continued. Alauddin's famous *Haus Khas* still exists. Firuz Shah undertook irrigational schemes. At least one canal dug by him exists today. He also

undertook to restoration of old buildings, *minars* and mausoleums. He set up a department for the employment of youths and a marriage bureau to provide help to the needy in getting their daughters married. All the sultans encouraged *karkhanas* or workshops to be set up for various crafts and industries. Firuz Shah Tughlaq set up a central committee called *Ghair-i-Ratibi* to look after the different *karkhanas*. Road building was yet another regular feature of the public works. Iltutmish built the three main trade routes from Delhi to Multan, Delhi to Awadh and Delhi to Ujjain. These were further improved by Balban. As part of his setting up of a second capital at Devagiri, Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq set up *saraïs* at frequent intervals on the road to Daulatabad (Devagiri). Trees were planted to provide shade. (Habib Muhammad and Nizami K.A, *The Delhi Sultanate*, People's Publishing House, Delhi)

Judicial Administration

Theoretically the Sultan was the head of the judiciary. Sultans usually dealt with administrative and political offences. Most sultans saw to it that justice was fairly meted out. Balban particularly publicly tried negligent and

oppressive *amirs* and took extra care to listen to the grievances of the people. Religious and social offences were dealt by the *Qazi-ul-Quzat* in accordance with the *Shariat*. Actually the sultans who otherwise took care to separate the *ulema* from administrative matters had to concede in this matter. Peace and justice and law and order were maintained by officers like *fouzdar*, *kotwal*, *thanadar* and above all by the espionage system carried out by *barids*.

Army

A large army was maintained by the sultans. The army was the creation of Iltutmish but further improved and reorganized by Alauddin Khalji. The latter paid his soldiers in cash. The salary was 234 *tankas* annually and 78 *tankas* more for an extra horse. The horse (*aspa*) was the most important war animal. K. A Nizami remarked 'this was the age of the horse'. One reason why Alauddin conquered Gujarat was to get control over the supply of horses which came through the ports of Gujarat. His establishment of the separate horse market at the *Sarai-i-Adl* and regulating market prices were also motivated by this. Judicious use of the elephant was another feature of the Sultanate army.

Elephants were not only used as baggage animals but also strategically placed in the battlefields. Balban considered a single elephant to be as effective in battle as five hundred horsemen. (Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*, quoted by Nizami, *Religion and Politics in the Thirteenth Century*, Oxford). Amir Khusrau was an eye witness to many a battle fought by the *Alai* army and had spoken highly of an elephant army in his *Qir'an-us-Sa'dain*.

The strategies were planned by sultans themselves. But they also had superior, talented generals. Iltutmish was a fine commander in Qutubuddin Aibak's army. Alauddin had four very talented generals—Alp Khan, Nusrat Khan, Ulugh Khan and Zafar Khan. Later he had Malik Kafur, the protagonist of his southern campaigns.

Slavehood and the special category of slaves called the *mameluks* were given special military training. Most often they were manumitted and raised to the ranks of *amir* and *malik*. Iltutmish and Ghiyasuddin Balban began their careers as slaves to become sultans later by dint of their

genius. Malik Kafur was also a slave but rose to take the highest command of the Alai army.

