

Sher Shah's- Administration

(A brief summary)

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All contemporary and earlier writers agree that Sher Shah was one of the ablest, most vigorous and clear headed administrator of medieval times. The accession of Sher Shah marked the beginning of that era of liberal Islam which lasted till the reaction of Aurangzeb's reign. Sher Shah realised that without Hindu-Muslim unity it was difficult to have a lasting and permanent empire .He discarded the policy of placing religious bigotry above consideration of the good of the kingdom. He can thus be called as the frontrunner of Akbar in this regard.

Sher Shah created confidence and respect for the ruler in the minds of his subjects by a just and progressive administration. Realising fully that the basis of the stability of state is finance and also welfare of the cultivators he paid attention in this direction. He reformed the revenue system of the country and was most concerned about the welfare and safety of the cultivators as land revenue was the chief source of income. He established direct contact with them and thus minimised the possibilities of oppression.

Sher Shah in a short period of five years, he brought about wide and various reforms in the administration. Though he was not an innovator, yet he was an extraordinary reformer and his reforms looked like innovations.

General administration

- 1) The King-a benevolent despot- The head of administration was the King. He wielded unlimited powers, his word was law. Sher Shah had number of ministers who assisted him in the discharge of his kingly duties, yet they

were mere secretaries who only attended to the routine work. He kept, all strings of policy in his own hands and himself disposed of a major part of State's business. However Sher Shah was a benevolent despot. He took special care for the welfare of his subjects

- 2) Ministers and their Departments- To assist the emperor, in the discharge of his duties there were a number of ministers who were in charge of their respective departments. The departments were mainly-
 - a) Diwan-i- Wazarat- Revenue and finance department was headed by the Wazir whose chief duty was to keep all accounts of income and expenditure. He also extended general supervision over ministers.
 - b) Diwan-i-Ariz- The department was under the minister known as Ariz-i- Mumalik- He performed functions regarding recruitment, organisation and discipline of the army.
 - c) Diwan-i- Rasalat. It was the department of foreign affairs under the charge of a minister whose chief function was to maintain diplomatic relations with other states and receive as well as send out ambassadors under directions of the king.
 - d) Diwan -i- Insha- The Minister in charge of this department drafted royal proclamation and despatches and also kept government records.
 - e) Diwan-i-Qaza- It was the department of judicial affairs under the charge of chief Qazi who dealt with appellate cases from the lower courts and supervised the administration of justice.

Sarkar and its Administration- Sarkar was an important unit of administration. There were, it is believed as many as 47 sarkars in Sher Shah's empire. The administration of a Sarkar was carried on chiefly by two officers-Shiqdar-i-Shiqdaran or Chief Shiqdar and Munsif-i-Munsifan or Chief Munsif. The Chief Shiqdar had about 2000 to 5000

troops under him. The Chief Munsif supervised the officials of Pargana, also settled disputes regarding boundaries of the parganas, besides acting as a judge in civil cases.

Pargana and its administration- Each Sarkar was sub-divided into a number of parganas. The administration of parganas was carried on mostly by Shiqdar and Amin or Munsif of the parganas. Besides the Shiqdar and the Munsif, there was one Khazanchi (Treasurer) in every pargana. There were also two Karkhums, or accountants, under him. They kept all records pertaining to land and land revenues and their records were considered an authority in matters relating to land revenue.

Village administration- Sher Shah allowed the continuance of the autonomous existence of the village communities. In every village there used to be a panchayat, a council consisting of the influential men of the village. It performed judicial and administrative functions. Sher Shah maintained contacts with the village officials, like Patwari and Chowkidar.

Military administration- Sher Shah set up an excellent military system. He brought all the soldiers into direct contact with the emperor and made them take oath of obedience to the king. He recruited the soldiers himself and as far as possible made the payment individually. Sher Shah greatly reformed the army by reviving the practices of Dagh (branding of horses) and Chera (descriptive rolls). This was done to avoid corruption. Sher Shah had a personal standing army, consisted of 153,000 cavalry, 25,000 infantry and 500 war elephants. Besides there

were large number of soldiers supplied by jagirdars. There was a strict discipline among the soldiers.

Land Revenue System- Sher Shah had already managed the jagirs of Seshram, Khawaspur and Tanda quite successfully and as such he had gained a good knowledge of the working of the revenue system. As soon as he became the emperor, he introduced the same on a large scale. He ordered the measurement of lands according to uniform standard. The cultivable land was divided into three parts, good, middling and bad. The average of these three was taken and thus produce of the land per bigha was ascertained. The state share was fixed at $\frac{1}{3}$ of the gross produce. In addition to this every cultivator was to pay in kind 2.5% of the revenue to the state and in lieu of this, grain was supplied to the subjects, at very cheap rates in times of famine and other calamities.

There were other sources of income,

- a) Khams- it was $\frac{1}{6}$ th of the loot collected during wars.
- b) Jaziya- It was a tax levied upon the Hindus.
- c) Salt and Custom Duties.
- d) Mint-The royal mint also brought income to the state.
- e) Presents- Presents from vassals and nobles and officials also supplemented the royal income.

Judicial Administration- Sher Shah himself was the highest court and the cases of high nobles and officials were always decided by him personally. His decision was final and could not be challenged anywhere in the empire. After him was the Chief Qazi, who was the head of the department of justice. The Chief Munsif and Amir decided the civil cases

in the Sarkar and pargana respectively. However the punishment in the time of Sher Shah was very severe, to set an example.

Police system- There was no separate police department during Sher Shah's time. On the other hand the military officers were required to discharge police duties as well. In the Sarkar it was the duty of Chief Shiqdar to maintain peace and order., while the shiqdar in pargana exercised the same functions. In the villages Sher Shah introduced the principle of local responsibility and hence, made the headman responsible for all the crimes committed in the village. Punishment here too was severe.

Currency Reforms- Sher Shah introduced large number of new copper coins. He then introduced, the halves, the quarters, the eighths and sixteenths of the silver and copper coins. He further introduced a standard silver tanka of 178 grains. Sher Shah's coins were both square and circular in shape and bore the name and title of the emperor and the place of the mint. Some coins were in Devanagiri script and bore the names of the four Khalifas.

Public Reforms-

a) Roads- the important roads constructed by him, road running from Sunargaon to Rohtas on the Jhelum. It was 1500 kms in length, road running from Agra to Burhanpur, and the road running from Agra to Jodhpur and also a road running from Lahore to Multan. These roads brought about imperial unity, made the empire secure and led to the development of trade and commerce.

- b) Buildings- He got constructed – the Purana Qila of New Delhi and also constructed Rohtasgarh on the Jhelum river. His own mausoleum in Sasaram is one of the best designed of the times.
- c) Sarais- He got constructed about 1700 sarais along the roads. Each sarai consisted of two quarters- one for the Hindus and the other for the Muslims. There was a mosque and a well in every sarai. The sarais were safe and every effort was made to see that every traveller was kept comfortable. Sher Shah became very popular and was considered benevolent for building these sarais.

Thus Sher Shah was not only a great conqueror but also an excellent administrative genius. In a short period of five years he brought about wide and various reforms in the administration. Though he was not an innovator, yet he was an extraordinary reformer and his reforms looked like innovations.