



# History of Medieval India

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## Administration of Delhi Sultanate

### Nature of the State:

It is a matter of debate among scholars whether the state under Delhi Sultanate was a theocratic state or a secular one. Before coming to any conclusion, we should examine the state of affairs under Delhi Sultanate. The term theocracy originates from the Greek word '*theos*', which means God. So, theocracy means the '*Rule of God*'. The rule by God or a theocracy should fulfill two criteria:

1. There should be a hereditary Ulema class, which rules on behalf of God.
2. The application of divinely ordained laws.

We find that the Delhi Sultanate didn't fulfill any of the above two criteria. E.g. there existed an Ulema class under the Sultanate which was mainly involved in defining Sharia rules but these Ulemas were not hereditary. Furthermore, Ulemas looked forward to Sultan for their power and prestige and the powerful Sultans like Allauddin Khalji and Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq checked the Ulemas.

Secondly, although the laws of Sharia (divine laws) were being followed but there were certain rules, made by the Sultans, which didn't comply with the Sharia. Thus, even the second criterion of a theocratic state is not fulfilled. There are three parts in the Muslim Shariat - Ibadat (Prayer), civil laws and criminal laws. We find that the women were disinherited from property under the civil law. Likewise, there were some discrepancies in the land revenue rates also. Both these laws contravened the basic tenets of Islam. Likewise, in the criminal law, there were provisions for dancing houses, prostitution etc. which were banned under Islamic Sharia. So, these laws did not meet the standard of a theocratic state. Furthermore, apart from the Sharia laws, some supplementary laws were promulgated by the Sultans for practical considerations. These laws were popularly known as Urf or Zawabit.

But, we are not going to accept the Delhi Sultanate was a secular state. This is because, at least in theory, the declared objective of the state was to convert 'Dar-ul-Herb' into 'Dar-ul-Islam'. In fact, the confusion about the nature of state under Delhi Sultanate arises due to some misinterpretations. But, on a deeper observation, we find that the term 'Sultan' itself gives a hint about the actual nature of state. The term Sultan has originated from the term 'Sult' which means 'power and authority'. So, in one sense, emergence of Sultanate itself, was an extra-Islamic development and the political power rather than the religious one became a decisive factor in the foundation of Sultanate.

If we think rationally, we will find that between c. 1192 to 1526 CE, there were dynastic changes on at least nine occasions. But, except on two occasions, all the others were violent. Thus, we can say that under the Delhi Sultanate, the state was essentially a military aristocracy whose sole objective was to appropriate the economic surplus and the whole system was established while developing proper goodwill with the majority i.e. the Hindus.

## Institutions of Delhi Sultanate

**Central Administration:** The military and political bankruptcy of the Rajput states by c. 1000 CE left a void in the socio-political sphere. It was filled by the Turkish invaders who conquered the whole of Northern India with amazing alacrity. However, the task of constructing an enduring administrative structure was far more complicated than the conquest.

1. The Sultan was at the head of the administration. In theory, he was a subordinate to the Caliph, but in practice, he worked independently. Although, there were certain checks on his power as he was supposed to win over the support of nobles and Ulemas, and earn the goodwill of the majority population, the Hindus.
2. The Sultan, as the supreme head of state, comprised of all the executive, legislative and judicial authority, just like the Persian style. Consequently, strength of the state was mainly dependent on his character and ability. Theoretically, an ideal Sultan was supposed to govern according to the tenets of sharia, but a powerful Sultan like Allauddin Khalji or Muhammad Bin Tughlaq could interpret any law to their own advantage.
3. The biggest restraint on the Sultan's autocracy were the following:
  - I. The ambiguous law of succession made Sultan vulnerable and he was compelled to secure the goodwill of his compatriots who otherwise considered themselves equally qualified for the throne. With no fixed rule of succession, monarchy was not the right of legal inheritance but a prize for the strongest. The principle of election provided a convenient riddance of an undesirable sovereign, as it was amply proved by the 'Turk-e-Chahalgani vs. the Slave Dynasty'.
  - II. The maintenance peace and securing acquiescence of the non-Muslim population, who as the majority, could never be annihilated. It explains why majority of the Delhi Sultans did not follow the war cry of Jihad, rather they adopted an easier alternative of imposing Jaziya tax. Since, his ability translated into the strength of state, he had to evolve an efficient administrative machinery for the Sultanate.
4. **The Major Departments:** Barani mentions four important departments under Delhi Sultanate.
  - I. **Diwan-i-Wizarat:** The head of this department was Wazir. Initially, Wazir was powerful and apart from enjoying the financial power, Wazir led the army too. Later, this power was curtailed as new departments were created. So, under the Delhi Sultanate, this department was accountable for the assessment and collection of revenue as well as keeping the accounts of income and expenditure. The Tughlaq period is supposed to be the heyday of Wizarat as the Wazir wielded too much power and prestige under the Tughlaq Sultans.
  - II. **Diwan-i-Insha:** This department was concerned with royal correspondence and it was put under an officer 'Dabir-i-Mumalik'.
  - III. **Diwan-i-Ariz:** This department was put under the control of 'Ariz-i-Mumalik'. This department was constituted by Balban. It was associated with the recruitment, maintenance and salary of the army. But, Ariz-i-Mumalik was not the supreme

commander of the armed forces. It was the Sultan, who was the supreme commander. When Allauddin Khalji carried out the military reforms and introduced the system of Hulia (Descriptive roll) and Dagh (branding of horse), the responsibility of this department increased even further.

IV. **Diwan-i-Risalat**- There is some confusion about the actual role of this department. According to one view, it was the external affairs' department but according to the other, it was a religious department. On closer observation, we find that the term Risalat had possibly originated from the term 'Rasool' which meant the prophet or Caliph. On this basis, it appears to be a religious department. It was put under the supervision of Sadr-us-Sadr. Although, the judicial department was put under the supervision of Qazi, but the same person normally occupied the post of Sadr-us-Sadr as well.

V. **Other Departments and Officers**: Apart from the regular departments mentioned above, some other departments were also created by different Sultans with specific purpose.

- a. Under the department of Wizarat itself, Jalaludin Khalji created a new department Diwan-i-Waqf. It was accountable for the estimation of expenditure.
- b. Allauddin Khalji created a department Diwan-i-Mustakharaj in order to collect arrears.
- c. Under the Diwan-i-Wizarat itself, Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq founded a new department Diwan-i-Kohi. The objective of this department was to carry out agrarian reforms in the Doab region.
- d. Allauddin Khalji constituted a new department Diwan-i-Risalat in order to carry the market control system.
- e. Firoz Shah Tughlaq created a number of departments such as Diwan-i-Khairat (Charity), Diwan-i-Istihar (old age pension) and Diwan-i-bandgan (department of Slaves).

Other than the different departments mentioned above, we come to know about a number of officers. Although, they were not associated with any specific department, still they had to perform certain duties. For example, there were officers like Sar-i-jaandar (security officers of Sultan), Amir-i-Hazib (maintaining court rules & decorum), Waqil-i-dar (head of royal karkhanas), Amir-i-Mazlis (head of ceremonies), and Naib-i-Mumalikat (Deputy Sultan).

**Provincial Administration**: Since no kingdom, large or small, could function without a provincial administration, the Delhi Sultan too divided its domain into provinces which based on the Byzantine and Persian models. The provinces (almost twenty-five in number) were placed under governors called Walis or Muqti. Their power varied according to the personality of the monarch (vs. their own) and the distance from the centre.

1. Based on their size and proximity to the imperial capital, the provinces under the Delhi Sultanate were divided into three categories:

- a. Those, which were smaller in size and nearer to the capital, were under a greater personal supervision of the Sultan. Consequently, the governor enjoyed limited powers e.g. Meerut, Baran, Koil, Kannauj, Badaun, Sirhind, Samana, Lahore, Dipalpur, Multan and Oudh.
  - b. Those provinces, which were larger and were located at a distance from the centre, e.g. Bengal, Gujarat and Deccan, comprised the second category of provinces over which Sultana could not exercise personal control. Their governors were inclined to enjoy unlimited powers.
  - c. The native chiefs were allowed to retain their territories, subject to their payment of tributes to the Sultan.
2. The provincial administration was a replica of the central government, with the governors of the distant provinces acting as mini-Sultans. As the chief executive and judicial body in the province, his duty consisted of enforcement of law and order, justice, maintenance of a local militia and supervision of the public works. The governors were expected to maintain contingents of army and they were to contribute the necessary contingent to the central army whenever called upon.
  3. The governor collected revenue from his province. After meeting the expenses of administrative machinery and maintenance of army, he was obliged to give full account of revenue income to the Diwan-i-Wizarat. The governor received a fixed portion of the provincial revenue as his salary. In this, he was assisted by the Khawaja, who was appointed by the Sultan on the Wazir's recommendation and to an extent was independent of the governor and a restraint on him. He was assisted by Mutsarafs and Karkuns.
  4. It may be noted that the provincial administration was not fully centralised and the governors were apparently powerful. They could be restrained only by the strong personality of Sultan. Appeals could be lodged against the governors with Sultan. An efficient system of espionage enabled the Sultan to keep an eye on their activities.

**District Administration:** The provinces were further divided into a number of districts (shiqs). Each district was under the control of an Amil or a Nazim. The districts were further subdivided into Parganas or collection units. Afif has mentioned the existence of fifty-two Parganas in the Doab country under Firuz Shah Tughlaq. Each Pargana comprised of a number of villages and was called 'Kasba' at times. Its extent is unknown. Dr. Qureshi, relying on Ibn Batuta's description, has identified a collection of 100 villages as a 'Sadi' which was similar to the Pargana. A Faujdar was its chief executive officer. He maintained peace and order in the district.

**Local Administration:** The village formed the lowest unit of administration. The village headman (called Muqaddams, Khuts, and Chowdharies alternatively) looked after it. During the Sultanate period, no effort was made by the state officials to disturb the work of local administration which continued to work as they had been doing since earlier times. Thus, the administration at the local level remained unaffected by the political changes at the highest level.

**Judicial Administration:** Qazis and Muftis were appointed in every city who dispensed justice-civil and criminal. Judiciary at the provincial level comprised of courts at the provincial and pargana level, while panchayat administered justice in the villages. In the Parganas, Qazi and Kotwal rendered justice.

Thus, the system of administration during the Sultanate period was quite different from the traditional system prevailing in the ancient times. The rulers were mainly concerned with the preservation of their authority, consequently, they pursued policies which promoted their own interest rather than the interests of people.

## **Military**

The Delhi Sultanate, like a typical medieval state, had a military despotic character. Its solidarity depended upon the strength and efficiency of its army. A strong standing army was needed, not only to quell the Hindu and the Rajput chiefs, but also to curb the turbulent Turk-Afghan governors, Nobility and the Mongol invaders who loomed large on the North-Western frontier.

1. The military organization of the Delhi Sultanate was based on the **Turkish model**. Based on the decimal system, it was graded into the groups of tens, hundreds and thousands. While, the commanding officers were graded as Amirs, Maliks and Khans. The entire army comprised:
  - a. The standing army under the Sultan's command.
  - b. The armies under Walis and Iqtadars in various provinces
2. The army of Sultans comprised of the cavalry, infantry and elephant corps, with the cavalry corps being the most important wing. The elephant corps was graded next and then the Infantry. In emergency, local people were also enrolled for suppressing a rebellion. The Sultan, however, preferred to directly control the army.
3. The recruitment was left to the nobles and governors, who were instructed to be careful in the selection of officers. Balban had tried to improve the existing system and plug the loopholes by posting his own sons and loyal slaves as the commanders. However, it was the Allauddin Khalji who introduced meaningful innovations to centralize the army and improve its efficiency. The soldiers were thoroughly scrutinized by the Ariz before recruitment and their descriptive rolls were prepared. They were employed throughout the year and paid in cash. The system of branding of horses and muster rolls, kept the centre informed not only of the troops posted in capital but even of those soldiers posted at remote strategic points. However, under Firuz Tughlaq, the system degenerated due to laxity and corruption.
4. However, the army of the Sultans was not national in character. It consisted of soldiers drawn from diverse nationalities such as the Turks, the Tajiks, the Persians, the Mongols, the Afghans, the Arabs, the Abyssinians, the Indian Musalmans and the Hindus. It was a mercenary army which worked for money. The only loose bond which kept such diverse elements united was the personality of Sultan.

5. The Sultans with the exception of Razia, themselves were the commander-in-chiefs. However, when an expedition was sent, one of the lieutenants was appointed as the commander of the overall expeditionary force.
6. Ariz-i-Mumalik and his Naib were the most significant. They looked after the recruitment, muster rolls, branding of horses, supplies and war booty. Amir Akhnur, chief of the stables and royal guards, was another important officer who stayed near the king.
7. The mode of payment to the army varied from reign to reign. While Iltutmish had given Iqta assignments as their salary and this policy was continued by Balban in spite of his dislike for the system. Allauddin Khalji, for the first time, paid the soldiers in cash. Firuz Shah Tughlaq discontinued the cash payments and re-introduced assignments of revenue. However, the Amirs, Maliks and Khans were not paid in cash. They were granted assignments of revenues (Iqtas) in keeping with their ranks.
8. The forts were an important feature of the military defence. This was especially true of the North-Western border which was elaborately fortified by both Balban and Allauddin Khalji. Each fort was kept under a Kotwal, who commanded and kept the keys of the fort. Usually, they were the rich Maliks who had sufficient agricultural tracts assigned to them so as to support their contingents. They were assisted by a Qazi and Mir Dar. Allauddin Khalji was very keen on the maintenance of forts and employed skilled engineers to this end.
9. The Sultans of Delhi also introduced certain new military tactics in India, which they had learnt in their homeland- Afghanistan and Central Asia. They employed mounted archers as light troopers for harassing the enemy and causing confusion in their ranks and then charging them with heavy armored cavalry. They also used certain types of wooden machines (catapults) for throwing heavy stones inside the forts.
10. However, the standard of the Sultanate army declined during the reign of Firuz Tughlaq. And during the days of Sayyid and Lodis, there were no means of strengthening the military organization.

## **Iqta System**

Iqta is an Arabic word. Its literal meaning is 'a plot of land'. The Iqta system developed earlier under the Abbasid Caliph. Due to the scarcity of money, the soldiers started to get paid in land grants. These grants were known as Iqtas. Normally, we find two different types of Iqtas - the 'western Iqta' and the 'eastern Iqta'. The Western Iqta developed under the Syrians and Seljuks. We find that under these dynasties, there was a scarcity of money. So, in order to pay soldiers, the system of land grants was started. But, the state was cautious that the soldiers should not develop vested interest in land. So, as a precautionary measure, Iqtas were allotted to soldiers in those areas where they were not deployed and they had to collect their revenue income with the help of their agents.

On the other hand, we find the model of eastern Iqta that was developed under the Samanids and Ghaznavids. There was not any scarcity of money in this region as the money

economy was much more developed. So, the state did not need to provide Iqtas or land grants to the soldiers. But, the members of the royal family, the kinsmen and some important nobles continued to be paid and rewarded for their services through larger Iqtas. At the same time, with the change of king and/or dynasty, even the Iqtas were transferred, leading to political confusion and instability. So, in order to avoid this situation, these Iqtas were made hereditary.

In this way, we find the two different models of Iqtas - one transferable and another hereditary.

**Iqta system in India:** Turkish rulers introduced Iqta system in India, as a form of revenue assignment. When the Turkish rule was established in northern India, one important challenge before the state was to collect revenue while suppressing a large number of Hindu nobles of such a vast region. In fact, it was not feasible for a Sultan to create military pressure on Hindu nobles of such a vast region - from Multan to Lakhnauti. Iqta and Kharaj system became a tool for centralisation under the state. It became an efficient instrument for collecting the revenue from remote areas.

Larger Iqtas, like the provincial Iqtas, were created and were given to important nobles in the form of revenue assignments. The holders of these Iqtas came to be known as Muqti or Wali. The Muqti was supposed to collect the revenue and to meet the administrative and military expenses and his own salary from this revenue. Rest of the amount was deposited to the royal treasury. The post of the Muqti was not hereditary but transferable. In this way, a compromise was made between the interest of the state and the ambition of the nobles through the Iqta system.

The distribution of Iqta first started under Muhammad Ghori when he provided the Iqta of Hansi to Qutubuddin Aibak. But, the credit is given to Iltutmish for regularizing the Iqta system. It is said that he divided the vast region between Multan and Lakhnauti into different Iqtas and distributed them among different nobles. But, from the very beginning, it was a challenge for the Sultans to properly control the Iqta administration and to check the ambition of Muqti. Different Sultans tried to solve this problem in their own way:

1. Balban started to appoint an officer Khawaja in order to supervise the income and expenditure of the Iqta.
2. Allauddin Khalji increased the interference of central administration into Iqta administration.
3. Giasuddin Tughlaq, in order to protect the interest of Soldiers in Iqta, brought a provision that salary of the soldiers in Iqtas should be separated from personal salary of the Muqtis.
4. Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq started maximum interference into the Iqta administration.
  - a. He appointed two officers of equivalent rank in a single Iqta. One was Muqti who was in charge of general administration and another was Wali-ul-Kharaj, who was accountable for the collection of revenue.