

Balban's Theory of Kingship

Policy of Blood and Iron:

Theory of Kingship:

The stern, harsh and violent policy adopted by Balban to suppress the internal revolts and meeting with the challenges posed by foreign invaders of Mongols is known as the policy of blood and iron.

The theory of kingship propounded by Balban led to the adoption of the policy of blood and iron. Balban was convinced that the only way to face the internal and external dangers was to increase the power and prestige of the Sultan (King).

'Sword' was the chief weapon of Balban to achieve his objectives. He used this weapon with a great vengeance against his rivals, rebels, robbers, thieves and the invaders. By following this policy, he wanted to create terror in the minds of the people that whosoever dared to challenge the authority of the Sultan, he would not be spared.

On account of this policy he was able to remain at the helm of affairs for about 40 years i.e. 20 years as the Naib/Prime Minister of Nasir-ud-din Mohmud and then after as the Sultan of Delhi. He executed his policy of blood and iron very successfully and raised the prestige and power of the Sultan in the eyes of the nobles and his subjects.

Main principles of Balban's theory of Kingship:

Main principles of the theory of Kingship were as under:

1. Divine right of Kings:

Balban said that the king was the representative of God on the earth and Kingship was a divine institution. He declared this to make the nobles believe that he got the crown or the Kingship not through their mercy but by the mercy of God.

2. Royal ancestry:

Balban realized that people at that time believed that it was only the prerogative of the ancient royal families to rule and exercise power, he therefore declared that he was the descendant of the legendary Turkish warrior Afrasiyab and that circumstances only had made him a slave.

3. King as a despot:

He said to his son Bughra Khan that “Kingship is the embodiment of despotism”. He believed that it is the “King’s superhuman awe and status which can ensure people’s obedience.

4. Word of difference between descendants of noble lineage and commoners:

Historian Zia-ud-Din Barni has gone to the extent of remarking that whenever Balban saw a man of low birth, his eyes started burning with rage and anger and his hands reached his sword to murder him. This view seems to be on the extreme side. However this much is believable that because of this outlook of Balban, he dismissed all officials not born of noble families, from all important posts.

5. Recognition of tripartite relationship:

Balban emphasized the relationship between God and the Sultan, Sultan and the people and the God and the people. He considered himself the representative of God on the earth to look after the welfare of the people—people created by God. Accordingly, he emphasized that treasury should be used for the benefit of his subjects. Likewise, the king should be impartial in dispensing justice.

Practical measures to translate the theory of Kingship into operation:

1. Decorum and grandeur of the court:

Balban enforced strict discipline in the court. No one was allowed to indulge in humor or loose talk. He maintained considerable distance from the courtiers. He prescribed the court dress.

2. Adoption of several ceremonies:

Balban introduced the practice of ‘Sijada’ in which the people were required to kneel and touch the ground with their forehead in salutation to the king.

3. Appointment of guards:

Balban appointed fearsome and tall guards who were to stand round the king’s person with naked swords in their hands. Whenever he used to go outside the palace, his bodyguards marched with him with naked swords and shouting ‘Bismillah-Bismillah.’

4. Following Persian traditions:

Balban was convinced that the glory of Kingship was possible only by following the Persian traditions and he very carefully followed these traditions in his personal and public life. He named his grandsons on the pattern of Persian kings. He introduced several Persian etiquettes in his court.

5. Always reserved:

Balban never expressed unusual joy or sorrow in public. It is said that even when the news of the death of his eldest son, Mohammad was conveyed to him, he remained unmoved and carried on the administrative work though in his private apartment, he wept bitterly.

6. Strong army:

There is no doubt that a strong army is needed for the sustenance of a powerful monarch. Balban, therefore, strengthened his army.

7. Protection from foreign invaders:

The strength of a despotic ruler is also measured by his ability to protect his subjects from external danger. Balban in this regard took effective steps.

Impact/Achievements of Balban:

Balban's theory of Kingship coupled with his policy of blood and iron paid him good dividends. He enhanced the prestige of the Sultan. He crushed the powers of his opponents. He brought about peace and order. He saved the country from the invasions of the Mongols.

The Policy of "Blood and Iron"

A strong and absolute monarch is expected to follow a strict policy in dealing with his enemies. Balban accordingly adopted this policy.

It is not without significance that out of about 84 year's rule of the Slave Dynasty, Balban's rule lasted for about 40 years i.e. 20 years as 'Naib' or Prime Minister but virtually the Sultan and 20 years as the Sultan of Delhi.

Other 10 Slave rulers ruled for 44 years i.e. just 4 years more than the rule of a single Sultan i.e. Balban.

It became possible to achieve this distinction by Balban on account of the successful execution of his policy of blood and iron.

Balban displayed great vigor and energy to follow this policy and saved the Delhi Sultanate from the shocks of internal revolts and external invasions. He enhanced the prestige of the king. His rise from the low position of a water carrier to the rank of the Sultan speaks of his extraordinary qualities.

Meaning of the policy of blood and iron:

This policy implied being ruthless to the enemies, use of sword, harshness and strictness and shedding blood. It allowed use of all sorts of methods of terrorisms the enemies and inflicting violence upon them. Even before becoming the Sultan of Delhi, Balban had tried these measures to some extent to rise to high posts. He had betrayed Razia and engineered revolts against her. He was responsible for the dethronement of Bahram Shah and installment of Masud as a King.

Later he conspired and removed Masud and enthroned Nasir-ud-Din Mahmud and usurped all the powers of the Sultan by becoming his Prime Minister. By all means Nasir-ud-Din was a sort of captive of Balban. Thus even before assuming the reigns of administration, Balban had gained sufficient experience to make use of the power of the sword against his enemies.

A few examples of Balban's policy of blood and iron:

Theory of Kingship:

Balban realized that problems arose on account of the weak position of the king. He therefore put forward the concept of Divine Right of Kings i.e. the king was the representative of God on earth. None could challenge him. The king was there to rule and the nobles and others were there to obey him. The powers of the king were absolute and he was a despot.

Loose administration:

The administration needed a strong ruler to bring about order out of chaos.

Corps of Forty:

Balban himself belonged to the 'Corps of Forty' an institution or the group created by Iltutmish for strengthening his position. Iltutmish used this group to get all sort

of information about his nobles. Balban was fully aware of the destructive activities of these. In due course, these slaves became so powerful that the rulers became captives in their hands. Balban realized that they were responsible for the chaotic and unstable condition of the state. Balban considered them as trouble shooters and realized the necessity of getting rid of them through stern measures.

1. Prof. S.R. Sharma states that when Amir Khan, one of his generals who was defeated by a rebel came back with this news, “the infuriated Sultan in his paroxysm of rage ordered the defeated generals to be hanged over the gates of Ayodhya.”
2. After killing a rebel Tughril Khan, the Sultan ordered the killing of all his friends and rebels. The situation has been described by Lane-pole as, “Even a beggar to whom the usurper had been kind was not spared.”
3. According to Barani, “Such punishment as was inflicted on Lakhnauti had never been heard of in Delhi nor could anyone remember such a thing in all Hindustan.”
4. Several members of the ‘Corps of Forty’ were poisoned to death secretly.
5. Dr.V.S. Smith states, “By royal command many of the rebels were cast under the feet of elephants... Skinned from head to feet... some of them were hung over every gate of Delhi... One never heard such a tale of terror.

Revolts:

There was the danger of revolts of some sections of Muslim chiefs and Rajput rulers.

Mongol invasions:

The Mongols posed a serious threat to the empire.

Ala-ud-Din’s Theory of Kingship

Ala-ud-Din’s theory of kingship:

Ala-ud-Din maintained that the Sultan was God’s representative on earth. Ala-ud-Din’s theory of kingship may be explained in the words of historian, Ashraf,

“The Sultan of Delhi was in theory an unlimited despot, bound by no law, subject to no material check, and guided by no will except his own.”

The Sultan used to say, “I do not know whether this is lawful or unlawful, whatever I think to be for the good of the state or suitable for the emergency, that I decree and as for what may happen to me on the approaching Day of Judgement that I know not.”

Principles of Ala-ud-Din’s theory of kingship:

1. Kingship was the creation of God.
2. The king was God’s representative on earth.
3. The king was there to rule.
4. The king’s authority could not be challenged.
5. The king’s word was law.
6. The king was not bound by the advice of anyone.
7. The king was supreme in matters of religion. He was not to be guided by the power of the Ulemas.
8. The king should expand his territories.
9. The king should devote himself to the good of the people.

Practical Implications of the Theory of Kingship:

All powers in one individual:

Ala-ud-Din combined in himself all powers. He was the Commander-in-Chief, the Supreme Administrator, the Chief Justice and the Temporal Head.

Desire for world conquest:

Ala-ud-Din’s desire to conquer the world was derived from his theory of Kingship. Ala-ud-Din wanted to be the ruler of the entire world. Of course, on the advice of the kotwal of Delhi, he gave up this idea but decided to bring the whole of India under his sway.

Desire for founding a new religion:

Ala-ud-Din wanted to set up a new religion. However, again on the advice of Qazi Ala-ul-Mulk who was also the Kotwal of Delhi, he gave up this idea. Nevertheless he decided to work independently in matters of religion and freed himself from the religious scholars (Ulemas).

Vast conquests:

Ala-ud-Din believed that a king should constantly extend his empire by conquests so that his name might become immortal. He, therefore, made all possible efforts to bring the whole of India under his influence.

Autocratic rule:

He believed that an autocratic rule was necessary for the stability and consolidation of royalty. Accordingly, he took various severe measures to check the powers of the nobles, He confiscated the property of several nobles. He established an efficient spy system to keep himself well informed of the affairs of the state.

Issue of regulations:

To prove that he was also a temporal head, he issued some regulations regarding inflicting punishments which were not in accordance with the Muslim law. Dr. Ishwari Prasad in this regard has observed, "Ala-ud-Din was opposed to the interference of the 'Ulemas' in matters of state and in this respect he departed from the previous position of the Sultans of Delhi.

The law was to depend upon the will of the monarch and had nothing to do with the law of the Prophet. This was the guiding maxim of the monarch." As Dr. R.P. Tripathi observes, "Kingship could exist without any special religious support and that the outlook of a king was different from that of the clergy. This was the greatest contribution of Ala-ud-Din.

Ministers' advice:

The king was the head of the administration. In the discharge of his kingly duties, Ala-ud-Din had certain ministers to assist him but their advice was not binding on him.

Public welfare:

Though Ala-ud-Din believed in assuming all powers in accordance with his theory of kingship, yet he was not averse to public welfare. In his despotism there was no lack of concern for public welfare.

Dispenser of justice:

His theory of justice derived its inspiration from the theory of kingship which proclaims that a king must do justice. He dispensed justice in the open court. According to Dr. Ishwari Prasad, "The reign of Ala-ud-Din represents the high watermark of despotism." Lane-poole calls Ala-ud-Din "a bloody and unscrupulous tyrant." In the words of Dr. V.A. Smith, "He was particularly a savage tyrant— exceedingly disgraceful in many respects."

Lane-poole has summed up the personality and rule of Ala-ud-Din in these words, "Though he might be wrong-headed and disdainful of the low, he was a man of determination, who knew his own mind, saw the necessity of the situation, met it by his own methods, and carried out those methods, with persistence.

Afghan Theory of Kingship and Lodi Sultans | Indian History

The Afghan theory of kingship differed from that of the Turks. The Turkish theory of kingship was similar to the theory of Christian and Hindu monarchs. The Turkish Sultans, right from Sultan Illtutmish to Sayyid rulers, believed in absolute monarchy and some of them claimed even divinity.

They claimed that the Sultan was superior to all in the state and all his nobles, governors, supporters, etc. were his subordinates. Therefore, none could claim equality with the Sultan and no one had the right to share in the administration of the state but with the consent or orders of the Sultan.

The Afghans, on the contrary, regarded the Sultan as one among themselves or only first among equals. They did not believe in the divinity of the Sultan and therefore, claimed power and respect in matters of the state. The Afghan theory of kingship, thus, believed in the equality of nobles with the Sultan and thus, more or less, supported an oligarchy.

The primary features of this theory were as follows:

1. The Afghans did not accept the nomination of the successor by the Sultan. They believed in the election of the Sultan by the nobility.
2. Every Afghan noble claimed to be the commander of his forces and did not accept his forces as a part of the army of the Sultan.
3. The Afghans accepted no privilege of the Sultan. They claimed all those privileges for which the Sultan was entitled.

The result was that every Afghan noble kept his independent armies, claimed extensive jagirs, enjoyed equal privileges with the Sultan and could force him to depend on their power. In case of opposition from the Sultan they could put up in the field equally powerful army against him.

Bahlul Lodi was the first Afghan ruler of the Delhi Sultanate. He was the founder of the Lodi dynasty and therefore, the nobles accepted him as their leader. Yet, Bahlul compromised with spirit of equality and independence of the Afghans.

He worked on the Afghan theory of kingship, regarded himself as only first among equals, sat and ate with his important nobles on the same carpet, called his nobility Masnad-i-Ali, visited one's home if one felt displeased or was sick, shared the booty equally with them, did not keep personal bodyguards, received his food every day from the one or the other noble and was offered horse by one of his nobles whenever he used to ride.

According to Firishta, he said, **“It is enough if my name is associated with the kingdom.”** Mushtaqi, the author of Vakiyat-i-Mushtaqi wrote- “He never sat on the throne and forbade his nobles to remain standing before him.” Bahlul assigned extensive jagirs to his nobles and allowed them to increase their power and influence. Thus, Bahlul respected all Afghan traditions in dealing with his nobility and kept them satisfied. He never asserted himself as the Sultan and shared the power of the state with his nobility.

Dr K.A. Nizami has commented:

“The government of Bahlul was based and carried on in the spirit of a biradari (clan).” Dr R.P. Tripathi also writes- “Bahlul Lodi in keeping with the sentiments of the Afghans and the traditions of his father claimed to be nothing more than one among the peers. He was quite satisfied with the title of Sultan and the leadership

of the Afghans. In his days, the Afghan empire was a sort of confederation of tribes presided over by the Lodi king.”

However, Professor Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqi has expressed his difference regarding opinions expressed above with regard to the policy of Bahlul Lodi towards his nobles. Primarily he differs regarding the motives of the policy pursued by Bahlul. He agrees that Bahlul behaved with his nobles generously or rather on equal footing but he argues that it was not because he believed in that policy sincerely but because he compromised with circumstances.

He claims that Persian chroniclers suggest that Bahlul believed in a despotic monarchy but he did not behave accordingly because he needed the support of his Afghan nobles to consolidate and strengthen his infant empire.

He, therefore, writes- **“The view that the Sultanate of Delhi under him was confederacy of the Afghan tribes is not borne out of historical facts and may be dismissed as an attempt to misread the history of his reign.”**

He contends that Bahlul needed the support of the nobility, the Ulema and other influential people and therefore, behaved diplomatically to keep them satisfied. But Bahlul suppressed those nobles, even Afghans, who dared to challenge his authority. The governors of Sialkot, Lahore and Dipalpur were forced to submit by Bahlul.

Bahlul used to transfer his governors from one place to another so as to justify that their positions depended on him. Professor Siddiqi, therefore, concludes that Bahlul dealt his nobility diplomatically and encouraged them to regard themselves as members of one biradari (clan) instead of chiefs of different biradaris and thus successfully utilised their power and resources for enhancing his own power.

The contention of Prof. Siddiqi is quite logical. Of course, Bahlul pursued a policy which aimed at keeping satisfied his nobles with which Prof. Siddiqi also agrees but this is also certain that he had kept his nobles under sufficient control so that none of them thought of making himself the Sultan after his death and they chose one of his sons as his rightful successor. This is a sufficient proof of the contention of Prof. Siddiqi.

Sikandar Lodi felt more free than his father in dealing with his nobility. The Lodi empire had stabilised and strengthened itself. And the success which he gained in destroying his rivals in the very first year of his reign, encouraged him to bring his nobles under further submission. Sikandar Lodi simply desired to restore the prestige of the Sultan.

Therefore, he desired discipline, respect and obedience of his orders from his nobles. He did not desire to disrespect them or destroy their power. Therefore, he pursued a policy which was, of course, strictly disciplinarian but was blended with generosity and practical wisdom. He framed certain rules for his courtiers and governors which were strictly enforced and those who exhibited defiance were severely punished.

Mushtaqi writes:

“Anyone who turned from the path of obedience, he (the Sultan) either got his head severed off the body or expelled from the empire.” Those twenty-two nobles, who conspired against him in favour of his younger brother Fateh Khan, were either executed or banished out of the empire. The Sultan organised an excellent espionage system which helped him much in keeping his nobles under submission. But, Sikandar respected the old and experienced nobles and was generous to others in many ways.

He never punished any noble unless his guilt was proved. He tried to educate their children and gave respectable positions to his loyal nobles. The Sultan succeeded in establishing the prestige of the Sultan by this policy.

Prof. Siddiqi writes:

“Sultan Sikandar was the first Afghan king who behaved like an all- powerful monarch and demanded complete obedience as well as unwavering loyalty from his nobles . . . His tactfulness, humanism and generosity, high sense of purpose and personal magnetism, coupled with his unfailing success in the battlefield, made the nobility completely loyal and subservient to the sovereign and also suppressed its sentiments of equality with the Sultan.”

But, as soon as Ibrahim ascended the throne, the Sultan and the nobility came into serious conflict with each other. Sikandar Lodi, of course, had succeeded in exacting obedience and discipline from his nobles but he had not succeeded in

destroying their spirit of independence and equality. Besides, many Afghan nobles yet kept large standing armies and enjoyed extensive jagirs.

In these circumstances it would have been wiser for Sultan Ibrahim to proceed cautiously and slowly in enhancing further the power and prestige of the Sultan. But Ibrahim chose a different course. He rashly and tactlessly decided to impose his will on his nobles which resulted in his conflict with the nobility.

He committed mistakes right from his accession on the throne when he blundered in accepting his brother, Jalal Khan, as ruler of Jaunpur. The conflict between the two brothers which ensued afterwards divided the nobility and created mistrust between the Sultan and many notable nobles. The mistrust went on increasing and largely the Sultan was responsible for it.

The suppression of nobles merely on suspicion, the poisoning of Jalal Khan, cruelty towards his brothers, imprisonment of nobles like Azam Humayun, Fateh Khan and Miyan Bhua resulted in the open revolt of Islam Khan. Ibrahim, no doubt, succeeded in suppressing that revolt but at a heavy cost. Ten thousand best Afghan soldiers and chiefs laid dead on the battlefield. Yet, the Sultan failed to change his course of action.

Undeterred of consequences, he became more aggressive in pursuing his policy. While Azam Humayun and Miyan Bhua were allowed to die in prison under suspicious circumstances, Husain Khan, governor of Chanderi, was murdered. It led to the revolt of Dariya Khan and after him his son Bahadur Khan in Bihar which resulted in the loss of entire territory from Bihar to Sambhal.

Ibrahim failed to get the loyalty of Daulat Khan Lodi, governor of Punjab as well. Therefore, instead of helping the-Sultan he invited Babur to attack India. The first battle of Panipat was, thus, fought among two unequal powers—Ibrahim being weaker in the position in which he was put because of his conflict with the nobility besides other reasons.

The conflict between Sultan Ibrahim and his nobility, of course, was less on principles and more because of mutual suspicion and impolitic behaviour of the Sultan. Yet, there is no doubt that Ibrahim, like his father, was also trying to establish the principles of absolute monarchy which would have been certainly

helpful in safeguarding larger interests of the Afghan empire in India and Afghan nobility as well.

But, the imprudence of Sultan Ibrahim, on the one hand and the ignorance of the nobility to realise the benefits of this principle, on the other hand, led to the downfall of not only Ibrahim and Lodi dynasty but also that of the first Afghan empire in India.