

The Central Administration of the Delhi Sultanate

The Sultanate Period:

The Sultans of Delhi ruled over India from 1206 A.D. to 1526 A.D. — a period of about 320 years.

Qutub-ud-Din Aibak was the first Sultan and Ibrahim Lodi, the last Sultan.

With the defeat of Ibrahim Lodi at the hands of Babur in 1526, came the end of the Delhi Sultanate.

Chief Characteristics of administration of the Delhi Sultanate:

The first salient feature was that it was expected to work in accordance with the Islamic jurisprudence or law. The second was that it should follow the Islamic principle of sovereignty which declares that the Muslims all over the world have only one ruler i.e. the Caliph or Khalifa of Baghdad.

None else could be deemed as a sovereign ruler. The Sultan was considered as a representative of the Caliph. Most of the Sultans of Delhi regarded themselves as the Viceroys of the Khalifa in whose name they ruled. Again, most of them used Khalifa's name on their coins. The first ruler to abandon this practice was Ala-ud-Din. The third feature was that the state under the Sultan rulers was an Islamic or Theocratic state. The fourth feature was that the state was a military state and the Sultan himself was the supreme commander of his forces. The fifth feature was that it was a feudal state. The sixth feature was that the Sultan was the fountain head of all authority. The seventh feature was that the Ulemas tried to influence administration and policy.

Central administration:

1. Sovereignty of the king and his power:

The Sultan enjoyed vast powers. He was the fountain head of all power. Some of the Sultans like Balban and Ala-ud-Din enjoyed vast powers. Ala-ud-Din used to say that his 'word was law'. Secondly the Sultan usually behaved like a despot. Thirdly he was the head of the executive, judiciary and military.

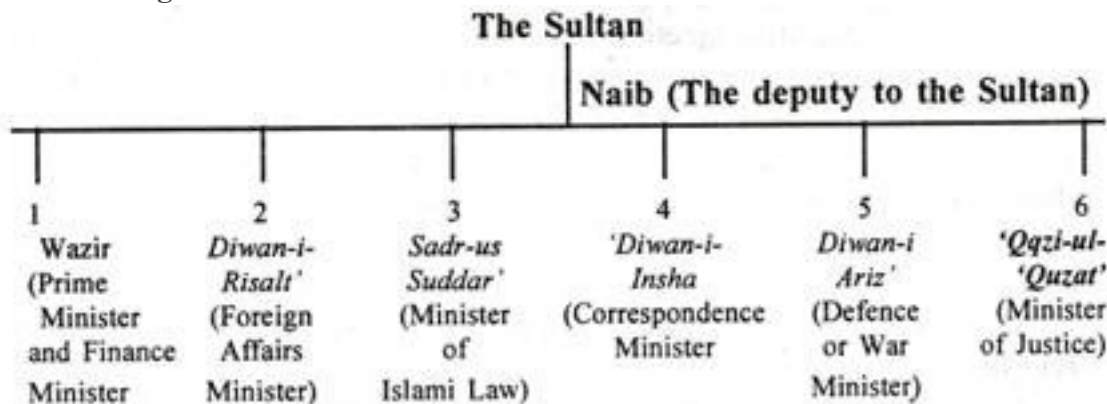
Some rulers like Ala-ud-Din assumed the role of a religious head also. Fourthly, the Sultan maintained a great grandeur in his court. The court was considered as a symbol of power and glory of the Sultanate. Fifthly, the king depended mostly on the power of his army. Sixthly, in general the Sultan tried to seek the advice of the Ulemas in various types of administrative matters.

2. The Ministers:

It is said, “The bravest of men require arms and the wisest of Kings need ministers.” The Sultans tried to appoint only competent ministers who were responsible to them only. Their positions and powers were defined by law as well as by tradition. Usually there were six ministers. The Wazir, Diwan-i-Risalt, Sadr-us-Sudur, Diwan-i-Insha, Diwan-i-Arz, Qazi-ul-Quzat.

Sometimes, there existed a post of a Naib which was next only to the Sultan and he was above the wazir. This post became important when there were weak Sultans. The powerful Sultan either abolished the post altogether or gave it to a noble simply to honour him as was done by Ala-ud-Din Khalji. In that case the post was just ‘ornamental’ and the ‘Naib’ enjoyed no special powers in administration.

Chart showing Administrative structure at the centre:



Revenue sources:

Following were the sources of revenue:

(i) Ushr:

It was a tax on land which was collected from Muslim peasants. It was 10 per cent of the produce on the land watered by natural resources and 5 per cent on the land which enjoyed facilities provided by irrigation works.

(ii) Kharaj:

It was a land tax charged from non-Muslims and ranged from one third to half of the produce.

(iii) Khams:

It was one-fifth of the booty captured in the war. Four-fifth of it went to the army which fought war.

(iv) Jizya:

It was a religious tax on Non-Muslims. According to Islam, a Zimmi (Non-Muslim) had no right to live in the kingdom of a Muslim Sultan. But this concession was permitted after payment of the tax called Jizya. Women, children, beggars, priests, Brahmans etc. and all those who had no source of income were exempted from this tax. Firoz Tughlaq levied this tax on Brahmans also.

(v) Zakat:

This was a religious tax which was imposed only on rich Muslims and it was 2 1/2 per cent of their income.

(vi) Trade tax:

Trade tax was charged at the rate of 2 1/2 per cent from the Muslims and 5 per cent from the Hindus.

(vii) Horse tax:

There was 5 per cent tax on the sale and purchase of horses.

(viii) House tax:

It was levied by Ala-ud-Din Khalji.

(ix) Grazing tax:

It was also levied by Ala-ud-Din Khalji.

(x) Property revenue:

All property which had no heirs passed to the state.

(xi) Mines tax:

It was 1/5 of the produce of the mines.

(xii) Buried treasure tax:

It was 1/5 of the buried treasure that was found.

5. Assessment of Land and land revenue:

The land was of 4 kinds:

(a) The Khalsa land:

This land was directly administered by the central government. The central government appointed revenue officers for the collection of revenue.

(b) The Walis or Muqtis:

This land was in the hands of provincial governors. The provincial governors collected land revenue from this land and after meeting the collection charges they deposited the surplus in the central treasury,

(c) Land of the Feudary Hindu chiefs:

The chiefs paid fixed annual tributes to the Sultan.

(d) Inam or Waqf land:

This type of land was given to the people in gift or charity and particularly to Muslim scholars and saints. It was free of tax. Mostly the land revenue was collected in cash but sometimes in kind also.

Administration of Justice:

Under the Sultanate of Delhi there was not separate judiciary. King's court was the place of granting judgement and king was the dispenser of justice. He was the enforcer of the law and the head of the judiciary. Though there were Chief Kazi and Kazis to help the sultan in the matters of justice, yet he was the highest authority in this matter. Kazi-i-Mamalik or Chief Kazi was the minister of Law in the Central government.

He was the head of the department called Diwan-i-Kaza. He dealt with the legal cases of the central government and also heard the cases of provincial and district kazis. Besides them, the sultan appointed the Amir-i-dad in important cities to administer justice. The village panchayats were also given some power to settle local disputes.

There was no regular judicial procedure. Muslim cases were tried according to Shariat. But Hindus were tried according to their customs and traditions. Punishment was severe; it was common for an offender to be punished with mutilation and death. Punishment was given neither according to Shariat nor according to Hindu customs and traditions.

It was sheer monopoly of the sultan. Balban and Ala-ud-din Khilizi inflicted severe punishments even to the nobles for minor offences. They did it to crush their rivals. Old forts were used for prisons. Marco Polo says, the law of debt was severe in the Sultanate period.

The Sultan was the highest judicial authority He used to hold his court twice a week and decided all types of cases. Qazi-ul-Qazat (Chief/judicial officer or the Minister for justice) heard appeals

from the lower courts. There was a 'Qazi' in every town. The Qazis' were appointed by the Sultan in consultation with the chief judicial officer. Usually severe punishments were awarded.

Police Administration:

Maintenance of law and order was another important duty of the Sultanate rulers. But there was no regular police force and departments as we have today. In cities Kotwals were appointed to find out criminals and check crime. Mutasib or censor of public morals was another officer appointed in cities and district headquarters to keep a strict watch over the conduct of the people. His duties were also to control the market and regular weights and measures. Besides spies were appointed who informed the sultan about important incidents and activities of the people. In villages, chaukidars were appointed to maintain law and order and to check crimes.

Army Administration:

Administration and conquest were two important duties of a sultan or a king of Medieval Period. These two could be well-supported by a strong army only. They had realized that. And again as the sultans were military leaders, they tried to derive their authority from their armies. They remained in power so long as they enjoyed the support of a strong army.

During the sultanate rule a strong army was absolutely required not only for the purpose of conquest but for the protection of the country from the mongol attacks and to suppress possible rebellions by ambitious nobles and subjects. Therefore every sultan was forced to keep a large army at the centre. It was called the central army which was centrally recruited, centrally paid and centrally administered. Ala-ud-din Khiliji created a large standing army at the centre which included 4, 75,000 horsemen besides the infantry.

Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq also kept a large standing army at the centre. But all other sultans had not kept such standing army at the centre. A minister in-charge-of the army called the Diwan-i-ariz was appointed to look after the army. He did the duty of recruitment and organisation of the army. He also paid the salary to the soldiers.

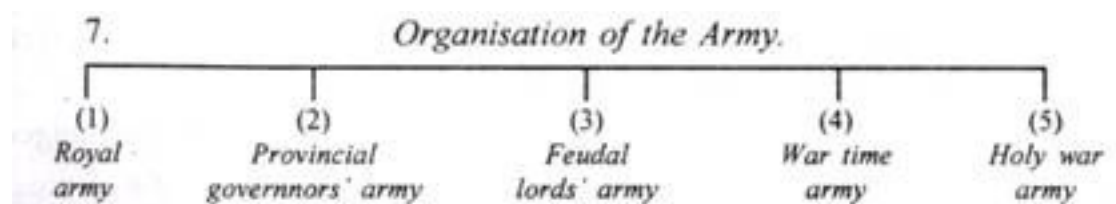
Apart from the central army there were armies in provinces who were recruited trained and paid by the provincial governors. There were also some nobles who were assigned jagirs in lieu of their military service to the Sultan at the time of need. Arizs were appointed in provinces to look after the provincial army but the primary responsibility was that of nobles and governors. They kept their army under their control and brought them to the service of the sultan only when ordered.

Besides there were some soldiers, who were recruited during the war on temporary basis and were paid only for that period. Lastly there were some volunteer Muslim Soldiers who joined war against the non-Muslims when jihad was declared. They did not take any salary. But they took a part of the booty captured in the war.

The army consisted primarily of cavalry infantry and elephants. The cavalry was the backbone of the army. The victory in the war depended much on them. Another important section of the army consisted of trained war-elephants. The vast part of the army was the infantry. They were armed mainly with swords, spears and bows and arrows. There were separate departments of the different sections of the army for their training and maintenance.

The army of the Sultan belonged to different nationalities and faiths. There were Persians, Afghans, Mongols, Indian Muslims and Hindus in the army. But the high offices were occupied by Turkish and foreign muslims. There were various ranks in the army such as Sari-i- Khail (head of ten-horsemen), Sipahsalar (head of ten Sar-i-Khail, amir (head of ten sipahsalar), malik (head of ten arirs) and khan (head of ten maliks). The promotion, demotion and dismissal of soldiers depended on the personal wish or will of the Sultan. But a strong ruler always enjoyed this credit.

During the war, the army was divided and kept in different direction so that attack on the enemy would be possible from all sides including the centre. Permanent armies were kept in forts and at all strategic points. The Sultan himself was the commandeer-in-chief. He himself led the war or could appoint others as commander to lead the army. However, the strength and efficiency of the army largely depended on the personality and capability of the Sultan.



A strong army was needed by the Sultan as his very existence depended upon it.

It was needed for four purposes:

- (i) For extending kingdom
- (ii) For checking rebellions

(iii) For maintaining law and order and

(iv) For meeting the challenge of Mongol invasions.

7.Royal army:

It was a heterogeneous body comprising the Turks of various tribes, the Tajiks, the Persians, the Arabs, the Afghans, the Abyssinians, Indian Muslims and Hindus.

Provincial governor's army:

The governors maintained their own armies. They brought their armies to the service of the Sultan when ordered.

Feudal lords or chief's army:

Feudal chiefs whether directly under the Sultan or under his suzerainty-maintained armies and supplied the same when asked by the Sultan.

Wartime army:

Soldiers were recruited on temporary basis.

Holy war army:

There were Muslim soldiers who joined the army voluntarily to fight wars against the Hindus. They received no pay but were given the share of booty captured during war.

Administration of provinces under the Delhi Sultanate

Meaning of the Iqta system:

‘Iqta’ is an Arabic word denoting a sort of administrative regional unit. It is usually considered equivalent to a province.

Initially the Delhi Sultans had divided their empire into several ‘Iqtas’ or provinces or spheres of influence and put them under the charge of officers called ‘Iqtadars’ (governors).

The number of Iqtas was not fixed. There was no uniformity in their administration.

Besides ‘Iqtadar’, other names of the heads of an Iqta’ was Naib Sultan, ‘nazim’ might’ or ‘wali’.

Each 'Iqta' was under the charge of an experienced general who generally was the member of the royal family or a notable 'Amir' (noble) and confidant of the Sultan.

Duties and powers of the Iqtadar:

1. He was under the supervision of the Central government and carried on orders of the Sultan.
2. He enjoyed the same powers in the province as the Sultan enjoyed in the empire.
3. He maintained large armies and was required to send the same when asked by the Sultan.
4. He maintained order in the territory under his charge and protected the life and property of the people.
5. He appointed soldiers in his army.
6. He collected revenue from the people of his territory.
7. From the revenue thus collected he administered expenditure on the maintenance of his army, his pay and other administrative expenditure and deposited the rest in the state treasury.
8. He sent yearly report of his income and expenditure to the centre.

Restrictions on the Iqtadar:

1. The Iqtadar did not always enjoy hereditary powers. The Sultan could take back Iqta from him whenever he pleased.
2. The Iqtadar was liable to be transferred from one place to another.
3. He could not engage himself in wars of extension without the prior approval of the Sultan.
4. He was required to send a part of the booty to the Sultan.
5. The elephants and the members of the royal family captured during wars were to be sent to the Sultan.
6. He was not allowed to hold his own court.
7. He could not use a canopy or royal emblem.

8. He could not mint coins in his name.

9. He could not read 'Khutba' in his name.

During the rule of a weak Sultan, the 'Iqtadars' were tempted to enjoy more powers. They even kept elephants an exclusive privilege of the Sultan.

Two categories of Iqtas:

During the reign of Ala-ud-Din, the Iqtas were divided into two categories:

(1) Iqtas which had been under the Delhi Sultans from the very beginning

(2) The territories brought under control by Ala-ud-Din Khalji.

The 'muqtis' or the 'walis' i.e. the 'Iqtadars' of the second category were given more powers so that the newly acquired territories could be brought about under more effective control.

Besides the 'Iqtadar', there were several other officers of the central government.

The efficient functioning of an 'Iqta' depended on the power of the Sultan on the one hand and on the other hand on the capability of the 'Iqtadar'.

Division of 'Iqtas' into units:

Local Government:

The iqtas or Provinces were further divided into smaller units called Shiqs. The officer who was in the charge of a Shiq was called Shiqqdar. And again every Shiq was divided into still smaller units called praganas. The officers of a pragona were the Amil, Who collected revenues, the Mushrif who kept the accounts, the Khazandar who safeguarded the treasury and the Qazi, who decided judicial cases. Every pragona was divided into several villages.

The village was the smallest unit of administration which was administered by some hereditary officers and the village panchayat. The hereditary officers appointed in the villages were the Chaudhuri, the Patwari, the Khut, the Muqaddam and the Chaukidar. The panchayat of the villages looked after education, sanitation and acted as a judicial body.

The head of a 'Shiqq' was called 'Shiqqdar'. Important officials of a 'paragona' were the 'amil' or 'munsif' the treasurer and the 'quanungo'

Local administration:

The village, the smallest unit of administration was administered by local hereditary officers and the 'Panchayat' of the village. The 'Panchayat',, looked after education, sanitation etc. It also acted as a judicial body.

The 'Chaudhri' the 'Patwari', the 'Khut' the 'Muqaddam' and the 'Chankidari' were the hereditary officers of the village who helped in the collection of revenue.

The Sultan or the governor or officials of the state normally did not interfere in the village administration.