

Function of the Central Government during the Delhi Sultanate Period

The Sultan was the head of the state and government who enjoyed unlimited power. His office was the most important in the Sultanate.

Political, legal and military authority vested in him. He was the head of the administration and was commander-in- chief of the army.

Though there were judges to hear the people in the matters of law and justice, the Sultan acted as a court of appeal against the judges. He was the highest dispenser of justice. He could hear a direct appeal against the high handedness of any of his officials. Everybody knows the stern manner in which Balban dispensed justice, not sparing even the high officials and their relations. Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq applied the same to the ulemas in the early period of his reign. Therefore, the dispensation of justice was a very important function of the Delhi Sultans. But the amount of Justice was doubtful as very often it was done to crush the rivals of the Sultan.

Regarding the Law of Succession, there was no such clear cut law among the Muslim rulers. Therefore, all the sons of a ruler had equal claim to the throne. The idea of primogeniture was also not acceptable to them. Some rulers had nominated one of their sons, but not necessarily the eldest, as the successor. Iltutmish even nominated a daughter in preference to his sons.

Besides usurpation of throne during the Sultanate period had happened more than once. Even among the sons of a ruler, the throne had gone to the person who had better display of sword. Thus, military strength was the main factor in succession to the throne. However, public opinion and noble's approval could not be ignored. Iltutmish no doubt was a great military leader, but he had the support of the Delhi nobles against Aibak's nomination of his son Aram Shah to the throne of Delhi. Similarly the Khilzils, for fear of public opinion, could not dare to enter Delhi for a long time after deposing the successors of Balban.

Ministers and Other Officers:

The Sultan was assisted by a number of ministers and officers who were chosen by him and remained in office at his pleasure.

They were as follows:

1. Wazir:

The key figure in administration was Wazir. He was the Prime Minister. In the earlier period, military leaders were appointed as Wazir. But subsequently a man expert in revenue matters was appointed as Wazir. His office was called Diwan-i-Wizarat which mainly looked into income

and expenditure of the state. An Auditor General for scrutinizing expenditure and an Accountant General for inspecting income worked under the Wazir.

Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq appointed Khwaja Jahan as his Wazir. He was a widely respected man and the Sultan gave him the charge when he went out of the capital. Therefore Wazir was the most trusted person of the Sultan.

2. Ariz-i-Mamalik:

Ariz-i-Mamalik or the minister in-charge of the army was next to wazir. The department he held was called diwan-i-ariz. The ariz was not the commander-in- chief of the army, since the Sultan himself commanded all the armed forces. His special responsibility was to recruit, equip and pay the army.

3. Diwan-i-Risalat:

Diwan-i-Risalat was the department who dealt with religious matters, pious foundations and stipends to deserving scholars and men of piety. The minister in-charge of this department was called Sadur-us-Sadur.

4. Dabir-i-Mamalik:

Dabir-i-Mamalik was the minister who held the department of Diwan-i-insha which dealt with state correspondence. All the correspondences, formal or confidential, between the ruler and the sovereigns of other states, and with his subordinate officials was dealt with by this department.

5. Other Officials:

Besides these ministers, there were other high officials who assisted the ruler in the administration. They were Qazi-i-Mamalik and Barid-i- Mamalik. The former was the head of the judicial department and the latter was the head of the department of information and intelligence. There were also various departments which were assigned to different high officials.

The diwan-i-amir kohi (the department of agriculture) was opened by Muhammad-bin- Tughlaq. The other officers were such as the wakil-i-dormahal (head of the household affairs of the palace), Amir-i-hajib (looked after the visitors to sultan), Amir-i-Shikar-i-Sahai (head of the hunting parties of the Sultan), Amir-i-majlis-shahi (looked after festivals of the state) and sar-i-jalandar (head of the Sultan's body guard).

There were a number of karkhanas, whose authority was in the hands of man in charge of the royal Household. With the help of these ministers and officers, the sultans of Delhi did try to render better administration.

Provincial Government:

The Sultanate Empire was divided into a number of provinces for the convenience of administration. They were called iqtas and the governors in charge of the iqtas were called muqits or walis. Like the Sultan at the centre, they performed the duties such as collection of revenue, maintenance of law and order, control of army and exercise of judicial function in their respective provinces.

All the ministers and high officials at the centre had their corresponding subordinates at the provinces. Similarly the central departments had their corresponding departments at the provinces. Muqit was the head on iqta (province). Besides the Muqit, there were other officers in every iqta such as a vazir, a ariz and a qazi etc.

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.

Revenue Administration:

For the smooth running of administration, the Sultans of Delhi, used to collect revenue from its subjects.

The sources of revenue mainly were as follows:

(1) Ushr:

It was a land tax which was collected from Muslim subjects. It was 5 to 10 percent of the total produce

(2) Kharaj:

It was a land-tax collected from non-Muslims and its range was 1/3 to 1/2 of the produce.

(3) Khams:

It was a tax charged from captured body and produces of mines or buried treasure. The amount of this tax was almost 1/5th of the body or buried wealth.

(4) Jizya:

It was a religious tax collected from non-Muslims. It was charged from 12 dirhams to 48 dirhams on the basis of the economic condition of the non-Muslim subjects. Hindus were the worst-hit class of this tax.

(5) Zakat:

It was a religious tax which was imposed on rich Muslims and consisted of 2 ½ percent of their income. Besides above taxes, there were other taxes such as trade tax, house-tax, grazing tax etc. All the taxes were the sources of revenue of the Sultanate of Delhi. These taxes were collected both in cash and in kind.

The government had appointed officers under the Department of Revenue to collect taxes smoothly. From wazir to village Choudhary all were connected with the process of collection of revenue. Some rulers like Alu-ud-din Rhilizi Firoz Tughlaq had introduced land-measurement system. Though it was not done in the full scale, still it was confined to Delhi and some provinces.

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.

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 organization 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.