
UNIT 26 THE DELHI SULTANATE-II

Structure

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26.1 INTRODUCTION

Administrative and institutional structures are the extensions of the 'state' in all political formations. It is through these structures that political control is extended from a core area — such as the political capital of a kingdom — to the outer reaches of the kingdom or empire.

Political control of the kingdom, especially in the early phases of the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, was often tenuous, and uprisings and challenges to royal authority were a frequent occurrence. The political foundation of the sultanate stabilised after more than 100 years and the important instrument of political control over the outlying areas of the sultanate were the various administrative structures introduced and

maintained by the central government. After the armies of the rulers had annexed a particular territory, it would often be difficult to retain control over these newly conquered domains; it was here that the administrative structures of the centre, once introduced, would help in maintaining political control.

26.2 BACKGROUND

Islam spread outside Arabia since the time of the pious Caliphs (Abu-Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali). To begin with the newly conquered territories were governed by the Governors appointed by the Caliph. In due course of time the dynastic ruler got established in most of the regions. The beginning of dynastic monarchy can be traced to the establishment of Ummayid power. Ummayid period was marked by the dominance of Arabs and the unity of Muslims. The Republican Caliphate had been transformed into a monarchy supported by a governing class around 661 CE. Abbasid period (with capital at Baghdad) saw the ascendancy of Persians in the administration and the gradual shrinking of the territorial control of the caliphate. Under the Ummayids and Abbasids heredity and nomination were the norms which determined succession to the Caliphate. The Fatimid caliphate of Egypt (followers of Shia sect) emerged as a rival and posed a threat to the Abbasids.

During the Abbasid period an elaborate administrative system was established which consisted of several departments e.g., *Diwan-ul-kharj* (board of taxes), *Diwan-ul-dhiyyal* (board of crown lands), etc. The Wizarat also existed in this period though it was Persian in origin.

According to U.N. Day (*Government of the Sultanate* p. 22) “when the Caliphate began to decline and distant provinces turned independent muslim kingdoms this pattern was adopted by them with necessary modifications. The Turkish Sultans of Delhi also adopted many offices from this pattern and made additions and alterations in them as demanded by the various administrative problems they were called upon to solve”.

With the weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate many minor dynasties ruled over Persia for example the Samanids and Ghaznavids in eastern Persia. The kingdom of Ghazna was established by the Turkish slaves. The tradition of Turkish slaves as bodyguards can be traced back to Caliph Mutassim (Abbasid). Subuktagin the father of Mahmud of Ghazna had been taken captive in tribal conflicts and sold in the market as a slave. The Ghaznavid rule was consolidated by Subuktagin after he was elected as chief to the throne of Ghazna. In the 10th and 11th Century CE. Ajam (non Arab lands) witnessed the rise of Sultanates (the lands of Persians and Turks) and the ascendancy of Turks as a military and governing class. However, the establishment of Turkish army is attributed to the Samanids.

Subuktagin’s position was subordinate to the Samani overlord who derived his authority over Sind, Khurasan, Turkistan, Mawaraunnahr, Jurja from the Khalifa of Baghdad. When Mahmud came to power he freed the state of Ghazna from the tutelage of the Samanids and adopted the title of ‘Amir’ and ‘Sultan’. His position was further reinforced by the sanction of the Khalifa of Baghdad.

Under the Ghaznavids both ability and heredity influenced succession to the throne however under Mahmud descent became more important. The Ghaznavids did not accept the policy of partitioning the Empire whereas the Ghorids did resort to it. The

practice of the division of the kingdom and the nomination of the successor outside the royal house did not get acceptance under the Ghaznavids.

The Ghorids (in Afghanistan) belonged to the Shansabani dynasty. Though initially subordinate to the Ghaznavids they conquered Ghazna and subsequently invaded Multan in India which had been attacked by Mahmud of Ghazni earlier. The Ghaznavids and Ghorids traced their ancestry to the ancient families of Turan and Iran. Under the Ghorids general consent of the clan and might were important factors which decided the issue of succession.

Qutbuddin (slave of Ghorid ruler) was the governor of Hansi which formed a part of the Ghorid Empire. He was an efficient general and was the son-in-law of Yalduz the favourite slave of Ghorid Sultan. After the Sultan's death Qutbuddin obtained the letter of manumission and the *Chatr* (royal umbrella) and *Durbash* (baton) and tried to assert his independence. Subsequently, Iltutmish (Turkish slave officer and son-in-law of Qutbuddin who was governor of Badaon) made Delhi the capital and established himself as an independent ruler of India. Nomination, selection by nobles, ability, heredity and recognition from the Caliph were important parameters which shaped the succession issue.

26.3 SULTAN AND THE CAPITAL CITY: NODE OF ADMINISTRATIVE APPARATUS

The node of the administrative apparatus was the Sultan. He was the ruler of the entire realm, and after accession to the throne — he had absolute power in his hands. He was the supreme commander of the army, and it was he, or officers appointed by him, who led armies to conquer other areas. Thus, the sultan was in many ways the head of the administrative system. This is applicable to almost all the sultans of the Delhi sultanate, with some exceptions like Sultan Ruknuddin Firuz, Sultan Muizzuddin Bahram, Sultan Alauddin Masud, and Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud, in whose times cliques of nobles at the court are said to have been more powerful. But even in these infrequent instances, the sultan remained the ceremonial head of the entire political establishment of the empire.

Fatwa-I-Jahandari of Barni-II, Advice XV on the king's high resolve, according to M. Habib and Dr. Afsar Begum "... this advice deals with the following topics: (i) High resolve is the distinguishing feature of a great king; (ii) The king with high resolve is characterised by his generosity; (iii) Miserliness is incompatible with high resolve; (iv) Wise men have enumerated 11 characteristics of a King with high resolve; (v) Praises of Sultan Mahmud and (vi) five conditions which a King should observe when conquering foreign lands". *Medieval India Quarterly*; Vol. III, Nos. 3 and 4, January, April 1958, Prof. M. Habib and Dr. Afsar Begum, Pg. 151.

The capital city and its surrounding areas were often areas where direct central control-administrative and otherwise — was prevalent. Since it was in the close vicinity of the ruler, central control was most strongly felt in these areas. The ruler, the nobles, the court, royal architecture, trade, urbanisation, all were more focussed on these regions, and hence the administrative apparatus was also elaborate and prominent. This created the core area of political control. However, a defining feature of this area was also that

most of the people who lived in this area were ‘professionals’, namely, non-agriculturists. These classes and groups had to be sustained from the produce of other areas of the empire; and for that to happen, the surplus produce had to be collected from the agriculturists mostly through the various taxation measures introduced and imposed by the centre on these areas.

Thus, the very nature of politics at the time engendered the need to introduce centrally monitored apparatuses of control and regulation. First, political conquest of a new area was never enough to ensure its integration into the political empire for it could easily break away at an opportune moment if there was insufficient central control. Second, the “parasitic” nature of the governing classes, along with other groups such as artisans, traders, soldiers, etc. meant that resources had to be appropriated — sometimes by force — from other parts of the empire for the maintenance of this political structure. Bureaucratisation was often highest in the core areas, with a gradation of political/ bureaucratic control as one moved farther and farther away from the core. These in total comprised the territory of the state, all areas being tied in their recognition of the supremacy of the sultan in their domains.

26.4 NOBILITY

Qutbuddin ascended the throne without any conflict since the Muizzi (Muizzuddin Ghori, The Ghori ruler) nobles accepted him as their superior and offered their loyalty to him. Iltutmish’s accession to the throne of Delhi constituted an important landmark in the growth of Turkish nobility in India. This reflected the power of the nobles to select their leaders through armed strength. Now heredity and nomination the principles of sovereignty and leadership were relegated to the background. Nobles in Delhi acquired prominence in selecting the ruler and Delhi became the hub of political activity of Turkish rule. Iltutmish is credited with the establishment of a sovereign Turkish state in India and the nobility in his time consisted of efficient administrators who though slaves were imbued with merit and ability. After Iltutmish the hereditary principle again resurfaced with the accession of Ruknuddin Firoz, Raziya and Bahram Shah. During this phase the tussle between the Turkish and Tajik (Arab and Persians) nobles became intense. After Iltutmish’s death (1235) till the accession of Balban (1269), the Chihalgani slaves (group of 40 nobles of which Balban was also a part) decided the succession issue. Balban tried to restore the supremacy of the crown by crushing the power of the Turkish nobility. Balban’s accession demonstrated that the hereditary principle was no longer relevant. Both Qutbuddin and Iltutmish considered the nobles at par with themselves. Balban made a major departure. He maintained a distance from the nobility and believed in divine theory of kingship. He traced his ancestry to the mythical king Afrasiyab of Ajam (non-Arab lands). Balban tried to weaken the power of the Shamsi (Shamsuddin Iltutmish) nobles. The accession of Jalaluddin Khalji (1290) to the throne established that heredity was not always the basis of the sovereignty and kingship. Ability and force were also important factors in the succession to the throne.

During the rule of Khaljis and Tughlaqs the doors of nobility were opened to people of diverse backgrounds and it was no more the preserve of the Turks only. According to M. Habib (Medieval India Quarterly, pg. 230) “During the period of slave kings membership of the higher bureaucracy was dangerous for an Indian Musalman and impossible for a Hindu. But the Khilji revolution seems to have brought about a change.

Amir Khusrau in his *Khazainul Futuh* tells us that Sultan Alauddin sent an army of thirty thousand horsemen under a Hindu officer, Malik Naik, the *Akhur-bek Maisarah*, against the Mongols, Alibeg, Tartaq and Targhi. The position of low-born men (whether Hindus or Muslims) in the government of Mohammad bin Tughlaq was the natural culmination of a process covering a century and a half.” Barani criticises Mohammad bin Tughlaq and says “. . . He assigned the Diwan-i-Wizarat (Ministry of Revenue) to Pera Mali (the Gardner), the lowest of the low born and mean born men of the Hind and Sind and placed him over the heads of maliks, amirs, walis and governors (maqta’s)” (*Medieval India Quarterly*, pg. 229). During the Lodi period except for the reigns of Sikandar Lodi and Ibrahim Lodi, tribal concept of equality of the Afghans determined the official attitude towards the nobility.

26.5 ULEMA AND THE LEARNED IN THE POLITICAL AND SOCIO RELIGIOUS REALM

But before proceeding to study the various administrative offices and institutions at work in the Delhi Sultanate, it is important to understand that bureaucratic administration was only one important way in which the centre made its authority and presence felt in the larger political realm. An institutional feature of the political discourse of the Delhi Sultanate was the presence of the *Ulema* [theologians] both at the court, and in the provinces through the offices of the *Qazi* and officials manning the educational institutions.

There has been a lot of debate amongst historians about the nature of the state in the Delhi Sultanate. It seems reasonable to assume in the light of the available evidence that politics and religion functioned in separate areas despite appearing to complement one another. The *Ulema* as a group consisted of persons who performed the role of the preachers and guardians of Islamic religion, and [at least in the initial stages of the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate] most of them had come from outside the sub-continent. Traditionally, they were committed to upholding the Islamic religious order, and thus acted as socio-moral censors for the Muslim community at large. The *Ulema* rose as a powerful political faction and on account of the high judicial positions held by them they could sway the king and the nobility in their favour. They held important positions in the administrative system particularly in the judiciary. Prof. Habib points out “. . . Under these conditions wise kings adopted a policy of compromise and moderation. They paid lip homage to the *Shari’at* and admitted their sinfulness if they were unable to enforce any of its provisions; they kept the state controlled *mullahs* disciplined and satisfied; over the whole field of administration concerning which the *Shari’at* is silent or nearly silent, they made their own laws; if the traditional customs of the people were against the *Shari’at*, they allowed them to override the *Shari’at* under the designation of *Urf*. Thus state laws called *Zawabit* grew under the protection of the monarchy. If these laws violated the *Shari’at* the principle of necessity or of *istihasan* (the public good) could be quoted in their favour. And the back of the *shari’at* was broken for the primary reason that it had provided no means for its own development”. (*Politics and society during the early medieval period*, *Collected works of Muhammad Habib*, Volume-II, p.312.)

At the centre, the *ulema* functioned as the religious benchmark of the political empire — apart from acting as judges [mostly in civil cases], *alims* were sometimes appointed as principals of *madrasas* [educational institutions] such as Minhajuddin Siraj, the

author of the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, who was appointed to head the Nasiriyya Madrasa in Delhi. Through these formal and informal channels, the primary aim of the *ulema* was to spread the religious Word, and uphold the Islamic religio-moral order as far as was possible. This was often a contentious issue since the Sultan's ultimate objective was never the glorification of Islam but the success of the political life of the Sultanate. Given the fact that the majority of the subject population was non-Muslim, the sultan was more keen to act in a politically tactful way rather than solely uphold the banner of religion.

This brought the interests of the *ulema* and the sultan in direct clash on frequent occasions, and the reign of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq is particularly significant in this regard. Muhammad bin Tughluq had appointed a number of non-Muslims in royal service since they were meritorious, and alims like and Ziauddin Barani strongly condemned it in their writings. Fakhr-i-Mudabbir's *Adabu'l Harb Was'h Shujaa't* written in the honour of Sultan Iltutmish also lays emphasis on the noble birth of state officials. Mohammad Tughlaq's policies show that the upholding of religious ideals was not always the priority of the Sultan. Moreover, the interests of the Sultan and the *ulema* and the learned hardly coincided.

Barani emphasises on noble birth and says "On the noble birth of the supporters of the state... the person selected should for certain have the advantage of free, gentle and noble birth.... For to promote base, mean, low born and worthless men to be the helpers and supporters of the government has not been permitted by any religion, creed, publicly accepted tradition or state law. Fatwa-i-Jahandari, Advice XIX, Medieval India Quarterly, Prof. Muhammad Habib and Afsar Begum, p. 175.

Sa'id Fakhr-i-Mudabbir, in his *Adabul Harb was'h Shujaa't* (rules of war which deal with warfare and statecraft) writes that "... the king should consider it essential to investigate and thoroughly inquire into the antecedents of the members of the army and scholars... the king should not allow those to occupy high posts whose forefathers have not been men of letters and have not served in the government or have not been in the service of kings, nobles and wazirs.... their actions lead to the fall of the kingdom and create trouble for the state and the people. (cf. Appendix in Yusuf Hussain's Indo-Muslim Polity, pp. 221 and 228.

The *Ulema* preached obedience to the Word of God, among common people, nobles and even to the sultan. Thus, as a corollary, they were an important instrument of social control since the message of obedience that they imposed on the Muslim subject population, as well as others engendered notions of obedience and hierarchy which worked towards formulating a royal political discourse. Of course, the sultan did not depend solely on the abstractions of religion for administrative control, but instituted a number of other offices to establish his control in the core areas and extend his control over the larger political realm.

26.6 EVOLUTION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE APPARATUS OF THE DELHI SULTANATE

There is very little information regarding administration available for the period of the Delhi Sultanate, especially for the first 100 years. The political canvas of the northern

part of the Indian sub-continent before the advent of the Turks was fragmented, and the political empires immediately northwest [Ghazni and, later, Ghur] had long been interested in searching for fortunes in the sub-continent. This had led to intermittent invasions but not to the development of an elaborate administrative apparatus since the invaders did not plan to set up an empire in the subcontinent. The indigenous rulers, on the other hand, belonged to fragmented political dynasties and the administrative structure was often one that had been developing through the centuries, mutating and adapting to the changing conditions.

26.6.1 Blend of West Asian and Central Asian Traditions

When Qutubuddin Aybak declared himself as an independent Sultan at Lahore — no systematic administrative apparatus existed. Consequently, what emerged was a mixture of politico-administrative institutions from Central Asia and beyond as practised in the realms of the Ghurid empire, and a formal recognition of the prevailing administrative structures in the various parts of the sultanate as it expanded within the sub-continent. As long as the local rulers (Rajas, Rais and Ranas) recognised the supremacy of the Sultan in Delhi, they were largely left to their devices to collect the taxes and send it to the central treasury as tribute. It appears that the centre often appointed a host of officers (*Amil, Karkuns*, etc.) to be present in the various realms of the sultanate but only to assist the intermediaries (*Khots, Muqaddams and Chaudharies*) in their administrative tasks; it was only in later times, from the late 13th century, that central authority in the outer realms was well established.

Before we proceed to discuss the administrative structure and institutions of Delhi Sultanate we would like to give you a brief idea about the impact of central and west Asian institutions on the Delhi Sultanate.

The administrative structures and institutions introduced in India by the Ilbari (tribe) Turks were Abbasid and Persian in origin which had been transformed under the Samanids, Ghaznavids, Ghorids and Seljukids (Turks who ruled in Persia).

Iqta System

The iqta was a territorial assignment given to administrative officers and nobles in lieu of the services they performed for the state. The holder of iqta was designated as *muqti*. The *muqti* was responsible for the collection of revenue from these territories and also worked as administrative head. They were supposed to retain the revenue equivalent to their personal pay as well as the salaries of troops employed by them. The surplus if any was to be deposited in royal treasury. We will discuss iqta system in detail under the section revenue administration.

It is generally accepted that the Iqta system was established at the end of the Abbasid period and got consolidated during the Seljuk period. Its origin has been attributed to various factors:

- 1) The development of mercenary armies in place of citizen armies.
- 2) Some scholars consider it to be a bureaucratic and administrative apparatus, which got transformed into a military organization on account of the need to maintain the army through land assignments when the gold economy collapsed.
- 3) The Turkoman (Turks) tribal movements had led to the emergence of the idea of tribal concept of land as the joint property of the tribe headed by a Chief.

Although, there were several types of Iqtas in west and central Asia the system adopted in India was based on the Seljuk pattern which was called the Mustaghall type of Iqta in which no hereditary rights were permitted. In this both military and administrative features were important but slowly military became predominant. The Iqta served as the foundation of the political and military system of the Turks.

The Mongol Influence

An important point which needs to be discussed is the influence of Mongol inroads on central and west Asia and the effect of Mongol institutions on Turkish rule in India. Just as Balban's theory of sovereignty was inspired by Sassanid (Persian) traditions similarly Muhammad Bin Tughlaq and his Khurasani nobles tried to adopt the ideas of Mongol Khans and were probably influenced by the Mongol Yassa (steppe governing class and its traditions). Muhammad Bin Tughlaq's policy of enforcing strictness in the administration (army and nobility), the egalitarian attitude towards all subjects and refusal to give special status to Ulema and appointment of Hindus in the nobility had resemblance to the Mongol traditions and Yassa. Mongol ideas affected the organisation of the nobility and army under the Tughlaqs. The Amiran-i-sada and Hazara were Mongol and Afghan in origin and initially joined the service of Alauddin Khalji. They became prominent in Muhammad Tughlaq's reign. His token currency experiments were also borrowed from Mongol measures in China and Firoz Tughlaq's attempt to make Iqtas hereditary was based on the Mongol ruler Ghazan Khan's reforms which made shares and assignment of lands to nobles and soldiers hereditary.

26.6.2 Unique Features Introduced in the Indian Sub-continent: Change and Continuity

From the outset, the sultans were aware of the unique nature of the Delhi sultanate, which meant that it was for the first time in the political history of Islam that an Islamic ruling group found itself in a position of political control over a largely non-Islamic subject population. However, Jizyah was imposed as a separate tax which even the Brahmins had to pay during the reign of Feroze Tughlak. These measures were resorted to by individual sultans but the general character of the state continued to be based on political expediency. The term Jizyah like Kharaj is mentioned in the Quran and indicates a tax or tribute. Jizyah was traditionally imposed on non-muslims in lieu of protection of life and property and exemption from military service. It was not exacted uniformly from all non muslims. Children, women, illiterate etc. were exempt from it. Jizyah is considered by Sunni Jurists as a lawful tax.

Upendra Nath Day maintains that although the sultans of Delhi had to introduce particular measures to suit the conditions of the newly established sultanate, they did try to 'adjust them and keep them in conformity with the ideas and principles developed in Arabia and Persia' (U.N. Day, *The Government of the Sultanate*, (reprint) Delhi, 1993, p.2). This, however, seems to be more applicable to particular offices and institutions like that of the **wazir, qazi, iqta**, etc. rather than to the administrative system as a whole. At the local (village level) Patwaris and village head man continued to perform their traditional role.

The Sultanate as already indicated was spread in large areas with a core and outlying provinces. The large extent of the sultanate necessitated the evolution of administrative apparatus separately for the centre and the provinces. Therefore, it is useful to study

the administrative institutions of the Delhi Sultanate at the centre and provincial areas separately. Those at the centre were the areas of direct administration, and the administrative apparatus developed and expanded with the territorial expansion of the empire.

26.7 CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

Central administration in the Delhi sultanate during the period of Ilbari Turks (slave dynasty) was carried out mostly by trusted slaves [appointed to administrative positions by the sultan] who had helped the sultan to acquire the throne; or by the members of the royal household and family. Loyalty was therefore a prerequisite for holding the high office and was given the highest rewards. The Sultan was the head of the administration with all military, administrative and legal powers. A number of separate departments were created to look after different aspects of administration. We will discuss these separately under this section.

26.7.1 *Wizarat*

After the seat of the sultan, the most important office in the sultanate was the *Diwani-Wizarat*, headed by the *wazir*. He had under him a naib *wazir*. Derived from the Persian and Abbasid traditions, the *wazir* [prime minister] was the most important person in the royal court, and his role was of a general supervisor over all departments. He was the primary advisor to the sultan, and often gave advice which, in retrospect it is possible to say, may have shaped the course of history. For instance, Nizam ul-Mulk Junaidi, the *wazir* of Sultan Iltutmish is credited with the famous warning to the sultan that Muslims in India were like ‘salt in a dish’, i.e., a minority who could easily be overturned. The wisdom reflected in such a statement reveals both the strength required to occupy the position, as also the importance given to the office by the sultan. Theoretically, the *wazir* was supposed to take the sultan’s permission prior to every decision he made; however, in practice it may not have been so as is evident from the cases when *wazirs* would actually become more powerful than the sultans. The case of the *wazir* Khwaja Muhazzab [in the reign of Sultan Alauddin Masud Shah] is one such example.

Sai’d Fakhr-I-Mudabbir’s, *Adabul Harb Was’h Shujaa’t* (Rules of war and bravery) Indo-Muslim Polity, Yusuf Husain, Appendix, Status of the Wazir, pp.229. “... The *wazir* is responsible for the prosperity of the kingdom, the collection of revenues, recruitment of the army, the appointment of tax collectors, the checking of accounts, the inspection of workshop – wards, the reckoning of horses, camels and other cattle, the payment of salary to the army, the retinue and other working people. He is responsible for the contentment of his subjects, the welfare of the well-wishers of the state, the payment of remuneration to scholars, the caring for the widows and orphans, the patronizing of the ‘ulama,’ the maintenance of order in the country, the organization of administration and for looking after the affairs of the people.”

The main function of the *wazir* was to look after the financial organisation of the state, give advice to the sultan, and on occasions to lead military expeditions at the sultan’s behest. Another important function included supervising the payment to the army, the

largest “non-producing” class of royal retainers. His office also kept a check on land revenue collections from different parts of the empire. The *Wizarat* maintained a record of all the income and expenditure incurred by the state. Therefore, the salaries of all royal servants in different parts of the empire were controlled and/or recorded by this office. Charitable donations such as *waqfs*, *inams*, etc. were also handled by this department.

Further, the mints, the royal buildings, intelligence departments and other sundry affiliations of the royal court like the *karkhanas*, were all supervised by the *Wizarat*. They also had a number of minor departments working under their supervision with more specific functions. These included, for instance, the *Mustaufi-i-Mumalik* [Auditor General, incharge of expenditure], *Mushrif-i-Mumalik* [Accountant General, incharge of income] and the *Majmuadar* [keeper of loans and balances from treasury]. With the passage of time, however, the complexities of the greatly enlarged geographical territory saw further streamlining and introduction of new offices which were monitored by the wazir and wizarat. These included the *Diwan-i-Waqoof* [introduced by Jalaluddin Khalaji to supervise expenditure *only*; i.e, after separating ‘income’ records from ‘expenditure’ records]; *Diwan-i-Mustakhraj* [set up by Alauddin Khalaji to enquire into and realise arrears of revenue payments from the different parts of the empire]; and the *Diwan-i- Amir Kohi* [under Muhammad bin Tughlaq, this department was responsible for bringing uncultivated land into cultivation through state support].

The *wazir* and the *Diwan-i-Wizarat* were thus the most important and trusted offices of the empire. This was also evident from the fact that the wazir was one of the very few persons who had direct access to the ruler and, according to Ibn Battuta, stood closest to the sultan at court. It was on the wazir’s wisdom, sagacity, sincerity and loyalty that the position and success of the sultan was greatly dependent.

26.7.2 Diwan-i-Arz

But the sultan and the wazir together could do little without the help of the army, the most important component of political rule in pre-modern times. It was the army which helped the sultan to conquer new areas, protect his own kingdom, and maintain order within the empire. The *Diwan-i-Arz* was instituted especially to look after the military organisation of the empire. It was headed by the *Ariz-i-Mumalik*. With the Delhi Sultanate always having a large military entourage, this ministry was very important in the empire. The *Ariz*, along with his office, maintained the royal contingents, recruited the soldiers, ensured the discipline and fitness of the army, examined the horses and branded them with the royal insignia. During times of war, the *Ariz* arranged the military provisions, transportation and administered the army at war, provided constant supplies, and was the custodian of war booty. The importance of his position, and that of the army, is evident from the fact that in later times the *Ariz* could actually reward individual soldiers by increasing their salaries. Alauddin Khilji introduced the system of *dagh* (branding) and *huliyah* (description) and cash payment to soldiers. This was meant to strengthen his control over the army.

Firuz Tughlaq did away with the system of *dagh* and *huliyah* however Muhammad Tughlaq continued the system of *dagh*. Under Sikandar Lodi *huliyah* was referred to as *chehrah*.

26.7.3 Naib-Ul-Mulk

Next in line, and in part attached to the earlier office, was that of the *Naib*. Theoretically, the *Naib* was the deputy of the *Ariz*, and was supposed to assist him in his many administrative chores; however, as the example of Ghiyasuddin Balban [*naib* of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud, and later to become sultan] shows, sometimes the *Naib* could become more important than the *wazir*. But these were exceptions rather than the rule, dependent more on individual personalities and circumstances. It does however indicate the possibility of ambitious individuals to use the exceptional practice to their advantage.

26.7.4 Diwan-i-Insha

Royal authority was conducted to a fair degree through declarations, announcements, *farmans*, and the like. The *Diwan-i-Insha*, headed by the *Dabir-i-Khas*, looked after the department of royal correspondence. He drafted and despatched royal orders, and received reports from officers in various parts of the empire. This reflected the diplomatic perspective which conveyed in carefully chosen language the commands of the ruler. The *Dabir* was the formal channel of communication between the centre and the other areas of the empire, and at a time when transport and communication was underdeveloped, the job was made more difficult. The *Dabir* was also the private secretary of the sultan, responsible for writing the *farmans* [except in the reign of Sultan Firoz Shah Tughluq when the office lost its importance].

26.7.5 Diwan-i-Riyasat

During the reign of Sultan Alauddin Khalaji, the *Diwan-i-Riyasat* became very prominent. Alauddin's market regulations required constant surveillance; this ministry registered all the supplies of commodities, and maintained standards in the markets [such as checking weights and measures, etc]. With the collapse of the market regulations after Alauddin's death, this department also faded out of prominence.

26.7.6 Diwan-i-Risalat and Diwan-I-Qada

It was headed by the *Sadr-us-Sadr* who was also the *Qadi-i-mumalik* and was responsible for administration of justice and also looked after the religious matters as *sadr-us-sadr*. *Diwan-i-Qada* was placed under a *Qadi-i-mumalik*. He was in charge of religious and legal matters. Local *qadis* (judges) were chosen by him. In the time of Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq the complaints of the people were registered with the *Diwan-i-Risalat*.

26.7.7 Diwan-i-Mazalim

It was headed by the *Amir-i-Dad* in the absence of the Sultan. His role was to supervise the *qadis*, *kotwal* (police) and *muhtasib* (Executive officer who supervised and enforced the public morals and public conveniences).

26.7.8 Smaller Departments

Apart from these, there were a number of smaller 'departments' at the centre which helped in the every day administration of the empire. They were usually supervised directly by the sultan. Important amongst them were those dealing with intelligence [like the *Barid-i-Mumalik*], the royal household [headed by the *Wakil-i-Dar*], court

ceremonies [led by the *Amir-i-Hajib*], royal bodyguards [under the *Sar-i-Jandar*]. Other important departments looked after slaves, royal workshops [*karkhanas*]; and important royal slaves also performed various functions such as bearing the royal parasol, serving wine, etc.

26.8 PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

Administration in areas, which were outside the core political area, was conducted in a number of ways, depending on the degree of political control which was exercised over the area. In the initial years of the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, especially after the accession of Shamsuddin Iltutmish, many other slave-governors [Bahauddin Tughril in Bayana, Nasiruddin Qabacha in Multan] asserted their independence. The political turmoil that followed [and which continued for the better part of the next 30 years after the death of Iltutmish] meant that the sultan's attentions were concentrated on stabilising the political base of the sultanate, especially when tensions were both from within [other slave-governors; recalcitrant notables] as well as from outside [other indigenous rulers; Mongols]. As the empire expanded, newly annexed areas became loosely affiliated to the politico-administrative structure, often through nominal recognition of the political supremacy of the sultan/centre. A few officials were appointed by the centre to these areas as a symbol of imperial presence, but every day administration most often remained in local hands. The interest of the centre in these areas was mostly economic, i.e., collection of revenue to sustain the larger imperial edifice.

26.8.1 Position of Governor of the Province

Sultanate comprised of provinces placed in charge of governors called *wali* or *muqti*. In the 14th century with the consolidation of the sultanate the provinces became unmanageable and were therefore, partitioned into *shiqs* for administrative convenience. They were administered by the *shiqdars*. Subsequently the *shiqs* got transformed into *sarkars* in the Afghan period. The *sarkar* as a territorial unit comprised of a number of *paraganas*.

In spite of the complicated web of authority and power the administration of the outer areas was often nebulous. Usually, the sultan appointed a governor as his deputy, who was responsible for the overall administration of the area. This involved ensuring the collection of revenue, maintaining law and order, and keeping opposition to central authority under control. He was the chief executive officer deputed by the centre, and embodied the sultans's administrative power in the provinces of the kingdom. Since the official was a newcomer to the region, he was usually dependent on the local officials [whose offices had been in existence prior to the establishment of the Sultanate] to execute his duties, along with his own military retinue. Often, a part of the revenue collected went towards the governor's own salary [which included the maintenance of his army]; so it was in the interest of the governor to ensure the proper and timely collection of revenue. A part of it was sent to the central treasury. In such cases, land was allotted to the governor as his '*iqta*', and the governor was variously called *malik*, *amir*, *muqti* or *iqtadar*'.

A significant component of the '*iqtadar*'s duties was the maintenance of a military unit under his command. This was important because he could be called upon to muster his army at any point to help the sultan in battles. Thus, the armies of these governors acted as reserve platoons of the central army. The same was expected from the local

rajas as well, since they had accepted the suzerainty of the sultan. The governor was helped in these military duties by the *Ariz* who looked after the military contingents under the supervision of the governor. The *Ariz* was placed under the *Ariz-i-Mumalik*.

Thus, the governor and the local power-blocs worked in close association with each other, which, consequently, generated other problems for the sultan at the centre. Being at a distance from the centre gave these governors the opportunity to liaise with the local power groups and rise in rebellion against the sultan at the centre. This was a frequent occurrence, and on such occasions the sultan himself or some trusted official from the centre was sent to suppress the rebellion.

The office of the governor could therefore be used for political gain. Even if the sultan was helpless in containing the attempts by the governors to usurp power in the provinces, he would [very rarely] accept the use of the title of 'sultan' by the governor: the example of Bughra Khan in Bengal during the reign of Sultan Balban is a case in point. Conversely, if a particular notable was very powerful in a particular area [or at the court in the capital] then the sultan could appoint him as governor of a distant province to remove him from his position of popularity and power. The historian Ziya Barani informs us that when Zafar Khan became very renowned as the governor of Samana, Sultan Alauddin Khalaji began to think of transferring him to Lakhnauti [Bengal] to uproot him from his power base and thereby weaken his growing strength.

26.8.2 Local Administration: Role of *Khots*, *Zamindars*, *Rais*, *Ranas*, etc.

A number of villages formed a **pargana** (this term becomes common in the 14th century and is Indian in origin). The villages were under the administrative supervision of the following set of officials: *muquddam* (the village head man); *patwari* (village accountant); *khut* (village headman). It is important to note that the village and pargana were independent units of administration, and yet inter-related areas over which officials commanded administrative powers. The important pargana officials were *chaudhary* (highest local rural magnate accountable to the government for land revenue collection), *mutasarrif* or *amil* (revenue collector) and *karkun* (accountant).

Khot, *Muqaddam*, *Patwari* and *Choudhary* were the local officials who worked in conjunction with the governor in the collection of revenue and maintaining law and order, etc. Before the Bengal Expedition in 1353 Firuz Tughlaq in his proclamation suggested that *zamindars* constituted the *muqaddams*, *mafrozis* and *maliks* (*Inshahi-mahru*, letters of the early years of Firuz Tughlaq's reign). Thus the word *zamindar* encompassed the entire superior rural class. In certain cases the province also had a local ruler [*rai*, *rana*, *rawat*, *raja*] who supported the governor in his duties. In such instances, the local rulers were usually recognised by the sultan at the centre as being his subordinate, albeit the local rulers were allowed to act as sovereign powers in conducting the administrative affairs of the region. This practice was adopted in the Delhi sultanate because it allowed the sultanate to expand geographically on the basis of nominal sovereignty, coupled with an assured financial contribution to the central treasury.

26.8.3 Other Officers: *Shiqdar*, *Faujdar*, *Amil*, etc.

The other important officers in the provinces — those who had direct access to the sultan — were the *barids* [intelligence officers and reporters]. They played a very

significant role in the reporting of local developments to the sultan, and were usually appointed directly by the sultan. These officers were the sultan's 'eyes and ears' in the outer realms, and acted as an important check on the governors.

Ziya Barani mentions two other officers — the *shiqdar* and the *faujdar* — at the provincial level. *Shiqdar* is mentioned during Alauddin Khalji's period. Barani also refers to *shiqdar* and *faujdar* during Mohammad Tughlaq's reign. Their duties are not very clearly articulated, and often the role of the two seems to overlap. The *shiqdar* was in charge of a *shiq*, and assisted the governor in the maintenance of law and order [particularly criminal justice] and provided military assistance, especially if it was required in the collection of land revenue, or the suppression of local rebellions. His salary seems to have been derived from the revenue collections of the area [though we have no direct evidence to prove it] and it was a fairly stable office since we find mention of it even during the Lodi period and onwards. The *shiqdar*'s duties also included supervising the functioning of the smaller administrative units such as the *pargana*. The duties of the *faujdar* were much similar to that of the *shiqdar*, yet they seem to have existed simultaneously. In most cases, the *shiqdar* was superior to the *faujdar* though this seems to have been reversed in the period of the Saiyyids. In the Tughlaq period in the deccan, *shiq* was bigger than a district. Smaller *shiqs* are also mentioned under the Tughlaqs. *Shiqdar* was assisted by the *faujdar*s in maintaining law and order during the Tughlaq period. The *kotwal* was placed under the *faujdar*. Under the Lodis the *shiqdar* was the *pargana* or city officer who were responsible for both civil and military administration.

The *shiqdar* and *faujdar* were helped in carrying out their duties by a host of other local officials including the *Qazi* [dealt mostly with civil cases and acted as a juriconsult since he was educated in the Quran], *Amil* [primarily responsible for the collection of revenue], *Amin* [carried out measurement of land in the reign of Sikandar Lodi as mentioned in the sources (Waq'at-i-Mushtaqi, late 16th century) and *Kotwal* [an office of varying importance, he was under the *shiqdar*/*faujdar*, and helped in the maintenance of law and order].

The financial accounts of the provincial income and expenditure were maintained by the *Sahib-i-Diwan*, who was appointed by the sultan on the recommendation of the *wazir*. He was the book-keeper of provincial revenue, and was assisted in his task by *mutassarifs* and *karkuns*. The nazir and waqf were officers who looked after the collection of the revenue and expenditure respectively.

We also find mention of the office of the *Khwaja* (probably same as *Sahib-i-Diwan*), who kept a record of the income of the *iqta*, on the basis of which the sultan was able to make his revenue demands. The *Khwaja* was also appointed by the sultan on the recommendation of the *wazir*. This office was important because the agricultural produce of the entire sultanate was never uniform, and so the taxation system and demand were different for different parts of the sultanate depending on the yield of different areas.

26.9 ARMY ORGANISATION

The contingents stationed at Delhi was called Hasham-i-galb and included among others royal slaves and guards. Provincial contingents were called *hasham-i-atraf*. Garisons

are mentioned in the time of Qutbuddin Aibak which were placed under Kotwals. Cavalry was composed of *murattab*, *sawar* and *do-aspah* (men with 2 horses, single horse and no horses of their own respectively) (*The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*, I.H. Qureshi, p. 250-253). Elephant establishment at Delhi was supervised by the *Shahnah-i-fil*. The infantry or foot soldiers were referred to as *paiks* (generally Hindus, slaves or persons of low origin). The decimal system (multiples of 10) was the basis of army organisation under the Ghaznavids and Mongols. Sultans of Delhi followed a similar system. Barani in his *Tarikh-I-Firoz Shahi* discusses the army organisation, “A *sarkhail* commands 10 chosen horsemen; a *sipah-salar* 10 *sarkhails*; an amir 10 *sipah-salars*; a *malik* 10 amirs, a khan 10 maliks, and a king should have at least 10 khans under his command”, (Medieval India Quarterly, M. Habib, p 228.) Barani also refers to *amiran-i-sadah* (centurians) and *amiran-i-hajara* (commanders of one thousand). The hierarchy comprised of Sarkhail at the bottom (with 10 horse men subordinate to him), a sipah-salar (had 10 sarkhail under him), amir (10 sipah-salars below him), malik (had power over 10 amirs), Khan’s troops (were equal to troops under 10 maliks).

Barani in *Tarikh-I-Firoz Shahi* says that Muhammad Tughlaq told the governor of Dhar (Malwa) ‘ I hear that everyone who rebels does so owing to the support of the amiran-i-sadah (Sadah amirs: commanders of one hundred) and the amiran-i-sadah support him owing to their anger (at the imperial policy) and love of plunder.’ Medieval India Quarterly, Prof. M. Habib, p. 288.

The *masalik-ul-absar* (An Arabic source of the 14th century) gives an estimate of the salaries of officers: Khan: 1 lakh tankhas, malik: 50 to 60 thousand tankhas, etc. Soldiers were directly paid in cash by the central government during the time of Khaljis and Tughlaqs. The nobles were given assignments of revenue in lieu of salary. The standing army comprised of regular troops called *wajhis* and irregular called *ghair wajhis*. Sometimes soldiers were also paid through *itlaq* (drafts).

26.10 REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

Since the economy in the Indian sub-continent was predominantly agrarian, the primary source of income for the state was land revenue. States from ancient times had taxed the farmer on their produce, and appropriated a portion of it as tax/revenue to sustain the larger state structures. With the passage of time, the machinery of tax collection had crystallised in different parts of the sub-continent. Therefore, as the sultans expanded the frontiers of the sultanate, they were able to utilise the existing administrative machinery for their purposes.

The primacy of agriculture in the economy meant that the village remained the basic unit of administration in the Delhi sultanate. According to Irfan Habib “To begin with, it would seem that there was little question of the peasants claiming property rights over any parcel of land. Land was abundant, and the peasant could normally put up with a denial of his right over the land he tilled. What he feared, on the contrary, was a claim of the superior classes over his crop, and more still over his person”. (*The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Irfan Habib and T.R. Choudhary (eds.), Vol.I, p. 54.) The state held large tracts of land [khalisa] which were tilled by farmers maintained by the centre and from where all the revenue came to the central treasury through the

agency of officials called *amils*. But the largest part of the land was distributed as *iqta* within the sultanate. The centre's policy of revenue collection reached its highest of one-half of the produce during the reign of Alauddin Khalji, who had adopted the policy of actual measurement of land [called *hukm-i misahat*] where land was measured and revenue demand determined on its anticipated yield.

Since the time of the Ghaznavid conquest of India *Kharaj* was an important source of revenue. *Jizya* too was exacted from non-muslims. *Zakat* was probably also imposed. The Ghorids also adopted the Ghaznavid practice when they conquered India. Muizuddin Ghori appointed governors who were in charge of civil and military administration in various parts of India. Slowly and steadily an administrative apparatus began to develop on the pattern of the Ghaznavids which also bore the imprint of local traditions and customs.

The taxation principles followed by the Delhi Sultan were to some extent based on the Hanafi School of Muslim Law. The revenue was broadly categorised into two by the Muslim Jurists: *Fay* and *Zakat*. *Fay* was further subdivided into *Khams*, *Jizya* and *Kharaj*. *Zakat* comprised of tax on flocks, herds, gold, silver, commercial capital, agricultural produce, etc. *Khams* represented one fifth of the booty acquired in war or mine or treasure trove (found) to be handed over to the state. *Jizya* was imposed on non-muslims "in return for which they received protection of life and property and exemption from military services". (R.P. Tripathi, *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration*, p. 339) *Kharaj* was the tax on land. Initially this tax was not levied on muslims however due to the need of the state for revenue it was later not practical to give immunity to muslims from the payment of this tax. Theoretically, the holders of *Kharaj* land were to pay land tax whether land was cultivated by them or not. The Muslim law and state followed a liberal policy towards the land holders and they could not be evicted easily and the state tried to encourage cultivation by giving them loans. These theoretical postulates got modified in actual practice in the Delhi Sultanate.

Agrarian taxation in the Delhi Sultanate

As already suggested the Muslim theory of taxation was adopted in India with modifications. We get proper information about the taxation system from the period of Alauddin Khalji. Barani in his *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* gives a description of Alauddin Khalji's agrarian policy in North India'. "The sultan decreed that 3 taxes were to be levied on the peasants viz. the *Kharaj* (also called *Kharaj-I-jizya*) or tax on cultivation; *charai*, a tax on milch cattle; and *ghari* (a tax on houses). As for *Kharaj*, all who engaged in cultivation whether of lands of large or of small extent were to be subject to (the procedure of) measurement (*masahat*) and (the fixation of) the yield per *biswa* (*wafa-I-biswa*) and were without any exception to pay half". (Irfan Habib and T.R. Choudhary (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Volume I*, p. 61). It seems that generally tax was collected in cash though it was sometimes also collected in kind for specific purposes. An important consequence of Alauddin Khalji's tax administration was that *Kharaj* or *mal* henceforth became the main source through which revenue was exacted from the peasants by the ruling class. Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq introduced changes in the earlier policy and tried to win over the peasants and village headmen by providing relief measures (exemption from additional levies, tax on cattle, etc.).

Under Muhammad Tughlaq the whole of India including Gujarat, Malwa, Deccan, South India and Bengal were brought under a monolithic taxation system. Barani points

out that *abwab* (additional cesses) were imposed on the peasants. The three taxes: *ghari*, *charai*, and *Kharaj* were strictly levied. There was thus increase in agrarian taxation. *Kharaj* was now calculated on standard yield and not actual yield of measured land for assessment in kind. For obtaining the assessment in cash instead of actual prices officially laid down prices were applied. Thus the demand rose. These measures resulted in agrarian distress. Around this time famine hit Delhi and the Doab. Muhammad Tughlaq tried to provide relief by giving the peasants *Sondhar* (agrarian loans) for encouraging cultivation through various means. Firoz Tughlaq reversed Muhammad Tughlaq's policy and many agrarian levies (*abwab*, *ghari* and *charai*) were discontinued. However, *Jizya* was imposed as a separate tax. Careful examination tells us that *Jizya* was closer to *ghari* since it was a levy on the head of the house. Firoz also imposed water tax on the villages which utilized the canals and it was one tenth of the produce. During the period of the Lodis land tax was collected in kind due to the declining price situation.

Grants (*Iqta*, *Milk*, *Idrar*)

Iqta was grant of land made from *Kharaj* land to officers called *Muqti*. *Iqta* was not hereditary and did not entitle the *Muqti* the right of ownership. They could be transferred and revoked by the Sultans. *Jizya* revenue of *Iqta* was assigned yearly whereas non *Jizya* revenue was granted for many years. The *Muqti* was assigned the duty of collecting the revenue and utilizing it for maintaining troops for the Sultan. The *Muqti* did sub allot smaller *Iqtas* for maintaining their troops. The surplus collected from *Iqta* was required to be sent to the central treasury.

Tusi (a Seljukid statesman of 11th century) in *Siyasat nama* gives the classical description of the *iqta* as follows “*Muqtis* who hold *iqtas* should know that they have no claim on the subjects/peasants (*riaya*) other than that of collecting from them in a proper manner the due mal (tax, land tax) that has been assigned to them (the *muqtis*). When the revenue has been realised from them, those subjects/peasants should remain secure from (any demands by) them (the *muqtis*) in respect of their persons, wealth, wives and children, cultivated lands (*ziya*) and goods. The *muqtis* do not have any (further) claims on them. The subjects/peasants, if they so wish, can come to the (king's) court and represent their condition. They should not be prevented from doing so. If any *muqti* does anything other than this they (the kings) take away his power (literally, cut away his hands) and resume his *iqta* and visit their wrath on him, so that others might be warned thereby. They (the *muqtis*) should in truth realise that the country and peasantry (*raiyat*), all belong to the sultan, with the *muqtis* (simply) placed at their head”. (The Cambridge Economic History, I. Habib)

During Balban's reign an attempt was made to enquire into the income of *Muqtis*. An important change took place in Alauddin Khalji's period. With the expansion of the Empire far off areas were assigned in *Iqta* and the areas closer to Delhi were brought under *Khalisa*. The Sultan's troops were now paid in cash. This practice continued till Muhammad Tughlaq's reign. The changes in the *Iqta* administration during Alauddin Khalaji's period are reflected in the following passage from Irfan Habib (*Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol.-I, pg.70). “The tax income (*Kharaj*) from each *iqta* was estimated at a particular figure by the finance department (*Diwan-i-wizarat*).

The department remained on the constant look out for an opportunity to enhance the estimate. Out of the estimated income of the *iqta* a certain amount was allowed for the pay (*mawajib*) of the troops (*hasham*) placed under the *muqti* or *wali*. The area expected to yield this amount was apparently set apart by the *Diwan*. The remainder was treated as the *muqti*'s own personal *iqta* i.e. for his own salary and the expense of his personal establishment of officials. He had to pay into the treasury all realization above the amount allowed for the pay of the army and for his own income". During Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq's time the estimated income of the *Iqta* was not raised by the finance department and the *muqtis* and other officials were allowed to appropriate for themselves small sums over and above the sanctioned income.

Under Muhammad Tughlaq the dual task of collecting revenue and maintaining soldiers was divided. The *Masalik-al-Absar* gives a detailed account of the institution of *Iqta* under Muhammad Tughlaq. It points out that "all army commanders from Khans heading 10,000 cavalry troops to *sipah salars* placed over less than 100 were assigned *iqtas* in lieu of their salaries. The estimated income of *iqta* against which the salary was adjusted was always less than the actual. The significant point is that the troops are said to have been always paid in cash by the treasury and that the *iqtas* was given only in lieu of the commanders' personal salaries". (cf. Irfan Habib and T.R. Choudhary (eds.), *Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. I*, pg. 72). Due to his policies Muhammad Tughlaq faced problems in Deogir when the *Amiran-i-sada* (centurians) became disaffected.

Firoz Tughlaq adopted the policy of remuneration of soldiers through assignment of revenue of villages known as *wajh* (a new assignment given in lieu of salaries). In cases where soldiers were not assigned *wajh*, cash salaries were paid from the treasury or through drafts on the *iqtas* of nobles which were to be drawn through the surplus payment which were due to the central treasury from the *iqtas*. These drafts could be sold at a price to speculators. The hereditary aspect was strengthened in this period as against the transfer principle. Under the Lodis the term *iqta* was still used for areas held by *wajhdars*.

Assignments of revenue of villages or lands for lifetime to the religious intelligentsia were categorized as *milk* (proprietary rights given by state), *idrar* (pension) and *inam* (gift). Grants made for the support of religious institutions like madrasas, Khanqahs, were called *waqf* (endowments). These grants were made by the Sultan both within *Iqta* and *Khalisa* through a *farman*. Economically these grants did not have much implication.

26.11 SULTANATE: A COMPLEX COHESIVE ADMINISTRATIVE NETWORK

Despite the paucity of evidence for the Delhi Sultanate, it is possible to suggest that the central political power located in the capital city asserted political hegemony over the core areas through direct control via its officers. The sultan's presence was felt most strongly over here, and was visible not only through his physical presence, but also through the complex network of officers and military retainues which worked towards maintaining sovereign royal power. The authority of the sultan also acquired more concrete forms, especially in the construction activities which were initiated at his behest.

These included architectural constructions of various types but, especially in the early phases, the building of mosques which brought the community [*ummah*] together for prayer. Through such a complex and interwoven series of symbolic and architectural activities, the newly established sultanate managed to retain its hold over a core political area and create a base for itself from where it could expand. This expansion was possible through the large army it had mustered, and whose military prowess and efficiency was kept to a level through particular offices created for the purpose. The administrative structure, along with the religious discourse of the *ulema*, therefore allowed for the creation of an obedient population upon whom sovereign political authority was exercised. This structure was kept in place through the system of the bureaucratic network established.

The same system was at work in the provinces of the sultanate, but with one important difference. Here, the central authority was exercised by a handful of officers. The internal cohesion of this body of officers was weakened by the fact that each was appointed as a check on the other, so that they may not turn recalcitrant given that they were so far removed from the centre. Further, the governor in these areas was dependent upon local officials for carrying out many of his duties, and often the 'system' established by the Delhi Sultans was actually a continuation of the prevalent 'customs' in the area, be they regarding collection of revenue or civil and criminal arbitration (traditional practices). Too much interference had the risk of fomenting opposition, which the sultan could ill-afford; therefore, it seemed tactful to work in association with the local power groups for the fulfilment of their own interests.

These two rungs of administration, at the centre and at the provinces, included a host of officers who worked to maintain imperial power and sovereignty. Of course, there were situations in which they themselves worked against their master's interests. But otherwise, it was a system which worked well to provide a cohesion to the political structure. This was significant because at a time when there were no other common binding factors within the disparate sections and regions of the entire Delhi sultanate, administrative measures and officers provided a common imperial reference point, an imperial scaffolding which held together the entire political edifice.

Finally, the various offices and posts, the land measurement and revenue assignments and the relationship with the local power brokers, etc. laid the foundation for a more intensive and integrative bureaucratic system that was to become a defining feature of the Mughal empire from the middle of the 16th century. The administrative efficiency of the Mughals would not have been possible without the foundation of it having been laid by the Delhi Sultanate in difficult conditions.

26.12 SUMMARY

With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate an altogether new system of administration was introduced at the top level with only minor changes at the local pargana and village level. The sultan enjoyed enormous powers not only over his subjects but also over nobles and officials. In Delhi and its immediate environs the power and authority of Sultan was most visible and it can therefore be considered as the core region. In the outlying, distant territories and provinces also the authority of Sultan prevailed but it was limited depending on the officers governing the provinces. During the initial phase of the Sultanate the nobles shared authority with the Sultan but from the time of Balban

and to the period of Khalji and Tughlaq rule the Sultan emerged as all powerful. The Ulema or the learned sections had only a limited role in the administrative process.

The administrative apparatus of the Sultanate was a blend of West Asian, Central Asian and local traditions. Two distinct components emerged i.e. the central administration and provincial and local administration. The central administration was organised through various departments headed by senior nobles. The important departments were *wizarat*, *Diwan-i-arz*, *Diwan-i-insha*, *Diwan-i-riyasat*, *Diwan-i-risalat* and *Diwan-i-qada*. The provincial administration was entrusted to the governors (*Wali* or *muqti*) who worked in collaboration with the local officials and superior right holders (who had traditionally enjoyed customary rights prior to the establishment of the Sultanate). The local administration along with customary officials were allowed to continue after making minor adjustments and working out new relationships.

The most significant new institution that evolved and played an important role in effective governance was the *Iqta* system. *Iqta* was a territorial assignment given to the officials in lieu of their salaries. The holders of *iqtas* were called *muqtis* and enjoyed their position as long as the Sultan wished. They had no hereditary claim and were subject to transfer at the will of the Sultan. They were entrusted with the responsibility of collecting revenue and administering the territories assigned. They were also required to maintain a certain number of soldiers which were to be placed at the service of Sultan when needed. The holders of large territories were almost akin to provincial governor and the nomenclature applied to them was *iqtadar*, *muqti* or *wali*.

A separate department *diwan-i-arz* looked after the organisation and supervision of army. The department maintained exclusive contingents as the Sultan's army. It also supervised the contingents of the *muqtis*.

Since land revenue was the main source of the income of the State its administration was given priority. Officials were appointed to look after assessment and collection of revenue from the lands either directly administered by the centre or assigned to *iqta* holders.

The Sultanate managed to develop a complex cohesive administrative network which could sustain it, with fluctuating actual control, for over three hundred years of its existence.

26.13 EXERCISES

- 1) Discuss the nature of the administrative apparatus of the Delhi Sultanate.
- 2) Describe the provincial and local administration under the Delhi Sultans.