UNIT 11 : ADMINISTRATION OF THE DELHI SULTANATE

UNIT STRUCTURE

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11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- explain the administrative mechanism that functioned under the Delhi Sultanate,
- discuss the responsibilities and duties of the ministers under the various departments, and
- describe the influence of Islam on the administrative structure and functioning during the Sultanate period

11.2 INTRODUCTION

The administration initiated by the Delhi Sultans was quite different from the earlier ones. It was largely influenced by the principles of the general Islamic administration of the world. At the same time, in India, the Sultans did not always try to impose their way of governance on the Indian people.

On many occasions, they allowed the indigenous people to retain their own laws. In this unit you will have references to different branches of administration like central, provincial, revenue, military, judiciary etc under the Delhi Sultanate.

The administrative mechanism of the Delhi Sultanate was revolved round the *iqta* system. Moreover, different ruling dynasties under the Delhi Sultanate came to India at different times from different places of Asia. The Delhi Sultans naturally based their administration on the teachings of the Quran.



LET US KNOW

Iqta: Iqta literally means "portion". It was a land or revenue assigned to the nobles in lieu of service to the state.

11.3 CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

In India, under the Delhi Sultanate, the Sultans were the heads of their governments. Here also the forms of election were maintained. A person had to secure the consent of the nobles and influential jurists of Delhi to become the Sultan. The post of Sultan was not hereditary in India. It was an elected post. Of course, priority was first given to the eldest son of the deceased Sultan. Moreover, a Sultan could be deposed under certain circumstances. These were-

- If a Sultan failed to carry out his trust,
- If a Sultan lost the power of judgment, and
- If a Sultan lost his physical ability.

Duties of the Sultan: The Delhi Sultans modelled their administrations with the Caliphs. So, they had to perform the same functions which were performed by the Caliph in his Caliphate. Following were some of the important duties of the Sultans in India.

- To protect the principles of Islam
- To defend the territories of Islam
- To settle disputes among his subjects
- To enforce criminal law
- To strengthen the frontiers of Muslim territory
- To wage holy wars against the enemies of Islam
- To collect taxes.

LET US KNOW



Caliphs: it is the title borne by the leader of the Islamic world. The first Caliph was Abu Bakr who succeeded Mohammad in 632. When the Ottomans ousted the rule of Abbasids in 1517, the title was borne by the former till 1922 after which it was abolished in 1924.

The Ministers:

Civil Administration- the Wazir: Under the Delhi Sultanate the Sultan was the head of his government. He was assisted by a number of ministers of different ranks and status. The head of the civil administration was known as the *Wazir.* His department was known as the *Diwan-i-Wizarat.* The Wazir had to perform two main duties. *Firstly,* he was the central finance officer at the head quarters. So, collection of revenue was his main responsibility.. Moreover, he controlled various expenditures. His subordinate officers compared, checked and passed accounts of various government departments. Secondly, the Wazir had to supervise the workings of other offices at the headquarters. He appointed the civil servants at different departments. Apart from this, the Wazir had to perform some important miscellaneous functions. Some of them were-

- The Wazir had to meet all requirements of the military department. His office kept all military accounts, disbursed salaries among the officers and allotted land assignments.
- The office of the Wazir paid stipends to scholars and learned men.
- The office of the Wazir distributed money among the poor and the needy.

Assistant Officers: In order to shoulder many important responsibilities of various natures, the Wazir had to take the help of a few other important officers. The chief assistant of the Wazir was known as the *Naib Wazir.* Next to him was *Munsif-i-Mumalik.* Initially his duty was to enter the accounts and expenditures received from various departments. But Firuz Shah Tughlaq (1351-1388 A.D.) released him of his duty of recording expenditure. *The Munsif-i-Mumalik,* again, was assisted by a *Nazir.* He supervised the collection of revenue and audited the local revenue. Another officer, known as *Mustaufi-i-Mumalik* audited the accounts of the office of *Musrif.* Firuz Shah directed him to deal with expenditures of different departments.

Different Ministries: Apart from the office of the Diwan-i-Wizarat, there were three other main ministries. Following are these ministries and their functions.

I. **Diwan-i-Risalat:** It was headed by a minister known as *Sadr-us-Sudur.* This ministry dealt with religious matters, pious foundations, stipends to pious men etc. The Sadr-us Sudur was also the *Qazi -i-Mumalik* and controlled the department of justice

II. **Diwan-i-Arz:** The minister of this department was known as the *Ariz-i-Mumalik.* He was the controller general and inspector general of the military department.

III. **Diwan-i-Insha:** This ministry dealt with all types of formal and confidential correspondences. The minister of this department was known as *Dabir-i-Khas*.

Another important minister of the Sultanate was *Barid-i-Mumalik.* He was the head of the state news agency. He had to collect the information of all the important events of the state.



LET US KNOW

The ministries of *Diwan-i-Wizarat, Diwan-i-Risalat, Diwan-i-Arz* and *Diwan-i-Insha* were the main strength under the Delhi Sultanate. They were often compared to the **four pillars** *of the administration.*

Status of the Ministers: You know that the Delhi Sultans were elected. But, they enjoyed tremendous administrative power and authority. No individual, even the ministers, could question his wishes unless it went against the Shari'a or the Islamic law. The ministers of the Delhi Sultans were like their servants like any other officers. The ministers enjoyed their capacities only as the heads of their departments. Although they were experts in their own fields yet they did not enjoy any autonomy. They carried out the wills of their Sultans.

Household Officers of the Sultans: The personal officers, the Sultan's body guards, personal attendants etc. were placed under a *Wakil-i-Dar.* He supervised the payments of the salaries and allowances of such officers. Another officer called *Amir-i-Hajib* supervised the ceremonial works at the court. The royal household also had traditionally thirty six *karkhanas.* Their main task was to produce commodities for court use and the army. Different officers were appointed to look at different works of these karkhanas. One of such officers was *Khurbek.* He supervised the breeding of the horses for the army.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

1. Who was known as Dabir-i-Khas?

   .....

2. Who was the chief assistant of the Wazir?

   .....

3. Name the four pillars of the Mughal administration.

   .....

4. Who supervised the breeding of the horses for the army?

   .....

11.4 PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

The empire of the Delhi Sultans was divided into many provinces. It also included many tributary states. As long as these tributary states did nothing against the policies of the Sultans, they were allowed to manage their own affairs. The duties of the rulers of these tributary states were clearly defined by the Sultans. These were-

- To protect imperial officials,
- To protect Muslim residents, and
- To give good administration to the subjects

The Governors and their Powers: There were two types of provinces under the Delhi Sultanate. Some of them enjoyed limited powers and the other practically unlimited powers. Each province was administered by a Governor. The Governors were appointed by the Sultans. Bengal was the furthest province of the empire. At that time, the system of communication and transportation was also not as it is today. It was really very difficult to control each activity of the Governor of Bengal from Delhi. So, the Governors of Bengal enjoyed unlimited powers. They were just like semi-independent rulers. They had to pay regular tributes to the Sultans and provide good administration to the subjects. As long as they satisfied these, the Sultans did not interfere in their administrations. At that time, tribute was usually in the form of elephants from Bengal.

The second category of provinces enjoyed limited powers. Most of the provinces of the empire fell under this category. Here, the Governors were under the full control of the Sultans. Their powers were clearly defined. Certain specific provisions were made to control their authority.

Firstly, they were to act only with the help of some other executive officers in all departments. These were same with those of the central government. The Sultans had all say in the appointment of such officers. Secondly, the ministers of the central governments had control over the same departments in the states. Thirdly, although each province had its

own army but the Governors had no direct control over it. The provincial army was placed under local officers called Arizs. They were responsible not to the local Governors but to an officer called Ariz-i-Mumalik. He was an officer of the central government. So, the Sultans had many ways to control the powers of the provincial Governors.

Divisions of the Provinces: For good administration each province was divided into *shiqs*. These were put under Shiqdars. However, taking advantage of the Sultans from time to time, provincial dynasties grew in many provinces. The shiqs then emerged as sarkars. Then each sarkar was divided into many parganas. The governments maintained direct relation with the peasants only through the parganas. The main official of a pargana was an Amil, who was later called Shiqdar; a Mushrif or Amin who was also called Munshif, a treasurer, two Karkuns and a Qanungo. These officers performed the following duties-

- The Amil: He was the head of the pargana administration.
- The Mushrif: He was the chief assessment officer.
- The Treasurer: He was the collector of revenues.
- The Karkuns: They were the registrars of the parganas.
- The Qanungo: They maintained previous records of the produced in their provinces.

LET US KNOW



The smallest unit of administration in a province was a village. So, apart from officers in the provinces, Chaudhuries were appointed. They often informed the administration about the conditions and needs of the peasants. The village accountant was known as the Patwari. He kept records of the village produce, cultivation and state demand as taxes.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

5. What was the form of tribute sent from Bengal to the Delhi Sultans?

.....

6. Who were the Karkuns?

.....

7. What is meant by shiqs?

.....

4.5 LAND REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

Good administration was the topmost priority of the Delhi Sultans. A good administration is impossible without a good economy. Under the Delhi Sultanate, therefore, the financial resources of the state were clearly defined. The main source of state income was agriculture. There were two different methods of assessment of agricultural produce. One was sharing; the other one was appraisement or measurement. The appraisement system was based on a system under which the average produce of each sub-division was counted. Then, the probable produce of an area was calculated. It was then estimated how much were to be produced by an individual peasant. Before Ala-ud-din-Khalji (1296-1316 A.D.) the Delhi Sultans demanded one fifth of the total produce as the state share. Alaud-din-Khalji raised it to half of the total produce of a peasant. However, after his death the state share was again reduced to one fifth. Later, Muhammad-bin-Tuhglaq (1325-1351 A.D.) tried to increase the state share rapidly in the more fertile Gangetic Doab region.

Apart from land revenue, the other sources of income of the Delhi Sultans were

- Import duties on foreign goods
- State share in spoils of war

- Taxes on mines and treasure-troves with pre-Muslim coins

The import duties were collected between two and half and ten percent. The state spoils of war and taxes on mines were fixed at twenty percent.

Apart from these taxes, two different taxes were imposed on the Muslims and the Hindus separately. The Muslim subjects had to pay a tax called Zakat. On the other hand,a capitation tax was levied on the Hindus. It was called Jizya. It varied on the wealth of the tax payer. It was levied at the rate of either ten, twenty or forty tankas per year. You have already been told that the Delhi Sultans granted the right of worship to the non-Muslims. Now, you may wonder, if it was so, then why was Jizya imposed only on the Hindus? Well, the reason is that, under the Delhi Sultanate, theoretically, military service was compulsory for all the Muslims. But, for the Hindus it was only voluntary. Jizya was charged in lieu of military service. So, it was imposed on the Hindus but the Muslims had no question of paying Jizya.

LET US KNOW



Jizya was not imposed on all sections of the Hindus. The following sections were exempted from paying Jizya - women, children, government servants, monks and priests who did not earn for living, imbecile old men, cripples, blind and poor.

11.6 LAW AND ORDER ADMINISTRATION

- **ARMY**

The Delhi Sultans made elaborate arrangements for a strong army. The army was headed by the Sultan. However, the General of the Army was known as Ariz-i-Mumalik. His duty was to keep up the strength and efficiency of the forces. He also had to provide equipment, horses and rations. He had to maintain the descriptive roll of each soldier. The army was posted on the frontiers. It was also posted on places from where it was easy for them to move, to deal with internal disturbances.

The army had three main divisions- cavalry, elephantry and infantry.

Cavalry was the main division of the army. The system of branding of horses was introduced by Ala-ud-din-Khalji. Elephantry also played an important part in the army of the Delhi Sultanate. However, the infantry was given secondary importance by the Delhi Sultans. The use of fire arms was known since the days of Ala-ud-din-Khalji. Apart from the fighting soldiers every army had some divisions of engineers, scouts, doctors etc.



LET US KNOW

The Sultans of Delhi took adequate steps to prevent the monopoly of any particular race in the army. So, their army had soldiers from almost all possible races - the Turks, Afgans, Persians, Mongols and even the Indians.

- **JUDICIARY**

Islamic Polity-Shari'a: The judiciary of the Delhi Sultanate was based on the conception of Shari'a or Islamic law. Both the monarchs and the subjects were subordinate to it. The Shari'a was mainly based on the principles of the Quran. The Shari'a had three elements. These were-

- The *Quran* or the holy book,
- The *Hadis* or reliable traditions
- The *Ijma* or consensus of opinion of the Muslim jurists.

Thus, we can observe that apart from a written book Shari'a was also developed by the interpretations of judges. In course of time, it gave rise to several schools of law in Islam. Each had its own characteristics. The orthodox Islam, which is generally called Sunnism, evolved four main schools of law. They were- *Hanbali, Maliki, Shafii,* and *Hanafi*.

Law governing Non-Muslims: The Shari'a laid down three broad principles regarding the non-Muslims of a Muslim state. Firstly, the non-Muslims should not rebel against their Muslim rulers. Secondly, they had to

pay a tax called Jizya. Thirdly, any of the zimmi could go to an Islamic court, if he/she wanted to do so. Normally cases were decided by the personal law of the zimmis.



LET US KNOW

Zimmi: The Hindus were termed as zimmi who were protected or tolerated.

In India, Islamic criminal law was generally applied. Interestingly, when it came into conflict with the moral notion of the Indians, Islamic law was not applied there. Again, the Muslim jurists did not expect the same respect to Islamic law from a Hindu (zimmi) like a Muslim. So, the punishment for criminal offence was lighter for a Hindu than for a Muslim.

The Courts: The Sultan was the enforcer of law in India. He exercised three major functions. These were-

- The Sultan was the arbitrator of disputes between his subjects,
- He was the head of the bureaucracy, and
- He was the commander of the army.

So, all the justice delivered in his territory was in the name of the Sultan. The Sultan was the head of the judiciary and the judges were subordinate to him

In the delivery of justice, the Sultan was assisted by an officer called Diwan-i-Qaza. Another officer called Diwan-i-Mazalim settled disputes involving bureaucrats. The military trials were conducted by Diwan-i-Siyasat. It consisted of eminent lawyers. However, only the Sultan could offer capital punishment to an offender.

The disputes between two civilians were tried by Qaza-i-Mumalik. He was assisted by his deputies in the capitals or the provinces and Qazis in each important town. It was the duty of the chief Qazi to find out the facts

and apply law. An officer called Amirdad had to bring the accused to the courts. The Kotwals were the heads of the police administration in every town. In case of a dispute, an officer called Muhtasib along with the Kotwal carried out initial investigation. The system of appeal from a lower court to a higher court existed during the Delhi Sultanate. The Sultans allowed the Panchayats to exist in the village level. The Sultans did not usually interfere in the works of Panchayats or Qazis.

LET US KNOW



In India, the Muslims and the non-Muslims were governed by separate laws. For example, committing suicide was an offence under the Muslim criminal law. But, the Sultans tolerated the practices like *jauhar* or *sati*. However, nobody was allowed to forcefully compel a woman to commit *jauhar* or sati and prior permission of the government was mandatory in such cases.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

8. Who headed the Judiciary department?

.....

9. What was the function of Diwan-i-Siyasat?

.....

10. Who settled the disputes between two civilians?

.....



11.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this Unit, you have learnt that–

- The Sultan was the head of the government and though his position was not hereditary, the Sultan yielded much power and authority.
- Islam played a definite role in the administration of law and order.
- The entire administration was distributed widely among the different ministers, each entrusted with separate roles and responsibilities.



11.8 FURTHER READING

1) Chandra, Satish. (Reprint 2008): *Medieval India: From Sultanate to the Mughals, Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) Part one.* New Delhi, India: Har-Anand Publications Pvt. Ltd

2) Mazumdar, R. C. (1990). *The Delhi Sultanate.* Bombay, India: Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan.

3) Prasad, Iswari (1940). *History of Medieval India.* New Delhi, India: Indian Press.



11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Q. No. 1: The minister of the department of Dewan-i-Insha was called Dabir-i-Khas.

Answers to Q. No. 2: Naib Wazir

Answers to Q. No. 3: Diwan-i-Wizarat, Diwan-i-Risalat, Diwan-i-Arz and Diwan-i-Insha

Answers to Q. No. 4: Khurbek

Answers to Q. No. 5: Elephants

Answers to Q. No. 6: Registrar of the Parganas

Answers to Q. No. 7: Shiqqs were provincial division made for the proper administration

Answers to Q. No. 8: The Sultan

Answers to Q. No. 9: To conduct military trials.

Answers to Q. No. 10: Qazi-i-Mumalik.



11.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

(A) Very Short Question (answer within 50 words):

Q.1. Who were the Patwaris?

Q.2. What was the function of Amirdad?

Q.3. Why was the Jizya charged only from the Hindus?

(B) Short Questions (answer within 150 words):

Q.1. Under what circumstances can the Sultan be deposed?

Q.2. What was the function of the Wazir?

Q.3. In what ways was the power of the provincial Governors limited?

(C) Long Questions (answer within 300-500 words):

Q.1. Discuss the judicial administration of the Delhi Sultanate.

Q.2. Describe the power of the Sultan in the administrative machinery and the limits in exercising those powers.

Q.3. Elaborate on the centralised administrative structure under the Delhi Sultanate.

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