

# VIVEKANANDA COLLEGE THAKURPUKUR KOLKATA-700063

NAAC ACCREDITED 'A' GRADE



Topic: **"Sher Shah was a reformer and not an innovator"-Do you agree?**

Course Title: **History of India (c 1526-1605)**

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7) "Sher Shah was a reformer and not an innovator" - Do you agree?

A brave warrior and a successful conqueror Sher Shah was the architect of a well-organised administrative system. That he was among the greatest administrators of medieval India is beyond question. But still a great controversy centres round the question whether, in the field of administration, he was only a reformer or an innovator. Historians have given different answers to the question. According to Mr. Keene, "No government - not even the British has shown so much wisdom as this Pathan." W. H. Moreland considers Sher Shah to be "one of the outstanding administrators of Muslim India. Historian Prof. Kaliranjana Sanungo is of the opinion that Sher Shah was a greater constructive genius and a better nation builder than even Akbar the great. On the other hand, some scholars, notably Dr. R. P. Tripathi and Dr. P. Saran, have opined that his achievement as a ruler have been very much exaggerated and that he was, in fact, a reformer not an innovator. Taking into careful consideration these controversial views expressed by the eminent scholars we have to judge the merit of Sher Shah as an administrator.

Central Government: There was practically no institutional change in the structure of the

central govt. Like all rulers of the Sultanate of Delhi Sher Shah was a despot, concentrating all civil and military powers in his own hands. But unlike his predecessors, he was a benevolent despot, exercising power for the benefit of the people. Sher Shah had four ministers after the model of the Sultanate period. They were (1) 'Diwan-i-Wazirat' (primarily dealt with finance), (2) 'Diwan-i-Ariz' (looked after the recruitment, organisation and payment of the army); (3) 'Diwan-i-Rasalat' (dealt with religious matters, pious foundations, stipends to deserving scholars and men of piety), (4) 'Diwan-i-Insha' (dealing with court correspondence).

The other departments, which were sometimes reckoned as ministers, were 'Diwan-i-Qaza' and 'Diwan-i-Barid'.

It will thus, be seen that the machinery of the central govt. was exactly the same as under earlier Sultanates of Delhi.

Provincial Government:- Like the early Turks and the Lodis Sher Shah had no definite ideas about provincial organisation. While on the one side there were large provinces as Malwa and the Punjab, on the other there were small divisions into which the whole country from Delhi to Bihar was divided. The case of Bengal stands alone. But even in Bengal no radical reorgan but only an intelligent systematization of the time-honoured system of the region was possible.

in the circumstances prevailing at that time. To quote prof. Banungo, "In Bengal Sher was more concerned to systematize than innovate". According to prof. Banungo, Sher Shah could not think of any other administrative division than 'Sarkar' as the biggest unit which had been introduced into the Lodi Sultanate. According to prof. Banungo Sher appointed a chief 'Shiqdar', a chief 'Munsiff' and a 'Bazi' over each 'Sarkar'.

There was no intermediate administrative unit between the 'Sarkar' and the 'Pargana'. As before a Pargana consisting of several villages remained the effective unit of administration. Over each 'Pargana' there were one Shiqdar, one 'amil', one 'jotahdar' and two clerks, one to write accounts in Hindi and the other in Persian. The duties of the 'Sarkar' and the 'Pargana' staff in Bengal must have corresponded to those in other parts of Sher Shah's empire. The 'Shiqdar' and the 'amil' discharged the duties of the magistrate and collector respectively at the 'Pargana' level. According to Dr. Tripathi, the idea of making the Pargana a unit, and of keeping revenue or civil affairs separate from the police and military, was not the creation of Sher Shah, it had come as a lag from the early Turks.

Land Revenue Administration:- The land revenue system of Sher Shah had many salient features, new and original, and it served as a model for future agrarian systems in India.

most important contribution in this field seems to have been the introduction of ray or schedule of the crop-rates of assessment. The good, the middle and the poor produce, from a bigha of all the leading crops of each of the two seasons were taken into consideration. By adding the good, middling and poor produce of a 'Bigha' and dividing the total by three, an average of the produce of a 'bigha' was arrived at. One third of the average produce was fixed as the state-share. The govt. revenue could be paid either in cash or kind, but the former mode was preferred. According to Dr. Tripathi the absence of any previous reference to pay in the reigns of Sultans of Delhi might suggest that it was Sher Shah who introduced it in India.

From his experience in the 'jagir' of Sasaram in his early days Sher Shah came to the conclusion that measurement was by far the better system than division of crops. He of course instructed the local officials to realise the revenue by measurement. In this respect his ideas were similar to those of 'Alauddin Khilji' and Muhammad Shah Tughlaq. Besides local measurement Sher Shah ordered a general survey of the land for the use of central Govt. On the basis of the general survey a register was prepared in which were entered the rights of owners and the measurement of all cultivated pieces of land and their different classes. His

general survey gave him a good basis for fixing a new jama which probably was not done by the syyads and lodis.

Sher Shah considered agriculture to be the main source of prosperity of his empire, and therefore, he took special interest in the welfare of the cultivators and took steps against any oppression or harassment to them. Each cultivator received from the state a "patta" which recognised his revenue dues. In return, he had to sign a "qabuliyat" indicating his consent to pay the revenue dues. Sher Shah instructed his revenue official to be lenient in assessment but to be strict in collection. Sher Shah's currency and tariff reforms contributed a great deal towards the improvement of the economic condition of ~~the economic condition~~ of country. He also facilitated trade and commerce by abolishing many vexatious customs and permitting the imposition of customs on articles of trade only at the frontiers and in the places of sale. For the purpose of imperial defence, as well as for the convenience of the peoples Sher Shah connected the important places of his kingdom by a chain of excellent roads.

To sum up, in the administrative machinery Sher Shah did not introduce any notable change. He did not create any new ministry, his administrative divisions and sub-divisions were borrowed from the past as

also the title of his officers. He did not also introduce anything new either in administration of justice or in judicial organisation. His system of espionage and "dak charki" were borrowed from his predecessors. In regard to the army Sher Shah revived the system of "Alauddin Khalji" with improvements. We do not find anything entirely new or original in his elaborate regulations except in certain features of his land revenue system. He was thus more a reformer than an innovator. Although Sher Shah was primarily a reformer he infused a new spirit into the old institutions and even improved ~~and~~ them by eliminating deficiencies and sometimes adding new elements.