

Sher Shah

Dak Chowkis: -

Dak Chowkis were posts meant for carrying news and messages from one place to another. It was by means of these '*chowkies*' that rulers like Sher Shah could keep himself informed about the events in his vast empire.

Patta: -

Sher Shah Suri is known for his revenue reforms. To save the peasants from being cheated, they were given a written record of their sown area, type of crop and the payable revenue. This written deed was known as '*Patta*'.

Chehra: -

Chehra means descriptive roll of soldiers such as his name, parentage, height, village and some identification mark which were recorded by Sher Shah with great precision. This record of '*Chehra*' or description roll ruled out the possibility of any malpractice in his army.

Dagh: -

'Dagh' was the practice of branding the horses with the imperial mark so that horses of superior qualities were not substituted by horses of inferior quality. This practice of branding animals is still prevalent.

Jazia: -

'Jazia' was a discriminatory tax that the Muslim rulers charged from their non-Muslim subjects, particularly Hindus. Women and young children were, however, exempt from this tax

Steps taken by Sher Shah to promote trade and commerce:

The following measures were adopted by Sher Shah to promote trade and commerce:

1. **Construction of Roads.** Sher Shah got constructed several roads. G.T. road connected Sonargaon with Attock, another road connected Agra and Chittor, the third one connected Jodhpur with Agra and a fourth one connected Lahore with Multan. Shady trees were planted on either side of the roads. Sarais were got built and wells were sunk. All these steps greatly promoted trade and commerce.

2. **Maintenance of Law and Order.** Keeping in view the Promotion of trade and commerce, Sher Shah established law and order in the country. He persecuted the thieves and dacoits. He was also very hard with the Jagirdars so that they might not rise in revolt. In this way, law and order was fully established which greatly helped in increasing trade and commerce.

3. **Construction of Sarais.** Sher Shah got constructed Sarais at every two '*kos*' distance. He made separate arrangements for the stay of Hindus and Musalmans. These facilities encouraged trade and commerce. Many townships sprang up around the *sarais* which became great centres of trade. The farmers could easily sell their commodities at these centres.

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4. Good Dealing with the Traders. Sher Shah issued instructions to his officers that they should treat the traders and the travelers nicely. They should not harass them. The Muqaddams were held responsible for the property and person of the traders. In case of loss of life or property the Muqaddams were held responsible.

5. Removing the undesired Taxes. Sher Shah removed many unwanted taxes which he thought quite unnecessary. The merchants had to pay the octroi duty at many places. He removed them. In their place octroi duty was charged at two places only-once when a certain commodity entered the country and again when that commodity was put to sale. These concessions increased the prospects of trade.

6. Improvement of the Currency. Before Sher Shah, the coins of mixed alloys were in vogue. The foreign traders hesitated to accept these coins. It resulted in the loss of trade. Therefore, Sher Shah issued pure copper, silver and gold coins in place of old coins as well as coins of mixed alloys.

7. New Weight and Measures. In order to check corruption in respect of weights and measures, Sher Shah introduced new weights and measures which were more dependable. This step also proved quite helpful in promoting trade and commerce.

The administration of Sher Shah Suri:

Sher Shah was not only a great conqueror but also a great administrator. In fact, he was the first Muslim ruler who paid attention towards the administration and welfare of his subjects

- 1. Central Administration.** Sher Shah himself headed the Central Administration. All the military and administrative powers of the state rested with him. He was completely an autocratic ruler. He could change his officials and ministers at will. In order to run his Central Administration effectively, he had divided the administration into many departments. Each department was under a minister. Many clerks and secretaries assisted him in his work. Sher Shah was himself very painstaking. He supervised the work of each ministry. His main object was to improve the lot of the people.
- 2. Provincial Administration.** Sher Shah divided his whole kingdom into 47 *Sarkars*. Each *Sarkar* was divided into Parganas. He appointed very able officers in the Sarkars and the Parganas. The chief officials of the Sarkar were *Shiqdar-i-Shiqdaran* and *Munsif-i-Munsifan*. They looked after the general administration and justice. In each Pargana there was Shiqdar, Munsif, Amin, Khazanchi etc. The Pargana was further divided into several villages and their administration was in the hands of the Panchayats. These officers were changed frequently so that they did not become very influential in their areas. Sher Shah treated such officers very strictly who were inefficient and accepted bribes.
- 3. Land Revenue System.** Sher Shah was the first Muslim ruler who got the land measured and fixed the amount of the land revenue. The land of each peasant was first measured in bighas and then the land revenue was fixed between 1/3 to 1/4 of the total produce. Everyone was given the option to pay the land revenue in cash or kind. The

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cultivators could deposit the same straight in the state treasury. Sher Shah had given instructions to his revenue officers that at the time of assessment they should take a lenient view but they were asked not to show any leniency at the time of the realization of the revenue. It was kept in view that no one was a loser in the deal. At the time of famine or drought, the state helped the cultivators. Sher Shah had given instructions to his soldiers, that at the time of campaigns, too, standing crops should not be damaged. The damages made during the war-operations were compensated by the Government.

4. **Military Reforms.** In order to reorganise his army and to maintain efficiency, Sher Shah introduced many reforms. Before him, only the Jagirdars kept soldiers and sent them at the time of need. But these soldiers cared more for the Jagirdars because the ruler had no direct link with them moreover, the Jagirdars became so powerful that they thought of capturing power by one way or the other. But Sher Shah established direct links with the soldiers and made them loyal to the crown. He himself recruited every soldier, promoted or demoted him. He removed those soldiers who were not up to the mark. He gave cash salary to his soldiers. He himself fixed the salary of each soldier. He introduced the systems of writing descriptive rolls of the troopers and branding of horses so that no one could deceive the Emperor. He divided his army into two parts. He kept one part of the army under his direct command which was kept in the capital. This army included 1,50,000 cavalry, 25,000 infantry, 3,000 war-elephants and several cannons. Besides that he set up several cantonments in different parts of the country and each was put under an army officer called Faujdar. Special stress was laid on the control and supervision of the soldiers. If any soldier damaged crops, his ears were chopped off
5. **Police Administration.** Sher Shah's police arrangements were also very good. If there was any incident of theft, the Muqaddam or the Lambardar of that village was held responsible. They had to trace out the thieves or make up the losses. In case of murder, they had to trace out the murderer or themselves had to go to the gallows. The travelers could travel without any risk throughout the length and breadth of the country.
6. **The Spy System.** Sher Shah improved the spy system along with the police system. In order to be always well-informed, Sher Shah appointed many trained spies. They kept a close watch on those officers who committed atrocities on the people. The Emperor was also able to watch the activities of the officers and nobles who had rebellious intentions. He was also able to put an end to the mutual quarrels of the Afghan nobility. No one dared to conspire or rebel against the emperor. Besides these spies, Sher Shah also appointed another officer called the "*Muthashib* " to raise the ethical standard of the people.
7. **The Judicial System.** Sher Shah was also a great lover of Justice. He treated the rich, poor, low, high, the Hindus and the Muslims on equal footing. No one could exploit his high position in the matter of justice. When his son Adil humiliated a lady of Agra, he did not even spare him. The punishments were very hard. For theft, bribery and robbery the capital punishment was awarded. Thus, Sher Shah's judicial system was very admirable.

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- 8. Road and Sarais.** In order to promote trade and commerce, to transport the soldiers from one place to another and for the comfort of the travelers he got constructed many roads. Shady trees were planted on either side of the roads. Sarais were built at a distance of two kos where arrangement was made for separate kitchens for the Hindus and the Muslims. The most important roads built during his reign, were as follows : (i) The Grand Trunk Road which linked East Bengal (Sonargaon) with Attock on the North Western Frontier, (ii) the second road was from Agra to Burhanpur, (iii) the third road stretched from Agra to Jodhpur and Chittor and (iv) the fourth was from Lahore to Multan. These roads facilitated the traffic very much and resulted in a great increase in trade and commerce and greatly improved the economic condition of the state as well as that of the people.
- 9. Pure Coins.** Before Sher Shah, the coins were not made of pure alloys. They were always of mixed alloys. Sher Shah made changes in the coins and brought out coins of pure gold and silver. These coins were later on adopted not only by Akbar alone but also by the English. The issue of new coinage greatly added to the prestige of the country.
- 10. Encouragement to Trade.** Sher Shah encouraged trade in the country by maintaining law order, by construction roads and by issuing and introducing new coinage. Besides this, he did much more. He removed many obnoxious taxes and asked his officials to help the traders in every possible way.
- 11. Dak Administration.** By building roads and *sarais* at short distances, Sher Shah had another thing in view. He used the *sarais* as dak posts. At each dak-post two horse-riders always got ready. They carried the dak from one post to the next post. Thus, Sher Shah was able to get information of the far-flung provinces in a short time. Consequently, he could keep good control over the country.
- 12. Charitable Endowments and Grants.** Sher Shah got opened many *Makhtabs* and *Madarsas* (or Arabic and Persian schools) and helped them very liberally. He fixed scholarships for the students and the teachers. He said that it was the duty of the king that he should remove the grievances of the poor and the destitute. He opened many free kitchens where the poor and the destitutes were served food free of cost. It is estimated that he spent about 80,000 *Ashrafis* on these free kitchens every year. In fact, he treated his subjects as his own children.
- 13. Sher Shah's Buildings.** Sher Shah was a great architect. Within a short span of five years, he created some very fine specimens of architecture. On the bank of river Jhelum, he got built a fort at Rohtas. He got constructed the new township of Delhi. A mosque inside the Purana Qila of Delhi is still there with its full magnificence and grandeur. Sher Shah's famous tomb at Sahasram was built in his life-time. This tomb is situated in the midst of a lake at a raised platform. It is considered as one the best pieces of architecture of his times.

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Character and achievements of Sher Shah Suri.

Sher Shah Suri is counted among the few great rulers of Indian history. He was hard working, a great warrior, administrator of repute, patron of art and literature and a nation builder. He practised religious toleration and had a great love for his subjects. His policy was framed on the basis of public utility. He set up a vast empire in India.

1. **As a Man.** Sher Shah was a man of versatile genius. Because of his personal qualities, he became an independent ruler from a petty chief. He was very hard working and never lost time in useless pursuits. He himself supervised most of the official work. He had sympathy for the poor and the aggrieved. He always kept himself in readiness to help the needy. He had no taste for sexual vagaries. No doubt, he had one short-coming. In order to fulfill his ambition, he sometimes resorted to deceitful means. In 1542, when Humayun advanced towards him, he put him off with a deceit. Similarly, when he could not succeed against Maldev of Jodhpur, he took to deceit by throwing a fictitious letter near the camp of Maldev.
2. **As a General.** Sher Shah was a courageous soldier and a great general. He had gained sufficient experience by serving under different rulers and Subedars. While serving under Babur, he observed the short-comings of the Mughal soldiers. He defeated Humayun with his military ability and efficiency. He succeeded in ousting Humayun from Hindustan. Later on, he conquered the whole of North India. He fully proved his military skill. He could well understand the problems of his soldiers. They also loved him from the core of their hearts.
3. **As an Administrator.** Sher Shah Suri's greatness lies in the fact that he was an able administrator. He is counted among the best administrators of Medieval India.
4. **As a Religious Leader.** Sher Shah treated all equally irrespective of their religious affiliations. He never took to religious indiscrimination while administering justice.
5. **Lover of Art and Literature.** Sher Shah was a great lover of art and literature. For the propagation of education, he got opened many " *Maktabas*" and " *Madarsas*". He fixed scholarships for the students and the teachers. He also paid a special attention towards the erection of some fine buildings. He got constructed many towns, forts, bridges and beautiful buildings. His tomb at Sahasram is unique for its beauty and design.
6. **As a Well-wisher of People.** There is absolutely no-doubt that Sher Shah was a ruler with absolute powers. But even then he looked after the interests of the people. He served the people in the true sense of the word. He removed lawlessness and anarchy and maintained law and order. He got built roads and sarais for the benefit of the common people. He protected his people from the thieves and the dacoits. In fact, Sher Shah's administration was based on the fare of the people.
7. **As a Nation-builder.** Sher Shah Suri was a renowned diplomat and a nation-builder :
(i) He removed the mutual differences of the Afghan nobility and united them. (ii) He treated both the Hindus and the Muslims on equal footings. He was able to awaken national feelings among his subjects. (iii) He brought people of all regions closer to each

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other by constructing roads in different parts of the country. It helped in the development of the national feeling. (iv) By treating the rich and the poor alike, he brought about national integrity, (v) Sher Shah granted security of life and property which helped in the development of national feelings. On the basis of these facts, Sher Shah deserves the title of a nation-builder.

