

Getting entwined in a serious quarrel with Sher Khan—which was to last for many years—Humayun tried to besiege the fortress of Chunar in 1532 CE, which was yet another failure. Thereafter he conquered Malwa and Gujarat, but failed to establish complete control over them. Without completing the conquest of the fortress of Chunar, Humayun rushed towards Bengal to assist Sultan Mahmud Shah against Sher Khan. Meanwhile, having kept away from his capital for a fairly long period of time, he also lost touch with the situation in Delhi and Agra. Making the most of this opportunity, his brother, Hindal, began to openly act as the independent ruler of Agra. This forced Humayun to leave Gaur, the capital of Bengal, and return to his own capital.

Of all his political adversaries, Sher Khan proved to be the most formidable. While Humayun remained occupied with his campaign against Bahadur Shah, Sher Khan utilized the opportunity to mobilize his forces in Bengal and Bihar to defeat Humayun in 1539 CE at Chausa, situated a few miles southwest of Baksar and at a short distance from the Karamnasa river of modern day Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Sher Khan was to engage Humayun in battle once again at Kannauj in 1540 CE, when the latter became too weak to defend Agra and retreated to Bilgram near Kannauj. It was there that Humayun fought his last unsuccessful battle with Sher Khan, who had by now become a popular leader under the title of Sher Shah.

Humayun's Failure

Humayun was forced to move away to Lahore after his defeat at Kannauj and for years he wandered in search of political shelter. From Lahore he fled to Sind, from Sind to Rajputana, and from Rajputana back to Sind until he finally left India for Persia. It was during his wanderings that his son, Akbar, was born in 1542 CE at Amarkot in Sind. Humayun finally sought refuge from Shah Tahmasp I of Persia. The Shah

agreed to assist him with an army on condition that Humayun becomes a Shia Muslim and acquires Qandahar, an important frontier town and commercial centre, for Persia.

The primary reason behind Humayun's failure to keep his empire intact was the lack of strength in his personality and also because of the defects in the early Mughal political organization, where the nobles owed their allegiance first to the chief of their clan and then to the ruler. In such circumstances, the threat from various chieftains asserting themselves always remained, leading to the emergence of new centres of power. Taking advantage of Humayun's forced exile from India, Sher Shah now established the Sur hegemony with his political tact and military skills. He ably held on to his empire, even successfully checking the advance of the sultan of Gujarat to the south of his kingdom.

SHER SHAH SUR (1540–45 CE)

Sher Shah is considered to be one of the greatest rulers of the Indian subcontinent. Born in 1472 CE, he belonged to an Afghan family, which claimed descent from an Afghan adventurer recruited by Sultan Bahlol Lodi of Delhi during his long contest with the Sharqi sultans of Jaunpur. Named Farid Khan, he was one of the eight sons of Hasan Khan, the *jagirdar* of Sasaram in Bihar. When Farid grew up, he rebelled against his father's ill-treatment of his stepmother and left home at the age of 22 to enlist as a soldier in the service of Jamal Khan, the governor of Jaunpur. In those days Jaunpur was a great seat of Islamic learning. Farid devoted himself to study, very soon becoming proficient in Arabic and Persian literature. His exceptional talents caught the attention of Jamal Khan, who brought about a reconciliation between Farid Khan and his father, and as a result, Farid went back to Sasaram to help manage his father's family estate for the next 21 years. He managed his *jagir* so well that he

won the reputation of being an honest and good administrator. This experience was to stand him in good stead later when he became the ruler of northern India.

The successful administration of their *jagir*, however, aroused the jealousy of his stepmother and Farid had to leave Sasaram once again. This time he took up service with Bahar Khan Lohani, the governor of Bihar. Bahar Khan, impressed with his service and devotion, conferred the title of Sher Khan on him for single-handedly killing a tiger. He was also rewarded with his appointment as the *vakil* or deputy governor. After Bahar Khan's death, Sher Khan became the guardian of Bahar Khan's minor son, Jalal Khan; but within a few years he became the virtual ruler of Bihar, asserting his independence in 1531 CE when Humayun became the emperor of India. He even defeated Mahmud Shah, the ruler of Bengal, and became an independent ruler of both Bihar and Bengal. By early 1539 CE, he had occupied the strong and important fortresses of Chunar and Rohtas.

Alarmed by the rising strength of Sher Shah, Humayun had marched against him to seize the fortress of Chunar. Finding the emperor too strong for an open contest, the clever Afghan had offered his submission, but as soon as Humayun returned to Agra, Sher Shah declared himself independent once again. Humayun and Sher Shah met each other in two decisive battles—the battle of Chausa (26 June 1539 CE) and the battle of Kannauj (May 1540 CE). In both the battles Humayun was defeated and, thereafter, compelled to flee from India. Sher Shah became the ruler of India in 1540 CE, reviving the rule of the Afghans for a short period within the Mughal era. After his accession to the throne, he extended his empire to the Punjab, Malwa, Multan, and a part of Rajputana. He also suppressed the Baluch chiefs on the northwestern frontier in Sind. He then besieged the strong fort of Kalinjar, where he met his death in an accidental explosion of gunpowder in May 1545 CE.

Counted among the greatest Muslim rulers of India, Sher Shah rose from the rank of an ordinary *jagirdar* to become an emperor. Not only did Sher Shah establish a vast and powerful empire, he also strengthened it through a wise and efficient system of administration. He implemented a new and equitable revenue settlement, efficiently administered the army and tax collections, built roads, rest houses and wells for his people, reformed the imperial currency, encouraged trade and commerce, improved communication, and dispensed impartial justice.

SHER SHAH'S ADMINISTRATION

Sher Shah was not only a successful general but was also an able administrator. In fact, his qualities as a ruler were more remarkable than his conquests. He introduced original and wise changes in every branch of administration during his brief reign of five years. On his father's *jagir* he had fixed the amount of tax to be paid on the land and had sternly warned the tax collectors against collecting more than the fixed amount. He applied these same principles in the administration of his empire.

Central and Provincial Administration

Power was concentrated in the hands of the ruler and there was a bureaucratic structure to administer the state. He divided the whole empire into 47 units called *sarkars*, each of which was again sub-divided into several smaller units called *parganas*. Each *sarkar* had one *amin*, one *shiqdar*, one treasurer, and one Hindi and one Persian writer to keep accounts. Every *sarkar* was placed under two officers called the *shiqdar-i-shiqdaran* and the *munsif-i-munsifan*. They were entrusted with the duty of supervising the work of the *parganas*. The administration of the *parganas* was conducted on

the same lines as the *sarkars*. Each *pargana* comprised several villages and in each village there was a *muqaddam*, a *chaudhuri* and a *patwari*. The *panchayats* also played an important part in village administration. Sher Shah devised the system of transferring government officers every two or three years to prevent them from acquiring undue influence over one place. Sher Shah's practical approach to state administration was subsequently adopted by subsequent Mughal rulers and eventually by British colonial administration.

Land Revenue

Sher Shah introduced a number of reforms in the land revenue system. He had the entire land surveyed; and fixed one fourths to one thirds of the produce to be paid as land revenue, which could be paid out to the state either in cash or in kind. For the collection of revenue, a large number of officials were utilized, like the *amins*, *muqaddams*, *shiqdars*, *quanungos* and *patwaris*. He urged his officers to be lenient to the peasants during the land revenue assessments. The rights and obligations of the peasantry were clearly stated in the *qabuliyat* (deed of agreement), which the state kept in its records and gave the *patta* (title deed) to the peasants in return. Land was classified into three categories, and the land survey measurement was standardized. Sher Shah made it a point to see that no hardship was caused to his peasants. In times of drought, or any other unforeseen calamity, advances were liberally made to the farmers. Sher Shah's land revenue system was so efficient that it was later adopted by Akbar and continued throughout the Mughal period, one of the reasons why Sher Shah is often known as the forerunner of Emperor Akbar.

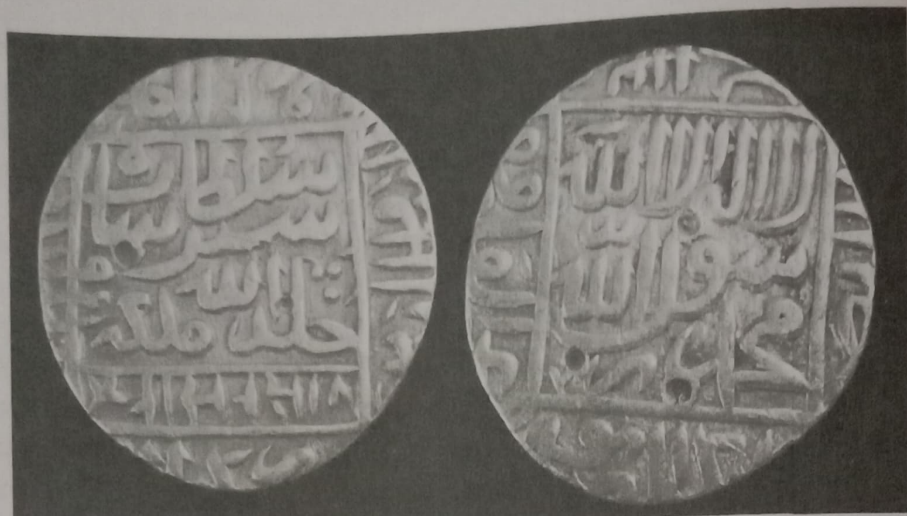
The Judiciary

In order to establish peace and order in the country, Sher Shah paid special attention to the

administration of justice. He tried to mete out even-handed justice to all, irrespective of rank. The guilty could never escape punishment. He even punished his near relatives and high officials if they tried to break the law or attempted to harass his people. The chief *qazi* was the head of the judicial department, while there was an *amin* in every *pargana* and a *qazi* in every district to decide judicial cases. The king heard direct appeals against subordinate courts on every Wednesday in his own court. As was prevalent throughout most of the medieval world, criminals were sentenced with very severe punishments—the main objective of which was not to reform, but to set an example. The *muqaddam* or the village headman was responsible for crimes within his jurisdiction, and if he failed to trace an offender he had to compensate for the losses incurred. A network of spies was also appointed to keep the king abreast of all occurrences in his empire. As a result of such strict and efficient measures, life and property remained secure under Sher Shah's rule.

The Army

Sher Shah knew the importance of a strong and efficient army, taking great care to re-organize it. He maintained a large standing army of 1, 50, 000 cavalry, 25, 000 infantry, 300 war elephants and an efficient artillery. In order to establish a direct relationship with his soldiers, he recruited them himself and fixed their salaries according to their qualities. He introduced the system of branding horses and maintaining descriptive rolls of soldiers to avoid malpractices in the army. He treated his soldiers very kindly, but never let his benevolence interfere with the maintenance of discipline and efficiency within the army. He built many new forts, while repairing and strengthening the old, existing ones. He kept a *fauj* or garrison under the command of a *faujdar* at each of these forts. Though most of Sher Shah's soldiers were Afghans or Pathans, Hindus were also given high positions in the army.



THE FIRST RUPEE, a Rupiya silver coin, issued by Sher Shah, 1540–45 CE

The Economy

Sher Shah introduced reforms in currency and tariff (custom duties) in order to improve the general economic condition of the empire. When he became the ruler, coins issued by previous kings were still in circulation which caused a great deal of confusion, since the exact rates between the various coins were not clearly specified. Sher Shah abolished the use of old coins, issued a large number of gold, silver and copper coins, and fixed their rates relative to each other. Most of the coins issued by Sher Shah, especially the silver rupee, continued to form the basis of Indian currency for a long time. For the promotion of trade and commerce, customs duties levied at various places were abolished. Merchants now had to pay customs duties only at two places—at the frontiers of the kingdom and at the place where the goods were to be sold. This basic principle of levying customs duties is followed even to this day.

Transport and Communication

Sher Shah also brought about various reforms in the means of transport and communication. A

number of important roads were built, along which avenues of trees were planted. Wells were dug and *sarais* (rest houses or inns) were provided for the convenience of travellers. The most famous road that he constructed was the Grand Trunk Road, extending from Sonargaon in Bengal to Peshawar in the north-western frontier (now Pakistan). The present Grand Trunk Road (or National Highway 2) is built on the same roadway. Sher Shah also introduced a regular postage system; and the *sarais* built along the roads also served as the *dak chaukis* of the postal department. At every *sarai* or *dak chauki*, two horsemen were always kept ready to receive the *dak* or mail from the previous *chauki* and carry it to the next one. This was how news from all corners of the empire was efficiently communicated to the imperial capital within a short span of time.

THE SUCCESSORS OF SHER SHAH

The Afghan kingdom established by Sher Shah in northern India remained in power from 1540–56 CE. After the untimely death of Sher Shah (1545 CE), the kingdom remained in power

for about a decade. Sher Shah was succeeded by his son, Jalal Khan, who took the title of Islam Shah, commonly known as Salim Shah. He was a capable ruler who managed the kingdom in his father's tradition. Following his death in 1554 CE his minor son, Firuz Khan, was murdered, and anarchy and confusion descended on the empire. The throne was usurped by Islam Shah's brother-in-law who proclaimed himself emperor and took the title of Adil Shah.

Adil Shah was an indolent ruler, who left the affairs of state in the hands of Hemu, his Hindu chief minister, who was a capable administrator, but more interested in seizing the throne for himself. There were revolts in various corners, which ultimately led to the decline and disintegration of the Afghan kingdom. While Sher Shah's nephew, Sikandar Sur, declared himself independent in the Punjab, Humayun (who had recovered Kabul in the meantime) took advantage of the anarchy to return to India in 1555 CE. Humayun now defeated Sikandar Sur and occupied Lahore, before marching into Delhi. In 1555 CE Humayun, thus, re-established the Mughal empire in India bringing the rule of the Sur dynasty to an end.

THE RETURN OF HUMAYUN (1555–56 CE)

After returning to Kabul from Persia, Humayun kept a keen eye on the political situation in India, preparing to recover his kingdom. Affairs took a favourable turn when Sher Shah passed away, and the resultant chaos and confusion, induced Humayun to win back his lost kingdom. Capturing Qandahar and Kabul from his brothers, Humayun re-asserted his position and consolidated the nobles who remained loyal to him. By 1554 CE he had become the master of almost the whole of Afghanistan; and armed with 14,000 men he was ready to charge into India and reclaim the throne of Agra. In December 1554 CE, he crossed the Indus and marched into Lahore, which he took possession of without much opposition. Thereafter, he went on to occupy Sirhind, before capturing Delhi and Agra in July 1555 CE, thus regaining his throne after an interval of nearly 12 years. He proceeded to appoint his son, Akbar, as governor of the Punjab, leaving his gallant general, Bairam Khan, to assist the young prince. Humayun, however, did not live long to enjoy this Mughal recovery. He died in early 1556 CE from a fatal fall from the staircase of his library in Delhi.

SUMMARY

- Babur was succeeded by his eldest son, Humayun, who was only 23 years old when he became the ruler of the newly established Mughal Empire in India.
- When Humayun ascended the throne, the political conditions in the Indian subcontinent were such that the newly founded Mughal state was threatened by numerous internal as well as external enemies.
- Humayun had to tackle Bahadur Shah of Gujarat as well as the Afghan nobles of Bihar and Bengal, while his three brothers—Kamran, Hindal and Askari, whom he had appointed governors of the provinces of Kabul, Mewat and Sambhal respectively—were not very faithful to him.
- Humayun first invaded the Hindu principality of Kalinjar in Bundelkhand, which he failed to subdue. Next he fought wars against Sher Khan of Bengal and Bahadur Shah of Gujarat.
- While Humayun was busy in his campaign against Bahadur Shah, Sher Khan got adequate time to mobilize his forces in Bengal and Bihar, defeating Humayun at Chausa in 1539 CE. Sher Khan was to defeat Humayun yet again in 1540 CE at Kannauj.
- Humayun had no option but to flee India, taking refuge under Shah Tahmasp I, the Shah of Persia.
- Taking advantage of Humayun's exile from India, Sher Shah established the Sur hegemony with his political tact and military skills.