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## Alauddin Khilji's administrative practices: Foundations for later governance in India

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### Abstract

This research paper discusses the administrative practices of Alauddin Khilji, the Sultan of Delhi from 1296 to 1316, and their profound impact on the foundations of later governance in India. Alauddin Khilji is recognized for implementing a range of administrative reforms, including revenue policies, market regulation, and military organization, aimed at consolidating his empire and ensuring its stability. By analyzing primary and secondary sources, this study explores how Khilji's strategies—such as revenue policies, centralised bureaucracy, market control, economic and military reforms—established a framework that influenced subsequent governance, including the Mughal administration. The paper reflects that Khilji's governance model laid the groundwork for administrative continuity and adaptation, contributing significantly to the evolution of India's political and administrative landscape.

**Keywords:** Administrative reforms, influenced, subsequent governance, Mughal administration

### Introduction

Alauddin Khilji, who reigned as the Sultan of Delhi from 1296 to 1316, is often remembered as one of the most formidable rulers of the Delhi Sultanate. His period of rule was marked not only by military conquests but also by significant administrative reforms that laid the groundwork for subsequent governance in India. Khilji's administration was characterized by a series of revolutionary strategies, including centralization of authority, rigorous revenue collection systems, price control measures, and military restructuring, aimed at fortifying the Sultanate's power and ensuring socio-economic stability. These policies were not merely reactive measures but deliberate attempts to address the challenges of governance, maintain political control, and optimize resource management in a diverse and expansive empire.

This paper explores the scope, nature, and impact of Alauddin Khilji's administrative practices, highlighting how they created a foundation for later rulers, including the Mughals, to build upon. It argues that Khilji's innovations in governance were instrumental in shaping the administrative ethos of medieval India, providing a framework for statecraft that was adapted and refined by his successors. By examining these practices in detail, this study aims to shed light on how Khilji's governance model influenced the evolution of political and administrative strategies in India long after his reign.

### Major Administrative Practices of Alauddin Khilji

Some major administrative practices of Alauddin Khilji and their impact on subsequent governance are following:

#### Centralization of Power

Alauddin Khilji established a highly centralized administrative system. He maintained strict control over the nobility and local governors to prevent rebellions and ensure loyalty. Key measures included:

**Restrained Division of Empire:** The empire was divided into provinces called Iqtas, each headed by a governor or Iqta'dar, who was responsible for maintaining law and order, collecting revenue, and recruiting soldiers for the Sultan's army. The governors were frequently transferred to prevent them from forming local power bases.

**Subjugation of Nobility:** To curb the power of the nobility, Alauddin confiscated their wealth, prohibited social gatherings, and forbade them from forming matrimonial alliances

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without his consent. This ensured that they could not form independent power bases that could challenge his authority.

**Controlled Revenue Administration:** Alauddin created separate departments for different aspects of administration, including revenue collection, military organization, and market control. The revenue administration was centralized under the control of trusted officials, who reported directly to the Sultan. This reduced corruption and improved efficiency.

#### Impact on Subsequent Governance

- **Precedent for Mughal Centralization:** Alauddin's emphasis on a strong, centralized bureaucracy influenced the Mughal Empire's governance structure. The Mughals developed a more elaborate and extensive bureaucratic system, building upon the foundation laid by the Delhi Sultanate.
- **Institutional Governance:** Alauddin's policies demonstrated the benefits of centralized governance, creating an institutional framework that was later refined by subsequent rulers to maintain effective control over a diverse and vast territory.

#### Military Reforms

Alauddin Khilji's military reforms were aimed at strengthening his army to protect the Sultanate from external invasions, particularly the Mongol invasions, and to expand his territories in India:

- **Standing Army:** He maintained a large, standing army that was directly under his control, reducing reliance on feudal levies provided by the nobles. This professional army was paid in cash, which was revolutionary at that time, and it ensured loyalty directly to the Sultan.
- **Dag and Chehra System:** He introduced the "Dag" (branding of horses) and "Chehra" (maintenance of descriptive rolls of soldiers) systems to prevent corruption and ensure that soldiers received the correct payments. Horses were branded to ensure they were not substituted with inferior animals, and descriptive rolls were kept to maintain an accurate roster of soldiers.
- **Fortification and Garrisoning:** To guard against invasions, particularly those of Mongols, Alauddin fortified border areas and established garrisons in key locations. He strengthened the defences of cities like Delhi, which became the nerve centre of his empire.

#### Impact on Subsequent Governance

- **Military Modernization:** These reforms were pivotal in shaping military administration in India. Later rulers, especially the Mughals, adopted a similar centralized system of military organization. Akbar's Mansabdari system, for instance, was influenced by Alauddin's practices, emphasizing a professional, salaried army that reported directly to the central authority.
- **Enhanced State Authority:** Alauddin's military reforms curtailed the power of regional nobles and local chiefs, establishing a strong central army that supported the ruler's authority, a practice that continued under the Mughals to prevent regional insurrections and maintain internal stability.

**Economic and Taxation Reforms:** Alauddin Khilji

implemented several economic reforms aimed at stabilizing the economy, controlling inflation, and ensuring a steady revenue stream for the state:

- **Market Control and Price Regulation:** Alauddin enforced strict price controls on essential commodities, such as grains, cloth, sugar, and other goods. He established markets (Shahna-i-Mandi) for different commodities, and appointed market controllers (Shahnas) to regulate prices and prevent hoarding and black marketing. This was primarily done to ensure a constant supply of goods at reasonable prices for the army and the common people.
- **Measurement and Quality Control:** He introduced standard weights and measures to prevent cheating in trade. All traders were required to use these standards, and officials checked the markets to ensure compliance. Penalties for violating these regulations were severe, including fines, public humiliation, or even execution.
- **Land Revenue System:** Alauddin undertook significant reforms in land revenue administration. He conducted a detailed survey of land and assessed the revenue based on its productivity. Land was classified according to its fertility, and the revenue was fixed at half of the produce, which had to be paid in-kind or kind. This measure was intended to increase state revenue while ensuring that farmers did not suffer unduly.
- **Imposition of Taxes and Abolishment of Privileges:** He introduced several new taxes, such as the Kharaj (land tax), Jizya (poll tax on non-Muslims), Zakat (alms tax on Muslims), and Ghari (house tax). The Kharaj was the primary source of revenue and was fixed at 50% of the agricultural produce. Moreover, Alauddin abolished the privileges enjoyed by landlords, local chieftains, and village heads (Muqaddams and Khuts), who were traditionally exempted from paying taxes. This policy reduced their wealth and influence, increased state revenues, and ensured that all classes contributed to the state treasury.

#### Impact on Subsequent Governance

- **Legacy in Economic Administration:** Alauddin's market reforms served as a model for future economic management. Later rulers, including the Mughals, recognized the importance of state intervention in economic affairs. For instance, Akbar's administration continued the practice of state regulation of market prices and monitored economic activities to ensure the welfare of the state and its subjects.
- **State Control over Economy:** The concept of state-controlled markets laid by Alauddin influenced subsequent policies where the state actively participated in the economy to maintain stability and revenue flow. This policy became a critical aspect of governance during both Sultanate and Mughal periods.

#### Judicial Administration and Law Enforcement

- **Emphasis on Law and Order:** Khilji's administrative reforms highlighted the importance of law and order for maintaining a stable and prosperous state. The use of strict punishments and the appointment of 'Qazis' to ensure impartial justice set early standards for judicial administration.

- **Separate Department for Law Enforcement:** Alauddin established a separate department for law enforcement known as the "Diwan-i-Mustakhraj." This department was responsible for the enforcement of laws, particularly related to tax collection and the regulation of markets. He appointed officials known as "Muhtasibs" to ensure adherence to Islamic law (Sharia) and to regulate public morals. They were responsible for preventing practices considered unethical or illegal under the Sultanate's law, such as hoarding, black marketing, and usury.
- **Equal Application of Law:** One of the hallmarks of Alauddin's judicial policy was the equal application of law to all subjects, including nobles and commoners. Nobles were not immune to prosecution, and the Sultan did not hesitate to punish even the highest-ranking officials if they were found guilty of any crime or misconduct. This policy ensured that justice was perceived to be impartial and helped in maintaining order and loyalty among the various classes in his empire.

### Impact on Subsequent Governance

- **Institutionalization of Law Enforcement Agencies:** Alauddin's creation of specific departments for law enforcement, such as the "Diwan-i-Mustakhraj," influenced later dynasties to develop specialized departments for law and order, tax collection, and market regulation. The Mughal Empire further expanded these departments by establishing a well-structured police system and administrative machinery to maintain order and enforce laws across the vast empire.
- **Reinforcement of the Role of Muhtasibs:** The role of "Muhtasibs" as regulators of public morality and enforcers of Sharia law continued under the Tughlaqs, Mughals, and even during the British colonial period (though adapted to the colonial context). These officials were responsible for ensuring compliance with state laws and religious norms. This role evolved over time, but the concept of having officials to oversee and enforce public morality remained an integral part of governance in various forms.

### Spy System (Intelligence Network)

Alauddin Khilji's establishment of a sophisticated network of spies and intelligence gathering was one of the key features of his administration. This system was crucial for maintaining control over his vast empire and managing both internal and external threats.

### Creation of a Spy Network

Alauddin Khilji created an extensive spy network, known as "Munhiyan", which was responsible for gathering intelligence across the empire. These spies were deployed in strategic locations such as cities, markets, military camps, and even within the homes of nobles and high-ranking officials. The network was hierarchical, with spies at various levels reporting to higher authorities. This ensured that information was collected from multiple sources and cross-verified for accuracy.

### Monitoring Nobility and Officials

The primary role of the spy network was to monitor the

activities of the nobility, governors, and military officials. The Sultan kept a close watch on their financial dealings, personal conduct, and political affiliations. Spies were also tasked with reporting any signs of discontent, rebellion, or corruption among the officials, ensuring that any potential uprising could be thwarted before it gained momentum.

### Direct Reporting to the Sultan

The spies reported directly to the Sultan, bypassing local officials and governors. This allowed Alauddin to receive real-time information without any distortion or manipulation by intermediaries. The direct communication between the spies and the Sultan helped in swiftly addressing potential threats like conspiracies, rebellions, or disloyalty among the nobility.

### Impact on Subsequent Governance

#### Precedent for Strong Central Control

Alauddin Khilji's intelligence system set a precedent for future rulers in India to establish strong central control over their empires. Subsequent rulers, like the Mughal emperors, adopted similar practices to centralize their power and reduce the autonomy of regional governors and nobles.

### Institutionalization of Intelligence Networks

The use of a formal spy network became a standard practice in subsequent administrations. Mughal emperors like Akbar, Jahangir, and Aurangzeb employed similar networks to monitor their officials, military commanders, and provincial governors. Intelligence gathering was institutionalized with the creation of specific departments responsible for espionage and counterintelligence, such as the "Barid" or "Secret Intelligence" department in the Mughal administration.

### Relevance of Alauddin Khilji's Administrative Practices in Modern India

While Alauddin Khilji's administrative policies are not directly applied in modern India, their historical influence can be traced in several ways. His policies offer insights into governance strategies, military organization, and economic management that have indirectly shaped some aspects of administration and governance in the Indian subcontinent. Alauddin Khilji's administration has had a long-term impact on modern Indian administration in the following ways:

#### Standing Army Concept

Khilji's creation of a large, centrally controlled standing army paid in cash set a precedent for subsequent military administrations in India. Modern India continues to maintain a professional standing army with centralized control and a focus on preparedness and discipline, although the context and scale have evolved significantly.

#### Market Regulation Insights

Alauddin Khilji's policies on market regulation and price controls were some of the earliest instances of state intervention in the economy to protect the public interest. Modern regulatory frameworks in India, such as those managed by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution, reflect a similar understanding of the state's role in regulating markets to ensure fair prices and prevent hoarding.

### Development of a Bureaucratic System

Khilji's reforms required a structured bureaucracy to implement his policies, such as revenue collection, market regulation, and law enforcement. Today, India's vast civil service system owes its roots to historical models of governance, where efficient administration was essential for controlling large territories.

### Intelligence and Internal Security

Khilji's extensive spy network to monitor internal dissent and ensure loyalty has echoes in modern India's intelligence and internal security apparatus. While the objectives and methods of modern agencies like the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) differ greatly, the importance of intelligence in maintaining state security and stability remains crucial.

### Materials and Methods

This research is based on secondary data sources and employs an exploratory and descriptive methodology to analyze the practices, policies and reforms in the administration of Alauddin Khilji and his subsequent rulers. The study relies on secondary sources including books, academic journals, newspapers and academic articles.

### Conclusion

The research on the administrative practices of Alauddin Khilji reveals that his governance strategies laid foundational elements for subsequent rulers in the Delhi Sultanate and beyond. Alauddin Khilji's innovative reforms in land revenue, market control, military organization, and centralized administration created a more efficient and structured governance model that was both effective in consolidating power and maintaining stability in a vast and diverse empire. His administrative policies, particularly his emphasis on direct taxation, price regulation, and a centralized bureaucracy, were pioneering steps that not only strengthened his rule but also set precedents for his successors.

Alauddin Khilji's administrative innovations provided a framework that informed the governance structures of later sultans and contributed to the evolution of statecraft in medieval India. While some of his practices were modified or abandoned by his successors, many aspects of his administrative vision continued to shape governance in the subcontinent. Also, we see that his policies offer insights into governance strategies, military organization, and economic management that have indirectly shaped some aspects of administration and governance in the modern India, underscoring his legacy as a ruler who fundamentally transformed the administrative landscape of his time.

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