

Sher Shah Suri, Life, Conquests, Administration and Reforms

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Sher Shah Suri



Sher Shah Suri, a formidable figure in Indian history, was an Afghan ruler known for his exceptional administrative skills and military prowess. **Founder of the Suri dynasty**, Sher Shah's reign, though short-lived, laid the foundation for many reforms that the Mughal Empire later adopted. His efficient administration, land revenue reforms, and visionary infrastructure projects left a lasting impact on India's governance system.

Who was Sher Shah Suri?

Sher Shah Suri, originally named **Farid Khan**, was born in 1486 in **Sasaram, Bihar**. He was the emperor of north India (1540-45) in the Islamic Sūr (Afghan) dynasty. Sher Shah fought extensive wars with the Rajputs, expanding his empire.

- He conquered Punjab, Malwa, Sind, Multan, and Bundelkhand. His empire included all of North India except Assam, Nepal, Kashmir, and Gujarat.
- He established a long-lasting bureaucracy accountable to the ruler and a carefully calculated revenue system.

- He efficiently administered the army and tax collections and built roads, rest houses, and wells for the people.
- He was generally **tolerant of non-Muslims**, except for his massacre of Hindus following Raisen's surrender. His tomb at Sasaram is among the most magnificent in India.

Rise and Conquests of Sher Shah Suri

Sher Shah was the son of Hasan Khan, a minor Afghan jagirdar of Sasaram in Bihar. Sher Shah rebelled against his father and enlisted as a soldier in the service of Jaunpur's governor, Jamal Khan.

- **Early Rise:** He later worked for the Mughal king of Bihar, who rewarded him for his bravery with the title of "**Sher Khan**" after reportedly killing a tiger with his bare hands. After defeating a Bengal army, Sher Shah Suri gained control of Bihar. In early 1539, he conquered Bengal and cleverly seized the Rohtas stronghold through strategic deception.
- **Victory over Humayun:** On June 26, 1539, Sher Shah triumphed over the Mughal emperor **Humayun of the Mughal Empire** at the **Battle of Chausa** and adopted the royal title of **Farid al-Din Sher Shah**.
 - In May 1540, he once again defeated Humayun at the **Battle of Kannauj**, driving his enemies out of Bengal, Bihar, Hindustan, and Punjab.
 - He also suppressed the Baluch chiefs on the northwestern frontier.
- **Later Conquests:** After expelling Humayun, Sher Shah began to strengthen his position in northern and eastern India.
 - In 1542, he defeated and conquered **Malwa**, followed by **Chanderi**.
 - In Rajasthan, he directed campaigns against Marwar, Ranthambhore, Nagor, Ajmer, Merta Jodhpur, and Bikaner.
 - He defeated the rebellious Afghans in Bengal. By 1545, he had established himself as the supreme ruler of Sindh and Punjab, as well as the entire Rajputana region in the west and Bengal in the east.
- **Death and Aftermath:** In 1545, while besieging the **Kalinjar fort**, Sher Shah Suri was killed by a gunpowder explosion.

He had reigned for five years before his death, but he had built a vast empire and a magnificent and powerful government. Sher Shah was succeeded by his second son, **Islam Shah**, who ruled until 1553. His death at a young age confused succession. Humayun used this opportunity to reclaim Delhi and Agra from the Sur rulers.

Sher Shah Suri Administration

Sher Shah Suri's administrative system was a combination of traditional practices and innovative reforms. He established a centralised administration that would later shape Mughal governance, especially under **Akbar**.

- **Council of Ministers:** The king was assisted by four important ministers:
 - *Diwan -i- Wizarat* - in charge of Revenue and Finance.
 - *Diwan-i-Ariz* - in charge of the Army.
 - *Diwan-i-Rasalat*- Foreign Minister.
 - *Diwan-i-Insha*- Minister for Communications.

- Division of Empire:** Sher Shah's empire was organised into 47 administrative divisions known as **sarkars**. Each sarkar was overseen by two key officials: the **Chief Shiqdar**, responsible for maintaining law and order, and the **Chief Munsif**, who acted as a judge.
 - These sarkars were further subdivided into **Parganas**, where the **Shiqdar** managed military affairs, the **Amin** handled land revenue collection, the **Fotedar** acted as the treasurer, and **Karkuns** served as accountants. Additionally, there were smaller administrative units known as **iqtas**.
- Land Revenue System:** Sher Shah Suri implemented a highly organised land revenue system. He ensured thorough land surveys, categorising all cultivable land into three classes: **good, average, and poor**. The state's share was set at one-third of the average produce, which could be paid either in **cash or crops**.
- Military Administration:** During his tenure, the police force was reorganised more efficiently, and crime was reduced. The military administration was also reorganised efficiently, and Sher Shah borrowed many ideas from **Alauddin Khalji**, such as branding horses.

Sher Shah Suri Reforms

Sher Shah Suri implemented a series of reforms that touched various aspects of governance, economy, and infrastructure. These reforms aimed to improve administration, boost trade, and enhance the overall welfare of the people.

- Peasant Welfare:** Sher Shah Suri introduced a flexible land revenue system based on soil fertility and ensured army movements didn’t damage crops, prioritizing peasant prosperity for stability.
- Trade and Commerce:** He simplified taxes, collecting them only at entry and sale points, and standardized the metal content of coins, setting the foundation for Indian coinage through the Mughal and British periods.
- Infrastructure Development:** Sher Shah repaired and built key roads, including the Grand Trunk Road, and established four major highways. He also set up sarais (rest houses) to support trade and travel.
- Currency Reforms:** He introduced new silver coins, "Dam," and a tri-metallic currency system with gold, silver, and copper coins.
- Justice and Law Enforcement:** Known for his impartial justice, Sher Shah punished even nobles and relatives when necessary, enforcing strict law and order and supporting the poor with stipends.
- Art and Architecture:** He initiated the construction of **Purana Qila (Old Fort)** in Delhi and built his mausoleum in Sasaram. Sher Shah also patronized scholars, including Malik Muhammad Jayasi, who wrote *Padmavat* during his reign.

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