



**TURKISH RULE IN INDIA
(GHIYASUDDIN BALBAN: PART-2)**

**भारत में तुर्की शासन
(गयासुद्दीन बलबन: भाग-2)**

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▶ Balban's Achievements

As a shrewd and practical statesman, Balban gave up the policy of extension of the empire. He concentrated on restoring peace and order within the existing territory of his kingdom and bringing it under his effective control. Therefore, he emphasized on consolidation of the territories of the Delhi Sultanate.

▶ (i) Balban's Theory of Kingship and Restoration of the Prestige of the Sultan -

Balban was the first Sultan of Delhi who expressed a clear and strong opinion concerning the powers of the Sultan.

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Professor K.A. Nizami believed that it was necessary for restoring not only the dignity of the Sultan and eliminating the possibility of conflict with the nobility but also due to inferiority complex and guilty conscience. Balban wanted to impress upon his nobles that he got the throne because of Divine will and not by the poisoned cup or the assassin's dagger.

Primarily, Balban highlighted two points regarding his theory of kingship. Firstly, he gave currency to the epithet *Zil-i-Ilahi*, the Shadow of God for himself and secondly, it was necessary for the Sultan to be a despot.

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He expressed that Kingship was the vice-regency of God on earth (*niyabat-ikhudai*) and it was next only to prophethood. He ruled by 'divine sanction' and was not answerable to any worldly authority for the discharge of his power and functions as sovereign. He believed that Kingship was the embodiment of despotism. On another occasion he declared that it was the King's super-human awe and status which could ensure the people's obedience.

Balban brought these ideas in practice. He claimed descent from the mythical Turkish hero, Afrasiyab. He gave up drinking having wine and

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pleasure parties. He believed that the king was above everyone in status and in grandeur. It was for this reason that he never moved freely with ordinary people. He never expressed unusual joy or sorrow in public. Even when he was informed of the death of his eldest son, Muhammad he remained unmoved and carried on the routine administration though in his private apartment he wept bitterly. He never came to the court without complete regal dress and no one could have ever seen him talking humorously or laughing. He framed certain rules for court-behaviour and enforced them strictly.

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Balban organized a grand *darbar* on the Persian model. He introduced the practices of *Sijda* or prostration and *Paibos* or kissing the feet of the Sultan, appointed tall and fearsome guards who were to stand round the Sultan's person with naked swords and, except high nobles, ordered the rest to remain standing in the court. His courtiers put on prescribed costumes and drinking of wine was prohibited for them. Nobody could smile or laugh in the court. The yearly festival of *Nauroz* was celebrated in his court with great pomp and show. The foreigners were simply stunned by the glamour of his court.

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Whenever Balban used to go outside the palace, his tall and muscular Turkish slaves, in rich attire and heavily armed, with drawn-out swords marched with him shouting '*Bismillah-Bismillah*'. All these measures helped in restoring the prestige of the Sultan and added glamour to his personality. Besides, Balban gave shelter to all foreign scholars and nobles and named their residences in the name of their country or family because of which he was regarded as the protector of Muslim culture. This gave him a respectable position even in foreign countries of the Muslim world.

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Balban discriminated between the high-born and the low-born people; the former were given further given unequal treatment on racial considerations. Balban suffered from inferiority complex which tempted him to assume a haughty and aggressive behaviour against the commoners.

(ii) Liquidation of 'The Forty'- Even when Balban worked as the Prime Minister of Sultan Nasiruddin, he attempted to break up the power of the group of 'the forty' as he regarded it necessary to restore the powers of the Sultan. By the time Balban ascended the throne, most of these nobles had either died by themselves or were destroyed by Balban.

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The rest who remained were now killed or deprived of power. The governor of Badaun, Malik Baqbaq, who had beaten one of his slaves to death, was flogged publicly, demoted and disgraced. Another influential noble and the governor of Avadh, Haibat Khan was whipped publicly with 500 stripes and then delivered to the widow of the slave whom he had murdered while he was drunk. The same way Amin Khan, governor of Avadh was hanged at the gate of the city of Ayodhya when he failed to suppress the revolt of Tughril Khan of Bengal.

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Another member of the 'forty' and cousin of Balban, Sher Khan was poisoned as Balban became jealous of his ability and suspicious of his ambition. Thus, Balban, a member of the *Chalisa* himself brought about the destruction of that group.

(iii) The Administration and the Spy system - The administrative system of Balban was half-military and half-civil. All his officers were supposed to perform both administrative and military duties. Balban himself kept control over the entire administration. There was no post of *naib* during his reign and the position of the *wazir* too had become quite insignificant.

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Balban himself supervised the appointment of all officers and was particular that only people of noble birth were appointed to higher posts. Balban was successful in providing peace and justice to his subjects.

Balban owed his success largely due to an efficient organization of his spy- system. He set up a network of news writers and spies (*Barids*) throughout his dominions to watch the activities of his governors, military and civil officers and even that of his own sons. Balban appointed them himself and they received fat salaries.

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They were expected to provide every important information to the Sultan and were severely punished if they failed to submit correct and prompt reports to the Sultan about the wrongful activities of the nobility.

Every spy had direct access to the Sultan though none met him in the court. Balban's spy-system struck terror in the hearts of the government employees, strengthened the hold of the central government over them and helped the Sultan in the establishment of an absolute monarchy.

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(iv) **The Suppression of Revolts:** Balban took instant measures to provide security to the city of Delhi. The forests around Delhi were cleared, four forts were built on the four corners of Delhi and ferocious Afghan troops were placed in them. The robbers and freebooters around Delhi were constantly attacked and killed brutally. Within a year, Delhi became free from the menace of those people who had made the life of the citizens unsafe in the capital. Next year, Balban suppressed the revolts in Doab and Oudh. He divided the area into several military commands, established military check-posts at several places, cleared the forests and pursued

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the rebellious people from one place to another. His measures succeeded and peace was restored in these areas. Next, Balban adopted semi-barbaric measures to strike terror among the people in Katehar. Even innocent women and children were not spared. He ordered his soldiers to slay the entire male population, burn their fields and villages and take women and children to slavery. The people of Katehar never rose in revolt against the Sultan. Balban also constructed roads, cleared the forests and made arrangements for the safety of the travellers. All these measures ensured peace within his kingdom.

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(v) **The Conquest of Bengal-** Bengal was lost to the Delhi Sultanate during the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin. Balban appointed Tughril Khan as governor of Bengal. But Tughril Khan declared himself independent in 1279 CE and assumed the title of Sultan Mughisuddin. The rebellion gave a rude shock to Balban's authority. It was the first revolt of a slave-noble and had it been allowed to succeed. Balban immediately ordered Amin Khan, governor of Oudh, to bring him to knees. Amin Khan, however, was defeated and he was executed by Balban. The next two succeeding expeditions, also met with a similar fate. Balban was infuriated by this.

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He himself proceeded towards Bengal with a huge army. He added his strength further by additional troops of Avadh and reached Bengal with his son, Bughra Khan. Tughril Khan fled away from Lakhnauti. Balban pursued him and ultimately, succeeded in killing him at Jajnagar (Orissa). Balban then returned to Lakhnauti and wreak vengeance on all the friends, supporters and relatives of Tughril. Balban appointed his son Bughra Khan as governor of Bengal and advised him to remain loyal to the Delhi Sultanate.

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(vi) **Defence of North-West Frontier-** When Balban became the sultan, his cousin Sher Khan was in-charge of the North-Western frontier. He was a great warrior who had terrorized the Mongols and the Khokars. He defended the region from the Mongol in-roads with ability and courage. On his death in 1270, the provinces of Lahore, Multan and Uchh were placed under the charge of Balban's son Muhammad. Balban created a second line of defence under the command of his second son Bughra Khan who was given charge of the *iqtas* of Sunam, Samana and Divalpur.

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Balban himself stayed in the capital as far as possible and personally supervised the defence arrangements made against the Mongol penetration in this region. A special force of 30,000 well equipped cavalry was kept in reserve exclusively to reinforce the border contingents. On the whole, Balban's policy to checkmate the Mongol menace was defensive in nature; he did not attempt to liberate the whole of North-Western region from them.

In 1285, the Mongol leader Timur Khan of Afghanistan launched a major attack on the Punjab. Prince Muhammad gave him a bold fight

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but lost his life in the combat, and the towns of Lahore and Dipalpur were plundered by the marauders.

The provinces of Multan and Uchh were protected from the Mongol menace by the royal troops under the command of Muhammad's son Kai Khusrau. Balban nominated Kai Khusrav as his heir and could not survive the shock of the untimely death of his son and died a broken-hearted man about the middle of 1287.

(To be continued)