

Legacy of Ala-Ud-Din Khilji's Military Policies in Later Sultanate and Mughal Administration

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Abstract: *The military policies of Alauddin Khilji (1296–1316 CE) played a transformative role in shaping the administrative and military framework of medieval India. This study examines the enduring legacy of his reforms—such as the establishment of a large standing army, branding system (Dagh), descriptive rolls (Chehra), and strict centralization—and their influence on subsequent rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. The paper highlights how these policies laid the foundation for efficient military organization, fiscal discipline, and centralized governance. It concludes that Khilji's innovations had a lasting impact on later administrative systems, particularly in shaping the military-bureaucratic structure of the Mughal state.*

Keywords: Alauddin Khilji, Military Policies, Delhi Sultanate, Mughal Administration, Dagh System, Chehra System, Centralization

I. INTRODUCTION

The reign of Alauddin Khilji (1296–1316 CE) stands as a defining period in the history of the Delhi Sultanate, particularly in terms of military organization, administrative centralization, and state control. His military policies were not only instrumental in expanding and defending the Sultanate during his lifetime but also laid the foundation for future systems of governance and warfare in medieval India. The influence of these policies extended well beyond his reign, shaping the administrative and military frameworks of subsequent Sultanate rulers and even the later Mughal Empire.

Alauddin Khilji's military strategy was characterized by the establishment of a **large, permanent standing army**, paid in cash and directly controlled by the state. To ensure discipline and efficiency, he introduced measures such as branding of horses (dagh system) and maintenance of descriptive rolls of soldiers (chehra system). These innovations minimized corruption, prevented the use of inferior horses, and ensured accurate record-keeping, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of the military structure. His emphasis on centralization reduced the dependence on feudal levies and strengthened royal authority.

In addition to organizational reforms, Khilji implemented strict **economic and administrative policies** to support military needs. Market regulations, revenue reforms, and control over resources ensured that the army could be maintained at a relatively low cost while remaining well-equipped and prepared. These integrated measures created a strong linkage between economic governance and military efficiency, a model that influenced later rulers.

The legacy of these policies can be clearly observed in the practices of subsequent rulers of the Delhi Sultanate, such as Muhammad bin Tughlaq and Firoz Shah Tughlaq, who adopted and modified elements of Khilji's administrative and military systems. Furthermore, the Mughal rulers, particularly Akbar, incorporated similar principles of centralized control, systematic revenue administration, and organized military structure, although with greater refinement and institutionalization.

The continuity and adaptation of these policies highlight their long-term significance in shaping medieval Indian governance. Alauddin Khilji's emphasis on discipline, centralization, and resource management became key features of later imperial systems, demonstrating the enduring impact of his reforms.

Therefore, the present study aims to examine the legacy of Alauddin Khilji's military policies and their influence on later Sultanate and Mughal administration. It seeks to analyse how his innovations were adopted, modified, and institutionalized over time, contributing to the evolution of military organization and statecraft in medieval India.

II. KEY MILITARY POLICIES OF ALAUDDIN KHILJI

2.1 Establishment of a Standing Army

One of the most significant military innovations introduced by Alauddin Khilji was the establishment of a **large and permanent standing army**, which marked a major shift from earlier military practices in the Delhi Sultanate. Unlike the traditional system that relied heavily on feudal levies and land grants (iqta system), Khilji ensured that his soldiers were **paid in cash directly from the state treasury**.

This system had several important advantages. Firstly, it ensured **greater loyalty and discipline among soldiers**, as their livelihood depended directly on the Sultan rather than on local nobles or intermediaries. Secondly, it reduced the influence and power of regional chiefs and feudal lords, who had previously controlled military resources through land assignments. By centralizing military authority, Khilji strengthened the position of the crown and minimized the risk of rebellion.

The maintenance of such a large army was made possible through Khilji's efficient economic policies, including revenue reforms and market control. Regular payment in cash also allowed the state to maintain a **professional and well-trained force**, capable of responding quickly to internal disturbances and external threats, particularly Mongol invasions.

This system of a centrally controlled standing army became a **model for later rulers**. Successors in the Delhi Sultanate, as well as rulers of the Mughal Empire, adopted similar principles of maintaining a permanent, salaried military force. It laid the foundation for more advanced military-administrative systems, such as the mansabdari system under Akbar.

In conclusion, the establishment of a standing army by Alauddin Khilji was a landmark development in medieval Indian military history. It not only enhanced the efficiency and strength of the army during his reign but also had a lasting influence on the evolution of centralized military systems in later periods.

2.2 Dagh and Chehra System

A major administrative innovation in the military organization of Alauddin Khilji was the introduction of the **Dagh and Chehra system**, which played a crucial role in ensuring discipline, transparency, and efficiency within the army of the Delhi Sultanate.

The **Dagh system** referred to the **branding of horses**. Each horse used in the military was marked with a unique state symbol to certify its quality and ownership. This measure was introduced to prevent corrupt practices such as the substitution of inferior horses or false reporting by military officials. By ensuring that only approved and properly maintained horses were used, the system enhanced the operational effectiveness and reliability of the cavalry, which was a vital component of the army.

The **Chehra system**, on the other hand, involved maintaining **descriptive rolls (records) of soldiers**. These records included detailed information about each soldier's identity, physical features, and service details. This prevented the practice of presenting fake soldiers or drawing salaries for non-existent personnel, a common issue in earlier military systems.

Together, these measures helped to **eliminate corruption and improve accountability** within the military structure. They ensured that soldiers and equipment were properly verified, salaries were fairly distributed, and the overall organization of the army remained efficient and disciplined.

The impact of the Dagh and Chehra system extended beyond Khilji's reign. These practices influenced later administrative developments, particularly in the military systems of subsequent Sultanate rulers and the Mughal

Empire. Elements of record-keeping and inspection can be seen in the more refined mansabdari system introduced by Akbar.

In conclusion, the Dagh and Chehra system represented a significant step toward **institutionalizing military administration**. By ensuring accuracy, accountability, and quality control, these reforms strengthened the army and contributed to the long-term evolution of military governance in medieval India.

2.3 Strict Discipline and Central Control

A defining feature of the military administration of Alauddin Khilji was the enforcement of **strict discipline and centralized control** over both soldiers and officials. Recognizing that internal instability posed as great a threat as external enemies, Khilji established a highly organized system to maintain order, loyalty, and efficiency within the Delhi Sultanate.

One of the key elements of this system was the imposition of **rigorous discipline in the army**. Soldiers were expected to adhere to strict codes of conduct, and any form of negligence, corruption, or disobedience was met with severe punishment. This ensured high standards of performance, readiness, and accountability, which were essential for the success of military campaigns.

To reinforce control, Khilji developed a **strong intelligence and espionage network**. A network of spies and informants was deployed across the empire to monitor the activities of military personnel, nobles, and provincial governors. These agents regularly reported to the central authority, enabling the Sultan to detect and suppress conspiracies, corruption, or signs of rebellion at an early stage.

This system significantly reduced the power of the nobility, who had previously posed challenges to royal authority. By keeping them under constant surveillance and limiting their autonomy, Khilji ensured that loyalty remained directed toward the throne rather than toward local or personal interests.

The emphasis on discipline and surveillance resulted in the **strengthening of central authority**. It created a stable political environment in which military and administrative systems could function effectively without internal disruptions. This stability was crucial for sustaining military expansion and maintaining control over a vast empire.

The legacy of this centralized control system can also be observed in later administrative practices of the Delhi Sultanate and even the Mughal Empire, where rulers adopted similar mechanisms of surveillance and discipline to maintain authority.

In conclusion, the strict discipline and central control enforced by Alauddin Khilji played a vital role in consolidating power, preventing internal threats, and ensuring the efficiency of the military system. These measures significantly contributed to the long-term stability and strength of the state.

2.4 Fortification and Defense Mechanisms

To safeguard the empire from external threats, particularly the repeated incursions of the Mongols, Alauddin Khilji undertook extensive measures to strengthen **fortifications and defence mechanisms** across the Delhi Sultanate. Recognizing the strategic importance of defence, he focused on reinforcing vulnerable frontiers and securing key military positions.

One of the major initiatives was the **fortification of strategic locations**, especially along the north-western frontiers, which were most exposed to Mongol invasions. Existing forts were repaired and strengthened, while new defensive structures were constructed to create a robust line of defence. These forts served as military bases, supply centres, and safe zones during enemy attacks.

Khilji also ensured the **deployment of well-trained troops in frontier regions**, maintaining constant vigilance against potential invasions. The presence of a strong and alert military force in these areas acted as a deterrent to enemy advances and enabled quick response in times of conflict.

In addition to physical defences, the Sultan adopted a proactive approach by maintaining **efficient communication and intelligence systems**. Information regarding enemy movements was gathered and transmitted swiftly, allowing the administration to take timely preventive or defensive action.

These defence mechanisms not only protected the empire from external aggression but also contributed to **internal stability and administrative efficiency**. A secure frontier allowed the Sultan to focus on expansionist campaigns and governance without the constant threat of invasion.

The emphasis on fortification and organized defence had a lasting influence on later rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire, who continued to invest in strong defensive infrastructure and frontier security.

In conclusion, the fortification and defence strategies of Alauddin Khilji played a crucial role in ensuring the long-term security and stability of the empire. These measures highlight his foresight in combining military strength with strategic planning to protect and sustain imperial power.

III. INFLUENCE ON LATER DELHI SULTANATE ADMINISTRATION

The military policies of Alauddin Khilji had a **profound and lasting impact on the administrative structure** of the Delhi Sultanate. His reforms not only strengthened the state during his reign but also provided a framework that influenced subsequent rulers in shaping their military and administrative systems.

One of the most important influences was the **adoption of centralized military control**. Later rulers recognized the effectiveness of Khilji's approach in reducing the power of nobles and ensuring loyalty to the throne. As a result, they continued to emphasize centralized authority over military organization to maintain political stability and control.

The **concept of a standing army** also became more prominent after Khilji's reign. Successors understood the strategic advantage of maintaining a permanent, salaried force that could be deployed quickly in times of need. This marked a gradual shift away from reliance on feudal levies and contributed to the professionalization of the military.

Khilji's administrative innovations further **inspired reforms under later rulers** such as Muhammad bin Tughlaq and Firoz Shah Tughlaq. Although their policies differed in scope and execution, they built upon the foundation laid by Khilji, particularly in areas such as revenue administration, military organization, and central governance.

Another enduring legacy was the **importance of surveillance and intelligence in governance**. The use of spies and informants to monitor officials, nobles, and military personnel became a continued practice, helping rulers maintain control and prevent rebellions. This emphasis on internal security remained a key feature of Sultanate administration.

However, it is important to note that **not all of Khilji's policies were implemented with the same level of rigor by his successors**. The effectiveness of his system largely depended on strong leadership and strict enforcement, which were not always sustained in later reigns. Despite this, the underlying principles of his reforms continued to influence administrative practices.

In conclusion, the military policies of Alauddin Khilji played a crucial role in shaping the evolution of governance in the Delhi Sultanate. His emphasis on centralization, discipline, and administrative efficiency left a lasting imprint on subsequent rulers and contributed to the development of a more organized and controlled state system.

IV. IMPACT ON MUGHAL MILITARY AND ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

The legacy of Khilji's military policies is most evident in the administrative practices of the Mughal Empire.

4.1 Influence on Mansabdari System

The military innovations introduced by Alauddin Khilji, particularly the **Dagh (branding of horses)** and **Chehra (descriptive rolls of soldiers)** systems, had a lasting influence on the development of later military-administrative structures, most notably the **Mansabdari system** under Akbar in the Mughal Empire.

The Mansabdari system was a highly organized framework that classified officials and military officers (mansabdars) based on rank and responsibility. A key feature of this system was the **strict regulation and verification of troops and horses**, which closely resembled Khilji's earlier practices. Like the Dagh system, horses maintained by mansabdars were **branded and inspected** to ensure quality and prevent substitution or fraud. Similarly, the Chehra system's

concept of maintaining **detailed records of soldiers** was reflected in the Mughal practice of documenting the number, identity, and equipment of troops under each mansabdar.

These measures ensured **accountability, transparency, and efficiency** within the military structure. They prevented corruption, such as false musters or misappropriation of resources, and helped the central authority maintain accurate control over military strength. This was particularly important in a vast empire like the Mughal state, where effective administration depended on reliable record-keeping and supervision.

Moreover, the adaptation of these principles under Akbar demonstrates how Khilji's policies were not only innovative for their time but also **flexible enough to be refined and institutionalized** in later periods. While Akbar expanded and systematized these ideas within a broader administrative framework, the foundational concept of state control over military resources can be traced back to Khilji's reforms.

In conclusion, the influence of Alauddin Khilji on the Mansabdari system highlights the **continuity and evolution of military administration** in medieval India. His emphasis on inspection, record-keeping, and centralized control played a crucial role in shaping one of the most sophisticated administrative systems of the Mughal Empire.

4.2 Centralized Military Structure

The development of a **centralized military structure** under the Mughal Empire reflects the enduring influence of the military policies of Alauddin Khilji. His emphasis on direct state control over the army laid the foundation for a system in which military power was firmly concentrated in the hands of the ruler.

Under the Mughals, particularly during the reign of Akbar, the army was organized and maintained under a **centralized administrative framework**, reducing reliance on feudal or semi-independent forces. Unlike earlier systems where local chiefs provided troops in exchange for land grants, the Mughal system ensured that military personnel were **directly accountable to the emperor** through structured hierarchies such as the Mansabdari system.

This approach closely mirrored Khilji's policy of maintaining a **standing army paid and controlled by the state**, which minimized the influence of nobles and prevented the fragmentation of military authority. By centralizing control, the ruler could ensure greater discipline, uniformity, and efficiency within the armed forces.

A centralized military system also contributed to **enhanced imperial authority and political stability**. Since the army was loyal to the central government rather than to individual nobles, the chances of rebellion or regional autonomy were significantly reduced. This enabled the Mughals to govern a vast and diverse empire more effectively.

Furthermore, such a structure allowed for **better coordination, resource allocation, and strategic planning**, which were essential for conducting large-scale military campaigns and maintaining internal security. The administrative efficiency achieved under this system became a hallmark of Mughal governance.

In conclusion, the centralized military structure of the Mughal Empire clearly reflects the legacy of Alauddin Khilji. His emphasis on direct state control over the military not only strengthened his own empire but also influenced the evolution of a more organized and powerful imperial system in later periods.

4.3 Revenue-Military Link

One of the most enduring contributions of Alauddin Khilji was the clear **integration of revenue administration with military requirements**, a principle that significantly influenced the शासन of the Mughal Empire. Khilji recognized that a strong and permanent army could only be sustained through a stable and efficient system of revenue collection, and this idea became a cornerstone of later imperial governance.

Under Khilji, reforms such as direct land revenue collection, high taxation rates, and strict economic regulation ensured a **continuous flow of income to the state treasury**, which was then used to maintain a large standing army. This direct linkage between economic resources and military expenditure created a model of governance where financial strength directly translated into military power.

This concept was further refined and institutionalized by Mughal rulers, especially Akbar, who developed a highly organized revenue system known as the **Zabt system**. This system involved systematic land measurement,

classification, and standardized assessment of revenue, ensuring efficiency and consistency in tax collection. The revenue thus generated formed the backbone of the Mughal military establishment.

The Mughal administration clearly reflected Khilji's principle that **economic stability is essential for sustaining military strength**. By maintaining a well-structured revenue system, the Mughals were able to support a large and disciplined army, conduct extensive military campaigns, and maintain control over a vast empire.

Moreover, this integration reduced dependence on feudal intermediaries and strengthened central authority, as both revenue and military power were concentrated under the direct control of the state. It also enabled better planning and allocation of resources for military purposes.

In conclusion, the revenue–military link established by Alauddin Khilji had a lasting influence on Mughal administration. By demonstrating the importance of aligning economic policies with military needs, he laid the foundation for a system that ensured both financial stability and military efficiency in medieval Indian empires.

4.4 Administrative Discipline and Record-Keeping

The emphasis on **administrative discipline and systematic record-keeping** in the Mughal Empire can be traced back to the earlier practices of the Delhi Sultanate, particularly those introduced by Alauddin Khilji. His शासन marked a significant step toward the development of a more organized and bureaucratic administrative system.

Khilji placed great importance on **maintaining accurate and detailed records**, especially in relation to the military and revenue administration. Systems such as the Chehra (descriptive rolls of soldiers) and regular inspections ensured that information regarding personnel, resources, and finances was properly documented and verified. This helped eliminate corruption, prevent fraud, and improve administrative efficiency.

This tradition of record-keeping was further **refined and institutionalized under the Mughals**, particularly during the reign of Akbar. The Mughal administration developed a highly structured bureaucratic system that relied on detailed documentation of land revenue, military personnel, salaries, and state expenditures. Officials were required to maintain precise records, which enabled effective governance across a vast empire.

Administrative discipline was also strengthened through **regular audits, inspections, and supervision**, ensuring accountability at every level of governance. This systematic approach reduced the chances of mismanagement and enhanced the overall efficiency of the राज्य machinery.

Moreover, the focus on documentation allowed the state to make **informed decisions based on accurate data**, facilitating better planning in areas such as taxation, military deployment, and resource allocation. It also ensured continuity in administration, as records could be used for reference and policy implementation over time.

In conclusion, the Mughal system of administrative discipline and record-keeping owes much to the foundational practices established by Alauddin Khilji. His emphasis on organization, accountability, and documentation played a crucial role in shaping the evolution of a sophisticated bureaucratic system in medieval India.

V. EVALUATION OF LEGACY

The military policies of Alauddin Khilji represent a landmark in the evolution of statecraft within the Delhi Sultanate, leaving a deep and lasting imprint on subsequent regimes, including the Mughal Empire. While these policies were highly effective in achieving their objectives, a balanced evaluation reveals both significant strengths and certain limitations.

Strengths

One of the most notable strengths of Khilji's military system was the **establishment of centralized military authority**. By bringing the army under direct state control and reducing dependence on feudal elements, he strengthened the power of the monarchy and ensured greater political stability.

His policies also led to **improved efficiency and accountability** within the military and administrative framework. Measures such as systematic record-keeping, inspection of troops and horses, and strict discipline minimized corruption and enhanced operational effectiveness.

Another key strength was the **strengthening of state control over resources**. Through the integration of economic and military policies, Khilji ensured a steady flow of revenue to sustain a large standing army. This close linkage between finance and military power became a model for later rulers.

Furthermore, his reforms had a **long-term influence on administrative development**. Successive rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire adopted and refined many of his ideas, demonstrating the enduring relevance of his approach to governance and military organization.

Limitations

Despite these achievements, Khilji's system had certain limitations. A major drawback was that it **required strict enforcement and strong leadership**. The success of his policies depended heavily on his personal authority, making them difficult to maintain under weaker rulers.

Additionally, some measures proved **unsustainable after his reign**. The rigid control over markets, administration, and the military required constant supervision, which later rulers were unable to uphold with the same level of effectiveness.

Another limitation was that **excessive control sometimes led to administrative rigidity**. While strict regulation ensured discipline and stability, it also restricted flexibility and could hinder adaptability in changing circumstances.

Overall Assessment

In conclusion, despite certain limitations, the military policies of Alauddin Khilji had a **profound and enduring impact** on medieval Indian governance. They not only strengthened the Delhi Sultanate during his reign but also influenced the development of more sophisticated administrative and military systems in later periods. His legacy stands as a significant example of how effective military organization, combined with strong central authority, can shape the course of political history.

VI. CONCLUSION

The legacy of the military policies of Alauddin Khilji represents a crucial turning point in the evolution of military organization and state administration in medieval India. His reforms—ranging from the establishment of a large standing army and strict disciplinary measures to innovations like the Dagh and Chehra systems—laid a strong foundation for centralized governance within the Delhi Sultanate.

These policies not only strengthened the military efficiency and political stability of his own reign but also significantly influenced subsequent rulers. Later Sultanate rulers adopted elements of his centralized approach, while the Mughal Empire, particularly under Akbar, refined and institutionalized many of these principles through systems like the Mansabdari framework, organized revenue administration, and detailed record-keeping. The continuity of these ideas demonstrates the depth and durability of Khilji's administrative vision.

Moreover, Khilji's integration of military needs with economic and administrative policies highlights a sophisticated understanding of governance. His emphasis on discipline, accountability, and central control became defining characteristics of later imperial systems, contributing to the development of more structured and efficient state mechanisms.

However, the sustainability of his policies depended largely on strong leadership and strict enforcement, which limited their long-term application in their original form. Despite this, their core principles continued to shape administrative practices and military organization in subsequent periods.

In conclusion, the military policies of Alauddin Khilji had a profound and enduring impact on both the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal administration. His legacy lies not only in his military successes but also in the institutional frameworks he established, which played a vital role in the evolution of centralized governance and imperial power in medieval Indian history.

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