

Ques-How far is it correct to say that the reforms of Sher Shah Suri were the true inspiration behind Akbar's administrative innovations?

Answer: During his short tenure as emperor, Sher Shah Suri introduced a remarkable range of administrative, economic, and military reforms. Therefore, it is tempting to think that Akbar should have based many of his administrative reforms along the same lines. While this may be true to some extent, to give entire credit to Sher Shah would be a gross injustice to the acumen and sagacity of Akbar.

- **Some actions of Sher Shah certainly influenced the policies of Akbar.**
 1. **Empire building:** Both Sher Shah and Akbar were empire builders. Akbar conquered the Kabul-Kandahar-Gazani natural defense line for India. He did not leave Deccan completely unattended. During the end of tenure, he had compelled Ahmednagar to submit to him.
 2. **Dividing the empire into administrative units:** Sher Shah for more convenient conduct of administration divided his empire into 47 *sarkars*. Akbar accepted the concept of *sarkars* and took the idea further by divided his empire first into 15 provinces.
 3. **Sovereignty of kingship:** Both Sher Shah and Akbar gave ministerial responsibilities to individual nobles. Akbar was a bit more trusting in this matter. But, neither of them tolerated a dilution of the divine right of kingship. Sher Shah fought the centrifugal tendencies of the Afghan tribal polity. Similarly, Akbar rejected the Mongol-Timurid legacy of dividing the empire between the sons.
 4. **Military system:** Sher Shah strictly enforced the system of *dagh* (branding of horses) to maintain the quality of horses and *hulia* (descriptive roll of soldiers) to prevent recruitment of bogus soldiers. Akbar accepted this system and elaborated it further with his *Mansabdari* system.
 5. **Provision of justice:** Both Sher Shah and Akbar understood the value of justice. The sultan/Padshah, chief Qazi, provincial and local officials, all of them were enjoined with the responsibility of maintaining law & order and a just judicial system in their areas. Village panchayats had the responsibility of law & order in their area.
 6. **Land reforms:** Sher Shah had introduced a system of classification of land into good, middling and bad. It was measured with an iron rod. Rates were decided as per a chart (*rai*) and one-third of the crop was taxed as land revenue, which was collected both in cash and kind. Since Todarmal had served both, Sher Shah and Akbar, there was some continuity in the land revenue administration of these two rulers. Akbar took the idea of classification further based on how long it was left fallow. Eventually, '*ain-i-dahshala*' was introduced in 1580 CE.

Thus, the above comparison indeed shows that there were a lot of continuities in the administrations of Sher Shah and Akbar. In fact, historian Vincent Smith says that **if Sher Shah had more time, the great Mughals would not have had the opportunity to appear in Indian history.**

But, there were many innovations in the administration of Akbar that had no precedence in the reign of Sher Shah.

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1. In central administration, Sher Shah mostly continued the old departmental structure of the Delhi Sultanate. But, Akbar introduced many new offices i.e. wakil. The division of responsibility between Diwan and Mir Bakshi was a beautiful way of maintaining the authority of Padshah.
2. The administrative units of sarkar and pargana were not new. In fact, sarkar was a modified version of an earlier unit called 'shiq'. It was Akbar who introduced a uniform structure of provincial administration i.e. subah.
3. As far as land revenue administration is concerned, the reforms were gradual starting from the time of Alauddin Khilji and not Sher Shah.
4. Akbar himself had inherited the Timurid legacy of a robust kingship. Afghan concept of sovereignty was no match to such a powerful tool.
5. The Mansabdari and Jagirdari systems of Akbar were quite a new thing for the Indian conditions.

In conclusion, we can say that Akbar, being a curious learner, certainly took many good ideas from Sher Shah. But, the achievements and administrative coherence of Akbar are his own.

