CHAPTER - XII

DAK-CHAUKIS AND SECRET SERVICE

The secret service, or the espionage system, is an adjunct of every monarchy and is as old in India as the dawn of recorded history and was based on the conception of a monarch as the embodiment of benevolent vigilance. A big empire in those days of meagre communications had to invest its local officials with considerable powers which could be misused in oppression or rebellion. Therefore, the secret service institution was devised to keep the centre informed of all that was happening in the provinces.  

The sarais of Sher Shah were also the stations of dak-chaukis (i.e. conveyance of news by relays of horses). Sher Shah kept his finger on the pulse of the empire by means of these institutions. Two government horses were kept in each sarai for the carrying of persons and despatches. "By dak-chauki, news reached him (Sher Shah) every day from Nilab and the extremity of Bengal." News reached him from two sources, namely, official and secret. Spies, posted all over

1. Qureshi, Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi, p.88.
2. Tarikh-i-Khan Jahan (Ms. p.186)
the country, used to send reports to the king through dak-
chauki. This was the origin of the news department under
Daroga-i-dak-Chauki appointed by the Mughals. "The net of
Sher Shah's secret service spread beyond the confines of his
dominion and to this he owed his salvation many a time." 4

SECRET SERVICES UNDER EARLY SULTANS

Muslim chroniclers recognised the antiquity of the system. 5
Abbasids attached great importance to the news writer and an
early ruler is reported to have called him 'a pillar of the
state'. 6 The Ghaznavids were well acquainted with the
system, from whom it was adopted by the Ghorids. 7 Qutab-ud-
din Aibak possessed his complement of news-writers, so this
system was well-established from the start of the Sultanate
of Delhi. 8 Balban is credited to have developed this system
to its utmost capacity, and his success in enforcing
obedience can be partly attributed to a well-organised news-
agency. 9 Allauddin Khilji also depended for the success of
his reforms on a highly developed system of espionage and

4. Qanungo, Sher Shah, p.393.
5. Siyasat Namah p.58.
6. Qureshi, Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi, p.88.
7. Baihaqi, pp.85, 139.
under him it had attained its frightful perfection. The institution of dak-chauki is also attributed to him. "It was the practice of the Sultan (Alauddin Khilji), when he sent an army on an expedition, to establish posts on the road, wherever posts could be maintained, beginning from Tilpat, which is the first stage. At every post relays of horses were stationed, and at every half or quarter kos. Runners were posted, officers and report-writers were appointed. Everyday or every two or three days, news used to come to the Sultan reporting the progress of the army, and intelligence of the health of the sovereign was carried to the army. False news was thus prevented from being circulated in the city or in the army. The securing of accurate intelligence from the court on one side, and the army on the other was a great public benefit." This is perhaps the earliest record of a Publicity Bureau in history. This department seems to have been wholly non-existent under his unworthy successors. Ibn Battutah, however, pays a high tribute to the efficiency of the news service under Muhammad bin Tughlaq.

11. Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi in Elliot, iii, p.203.
The Lodis also developed to a high level their means of securing information, indeed Sultan Sikandar Lodi was credited with extraordinary powers in this respect by some of his subjects. Sultan Sikandar Lodi revived this dak-chauki but with far less rigorous espionage. Earlier the institution was of a military character, but Sultan Sikandar greatly improved it, and extended its operation to all parts of his dominions. Under him it became a more permanent institution, used for both military and civil purposes. The following passage from Nizamuddin will give us an idea of how Sultan Sikandar Lodi controlled the movements of his armies on a distant expedition like a game of chess, from his capital by an efficient system of dak-chauki: "Whenever he sent his army in any direction, two farmans daily reached it; one in the early morning, giving instruction at what place it should halt after the day's march; and one at the time of afternoon prayer or in the evening, giving direction 'Do this and that'. This was never allowed to be disturbed. The horses of the dak-chauki were always kept in readiness." (Tabakat-i-Akbari, text p.171, Ferishta, p.187, copies it verbatim.) "After the custom of the days of Sultan Allauddin Khilji, it was necessary for daily reports of the prices of things, occurrences in the (Heaven) protected kingdom, and

the condition of the army (through dak-chauki) to reach the king (Sultan Sikandar Lodi). If anything went wrong by a hair's breadth, he made an instant inquiry into it." (Ferishta, Pers. text. p.187). "Daily report of prices and occurrences in the parganas of his dominion reached him every day." 14

UNDER SHER SHAH

Sher Shah owed this institution to his predecessors. Like all other departments of administration, he developed it to near perfection and made it extremely efficient. He employed a large number of actual spies who wandered about the land as travellers, traders or religious merchants. These men mixed with the populace and acquainted themselves with the views of the people on various matters, so discovering secrets which official agencies did not possess. He kept his finger on the pulse of the empire by means of this institution and through this his vast administrative machine worked effectively. Spies posted all over the country, used to send reports to the king through dak-chauki. An interesting event is related by Abbas Sarwani that when Sher Shah gave Shujaat Khan government of the Kingdom of Malwa, at the time of assigning Jagirs, Shujaat Khan's ministers ill-advised to keep a share for himself from the portion

assigned to the soldiery. Shujaat Khan from covetousness agreed to his minister’s proposal. 2000 cavalry resented and decried against this. They decided to acquaint Sher Shah of the happenings and deputed their vakil to his court, to represent real circumstances. Abbas Khan writes (Elliot IV. pp. 426-428) "Their vakil had not yet arrived when Sher Shah’s spies reported the circumstances of Shujaat Khan’s quarrel with the 2000 remonstrants to Sher Shah. On hearing the news, Sher Shah was enraged, and sending for Shujaat Khan’s vakil, said to him, “write to Shujaat, and say: ‘You were poor, and I ennobled you, and put under you Afghans better than yourself. Are you not satisfied with the revenue of your government, that you covet the rights of the soldiery? and are you without any shame before the people or any fear of God, and have you violated my regulations I have enacted and promulgated for this very purpose, that the chief’s rights and those of his soldiery might be distinct, and that the chiefs might respect the rights of the soldiers? If you were not a protege of my own, I would strip off your skin; but I pardon you this first fault. Do you, before their vakil reaches me, appease your soldiery, and their vakil comes and complains to me, I will resume your jagirs, and arrest and punish you severely. It does not behove nobles to disobey their master’s orders, for this occasions the loss to him of his honour and authority.”
When the vakil's letter reached Shujaat Khan, he was exceedingly confounded and ashamed, and disturbed with dread and apprehension; so reproaching his ministers, he said: "Your counsel has been the cause of disgrace and distress to me. How shall I show my face to the King?" Then going himself to the encampment of the 2000 remonstrants, he made many excuses for himself, and appeasing the soldiery with promises and oaths that he would not do them any harm, and encouraging them with gifts and presents, brought them back to his own encampment. When the vakil of the soldiers turned back again from his journey, and came to Shujaat Khan, the latter returned many thanks to heaven, and distributed much money to the poor and needy, and gave him a horse and a princely robe of honour. Sher Shah's authority, whether he was absent or present, was completely established over the race of Afghans. From the fear, either of personal punishment or of deprivation of office, there was not a creature who dared to act in opposition to his regulations and if a son of his own, or a brother, or any of his relatives or kin, or any chief or ministers, did a thing displeasing to Sher Shah, and it got to his knowledge, he would order him to be bound and put to death.  

The knowledge that there were spies abroad who would be sending reports to the monarch kept the regular official news writers efficient and careful.