SHER SHAH was the architect of a brilliant administrative system. The analysts of the Mughals have been obliged to admit, albeit ungraciously, his merits as a soldier and a statesman, but to them he was always Sher Khan, the Afghan rebel. His qualities as a ruler were more remarkable than his victories in the battle-fields. His short reign of five years was marked by the introduction of wise and salutary changes in every branch of administration. Some of these reforms were by way of revival and reintroduction of the traditional features of the old, tried out administrative systems in India, Hindu as well as Muslim, while others were innovations which have proved to be significant links between ancient and modern India.

All modern writers have fully recognized the fact that the revenue and currency systems which prevailed in India, from the time of Sher Shah with very little modification down to the middle of the 19th century were not the achievements of Akbar but of Sher Shah, no serious attempt was made to trace the hand of that great Afghan’s constructive genius in the imperial edifice itself which the stupendous literary activity of Abul-Fazl misled the world into regarding as the
sole creation of his royal patron, Akbar.1 "No government not even the British" declared Keene, "has shown so much wisdom as this Pathan." 2

Right from his youth, Sher Shah had sedulously devoted himself to the acquisition of learning and to the study of the art of government, and found an opportunity of putting his knowledge into practice in the administration of the parganas which his father placed under his charge, where also in the suppression of rebellion and organised brigandage, he gained practical experience of the art of war. He devoted the whole of his time to the affairs of state, allowing himself no leisure, and by the time he acquired the supreme authority he was ultimately acquainted with all the details of civil administration, as no other Indian ruler, before or since, has been.3

Sher Shah gradually built up from below a solid structure of Government whose base was coextensive with the area of his empire. He wished to organize the whole of Hindustan as one

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1. Qanungo's Sher Shah, p.347.

2. Keane, Fall of the Mughal Empire.

3. Cambridge History of India vol. IV.p.56. Abbas mentions (Elliot IV. p.411) that Sher Shah believed "it behoves the great to be always active, and they should not consider, on account of the greatness of their own dignity and loftiness of their own rank, the affairs and business of the kingdom small or petty, and should place no undue reliance on their ministers."
vast royal fisc which would give him entire control over the financial resources of the whole empire and draw the remotest village into closer connection with the imperial authority. He took up the pargana—a conglomeration of contiguous villages—as its administrative unit—the smallest he could find without destroying the autonomous village communities. He appointed one shiqdar, one amin, one treasurer (fotehdar) and two karkuns (writers)—one to write Hindi and another to write Persian—to every pargana. Abbas (MS. p.265 = Elliot, iv. p.424) gives the number as 113,000 but there were said to be 116,000 which is confirmed by the author of Wakiat-i-Mushtaki (Elliot, IV. 413).

4. Elliot's translation reads amir and amil indiscriminately; amil is correct.

5. (Abbas MS. p. 249 = Elliot, iv. p. 413) we have no means of ascertaining the exact number of parganas included in the Empire of Sher Shah.

6. The original of Abbas has "113,000 parganas, i.e., villages." The mistake is evident. Some inconsistency is to be noticed in the foot-notes of Elliot. In IV. p.413. (Foot-note 1) he gives 116,000 as the number of parganas mentioned by the author of Wakiat-i-Mushtaki and supported by the Tarikh-i-Daudi. In p.424 (Foot-note 1) he writes 113,000 parganas, while in the extracts from that author (iv. p.551) we find 13,000. Qanungo holds that the figure given of parganas should be considered that of villages (dihí) (Qanungo's Sher Shah, p.351 & 352). Tripathi in Some Aspects of Muslim Administration p.352 mentions that this figure "was neither of the villages nor of the parganas but of the sawars in all the parganas of the Khalsa Land." Tripathi's assumption presumably based on the Tarikh-i-Daudi and supported by Elliot (IV. p.417 foot note 1) is incorrect and Qanungo's seems to be correct as Sher Shah is known to have always kept 1,50,000 horsemen in his standing army (Elliot IV. p.415). According to the 'Ain-i-Akbari the Subah of Bengal (minus Orissa) contained 19 sarkars sub-divided into 688 mahals or parganas; the subah of Delhi 8 sarkars 237
The next higher and larger administrative unit was the Sarkar. According to Abbas Sarwani a number of parganas were grouped into a Sarkar over which Sher Shah appointed two officials, one military and the other civilian, who respectively bore the title of Shiqdar-i-Shiqdaran (the chief Shiqdar) and Munsif-i-Munsifan (Chief Munsif) to supervise the conduct of their subordinates. This was borrowed by Sher Shah from the system possibly introduced by Sultan Sikandar Lodi for the government of crownlands divided into Shiqs.

We do not come across any larger administrative unit than the Sarkar. The Subhas Subhadars were the creation of Akbar.

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parganas; the subah of Agra 13 sarkars 262 parganas; the subah of Allahabad 9 sarkars (excluding the sarkar of Kalinjar, which was not settled at the time of Sher Shah's death) 166 parganas; Oudh 5 sarkars 133 mahals (parganas), 5 sarkars of Rajputana (Ajmer, Ranthambhor, Jodhpur, Nagor and Sirohi) contained 160; the five Doabs of the Punjab 232, the twelve sarkars of Malwa 301; the 3 sarkars of Multan, Dipalpur and Bhakkar, 86 sarkars sub-divided into 2,467 parganas. Even if we concede that Sher Shah made the parganas smaller for better administration, thrice this number (2,467 x 3) would represent the maximum number, considering that each contained on the average 15 townships (Qamungo in Sher Shah p.352). These are only assumptions but the exact number cannot be ascertained.

7. The word Shiq --- which means a fiscal sub-division with some important township as its sadar or chief town such as shiq of Hansi, shiq of Delhi as found in Tarikh-i-firuz Shahi. Sultan Muhammed Tughlaq divided the Maratha country in four shiqs (Vide Elliot, III p.251). The word Sarkar is not mentioned by any early Persian writer of the 15th century. Sarkar denoted a territorial sub-division comprising of a group of parganas by Sher Shah, because the word Sarkar is not to be found even in Babur's Memoirs.
Sher Shah wanted to abolish big governorships especially of the military type. His ideal of provincial organisation was that of Bengal, where he appointed Qazi Fazihat governor of the whole province but the office carried no military command and no great administrative duties except that of supervision and prevention of quarrels which were bound to arise among a number of officials of equal status and independent of one another. He would have placed such civilians at the head of other provinces if he could have done so with safety. But, strategic requirements and military necessity compelled him to keep many governors at the head of large armies in some of the important provinces. But even in these parts, like the rest of the empire, Central government controlled finance and justice.

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8. Sher Shah kept Haibat Khan Niazi whom he gave the title Azam Humayun, as the governor of the Punjab and Multan with 30,000 horsemen; (Elliot iv. p.428) Shujaat Khan ruled over southern Malwa and had under him 12,000 horsemen (Elliot iv. p.426). Khawas Khan held sway over Ajmer, Jodhpur and Nagor with a large retinue of armed forces.