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## HISTORY OF POSTAL COMMUNICATIONS DURING MEDIEVAL DECCAN

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### INTRODUCTION

Early Indian rulers were impelled by the need for a regular supply of information regarding the conduct of their officers, the daily occurrences in the country and the movement of their enemies. Postal system owes its origin to the news-letters and news-reporters, which formed an important part of the administrative machinery in the early days. The system of newsletters was based on the conception of the 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. Therefore it was essential that an institution be devised to keep the center informed of all that was happening in the provinces and in remote places of far-flung empires. Even before the medieval period, there existed a postal system of a different type in the Deccan, and "Postal system had from time immemorial existed in India." But a new type of postal system evolved in the Deccan when it came under the suzerainty of the Delhi Sultanate. The evolution of postal communications in Medieval Deccan can be classified as follows:-

1. Under the Delhi Sultanate, 695-741 /1296 -1340.
2. under the Deccan Rulers, 741 -1137/1340-1724.
3. under the Mughals, 968-1137/1561 -1724
4. Parallel Postal Systems along with those of Deccani Rulers:
  - (a) Of the Mughals, 1048-1098/1637-1687
  - (b) Of the Europeans, 907-1137/1500-1724

### I. Under the Delhi Sultanates

#### i. Jalalu'd-din Khalji

In the Deccan, the system of news-letters and regular postal communications originated in the thirteenth century when the governor of Kara, "Aläu'd-din Khalji (nephew of Sultan Jalälu'd-din) led the expedition into the Deccan against the Yadava Ruler of Devagiri in 695/1296 and coerced him to cede Elichpur, after which he marched to Devagiri. With this expedition the foundation of regular postal communications for sending news-letters were laid in the Deccan.

According to the Tarikh-i Firoz Shāhi "It was the practice of the Sultan (Jalālu'd-din Khalji), whenever he sent an army on an expedition, to establish posts on the roads wherever posts could be maintained, beginning at Tilpat (near Delhi) which is the first stage. At every post relays of horses were stationed, at every half or quarter *Kos* runners were posted, and in every town or place wherever horses were posted officers and report-writers were appointed. Once every two to three days news came to the Sultan reporting the progress of the army and intelligence of the health of the sovereign was carried to the army.<sup>1</sup>

## ii. Alau'd-din Khalji

"Alāu'd-din Khalji succeeded Sulṭān Jalalu'd-din Khalji in 695/1296 and in the same year he sent an expedition to Dēvagiri. His first expedition was dispatched in 703/1303 against the Kakatiyas of Warangal. With these expeditions, we find further extension of postal system in the Deccan. 'Alāu'd-din Khalji had good means of communications for his large empire. The Sulṭāns' Barids', distributed all over the empire, furnished him with news. A minister with great importance called Barid-i Mamalik, was the head of the State News-Agency. It was his duty to keep himself informed of all that was happening in the Empire, and agents spread all over the Empire reported all news which had any significance or importance. The headquarters of every administrative subdivision had a local Barid who sent regular news-letters to the Central Office. Men of known probity and honesty were appointed to this post; sometimes learned men with an outstanding reputation for piety and impartiality were made to accept it against their will as a matter of public duty. So great was the responsibility that if the Barids failed to report a misdeed or some act of gross injustice committed by a well-placed official, he sometimes paid for his shortcomings with his life. Nothing was outside the cognizance of a Barid; he was the confidential agent of the Central Government to report on every aspect of public administration. He kept his informers everywhere and let nothing escape his argus-eyed vigilance. Having gathered all the information he could, he classified it and put it in the reports so that each document could be referred to separate departments concerned by the Central Office or personally to the Sultan. A well-organized news-agency was a prime necessity for the successful administration of justice in the realm, since in this way the monarch got prompt news of the deeds of his servants; hence the department was compared to 'the windows in a house which admit light from outside.' The Barids were required to report "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." The post was well-paid, for it was widely considered to keep the Barids immune from the temptation of accepting bribes.<sup>2</sup>

It is doubtful if the Sultan's post carried private letters; it is certain, however, that the soldiers on expeditions were able to communicate with their families by this method. When Sultan Alau'd-din sent Malik Kafūr against Warangal in 710/1310 the Sultan was anxiously following the progress of the expedition to Warangal by the daily news-dispatches by the post which had been established all along the route from Delhi to Warangal. Finally, by the year 718/1318, the postal system of the Delhi Sultanates was fully extended throughout the Deccan.<sup>3</sup>

## iii. The Tughluqs

The House of Tughluqs succeeded the Khalji Sultans in 1325. Great improvement in the development of the postal system was made during the reign of Muhammad Bin-Tughluq especially when he made Devagiri, renamed Daulatabad, and his second capital. Eloquent tributes have been paid by the Moorish travelers. Bin-Tughluq regarding the transmission of news and the postal system during the time of Muhammad Bin-Tughluq. Bin-Tughluq arrived in India on 1 Muharram 12

September 1333. He says: 15 "The Barid in India are of two types. The Barid-i-Khail they are generally called *Elwulaq*. (The first letter 'Wav' is to be accentuated with 'Pēsh' and the last letter of the word is 'Qaf'.) The horse courier, which is a part of the Sultan's cavalry, is stationed at a distance of every four *Kroh*. The Barid-i-Rijalah is thus arranged; each *Kroh* was into three equal parts called *Davah* which signifies one-third of a *Kroh*. At each third of a *Kroh* there is an inhabited village on the outskirts of which there are three *Qibbabin* which the couriers sit, ready to move off with their loins grinded. In the hands of each is a rod about two cubits long tipped with *Jalajil-i-Nahastied* at the end held upside. When a courier leaves the village, he takes the letter in one hand and in the other, the rod with jinglers. In this manner, he proceeds to the nearest food courier, running with all his might; and, as he approaches, he shakes his rod. When the men in the *Qibbab* hear the sound of jinglers, they prepare to receive him. When he arrives, one of them takes the letter and sets off with all speed. He keeps on cracking his rod until he reaches the next *Davah*. Thus, these courier proceeds until the letter reaches its destination.<sup>4</sup>

## II. Under the Deccan Rulers

### 1. The Yadavas and the Kakatiyas

The rulers of the Yadavas and the Kakatiyas dynasties of the Deccan used to employ special messengers to communicate with one another and to send orders to their officers.

Ferishta records that, "Ram Dev, in a state of utmost perplexity sent expresses to hasten the succour which he expected from the Rajas of Koolburg, Tulingana, Malwa and Kandesh." These messengers of the Raja Ram Dev were called *Basiths*, according to the *Khazainu'IFutuh*, in which the author, Amir Khusro uses his word for the messengers of Ram Dev. Likewise similar system might had been employed by the Rajas of other Deccan Kingdoms.<sup>5</sup>

### 2. The QutbShahis of Golkonda, Hyderabad

With the break-up of the Delhi Sultanates, the postal system was also disorganized. It is quite possible that a similar system of postal communication was followed by the Bahamanis and other Kingdoms of the Deccan for their news-letters and/or for the controlling of their provincial administration of the Empires. The Bahamanis even maintained the *Munhiyan* or secret service against Delhi. For the proper functioning of this intelligence service, the Bahamanis probably had a regular postal system; but the precise details are not known. What is mentioned here are details of the Qutb Shahi of Golkonda and Adil Shahi of Bijapur which emerged after the dissolution of the Bahamanis Kingdom along with three other dynasties of the Deccan.

Ibrahim Qutb Shah (1550-1580), the fourth ruler of the Qutb Shahi Kingdom, introduced a new intelligence service to keep in touch with the subjects and officers of local units. A large number of reporters were posted throughout the Kingdom for conveying local news to the capital Golkonda.<sup>6</sup>

The existence of good and efficient postal system under the Qutb Shahi is given in an interesting account of Jean Baptiste Tavernier, who visited Golkonda several times in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Tavernier describes the system when he met Mohammad Sa'ed Mir Jumla, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom at Gandikota on 23 Ziqah 1062/15 September 1652, as follows – "After his (Mir Jumla's) secretaries had written the answers, he caused them to read and then took the letters and sealed them himself, giving some to foot-messengers, others to horsemen. For you must know that all those letters which are sent by the foot-posts all over India, go with more speed than those letters which are carried by horsemen. The reason is that at the end of every two leagues

there is a little hut where there are men always ready, who are engaged to run immediately, so that when one of the men who carry the letters, comes to one of these huts, he throws the letters into the hut and then he who is appointed runs with them to the next stage. They look upon it as ill-omen to give the letters into messenger's hands but they must be thrown at his feet and he must gather them up. It is to be observed that the highways in most part of India are like walks of trees; and if there are no trees, at every five hundred paces distance, there are set up little heaps of stones, which the inhabitants of the nearby village are bound to whitewash from time to time, so that the letter-carriers may not miss their way in dark and rainy nights."<sup>7</sup>

Tavernier has described the postal system between Golkonda and Gandikota, established immediately after it was conquered by Mir Jumla; and according to Jagdish Narayan Sarkar, "For facility in transmission of news, Mir Jumla set up *dakchaukis* from Hyderabad to Karnataka."<sup>8</sup>

The effectiveness of the system is evident from the following statement of Tavernier – "When we perceived him (Mir Jumla) at a little leisure, we asked him whether he had any commands to lay upon us and whether he thought our commodities fitting to be shown to the King. He answered that we might go to Golkonda and that he would write to his son in our behalf and that his letters would be there sooner than us."<sup>9</sup>

The elaborate postal system which the Qutb Shahi rulers were maintaining can be imagined from the amount of budget of Rs. 7501 for the salaries of postal *harkaras* allotted for the year 1685-86 only for what became later the Subah of Hyderabad.<sup>10</sup>

After the defection of Mir Jumla to the Mughal side as wazir of Aurangzeb, Karnataka was conferred by the Emperor Shah Jahan, in Ramazan July 1656, on Mir Jumla as a personal *jagir* under the Mughal Empire. Thus with this grant the *dakchaukis* in the Karnataka, which had been established earlier by Mir Jumla under Qutb Shahis of Golkonda, became the private property of Mir Jumla. This can be noted from the following passage – "He (Qutb Shah) instructed his general Abdul'I-Jabbar, to hinder the *dakchaukis* of Mir Jumla and to pick up a quarrel with his agents, causing considerable disorders in the internal administration of Karnataka."<sup>11</sup>

In the absence of Mir Jumla from Karnataka, Aurangzeb took all necessary and possible measures to guard Mir Jumla's dominion. Aurangzeb gave adequate instructions to Qubad Beg, a Mughal *hajib* at Golkonda. So great was the importance of Mir Jumla's *dakchaukis* that at his request, Aurangzeb dismissed Qubad, who was held responsible for the delays in the working *dakchaukis* from his post of *hajib*, and appointed Ahmad Beg Najmsani in his place.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, we see that for some years there was simultaneous operation of Qutb Shahi's and Mir Jumla's postal communication system within the territories of Golkonda as the postal routes of Mir Jumla between Hyderabad and Karnataka, Hyderabad and Sidhout, Hyderabad-Indore-Burhanpur etc. were all within the territories of Golkonda Kingdom.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. The Adil Shahi of Bijapur

The Adil Shahi Kingdom of Bijapur had an elaborate postal system for the communication of news and news-letters. During the reign of Ali Adil Shah I, (1558-1580) the King maintained an army of 300 Brahman *harkaras* and 700 *jasus* for the news reporting and conveying news-letters. Though these reporters were under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister, they had no restrictions approaching the King directly for reporting.<sup>14</sup>

The nature of duties of the *jasus* under Adil Shahis were similar to those of Barids of the Delhi Sultanates. They were appointed exclusively to report day and night to the King all the happenings in different parts of the Kingdom and *harkaras* conveyed letters from the Capital to the

officers of the Government at various places in the Kingdom and vice versa. According to Ferishta, the Adil Shahi Rulers studied the daily news reports brought by special messengers from different parts of the Kingdom in the open *darbar*, held every day except for Fridays. Official orders were passed by the King on these reports.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. The Maratha Rulers

Shivaji too organized an 'intelligence department' for the efficient operation of his army and an elaborate postal system. This system did not occupy any recognized position under the Maratha Rule. Special agencies were employed on particular occasions, when the armies went to Hindustan or to Karnataka. These special agencies consisted of *jasuds* or *Kassidsi*.e. runners, who apparently took 18 days to go to Delhi from Thalner, and 13 days from Maheshwar, and they were paid handsomely 3 rupees a day, the amount being regulated inversely according to the number of days they took for the journey.<sup>16</sup>

From the Maratha sources, it is noted that the *dak* system in Maharashtra came into existence chiefly to serve the needs of the Maratha Government. For the public post no difficulty was felt by the people who went on pilgrimage, as a person named 'Athawla' established a *dak* which carried letters between Banaras and Poona, Subsequently, two systems of *dak* came into existence in Maharashtra – the *Sarkaridak* and the *Sahukaridak*. The Maratha *dak* system operated between all the principal towns of Maharashtra and also between Kalyan and Banaras, Kalyan and Bombay, Poona and Nasik, Gwalior and Satara. The Maratha Rulers employed *Machwe* along the Konkan Coast for dispatch and receipt of *Baatmi* while *Azurdaars* and *Jasuads* were employed across Maharashtra. According to the Marathi Encyclopedia, the *Sarkaridak* was dispatched daily in normal days and twice or thrice a day during war by means of *sawars* and *kassids*.<sup>17</sup>

### III. Mughal Postal System in Deccan

#### 1. Relay System of Akbar

The organization of relay system by Mughal Emperors in the Deccan dates back to 1596 when annexed the Imad Shahi of Berar. Akbar organized his conquest of the Deccan into three *Subas* and made over their Government to Prince Daniyal. The Mughal Postal System, which was a replica of Akbar's well organized system of postal service was established during this time. News and news-letters were the nuclei for the development of postal services. According to Ferishta, Akbar established posts throughout his dominion, having 2 horses and a set footman stationed at every *Dak Chowki* were employed to convey letter to ordinary businesses or to and from the Court. The footmen would travel fifty *kos* within 24 hours and when in special messengers were required to go quickly, they avail themselves of the post horses to proceed in the same way. Four thousand runners were in permanent pay, some of whom extraordinary occasions (where there were no posts) have performed a journey of seven hundred *kos*, in ten days (1400 miles in 10 days with post-horses.)<sup>18</sup>

Though Ferishta records that 1400 miles were covered in ten days, the news of the death of Jahangir in 1627, from the borders of Kashmir to Shah Jahan at Junnar in the Deccan was conveyed by a messenger named Banarsi in twenty days, covering a distance of a thousand miles. Probably, this efficiency might have been decreased after Akbar's reign. During Jahangir's time, the letters used to travel 80 *kos* during the day and night. While during Aurangzeb's rule, the efficiency of postal system seems to have increased. From the dates mentioned in the letters collected in the

*Aadab-i-Alamgiri*, we found that in Aurangzeb's time, it took only six days for a letter to reach Hyderabad from Delhi and vice versa.<sup>19</sup>

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