

## Development of trade and commerce during the tenure of Sher Shah Suri

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### Abstract

*The motive of this proposed research paper is to highlight the measures that were adopted by Sher Shah Suri for the development of trade and commerce in his empire. When we cross check the history of Sher Shah we find out that he endorsed numerous steps to boost the trade and commerce activities into his empire like he got many roads constructed, sarias (rest houses) which slowly took the shape of markets, he removed many unwanted taxes, introduced many reforms in Land revenue and other measures. In this proposed research paper we will discuss all those reforms which increased the economic charm within the empire of Sher Shah Suri.*

**Keyword- Roads, Sarias, taxes, law and order, traders, currency.**

### Introduction

Sher Shah Suri, a great ruler, a great administrator and a great warrior witnessed by Medieval India who turned down the Mughal rule from India and established the rule of Afghans which came to known as Sur dynasty which happened from 1540 A.D. till 1556 A.D. with Sher Shah Suri as its first ruler from 1540 to 1545 A.D. Farid was the childhood name of Sher Shah Suri and the title Sher Shah was conferred upon him by Bahar Khan, who was the then Jagirdar of Bihar. Sher Shah was not only a great defeater but his taste towards administrative affairs was also worth appreciation which made him one of the greatest ruler of Medieval India instead of ruling for merely for 5 years. He was always keen about to establish such nature of rule that will be beneficial for goodwill of people. In a brief interval of his rule of only 5 years he introduced so many reforms for development of trade and commerce to increase the economic charm in his empire and to raise the standard living of common masses that was praised by Dr V.A Smith in following words, ***“if Sher Shah Suri would have been surviving for long or his successors had been worthy like him, the great Mughals would not have been appeared on stage on Indian History after Sher Shah Suri.***

***Measures taken by Sher Shah Suri for development of trade and commerce.***

***Construction of roads-*** the chain of roads got established by Sher Shah which connected important parts of Country within his capital. The most important road among the Sark –I-Azam (renamed as Grand Trunk Road by Britishers), connecting Sonargaon in Eastern Bengal with Attock (now in Pakistan). The second road connected Agra and chittor, the third road connected Jodhpur with Agra, the fourth one connected Lahore and Multan and other one connected Agra to Burhanpur. This kind of road network boosted trade and commerce

activities within his empire. For the stability of travellers shady trees were planted on both sides of these roads. (chaurasia, 2002)

**Construction of Sarais (Rest houses)** - To ease the journey of the travellers about 1700 sarais were built by Sher Shah at the distance of every 2 Ko's (about 8 kms) on above mentioned roads. The travellers while on journey can stay in these sarais and for them separate kitchen arrangements were made both for Muslims and for Hindus. On the gate of every Sarai there were pots full of water which were given to both Hindus and Muslims. The names of those travellers who stayed in these Sarais have to be noted down in Persian as well as in Hindi language. In every Sarai two horses with men were maintained so that the news from the distant places could reach as fast as possible. (Sarwani Abbas Khan ., 1974) With the time most of these sarais converted into markets where the peasants and other business related persons gathered to sell their produce. So these sarais proved to be a good source for the improvement of trade and commerce. Every Sarai had several watchmen under the control of 'Shahna', and every Sarais has been called as 'arteries' of the empire. (chandra, 2007)

**Eliminated unwanted taxes-** Before Sher Shah sat on the throne; the merchants had to pay number of obnoxious taxes which Sher Shah felt quite unnecessary after he crowned himself as Emperor. So in action he removed many of such taxes and charged Octroi duty only at two places, when any article produced or entered into country, and when the article was put on sale (chaurasia, 2002). So after removing many unwanted taxes the traders and other business persons felt ease to indulge them into trade activities which increased the economic charm within empire. (rai, 1995-96)

**Good behaviour with traders-** The officers and other administrative persons were ordered by Sher Shah Suri to tackle the traders and other travellers in proper way and ordered them not to be harsh towards them. In case the trader suffered a loss of life or property, the village headmen was asked to present the culprit or to compensate by their own. So in such circumstances the traders could trade freely without any fear of loss, which led to high economic prosperity within the empire. (chopra, 1996)

**Law and order situation-** It is necessary to maintain the law and order situation to promote trade and commerce activities. So in this regard Sher Shah was very strict. Hard steps were taken by him to punish the burglars and criminals. He was also strict towards official persons who use to despoil the traders. (Majumdar, 1994). Abbas Khan pointed out, that if old women might place a basket full of Gold on her head and go on journey; no thief or robber would come near her for fear of punishment which Sher Shah imposed within his empire.

**New weights and measures-** To avoid any kind of fraud regarding the weights and measures, Sher Shah introduced new weights and measures which were more dependable and reliable. This step also proved to be very helpful in promoting trade and commerce activities. (chaurasia, 2002)

**Currency improvement-** Sher Shah introduced many reforms in coinage department as before him coins of mixed alloys were circulating into market, which traders hesitated to accept. Sher Shah struck the coins of fine gold, silver and copper in place of old coins. The reforms in silver coin were executed in such way that it remained in action even during Mughals and Britishers. (Chandra, 2004)

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the contribution of Sher Shah Suri in development of trade and commerce is really laudable. Sher Shah's occupation was merely for 5 years but it proved to very fruitful in economic affairs not only for upper classes but also for common masses. The way in which he command the peace and order situation, constructed good network of roads, created a really peaceful environment for traders to trade within the country displays his great vision in economic activities. All such measures proved that Sher Shah aimed for the well being of his subjects, as told by W. Crooke that, "He was the first ruler who attempted to found an empire broadly based upon people's will (Majumdar, 1994). All the measures that Sher Shah adopted to promote trade and commerce activities within his empire left no stone unturned to impress even Mughals and Britishers.

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