Ghiyas ud din Balban

Ghiyas-ud-din Balban who ruled India as the Sultan of Delhi from 1266 to 1287 A.D. was one of the greatest Sultans of the Mediaeval period. He like his master Iltutmish rose to power and became the Sultan of Delhi. His period has been marked as an illustrious chapter in the history of the Delhi sultanate.

**His Early Difficulties:**
Balban had to face a number of problems after his accession to the throne. The affairs of the state had fallen into confusion as well as the prestige of the crown had sunk low due to the misrule of weak and incompetent successors of Iltutmish. The powers of the nobles had increased and the majority of the members of the famous Forty had become disloyal to the throne.

They were proud, arrogant and were jealous of Balban. In the words of Barani, “Fear of the governing power which is the basis of all good governments and the source of the glory and splendor of the state, had departed from the hearts of all men, and the country had fallen into a wretched condition.”
The royal treasury was empty and the army was not well-organised. The Mongol invasion was imminent as well as the internal rebellions were raising their heads at regular intervals. Such was the critical stage, when Balban had been given the responsibility to face and fight. However he proved himself to be more than an equal for them.

Meaning of the policy of blood and iron:

This policy implied being ruthless to the enemies, use of sword, harshness and strictness and shedding blood. It allowed use of all sorts of methods of terrorisms the enemies and inflicting violence upon them. Even before becoming the Sultan of Delhi, Balban had tried these measures to some extent to rise to high posts. He had betrayed Razia and engineered revolts against her. He was responsible for the dethronement of Bahram Shah and installment of Masud as a King. Thus even before assuming the reigns of administration, Balban had gained sufficient experience to make use of the power of the sword against his enemies.

Theory of Kingship:
Balban realized that problems arose on account of the weak position of the king. He therefore put forward the concept of Divine Right of Kings.
i.e. the king was the representative of God on earth. None could challenge him. The king was there to rule and the nobles and others were there to obey him. The powers of the king were absolute and he was a despot.

**Loose administration:**
The administration needed a strong ruler to bring about order out of chaos.

**Corps of Forty:**
Balban himself belonged to the ‘Corps of Forty’ an institution or the group created by Iltutmish for strengthening his position. Iltutmish used this group to get all sort of information about his nobles. Balban was fully aware of the destructive activities of these. In due course, these slaves became so powerful that the rulers became captives in their hands. Balban realized that they were responsible for the chaotic and unstable condition of the state. Balban considered them as trouble shooters and realized the necessity of getting rid of them through stern measures.

**Revolts:**
There was the danger of revolts of some sections of Muslim chiefs and Rajput rulers.

**Mongol invasions:**
The Mongols posed a serious threat to the empire.

**Achievements**
1. Balban’s Theory of Kingship and Restoration of the Prestige of the Sultan:

Balban was the first ruler of the Delhi Sultanate who expressed clear and firm opinion regarding the powers of the Sultan. Professor K.A. Nizami has expressed that it was necessary for restoring not only the dignity of the Sultan and eradicating the possibility of conflict with the nobility but also the result of an inferiority complex and guilty conscience.

2. The Destruction of ‘The Forty’:

Even when Balban worked as the Naib of Sultan Nasir-ud-din, he tried to break up the power of the group of ‘the forty’ (Turkan-i-Chihalgani) as he regarded it necessary to restore the powers of the Sultan. When he himself became the Sultan, he used every means to achieve this aim. By the time Balban ascended the throne, most of these nobles had either died by themselves or were destroyed by Balban. The rest who remained were now killed or deprived of power.

3. The Army:

A strong army was a necessity for a powerful monarchy. Balban realised its necessity to make his despotism effective, to safeguard his empire from the invasion of the Mongols and to suppress rebellions. He increased the number of officers and soldiers of his army, paid them good salaries and took personal interest in their training.

4. The Administration and the Spy-System:

The administration of Balban was half-military and half-civil. All his officers were supposed to perform both administrative and military duties. Balban himself kept control over the entire administration.
Balban owed his success largely due to an efficient organisation of his spy-system. He appointed spies (Barids) to watch the activities of his governors, military and civil officers and even that of his own sons. Balban appointed them himself and they were well-paid.

They were expected to provide every important information to the Sultan and those who failed were punished severely. Every spy had direct access to the Sultan though none met him in the court.

5. The Conquest of Bengal:

Bengal was lost to the Delhi Sultanate during the reign of Sultan Nasir-ud-din when Arsalan Khan had declared himself independent. However, when Balban ascended the throne.