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## **The Role of Balban in the Subjugation and Administration of Mewat: A Study of Power Dynamics and Governance in the Delhi Sultanate**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

This abstract aims to provide a concise overview of the role of Balban in the subjugation and administration of Mewat during the Delhi Sultanate era. Balban, a prominent figure in medieval Indian history, played a significant role in expanding the territorial reach of the Delhi Sultanate, and Mewat was a key area in this endeavor. Balban's military campaigns and administrative policies were instrumental in bringing Mewat under the direct control of the Delhi Sultanate, reflecting his strong centralizing tendencies and efforts to establish effective governance in newly conquered territories. His approach to administration in Mewat aimed to maintain law and order, extract revenue, and ensure loyalty to the Sultanate, influencing the power structures, governance practices, and cultural interactions in the region. Exploring Balban's role in the subjugation and administration of Mewat offers valuable insights into medieval statecraft, the dynamics of center-periphery relationships, and the enduring impact of his policies on Mewat's historical narrative.

**Keywords:** Balban, Mewat, Meos, Mewati, Rajput.

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### **Introduction:**

Balban, a prominent figure in the history of medieval India, played a significant role in the subjugation and administration of Mewat during the Delhi Sultanate era. As a powerful noble and later Sultan of the Delhi Sultanate, Balban's policies and strategies had a lasting impact on the governance and control of the Mewat region. During his tenure as the Sultan, Balban sought to consolidate and expand the territorial reach of the Delhi Sultanate, and Mewat was a crucial frontier area in this endeavor. Balban's military campaigns and administrative measures were instrumental in bringing Mewat under the direct control of the Delhi Sultanate, effectively subjugating the region and integrating it into the empire.

Balban's role in the subjugation and administration of Mewat had broader implications for the political and cultural dynamics of the region. His policies and actions influenced the power structures, governance practices, and cultural interactions in Mewat, leaving a lasting imprint on the region's historical trajectory. In this context, exploring the role of Balban in the subjugation and administration of Mewat offers valuable insights into the dynamics of medieval statecraft, the relationship between the center and the periphery in the Delhi Sultanate, and the enduring impact of his policies on the historical narrative of Mewat. Balban's approach to administration in Mewat reflected his strong centralizing tendencies and his efforts to establish effective governance in the newly conquered territories. His policies aimed to maintain law and order, extract revenue, and ensure loyalty to the Sultanate, thereby shaping the administrative framework of Mewat and its relationship with the Delhi Sultanate.

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### **Balban and Mewat:**

The Sultanate of Delhi had become weaker in the two decades that followed the death of Sultan Iltutmish. Territory was lost to the Mongols, nobility and other chiefs of the Sultanate. To make matters worse, the Mongols were regularly raiding the regions of Sindh and Punjab. Even the Meos or Mewatis in the suburb of Delhi were independent and posing threat to the capital and the territory. Ghiyasuddin Balban (Ulugh Khan) had realized this in his days as the wazir and later as sultan of the Sultanate. He was responsible for re-organization of the sultanate administration and military that would allow them to deal with the emerging threat to the Sultanate. He also permanently suppressed the turbulent Mewatis or Meos in the adjoining areas of his capital Delhi. Balban rebuilt the strength of the Sultanate of Delhi to counter the Meos. The military of the sultanate was reorganized. He built up a professional and disciplined army of two hundred thousand men from all different castes/tribes. A new offensive began against the Meos of Mewat. The structure of administration and governance with the Sultanate was also changed. Balban believed in ruling through a policy of "Iron and Blood". He brought an end to the old noble families who had gained far too much power and had previously used it to control the sultans. He instilled the discipline and order that was desperately needed in the empire.

Ghiyasuddin Balban (Ulugh Khan) was among the few rulers and Amirs of Delhi, who tried to subjugate the people or Meos of the turbulent area of Mewat. He created havoc by mass level murder and destruction in Mewat area, covering the many hundred miles. The Mewat region which lies to the

south of Delhi surrounding several hill ranges of Arawali Mountain was mostly inhabited by the Meo community. The Meos or Mewatis were by nature, very brave, warring, and hard-working people representing the Rajput characteristics from which they claim their origin. The Meos are from many centuries famous for their predatory character, who at all times gave great trouble to the Turk, Pathan, Mughal, and British rulers at Delhi. The Mewat region is important and rather source of attraction to the scholars of all over the world, due to its rich historical background as well as cultural and traditional peculiarity and complexity. The Arab and Persian chroniclers have given much importance to the people of this area. Perhaps Meos, the inhabitants of this area, has no parallel in the Indian history regarding their fight for independence as well as for their retribution by the rulers.

Balban routed the Mewatis, both as an Amir and ruler and by various invasions invaded the area and subjugated the turbulent Meos permanently. The above reference does not mean that the Mewati turbulence was new to Balban, but it was Balban, who tried to crush them permanently for the first time in the history of present Mewat. Balban made it a policy matter to completely control the area and eliminate the area from the marauders and set up peace, law and order in that country.

The turbulence of Mewatis was due to the taxation system of the government. The alkaline soil and barren land of Mewat made the Mewatis' life very tough, and subsequently, it made them brave and warring in comparison to other communities of India. They frequently faced the natural disaster like famine, draught, and flood, which compelled them to base their livelihood on loot and plunder. They also rose in open rebellion whenever they were unable to pay the heavy taxes imposed by the government.

It is to be noted that the Meos of Mewat were not robbers as repeatedly yelled by the contemporary chroniclers but a band of irregular, freelance and unpaid armies which were, due to some circumstantial reasons, always in revolt against the Delhi rulers. They even slain many of the Delhi commanders who tried to attack the Mewat region. They not even spared Balban, a man of horror, and carried off a large number of his camels, without which the army could hardly have taken the field. By the rulers of Delhi, they were treated with the most merciless cruelty. The Meos were hunted down like beasts, and massacred in thousands. In the series of persecution and suppression of the Meos, Balban invaded the Mewat area in 1247, 1260 and in 1266 when he ascended to the throne.

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### Balban's Attack in 1247

As narrated by the various historians of different ages about the rebellious nature of the Mewati people, they were always being plundered and tortured by Delhi Amirs and rulers. For the first time, their rebellion was checked during 1247, when Balban (Ulugh Khan) was in command of Mewat with his headquarter at Hansi and Rewari. At that time, one of the Delhi rebel leader Kutlugh Khan sought refuge in Mewat, where the local Mewati chief Ransi Ran Pal, also known as Ant Pal, was ruling the area. Ransi Ran Pal, the local ruler by giving him protection openly invited the troubles and curse of Delhi. According to some local traditions, it was Ant Pal who ruled Mewat with his capital at Ajangarh. According to the local traditions and genealogy of the ruling dynasties of the area, it seems more probable that Ransi Ran Pal was actually Ant Pal, who ruled Mewat with his capital at Ajangarh to which his father Bandh Pal founded around 1216, with the assistance of a *Darvesh* Shah Alakh.<sup>1</sup>

Mewat was first time invaded in 1247, by Ulugh Khan (Ghiyasuddin Balban), minister of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah. Ulugh Khan invaded Mewat country for the first time and after a pitched battle forced the rebels to fly. In this battle so many rebellious Mewatis were killed that the numbers cannot be computed or described. Firishta says that Ulugh Khan later known as Balban, the Wazir of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud, and governor of Hansi and Rewari, in which office he distinguished himself in several actions against the inhabitants of Mewat. By not giving much details of this expedition, Firishta writes that it was in 1247, Wazir marched with an army to Ranthambhor and the mountains of Mewat. After chastising the refractory inhabitants returned to Delhi.<sup>2</sup>

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### Balban's Attack in 1260

From the invasion of Balban on the Mewati leader Ransi Ran Pal (Ant Pal of Ajangarh) in 1247, the enmities between two were increased day by day. The Mewatis again organized with much vigour and valour under, Malkha or Mangal who became local head of the Mewati territory with its capital at Indore. The Meos wanted to chastise the Balban in order to revenge their previous failure. They were waiting for the pretext to attack on the Ulugh Khan. They find a chance in 1257, and they had carried off from Hansi a drove of camels and a number of the people of Ulugh Khan. It was an open signal of their rebellion against Balban. Ulugh Khan and all the princes and nobles were sorely vexed but it was then impossible to do anything as the army was fully employed in expelling the Mongol forces on the frontiers.<sup>3</sup>

In 1260, Ulugh Khan and other nobles, with the royal troops and their own followers, suddenly resolved upon a campaign in the hills to subdue the turbulent Mewatis in the Arawali hills. Firishta says that these hills (Arawali) were inhabited by a turbulent people (Mewatis), who committed depredations on the roads, plundered the goods of Muslims, drove away the cultivators, and ravaged the villages in the districts of Haryana, the Siwalik hills, and Bayana. In this second campaign against Mewatis, the royal force accomplished nearly fifty kos, and fell unexpectedly upon the rebels. Ulugh Khan captured the Santur or Satur (Indore), the capital of Mewat. These retreated to the summits of the mountains, to the defiles, to deep gorges and narrow valleys, but they were all taken and put to the sword. For twenty days the troops traversed the hills in all directions. The villages and habitations of the mountaineers were on the summits of the loftiest hills and rocks, and were of great strength, but they were all taken and ravaged by order of Ulugh Khan, and the inhabitants who were thieves, robbers, and highwaymen were all slain.<sup>4</sup>

A silver tanka was offered for every head, and two tankas for every man brought in alive. Eager for these rewards the soldiers climbed the highest hills, and penetrated the ravines and deepest gorges, and brought in heads and captives; especially the Afghans, a body of whom, amounting to three thousand horse and foot, was in the service of Ulugh Khan. These men were very bold and daring, and in fact the whole army, nobles and chiefs, Turks and Taziks, exhibited great bravery, and their feats will remain recorded in history. The Mewati chief Malkha who had carried off the camels was taken prisoner with his children and dependants. Two hundred and fifty of the chiefs of the rebels were captured. One hundred and forty-two horses were led away to the royal stables, and six bags of tankas, amounting to thirty thousand tankas were taken and sent to the royal treasury.<sup>5</sup>

In the course of twenty days Mewatis were totally subdued and the army returned to the capital. Two days later by the royal command the prisoners along with the ruler Malkha were publicly massacred with great cruelty near Hauz Rani in front of the Badaun Gate. Many of the rebels were cast under the feet of elephants, and the fierce Turks cut the bodies of the Mewatis in two. About a hundred met their death at the hands of the flayers, being skinned from head to foot; their skins were all stuffed with straw, and some of them were hung over every gate of the city. The plain of Hauz Rani and the gates of Delhi remembered no punishment like this, nor had any one ever heard such a tale of horror.<sup>6</sup>

### Balban's Attack in 1266

When Ulugh Khan ascended the throne of Delhi in 1265 with the title of Balban, the Mewat area, adjoining the Delhi territory, was ruled by Kaku Rana. Not much is known about Kaku Rana and no Persian or British historian has mentioned his activities. He only finds the place in the oral history of Mewat told by the bards or *Mirasis* and other traditional stories. Maulvi Abdus Shakoor in his *Tarikh Meo Kshatriya* has mentioned a court scene of Kaku Rana. However, Swaleh Khan Athar in his *Tarikh Meo Mehar* refutes any relation between Balban and Kaku Rana. He is even doubtful of their being a contemporary.<sup>7</sup>

By all observations, it can be concluded that Kaku Rana was a chief of Mewat whose position was not very important as he worked in a democratic style by aids and advice of the village headmen and common people. In order to fight the royal forces of Delhi, he made his stronghold at Garhdhamna, a place in the outskirts of Mehroli. He also might have controlled the some parts of Mewat area from Indore, which was once the stronghold of Malkha. It was perhaps the strategy of the Meos, to set up their military base at Garhdhamna to fight against Balban.

Abdus Shakoor mentions that in this campaign, the Balut Meo leader Kaku Rana invited the chiefs of Bayana and Bairath and all the chaudharies of Mewat with all their forces. All the presenters of the court suggested him to give the Balban tough resistance as usual. It was the fiercest attack of Balban and surprisingly, the Meos also fought with full of their strength. At last the Meos were again defeated and from that time, the city was delivered from the attacks of the Mewatis. It is also notable that during this time, Yadubanshi Adhan Pal was the ruler of Kultajpur near Tijara. His association with Kaku Rana, in the battle of 1266, might be possible. After this battle, Adhan Pal had taken refuge in Sarehtha.<sup>8</sup>

According to Ziauddin Barani in his *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, the daring of the Mewatis in the neighborhood of Delhi was carried to such an extent that the western gates of the city were shut at afternoon prayer. Meos plundered the travelers on the roads, entered the city by night, and robbed the inhabitants in their houses, and even by day robbed and stripped water-carriers and women drawing water from the large reservoirs *Sar-Hauz* just within the city walls, so that it became necessary to shut the gates on the western side of the city immediately after the hour of afternoon prayer. No one dared to go out of the city in that direction after that hour, whether he traveled as a pilgrim or with the display of a sovereign. These daring acts of the Mewatis caused a great ferment in Delhi. Barani further says that the Sultan felt the repression of the Mewatis and for a whole year he was occupied in overthrowing them and in scouring the jungles.<sup>9</sup>

Sultan built a fort at Gopalgarrh, and many police posts were established and placed in command of Afghans. They were assigned the land for maintenance, and the army was supplied with hatchets. They also cleared away the woods around Delhi. The tract thus cleared was considerable and became well cultivated. Balban gave the town and areas to the distinguished chiefs with the direction to lay waste and destroy the villages of the marauders, to slay the men, to make prisoners of the women and children, to clear away the jungle, and to suppress all lawless proceedings. The noblemen set about the work with strong forces, and they soon put down the daring of the rebels.<sup>10</sup>

The last operation of Balban seems to have been so effectual that there is little mention of Mewat for a hundred years, during which the chiefs of Mewat appear to have maintained satisfactory relations with the authorities at Delhi. This type of cruel treatment was common throughout the period of Delhi Sultanate, and it became the proverb as the proper way of treating Mewatis. According to Cunningham, the Meos as Hindus often successfully resisted the arms of the Mohammadan kings of Delhi until the time of Feroz Tughlaq, when they were converted into Islam. However, in spite of their change of religion the Muslim Meos were just as turbulent as their Hindu ancestors, and they remained virtually independent of the time of Timur's invasion until the conquest of Northern India by Babar.<sup>11</sup>

In all the above three or four battles against Mewatis about one lakh of the royal army was slain by the Mewatis, and the most probability the same number of Mewatis were also put to the sword. By glorifying the bravery of Mewatis against Balban who put on sword the uncountable Meos, Mohammad Kamaluddin Mewati writes:<sup>12</sup>

*"Na Bas Kuchh Chal Saka Ham Par Ghiyasuddin Balban Ka,*

*Ki Jis Ne Noch Dala Tha Har Ek Phool Apne Gulshan Ka,*

*Wo Jisne Naash Insaani Se Dasht Wo Koh Bhar Dale,*

*Jawan Ek Laakh Bedardi Se Jisne Qatl Kar Dale”*

(Ghiyasuddin Balban could not do anything against us; that he had plucked every flower of our garden (killed every youth of Mewat region); it was he who had filled forests and mountains with human dead bodies; he killed a million youths mercilessly).

Undoubtedly, it was a genocide and ethnic cleansing which Balban tried in his raids against Mewatis or Meos. Only women, children and old people could save their lives. Balban ordered to cut the forests and deployed merciless Afghan soldiers under the superintendents by dividing the Mewat region into several units. Nobody was dared to even think of revolting against the Delhi rulers. However, the situations changed in later years during the reign of Feroz Tughlaq when the Mewatis were given Jagirs in Mewat to rule the entire region under Delhi Sultans.

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### Conclusion:

In conclusion, the role of Balban in the subjugation and administration of Mewat during the Delhi Sultanate era was pivotal in shaping the region's historical trajectory. Through his military campaigns and administrative policies, Balban effectively brought Mewat under the direct control of the Delhi Sultanate, reflecting his centralizing tendencies and efforts to consolidate the empire's territorial reach. His approach to governance in Mewat aimed to maintain law and order, extract revenue, and ensure loyalty to the Sultanate, influencing the region's power structures and cultural dynamics. Balban's policies had a lasting impact on Mewat's historical narrative, shaping its relationship with the Delhi Sultanate and leaving an enduring imprint on the region's administrative framework. By examining Balban's role in the subjugation and administration of Mewat, we gain valuable insights into medieval statecraft, the dynamics of center-periphery relationships, and the broader implications of his policies on the historical and cultural landscape of the region.

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