

# **MUGHAL NOBILITY UNDER AKBAR**

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The state under an absolute monarchy, like all other forms of government, requires the aid of several brains. Even the most gifted men like Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte could not handle the problems of state single handedly. In northern India, monarchs like Balban and Alauddin Khalji who believed in centralizing all power in one hand and controlled the administrative machinery personally, had to feel the need of ministers and to show respect to them. Under every form of despotism, the existence of a body of ministers or a council of advisers becomes indispensable. This formed the crux of the Mughal nobility under the rule of Akbar.

The nobility along with the *Zamindars* formed the ruling class of the Mughal Empire. *Mansabdars* formed the bulk of the Mughal nobility along with the Ministers. They were not only public servants but also the richest class in the empire and a closed aristocracy. Heredity was the most important factor in the appointment of the nobles. The *khanazadas* or sons and descendants of *Mansabdars* had the best claim of all, and all constituted a little less than half of the nobility during the period.

Then there were nobles and high officers of other states who were given a place in the Mughal nobility on account of their experience, status and influence or the contingents they commanded and the territories they controlled. A very small portion of the Mughal nobility was recruited from those who had no claims to high birth but were pure administrators or accountants. The Mughal nobility during the early years of Akbar came to consist of certain well-organized racial groups. These were the *Turanis*, *Iranis*, *Afghans*, *Shaikhzadas*, the *Rajputs* etc.

There, was, therefore, great diversity in the Mughal nobility and there existed a certain amount of jealousy among various sections of the nobility. The Mughal nobles received very high salaries but their expenses were also extravagant and they lived a life of great pomp and luxury.

Consequently, spending, not saving was the chief characteristic of the ruling class. Still there were a large number of nobles who invested their money on interest and owned a fleet of mercantile ships and took part in trade and commerce, particularly foreign trade which was very profitable. But income from land, rather than trade and commerce, was the chief occupation and concern of the nobles.

### **THE CHIEF DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR HEADS:-**

The imperial government consisted of six well-organized ministers besides a number of miscellaneous departments. These were headed by six respected members of senior rank. All of them were nominees of the emperor. Each one of them was individually answerable to the monarch for the successful functioning of his respective charge.

1. The Exchequer and Revenue (under the High *Diwan*)
2. The Imperial Household (under the Khan-i-Saman or High Steward)
3. The military Pay and Accounts Office (under the imperial *Bakhshi*)
4. Canon Law, both civil and criminal, (under the Chief *Qazi*)

5. Religious endowments and charity (under the chief Sadr)
6. Censorship of Public Morals (under the *Muhtasib*.)

### ***Vakil or Wazier***

The term *vakil* literally means a representative; as such the *vakil* was the most important man after the emperor in the administrative hierarchy of the Mughals. He deputized for the emperor in case of latter's illness or absence from the capital.

The *Wazier's* office received all revenue, papers and returns and dispatches from the provinces and the field armies. He also acted as the king's representative on many ceremonial occasions. All orders for payment had to be signed by him, and the payment (except to the field army and the workmen of the State factories) was made through his department only. All questions connected with the collection of the revenue were decided by him, who consulted the Emperor in important cases and frequently reported to him the state of the Treasury. Some of the famous *wazirs* of the Mughal period were also masters of Persian prose and they acted as secretaries in drafting royal letters to foreign rulers on behalf of their masters.

The chief duties of attached to his office were to regulate the policy of the state in connection with (a) populating the country, (b) equipping the army, (c) fixing sources of revenue, and (d) making the life of the subjects easy.

Secondly, he should consolidate the finances of the state spending wisely, and keeping sufficient in reserve for emergencies.

Thirdly, he should be prepared to meet the enemy by

- (a) Keeping the roads safe and in good condition,
- (b) Maintaining a well-organized army,
- (c) Making all weapons and instruments of warfare,
- (d) Keeping different groups of people and servants of the state in their proper places.

### **The imperial diwan**

The *diwan-i-ala* or the finance minister was the second most important minister of the Mughals up to the time of Jahangir. He held the charge of the revenues and expenditure of the state. The imperial *diwan* formulated the fiscal policy of the state. He was responsible for the allocation of grants for various departments. The provincial *diwans* were appointed by the emperor on his advice. All payments from the imperial treasury needed his sanctions and no expenditure could legally be incurred except under his authority.

He thus acted as a link between the emperor and the important functionaries of the state. All warrants of appointment, transfer and promotion were issued from his office. The imperial *diwan* was assisted by at least half a dozen *diwans* to cope with the heavy work. They include the *diwan-i-khalsa* (the crown lands) and the *diwan-i-jagir* or the in charge of land assignments, granted by the state to the civil and military officials in lieu of service, or as free gift, called *Sayurghals*. Similarly, the

*diwan-i-bayutut* exercised supervision over the state owned *karkhana*'s or workshops; *sahib-i-tajjuh* was in charge of military accounts while the treasury chief was called *the mushrif-i-khazana*.

### **Mir bakshi or the paymaster general**

*Mir bakshi* was the minister in charge of the military establishment. He occupied the third position at the imperial court, after the prime minister and the imperial *diwan*. After the introduction of the *Mansabdari* system, most of the government officers were placed on the payrolls of the army so that the *Mir Bakshi* practically became the paymaster general of the empire as well. He maintained complete service record of the government officers under the *Mansabdari* system. All *mansabdar*'s were appointed by his office.

He posted the armies in various parts of the empire, effected transfers of the *mansbadars* and detailed them for active duty on the war fronts. *Mir bakshi* acted as the most confidential adviser on military affairs to the king. Like the imperial *diwan* he too had a number of *bakshi*'s, who assisted him in the discharge of his onerous duties.

### **The chief sadr**

The fourth prominent imperial minister was called *sadr-i-sadur* or *sadr-i-jahan*-the *chief sadr*. He was in charge of the ecclesial affairs and religious endowments. In accordance with the Islamic tradition, the *sadr* performed three major functions: (a) he was the chief religious advisor to the king; (b) he exercised

control over and disbursed the religious charities; and (c) acted as the chief justice of the state.

The *sadr* acted as the guardian of the Islamic law. He made sure that the king governed according to the law. He regarded himself as the chief representative of the *ulama* and safeguarded their interests.

The second major function of the *sadr* was to control and disburse the royal charities. It placed immense wealth and resources of the state at the disposal of the *sadr* for the *propagation* of the faith and welfare of the *millat*. The *sadr* arranged for the collection of two religious taxes, *jaziya* was collected from the *zimmis* or the non-Muslims and *zakat* from the Muslims.

### **Khan-i-saman or The High Steward.**

The High Steward was a very important officer of the Mughal times, as he was the head of the Emperor's household department and accompanied him during his journeys and campaigns. All the personal servants of the Emperor were under this officer's control, and he also supervised the Emperor's daily expenditure, food, tents, stores, etc. Naturally the *Khan-i-saman* enjoyed great trust and influence, and there are examples of *wazirs* being appointed from among the *Khan-i-samans*.

### **The Chief Qazi**

The Emperor, as "the *Khalif* of the Age," was theoretically the highest judge and used to hold courts of justice and try select cases

personally on Wednesdays. But the court held by him was a tribunal of the highest appeal rather than a court of first instance. The *Qazi* was the chief judge in criminal suits, and tried them according to Muslim law. Assisted by a mufti, who consulted the old Arabic books on jurisprudence and stated the abstract law bearing on the case, the *Qazi* pronounced sentence. The supreme *Qazi* of the empire was called the *Qazi-ul-quzat* and also "the *Qazi* of the imperial camp," and he always accompanied the Emperor. Every provincial capital had its local *Qazi*, who was appointed by the Chief *Qazi*.

### **The Censor of Public Morals**

According to Muslim law, it is the king's duty to appoint an Inspector or Censor of Public Morals (*Muhtasib*) to regulate the lives of the people in strict accordance with the scriptural rules. The Censor's functions are to enforce the Prophet's commands and put down the practices forbidden by him (*amr wa nihi*),—such as drinking distilled spirits and fermented beer, bhang (i.e., hemp or *Cannabis sativa*) and other liquid intoxicants, gambling and certain kinds of immorality. He used to go through the streets with a party of soldiers demolishing and plundering liquor-shops, distilleries and gambling-dens wherever he found them, and enforcing the strict observance of religious rites on the part of the *Muhammadan* population.

### **Mannsabdars**

THE "*Mansab*" system was what made the Mughal empire tick. It was an important feature of the Mughal administration that all civil officers, high and low, were chosen from the holders of the

military rank, i.e. the *mansabdars*. The *mansab* although primarily a military rank really constituted the terms in which official hierarchy, and incidentally social status, was expressed. According to historian Abdul Aziz history of the Mughal army is the history of the *mansabdari* system.

The word *mansab* has been derived from the Arabic term *mansib* which means a post, an office, rank or status; hence *mansabdar* means the holder of a rank or an officer. What adds to the difficulty is the fact that the *mansabdari* is not a stationery phenomenon, but a living growth.

In its most highly developed form-for instance in the reign of emperor *Shahjahan*- a full *mansab* is expressed thus: *chahar hazari zat wa hazar suwar*, which means 4000 personnel and 300 horse rank. A few peculiarities may be noticed here, firstly, the *zat*, i.e., personal rank is always equal to or higher than the *suwar*, i.e., the horse rank. Secondly, the order in the lists follows the *zat* and not the *suwar* rank; the former being presumably more important, and lastly, there may be a *zat* rank without any *suwar* rank, though it is rare; but there never is a *suwar* rank without a *zat* rank.

This also formed the basis of gradation of *mansabdars*. Thus a *mansabdar* whose *zat* and *suwar* rank were equal, was a first class military commander. The one whose *suwar* rank was less than the *zat* rank but more than half of the latter, belonged to the second class. While an officer whose was less than half of the *zat* rank was a third class *mansabdar*. This also concludes one point i.e., the *suwar* rank can never exceed the *zat* rank but the latter can be equal to or exceed the former.

The *mansabdars* received cash salaries. Each *mansabdar* received a fixed rate of pay according to his *mansab*, out of which he had to pay the cost of his establishment. Nevertheless, even after meeting this expenditure, the *mansabdar* was left with a substantial amount of money with him to ensure a very dignified and rather luxurious standard of living for him.

## **CONCLUSION**

Akbar did not take long to realize the existing system of government. Considering carefully the pros and cons of the old system, he evolved an entirely new system quite in consistence with the spirit of the age and the sentiments of his subjects. He built up an empire and a nation not on the foundation of swords and military terrorism but on the acquiescent good-will of his subjects. The nobility under the reign of Akbar signified pomp and grandeur but at the same time it was accountable to the emperor for its actions. We have traced the path of nobility through the ministers employed under Akbar, since they find mention in the works of writers such as Abul fazl and Badauni and also because they formed the nature and vision of the Mughal empire. It was they who formed the arms of the emperors as well as the royalty of the royal empire. The empire being controlled by a vast number of nobility had one risk, that of revolting against the emperor himself. However by providing them with special powers and maintaining that they remain subservient to the emperor they formed the administrative structure of the Mughal empire until the reign of *Muhi-Ud-Din Muhammad Aurangzeb Alamgir*.

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