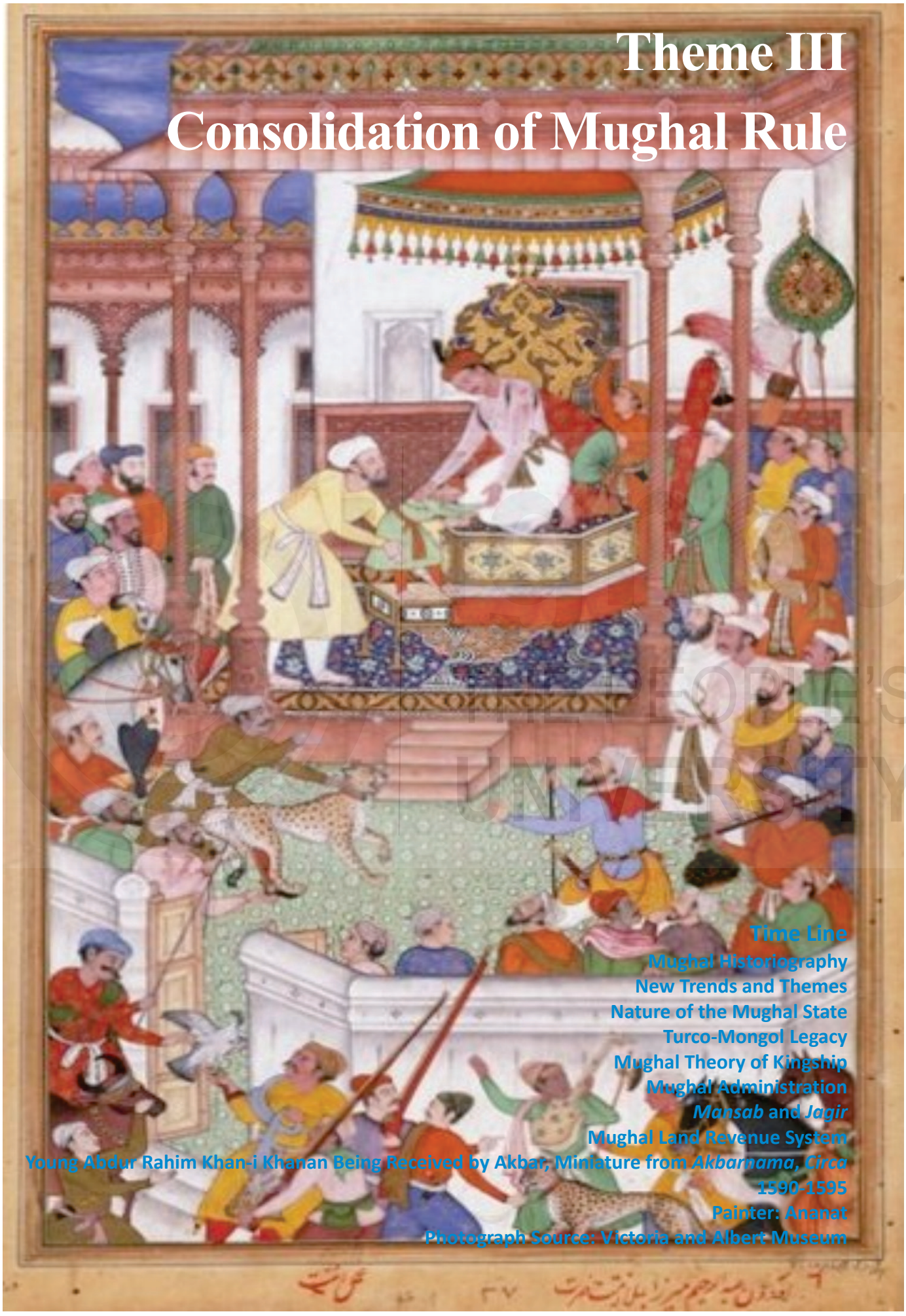
# Theme III
# Consolidation of Mughal Rule



Time Line
Mughal Historiography
New Trends and Themes
Nature of the Mughal State
Turco-Mongol Legacy
Mughal Theory of Kingship
Mughal Administration
*Mansab* and *Jagir*
Mughal Land Revenue System

Young Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan Being Received by Akbar, Miniature from *Akbarnama*, *Circa* 1590-1595
Painter: Ananat
Photograph Source: Victoria and Albert Museum

**Photograph Source:** Victoria and Albert Museum

**Source:** https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Young_Abdul_Rahim_Khan-I-Khana_being_received_by_Akbar,_Akbarnama.jpg

# UNIT 8 HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE MUGHAL STATE*

**Structure**



## 8.0 OBJECTIVES

The study of this unit would enable you to:

- Acquaint yourself with the various historical approaches adopted to study the nature of Mughal State,
- Analyze the various factors which influenced and shaped the studies undertaken by different historians regarding the nature of Mughal State,
- Understand the nature of political organization under the Mughals, and
- Comprehend the **historiography** of Mughal State.

## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

Historiography is the study of history of academic writings and theories concerning a particular subject, which in this context is nature of the Mughal State. Historiography of the nature of state concerns with the enquiry into the utilization of political power in achieving certain objectives in pre-colonial India. The study of medieval Indian state administration and accompanying social and political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implications is one of the most contested subject matters, especially the Mughal Indian state. The study of Mughal state began by asserting the Hindu-Muslim divide by the imperial historians. With the establishment of colonial conquest, the propaganda was systematically spread across the academic plane, percolating to the history textbooks.

The colonial power wanted to usurp power by legitimizing from the earlier practices prevalent under the Mughal regime. With religion as the sole determining factor in historical writing and the tripartite division of Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British epochs by James Mill[1], modern historiography of the Mughal state developed on two trajectories. As the medieval Muslim state, on the one hand, the Mughal state was seen as spreading Islam in India. On the other hand, an alternative approach was developed which saw the initial challenges posed by the Mughal power to the indigenous subjects and their later mutual accommodation. One strand of history came to be seen as communal by the other projecting itself as secular nationalist.

Initially writings on the military and political organization under Mughals were given credence. Historians like W. H. Moreland in his work, *Agrarian System of Moslem India*, continued with the theories and assumptions about the nature of Mughal state advocated by the Britishers. Though Moreland incorporated the analysis of historical documents into his study. With the decline of Eurocentric theories and nationalist theories being written in the post-independence era, a major break marking the shift in the base of history writing away from these two paradigms arrived in 1956 with the work of D. D. Kosambi[2] and the work of Irfan Habib[3] in 1963, Marxist influence over the process of history writing was witnessed. Focus on religion was shifted to focus on the existence of class and economic processes in the country.

One of the most seminal historical works on Mughal India that came to be recognized was done by Irfan Habib in his study of the agrarian system under the Mughal regime. Much credence was given to the Persian sources. Prof Habib's work became a seminal work of reference around which a whole body of work came to be written. Though at the time same, the liberal-nationalists such as Mohibbul Hasan and Haroon Khan Sherwani, among others continued to write on the Mughal regime in India. The latter has extensively worked upon the regional sources and published volumes on history of the Deccan. Historians such as Khaliq Ahmad Nizami and Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi delve into the aspects of religious policies under Mughals.

The Aligarh historians influenced by the Marxist writings evolved a new trend in historiography of the Mughal state. Even the Aligarh School shared the view of oriental historians on the distribution of resources under the Mughal empire. The Mughal state was seen by these historians as a highly centralized and systematic bureaucratic state. They categorized it into the kind of a 'conquest state'. He state parceled out some of its powers in order to extract maximum revenue from the

[1] Mill, James, (1817) *The History of British India*, in 6 volumes (London: Baldwin, Cradock & Joy).

[2] Kosambi, D. D., (1956) An *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay: Popular Book Depot).

[3] Habib, Irfan, (1963) *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House).

people while simultaneously maintaining a well-established system of checks and balances in order to retain the centralized power.

There were issues that were not dealt by the Aligarh school of historians. The chronology under focus was majorly from 1556 to 1707, i.e. from Akbar to Aurangzeb. There was a relative negligence of the first half of the seventeenth century. Moreover, emphasis was laid on the Ain-i-Akbari written by Shaikh Abu'l Fazl. Moreover, the epithet of 'centralized and bureaucratic despotic 'absolutist' nature of the Mughal empire could find no basis in the periods of history before Akbar nor under the emperors after Aurangzeb. Also, it was argued that the Mughal state was largely an extractive state which took away almost all the surplus from the peasantry and used it for non-productive conspicuous consumption.

In the 1960s, the Cambridge School – known so because of the approach adopted by certain historians who did not necessarily belonged to Cambridge, focused on intensive archival research and writings of elites. The complex interplay of polities at the regional or local levels were paid much attention by these historians. The Mughal rule was considered indirect in nature, with no other reason than military success binding the emperor to the *mansabdars*. According to them, rule was dependent upon the group of intermediaries with patron-client ties forming the base. Critical of the Cambridge school, the **subaltern** school studied the Mughal state from a different aspect.

In the 1980s, C.A. Bayly pointed out that the earlier writings on Mughal state emphasized entirely upon the agency of state and has entirely ignored the agency of enterprising communities. He saw a continuity marking the transition from Mughal to colonial India with economic activities being carried by regional elites as hallmarks of decentralization that were formed under the Mughal rule. This viewpoint was supported by Muzaffar Alam who emphasized upon the institutions of *jagir* and *ijara* as manifestation of growth in the state administration.

Historians like Stephen Blake, M. Athar Ali, Douglas Streusand, John F. Richards and Herman Kulke termed it to be a patrimonial-bureaucratic state. The Subaltern Studies broke new ground by moving away from the top-down approach to historical understanding. These studies criticized the emphasis on elites and nationalist icons in the earlier understandings of the Mughal state. They attempted to recover the history of the masses under the Mughal regime. The Subaltern school held the belief that the local communities in the Indian society were quite autonomous and self-governing. These communities persisted with their beliefs and customs with constrained external interference. They utilized the oral archives of history. As pointed out by other groups of historians, one of the weaknesses in their approach to historical research has been the lack of attention paid to quantified data of the widespread consequences.

Revisionist theories towards understanding the Mughal state have been criticized for their analysis of historical sources and to be less assertive in character. By the 1980s and 1990s, new paradigms of historical inquiries had emerged in the realms of cultural and social history. The concept of normative text began featuring in these works. With changing approaches to looking at history of the subcontinent, useful insights into studying the varied aspects of the Mughal state have evolved over time ranging right from the analysis of historical events as evident in paintings to the problem of court culture from bottom up.

According to Irfan Habib, Mughal empire concentrated its power in the hands of high officials and Mughal ruling class. When the second edition of Irfan Habib's work, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, was published in 1999 several fresh studies of Mughal State had emerged by then. Looking at the state from only a fiscal-administration aspect became an old school of study. Historians moved beyond the canonical position ascribed to particular historical texts and are analyzing the history of everyday lives and associations. New and fresh approached towards understanding the system of governance under the Mughal regime came to be adopted.

## 8.2 NEW TRENDS AND THEMES IN MUGHAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

- The question of religion under the Mughals generated a great deal of interest, especially overlapping with the Babri Masjid controversy in the subcontinent. The works left by Sufi saints and other saintly figures, once relegated to secondary position, during the period began to receive attention.
- Language, literature and culture under the regime. These studies broke down the earlier perceptions around the Indian state which was seen to be under a constant oriental inertia. The cultural traditions followed by the Mughal elite received much attention under these studies and continue to arose much interest among scholars.
- The earlier neglected periods of Mughal history, i.e. the first halves of the sixteenth century and seventeenth century.
- Regional monographs began receiving their due consideration. The regions of Bengal, Bihar and Punjab began to be studied in detail. Farhat Hasan's work, State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relation in Western India c. 1572-1730, is considered as one of the seminal works of this genre belonging to the Aligarh school.
- The integration of art and architecture as part of the 'visual culture' under the regime. Both the fields began to be analyzed as being components of the larger propaganda and ideology of the Mughal rule. This marked a break from the preceding studies that looked at art history and architectural studies as two distinct domains of history.
- Textual editions of several important Persian works, for example Mau'izah-i Jahangiri of Muhammad Baqir Najm-i Sani, came to be studied.
- Lastly, the field of gender studies have received attention not only with respect to femininity or the studies around Mughal harem but also with respect to the notion of masculinity in the Mughal world. These studies did not restrict themselves to the Mughal elite. Rather they encompassed themselves to the people at large.
- In addition to the new fields of study, the fields of political ideology, political economy, science and technology continue to attract scholarly attention.

**Check Your Progress-1**

1) Describe the earlier approaches to study the nature of Mughal state.

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2) Which aspects of the Mughal empire received attention by the imperial historians?

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3) How was the Mughal state characterized by the Marxist historians? What were the differences between their study of Mughal state and that done by the Subaltern Studies?

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4) Who, among the following, dealt with a major break away from the Eurocentric and nationalist theories in the post-independence era history writing of Mughal India?

a. Irfan Habib

b. Mohibbul Hasan

c. Haroon Khan Sherwani

d. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami

5) Which, among the following, was not a new trend in Mughal historiography?

a. Art and Architecture as part of Visual Culture of the regime

b. Language, literature and culture

c. Political economy, science and technology

d. State as the sole agency of governance

e. All of the above

6) What are the new trends and approaches to study and analyze the nature of Mughal state in India?

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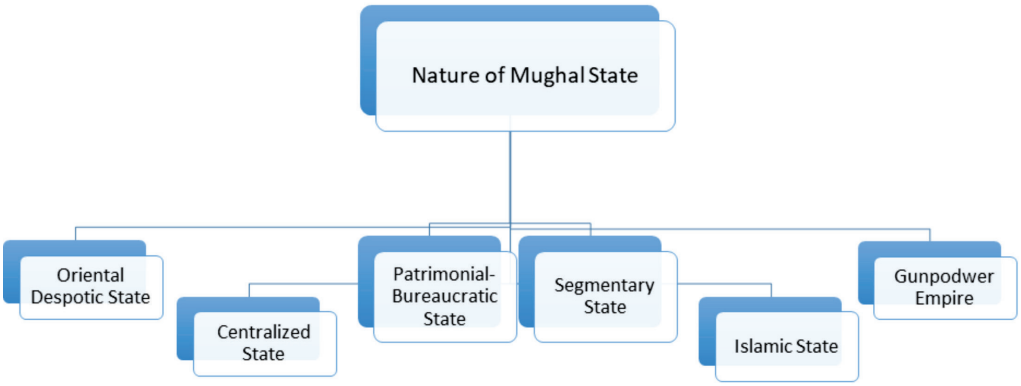
## 8.3 NATURE OF THE MUGHAL STATE

The study of the nature of Mughal state, especially in the context of the study of nature of pre-colonial state in India is a very interesting subject matter. There are several theories promulgated by different historians towards understanding the Mughal empire:




### 8.3.1 Oriental Despotic State Theory

The concept of Asiatic Despotism and the Asiatic Mode of Production emerged in the writings of Karl Marx in a different context. With respect to the nature of pre-colonial state in India, Francois Bernier[4] propounded his theory of Oriental Despotic Monarchies which were essentially different in character from the European state. Under this theory, monarchies were the ones where:

i. King was the owner of the land and extractor of revenue

ii. Unlike hereditary European lords, temporary tenures were held by tax collectors, a system that reflected state ownership of land

Francis William Buckler, in his essay 'The Oriental Despot', described the Mughal sovereignty as a model of 'corporate kingship' wherein all the nobles were 'members' in the set-up rather than being servants. This system of governance led to the exploitation of peasantry and decline in economic development and prosperity of the people. The element wherein there was a lack of restraint in the collection of taxation lent the state a 'despotic' character. The Britishers were opined to have infused an element of freedom into this existent Oriental Despotic State.

James Mill[5] and John Crawfurd adopted the argument formulated by Bernier and argued in the East India House that India was the most lightly tax country in the world. Later, W. H. Moreland[6] in his seminal work opined that, after weather conditions the most dominant factor in the economic life of the people in the Mughal period was the state administration. The whole focus of the theory of an Oriental Despotic state rested on the premises of land and taxation.

This model of state sovereignty has been nuanced by historians. Historians such as R. P. Tripathi – *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration*; Ibn Hasan – *The Central Structure of the Mughal Empire*; and P. Saran – *Provincial Governments of the Mughals*, asserted the fact that the various administrative institutions of monarchy were based on the geographical and cultural institutions of the country. They argued that there was little scope of over-taxation in the Mughal regime. After 1947, the Marxist influence on historical writings became much evident. The major interpretation of pre-colonial Indian state under the Marxian influence was

[4] Bernier, Francois, (1916) *Travels in the Mughal Empire A.D. 1656-1668*, Translated by A. Constable (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

[5] Mill, James, (1817) *The History of British India*, in 6 volumes (London: Baldwin, Cradock & Joy

[6] Moreland, W. H., (1929) *Agrarian System of Moslem India* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot).

propounded by D. D. Kosambi[7]. D. D. Kosambi argued that with a change in regime, distinct elements in the 'relations of production' evolve.

### 8.3.2 Centralized State Theory

According to this view, the state power at the centre penetrates to all the levels of society via revenue inflows from the periphery. This approach has largely been termed as a Centre-Oriented Theory. Policies leading to political unification by exerting power over the local regimes, secular norms of governance and composite composition of the ruling classes, among other state practices, are emphasized by the promulgators of this theory of Mughal state. The nationalist historians developed this theory within the confines of a liberal nationalist state in order to counter the imperialist view. The Mughal state aimed at achieving communal and political unification.

According to the centralized state theory, the state administration penetrated into all levels of the society through the agency of the intermediaries. The intermediaries such as merchants, artisan and peasants were entirely dependent upon the state. Thus, state and society remained closely tied aspects in the regime. Every phenomenon revolved around the centre. As per the centralized state theory, all aspects of society were viewed from above. Much of the influence exerted upon this theory is by the chroniclers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who mostly portrayed the Mughal state in a similar light. Much emphasis has been laid upon the systemization of administration done under emperor Akbar, especially the *mansabdari* system and uniformity in division of offices for different regions. These offices and centralized administration were carried on and strengthened under successive emperors.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Satish Chandra synthesized the work already done on the Mughal polity and administration. Irfan Habib accepted the Centralized State Theory that emphasized on the centralized ruling class which collection land-tax. To him, this was a hierarchical system wherein resources were shared between the ruling class and the class of *zamindars*. This assertion was based on an extensive scrutiny of historical and official works in addition to local documents. With the help of Marxist tools of analysis, these studies reinforced the dominant nationalist interpretation of Mughal state in many essential facets.

The earlier model of Mughal agrarian system being bipolar in nature, with the state and the peasantry constituting the two major elements, was replaced with a three-tiered division of society under Mughals – the ruling class (state), the *zamindars* (zamindar) and the peasants (peasantry). The Mughal state was viewed as the foremost exploiting instrument. The hierarchy among the class of *zamindars* was reinforced.

With the increasing influence exerted by the segmentary state model propounded by the American sociologists in the 1970s, the centralized state model came to be criticized by many historians. Douglas E. Streusand's *The Formation of the Mughal Empire* questioned the centralizing nature of Mughal empire. Though he saw four levels of transformation under the regime: central power, acceptance of emperor Akbar, the *mansabdari* system and subsequent changes in the regime. He has

[7] Kosambi, D. D., (1956) *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay: Popular Book Depot).

tried to integrate both the theories for the Mughal state throughout his work. The real question posed by critiques is on the level of control exerted by the Mughals in several regions, i.e. away from the centre.

### 8.3.3 Patrimonial-Bureaucratic State Theory

One of the new paradigms to study the Mughal state has been to view the nature of state from the lens of a patrimonial-bureaucratic rule. This theory derives from the Max Weber's model on patrimonial state. Under this model, a persistent divide exists between the patrimonial polity and bureaucratic administrative structure under a pre-modern regime. A ruler governs the state on the same lines as a patriarch asserts authority over his household or within the patriarchal domain. The larger realm is considered as an extension of this patriarchal domain where supreme authority is asserted in all realms such as military and jurisdictional.

This patrimonial model of political organization, when operating on a huge scale within a large territorial area, is referred to as a patrimonial-bureaucratic empire. Since through the medium of several tactics and policies, authority is diffused in order to govern varied regions. To ensure that the administration is carried successfully, an array of army was organized who were loyal to the ruler. The enormous troops were divided into two groups, first those who were directly under the service of the emperor and second, those who were the soldiers of the subordinates bound to their commanders.

Similarly, in other realms of administration members served at the pleasure of the emperor and displayed a certain level of loyalty and allegiance. A large proportion of state revenue was assigned to such class of officials. Over a period of time, this system led to the waning of power possessed by the emperor. Therefore, checks and balances were maintained by the person of the emperor to curtail this increase in power held by state officials. For example, periodic rotation of officials was set in place along with a huge network of spy officials who reported directly to the emperor. Elaborate rules governed the court and throne, confirming to the patriarchal relationship shared between the emperor and subjects. The centrality of the imperial household is persistent in the organization of the administration.

Historians like Stephen Blake have analyzed the highly bureaucratic *mansabdari* system as described in the Ain-i-Akbari as confirming to this patrimonial-bureaucratic state model. Wherein the *mansabdars* and other components of the Mughal army are seen as an adjunct to the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire. The army personnel were called to the court at times of promotions or change of assignment. They were promoted as *mansabdars* after standing duties in the imperial household and an approval done by the emperor himself. Likewise, management system of the land revenue administration also followed the patrimonial-bureaucratic pattern. Even while touring the territories, the emperor used to hold court regularly and the state work was carried much efficiently.

Many contemporary Asian states – the Safavid Empire of Iran, the Ottoman Empire of Turkey and the Ming Empire of China have been categorized by historians as patrimonial-bureaucratic states. The Mongol and Turkish influences of their ancestors are opined to have contributed to the working of Mughal state. The strong centralizing tendency and the well-organized bureaucratic administrative system is considered as a legacy inherited from Central Asia by the Mughals.

Some of these elements were already exhibited by earlier empires in India, Delhi Sultanate and the Mauryan Empire. And some of the elements were brought by emperor Babur upon his arrival in the subcontinent, later refined and crystallized by emperor Akbar. The emperors after Akbar largely followed the practices established by him.

The following features characterized the patrimonial-bureaucratic nature of Mughal state:

- Emperor as a divine patriarch
- Imperial household as the central element in governance
- Army personnel completely dependent upon the emperor
- Structured administration controlled by the imperial household
- Various checks and balances kept by the emperor

### 8.3.4 Segmentary State Model

Post-1970s, the historiography of Mughal state was influenced by the American sociologists' segmentary state model. In the segmentary state model, all the segments or components of a formal state are said to be in existence. These segments are coherent in themselves and are held by a sovereign in a nominal manner. According to this approach of history writing, the penetration of centre into the regional or periphery areas was overruled. The relationship between the centre and the periphery was looked upon as a ritual one, rather than being political in nature. Ritual obligations tie the periphery to the centre.

According to the segmentary sate model, the society is divided into a hierarchical structure, each segment or unit converging into the succeeding unit. For instance, village, locality, supra-locality and the larger kingdom. Burton Stein raised objections on the development of a centralized state institution in India in view of the cultural and social environment. With respect to South India, he propounded the 'segmentary state model'. In this approach to the study of governance, institutions such as caste, status and religion were given credibility in understanding the regime of state and local authorities. This theory was not itself free from criticism from other historians who refuted it in the context of South India.

Douglas E. Streusand[8] expanded this model to the territorial bounds of Mughal India, especially for the time-period from 1556 to 1582. Streusand had studied the military and fiscal hierarchy existent in the Mughal state, the influx of varied groups into the empire apparatus, and the nature of sovereignty exercised by the emperor, especially the mechanisms evolved under the reign of emperor Akbar. Many transformations have been observed under Akbar's regime – increasing exertion of central power, acceptability of the sovereign power, and standardization of the Mansabdari system. The Mughal conception of kingship constituted an amalgamation of several earlier concepts practiced in the country. Mughal policies established by Akbar, for example, the abolition of *jiziah*, introduction of *sulh-i-kul* and adoption of a liberal religious policy had huge administrative and social implications.

[8] Streusand, Douglas E., *The Formation of the Mughal Empire*.

Streusand transposed the elements of segmentary state model as promulgated by Burton Stein in the context of *zamindari* areas in the Mughal polity, and the central state approach in the context of *parganas* falling under direct control of the central administration. As opposed to the centralized state model, the segmentary state model argues for the existence of autonomous regional powers with no economic linkage with the central authority. The historians have taken a larger view-point. Many studies from below have been undertaken where the focus has been on lower classes of society and their lives as active participants in the various processes of state.

**Check Your Progress-2**

1) Who categorized the Mughal state as an Oriental-Despotic State? And Why?

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2) Differentiate between the Centralized State theory and Segmentary state model in the context of Mughal state in India.

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3) Explain the main proponents of the Patrimonial-Bureaucratic State theory.

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## 8.3.5 Revisionist Theories

C. A. Bayly presented a theory of continuity under the British regime by assigning authority to the 'social classes' wielding economic power who shifted loyalty to the British after the decline of Mughal state. In his study of the Mughal polity, decentralization and regional polities emerged as prime factors defining the character of the state. The penetration of the Mughal empire was confronted by the regional traditional village elites. Therefore, the decline of the empire in the eighteenth century did not lead to a setback at the economic front and there was continuity between the Mughal empire and the colonial regime.

C. A. Bayly and Sanjay Subramanyam, of late, categorized a 'contact zone' or 'grey area' - an area where the state and society converged. This 'grey area' constitutes of the place where the elements of centralized state model and segmentary state model converge. Initiatives from above and engagements from below submerge together. According to Subramanyam and Bayly, certain social groups articulated between the state and society. In South India, these social groups were largely the revenue farmers or 'portfolio capitalists' who were participants in the economic processes. They ensured guaranteed economic gains to the state.

Hence, C. A. Bayly recognizes the signs of economic growth in the state. The agents of this economic growth were not always created by the state such as

*mansabdars* or *jagirdars* appointed by the state. Some of these agents of growth were already embedded within the structure of society and grew in power with procuring more and more resources at their disposal. They constituted the political economy for a particular region. Similarly, historian Muzaffar Alam[9] emphasized upon the institutions of *jagir* and *ijara* as manifestation of growth in the state administration. Frank Perlin has criticized the economic study of Indian history that focus on Mughal and Maratha-centric treatment. To him, the ***watan*** was the basic unit of political power.

Recently, the work done by Farhat Hasan[10] has made significant contributions in the way Mughal state has been perceived. He does not categorize the Mughal state into a unilateral, centralized or patrimonial-bureaucratic model. Rather according to his research the Mughal power was a result of the day-to-day interactions with the local elites. The dense network of imperial-local alliances or bonds sustained the power house of Mughals. For instance, the merchant associations in different regions mediated the state demands on their associates. The local merchant associations in Cambay and Surat performed this role in the region of Gujarat. These elite houses were not subservient to the stately authority. They employed different mechanisms to counter any oppression done onto them by the state officials or to put forward their demands to the state. The people found their own ways to sustain under the larger regime. Everyday struggle was witnessed by the state authorities, be it in courts or markets.

### 8.3.6 Islamic Theory of Sovereignty

One of the earliest historical research that looked at the Mughal state in the context of role of Islam in the functioning of state, colonization of India and struggle for independence posed the question whether it was a **theocratic state** or not. These ideas date to the posterior. The concept of conquest being used as a legitimizing tool was a prevalent trend in medieval times. Modern colonialism altered the very meaning of conquest, primarily done for the economic benefit of one nation by controlling the resources of another nation.

Historians like Doughlas E. Streusand who are critical of both the centre-oriented studies and segmentary state oriented studies of Mughal state, have used a new theory called the Hybrid Islamic administration theory. According to this theory, at one level i.e. at the level of empire centric regions the administration is imposed from above. Whereas at the provincial level, indigenously developed administration used to exist. This model for studying the nature of Mughal state is not a decline-oriented study.

Whether it was the methodology of history writing being adopted by individual contemporary historians under successive emperors at the Mughal courts or the general trend of asserting power by conquering lands, with references to *kafirs* and *kufr*, for instance the Battles of Panipat (Babur) and Kangra (Jahangir) – such methodology and episodes reflect upon the proselytizing zeal of the Mughal state. But the real question is that how far was Islam institutionalized in terms of the functionality of the state. Historian Harbans Mukhia has placed two criteria as an

[9] Alam, Muzaffar, *Writing the Mughal State*.

[10] Hasan, Farhat, (2004) *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India*, c. 1572-1730. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

answer to this question: the aspect of conversion of subjects to Islam and second, the jurisdiction of Islamic law in the territorial expanse.

The tolerance of individual emperors varied during their respective reigns with some demolishing temples and others assisting in getting temples constructed. Also, the motivations for conversions ranged from intellectual conviction to gaining promotion in the administrative hierarchy. With majority of episodes of conversions relating to politically affluent individuals who had an act of defiance or dereliction of duty in the eyes of the state. The proportion of Muslim population within the central territories ruled by the Mughals is said to have never exceeded 15 per cent. Moreso, documentary evidences of reverse conversions are also found under the Mughal rule. In the absence of substantiated evidence, it would appear an excess to categorize the Mughal state as a theocratic state, Islamic in this case.

Islam was one of the legitimizing elements during the Mughal regime, but it was not the only one. There were several other factors that were used to legitimize the rule by the regime. For instance, during Akbar's rule whence a new theory of kingship was developed by the emperor who was the paternal head of the empire and emphasis were laid upon social harmony. Neither was Islamic law the only basis of administration and jurisdiction by the state. While Islam gave an identity to the rulers but governance was carried on an administrative set-up where power and resources were shared amongst the officials and different segments of society.

In addition to the composite nature of Mughal nobility and establishing institutions of centralization, the Mughal rulers were seen stressing upon the absoluteness of the sovereign. While legitimizing this absolute status, marital alliances were forged with elite chieftains in different territorial areas. A direct relation was also established between the emperor and his subjects. Also, with respect to religion apart from attempts to assert status within the framework of Islam, the emperor enjoyed a position of spiritual guide amongst the non-Muslim subjects. Though the presence of Islam as a structure was very much present in the state's functioning at the political, intellectual and popular realms. Practices such as *jharoka darshan*, tolerant religious policies and basing the legitimacy of rule on spiritual sanctity not only gave stability to the regime but at the same time ruled out the state being absolutely Islamic or Theocratic in nature.

### 8.3.7 Gunpowder Theory

Recently, historians have associated the increasing use of gunpowder or firearms beginning from the middle of fifteenth century as a crucial factor in the increasing power asserted by empires across the world. The highly centralized empires across Asia have been categorized by historians like Marshall G. S. Hodgson as '**gunpowder empires**'. The changes brought by the introduction of gunpowder technology in the context of state formation in India were very crucial. Others empires that have been categorized as 'gunpowder empires' are the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire and the Uzbek Khanate.

During the second half of the fifteenth century, some primitive form of gunpowder artillery is said to be in existence in different regions of the country. A personnel working in the field of firearms was referred to as ***kashakanjir*** in north India. In Kashmir, references to a weapon called ***topa*** in Muslim language and ***kanda*** in the Kashmiri dialect are found. Contemporary texts, as cited by historian Iqtidar

Alam Khan, such as Ma'asir-i Mahmud Shahi (1468) and **Riyazu'l insha'** (1470) also cite existence of the usage of some form of cannon in the region of Malwa and Deccan in those days. The siege of some of the stronghold fortifications – Champanir, Mandalgarh, Vijaymandirgarh - was a reflection of the destructive power of gunpowder artillery. Many of these forts had to be redesigned in the fifteenth century.

These costly cannons were possessed by some of the prosperous regional kingdoms like Vijayanagar and Malwa. Most of the *zamindars* and chieftains could not afford such equipment. Many of the powerful regional kingdoms conquered fortifications in the periphery or neighbourhood with the help of gunpowder artillery, thus, consolidating the process of state formation. This led to territorial expansion by powerful kingdoms. This process was accompanied by other factors such as increasing control on local chiefs and increasing sources of revenue. This further gave impetus to the strengthening of power by powerful kingdoms.

With the introduction of new techniques and methods in artillery due to the influence from West and expertise brought by Babur in sixteenth century India, gunpowder became a symbol for affirming the strength of a powerful kingdom. Though this technology did not come without posing some challenges such as difficulty in mobility and slow rate of firing. Despite the challenges, gunpowder was majorly used as a symbol of power assertion. Gunpowder did not play a chief role in the process of consolidation of empire by the Mughals. Apart from the siege of Chittor in 1568 and the siege of Ramthambhor in 1570 under Akbar's reign, firearms did not play a very crucial role in territorial acquisitions under Akbar's military campaigns and under the reign of other Mughal emperors. During the early sixteenth century, light artillery was effectively utilized in the siege operations and on the battlefield.

The usage of light cannons mounted on carriages or matchlock muskets aided the growth and consolidation of a centralized Mughal empire. One of the most significant innovation in terms of firearms in the seventeenth century was the placing of cannons on swivels mounted on the back of the camels. Matchlock muskets were effectual firearms of combat. At times in a battle formation, these were used so as to provide cover to artillery carts in the battlefield. The forceful attack and large scale of destruction caused by matchlock muskets, in comparison to mounted archers who continuously discharged arrows, could play a decisive role in a war. On an average, under the *mansabdari* system, one musketeer existed over five to eight horsemen in a contingent. These musketeers were an integral part of the contingent in direct service of the Emperor and remained a crucial component in maintaining control over local chieftains.

The importance of matchlock musket has been stressed by few historians in the Mughal warfare and centralizing character of the empire. Whereas historians like Irfan Habib have considered mounted archery as the mainstay of Mughal warfare.

Almost all the theories concerning the nature of Mughal state harmonize on the bureaucratic formation of the empire and the prevalent strong centric aspect. These studies have supplemented the study of regional polities and state institutions. Study of regional polities and new readings on village communities or crime and punishment under the Mughals does not imply that the institutions of governance such as *Mansab* and *Jagir* were of any less importance. Rather they reveal the

importance of varied factors, like distance from the central ruling authority and power asserted by different local authorities, in the overall nature of state under the Mughal regime in the subcontinent.

It is important to understand here that a centralized state need not necessarily exert influence and power equally in all the regions. Also, a regional or decentralized power might exert very strong power within its territorial boundaries while a central state exists simultaneously. The scrutiny of these concepts must rely on an objective analysis of the available documentation. Of all, the Centralized State theory is regarded as the most credential among historians, who share the same view with respect to certain institutions such as *mansab* and *jagir*. Though it is equally crucial to understand the cultural and social environment in which the Mughal state existed and the varied practices established under its regime with their powerful impact upon the people.

The varied perspective of historians or specifically the historiography of Mughal state should be understood in the context of the time-period when a particular theory concerning the state under Mughals was perceived. The element of presentism ingrained in a theory needs to be understood. For instance, nationalist studies, neo-Marxist studies, and others where looking back at history in order to justify the present actions or decisions. The right methodology would be to look for answers to means through the medium of which the rulers justified their actions at that point in time. Moreover, the categorizing of Mughal state into oriental, despotic or a combination of varied elements is arrived at while looking at some specific aspect of the state. Depending upon which aspect was being analyzed, the nature of state was categorized. One needs to place the Mughal state as part of a particular type of political organization.

Mughal India was not merely a world of Muslim rulers. The differentiated hierarchical and economic classes within the caste and communities cannot be kept in isolation. The centralizing nature of the Mughal empire cannot be viewed without the composite institutions and comprehensive policies. The nature of Mughal state should rather be understood in its own historical context. It cannot be understood as an Islamic state or a welfare state. It was no mere simple continuation of preceding regimes or an ancestor to the British raj in India. It exerted a profound impact on the economic and social conditions of the people. The nature of such an empire can be understood by the accompanying hierarchies and established traditions. Every successive emperor contributed new elements while keeping the larger administrative structure integral. A new theory of kingship evolved over time, which will be dealt in detail in the next unit.

**Check Your Progress-3**

1) Who, among the following, propounded the Gunpowder Empire theory for Mughal Empire in India?

   a. Irfan Habib

   b. Mohibbul Hasan

   c. Iqtidar Alam Khan

   d. Marshall G. S. Hodgson

   e. None of the above

2) How did the Revisionists view the Mughal rule in medieval India? Examine.

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3) Was the Mughal state a theocratic state? State reasons.

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## 8.4 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have tried to understand the various theories promulgated by different groups of historians concerning the nature and character of the Mughal state. During this discussion, we came across the several institutions and their character as established under the Mughal rule in India. The major features of each of these theories have been given in detail. These theories and their rationale have been dealt with respectively. The factors that should be kept in mind while understanding all these theories have been explained, thereby, demonstrating the inextricable value of these scholastic traditions. Further, it is explained as to why an analysis of various theories depicting the nature of Mughal state is crucial towards a better understanding of different viewpoints and for studying the institutions and customs practiced during the Mughal empire. Such an analysis in addition to an understanding of the cultural and social environment in which the Mughal state existed will help us comprehend the historical and socio-political perspective of the Mughal rule in India.

## 8.5 KEYWORDS

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Banduqchis*** | Musketeers |
| ***Barqandaz*** | A corps of mounted musketeers |
| **Gunpowder Empire** | An Empire with considerable success in military expeditions achieved with the help of firearms, especially cannon. For example, the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire and the Mughal Empire during the medieval times |
| **Historiography** | The study of writing of history with respect to a particular subject matter. For example, the historiography of the nature of Mughal state |
| ***Kashakanjir*** | A personnel working in the field of firearms during the fifteenth century India. He used to throw balls through the usage of explosive material/cannon |
| **Oriental Despotism** | The viewpoint wherein the society is viewed in a polar apparatus is associated with the |

| | |
|---|---|
| | theory of Oriental Despotism. At one end of the pole lie the rich classes, on the other the plebian classes – peasantry and artisans |
| ***Riyaz-ul Insha*** | A historical work for the Bahmanis of Gulbarga by Mahmud Gawan. It is a collection of letters written by Khwaja Mahumud Gawan written in Persian |
| **Subaltern Studies** | The studies undertaken with a bottom-top approach wherein emphasis is laid upon the lower classes of society |
| **Theocracy/Theocratic State** | A government wherein priestly class rules in the name of God. Or a state which governs with one dominant religion and people belonging to other religions are not allowed to practice their own religion |
| ***Topa*/*Kanda*** | Most probably meaning cannon in Muslim/ Kashmiri dialect |
| ***Watan*** | Locality |

## 8.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISE

**Check Your Progress-1**

1) See Section 8.1. Your answer should include the following points:
   i) The Imperialist approach towards the study of Mughal state
   ii) The Nationalist approach to the study of Mughal state
   iii) The Cambridge School
   iv) The Subaltern Studies

2) See Section 8.1. Your answer should include the following points:
   i) The various arguments made by Imperial historians regarding the nature of Mughal State
   ii) The reasons for their arguments

3) See Section 8.1. Your answer should include the following points:
   i) When was the Marxist influence introduced upon the historiography of the Mughal state
   ii) What were the new aspects analyzed by the Subaltern Studies concerning the Mughal state?
   iii) How were these aspects different from what the Marxists opined?

4) a. Irfan Habib

5) d. State as the sole agency of governance

6) See Section 8.2. In addition to the new fields of study, the fields of political

ideology, political economy, science and technology continue to attract scholarly attention.

**Check Your Progress-2**

1) See Section 8.3.1. Your answer should include the following points:
   i) The main features of the argument
   ii) The historians who supported this argument
   iii) Why was the theory criticized by some historians?
2) See Section 8.3.2 and Section 8.3.3. Make a comparison of the major points of difference between the Centralized and Segmentary Theories propounded by historians for understanding the nature of Mughal state.
3) See Section 8.3.4. Your answer should include the following points:
   i) The source of inspiration for patrimonial-bureaucratic theory on Mughal state
   ii) The main features characterized under the patrimonial-bureaucratic nature of Mughal state

**Check Your Progress-3**

1) d. Marshall G. S. Hodgson
2) See Section 8.3.5. Your answer should include the recent studies undertaken by C. A. Bayly, Frank Perlin, Muzaffar Alam and Farhat Hasan.
3) See Section 8.3.6. Your answer should include the premises and validity of this argument regarding the nature of Mughal state.

## 8.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## 8.8 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

Interview with Prof.Irfan Habib on the theme History and Historiography

https://www.youtube.com

watch?v=7zoJppZCEt8&list=PLwUYIeLOKZ8SgFJH6sAPhRjmokkdAFJHm

Harbans Mukhia on Mughal History and Historiography

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnCwjbeYtrA

# UNIT 9 IDEAS ON KINGSHIP*

**Structure**



## 9.0 OBJECTIVES

In **Unit 8**, we have dealt with varied theories concerning the nature of the Mughal state. Moving beyond the questions of characterization and categorization, the present Unit shall further our understanding of the formative phase of the Mughal empire and several instruments of its functioning and systems of governance. This Unit will discuss the diverse influences on political thought of the Mughals and their theory of sovereignty. The study of this unit would enable you to:

- Understand the evolution and nature of the Mughal state,
- Comprehend the formative factors and influences on the political thought under the Mughals and upon their theory of sovereignty,
- Learn about the Central Asian legacy of the Mughals and remnants of the political structure,
- Analyze the various forms of influences on the functioning of the Mughal state,


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- How the Mughals identified themselves as inheritors of a Turko-Mongol heritage,
- Comprehend basis of claims made to the sovereign status by the Mughals, and
- Examine the Mughal Theory of Kingship in India.

## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

Moving away from the rhetorical questions of characterization of the Mughal state that were posed in the previous Unit, here we will be dealing with the theories of kingship and functioning and governance of the empire. During the course of this Unit, it would be interesting to shed light upon various methodologies via the means of which Mughal emperors defined and justified their decisions. The theory of kingship, in literal terms, meant the doctrines upon which royal and political legitimacy of a regime rested. These doctrines assert the position of the sovereign in a given historical context.

As studied in the previous course concerning the Delhi Sultanate, you must be familiar with the fact that in the face of Mongol invasions, Balban propounded a theory of kingship. His theory of kingship raised prestige of the person of the king in the face of such challenges. Similarly, under the Mughal regime, theories of kingship were put into practice to effectively govern the subjects and raise the status of the sovereign. What differentiates these two is the vast amount of historiography concerning the Mughal state. This historiography initially resulted from the biased British writings and nationalist reaction to these writings. Only by rationally understanding the institutions of the empire will we be able to arrive at the Mughal theory of kingship.

The study of legitimacy of regimes is a recent phenomenon. The legitimacy of Mughal State survived long after the control exerted by the Mughal emperors declined. The memory of Mughals survives to this day with their legacies becoming subjects of concern and debate amongst different sections of society. The way the process of state formation in the medieval period is analyzed does not need to be necessarily confined to genealogical assessment. Neither does the institutional legacy or functional continuity need to imply changelessness. Every succeeding regime, either by tradition or conquest, took time to settle down in society. It did not immediately overtake the existing or preceding systems of administration. Rather powerful segments were generally retained by the new order. New systems gradually evolved over time. This fact held sway for most of the territorial polity in history across regions.

The Mughal empire founded by Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad Babur in North India in the 1520s attached much importance to the institution of sovereignty keeping in line with the Indian political thought and the Persian and Turco-Mongol traditions. Thus, while placing the Mughal empire in the larger context that includes Central Asia, it becomes crucial to view the rulers in their rightful places. Within this larger context, the neighbouring states under the Safavids ruled Iran from 1501 to almost 1720, the Ottomans ruled Turkey from 1300 to 1923, and the Mughals themselves occupied the throne in India from 1526 to 1857.

## 9.2 POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD: IRAN, CENTRAL ASIA AND THE OTTOMANS

The medieval Islamic life was witnessing the existence of multiple political centres and courts, in place of political dominance of the single imperial court of Samarqand. Certain socio-economical institutions developed as a result of developments of the time. During the second half of the fifteenth century, internecine struggles were taking place in the political climate of Central Asia. This led to re-emergence of Turko-Mongol principle that allowed all male members of the ruling clan the right to claim political sovereignty.

One of the most crucial events in the sixteenth century Central Asian history was the consolidation of Turkic and Mongol political traditions such as the organization of military, systemization of political administration, centrally organized institutions and influential cultural traditions that left their impact upon the other systems of governance, especially the Mughals. Without understanding the relationship of Mughal ties to the Turco-Mongol imperial traditions, it is difficult to comprehensively understand the theory of governance as exerted by the former in the territorial confines of India.

Timur and his descendants balanced the Turco-Mongolian and Islamic traditions to suit the political situation in Central Asia. Unlike Timur, his descendants could not hold out the promise of booty to their military elites. Thus, the institution of ***suyurghals*** i.e. the granting of revenue-producing land and other taxation free mechanisms emerged in the region. The *suyurghals* holder was free from any administrative or judicial interference from the central government. The benefits that accrued to the holder were greater than those connected with the earlier *iqta* system. There was no compulsory obligation to provide for military contingents. *suyurghals* became the dominant form of landholding in Central Asia and Iran.

During the sixteenth century, *suyurghals* continued to be granted but on a smaller scale and were replaced under the Safavids by the less generous *tiyul*. Other tax immunities continued to be granted at the same time in order to attain support for governance. Another institution under the Mongols and their successor states was that of ***tarkhani***. In addition to tax immunity, it granted many privileges to the individuals in lieu of their exceptional military service. By the sixteenth century, under the Safavids and Uzbeks, the *tarkhani* privilege became associated with members of the clergy and *ulama* and at times, were even granted to the important merchants.

Such a system of privileges meant loss of revenue to the central government and disintegration of power, apart from increasing arbitrariness in the realm of taxation. This also led to a broadening of the social base of patronage. Patronage activities – monumental architecture, miniature paintings, book production and others – were not devoid of political motivation and quest for legitimacy. These politically motivated measures led to a surge in artistic and cultural activities in the region.

According to the Chinggisid-Timurid traditional principle of succession, princes were granted appanages and were given territories to learn governance and

administration. Confronted with the weaknesses inherent in the Chinggisid-Timurid traditional principle of succession, the Ottomans and Safavids gradually modified this system. The Ottoman princes since the reign of Sultan Multan-I to the mid-seventeenth century, upon accession, executed all possible competitors. From the mid-sixteenth century, the Safavid princes were no longer given political appanages and were restrained to the royal household, thereby, confining the succession conflicts within the stronghold. The Ottomans, unlike the Mughals, showed interest in the protagonists of conservative Islamic legalism. The Mughals did not share a quiet relationship with the *ulama*.

The Safavid ruler Shah Ismail, founder of the dynasty, portrayed himself as a mix of Ali, Alexander and Jesus. Later rulers under the dynasty struggled to divest themselves off from this heavy-burdened role. With emperor Shah Abbas, changes were made in this portrayal. He distanced himself from being a *pir-o murshid* for the Turkmen tribal followers and shared a closer relationship with the *ulama*. Whereas with the emergence of Nadir Shah at the helm, the state became overly centralized with respect to the system of revenue collection. The relationship between the sovereign and the nobility in the Safavid state were aligned in line with that of the Mughals.

It is interesting to note here that the Ottoman empire witnessed regional centralization as was witnessed in Mughal India. During the last phase of the empire, social changes and readjustments like that of lowly groups gaining importance via the institution of *iltizam* – revenue farming. This institution has much resonance with the *ijara* system in place in Mughal India. The contemporary Ottomans constructed religious rather than landscape architecture. In the realm of cultural patronage, artistic patronage was considered by the Ottomans, Uzbegs and Safavids as the greatest Timurid legacy.

In the court of Murat IV, it was advised that the artists be patronized on the lines similar to that in the court of Husain Bayqara of Herat. The Mughal court, in times of religious tolerance, emerged as a refuge for those who fled from Iran and Central Asia because of the continuity in granting patronage. These artists from Central Asia were sought by the royal court. Such an artistic and literary efflorescence has been described by some as the 'Timurid renaissance in India'.

**Check Your Progress-1**

1) Mention the names of the neighbouring states of the Mughal empire. Also state one institution which was found across these states though with differing elements in each.

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2) Explain the medieval Islamic world on the eve of establishment of the Mughal empire.

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3) How was the Chinggisid-Timurid traditional principle of succession altered under the Ottomans and Safavids? Explain.

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4) Who, among the following Safavid rulers, shared a close relationship with the *ulema*?

a. Shah Abbas

b. Shah Ismail

c. Nadir Shah

d. None of the above

5) Which institution(s), among the following, had resonance with the *ijara* system that existed under the Mughal empire?

a. *pir-o murshid*

b. *suyurghals*

c. *iltizam*

d. *tarkhani*

e. All of the above

6) What was the status enjoyed by cultural patronage under the Ottomans, Safavids and Uzbegs in Central Asia and Iran?

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## 9.3 THE TURCO-MONGOL LEGACY OF THE MUGHALS

In the present Section would be to acquaint you the Mongol tradition of sovereignty, particularly Chenghizi *Turah*. We would also be discussing what was the Turkish tradition of sovereignty and how was it distinct from the Mongol tradition.

### 9.3.1 The Mongol Legacy

In the sixteenth century, powerful Muslim empires emerged in place of the fragmented minor sultanates in the Central Islamic lands. Sharing the Mongolian aspirations and Central Asian Turkic political traditions were the Ottoman, Safavid, Uzbek and Mughal empires. Dynasties in earlier times such as the Kushanas, who straddled the worlds of Central Asia, and Delhi Sultanate, some of whose rulers themselves belonged originally to Central Asia, could not maintain territorial aspirations in that region. This differed under the Mughal empire.

The Mongols in the thirteenth century established a vast empire in pre-modern history by emerging out of the steppes. The granting of *suyurghals* to scholars,

theologians and others by the Mughal emperors, especially under the reign of emperor Shahjahan, was a Mongol tradition. The *fiqh* scholarship upon which the Timurids heavily relied, served as the foundation for the commissioning of *Fatawa-i Alamgiri*. It continued to serve as the basis of Islamic law even through the colonial period in the subcontinent. The Mughals further remained careful in nurturing the historical Chinggisid-Timurid alliance with the Transoxiana-based Naqshbandiyyah Sufi order. The Naqshbandis were exempted on several occasions from the traditional performances of obeisance at the Mughal court.

To begin with Central Asia, after Chingiz Khan came to the region, Turkish culture began to dominate all spheres of life. And the empire of Timur was a blend of Turco-Mongolian administrative and military system. In addition to the dominance of Turkish culture, the Central Asian administration was influenced by a set of political principles and the organization of government and administration that came to be known as ***turah* or *yasa***. Any deviation from this immutable law was considered as an offence. Moreover, regular references were made to the Mongol law - the *turah/yasa* of Chingiz Khan, which was largely representative of the ancient Mongol custom.

The continuation of adoption of the *Akhlaqi* norms in the political philosophy of the empire again reflects a high degree of continuity between the Timurids and the Mughals. Religion was another element that offered a useful model for kingship for these empires. The legitimacy drawn by Mughal emperors by portraying themselves as a perfect sovereign or perfect man can be gauged from their memoirs. This model also draws motivation from their ancestral legacy. A prefect man in Transoxiana was the one who was Persianized, Islamicized Turco-Mongol aristocrat and a civilized man'.

### *TURAH/YASA* OF CHINGIZ KHAN

The Mongol control over vast territories is considered unique in human history. *Turah* is referred to the codification of ancestral traditions and laws of the Mongols by Chingiz Khan, founder of the Mongol empire. These laws were binding upon his descendants. *Yasa* or copies of this codified law were kept safe by the Mongol princes and were used for consultation purposes time and again. Attempts have been made to meticulously piece together all the fragments of this code and Muslim historians have debated the existence of such a code.

Some of these laws existed since time immemorial as Turco-Mongolian tribal customs. Such an adherence to old customs reflected the element of unquestioning submission in the Mongol concept of sovereignty. The concept of Divine Kingship was further stressed by these laws.

The Mughal emperors were proud of their Turco-Mongol connection. Babur mentions in the Baburnama that, "…as Chingiz Khan laid down his rules, so the Mughals still observe them". He gave a detailed account of the military norms as laid down by Chingiz Khan that continued upto his reign. A fine blend of these traditions were noticed in various spheres of administration under Akbar. Turah/Yasa lingered in he Mughal Empire mainly in the ceremonial sphere. *Turah* finds mention in Tuzuk-e-Jahangiri. The references begin to fade with emperor Shahjahan.

## 9.3.2 The Turkish Legacy

The Mughals in India proudly traced their ancestry to both Chingiz and Timur. In Babur Nama, emperor Babur talked of Chingiz, an ancestor of his mother and Timur, his paternal ancestor. According to the emperor, he conquered India because it belonged to his ancestor, a Turk. The famous court historian Abul Fazl traced the supernatural ancestry of Mughals to the Central Asian figure Alanquwa, the Chinggisid mother goddess impregnated by a beam of light. A study of the Timurid legacy is crucial for arriving at an understanding of the formative elements in the Mughal polity in India.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Islamic religion had reasserted itself in Central Asia and many of the learned men had decreed in favour of the *turah*. By the second half of the fifteenth century, the Timurid rulers moved towards orthodox religious thoughts. This did not eliminate the popularity of *turah*. Both the elements of sharia and that of *turah* co-existing under the Timurid regime. Emperor Babur opined that, "Our forefathers… respected the Chingiz-Turah… though it has not divine authority". A blend of Central Asian and Indian traditions can be noticed in the polity under Akbar. The *turah* figures in Jahangir's autobiography and flickers through some of his measures. References to *turah* started dwindling from the reign of Shahjahan and are not visible under the reign of Aurangzeb.

The divine concept of sovereignty was held by Chingiz wherein it was believed as said by a Mongol Khan, "In the sky there can only be one sun or one moon; how can there be two masters on earth". Timur continued to believe in the same theory of sovereignty and held that, "since God is one, therefore the vicegerent of God on earth should also be one". Babur also confirmed to have carried forward this theory when he mentioned in the Baburnama that, "Ten Dervishes sleep under a blanket; two kings find no room in a clime". Amongst the historians, it is argued whether the tradition of absolute monarchy existed among the Mongols or not. Iqtidar Alam Khan[1] has argued against the view held by Ram Prasad Tripathi[2] and stressed that Timur did not believe in the absolute powers of a khan. Notwithstanding the fact that a nominal counterpart head of the regime co-existed along with Timur, this in no way meant that he did not consider absolutism as crucial in his idea of sovereignty.

With the exertion of nominal powers of the khans, a gradual and steady claim was laid by Timur to the throne of Chaghatai. Further to this cause, a legend was said to be have been circulated which lent credence to this claim. According to this legend, Chingiz's grandfather (Kabul Khan) made an agreement with Qachuli Bahadur who was an ancestor of Qarachar and Timur. This agreement gave the right to succession of the Chaghatai state to the Timurids. Abul Fazl has also related about the agreement and said while mentioning about the Mughal royal descent, "the noble line (Akbar's) that came to be called Chaghatai".

Timur brought the divine theory of sovereignty into actual practice by declaring himself to be a Shadow of God on earth. He framed a set of laws in line with those framed by Chingiz Khan. Moreover, he established matrimonial alliances with the family of Chingiz in order to strengthen his hold over the region and adopted

[1] Khan, Iqtidar Alam. 1972. 'Turco-Mongol Theory of Kingship' in *Medieval India - A Miscellany*. Vol. II. Aligarh.

[2] Tripathi, Ram Prasad. 1959. *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration*. 2nd edition. Allahabad.

the title of **Gurgan**. His decisions were final and binding. In his letters exchanged with the Ottoman Sultan, he was referred to as *Khan-i Azam* and *Khaqan-i Muazzam*. By the later years of his reign, the coins were stuck in his name alone and the names of puppet khans has disappeared from the *khutba* as well. The appointment of these puppet khans was nothing more than a political tool of legitimacy over a land that was in reality taken over from the Mongols.

The nature of political structure of the Timurids has been another bone of contention amongst the historians. The nature of their polity has been argued by some to have been centralized. Trends were observed towards greater centralization. The nobility served as the main source of strength to the ruler. There was reciprocal sharing of privileges and assigning of special status upon certain nobles in the service, as can be seen in the Mughal regime. The Chingizid custom of exiling the nobles along with his family was practiced by emperor Babur.

In terms of the custom of succession, under the Timurids worth emerged as the most important criteria for accession. This led to civil wars and rebellions in both Central Asia and in Mughal India. In the memoirs of Babur, the coronation ceremonies of the ***khaqan*** find mention. Reference to the epithet '*zill'l lah*' (Shadow of God) was also found to be prevalent in the region. Thus, there were different signs of sovereignty that were considered appropriate by the Timurid rulers in the region of Central Asia.

Two of the traditional symbols of sovereignty held important for a Muslim ruler were: pronouncing of the name of the ruler in *khutba* and its inscription on the coinage. The custom of pronouncing the ruler's name in prayer had a long history in pre-Islamic times. Over time, this custom gained credence especially in troubled times for assertion of authority. However, the inscription of name on the coinage was a relatively later custom. This custom was first briefly practiced by the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik and it became common from the mid-8$^{th}$ century with the changing position of the name and slight variations in the legends reflecting change in expression of sovereignty.

Similar to the Timurid manipulated genealogy and titulature, the Mughal genealogy and affirmation of their heritage played an important role in their ideology of rule and conquest. To us the established line of succession from Akbar to Aurangzeb and others is visible, but these very practices show as to how much more unsettled and fractured picture existed beneath this seemingly unified visual.

**Check Your Progress-2**

1) Discuss the main elements of Mongol legacy as found under the Mughal empire.

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2) Define *turah* in the light of the Turco-Mongol theory of sovereignty.

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3) What was the divine concept of sovereignty as held by Chingiz Khan? What did emperor Babur opine about this theory?

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4) Which of the following titles did Timur adopt while claiming sovereignty?

a. *Khan-i Azam*

b. *Khaqan-i Muazzam*

c. *Turah*

d. None of the above

5) How did the nominal overlordship of Khans exist under the regime of Timur?

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6) What were the two traditional symbols of sovereignty held important for a Muslim ruler? What did they signify?

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## 9.4 MUGHAL THEORY OF SOVEREIGNTY

You would find that Mughal theory of sovereignty evolved during Babur and Humayun's period. However, it could take concrete shape only under Akbar.

### 9.4.1 Babur

Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur (1483-1530) came to India with a legacy of Turco-Mongol ideas and notions that were put to practice upon his arrival and by subsequent rulers. By the time of Babur's arrival, the Indian social and cultural set-up had attained a composite character. Though at the political front, there was much of anarchy and a sense of insecurity prevailed among the common populace. The reign of Babur was marked by a period of extreme political disintegration.

Samarqand remained an ancestral land in the memory of Babur's descendants and Timur remained as the dynastic sovereign. We find repeated mentions being made in the crafting of history under the emperor himself, describing love for his ancestral land. Like the Timurids, the Mughals also retained the title of Gurgan or son-in-law. As per the principle of heritable division of territory or **appanage system**, wherein the royal sons were trained as governors of provincial territories, Babur's grandfather divided his territory into four appanages for his sons.

Babur was given the appanage of Farghana. Throughout his youth, he made attempts to recover his lost appanage and conquer the ancestral capital of Samarqand. This

principle was carried on by the emperor right from his earliest days and the critical governorship of Badakhshan which was handed over to his eldest son Humayun. The territory of Qandahar was handed over to his younger son Kamran. Despite the weaknesses inherent in this system of shared sovereignty, it continued to threaten the unity of the empire.

Babur's religiosity was intricately tied to his conception of kingship. His interactions with living Sufi *awliyas*, by the means of visiting the tombs of deceased saints and by dreaming about them. These interactions provided the emperor with the needed guidance and direction. This ultimately led him to ascend the throne in India. In the royal court of Babur, the Naqshbandis achieved the status of spiritual nobility. This lent legitimacy to the Mughal imperial court as the historical Timurid alliance with the Naqshbandiyyah Sufis was encouraged. They were members who acted as kingmakers in Central Asia due to their influence.

In the realm of architecture, Babur and his descendants reproduced the much revered *chahar-bagh* in Central Asia. Sophisticated gardens functioned as sites of creative and shared expression in Transoxiana. The Timurid tradition of holding *majlis* in these gardens was missed by the emperor. The peripatetic court was adopted by the later emperors as a reminder of the regal power. These courts were part of the Turco-Mongol strategy of political control. Such constant movements averted the threats to the sovereignty of the empire.

### 9.4.2 Humayun

Emperor Babur can be understood to have laid the foundations of the Mughal empire in the capacity of a conqueror and not as an administrator. Babur's eldest son, Humayun, was born in an atmosphere of plenty. His first crucial assignment was as the governor of Badakhshan when he was aged twelve years. upon the death of his father and with an empty treasury, Humayun had multiple challenges to face. He was not much successful in overcoming many of these challenges, but the restoration of the throne of Delhi just in time before his death. The achievements of his son Akbar and the grandeur he achieved made an entity for the father.

At the realm of politics, factionalism posed a challenge to establishing a stable empire. Emperor Humayun lost his father's empire due to challenges thrown by his brothers. Even Akbar had to face political contests and appease the Turanis and Persians in the army. There was threat of defection from the different factions. His childhood training also fell under the traditional principles so that by administering the art of controlling a part, he could eventually manage the whole territory. This system of Timurid appanages disappeared from the reign of Akbar onwards and was never seen being practiced again. No reason was mentioned behind such a change in policy of accession. Also, the princely governorships were put into rotation.

But all these aversions did not lead to much of a change in the conflicts over sovereignty that continued to pose a threat to the Mughal court. The volatile territory of Badakhshan which was the traditional domain of Timurid princes became a refuge of rebels. Humayun's brother Kamran sought refuge in this land where the rival Timurid rulers grabbed some land. When Humayun returned from Tran to reclaim his patrimony, with the support of Safavids, he first led his force towards Samarqand. It was only after he was ousted from there by the Uzbegs that he headed towards North India.

Humayun, unlike his father and ancestors, tended to be a loner. His father directed him to socialize regularly with his companions and followers so that social cohesion was achieved. A political justification was given to the sovereign's participation in the regular drinking gatherings. Related to this tradition, Humayun unapologetically admitted to being addicted to opium. This was an unfortunate Timurid inheritance that cost the empire.

Despite the political challenges and after the initial foundation laid by Babur, Humayun introduced a few splendid rituals at his court. All such efforts undertaken by him came to a halt while he was forced into exile. His untimely death and small span of his reign could not afford him much of time to work on the theory of kingship for the Mughal empire. It was only after the coming of Akbar to power that the empire could be consolidated and the theory of kingship could be alleviated.

### 9.4.3 Akbar

A new theory of kingship was in formulation under the Mughal emperor Akbar. This theory assigned the sovereign a semi-divine supra-religious stature. This conception of the sovereign as divine light was rooted in the doctrines of Shihab al-Din Maqtul and was a departure from the post-Abbasid Islamic notion of the sovereign as the Shadow of God (*zill'l lah*). Further, it was regarded as the duty of this absolute sovereign to ensure that subjects belonging to all sects were viewed with the single eye. It was unto him to maintain universal reconciliation (***sulh-i kul***). This conception of sovereignty was directly linked to the religious policy practiced by Akbar.

Akbar's religious policy ensured that people belonging to various factions were held together without any of them gaining extra powers. This notion was accepted by the subjects to the extent that the ritual of *Jharoka darshan* – unknown to any earlier Hindu monarch – became part of the daily routine of religious life for majority of the subjects. This doctrine was manifested in the form of daily expressions. The sovereign occupying a position in the seating arrangement of *bisat-i nishat* similar to the one occupied by the sun in the universe was reminiscent of such doctrines.

Also, the conception of kingship as held by Ibn Khaldun was resonated by **Abu'l Fazl**. The regime of taxation was seen as wages given to the ruler to maintain the law and order of the land. This conception was similar to the one held true by many Sanskrit texts in Ancient India. This change in religious policy and the emergence of a new theory of kingship led to granting of revenue-free lands to the non-Muslims on an unmatched scale in order to construct places of worship. It also led to the abolition of *jizya*. The Shiites were granted the right to perform prayers in ordinary mosques. In his role as ***insan-i kamil***, Akbar was to implement the sharia in a manner that it did not lead to prejudice amongst the subjects. The declaration of *mahzar* in 1579 was another milestone which raised the sovereign as final arbiter in matters where the Muslim theologians disagreed. The notion of king embodying the empire was manifested not just in rituals and practices but also through the medium of architectural forms. The capital city was no longer recognized by a single place. It kept on moving and was identified with the presence of the king himself.

The discourse around matters of justice, politics, reason, religion and governance, among others, in the works of Abu'l Fazl should be understood as the politico-

religious thought behind attempts to change and reorganize the style of governance in the given historical situation. Historians have also argued in comprehending these policies in the light of the person of the emperor. An emperor who was born in the household of a Hindu chief, whose father sought the support of Shah Tahmasp – the Shia king of Iran and who learnt the art of portrait painting – otherwise considered forbidden in Islam.

Much of these measures and the theory of kingship at the court of Akbar were a result of various influences. Neither were his policies a static whole. This included a wide range of early Islamic theorist and mystics (such as Ibn al-Arabi and Turtushi) to illuminationist ideas of Shihab al-Din Maqtul and ishraqi doctrines of Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi. The influence of Nasirean ethics from Nasir al-Din Tusi on the theory of kingship is said to have been effectual even during the reign of Aurangzeb. There are historical debates around the extent of such influences and the decisive role of Akbar's vision and its valiant articulation. No exaggeration should be attributed to any one intellectual influence on this theory of kingship.

The established policies continued all through the 1560s and 1570s. Many of these tolerant state policies that emerged in the reign of Akbar were revised by emperor Jahangir. Though the larger nature of Mughal state and theory of kingship were retained during the course of the seventeenth century. Despite the orthodox policies practiced by emperor Aurangzeb, there are references (in the forms of letters to regional rulers) that confirm the conception of kingship as defined by Abu'l Fazl being held high in esteem by the Mughal ruling family. The re-imposition of *jizya* by Aurangzeb was disapproved by many in the Mughal nobility who praised the state policies that were followed by Akbar.

Beginning from the reign of Akbar to that of Aurangzeb, the Mughal imperial seal emphasized on the Timurid genealogy. Upon accession to the throne, Jahangir was described as second Timur. After a period of twenty-five years, emperor Shahjahan adopted the title of ***sahib qiran-i sani*** on his coins – a title adopted by Timur during his reign. Miniature paintings were retouched to portray the vast scenic of the Timurid lineage.

**AKBAR'S RELIGIOUS POLICY**
**CHANGES AND EVOLUTION**

K. A. Nizami has divided Akbar's reign in the context of his religious policy into three phases: first, from 1556-74, second from 1574-80 and third from 1580-1605. The first is considered as being conciliatory in nature whence *jizya* was abolished. Such measures have been seen by historians like S. A. A. Rizvi in the backdrop of political challenges and rebeliions faced by the emperor, especially from the Turani nobility. This extends to the nexus of land grants, matrimonial alliances and military concessions. In the second phase, the adoption of aggressive attitude was done so as to appease the Muslim orthodoxy. And during the last phase of introspection, a change in policies was visible with the crystallization Akbar's religious beliefs. A state based on principles of '*sulh-e-kul*' and '***wadad-e-wajud***' was established. Such measures - that emerged in the face of political and religious challenges - gave institutional basis to the empire to such an extent that even in 1857 the Mughal emperor continued to be 'the highest manifestation of sovereignty' in the mind of the people.

## 9.5 FORMULATION OF MUGHAL IMPERIAL AUTHORITY

There has been considerable debate amongst the scholarly circle regarding the theory of kingship of Mughal rulers. Some historians such as John F. Richards opine that the Central Asian legacy of the Mughals has little to contribute in terms of our understanding of the Mughal nature of governance. Whereas other group of historians like Muzaffar Alam, Maria Eva Subtelny, Richard Foltz, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Stephen F. Dale discourse that by understanding their experience with the preceding regimes it is easier to decipher the character of the Mughal empire and their theory of sovereignty. The famous and populous Mughal empire cannot be studied in isolation. Viewing it in the larger context of Central Asian Turco-Persian legacy, thus, forms a crucial segment.

According to J.F. Richards, the formulation of Mughal authority was achieved by a two-pronged methodology: first, an illuminationist theory (***farr-i izadi***) and second, the creation of a royal cult (*tauhid-i ilahi*). Both these measures emphasized upon the person of the sovereign and highlighted the notion of singular sovereignty rather than shared sovereignty. This has been characterized by R.P Tripathi and Iqtidar Alam Khan as the 'Turko-Mongol theory of kingship'. This strategy led to a flexible interpretation of *sharia* by the sovereign.

In early twentieth century, the study undertaken by Francis William Buckler – in his essay 'The Oriental Despot' – looked upon Mughal sovereignty as Corporate Kingship. According to M. N. Pearson, the representations associated with the presenting of *khila'at*, among other rituals, symbolized ritually incorporating the nobles into the king's body. Scholars have increasingly, over recent years, begun to recognize the Islamic antecedents behind the cultural manifestations and administrative organization in medieval India.

Upon the eve of foundation of the Mughal empire, Indian political milieu was marked by rivalries and hostility of nobles. The elimination of a parallel political power centre established in Kabul by Humayun's son and Akbar's half-brother Mirza Hakim (1554-85) was a crucial development for the Mughals in establishing a stable empire in India. The Mughals inherited various court rituals through the Sultans of Delhi, to which they added the Chingizi traditions. The inclusion of diverse segments in the functioning of the state further lent the adoption of other customs and practices. All these rituals elevated the person of the king.

The concept of kingship in theory and as practiced by the Mughals, thus, did not merely constitute the element of legitimacy derived from their ancestors. The court chroniclers also justified the rule and conquests by the sovereign by appealing to the attributes of a just ruler, one that would rescue the subjects from suffering and oppression. At times, under the regime of a ruler, his actions were justified on the basis of religious grounds and protection of Islam in the governed territories. Though royal descent was one of the major elements constituting the Mughal theory of sovereignty, essentially it consisted of the following principles:

- Dynastic Identity: by elevating and glorifying their ancestral traditions and connections, the Mughal rulers were adding prestige to their own dynasty. Justifying their rule over the land of India by virtue of royal blood lent credence to their legitimacy.

- The tradition of history writing in medieval India and centrality of Muslim rule in the court chronicles and historical texts crafted under the Mughals: The usage of the popular nomenclature 'Mughal' was first witnessed in a text carrying the conversations of a Sufi saint, Abdul Quddus Gangohi, compiled after twelve years of Mughal rule in India.[3]
- Relationship with the nobility: diverse groups were incorporated under the nobility via gaining their loyalty. This led to diminution in the clannish tendencies amongst the nobles who belonged to different racial groups.
- Subservience of *ulama*: relationship shared between the sovereign and the *ulama* determined the extent of absolute authority that was claimed by the divine persona of the king.
- Accessibility to the subjects: routine rituals such as the institution of Hall of Public Audience and *Jharoka Darshan* brought the sovereign closer to the subjects. This added the element of compassion and benevolence to the Mughal practice of kingship
- Court Rituals and Ceremonies: beginning from the court dress to the robes of honour, court rituals denoted access to high office and patronage from the sovereign. The practice of garment gifting had its roots in the early Abbasid period and the caliphal court. These rituals conveyed authority and rank at the imperial court.
- Alliance Marriages: marriage alliances augmented the status of elite groups in the Mughal empire. Status and authority was leveraged along with maintaining a peaceful diplomatic relationship at the same time.
- Creation of new identities: not only did robes of honour or alliance marriages linked individuals to the emperor, sharing a high-esteemed relationship with the sovereign himself lent the individuals a sense of new identity.

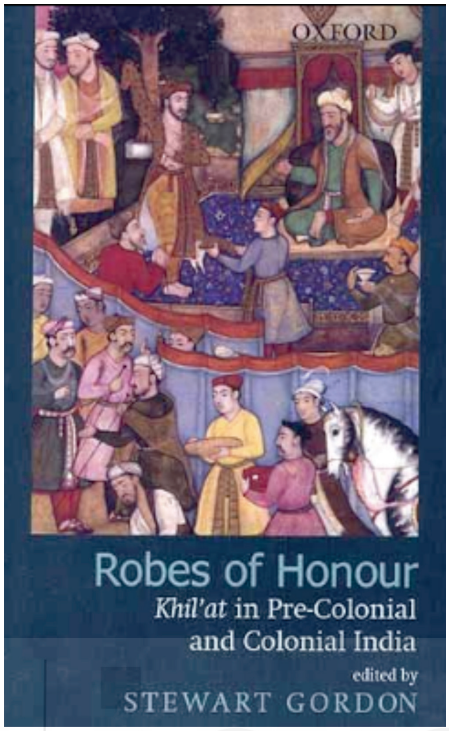
The theory of kingship evolved during the many phases in the Mughal rule in India. Upon laying down of foundation of the empire by Babur in the early sixteenth century, the Deccan states considered themselves as sovereign establishments. At that point in time, the latter derived legitimacy from Iran. Over a period of time, this changed. With the changed geographical extent of empire under Aurangzeb, the Vijayanagara's idea of sovereign gave way to the Mughals in south. During the course of expansion of the empire in the seventeenth century, the Mughals came to be viewed as the only basis of sovereignty in India. This was factual even for the Marathas who were growing in power and later, for the English East India Company who worked behind the Mughal model of sovereignty.

**MANIFESTATION OF THE SOVEREIGN**

The Theory of Kingship as practiced by the Mughal empire was manifested through symbolism. This symbolism included ceremonies that were held in high esteem in the Mughal court. Two of these significant ceremonies are described below:

***Jharokha Darshan*:** It was the practice of appearing of the emperor before the

[3] Rukn al-Din. *Lataif-i Quddusi*. Delhi. 1131 H./AD 1994.




subjects at the balcony of the palace. It allowed the common subjects to have a glimpse of the sovereign. The person of the sovereign embodied the empire and to challenge him, thus, meant challenging the empire. The audience was assured of his well-being and stability of the empire. This became a routine ritual for the subjects. This practice was adopted first by Emperor Humayun under the Mughal regime. *Jharokha Darshan* was continued by the Mughals even while travelling by the means of *do-ashiayana mazil*. No more could the empire be overthrown by simply attacking the capital. *Do-ashiayana mazil* was a moveable wooden house which was used for holding the ritual by the king. *Jharokha Darshan* was adopted by the regional kingdoms as well. Even the colonial regime practiced this ritual from the Red Fort on occasion of the Delhi Durbar.

**Robes of Honour/*Khil'at*:** The gifting of garment by the emperor as a symbol of patronage was known as *khil'at*. *Khil'at* is an Arabic term which meant 'robe of honour'. The Persian equivalent was *sir-o pa*. This ceremony was practiced by many medieval Islamic states and it was well established in the Caliphal tradition by the early Abbasid period, Baghdad. The ceremony was in use under the Delhi Sultanate and all the Deccan kingdoms. The exchange of presents tied the emperor to the receiving person via ties of loyalty. Babur was aware of this Chinggisid-Timurid tradition. It became a mark of identity for many individuals belonging to the elite groups and incorporated new groups within the fold of the empire. This ritual came to be practiced even at the field by special emissaries.

Despite the bureaucratic systems, the notion of the sovereign as the highest authority was manifested through the medium of such ceremonies. This courtly politics was given visual representation in the Mughal paintings. It signified the status and rank of an individual in the Mughal empire.

## Check Your Progress-3

1) Discuss the extent to which the Turco-Mongol traditions were adopted by emperor Babur under the Mughal empire.

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2) Was Emperor Humayun successful in laying the foundations of the Mughal theory of kingship? Give reasons for your answer.

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3) How was the theory of sovereignty linked to the religious policy as practiced by emperor Akbar? Explain.

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4) What were the various instruments that were used by Akbar as symbolism reflecting his theory of kingship? What were the influences upon this conception?

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5) Did the theory of kingship, as practiced by Akbar, continue in the subsequent regimes? Briefly describe. Also, describe the various manifestations of this theory as continued in practice by the subsequent emperors.

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6) What were the main principles of the Mughal theory of sovereignty? Discuss.

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7) Comment on the historical debate around the theory of sovereignty as practiced under the Mughal empire.

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8) Tick mark (✓/×) the correct statements:

i) J.F. Richards opined that the formulation of Mughal authority was achieved by a two-pronged methodology: *farr-i izadi* and the creation of *tauhid-i ilahi*. ( )

ii) Representations associated with the presenting of *khila'at*, among other rituals, symbolized ritually incorporating the nobles into the king's body. ( )

iii) The Mughals did not inherit any court rituals through the Sultans of Delhi. ( )

iv) The concept of kingship as practiced by the Mughals constituted only of the element of legitimacy derived from dynastic identity. ( )

## 9.6 SUMMARY

Thus, through the course of the Unit, we tried to understand the multiple forms that kingship took under the rule of Mughal sovereigns. At times, these roles were coercive in nature and at other times, these roles were benevolent. Various symbolic rituals at the Mughal court defined fidelity and loyalty towards the sovereign. The exchange of offerings at the court displayed the element of patronage and committed the sovereign to his subjects. The incorporation of loyals within the imperial service carried added advantages for the political governance of the land. Political gifts were another form of pledging of loyalty. The person of the emperor embodied the empire and to challenge him or anything that symbolized his person was to challenge the empire. All these rituals and ceremonies transmitted ideas and values as held by the Mughal theory of kingship and lent them visual form and substance. These symbolisms overlapped meanings as held by other systems. They acted as a means of communication among diverse groups.

The personal memoirs of the Mughal rulers were carefully composed to justify the sovereign's legitimacy. They form part of the imperial inheritance that was referred to by the successive generations of emperors and other targeted audiences. One of the most outstanding memoirs was that of emperor Jahangir. Being the fourth emperor of the Mughal dynasty and despite never having visited Central Asia, his constant reference to the Turco-Mongol legacy of his ancestors defines the central importance of these prestigious ancestral traditions. Such claims became resources of legitimization in the present.

The court chroniclers also justified the rule and conquests by the sovereign by appealing to the attributes of a just ruler, one that would rescue the subjects from suffering and oppression. At times under the regime of a ruler, in different regions of the world such as Central Asia, his actions were justified on the basis of religious grounds and protection of Islam in the governed territories. The tradition of history writing in medieval India and the question of centrality of Muslim rule in the court chronicles and historical texts crafted under the Mughals reflects upon their theory of kingship. The various terminologies used by these chroniclers to define the person of the ruler were a reflection of the medieval political thought.

This reflection is not just limited to the chronicles and popular literature. They were carried through the epithets such as *insan-i kamil*. They were also expressed through the medium of rituals observed at the court – *farmans*, *khil'at* and

salutations. And through symbols such as a parasol, the while felt tent, jade objects, the golden throne and small box holding the ruler's seal that lay in front of sovereign's knee in the patronized paintings. By tracing the parallel lines of thought in Central Asia and understanding the Mughal ideas of kingship, including its antecedents, assists in developing a better understanding of the process of legitimization. This patronage was retained also to manifest a central position by the Mughal emperors in the larger early modern Islamic world. The 'patronage (Emperor) and loyalty (subjects)' syndrome lent credence to the longevity of the Mughal state. Therefore, the retention of a charismatic ancestral lineage lent identity and legitimacy to the theory of kingship as practiced by the Mughals in the subcontinent.

## 9.7 KEYWORDS

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| **Appanage System** | The Chinggisid-Timurid traditional principle of division of territory amongst the princes as governors of semi-autonomous appanages who were trained in governing skills, organizing the military forces, managing a treasury. Within this system of appanages, one brother used to dominate the empire |
| ***Ataliqs*** | Special deputies appointed by the khan in each *khanate* (principality) for the collection of revenue and other administrative purposes |
| ***Farr-i izadi*** | Divine light, the principle wherein royalty holds a place of dignity in the eyes of God. This light emanates from Him, thereby creating paternal love in the heart of sovereign towards his subjects and builds a trust in him for God. As per this principle, all the actions taken by the sovereign are divine in nature and should be accepted without questioning |
| **Gurgan/*kurkan*** | Royal son-in-law |
| ***Insan-i kamil*** | Perfect man |
| ***Khan/khaqan*** | The title for a ruler in Central Asia. The *khutba* was read and coins were struck in the name of the *khaqan* throughout the empire |
| ***Kurultai*** | The Mongol consultative assembly |
| ***Paibos*** | Kissing of the ground before the ruler |
| **Sadr** | prime minister |
| ***Sahib Qiran*** | lord of the auspicious conjunction |
| ***Sahib qiran-i sani*** | the second lord of auspicious conjunction |
| ***Sijda*** | prostration before God |
| ***Suyurghals*** | revenue free land grants |

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|---|---|
| ***Sulh-i kul*** | universal peace or peace with all religious groups |
| ***Tarkhani*** | personal tax exemption |
| **Turah/*yasa-i Chingizi*** | the set of laws formulated by Chingiz Khan in his regime that were considered to be binding in nature |
| ***Wadad-ul wajud*** | the ideology of 'unity of being' |
| ***Zaminbos*** | kissing of ground as part of court etiquettes and culture |

## 9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

**Check Your Progress-1**

1) See Section 9.2. Discuss the institutions that were in existence in contemporary Iran and Central Asia. Also discuss few of these institutions that found resonance in Mughal India.

2) See Section 9.2. Your answer should include the following points:
   i) Timur and the Turco-Mongolian traditions preserved by him
   ii) Developments under the Safavids and Uzebgs
   iii) Social changes under the Ottoman empire

3) See Section 9.2. Your answer should include the following points:
   i) Changes in the Chinggisid-Timurid traditional principle of succession under both the regimes
   ii) Changes made to the portrayal of sovereign under the Safavid ruler Shah Ismail

4) a. Shah Abbas

5) c. Iltizam

6) See Section 9.2. In addition to the realms of culture where patronage was extended by these empires, elaborate upon the fact that the Mughal court gave refuge to artists who fled from Iran and Central Asia because of the continuity in granting patronage.

**Check Your Progress-2**

1) See Section 9.3.1. Your answer should include the following points:
   i) The granting of *soyurgals*
   ii) The influence of *Turah/Yasa*
   iii) The influence of Akhlaqi norms in the Mughal political philosophy
   iv) The concept of a perfect man as part of Mongol legacy of the Mughals

2) See Section 9.3.1 and Section 9.3.2. Define *turah/yasa* as understood in the

Central Asian context. Also, examine how the legacy of *turah/yasa* was carried under the Mughal regime.

3) See Section 9.3.2. State what emperor Babur mentions with respect to the divine concept of sovereignty as held by Chingiz Khan in the Baburnama.

4) a. Khan-i Azam

b. Khaqan-i Muazzam

5) See Section 9.3.2. Your answer should include the significance attached to the institution of khans in the Central Asian history and how were they related to the traditional symbols of sovereignty held important for a Muslim ruler, i.e. pronouncing of name in *khutba* and inscription on the coinage.

6) See Section 9.3.2. While defining the two traditional symbols of sovereignty held important for a Muslim ruler, analyse the change in the nature of these institutions under different regimes.

**Check Your Progress-3**

1) Refer to Section 9.4.1. Your answer should include the following points:

i) The legacy of Timur as mentioned by Babur himself

ii) The institution of appanges under Timur

iii) Babur and Sufi *awliyas*

iv) Influences of Turco-Mongol legacy in the realm of architecture

2) See Section 9.4.2. Mention the multiple challenges faced by emperor Humayun and in the light of these challenges, to what extent was he successful in introducing elements in the Mughal theory of kingship.

3) See Section 9.4.3. Explain the theory of kingship as laid down and consolidated by emperor Akbar. Also explain the religious policy followed by him – a policy which was not static. Analyze the relationship between these two developments.

4) See Section 9.4.3. Your answer should include the following points:

i) The doctrine of Shadow of God and its manifestation

ii) The writings of Abu'l Fazl

iii) The ceremonies of *Jharokha Darshan* and Robes of Honour/*Khil'at*

iv) The declaration of *mahzar*

5) See Section 9.4.3 and 9.5. Discuss the practices that continued in subsequent reigns as part of the Mughal theory of kingship.

6) See Section 9.5. Apart from the royal descent, deliberate upon the other major and essential features of the Mughal theory of sovereignty.

7) See Section 9.5. Discuss the historical debate regarding the theory of kingship of Mughal rulers. Examine the views held by historians such as J.F. Richards, Francis William Buckler and Maria Eva Subtelny, among others. Also, explain how the theory of kingship evolved during the many phases in the Mughal rule in India.

8) i) ✓

ii) ✓

iii) ×

iv) ×

## 9.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## 9.10 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

Symbolic Representations of Sovereignty in Mughal India

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bbr-hSiQbxU

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# Unit 10 ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE*

**Structure**




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## 10.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit would acquaint you with the overall working of the Mughal polity. After going through the Unit, you will learn about:

- the evolution of the Mughal administrative structure;
- the major administrative departments at the central level;
- the principal provincial officers, their duties and responsibilities;
- the administrative setup at the local level and its linkage with the central authority; and
- some basic features of town and port administration.

## 10.1 INTRODUCTION

The basic objective of the Mughal administrative set-up was to exercise control over the different parts of the Empire so that recalcitrant elements challenging the Mughal sovereignty could be checked. You will appreciate the difficulties if you could visualize that each part of the Mughal Empire was inhabited by diverse set of people over whom their respective rulers or dominant chieftains exerted considerable influence. The ingenuity of the Mughal polity lies in the fact that it not only incorporated these refractory rulers and chieftains into its administrative set-up but also enrolled them into military service (for details, refer to Unit 11 of this Course). The logical corollary of sustaining the huge administration was to appropriate maximum rural surplus in the form of land revenue for which the Mughal polity was geared to.

## 10.2 CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION: ITS EVOLUTION

The Mughal Empire had a Pan-Indian character. Babur and Humayun for reasons of their brief reign and that of being busy in military matters could not concentrate on establishing a definite system or pattern in administration.

By the end of Akbar's reign, we find establishment of elaborate offices with assigned functions to the heads of offices. The rules and regulations guiding both their public and private conduct had all been fixed so that the officers were converted into what can be termed the Apparatus of the Empire.

### 10.2.1 The Emperor

The ancient Indian traditions had always supported a strong ruler. The Muslim jurists and writers also held the same view. Thus, the concept of divine origin of monarchy could easily find credence among the Indian people. It is not surprising that the Mughals publicized their *jharokha darshan* with great deal of pomp and show in which the Emperor appeared at an appointed hour before the general public, the myth being that a mere look of his majesty would redress their grievances.

With such popular perception of the ruler, it is obvious that all officers in Mughal administration owed their position and power to the Emperor. Their appointment, promotion, demotion, and termination were subject to the ruler's personal preference and whims.

### 10.2.2 *Wakil* and *Wazir*

The institution of *wizarat* (or *wikalat* since both were used interchangeably), according to some accounts, can be traced back to the Abbasid Caliphs. Under the Delhi Sultans, the *wazir* enjoyed both civil and military powers. But under Balban his powers were reduced when the Sultan bifurcated the military powers under *diwan 'arz*. As for Sher Shah, this office remained almost in abeyance under the Afghans.

The position of the *wazir* revived under the early Mughals. Babur's *wazir* Nizamuddin Muhammad Khalifa enjoyed both the civil and military powers. Humayun's *wazir* Hindu Beg also virtually enjoyed great powers.

The period of Bairam Khan's regency (1556-60) saw the rise of the *wakil-wazir* with unlimited powers under Bairam Khan. In the 8th regnal year (1564-65), Akbar took away the financial powers of the *wakil* and entrusted it into the hands of the *diwan-i kul* (Finance Minister). Separation of finance gave a jolt to the *wakil's* power. However, the *wakil* continued to enjoy the highest place in the Mughal bureaucratic hierarchy despite reduction in his powers.

### 10.2.3 *Diwan-i Kul*

We have already seen how Akbar strengthened the office of the *diwan* by entrusting the revenue powers to him. The chief *diwan* (*diwan-i kul*) was made responsible for revenue and finances. His primary duty was to supervise the imperial treasury and check all accounts.

He personally inspected all transactions and payments in all departments. He maintained direct contact with the provincial *diwans* and their functioning was put under his vigil. His seal and signatures were necessary for the validation of all official papers involving revenue. The entire revenue collection and expenditure machinery of the Empire was under his charge. No fresh order of appointment or promotion could be affected without his seal. To check the *diwan's* power, the Mughal Emperor asked the *diwan* to submit the report on state finances daily.

The central revenue ministry was divided into many departments to look after the specific needs of the Empire. For example: *diwan-i khalisa*, *diwan-i tan* (for cash salary), *diwan-i jagir*, *diwan-i buyutat* (royal household), etc.

Each branch was further subdivided into several sections manned by a secretary, superintendents and clerks. The *mustaufi* was the auditor, and the *mushrif* was the chief accountant. The *khazanadar* looked after the Imperial treasury.

### 10.2.4 *Mir Bakhshi*

The *mir 'arz* of Delhi Sultanate changed its nomenclature to *mir bakhshi* under the Mughals. All orders of appointments of *mansabdars* and their salary papers were endorsed and passed by him. He personally supervised the branding of the horses (*dagh*) and checked the muster-roll (*chehra*) of the soldiers. On the basis of his verification, the amount of the salary was certified. Only then the *diwan* made entry in his records and placed it before the king. *Mir bakhshi* placed all matters pertaining to the military department before the Emperor. The new entrants, seeking service, were presented before the Emperor by the *mir bakhshi*. He dealt directly with provincial *bakhshis* and *waqai navis*. He accompanied the Emperor on tours, pleasure trips, hunting expeditions, battlefield, etc. His duty was to check whether proper places

were allotted to the *mansabdars* according to their rank at the court. His *darbar* duties considerably added to his prestige and influence.

The *mir bakhshi* was assisted by other *bakhshis* at the central level. The first three were known as 1st, 2nd and 3rd *bakhshi*. Besides, there were separate *bakhshis* for the *ahadis* (special imperial troopers) and domestic servants of the royal household (*bakhshi-i shagird pesha*).

### 10.2.5 *Mir Saman*

The *mir saman* was the officer in-charge of the royal *karkhanas*. He was also known as *khan saman.* He was the chief executive officer responsible for the purchase of all kinds of articles and their storage for the royal household. Another important duty was to supervise the manufacture of different articles, be it weapons of war or articles of luxury. He was directly under the Emperor but for sanction of money and auditing of accounts he was to contact the *diwan*.

Under the *mir saman* there were several officers, including the *diwan-i buyutat* and *tahvildar* (maintained supply of raw materials to the artisans).

### 10.2.6 *Sadr-us Sudur*

The *sadr-us sudur* was the head of the ecclesiastical department. His chief duty was to protect the laws of the *Shariat*. He was also connected with the distribution of charities – both cash (*wazifa*) and land grants (*suyurghal, inam*, *madad-i ma'ash*).

Initially as the head of the judicial department, he supervised the appointment of *qazis* and *muftis*. Before Shah Jahan's reign, the posts of the chief *qazi* and *sadr-us sudur* were combined and the same person held the charge of both the departments. However, under Aurangzeb, the post of the chief *qazi* (*qazi-ul quzzat*) and the *sadr-us sudur* got separated. It led to sharp curtailment of *sadr's* power. Now in the capacity of *sadr*, he supervised the assignment of allowances and looked after the charitable grants. He also looked into whether the grants were given to the right persons and utilized properly. He scrutinized applications for all such grants, both fresh and renewals, and presented before the Emperor for sanction. Alms were also distributed through him.

#### *Qazi-ul Quzzat*

The chief *qazi* was known as *qazi-ul quzzat*. He was the head of the judiciary (We have already mentioned that prior to Aurangzeb's reign his powers were combined in *sadr-us sudur*.) His principal duty was to administer the Shariat law both in civil and criminal cases.

In the capacity of the chief *qazi*, he looked into the appointment of the *qazis* in the *suba, sarkar, pargana* and town levels. There was a separate *qazi* for army also.

Besides the *qazi-ul quzzat*, another important judicial officer was *mir 'adl*. Abul Fazl emphasized the need to have a *mir 'adl* in addition to *qazi*, for the *qazi* was to hear and decide the cases while *mir 'adl* was to execute the orders of the court.

The *muhtasibs* (censor of public morals) was to ensure the general observance of the rules of morality. His job was to keep in check the forbidden practices – wine drinking, use of bhang and other intoxicants, gambling, etc. In addition, he also performed some secular duties – examining weights and measures, enforcing fair prices, etc.

**Check Your Progress-1**

1) Discuss the position of *wakil* under the Mughals.

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2) What were the functions of *mir bakhshi*?

.....

.....

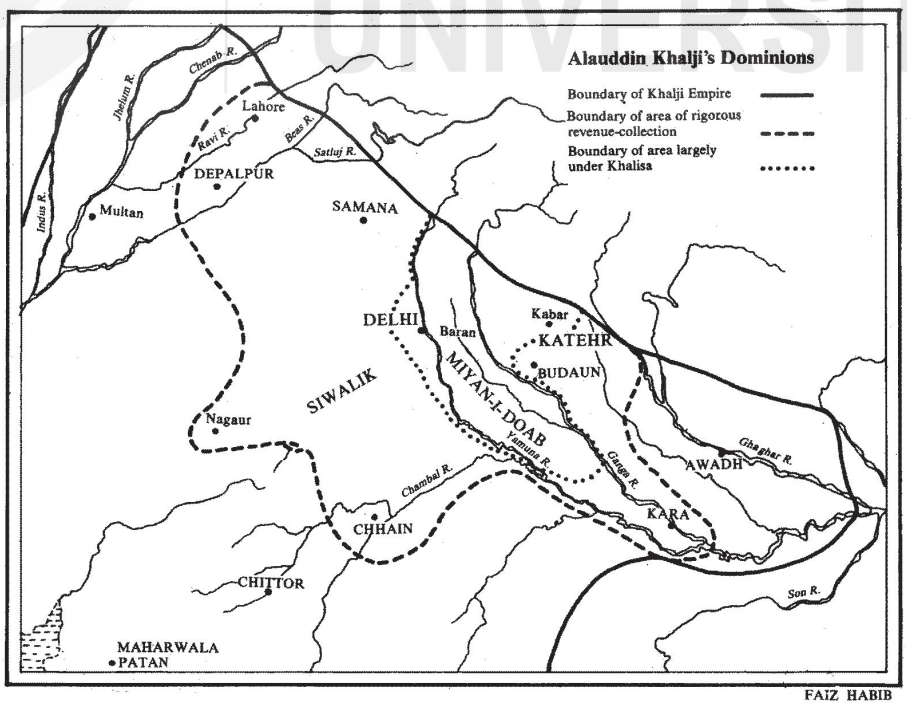
.....

3) Match the following:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| i) | *Tahvildar* | A) | Treasurer |
| ii) | *Muhtasib* | B) | Incharge of the revenue department |
| iii) | *Mir Adl* | C) | Maintained supply of raw materials to the artisans |
| iv) | *Fotadar* | D) | Public Censor |
| v) | *Diwan-i Kul* | E) | Executer of the court orders |

## 10.3 PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

In 1580, Akbar divided the Empire into twelve *subas*: Allahabad, Agra, Awadh, Ajmer, Admadabad (Gujarat), Bihar, Bengal (including Odisha), Delhi, Kabul, Lahore, Multan and Malwa. After the Deccan conquest three new *subas* were added i.e. Berar, Khandesh and Ahmadnagar. Each *suba* was divided into a number of *sarkars* and these were further divided into *parganas* and *mahals*. During Shah Jahan's reign, another administrative unit *chakla* came into existence. It was a cluster of a number of *parganas*.




**Map 10.1: Administrative Divisions (*Subas*) of the Mughal Empire, 1601**
**Courtesy:** Based on Habib, Irfan, *An Atlas of the Mughl Empire*, 1982, New Delhi: Oxford University Press
**Source**: EHI-4: *History of India from 16th to mid-18th Century*, Block 2, Unit 6, p. 27

### 10.3.1 Provincial Governor

The governor of a *suba* (*subadar*) was directly appointed by the Emperor. Usually the tenure of a *subadar* was around three years. Among the duties of the *subadar*, the most important one was to look after the welfare of the people and the army. He was responsible for the general law and order problem in the *suba*. A successful *subadar* was one who would encourage agriculture, trade and commerce. He was supposed to take up welfare activities like construction of *sarais*, gardens, wells, water reservoirs, etc. He was to take steps to enhance the revenue of the state.

### 10.3.2 *Diwan*

The provincial *diwan* was appointed by the Emperor. He was an independent officer answerable to the Centre. He was the head of the revenue department in the *suba*.

The provincial *diwan* supervised the revenue collection in the *suba* and maintained accounts of all expenditure incurred in the form of salaries of the officials and subordinates in the *suba*.

The *diwan* was also to take steps to increase the area under cultivation. In many cases advance loans (*taqavi*) were given to the peasants through his office.

A *roznamcha* (daily register) was maintained by the *diwan* which carried entries of amount that was deposited in the royal treasury by the revenue officials and *zamindars*. A large number of clerks worked under him.Thus, by making the *diwan* independent of the *subadar* and by putting financial matters under the former, the Mughals were successful in checking the *subadar* from becoming independent.

### 10.3.3 *Bakhshi*

The *bakhshi* was appointed by the imperial court at the recommendation of the *mir bakhshi*. He performed exactly the same military functions as were performed by his counterpart at the Centre. He was responsible for checking and inspecting the horses and soldiers maintained by the *mansabdars* in the *suba*. He issued the paybills of both the *mansabdars* and the soldiers. It was his duty to prepare a list of deceased *mansabdars*, but often news reporters (*waqai navis*) of the *parganas* directly sent information to the provincial *diwan*. Often his office was combined with *waqa'inigar*. In this capacity his duty was to inform the Centre the happenings in his province. To facilitate his work, he posted his agents in the *parganas* and various important offices.

### 10.3.4 *Darogha-i Dak* and the Secret Services

Developing a communication network was very essential to govern a vast Empire. A separate department was assigned this important task. The imperial postal system was established for sending instructions to the far-flung areas of the Empire. The same channel was used for receiving information. At every *suba* headquarters, *darogha-i dak* was appointed for this purpose. His duty was to pass on letters through the postal runners (*mewras*) to the court. For this purpose, a number of *dak chowkis* were maintained throughout the Empire where runners were stationed who carried the post to the next *chowki*. Horses and boats were also used to help in speedy delivery.

At the provincial level, *waq'ai navis* and *waqai nigars* were appointed to supply the reports directly to the Emperor. Besides, there were also *sawanih nigar* to provide confidential reports to the Emperor. Many reports of these secret service agents

are available to us. They are very important sources of the history of the period.

Thus, the Mughals kept a watch over their officials in the provinces through offices and institutions independent of each other. Besides, the Mughal Emperors' frequent visits to every *suba* and the system of frequent transfers of the officials after a period of three years on average, helped the Mughals in checking the officials. But the possibility of rebellion always existed and, therefore, constant vigil through an organized system of intelligence network was established.

## 10.4 LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

In this Section, we will discuss the working of administration at the *sarkar, pargana* and *mauza* (village) levels.

### 10.4.1 *Sarkars*

At the *sarkar* level, there were two important functionaries, the *faujdar* and the *amalguzar*.

***Faujdar***

He was the executive head of the *sarkar.* But his area of influence seems more complex. He was not only appointed at the *sarkar* level, but sometimes within a *sarkar* a number of *faujdars* existed. At times their jurisdiction spread over two full *sarkars*. We hear different *faujdars* appointed to *chaklas* as well. It seems his duty was mainly to take care of rebellions, and law and order problems. His jurisdiction was decided according to the needs of the region.

His primary duty was to safeguard the life and property of the residents of the area under his jurisdiction. He was to ensure safe passage to traders within his jurisdiction. As the chief executive of the region, the *faujdar* was to keep vigil over the recalcitrant *zamindars*. In special circumstances, he was to help the *amalguzar* in matters of revenue collection.

***Amalguzar***

The most important revenue collector was the *amil* or *amalguzar*. His primary duty was to assess and supervise the revenue collection through other subordinate officials. A good *amil* was supposed to increase the land under cultivation and induce the peasants to pay revenue willingly without coercion. All accounts were to be maintained by him. Daily receipts and expenditure reports were sent by him to the provincial *diwan*.

### 10.4.2 *Pargana* Administration

The *parganas* were the administrative units below the *sarkar*. The *shiqqdar* was the executive officer of the *pargana* and assisted the *amils* in revenue collection. The *amil* looked after the revenue collection at the *pargana* level also. His duties were similar to those of the *amalguzar* at the *sarkar* level. The *qanungos* kept all the records pertaining to the land in his area. He was to take note of different crops in the *pargana*.

The village was the lowest administrative unit. The *muqaddam* was the village-headman while the *patwari* took care of the village revenue records. Under the Mughals, the pattern of village administration remained almost on the same lines as it was under Sher Shah.

### 10.4.3 *Thana and Thanadar*

The *thana* was a place where army was stationed for the preservation of law and order. They were to arrange provisions for the army as well. These *thanas* were established specifically in disturbed areas and around the cities. Its head was designated as *thanadar*. He was appointed at the recommendation of the *subadar* and *diwan*. He was generally placed under the *faujdar* of the area.

**Check Your Progress-2**

1) Discuss the physical sub-divisions of the Mughal administrative set-up.

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.....

.....

2) What were the role and functions of a Mughal *faujdar*?

.....

.....

.....

3) Define each of the following in two lines each:

*Amil*.....

.....

*Bakhshi*.....

.....

*Waqai...navis*.....

.....

## 10.5 TOWN, *QILA* AND PORT ADMINISTRATION

To administer the cities and ports, the Mughals maintained separate administrative machinery.

### 10.5.1 *Kotwal*

For urban centres, the imperial court appointed *kotwals* whose primary duty was to safeguard the life and property of townsmen. He may be compared to the present day police officer in the towns and cities. The *kotwal* was also to maintain a register for keeping records of people coming and going out of the town. Every outsider had to take a permit from him before entering or leaving the town. The *kotwal* was to ensure that no illicit liquor was manufactured in his area. He also acted as superintendent of weights and measures used by the merchants and shopkeepers.

### 10.5.2 *Qiladar*

The Mughal Empire had a large number of *qilas* (forts) situated in various parts of the country. Many of these were located at strategically important places. Each fortress was like a mini township with a large garrison. Each fort was placed under an officer called *qil'adar*. A cursory survey of the persons appointed as *qiladars* reveals that *mansabdars* with high ranks, generally were appointed. He was in-charge of the general

administration of fort and the areas assigned in *jagir* to the *qiladar*. Sometimes, the *qiladars* were asked to perform the duties of the *faujdar* in that region.

### 10.5.3 Port Administration

The Mughals were aware of the economic importance of the sea-ports as these were the centres of brisk commercial activities. The port administration was independent of the provincial authority. The governor of the ports was called *mutasaddi*, who was directly appointed by the Emperor. Sometimes the office of the *mutasaddi* was auctioned and given to the highest bidder. The *mutasaddi* collected taxes on merchandise and maintained a custom-house. He also supervised the mint house at the port. The *shahbandar* was his subordinate who was mainly concerned with the custom-house.

## 10.6 NATURE OF MUGHAL ADMINISTRATION

Some historians (Irfan Habib, Athar Ali etc.) hold that Mughal administrative structure was highly centralized. This centralization is manifested in the efficient working of land revenue system, *mansab* and *jagir*, uniform coinage, etc. But Stephen P. Blake and J.F. Richards, while they accept the centralizing tendencies, point out that the Mughal Empire was patrimonial bureaucratic. For them, everything centred around the imperial household and the vast bureaucracy. For Streusand, despite being centralized, the Mughal structure was less centralized at its periphery. Chetan Singh supports this view. He is of the opinion that even in the 17th century the Mughal Empire was not very centralized. For him, the centralized structure controlled through the efficient working of *jagirdari* seems to hold little ground. According to him, *jagir* transfers were not as frequent as they appear, and the local elements at the periphery were quite successful in influencing the policies at the centre.

The extent to which the Mughal Empire was centralized in practice can be a matter of debate (for details, refer to Unit 8 of this Course). However, theoretically the Mughal administrative structure seems to be highly centralized and bureaucratic in nature. The Emperor was the fountainhead of all powers, and bureaucracy was mere *banda-i dargah* (slaves of the court).

In spite of the vast range of powers enjoyed by the central ministers, they were not allowed to usurp and interfere in each others' jurisdiction nor to assume autocratic powers. The Mughals through a system of checks and balances prevented any minister or officer from gaining unlimited powers.

**Check Your Progress-3**

1) Identify the true/false statements:

   i) The *kotwal* was the chief police officer at the *pargana* level.

   ii) The office of the *mutasaddi* was sometimes auctioned to the highest bidder.

   iii) Ports were separate independent units of administration under the Mughals.

   iv) Mints were placed under the charge of *shahbandar*.

2) Define each of the following in two lines each:

   *Kotwal*.....

   .....

*Mutasaddii*.....

.....

*Qiladar*.....

.....

## 10.7 SUMMARY

The Mughals tried to establish a 'highly centralized bureaucratic' machinery which was based on 'direct' command. The Emperor was the head of all powers. A number of central ministers were directly appointed by the Emperor to assist him in the administration. Similarly, to keep them in check, he adopted the principle of checks and balances.

To have an effective administration, the Empire was divided into *subas* (provinces), *sarkars, parganas* and villages. The provincial administration was on the lines of the Centre, headed by separate officers. Here also none of the officer enjoyed supreme powers. Both the *subadars* and *diwans* worked independently and were responsible to the Centre only. Cities and port-towns had separate administrative machinery. The *kotwal* in the cities and *mutasaddis* in the port towns normally took care of the law and order situation. The Mughals had certain military outposts as well where separate *qila'dars* were appointed. At local level, the *pargana* was the most important administrative unit while the villages formed the smallest unit of administration.

## 10.8 KEYWORDS

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Amin*** | Revenue assessor |
| ***Jagir*** | Territories assigned to *mansabdars*/nobles in lieu of their salary |
| ***Khalisa*** | 'Crown' land whose revenue was reserved for the Sultan's treasury |
| ***Muqaddam*** | Village headman |
| ***Patwari*** | Village accountant |
| ***Shariat*** | Islamic law |

## 10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

**Check Your Progress-1**

1. See Sub-section 10.2.2
2. See Sub-section 10.2.4
3. i) C ii) D iii) E iv) A v) B

**Check Your Progress-2**

1. See Sections 10.3
2. See Sub-section 10.4.1

3. See Sub-sections 10.3.3, 10.3.4, 10.4.2

**Check Your Progress-3**

1. i) × ii) ✓ iii) ✓ iv) ×

2. See Section 10.5

## 10.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Saran, P., (1988) *The Provincial Government of the Mughals, 1526-1658* (Jaipur: Sunita Publications).

Tripathi, R.P., (1959) *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot).

## 10.11 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECCOMENDATIONS

The Mughal Administration

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUom7d1E9Kk

Mughal Administration in India

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQaZHCawQUk

# UNIT 11 ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS: *MANSAB* AND *JAGIR**

**Structure**



## 11.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will discuss the the *mansab* and *jagir* systems, the two main organs of Mughal administration. After reading this Unit you will be able to know the:

- Basic features of *mansab* system under Akbar,
- Changes introduced in the *mansab* system during the 17th century,
- The main feature and working of *jagirdari*, and
- The various types of *jagirs*.


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## 11.1 INTRODUCTION

*Mansab* system under the Mughals in India did not develop suddenly; it evolved steadily through the time. These institutions were borrowed in some form from Western Asia and modified to suit the needs of the time in India.

The *mansabdars* were an integral part of the Mughal bureaucracy and formed, as Percival Spear says, 'an elite within elite'. They were appointed in all government departments except the judiciary. They held the important offices of *wazir, bakhshi, faujdar* and the *subadar*, etc. We will also discuss the *jagir* system.

## 11.2 *MANSAB* SYSTEM

The word *mansab* means a place or position and therefore it means a rank in the *mansab system* under the Mughals.

During Babur's time, the term *mansabdar* was not used; instead, another term *wajhdar* was employed. The latter differed in some ways from the *mansab* system that evolved under the Mughals after Babur.

Akbar gave *mansabs* to both military and civil officers on the basis of their merit or service to the state. To fix the grades of officers and classify his soldiers, he was broadly inspired by the principles adopted by Chinghiz Khan. As we have seen Chinghiz's army had been organised on decimal system. The lowest unit was of ten horsemen, then came one hundred, one thousand and so on. Abul Fazl states that Akbar had established 66 grades of *mansabdars* ranging from commanders of 10 horsemen to 10,000 horsemen, although only 33 grades have been mentioned by him.

*Mansab* denoted three things:

i) It determined the status of its holder (the *mansabdar*) in the official hierarchy.

ii) It fixed the pay of the holder.

iii) It also laid upon the holder the obligation of maintaining a specified number of contingent with horses and equipment.

### 11.2.1 The Dual Ranks: *Zat* and *Sawar*

Initially a single number represented the rank, personal pay and the size of contingent of a *mansabdar*. In such a situation if a person held a *mansab* of 500, he was to maintain a contingent of 500 and receive allowances to maintain it. In addition, he was to receive a personal pay according to a schedule and undertake other obligations specified for that rank. After some time, the rank of *mansabdar* instead of one number, came to be denoted by two numbers 6 *zat* and *sawar*. This innovation most probably occurred in 1595-1596.

The first number (*zat*) determined the *mansabdar's* personal pay (***talab-khassa***) and his rank in the organisation. The second number (*sawar*) fixed the number of horses and horsemen to be maintained by the *mansabdar* and, accordingly, the amount he would receive for his contingent (*tabinan*).

There has been controversy about the dual rank. William Irvine thought that the double rank meant that the *mansabdars* had to maintain from his personal pay two contingents of troops. Abdul Aziz, close to modern point of view, held that the *zat* pay was purely

personal with no involvement of troops. He rejected the theory of Irvine by stating that it meant the maintenance of one contingent and not two. Athar Ali clarified the position. He says that the first number (*zat*) placed the *mansabdar* in the appropriate position among the officials of the state and, accordingly, the salary of the *mansabdar* was determined. The second rank (*sawar*) determined the number of horses and horsemen the *mansabdar* had to furnish.

### 11.2.2 The Three Classes of *Mansabdars*

In 1595-1596, the *mansabdars* were classified into three groups:

a) those with horsemen (*sawar*) equal to the number of the *zat*;

b) those with horsemen half or more than half of the number of the *zat*, and

c) those whose *sawar* rank was less than half of their *zat* rank.

The *sawar* rank was either equal or less than the *zat* Even if the former was higher, the *mansabdar's* position in the official hierarchy would not be affected. For example, a *mansabdar* with 4000 *zat* and 2000 *sawar* (4000/2000 in short) was higher in rank than a *mansabdar* of 3000/3000, although the latter had a higher number of horsemen under him.

But there are exceptions to this rule particularly when the *mansabdar* was serving in a difficult terrain amidst the rebels. In such cases, the state often increased the *sawar* rank without altering the *zat* rank. Obviously the system was not a static one: it changed to meet the circumstances. Thus reforms were undertaken without modifying the basic structure. One such reform was the use of conditional rank (***mashrut***), which meant an increase of *sawar* rank for a temporary period. This was an emergency measure adopted in the time of crisis, that is, the permission to recruit more horsemen at the expense of the state.

Another development that took place was the introduction of *do aspa sih aspa* under Jahangir. Mahabat Khan was the first to get it in the 10th year of Jahangir's reign. According to this, a part or full *sawar* rank of *mansabdar* was made *do aspa sih aspa*.

For example, if a *mansabdar* held a *mansab* of 4000 *zat*/4000 *sawar*, he may be granted *huma do aspa sih aspa* (all two-three horses), In this case the original *sawar* rank would be ignored, and the *mansabdar* will maintain double the number of *do aspa sih aspa* (here 4000 + 4000 = 8000). Again, if the rank was 4000 *zat*/4000 *sawar* of which 2000 was *do aspa sih aspa*, then it would mean that out of the original *sawar* rank of 4000, the ordinary or ***barawurdi*** troopers will be only 2000 and the additional rank of 2000 *do aspa sih aspa* will double itself to 4000 ordinary troopers. Thus, the total number of horsemen would be 6000.

What could have been the reasons for adopting *do aspa sih aspa* system? Our sources do not help us in this respect. But we can visualize the following: Jahangir, after becoming emperor, wanted to promote nobles of his confidence and strengthen them militarily, but there were some practical problems. As we noticed in sub-section 8.5.2, generally the *sawar* rank could not be higher than *zat* rank. In such a situation, any increase in *sawar* rank would have meant an increase in *zat* rank also. The increase in the latter would have led to additional payment as personal pay thereby increasing the burden on treasury. Moreover, there would have been an upward mobility of the noble in the official hierarchy which was likely to give rise to jealousy among the nobles.

In fact *do aspa sih aspa* was a way out to grant additional *sawar* rank without disturbing the *zat* rank or *mansab* hierarchy. It also meant a saving for the state by not increasing the *zat* rank.

### 11.2.3 Appointment and Promotion of *Mansabdars*

The *mir bakhshi* generally presented the candidates to the Emperor who recruited them directly. But the recommendation of the leading nobles and governors of the provinces were also usually accepted. An elaborate procedure involving the *diwan, bakhshi* and others followed after which it went to the Emperor for confirmation. The *farman* was then issued under the seal of the *wazir*. In case of promotion the same procedures were followed.

Granting of *mansab* was a prerogative of the Emperor. He could appoint anybody as *mansabdar*. There was no examination or written test as it existed in China. Generally, certain norms seem to have been followed. A survey of the *mansabdars* appointed during the reigns of the Mughal Emperors show that some groups were more favoured than the others.

The most favoured category were the sons and close kinsmen of persons who were already in service. This group was called ***khanazad***.

Another group which was given preference was of those who held high positions in other kingdoms. The main areas from which such people came were the Uzbek and Safavi Empires and the Deccan kingdoms. These included Irani, Turani, Iraqi and Khurasani. The attraction for Mughal *mansab* was such that Adil Shah of Bijapur in 1636 requested the Mughal Emperor not to appoint *mansabdars* from among his nobles.

The rulers of autonomous principalities formed yet another group which received preferential treatment in recruitment and promotions. The main beneficiaries from this category were the Rajput kings.

Promotions were generally given on the basis of performance and lineage. Manucci, writing during the last years of Aurangzeb's reign, says: "To get the *hazari* or the pay of one thousand, it is necessary to wait a long time and work hard. For the kings only grant it sparingly, and only to those who by their services or their skill in affairs have arrived at the stage of deserving it. In having this rate of pay accorded to you, they give you also the title of Omera (**Umara**) 6 that is noble." However, in actual practice racial considerations played important role in promotions. Unflinching loyalty was yet another consideration.

**Check Your Progress-2**

1) Define *zat* and *sawar* rank.

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2) What were the three classes of *mansabdars*?

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.....

.....

## 11.2.4 Maintenance of Troops and Payment

*Mansabdars* were asked to present their contingents for regular inspection and physical verification. The job of inspection was performed by the *mir bakhshi's* department. It was done by a special procedure. It was called *dagh-o-chehra*. All the horses presented for inspection by a particular noble were branded with a specific pattern to distinguish these from those of other nobles through a seal (*dagh*). The physical description of troops (*chehra*) was also recorded. This way the possibility of presenting the same horse or troop for inspection was greatly reduced. This was rigorously followed. We come across a number of cases where a reduction in rank was made for non-fulfilment of obligation of maintaining specified contingents. Abdul Hamid Lahori in his book *Badshahnama* mentions that under Shah Jahan it was laid down that if a *mansabdar* was posted in the same province where he held *jagir*, he had to muster one-third of the contingents of his *sawar* rank. In case he was posted outside, he had to muster one-fourth. If posted in Balkh and Samarqand, he had to maintain one-fifth.

The scale of salary was fixed for the *zat* rank, but one rank had no arithmetical or proportionate relationship with the other. In other words, the salary did not go up or go down proportionately.

The table given below shows the salary for the *zat* rank per month during Akbar's period. (Please note that under Akbar, *zat* rank above 5000 was given only to the princes. In the last years of Akbar, the only noble who got the rank of 7000 *zat* was Raja Man Singh.)

**Pay for *Zat* rank**

| *Zat* Rank | Class I (Rs.) | Class II (Rs.) | Class III (Rs.) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7000 | 45000 | 6 | 6 |
| 5000 | 30000 | 29000 | 28000 |
| 4000 | 22000 | 21800 | 21600 |
| 3000 | 17000 | 16800 | 16700 |
| 2000 | 12000 | 11900 | 11800 |
| 1000 | 8200 | 8100 | 8000 |

The salary for the *sawar* rank was the sum total of the remuneration given to each trooper which was fixed and uniformalry applicable, whatever the number of the *sawar* rank might be. In the time of Akbar, the rate of payment was determined by a number of factors such as the number of horses per trooper (presented for *dagh*), the breeds of the horses etc. The rates fluctuated between Rs. 25 to 15 per month.

### Month Scale

The *mansabdars* were generally paid through revenue assignments (*jagirs*). The biggest problem here was that the calculation was made on the basis of the expected income (*jama*) from the *jagir* during one year. It was noticed that the actual revenue callection (*hasil*) always fell short of the estimated income. In such a situation, the *mansabdar's* salaries were fixed by a method called month-scales. For example, if a *jagir* yielded only half of the *jama*, it was called *shashmaha* (six-monthly). If it yielded only one-fourth, it was considered *sihmaha* (3 monthly). The month-scale was applied to cash salaries also.

There were deductions from the sanctioned pay. The largest deductions were from the Deccanis, who had to pay a fourth part (*chauthai*). There were other deductions known as ***khurak dawwab*** (fodder for beasts) belonging to the Emperor. Those who received cash (*naqd*), two *dams* in a rupee were deducted (*do-dami*). Often there were fines (*jarimana*) imposed for various reasons. With the reduction of salaries, there was thus a definite decline in the income of the nobles.

The distribution of the revenue resources of the Empire among the ruling class shows that 80% of the total revenue resources of the Empire was appropriated by 1,571 *mansabdars*. This shows how powerful the *mansabdars* were.

### 11.2.5 The System of Escheat

Many contemporary accounts, especially those of the European travellers, refer to the practice whereby the Emperor took possession of the wealth of the nobles after their death. The practice is known as escheat (*zabt*). The reason was that the nobles often took loan from the state which remained unpaid till their death. It was duty of the *khan saman* (see Unit 7) to take over the nobles' property and adjust the state demand (*mutalaba*), after which the rest of the property was given to the heirs or sometimes distributed by the Emperor among the heirs himself without any regard for the Islamic inheritance laws. It seems that in most cases it depended on the will of the Emperor. Sometimes the state insisted on escheating the entire wealth. In 1666, Aurangzeb issued a *farman* that after the death of a noble without heir, his property would be deposited in the state treasury. This was confirmed by another *farman* in 1691 which also instructed the state officers not to attach the property of the nobles whose heirs were in government service because the latter could be asked to pay the *mutalaba*.

## 11.3 COMPOSITION OF *MANSABDARS*

In **Unit 12**, we would be discussing the racial composition of the ruling class. Here, we very briefly recapitulate the same.

Despite the theoretical position that *mansabdari* was open to all, the Mughals, in practice, considered heredity as an important factor. It appears that the *khanzads* (house-born; descendants of *mansabdar*) had the first claim. Out of a total number of 575 *mansabdars* holding the rank of 1000 and above during the reign of Aurangzeb, the *khanzads* numbered about 272 (roughly 47%). Apart from the *khanzads*, a number of *mansabdars* were recruited from the *zamindars* (chieftains). Out of 575 *mansabdars* in 1707, there were 81 *zamindars*. The Mughals also welcomed Persian, Chagatai, Uzbeks as well as the Deccanis in the *mansabdari*. Certain racial groups were well entrenched. They were the Turanis (Central Asians), Iranis, Afghans, Indian Muslims (*Shaikhzadas*), Rajputs, Marathas and the Deccanis, the last two were recruited by Aurangzeb on larger scale due to military reasons.

**Check Your Progress-3**

1) What was month scale?

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2) Why was the system of *do aspa sih aspa* adopted?

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3) What do you understand by system of escheat?

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## 11.4 *JAGIR* SYSTEM

The revenue assignments made by the Delhi Sultans were termed *iqta* and its holder *iqtadar* (for details see our Course **BHIC107**, **Unit 4**). The system was developed to appropriate the surplus from the peasantry and distribute it among the nobles. This also included the administration of the area by the assignee.

The Mughal Emperors, too, did the same. These assignments were given in lieu of cash salaries. The areas assigned were generally called *jagir*, and its holders *jagirdar*. Sometimes terms like '*iqta*'/'*iqta'adar*' and *tuyul*/*tuyuldar* were also used, but very sparingly. It must be made clear that it was not the land that was assigned, but the income/revenue from the land/area was given to the *jagirdars*. This system developed over a period of time and underwent many changes before stabilising. However, the basic framework was developed during Akbar's reign. Let us first study the early form of *jagir* system.

### 11.4.1 The Early Phase

Babur, after his conquest, restored to the former Afghan chieftains or conferred upon them assignment of approximately more than one-third of the conquered territories. The holders of such assignments (*wajh*) were known as *wajhdars* (*wajh* means remuneration). A fixed sum was assigned as *wajh* out of the total revenue of the area. The rest of the revenue of the territories was deemed to be a part of the *khalisa*. The *zamindars* continued in their respective areas, but in other conquered areas Babur ruled through *hakims* (governors). The same pattern perhaps continued under Humayun.

### 11.4.2 Organisation of *Jagir* System

During Akbar's period all the territory was broadly divided into two: *khalisa* and *jagir*. The revenue from the first went to the Imperial treasury, and that from the *jagir* was assigned to *jagirdars* in lieu of their salary in cash (*naqd*) according to their rank. Some *mansabdars* got cash salary, and, hence, they were called *naqdi*. A few were given both *jagir* and cash. The bulk of the territory was assigned to *mansabdars* according to their rank. The estimated revenue was called *jama* or *jamadami* as it was calculated in *dam* (a small copper coin, l/40th of the silver *rupaya* on the average). The *jama* included land revenue, inland transit duties, port customs and other taxes which were known as *sair jihat*. Another term used by the revenue officials was *hasil*, that is, the amount of revenue actually collected. You must understand these two terms 6 jama and basil 6 which you will come across frequently. The

revenue officials used yet another term, that is, *paibaqi*. This was applied to those areas whose revenue were yet to be assigned to *mansabdars*.

In the 31st year of Akbar's reign, the *jama* of the *khalisa* in the province of Delhi, Awadh and Allahabad amounted to less than 5% of the total revenue. Under Jahangir, almost 9/10 of the territory was assigned in *jagir* and only 1/10 was available for the *khalisa*. The ratio of *jagir* and *khalisa* kept fluctuating. Under Shah Jahan, it rose to one-eleventh and, by the 20th year, it was nearly one-seventh. The trend continued in the next reign; in the 10th year of Aurangzeb, the *jama* of the *khalisa* amounted to almost one-fifth of the total. However, in the later part of Aurangzeb's reign, there was a great pressure on the *khalisa* as the number of claimants for *jagir* increased with the increase of the number of *mansabdars*.

Another important feature of the *jagir* system was shifting of *jagir*-holders from one *jagir* to another for administrative reasons. This system of transfers checked the *jagirdars* from developing local roots. At the same time, its disadvantage was that it discouraged the *jagirdars* from taking long term measures for the development of their areas. They were merely interested in extracting as much revenue as possible in a short time.

### 11.4.3 Various Types of *Jagirs*

There were generally four types of revenue assignments:

a) *jagirs*, which were given in lieu of pay, were known as *jagir tankhwah*;

b) *jagirs* given to a person on certain conditions were called *mashrut jagirs*;

*c)* *jagirs* which involved no obligation of service and were independent of rank were called *in'am jagirs*; and

*d)* *jagirs* which were assigned to *zamindars* (chieftains) in their homelands, were called *watan jagirs*. Under Jahangir some Muslim nobles were given *jagirs* resembling to *watan jagir* called *al-tamgha*.

*Tankhwah jagirs* were transferable every three or four years, *watan jagirs* remained hereditary and non-transferable. Sometimes *watan jagir* was converted into *khalisa* for a certain period as Aurangzeb did in case of Jodhpur in 1679. When a *zamindar* or a tributary chief was made a *mansabdar*, he was given *jagir tankhwa*, apart from his *watan jagir*, at another place if the salary of his rank was more than the income from his *watan jagir*. Maharaja Jaswant Singh, holding *watan jagir* in Marwar, held *jagir tankhwah* in Hissar.

### 11.4.4 Management of *Jagirs*

The *jagirdar* was allowed to collect only authorised revenue (*mal wajib*) in accordance with the Imperial regulations. He employed his own officials (*karkun*) like *amil* (*amalguzar*), *fotadar* (treasurer), etc. who acted on his behalf.

The Imperial officials kept watch on the *jagirdars*. The *diwan* of the *suba* was supposed to prevent the oppression on the peasants by the *jagirdars*. From the 20th year of Akbar, *amin* was posted in each province to see that the *jagirdars* were following Imperial regulations regarding collection of revenue. The *faujdar* often helped the *jagirdar* to collect revenue whenever difficulties arose. It appears that from the period of Aurangzeb, bigger *jagirdars* were having *faujdari* powers, too.

**Check Your Progress-3**

1) Write two lines each on various types of *jagirs*.

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2) Why were *jagirdars* transferred?

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## 11.5 SUMMARY

*Mansabdari* and *jagirdari* were the two main institutions of the Mughal Empire, which embraced both civil and military sectors of administration. The system was developed to create a centralised administrative system as well as creating a large force. *Mansabdars* and their large forces were used to expand the empire and administer it effectively. The main features of *mansab* system were as follows:

- *Mansabdars* held dual ranks 6 *zat* and *sawar*, the former indicated the status of the officer in the administrative hierarchy, and which also determined the personal pay. The latter denoted the contingent they were expected to maintain.
- *Mansabdars* were divided into 3 classes on the basis of the ratio between their *zat* and *sawar* ranks.
- The salaries and obligation of maintaining troops were governed by a definite set of rules which underwent changes from time to time.

For revenue purposes all the land was divided into two 6 the *jagir* and *khalisa***.** The land revenue collected from the *khalisa* went to the royal treasury while that from the *jagir* to *mansabdars***.**

*Mansabdars* were paid through the assignment of *jagirs*. The *jagir* system as an institution was used to appropriate the surplus from the peasantry. At the same time it was used for distributing the revenue resources among the ruling classes. Of the four types of *jagirs* given to assignees, the *watan jagir* was a very effective way of absorbing Indian chieftains in the Mughal ruling class.

## 11.6 KEYWORDS

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Barawurdi*** | under Akbar the advance paid to *mansabdars* for maintenance of troops was called *barawardi***.** From the reign of Jahangir onwards it was used for regular payment given to *mansabdars* for the maintenance of troops. |
| ***Hasil*** | Actual revenue |
| ***Jama*** | Estimated revenue |

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Khanazad*** | the sons and close kinsmen of persons who were already holding positions in the nobility. |
| ***Khalisa*** | 'Crown' ('reserve') land whose revenue was reserved for the Sultan's treasury |
| ***Khurak-dawab*** | fodder allowance for animals. |
| ***Mashrut*** | the conditional rank given to nobles. |
| ***Talab-Khassa*** | the personal pay of the nobles. |
| ***Tabinan*** | the contingent maintained by nobles. |
| ***Umara*** | plural of *amir* i.e. noble. |
| ***Wajhdar*** | *Iqta*-holder |

## 11.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

**Check Your Progress-1**

1) *Zat* indicated the personal pay of the *mansabdar* while *sawar* indicated the number of troops to be maintained. See Sub-section 11.2.1

2) The *mansabdars* were categorised into three classes on the basis of their *zat* and *sawar* ranks. See Sub-section 11.2.2

**Check Your Progress-2**

1) Month scale was devised to bridge the gap between the estimated income and actual income (net realisation of revenue) of the *mansabdar***.** See Sub-section 11.2.4

2) This system was adopted to raise the *sawar* rank of *mansabdars* without disturbing the *zat* rank. See Sub-section 11.2.4

3) Through the system of escheat the Mughal state used to take control of the assets of the *deceased* noble. For details see Sub-section 11.2.5

**Check Your Progress-3**

1) See Sub-section 11.4.3 where four types of *jagirs* are discussed.

*2)* *Jagirdars* were transferred to adjust the changes in their ranks and salaries. Besides, it was a method to discourage *jagirdars* from developing local roots in the areas under their jurisdictions. See Sub-section 11.4.2

## 11.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Day, U.N., (1970) *Mughal Government, 1556-1707* (New Delhi: Kumar Brothers).

Ray, Anuruddha, (1984) *Some Aspects of Mughal Administration* (Calcutta: Kalyani Publishers).

Raychaudhuri, Tapan and Irfan Habib, (1982) *The New Cambridge Economic History*

*of India*, Vol. I, (Cambridge: New Delhi).

Sarkar, Jagdish Narain (1984) *Mughal Polity* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli).

Shivram, Balkrishan, (2008) *Jagirdars in the Mughal Empire during the Reign of Akbar* (New Delhi: Manohar).

## 11.9 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

**Mansabdari System - I**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpQX7Ke8nAQ

**Mansabdari System - II**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqbJCUJi_Ak

**Jagirdari System Part I**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gggszz3I4bY

**Jagirdari System Part II**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhqLVUGSsUY

# UNIT 12 COMPOSITION OF NOBILITY*

**Structure**



## 12.0 OBJECTIVES

In Unit 11, we have discussed the working of the two important administrative institutions of the Mughal empire – *mansab* and *jagir*. In this unit we shall discuss the chief characteristics of the Mughal ruling class during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. After reading this Unit you will:

- know about the origins and development of the Mughal nobility;
- understand the racial composition of the nobility
- learn about its organization;
- have some idea about the share of the nobility in the revenue resources of the empire;
- get information about the socio-economic role of the nobility; and
- become familiar with the living standard of the nobility.


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## 12.1 INTRODUCTION

The Mughal ruling class or the nobility as it is commonly designated was a heterogeneous mass comprising both civil bureaucrats as well as military officers, **The Mughal ruling class was multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-regional in character.** The nobility was next to the kingship and all the important central as well as state ministers and officers and also the provincial governors (*subedars*) were part of it. They all held ranks (*mansab*) and received their salary either in cash (*naqd)* or through assignment of the revenues of various territories (*jagir*). Therefore, the numerical strength of the *mansabdars* (nobles) materially influenced not only politics and administration, but also the economy of the Empire.

In the present Unit we would be discussing the broad features of the nature and pattern of nobility under the Mughals. Our focus would be Akbar but we would also be elaborating on the changing pattern in the composition of the nobility under Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb.

## 12.2 THE NOBILITY UNDER BABUR AND HUMAYUN

The nobility which accompanied Babur to Hindustan largely comprised Turanis (Central Asian 'Begs') and a few Iranis. After the battle of Panipat (1526), some Afghan and Indian nobles of Sikandar Lodi's camp were admitted in his higher bureaucracy. They were soon taken into confidence and given important assignments. Many local chieftains also accepted Babur's suzerainty and became his allies in subsequent battles. Thus, after the battle of Panipat, the ruling class under Babur no longer remained purely Turani. It appears from the *Baburnama* that out of a total of 116 nobles, 31 were Indians including Afghans and Shaikhzadas.

During the early years of Humayun's reign, there was a decline in the number of Indian nobles as many of the Afghan nobles deserted the Mughal service and joined Bahadur Shah of Gujarat. However, a great change occurred in Humayun's nobility between 1540 and 1555, when most of his Turani nobles deserted him and joined Mirza Kamran. Only twenty-six persons in all accompanied him to Iran, seven of whom were Iranis. But during his stay in Iran, many more Iranis joined him. They accompanied Humayun from Iran to take Qandahar and Kabul. The position of Iranis further improved as a number of Iranis came to Kabul and joined Humayun's service during his stay at Kabul between 1545-55.

At the same time when Iranis increased in the nobility, Humayun raised a new Turani nobility by promoting low ranking Turani nobles to counter the power of the old nobility, thereby strengthening his position. There were 57 nobles who accompanied Humayun back to India, of whom 27 were Turanis and 21 Iranis. This new nobility served him loyally throughout his contest with Mirza Kamran between 1545 and 1555, and followed him in the conquest of Hindustan. In recognition of their services, important assignments were generally given to this section of nobility.

Although by raising Iranis and low ranking Turanis to higher ranks, Humayun could create a loyal ruling class which helped him in reconquering India, the dominant sections in his nobility were still confined to a limited number of class-cum-family groups with their roots in Central Asian traditions.

Thus, the Mughal nobility at its formative stage under Babur and Humayun was not a disciplined and effective organization to cope with the problems facing the newly established Empire in India. Babur and Humayun did not fully succeed in making it loyal and subservient to them even by bringing about a few changes in its composition.

## 12.3 DEVELOPMENT UNDER AKBAR

The position remained unchanged during the early years of Akbar's reign. The two foreign elements Turanis and Iranis enjoyed a predominant position. After the dismissal of Bairam Khan, a crisis developed at the court which ultimately led to the rebellion of the Turani nobles. To balance their pressure, Akbar introduced two new elements – Indian Muslims and Rajputs in his nobility. He also promoted Iranis to higher ranks as a reward for their loyalty during the crisis. Besides those Iranis who were already in the service of Humayun or under Bairam Khan, a large number came to India in search of employment during this period. Many factors were responsible for their migration from Iran. The important one was the unfavourable religious atmosphere for the Sunnis in the Safavi Iran during the sixteenth century. A good number of them proceeded to India in search of security as they were apprehensive of punishment by the Safavi rulers. Many of them were highly trained in administrative affairs and belonged to the noted families of Iran. In India, they were welcomed and admitted by Akbar in his service and given suitable posts. Some of them were introduced to the Mughal Court by their relatives who were already in the Mughal service. Besides them, many others came as adventurers in search of better opportunities knowing that the Mughal court was open to talent. Thus, the position of Iranis in the Mughal ruling class not only became stable and strong but also self-perpetuating.

From 1561, that is, after the exit of Bairam Khan, Akbar started recruiting Rajputs and Shaikhzadas (Indian Muslims) in his service. In order to win recruits from these sections, he adopted certain measures of placating and befriending them. For instance, he established matrimonial relations with the Rajput Chieftains, abolished pilgrimage tax (1562) and the *jiziya* (1564) which was imposed earlier on the Hindus. Akbar's attitude towards Rajputs changed radically after the suppression of the Uzbek rebellion as he adopted a vigorous policy of reducing them to submission by force.

During the period 1575-80, Akbar, with a view of creating wider support for the Empire amongst the Muslim Communities in India, also adopted an attitude of promoting and befriending the Indian Muslims through several conciliatory measures. By adopting these measures Akbar was successful in building a loyal and efficient bureaucracy and in running his government effectively without having any serious crisis in his nobility for a very long time. But, at the same time, he failed to provide any solution to the problem of succession; as a result of which the nobility tended to divide into factions supporting rival princes aspirant for the throne.

**Check Your Progress 1**

i) Examine the nature of the nobility at its formative stage under Babur and Humayun.

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ii) Discuss changes in Akbar's attitude towards various elements of his nobility.

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## 12.4 COMPOSITION OF THE MUGHAL NOBILITY

After its first phase of development during the reign of Babur and Humayun and the early years of Akbar, the Mughal nobility came to consist of certain well-recognised racial groups. The important ones were Turanis, Iranis, Afghans, Shaikhzadas, Rajputs and also the Deccanis (Bijapuris, Haiderabadis and Marathas). Thus, it was an 'International' ruling class; for recruitment 'nationality' was no bar. Chandra Bhan Brahman has given an account of this international and heterogeneous character of the Mughal nobility towards the close of Shahjahan's reign. Among European observers Bernier also speaks of the presence of Uzbeks, Persians, Arabs and Turks or their descendants in the Mughal Court. However, mere fulfillment of certain criteria of merit and competence was not the sole requirement to gain entry into it; clan or family links were the most important considerations for recruitment and ordinary people, with whatever merit to their credit, were normally not admitted to this aristocratic class of the society.

The *khanazads* (the house-born ones), who were the sons and descendants of those officers (*mansabdars*) who were already in the Mughal service, were the best and foremost claimants. They constituted almost half of the ruling class throughout the Mughal period and the remaining half of the ruling class comprised of variety of persons not belonging to the families already in service.

The *zamindars* or the chieftains were one of them. Though they had been in the state service ever since the time of Delhi Sultans, they attained great importance under Akbar who granted them high *mansabs* and *jagirs* in various parts of the Empire. These *jagirs* were in addition to their ancestral domains which were now treated as their *watan jagir* (See **Unit 11**).

Nobles and high officers of other states were also taken into the Mughal nobility on account of their experience, status and influence. Leading commanders of the enemy state, in particular, were offered tempting ranks to make them desert their masters. A very small portion of the Mughal nobility consisted of persons belonging to the accountant castes, that is, ***Khatris, Kayasthas***, etc. They were usually appointed in the financial departments on low ranks, but they could rise to higher ones. Todar Mal under Akbar and Raja Raghunath under Aurangzeb belonged to this category. They served as *diwan* and received high ranks (*mansabs*).

Scholars, saints/sufis and theologians, etc. also received ranks and offices in the Mughal service. Abul Fazl under Akbar, Sadullah Khan and Danishmand Khan during Shah Jahan's reign, and Hakim Alaul Mulk Tuni Fazil Khan and Inayatullah Khan Kashmiri in Aurangzeb's period are some of the noteworthy examples of this class.

### 12.4.1 Racial and Religious Groups

As mentioned earlier, there were certain well-recognised racial groups – Turanis, Iranis,

Afghans, Shaikhzadas, Rajputs and Marathas – who provided new recruits for the Mughal ruling class. These elements were taken into the Mughal service largely as a result of historical circumstances, but partly (as for example the Rajputs) as a result of planned imperial policy of integrating all these elements into a single imperial service. For that purpose, very often, officers of various groups were assigned to serve under one superior officer. Akbar's policy of *sulh kul* was also partly motivated by a desire to employ persons of diverse religious beliefs – Sunnis (Turanis and Shaikhzadas), Shias (including many Iranis) and Hindus (Rajputs) – and to prevent sectarian differences among them from interfering with the loyalty to the throne.

## 12.4.2 The Foreign Elements – Turanis and Iranis

The foreign elements in the Mughal nobility comprised largely the Turanis and Iranis. By Turanis we mean persons coming from Central Asia, where the Turkish languages were spoken; while Iranis (also called Khurasanis and Iraqis) were largely the Persian speaking people from Herat upto Baghdad. According to the *Ai'n-i Akbari*, about 70 per cent of Akbar's nobles were foreigners by origin. This high proportion of foreigners continued under Akbar's successors and among them Iranis enjoyed the most dominant position. In the early years of Jahangir's reign, Mirza Aziz Koka had alleged that the Emperor was giving undue favours to Iranis and Shaikhzadas while the Turanis and Rajputs were neglected. Though Shah Jahan tried hard to emphasize the Central Asian affiliations of the Mughal dynasty, it had no adverse effect on the position of Iranis under him. The greater part of Aurangzeb's nobility, according to Bernier, consisted of Persians who, according to Tavernier, occupied the highest posts in the Mughal Empire.

The Iranis appear to have been constantly migrating to India from different regions of Safavid Iran during the 16-17 centuries owing to various social and political reasons (as pointed out above in **Unit 12.3**).

Athar Ali finds a declining trend in the number of nobles directly coming from foreign countries ever since the time of Akbar. This decline of foreigners, according to him, further sharpened during the long reign of Aurangzeb. The fall of the Uzbek and Safavi kingdoms and the concentration of Aurangzeb's attention in the Deccan affairs for a long period, and, his not following a forward or militaristic policy in the North-West, have been suggested as some important reasons for the decline of direct foreign recruitments. The Iranis, however, could maintain their dominant position in the nobility because of the continuous influx of Iranis from the Deccan Sultanates. Muqarrab Khan, Qizilbash Khan and Mir Jumla (under Shah Jahan); Ali Mardan Khan Haiderabadi, Abdur Razzaq Lari and Mahabat Khan Haiderabadi (under Aurangzeb) are some of the important examples of Irani nobles from the Deccan. The Sunni orthodoxy of the Emperor also did not affect the position of Iranis.

## 12.4.3 The Afghans

The Afghans had been distrusted by the Mughals, especially suspected after the Mughal restoration under Humayun. Most of them were kept at a distance by Akbar. They, however, improved their position under Jahangir who assigned a high position to Khan Jahan Lodi. During Shah Jahan's reign, the Afghans again lost the imperial trust and suffered a setback after Khan Jahan Lodi's rebellion. During the later years of Aurangzeb's reign, however, the number of the Afghan nobles considerably increased. This was mainly because of the influx from the Bijapur kingdom.

### 12.4.4 Indian Muslims (*Shaikhzadas*)

The Indian Muslims, better known as *Shaikhzadas*, comprised mainly the Saiyids of Barha and the Kambus and certain other important clans.

The Saiyids of Barha and the Kambus who had enjoyed a leading position since Akbar's time, were no longer equally prominent during Aurangzeb's reign. More particularly, the Saiyids of Barha, who, on account of their martial qualities, once enjoyed the honour of constituting the vanguard of the Mughals armies, were distrusted by Aurangzeb. It was perhaps because they had been loyal supporters of Dara Shukoh in the war of succession.

Some of the Kashmiris also got prominence during the later years of Aurangzeb's reign; Inayatullah Kashmiri was one of the favourite nobles of the Emperor.

### 12.4.5 Rajputs and Other Hindus

As has been discussed above, Rajput Chiefs and other Hindu nobles were inducted in the Mughal nobility during the reign of Akbar who adopted a friendly and liberal attitude towards them. It is clear from the contemporary sources that the Hindu nobles in general and Rajput Chiefs in particular achieved a position of respect and honour in the reign of Akbar which they continued to enjoy down to Aurangzeb's reign. Shah Jahan was a devout Muslim, who adopted several measures to display his orthodoxy. Yet there was a great increase in the number of Rajput *masabdars* during his reign. Aurangzeb was also a devout Muslim and he is generally blamed for adopting anti-Hindu policies. But the fact remains that during the early years of his reign, the position of the Rajput nobles actually improved over what it had been in Shah Jahan's time. There had been no Rajput officer throughout the reign of Shah Jahan holding the rank of 7000 zat. Now Mirza Raja Jai Singh and Jaswant Singh were promoted to the rank of 7000 zat/7000 sawar. Similarly, ever since Raja Man Singh's recall from Bengal in 1606, no Rajput noble had been entrusted with an important province. In 1665, Jai Singh was appointed the viceroy of the Deccan, the highest and most important charge which normally only princes were entrusted with. Jaswant Singh was also twice appointed governor of Gujarat in 1659-61 and 1670-72. It may be pointed out that with a slight fall (21.6 per cent) in the first phase of Aurangzeb's reign (1658-78), the number of Hindu *mansabdars* remained almost the same what it had been during Akbar (22.5 per cent) and Shah Jahan's (22.4 per cent). This may be better appreciated from the following Table:

| | Akbar (1595) | Shah Jahan (1628-58) | Aurangzeb (1658-78) | Aurangzeb (1679-1707) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A Total *mansabdars*** | 98 | 437 | 486 | 575 |
| **B. Hindus** | 22 | 98 | 105 | 182 |
| **B. as % of A** | 22.5 | 22.4 | 21.6 | 31.6 |

During the last phase of Aurangzeb's reign (1679-1707), however, the proportion of the Hindu nobles appreciated to 31.6 per cent. In other words, during this time there were more Hindus in service than at any preceding period. The increase in the number of Hindus during this period was because of the influx of the Marathas who began to outnumber the Rajputs in the nobility.

### 12.4.6 Marathas and Other Deccanis

The recruitment of Marathas began during the reign of Shah Jahan at the time of

his Ahmednagar campaign. Since Marathas played an important role in the Deccan affairs, they were steadily recruited to the Mughal nobility. Aurangzeb, too, admitted the Marathas on a large scale by granting high ranks to some of them. The Mughal attempt to win over the Maratha chieftains by granting them high mansabs, however, proved a failure. The allegiance of the Maratha nobles under Aurangzeb was always unstable and, therefore, they never attained any real position of influence within the Mughal ruling class.

As regards the other Deccanis, they were the nobles who belonged to the Deccan kingdoms of Bijapur or Golkunda before joining Mughal service. They could be of Indian origin such as Afghans, Shaikhzadas or Indian Muslims; or of foreign origin like Iranis and Turanis. It appears that the Deccanis did not form a very large section of Aurangzeb's nobility in the first period (being 58 or 11.8 per cent of the 486 total *mansabdars*). They were regarded as a subordinate class of nobles; one-fourth of their total pay-claim was deducted according to the regulations for pay in the Deccan.

In the second period, however, the Deccani nobles (Bijapuris, Haiderabadis and Marathas) were recruited on a large scale (they were 160 or 27.8 per cent of the total 575 *mansabdars)*. The influx of the Deccanis in the later years of Aurangzeb's reign was so great that it caused much resentment among the older section of the nobility – the *khanazadas*.

**Check Your Progress 2**

1 What was the position of Rajputs in the Mughal nobility?

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2 Mention various ethnic groups that constituted the Mughal nobility.

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## 12.5 ORGANISATION OF THE NOBILITY

The Mughal nobility was organized within the framework of the *mansab* system, one of the two important institutions (the other being the *Jagir* system) which sustained the Mughal Empire for about 200 years. The *mansab* system was based on the principle of direct command i.e., all *mansabdars,* whatever be their rank, were directly subordinate to the Mughal Emperor.

***Mansab System:*** Technically, *mansab* means office, position or rank. Under the Mughals the functions of *mansab* were threefold:

i. it determined the status of its holder (the mansabdar) in the official hierarchy;

ii. it fixed the pay of the *mansabdar* accordingly, and

iii. it also laid upon him the obligation of maintaining a definite number of contingent with horses and equipment. Each officer was assigned a dual rank

(a pair of numbers) designated *zat* and ***sawar. Zat*** was a personal rank which determined the status of the *mansabdar* in the official hierarchy and also indicated his personal pay. The ***sawar*** rank was a military rank which determined the number of contingents the *mansabdar* was required to maintain and also fixed the payment for the maintenance of the required contingent. (For details see **Unit 11**).

The Mughal *mansabdar* received his pay as determined by his *zat* and *sawar* ranks either in cash (*naqd*) or in the form of territorial assignments (*Jagirs*).

For recruitment as *mansabdar* nationality was no bar. The *Khanazads (*or sons and descendants of *mansabdars* already in service) had the first claim to the appointment. The second source of recruitment were the immigrants from Iran and Central Asia. The third channel of recruitment was recommendation (*tajwiz*). Another category from which recruitment was made were the leading commanders of the enemy camp who were often tempted to desert their masters.

The Central ministers, princes of royal blood, provincial governors and important military commanders used to recommend persons for appointment and promotions. (For details, see **Unit 11**).

## 12.6 DISTRIBUTION OF REVENUE RESOURCES AMONG THE NOBILITY

A. Jan Qaisar and Shireen Moosvi has shown that 82% of the total revenue resources of the Empire was appropriated by 1,671 *mansabdars*. While the top 12 *mansabdars* controlled as much as 18.52% of the total income of the Empire, the remaining 1,149 *mansabdars* controlled only 30% of the revenue. Thus, there was an immense concentration of revenue resources in the hands of a few persons during the time of Akbar. This concentration continued under his successors. A. Jan Qaisar has calculated that 445 *mansabdars* under Shah Jahan claimed 61.5% of the revenue. And the top 25 *mansabdars* controlled 24.5% of the revenue. The salary of the *mansabdars* was very high. Khan-i Jahan Lodi's annual income from his *Jagirs* was 30 lacs of rupees out of which he spent 24 lacs on his establishment expenditure and the remaining 6 lacs were kept in saving. Mahabat Khan had an annual income of one crore rupees and he used to spend all that too. The pay claim of Asaf Khan during the reign of Shahjahan amounted to 50 lacs of rupees a year.

The nobles, by and large, drew their income from the land revenue. There was immense concentration of wealth in the hands of a very small number of persons comprising the core of the Mughal nobility. They did not spend the whole amount on their troopers which they claimed against their *sawar* ranks. This led to further concentration of wealth in the hands of the nobles.

## 12.7 SOCIO-ECONOMIC ROLE OF THE NOBILITY

The members of the Mughal nobility having accumulated enormous treasurers in specie, cash and jewels often invested it in trade, either by engaging in trade directly or by making capital advances to merchants. They also invested large amount of capital in sea-borne trade. Tavernier says, 'on arrival for embarkation at Surat, you find plenty of money. For it is the principal trade of the nobles of India to

place their money on speculation for Hormuz, Bassora and Mocha and even for Bantam, Achin and Philippenes'. Apart from the capital advances the Mughal nobles were also engaged in business investments. Sometimes they had their own ships which sailed to different ports laden with their own goods or, in some cases, with cargo of other merchants. Mir JUmla had frequent business deals with the English and sometimes also advanced money to the English factors. He was in a real sense a 'merchant prince'. His ships carried on trade between Arakan, Southern India, Bengal, Persia and Arabia.

It is also evident that nobles' commercial activities were not confined to foreign trade, it also extended to internal trade. If Mir Jumla offers the best example of a Mughal noble taking part in sea-borne trade, Shaista Khan is the best example of an aristocrat engaged in internal trade. He sought to obtain gains from trade during his viceroyalty of Gujarat and Bengal where he had tried to monopolize and control trade in many important articles of daily use like salt, supari (betel-nuts) and even the fodder of animals.

The nobles were also very much enthusiastic about luxury good and jewels from Europe. Shaista Khan was fond of purchasing of rarities of Europe especially the pearls and jewels. He purchased from Tavernier such articles during his governorship of Gujarat, Bengal and the Deccan. Manucci calls him a great amateur of precious stones.

## 12.8 LIVING STANDARD OF THE NOBILITY

With huge amount of money at their disposal the ruling class led a life of great pomp and show. They maintained large establishment of wives, servants, camels and horses. The household of which the *harem* was the main part must have absorbed a reasonably large sum. And, yet, they were left with substantial wealth that could be spent on the construction of stately houses and works of public utility.

From Shaikh Farid Bhakkari's biographical work *Zakhirat-ul-Khawanin* (1642), it appears that Mughal officers and nobles were fond of constructing attractive and imposing houses for their residence. Pelsaert mentions these houses as 'noble and pleasant with many apartments'. Inside many of these houses there were gardens and tanks and in hot weather the tanks were filled daily with fresh water, drawn by Oxen from the wells. In these gardens nobles used to hold grand feasts in honour of the Emperor. Manrique gives a detailed description of a dinner party in the house of Asaf Khan which indicates the lavishness and the sophistication with which the dinner was organized.

Similarly, a large number of works of public utility such as *sarais*, *hammams* (public baths), wells, step-wells (*baolis*), water tanks, markets, roads and gardens were also built by the nobles throughout the Empire. During the reign of Akbar, Murtaza Khan Bukhari built mosques, *sarais*, *khanqahs* and tanks at Lahore, Agra and Ahmadabad. Murtaza Khan Shaikh Farid Bukhari was a great builder of Akbar's time. In Ahmadabad he built a *sarai*, a mosque and other buildings. During Jahangir's reign, Abdur Kahim Khan Khanan, Azam Khan, Khwaja Jahan Kabuli, etc. were great builders.

The wives and staff of nobles also took equal interest in constructing works of public utility. We get several references about religious and educational buildings such as mosques, ***madrasas***, ***khanqahs***, tombs and temples (*devrah*) built by Mughal nobles. Some of the Hindu nobles and officers also built mosques. Construction of tombs during one's own life time and for the deceased persons of one's family was a popular trend in the Mughal period. Beautiful gardens were laid out around these imposing structures. In constructing these tombs, the nobles sometimes vied with each other. Tombs were also built for sufis by their disciples.

Mughal nobles and officers constructed public welfare buildings outside India.

A number of Irani nobles at the Mughal court are reported to have funded the construction of mosques, ***sarais,*** etc. in Iran. Many nobles and officers also founded cities, towns and villages in their native places or in the territories under their jurisdiction. Sometimes the old existing towns were renovated and beautified with gardens, trees, roads and structures of public utility. Whenever a new city or town was built is was provided with all the necessities of civil life and amenities of an urban settlement with the purpose of encouraging the ^ people to settle down there. Laying out of gardens was. a part of the nobles' cultural activities. Hakim Alimuddin Wazir Khan, the *Wakil* of Shahjahan built a new city at his native town Khabrot and handed it over to its residents. He also built there a market, a *sarai*, a step-well, mosque, *madrasa* and a dispensary and made an endowment for their maintenance.

A. Jan Qaisar has shown a linkage between social values and building activity of the Mughal elite. He says that these values were a continuation of the long established Indian traditions. Why the building activity was undertaken on such a scale? It seems that prestige factor was important. It nourished competitive spirit for cultural exercises with a view of scoring over their compatriots. The desire was to perpetuate one's name for indefinite period. The aspiration unfolded itself in both the forms of their activities, private and public. Religious sanction, too, spurred the elite to construct charitable works, particularly mosques. Role model/expectation also motivated the elite to perform charitable acts. Masses looked to affluent sections to provide public utilities which were culturally identifiable, for example, hospitals, mosques, *sarais*, etc. Masses expected that materially prosperous persons should alienate a part of their wealth in their favour. This'' role was played pretty well by the Mughal nobles. It also resulted in the distribution of material resources 6 of whatever magnitude 6 of the society among masses.

The nobles maintained their own *karkhanas* to manufacture luxury items of their own tastes and specifications for their personal and household consumption. Carpets, gold embroidered silks and high quality jwellery were the main items produced. Ali Mardan Khan maintained some *karkhanas* in Lahore and Kashmir where carpets and shawls were manufactured. Itiqad Khan also had great interest in shawl and wool industry of Kashmir and is said to have introduced new patterns in shawl, pattu, tabrezi and karbalai in wool. Besides, they also imported large number of luxury articles from different countries. The British and Dutch records give innumerable references to the demands made by the nobles for which they used to pay handsomely.

The nobles are also found spending large amount of money in charity. Some of them were very particular in giving gifts to the residents of their own native places. Mir Masum Bhakkari had fixed yearly, monthly, weekly and daily stipends for a large number of inhabitants of his native town Bhakkar. He also used to send gifts to his townsmen from the place of his postings.

Nobles had different hobbies to pass their leisure time such as hunting, horticulture, animal husbandry, alchemy etc. Many of them were also patrons of musicians and men of letters. Besides these and other sports activities, marriages in the family and festivals were other occasions where wealth was squandered freely by them.

Since there was no restriction and audit of their income and expenditure the nobles had their own *'sarkar'* or semi-autonomous administration which comprised his military contingent, harem, household staff, officials and servants.

**Check your Progress 2**

1) Discuss the organization of the Mughal ruling class.

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2) How did the Mughal *mansabdars* utilize the immense revenue resources at their command?

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3) Describe the socio-economic role of the Mughal nobility.

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## 12.9 SUMMARY

In this Unit, we have seen the evolution and development of the Mughal nobility through various stages. In the beginning it emerged as a Turani-dominated class but later as a result of political exigencies, others such as Iranis, Indian Muslims, Rajputs, Marathas, and Afghans were recruited. Thus, it became a heterogeneous ruling class. The Mughal ruling class was organized through ***mansabdari*** and ***jagirdari***, the two important institutions whose efficient working sustained the Mughal Empire for about 200 years. The *mansabdars* constituted the ruling class which was not only a prosperous class but also the elite of the society. They enjoyed the security of wealth amassed during their tenure of service and left large legacies to their families. The nobles invested their accumulated treasures in trade either directly or by making capital advances to merchants. They also patronized luxury-goods and skilled artisans.

## 12.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

**Check Your Progress 1**

1) See Section 12.2

2) See Section 12.3

**Check Your Progress 2**

1) See Sub-section 12.4.5

2) See Section 12.4

**Check Your Progress 2**

1) See Section 12.5

2) See Section 12.6

3) See Section 12.7

## 12.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Ali, Athar, (1997; New Edition) *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).

Anwar, Firdaus, (2001) *Nobility under the Mughals (1628-1658)* (New Delhi: Manohar).

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Khan Iqtidar Alam, (2016) *The Mughal Nobility: Two Biographies* (New Delhi: Permanent Black).

## 12.12 INSTRUCTIONALVIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

**Patronage of Nobility under Akbar**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vo48-qnUi3s

# UNIT 13 FISCAL SYSTEM *

**Structure**



## 13.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we will discuss some important aspects of the fiscal system of Mughal India. After going through this Unit you would know the following:

- the methods of assessment under the Mughals,
- the magnitude of land revenue demand under the Mughals,
- mode of collection of land revenue under the Mughals,
- the different methods used to collect the land revenue under the Mughals,
- what sort of relief was available to peasants in case of adverse circumstances under the Mughals,
- the duties and obligations of different officials engaged in land revenue extraction under the Mughals,
- the main taxes other than land revenue imposed by the Mughals, and
- the mechanism of collecting taxes.


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## 13.1 INTRODUCTION

The central feature of the agrarian system under the Mughals was the alienation from the peasant of his surplus produce (produce over and above the subsistence level) in the form of land revenue which was the main source of state's income. Early British administrators regarded the land revenue as rent of the soil because they had a notion that the king was the owner of the land. Subsequent studies of Mughal India have shown that it was a tax on the crop and was thus different from the land revenue as concieved by the British. Abul Fazl in his *Ain-i Akbari* justifies the imposition of taxes by the state saying that these are the 'remuneration of sovereignty, paid in return for protection and justice'.

In this Unit we will study the economic institutions and changes that the Mughals introduced.

Land revenue was the most important source of income in Mughal India. Besides this, there were other sources of income for the state. In the this unit we will discuss the major sources of income of the state from sources other than land revenue. The contemporary sources provide detailed information about land revenue but on other taxes it is sketchy and brief.

The territory whose revenues were directly collected for the Sultan's own treasury was designated *khalisa*. Under the Mughals *khalisa* or *khalisa-i sharifa* was not fixed instead kept on fluctuating. Under Akbar it was approximately 25 per cent of the total *jama*; under Jahangir it shrank to less than 1/20$^{th}$ of the total *jama*; under Shahjahan it amounted to 1/7$^{th}$ of the *jama*; while under Aurangzeb it became 1/5$^{th}$ of the total *jama*. However, still almost 4/5$^{th}$ revenue of the empire was alienated in the form of *jagirs*.

## 13.2 MUGHAL LAND REVENUE SYSTEM

The Persian term for land revenue during the Mughal rule was *mal* and *mal wajib*. *Kharaj* was not in regular use.

The process of land revenue collection has two stages: (a) assessment (*tashkhis*/*jama*), and (b) actual collection (*hasil*).

Assessment was made to fix the state demand. On the basis of this demand, actual collection was done separately for *kharif* and *rabi* crops.

### 13.2.1 Methods of Land Revenue Assessment

Under the Mughals assessment was separately made for *kharif* and *rabi* crops. After the assessment was over a written document called *patta*, *qaul* or *qaul-qarar* was issued in which the amount or the rate of the revenue demand was mentioned. The assessee was in return supposed to give *qabuliyat* i.e. 'the "acceptance" of the obligation imposed upon him, stating when and how he would make the payments'.

We will discuss here a few commonly used methods:

1) *Ghalla Bakhshi* (Crop-sharing): In some areas it was called *bhaoii* and *batai*. The *Ain-i Akbari* notes three types of crop-sharing:

   a) Division of crop at the threshing floor after the grain was obtained. This was done in the presence of both the parties in accordance with agreement.

   b) *Khet batai*: The share was decided when the crop was still standing in the fields, and a division of the field was marked.

   c) *Lang batai*: The crop was cut and stacked in heaps without separating grain

and a division of crop in this form was made.

In Malikzada's *Nigarnama-i Munshi* (late 17th century) crop sharing has been mentioned as the best method of revenue assessment and collection. Under this method, the peasants and the state shared the risks of the seasons equally. But as Abul Fazl says it was expensive from the viewpoint of the state since the latter had to employ a large number of watchmen, else there were chances of misappropriation before harvesting. When Aurangzeb introduced it in the Deccan, the cost of revenue collection doubled simply from the necessity of organising a watch on the crops.

2) *Kankut/Danabandi*: The word *kankut* is derived from the words *kan* and *kut*. *Kan* denotes grain while *kut* means to estimate or appraisal. Similarly, *dana* means grain while *bandi* is fixing or determining anything. It was a system where the grain yield (or productivity) was estimated. In *kankut*, at first, the field was measured either by means of a rope or by pacing.

   After this, the per *bight* productivity from good, middling and bad lands was estimated and the revenue demand was fixed accordingly.

3) *Zabti*: In Mughal India, it was the most important method of assessment. The origin of this practice is traced to Sher Shah. During Akbar's reign, the system was revised a number of times before it took the final shape.

   Sher Shah had established a *rai* or per *bigha* yield for lands which were under continuous cultivation (*polaj*), or those land which very rarely allowed to lie fallow (*parauti*). The *rai* was based on three rates, representing good, middling and low yields and one third of the sum of these was appropriated as land revenue. Akbar adopted Sher Shah's *rai*. Akbar introduced his so-called *karori* experiment and appointed *karoris* all over North India in 1574-75. The entire *jagir* was converted into *khalisa*. On the basis of the information provided by the *karoris* regarding the actual produce, local prices, productivity, etc. in 1580, Akbar instituted a new system ain *dahsala*, where the average produce, of different crops as well as the average prices prevailing over the last ten years (15-24 R.Y. of Akbar) were calculated. One-third of the average produce was the state's minimum share. Under *karori* experiment, measurement of all provinces took place. Bamboo rods with iron rings called *tanab* were used instead of hempen ropes. On the basis of productivity and prices prevailing in different regions they were divided for revenue purposes into *dastur* circles. The rates of assessment in cash for each crop in every *dastur* was decided, and the demand was fixed accordingly. The main features of the *zabti* system as it finally came into operation under Akbar were:

   i) measurement of land was essential;

   ii) fixed cash revenue rates known as *dastur-ul amal* or *dastur* for each crop.

   iii) all the collection was made in cash.

   From an administrative point of view, *zabti* system had some merits:

   i) measurement could always be rechecked; ii) due to fixed *dasturs*, local officials could not use their discretion; and

   iii) with fixing the permanent *dasturs*, the uncertainties and fluctuation in levying

the land revenue demand were greatly reduced.

There were some limitations of this system also:

i) It could not be applied if the quality of the soil was not uniform;

ii) If the yield was uncertain, this method was disadvantageous to peasants because risks were borne by them alone. Abul Fazl says, "if the peasant does not have the strength to bear *zabt*, the practice of taking a third of the crop as revenue is followed.

iii) This was an expensive method as a cess of one *dam* per *bigha* known as *zabitana* was given to meet the costs towards the maintenance of the measuring party; and

iv) Much fraud could be practised in recording the measurement.

*Zabti* system was adopted only in the core regions of the Empire. The main provinces covered under *zabti* were Delhi, Allahabad, Awadh, Agra, Lahore and Multan. Even in these *zabti* provinces, other methods of assessment were also practiced, depending on the circumstances of the area.

*Nasaq* was not an independent method of assessment; it was subordinate to other methods. It was a method or procedure which could be adopted whatever be the basic method of revenue assessment and collection that was in force. In North India it was *nasaqi zabti*, while in Kashmir it was *nasaqi ghalla bakhshi*. When it was applied under *zabti* the annual measurement was dispensed with and previous figures were taken into account with certain variations. Since *zabti* system involved annual measurement, the administration and revenue payers both wanted to replace it. *Zabti-i harsala* or annual measurement was, therefore, set aside with some modifications.

**Revenue Farming (*Ijara*)**

*Ijara* system or revenue farming was another feature of the revenue system of this time. Though, as a rule Mughals disapproved of this practice, in actual fact certain villages were sometimes farmed out. Generally, these villages, where peasant did not have resources available for undertaking cultivation or where owing to some calamity cultivation could not be done, were farmed out on *ijara*. The revenue officials or their relatives were not supposed to take land on *ijara*. It was expected that revenue farmers would not extract more than the stipulated land revenue from the peasants. But this was hardly the case in actual practice.

The practice of *ijara*, it seems, could not have been very common in the *zabti* provinces, Gujarat and the Mughal Dakhin. In the *khalisa* lands also this practice was very rare. However, in the *jagir* lands it became a common feature. Revenue assignees (*jagirdars*) farmed out their assignments in lieu of a lump sum payment, generally to the highest bidders.

Sometimes, *jagirdars* sub-assigned part of their *jagirs* to his subordinates/troopers. During the 18th century *ijara* system became a common form of revenue assessment and collection.

## 13.2.2 Magnitude of Land Revenue Demand

Let us first examine what share of the produce was taken by the state as land revenue. Abul Fazl says that no moral limits could be set for the demand of the ruler from his subjects; 'the subject ought to be thankful even if he were made to part with all his possessions by the protector of his life and honour'. He adds further that "just sovereigns" do not exact more

than what is required for their purposes which, of course, they would themselves determine.

Aurangzeb explicitly said that the land revenue should be appropriated according to *shariat*, i.e., not more than one half of the total produce.

European traveller Pelsaert, who visited India in the early 17th century, declared that 'so much is wrung from the peasants that even dry bread is scarcely left to fill their stomachs'. Irfan Habib comments: 'Revenue demand accompanied by other taxes and regular and irregular exactions of officials was a heavy burden on peasantry'.

Sher Shah formed three crop rates on the basis of the productivity of the soil, and demand was fixed at 1/3 of the average of these three rates for each crop. Abul Fazl comments that under Akbar, Sher Shah's 1/3 of revenue demand formed the lowest rate of assessement. Recent studies show that revenue demand under the Mughals ranged between 1/3 to 1/2 of the produce, and sometimes even 3/4 in some areas. On close scrutiny we find that the revenue demand varied from *suba* (province) to *suba*. In Kashmir, the demand in theory was one-third while in practice it was two-thirds of the total produce. Akbar ordered that only one-half should be demanded.

In the province of Thatta (Sind), the land revenue was taken at the rate of one-third. Yusuf Mirak, the author of *Mazhar-i Shahjahani* (a memoir on the administration of Sind written in 1634), explains that the Tarkhans who held Thatta in *jagir* when the *Ain-i Akbari* was written, did not take more than half of the produce from the peasantry and also in some cases they took one-third or a fourth part of the total produce.

For Ajmer *suba*, we find different rates of revenue demand. In fertile regions of eastern Rajasthan ranged from one-third to one-half of the produce. Irfan Habib on the basis of the *Ain-i Akbari* says that in the desert regions, proportion amounted to one-seventh or even one-eighth of the crop. But Sunita Budhwar Zaidi points out that there is no evidence in other sources of such low rates from any locality of Rajasthan. Even in Jaisalmer, one-fifth of the produce was collected from the *rabi* and one-fourth from the *kharif* crop.

In Central India, rates varied from one-half, one-third to two-fifths. In Deccan, one-half was appropriated from the ordinary lands while one-third was taken from those irrigated by wells and one-fourth was taken from high grade crops.

Aurangzeb's *farman* to Rasik Das Karori stipulates that when the authorities took recourse to crop-sharing, usually in the case of distressed peasantry, the proportions levied should be one-half, or one-third or two-fifths. Rates under Aurangzeb were higher than that of Akbar. Perhaps it was due to the fact that there was a general rise in agricultural prices and, thus, there was no real change in the pitch of demand.

In the case of Rajasthan it is reported that revenue rates varied according to the class or caste of the revenue payers. Satish Chandra and Dilbagh Singh have shown that Brahmins and Banias paid revenue on concessional rates in a certain *pargana* of Eastern Rajasthan.

It may be safely assumed that in general the rate of revenue demand was from 1/2 to 1/3 of the produce. Since, the revenue was imposed per unit of area 'uniformly' irrespective of the nature of the holding, it was regressive in nature 6 those who possessed large holdings felt the burden less than those who possessed small holdings.

**Check Your Progress-1**

1) Define the following:

*Ghalla Bakhshi*.....
.....

*Kankut*.....
.....

*Nasaq*.....
.....

*Polaj*.....
.....

*Rai*.....
.....

2) Enumerate merits and demerits of the *zabti* system.

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.....

3) Discuss the pattern of revenue demand in Mughal India.

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## 13.2.3 Mode of Payment

The practice of collecting land revenue in cash was in use in some regions even as early as the 13th century. In the Mughal period, the peasant under *zabti* system had to pay revenue in cash. No provision is on record for allowing a commutation of cash into kind in any circumstances. However, under crop-sharing and *kankut*, commutation into cash was permitted at market prices. Cash nexus was firmly established in almost every part of the Empire.

## 13.2.4 Collection of Land Revenue

Under *ghalla bakhshi*, the state's share was seized directly from the field. In other systems, the state collected its share at the time of harvest.

Abul Fazl maintains that, 'Collection should begin for *rabi* from Holi and for *kharif* from Dashehra. The officials should not delay it for another crop'.

In the *kharif* season, the harvesting of different crops was done at different times and the revenue was accordingly to be collected in three stages depending on the type of crops. Thus, under *kharif* the revenue could only be collected in instalments.

The *rabi* harvest was all gathered within a very short period. The authorities tried to collect revenue before the harvest was cut and removed from the fields. By the end of the 17th century, the authorities in desperation started preventing the peasants from reaping their fields until they had paid their revenue. Irfan Habib comments: 'It shows how oppressive it was to demand the revenue from the peasant before the harvest, when he would have absolutely

nothing left. The practice was at the same time the work of a well-developed money economy, for it would have been impossible to attempt it unless the officials expected that the peasants would pay up by pledging their crops beforehand to grain merchants or moneylenders'.

Usually, the revenue was deposited in the treasury through the '*amil* or revenue collector. Akbar encouraged the peasants to pay directly, Todar Mal recommended that the peasants of trusted villages, within the time limit, could deposit their revenue in the treasury themselves and could obtain receipt. The village accountant, *patwari*, made endorsement in his register to establish the amount paid. Irfan Habib considers these regulations as precautionary measures on the part of administration to avoid fraud and embezzlement.

## 13.3 RELIEF MEASURES

Abbas Khan in the *Tarikh-i Sher Shahi* writes, 'Sher Shah declared that concessions could be permitted at assessment time, but never at that of collection'. Aurangzeb in his *farman* to Muhammad Hashim *karori*, instructed that no remissions were to be allowed once the crop had been cut.

Whatever be the method of revenue assessment, there was some provision for relief in the case of bad harvests. We have already seen that in *ghalla bakhshi* and *kankut*, state's share would rise and fall depending upon the current harvest. In *zabti*, relief was given by excluding the area designated *nabud* from assessment.

In practice, it was not possible to collect the entire amount, and there was always a balance which was to be collected next year. It also seems to have been a common practice to demand the arrears, owed by peasants who had fled or died, from their neighbours. Aurangzeb issued a *hasb-ul hukm* in CE 1674-75 to check this practice in *khalisa* and *jagir* lands, arguing that no peasant could be held responsible for arrears contracted by others.

*Taqavi* (strength giving) loans were granted to enable the peasants to buy seeds and cattle. Abul Fazl writes, 'the *amalguzar* should assist the empty handed peasants by advancing them loans'. Todar Mal had suggested that *taqavi* should be given to cultivators who were in distressed circumstances and did not have seeds or cattle. These loans were interest-free, normally to be repaid at the time of harvest. These were advanced through the *chaudhris* and *muqaddams*. Abul Fazl says that the loans should be recovered slowly.

New wells were dug up and old ones were repaired for extension and improvement of cultivation.

**Check Your Progress -2**

1) What was the medium of payment of land revenue?

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2) What were the forms of relief given to the peasants at the time of natural calamity?

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## 13.4 LAND REVENUE ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE MUGHALS

We get ample information about the revenue machinery for *khalisa* lands. But our information for *jagir* administration is quite scanty. Since *jagirdars* were transferred after every two or three years, they had no knowledge of revenue paying capacity of the people and local customs. So we find three types of officials:

a) officials and agents of *jagirdars*,

b) permanent local officials many of whom were hereditary. They were generally not affected by the frequent transfers of the *jagirdars*, and

c) imperial officials to help and control the *jagirdars*

At the rural level, there were many revenue officials:

i) ***Karori*:** In 1574-75, the office of *karori* was created. Describing his duties, Abul Fazl says that he was incharge of both assessment and collection of the revenue. An important change took place during Shah Jahan's reign. Now *amins* were appointed in every *mahal* and they were given the work of assessment. After this change, *karori* (or *amil*) remained concerned chiefly with collection of revenue which *amin* had assessed.

The *karori* was appointed by the *diwan* of the province. He was expected to look after the interests of the peasantry. The accounts of the actual collection of the *karoris* and their agents were audited with the help of the village *patwari's* papers.

ii) ***Amin*:** The next important revenue official was *amin*. As we have already mentioned, that the office of *amin* was created during Shah Jahan's reign. His main function was to assess the revenue. He, too, was appointed by the *diwan*. He was responsible jointly with the *karori* and *faujdar* for the safe transit of the collected revenue. The *faujdar* of the province kept a vigilant eye on the activities of *amin* and *karori*. He also used to recommend their promotion.

iii) ***Qanungo*:** He was the local revenue official of the *pargana*, and generally belonged to one of the accountant castes. It was a hereditary post, but an imperial order was essential for the nomination of each new person.

*Nigarnama-i Munshi* holds *qanungos* responsible for malpractices because 'they have no fear of being transferred or deposed'. But a *qanungo* could be removed by an imperial order if he indulged in malpractices, or on account of negligence of duty. He was supposed to maintain records concerning revenue receipts, area statistics, local revenue rates and practices and customs of the *pargana*. It was generally believed that if a *qanungo* was asked to produce the revenue records for the previous hundred years, he should be able to do so.

The *jagirdar's* agents were generally unfamiliar with the locality; they usually depended heavily on the information supplied to them by the *qanungos*.

The *qanungo* was paid 1% of the total revenue as remuneration, but Akbar started paying them salary.

iv) ***Chaudhari*:** He was also an important revenue official like the *qanungo*. In most cases he was the leading *zamindar* of the locality. He was mainly concerned with the collection. He also stood surety for the lesser *zamindars*.

The *chaudhari* distributed and stood surety for the repayment of the *taqavi* loans. He was a countercheck on *qanungo*.

From *Dastur-ul Amal-i Alamgiri* it appears that the allowance to the *chaudhari* was not very substantial. But it is possible that he held extensive revenue free (*inam*) lands.

v) ***Shiqqdar*:** Under Sher Shah, he was the incharge of revenue collection and maintained law and order. In Akbar's later period, he seems to be a subordinate official under the *karori*. Abul Fazl mentions that in case of an emergency, the *shiqqdar* could give the necessary sanction for disbursement which was to be duly reported to the court. He was also responsible for thefts that occurred in his jurisdiction.

vi) ***Muqaddam* and *Patwari*:** The *muqaddam* and *patwarl* were village level officials. The former was the village headman. In lieu of his services, he was allowed 2.5 per cent of the total revenue collected by him.

The *patwari* was to maintain records of the village land, the holdings of the individual cultivators, variety of crops grown and details about fallow land. The names of the cultivators were entered in his *bahi* (ledger). On the basis of information contained in these *bahis*, the *bitikchi* used to prepare necessary papers and records according to which assessment and collection was carried out.

In each *pargana*, there were two other officials 6 the *fotadar* or *khazandar* (the treasurer), and *karkun* or *bitikchi* (the accountant). Under Sher Shah, there were two *karkuns*, one for keeping the records in Hindi and the other in Persian. But in CE 1583-84 Persian was made the sole language for accounts.

The *faujdar* represented the military or police power of the imperial government. One of his main duties was to help the *jagirdar* or *amil* in collecting revenue from the *zortalab* (refractory) *zamindars* and peasants.

There were *waqai navis*, *sawanih nigar* (news writers), etc., whose duty was to report the cases of irregularities and oppression to the centre.

**Check Your Progress-3**

1) Describe the duties and functions of a *karori*.

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.....

.....

2) Define the following:

i) *Zortalab Zamindars*.....
.....

ii) *Fotadar*.....
.....

iii) *Waqai Navis*.....
.....

## 13.2 TAXES OTHER THAN LAND REVENUE

It is very difficult to ascertain the exact share of taxes other than land revenue in the total income of the Empire. Shireen Moosvi (1990) has calculated them to be around 18% and 15% for the subas (provinces) of Gujarat and Agra, while in rest of the *subas* it was less than 5%.

Here, we will not go into the details of various taxes. We will confine ourselves to what these taxes were and what was the mechanism to collect them.

The main sources were tolls and levies on craft production, market levies, customs and rahdari (road tax) both on inland and overseas trade, and also mint charges. Apart from these, the state treasury received huge amounts by way of war booty, tributes and gifts from various quarters.

Almost everything sold on the market was taxable. The main articles taxed were clothes, leather, foodgrains, cattle, etc. Every time the merchandise was sold, a certain tax was to be paid. We do not have enough data to calculate the exact rate of taxation. The general accounts suggest that these taxes were quite harsh. Peter Mundy (1632) complains that the governor at Patna was harsh in realizing taxes, and even women bringing milk for sale were not exempted. Another contemporary writer says that every trader-from the rose-vender down to clay-vender, from the weaver of fine linen to that of coarse cloth had to pay tax.

Apart from marchants, all the artisans also paid taxes on their products. *Katraparcha* was a tax levied on all sorts of cotton, silk and wool cloth. Indigo, saltpetre and salt were other important commodities subjected to taxation. In some cases as in Panjab, the tax on salt during Akbar's time was more than double the prime cost.

**Customs and Transit Dues**

When the goods were taken from one place to another, a tax was levied. We have some information on the rate of custom levies. All merchandise brought through the ports was taxable. Abul Fazl says that during Akbar's time the duties did not exceed 2% per cent. One early seventeenth century account suggests that at Surat the charges were 2% per cent on goods, 3 per cent on provisions and 2 per cent on money (gold & silver). Towards the close of the 17th century, the customs ranged from 4 to 5 per cent. Aurangzeb levied separate transit taxes for separate groups. The rate fixed was 2%% from Muslinis 5% from Hindus and 3%% from foreigners. These rates were applicable throughout the Empire. The articles valued at less than 52 rupees were exempted. For some time, Aurangzeb exempted the Muslims from all custom dues but after a short period the levy of 2%% was reimposed. In spite of the Emperor's instructions, the merchants were often charged more than the prescribed customs. We find the foreign merchants complaining about the custom dues. The English in 1615 complained that three separate duties were collected on goods brought from Ahmedabad

into Surat. Time and again the English and the Dutch obtained *farmans* for the exemption of customs, but they were made to pay duties at the custom-houses. Apart from the Mughal territory, the autonomous chieftains also levied customs and duties on goods passing through their territories. Moreland says that it is not possible to define the burden on commerce in quantitative terms, since any one might claim a tax of any amount, even if goods had paid taxes in an adjoining jurisdiction.

Apart from customs, another tax called *rahdari* or transit tax was collected. This was a road-toll collected on goods passing through various territories. Though the amount at each place was small, the cumulative charge became heavy. Even the zamindars used to collect tools on goods passing through their territories.

According to one contemporary account of the 17th centui (Khafi Khan), rshdari was considered illegal but large amounts were collected from merchants and traders. This tax was collected on river routes also.

**Income from Mints**

The tax generated at mints was another source of income for the Empire. The state mint-fee was called *mahsul-i dar-u1 zarb*. The charges were around 5% of the value of the money minted. Besides, two other charges were also collected. These were *rusum-i ahlkaran* (perquisites of officials) and *ujrat-i karigaran* (wages of artisans).

## 13.3 MECHANISM OF COLLECTION OF TAXES OTHER THAN LAND REVENUE

Like land revenue there was a well organised machinery for collection of these taxes. The effort of the state was to keep separate accounts for the income from land revenue and other taxes. For this purpose, the taxes were classified into two *mal-o-jihat* and *sair jihat*. The former related to land revenue and the latter to taxes charged on merchandise and trading. For the convenience of assessment and collection, separate fiscal divisions called *mahalat-i sair* or *sair mahals* were created in big cities and towns. The *mahal* was a purely fiscal division and was different from the pargana which was both a revenue and territorial division.

The *Ain-i Akbari* gives separate revenue figures for towns and *sair mahals* for places like Ahmadabad, Lahore, Multan and Broach, etc. In case of Bengal, these market dues are separately mentioned in the *A'in*. In most of the 17th century revenue tables, the *sair mahal* figures for each town are given separately. (For example: the list given for Surat contains revenue *mahals* such as *mahal farza, mahal khushki, mahal namakzar, mahal chabutra-i kotwali, mahal dallali, jauhari wa manhari, mahal darul zarb, mahal ghalla mandi* and *mahal jahazat*.

These revenue districts were either given in jagir or their collections were sent to the state treasury. Except custom houses and mints, most of the officers responsible for the collection of taxes carried the same designations as land revenue officials (*amin, karori, qanungo, chaudhari*).

Ports had a separate set of officers, The *mutasaddi* was the chief official or superintendent of port. He was directly appointed by the Emperor and was responsible for the collection of taxes. The rates of commodities in the market were fixed according to the prices settled by merchants at the custom-house.

The *Mutasaddi* had a number of officials working under him who assisted him in

valuation and realization of custom dues and maintaining accounts. Some of them were the *mushrif, tahwildar*, and *darogha-i khazana*. These were also directly appointed by the court. A large number of peons and porters were also attached to custom-houses.

In the absence of relevant data it is difficult to calculate the net amount-collected. It has been estimated by Shireen Moosvi that the share of these taxes was around 10% of the total income of the state.

**Check your Progress-4**

1) List the main taxes other than land revenue.

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.....

.....

2) How were the *rahdari* and custom tax collected?

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.....

.....

## 13.7 SUMMARY

The land revenue was the main source of the state's income. The British administrators regarded it as rent of the soil, and thought that the owner of the land was the king, but subsequent studies have shown that it was a tax on the crop rather than on land.

The salient features of the Mughal land revenue system may be summarised as follows:

a) The magnitute of land-revenue demand varied from region to region,

b) A number of methods were used to assess the land revenue demand. Though *zabti* was the most important method of revenue assessment, other methods, like *ghalla bakhshi*, and *kankut* were also prevalent,

c) The special feature was that in most cases (at least in the *zabti* provinces), revenue was realized in cash, thereby giving impetus to monetization and market economy,

d) Relief was provided at the time of natural calamity. The state used to give concessions in the form of *nabud*, and advanced loans called *taqavi*, and

e) A large number of officials were associated with the administration of land revenue. Some of the important functionaries were *karori*, *amin*, *qanungo*, *chaudhuri*, *shiqqdar*, *fotadar*, *bitikchi*, *diwan*, *faujdar*, *waqai navis*, etc.

In this Unit, we studied that, apart from land revenue, there were other sources for state's income. This income came from market taxes, customs, *rahdari*, mint charges etc.

## 13.8 KEY WORDS

***Bahi*** Record book, accounts book

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Hasil*** | Actual Collection |
| ***Jama*** | Estimated revenue |
| ***Maurusi*** | Hereditary |
| ***Nabud*** | Not-Existing (land on which cultivation was not done in a particular year) |
| ***Patta*** | A written document issued by the revenue department to the peasants in which revenue demand, etc. were entered |
| ***Qabuliat*** | Acceptance |
| ***Raiyat*** | Peasants |
| ***Taqavi*** | Agricultural loan |
| ***Ummal*** | Plural of *amil* (revenue collector) |
| ***Zortalab*** | Refractory |

## 13.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

**Check Your Progress-1**

1) See Sub-Section 13.2.1

2) At first-define *zabti* system. Trace its origin and then discuss its merits and demerits. See Sub-Section 13.2.1

3) Analyse that in Mughal India revenue demand was not uniformly imposed. Discuss how it varies from region to region. See Sub-Section 13.2.2

**Check Your Progress-2**

1) See Sub-Section 13.2.3

2) Write the nature of the relief measures. What types of loans were given? What was *taqavi* loan; why it was given and on what condition? Who were the officials involved in the distribution of these loans, etc. See Section 13.3

**Check Your Progress-3**

1) Analyse why Akbar created the office of *karori*? What powers were entrusted upon him at that time. What changes we're made during the succeeding reigns in his powers and functions. See Section 13.4

2) See Section 13.4

**Check Your Progress-4**

1) You can write taxes collected from tolls, mints, and the sale of merchandise, etc. See Section 13.5

2) See Section 13.6

## 13.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

Fukazawa, H., (1991) *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and States, 16 to 18 Century* (Delhi: Oxford University Press).

Habib, Irfan, (1990; Revised) *Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707* (Delhi: Oxford University Press).

Moosvi, Shireen, (1990) *The Economy of the Mughal Empire* c. *1600* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).

Raychaudhuri, Tapan and Irfan Habib, (1982) *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I (Delhi: Cambridge University Press).

## 13.11 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECCOMENDATIONS

**Discourse on Mughal Economy**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOZaH2L6b0I

**Economic History of Mughal India**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XM3Afvx-nag

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