

SOME ASPECTS
OF
MUGHAL ADMINISTRATION

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CHAPTER X

Mansabdari System

The word *mansab* means a place or a position where something is fixed or placed and therefore, it means a station or a position in the system. Under the Mughals in India, it began to mean a function or a duty, although it signified the growth of a station or rank in the organisation. But there are two problems inherent in the system of mansabdari organised and developed by the Mughals. The first is that mansab is not applied to all the rank or stations in the system. It was mainly applied to the higher one, although the system meant that all government officials should be covered by it. The second problem was best stated by I.H. Qureshi, "...the mansab was defined in military terms, though the military definition was only a myth or at best a symbol."¹ It was a myth because all officers were given military ranks although no military obligation was always necessary for him. It became a symbol only when the mansabdar (the holder of mansab) performed the military duties.

The word mansab in the sense of rank was used in Central Asia, but not in the form in which Akbar used it. The inherent concept of the State officials having military rank, receiving their pay from the military payroll, was not unknown in the Delhi Sultanate.² Barani's statement that the poets of Alauddin Khalji were paid from the fund of the *Dewan-i Arz* showed a common payroll for both military and civilian officers and servants of State. There is no evidence to show that they fought with their sword on behalf of Alauddin, although it would not be uncommon.

1. Qureshi : *Administration of the Mughals*, 89.
2. Qureshi : *Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*, 153-54.

Muslim writers divided the servants of the State into three main categories : *ashab-us saif* (masters of sword), *ashab-ul kalam* (masters of pen) and *ashab-ul mamal* (men of turban), meaning theologians, although the last class would not really be included as servant of the State. There is no dispute however of the first two.³

The earlier opinion of Babur's administrative system was that he parcelled out various territories in Hindustan among his begs had been considerably modified by recent research.⁴ It had now been found that the assignees, after conquering the area were not necessarily allowed to settle there and more than one-third of the area of Babur's Empire were either restored or conferred upon the Afghan chiefs. It was not a jagir system but they were called *wajdars*, who were over-all in charge of a territory, both fiscal and administrative while the Emperor could claim a fixed sum, details of which would be seen in another chapter.

After his accession, Humayun "divided all the officers of the State, or rather all the inhabitants of his dominions into three classes—*Umara* (relatives and officers), *Wazirs* (ministers) in *Ahl-i Dawlat* (officers of the State); holy persons and learned men including Qazis as *Ahl-i-Sadat* and artists as *Ahl-i Murad* (people of pleasure), keeping two days of the week fixed for each of the classes. Thus the entire civil and military officers of the State were lumped in one class of *Ahl-i Dawlat*. This was the system that Abul Fazl copied in the *Akbar Nama* with some modifications.⁵

Abul Fazl stated that Akbar established 66 grades of mansab-dars, ranging from commanders of ten horsemen to ten thousand. The number sixty-six represented the numerical value of the word Allah according to *Abjad* system of notation, although only thirty-three grades were used, the other half being merely theoretical.⁶

In a recent article entitled "Evolution of the Mansab System under Akbar until 1596-97" (*JRAS*, 1981, pt. 2), Shireen Moosvi had reorganised the stages of the evolution of the system. She had

3. Qureshi : *Administration of the Mughals*, 88.
4. A.R. Khan, *op. cit.*, 208.
5. Khwand Mir, *op. cit.*, 31-32.
6. "The number of mansabs is sixty-six, the same as the value of the letters in the name of Allah." (*Ain*, II, 248).

suggested, on the basis of contemporary Persian sources, that this evolution may be divided into four distinct phases, namely :

(i) Until the first decade of Akbar's reign, as previously, no standing military obligations in terms of the size of the contingents were fixed and salaries were fixed arbitrarily.

(ii) In the 11th regional year (1566-67), Akbar attempted to fix military obligations and the nobles were asked to maintain cavalry troops in accordance with the revenue of their jagirs and on the basis of certain rates sanctioned for the troopers.

(iii) In the 18th regional year (1573-74), the numerical rank (mansab) was instituted with a single number that determined both their pay and the number of animals (such as elephants, horses, carts etc.), which the nobles had to maintain out of their personal establishments. They were to receive an advance payment for the mansab, called *Barwardi* and the balance of pay was adjusted after the *Dagh* (inspection and branding of horses).

(iv) In the 40th year (1595-96), mansabdars were classified into three groups—those with sawars equal to number of mansabs, those with sawars half or more than half of the number of mansabs and those whose sawars were less than half of the number of mansabs. The salary of the sawars was determined on this basis and was separated from the number of mansab. Thus the dual system, *Zat* and *Sawar* started on and from 1595-96. This view thus modifies the earlier views held by Moreland, Habib and others.

Akbar did not bring the system of mansab all of a sudden. Like his other reforms, Akbar continued to experiment till he gave it a final shape in the 40th year of his reign. Moreland stated earlier that Akbar introduced two ranks—*Zat* and *Swar*—in the 12th year of his reign.⁷ But recent research had shown that the dual rank

7. W.H. Moreland : "Rank (mansab) in the Mogul State Service in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, London, 1936, 641-655, [R.A.S.]

first started from the 20th year of his reign.⁸ The chief feature of the system was that all the mansabdars owed direct subordination to the Mughal Empire, absolutely a necessity in view of the early stage of the establishment of the Empire, which was expanding.

Rank

Akbar's chief credit lay in establishing dual rank of *Zat* and *Sawar*, both of which were given to a mansabdar to make up his mansab. Prior to Akbar, there were ranks in the Delhi Sultanate but there was no second rank which was the chief contribution of Akbar. The system was modified or developed along with the centuries but the basic structure remained unaltered.

There was a controversy about the significance of the dual rank. William Irvine stated that double rank meant that the mansabdar had to maintain from his personal pay two contingent of troops.⁹ Abdul Aziz, closer to the modern point of view, stated that the personal rank was purely personal with no involvement of troops. Rejecting the theory of Irvine, he stated that it meant maintenance of one contingent of troops and not two.¹⁰

M. Athar Ali, in his monumental work on the Mughal Nobility, found Abdul Aziz near the truth.¹¹ He found that the *Zat* rank, always inserted as first rank, placed the holder (mansabdar) in the appropriate position in the hierarchy i.e. to proclaim his place among the officials. It also indicated, consequently, the salary of the mansabdar in the pay-scale. The *Sawar* rank, he stated, determined the number of horsemen and horses the mansabdar had to furnish. It instituted a check on the maintenance of contingents according to the salary or income granted to the noble.

Normally, the *sawar* rank (the second rank) was either equal or less than the *Zat* rank (the first one). Since the first rank indicated the position of the mansabdar, the higher or lower rank of a *sawar* did not make the Mansabdar high or low. For example, a

8. A.I. Qaiser : "A Note on the Date of the Institution of Mansab under Akbar" in *The Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 1961, 155-57.

9. William Irwin : *The Army of the Indian Moghuls*, New Delhi (reprint), 1962, 9.

10. Abdul Aziz : *The Mansabdar System and the Mughal Army*, Delhi, 1972.

11. M.A. Ali, *op. cit.*, 39-40.

mansabdar with 4000 Zat and 2000 Sawar (4000/2000 in short) was higher in rank i.e. of position than a mansabdar of 3000/3000, although the later mansabdar had more horsemen and horses in his contingent than those of earlier ones.

Mughals were quick to adapt themselves and their rules to the new situations and it was often found that, for reason of continuity, the sawar rank had to be increased without effecting a change in the Zat, or the position of the mansabdar. Therefore, in latter half of the reign of Aurangzeb, when the Mughal Empire was beset with constant wars, many cases were found when the Sawar rank was more than the Zat rank. These were exceptions, and not errors in transcription as noted by Abdul Aziz, although the practice was apparently limited. Athar Ali held that this was due to the scarcity of able and reliable officers, that Aurangzeb had to "assign larger contingents to persons on whose efficiency he could rely..."¹² Apparently, the system was not a static one but really fluid which was constantly changing. Yet it underlined the basic fact that the Mughal Empire were not desirous of making the basic change in the framework. Further study of these changes would show the ingenuity of the Mughal Emperors to keep the framework as it was but make the necessary reforms to keep the system moving. One such reason of their unwillingness to make a basic change in the system or alter the rank of a mansabdar suddenly for military justification was the reaction it would create among the nobility. Apart from the uncertainty creeping into the rank of nobility destabilising them, there was also the reason of economy for such exceptions. With an economy which was already sagging under its own weight due to various factors, the increase in rank meant an increase in expenditure of the State. To reduce this, Aurangzeb often resorted to this measure particularly in case of lower mansabdars as this measure was not followed in case of higher mansabdars. Obviously this was not a deliberate reform but a measure of crisis employed under strain. Another form of such measure was the use of conditional rank (*Mas'ru'i*),¹³ which was however adopted in Sawar rank for a specified period. This was done when the Emperor required the services of a particular officer for a particular post—once again an emergency measure by which the officer was given

12. *Ibid*, 40-41.

13. *Ibid*, 41-42.

higher responsibilities. If he was transferred from such a post, the additional liabilities with additional income was also cancelled.

A person admitted into the service was given mansab as commander of certain number of cavalry. He had then to enroll and produce his men and horses corresponding to the command. On producing these, he was entitled to draw the salary. But his force was usually less than his sawar rank indicated. A mansabdar of 100 sawar does not mean that he had to keep the required 100 horsemen. Abdul Hamid Lahori in *Badshah Nama* clearly mentioned this indicating that the law was introduced in the reign of Shah Jahan. He stated that if the mansabdar was posted in the same province where he held jagir, he had to muster one-third of the force indicated by his rank. If he was posted outside the suba in which his jagir lay, he had to muster only one-fourth. In case of expedition to Balkh and Samargand, due to the distance involved, Shah Jahan ordered that each mansabdar should muster one-fifth.

Although the language of Abul Fazl was ambiguous here, it is clear that, at the time of Akbar, there is already a classification based on the number of horsemen mustered in relation to the rank. There were already three classes or divisions within a rank, from which the officers above 5,000 Zat were exempted, there being no division within that rank. Abul Fazl¹⁴ stated that an officer with equal zat and sawar rank was placed in the first class while the second class meant a sawar rank less than the zat but upto half. Those whose sawar rank were below the half of the zat rank were placed in the third class. However one should note that the third class of a certain rank was higher than the first class of the next lower rank. Qureshi had found the statement of Abul Fazl ambiguous but accepted the statement and the classification.¹⁵ He suggested that the classification was due to the fact that the Emperor, after recruitment, did not want to give absolute responsibility and therefore at first would give only a certain number of horsemen to find out his capability.

The organisation of the army on decimal basis was already

14. *Ain*, II, 248.

15. Qureshi, *op. cit.*, 91.

done by Chengiz Khan, although with the decline of Timurid power, terms lost their original meaning and merely used for prestige.¹⁶ For example, the *tumani* under Babur did not have more than thousand persons, although the original *tumani* was said to have ten thousand. This discrepancy continued in Akbar's period. The Empire was small in the early period of Akbar and therefore high sounding titles were given with inflated assignments for propaganda value of exaggerated numbers. The Mughals were very much conscious of such propaganda and salaries were shown in dams (copper coins) and not in rupees. Later on the assignments were correctly evaluated to solve problems of administration.

The entire division was based on decimal system. There were 11 classes¹⁷, from 100 horses inferior, while the 11th class had no sawar rank as it decreased by 10. The lowest rank was the commander of ten. From 10 to 100, he was called *Yuzbashi*; from 100 to 400, mansabdar; from 500 to 2500, *Amir*; from 3000 upwards, *Amir-i-Azam*, etc. This was more or less the same as existed perhaps in the Delhi Sultanate. But there were other features in the Mansabdari system which made it a departure.

Irvine is quite correct when he stated that the objective of the Mansabdari was to settle precedence and fix gradation of pay.¹⁸ Mughal Court etiquette was elaborately laid down in which the system was based on honours which was in turn based on precedence. Within this framework, the Emperor would have enough leverage to manipulate rewards, without hurting either honour or precedence of others. This helped the Emperor to keep the older nobility contented and at the same time allowing the adventurous persons to take risks.

The Mansabdars had also to maintain a certain number of beasts of burden, in which sawar rank was not involved. Apart from the horses of his cavalrymen, the mansabdar had to maintain a certain number of horses according to rules laid down, which classified the types of horses.¹⁹ They had to maintain carts for

16. Aziz, *op. cit.*, 17-23. Athar Ali holds the view that despite similarities "the mansabdari system as instituted by Akbar was different in certain vital respects from the earlier system." (*op. cit.*, 39).
17. *Ain*, II, 248-49.
18. Irvine, *op. cit.*, 4.
19. *Ain*, II, 248.

transport and therefore had to maintain elephants, mules and in certain areas camels. The elephants were also classified. The cost of such maintenance came from the Zat rank salary.

However, all the mansabdars were not military officers. Some of them holding high civil posts were also mansabdars and were graded accordingly. The *Ahals*²⁰ were not mansabdars but drew their salaries from the common military payroll. They were also appointed as civil officials, although theoretically they were considered as soldiers. A mansabdar with a civilian post was given only zat rank. But often he was given a sawar rank for promotion, making the system complicated. This kind of indifferention led some historians to conclude that the Mughal government was a military government. This would be difficult to accept since there was no trace of military methods in civilian jobs and the rules and regulations did not give precedence to military.²¹ Also, as the empire progressed, there were very few military officials succeeding civilian bureaucrats, where expertise and merit were the chief qualifications. It may also be mentioned in this connection that no mansab was hereditary for life. All the mansabdars had to start from the lower rung and work their way up, although there was some consideration for heredity. For example, Muhammad Amin Khan, son of Mir Jumla, did not start at the lowest rung. But then there was a political reason for his starting high up. These kinds of consideration had played important part in the reign of Aurangzeb in the recruitment of the mansabdars as ably showed by M. Athar Ali.

Du Aspa Sih Aspa

This reform was introduced in the reign of Jahangir and Mahabat Khan was given this rank in the 10th year of the reign. There were few such cases in the reign of Jahangir but it increased further in the reign of Shah Jahan. Actually, this means a favour—an increase of sawar rank with salary without the corresponding increase of Zat rank or precedence. It means double pay with

20. "There are many brave and worthy persons whom His Majesty does not appoint to a Mansab, but whom he frees from being under the orders of anyone. Such persons belong to the immediate servants of His Majesty... he calls such persons *Ahals* (from *Ahad*, one)." (*Ain*, II, 259).
21. See discussion in Qureshi: *Administration of the Mughals*, 102.

double obligation. Athar Ali had shown that in the first twenty years of the reign of Aurangzeb, there were 68 mansabdars who held this rank out of a total number of 486 mansabdars of 1,000 Zat and above. In the latter part of his reign, 70 out of 575 mansabdars of 1000 Zat and above were holding this rank showing a proportional decrease but numerically superior than the first part of the reign of Aurangzeb.²²

The *du aspa sih aspa* rank was regarded as sawar rank and it could never exceed the zat rank. If a portion of sawar rank was turned into *du aspa sih aspa*, the rest of the sawar rank was termed as *bawardi*.

The *du aspa sih aspa* could best be explained by a set of tables appended here²³:

| | | | |
|----------|--------------------|---------|------------------------|
| Normal : | In 1000 troopers : | 300 sih | $aspa \times 3 = 900$ |
| | | 600 du | $aspa \times 2 = 1200$ |
| | | 100 yak | $aspa \times 1 = 100$ |

2200 horses

Therefore in normal 1000 troopers contingent, there were 2200 horses, obviously to supply horses dying in the field of battle. *Du Aspa Sih Aspa added* : 4000 sawars with 1000 *du aspa sih aspa*. This means that $3000 \text{ ordinary} + 1000 \text{ du aspa sih aspa} = 3000 \text{ ordinary} + 1000 \times 2 \text{ ordinary} = 5000 \text{ ordinary}$

Salary of the mansabdars

Mansabdars were paid salary in two ways. One was the cash salary (*Nagdi*) and the other and more general was the assignment of the revenue of land (*Jagir*). The salary was calculated in terms of money determined by the mansab or rank.²⁴

Regarding the zat rank, the scale of salary was fixed and the Mansabdar would make a claim, known as (*talab*) for definite amount of money. The chief feature of the salary scale of the Zat rank was that one rank had no arithmetical or proportionate rela-

22. M. Athar Ali, *op. cit.*, 42-43.
23. *Ibid*, 42-43.
24. *Ibid*, 43-46.

tion with other ranks. In other words, salary of the Zat rank did not rise proportionately as one goes up higher in the Zat rank. As already stated, below the rank of 5,000 zat, the pay was fixed for three classes. One should also note that the zat rank was basically personal while the sawar rank, along with *du aspa sih aspa*, were fixed for the contingents maintained by the nobles. Therefore the salary for the zat rank was meant for the maintenance of the family and the cost of personal establishment, the salary for sawar were meant for the expenses of the contingents. Thus in the pay certificates, salary of the zat was noted as *Khasa* (personal) and the latter as *tabinan* (contingents or followers).

Contrary to that of the zat rank, the salary for the sawar rank was not given separately for each rank. Here, the rate was given per unit of the sawar rank. The calculation of the salary for sawar becomes obvious as the unit has to be multiplied by the rank. The reason perhaps was that this was treated as "contract rates" for maintaining the required contingents. In such a case the salary increased by exact arithmetical proportion as one attained higher ranks.

The principle of payment of *du aspa sih aspa*, which was considered part of the sawar rank, was double the obligation for the ordinary rank. The calculation of this would be double that of the ordinary rank.

The salary for the sawar rank would thus always be substantially higher than the pay for the Zat rank, which was personal pay of the mansabdar. The salary was calculated in terms of dams and the assignment figure of the jagir was also calculated in terms of dam from the time of Akbar onwards.

Moreland had shown that Shah Jahan had scaled down the contingents of the sawar rank, mainly from his order on the Balkh and Badakashan expedition of 1646 and 1647, as already cited here.²⁵ Ifan Habib, in a brilliant analysis of the Mansab System, disagreed with Moreland after giving him due credit.²⁶ Habib concluded that substantial reduction in the scale of pay on zat rank

25. Moreland, *op. cit.*
26. Ifan Habib : "The Mansab System 1595-1637" in *The Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 1967, 221-242.