

VIVEKANANDA COLLEGE THAKURPUKUR KOLKATA-700063

NAAC ACCREDITED 'A' GRADE



Topic: **What do you know about Mughal Mansabdari system?**

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10) What do you know about Mughal 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. But there are two problems inherent in the Mansabdari system of the Mughals. The first is that Mansabdari was not applied to all the ranks or stations in the system. The second problem was, "the mansab was defined in military terms, though the military designation was only a myth or at best a symbol."⁽¹⁾

The word mansab in the sense of rank was used in central Asia, but not in the form in which Akbar used it. Abul Fazl stated that Akbar used established 66 grades of mansabdars, ranging from commanders of 10 horsemen to 10,000. The number 66 represented the numerical value of the word Allah, although only 33 grades were used, the other half being merely theoretical. Akbar did not bring the mansabdari system 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 that Akbar introduced two ranks - zat and Swar - in the 12th year of his reign.

Prior to Akbar, there were ranks in Delhi Sultanate but there was no second rank which was the chief contribution of Akbar. There was a controversy about the significance of the dual rank. William George Fisher stated that double rank meant that the

mansabdar had to maintain from his personal with no involvement of troops. Abdul Aziz, close to the modern point of view, stated that the personal rank was purely personal with no involvement of troops.

Normally, the suwar rank (the 2nd rank) was either equal or less than the zat rank (the 1st rank). Since the first rank indicated the position of the mansabdar, the higher or lower rank of suwar did not make the mansabdar high or low.

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 ~~suwar~~ rank indicated. A mansabdar of 100 ~~suwar~~ does not mean that he had to keep the required 100 horsemen.

However, all the mansabdars were not military officers. Some of them holding high civil posts were also mansabdars and were graded accordingly. The "Ahadis" were not mansabdars but drew their salaries from the common military payroll. A mansabdar with a civilian post was given only zat rank. But often he was given a ~~suwar~~ rank for promotion, making the system complicated. This kind of indifferention led some historians to conclude that the Mughal govt. was a military govt.

It may also be mentioned that no mansab was hereditary for life. All the mansabdars had to start from a lower rung and work their way up, although there was some consideration for heredity.

For example, Md. 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.

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 (Zagir). The salary was calculated in terms of money determined by the mansabdar rank.

Theoretically all mansabdars were recruited directly by the emperor and the candidates had to appear before him. The Mir Bakshi was responsible for presenting all the candidates before the Emperor. There was also another method of recruitment on the basis of recommendation of the leading nobles of the Empire, particularly from the governors of provinces and commanders of military expeditions. The princes of royal families were also recommended and their recommendations were accepted. After such approval, an elaborate procedure followed. It was sent through Diwan, Bakshi and military accountant from whom it was sent again to the Emperor, who approved it for the second time; only when the Farman was drawn up with the seals of various officers. It was issued under the seal of the wazir. The procedure for the grant of promotions to higher mansab was similar to that of recruitment as each rank was considered separate and not as the part of chain. On the successful conduct of a military expedition, promotions were granted.

Akbar made the rule that each contingent should have horses of double the number of

horsement. It means a mansabdar of 100 sawars rank would need to bring 50 men and 100 horses. The mansabdari system had many weaknesses that played no small part in the downfall of the Mughal empire. ③ After a certain time, it was not efficient as a military machine. The organisation rather the amalgamation of all services into a single centralised machinery, did not contribute to its efficiency. As a result bureaucratic procedures or the red tape, entered into the military services ruining its effectiveness as military machinery, which became more and more clumsy, as time went on.

The Mughals depended on the mansabdars for the bulk of the army and left its care to the officers. The system of checks and balances to oversee the smooth functioning of the army depended to a great extent on the personal initiative of the Emperor or to the narrow eyes of the Accountant. Actually, Mughals believed that any mansabdar, barring a few theologians and philosophers, could be military campaigns. The internal jealousy among the nobility based on their suppressed ambitions often acted as the catalyst for the downfall when, in spite of the largest contingent assembled against Nadir Shah at Karnal, no real battle was fought.

The Mughals, however, attempted hard to weaken the tribal oligarchy which, from time to time, had grabbed power. The rise of Syed of Banda, within 20 years of the death of Aurangzeb, showed that the Mughals did not succeed.

The chief merit of the system, that it was theoretically based on merit and talent, since no office was hereditary. It so happened that till a few years after the death of Aurangzeb, the monarchs were fairly impartial in the encouragement of the ability, although there were some like the Rajput chiefs, who did not start at the bottom of the ladder.

The mansabdari system strengthened the monarchy and prevented the development of a feudal caste, since every mansabdar could only look to the monarch for promotion and rewards. But it can hardly be compared with European feudalism as the basic concept of the mansabdari system was modelled after the Turkish institution, which had affinities with similar situations in the Middle East. ④

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- 1) Qureshi, S.H.: Administration of the Mughals; p-89
 - 2) Swin, William: The army of the Indian Mughals.
 - 3) Qureshi, S.H.: Administration of the Mughals; p-111-112
 - 4) Ray, Aniruddha: Some aspects of Mughal administration; p-235; ed. 1984