INTRODUCTION

The nobility had been an important organ of monarchical system of government during Medieval period of Indian History. Theoretically this institution enjoyed no privileges, however some of its constituents were found always trying to be close to the monarch, exercising power if happens to have a chance and maintained their individual identities. As a consequence the composition of the nobility varied from time to time depending on their loyalty, administrative efficiency, political consideration social milieu of the Empire and finally the will of the Emperor. During the Mughal period the character, composition and functioning of the nobility created serious problem for the Empire. The Mughal Emperors evolved a system of checks and balances by which on the one hand they were able to upheld the monarchical traditions and on the other created a disciplined and efficient ruling class. The study of the nature and character of the Mughal nobility had attracted the attention of the scholars and at least three detailed studies ‘Satish Chandra’s Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court 1707-40, Athar Ali’s The Apparatus of Empire and The Mughal nobility under Aurangzeb have already been published. In a recent study the role of important family groups of Iranis, Turanis, Rajputs, Afghans and Indian Muslims during the reign of Akbar and Jahangir\(^1\) have also been worked out:

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Some studies have also been made to analyse the role of a particular racial group in the nobility under a particular ruler or in a particular period. But in this context detailed studies have been made only of the Rajput nobility or some clans of the Rajputs in the Mughal service² A study of Irani nobility under Shahjahan and Aurangzeb have also been made although it had yet not been published.³

But baring few articles on some individual Indian Muslim nobles or one or two families of Indian Muslims no comprehensive work had been done on the role of Shaikhzadas nobles under the Mughal rulers⁴. Similarly the role of Afghan nobles also could not get sufficient attention; although two works on Afghans⁵ have been published but they are of very general nature. The present study therefore is aimed to workout in detail the role of Indian Muslim and Afghan nobles during the reign of Shahjahan. A study of this kind must necessarily began with

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3. Afzal Khan, Iranian Nobility under Shahjahan and Aurangzeb (Un Published thesis.)
Abdul Rahim, History of the Afghans in India 1545-1631, Karachi 1961;
the reign of Akbar and Jahangir when for the first time significant changes in the composition of the nobility took place and Indian Muslims and Rajputs were admitted in the nobility. But no detailed work have been done so far for this period also. We have attempted to present a brief account of Indian Muslims and Afghans in the Mughal nobility before Shahjahan in the following pages.

The Mughal nobility as it is well known comprised of multiracial (Turanis, Iranis, Indian Muslims, Rajputs Afghan, Deccanis etc.) and multi religious elements (Hindus, Muslims including Shias and Sunnis and Christians). However at the time of Babur's conquest of India it was purely Turani with the exception of a few Khurasanis who joined him after the fall of Timuride Kingdom of Hirat. But soon after his conquest he admitted a large number of Afghans, Shaikhzadas and local chiefs in his nobility mainly because of two reasons; firstly, his central Asian nobility had been creating problem for him in Farghana, Samarqand and Kabul and from Baburnama it appears that they continued to creat trouble in India also. It seems by admitting local elements he wanted to counter them. Secondly, by admitting local elements he also wanted to broad base his ruling class and expand the acceptability of his Kingdom. It may therefore be pointed out that Akbar's introduction of the Indian elements in his nobility was not wholly an innovation.  

6. The Nobility under Akbar and Jahangir, 4.
The situation however, changed after the accession of Humayun, because very soon Afghans started offering resistance and as a consequence Afghan nobles started defecting. Besides that the infighting among the Mughal Princes, sharp division in the Turani nobility and above all the incapacity of Humayun to deal with the situation firmly led further to the thinning of the ranks of Indian nobles in Mughal service. The nobility of Humayun again became purely Turani. Humayun was ultimately expelled from India in 1540 and it can be said without any shred of doubt that one of the most important factor for his defeat and dismissal was the destructive role of his nobility. During the period 1540-55 Humayun’s nobility under went a great change, a number of Persians joined his service and the old Turani nobles were dismissed and in their place a new Turani nobility was admitted.

In his early years (1556-60 and 1560-68) Akbar faced a very serious crisis in his nobility. We need not go into details, but at the end it becomes clear that at the bottom of the crisis was Turani nobility’s contention that the relations of the nobility with the imperial authority be governed by the traditions evolved under the early Khaqans which are variously referred as Yasa-i-Chengezi, Yasa-i- Chaghtai, Tura-i-Changezi etc. As the bulk of the nobility was Turani, it was difficult to bring about
any change in the concept of the sovereignty\textsuperscript{7}. Hence, Akbar decided to counter them by admitting local elements, viz Indian Muslims and Rajputs and he thereafter succeeded not only in altering the composition of nobility but introduced a new concept of sovereignty also\textsuperscript{8}.

Table 1.1

Total number of nobles between 1565-75 (96)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turanis</th>
<th>Persians</th>
<th>Shaikhzadas</th>
<th>Rajputs</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A study of Table of 1.1 indicate that the Turanis lost their unique position in the nobility. Their numerical strength declined and the local elements who were admitted at their expanse were not merely admitted in service, they were also given high mansabs and important jobs\textsuperscript{9}. Thus

\textsuperscript{7} For more details see Iqtidar Alam Khan, ‘The Political biography of a Mughal noble, Munim Khan Khanan(1497-1575), Aligarh, 1973, x-xx; also see ‘Turko Mangol Theory of Kingship’, Medieval India, Miscellany, vol. II, 8-10.

\textsuperscript{8} Iqtidar Alam Khan, ‘The Nobility of Akbar and Development of his religious policy’ J.Y.A.S, 1968.

\textsuperscript{9} Abul Fazl 5000/X Subedar of Delhi  
Shaikh Farid Bukhari 5000/X Mir Bakshi  
Itimad Khan 4000/X Subedar of Gujrat  
Shahbaz Khan 2000/X Mir Bakshi & Subedar of Bihar  
Sadr-i Jahan 2000/X Sadrus-sudur
not only the composition of the nobility change, its complexion also changed.

However, Afghans who could not reconcile to the loss of their sovereignty and continued to foment trouble were not admitted in the nobility in large number. Only few of them like Daulat Khan Lodi, Yusuf Khan, Muhammad Khan Niyazi, Baz Bahadur, Salim Kakar etc. were admitted but their status in ruling class was insignificant.\(^\text{10}\)

By these measures Akbar was able to build up an efficient and loyal nobility by affecting some basic changes in Mughal polity especially in condition of service. But tension within the nobility continued; on several occasions Turani officers refused to cooperate with Persians and Turanis and Iranis remained hostile to Indian Muslims.\(^\text{11}\). It is also interesting to note that relation between Afghans and Indian Muslims were also extremely hostile.

Jahangir in various aspect of administration is said to have largely followed the policy of his father. However, his attitude changed towards certain sections of nobles because of their role during the accession crisis. As a matter of fact, even before coming to power, he developed distaste for some of the senior Akbar Shahi nobles. He was of

\(^\text{11}\) The Nobility under Akbar and Jahangir; 217-20.
the view that they have attempted to poison the ears of the Emperor against him and precisely for this reason he got Abul Fazl killed; and Raja Man\textsuperscript{12} Sing and Aziz Koka not only fell out of favour for their hostility during the accession crisis but Jahangir lost confidence in Akbari nobles in general particularly after the rebellion of Khusrau. Hence, he raised a new nobility on whom he could have complete confidence. So, he promoted to higher ranks Sadr-i-Jahan, Sharif Khan, Abdullah Khan, Qutbuddin Khan, Mahabat Khan, Bir Singh Deo Bundela, Barha Sayyids and others. Almost all of them were raised to higher ranks for their service rendered to him when he was a Prince or at the time of accession crisis.

Although the mansabs of old nobles were not curtailed, but above mentioned officers were raised to equal ranks by means of extra ordinary promotion. They were also given important military commands and governorships. This naturally created rivalry and suspicion between Akbar Shahi and Jahangir Shahi nobles. Mirza Aziz Koka in a strong worded letter\textsuperscript{13} accused Jahangir of changing the policy of his father (Emperor Akbar) regarding the composition of the nobility by deliberately ignoring Rajputs and Turanis and giving undue importance to Indian Muslim and Irani.

\textsuperscript{12} The Nobility under Akbar and Jahangir, 185-86.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid
Table 1.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Total No. of Mansabdar</th>
<th>Turani</th>
<th>Irani</th>
<th>Rajput</th>
<th>Shaikh-zada</th>
<th>Afghan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1575-1605 List of Akbar's nobles</td>
<td>500 &amp; above 307</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1605-1612 List of Jahangir's nobles</td>
<td>1000 &amp; above 128</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1613-1627</td>
<td>1000 &amp; above 220</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2\(^4\) A shows that between 1575-1605 there were 34 Shaikhzada (Indian Muslims) nobles holding the rank of 500 and above. As against that during the early years of Jahangir's reign (1605-1612) we get reference of only 17 Indian Muslim nobles holding rank of 1000 and above and in the closing years of his reign there were a total of 30 Shaikhzadas nobles. So neither there was any increase in their numerical strength nor in total mansabs. Therefore Aziz Koka's charge of undue favour shown to Shaikhzadas and Khurasanis is not really born out. The only change that may have taken place was Jahangir's close association with two Indian Muslim families viz the member of Shaikh Salim Chisti's family and the Barha Sayyids; with the family of Shaikh Salim Jahangir's relations were personal and emotional and Barha Sayyids played an important role in his accession. The only other Indian Muslim

\(^4\) The table is based on the list of nobles available in M Athar Ali's, The Apparatus of the Empire, Award of Ranks, Offices, Titles to the Mughal nobility (1574-1658), O U P, Delhi 1985.
who got special favour was Sadr-i Jahan who enjoyed almost the same status under Akbar also.

But the real change in the composition of the nobility during Jahangir’s reign was the introduction of Afghans in the nobility in a big way. As mentioned earlier during Akbar’s reign very few Afghans were admitted in service and none of them were given high mansabs and important positions. In the early year of his reign much before Khan-i Jahan Lodi was elevated to higher rank as many as 21 Afghans held mansab. The author of Tarikh-i Khan-i Jahan highlights this point when he writes;

‘He (Jahangir) gave so much attention to them (the Afghans) that they gave up their hostile attitude and bound themselves in submission and attachment to him even at the sacrifice of their lives. By their distinguished service they raised themselves to the rank of great nobles and became worthy of being admitted to the Emperor’s company.

The admission of Khan-i Jahan Lodi in the Mughal nobility, his subsequent promotion to higher rank and appointment to important offices and close personal relation with the Emperor completely changed the position of Afghans at the Mughal court. This was perhaps made

possible by the fact that the suspicion of the Afghans which had haunted the Mughals earlier might now have been moderated considerably after the firm foundation laid by Akbar for Mughal rule. However, Khan-i Jahan’s relations were not admitted in service in any numbers although usually family members of favorite nobles were given appointments on generous scale. A number of Afghans are noticed in our list during 1613-1627 but none could attain the rank of 5000 Zat and 5000 Sawar. Even the sons of Khan-i Jahan were not given higher ranks. Besides Khan-i Jahan only two other Afghan nobles were appointed as provincial governors. They were also not given any independent assignments. At the end it may be pointed that during the reign of Jahangir Mughal policy towards Afghans was modified to the extent that they were admitted into service without much prejudice but promotions to higher ranks and appointment to the important assignments were still not easily given. This might have been because of their extensive tribal feelings.

The above discussion on the Afghan and Indian Muslim elements in the Mughal nobility (under Babur, Humayun, Akbar and Jahangir) show that Indian Muslims have become integral part of the Mughal nobility, holding high ranks and important offices. However, Afghans, inspite of Jahangir’s favourable attitude could not make their position

17. For details see Appendix -E
secure because of their extensive tribal loyalties.

In the present study we propose to examine the position of Afghan and Indian Muslim during the Shahjahan’s reign by detailed investigation of the fluctuating fortune of (11) eleven leading families of Indian Muslims (Six families) and Afghans (five families). Realizing that such a study might be one sided, I have also tried to look at the nobility as a whole while assessing the role individual families.