CHAPTER 5

NOBILITY IN MUGHAL ADMINISTRATION

The Mughal political system was despotic. In such a monarchical state system the fate and fortunes of all the nobles, whether Hindus or Muslims, depended on the general approval of the highest authority in the state, i.e. the emperor. The institution of the court was therefore very crucial, because the nobility looked towards the court for its personal gratification, official and non-official. The emperor, on the other hand, had to depend on the nobility because he had to govern the empire through its help and services. The emperor's interests were thus twofold. He had to see whether the nobles actually carried out his orders or not and also whether they mis-appropriated their power or not. Thus a study of the exact relationship existing between the Mughal nobility and the Mughal court becomes imperative, in the process also analysing the fruitful relationship governing the Mughal nobility to the Mughal emperor.

An easy and comfortable division can be executed so far as the Mughal nobility is concerned. This division applies to the Mughal nobility all through its existence from Babur down to Aurangzeb and Bahadur Shah. First, the two sections of the Mughal nobility done on this basis are called Tainat-i-rakab, and Tainat-i-subajat. The Tainat-i-rakab comprised those nobles who were posted at the court itself. And the Tainat-i-subajat comprised those nobles who were posted in the outlying units of the empire, namely the provincial units. It may be also stated here that these divisions were complimentary and flexible. These divisions were executed chiefly and primarily on the postings of different officials or nobles. But all these nobles could be very comfortably changed and intermixed from group to group. Thus, it can be re-stated that these two divisions of the administrative Mughal nobility were flexible and interchangeable.

The Mughal nobility was attuned to fixed rules and regulations. For example, all the different gradations of the Mughal nobility required the practice of one fixed tradition. This was, that before the actual transfer of the

4. Ibid, P.81
5. Ibid, P.85
noble, he was subjected to a strict disciplinarian presence at the court level itself. This was done before the concerned noble proceeded to his new place of transfer and assignment, where it may be. But as it was, the noble was not required to present himself at the court in one case. This was, that, if his transfer was due to any fault committed by him, his presence at the court was not required any more. Any noble, who used to come to the court without the imperial grant of permission, was considered and subjected to be dismissed from his paternal post.

The administrative divisions of the Mughal nobility into the Tainat-i-rakab and Tainat-i-subajat was done while keeping note of the different essential elements into view. Such nobles who had organising and administrative talents, were on the whole deputed to the out-lying districts of the empire. Such nobles rarely did make their appearance at the court and they were not even required to give their presence at the level of the court. Such a condition changed only then, when, the presence of the nobles was determinedly essential at the court. The nobles coming under the

7. Ibid, P.63
11. Ibid, P.221
12. Ibid, P.230
periphery of Tainat-i-rakab, were kept present at the
court in the capital to be serving and acting as a unit
in reserve. Such nobles were asked to deputise for the
state in all the different military and political campaigns
of the state. As such, such nobles who were of eminent
ranks and of high abilities, were stationed under the
watchful eyes of the emperor himself. So that they may be
put to any urgent military duty as may be required from
time to time. The Mughal emperors also kept maintaining
a comparatively large force ready at their urgent disposal
so that no military general however, powerful he may be,
may not be able to exercise such a thing as a coup d'etat.

There were certain systems prevailing at the
Mughal court as regards the court etiquette, customs,
rituals, common and uncommon practices, and so on. The
Mughal nobles, those who were stationed at the capital,
were required to present themselves two times in a day
before the emperor. They were to be presented before the
emperor every morning and evening all through the year.
But this rule was also flexible under times of duration,
such as personal illness, private business and so on.

    1905), P.51.
15. Ibid, P.54.
17. Ibid, P.84.
Before the emperor and especially on ceremonial occasions, definite rules and rituals were strictly observed. Thus the nobles were presented before the emperor in their proper order of ranks, position and precedence. Proper and distinctive rows of nobles signified their exact ranks and position, each noble standing at his very definite and appointed situation. None of the nobles could sit down while the proceedings of the court were in progress.

After the emperor had formally sat down upon the throne, none of the nobles could leave his presence without obtaining the formal permission of the emperor. Without obtaining the emperor's permission, no noble could come to the court with arms. No noble could arrive in a palanquin within the confines of what was called the gulab-bar or the enclosure of the emperor's private place of residence. Those colours which were declared to be illegal by the shariat, were prohibited to be used by the nobles, especially while in and around the court. The nobles were also prohibited to don the half sleeves and they could not, according to the rules, wound shawls around their shoulders while in the

22. *Ibid*, P.149
mighty and honourable presence of the emperor. The Mughal emperors had also prohibited the eating and exchange of betel-leaves or pan by the nobles in the court as it was considered to be a breach in the maintenance of court etiquette. The most significant task performed by the nobles while at court was connected with the mounting of guards at the royal palace. This practice remained as it was from Akbar down to Bahadurshah. The European traveller, Jean Baptiste Tavernier has offered a graphic picture of the same.

"The first court is, as I have elsewhere said, surrounded by porticoes with small rooms connected with them, and here it is that the Qmrahs stay while they are on guard for it should be remarked that one of the Qmrahs mounts guard every week. He disposes both in the court as also about the Emperor's palaces or that when he is in the field, the cavalry under his command, and many elephants. The best of these Qmrahs command 2000 horses, but, when a prince of the blood royal is on guard, he commands upto 6000".

27. Abul Fazl, op. cit, Vol. I, P. 267
Again,

"The principal nobles mount guard every Monday, each in his turn and they are not relieved before the end of a week. Some of these nobles command 5000 or 6000 horses and encamp; under their tents around the town"\(^29\)

But absence from mounting guard in case of sickness, marriage and death was also to be seen and there were rules about it\(^30\).

Whenever the emperor rode an elephant for the occasion of a procession, the nobles followed him riding on their personal horses\(^31\). And when the emperor was himself riding a horse, the nobles used to follow him on foot\(^32\).

Several ceremonial rules and regulations of the court were chiefly the privilege of the emperor. The chief reason as to why were these court rules and regulations so stringent and so elaborate, was to keep the nobles in check, to check their recalcitrance and to impress upon them the aura of

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the emperor's power, position, and prestige. In those Mughal times all this was a part of the basically intimate and essential instruments of the state government and administration. The Mughal emperors maintained and practised their pomp and splendour very essentially so as to make the nobility aware that it was much below the emperor's prestige and position and that its power and position depended on the emperor's goodwill and liking. Moreover, the Mughal emperors were always in need to emphasize to their subjects that all the nobles were their paid servants, and they themselves were alone everything and everybody, they being the supremos.

The Mughal nobility was decorated with honorary titles and distinctions. The Mughal rulers followed the policy of giving incentive to the people to pave the way for a better state, society, and culture. In this way they succeeded in gaining the support and cooperation of the Hindustani masses. Among the different distinctive marks of honour presented by the Mughal emperors to people

33. V.A. Smith, Akbar the great Mogul, Oxford, 1919. P. 89
34. Ibid, P. 93
38. Ibid, P. 94
were significantly known as titles, standards, kettle-drums or nakarrah, robes of honour, and various presents ranging from bejel-leaves to jewelled daggers and swords, etc. 39

The European traveller, Niccolao Manucci has remarked that,

"The king confers these names either as a mark of distinction and of the esteem he holds them in by reasons of their services, or else from friendship and liking. These lords can acquire more wealth as well as more titles." 40

The same author also states that,

"At present there is a very great number of them; but in Shahjahan's days, it was not so, and it was very hard to acquire these titles, for it was at once necessary to give a heavy payment and produce enough to maintain a great display." 41

A title which was once granted, used to serve as officially as the name of the individual noble concerned. Many titles were kept reserved for the Muslim nobles, and

39. Ibid, pp.96-97
40. N. Manucci, op. cit, Vol.II, P.359
41. Ibid, Vol.II, P.369
some other titles for the Hindus. Some titles were kept in reserve for the common masses as pertaining to the achievement of excellence in the different professions.

The title of 'Khan' was of pre-eminent importance. So the Mughal administration used to take great care so that the title of 'Khan' may not be given to any noble who had as yet not achieved the required position. During the last days of the Mughal empire, the element of heredity came to be witnessed, as a result of which if any son of a dead noble proved to be worthy then in such a case he was provided with his dead father's title. It was also seen that the same title was not given to more than one person, because two persons could not hold this title at the same time. Titles were also given to those if they had changed their titles or had received new ones in place of the old ones. Some titles, such as those of Mahabat Khan, Amir Khan and so on, were held by other nobles even after the actual holders were dead. Those titles, which pertained to important nobles before, attached an immense prestige and value. The nobles often were busy in buying such titles by offering gifts and bribes, etc. The titles to the Mughal

42. Ibid, Vol.II, PP.366-69
43. Abdul Hamid Lahori, Badshah-Nama, ed. Mauloi Kabiruddin and Maulvi Abdur Rahim, Bib. Ind., Calcutta, 1867-68. P.22
44. Saqi Mustaid Khan, Measir-i-Alamgiri, Bib. Ind., Calcutta, 1871. P.489
46. Saqi Mustaid Khan, op.cit, P.489
47. Ibid, P.489
nobles were awarded at the emperor's accession, on the day of the Naoroz or the Persian New Year day, as also on the birthday of the emperor, and also on the victory day of any Mughal imperial military campaign. Khilats or robes of honour were given to the nobles to signify the emperor's gratitude and favour. These robes of honour consisted of up to six or seven pieces of cloth and ornaments and were of various shades and colours. The robes of honour were provided on the same days on which the titles were conferred upon the nobles. The Hindu nobles were conferred upon the robes of honour during the important Hindu festival of Dusshera.

Emperor Akbar conferred upon the nobles various standards such as Alam, Chatrtoq, Tumantoq, Jhanda, etc. During the later Mughal period, another new standard, Mahi-Maratib, came into being. The standard of Mahi-Maratib was in practice during the Sultunate period of Indian history, and was also prevalent in the Muslim kingdoms of southern India. This standard became the highest honour of state in the Mughal empire, and it was given to only those nobles.

48. A.H. Lahori, *op. cit.*, P.46
50. Ibid, P.163
who were in the rank of 7000 or above. Similarly, the standard of Alam was conferred upon only those nobles who were in the rank of 1000 or above. Naubat was conferred on a noble of the rank of 2000 or above. On the occasion of the conferring of these standards, the nobles were given cash offerings by the emperors, besides several other varieties of gifts such as jewels, swords and daggers, elephants and horses. There were some standards which were conferred on very rare occasions, such as Padm-i-muras and Sarpech-i-yamani. There were several other ways through which the Mughal emperors showed their generosity towards the nobles, for example they used to write formal letters of good wishes and congratulations to the highest of their nobles. Whenever any particular relative of any important noble died, the emperors sent their condolences to the bereaved noble. The most important and influential of the nobles were related quite often to the emperor himself, because the emperor and his sons used to choose their prospective brides from families of such nobles who had an aristocratic background and rich financial and cultural

54. Ibid, P.400
55. Anand Ram Mukhlis, op.cit. f.16a
56. Ibid, f. 16a
59. A.H. Lahori, op.cit. P.243
60. Ibid, P.349:
heritages. In this context, mention may be made of the great and powerful Rajput houses who provided well-born brides to the Mughal imperial family for generations at end. When the Mughal emperors asked for brides either for himself or for his sons, it was considered as a very honourable gesture on his part, and though limited to only a few selected families, this accounted to the acquisition of a lot of imperial favour and prestige for the concerned families of nobles. However, as the political exigencies of the times demanded, the Mughal emperors, never themselves, gave the women-folk of their imperial families to any noble however prestigious his family may be, the fate of the ladies of the imperial family thus being sealed.

An overview of the role of the Mansabdars or nobles in the public service of the Mughal empire, is necessary. The Mughal government did not believe in national reconstruction. Its moral responsibility lay in the maintenance of law and justice, political and social order, prevention of crimes, and prevention of violent conflicts between the different sections of the Mughal society.

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63. Ibid., p. 64
64. Ibid., p. 67
65. Ibid., pp. 201-3
The chief Mughal state activity revolved around the organization of the military, collection of revenue, functioning of the judicial system, and so on. The judiciary was an independent unit in itself, but the remaining functions of the government were assigned to, and worked out in practice by the Mughal Mansabdars.

The Mansabdari organization included into its fold all the administrative services, this being not done by any subdivisions into military, financial and executive systems. Military duties were nearly always superimposed upon the Mansabdars according to their ranks of Suwar.

Separate divisions had to be formed in the administrative set-up with the posts of the faujdar who was in charge of the military and civil affairs, the diwan who was in charge of finance, the kotwal who did police duties, and so on.

Thus, the position held by the Mansabdars required them to perform different types of duties. As such, though for just name-sake, there existed no difference between the civil and military functions of the Mansabdars, yet as a matter of fact, civil (Revenue) and military duties were very often

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66. N. Manucci, op. cit. Vol. III. P. 89
67. Ibid., Vol. IV. P. 108
68. Peter Mundy, op. cit., Vol. II. PP. 62-66
given to different persons who had an apt knowledge and training and experience in that particular field. As such, nobles like Jai Singh, Dalpat Bundela, etc. were always given military duties to perform and were never assigned financial or revenue duties. There were some nobles who were always assigned financial and executive duties such as Raja Raghunath, Fazil Khan, and so on. However, there are also examples of the same mansabdars serving in different departments at alternative times. For example, Amanant Khan, the diwan of Bijapur and served as Commandant of Aurangabad.

The Mughal judiciary was on the whole a separate institution because the functions required a specific academic training. Thus the judicial officers such as the Qazis and the Sadr could only expect and get suitable careers in a single branch alone. Several Mughal nobles such as Syed Jalal Khan, Abdul Wahab, etc. served as judicial in character. The judicial nobility was never

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71. Ibid, Vol.II, PP. 49-52
73. N. Manucci, op. cit. Vol.I, P. 119
assigned any financial and executive duties because the Mughal government thought it wisely to refrain their administrative ambitions. The Mughal judiciary was not entirely an independent institution, but upto a great extent it exercised its power as a restraint upon the tyrannical attitudes and practices of the executive. In the same spirit, the Mughal administrators and the nobility always considered the judiciary to be an independent and separate institution, which had nothing to do with the country's administration in the normal times. If the judiciary ever interfered in administrative affairs, then the nobles let out their resentment, for example the powerful Mughal noble Mahabat Khan had several times protested against the increase in power of the Qazis and judges in the Mughal empire. Theoretically, a Mansabdar after accepting the charge of the mansab became a sort of a slave of the emperor. His duties passed over from just supplying the necessary contingents or fulfilling other obligational requirements from his personal rank and status. Practically, he could be assigned to any office, even without receiving the specific salary attached to the mode and

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75. Syjan Rai Bhandari, Khulasat-ul Tawarikh, ed. Zafar Hasan, Delhi, 1918, P.72
76. Ibid, P.73
77. Ibid, P.75
78. P. Mundy, op.cit. Vol.I. PP.86-87
status of the post and work assigned to him. In fact, his personal emolument covered everything, and if the said Mansabdar failed to satisfy the emperor's wish by neglecting his duty, then in such a case, his allowance was not reduced but his Mansab rank and status were reduced. Definite rules, in course of time, were developed to form a relationship between any post and rank held by the mansabdar assigned to that particular post. There existed three important executive posts in the provinces. First, the Nazim or Subedar or Governor, the Faujdar, and thirdly the Thanedar. Nobles of the rank of 2500 to 7000 were made governors generally. For the post of the faujdar, normally mansabdars of the ranks of in-between 500 to 5000 were appointed, and the charges or duties of the faujdar varied considerably. Some faujdaris were assigned to the local noble elements, such as the jagirdars. In some faujdaris in every province, the charge of governing them was given to a subedar who governed it through a deputy and appointed a mahi of his own choice for its administration and made him responsible for governing it. In the matter of administrative

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79. Ibid, P.97
81. Ibid, P.32
82. Ibid, P.37
83. J.N. Sarkar, Mughal administration, Calcutta, 1920, PP.63-67
charges, the post of the faujdar was immediately succeeded by that of the thanedar. The exact character and functions of the thanedar and the limits and boundaries of the control exercised over the thanedars by the local faujdars, during the Mughal empire is not clear\textsuperscript{84}. Some thanedars during the Mughal empire were so important that nobles of very high ranks alone were appointed for those posts\textsuperscript{85}. Generally, those nobles who were in the rank of 200 and above, were appointed as thanedars\textsuperscript{86}. In the administrative and financial spheres, the post of Diwan, Mir Bakshi, Second Bakshi, Third Bakshi, and so on were important\textsuperscript{87}. The post of the Central Diwan was the most crucial one and eminent nobles such as Wazir Khan were appointed to it\textsuperscript{88}. The post of Mir Bakshi was also very important and it was given to first-rank nobles such as Bahramand Khan\textsuperscript{89}. To the posts of Second and Third Bakshi, only nobles of second strata were appointed\textsuperscript{90}. The Mughal nobles, thus were given different offices in different departments, and they were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} V.A. Smith, \textit{op.cit.} P.91
\item \textsuperscript{85} P.Mundy, \textit{op.cit.} Vol.I. P.72
\item \textsuperscript{86} Ibid, P.74
\item \textsuperscript{87} Munshi Nand Ram Kayasth Srivastava, \textit{Siyaa Nama}, Lucknow, 1879, P.34-37
\item \textsuperscript{88} Ibid, P.41
\item \textsuperscript{89} M.H.Khafi Khan, \textit{op.cit.} Vol.II, P.407
\item \textsuperscript{90} Shah Nawaz Khan, \textit{op.cit.} Vol.I, P.311
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sent to any province on any pretext or assignment which
the Mughal emperors thought as essential. Throughout the
life-span of the Mughal empire, numerous nobles were
transferred to all parts of the empire, with the result
that all the Mughal nobles had at one time or other, served
in almost all variant regions of the empire\textsuperscript{91}.

Thus, a deep relationship existed between the
Mansabdari system and the administrative system of the
Mughal empire. The Mansabdari institution comprised the
civil, financial and military services, leaving aside the
judiciary, because any Mansabdar had some military obligation
though he could be assigned to do any administrative job. And
whereas the Mansab held by any noble and the actual post
assigned to him were indirectly related, a general
relationship existed between the two\textsuperscript{92}. The Mughal Mansabdars
were truly speaking the governing class of the empire, and
were different from the European nobility of seventeenth
century which had been pushed out of the administrative
services\textsuperscript{93}. The Mughal nobility had an important role to
play in the Mughal administrative set-up and it maintained

\textsuperscript{91} J.N. Sarkar, \textit{Mughal administration}, Calcutta, 1920, P. 106
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Ibid}, P. 124
\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Ibid}, P. 131
its inner cohesion by the system of constant transfers, and it can be maintained that the Mughal nobility was a truly national and an all India body.

The Mughal nobles' conduct in the administrative set-up of the Mughal empire may also be examined. The Mughal nobility was in itself always combining the roles of an aristocracy and that of a bureaucratic organization. Thus, the Mughal nobility's role as a bureaucracy must be examined. The Mughal nobles' conduct was always subjected to the control and influence of the emperors, who used to promote them, demote them, depose them, and reward and punish them according to their own discretion and according to the exigencies of the times. But in its own turn, the imperial policy in governing this control and influence was largely influenced by the premises of the object of the governance of the Mughal state. Though the objective of national construction was lacking, yet the maintenance of law and order and the relief in times of general distress was present at all times in the policies of the Mughal government. Much emphasis was put on the mystic or religious sensibilities, in conjunction to the idea of sulh-i-kul

94. Ibid, P.87
95. Ibid, P.62
of during Akbar down to the Shariat of Aurangzeb. Thus the Mughal imperial government played the role of morality, at least theoretically, if not practically, in all its fields of activities. The wholesale attention of the state was drawn towards increasing its income, augmenting its military resources, and maintaining day-to-day administration on an efficient basis. The Mughal nobles were demoted because of disobedience to the emperor's orders, not discharging functions up to the satisfaction of the emperor, and not maintaining in full the required rank of contingent, infringement upon the royal prerogative, maintaining connections with the enemies, sympathizing with the rebels, and showing cowardice in any military action. Another very important set of rules was as regards the immoral activities indulged upon by the nobles, such as drinking etc., which brought about reduction in their ranks. Tyrannical behaviour, maladministration, murder, theft, etc., also brought about severe punishments. But during the later Mughal period, leniency by the Mughal emperors, was to be seen in such cases. Thus followed the abolishment of many illegal taxes on merchants and peasants, bringing up a situation wherein due

96. J.N. Sarkar, Studies in Aurangzeb's reign, Calcutta, 1933, pp. 91-93
97. J.N. Sarkar, Mughal administration, Calcutta, 1920, pp. 32-33
98. Ibid., pp. 52-56
to the lack of any stringent imperial control, the noble's personal conscience was alone important. But the nobles had no conscience, as is evidenced by the fact that bribery was widely prevalent throughout the Mughal empire, and the Mughal nobles justified themselves by taking and giving bribes. The Mughal nobles used to aim for presents and gifts for doing anything, even for acts done under imperial orders or in accordance with the specified duties of their posts. The European traveller Niccolao Manucci writes that the faujdars and governors turned out from houses, lands and villages, the people to whom these had been given by the imperial farmans unless and until they gave to them gifts and presents. Thus, in the Mughal empire, it was through bribery that the masses could gain the attention of the administrators either for their personal protection or for someone's destruction. A more severe direct attention was taken by the administration in cases and instances of

100. Charles Fawcett, ed., *English factories in India, 1661-64*, Oxford, 1936, P.203-05
101. Ibid, P.204
102. Ibid, P.204
103. N. Manucci, *op.cit.* Vol.III. P.232
embezzlement, because, here, the central treasury was directly affected. Thus the Mughal nobility was extremely short-sighted, as they had personal gains in their minds and not national reconstruction or the interests of state in mind. As such, the civil administration, the military administration, and the diplomatic administration all collapsed systematically, leading to the inevitable downfall of the Mughal empire after 1707.

104. Charles Fawcett, op. cit. 1670-77, P. 267