CHAPTER 7

NOBILITY AND MUGHAL SOCIETY

The Mughal nobility brought to its fold a huge amount of the surplus production under the Mughal empire and some of this amount they utilized for the activities of public welfare and charities. The notable Mughal noble, Bakhtawar Khan, erected several building structures of public utility for the society. He built a traveller's inn or sarai near Shahjahanbad and named it after his own name, Bakhtawar Nagar¹. Constituted of independent quarters for travellers with their families, it also had a mosque, with wells and bathrooms, providing for the travellers². A garden surrounded the inn, and a tank was also built nearby. The same noble also built a bridge in-between Faridabad and Bakhtawar Nagar³. At Bakhtawarpura, the same noble built a mosque along with a tank and a residence for the poorer sections of the society⁴. Bakhtawar Khan also erected two or more gardens for the people at Agharabad and Lahore, and also built a mosque at the tomb of Shaikh

². Ibid, ff. 250a
³. Ibid, ff. 251a
⁴. Ibid, ff. 251a
Nasiruddin Chiragh. Thus Bakhtawar Khan built many rest houses, inns, wells and tanks, bridges, gardens and mosques; but he did not build any theological colleges or madrasas.

Another notable Mughal noble, Shaista Khan, also contributed immensely to building of bridges and inns all through the width and breath of Hindustan on which he spent several lakhs of rupees. The prominent Mughal noble, Mir Jumla built a big tank and a large garden at Hyderabad. The Mughal noble Mir Khalil also built a large tank at Khalil Sagar at Narnol. The Mughal noble Irij Khan constructed a sarai or traveller's inn near Ilichpur. Ghaziuddin Khan built a Khangah at Delhi. All these Mughal nobles constructed a large number of mosques throughout Mughal India. On special occasions the Mughal nobles used to open free feeding-places for the poor people, sometimes on their own and sometimes under imperial orders. During the 1660 famine of northern India, all Mughal nobles of 1000 rank or above opened free kitchens. But the Mughal nobles did not strive to work for such things as irrigation, hospitals, academic institutions and likewise.

5. Ibid. ff. 252a
6. Saqi Mustaid Khan, Massir-i-Alamgiri, Calcutta, 1871, P. 223
10. Ibid. Vol. II, P. 878
11. Muhammad Kazim, Alamgir Nama, Calcutta, 1865-73, P. 611
The Mughal nobles were highly interested in arts and literature. Some nobles were themselves scholars while some patronised scholars, though they never did anything in the way of opening up academic institutions for fostering arts and literature, because the best they did was to patronize scholars on individual basis. Many Mughal nobles became famous as patrons of art and literature. The Mughal noble Itiqad Khan was very fond of learned people who were poor. Sidi Miftah was too fond of scholars and he showed it by helping them and spending money for their upliftment and betterment. Amir Khan used to send large sums of money to the Persian scholars. Muhammad Saeed was a famous patron of authors. Zulfiqar Khan used to patronize the famous poet Nasir Ali. Husain Ali Khan used to patronize Abdul Jalil, a contemporary poet. Some Mughal nobles had an interest in science and medicine. The Mughal noble, Danishmand Khan had engaged the famous European traveller Francois Bernier in order to hold discussions regarding medical subjects. The famous monograph; 'Tuhfat-al-Hind', was compiled under the direct special orders of Khan-i-Jahan.

12. Ibid, P.502
15. Ibid, Vol.III, PP.579-83
17. Ibid, P.130
18. Ibid, P.275
19. Francois Bernier, Travels in the Mogul empire, Delhi, 1968, PP.324-25
Bahadur Kokaltash\(^{20}\). Some Mughal nobles themselves were able scholars, and we may maintain thus that the intellectual capacity of the Mughal nobility was not nil. The Mughal noble Danishmand Khan was himself of a scholarly disposition\(^{21}\). Izad Baksh, the governor of Agra was a famous poet and prose-writer\(^{22}\). Shaikh Ghulam Mustafa had a vast knowledge of subjects ranging to medicine, astrology, poetry, and calligraphy\(^{23}\). Zafar Khan wrote and composed a Diwan\(^{24}\). Mirza Muhammad Tahir wrote a history of the reign of emperor Shahjahan\(^{25}\). Himmat Khan was a poet and profound scholar of Hindi\(^{26}\). Islam Khan was a poet\(^{27}\). Muhammad Ashraf was a mystic and did a collection of the work of Maulana Jalaluddin\(^{28}\). Hisamuddin was a scientist and a poet as well\(^{29}\). Multafat Khan was a scholar of contemporary literature and was also a poet\(^{30}\). Aqil Khan Razi was a poet and wrote 'Waqiat-i-Alamgir'\(^{31}\). Dianat Khan was also a scholar of some repute\(^{32}\).

\(^{20}\) Ibid, P.121  
\(^{21}\) Shaikh Muhammad Bega, *op.cit*, f.222 b  
\(^{23}\) Ibid, PP.74-75  
\(^{24}\) Ibid, PP.95-96  
\(^{25}\) Ibid, Vol.II, PP.96-97  
\(^{26}\) Ibid, Vol.III, PP.946-49  
\(^{27}\) Ibid, Vol.I, PP.217-20  
\(^{28}\) Ibid, Vol.I, PP.272-74  
\(^{29}\) Ibid, Vol.I, PP.584-87  
\(^{30}\) Ibid, Vol.III, PP.500-03  
\(^{31}\) Ibid, Vol.II, PP.821-23  
\(^{32}\) Ibid, Vol.II, PP.59-63
Alahwardi Khan Alamgir Shahi was a poet and composed a Diwan. Musavi Khan was a scientist and a rationalist. Saif Khan was a poet, a musician and was the author of 'Rag Darpan'. Mir Khalil was a scholar of science, calligraphy and music.

The Mughal nobles maintained a well-organized harem. The harems included numerous wives of the nobles, servants, and animals in use. The harems comprised an integral part of the Mughal nobles' household, and its establishment and maintenance used to cost the nobles a considerable amount of monetary expenses. Each Mughal noble had several wives, not less than five or six, all these women being daughters of aristocrats. They lived together in the noble's palace which was surrounded by high walls on all sides. Each wife lived in an independent enclosure or apartment of her own, well attended by slaves who even numbered up to one hundred. These aristocratic women felt happy to spend their lives in seclusion and so slave-men.

34. Ibid, Vol.III, PP.633-36
37. Francois Bernier, op.cit, P.213
38. Streynsham Master, The diaries of Streynsham Master, 1675-80, London, 1911, P.72
39. Ibid, P.81
40. Pelsaert, Jahangir's India, Cambridge, 1925, PP.64-65
slave-girls, and eunuchs were employed to look after them and cater for their personal needs and services. The European author John Fryer has described them as follows:

"...toothless old women and beardless eunuchs. They also wait on ladies to hand them necessaries as food, water, meat, and they like taking them at the door, as to prevent unlawful intruders."

The life of the Mughal nobility within the four-walls of the palaces was all luxury. Gardens, and tanks beautified the palaces, and running water, feeding tanks and artificial water-falls adorned the enclosure of these palaces. The life of the Mughal nobility inside the harems is well-illustrated by the European traveller Niccolao Manucci as follows:

"The ladies love to regale themselves with quantities of delicious shews; to adorn themselves magnificently, either with clothes or jewellery."


42. Ibid, Vol.1, P.328

43. Pelsaert, op.cit, P.64
pearls, etcetera; to perfume their bodies with odours and essences of every kind. To this must be added that they have permission to enjoy the pleasure of the comedy and the dance, to listen to tales and stories of love, to recline upon beds of flowers, to walk about in gardens, to listen to the murmur of the running waters, to hear singing and other similar pastimes.\textsuperscript{44}

Again Niccolao Manucci states:

"In the cool of the evening they drink a great deal of wine, for the women learn the habit quickly from their husbands."\textsuperscript{45}

The noblemen spent their evenings and nights in the harems, while drinking, music and dances went on up till the late hours of the night.\textsuperscript{46} The European traveller, Francois Bernier has remarked that in Mughal India one cannot see and enjoy the houses of the nobles as was the case in France, because the houses of Mughal nobles were

\begin{footnotesize}
46. Pelsaert, \textit{op. cit}, P. 65
\end{footnotesize}
barricaded by high huge walls and the gardens and other assets of a luxurious life were all hidden from the eyes of the common people. As a matter of fact, the Mughal nobles spent lavishly on their haflams and lived a highly luxurious life. For example, the Mughal noble Amanat Khan, possessed a palatial house at Burhanpur with gardens and tanks fed by canals. The Mughal nobles possessed a number of animals and to give an example, the Mughal noble Aaud Khan spent Rs.250000 on his animals including tigers, per year. The Mughal nobles, besides leading a highly luxurious life within their palaces, always maintained pomp, gaiety and splendour out of their houses too. To quote the European traveller, Francois Bernier, the Mughal nobles

"are never seen out-of-doors but in the most superb apparel; mounted sometimes on an elephant, sometimes on horse-back, and not infrequently on a palkey attended by many of their cavalry, and by a large body of servants on foot, who take their station in front and at either side of their lord, not only to clear the way, but to flap the flies and brush off the dust with tails.

47. F.Bernier, *op.cit.*, P.233
49. *Ibid, f.27a*
50. N. Mamucci, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, P.255
of pea-cocks; to carry the piquedant and spittoon, water to allay the Qurah's thirst, and sometimes account book and other papers.\textsuperscript{51}

The European traveller, John De Laet has stated that the luxurious life-style of the Mughal nobility is very difficult to describe because the one prime concern of their life was to eke out every kind of pleasure and luxury out of their life.\textsuperscript{52} Because of their temporary and precarious official situations, the Mughal nobles were, as a matter of fact, narrow in their aims and a lot petty in their attitudes and purposes; they also being proficient in flattery and polite but insincere when they had to get some privilege out of any one.\textsuperscript{53} The Mughal nobles were the embodiment of wealth and voluptuousness mingled together in an unnatural way.\textsuperscript{54} They practised oppression on the common and poor masses of Mughal India, although such ill-character traits were kept in check by the Mughal emperors although it is also true that the emperors were unable to check and curb the widespread ill of disloyalty and recalcitrance which characterised the Mughal nobility.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{51} F. Bernier, \textit{op.cit.}, PP.213-14

\textsuperscript{52} John De Laet, \textit{The empire of the great Mogol}, Bombay, 1928, P.90

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Ibid}, P.97

\textsuperscript{54} Thomas Roe, \textit{The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the court of the great Mogol}, Vol.1, London, 1926, P.74

lack of loyalty among the Mughal nobles was to be witnessed from the very outset, for example, emperor Babur had to compel his nobles to take oaths from the Quran sharif before he undertook his expedition against Rana Sanga. The little feeling among the Mughal nobility for the emperor who was the one and only sign of national solidarity, was overshadowed by their characteristic ills of treachery and ingratitude. Nobles who were in crucial positions in the state administration never strained themselves from plotting intrigues against the emperor. When emperor Shahjahan was overthrown by his son Aurangzeb, none of his nobles came forward to help him in his time of distress, a thing which could not have been tolerated by the nobles if there would have been a semblance of constitutional monarchy. But at the same time there were a few minor exceptions among the nobles who stood the test of time in their steadfast loyalty to the throne. For example Asad Khan, the Mughal noble has been landed in this way;

"He may be said to have been the seal and last member of that ancient nobility of Hindustan.

57. F.S. Manrique, op.cit., Vol.II, P.73
58. N. Manucci, op.cit., Vol.IV, P.42
that had done so much honour to the Empire. He had every qualification that can constitute a character equally eminent in public, and amiable in private; of a placability of temper, and of a benignity of disposition so endearing, that to this very day, his name is affectionately remembered by every one. Without having ever stooped to any lords of the recent courts, he lived with dignity and splendour to the very last, exerting uninterruptedly his boundless influence over every part of the empire, where, to his immortal honour, as well as to the emolument of all contemporaries, he never ceased to employ his credit, as well as purse, in obliging any one that presented himself, whether a friend or stranger ⁶⁰.

The Mughal nobles were very courageous for courage was needed for the nobles to attain status and rank, and their behaviour was very civilized. They used to hold darbars where the inferiors obeyed them and listened to them, showing their respect for them silently as statues ⁶¹. But these facets of the Mughal nobility passed away into oblivion

⁶⁰. Ibid, Vol.IV, PP.98-100
after Aurangzeb, when weak sovereigns came to sit upon the Mughal throne, as has been rightly said that weak emperors were responsible for weak nobility. Thus the Mughal noble Saadat Khan invited Nadir Shah to invade Mughal India, and Saadat Khan's son Safdar Jang who commanded the artillery against the Mughal empire itself.

During this time, the rapid changes in the headship of the government, made the nobles feel insecure and they doubted about their allegiance. Every Mughal noble, thus, during the later Mughal history, became a sort of law unto himself. Aurangzeb's son, Bahadur Shah had promised to the nobility even before becoming the emperor that he would not disobey its wishes. Thus, after he became the emperor, he gave out mansabs and ranks to the nobles on an unprecedented scale, with the result that the position and dignity associated with Mansabs fell down heavily. Thus, "the grants of mansabs, naubat, and nakara, elephants, the jigha and sarpech were no longer regulated by the rank and dignity of the recipient. This fact earned for the emperor the title of the Heedless King." Succeeding Aurangzeb, all Mughal

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62. Ibid, P.341
64. Ibid, Vol.I, P.330
65. Syed Ghulam Husain Khan, op.cit, P.54
66. Ibid, P.17
emperors were all weak which led to the Mughal nobles becoming all powerful to the extent that they even went up to the extent of quarrelling in the presence of the emperor himself as did Muzaffar Khan and Burhan-il-Mulk in front of Muhammad Shah. The nobles acquired immense control over government and non-government lands, organized their personal contingents and used the emperor as a ploy in their own hands.

The Mughal nobility's wealth originated from the imperial treasury and it was the same place that a part of the nobility's wealth returned in form of presents on their behalf to the Mughal emperors, which was an established social custom during the Mughal empire:

"Whoever it may be who desires to have audience of the king, they ask before everything else, where the present is that he has to offer to him, and they examine it to see if it is worthy of being offered to his Majesty. No one ever ventures to show himself with empty hands, and it is an honour obtained at no little cost."

68. Ibid, P.397
69. Ibid, P.209
This social custom of the Mughal nobility offering costly presents to the Mughal emperors had its origin in the Persian Caliphate. Whenever, the Mughal provincial governors had to pay their share of annual land revenue to the Mughal emperors, they had to follow this practice of presenting presents to the imperial headship. On some special occasions it was customary of the Mughal nobility to offer presents to the emperor, such as on the birthday of the emperor. Those nobles who had done anything out of order, those who wanted some favour out of the emperor, all used presents to bring the best of humour from the emperors. Thus the Mughal nobles indulgently presented the emperors with diamonds and pearls. These presents were in fact presents and not bribes because they were offered openly as a form of the social etiquette prevailing in the Mughal society. On the New Year Day the Mughal emperors received presents from their nobility, it being a custom adopted by emperor Akbar and borrowed from Persia.

On this occasion the emperors received gifts and presents.

71. Khuda Baksh, The orient under the Caliphs. P.128
72. J.B. Tavernier, op.cit, Vol.I, P.123
73. N. Manucci, op.cit, Vol.II, PP.347-48
74. F. Bernier, op.cit, P.271
75. N. Manucci, op.cit, Vol.II, P.344
76. F. Bernier, op.cit, P.263
from the common people of the land also. On such special occasions, the wives of the Mughal nobles went to the inner portals of the emperor's palace to congratulate the wives of the emperors and carried with themselves presents for the emperor's wives. Upon the birth of the royal prince, the nobles presented the emperor with precious stones, money, and costly animals. Whenever the Mughal imperial forces chalked out a victory the occasion was fit enough for the nobles to congratulate the emperor by way of offering him presents. For example when the Mughal noble Nizam-ul-Mulk won a victory he congratulated the emperor and sent along a number of ashrafis or gold mohurs as a form of nazar. During Jahangir, Kunwar Karan, after gaining victories in the Deccan presented the emperor with one hundred gold mohurs, rupees one thousand as nazar, and rupees twenty-one thousand in value, plus some animals as pesh-kash. The Mughal emperors also received presents from royal princes because they were also subjects, as for example Prince Khurram (Shahjahan) offered Jahangir one thousand gold mohurs.

77. John De Laet, Description of India and Fragment of Indian History, Bombay, 1928, P.100
78. N. Manucci, op.cit, Vol.II, P.345
79. Ibid., Vol. II, P.343
and one thousand rupees on one occasion. The Hindu rajas had to also pay presents to the emperors because the Mughal emperor was their overlord, as for example the Raja of Kumaun presented Akbar with a yak and a Musk-deer, once.

Sometimes the Mughal emperors visited the houses of their nobles and on such occasions the nobles used to offer costly presents to the emperors who honoured them by visiting their houses. When Babur visited the house of his paymaster, the latter presented him with gifts worth two lakhs of rupees. Similarly Asaf Khan presented Jahangir with gifts worth 1.14.000 rupees when Jahangir visited his house. Jahangir also visited Itimad-ud-daulah's houses, the noble presented gifts upto rupees 4,50.000 to the emperor. When Aurangzeb visited the house of his noble Jatar Khan, the latter presented the emperor with gold coins worth one hundred thousand crowns, some costly pearls, a ruby costing forty thousand crowns.

The custom of offering the emperors with presents by nobles was prevalent throughout the Mughal period. Babur,

82. M.H.Khafi Khan, op.cit, P.474
83. A.Q.Badayuni, Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh,Calcutta,1865-68,P.377
84. Z.Babur, op.cit, P.89
86. Ibid. Vol.II, P.71
87. F. Bernier, op.cit, P.271
the first Mughal emperor writes that upon his son Humayun's nativity he received such a mass of white tankas that he had never set his eyes upon ever before. Akbar had even issued a state-order that everyone, rich or poor should bring presents for him. In his turn, the emperors also offered presents by way of their favour for someone, thus, giving away precious stones, costly robes and animals like horses and elephants. Jahangir used to send dresses of honour to the nobles of Kabul. Once the same emperor sent winter robes to honour the governor of Bengal Qasim Khan. Dresses of honour were sent by Jahangir also to Khan-i-Khanan Jan-Sipar, and other nobles doing services in southern India or Deccan. Upon the death of his noble Itimad-ud-daulah, Jahangir offered honour-dresses to more than fifty offsprings of the said noble. Once in every year, the Mughal emperors presented an outfit for the rainy seasons known as "Batani" to the nobles. When any armed victory was attained by the Mughal emperors, the nobles were presented with increase in ranks and monetary presents on the behalf of the Mughal

88. Z. Babur, *op. cit*, P.83
93. *Ibid*, P.97
94. *Ibid*, P.223
emperors. For example, when Humayun achieved a victory over Sikandar Lodi's son Sultan Muhammad, he honoured the nobles by presenting them with Arabian horses and robes of honour. Whenever any noble was awarded a new appointment he was presented with a Khilat, for example when Emperor Shah Alam appointed Shuja-ud-daulah as the Vazir, the emperor presented him a khilat of precious stones, and a casket made of gold and studded with precious stones.

About emperor Akbar it has been stated that;

"His majesty, from his knowledge of man's nature, gives donation in various ways. It looks as if he lends, but in his heart he makes a present or he calls the donation a loan, but never asks it back. The far and near, the rich and poor, share His Majesty's liberality. He gives away elephants, horses, and other valuable articles."

Again, about the same emperor it has been stated;

96. S.G.H. Khan, op. cit, Vol.III, P.189
97. Ibid, P.395
"He bestows his fostering care upon men of various classes, and seeks for occasions to make presents. Thus, when His Majesty was informed of the feasts of the Jamsheds, and the festivals of the Parsi priests, he adopted them, and used them as opportunities of conferring benefits."

The Mughal nobility spent the most on arms, but following it the Nobility's chief expenditure was on leading a highly luxurious social life. A Mughal noble could buy only the necessities up to the minimum in Delhi's bazaar with an amount of rupees 100,000. The Mughal nobles spent a lot of money on the imported items of luxury from Iran and Central Asia. The Mughal nobility had a relish for productive items of luxury which were of extremely high and complicated skills. This encouraged the specialization of manufactured items in Mughal India. Thus the Mughal nobility's style of social life was responsible to a great extent for the development of luxury manufactures. The Karkhanas or workshops were an integral part of the Mughal

99. Ibid, P. 276
100. Irfan Habib, The agrarian system of Mughal India, Bombay, 1963, P. 121
101. N. Manucci, op. cit., Vol. IV, P. 89
nobility's establishment. These karkhanas produced all sorts of luxury goods and were responsible for giving opportunity to skillful artisans during Mughal India. The European traveller Francois Bernier has written that

"The arts in the Indies would long ago have lost their beauty and delicacy, if the Monarch and principal Qmrahs did not keep in their pay a number of artists who work in their houses".

The Mughal nobility also contributed towards building the infrastructure of the empire, for example, the nobles lent an important hand in the building up of the Mughal cities, Ialore, Agra, Delhi, and Fateh-pur-Sikri were all built with the help of the Mughal nobles. They lavished their resources in building up Delhi, as also the cities of Dacca and Aurangabad were also taken note of by the Mughal nobles. Bernier has written that the nobles who wanted to seek favour from the emperor Shahjahan embellished the city of Delhi at their own expense. The Mughal nobles practised the policy of planting road-side trees along the

103. Ibid, Vol.IV, P.123
104. P. Bernier, op.cit, PP.228-29
105. Ibid, P.251
106. Ibid, PP.280-81
major routes of the Mughal empire, also putting up road-signs for the convenience of the travellers\textsuperscript{107}. The Mughal nobility also invested in horticulture. All the nobles maintained orchards for catering to the markets\textsuperscript{108}. Fruits from Iran and central Asia were developed in India during the Mughal period. One grievous ill in the society of the Mughal nobles was the desire and practise of hoarding up unlimited treasures in way of cash and assets\textsuperscript{109}. They did so because there were lesser investment opportunities, and they wanted to buttress their political influence as well as to maintain the sustenance of a high cost and standard of living\textsuperscript{110}. Several Mughal nobles left an amount of in-between three to ten millions after their deaths\textsuperscript{111}.

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\item \textsuperscript{107} W.H. Moreland, \textit{op.cit}, P.134
\item \textsuperscript{108} \textit{Ibid}, P.151
\item \textsuperscript{109} Irfan Habib, \textit{op.cit}, P.82
\item \textsuperscript{110} \textit{Ibid}, P.133
\item \textsuperscript{111} \textit{Ibid}, P.97
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