MANSABDARI SYSTEM

The Mughal State had no division of its civil and military functions and a Mughal sepoy defended the international border’s, manned the forts fought battles, but had also to perform a policeman’s duties in the times of peace.

Govt. officials too were required to perform civil and military duties simultaneously Akbar wanted to evolve a unique system of regulating these imperial services and the result was the promulgation of the Mansabdari system. Akbar introduced this Mansabdari system in 1571 with the help of Shahbaz Khan.⁠¹ All the gazetted imperial officers of the state weree styled as Mansabdar’s. Initially they were classified into sixty six grades from the Mansab of ten thousand, although, in practice only thirty three grades were constituted.⁠² The broad outlines of the system heve been given by Abul-i-fazl in the Ain-I Akbari.³

According to some scholars Akbar was not the originator of the mansabdari system certain elements of the system were present in the Administration of Babar and Humayun who originally brought it from Persia to India. However, it can not be denied that the system was given a systematic shape by Akbar and he put it on a regular footing.⁠⁴

The word ‘mansab’ is derived from the Arab term mansib⁵ meaning a post, an office, rank or status hence mansabdar means holder of the rank or an officer some modern historians theorise that Akbar was not originator of the system because the practice of grading the military personal by the grant of mansabs had already mean in vogue in various muslim countries. The mansabdari system was thus not new to India.
Akbar took it from the system introduced by Khalifa Abba said and accepted by Chenqhiz Khan and Timur.

Certain it was Akbar who had credit of perfecting the system of mansabdari. He alone organized the mansab of his imperial officer’s both civil and military, in a systematic form and so regulated the entire structure of services round the pivot of mansab that it become associated with his name. An examination of the list of mansabdar’s given by Abn-I-Fadl reveals the existence of various ranks, within each rank there was three subdivisions from the very beginning.\(^6\) Blochmann translation has ambiguity. For example he explains “his majesty sees through some men at the first glance and confer; upon them high rank. Sometimes he increases the mansabs of a servant, but decreases his contingent. He also fixes the number of the beasts of burden. The monthly grants made to the mansabdar’s vary according to the condition of their contigents. An officer whose contingent comes upon his mansab, is put into the first class of his rank, if his contingent is one half and upwards of the fixed number’s he is put into the second class; the third class contains those contingents which are still less.” Irvine is right when he says that the object of the mansabdari system was to settle precedence and fix gradation of pay, it did not necessarily imply the exercise of any office and meant nothing beyond the fact that the holder was in the employment of the state and bound in return to yield certain services when called upon.\(^7\)

The recruitment and promotion of the mansabdar’s was in the hands of the emperor who could also dismiss them at will. Mostly the recruitment of the mansabdars was made on the recommendation of the mirbakshi who presented the person to the emperor. If the emperor was convinced of the utility of the person to the state he was granted a mansab. A complete record of each mansabdar was maintained and
promotion were made on the basis of his record (known HI-QI-QAT). Generally, the promotions were granted to the mansabdar’s on the eve of fresh expeditions or on a successful conclusion of an expedition. The occasions of auspicious and testivity were also utilized to grant promotions. In normal times also promotions were granted in case there was a vacancy. If the king found the mansabdar dishonest or disloyal he could also dismiss him.

Under the mansabdari system, different number’s which could be divided by ten were used for ranking officers. They were also meant for fixing the salaries and allowances of officer’s. W.Drvine in the army of the Indian Mughals observes that the system interminned the rank, pay scale and the position of the imperial officer in the royal court in respect of other Govt. officers. During Akbar’s regime initially, the lowest rank was that of number ten and highest that of ten thousand. Mansab above 5000 and later on that of 7000 were given only to princess, the highest rank of ten thousand was given exclusively to Salim, the crown prince. At a later stage, however, Akbar raised the highest rank to twelve thousand. During Jahangir and Shahjahan’s reign, mansabs only 8000 were given to officers which princes were given mansabs upto forty thousands the later Mughals gave mansabs upto the number of fifty thousands).

All officer’s below the rank of the mansab of 500 were called mansabdars, the officers enjoying the mansab from 500 to 2500 were called amirs and those ranked over 2500 were called amir-I-azam. The officer called Khan-I-jahan was still higher in rank while the highest rank in the army was that of Khan-i-khana. When the empire was small under Akbar and the number of officer’s with high title too many, assignment given to them in lieu of their salaries had to be inflated until they bore no reality.
Although the mansabdar system had made military service the basic consideration for the classification of all the imperial officer’s, it was understood that all the mansabdars were not equally good military generals nor were they expected to recruit and hold under their charge the number of soldier’s as indicated by their mansab or rank. For instance a mansabdar of one thousand was not always a commander of one thousand men. If employed in the revenue or judicial establishment, he might not have had even a single soldier under him. The mansabdars of each category were subdivided further into three grades on the basis of the actual number of soldier’s commanded by them. An officer whose contingent comes upto his mansab is put into the first class of his rank; of his contingent is one half and upward of the fixed number’s he is put into the second class; the third class contains those whose contingents are still less. A mansabdar of one hundred belonged to the first class if he actually furnished 100 soldier’s; he was a second class mansabdar if the number of soldier under his charge was fifty or more but less than 100, he was graded as a third class mansandar of the number of soldier’s maintained by him was less than fifty. No mansab was hereditary.

In addition to the contingents of the mansabdars certain other soldier’s were also maintained during the times of Akbar. There consisted of two categories- the Dakhilis and Ahdis. The Dakhilis meant the fixed number of troops which were handed over by the state to the mansabdars. They were paid by the state. In the descriptive rolls there soldiers were shown as nimah awaran or hall trooper’s. The Ahdis were a class of brave soldier’s who were recruited by the emperor himself and were not under the orders of anyone. They were the direct servants of the kind and served as his body guards. Ain-I Akbari gives the following description of the Ahdis: There are many brave persons whom his majesty does not appoint to a mansab, but
when he frees from being under the order’s of anyone. Such persons belong to the immediate servants of his majesty and are dignified by their independence.

**Significance of Zat and Swar**

The threefold gradation of mansabdar’s caused much confusion in the army ranks. The central government found it impossible to ascertain the exact or even an approximate number of regular soldier’s controlled by all the imperial mansabdar’s. The difficulty was solved by the introduction of two ranks Zat and Swar for each mansabdar historians are divided over the interpretation and significance of there ranks. Some like A.L. Srivastava say that while the rank of Zat indicates the total number of soldier’s number a mansabdar, the rank of Swar indicates the number of horsemen under him, other like Dr. R.P. Tripati hold the view that the rank of Swar was given to mansabdar’s to fix their additional allowances.

A mansabdar was paid rupees two per horse therefore, if a mansabdar received the rank of 500 swar he was given rupees one thousand as additional allowance. According to Dr. J.L. Mehta, the Zat rank was not a new introduction; it simply referred to the original mansab enjoyed by an officer earlier, and it determined both its status and standing in the administrative hierarchy as well as his position in the court. The swar rank referred to the actual number of soldiers under the command of an officer. The swar was essentially a military rank that showed the distinction between the civil and military characters of the mansabdars.

The introduction of the double rank, however, made the threefold classification of the mansabdars more intelligible and precise. Thus a mansabdar whose Zat and Swar ranks were equal, was the first category among his grade of mansabdars i.e. if a
mansabdar enjoyed the rank of 5000 Zat and 5000 swar then he was of the first category among the mansabdars of 5000. The one whose swar rank was less than his zat rank but more than half of the latter belonged to the second class i.e. if a mansabdar enjoyed the rank of 5,000 zat and 3,000 swar then he belonged to the second category among mansabdars of 5,000. A mansabdar whose rank was less than half of the zat rank was a third class mansabdar, i.e. if a mansabdar had the rank of 5,000 zat and 2,000 or even less swar, then he was of the third category among rank of 5,000 mansabdars. On the basis of swar ranks, the approximate strength of the imperial army under the effective control of the mansabdars could be readily calculated. Beside soldiers, the military generals maintained horses, camels, bullock carts and beasts of burden as specified by their swar as a part of their establishment.

SALARY STRUCTURE

Based upon the details given in the Ain-i-Akbari of the salaries and other emoluments of the various categories of government officials, we can get a good idea of the salary structure of the mansabdars. The mansabdars received cash salaries and these were fairly high. No mansabdar, whether he was a high ranking general or a prince, could join a jagir indefinitely. Each mansabdar received a fixed rate of pay according to his mansab. Even after meeting the cost of maintaining his establishment, including horses and beasts of burden, the mansabdar was left with a substantial amount of money to ensure for himself a rather luxurious life-style. Starting at his lowest level, a mansabdar of ten received a monthly salary of rupees 100, 82.5, and 75, depending on whether he belonged to the first, second or third class. Each mansabdar was required to maintain four horses of specified breeds, the
approximate cost of which was rupees forty-four per month. After deducting this expenditure from his gross emoluments, the first class mansabdar of ten received fifty-six rupees, the second-class mansabdar received thirty-eight rupees and the third class mansabdar, thirty-three rupees. The salary of soldiers in the mansabdar contingent came from the state treasury. Similarly for higher officers, such as the amir of the lowest rank or the mansabdar of 500, gross emoluments per month were to the tune of rupees 2500, 2300 and 2100, depending on whether he belonged to the first second or third class. After deducting rupees 1170 was the approximate cost of his establishment from the gross emoluments, the net personal salary of the mansabdar came to 1330, 1130, and 930 rupees for the first, second and the third class respectively.

Abul Fazl mentions that the establishment of mansabdar of 500 comprised 30 horses and 12 elephants, ten camels, two mules and 15 wheel carts. Subordinate government officials like horse men, foot soldiers, matchlockmen, and even the menials, were also fairly well-paid, For examples, the monthly salary of a foot soldiers varies from 240-500 dam, when forty dams equaled a silver rupee.

**Advantages and disadvantages of the Mansabdari System**

The mansabdari system was an improvement over the systems of tribal chieftainship and feudalism; was a progressive and systematic method adopted by Akbar to re-organize his army within the fold of despotic monarchy. Although many mansabdari were allowed to recruit soldiers on tribal or religious considerations, they were also made to know that they owed unconditional allegiance to the central government. Single men approaching the court the hope of obtaining employment in the army,
were obliged first to seek a patron. These men generally attached themselves to chiefs from their own race. Mughals became the followers of Mughals, Persians of Persians and so on. This led to certain homogeneity of military traits and the development of tactics particularly suited to the military prowess of individual groups. Certain groups began to be identified with qualities- Rajput and Pathan soldiers were considered most valuable for their martial prowess and fidelity, for instance.

As a result of the mansabdari system, the emperor had no longer to depend exclusively on the mercenaries of the feudal chieftains. The mansabdari system put an end to the jagirdari system within the territories under the direct control of imperial government. No portion of a mansab was hereditary, and a mansabdar’s children had to began afresh. All appointments, promotions, suspensions and dismissal of the mansabdars rested entirely with the emperor. Every mansabdar was thus held personally responsible to the monarch; this factor eliminated chances of disaffection and revolts by the military officers and may be said to be a mayor achievement of mansabdari system.

Nevertheless, the mansabdari system suffered from many disadvantage as well. The system did not give birth to an army of national characters since two-thirds of the mansabdars were either foreigners or descendents of foreigners immigrants. Inspite of Akbar’s secular policy in the matter of recruitment, Hindus formed barely nine percent of the aggregate strength of the imperial cadre. The state’s failure to recruit all the soldiers under the supervision of a central or imperial agency, was to cost it clearly. Since mansabdars were free to recruit their soldiers as they pleased, they preferred to enroll men of their own tribe, race, religion or region. While this led to homogenization of military tactics, it also divided the imperial army into many
heterogeneous units. There were no uniform rules for the systematic training of the soldiers, nor for the conduct of regular drill of physical exercise to keep them fit. No uniform standard was fixed for arming the soldiers; as a result there was considerable variation in the weapons bone by them the standard of efficiency also varied from contingent to contingent.

Furthermore as a soldiers were recruited by a mansabdar for his own contingent, they regarded him as the employer and patron and tended to display more loyalty of their immediate military commander than the emperor, A mansabdar always commended the same troops for life and transfers of the soldiers from one contingent to another were not known. As the soldiers received their salaries and allowances from the mansabdars, the latter could cheat the state if they wanted to. A dishonest mansabdar could for instance, recruit less than the specified number of troops as indicated by his swar rank and get the salaries paid to the fictitious man or alternatively, get fictitious payrolls prepared in the name of non-existent person, in collaboration with the corrupt of the army establishment or the finance department.

The high ranking mansabdars like the amirs and amir-ul-umara were most highly paid officers of the state, as the mughal empire was in a formatting stage it was involved in a process of continuous conquests and annexations. Thus the military officers were often in a position to appropriate for themselves a substantial part of the body. Even if Akbar did come to know of the misconduct of his senior officers in this regard, he could not take action against each one of them.

As members of the ruling elite, the ranking mansabdars followed the examples of their rulers in enjoying highly luxurious and extravagant standards of living. Since their offices and privileges were not hereditary, they were not allowed to pass on
their wealth and property to their descendant. So they were tempted to spend as much as quickly as they could. The prestigious personal establishment, once developed, could not be cut to size, and many mansabdars, finding it difficult to live within their means, overdrew from the royal treasury or borrowed heavily from other sources. All this ultimately resulted in the deterioration of character and martial qualities of the mansabdars. Their demoralization adversely affected the discipline and standard of efficiency of their military contingents.

Under the later Mughals, the mansabdari system began to lose its true characteristics. The discrepancy between the actual number of the swar maintained and numbers that a mansabdar was expected to maintain, increased. For example, during shahjahan’s reign, a mansabdar holding a jagir in the same suba in which he was serving was to bring one-third of the swar rank to the muster; if his jagir was in a different suba then he was to bring only one-forth of his swar for the muster; and if he served in balka and Badakshan, then he was to bring inly one-fifth of his swar for the minister. By Shahjahan’s time, the swar rank could even exceed the zat rank. Under Aurangzeb, the mansabdars could be paid either in cash or by the grants of jangirs. If more than half the salary was paid in cash it was called naqdi; if more than half of it was in form of Jagir, then it was called jagirdari; and a different set of rules guarded their interests.

While the value of jagir increased on paper, the actual income of the mansabdars remained the same. The service obligations were reduced as a consequence and they were paid for the number of months that they rendered services. The princes were the only one who were paid for the number of months that they rendered service. The princes were the only only ones who were paid salaries for
twelve months; all the mansabdars were paid for a period of three to eight months; all the mansabdars were paid salaries for twelve months, though, in exceptional cases, this could be extended to eleven months. When the empire was involved in continuous warfare against the Rajputs and Marathas during Aurangzeb’s reign, the mansabdars were allowed to maintain a large contingent than was warranted by their swar rank. As a result of the various discrepancies that crept in, the mansabdari system proved cumbersome and untenable. It is pertinent to mention here that during the reign of Akbar rebellions perpetually harassed him. Indeed a systematic survey of there revolts as related by his court historian abul fazl in his Akbarnama shows that there were no less than hundred and forty five such incidents. That is almost every fourth month on an average, emperor in the course of all his fifty years of rule was required to dispatch forces of make some alternative arrangement in order to restore peace in the affected area. The suppression of revolts therefore must have been one of the chief items on the imperial agenda of the annual scheme.  

Out of the above 144 revolts thirty were raised by the princes or high graded Umara of the realm, lighty by the leader’s of the distant provinces beginning immediately after their annexation, twenty eight by the Hindu Zamindars and six were by miscellaneous groups of minor significance.

Though most of the rebellions were conducted individually by one leader there are occasions when confederacies were formed for simple purpose of combining forces against the emperor.

Akbar not with standing his youth had so skillfully handeled them that soon after the end of that period they had begun to identify themselves completely with the state. It would seem that it was only after ensuring their full support that the emperor had
launched upon a programme of conquest of large sized farther off provinces (that is after 1572). This hard end too could be achieved only with the unflinching loyalty of his mansabdars. Who now viewed with each other in rendering sacrifice, in suffering ordeals, in exposing and even giving up their lives for their sovereign.  

In fact the spirit of rebelliousness amongst the umara so widespread around the first decade of the reign was handled with such adroitness that it was reduced to a minimum after that period. Indeed, even in the three subsequent reigns they seldom raised the head of sedition.  

The Mughals succeeded fairly well where they found that overwhelming numbers and resources could crush the enemy, but when they came across wily foes like the maratha or guerrillas like the Pathan tribesmen, they found it difficult to deal with them. Then it was the determination of Akbar which could extract them out of difficulties.  

Toward the end of Akbar reign mansabdars and their follower’s consumed 82 percent of the total annual budget of the empire for their pay allowances. There were around two thousand mansabdar’s at the time and between them they commended 1,50,000-2,00,000 cavalary men. The emperor personally commended a further seven thousand crack sowers plus eighty thousand infantry and gunners who together accounted for another 9 percent of the budget. In addition, according to Abul Fazl, the locally based zamindars could master a colossal 4.5 million retainers, mostly infantrymen. The Mughal empire whether bearing the character of a patrimonial bureaucracy as per the administrative hierarchy or of ‘a centralized autocracy as per the ranking system was essentially a coercive military machine.