Chapter - VII

CONCLUSION

The office of the Prime Minister has always been an important one in the history of any nation. In a monarchial system of government where he was the premier noble and the highest official after the Emperor, he was almost indispensable to the development of polity by virtue of his potential to help, advise and if possible restrain the monarch. Cutting across periodization of historical phases, one finds scores of prime ministers who have held their office with rare distinctions. The plans and programmes envisaged by them may appear strange when judged by modern standards, but when one analyses the results of their efforts they appear as high achievers, who played a significant role not only in influencing the political set-up of the time but left their impact on social, cultural and economic life as well.

In view of the multifarious responsibilities and nearness to the monarch, the Prime Minister, during the period under review, had to be a skilled statesman and an accomplished courtier. Since he was the vital link between the sovereign and the subjects, he needed to possess the ability to deal with both in such a manner as to secure for himself the acceptance and affection of both.

Being the highest official in the state, he has been regarded as a 'partaker of sovereignty without whom no state can be stable and prosperous'. Although his impact on non-political issues may seem peripheral or even negligible, but numerous contemporary accounts prove that they were trend setters in many ways. From time to time, their wise deliberations did result in expansion and consolidation of
the Mughal empire that ushered an era of economic prosperity as well as promoted welfare activities resulting in socio-cultural upliftment of the masses.

The Persian institution of Wizarat was incorporated into Islamic polity around 750 A.D. with the rise of the Abbasids and gradually the office assumed so much power that the Wazir became the channel through whom the king exercised his authority.

Although Islamic jurists mention the existence of two kinds of Wizarat, the Wazir-i-Tafwid (unlimited Wizarat) and the Wazir-i-Tanfiz (limited Wizarat), it was the latter which was more suited to the requirements of medieval Indian polity. The nature of the institution underwent a continuous process of change as a result of the emperor’s attitude, the behavior of the Wazirs, and the social milieu of the time but its historical continuity highlights the importance of the institution.

The Wazir became the most influential official with the establishment of an independent kingdom of Ghazni with civil and military powers in his jurisdiction. The Wizarat as an institution became more well defined with the establishment of the Sultanat in India and the Wazir became very powerful till Balban realised the danger of handing it to ambitious men and concentrated all power in his hands. Allaudin Khilji revived the tradition of combining civil and military duties in the Wazir, although throughout the Khilji period the Wizarat remained in the hands of military generals like Malik Kafur and Khusro Khan.

The Tughluq period is considered as a landmark in the development of the institution by virtue of the high status enjoyed by the Wazirs and the novel experiments introduced by the Sultans. The appointment of Indian Muslims to the post and its being offered to the son in succession to his father under the Tughluqs was a significant
development. After a brief period of chaos that followed Timur's invasion, the Wizarat developed into a well defined institution.

Babur's Wazirs Baqi Chagniani and Nizamuddin Khalifa functioned with remarkable ease in military as well as diplomatic field and appear to be influential advisors to the Emperor. The fact that Nizamuddin Khalifa even tried to regulate the succession to the Mughal throne is symbolic of a new dimension that emerged amongst the nobility – the realisation that the empire belonged to the ruling dynasty and not to the ruler and that with the absence of a well-defined law of succession, choices and preferences within the ruling dynasty could always be made.

Humayun's unsettled and fragmented reign saw the continuation of the same policy that was initiated by Babur. He even attempted to distribute the powers of the Vakil by delegating financial functions to the Wazir in 1545 A.D. but the experiment was not very well received by Qaracha Khan, the official concerned.

The accession of Akbar in 1556 A.D. heralded a new age in the history of the Wizarat, with Bairam Khan, the only one in the long line of Mughal prime ministers enjoying the status of what may be called 'the position of the first-class Wazir (Wazir-i-Tafwid). The premier noble under Akbar came to be known as the 'Vakil-i-Sultanat' Akbar's ill-experience of Bairam Khan brought about a marked change in the power and prestige enjoyed by the incumbents to the office following 1560 A.D. Divested of a major chunk of their powers by the creation of the office of the Diwan, the later Vakils enjoyed rank and status, but no power.

The appointment of Todar Mal to the highest office in the empire was a milestone in the sense that he was the only non-Muslim who was appointed to this office without having to compromise on his religious
beliefs. Todar Mai must have shared Akbar's vision of a vast and enduring empire. While Akbar genuinely desired to strengthen the empire by bringing the two major communities closer to one another, Todar Mai used the administrative machinery at his command to facilitate the process.

Both Jahangir and Shahjahan were lucky to enjoy the services of great men like Itmad-ud-Daulah, Asaf Khan, Afzal Khan and Sadullah Khan. Their services to the Mughal throne not only enriched the empire culturally, but also gave it that force and vitality that substantiated its claim of being the most promising and productive phase of Indian history.

Despite the troubled times of Aurangzeb, when forces of decay had begun to assert themselves, his prime ministers displayed unflinching loyalty to the emperor. Although their services were mainly used in military expeditions, with hardly any record of their financial and administrative activities, their personal ambitions never came into clash with the emperor nor did they try to aggrandize their position and act independently.¹

Between 1526-1707 A.D., the prime minister theoretically remained the head of the administration. The good government that the Mughal rulers gave their subjects was a great factor in winning the affection of their subjects and perpetuating their rule. The Mughal ideals of benevolence, justice and good governance were to a large extent the result of the endeavours of the emperor's chief advisor - the Prime Minister.

Right through the medieval times there was no clear cut demarcation of civil and military functions. Most Mughal prime

¹ Laiq Ahmad, Prime Ministers of Aurangzeb, p. 145.
ministers made significant contribution in expanding Mughal frontiers and enhancing the power and prestige of the crown.

While Babur and Humayun received the most crucial help from Nizamudin Khalifa and Bairam Khan in the establishment and restoration of the Mughal empire, Todar Mal, Abdur Rahim, Khan-i-Khanan, Sadullah Khan and Mir Jumla led Mughal armies to glorious victories that brought about large scale military successes and territorial expansion. Mughal prime ministers like Bairam Khan, Itmad-ud-Daulah and Asaf Khan strengthened the administrative set up tremendously. While Bairam Khan moulded the crucial first four years of Akbar's reign into one of dynamic growth in territory as well as resources, the dependable Itmad-ud-Daulah, without bringing about any radical change in the administrative set up, gave the empire a certain cohesion that steered the country out of danger. Sadullah Khan, who was regarded as the best Diwan in the long line of Mughal Wazirs left behind a great tradition of public service and created conditions of peace and prosperity that made Shah Jahan's reign a prosperous one.

One of the greatest factors that contributed to Mughal success was the sound economic base that supported their governance. The rapid territorial expansion of the empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was accompanied by an era of economic prosperity that resulted from a steady increase in revenue.

The two financial geniuses under Akbar — Muzaffar Khan and Raja Todar Mal — formulated sound financial policies and introduced extensive reforms that resulted in noticeable economic prosperity. Whereas Muzaffar Khan abolished the 'jama-i-raqami' and replaced it with 'Jama hal-i-hasil' which not only checked corruption but was also a more rational form of assessment, Raja Todar Mal suggested the conversion of jagir lands to Khalisa lands and placing them under
government officers rather than the assignees. He evolved a system of revenue assessment that drew a balance between the demands of the state and the well-being of the subjects. He also systemized and centralized the revenue administration of the empire. Sadullah Khan, known for his extensive knowledge of business and finance, established a new territorial unit called the 'Chakla' that not only streamlined provincial administration but also helped in increasing revenue. The contribution of these prime ministers in restructuring the revenue system that operated jointly with the system of jagirs left an enduring impact on the rural society in North India.

Since the Mughal nobility was not tied to the land, their jagirs being transferable, they did not isolate themselves from the commercial world and were open to lucrative economic enterprises. The awareness of possibilities of economic growth through trade and commercial activity was heightened with the conquest of Gujrat in 1572 A.D. Since the state placed few constraints on economic activity and offered incentives to foster trade at all levels, the royalty and nobility participated in commercial activities particularly sea-borne trade. However, initially all trading activities were linked with their religious beliefs.

Asaf Khan and Mir Jumla indulged in large-scale trading activities through the misuse of their political power and not because they were qualified for the task. However, there is documented evidence that Sadullah Khan while indulging in private trade himself always watched the interests of the merchant community. Mir Jumla whose commercial activities offer the most noteworthy example of business investments of a Mughal Wazir indulged in dubious practices as often

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the capital invested by him came partly from the revenue resources of the empire. When senior officials like him cornered the market and created monopolies by using their official positions, it had a negative impact on trade and economy. Jafar Khan and Asad Khan also did not isolate themselves from the commercial world and were often the link between the Mughal emperor and the Europeans for trading sanctions. However, this often offered opportunities for personal monetary benefits.

While the participation of Mughal Wazirs in commercial enterprises, to further their own economic interests through misuse of power, hindered the free growth of economic activity, it was also responsible for the capture of internal and external trade by the Europeans. Nevertheless it opened the doors of the Mughal elite to European socio-cultural influences and led to greater cooperation between them.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are distinguished by large scale urbanization, a direct outcome of the political stability and economic prosperity brought about by the Mughals. The role of Mughal nobility in promoting urban growth is quite understandable as very often the morphology of urban life was determined by the settlement patterns of the aristocracy who invested a substantial part of their income in the infrastructure that led to urbanization. Although the motivation behind such endeavours was administrative convenience it did indirectly boost the economy and brought about urban expansion.

The names of some Mughal prime ministers are associated with the revival of older established cities, the addition of few new cities and the building of an impressive array of monuments in some cities in North India. Munim Khan's role in boosting Jaunpur as an important

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centre which thrived on account of its trade, karkhanas and bazaars is noteworthy. The bridge over the river Gomti is the most important legacy of Munim Khan. There is substantial evidence to prove that Todar Mal was instrumental in the revival of Banaras as an important centre of learning. Abdur Rahim, Khan-i-Khanan, apart from founding the town of Jahangirpura in Khandesh built a number of mosques, baths and gardens. Sadullah Khan’s name is associated with the foundation of Jama Masjid, the largest congregational mosque in India. He also built a ‘Chauk’ (square) which came to be known as chauk Sadullah Khan at Shahjahanabad.

It is surprising that Mughal nobility, including prime ministers, who set up Karkhanas for manufacturing rare articles of luxury did not respond positively to the innovations brought about as a result of European contacts. Although printing activity was introduced in India by this time, it did not arouse any curiosity in Fathullah Shirazi, a great noble in Akbar’s court. Shah Jahan’s Wazir, Sadullah Khan, famous for his literary accomplishments also refused to accept the printed theological refutation of an Islamic work which was brought to Shah Jahan’s court in 1651 A.D. It proved the fact that though the ruling classes evinced interest in use of articles of convenience and luxury, rational thinking and desire for acquiring technical know-how was missing.

Mughal emperors were known for their grandeur and opulence, a tradition followed by the aristocracy who emulated the ostentatious style of the royalty to the extent that their resources permitted them. Some Mughal prime ministers were also great admirers of beauty and had an eye for artistic talent. Possessing great wealth, these grandees were highly visible figures who apart from leading luxurious lives also

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spent their wealth on a whole lot of constructive work. They appreciated and encouraged various forms of art by patronizing artists, craftsmen and scholars who found lucrative employment with them. Moreover, scholars and men of talent were always needed to serve as civil officers and cater to the educational needs of the ever expanding empire.\footnote{I.H. Siddiqui, "Muslim Intellectual Life in Inda", in I.H.Siddique, ed., Medieval India, Essays in Intellectual Thought and Culture, Manohar, 2003, p.88}

Prime ministers enriched the socio-cultural ethos in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by financing madrasas, encouraging scholars, musicians, astrologers and artisans who looked up to them for patronage. Prime ministers like Bairam Khan, Abdur Rahim, Khan-i-Khanan, Afzal Khan and Sadullah Khan furthered the cause of literary activity and scholarship during this period. Abdur Rahim’s name stands out as a great linguist and one of the most celebrated poets of Hindi literature. Persian and Sanskrit sources of the time talk of a great cultural renaissance during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On the one hand there was court patronage to Sanskrit and on the other Todar Mai, Prime Minister from 1582-89 A.D., persuaded his co-religionists to learn Persian, the language of their rulers and facilitated the possibility of achieving upward mobility in official hierarchy.

Men like Itmad-ud-Daulah and Asaf Khan had varied interests and often hosted lavish banquets and other gatherings where guests were offered a variety of music, dance, poetry and cuisine. Munim Khan, Abdur Rahim, Sadullah Khan were known to have built mosques and madrasas, while Abdur Rahim, Khan-i-Khanan, and Asaf Khan laid out the most exquisite gardens of the time.

The process of Mughal cultural transformation from Turko-Mongol robustness to Persian style, culture and ceremonialism which began during Humayun’s stay in Persia was to some extent the result of prime ministerial office being held by men of Persian origin like
Bairam Khan and his son Abdur Rahim, Itmad-ud-Daulah and Asaf Khan,\(^1\) apart from the influence of Persian wives of Mughal emperors like Maham Begum, Hamida Bano Begum, Nur Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal. This is evident from the fact that while Babur wrote in Turki which was his mother tongue, Jahangir wrote in Persian, but could write in Turki as well. However, Shah Jahan refused to learn the language as a child which came to be considered as a crude and uncouth one.

Aurangzeb's indifference to fine arts in general and painting in particular was partly responsible for the decline of these arts among the nobility who no longer had a model patron in the Mughal emperor. Nevertheless, the tradition did not come to an end and the Mughal style largely influenced later schools of painting at the regional level.

Apart from the valuable contribution made by the prime ministers in various facets of life, they were after all human beings who got involved in court politics and conspiracies. By virtue of his position, the Prime Minister had to deal with the emperor on one hand and the common man on the other and an equally important third element, the other members of the nobility. Most of them were efficient, hardworking and loyal to their masters but conscious of the fact that despite the absolute powers of the emperor, their opinions and interests also played a significant role in formulation of state policies, they tended to become ambitious. Aware of possibilities and opportunities for themselves and certain Islamic perceptions like theoretic equality of men as well as an absence of a well defined law of succession, they often attempted to go beyond their jurisdiction. The careers of Nizamuddin Khalifa, Bairam Khan, Aziz Koka and Asaf Khan indicate

the trend. Very often when they formed a group or sided with a particular one at any time, they did so not on principles but purely on the basis of their judgement as to how they would benefit by adopting a particular course of action. Personal rivalries and jealousies very often led them to indulge in politics to crush any possible challenge to their position, a trend that assumed dangerous proportions in the post-Aurangzeb period when by virtue of substantial patronage and power, the office of the Wazir became an object of intrigue among the nobility.¹

Along with the regression of medieval culture and civilization in the early eighteenth century, a subtle change is also visible in the values, social attitudes and intellectual capacity of the nobility in general.² Aurangzeb’s prime ministers never enjoyed the independence, responsibility and the resources available to the earlier incumbents. Coupled with the lack of leisure amidst perpetual warfare this led to general decay of culture and scholarship in aristocratic circles. One cannot ignore the fact that in the changed circumstances of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the nobility also suffered tremendous financial deprivation as a result of losses in revenue. This to some extent would also explain their failure to offer patronage to innovations that were the result of European contact.

The record of the activities between 1526-1707 A.D. endorses the fact that the Mughal empire benefitted tremendously from the services provided by their prime ministers. Even when the negative aspect is taken into account there is much by way of positive and constructive contribution to be appreciated in retrospect. Their productive input in enriching the Mughal state, its economy and culture needs to be acknowledged and applauded.

¹ Satish Chandra, Parties and Politics of the Mughal Court, p. 102.
Finally, some passing comparisons of the Mughal prime ministers with their ancient and early medieval counterparts may not seem out of place here. The most important Prime Minister of the ancient period, Kautilya, as regent and guardian of Chandra Gupta Maurya, was astute enough not to overreach himself realising the potential and qualities of the would-be monarch Chandra Gupta Maurya, unlike Bairam Khan who dominated the first four years of Akbar's reign. Kautilya who was instrumental in overthrowing the Nandas and placing Chandra Gupta Maurya on the throne believed in "the minister investing himself with powers of sovereignty only in the event of the king's demise". 1

Mughal prime ministers compare favourably with their counterparts during the Sultanat period. Domestic history of the early Turkish empire of Delhi centres around the activities of the nobility especially the prime ministers to keep the strings of administration in their hands; where some like Balban pressed by their inordinate ambition, forced the crown to surrender maximum privileges to them. Whereas perpetual conflict between the crown and the nobility for possession of authority was a permanent feature of the thirteenth century, the Mughal prime ministers never tried to usurp the throne for themselves though they did try to manipulate and control succession within the ruling dynasty itself.

The problem of Wizarat in post-Aurangzeb period dominated the political scenario of the eighteenth century culminating in the prime ministers of the weaker Mughals establishing their own regional dynasties; while under the Marathas they went a step further and supplanted the ruler.

1 Kautilya, Arthasasthra, Eng. Trans. R. Shama Shastri, p. 284. Kautilya is also said to have remarked, "It is verily the duty of the King to appoint ministers".
In the contemporary West, unlike medieval India, the system of feudalism helped the prime ministers along with the nobility to restrict the king leading to the establishment of constitutional monarchies of which Great Britain is the most conspicuous example.

The Mughal Prime Minister with all his multifarious talent was essentially a part of a bureaucratic setup where as an advisor he could only influence rather than shape the empire's polity. He could make a more substantial contribution to conquest and consolidation, strengthening the economic structure and steering the empire towards cultural progress.