

Analysis of Akbar's Mansabdari System Through Philosophical Lens

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Abstract: No doubt Akbar was an illiterate but on the other hand god has bestowed him great brain power, wit and wisdom and with this he perceived things quickly. He introduced various reforms but he is widely known for Mansabdari system. The Mansabdari system played a key role in the consolidation of the Mughal empire. Here the concern of my paper is to analyze the whole data of Mansabdari system through philosophical views of different thinkers such as Machiavelli, Kautilya and Plato. It is not but it looks like that it was made on the footsteps of these different thinkers. The chief features of the good state given by different thinkers regarding the selection process of officers, their salaries, eradication of corruption, transfer policy etc. all these are reflected in the Mansabdari system in one or other form. This thing made the Mansabdari system quite effective and efficient and also helped him in delivering good governance and better management.

Introduction: The word 'Mansab' is an Arabic word which means rank, position, status or an office and hence mansabdar an officer or holder of the rank. According to William Irvine the term mansab was not only given to military officers but to everyone in state employ above the position of a common soldier or messenger whatever the nature of his job –civil or military received a mansab. During his reign the highest mansab being the command of 10,000 and the lowest being 10. The mansabdari system under him developed gradually. At first there was only one rank i.e. mansab but later on the ranks were divided into two- Zat and Suwar. The Zat rank denoted the personal status of a person in the hierarchy and also his salary due while as the Suwar rank denoted the number of cavalymen and beasts of burden that a mansabdar was required to maintain for the service of the state. On the basis of Zat and Suwar ranks the mansabdars were classified into three categories. An officer whose Zat rank was equal to Suwar rank was called first class mansabdar, if his Suwar rank was half or more than half of the Zat rank then he was called second class mansabdar and if his Suwar rank was less than half or no Suwar rank at all then he was called third class mansabdar. Theoretically there were as many as 66 grades of mansabdars but in real practice there existed only 33.

Generally, the mansabdars were appointed by the emperor himself as he was the real head of the state. But in this field he was also assisted by Mirbakshi. Before throwing light on the recruitment process of mansabdars, first of all we should here highlight some important features of the good state given by different thinkers regarding the selection process of officers. According to Machiavelli a prince should always select his officers on the basis of merit rather than on the basis of caste, creed, kinship or religion. He advised the prince that stern action should be taken against those who will use their power for their selfish ends. He considered it a shock therapy to cure corruption and rejuvenate civic virtues. Another thinker, Kautilya says that an ideal king is one who should appoint trusted ministers and other officials for administrative purpose. In other words, it means that an ideal king is one who should appoint his ministers and other officers on the basis of merit. Those who possessed all the requisite qualities of merit should be appointed to the highest grade, those who lack a quarter should be appointed at the middle grade and those who lack a half should be appointed at the lowest grade. He further stated that while selecting them he should see in them the qualities of wisdom, honesty, loyalty and heroism. He propounded few tests for selection and tests are conducted in the areas of wealth, pleasure, judiciary and fear. An officer should be selected only if he successfully passes all above mentioned tests. Selecting the right person through such

a way will help him in fighting corruption, better management and also will help him in delivering good governance. Plato –the great thinker defines justice as “giving everyman his due”. This sentence simply means that all officials should be appointed on the basis of merit and talent. According to him an efficient and good state is one in which everybody does only what he is at best. All these features are reflected in the mansabdari system in one or other form. As during the reign of Akbar, all appointments were made on the basis of merit and talent. Usually, the recruitment of the mansabdars were made on the directions of the mirbakshi who generally presented the candidate to the emperor. If the emperor perceives that the candidate was able, talented and good to the state he appointed him at a low mansab and constantly promoted depending upon his merit and favor of the emperor. A talented person during his reign could rise from the lower rung of the ladder to the top if he knows how to utilize the opportunities that came under his way. Absolute alertness and keenest perception were necessary conditions of the success as any shortcut may throw a man down. In other words, we can say that a person can be promoted or demoted depending upon their merit and talent. Before him the Muslims in India formed the ruling class from which all high and low officials were drawn and it was only he who for the first time abolished the Muslim dominance by choosing men on merit rather than on the basis of religion. During his reign the offices of trust was not the monopoly of the Mughal race but were filled by men of all classes. This point clearly indicated that Akbar’s rule was not subject to a tyrannical, extremist Muslim rule but was subject to the goal of equality of all its subjects. As a result of it the non-Muslims not only became the supporters of Mughal rule but also became strong pillars on whose back and support Akbar expanded and consolidated his rule. Also as a result of meritorious recruitment system the jagirdari structure came to an end because during his reign everyone was a life peer and surrendered the peerage at his death or dismissal. The property of an official was regarded as an official property rather than personal and escheated to the crown at his death or dismissal. The son of the mansabdar thus did not get the grade from his father. However, the sons of expired mansabdars had as a rule to start life at the lowest mansab and try to their luck and royal generosity for the advancement. They could reach to the highest mansab depending upon their merit and talent. Thus, the features of the good state given by different thinkers regarding the recruiting process and the features of the recruiting system of mansabdari system are quite alike. This feature made mansabdari system effective and efficient and also help him in delivering good governance and better management. Also each mansabdar was answerable to monarch and in this way eradicated the chances of discontent and rebellions by the rank holders and may be said to be a major success.

But with the passage of time the mansabdars who were appointed on the basis of merit became corrupt. Corruption means dishonesty, chaos, anarchy, and disorderly ambitions. Here we will discuss how Akbar deals with corruption and also will highlight some philosophical views regarding the eradication of corruption in any administration. The mansabdars who were appointed by him were called Tainatiyan (appointed) while as their contingents were called Taibinan (followers). Much the greater part of the Mughal Cavalry i.e. the chief force consisted of mansabdars and their contingents. So the quality of the Mughal army, thus, solely depended upon the leaders selected under the mansabdari system and the soldiers enrolled and presented by them at the time of war. The government generally depended upon their honesty, loyalty and efficiency. For that purpose, the contingents of the mansabdars were mustered at stated times and were paid from general and local treasuries. But Akbar faced much difficulties with these musters because fraudulent practices were quite common among mansabdars. Before discussing his problems, we will highlight the different policies of different thinkers regarding the eradication of fraudulent practices and corruption. According to Plato everyone is selfish and want more and more. He further stated that even the honest men fell in this trap. He feels that some preventive measures should be taken against those who are in power so that they will not abuse power. Among these preventive measures the most important were educational, social and biological. According to him through education one’s mind, behavior and character can be changed. Similarly, he says that both ruling and military classes should be forbidden to possess any property or family life. Through this he wanted to conquer desire because desire is the cause of all selfishness and if desire

can be conquered all selfishness can be removed. But it is impossible to implement all these preventive measures in this real world. According to Kautilya human nature poses corruption. It is human nature. He said that it is impossible not to taste the honey that finds at the tip of the tongue. So it is impossible for a government servant not to eat up at least a bit of the king's revenue. Like Plato he suggested some remedial measures. According to him strict action should be taken against corrupt officials. Strong steps should be taken to change the psychology of officers to keep them upright. Constant watch through a strict system of checks and supervision to monitor the functioning of government offices. Efficient espionage system should be established. According to Machiavelli it is a natural phenomenon that every human-being is selfish, corrupt and egoistic. Each one loves wealth, majority, name and fame. Everyone wanted to fulfill these desired ends by means of fair and foul. To curb selfishness, he stated that it was the duty of the prince to make those laws which would develop the moral and civic virtue among his people. It was also the responsibility of the prince to reform a corrupt society. During Akbar's reign same was the case of mansabdars. They even were selfish, corrupt and followed dishonest ways and means to achieve their selfish ends. They adopted way of false muster and due to this the conditions of the soldiers got deteriorated because the masters did what they liked. Badoni has thrown ample light on the false musters. According to him it was a natural phenomenon that the mansabdars put most of their own servants, kins and kiths and mounted auxiliaries into soldier's uniform (Libas-i-Siphai) brought them to the musters and performed the formalities according to the norm. But when they got their Jagirs i.e. their desired ends they gave leave to their servants, kins and kiths and mounted auxiliaries and when a new emergency arose they mustered as many borrowed soldiers as were required and sent them again when they had served their purpose. As a result of it the income and expenditure of the mansabdars remained in statuesque dust fell into the plates of the helpless soldiers so much so that they remained no longer fit for anything. In this way they cheated the emperor as they did not maintain the requisite quota of troopers. No doubt Akbar was illiterate but on the other hand god has bestowed him great brain power, wit and wisdom and with this he perceived things quickly. So he decided to eradicate these mal practices by introducing careful measures. He introduced the custom and practice of Dagh-i-maholi. It was not a new practice. It was first introduced by Ala-ud-din Khiliji and afterwards the law under various rulers. But due to the political turmoil it disappeared from army administration. Akbar reintroduced it and made it the basis of mansabdari system. Dagh-i-maholi simply means the horses were branded with imperial marks i.e. dag. This system proved very beneficial for the state as it not only checked the fraudulent exchanges of horses at the time of inspection but also makes it possible for the state to employ only superior quality of horses by inspecting them at the time of branding. The second important measure introduced by him was the system of Chihrah i.e. descriptive roll of soldiers (face). It means that every soldier was registered in order to prevent fraudulent exchanges. Thus the descriptive roll of each soldier was drawn up showing his personal name, fathers name, his age, his place of birth, his tribe or caste, his peculiar mark, his complexion, his height.... etc. were carefully registered. In addition to this also the descriptive roll of horses i.e. Chihrah-i-Aspa was drawn up. It was an elaborate description of the horse or horses, setting forth in detail the class to which the horse belonged in a highly elaborate system of classification and describing minutely the peculiar marks on the horse's body etc. were registered. As a result of these measures the mansabdars would not lend each other the men and horses to make up their quota at the time inspection. In other words, we can say that Akbar successfully halted corruption among his mansabdars. Thus the views of above thinkers regarding the eradication of corruption are reflected in Akbar's mansabdari system. These preventive measures proved quite fruitful as it developed the moral and civic virtue among his mansabdars. Also as a result of it Akbar succeeded in maintaining a huge, well-disciplined and efficient army.

Both mansabdars and their contingents received handsome salaries during the reign of Akbar. Before throwing light on this topic we will mention the important view of Kautilya regarding this issue. While highlighting the principles of good governance he declares, "In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness in their welfare lies his welfare. He shall not

consider as good only that which pleases him but treat as beneficial to him whatever pleases his subjects.” Kautilya warned the king against those acts which would create popular anger, thereby laid great stress to the happiness of the people. According to him when people are impoverished, they become greedy, when they are greedy they become dissatisfied, when they become dissatisfied they either go to the side of enemy or kill their ruler themselves. Thus no king should give room to such causes as would bring about impoverishment, greed and disaffection among the subjects. He further stated that the ministers should be paid handsomely based on efficiency and high performers were recognized and rewarded with high incomes. This view is clearly seen in the mirror of mansabdari system. Akbar tried to conqueror this desire among his mansabdars and their contingents by paying them handsomely. The mansabdars during his reign were paid in two ways Naqdi (cash) or in the form of assignment of land revenue corresponding to the salary calculated in terms of money. This assignment was called a jagir. A jagir did not confer any hereditary rights on the holder or disturb any of the existing rights in the area. It only meant that the land revenue due to the state was to be paid to the jagirdari. During his reign the Mughal mansabdars formed the highest paid service in the world. Pay was reckoned in a money of account of which forty went to the rupee. With this the mansabdars getting payments from the emperor they were more devoted and risks of their revolts were minimized because they considered him as their well-wisher. A Taibinan also received high salary during his reign. According to William Irvine a common cavalryman during his reign was looked on being a gentlemen and such men even when illiterate often rose to the highest position. As a result of it the mansabdars and their contingents remained satisfied because they enjoyed the wealth that they desired.

By mansabdari system Akbar also tried to weaken the bond of tribalism and parochialism. Before discussing it we will mention here the view point of Machiavelli. Like Aristotle he believes that it is the duty of the government to make his citizens just and fair. He further stated that the prince should make those laws which would develop the moral and civic virtue among his people. It was also the responsibility of the prince to reform a corrupt society. This view is clearly seen in the Farman of Akbar. He issued an order that the contingents of the mansabdars should be mixed ones i.e. selected from all sects Mughal, Pathan, Hindustani and Rajput. It is interesting to mention here that only Mughal and Rajput mansabdars were allowed to have contingents exclusively of Mughals or Rajputs. But in course of time mixed contingents became the general rule. According to William Irvine a mansabdar from Mawar-un nahr (Transoxiana –known in Arabic sources as Mawar-un-nahr) recruited none but only Mughals, if from Iran he might recruit one third Mughals and the remaining sayyads and sheikhs or if he took Afghans and Rajputs, of the former he might enroll one sixth and of the latter one seventh of his total number. Mansabdars who were Sayyads or Sheikhs might enlist their own tribe or up to one sixth they might take Afghans. Afghans themselves might have one half of the Afghans and the other half Mughals and sheikhzaidhs. Rajputs made up to their whole force of Rajputs. The mansabdars appointed by him were also transferred from one place to another, from civil to military and from military to civil administration. The main motive behind this transfer policy was that he did not want that his mansabdars would lay their roots deep in one particular department or in one particular place. The transfer policy proved very beneficial for the state as mansabdars remained obedient to the state.

Conclusion: In the above introduction we analyzed the whole data of mansabdari system through philosophical lens and we found that it was an effective and efficient system through which good governance was delivered. During his reign It became the strongest pillar on which the whole Mughal empire depended.

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