
UNIT 15 THE MUGHAL STATE

Structure

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15.1 INTRODUCTION

We have explained in earlier Units-8 and 9 the nature of polity existing under the Delhi Sultanate and in the kingdoms that emerged following the decline of the Delhi Sultanate. In the analysis of state in medieval times the major landmark is the establishment of the Mughal state by Babur in the early half of the 16th century. The task initiated by Babur was further carried forward by his successors, particularly Akbar. The Mughal empire lasted for over two centuries and in the process of its expansion and consolidation it left a lasting impact on the polity of the Indian subcontinent. The extraordinary longevity of the Mughal imperial structure and the control that the emperors developed to rule such a vast empire make it more important to understand the dynamics of the Mughal state. We have large number of historical works for understanding the Mughal state. Starting from the writings by early British writers till recently we come across scholarly debate among historians around whether the Mughal was a conquest state or a highly centralized bureaucratic empire or a patrimonial state or a state to be understood in terms of its fiscal management, etc. In this Unit we will first explain the basis of imperial ideology tracing it from the central Asian tradition and the innovations made by the Mughal rulers. After this you will be introduced to the various interpretations on the nature of the Mughal state and the debates regarding the decline of the Mughal empire. This should help in making your assessment of the Mughal polity.

15.2 EVOLUTION OF THEORY OF SOVEREIGNTY

After the decline of the Mongol empire in the 14th century Timur, a Chaghtai Turk, established a large empire covering central Asia, west Asia and parts of south Asia. The Mughals were the direct descendants of Amir Timur. The Timurids, the Ottomans in eastern Europe (Turks), the Safavids (in Persia) and later the Mughals in India, though Islamised did not consider it essential to obtain the formal sanction from the *khalifa* whose power was waning. It is interesting to note that although these powers had gradually been Islamised but their political ideals were not based on purely Islamic principles. The Timurid polity combined the attributes of the Yassa of Chingez (Mongol Traditions), Turkish traditions and the principles of *shara*. Therefore the Mughal state can be understood by a close examination of the Timurid polity and can be categorized as an admixture of Islamic, Persian and Turko Mongol practices. Timur's empire or

the Chaghatai Khanate was transformed from a loose structure to a close knit system which was a blend of divine precepts and Chingiz Khanid decrees. The divine proclamation aspect was given priority over the mundane Chingiz Khanid regulations (partitioning of tribes). The divinity related aspects imparted legitimacy to the state more than any other type of law or decree. It is argued by some scholars that the Timurids did adopt the bureaucratic system (largely based on Persian traditions) however, their principle of shared sovereignty could lead to partition and decentralization of empire.

The Mughal state cannot be analysed without an understanding of the Turko-Mongol theory of kingship. Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India was related to the Mongol leader Chingiz Khan and Timur the Chaghtai Islamised Turk. Therefore Babur's perception portrayed a combination of Turkish, Mongol and Islamic ideals. The Turks, Persians and Mongols regarded the ruler as holding a status which was higher than a chief. Myths relating to Chingiz Khan's ancestry point to super natural aspects of his life by referring to him as son of light. The divine aspects attributed to Chingiz Khan's lineage and the tremendous respect and veneration his family enjoyed had enabled the house of Chingiz to retain kingship till the 16th Century. Thus, sovereignty acquired a hereditary character and was confined to the house of Chingiz not on the basis of mythical traditions but real exploits and achievements which imparted an exalted status to their house. Even Timur was unable to aspire to the status of the house of Chingiz and therefore he had to remain satisfied with the modest title of 'Amir' or 'Beg'.

Khan of the Mongols can be contrasted with the *khalifa* of Islamic state. The *khalifa* was basically a religious and political head of the Islamic community or states. However, the great Khan was a political and warrior leader and thereby his status as a sovereign was not bound by religious or divine factors. According to Dr. R.P. Tripathi 'He was a political sovereign pure and simple'. Though the Great Khan was an elected leader but this election was devoid of religious overtones. A characteristic aspect of Mongol polity was that the empire was split among the princes not on a territorial but a tribal premise. The areas over which the princes had power and authority were practically their autonomous domain. However, they owed symbolic allegiance to the Great Khan who ruled in their homeland in Central Asia.

The *Malfuzat-I-Timuri* (Institutes, Political and Military written originally in Mongol language by the Great Timur) is an important source material for understanding the ideals of sovereignty which existed during the period of Timur. This reflects an amalgamation of Mongol and Islamic ideals. The main focus of Timur's theory of sovereignty was the understanding that the positions held in the temporal empire were in fact a representation of the empire of God. This belief had been revealed to him by his spiritual teacher. Timur was of the opinion that since there was only one God therefore the representative of God on earth could be only one. King should not be influenced by anyone. Power should not be exercised arbitrarily by the king. The nobles and the officials were to be taken into confidence and respected. But the King's resolve was the ultimate solution. The advice of the officials was not binding upon him.

Timur had imbibed Islamic ideals and therefore his conception of kingship, at least theoretically, could not be simply political and military. According to the *Malfuzat-I-Timuri* through a letter (*maktub*) Mir Sayyid Sharif bestowed upon Timur a title

depicting him as the champion and reformer of Islam. Here Timur's name is found with the names of Ummayid and Abbasid *khalifas*. It is also mentioned that Timur read the *khutba* in his name in the mosque in the manner of some of the earlier *khalifas*. An important change took place under the Timurids since the Mongol practice of splitting the tribes and placing them under the princes. was now replaced by territorial partition of the empire among the princes. Timur adopted this policy and this tradition was carried further by his successors.

Abu Said Mirza, the grandfather of Babur, brought about a drastic shift in Timur's position. It has already been stated that though the Timurids enjoyed absolute power in their territorial spheres but they theoretically accepted the suzerainty (though nominal) of the Great Mongol Khan. Babur's grandfather pointed out that '... the mandates will be issued in the name of the dynasty (of Timur) because I am Padshah in my own right'. This challenge to the authority of the Great Mongol Khan was a novel step resorted to by the Timurids. Abu Said Mirza adopted the humble titles of Sultan and Mirza though he did try to break the hegemony of the Great Mongol Khan.

It seems that women were not allowed to become sovereign themselves but could influence state functioning during the minority of princes as their regents. Minority did not debar a prince from attaining the status of sovereign. Babur and Akbar were both minors when sovereign status was bestowed upon them. The nobility and the religious groups were the other categories which enjoyed tremendous respect and authority in central Asia.

Around 1507 Babur adopted the designation *padshah* (emperor). He was firmly established in Kabul. The emergence of Ottomans in eastern Europe, Safavids in Persia and Shaibanids Uzbeks (Mongol tribe) in central Asia was a major threat to the authority of the Timurids. The Ottomen Sultan adopted the title of Qaisar, Safavid of Shah and the Shaibanids called themselves Sultan. In these circumstances taking cue from his grandfather Babur adopted the title of *padshah*.

Babur's religious beliefs did not shape his political outlook which was pragmatic. Dr. R.P. Tripathi suggests 'Although he had unbounded faith in the will of God and had versified the Islamic law for the guidance of his second son, his memoirs do not show any superstitious and morbid regard either for schoolmen or the details of the law'. Patrimony, ancestry, heredity were regarded by Babur as the foundation of sovereignty. His views regarding kingship and sovereignty were spelt out in a letter he wrote to Humayun in 1529. He suggested that sovereignty was like bondage and a sovereign could not combine his work with pleasure and rest. He also indicated that advice should be sought from close associates. With regard to conflict between Humayun and Kamran although division was advocated but he was of the opinion that *padshahi* (sovereign power) should not be split. Babur mentioned that 'partnership in rule is a thing unheard of'. It was felt that partitioning of authority was not in accordance with the ideal of preservation of sovereign power and brought about problems in the functioning of the state.

The pious caliphs had carved out a special niche for themselves as heads of Islamic religious and political system. However, the Timurids had never accepted the *khalifa* as their suzerain. When Babur invaded India even the semblance of authority of the *khalifa* of Egypt had been erased. The authority of the Ottomans (who conquered

Egypt, Syria, Arabia in the 16th century and got the title of Sultan of Rum (Asia Minor) from the caliph at Cairo and adopted the title of Padshah-i-Isalm) could never be acceptable to the Timurids as higher.

The accession of Babur and Humayun as the eldest sons established a positive tradition for the Mughal state. The legitimacy and sanctity which the Mughal Emperors Babur and Humayun provided to the principles of heredity and especially the faith reposed in the eldest progeny provided the foundation to the principles of sovereignty as operational in the Mughal state.

The death of Babur was followed by the accession of Humayun without any conflict but the problem of dividing the empire among his brothers could not be resolved easily. The Mughals in India had not acquired a secure foothold and the principle of partition of empire was applied in these adverse circumstances. The empire had to counter resistance from several quarters and amidst the problems the issue of division of empire loomed large over the empire. After Humayun was defeated by Sher Shah, he decided to go to Badakhshan through Kabul but Kamran (Humayun's brother) did not allow him passage on the pretext that it was given to Kamran's mother by Babur. Hindal, Humayun's brother removed Babur's name from the *khutba* at Qandahar. In this situation Babur was made to realize that the principle of division of empire as an administrative procedure was fraught with many lacunae.

Humayun's personal beliefs played an important role in the formulation of an ideology which found articulation in various ways. He was interested in transcendentalism, astrology and like a devout muslim he regarded the king as the 'shadow of god on earth'. He maintained that the sun was the pivot of the physical world and the king being comparable to the sun was the focus of the mortal (human) world. He organized the servants of the state into 12 parts and placed himself at the centre. This philosophy was derived from the Timurid legacy. Humayun also laid down novel court procedures and ceremonies which enhanced the status of the monarch. The belief that king was the shadow of god on earth was manifested in the official history of the period written by Khwand Mir. The historian refers to Humayun, his majesty the king, the shadow of god (Hazrat Padshah Zill-i-ilahi). Humayun's perception of the sovereignty implied that kingship was the 'personal property' of the king which he could confer on whomsoever he desired. Humayun's ideas of kingship also incorporated the ideal of abject submission of the nobles to the will of the *padshah*. However, in reality Humayun was not able to command total loyalty and subservience from his nobles. Although he was regarded as a 'personification of spiritual and temporal sovereignty' and the Mughals considered themselves superior to the other contemporary political powers viz. Uzbeks, Safavids, Ottomans, etc. but the Timurids did not possess a dynastic and religious ideology to enforce total submission of the populace to the crown.

15.3 IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY UNDER AKBAR

Under Akbar a framework of power and hierarchy was developed buttressed by symbolic and ritual elements. The rallying together of the nobility including the military cum civil personnel i.e. the *mansabdar-jagirdar* category, *zamindars* especially the chieftains and the *ulema* in the state machinery was brought about due to the sharp acumen of Akbar. He had to combine the task of expansion of territory with the creation of an administrative structure based on a delicate equilibrium between the different

ethnic, religious and social groups which were accommodated in the imperial service as *mansabdars*. This category (military cum civil administrative elite) became the crux of the administrative system and gave adequate opportunity to the various ambitious rajas (chiefs), Muslim migrants etc. to rise in social and economic status. In Block 6, we will separately discuss the organization of nobility as reflected in the *mansabdari* and *jagirdari* system of the Mughals. The elite or nobility relied upon the Emperor for obtaining a position in the Mughal administrative system. Remuneration was accorded to those employed in Mughal administrative system for services rendered by them. The composition of the nobility was based on a variegated category comprising of various groups viz. Indo-Muslim, Persian, Brahman, Khatri, Kayastha etc. The *khanzads* (Muslim sons of the house) who were related to the Mughals by descent, family and heredity and the Rajputs proved to be the most trustworthy and reliable props of the Mughal state. The principle of authority and subordination in a hierarchical pattern was stressed which helped in sustaining the state in the midst of all kinds of challenges. This was achieved by the formulation of an imperial ideology under Akbar.

Akbar's authority was reinforced by a systematic unfolding of a dynastic ideology by Abul Fazl. This ideology combined the Timurid traditions of hereditary monarchy and ascribed spiritual status to the emperor through symbols and metaphors. The emperor could now command unflinching loyalty from his subordinates. In this respect Akbar's period represented a major shift from the earlier pattern of division of empire and of power, which hindered the process of centralization and cohesion. As mentioned earlier the Mongol appanage tradition was based on the fragmentation of tribes, which resulted in division of sovereignty and therefore decentralisation.

Abul Fazl's elucidation of the principle of sovereignty is contained in the copious *Akbarnama* which has preserved events for 47 regnal years. It has a huge appendix in the form of three volumes of *Ain-i-Akbari* which is regarded as the official manual and gazetteer. The chapter on *rawaiyi rozi* in the *Ain* discusses the theory of kingship and this allowed Akbar to weaken the hold of the religious elite over political matters. Abul Fazl's view regarding kingship is quite clearly demonstrated in this passage from *Ain* which forms a part of *Akbarnama*.

'Kingship is the gift of god, and it is not bestowed till many thousand grand requisites have been gathered together in an individual. Race and wealth and the assembling of a mob are not enough for this great position. It is clear to the wise that a few among the holy qualities (*sifat-i-qudsi*) are magnanimity, lofty benevolence, wide capacity, abundant exuberance, exalted understanding, innate graciousness, natural lineage, justice, rectitude, strenuous labour, proper conduct, profound thoughtfulness, laudable overlooking and acceptance of excuses. . . . Thanks be to god! The holy personality of Shahinshah (Akbar) is a fount of perfect qualities and a mine of holy principles.'

This document was submitted to the Emperor in 1595. It represents a masterpiece containing not only useful information but decorated with miniature paintings and calligraphy which enhance its significance. *Akbarnama* may be placed in the category of Indo-Islamic court panegyric however more elaborate than many others. This official chronicle was based on contemporary records, no longer available, and discussions with contemporary observers and those associated with the contemporary events. The details mentioned in the work contain an underlying ideology of power and validity. The eulogy is intended to illustrate covertly or overtly with hyperbolic tools the personality

of Akbar as superior to ordinary men. Abul Fazl tries to demonstrate that Akbar's authority over the populace did not emanate merely from the principles of coercive power, suppression, conquest and force but it was based on veneration which Akbar's personality commanded.

The nature of kingship under the previous Indo-muslim rulers was centred on religious validation. The reading of the *khutba* in the name of the king and the sanction of the *khalifa* were important for the rulers to get acceptance and legitimacy to rule. But none of the kings before Akbar could lay claim to infallibility. The faultless and the impeccable qualities of the king put him above ordinary people and as a consequence close to God and the truth or the ultimate reality. Akbar was perceived as possessing indescribable brightness and glow, which could be noticed only by men who had mystical and spiritual leanings. Abul Fazl's brother, the poet Faizi in his eulogistic quatrains (*rubaiyat*) says 'He (Akbar) is a king on account of his wisdom, we call *zufunun* (possessor of the sciences) and our guide on the path of religion. Although kings are the shadow of god on earth, he is the emanation of god's light. How then can we call him a shadow?'

It was considered that Akbar's mystical and spiritual accomplishments surpassed the authority and wisdom of interpreters of *sharia* (Mujtahid of the age), the sufi saint (*pir*) or the charismatic saviours (*mahdi*). According to J.F. Richards 'Akbar's assertion of the right of final judgment between the various interpretations of the sacred law resulted from his long struggle with the conservative *ulema* holding state positions in the 1560s. The final resolution of this appeared in the much discussed testimony (*mahzar*) of 1578. This document signed under duress by the chief Qazi and the *sadr* of the empire stated that the rank of the sultan is higher in the eyes of God than of a mujtahid.'

Akbar imbibed in his person lustrous power which had been bestowed upon him by the creator of the world. Thus Akbar incorporated in his personality the supernatural and complex traits which shaped his foresight and idealism, the source of his dominance and authority.

The manuscripts of *Akbarnama* are adorned with beautiful miniature paintings, the contribution of artists who had lent support to Abul Fazl in building up the pictorial image of Akbar which corresponds to his description in the text. The miniature paintings of Akbar depict him as a divine, forbearing, balanced, enlightened personality at variance with the vast, undisciplined, unmanageable masses. The techniques used by the painters do not project flamboyance or grandeur. Simple colours and dress together with definite, identifiable features (curves, lines etc.) presented Akbar as an infallible patron who guided his subordinates and subjects.

Abul Fazl in his *Akbarnama* devotes several passages explaining Akbar's lineage and ancestry. He starts with Adam, the ancestor of mankind and refers to fiftytwo human generations before illumination dawned upon Akbar. He describes Akbar's forefathers as having come from heaven as 'kings, kings of kings, kingdom bestowers and king makers (who) governed the world by god-given wisdom and true insight'. Abul Fazl mentions nine Mughal (or Mongol) kings and Mughal khan, the son of a Turk, is considered by him as the founder of the dynasty.

Abul Fazl attributes divine origin to Akbar. He gives a fascinating story of the birth of Akbar and his forefathers. A supernatural light or illumination (divine) was responsible

for the birth of Akbar and his forefathers. The important Turko-Mongol rulers mentioned by Abul Fazl are Chingiz Khan and Amir Timur Gurgan of Samarkand. He does not speak highly of Chingiz Khan. However Amir Timur is regarded as the lord of conjunctions of the planets (Sahib Qiran) and the propounder of Timurid concept of sovereignty which was adopted by his descendants for legitimizing their power. His conquest of central Asian lands in Balkh, Badakhshan and Ferghana provided the spring board to his descendants from where they could extend their rule in other directions. The divine illumination ‘...passed through generation after generation until the shahinshah of mankind Akbar was born in 1542’.

The Timurid kings (especially Babur) established the tradition of beginning the dynastic pedigree with Amir Timur. The *tughra* (engraved iron seals with calligraphy bearing the Emperor’s titles) and the symbolic gold coins of the dynasty were an expression of dynastic authority. Abul Fazl describes Babur as ‘the carrier of the world illuminating light’. Humayun’s failures are projected as predestined and pave the way for the impending arrival of Akbar. The exaggerations and metaphors applied by Abul Fazl were drawn from the myth of the origin of the Mongols and the illuminationist theosophy of Suhrawardi Maqtul, the Persian mystic and philosopher. Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat’s *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* is an important source which Abul Fazl used for his dynastic account of the Mongols. The *Tarikh-i-Hukama* of Shamsuddin Muhammad Shahrazuri is an Arabic biography of pre-Muslim and Muslim mystics and philosophers. This account includes the biography of Shihabuddin Suhrawardi Maqtul the teacher-philosopher of Shahrazuri who had established the eastern or Ishraki school of Persian philosophy. The central theme in Ishraki school of thought is that life and reality is light created by god. Abul Fazl uses the sufi philosophy for eulogizing the Mughal emperor. Akbar’s esoteric and mystical knowledge combined both love and strictness and it found clear expression or manifestation in the doctrine of *sulh-i-kul* or peace for all. This belief is contained in the *Akbarnama* and was not merely meant as a device to bridge the chasm between the Hindus and the Muslims but it was conceived as a broad ideology of governance for the imperial power to ease the strained relations between the subjects and the rulers.

Akbar’s spiritual urge led him to search for a liberal and broad religious order. His inclination towards sun worship fitted well with the dynastic ideology of the Timurids which laid stress on illuminating light. This religious aspect of sun adulation found acceptance among the official personnel, the landed aristocracy (zamindars) and other local chiefs. Generally Akbar’s religious views have been explained in the context of their affinity to the Zoroastrian, Sufi, Nath yogic or Brahmanical faith. His divine faith has been regarded as an amalgamation of a myriad of beliefs and practices. To understand Akbar’s religious ideas it is important to explain how Akbar deviated from the conventional Islamic tradition and gave up the public prayer mode and adopted a rational and reasoning attitude towards religious practices. Sun worship before a sacrificial fire and the chanting of Sanskrit name for sun, religious discourse with the mystics and saints of various creed and sect, restraint and self-denial in social practices were to some extent based on Hindu belief of metempsychosis. Blochmann who has translated the *Akbarnama* describes Akbar’s religious propensity as Divine faith which was able to enlist as its followers a number of nobles and courtiers. S.A.A. Rizvi disagrees with Blochmann and feels that the Divine faith served a more constructive purpose than simply creating a coterie of Emperor’s favourites. It was able to mobilize the Imperial Disciples or votaries through the ideological formula of Emperor’s connection with the sun and light. This methodology (ideological training) was adopted

to create a loyal and sincere group of nobles who would strengthen the political foundation of the empire. Rizvi refers to four types of devotion which were meant 'to unify the new Mughal elite around the . . . throne.' The four category of devotion were: the willingness to surrender one's life (*jan*), property (*mal*), religion (*dar*), and honour (*namus*) for the sake of the Emperor. Babur's nobility was bound by ethnic, hereditary, family bonds but Akbar was faced with the problem of unifying the motley group of nobles of varied ethnic background and religious persuasion. The diverse groups in the nobility had to be appeased and balanced which could be attained by tying them to the imperial ideology. Emperor was portrayed as possessing divine attributes. According to Richards 'Popular understanding of the Emperor's assertions of divinely sanctioned ancestry, illumined wisdom and spirituality clearly permeated among the populace of the court/camp and other major urban centers of the empire. Ultimately this understanding became so pervasive that a continuing memory of Akbar's powers was even absorbed into the folk culture of rural society within the various regions of the empire.'

It has been pointed out by scholars that Akbar's administrative and political initiatives were closely linked to his personal traits or characteristics. Akbar's public image was shaped by the contemporary 16th century chroniclers, nobles at court, agents of *mansabdars* sent to court, agents of rajas or merchant houses and secret agents of the regional kingdoms. His approachable and open personality did not deter the possibility of the creation of the halo of unbridled power. After 1580 when Abul Fazl became a close associate of Akbar the unrestrained power of Akbar was justified through an ideology which was a blend of dynastic traditions and religious beliefs hinged on philosophical principles. Akbar's decision to establish his capital at Fatehpur Sikri and the large scale construction activity undertaken in his period was also a manifestation of his desire to assert his power. The shift of the center of power from Delhi (under Humayun) to Agra meant that Akbar did not wish to inherit the previous stronghold of imperial power but desired assertion of a new dynastic authority by building a new capital. The palace fortresses built by Akbar at Agra, Allahabad, Lahore, Ajmer and the new capital (Sikri) were manifestations of a new political order and statement. The choice of Sikri was also related to Akbar's close association with the Sufi mystic Shaikh Salim Chisti. Akbar's capital had the mosque and tomb (*dargah*) of the sufi saint the twin symbols of Indian Islam with mystical overtones. Akbar's despotism were reflected in the audience chamber (*Diwan-i-khas*) meant for limited court audience and (*Diwan-i-Aam*) Hall of Public audience and the pillar and platform in the hall of public audience. Mysticism was also a means to impart an aura of greatness to the Emperor, which further helped in legitimizing imperial authority. His close relations with Chishtiyya sufi order enhanced his charisma in political life. Akbar's esoteric proclivities were an asset in his ideological debates with the obscurantist *ulema*. These debates were a pre-requisite to make the state broad-based. As J.F. Richards points out 'Thus by 1590 when Abul Fazl began a systematic affirmation of Akbar's claim to universal authority in the Akbarnama, he included an anecdote which indirectly stated Akbar's superiority over even the most famed Chistiyya saint'.

15.4 NATURE OF STATE: VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

Historians have given different interpretations for explaining the nature of the Mughal state. The theory of sovereignty or kingship has been discussed which is indispensable for an understanding of the Mughal state. A voluminous collection of historical works is

available on the Mughal state. W.H. Moreland's study of the agrarian system of the Mughals represents a major contribution towards the study of the Mughal empire. The most important school of historical analysis in so far as the Mughal state is concerned is the Aligarh school. Historians belonging to this school have tried to evaluate the state mainly in the context of its economic organization. According to the scholars belonging to the Aligarh school the main features which characterized the Mughal state were its monetary (silver rupiya, gold muhr, copper dam and paisa) and fiscal system, the Mughal ranking system (*mansabdari*) and system of revenue assignments (*jagirs*). The flourishing overseas trade is also considered as a hallmark of the Mughal period especially the development of ports such as Surat, Thatta, Goa, Hughli, Balasore and Masulipatnam by historians like J.F.Richards. According to T. Ray Chaudhury 'the uncomplicated desire of a small ruling class for more and more material resources explains most of the Mughal state's actions; in the case of the Mughals, he asserts 'their' economism was simple, straight forward and almost palpable. . . there was no containing it until it collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions'. A logical inference which can be drawn from the above mentioned interpretations is that the state obtained the surplus from the agrarian economy as land revenue which constituted a definite part of the produce and the revenue demand varied from 1/3 to 1/2 or more of the produce. The essence of the perspective of the historians like Habib, Raychaudhuri and Richards is that during the period of Akbar (1556-1605) a cohesive and uniform or standardized agrarian system came into existence and this view was largely drawn from the earlier work of the British administrator historian W.H. Moreland. However, Habib's postulates are at variance with Moreland's because of following:

- 1) The first is apparently the use of Marxist tools of analysis.
- 2) The second is greater use of Persian sources, Moreland's application of theory of Oriental Despotism was replaced by class antagonism, struggle and exploitation postulate.

Irfan Habib regards the "*Zabt* system" (method of revenue assessment based on measurement) which got its final shape in 1580 as the epitome of the unified administrative system under the Mughals. He points out 'In 1574-75 Akbar took a series of important measures, which involved among other things, a new attempt to work out revenue rates. Information on yields, prices and the area cultivated was collected for each locality for a period of 10 years; 1570-71 to 1579-80. On the basis of detailed information the revenue rates were now fixed directly in cash for each crop. The provinces of Lahore, Multan, Ajmer, Delhi, Agra, Malwa, Allahabad and Awadh were divided into revenue circles, each with a separate schedule of cash revenue rates (*dastur-ul-amals*) for various crops. . . (These) sanctioned cash rates were to be applied year after year with such revision only as might be decreed by the administration in these rates from time to time'. On the basis of the sources of the period it was suggested by these historians that the *zabt* system was operational through the agency of a military cum bureaucratic system in the entire region from the Indus to Ghagra and state demand fluctuated between one third and half of the yield. A re-examination of the important contemporary sources on which the argument is based brings forth certain lacunae in the interpretation of the sources used by the historians. *Ain-i-Akbari* of Abul Fazl contains revenue related information in a concise form. A detailed survey of field is not given. Therefore, on close scrutiny it appears that the system was not applied to all the territories uniformly. Scholars like Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam point

out that towards the close of Akbar's reign many *subas* have no data on *arazi* (measured) land therefore in about 1600 about one third of land revenue collection under the Mughals was done by methods other than *zabt*. The subas where *zabt* was implemented were Allahabad, Awadh, Agra, Delhi, Lahore and Multan. In 1600 in Malwa and Gujarat *zabt* was not adopted in totality or even on a large scale and was seldom practiced. In Ajmer too a large portion of land was with the chieftains who must have adopted methods other than measurement for revenue fixation. It appears from the above discussion that the analysis of the Mughal state as one based on uniform and unified administrative apparatus on the basis of the compendium of revenue data of *Ain* is now being questioned by scholars. The studies on population, urbanization and external trade are all based on the interpretation of the concise data given in the *Ain* and therefore they too are being scrutinized afresh by scholars. The postulates of the Aligarh school are as follows:

- They lay stress on the period from Akbar to Aurangzeb (1556-1707). Akbar and Aurangzeb's reigns are given more importance and *Ain-i-Akbari* is regarded as the most reliable source. It is suggested that the Mughal institutions were established by Akbar, they continued to function under his successors but developed cracks in Aurangzeb's period. The pre-Akbar period and the post-Aurangzeb period are neglected in their historical writings.
- The state is regarded as an extremely centralized and bureaucratized system. This characterization is explained on the basis of the uniform revenue, *mansabdari/Jagirdari* and coinage system etc.
- State is portrayed as an 'insatiable leviathan' which levied taxes and appropriated revenue from the peasantry.
- The parasitic elite of the empire to a large extent consumed the surplus and did not use it for productive purpose by adopting scientific techniques.
- Ideology is regarded as insignificant for analysis of historical texts and attitude of various social groups especially the elite.
- Trade is considered relevant only in the context of providing imports for elite use. The flow of precious metals (bullion) through trade is regarded as a cause which brought about the price revolution or inflation in the 17th century which had a negative impact on the economy.
- 18th century is regarded as a period of anarchy and decline especially by Athar Ali and Irfan Habib. They feel that *jagirdari* crisis in Aurangzeb's reign led to peasant rebellions and anarchy in the 18th century and inflation aggravated the crisis.

The Central Asian Legacy of the Mughals is not given sufficient emphasis in Mughal historiography. The majority of writings on the Mughal state mainly lay stress on two reigns: Akbar (1556-1605) and Aurangzeb (1658-1707). The period of Babur and Humayun is not paid due attention in historical literature. However, some historians like S. Nurul Hasan, Simon Digby, Ahsan Raza Khan, Mohibbul Hasan and I. H. Siddiqi have tried to deal with the institutional structures of Afghan rulers (Lodis and Surs) and early Mughals (Babur and Humayun). The phase (of Mughal rule) preceding Akbar's reign represents a not so well researched period of history just as the period after 1707 had earlier been regarded in history as a dark period. Historians regard the

mansab and *jagir* system as the “steel frame” of the Mughal state and therefore the importance given to Akbar as one who initiated the system and to Aurangzeb who impaired it is quite logical.

Studies on Mughal institutions have failed to focus on the continuities which existed between the structures laid down by the Afghans and the Mughals. If such a comparison is drawn it would be possible to delineate the similarities and contrast between the Afghan and the Mughal system. It is interesting to note that the Lodi Afghans believed in the concept of distribution of power and sharing of sovereignty. Bahlul Lodi in pursuance of the tribal ideas of egalitarianism treated his nobles or aristocracy as equals. However under Sikandar Lodi the loosely knit conglomeration of tribal chiefs was made subordinate to the authority of the king without antagonizing the nobles. This practice was pursued with greater rigor by Ibrahim Lodi who crushed the power of the nobles and tried to establish indivisible sovereignty, which would not disturb the unity of the empire. The social and tribal traditions based on fragmentation of authority and egalitarian clan and kin ties also initially influenced Afghan polity. However, these had to be set aside for establishing a strong state. The analysis of Afghan fiscal system by Moreland, Nurul Hasan and I.A. Khan suggests that the pioneering efforts in the sphere of fiscal and land revenue administration were the contribution of Afghan rulers particularly Sher Shah. Reference to *rupiya* as a coin is initially found in Sher Shah's period (1538-45) and the *rai* (schedule of crop rates) prepared by Sher Shah was the harbinger of the Mughal revenue reforms. An important contemporary source material for Sher Shah's period is Abbas Khan Sarwani's *Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi* written in Akbar's reign. The territories where *zabt* system prevailed in 1600 were those which had been in the possession of the Afghan leader Sher Shah and the newly annexed territories of Gujarat, Bengal, Berar and Khandesh continued with their separate revenue system. Another important contribution of Sher Shah was in the sphere of construction of roads. Sarwani points out '(Sher Shah) built road sarais (rest houses) which commenced from the fort that he had constructed in the Punjab and it ran upto the town of Sonargaon which lay situated on the edge of the Bay of Bengal (*dariya i-shor*). He built another road that ran from the city of Agra to Burhanpur on the borders of the Deccan. He made another road which ran from the city of Agra to Jodhpur and Chittor. He then built still another road with Sarais which ran from the city of Lahore to Multan. In all he built 1700 sarais on the roads which lay in various regions and in every sarai he built apartments for both Hindu and Muslims.' The sarais served as commercial centers and the road construction activity of Sher Shah played an important role in integrating the economy of Bengal with other parts in north India. The Afghans state under Sher Shah was created due to the availability of 'military labour market' in the 16th century India. Loose confederacies comprising of ethnic identities such as Rajput and Afghans were bound together in a complicated network of alliances which were necessary for rulers like Sher Shah and Humayun for state formation. The basis of Sher Shah's power was the peasant retainer who formed an important part of the armed contingents. Discipline, proper recruitment, branding of horses, regular pay and loyalty were the pillars of military power under Sher Shah. The seizure of power by Sher Shah is attributed to his army organization (consisting of various ethnic groups viz. Rajputs, *zamindars* and Afghans) and the subsequent consolidation of power under him was on account of the organization of the revenue resources of the territories under his control which provided a regular source of revenue for sustaining the empire. On the ideological level he kept

himself at a distance from *ulema* and believed in heterodox eclecticism. Sher Shah's kingship was not based on horizontal alliances with Afghan chiefs and other groups but on a vertical hierarchical relationship between king and the loyal retainers. Treasures he had acquired as soldier/commander or otherwise also helped him in his political ambition.

Analysing the ideology of the Mughal empire J.F. Richards has pointed out two basic features:

- 1) Illuminationist theory (Farr-i-izadi) and the Tauhid-i-ilahi (kind of royal cult). These formed the crux of the Mughal theory of kingship and sovereignty.
- 2) This notion of sovereignty made it possible to deviate from the orthodox *shariat* principles and also to counter the orthodox *ulema*.

Kingship continued to be divinely ordained under Jahangir and Shahjahan. Sir Thomas Roe the emissary from the king of England to the Mughal Emperor Jahangir says that the latter 'Falling upon his father's conceipt, hath dared to enter farther in, and to professe himselfe for the Mayne of his religion to be a greater Prophett than Mahomett; and hath formed to himself a new law, mingled of all...'. Mirza Nathan, a *khanzada* (Persian noble) served as an imperial *mansabdar* in Jahangir's time and made use of terminology like *pir-o-murshid* (sufi saint of virtue) and *qibla* (The western part of the mosque in front of which prayer is offered). The western part of mosque in front of which prayer is offered for Jahangir. This shows that the king's image was placed equal to that of a sufi saint.

In Shah Jahan and Jahangir's period there was a shift in ideology and the 'divine faith' received a setback. Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, a Naqshbandi sufi saint, tried to promote Islamic revivalism in Jahangir's period. He believed that *Shariat* principles should be strictly followed. The Naqshbandi, Shattari, Chisti and other sufi sects were resorting to Islamic revivalism and orthodoxy in the period of Jahangir and Shahjahan. Sufi ideology was permeated with orthodoxy and it tried to influence politics by enlisting nobles as disciples and encouraging Islamic revivalism.

Growth of fiscal system and expansion of trade was an important characteristic of the 17th century. An important development which took place in this period was the growth of the agency of bankers to remit revenue from the provinces to the centre and the integration into the economic system of the trade related and monetary aspects. The 17th century was also marked by the involvement of the nobility and the rulers in commerce and trade. Scholars like Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam are of the opinion that 'Shahjahan's trade was part of an implicit bullionist orientation in Mughal state policy in the period'. As the Dutch Company employee Gerard Pelgrom writes in 1655, 'Were the king not to constrain his subjects to go through with the said passage with force there would be few or perhaps even no traders to be found who would willingly risk their goods therewards, all merchants being made by his majesty by a certain order to send a specified number of packs (of textiles) perforce to Mokha, even though the king very well knows that the owners will thereby gain but little interest, trying by these means to keep his view on increasing the textiles that one made in Gujarat and Hindustan (where most of his subjects live) and by the same means to bring a considerable sum of Spanish reels and ducats into his realm, as he otherwise

has no gold or silver mines, on account of which it is also deemed necessary that the Moors continue in this trade, for otherwise the artisans will be impoverished'. In the period of Jahangir and Shahjahan fiscal dispatches were conducted through the medium of bankers and *hundis* (bills of exchange). These were used for financial transfers although cash transfer (coin and bullion) by the imperial agents and armed bearers also continued to be practiced.

Many *dasturul amals* or the revenue documents which were used by historians as source material and evidence of the centralized character of the Mughal state are dated to the middle of the 17th century. It needs to be emphasized that Shahjahan's and Aurangzeb's reigns are also noted for the efforts on the part of the imperial authority to bring more and more land under *khalisa*. Several changes were introduced in the time of Shahjahan in the sphere of *mansabdari*. We have already referred to the systemic postulate propounded by the Aligarh scholars who feel that the administrative system (agrarian structure, *mansab, jagirdari*) was initiated and made impeccable by Akbar but this has been questioned by other scholars. It seems that these administrative arrangements developed and grew in the late 16th century and reflected to some extent a continuation of the earlier institutional arrangements and ceaselessly evolved into the 17th century. Therefore it is important to stress the evolutionary aspect with regard to the development of administrative structures. No single ruler can be credited for perfecting these institutions.

Expansion of agriculture by cutting the forests is an important development of Shah Jahan's period as given in the *Haqiqat-i-suba-Bihar*: 'from the time of Shah Jahan it was customary that wood cutter and ploughmen (*tabrdaran wa tishadaran wa qalbaha*) used to accompany the troops so that forests might be cleared and land cultivated. Ploughs used to be donated by the government at the rate of one *anna* per *bigha* in the first year. Chaudharis were appointed to keep the *riaya* happy with their considerate behaviour and to populate the country. . . . There was a general order that whosoever cleared a forest and brought land under cultivation such land would be his *zamindari*'. Thus the period between middle of the 17th and the beginning of 18th century was notable for the growth of trade, fiscal system and agricultural expansion.

The increasing compilation of *dastur ul amals* in Shah Jahan's and Aurangzeb's period reflect the greater stress on formalism and emphasis on procedure and propriety with focus on measurement (by inspection and survey). The *Akhbarat* (news letters of the imperial court) were used as a medium to ensure the smooth communication between the centre and the provinces. Aurangzeb's official position is reflected in the corpus of royal letters, orders and communication to his officials. The bulky corpus of views of Arabic legal experts contained in the *Fatwa-i-Alamgiri* and the *farmans* issued to Muhammad Hashim and Rasikdas (Mughal officials) were a clear indication of Aurangzeb's efforts to delineate a definite legal procedure (based on Hanafite law) for the provinces or territories under the Mughals. The 'canonization' efforts of Aurangzeb might have contributed to the insurrections and revolts but the crisis which took a definite shape in the period of Aurangzeb was also a consequence of the problems confronting the economic and bureaucratic system and also reflected the desire of the local and the regional elements for a greater share in political power and greater

autonomy (self determination). The nature of Mughal religio-legal scheme has to be analysed and the role of the *Qazi* and the other judicial officials in the settlement of religious and other types of discord have to be studied. *Sharia* served as a reference point (to some extent especially in judicial matters) in governance but it continued to be interpreted in accordance with the political needs.

R.P. Tripathi suggests that the Afghan polity and the Timurid polity were basically decentralized. The Mongol features inherent in the Timurid polity especially the decrees of Chingez Khan laid stress on division of sovereignty through division of tribes which encouraged creation of an appanage system. This did not allow the emergence of a bureaucratic system and a strong ruler which were the essential prerequisites of centralization. It is argued by scholars like I. A. Khan that Humayun had to contend with the power of the nobility and his brothers but Akbar was able to avoid this obstacle and adopted the practices of the Turkish rulers of 13-14th centuries and was able to establish a strong absolutist state. D. Streusand also accepts this view. However on the basis of recent evidence (Jean Aubin's work on Timur) it is suggested that the Timurid polity was transformed from a not so cohesive system to a tightly knit despotism. This is deduced on the basis of the belief that Timur based his empire on the combination of divine sanction and Chingez Khanid traditions. More emphasis was placed on divine aspect which gave legitimacy to despotism. Streusand contends that the Persian bureaucratic traditions were adopted by the Timurids which further disproves the decentralized contention of scholars. Sanjay Subrahmanyam suggests that it is important to study Mirza Hakim's (Akbar's half brother) position and the threat posed to Akbar by him. This would enable us to understand that succession always posed a problem, whether in Humayun or Akbar's case or in the time of Aurangzeb and after his death. Partition and appanaging was an issue in succession and the idea of 'linear succession' could not always be easily implemented. Scholars feel that partition and appanage formation tradition counters the centralization perspective.

Some scholars feel that the institutions which were established under Akbar, paved the way for centralization. However it is important to note that the *jagir* or *mansab* had their origin in the earlier periods (similar to the *wajah* of Lodis, *tuyul* of Babur and Humayun) and they represented an evolutionary institutional system and were not the creation of Akbar's genius. M. Hodgson's 'gun powder empires' proposition lays emphasis on the role of fire arms in the establishment of centralized empires like Mughal. Struesand regards the Mughal state as an admixture of Islamic (at the center) and Hindu (at the periphery) ideals. This view is quite close to Burton Stein's segmentary state theory. It is suggested that though it was centralized in Akbar's period, but in the post Akbar period, several factors viz. (crisis in *jagir* system) contributed to decentralization.

Stephen Blake analyses the Mughal state as a patrimonial bureaucratic empire. This concept is borrowed from Weber and applied to the Mughal state. This postulate is based on the premise that in small states, the ruler governed as if it was his patrimony or household realm. With the expansion of territory and emergence of large states a bureaucracy has to be recruited for effective governance. This was the basis of patrimonial bureaucratic empire.

Contemporary Europeans like Dutch merchant Francisco Pelsaert (1595-1630) and French physician Francois Bernier (1620-1688) refer to the Mughal state in the 17th century as having its own limitations. Bernier refers to the 'agrarian crisis' due to the problems in the *jagirdari* system. This view was adopted by W. H. Moreland and later M. Athar Ali and Irfan Habib. The non-existence of private property in land in this period is mentioned by Bernier. He divided the Mughal state vertically into two parts: the overarching super structures headed by the Mughal tyrant and the other part dominated by the native princes placed below the absolute Mughal sovereign. Recently scholars like Chetan Singh have tried to assess the Mughal state in the context of the various regions embodied in it. The study of regions enables us to understand their dynamics separately and helps us to understand the Mughal state not as a monolithic entity but as a variegated whole comprising of several regions which had their own peculiarities.

It would be reasonable to assume that the centralized perspective of the historians needs to be reassessed in the light of researches which have brought forth new ideas and perspectives on the basis of fresh evidence.

15.5 DECLINE

The decline of the Mughal empire meant the crumbling of the edifice of the state. Therefore, an analysis of the decline or weakening of the empire would inevitably mean scrutinizing the degeneration which had crept into the main pillars of the state system i.e. the agrarian and *mansab-jagir* system. This would help us to understand better how the state system functioned and what were its strengths and weaknesses. A number of eminent historians have tried to understand the process of Mughal decline through their works. These works — Satish Chandra's *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court*, Irfan Habib's *Agrarian System of the Mughal Empire*, M. Athar Ali's *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* and N. A. Siddiqi's *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals* offer a single explanation of this crisis which has been summed up by P. Hardy as follows:

'From these works it is possible to draw a diagram of tensions between monarch (padshah), military or service noble (mansabdar), landholder (zamindar) and peasant (raiyyat) which when maintained in equilibrium were creative of order and stability but which if allowed to pull free were creative of disorder and impotence. Such a free pull occurred when the Marathas as zamindars forcibly jerked against the bit of Mughal control and resisted domestication with the Mughal system. The efforts of the Mughals to muster the resources in revenue and men to overcome the Marathas led to strains within the nobility and insupportable pressures upon both zamindar and peasant who if they did not revolt actively at least resisted the Mughal revenue collector passively. A combination of over lavish appointments by the emperor and the military success of the Marathas created a shortage of assignments (jagirs) of areas of land productive of income for the nobles. Thus resources wherewith to support the military contingents which were the condition of receiving appointments were rendered inadequate. Consequently the number and effectiveness of the Mughal forces fell off and the Mughal military machine (which was essentially an instrument for the internal military occupation of India) became progressively incapable of controlling the autochthonous military and rural aristocracy (the zamindars of various degrees) of the sub-continent'.

M.N. Pearson points out that the link between the Emperor and the imperial *mansabdar* (whom he regards as constituting the empire) was based on the victories attained in wars. The bond of fidelity was not related to ethnicity or religion. He characterizes the empire as a war state which rested on the basic principles of conquest and annexation. The attachment between the Emperor and the imperial officers was personal which led the latter to believe, in Pearson's words, 'it was not their empire that was failing it was Aurangzeb's'.

J.F. Richards is of the opinion that due to the extension of *khalisa* the land to be assigned in *jagir* decreased. However he feels that this problem could have been overcome by consolidating the southern frontier of the empire. He also argues that Aurangzeb did not provide backing to or promote the Hindu warrior aristocracy in the Deccan (Maratha, Gond, Bedar or Telegu chiefs). Earlier traditional interpretations of decline gave a central place to Aurangzeb's policies (bigotry) which were regarded as a reversal of Akbar's endeavours. Peter Hardy summarises the arguments of Richards and Pearson as follows: 'the progressive inability of the dynasty to assure its agents a competence if not wealth to control the terms of service by those agents and to control the manner in which the elite extracted the resources of the empire from the producer so that in the end the dynasty was unable to withstand the Marathas, Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali'. Hardy suggests that this problem could have been countered and solved by adopting the model of "Weberian bureaucracy" which entailed the principles of direct administration and cash payments. The other factors responsible for weakening the military cum administrative edifice was the difference between estimated revenue (*jama*) and revenue actually collected (*hasil*) and therefore the inability of the mansabdars to sustain and support the requisite armed contingents. (The *mansabdars* were supposed to maintain the specified troops on the basis of the estimates of revenue (*jama*). However in actual practice the *hasil* or actual realisation was much less.) The economic and administrative crisis posited by the Aligarh school is acceptable to Pearson and Richards also. This postulate is based on inferences arrived at after a detailed study of the writings of contemporary writers viz. Abul Fazl, Mamuri, Bhim Sen and Khafi Khan.

Bernier's *Travels in the Mogul Empire* throws light on Shivaji and the Maratha problem Manucci in his *Storia do Mogor*, (translated by William Irvine, Vol II,) portrays the picture of political chaos in Mughal times caused by *zamindar* rebellions and the connivance of the Mughal officials in the acts of defiance by local magnates; Mamuri and Khafi Khan refer to decrease in *paibaqi* lands (lands to be assigned in *jagir*); Bhim Sen narrates the Deccani campaigns and refers to the 'failure to keep up the sanctioned strength of their contingents.'

The issue of disintegration of Mughal state as an effect of decreased *hasil* and the consequent reduced contingents has to be reassessed in the light of fresh look at the history of military techniques. It is felt that the Mughals lagged behind the Persians with regard to innovations in military technology and the lightly equipped armed and dressed Maratha cavalry proved formidable for the heavy Mughal cavalry. Certain other insights into the local price situation and an analysis of Aurangzeb's personality would help in deducing a more acceptable and convincing approach for characterizing the decay of the Mughal state.

15.6 SUMMARY

From the above analysis we can summarize that the Tuko-Mongol origin of the Timurid dynasty had influenced the Mughal idea of empire and concept of kingship. Babur's ideas of sovereignty and kingship had direct linkage with the principles of the tribal Mongol tradition and the Islamic tradition in which he was brought up. Akbar made innovation in the Mughal theory of sovereignty by introducing a rational element. M. Athar Ali explains that this rational concept demanded obedience in fulfilment of a mutual, contractual duty and helped 'to justify the sovereign's absolute claims over the individual subject. The strength of this theory lies in its secular character on alleged social needs'. The Mughal emperor was the supreme authority within the empire commanding absolute loyalty of all his subjects. To counterbalance the threat from the heterogeneous nobility to the imperial authority the Mughals developed a novel mechanism of checks and balances. In the conflict among the nobles over sharing of power and agrarian surplus the Mughal emperor ensured his position as a superior arbiter.

In analysing the nature of the Mughal state some historians have classified it as a highly centralized bureaucratic empire. The Aligarh historians have stressed on the systemic perspective and the fiscal/resource management of the Mughal empire in order to explain the nature and crisis of the empire. Irfan Habib has used the term 'medieval Indian system', a system characterised by the growing tendency of a highly centralized bureaucratic state apparatus to appropriate the surplus and exploit the peasantry. While scholars like Blake and Pearson have described the Mughal authority as essentially personal and patriarchal than despotic. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam focus on the persistence of differences from region to region rather than the centrally imposed uniformity as suggested by some historians. Chetan Singh is also of the opinion of a regionalization of the administrative functionaries of the Mughal state. Decline of the Mughal empire was not a sudden collapse of the imperial administrative apparatus, nor an individual ruler could be held responsible for the crisis, but the crisis in imperial structure because of economic and political reasons resulted in a shift of political and military power from the centre to regions. Emergence of successor and other states in the 18th century was the indication of this declining trend of the imperial polity.

15.7 EXERCISES

- 1) Analyse the important features of the Mughal theory of sovereignty.
- 2) Explain the nature of the Mughal state giving references to the views of different historians.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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