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## UNIT 13 MUGHAL RULING CLASS

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### 13.0 OBJECTIVES

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In Unit 12, we have discussed the formation and working of the Mughal Theory of state. This unit will discuss important features of the structure and working of the Mughal ruling class down to Aurangzeb's period. After reading this unit you will

- know about the origins and development of the ruling class;
- understand the racial composition of the ruling class;
- learn about its organisation;
- have some idea about the share of the ruling class in the revenue resources of the empire; and
- be acquainted with the life style of the ruling class.

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### 13.1 INTRODUCTION

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The Mughal ruling class was multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-regional. Theoretically it was the creation of the Emperor. The Mughal ruling class or the nobility as it is commonly designated, comprised both civil bureaucrats as well as military commanders. They all held **mansab** and received their salary either in cash or through assignment of the revenues of various territories (**jagir**). Therefore, the numerical strength of the **mansabdars** (nobles) materially influenced not only politics and administration, but also the economy of the Empire.

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### 13.2 THE RULING CLASS UNDER BABUR AND HUMAYUN

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The ruling class which accompanied Babur to Hindustan largely comprised Turanis (Central Asian 'Begs') and a few Iranis. After the battle of Panipat (1526), some Afghan and Indian nobles of Sikandar Lodi's camp were admitted in his higher bureaucracy. They were soon taken into confidence and given important assignments. Many local chieftains also accepted Babur's suzerainty and became his allies in subsequent battles. Thus, after the battle of Panipat, the ruling class under Babur no longer remained purely

Turani. It appears from the Baburnama that out of a total of 116 nobles, 31 were Indians including Afghans and Shaikhzadas.

During the early years of Humayun's reign, there was a decline in the number of Indian nobles as many of the Afghan nobles deserted the Mughal service and joined Bahadur Shah of Gujarat. However, a great change occurred in Humayun's nobility between 1540 and 1555, when most of his Turani nobles deserted him and joined Mirza Kamran. Only twenty-six persons in all accompanied him to Iran, seven of whom were Iranis. But during his stay in Iran, many more Iranis joined him. They accompanied Humayun from Iran to take Qandahar and Kabul. The position of Iranis further improved as a number of Iranis came to Kabul and joined Humayun's service during his stay at Kabul between 1545-55.

At the same time when Iranis increased in the nobility, Humayun raised a new Turani nobility by promoting low ranking Turani nobles to counter the power of the old nobility, thereby strengthening his position. There were 57 nobles who accompanied Humayun back to India, of whom 27 were Turanis and 21 Iranis. This new nobility served him loyally throughout his contest with Mirza Kamran between 1545 and 1555, and followed him in the conquest of India. In recognition of their services, important assignments were generally given to this section of nobility.

Although by raising Iranis and low ranking Turanis to higher ranks, Humayun could create a loyal ruling class which helped him in reconquering Hindustan, the dominant sections in his nobility were still confined to a limited number of class-cum-family groups with their roots in Central Asian traditions.

Thus, the Mughal ruling class in its formative stage under Babur and Humayun was not a disciplined and effective organisation to cope with the problems facing the newly established Empire in India. Babur and Humayun did not fully succeed in making it loyal and subservient to them even by bringing about a few changes in its composition.

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### 13.3 DEVELOPMENT UNDER AKBAR

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The position remained unchanged during the early years of Akbar's reign. The two foreign elements Turanis and Iranis enjoyed a predominant position. After the dismissal of Bairam Khan, a crisis developed at the court which ultimately led to the rebellion of the Turani nobles. To balance their pressure, Akbar introduced two new elements — Indian Muslims and Rajputs in his nobility. He also promoted Iranis to higher ranks as a reward for their loyalty during the crisis. Besides those Iranis who were already in the service of Humayun or under Bairam Khan, a large number came to India in search of employment during this period. Many factors were responsible for their migration from Iran. The important one was the unfavourable religious atmosphere for the Sunnis in the Safavi Iran during the sixteenth century. A good number of them proceeded to India in search of security as they were apprehensive of punishment by the Safavi rulers. Many of them were highly trained in administrative affairs and belonged to noted families of Iran. In India, they were welcomed and admitted by Akbar in his service and given suitable posts. Some of them were introduced to the Mughal Court by their relatives who were already in the Mughal service. Besides them, many others came as adventurers in search of better opportunities knowing that the Mughal court was open to talent. Thus, the position of Iranis in the Mughal ruling class not only became stable and strong but also self-perpetuating.

From 1561, that is, after the exit of Bairam Khan, Akbar started recruiting Rajputs and Shaikhzadas in his service. In order to win recruits from these sections, he adopted certain measures of placating and befriending them. For instance, he established matrimonial relations with the Rajputs Chieftains, abolished pilgrimage tax (1562) and the jiziya (1564) which was imposed earlier on the Hindus. Akbar's attitude towards Rajputs changed radically after the suppression of the Uzbek rebellion as he adopted a vigorous policy of reducing them to submission by force.

During the period 1575-80, Akbar, with a view of creating wider support for the Empire amongst the Muslim Communities in India, also adopted an attitude of promoting and befriending the Indian Muslims through several conciliatory measures.

## 13.4 COMPOSITION OF THE MUGHAL RULING CLASS

After its first phase of development during the reign of Babur and Humayun and the early years of Akbar, the Mughal ruling class came to consist of certain well-recognised racial groups. The important ones were Turanis, Iranis, Afghans, Shaikhzadas, Rajputs and also the Deccanis (Bijapuris, Haiderabadis and Marathas). Thus, it was an 'International' ruling class; for recruitment 'nationality' was no bar. However, mere fulfillment of certain criteria of merit and competence was not the sole requirement to gain entry into it: clan or family links were the most important considerations for recruitment and ordinary people, with whatever merit to their credit, were normally not admitted to this aristocratic class of the society.

The **khanazads** (the house-born ones), who were the sons and descendants of those officers (**mansabdars**) who were already in the Mughal service, were the best and foremost claimants. They constituted almost half of the ruling class throughout the Mughal period and the remaining half of the ruling class comprised of variety of persons not belonging to the families already in service.

The **zamindars** or the chieftains were one of them. Though they had been in the state service ever since the time of Delhi Sultans, they attained great importance under Akbar who granted them high **mansabs** and **jagirs** in various parts of the Empire. These **jagirs** were in addition to their ancestral domains which were now treated as their **watan jagir** (See Unit 15).

Nobles and high officers of other states were also taken into the Mughal ruling class on account of their experience, status and influence. Leading commanders of the enemy state, in particular, were offered tempting ranks to make them desert their masters. A very small portion of the Mughal ruling class consisted of persons belonging to the accountant castes, that is, **Khatris**, **Kayasthas**, etc. They were usually appointed in the financial departments on low ranks, but they could rise to higher ones. **Todar Mal** under Akbar and **Raja Raghunath** under Aurangzeb belonged to this category. They served as **diwan** and received high ranks.

Scholars, saints/sufis and theologians, etc. also received ranks and offices in the Mughal service. **Abul Fazl** under Akbar, **Sadullah Khan** and **Danishmand Khan** during Shah Jahan's reign, and **Hakim Abul Mulk Tuni Fazil Khan** in Aurangzeb's period are some of the noteworthy examples of this class.

### 13.4.1 Racial and Religious Groups

As mentioned earlier, there were certain well-recognised racial groups — Turanis, Iranis, Afghans, Shaikhzadas, Rajputs and Marathas — who provided new recruits for the Mughal ruling class. These elements were taken into the Mughal service largely as a result of historical circumstances, but partly (as for example the Rajputs) as a result of planned imperial policy of integrating all these elements into a single imperial service. For that purpose, very often, officers of various groups were assigned to serve under one superior officer. Akbar's policy of **sulh kul** was also partly motivated by a desire to employ persons of diverse religious beliefs — Sunnis (Turanis and Shaikhzadas), Shia's (including many Iranis) and Hindus (Rajputs) — and to prevent sectarian differences among them from interfering with the loyalty to the throne.

### 13.4.2 The Foreign Elements — Turanis and Iranis

The foreign elements in the Mughal ruling class comprised largely the Turanis (or the Central Asians) and Iranis (also called Khurasanis and Iraqis). According to the **Al'in-i Akbari**, about 70 per cent of Akbar's nobles were foreigners by origin. This high proportion of foreigners continued under Akbar's successors and among them Iranis enjoyed the most dominant position. In the early years of Jahangir's reign, **Mirza Aziz Koka** had alleged that the Emperor was giving undue favours to Iranis and Shaikhzadas while the Turanis and Rajputs were neglected. Though Shah Jahan tried hard to emphasize the Central Asian affiliations of the Mughal dynasty, it had no adverse effect on the position of Iranis under him. The greater part of Aurangzeb's nobility, according to **Bernier**, consisted of Persians who, according to **Tarvernier**, occupied the highest posts in the Mughal Empire.

Athar Ali finds a declining trend in the number of nobles directly coming from foreign countries ever since the time of Akbar. This decline of foreigners, according to him, further sharpened during the long reign of Aurangzeb. The fall of the Uzbek and Safavi kingdoms and the concentration of Aurangzeb's attention in the Deccan affairs for a long period, and, his not following a forward or militaristic policy in the North-West, have been suggested as some important reasons for the decline of direct foreign recruitments. The Iranis, however, could maintain their dominant position in the nobility because of the continuous influx of Iranis from the Deccan Sultanates. Muqarrab Khan, Qizilbash Khan and Mir Jumla (under Shah Jahan); Ali Mardan Khan Haiderabadi, Abdur Razzaq Lari and Mahabat Khan Haiderabadi (under Aurangzeb) are some of the important examples of Irani nobles from the Deccan. The Sunni orthodoxy of the Emperor also did not affect the position of Iranis.

### 13.4.3 The Afghans

The Afghans had been distrusted by the Mughals, especially suspected after the Mughal restoration under Humayun. Most of them were kept at a distance by Akbar. They, however, improved their position under Jahangir who assigned a high position to Khan Jahan Lodi. During Shah Jahan's reign, the Afghans again lost the imperial trust and suffered a setback after Khan Jahan Lodi's rebellion. During the later years of Aurangzeb's reign, however, the number of the Afghan nobles considerably increased. This was mainly because of the influx from the Bijapur kingdom.

### 13.4.4 Indian Muslims

The Indian Muslims, better known as Shaikhzadas, comprised mainly the Saiyids of Barha and the Kambus and certain other important clans.

The Saiyids of Barha and the Kambus who had enjoyed a leading position since Akbar's time, were no longer equally prominent during Aurangzeb's reign. More particularly, the Saiyids of Barha, who, on account of their martial qualities, once enjoyed the honour of constituting the vanguard of the Mughal armies, were distrusted by Aurangzeb. It was perhaps because they had been loyal supporters of Dara Shukoh in the war of succession.

Some of the Kashmiris also got prominence during the later years of Aurangzeb's reign: Inayatullah Kashmiri was one of the favourite nobles of the Emperor.

### 13.4.5 Rajputs and Other Hindus

As has been discussed above, Rajputs and other Hindu nobles were inducted in the Mughal ruling class during the reign of Akbar who adopted a friendly and liberal attitude towards them. It is clear from the contemporary sources that the Hindu nobles in general and Rajputs in particular achieved a position of respect and honour in the reign of Akbar which they continued to enjoy down to Aurangzeb's reign. Shah Jahan was a devout Muslim, who adopted several measures to display his orthodoxy. Yet there was a great increase in the number of Rajput mansabadars during his reign. Aurangzeb was also a devout Muslim and he is generally blamed for adopting anti-Hindu policies. But the fact remains that during the early years of his reign, the position of the Rajput nobles actually improved over what it had been in Shah Jahan's time. There had been no Rajput officer throughout the reign of Shah Jahan holding the rank of 7000 zat. Now Mirza Raja Jai Singh and Jaswant Singh were promoted to the rank of 7000 zat/7000 sawar. Similarly, ever since Raja Man Singh's recall from Bengal in 1606, no Rajput noble had been entrusted with an important province. In 1665, Jai Singh was appointed the viceroy of the Deccan, the highest and most important charge which normally only princes were entrusted with. Jaswant Singh was also twice appointed governor of Gujarat in 1659-61 and 1670-72. It may be pointed out that with a slight fall (21.6 per cent) in the first phase of Aurangzeb's reign (1658-78), the number of Hindu mansabdars remained almost the same what it had been during Akbar (22.5 per cent) and Shah Jahan's (22.4 per cent). This may be better appreciated from the following Table:

Table 1

	Akbar (1595)	Shah Jahan (1628-58)	Aurangzeb (1658-78)	Aurangzeb (1679-1707)
A. Total mansabdars	98	437	486	575
B. Hindus	22	98	105	182
B as % of A	22.5	22.4	21.6	31.6

During the last phase of Aurangzeb's reign (1679-1707), however, the proportion of the Hindu nobles appreciated to 31.6 per cent. In other words, during this time there were more Hindus in service than at any preceding period. The increase in the number of Hindus during this period was because of the influx of the Marathas who began to outnumber the Rajputs in the nobility.

### 13.4.6 <sup>1</sup> Marathas and Other Deccanis

The recruitment of Marathas began during the reign of Shah Jahan at the time of his Ahmednagar campaign. Since Marathas played an important role in the Deccan affairs, they were steadily recruited to the Mughal ruling class. Aurangzeb, too, admitted the Marathas on a large scale by granting high ranks to some of them. The Mughal attempt to win over the Maratha chieftains by granting them high mansabs, however, proved a failure. The allegiance of the Maratha nobles under Aurangzeb was always unstable and, therefore, they never attained any real position of influence within the Mughal ruling class.

As regards the other Deccanis, they were the nobles who belonged to the Deccan kingdoms of Bijapur or Golkunda before joining Mughal service. They could be of Indian origin such as Afghans, Shaikhzadas or Indian Muslims; or of foreign origin like Iranis and Turanis. It appears that the Deccanis did not form a very large section of Aurangzeb's nobility in the first period. (See Table 1) They were regarded as a subordinate class of nobles: one-fourth of their total pay-claim was deducted according to the regulations for pay in the Deccan.

In the second period, however, the Deccani nobles (Bijapuris, Haiderbadis and Marathas) were recruited on a large scale. The influx of the Deccanis in the later years of Aurangzeb's reign was so great that it caused much resentment among the older section of the nobility — the *khanazadas*.

### Check Your Progress 1

- Trace the evolution of Mughal ruling class spanning Babur, Humayun and Akbar's reigns.

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- Enumerate the various groups which comprised the Mughal ruling class. What was their position in the Mughal nobility?

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### 13.5 ORGANISATION OF THE RULING CLASS

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The Mughal ruling class was organised within the framework of the mansab system, one of the two important institutions (the other being the Jagir system) which sustained the Mughal Empire for about 200 years. The mansab system was based on the principle of direct command, i.e., all mansabdars, whatever be their rank, were directly subordinate to the Mughal Emperor.

**Mansab System:** Technically, mansab means office, position or rank. Under the Mughals the functions of mansab were threefold:

- i) it determined the status of its holder (the mansabdar) in the official hierarchy;
- ii) it fixed the pay of the mansabdar accordingly, and
- iii) it also laid upon him the obligation of maintaining a definite number of contingent with horses and equipment. Each officer was assigned a dual rank (a pair of numbers) designated zat and sawar. Zat was a personal rank which determined the status of the mansabdar in the official hierarchy and also indicated his personal pay. The sawar rank was a military rank which determined the number of contingents the mansabdar was required to maintain and also fixed the payment for the maintenance of the required contingent. (For details see Unit 15).

The Mughal mansabdar received his pay as determined by their zat and sawar ranks either in cash (naqd) or in the form of territorial assignments (Jagirs).

For recruitment as mansabdar nationality was no bar. The Khanazads (or sons and descendants of mansabdars already in service) had the first claim to the appointment. The second source of recruitment were the immigrants from Iran and Central Asia. The third channel of recruitment was recommendation (tajwiz). Another category from which recruitment was made were the leading commanders of the enemy camp who were often tempted to desert their masters.

The Central ministers, princes of royal blood, provincial governors and important military commanders used to recommend persons for appointment and promotions. (For details, see Unit 15).

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### 13.6 DISTRIBUTION OF REVENUE RESOURCES AMONG THE RULING CLASS

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Shireen Moosvi have shown that 82% of the total revenue resources of the Empire was appropriated by 1,671 mansabdars. While the top 12 mansabdars controlled as much as 18.52% of the total income of the Empire, the remaining 1,149 mansabdars controlled only 30% of the revenue. Thus, there was an immense concentration of revenue resources in the hands of a few persons during the time of Akbar. This concentration continued under his successors. A. Jan Qaisar has calculated that 445 mansabdars under Shah Jahan claimed 61.5% of the revenue. And the top 25 mansabdars controlled 24.5% of the revenue.

The nobles, by and large, drew their income from the land revenue. There was immense concentration of wealth in the hands of a very small number of persons comprising the core of the Mughal ruling class. They did not spend the whole amount on their troopers.

which they claimed against their sawar ranks. This led to further concentration of wealth in the hands of the nobles.

## 13.7 LIFE STYLE OF THE RULING CLASS

With huge amounts of money at their disposal the ruling class led a life of great pomp and show. They maintained large establishment of wives, servants, camels and horses. The household of which the harem was the main part must have absorbed a reasonably large sum. And, yet, they were left with substantial wealth that could be spent on the construction of stately houses and works of public utility. Here we would like to give you a brief idea about the nobles building activities.

From Shaikh Farid Bhakkari's biographical work *Zakhirat-ul Khawanin* (1642), it appears that Mughal officers and nobles were fond of constructing attractive and imposing houses for their residence. Murtaza Khan Shaikh Farid Bukhari was a great builder of Akbar's time. In Ahmedabad he built a sarai, mosque and other buildings. During Jahangir's reign, Abdur Rahim Khan Khanan, Azam Khan, Khwaja Jahan Kabuli, etc. were great builders.

So far as the works of public utility are concerned, our source mentions a large number of sarais, hammams (public baths), wells, step-wells (baolis), water tanks, markets, roads, and gardens built by the nobles throughout the Empire. During the reign of Akbar, Murtaza Khan Shaikh Farid Bukhari built mosques, sarais, khanqahs and the tanks at Lahore, Agra etc. The wives and staff of nobles also took equal interest in constructing works of public utility. We get several references about religious and educational buildings such as mosques, madrasas, khanqahs, tombs and temples (devrah) built by Mughal nobles. Some of the Hindu nobles and officers also built mosques. Construction of tombs during one's own life time and for the deceased persons of one's family was a popular trend in the Mughal period. Beautiful gardens were laid out around these imposing structures. In constructing these tombs, the nobles sometimes vied with each other. Tombs were also built for sufis by their disciples. Mughal nobles and officers constructed public welfare buildings outside India. A number of Irani nobles at the Mughal court are reported to have funded the construction of mosques, sarais, etc. in Iran. Many nobles and officers also founded cities, towns and villages in their native places or in the territories under their jurisdiction. Sometimes the old existing towns were renovated and beautified with gardens, trees, roads and structures of public utility.

Whenever a new city or town was built it was provided with all the necessities of civil life and amenities of an urban settlement with the purpose of encouraging the people to settle down there. Laying out of gardens was a part of the nobles' cultural activities.

A. Jan Qaisar has shown a linkage between social values and building activity of the Mughal elite. He says that these values were a continuation of the long established Indian traditions. Why the building activity was undertaken on such a scale? It seems that prestige factor was important. It nourished competitive spirit for cultural exercises with a view of scoring over their compatriots. The desire was to perpetuate one's name for indefinite period. The aspiration unfolded itself in both the forms of their activities, private and public. Religious sanction, too, spurred the elite to construct charitable works, particularly mosques. Role model/expectation also motivated the elite to perform charitable acts. Masses looked to affluent sections to provide public utilities which were culturally identifiable, for example, hospitals, mosques, sarais, etc. Masses expected that materially prosperous persons should alienate a part of their wealth in their favour. This role was played pretty well by the Mughal nobles. It also resulted in the distribution of material resources—of whatever magnitude—of the society among masses.

The nobles maintained their own karkhanas to manufacture luxury items for their own consumption. Carpets, gold embroidered silks and high quality jewellery were the main items produced. Besides, they imported large number of luxury articles from different countries. The British and Dutch records give innumerable references to the demands made by the ruling class for which they used to pay handsomely.

Besides, hunting and other leisure and sports activities, marriages in the family, festivals, etc. were other occasions where this wealth was squandered freely.

### Check your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the organisation of the Mughal ruling class.

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- 2) How did the Mughal ruling class utilize the immense revenue resources at its disposal?

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## 13.8 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit, we have seen the evolution and development of the Mughal ruling class through various stages. In the beginning it emerged as a Turani-dominated class but later as a result of political exigencies, others such as Iranis, Indian Muslims, Rajputs, Marathas, and Afghans were recruited. Thus, it became a heterogeneous ruling class. The Mughal ruling class was organised through **mansabdari** and **jagirdari**, the two important institutions whose efficient working sustained the Mughal Empire for about 200 years. The **mansabdars** constituted the ruling class which was not only a prosperous class but also the elite of the society. They enjoyed the security of wealth amassed during their tenure of service and left large legacies to their families.

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## 13.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sections 13.2 and 13.3
- 2) See Section 13.4

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 13.5
- 2) See Section 13.7.