

The composition of the Mughal nobility

Within the first three decades of Akbar's reign, the imperial elite had grown enormously. As the Central Asian nobles had generally been nurtured on the Turko-Mongol tradition of sharing power with the royalty—an arrangement incompatible with Akbar's ambition of structuring the Mughal centralism around himself—the emperor's principal goal was to reduce their strength and influence. The emperor encouraged new elements to join his service, and Iranians came to form an important block of the Mughal nobility. Akbar also looked for new men of Indian background. Indian Afghans,

being the principal opponents of the Mughals, were obviously to be kept at a distance, but the Sayyids of Baraha, the Bukhārī Sayyids, and the Kambūs among the Indian Muslims were specially favoured for high military and civil positions.

More significant was the recruitment of Hindu Rajput leaders into the Mughal nobility. This was a major step, even if not completely new in Indo-Islamic history, leading to a standard pattern of relationship between the Mughal autocracy and the local despotism. Each Rajput chief, along with his sons and close relatives, received high rank, pay, perquisites, and an assurance that they could retain their age-old customs, rituals, and beliefs as Hindu warriors. In return, the Rajputs not only publicly expressed their allegiance but also offered active military service to the Mughals and, if called upon to do so, willingly gave daughters in marriage to

the emperor or his sons. The Rajput chiefs retained control over their ancestral holdings (*watan jāgīrs*) and additionally, in return for their services, often received land assignments outside their homelands (*tankhwa jāgīrs*) in the empire. The Mughal emperor, however, asserted his right as a “paramount.” He treated the Rajput chiefs as zamindars (landholders), not as rulers. Like all local zamindars, they paid tribute, submitted to the Mughals, and received a patent of office. Akbar thus obtained a wide base for Mughal power among thousands of Rajput warriors who controlled large and small parcels of the countryside throughout much of his empire.

The Mughal nobility came to comprise mainly the Central Asians (Tūrānīs), Iranians (Irānīs), Afghans, Indian Muslims of diverse subgroups, and Rajputs. Both historical circumstances and a planned imperial policy contributed to the integration of this complex and heterogeneous ruling class into a single imperial service. The emperor saw to it that no single ethnic or religious group was large enough to challenge his supreme authority.

Organization of the nobility and the army

In order to organize his civil and military personnel, Akbar devised a system of ranks, or *mansabs*, based on the “decimal” system of army organization used by the early Delhi sultans and the Mongols. The *mansabdārs* (rank holders) were numerically graded from commanders of 10 to commanders of 5,000. Although they fell under the jurisdiction of the *mīr bakhshī*, each owed direct subordination to the emperor.

The *mansabdārs* were generally paid in nonhereditary and transferable *jāgīrs* (assignments of land from which they could collect revenues). Over their

jāgīrs, as distinct from those areas reserved for the emperor (*khāliṣah*) and his personal army (*aḥadīs*), the assignees (*jāgīrdārs*) normally had no magisterial or military authority.

Akbar's insistence on a regular check of the *mansabdārs'* soldiers and their horses signified his desire for a reasonable correlation between his income and obligations. Most *jāgīrdārs* except the lowest-ranking ones collected the taxes through their personal agents, who were assisted by the local moneylenders and currency dealers in remitting collections by means of private bills of exchange rather than cash shipments.