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Mansabdari System of Akbar

Mansabdari was a unique system formally introduced by mughal emperor Akbar in 1571AD. The word Mansab is of Arabic origin meaning rank or position. Hence, Mansabdar means the holder of a rank, or an officer. The Mansabdari system was of Central Asian origin. All together there were 66 categories of Mansabdars but practically there were 33 categories. The appointment of Mansabdars was based on decimal system; within this system Akbar tried to integrate the three major functionaries i.e, the class of nobility, the armed forces and the bureaucracy into a common pool of administration.

Minimum mansab was ranked 10 and maximum was 10,000. But during the period of Akbar maximum was 5000, Akbar granted the mansab of 7000, only to few distinguished nobles of the time i.e, Mirza Ajij Koka and Raja Maan Singh, the former being Akbar's foster brother and the later being related to him by the ties of matrimony. Although the word mansabdar was a generic term popularly only those holding ranks upto 500 were called mansabdars, 500-2500 were called Amirs and from 2500 and above- Amir Umda or Amir-i-azam. Since, it was a single service, theoretically, a person was supposed to enter at the lowest level, and work his way up. But the king could and often did appoint distinguished people at a higher level.

Zat and Sawar Rank:

By 1591AD the member of the mansab came to be adopted in the form of pair. The first value of the pair was the Zat and the second value of the pair was Sawar. Zat indicated the personal pay and status of noble, and the Sawar ranked the actual number of horsemen he was expected to entertain. According to Abul Fazl, the mansabdars were grouped into three categories:

- a) If the Zat and Sawar mansab were equal then he belonged to the first category of mansabdar.

- b) If the Sawar mansab was half of Zat mansab then the mansabdar belonged to second category.
- c) If the Sawar mansab was less than half of the Zat mansab then it belonged to the third category.

Only under special circumstances the number of Sawar mansab would be more than the Zat mansab for example during the war or foreign aggression. This additional increase of Sawar was known as Mashrut mansab and after the fulfillment of the necessity the system was abolished.

Mansabdars were appointed only by the ruler. However, only at the recommendation of Mir-Bakshi the mansabdar were appointed. But if the mansabdar was promoted then he was promoted on the number of Zat which enhanced his salary. The principle of demotion was there on non performance but generally it was not practiced. Each Mansabdar was given dual responsibility of both civil and military obligations. Akbar started the rule of Dabhisti. The general rule was that for 10 sawars there should be 20 horses (i.e, each mansabdar should appointed to him). This was done to ensure the nobility of the cavalry which was the main fighting force of the mughals. Second horse was needed as a replacement if the mount was tired or injured or dead.

Changes introduced by Jahangir and Shah Jahan:

Akbar was the pioneer of Mansabdari system but, this system continued throughout the mughal rule further changes was made by Jahangir and Shah Jahan:

Changes made by Jahangir:

There was a cut in Mansabdari system right after the death of Akbar as Jahangir reduced the system of 2 Aspas to 1 Aspa. What this meant was unofficially the number of soldiers were increased if it was required by that particular mansabdar but officially the number of sawar was not to be entered in the sawar numerically granted to them. The advantage of this was he was facilitated with keeping more number of soldiers without bearing the financial burden of this.

Changes made by Shah Jahan:

During the time of Shah Jahan another reform took place in Mansabdari system. The number of Mansabdars increased but there was shortage of land because of Jagirdari crisis. During Shah Jahan's reign an order was passed to reduce the number of sawar under a particular Mansabdar. Now mansabdar were to be paid on a monthly scale. If a mansabdar did not get the total salary of 12 months then he could reduce the number of sawars under them. He was now not in position to pay the total salary of Mansabdar. If a mansabdar was not able to get the salary of six months then he was allowed to bring a huge reduction in the number of sawars but their rank was not

reduced and classification remains the same. This was the period which witnessed the Jahangir crisis in India.

Merits of Mansabdari System:

- Mansabdari system was a unique and distinct system and formed the backbone of the Mughal administration. It is said that, till the system functioned the Mughal state functioned well.
- It introduced the concept of Uniformity in the administration which led towards the political unification.
- It also weakened the caste and the feudal system. The two major weaknesses of the time. So, it made mandatory for the mansabdars to appoint soldiers from all caste and religions. Thus, Shivaji and Sher Shah applied this system. There was no discrimination on account of caste and religion and now they were put on the foot of equality. So, the ruler was able to obtain the loyalty of all his subjects.
- The system of Mansabdari succeeded in curbing the power of the feudal class and the class of nobility. Now, they did not belong themselves to the class of nobility they rather came to be recognized as administrative class who then received a fixed service conditions imposed on them.
- This Mansabdari system increased the power of the ruler and it further consolidated and crystallized the polity of the monarchical form of governance and from the time of Akbar Mughal state moved towards an intense form of administration.
- The Mansabdari system also gave recognition to merit. Akbar took stern measures to stop the dynastic influences.

Demerits of Mansabdari System:

The system was however, inherently weak, contemporary writers especially Badayuni has given graphic details how during the first half of Akbar's reign. Mansabdars cheated the government by bringing to master men from the streets in military uniform and passing them off as soldiers. It was by no means rare for troopers to substitute indifferent horses for good ones supplied to them by military departments. It took Akbar many years indeed to stamp out corruption. But this was only because of Akbar's uncommon ability as a leader and administrator and his vigilance and discipline.

There was lack of strong successors in the Mughal empire and it gave Mansabdar immense power and they tried to enter the political affairs and played a role of nobility. Mansabdari system could work only under a strong ruler because this system was intensely centralized form of administration. Therefore, a lot depended on the personality of the ruler and this weakness

came into existence right after the death of Aurangzeb as the mughal empire witnessed the series of a weak and incompetent rulers therefore, it led towards factionalism in the administration of the empire since, each mansabdar wanted to work on their own interest and therefore to maintain a balanced and uniform system of administration became very difficult.

Mansabdari system had no organic centre and lacked the cohesive force which must always be essential in a national army. The mansabdars got their salaries from the emperor and paid themselves the salaries to their troops. This made the troops more loyal to the mansabdars than to the king.

The pomp and display which had become natural with the mansabdars acted as an obstacle to military efficiencies. In spite of so many defects the mansabdari system was an important upon the military establishment of the medieval period. But it could only work under an able guidance which was only possible till the reign of Aurangzeb. Later on the Mansabdari system turned out to be weak and led towards the fragmentation of the empire. However, it also combine itself with several advantages for example, certain Rajput Mansabdars were diplomatically used against certain other Rajput chiefs with whom they were at feud. This system assured steady loyalty of the mansabdars to the emperor. Thus, we can say that Mansabdari system was perhaps the most significant administrative institution developed by Akbar.