

THE MUGHAL NOBILITY : A POLITICAL, ADMINISTRATIVE,
AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY ;
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE
HINDU NOBLE ELEMENTS.

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ABSTRACT

The subject of the nobility during the medieval period of Indian history is an interesting subject for study and research. It is at the same time a very neglected aspect of the study of medieval Indian history. The Marxist school of historians have hitherto not studied this particular subject. A few non-Marxist historians have dwelt upon this subject but have not studied it systematically. This particular aspect of the study of medieval Indian history provides a great scope for both political and economic historians, because the subject's relevance is related to many aspects - such as political, administrative, military, social, economic and so on. One may assert that the study of the nobility during the medieval Indian period involves only political and administrative themes as the nobility was primarily a political and administrative institution; but when one goes deeper into the study one finds that economic and social implications are also concurrently involved with the so called political and administrative institutionalization of the medieval Indian nobility. Leaving aside the early medieval Indian nobility as it is out of the context of the present study, the later medieval Indian or the Mughal nobility which is the subject of the present research, can be stated to be such an institution which proved to be the very blood-line of the Mughal empire and the empire developed, consolidated, and ultimately eclipsed along with the institution of the nobility, which incidentally also underwent the same historical process, while both the state and the institution of the nobility proved to be crucial and detrimental to each other's existence.

The medieval Indian state, like all the state-systems in different ages and places, had distinct features of its own. One of these features was the sustenance of the principle and practice of sharing the political power and authority. First and foremost, it has to be kept in mind that the medieval Indian state as a system or as an institution was alien to the Indian conditions as well as to its people. It was a system the genesis of which lay in the soil of Central Asia and which had been implanted in India, a foreign land, by a handful of Muslims, among the vast multitude of Hindus living in India since times immemorial.

The medieval period of Indian history has often been called the Muslim period of Indian history by the traditional historians only because the Muslims were the rulers. This period has been very conveniently divided into two sub-periods: the period of the Delhi Sultans and the period of the Mughal emperors. In the medieval period as a whole, there was a distinct operation of sharing political authority going on. Although this sharing of power vested in the state-system was a distinctive feature of the medieval period as a whole, during the earlier period it was shared by the Delhi Sultans and the nobles of Central Asian extraction. They were all Muslims. The nobles came along with the Sultans from Central Asia, so that the latter could utilize their help and services, for governing an alien people. On the other hand, the cupidity of the recalcitrant nobles who had clan and class ties with the Sultans, had to be checked and satisfied by extending to them some sort of political authority. The situation thus demanded an interaction between the two parties, i.e., the Sultans and the nobles. Each party was using and at the same-time depending upon the other. However, it is significant to note that the Delhi Sultans did not entertain the services

of the Hindu chiefs as partners and co-sharers of authority even though the Hindus were the original inhabitants of the land, and still exercised considerable influence with the people at the grass-roots level. And this was significant in the ultimate decline and final extinction of the Delhi Sultunate.

Thereafter came the Mughals, and with them came the very same ideology and practice, as also the compulsion of sharing the power in the state-system. Once again the shared power-structure was born out of necessity as well as compulsion. The Mughal rulers had to enlist the services of the nobles of their own land to govern the people of an alien Hindustan. And at the same time the Mughal emperors had to check and satisfy the fissiporous desires of the nobility to keep it under effective control and submission. But the Mughal emperors were different, in so much as they realized that without the help and co-operation of the Hindus, the position of the empire would be insecure in a land predominantly inhabited by the Hindus. Hence the Mughal sought and enlisted the power ^{of} Hindu chiefs for the Mughal imperial service. Thus the medieval Indian state was a unique political organisation wherein the highest power was not remaining with the emperors but was being shared by others or the nobles. It was a unique situation because no parallel in history can be traced. If we try to seek a similarity with the western medieval political institutions wherein the institution of the nobility was existent, one may maintain that there was no similarity between the two because in the west the nobility came up due to the weakness of the kings. The feudal lords and barons came to share political power

due to the increasing weakness of the kings and not due to the circumstances prevailing in the medieval Indian state.

Thus the problem of the Mughal nobility is a multi-faceted problem which is not shorn of allied problems such as political, administrative, military, and social and economic. Hence a study of the Mughal nobility becomes all the more imperative in the light of the above mentioned circumstances.

The topic of the present research is "The Mughal nobility: A political, administrative and socio-economic study; with special reference to the Hindu noble elements". The study begins with the study of the rise of the nobility as a significant factor in the political condition of medieval India. The source of the nobility is traced to Central Asian origin, and its institutionalisation in India under the Muslim kings is determined by the contemporary circumstances which were peculiar as also due to the Islamic character of the medieval Indian state. The nobility was not only a political group but it was a social factor as well, in the medieval Indian state. These two facts were responsible to give it the crucial place which it received in the medieval Indian state. The study here-after deals with the composition and organisation of the medieval Indian nobility. The transmutory character of the composition of the Mughal nobility is underlined, while the organisation of the Mughal nobility is discussed. Coming to the Hindu constituent of the Mughal nobility, the present study has discussed in detail the role and status of the Rajputs and the Marathas within the confines of the Mughal nobility, and concludes that these Hindu noble elements played a crucial role in the consolidation and eclipse of the Mughal empire. The role of the nobility in

the Mughal administration has been studied and it has been concluded that there was no branch or activity of the administration which was not out of the periphery of the Mughal nobility. The Mughal nobility was a potent force in the economy of the empire both as patrons and participants.

The activities of the Mughal nobility in the contemporary trading and commercial activities of the empire have been analysed. The activities and role executed by the Mughal nobility in the imperial social structure have been discussed and the social significance of this aristocratic class in the building up of the empire has been analysed. One of the broad conclusions arrived at is that the Mughal nobility was next only to the Mughal emperors in the Mughal state. Thus the Mughal nobility has been viewed upon as the most powerful factor in the empire's strength and power and also in its eventual disintegration in which the jagirdari crisis played no mean part.