

Study Of Military Innovation During Various Muslim Rulers In The Medieval Period

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The army of the Great Mughals was based on the Mansabdari system which was introduced by Akbar. It was managed by a department totally separate from the civil government of the provinces as now. On the other hand, the recruitment of the greater bulk of the army, its training and discipline, its maintenance and equipment, and the arranging of campaigns and camps were all done through officials who were also responsible for the Civil Administration of the province. There were no military divisions of the empire, apart from the provinces, like the present commands into which the country is divided. Single troopers got enlisted under the banner of some chiefs little richer or better known than themselves. These inferior leaders again joined greater commanders, and thus, by successive aggregation of groups, a great noble's divisions were gathered together. Hence, the military organisation was an important subject of the provincial government, as it was of the central.¹

The plain of Panipat in South-East Panjab has been the scene of some of the most historic battles in Indian history. From the strategic background of Afghanistan, the path for invaders lay along the lines of least resistance, Khaiber, Kurram, Tochi and Gomal passes on to the Panjab plains; for, the Indus has never proved an obstacle to an enterprising general, who may find the going rough on the south because of the deserts of Rajputana. Invading armies were forced to enter the

Ganges and Januma valleys through the narrow bottleneck between the north-eastern extremity of the desert and the foot of the Himalayas.²

The Mughals had a sound military administration, according to which three types of forces were maintained. Firstly, the contingents which every high official, Hindu or Muslim, from the governor downwards had to maintain, in accordance with his rank. This was a part of the regular standing army of the Mughal Empire, maintained for the general security of the realm. Secondly, the provincial army, which consisted of the contingents of minor Zamindars, who were called upon to render service at the time of war. The third group of local or provincial forces consisted of cavalry, infantry and other arms, mentioned in the Ain-i-Akbari as the quotas allotted to Sarkars and Mahals, stationed under the Faujdars and petty Faujdars.

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Cantonments were set up at strategic places, such as Attock, Lahore, Sialkot, Multan, Jammu, Nagarkot, Mau, Jaswan, Kahlur, Guler, Mankot, Jasrota, and Lakhapur. The Mansabdars were granted military Jagirs in every corner of the province and they supplied contingents in the time of war. These Jagirdars had greatly helped the Mughal Emperors and eventually developed into petty chiefs. Apart from the Jagirdars, there were Faujdars of the forts, who maintained peace and order in their localities, kept the roads free from robbers and thieves, and enforced imperial regulations. They held a small force under them to perform police duties, to put down smaller rebellions, disperse or arrest robber gangs, take cognizance of all violent crimes, and make demonstrations of force to overcome opposition to the revenue authorities or the criminal judge or the censor.³

No large standing army was maintained by the State. "All able-bodied citizens of the empire were potential soldiers of the imperial army. The history of the Mughul army is largely the history of the *Mansabdari* system. Besides the *Man-sabdars*, there were the *Dakhilis* or supplementary troopers placed under the command of *Mansabdars* and paid by the State, and *Ahadlsor* a body of gentleman troopers, a special class of horsemen, who were generally round the

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Emperor's person, and owed allegiance to no one else. The *Mansabdari* system was not free from corruption. "False musters," writes Irvine, "were an evil from which the Mughul army suffered in its most palmy days. Nobles would lend to each other the men to make up their quota, or needy idlers from the bazars would be mounted on the first baggage pony that came to hand and counted in with the others as efficient soldiers".⁴ Steps were taken by Akbar's Government to remove these evil practices. Regulations were introduced for periodical musters, a *chihrah* or descriptive roll of a *Mansabdar* was drawn up, "showing his name, his father's name, his tribe or caste, his place of origin, followed by details of his personal appearance"; and the system of branding horses, known as *Dagh-o-mahalli* or simply *Dagh*, was revived.⁵ But these measures could not effectively check the evils.

To express it in modern terms, the Mughul forces were composed of (i) cavalry, (ii) infantry, (iii) artillery and (iv) navy. The cavalry was the most important of all these branches. The infantry was largely composed of men drawn from ordinary townsmen and peasants; and as a part of the fighting strength of the army it was insignificant. Guns, manufactured within the country and also imported from outside, were used in wars by Babur, Humayun, and Akbar, but the artillery was much more perfect and numerous in 'Alamgir's reign' than before. The artillery was wholly state-paid. There was nothing like any strong navy in the modern sense of the term, but AbulFazl writes of an "Admiralty Department", the functions of which were (i) to build boats of all kinds for river transport, (ii) to fit out strong boats for transporting war-elephants (iii) to recruit expert seamen, (iv) to supervise the rivers, and (v) to impose, collect or remit river duties and tolls. A fleet of 768 armed vessels and boats was stationed at Dacca to protect the coast of Bengal against the Mugs and the Arakanese pirates. But the naval establishment of the Mughuls does not seem to have been very formidable.

The Mughul army, though not so inefficient but it was with following defects. Firstly, it was not a national army, but was a mixture of diverse elements, each trying to follow its own peculiar methods and manoeuvres. Thus, though its numerical strength increased as years went on, it grew cumbersome and hard to be controlled and managed. Secondly, the soldiers did not owe direct allegiance to the Emperor, but were more attached to their immediate recruiters and superiors, whose acute jealousies and bitter rivalries often destroyed the chances of

success in campaigns. Lastly, the pomp and display of the Mughul army in camp, and on the march, were largely responsible for marring its efficiency. Akbar could at times depart from this practice. But generally the imperial army looked like "an unwieldy moving city" and was encumbered with all the lavish paraphernalia of the imperial court, including a proportion of the harem and its attendants, mounted on elephants and camels, a travelling audience-hall, musicians' gallery, offices, workshops, and bazars. Elephants and camels carried the treasure; hundreds of bullock-carts bore the military stores.

The Bakhshi, who was the second in rank to the governor, was usually the head of the provincial army. He was in charge of the military establishment stationed in the province. His assistants held yearly inspections of horses and reviews of soldiers according to the instructions received from the Mir Bakhshi. He issued warrants for payment to the Mansabdars serving the province when an expedition was ordered. The Bakhshi saw to it that the various officers called upon to take part in it had the requisite number of men and horses under them. In consultation with the leader of the expedition, the Bakhshi looked after the needs of the army and was represented by his Naib in the expedition as well.⁶

There were three different groups of forces in the provinces. It was maintained more for the general service of the empire than for that of the province. At first it was paid usually by assignments made to the Mansabdar carrying an in-come equal to his salary. Later on, the system of assignments was discouraged by Akbar and disbursement of salaries was made directly from the imperial treasuries.

So far as supply and transport were concerned, there was no separate department for them. Other arrangements were also not adequate. For their baggage and camp equipment, the Mansabdars, helped by the local authorities, made their own transport arrangements as best as they could. The provisions for the Mansabdars and their men were provided by the Banjaras who followed the army.

Thus regular army was primarily a standing army. The pay of mounted men included the cost of maintaining their equipment and horses. In the artillery, which was entirely imperial and administered as a department of the house-hold and not of the army, the pay ranged between about rupees three and rupees seven.

The infantry formed a miscellaneous crowd. It included musketeers and swordsmen among the combatant services, and spy

guards, wrestlers, porters, sappers and miners, carpenters, water carriers and camp followers of various kinds. The remuneration of the first categories ranged between three and six rupees monthly; that of porters between two half and three rupees; of wrestlers between two and fifteen rupees; and of the rest from a Dam to a rupee. As to the significance of these rates, it would be sufficient to note that the higher pay sanctioned for the cavalry was, in part at least, an index to a difference in social position. Service in the cavalry was respectable, and a gentleman could enter it. But the other branches of the army comprised almost all classes, even the menials, though a partial exception could be made in the case of artillery, in which foreign experts were employed in increasing numbers as time went on.

The so-called army indicated under the Subas was in the nature of a militia and not a regular army. The figures in question represented, in reality, general estimates relating to a sort of militia or the fighting manpower, which each province, Sarkar or Mahal was expected to be able to raise and supply to the government in time of need or whenever demanded to do so. The proportion of the contribution of cavalry of each locality was determined more by the material qualities than by mere numerical strength of its population, and of infantry more by the numerical strength than by the material qualities.⁷

The position of the local cavalry was probably more regular; their distribution over the provinces corresponded roughly to the importance of the Zamindar and it may be inferred that the forces enumerated under this head were of substantial military value, consisting of troops maintained by Zamindars at their own cost, but liable to be called in by the Emperor in case of need.

Referring to the grand camp of the Emperor Aurangzeb at Ahmadnagar, Grant Duff comments that "it proved a serious encumbrance to the movements of his army, while the devouring expense of such establishments pressed hard on his finances, and soon crippled, even the most necessary of his military and political arrangements."⁸ This sort of camp life naturally produced luxury and indiscipline in the army. The inevitable deterioration set in under Jahangir and Shah Jahan and manifested itself fully in the time of Aurangzeb. The army became incapable of "swift action or brilliant adventure".⁹ In this respect, the then light cavalry of Shivaji, maintained by him under strict discipline, was far better than the Mughul army.

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