

Mansabdar

The **Mansabdari system** was the administrative system of the Mughal Empire introduced by Akbar. The word mansab is of Arabic origin meaning rank or position. The system, hence, determined the rank of a government official. Every civil and military officer was given a ‘mansab’ and different which could be increased by ten were used for ranking officers. It was also meant for fixing the salaries and allowances of officers.

It was a system whereby nobles were granted the rights to hold a jagir, which meant revenue assignments (not land itself) for services rendered by them but the authority bestowed upon them was not unbridled but with the direct control of these nobles in the hands of the king. Abul Fazl has mentioned 66 grades of mansabdars but in practice there were not more than 33 mansabs. During the early reign of Akbar, the lowest grade was ten and the highest was 7,00,000. Higher mansabs were given to princes and Rajput rulers who accepted the suzerainty of the emperor. The main feature of this was mansab or office a person held and it was approved by the emperor.....

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History

The system was common to both the military and the civil department and is believed to have originated in Mongolia. It was prevalent during the reign of Babur and Humayun as well. Akbar made important changes to the system and made it more efficient.

The 'mansab' of a noble implied the following:

- (a) Salary of the officer
- (b) Status of the officer
- (c) Number of soldiers, horses and elephants etc., maintained by an officer.

Two grades delineated the mansabdars. Those mansabdars whose rank was one thousand or below were called the Amir, while those above 1,000 were called the Amiral Kabir (Great Amir). Some great Amirs whose ranks were above 5,000 were also given the title of Amir-al Umara (Amir of Amirs).

Zat and Sawar

During later years of his reign, Akbar introduced the rank of 'Zat' and 'Sawar' in the Mansabdari system. Different views have been expressed regarding these terms. According to Blochmann, every mansabdar had to maintain as many soldiers as were indicated by his rank of 'Zat' while the rank of 'sawar' indicated the number of horsemen among them. Irvin expressed the view that 'Zat' indicated the actual number of cavalry under a mansabdar besides other soldiers while 'sawar' was an additional honour.

According to R.P. Tripathi, the rank of 'sawar' was given to mansabdars to fix up their additional allowances. A mansabdar was paid rupees two per horse. Therefore, if a mansabdar received the rank of 500 'sawar' he was given rupees one thousand additional allowance. Abdul Aziz is of the opinion that while the rank of 'zat' fixed the number of other soldiers under a mansabdar, the rank of 'sawar' fixed the number of his horsemen.

A.L. Srivastava has opined that while the rank of 'zat' indicated the total number of soldiers under a mansabdar, the rank of 'sawar' indicated the number of horsemen under him. During the reign of Akbar, the mansabdars were asked to keep as many horsemen as were indicated by numbers of their ranks of 'sawar'. But, the practice was not maintained by other Mughal emperors.

(a) No. of 'Sawar' = No. of 'Zat' => 1st Class Mansabdar

(b) No. of 'Sawar' = 1/2 the No. of 'Zat' => 2nd Class Mansabdar

(c) No. of 'Sawar' < 1/2 the No. of 'Zat' => 3rd Class Mansabdar

Mansabdars were graded on the number of armed cavalymen, or *sowars*, which each had to maintain for service in the imperial army. Thus, all mansabdars had a *zat*, or personal ranking, and a *sawar*, or a troop ranking. All servants of the empire, whether in the civil or military departments, were graded in this system.

There were thirty-three grades of mansabdars ranging from 'commanders of 10' to 'commanders of 10,000'. Till the middle of Akbar's reign, the highest rank an ordinary officer could hold was that of a commander of 5,000. The more exalted grades between commanders of 7,000 and 10,000 were reserved for the royal princes. During the period following Akbar's reign, the grades were increased up to 20,000 and 20-25 rupees per horse was paid to a mansabdar.

Additionally, there was no distinction between the civil and military departments. Both civil and military officers held mansabs and were liable to be transferred from one branch of the administration to another. Each mansabdar was expected to maintain prescribed number of horses, elephants, and equipment, according to his rank and dignity. These rules, though initially strictly enforced, were later slackened. During Aurangzeb's reign the number of mansabdars was around 700 or more.

Main Features

1. The king himself appointed the mansabdars. He could enhance the mansab, lower it or remove it.
2. A mansabdar could be asked to perform any civil or military service.
3. There were 33 categories of the mansabdars. The lowest mansabdar commanded 10 soldiers and the highest 10,000 soldiers. Only the princes of the royal family and most important Rajput rulers were given a mansab of 10,000.
4. A mansabdar was paid his salary in cash.
5. The salary due to the soldiers was added to the personal salary of the mansabdar. At times, for paying salaries to soldiers, a jagir was given to him. But the revenue was realised by officers and necessary adjustments made.
6. The mansabdari system was not hereditary.
7. In addition to meeting his personal expenses, the mansabdar had to maintain out of his salary a stipulated quota of horses, elephants, camels, mules and carts. A mansabdar holding a rank of 5,000 had to maintain 340 horses, 100 elephants, 400 camels, 100 mules and 160 carts.

8. Handsome salaries were paid to a mansabdar. A mansabdar with a rank of 5,000 got a salary of 30,000 rupees per month, one of 3,000 could get 17,000 rupees, while a mansabdar of 1,000 got 8,200 rupees.

9. The horses were classified into six categories and the elephants into five.

10. For every ten cavalry men, the mansabdar had to maintain twenty horses for horses that had to be provided rest while on a march and replacements were necessary in times of war

11. A record was kept of the description ('huliya') of each horseman under a mansabdar and of branding ('dag') horses to prevent corruption.

12. The troops raised by the emperor but not paid directly by the state and placed under the charge of *mansabadars* were known as **Dakhili**

Changes introduced by Jahangir and Shah Jahan

1. Difference in the highest mansab: After Akbar, higher mansabs were introduced. During Jahangir and Shah Jahan's reigns, the mansab of a prince was raised to 40,000 and 60,000 respectively as against of 12,000 during Akbar's reign.

2. Reduction in the number of soldiers: Shah Jahan reduced the number of soldiers kept by a mansabdar. Now each mansabdar was required to keep one-third of the original number. Sometimes, it was even reduced to one-fourth or one-fifth.

3. Difference in the categories of mansabdars: During the time of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, the number of categories of mansabdars was reduced to 11 as against 33 mentioned by Abul Fazl in his book Akbarnama.

4. Relaxation in control: With Akbar's death, the control exercised over mansabdars became a bit slack.

Merits of the mansabdari System

1. Removal of the chief defects of the jagirdari system: The Mansabdari system proved helpful in removing the defects inherent in the Jagirdari system. With mansabdars receiving salaries from the emperor, they were more loyal and chances of their revolt were minimised.

2. Increased military efficiency: By regulating the maintenance of the horses and horsemen, military efficiency increased.

3. Extra revenue to the state: The entire land became state-land and officials realised the revenue drawn from it.

4. Merit as the basis of selection: Initially the system was not hereditary, a mansab was given to an official on the basis of merit and could be enhanced or lowered. But eventually it did become hereditary.

Demerits of the Mansabdari System

1. The mansabdars got their salaries from the emperor and paid salaries to their troops by themselves. This made the troops more loyal to the mansabdars than to the king.

2. The system proved very expensive due to the high salaries paid to the mansabadars.

3. Dishonest mansabdars and officials used to ally together during inspection, borrowed horses from one another and showed their full quota.

4. Caste system prevailed in the mansabdari system.

5. Since the property of mansabdars will be confiscated by the state after their deaths, they tend to spend lavishly during their lifetimes. This corrupted morality and had an adverse effect on their efficiency.

See also

- Mughal Empire
- Akbar
- Aurangzeb
- Afzal Khan
- Subedar
- Sawar
- Sepoy
- Hyder Ali
- Mughal weapons
- Humayun

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