

Mansabdari System of Akbar:

Origin:

Mansabdari was a system of army and civil services introduced by Akbar in place of the Jagirdari system.

Strictly speaking Akbar was not the originator of this system. It was originally a system introduced by 'Khalifa' Abba Saiyed and thereafter imported into India.

Akbar introduced several changes in this system. This system was the pillar of the Mughal administration. By abolishing the jagirdari system, the mansabdari system was introduced. It proved quite effective.

Meaning of the Mansabdari System:

The 'Mansab' is an Arabic word meaning rank or position or status of a person. Thus Mansabdari was a system in which the rank of a government official was determined. Every civil and military officer was given a 'mansab'. Different numbers which could be divided by ten were used for ranking officers. It was also meant for fixing the salaries and allowances of officers.

Categories of Mansabs:

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 5000. Towards the end of the reign it was raised to 7000. According to Badauni it was fixed at 12,000. Higher mansabs were given to princes and Rajput rulers who accepted the suzerainty of Akbar.

Significance of a mansab:

The mansab of a Mughal 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.

‘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.

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.

Some Historians have 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.

Main Features of the Mansabdari System:

1. The king himself appointed the mansabdars. He could enhance the mansab, lower down 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. Sometimes for paying the salaries to the soldier, a jagir was given to the mansabdar. But the revenue was realised by officers and necessary adjustments made.
6. 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 and mules and carts.
8. A mansabdar holding a rank of 5000 had to maintain 340 horses, 100 elephants, 400 camels, 100 mules and 160 carts.
9. Handsome salaries were paid to a Mansabdar. A mansabdar with a rank of 5,000 got a salary of Rs. 30,000 per month; a mansabdar of 3,000 could get Rs. 17,000 and a mansabdar of 10,000 got rupees 8,200.
10. The horses were classified into six categories and the elephants into five.
11. For every ten cavalry men, the Mansabdar had to maintain twenty horses for horses had to be provided rest while on march and replacements were necessarily in times of war.
12. A record of the description (‘huliy’) of each horseman under a mansabdar and of branding (‘dag’) horses to prevent corruption was kept.

Merits of the Mansabdari System:

1. Removal of the chief defects of the jagirdari system:

The Mansabdari system proved very helpful in removing the defects inherent in the jagirdari system as such. Now the mansabdars got their salaries from the emperor, they were more loyal to him. The chances of their revolt were minimised.

2. Increased military efficiency:

By regulating the maintenance of the horses and horsemen, the military efficiency of the army was increased.

3. Extra revenue to the state:

Now the entire land became state land. The state officials realised the revenue. Earlier this was done by jagirdars.

4. Merit as the basis of selection:

Mansabdari system was not hereditary. A mansab was given to an official on merit. It could be enhanced or lowered down.

Demerits of the Mansabdari System:

1. 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.
2. The system proved very expensive.
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 a mansabdar was confiscated after his death, he used to spend it lavishly during his life time.

This made the nobles luxurious and it led to their moral degradation which had an adverse effect on their efficiency