

Chapter 9

Kings and Chronicles The Mughal Courts

- Chronicles of the Mughal Emperor provides us valuable informations about the institution of Mughal state. These texts clearly depicted the policies of Mughal Empire which they sought to impose on their domain.
- Babur was the founder of Mughal Empire. His grandson, Akbar, was considered as the greatest Mughal Emperor.
- Akbar did not only consolidate his empire but also made it one of the strongest empires of his time.
- Mughal chronicles were written by mostly Mughal courtiers, who mainly focused on the events related to the rulers, their family, the court and wars and the administration.
- Persian was used as the main language.
- Paintings were done on the chronicles to make them attractive.
- Two most important illustrated Mughal official histories were—Akbar Nama and Badshah Nama.
- According to Abu'l Fazl, the Mughal emperor had the responsibility to protect the Jan, Mai, names and din of his subject.
- Shahjahan's daughter Jahanara took part in many architectural planning of new capital of the empire, Shahjahanbad.
- Imperial Kitabkhana were the main centres for the creation of manuscripts. Painters played an important role in the creation of Mughal manuscripts.
- Paper-makers required to prepare folio of manuscripts, calligrapher copied the text, gilders illuminated the pages, painter illustrated the scene from the text, bookbinders collected the individual folios and set them within ornamental covers.
- Akbar Nama has three volumes. Every volume contained information of ten lunar years. Its first two volumes were written by Lahori, which were later on revised by Wazir Sadullah Khan. The third volume is written by wazir, because at that time Lahori became very old and was unable to write.
- Gulbadan Begum wrote Humayun Nama. It gives us a glimpse into the domestic world of Mughals.
- Jharokha darshan was introduced by Akbar. According to the emperor it began his day at sunrise with a few religious prayer and then used to appear in a small balcony, i.e. the Jharokha in East direction. Below, a crowd wanted to have a look of the emperor.

- Court histories of the Mughals were written in Persian language in the 10th /17th centuries came from different parts of the subcontinents and they are now the Indian languages.
- All Mughal government officials held rank with two designation—zat and sawar. In the 17th century, mansabdar of 1,000 Zat or above was ranked as nobles.

The monarchs of the Mughal Empire considered themselves as legitimate rulers of vast Indian sub-continent. They appointed court historians to write on accounts of their achievements. Modern historians called these texts as chronicles, as they presented a continuous chronological record of events.

The Mughals and Their Empire:

- The name Mughal derives from the term 'Mongol'. The Mughals were descendants of the Turkish ruler Timur on the paternal side. Zahiruddin Babur was related to Ghenghis Khan from his mother's side.
- Babur was driven from Farghana by the warring Uzbeks. First he established himself at Kabul and then in 1526 came to Indian sub-continent.
- Babur's successor, Nasiruddin Humayun (1530-40, 1555-56) expanded the frontiers of the empire, but lost it to the Afghan leader Sher Shah Sur. In 1555, Humayun defeated the Surs, but died a year later.
- Jalaluddin Akbar (1556-1605) was the greatest of all the Mughal emperors. He expanded and consolidated his empire making it the largest, strongest and richest.
- Akbar had three fairly able successors Jahangir (1605-27), Shah Jahan (1628-58) and Aurangzeb (1658-1707). After the death of Aurangzeb (1707), the power of Mughal dynasty diminished.

Different Chronicles of Mughals:

- Chronicles commissioned by the Mughal emperors are an important source for studying the empire and its court.
- The authors of Mughal chronicles were invariably courtiers. The famous chronicles are Akbar Nama, Shahjahan Nama and Alamgir Nama.
- Turkish was the mother tongue of Mughals, but it was Akbar who made Persian the leading language of Mughal court.
- Persian became Indianised by absorbing local idioms. Urdu sprang from the interaction of Persian with Hindavi.
- All books in Mughal India were handwritten manuscripts and were kept in Kitabkhana . i.e. scriptorium.
- The creation of a manuscript involved paper makers, scribes or calligraphers, gilders, painters, bookbinders, etc.

- Akbar's favourite calligraphy style was the nastaliq, a fluid style with long horizontal strokes. Muhammad Husayn of Kashmir was one of the finest calligraphers at Akbar's court who was honoured with the title 'Zarrin Kalam' (Golden pen).

The Paintings of Mughal Period:

- Abu'l Fazl described painting as a 'magical art', but the production of painting was largely criticised by the Ulama, as it was prohibited by the Quran as well as by the 'hadis'.
- Hadis described life event of prophet Muhammad which restricted the deception of living beings as they regarded it as function of God.
- The Safavid kings and the Mughal Emperors patronised the finest artists like Bihzad, Mir Sayyid Ali, Abdus Samad, etc.

Historical Text of Mughals:

Akbar Nama and the Badshah.Nama:

- The Akbar Nama written by Abu'l Fazl is divided into three books, of which the third one is Ain-i Akbari which provided a detailed description of Akbar's regime.
- The Badshah Nama was written by Abul Hamid Lahori about the reign of Shahjahan. Later, it was revised by Sadullah Khan.
- The Asiatic Society of Bengal founded by Sir William Jones in 1784 undertook the editing, printing and translation of many Indian manuscripts, including Akbar Nama and Badshah Nama.

The Ideal Kingdom of Mughal Empire:

- Iranian Sufi thinker Suhrawardi developed the idea that there was a hierarchy in which the Divine Light was transmitted to the king who then became the source of spiritual guidance for his subjects.
- The Mughal artists, from the 17th century onwards began to portray emperor wearing the haloto symbolise the light of God.
- Abu'l Fazl described the ideal of Sulh-i kul (absolute peace) as the cornerstone of enlightened rule.
- In sulh-i kul all religions and schools of thought had freedom of expression but they did not undermine the authority of the state or fight among themselves.
- Akbar abolished the discriminating pilgrimage tax in 1563 and Jizya in 1564.
- Abu'l Fazl defined sovereignty as a social contract i.e., the emperor protected life, property, honour and faith and in return demanded obedience and a share of resources.

Capitals and Courts of the Mughals:

- The capital cities of the Mughals frequently shifted during the 16th and 17th centuries.
- Babur took over the Lodhi capital of Agra.
- In 1570, Akbar decided to build a new capital, Fatehpur Sikri.
- Akbar commissioned the construction of a white marble tomb for Shaikh Salim Chisthi at Sikri. He also constructed Buland Darwaza here after the victory in Gujarat.
- In 1585 the capital was shifted to Lahore to bring the North-West in control and to watch the frontier.
- In 1648, under the rule of Shah Jahan, the capital was transferred to Shahjahanabad with the Red Fort, the Jama Masjid, the Chandni Chowk and spacious homes for the nobility.
- In Mughal Court, status was determined by spatial proximity to the king.
- Once the emperor sat on the throne, no one was permitted to move from his position without permission.
- The forms of salutation to the ruler indicated the person's status in the hierarchy.
- The emperor began his day at sunrise with personal religious devotions and then appeared on a small balcony, the jharoka for the view (darshan) of his subjects.
- After that the emperor walked to the public hall of audience (Diwan-i-am) to conduct the primary business of his government.
- The Mughal kings celebrated three major festivals in a year i.e. the solar and lunar
- birthdays of the Monarch and Nauroz, the Iranian New Year on the vernal equinox.
- Grand titles were adopted by the Mughal emperors at the time of coronation or after a victory.
- The titles like Asaf Khan, Mirza Raja were given to the nobles.
- Whenever a courtier met with the emperor, he had to offer nazr (a small amount of money) or peshkash (a large amount of money).

The Mughal Household:

- The term 'harem' was used to refer to the domestic world of the Mughals.
- The Mughal household consisted of the emperor's wives and concubines, his near and distant relatives (mother, step-and foster-mothers, sisters, daughters, daughters-in-law, aunts, children, etc) and female servants and slaves.
- Polygamy was practised widely by the ruling class.

- Both the Rajputs and the Mughals took marriage as a way at cementing political relationships and forging alliances.
- After Nour Jahan, Mughal queens and princesses began to control significant financial resources.
- The bazaar of Chandni Chowk was designed by Jahanara.
- Gulbadan Begum, daughter of Babur wrote 'Humayun Nama' which was considered as an important source of Mughal Empire.

The Officials in Mughal Administration:

- In Mughal period, the nobility was recruited from diverse ethnic and religious group. In Akbar's imperial service Turani and Iranian nobles played a dominant role.
- Two ruling groups of Indian origin, the Rajputs and the Indian Muslims (Shaikhzadas) entered the imperial service from 1560 onwards.
- The emperor personally reviewed changes in rank, titles and official postings.
- Akbar designed mansab system which established spiritual relationships with a select band of his nobility by treating them as his disciples.
- Some important officials were Mir Bakshi (paymaster general), Diwan-i ala (Finance minister) and sadr-us-sudur (minister of grants and incharge of appointing local judges or qazis), etc. The keeping of exact and detailed rewards was a major concern of the Mughal administration.
- The Mir Bakshi supervised the corps of court writers who recorded all applications and documents of courts.
- News reports and important official documents travelled across the Mughal Empire by imperial post which included round-the-clock relays of foot-runners (qasid or pathmar) carried papers rolled up in bamboo containers.
- The division of functions established at the centre was replicated in the provinces (subas),
- The local administration was looked after the level of the paragana by three semi-hereditary officers, the qanungo (keeper of revenue records), the chaudhuri (incharge of revenue collection) and the qazi.
- Persian language was made the language of administration throughout, but local languages were used for village accounts.

Jesuit Missionaries in the Mughal Court:

- Mughal Emperors assumed many titles like Shahenshah, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, etc,
- All conquerors who sought to make their way into the Indian sub-continent had to cross the Hindukush mountains. Thus, the Mughal tried to ward off this potential danger, and tried to control Kabul and Qandahar.
- Europe got knowledge of India through the accounts of Jesuit missionaries, travellers, merchants and diplomats.

- Akbar was curious about Christianity and the first Jesuit mission reached the Mughal Court at Fatehpur Sikri in 1580.
- The Jesuit accounts are based on personal observation and shed light on the character and mind of the emperor.

Akbar's Quest for Religion:

- Akbar's quest for religions knowledge led to interfaith debates in the Ibadat Khana at Fatehpur Sikri, between learned Muslims, Hindus, Jainas, Parsis and Christians.
- Increasingly, Akbar moved away from the orthodox Islamic ways of understanding religions towards a self-conceived eclectic form of divine worship focused on light and sun.
- Akbar and Abu'l Fazl tried to create a philosophy of light and used it to shape the image of the king and ideology of the state. King was a divinely inspired individual who had supreme sovereignty over his people and complete control over his enemies.
- With these liberal ideas, the Mughal rulers could effectively controlled the heterogeneous population of Indian sub-continent for a century and a half.

Important terms:

- Chronicles: It is a continuous chronological record of events.
- Manuscript: The handwritten records.
- Divine theory of kingship: The king was believed as the representative of god, acquired his powers from him and therefore had to be obeyed.
- Sulh-i-kul: It is state policy of religious tolerance.
- Jizya: A tax imposed on non-muslims in lieu of military service.
- Mansabdar: All royal officers were known as mansabdars.
- Chahar taslim: A form of salutation to the emperor which is done four times.
- Tajwiz: A petition presented to the emperor by a nobleman recommending an application to the post of a mansabdar.

Time line:

- 1526 – Babur established Mughal dynasty in India.
- 1530 – Humayun succeeds the Mughal throne.
- 1556 – After the second battle of Panipat Akbar succeeds to the throne.
- 1563 – Akbar abolished the pilgrimage tax.
- 1585 – Akbar shifted his capital from Fatehpur Sikri to Lahore.
- 1589 – Babur Nama was translated in Persian and Abu'l Fazl wrote the Akbar Nama.
- 1605-22 – Jahangir wrote Jahangir Nama.

- 1648 – Shahjahanabad became the new capital of the Mughal Empire.
- 1668 – Alamgir Nama was written by Muhammad Kazim. It gives a historical account of the first decade of Aurangzeb's rule.
- 1707 – Aurangzeb died.
- 1857 – The last ruler of the Mughal dynasty was overthrown by the British.

