

PLACE OF MIR BAKHSHI IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE MUGHAL EMPEROR AKBAR

Tajammal Hussain

Ph.D. Scholar

Department of History and Pakistan Studies

University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Pakistan

Dr. Ghulam Shabbir

Assistant Professor

Department of History and Pakistan Studies

University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Mir Bakhshi was the head of the army and the minister of defense, but when Akbar introduced the mansabdari system, civil officers and military officers were all appointed and all these mansabdars were declared subordinate to Mir Bakhshi. Mir Bakhshi's powers extended to both military and civil matters. This research is showing how the Mughal dynasty had reached to the highest level during the reign of Akbar, he strengthened the governmental affairs and succeeded in establishing a central government of his own over the whole of India.

KEY WORDS: Mansabdar, Mir Samman, Ummrah, Diwan, Wazir, Recruitment, Battlefield, paymaster

Mir Bakhshi was the head of the army in the Mughal Empire. Mir Bakhshi was the equal of Diwan in terms of authority, status and contemporary influence. We see the title of Mir Bakhshi only in the Mughal period; however, if we study it, we find that it was called by different names even during the period of the Sultans of Delhi.¹ During the rule of Muslims, the powers of the Wazir were very high and wide, in which all civil and military matters were mentioned. Sultans of Delhi were the first to realize the ulterior dangers arising from all these extensive powers, only Balban, who withdrew military powers from the vizier and created for him an entirely separate one. The Sultan of Delhi succeeded in establishing an independent department.² Thus a new department of all military powers and affairs was established within the central government. During the time of the Delhi Sultans, the term had many names, but their meaning and powers were generally the same, conveying the same meaning. In the Delhi Sultanate's government, this post had many names such as Dewan-e- Arz or Aarz, etc. Coming to the duties of Dewane Arz, he was a representative of the king and the absolute head of the army, who possessed the highest powers in his department and his powers were unlimited.³

Imad-ul-Mulk Dewan Azar of Balban had said on one occasion that the king is the head of the army and I am his chief, while the army is the protector of the subjects of the kingdom. Dewane Arz had direct access to the King, who was always ahead of the in presenting the annual reports and lists of his department directly to the King. Recruiting the army, maintaining the troops in good condition, maintaining military discipline, inspecting the horses and soldiers at regular intervals and keeping them armed for campaigns etc., all these responsibilities were much more difficult for this department which he used to do efficiently.⁴ The name of this department was changed after the Mughals in India, but all its affairs and powers remained almost the same as those already existing during the Sultanate of Delhi. It was changed to Mir Bakhshi and it was named Mir Bakhshi throughout India during the Mughal period.⁵

According to one tradition, the word Bakhshi is derived from the Sanskrit word Bhakshu, but its use is seen in Eastern Turkey and Persian in the Mughal period, but from this, the preeminence of Buddhism is seen, and the preeminence and military position are apparently two contradictory things.⁶

Bartholomew Laffer states that according to Chandradas, the word is derived from the Mongolian word Baksi, the Mongolian word Baksi meaning a teacher, which he sees as a cognate of the Sanskrit words Guru and Acharya. Thus, apparently, we should abandon the idea that this word is derived from the Sanskrit word Bakhshu. In Central Asia, Baksi was never used in the sense of religious preceptors of Buddhism, thus proving that the position of Mir Bakhshi was in India, it is reserved only for the Mughal emperors, which in terms of its meaning is the substitute of Diwan-e-Arz.⁷

In the Mughal Empire, Mir Bakhshi as the head of his department had the same powers that the Diwan Sar used to enjoy during the Delhi Sultanate period, but the Mughal Empire did not limit Mir Bakhshi to his department only. He was also very close to the king due to which his prestige increased considerably.⁸ According to the military rules, the recruitment of military employees, maintaining the position of the mansabdars on fulfilling their duties and presenting the mansabdars for inspection at regular intervals every year and paying their salaries etc.⁹ Due to this responsibility, Mir Bakhshi's authority and prestige continued to increase. Due to his relationship with the military department, he was closely related to every official, therefore, it was necessary for him to be present in the court. Apart from this, Mir Bakhshi used to present all the matters related to his department before the king. People of different races, including Iranians, Romans, Englishmen, Indians, Kashmiris, all of them were desirous of employment. Mir Bakhshi would present them to the king and after approval, send them to the relevant departments where their salaries would be paid according to the approval of the relevant authorities. Mir Bakhshi used to present the horses of new soldiers and mansabdars to the king after they had been saddled. The list of the king's bodyguards was kept with him. The mansabdars of the capital were divided into seven divisions, and a day of the week was fixed for each division.¹⁰ Mir Bakhshi prepared their list and presented it to the king. The change of guard troops was done daily under the supervision of the king. The performance of these duties was mandatory and they were strictly followed. On the day of his mother's death, Akbar came to oversee the transition of these troops, dressed in black. Although the management of the royal tour and the staff accompanying the king was the responsibility of Mir Samaman, Mir Bakhshi's actions were also interfered with by him, as he was a liaison between the king and the mansabdars. He used to live with the king, he also took care of the royal tents.¹¹

Although he took care of the maintenance of the royal tents, he used to appoint all the officials according to their status and the officials who went on trips with the king and through the knowledge of the official met bakhshi to attend the service of the king. He used to get permission even during these trips; he was always busy working in his official capacity and performing his related duties.¹²

Soldiers were paid through Mir Bakhshi, whether they were in the form of loans, advance payments or salaries, in all cases Mir Bakhshi used to make payments to active troops on the battlefield. After the war, the accounts were given to the Diwan. According to Akbar Nama, Mir Bakhshi and his staff fought side by side like other soldiers on the battlefield. Mir Bakhshi's other duties were such that the files of all the orders related to the Highness of the Umrah passed through him, the work of distributing the army in different sectors was done in his office. To prepare a list of Umrah in the service of the king, to confirm all the appointments made in the

court, to revise and seal the records in his office, to receive the papers sent by the governors, bakhshis and guards of the provinces.¹³ To do and direct the necessary action on them were all such duties that Mir Bakhshi performed. One of Mir Bakhshi's responsibilities was to preserve many documents in the office, such as preparing lists of officials appointed in the capital and provinces. Accounts of the sums due to the Mansabdars, maintained the statements of payment of salaries.¹⁴ Further, he preserved the regulations relating to the conversion of salaries and jagirs. The methods of receipt were shoes, papers in which the dress of the mansabdars and riders were recorded, papers related to the horses and their inspection, etc., the attendance papers of the mansabdars in the provinces and various armies, the attendance papers of the Hafizeen Mahal, and the papers of the troops. It was one of Mir Bakhshi's great responsibilities to keep the lists and their order against the enemy etc. inside the office.¹⁵

Nowhere in Ain Akbari is the number of Bakhshis determined or estimated. In many places, the use of the word Bakhshis shows that there used to be more than one Bakhshi. There was a difference in the ranks, but still their number cannot be known. In Akbar's time, there were two helpers to help Mir Bakhshi, they were called Mir Bakhshi I and Mir Bakhshi II. Initially, one Bakhshi was considered sufficient, but during the reign of Shah Jahan, the number of Bakhshis was reduced to three. No specific number is mentioned in the Ain, but the word Bakhshi is used in various places, which shows that there were more than one Bakhshi.¹⁶ There was a difference, but it does not reveal their number. In all the documents of Akbar's time, the words met bakhshi or Bakhshis. But he was not called Bakhsh II as it came to be called during the time of the later rulers. From this it can be concluded that there used to be a Mir Bakhshi and another Bakhshi besides him, but he was not called Bakhshi II as it was called during the time of the later rulers.¹⁷

Some of the characteristics of Mir Bakhshi's position are as follows: Mir Bakhshi was the head of the army department and in this capacity he was the special representative of the officials, but because of this he did not have any special influence over the army, nor the empire. He was the commander-in-chief of the army, nor did have the right to lead an expedition by virtue of his position. It was entirely up to the will of the king to make suitable arrangements, whatever the nature of the campaign, in view of the arrangement of the army and the generals chosen.¹⁸

In most cases, separate Bakhshis were appointed to go on expeditions and were neither selected by the Mir Bakhshi nor necessarily from the Bakhshi department, they worked only under the supervision of the Bakhshi. In particular campaigns, the presence of the king or a high emir further reduced the influence of the bakhshi over the soldiers fighting on the battlefield, as the king was in direct contact with all subjects and generals, and the movement of the troops themselves. He kept an eye on them and gave them proper instructions.¹⁹

Mir Bakhshi was generally regarded as the official who distributed the salaries of the troops, but this was not part of his regular daily duties. The representatives did not go to the battlefield with the army, they only performed their duties through Bakhshi, thus the money approved in the battlefield was in his possession and he would distribute the cash salaries to them and give them to the army when needed. But when the army returned from the battlefield, Mir Bakhshi would hand over all the accounts to the Diwan's office, and thus his status as paymaster would cease.²⁰

The second feature of this position was that due to the nature of the work related to it, the person holding it had to become a military man. Due to his duties, it became necessary for him to

be full of knowledge and discipline. Thus, due to the combination of two different types of work, he could not be just a military-style person.

Conclusion

A perusal of the list shows that most of the Mir Bakhshis possessed both types of qualities and that particular care was taken in their selection. It was very interesting that during the days of Akbar, Mir Bakhshi Lashkar-e-Khawan and Shahbaz were pure soldiers, although they were famous for their efficiency and loyalty, but they were punished many times due to their stubbornness. There was only one Sadiq Khan who was dismissed by Jahangir on the grounds of disloyalty. So he was made the governor of the provinces and sent to the provinces or he was made a diwan or he remained in the same position throughout his life. If the whole conversation is taken into consideration, it is known that Mir Bakhshi had the characteristics of his position. It became a mandatory condition for the appointment, but due to the performance of office affairs and court duties, it was necessary for him to be familiar with knowledge and politeness. Bakhshis used to have far-reaching qualities and at the time of their selection, special care was taken for the presence of these two qualities.

References

- ¹ William Irvin, *The Army of the Indian Moghuls: Its Organization and Administration* (London: Luzac & Co, 1903), 37.
- ² Farshid Emami, "Royal Assemblies and Imperial Libraries: Polygonal Pavilions and Their Functions in Mughal and Safavid Architecture," *South Asian Studies* 35, no. 1 (2019/01/02 2019), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02666030.2019.1605564>.
- ³ Zaiudin Barani, *Tarikh e Feroz Shahi*, vol. 01 (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 2005), 115.
- ⁴ Pratyay Nath, "Through the Lens of War: Akbar's Sieges (1567–69) and Mughal Empire-Building in Early Modern North India," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 41, no. 2 (2018/04/03 2018), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2018.1430467>.
- ⁵ Barani, *Tarikh e Feroz Shahi*, 115.
- ⁶ R. Gibs & others, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 01. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 600.
- ⁷ Karuna Sharma, "A Visit to the Mughal Harem: Lives of Royal Women," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (2009/08/01 2009), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00856400903049457>.
- ⁸ R. Gibs & others, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 01.
- ⁹ Irvin, *The Army of the Indian Moghuls*, 46.
- ¹⁰ I. A. Zilli, *Sultanat e Mughalia ka Markzi Nizam e Hakoomat* (Urdu), (New Delhi: Tarakki Urdu Bureau, 1982), 232.
- ¹¹ Sahar Hosseini, "Safavid and Mughal Urban Bridges: Visual and Embodied Experience of Nature," *South Asian Studies* 35, no. 1 (2019/01/02 2019), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02666030.2019.1605573>.
- ¹² Anthony D. King, "Questionable Company: Representing Ethnicity at the Mughal Court," *South Asian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2020/01/02 2020), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02666030.2019.1601382>.
- ¹³ Zilli, *Sultanat e Mughalia ka Markzi Nizam e Hakoomat*, 232.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 234.
- ¹⁵ J.F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 63-64.
- ¹⁶ Bernard O'Kane, "Mughal Tilework: Derivative or Original?," *South Asian Studies* 35, no. 1 (2019/01/02 2019), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02666030.2019.1614730>.
- ¹⁷ V. Subramaniam, "The Administrative Legacy of Ancient India," *International Journal of Public Administration* 21, no. 1 (1998/01/01 1998), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01900699808525298>.
- ¹⁸ Manjeet S. Pardesi, "Region, System, and Order: The Mughal Empire in Islamicate Asia," *Security Studies* 26, no. 2 (2017/04/03 2017), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1280300>.
- ¹⁹ Neha Vermani, "The Perfumed Palate: Olfactory Practices of Food Consumption at the Mughal Court," *Global Food History* 9, no. 2 (2023/05/04 2023), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/20549547.2023.2203603>.
- ²⁰ M. N. Pearson, "Recreation in Mughal India," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 1, no. 3 (1984/12/01 1984), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02649378408713556>.