

## Socio-Economic Life of Mughal Nobles: A Stimulus to Trade & Commerce

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**Abstract:-** *This paper is an effort to study about the socio-economic life Mughal Nobles which gave encouragement to the trade and commerce. Mughal Nobility comprised the ruling class of the Mughal Empire. They were paid lavishly through grant of Jagir because of which they led a life full of luxury and extravagant. They spent lot of money on food item which include very rare fruits and wine mostly imported from other countries. In the same way, they spent large money on their wardrobe and paid much attention to different types of stuff and imported different kind of fabrics from other countries. As it was customary among the Mughal Nobles to offer presents to the Emperor on different occasions as a mark of loyalty. The things they offered to Emperor were mostly of high value and unique in appearance. So, in order to make offering to the Emperor, nobles spent large sums for procurement of rare articles. All these activities of the Nobles gave a strong stimulus to the growth of trade and commerce in Mughal India.*

### Introduction:-

Mughal nobility comprised the ruling class of the Empire and they were paid lavishly through the grant of *jagir* which enabled them to lead the luxurious lifestyle which include expensive clothes, gold and silver utensils, imported fruits and drinks, servants, slaves etc. European travellers who came to India during 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries wrote about the socio-economic life of the Mughal ruling class which included Mughal Emperor of the time and his nobility. So their works throw much light on the socio-economic life of elites as well as the commoners. While Mughal Emperors and his nobility had wealth in abundance, the commoners had very little of it which is evident from the standard of living of the both William Hawkins, Sir Thomas Roe, Francois Bernier, Manucci, Palseart, Peter Mundy etc. wrote about the luxurious lifestyle of the Mughal nobility. Moreover this luxurious lifestyle of the Mughal nobility gave great fillip to the trade and commerce during the Mughal Empire. As mentioned earlier, this class of Mughal elites spend the life which was full of luxury and extravagance. They were habituated to

varieties of dishes and spend lavishly on their maintenances. *Maathir-ul-umara* mentioned that Abul Fazl's daily ration weighed two and twenty *seer* excluding water. During deccan campaign, everyday one thousand plates of food was prepared and then distributed among all the officers.<sup>1</sup> Mughal elites spent large sums on the different types of fruits of fine quality, which were not found locally. So they imported them from Kabul, Qandhar, Kashmir etc. Merchants brought good qualities of fruits to the Mughal India from different places. Abul Fazl in *Ain-i Akbari* writes that the stores were full of fruits and were well supplied throughout the year. Giving the example of Musk melon, Abul Fazl writes that it was consumed throughout the year. From February to June-July, Musk melon came from different subhas of Mughal India and when they were out of season in India, they were imported from Kabul. And during the months of November and December, Musk melons were imported from Badakshan. Like Musk melons, other fruits like cherries, Pomegranates, Apples, Pears, Peaches, Apricots were imported from Kabul.<sup>2</sup> The imported fruits

were distributed to among the nobles as evident from the statement of Mughal Emperor Jahangir, who writes in his memoir that merchants brought Pomegranate of *Yazd* and Melons from Kariz in large quantities which were distributed to the nobles at the royal court and also to the nobles who were posted on frontiers.<sup>3</sup> Different varieties of fruits were imported from Persia, Kashmir, Samarkand, Badakshan and Kabul which adorned the dining tables of the Mughal nobles. According to Francois Bernier, "these fruits are however very dear, a single melon selling for a crown and a half. But nothing is considered so great a treat; it forms the chief expense of the Omrahs."<sup>4</sup> According to Francois Bernier, the good variety of melons are very scarce though gardeners tried their best to grow good quality by taking great care but the soil being so little congenial for good variety of melons.<sup>5</sup> Mughal nobles were accustomed to the use of ice which was considered as luxury. It was brought by water routes as well as land routes. Abul Fazl in his *Ain-i-Akbari* writes that near about ten boats were employed for the transport of ice out of which one boat reached the capital daily.<sup>6</sup>

Mughal Nobles spent large sums on their wardrobe and used expensive fabrics for their dresses. They dressed themselves according to their ranks which is evident from the statement of Abul Fazl who writes that Emperor Akbar ordered that the people of certain rank should wear certain articles.<sup>7</sup> Mughal Emperor Akbar paid great attention to various kinds of stuff and even imported fine quality of fabrics from other countries. Expert tailors and workers were employed to devise new designs and styles of dresses for the royal wardrobe. Abul Fazl writes that royal workshops in Agra, Lahore, Fatehpur, Ahmedabad and Gujarat turn out many masterpieces of workmanship which were very beautiful in terms of patterns, figures and designs.<sup>8</sup> Mughal Emperor Jahangir was also had very aesthetic taste regarding his clothing. Moreover, he devised a new kind of dress and named it *Nadiri*. Emperor Jahangir in his memoir writes, "Having adopted for myself certain special cloth and cloth stuff, I gave an order that no one should wear the same but he on whom I might bestow."<sup>9</sup>

The socio-economic life of the Mughal elites gave a great boost to the growth of trade and commerce. The another such activity of Mughal nobles was the practice of offering *Peshkash* to Mughal Emperors and offering gifts to members of royal family members. Moreover became a part of court culture and offering presents to the Emperor was seen as a mark of loyalty. European travellers who came to India during heyday of Mughal Empire mentioned about this custom of offering presents. Francois Bernier writes, "In Asia, the great are never approached empty handed."<sup>10</sup> Infact he writes that when he visited Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, he offered him Eight rupees as a mark of respect.<sup>11</sup> Not only this he also offered a knife case and a pen-knife mounted in Amber to Fazl Khan who according to Bernier was very influential noble and a minister charged with weightiest concerns of the empire.<sup>12</sup> Another European who writes about the custom of *Peshkash* was Niccolao Manucci who writes, "Any present made to the king are accepted in his capacity of sovereign-that is to say, he believes or makes out that these gifts are his by right, as homage rendered to his supreme Majesty."<sup>13</sup> Mughal nobles offered *peshkash* to Mughal Emperor on different occasions like birth anniversary of the Emperor, anniversary of the Emperor's accession, the birth of prince or princess, the celebration of a victory, on the eve of *Naoroz* etc. Francois Bernier writes that on the occasion of birth anniversary of the Emperor, all the Mughal nobles were likely to offer presents to him according to their status in the official hierarchy. He writes, "They (nobles) are expected to make handsome presents to the king, more or less valuable according to the amount of their pay. Some of them, indeed, take the opportunity of presenting gifts of extra ordinary magnificence, sometimes for the sake of an ostentatious display, sometimes to gain the favour of the king, and by that means obtains an increase in the salary."<sup>14</sup> Mughal Emperor Akbar introduced the festival of *Naoroz* (new year) and it was observed with great splendour. Abul fazl mentioned about this festival in *Ain-i-Akbari*, he writes, "It commences on the day when the sun in his splendour moves to Aries, and lasts 19<sup>th</sup> day of the month."<sup>15</sup> On the occasion of *Naoroz* Nobles made huge offerings to the

Emperor. Niccolao Manucci writes, "The king makes great gains on that day, for everybody in the palace, and all the nobles of the court, are obliged to make him large presents. The day is called *Naoroz* –that is to say, 'New Year'.<sup>16</sup> These offerings were mostly offered in the form of jewels, precious articles, horses and elephants of good quality, swords and daggers studded with precious stones, fabrics of fine quality etc. Nobles always tried to present something special and rare in its quality. Once Murtaza Khan send a ring made of a single *ruby* to Emperor Jahangir and latter was very pleased with the gift. He writes in *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* that till that day no one had ever heard of such a ring having come to the hands of any sovereign and the value of which was stated to be Rs 25000.<sup>17</sup> So in order to gift something very precious to the Emperor, nobles tried their best to procure the rarities at any cost. As it was customary for the nobles to present their offerings to the Mughal Emperor, the latter also bestow presents on his nobles on various occasions like promotion, new appointment or sometimes as an appreciation of the services of the noble in particular task. The presents given by the Emperor to his nobles mostly consisted of jewelled swords, gilded saddles, belts, gold embroidered coats, *Pashmina* shawls, vest of gold etc. The gifts which were given to the nobles were bestowed according to the rank and the status of the noble.

Another activity of the nobles which give great fillip to the trade and commerce was the building activity. Large number of nobles indulged in this activity. There were large number of cities and towns in Mughal India as the Mughal Emperors themselves very much interested in building activities and built many forts, palaces and buildings. Percy Brown divided Islamic architecture into two conventional divisions i.e. Religious and Secular, religious buildings consists of two kinds only – the mosque and the tomb. And on the other hand the secular buildings are of miscellaneous order, as among them may be included those intended for public and civic purposes, such as houses, pavilions, town- gates, wells, gardens, etc. besides the large imperial schemes of palace – forts and even entire cities.<sup>18</sup> During the early years of the Mughal rule, the country was too unsettled to produce any work of distinction but

gradually a new form of building art emerged and with the course of time evolved into one of the most important architectural styles of India. According to Percy Brown, "There were several factors responsible for this remarkable development of the building art and for the high standard of production that was consistently maintained over a period of more than two centuries; among these were the wealth and power of the empire itself, and relatively settled conditions that prevailed in most part of the country."<sup>19</sup>

The Mughal nobility took the examples set by Mughal Emperor and involved in building activities. Percy Brown writes, "For the culture of the Mughal period was throughout inspired by the throne, being dependent almost entirely on imperial patronage, rising to the greatest heights when stimulated by the personal interest of the ruler, but languishing when it declined."<sup>20</sup> Regarding the building activities, Abul Fazl in his *Ain-i- Akbari* writes that buildings required for the comfort of the army as well as source of splendour.<sup>21</sup> Mughal nobility was a dominant social group living in the towns and cities. As they were economically sound, they participated in the building activities and established their image as the constructors. Moreover they generated employment for the architects and artisans. Building activities gives great boost to trade and commerce as different kinds of building material required for the construction activities was brought from different areas. Moreover specialised artisans and workers were also appointed in architectural activities. Shaikh Farid Bhakkari who was very influential noble during the reign of Jahangir, involved in number of building activities. He built many *Sarais* .In Ahmedabad, he founded a *Mohalla* and built a mosque and tomb of Shah Wajhuddin. In Delhi, he founded a town named Faridabad.<sup>22</sup>According to Jahangir he built a stone terrace of stone on the bank of Yamuna which was very beautiful.<sup>23</sup> Raja Man Singh Kacchwaha, one of the most influential noble of Emperor Akbar, was also credited with the number of building activities. When he was the governor of *Subah* of Bengal, he changed the capital from Tanda to Akmahal (Rajmahal) and named it as Akbarmahal. He also built a palace and a strong

rampart there.<sup>24</sup> Raja Man Singh built a fort at Sharpur Herra in Mymensingh district whom he named as Salimnagar. His wife Kankawati built a beautiful marble temple in the memory of her deceased son, Jagat Singh.<sup>25</sup>

Thus it is seen that grandees of the Mughal Empire played significant role in the promotion of trade and commerce. Moreover, contemporary sources also testified the fact that Mughal royal family was also interested in the commercial activities. In the same way Mughal nobility also took part in the trade and commerce activities directly and even some nobles owned *Karkhanas* which manufactured different articles for the use of elites e.g. Ali Mardan Khan had a *Karkhana* where woollen carpets and shawls were manufactured. Moreover, Mughal nobility which was paid lavishly spent large part of their income on their luxurious life style and their socio-economic activities gave a fillip to the growth of trade and commerce in Mughal India.

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<sup>1</sup> Nawwab Samsam-Ud-Daula Shah Nawaz Khan and his son Abdul Hayy, *The Maathir-ul-Umara, Vol-I*, Tr.

H. Beveridge, Revised, annotated and compiled by Bainsi prashad, Patna, 1979, p.127

<sup>2</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol-I, Eng Tr. by H. Blochmann, Delhi, 1977, p.68

<sup>3</sup> Noor-ud-din Muhammad Jahangir, *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri or Memoirs of Jahangir, Vol.I*, tr. by Alexander

Rogers, ed. By Henry Beveridge, New Delhi, Rep. 1985, p.270

<sup>4</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in Mogul Empire*, 1656-1668, Eng. Tr. by Archibald Constable, Ed. & revised by

Vincent A. Smith, Rep. Delhi, 1997, p.249

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol-I, Eng Tr. by H. Blochmann, Delhi, 1977, p.59

<sup>7</sup> Ibid p.94

<sup>8</sup> Ibid p 93

<sup>9</sup> Noor-ud-din Muhammad Jahangir, *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri or Memoirs of Jahangir, Vol.I*, tr. by Alexander

Rogers, ed. By Henry Beveridge, New Delhi, Rep. 1985, p 384

<sup>10</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in Mogul Empire*, 1656-1668, Eng. Tr. by Archibald Constable, Ed. & revised by

Vincent A. Smith, Rep. Delhi, 1997, p.200

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

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<sup>13</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor, Vol-II*, tr. by William Irvine, Rep. Calcutta, 1966, p. 321

<sup>14</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in Mogul Empire*, 1656-1668, Eng. Tr. by Archibald Constable, Ed. & revised by

Vincent A. Smith, Rep. Delhi, 1997, p.271

<sup>15</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol-I, Eng Tr. by H. Blochmann, Delhi, 1977, p.286

<sup>16</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor, Vol-II*, tr. by William Irvine, Rep. Calcutta, 1966, p.325

<sup>17</sup> Noor-ud-din Muhammad Jahangir, *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri or Memoirs of Jahangir, Vol.I*, tr. by Alexander

Rogers, ed. By Henry Beveridge, New Delhi, Rep. 1985, p.132-133

<sup>18</sup> Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture (Islamic Architecture)*, p. 3

<sup>19</sup> Ibid p.88

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol-I, Eng Tr. by H. Blochmann, Delhi, 1977, p.322

<sup>22</sup> Nawwab Samsam-Ud-Daula Shah Nawaz Khan and his son Abdul Hayy, *The Maathir-ul-Umara, Vol-I*, Tr.

H. Beveridge, Revised, annotated and compiled by Bainsi prashad, Patna, 1979, p.526

<sup>23</sup> Noor-ud-din Muhammad Jahangir, *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri or Memoirs of Jahangir, Vol.I*, tr. by Alexander

Rogers, ed. By Henry Beveridge, New Delhi, Rep. 1985, p.137

<sup>24</sup> Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama, Vol-III*, English tr. By H. Beveridge, p. 1042-43

<sup>25</sup> Rajiv Narain Prasad, *Raja Man Singh of Amber*, p.98