



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Early Mughal Emperor's Relationship with the Nobility.

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The organization of the nobility was an important institution developed by the Mughal emperors and its roots can be traced back to political and economic developments in west Asia under Islam. In fact the existence of Mughal empire depended on the proper working of this institution as it had been an important organ of monarchical system of government. It played a significant role in the growth, organization, administrative structure, social and cultural life of the Mughal empire. There was a symbiotic relationship between the king and the nobility. The success of an emperor depended on his capacity to maintain the balance of powers between the crown and nobles as well as among the various factions of the nobility. The composition of the nobility began to change from time to time depending on their loyalty, administrative efficiency, political consideration, social atmosphere of the empire and finally the reaction and response of the emperors.

In the Timurid polity the position of the sovereign and its relations with the nobility continued to be guided by the traditions started under the early Mongol khans which are generally referred to the chronicles as Tura-i changezi.<sup>1</sup> In practice the Mongol king came to the power as much to the nobility's support as the case with Turkish sultan. In the Mongol polity there was the practice of hereditary privileges among a large section of the nobility. According to Mongol tradition all those claiming to be the offsprings of Bakhu Khatagi, Bakhatu salji and Bodauncher the three mythical figures whose birth was attributed to super natural inspiration had a special standing sanctified by divine origin.<sup>2</sup> For this position and status they did not depend upon the sweet will of a king. Moreover, the three of changez khan's chief lieutenants were also allowed certain hereditary privileges which cannot be suspended by any ruler without going against the code of Mongols.<sup>3</sup>

The Timurids claimed from a distinguished chief of the chagtai Ulus and the majority of their officers also belong to the chagtai clans settled in Central Asia. In accordance with the yasa-i changezi, Timur had assigned special status to a section of the nobility which enjoyed hereditary privileges. The chagtais who formed the major group of his military force, received special favours.<sup>5</sup> The Turco-Mongolian political and social structure had been built in such a way that the nobles became subservient to the khan, in spite of their privileges.<sup>6</sup> The majority of nobles serving under Babur claim a special status because of their ancestry with changez khan.<sup>7</sup> The non-Indian nobles among them 53 out of 112 can be easily identified either as chagtai of Central Asia or Mughals coming from Kashghar region (Mughalistan).<sup>8</sup>

There is proper ground to assume that the privileges of different sections of the nobility sanctified by changezi tradition were respected among Timurids till Babur's time. In view of this Babur advised kamran not to choose wakil-i Mutlaq outside the circle of nobles belonging to a particular 'Mughal' tribe suggests the practice of conventions recognizing hereditary claims to certain positions and offices.<sup>9</sup> He also advised Humayun to "take council and settle every word and act in agreement with the well wishes." It is with reference to the dispute between Humayun and Kamran he says that "the rule had been always adhered to that when thou had six parts Kamran had five."<sup>10</sup> Though Babur personally did not like the idea of the division of authority.<sup>11</sup>

In the Muslim history of India, it is surprising and significant that Humayun transferred the sovereign power for sometime to the water carrier who saved his life.<sup>12</sup> Gulbadan says that Humayun made the water carrier actually sit on the throne and "ordered all the amirs to make obsequiance to him. The servant gave every one what he wished and made appointments (Mansab)." It shows that sovereignty was a personal property of the Padshah who could award it to any body or do with it as he pleased.<sup>13</sup>

The Timurids allowed certain nobles to share in the khan's privileges. The first instance is that of Sultan Hussain Baiqara's noble Bahbud whose name had been inspired on the Sikka and Tamga.<sup>14</sup> It is also proper to mention that Sultan Bahqara was kind enough to Muzaffar Barlas with whom he made a strange agreement of giving him two tangs of each territory conquered by himself. Babur makes the following comment about this agreement. "A strange compact indeed! how it could be right to make even a faithful servant a co-partner in rule? Not even a pact; how then should a beg."<sup>15</sup>

1. For detailed discussion on Tura, see Babur nama, tr. Beveridge, vol i, PP.155; Tarikha-i Rashidi, tr. Vol i, PP.69-70.
2. The Secret History of Mongol dynasty, PP.50-51; Ain-i Akbari, tr. P. 65.
3. Ibid, PP. 143-144.
4. Barthold, Four Studies on Central Asia, v.ii, P.13-14.
5. Syed Jamaluddin, The State under Timur, Harn Anand pub, 1995, PP.29-42.
6. Mansura Haider, Medieval Central Asia: Polity, Economy and Military Organization, Manohar Publication, Delhi, 2004, P.52.
7. The Secret History, op.cit, P.144.
8. Iqtidar Alam Khan, Turco-Mongol Theory of kingship, Medieval India-A Miscellany, 1972, vol. ii, P.
9. Beveridge, Babur's letter to kamran, New Series, vol. xv, PP.330-333.
10. R.P. Tripathi, Some Aspects of Muslim Administration, Allahabad, 1959, PP.105-6.
11. Ibid. P.113.
12. Gulbadan Begum, Humayun Nama, Eng tr. A.S. Beveridge, Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1909. P.140.
13. R.P. Tripathi, op.cit, p.119.
14. Mansura Haider, The Sovereign in the Timurid, op.cit, P.80.
15. Babur Nama, tr. Beveridge, Vol I, PP.270-71.

The above remarks give a clear indication about the existing symbol of relations with a noble with the royal authority. Even Sultan Hussain did not care to honour his own promises when he himself became a Sultan and Muzaffar Barlas was ultimately poisoned.<sup>16</sup> Similarly one of Babur's own begs is reported to have set himself up, 'on regal footing starting receptions and a public table, court and workshop after the fashion of Sultan.' Another his begs had kettle drum beaten at his own gate, even though acknowledging Babur as padshah. In (1507-1508) Shah Beg Arghun, the commandant of Qandhar on behalf of the Timurid rulers of Khorasan 'Stamped his letter to Babur in the middle of its reverse, where begs seal if writing to one the lower circles.'<sup>17</sup> Farishta also observed about the chagtai nobility that 'each one of them considered himself equal to kaiqubad and kikus.'<sup>18</sup>

Although it can not be denied that changez, Timur and many other khans had assigned special status to their favourite amirs and some of the privileges were even hereditary. The fact is that such privileges enjoyed by the nobles were based on a reciprocal basis. Besides hereditary privileges, the nobles can be dismissed, executed, punished, fined or at least "sent Mecca." In case of any defiance, these privileges could always be terminated. Changez had prescribed a clause in his law whereby the nobles enjoying special status could be forgiven upto nine offences itself shows that khan could exercise his absolute power over the nobles.<sup>19</sup> The relationship between the khan and nobles was of the reciprocal nature in which the hereditary claims were not the greatest determining factor.<sup>20</sup>

In the same way the position of the early Mughal rulers depended on their capacity as military leaders. This suggests the fact that there started an interdependence of the monarch and nobles on each other. No monarch could remain on the throne without the support and co-operation of his nobles. Therefore, the position of the nobles depended on the influence they could hold over the king.<sup>21</sup> This interdependence gave some measure to another social reality that of conflict between the king and his nobles. As the power of the noble was basically a share of the royal power. It is found that there is continuous attempt on the part of the nobles to minimize the control which was exercised over them by the king. Thus the nobles had an almost universal tendencies prevailing the attempts of the king to become all powerful. On the contrary, kings tried their power to increase their domination over the nobles.<sup>22</sup>

Before the conquest of India, Babur was hardly in a position to organize a nobility fully disciplined and subservient to him. The territory under his control was small and not very productive. In these situations it was not possible for him to attract and retain a stable nobility. Moreover, the nobles who remained with him were treated more as associates. The situation became more complicated because of the presence of large number of close relations and members of important chagtai clans. Certain customary rules designated Turai- i changezi were closely followed. In these situations the position of the king remained very weak and he could not control ruling class very effectively.<sup>23</sup>

Although Babur accepted this position in Afghanistan, though he was apparently opposed to this kind of relationship between the ruler and his nobility when he started on his expedition to northern India, he raised 'small men of little standing' to the status of begs, to keep them effectively under his control.<sup>24</sup> But he was in for a close disappointment:

" when I set out from Kabul this last time I had raised many of low rank to the dignity of beg, in the expedition that if I had chosen to go through fire and water, they would have accompanied me cheerfully march where I would . It never surely entered my imagination that they were to be the persons who were arraign my measures, nor that before raising from the council, they should show a determined opposition to every plan and opinion which I proposed and supported in the council and assembly."<sup>25</sup>

It also appears that the motive behind admitting a large number of Indian nobles of Babur was to strengthen his position towards the older nobility. But his attempts did not succeed because of the Indian nobility could not be relied upon. In these circumstances he developed his cordial relations with the Chagtai nobility by having confidence with them.<sup>26</sup> After all he was able to keep under control his nobles and was socially quite free with them.<sup>27</sup>

In spite of the various attempts of Humayun to increase his prestige and power, he was never able to become politically supreme .He inculcated certain peculiar notions of kingly glory and divinity so as to be in a position to raise himself above his nobles. While in Bengal he is said to have put to a veil on his face in order to create a halo of divinity around himself.<sup>28</sup> Jauhar Aftabchi tells us when Humayun was retreating from Chausa, a noble man, Mir Fakkar Ali happened to come in front of him. Humayun was so enraged that he threatened to punish severely.<sup>29</sup>

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid, PP.119,249-250,277-332.

18. Mohd Qasim Farishta, Tarikh - i Farishta, Nawal kishore Press Lucknow, P.245.

19. Mansura Haider, The Sovereign in the ,op.cit,P.81.

20. Ibid,P.82.

21. Nurul Hasan, New Light on the Relations of the early Mughal Rulers with their nobility, Indian History Congress, Madras, 1944, P.3.

22. Ibid,P.4.

23. Afzal Hussain, Nobility under Akbar and Jahangir, Manohar Public, 1999, Delhi, P.67.

24. Ibid,P.8.

25. Memoirs of Babur, tr. Leyden, Vol.ii, P.248.

26. Afzal Hussain, op.cit, P.8.

27. .Nurul Hasan, op.cit, P.8.

28. Abdul Qadir Badauni, Muntakhabut Tarikh, tr. S.A, Ranking, vol,i, Asiatic Society, Patna, 1973. P.46.

29. Jauhar Aftabchi, Tazkiratul-waqiat, tr. Charles Steward, London, 1832, PP. 41-51.

In view of Humayun's desire to raise his social position, there are some examples showing a desire on his part to increase his political strength towards the nobles.. There was an attempt to reorganize the central government and to classify the nobles according to grades. Khawandmir approved the establishment of four central departments which was with a view to exercise some sort of control of the administration of various parts of the country by the nobles. It is also found that some sort of grades were introduced among the nobility. These measures were definitely intended to increase the dependence of the nobles of the king.<sup>30</sup>

In spite of these efforts and many attempts at conciliation made by Humayun, there was the tendency that the nobles were trying to become as independent as possible. Kamran, Askari, Hinde Beg almost every governor had grown practically independent and Humayun was not in a position to exercise control over them.<sup>31</sup> There were frequent rebellions of his nobles. Mirza kamran's autonomous control over Afghanistan



and the unreliable attitude of Askari and Hindal further contributed to the disruption of Humayun's control over his nobility.<sup>32</sup>

At the end of the first period of Humayun's kingship when it appeared that his fortunes were in declining position, many of his nobles resorted to acts of his disloyalty which sometimes turn to rebellion since there are numerous instances of disloyalty despite few examples of devotions shown by some nobles to Humayun. Thus it gives the fact that Humayun was not able to exercise as much control over his nobles as had been exercised by Babur.<sup>33</sup>

Humayun's grand concept of kingship and his expectations of receiving absolute loyalty from the nobles, sometimes had gone reverse due to many occasions the nobles forced their will to be implemented. There was such an occasion in Bengal when Humayun found himself alone there due to the activities of Sher Shah. In this situation the nobles obliged Humayun to increase their regiments, stipend and advance a large sum of money in hard cash supported by Askari.<sup>34</sup>

Even when Humayun's days of hard ships were over and Kamran was a prisoner in his custody the nobles told Humayun that they suffered long enough for him and did not see their wives and children in captivity or under torture.<sup>35</sup> In spite of Humayun's excuses the nobles remained firm in their request to give punishment to Kamran. Humayun then asked them to put down their demands in writing. They asked for the execution of kamran and supported their demand with legal options. Humayun did not go to that extent but issued order Kamran to be blinded.<sup>36</sup>

During the period of Babur the nobles supported him with wealth and power to found an empire. When Humayun came to the throne, nobles did not allow Humayun to become strong due to their political power could be effected.<sup>37</sup> The traditions of the Mughals divided the loyalties of the nobles. Since they gave a general loyalty to the ruling houses but they were not always loyal to particular individual. In the absence of the law of promogeniture and due to the practice of the Mughal tradition of dividing the 'kingdom' among different sons of the ruler, the members of the Timurid family or the Mirzas demanded a sort of equality with Humayun.<sup>38</sup>

This disunity among the Mirzas kept the nobility divided. In order to increase their own political power, groups of nobles would sometime support one member of the ruling house, sometime other. The opportunism of the nobles which was integrated in their class extended their support either with Humayun or with kamran. But they tried their best to support the strong party. At one moment it happened that such devotees of Humayun as yadgar Nasir Mirza, Hindal, Kasim Hussain, Sultan Uzbek and Tardi Beg deserted him. While among the officers of kamran, even a trusted follower like Keracha Khan tried to seek favour with Humayun when the latter conquered Kabul.<sup>39</sup>

These nobles showed shifting loyalties. But during his strength with Mirza Kamran for control over Kabul between 1545 and 1555, Humayun was able to develop a nobility more closely loyal to him. In view of this, he admitted low ranking Turani nobles and admitted a large number of Persians and used them against the old Turani nobles. The new nobility served him loyally throughout his contest with Mirza Kamran and followed him in the conquest of India.<sup>40</sup>

The nobles wanted to develop their class power so they did not give Humayun their full cooperation. They started deserting him when he was defeated and it was due to the lack of co-operation. Consequently the Afghan nobility which had been displayed by the Mughals, had the advantage of his lack of cooperation among the Mughals united under Sher Shah and captured the power. They defeated Humayun and with this defeat, the entire Mughal nobility was migrated from India.<sup>41</sup>

In this process of great change the nobility made a final attempt to protect their interests by making a compromise with the crown. The occasion came in 1555 when Humayun proposed that all the nobles should take an oath of loyalty to him. They were prepared to do so, but Haji Muhammad Khan (Humayun's Vakildar) demanded that "His Majesty should likewise take an oath that whatever we, his well wishers recommended for his interests he will consent to form." Hindal objected to this 'insolence' on the part of a 'servant' but Humayun took the oath.<sup>42</sup>

30. khawandmir, Qanuni-Humayuni, tr. Beni Prasad, Calcutta, 1940, PP.34-36.

31. Nurul Hasan, op.cit, P.4.

32. Afzal Hussain, op.cit, P.5.

33. Nurul Hasan, op.cit, P.8.

34. Tazkiratul waqiat, op.cit, PP.14- 15.

35. Humayun Nama, tr. P.201.

36. Akbar Nama, tr. Vol i, P.603.

37. Nurul Hasan, op.cit, P.4

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid, P.6

40. Afzal Hussain, op .cit, P.8.

41 .Nurul Hasan,op.cit, PP.7-9.

42.Ibid, P.9.

It was an attempt on the part of the monarch as well as the noble to resolve the crisis. The nobles by taking an oath, recognized that unless the Mughal monarchy were established, Mughal nobility could not have any power. Besides king should give full consideration to the wishes of his nobles. There is considerable evidence to believe that Humayun tried to act upon his promise. Whenever his nobles visited on any thing he generally accepted their advice against his own wishes, e.g. his suspension of the project of invading kashmir on the punishment given to kamran. He even rebuked Akbar when these nobles complained about the prince.<sup>43</sup>

But this entire scheme including the promise given by Humayun to respect the wishes of a united nobility failed.<sup>44</sup> Though he was able to create a ruling class loyal to the king and was successful in reconquering Hindustan. The dominant section of his nobility were still confined to a limited number of clan and family groups. These clan groups were opposed to any centralization of authority. Babur and Humayun could not fully make the nobility subservient to the crown.<sup>45</sup> It was the dominating personality of Akbar which could never tolerate any compromise. He established a strong monarchy which made nobility completely subservient to the ruler.<sup>46</sup>

In this respect Akbar removed clan and family loyalties among the nobles to pay obedience to the sovereign. The subsequent developments that took place under him and partly under Jahangir were directed towards this objective.<sup>47</sup> There fore, relationship between Babur and Humayun with their nobles reveals the inherent contradictions of the early nobility and the fact is that if they wanted to maintain social position, they had to surrender the political power.<sup>48</sup>

43. Ibid, P.10.

44. Ibid.

45. Afzal Hussain, op.cit, P.9.

46. Nurul Hasan, op.cit , P.11.

47. Afza Hussain, op cit, P.9.

48 . Nurul Hussain, op.cit, P.11.

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