



How Was Mughal Administration Structured?

Description

The Mughal Empire, stretching across a vast subcontinent, developed an intricate administrative system that allowed it to govern for centuries. This structure was not static; it evolved significantly under different emperors, reflecting both internal needs and external pressures. Understanding this administrative framework is crucial for comprehending the dynamics of Mughal power, its strengths, and eventually, its vulnerabilities. It represents a sophisticated blend of centralized authority, delegated responsibilities, and flexible mechanisms designed to manage a diverse populace and expansive territories.

The core of this elaborate governance lay in a carefully organized hierarchy, reaching from the emperor himself down to the village headman. Revenue collection, military organization, judicial processes, and the maintenance of public order were all integrated into this system. This article explores the multifaceted structure of Mughal administration, detailing its components, key policies, and their impact on the empire.

The Foundation of Mughal Administration and Governance

The Mughal administrative machinery was characterized by a strong central authority, which permeated through various levels of governance. The entire system revolved around the emperor, whose word was law and whose authority was absolute.

The Sovereign as the Governing Center

At the pinnacle of the Mughal administrative structure was the emperor, who held supreme legislative, executive, judicial, and military powers. His position was considered divinely ordained, reinforcing his unchallenged authority. All major policy decisions, appointments, and judicial pronouncements ultimately emanated from the emperor. He was assisted by a council of ministers and a bureaucracy, but the final say always rested with the sovereign. This concentration of power in a single individual was a defining feature of Mughal rule.

Central Administration: Structure and Key Roles

The central administration was highly organized, with specific departments overseeing different aspects of governance. This structure ensured a degree of specialization and efficiency, even within an absolutist framework. The main departments included finance, military, imperial household, religious affairs, and justice. Each department was headed by a senior minister who reported directly to the emperor. This system of checks and balances, though rudimentary, aimed to prevent any single minister from becoming excessively powerful.

Provincial Administration: Uniformity and Control

For effective governance, the empire was divided into provinces, known as Subahs. Each Subah was further subdivided into Sarkars (districts), which were then broken down into Parganas (sub-districts). At the lowest level were the villages. This hierarchical division allowed for standardized administration across the empire, facilitating tax collection, law enforcement, and communication. The provincial administration mirrored the central structure, with provincial officials appointed by and accountable to the emperor. This point needs attention: despite decentralization in function, control remained centralized.

Judicial Administration: Function and Authority

Mughal judicial administration was primarily based on Islamic law (Sharia), supplemented by imperial decrees (farmans) and customary law. The emperor was the highest court of appeal, embodying the ultimate source of justice. A hierarchy of courts existed, with Qazis (judges) presiding over them at various levels—from the capital to the provinces, districts, and even smaller towns. The Qazis administered justice according to religious injunctions, while Mir Adls assisted in the procedural aspects. The Sadr-us-Sudur was responsible for religious grants and overseeing the judicial appointments.

Detailed Roles of Central Officials

The smooth functioning of the central government depended on a cadre of highly placed officials, each with distinct responsibilities:

- **Wazir (Diwan-i-Kul):** The chief minister, responsible primarily for finance and revenue administration. He oversaw all expenditure and income, controlled the Khalsa land, and appointed lower-level revenue officials. This was a crucial role, second only to the emperor.
- **Mir Bakshi:** Head of the military department. He was responsible for the recruitment, organization, and discipline of the army. He also maintained the Mansabdar rolls, sanctioned salaries, and acted as the chief intelligence officer of the empire.
- **Mir Saman (Khan-i-Saman):** In charge of the imperial household, including the royal workshops (karkhanas), stores, and supplies for the emperor and his court. This involved managing a vast network of artisans and suppliers.
- **Sadr-us-Sudur:** Chief Sadr, responsible for religious affairs, charities, and judicial appointments. He granted stipends and land grants (Madad-i-mash) to religious scholars and institutions. He also acted as the emperor's chief religious advisor.

- **Qazi-ul-Quzat:** The Chief Qazi, head of the judiciary. He supervised the administration of justice across the empire and was responsible for appointing provincial and district Qazis.

Officials at Provincial, District, and Village Levels

The administrative structure extended down to the grassroots through a network of officials:

- **Provincial (Subah) Level:**
 - **Subahdar (Nazim):** The governor of the province, appointed by the emperor, responsible for maintaining law and order and general administration.
 - **Diwan:** The provincial finance minister, reporting directly to the imperial Diwan, responsible for revenue collection and provincial finances. This created a dual control system to prevent excessive power in the Subahdar's hands.
 - **Provincial Bakshi:** Maintained the military contingent and intelligence network at the provincial level.
 - **Provincial Qazi:** Administered justice in the province.
- **District (Sarkar) Level:**
 - **Faujdar:** Chief military and law enforcement officer of the Sarkar, responsible for maintaining peace and order.
 - **Amil (Amalguzar):** Chief revenue collector of the Sarkar, assessed and collected land revenue.
 - **Kotwal:** Chief police officer in towns, responsible for law and order, urban administration, and keeping records of residents.
- **Village (Gram) Level:**
 - **Muqaddam:** The village headman, responsible for revenue collection and maintaining order at the local level.
 - **Patwari:** Maintained village land records and assisted the Muqaddam in revenue collection.
 - **Chaudhari:** A prominent landholder, often assisting in revenue assessment and collection over several villages.
 - These local officials often held hereditary positions and served as intermediaries between the state and the peasantry.

The Mansabdari System: Structure, Grades, and Reforms

The Mansabdari system was the bedrock of Mughal administration, influencing both the military and civil services. It was a unique system that combined military and civil roles within a single hierarchy.

Introduction and Core Purpose

Introduced by Emperor Akbar around 1573-74, the Mansabdari system was a graded imperial service that assigned rank (Mansab) to all imperial officers, nobles, and military commanders. Its core purpose was to organize the nobility, the army, and the bureaucracy into a single, unified system. A Mansabdar was a person who held a Mansab, and this rank determined his status, salary, and the number of cavalymen and horses he was obligated to maintain for the imperial army. This system rationalized the administrative structure and provided a structured hierarchy for imperial service.

Zat, Sawar, and Mansabdar Gradations

The Mansab was expressed in numerical terms, initially ranging from 10 to 5,000, later extended to 7,000 for princes. After a reform in 1595-96, each Mansabdar was assigned two distinct numbers:

- **Zat:** This indicated the Mansabdar's personal rank, his status in the imperial hierarchy, and his personal salary. A higher Zat rank meant higher status and more personal income.
- **Sawar:** This indicated the number of cavalymen (sawars) the Mansabdar was required to maintain for the imperial service. The Sawar rank determined the Mansabdar's military obligation and the additional payment he received for maintaining the contingent.

Not all Mansabdars with a high Zat rank necessarily had a corresponding high Sawar rank, leading to distinctions like *Do aspa* (two horses per trooper) and *Sih aspa* (three horses per trooper) to indicate the quality and quantity of the cavalry. A Mansabdar with Zat equal to Sawar was considered of the first class, Zat greater than Sawar of the second class, and Zat less than Sawar of the third class. This distinction becomes important.

Changes Under Jahangir: Du-aspa-sih-aspa

By Jahangir's reign, the Mansabdari system faced financial strain. To address this, Emperor Jahangir introduced the **Du-aspa-sih-aspa** system (literally, 'two-three horses'). Under this provision, a part of a Mansabdar's Sawar rank could be increased without increasing his Zat rank. This meant that the Mansabdar had to maintain a larger contingent of troopers (e.g., doubling the number of horses per trooper or doubling the actual contingent) but did not receive a corresponding increase in his personal Zat salary. This reform allowed the emperor to significantly augment the military strength of his Mansabdars without having to grant them higher Zat ranks, which would have put a greater burden on the imperial treasury in terms of personal salaries.

Shah Jahan's Month-Ratio System

Further financial pressures and the shortage of Jagirs (land assignments) prompted Emperor Shah Jahan to introduce the **Month-Ratio** (Mahsana) system. Mansabdars were usually paid through Jagirs. Due to the increasing number of Mansabdars and stagnant revenue resources, there was a shortage of Jagirs. The Month-Ratio system stipulated that the Mansabdar's salary, though theoretically for 12 months, would be reduced based on the actual revenue realization from his Jagir. For instance, a Mansabdar might be granted a 6-month or 8-month Jagir, meaning he would only be paid for that many months, reducing his obligation to maintain his Sawar contingent proportionally. This reduced the number of troopers a Mansabdar was expected to maintain, reflecting the practical difficulties of the empire. At this stage, one issue becomes clear: these reforms reflected the growing financial strain on the empire.

Mughal Land Revenue: Systems, Classification, and Cultivators

Land revenue was the backbone of the Mughal economy, representing the primary source of imperial income. The administration developed sophisticated systems for its assessment and collection.

Classification of Land Types for Revenue

For the purpose of revenue assessment, Akbar's administration, largely influenced by Raja Todar Mal, classified land based on its cultivation frequency and productivity:

- **Polaj:** Land continuously cultivated year after year, never left fallow. This was considered the best land.
- **Parauti:** Land left fallow for a short period (1-2 years) to recover its fertility.
- **Chachar:** Land left fallow for 3-4 years to recover fertility.
- **Banjar:** Uncultivated land for five or more years, or wasteland.

Revenue rates varied according to these classifications, with Banjar and Chachar lands receiving concessions to encourage cultivation.

Ghallabaksh, Zabti (Dahsala), and Nasaq Systems

Three main systems were employed for land revenue assessment:

- **Ghallabaksh (Batai):** This was a system of crop-sharing, where the produce was divided between the state and the peasant. There were several variants:
 - **Kankut:** Estimation of the standing crop, then dividing it.
 - **Bhaoli:** Actual division of the harvested crop.
 - **Lank Batai:** Division after threshing.
 - Ghallabaksh was prevalent in certain regions, particularly where land measurement was difficult or less accurate.
- **Zabti (Dahsala System):** Primarily associated with Raja Todar Mal's reforms in 1582, this was the most advanced and widely adopted system. It involved:
 - **Measurement:** All cultivable land was measured using a uniform standard (Ilahi gaz).
 - **Classification:** Land was classified based on productivity.
 - **Dahsala (Ten-Year Average):** The average produce of different crops and their average prices over the previous ten years were calculated. One-third of this average produce was fixed as the state's share, convertible into cash at average prices.
 - This system provided a more predictable and standardized revenue demand.
- **Nasaq:** This was a summary assessment system based on previous records and estimates, without detailed measurement or crop estimation. It was simpler to administer but could be less accurate and prone to local manipulations. It was often used in less settled or remote areas.

Advantages of the Dahsala System

The Dahsala system offered significant advantages:

- **Predictability:** Both the state and the cultivators knew the revenue demand in advance, fostering stability.
- **Equity:** Revenue was based on actual productivity and local prices, making it fairer than arbitrary demands.
- **Reduced Corruption:** Standardized measurement and assessment reduced opportunities for local officials to exploit peasants.

- **Efficiency:** Streamlined the collection process and provided a stable revenue base for the empire.

Categories of Agriculturists (Khudkashta, Muzarian, Pahikashta)

Mughal records recognized different categories of agriculturists:

- **Khudkashta:** Peasants who owned the land they tilled in their own village. They generally enjoyed more rights and a better economic standing.
- **Muzarian:** Tenant cultivators who tilled the land of others. They paid rent to the Khudkashta or landlords and had fewer rights.
- **Pahikashta:** Non-resident cultivators who tilled land in villages other than their own, often due to better opportunities or to escape oppression. They were temporary cultivators.

Types of Land Based on Authority (Jagir, Khalsa, Madad-i-mash, Paibaki)

Land within the empire was managed under different categories:

- **Jagir:** Land assigned to Mansabdars in lieu of cash salary. The Mansabdar (Jagirdar) was entitled to collect revenue from his Jagir to support himself and his military contingent. Jagirs were transferable and not hereditary.
- **Khalsa (Khalisa):** Land directly controlled by the imperial treasury. The revenue from Khalsa land went directly to the central government, funding the emperor's personal expenses and the central administration. Its proper management was critical for the empire's financial health.
- **Madad-i-mash:** Revenue-free land grants given to religious scholars, pious individuals, and charitable institutions. These grants were intended to support learning and religious activities.
- **Paibaki:** Land earmarked for distribution as Jagirs but not yet assigned to any Mansabdar. It essentially served as a reserve pool of Jagir land.

Mughal Rajput Policy: A Historical Evolution

The Mughal-Rajput relationship was a complex and evolving aspect of imperial governance, significantly impacting the empire's stability and character.

Early Mughal-Rajput Relations

Initial interactions between the early Mughals (Babur and Humayun) and the Rajputs were largely characterized by conflict and conquest. Battles like Panipat and Khanwa demonstrated Mughal military superiority, but also revealed the fierce resistance of Rajput states. There was no consistent policy of integration during this nascent phase of the empire.

Akbar's Policy of Integration and Conflict

Akbar, recognizing the strategic importance of Rajput power, adopted a policy of conciliation and integration, marking a significant shift. His policy had several facets:

- **Alliances and Marriages:** He forged marriage alliances with several Rajput ruling families, notably Amber (Jaipur), allowing them to retain their independent internal administration.
- **High Appointments:** Rajputs were granted high Mansabs and important administrative and military positions within the Mughal hierarchy, with figures like Raja Man Singh and Raja Todar Mal becoming pillars of the empire.
- **Religious Tolerance:** Akbar abolished the Jaziya (poll tax on non-Muslims) in 1563 and the pilgrimage tax in 1564, fostering a sense of inclusion among his Hindu subjects, including Rajputs.
- **Military Campaigns:** While pursuing integration, Akbar also did not hesitate to use force against defiant Rajput states, such as Mewar, which resisted his suzerainty. This dual approach ensured submission while offering opportunities for integration.

This comprehensive policy significantly strengthened the Mughal Empire by securing a loyal and powerful segment of the Indian aristocracy.

Policy Under Jahangir and Shah Jahan

Jahangir and Shah Jahan generally continued Akbar's policy of conciliation. The alliances with Rajput states remained strong, and Rajputs continued to hold high positions in the administration and military. There were occasional military campaigns against recalcitrant Rajput rulers, but the overall framework of alliance and integration persisted. For instance, Jahangir successfully negotiated a treaty with Mewar, ending decades of conflict. The reigns of these emperors largely saw a continuation of the stable relationship forged by Akbar.

Aurangzeb's Policy Shift and Its Consequences

Aurangzeb's reign marked a distinct and detrimental departure from Akbar's inclusive Rajput policy. His policies included:

- **Reimposition of Jaziya:** He reimposed the Jaziya tax in 1679, reversing Akbar's inclusive stance.
- **Religious Intolerance:** He ordered the destruction of temples and pursued policies that alienated non-Muslims, including the Rajputs.
- **Interference in Succession:** Aurangzeb often interfered in the succession disputes of Rajput states, notably Marwar, which sparked prolonged conflicts with the Rathors.
- **Protracted Wars:** His policies led to costly and prolonged wars against Rajput states like Marwar and Mewar, diverting significant imperial resources and manpower.

The shift alienated a crucial base of support for the empire, weakened its military, and contributed significantly to the financial and political strain that would hasten its decline.

Analysis of Key Mughal Administrative Policies

The success and eventual decline of the Mughal Empire can be deeply tied to the effectiveness and evolution of its administrative policies.

Effectiveness of Centralized Control

The Mughal administration, particularly under strong emperors like Akbar, was remarkably effective in establishing centralized control over a vast and diverse empire. The hierarchical structure, with clear lines of authority from the emperor to the village, facilitated efficient revenue collection and law enforcement. The creation of Subahs, Sarkars, and Parganas ensured administrative uniformity. However, the effectiveness of this control was heavily dependent on the personality and capabilities of the emperor. During the reigns of weaker successors, central authority often waned, leading to increased autonomy for provincial governors and local potentates. Communication and transportation challenges also limited the reach and speed of central directives, especially in distant provinces.

Impact of the Mansabdari System on Military and Nobility

The Mansabdari system was initially highly successful. It created a powerful and loyal nobility, integrated diverse ethnic and religious groups into imperial service, and provided a strong and organized military. Mansabdars, being directly accountable to the emperor, ensured a degree of loyalty. However, over time, the system developed serious flaws. The increasing number of Mansabdars, coupled with a stagnant or declining amount of Khalsa land, led to a severe shortage of Jagirs. This Jagirdari crisis resulted in Mansabdars holding Jagirs for shorter periods, leading to exploitation of peasants and reduced investment in agriculture. Furthermore, corruption in maintaining the stipulated number of troops and horses became rampant, weakening the military effectiveness of the empire in its later stages.

Equity and Efficiency of Land Revenue Systems

The Dahsala system, pioneered by Todar Mal, was a landmark in terms of its equity and efficiency. By basing revenue on actual measurement, productivity, and a 10-year average, it offered a fair and predictable demand, benefiting both the state and the cultivators. It minimized arbitrary assessments and provided a stable income for the imperial treasury. The Ghallabaksh system, while simpler, could be less predictable due to harvest variations. The Nasaq system, being summary, was often less accurate. Despite the sophisticated systems, the burden of revenue was heavy, often up to one-third or even half of the produce, which could lead to peasant distress during times of famine or excessive demand. This became a major point of contention.

Long-Term Repercussions of Rajput Policy

Akbar's inclusive Rajput policy was one of the greatest strengths of the Mughal Empire. It transformed potential adversaries into reliable allies, provided the empire with capable military commanders and administrators, and helped establish a broader base of support among the Indian populace. This policy contributed significantly to the stability and longevity of the empire during its zenith. In contrast, Aurangzeb's reversal of this policy had devastating long-term repercussions. It alienated the Rajputs, forced them into rebellion, and drained the empire's resources in prolonged conflicts. This strategic misstep weakened the empire's military and political fabric, contributing to its fragmentation and eventual decline. The policy also fostered religious resentment, which further destabilized the empire.

UPSC Perspective

For aspirants preparing for the UPSC [Civil Services Examination](#), a thorough understanding of Mughal administration is indispensable. Both the factual details for the Prelims and the analytical depth for the Mains require focused study.

For **Prelims**, the emphasis lies on recalling key terms, specific dates, and the functions of various officials and systems. For instance, knowing that Mansab, Zat, Sawar, Dahsala, Ghallabaksh, Zabti, Khudkashta, Jagir, Khalisa, Wazir, Mir Bakshi, and Qazi-ul-Quzat are crucial terms is essential. Specific dates like Akbar introducing Mansabdari (1573-74), Todar Mal's Dahsala (1582), the abolition of Jaziya (1563), and pilgrimage tax (1564) are often tested. Details of reforms such as Jahangir's *du-aspas* and Shah Jahan's Month-Ratio system, along with the precise duties of central officials, form the factual core.

For **Mains**, the focus shifts to a critical evaluation of these administrative policies. This includes assessing the effectiveness of centralized control and its limitations, analyzing the broader impact of the Mansabdari system on the military, nobility, and economy, and conducting a comparative analysis of different land revenue systems in terms of equity and efficiency. Understanding the causes and consequences of variations in Rajput policy across different reigns and the role of specific administrators like Todar Mal is crucial. Aspirants must also be able to link these administrative policies to broader questions, such as the reasons for Mughal decline, demonstrating a comprehensive and analytical grasp of the subject.

Common Student Confusion

Several aspects of Mughal administration often lead to confusion among students:

- **The distinction between Zat and Sawar ranks in the Mansabdari system:** Students sometimes conflate these two. The Zat rank denotes the Mansabdar's personal status and salary, while the Sawar rank indicates the number of cavalymen he was required to maintain for the imperial army. They were distinct but related, with Sawar often being less than Zat to account for practical limitations.
- **The exact differences and regional applications of Ghallabaksh, Zabti, and Nasaq revenue systems:** Ghallabaksh was a crop-sharing system, often localized. Zabti (Dahsala) was a more standardized, measured, and cash-based system based on a 10-year average, prevalent in the core regions. Nasaq was a summary assessment based on past records. Their applicability varied geographically and temporally.
- **The nuanced differences in the Rajput policies of Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb, and their respective impacts on the empire's stability:** Akbar's policy was one of active integration, alliances, and tolerance. Jahangir and Shah Jahan largely continued this. Aurangzeb, however, reversed this inclusive approach with policies of intolerance and interference, leading to conflict and instability, which needs to be clearly understood.
- **The relationship between Jagirs, Khalsa land, and the Mansabdari system:** Jagirs were land assignments to Mansabdars in lieu of salary, allowing them to collect revenue. Khalsa land was directly managed by the state, with its revenue flowing to the imperial treasury. The Mansabdari system used Jagirs as the primary mode of payment, linking the two. The proportion of Khalsa

land vs. Jagir land was a critical indicator of the empire's financial health.

Short Revision Points

- The sovereign was the central authority, with ministers like the Wazir and Mir Bakshi managing state affairs.
- Mughal administration had a hierarchical structure from the centre to the village, based on uniformity and checks and balances.
- The Mansabdari system, introduced by Akbar, assigned ranks (Zat and Sawar) to nobles, determining status and military obligation.
- Key reforms to Mansabdari included Jahangir's *du-aspa-sih-aspa* and Shah Jahan's Month-Ratio system.
- Land was classified into Polaj, Parauti, Chachar, and Banjar for revenue purposes.
- Principal revenue systems were Ghallabaksh (crop division), Zabti/Dahsala (surveyed land, 10-year average rates), and Nasaq (estimate-based).
- Cultivators were categorized as Khudkashta (own land), Muzarian (tenants), and Pahikashta (temporary cultivators).
- Land types based on authority included Jagir (revenue assignment), Khalsa (direct state control), Madad-i-mash (grants), and Paibaki (compensation land).
- Akbar's Rajput policy focused on integration through alliances and high appointments, while Aurangzeb's policy of intolerance led to conflict and contributed to the empire's decline.

FAQs

1. What was the primary function of the Mansabdari system in the Mughal Empire?

The primary function of the Mansabdari system was to organize the nobility, the military, and the bureaucracy into a single, graded imperial service, assigning rank, determining status, and specifying military obligations for all imperial officers.

2. How did the Zabti system, associated with Todar Mal, improve Mughal land revenue administration?

The Zabti system, also known as Dahsala, improved administration by introducing detailed land measurement, classifying land based on productivity, and fixing revenue rates based on a ten-year average of produce and prices. This made the system more predictable, equitable, and efficient for both the state and the cultivators.

3. Why is Akbar's Rajput policy considered significant for the stability of the Mughal Empire?

Akbar's Rajput policy was significant because it integrated powerful Rajput ruling families into the Mughal system through alliances, high appointments, and religious tolerance. This strategy secured a loyal and capable base of support, transforming potential adversaries into strong allies, and thereby enhancing the empire's military strength and political stability.

In conclusion, the Mughal administrative structure was a sophisticated and dynamic system that underpinned one of India's most powerful empires. From the absolute authority of the emperor to the nuances of the Mansabdari system, the complexities of land revenue, and the evolving Rajput policy, each component played a critical role in shaping the empire's trajectory. Understanding how this administration was structured is key to appreciating both the zenith of Mughal power and the factors that eventually contributed to its decline. For those preparing for the Civil Services Examination, a deep dive into these aspects of governance is crucial, and guidance from institutions like [SHRI RAM IAS](#), widely regarded as the best [ias coaching in delhi](#), can provide invaluable clarity and strategic insights.

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