

## **The Social Stratification During Mughal Period: The Origin And Development Of Middle Class**

Dr. (Mrs) Tanuja Kumari

LM -01931

University Department Of History,  
BBMKU, Dhanbad  
Medieval India

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The Mughal period is also known for the coming of the European powers in India. Many of the historians while giving the information regarding the social and economic condition has also written about the European traders who had come to India. The historians have written about the Indian living standards but have also given description about the life of the traders and on the other hand they have also given information regarding the common people such as the peasants, labourers and some sections of the traders have also been mentioned as the middle class. This class was such a class in which the life of the people was that of between of the Amir class and that of the poor section. We find many such sections a social stratification in the society which included the traders. People who wear connected with trade and commerce, handicrafts in the commercial class, to it also belonged the prestigious doctors, artist and also the tailor class during the Mughal period in the administrative machinery. This class had a major role in the administrative structure.

In India the traders where the most powerful section in the middle class. The concept of middle class developed in Europe in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. In this class there where traders craftsman, doctor who worked independently in the society in the Mughal period. The lawyers,reporters educationist such classes did not exist but in the Mughal. The doctors, artist and traders well formed part of the middle class

W.H. Moreland has written that the middle class in the Mughal period was a very small section in the society ,in this class there were doctors lawyers and the ulemas whose population was relatively very low compared to that of the other sections of the society.

Iktidar Alam Khan in his book “ The middle class in the Mughal Empire” has thrown light on the condition of the middle class during the Mughal period. In this class belonged the traders merchants, artist, painters, craftsman and the officials belonging to the rank of minimum 500 Zat<sup>1</sup>. S in Mughal period the trader class developed as one of the strongest class in the society.It is clear that in India the population of the trader class was large. The banjaras also belonged to the trading class who used to carry the products from one place to another. There used to be caravans of banjaras who used to carry products from one place to another. The banjaras used to trade products such as cereals, pulses, ghee, salt which they used to carry on thousands of oxen .The trade through land was cheaper compared to trade by sea or waterways.

Bengal used to trade in sugar, rice, mulmul, silk and coramandel coast was known for cotton textiles. .Gujarat was the entrance to India for export and import. Lahore and Kashmir was the centre for shawls and carpet. The products which were manufactured in Punjab and Sindh where sent through Sindhu river to the Sea. Lahore was connected to Kabul and Kandhar and on other hand it was connected to Delhi and Agra. Lahore was centre for handicrafts products.

During the Mughal period such financial establishment was developed which helped in the smooth transportation of products from one place to another and also for sending money easily from one place to another. This was done through Hundis. Insurance was also involved with Hundis<sup>2</sup>. Sarafas also existed which worked as private banks. The traders in India did not belong to a particular caste or religion. The traders from Gujarat belonged to Hindus, Muslims, Jain's and primarily were Bohras. The traders from Rajasthan were Agarwal and Marwaris. In South India in the Coromandel coast the Chettis primarily belonged to this class.<sup>3</sup>

In 1500 A.D. the social stratification was very complex. The muslims had stronghold in trade and commerce and also in the manufacturing and management of ships. The big traders, and famous ships were from Red Sea and Hurmoz area. The ship building and Ships of Malabar, Gujarat and Bengal were under the Muslims and were neo- musalmans.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the trading class people were in status equivalent to that of prince and European traders. Virji wohra was one of the prominent traders of Surat for many decades .He had many huge ships with him and was very influential and wealthy person of the community. When a trader named Abdul Gaffur Bohra when died in 1718 A.D. he left behind 55 Lakh cash and property.<sup>5</sup> Many of the traders of Agra, Delhi and Bengal were very wealthy. Gaffur who was poor he came to Gujarat in 1670 for trade ,started doing trade and commerce in Red Sea and created property for himself. In 1680 in Surat he became one off the wealthiest person of Surat and out of 112 ships of which 17 ships was with him<sup>6</sup>.

The European traders who visited India during Mughal period they have also mentioned about the wealthy traders of India ,their big and lavish houses and travellers also mentioned about the small traders. Fance traveller Bernier has also mentioned that the wealthy traders portrayed to be poor so that nobody take away their assets and make claims over their property. Traders were oppressed to a limit and then also there was no danger to their property<sup>7</sup>.

In 1659 Mir Jumla ordered the closure of the gates of the factory of the Britishers in Qasimbazaar and asked the Indian traders not to trade with Britishers. Some of the European traders have complained about the roads not being safe but the condition of safety was satisfactory. For safety and protection of the traders insurance was done. After every 5 kos a Sarai was constructed and transportation means we're provided. Due to the self interest,the traders used to influence and participate in the administrative structure.Every group of traders had a leader known as Nagar Seth who used to solve the matters with the local officers. Many of the traders of Ahmedabad had also gone on strike. The Mughal rulers used to provide protection and we're active in boosting trade but compared to Britain, Holland, France like European countries did not provide similar facilities.

In the sixteenth century many kasbas and cities came into existence. Fitch who came to the Akbar court mentioned that Agra and Fatehpur Sikri were bigger cities than London. .Jesuists father Monserrate who came to the court of Akbar mentioned that Lahore was no lesser city than any another city in Asia or Europe. In seventeenth Bernier mentions that Delhi was no lesser than Paris and mentions that Agra was bigger than Delhi. In the Mughal period in West Ahmednagar, Burhanpur, in North West Multan, in East Patna,Dacca and Rajmahal developed a lot and transformed into big towns. These towns were not only trade centres but also administrative centres.<sup>8</sup>

After the Portugese other European powers such as Dutch, ,British and French came to India as traders.After the death of Akbar the trade of commodities such a Indigo, raw silk went in the hands of European traders in place of Indian traders. During the reign of Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb the traders of Britain and Holland came to India and from here traded with Western countries.The European traders basically entered India to trade in the Cloth produced in India.The European traders made Indian manufactured cloth in Europe.<sup>9</sup>

For trade in spices just like Danes,Britishers also came to Java and Sumatra but due to obstruction done by Danes ,Britishers entered India. During the late Sixteenth the decline of Portugese traders started. Inspite of protest by the Portugese in 1606 Dutch established themselves in Machilipatnam due the the farmans of Golconda rulers. After 1610 the Dutch gained hold in trade of spices and Dutch caught stronghold of the trade in clothes. Due to the approval of the local rulers the Dutch also got stronghold in the Coramandel coast and established their headquarters here.

In 1612 the Dutch defeated the Portugese near Surat and established their factory over here. In reality the part of European traders compared to Indian traders was lower in the regions of Gujarat, Coramandel,Bengal.The Indian traders had more knowledge about textiles and had also knowledge about its import and export markets. The Indian traders were ready to do business at a margin of 10-5 percent. There was also enhancement in the manufacturing of ships. In Surat in the Seventeenth century very quality ships were manufactured whose number was almost 50 till the late seventeenth century the number of ships increased to 120.

In the Mughal period trade and commerce increased not only due to Indian traders but also European traders. Due to the formation of new towns and cities the urbanization of the society occurred and as traders were earning profit they started investing in other industries (33) Dr. Om Prakash of Delhi School of Economics proved in the basis of Dutch records has written that in Seventeenth century the shiping industry in the Bengal ports were under the Amirs.The ships which went to Red Sea was basically for pilgrimage. The administration was nirankush and local amirs.traders and sometimes problems arose due to traders from other side of the sea.<sup>10</sup>

In Medieval Indian History the nobility class held important place. In the establishment and gaining stronghold of the Mughal dynasty this class held important position. Their importance in the society increased immensely and were known as Arkan – e- Daulat( Rajsthambh). They were given titles such as Khan, Malik, Amir, Beg, Mirza, Umra etc. The power and prestige had increased during the Delhi Sultanate and itself and due to this Iltutmish befriended them and formed the Chalisa Dal known as The Forty. The position continued similarly during the Mughal period and held prestigious position in the society and administrative structure.

In Medieval Indian History the landholders, rich class i.e. zamindars and also Amir class belonged to the ruling class. The Nobility was also known as Amir class .This class included Raja, Nawab, Amir, jagirdars Social class included this prestigious classes<sup>11</sup>.

In India prior to the Mughal dynasty the nobility class did not include the Hindus and two things related to this class has come into prominence. Firstly changes were being seen in the composition and expansion of the nobility class. In the thirteenth century this class included the Turks but in the late Fourteenth this class included Turks, foreigners (Taziks), Afghans and Indian Muslims also. Secondly in this class during the Mughal period the Hindus were included for administrative work but were not included in the nobility class.<sup>12</sup>

When Akbar became the Mughal ruler with his Suleh e Kul was owned by him and due to this Hindus started being included in this class Ali M. Athar in 1977 in his work "The Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb"; has given details of the percentage of Hindu amirs and nobility in the class (Table 1) Due to Mansabdari system also Hindus were included in the administrative structure. and due to this it provided equal opportunities to Hindus and Muslims. As the Mughal empire started expanding this Nobility class also included the Turanis, Irani, Sayyid, Afghans, Indian Muslims, Marathas, Rajputs and Jats. Due to this composite structure of the nobility it provided opportunities to both Hindus and Muslims and provided equal status to both Hindus and Muslims.

In spite of the racial and religious discrimination and diversity as the Mughal dynasty rulers provided equal status and opportunities to all the groups and formed such a diverse administrative structure and ruling class. As the Mughal dynasty started disintegrating small ruling dynasties gained prominence and some became Hindu princely states and Muslim princely status.<sup>13</sup>

Mughal Dynasty holds its speciality regarding the composite structure of the nobility class. During this period there came into existence and increase diverse administrative posts, increase in number of cities and gradation in posts in the administrative structure also occurred. The Nobility class was divided also on the basis of religion also The new social classes habitaedbin the cities, which gave rise of new culture and religion. During the Mughal period the nobility class not hereditary and only during their life enjoyed the privileges of the class. The Indian Muslims known as 'Shwukhzada' were also included in the nobility class. During 1580-81 during revolt during Akbar reign both Muslims and Rajputs supported Akbar. In 1582; during Akbar's Central administration 46 officials were appointed in which 8 were Hindus named Todarmal, Raidurga, Raisurjan, Raishal, Loonkarn, Jagannath, Birbal, Jagmal, Askarn were main.<sup>14</sup>

The Nobility class during the Mughal period were composite and diverse in nature. Despite of being of diverse sections, class and religion they represented the well organised ruling class. It can also be stated that in character the Amir class was basically feudal in nature and many features of diverse classes and section of the society and contained the features of the beauracrcy. The Nobility class contributed in the development of trade and commerce and also contributed in the development of towns.

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