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Title- A Study of the Mughal Military Culture (1526-1707)

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Abstract

The Mughal army seem to have a life of its own while performing its most crucial functions. The moment it decided to make an offensive, all its necessary apparatuses became operational. The most crucial aspects of this process being the planning, strategy and channelization of the resources. Military historians have largely focused on the institutions like *mansabdari* system and its various aspects like *zat* and *sawar* ranks. A very little had been said about the military values and cognitive abilities of the army. Different cultures stood differently as far as their military intelligence and chivalric conceptions were concerned. Some of the cultures like Rajputs and Persians came to occupy a high status for their grit and determination in the battle field. While the others like the Turkish race was condemned for fleeing the battlefield. The observations such as these are important for military analysis.

Further, the organic structure of Mughal army needs to be studied, as soldiers of different cultures and ranks shunned their differences to enter the battlefield. A general pervasiveness of the culture of arms is observed during Mughal times. In this regard, the participation of the religious elements in the military enterprises emerged as the most interesting phenomenon. *Sufis* seem to have participated in military enterprises both directly and indirectly during this period. Even the Hindu devotees, who could bear arms, were common in the army of eighteenth century.

Simon Digby has discussed in details the role played by *sufis* in Aurngzeb's Deccan. Physical fitness played an important role in the overall effectiveness of the army. Dirk H. A. Kolff has highlighted the significance of swords play and stick fighting in maintaining bodily fitness and in shaping martial attitudes in north India. A large inadequacies is felt in this area, hence, a need for a comprehensive research is needed to find other collateral activities which could have built strength and endurance of soldiers in the battle field.

The objective of this work is to study the cultural aspects of the army. It encompasses the areas like planning, organization, cognitive elements like military intelligence and conventions, and loyalties operating at various levels. These were crucial determinants which shaped the outcome of the battle. The planning and organization naturally meant handling scarcity of men and resources, logistical problems etc. The cognitive aspects defined the precision of the battle strategies and morality in the battlefield. One also needs to study the response of the army in various contingencies.

Mughal army was more than an institution and a tool in the hands of the state. It was an organic structure which subsumed divergent military cultures, which contributed in fulfilling the military goals of the state. In the process of doing its best, the army developed a culture of its own. It needed to accumulate resources, organize the transport of men and material, strategize and imbibe most desirable traits to become victorious in the battlefield. It was indeed a difficult process, as the challenges were many. The state had resources to finance the expeditions, but on many occasions, sovereigns and the princes faced scarcity, and borrowed money from others. Merchants and bankers played an important role in this regard. Important nobles like Tardi Beg and Mir Jumla came to rescue sovereigns from financial crisis on many occasions.

The bravery displayed by emperors, princes and the military generals inspired their army. Akbar possessed tremendous fighting vigor. His courage and capability in the battle of Sarnal, and display of risk and valor in the battle of Paronkh, established beyond doubt his credential in the warfare. It threatened his enemies for all time to come. Apart from unconventional display of power, Akbar possessed reasonable organizational skills to make his military maneuvers highly effective. Aurangzeb too, stood firm, when challenged by adversities, both on and off the field. He used allegorical languages to motivate his soldiers. He also often kept him dangerously close to the area of military operation. His military campaigns in the Deccan were characterized by the determination of the highest order.

Loyalty in the military affairs was another important factor which proved decisive in the battlefield. The emperors struggled to keep even the most loyal military officers in their fold. Babur and Humayun kept them under their control by different means. Akbar faced numerous rebellions of his officers during his reign. The rebellions of the royal princes and the most capable military officers became the common feature in the Mughal empire. However, by the time of Aurangzeb loyalty of military officers got stabilized, the officers showed more determination in their work. Planning and strategy was another crucial factor which defined the outcome of the battle. Akbar, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb applied themselves a lot in doing necessary preparation for the contest. Reshuffling military officers and clearing the debt of soldiers was an important step prior to taking military enterprises. On few occasions, the Emperor disguised his intent and attacked enemies on the pretext of hunting. However, some of the offensives required massive effort, especially siege operations, which required expert builders, carpenters and laborers to work day and night to bring the task to a successful

completion. A sound intelligence system helped army a great deal in this regard. It gave all the necessary inputs to the generals about the strength and the weaknesses of the enemy.

The marches of the Mughal army exhibited its culture in entirety. All the departments of the state coordinated to make the movement of the army possible. Emperor held counsel with the important ministers and discussed the next course of action. Akbar's campaign against Daud and Mirza Hakim, and the large scale engagements of Mughal army in the Balkh and Badakhshan gave an elaborate detail of the working of this machinery. The army needed to take into account the selection of the best possible routes with plenty of water and fodder. The army was given enough security on the marches to protect it from being ambushed. The spies moved in different directions to bring news of any unprecedented happenings. Thousands of laborers, sappers, artisans and carpenters moved with the army. The roads were leveled, forests were cut, and temporary bridges were made for the unhindered passage of the army. Mughals put a lot of emphasis on the constant movement of the army from one place to another. It was necessary to suppress the refractory elements and to consolidate the empire.

The fun and leisure was also an important aspect to keep army in the right mental state. Therefore, Mughal emperors often took to hunting and organized various sports to keep the army in good shape. The army attained efficiency and coordination with such exercises. Hunting expeditions involved important sections of the Mughal society. A high degree of discipline was attained with such exercises.

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