The Administration of Mughal and British Empires in India: Continuity and Change

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Abstract

The administrative machinery is one of the most important tools for any ruler to run the government, rule any territory and for an empire to sustain its power. The Mughals ruled India from 1526 till 1707 when the Emperor Aurangzeb died, and thereafter nominally till 1857. The Mughals were establishing new dynastic rule in India and they had to establish an authentic system of administration to consolidate their power. The British succeeded Mughals and inherited various administrative institutions. The rise of the British Empire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in India also resulted in introduction of a new system of administration. Political, military and economic strength of the Mughal and British Empires largely based on their ability to collect revenues and maintain law and order through an efficient system of administration. The present study looks into the organization, composition and historical legacy of the administrative systems of these empires, particularly focusing the administrative aspects of revenue collection and maintenance of law and order. Whilehighlighting the main features of the Mughal and British administration, the present study ponders into the question, that how far the British administrative system in India can be regarded as a continuation of the Mughal pattern, also looking into the change in the administrative pattern of British Empire.

Keywords: Mughal Empire, British Empire, India, Administration, Revenue collection, Law and Order

Introduction

From the victory of Zahir al-Din Babur in the battle of Panipat in 1526 AD till the partition of India in 1947 AD, two major empires, namely Mughal and British ruled India. Although conquered India as foreign powers, these empires successfully managed the affairs of the state with the help of a well-organized system of administration. The Mughals, who were having new dynastic rule in India, had to establish an authentic system of administration to remain in power. Mughals developed administrative structure which was a blend of various institutions, merged into each other which performed well during the reign of the Great Mughals. These institutions coordinated with each other in revenue collection and in the maintenance of peace and order. However, by the close of seventeenth century, the economic and administrative power of the Mughal Empire was weakened. The British succeeded Mughals and also inherited their administrative structure. However, they introduced various changes in administrative structure of Mughals while retaining certain principles and spirit to hold a tight grip of central authority on state affairs. The present paper while taking an overall look of Mughal and British administrative institutions tries to highlight the importance of these institutions for the managing of important state affairs at various levels. It also analysis the continuity and change in the field administration of the Mughal and the British Empires.

Administrative Structure of Mughal Empire

Mughal Empire replaced Delhi Sultanate founded by Qutb al-Din Aybeg in 1206. It was during the thirteenth century, when a central administrative structure started to re-develop in India under Delhi Sultanate, centuries after the decline of the Gupta Empire.[1] After the early efforts of Shams al-Din Iletmish (r. 1211-36) and Ghiyath al-Din Balban (r. 1266-86), Ala al-Din Khilji (r.1296-1316) was the one who significantly improved the administrative structure, particularly revenue administration

of Delhi Sultanate through number of important changes. His administrative structure was successfully applied and continued to work under Tughluqs, but with the passage of time it lost much of its efficiency.[2] The administrative system under the early Mughal Emperors, Zahir al- Din Muhammad Babur (r.1526-30) and Nasir al- Din Hamayun (d.1556) continued as it was more or less under the Sultans of Delhi. Babur, the founder of Mughal dynasty had little time to setup an effective system of government and the nature of administration was highly centralized without defined particular departments. Hamayun also remained engage in various issues and wars and could not establish an organized system of administration.[3]

Sher Shah of Sur (r. 1540-45) a great conqueror and an excellent administrator, who intervened between Humayun and Akbar, provided an excellent land revenue system.[4] He introduced many reforms in central and provincial administration and established a council of ministers to help the emperor in governing the whole Empire. The provinces were further divided into *Sarkars*, *Parganas*, and villages for administrative convenience.[5] Although the administrative institutions of the Mughal Empire were mostly a continuation of the Sultanate period with some alterations and improvements, it is also conceded that Akbar's administration owed a great deal to Sher Shah as well.[6] However, it is believed that after the death of Sher Shah the state was in disorder and much of the valuable work in the field of administration was destroyed.[7] After the reoccupying of the Indian Empire in 1555 the Akbar, who succeeded Humayun in 1556 made efforts to improve the administrative system.

While taking an overall view of the Mughal administration from the period of Akbar and onwards, it can be divided into two categories, central and provincial administration. The king was supreme head of the state. All power resided in the emperor and his ministers acted as advisors and assistants in various branches of administration.[8] Chief amongst was the *Vakil*, or Prime Minister; next the *Wazir* or *Diwan*, the Finance Minister was the lieutenant of the emperor in financial matters. His duties were to supervise income and expenditure of the state. Other important ministers were the *Sadr*, the chief justice and chief inquisitor, *Bakhsh-i-Mumalik* was the paymaster

general and chief recruiting officer.[9] *Diwan-i-Insha* was to supervise the government records and draft royal proclamations and letters. These officers were assisted by clerks, peons, informers in running of day to day administration.

Akbar divided his empire into provinces or *subas*. The provincial government modelled on the lines of the central government. Each province was under the control of *sipahsalar* also called *subadar*.[10] He was the vicegerent of the emperor and the provincial administration and troops were under his command. He supervised defence, executive and criminal justice. *Diwan* was next to *subadar*, who was responsible primarily for revenue administration and civil justice. *Mir-adl* also called *qazi* appointed by the emperor headed judiciary in the province. Another department was intelligence department. Information was gathered about the activities of the state officials as well as about various developments in the state under this department.

The *subas* were further divided into *sarkars* or districts, each under the charge of a *faujdar*,[11] who combined the functions of a modern magistrate and collector. In the towns, law and order were maintained by the *kotwal*. The defence organization was mainly built round the *mansabdars*. *Mansabdari* system helped the collection of revenue and running the provincial administration and gave a platform for the recruitment of army for internal and external defence.[12] Another important feature of the Mughal Empire was its structure of village administration.[13] Each village was headed by *muqaddam* or *chaudhri*. In village *panchayat* acted as an arbitrator among the villagers. Administrative network in the Mughal Empire was comprised of *patwaries*, *chaudharies*, *khuts*, *muqadams*, *karories*, *munsifs*, *kotwals*, *faujdars*, *amalguzars*, *subadars*, *diwans*, *wazirs* and the Emperor at the top.[14]

Akbar also made efforts to improve the revenue system, He collected complete information about land and introduced *zabti* system in revenue administration.[15] Under this system the cultivatable lands were measured with the standard *gaz* known as *jarib* and accordingly taxed.[16] A hierarchy of revenue officers was established from village to the centre like the *patwari*, *qanungo*, *chaudhri*, *karori*, *Amin*, *Amil*, provincial *diwan* and *diwan* at centre.[17] Due to this efficient system the probable

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annual surplus of Akbar's reign comprised near about seven million gold *muhrs* (76 metric tons) and seventy to hundred million silver rupees (minimum of 807 tons).[18] The land revenue system of Akbar continued in the Mughal period with little changes. The land revenue was the chief source of income along with other sources of supplement income like toll tax, customs, mints, presents received by King, war booty and indemnity from defeated rulers.[19]

Akbar's *Mansabdari* System

When Akbar came to the throne, the hereditary autonomous chieftains possessed the major portion of the Indian empire. Akbar was the first Mughal emperor who established purposeful relations with these chieftains by including many of them into the imperial hierarchy as well as into the administrative system.[20]A large number of Hindu generals and soldiers were recruited by the Akbar and this made reliance upon the Muslim warriors weakened.[21] Akbar successfully checked the power of the Muslim nobility by including heterodox and non-Muslim elements of the population into the management of the state affairs.[22]Akbar introduced *mansabdari* system to develop an integrated system of efficient and loyal servants on his disposal for the maintenance of order in the vast Empire. The chieftains joined *manasabdari* system and the sharing of power and wealth and lucrative incentive resolved many issues between the chieftains and imperial power.[23] The *mansabdari* system was an amalgamation of feudal aristocrats and tribal chieftains. It was unique as it served as an important source for organizing the ruling class.[24] It was a highly unified and systemized bureaucratic structure which served as a tool to assert the authority of an Emperor. It was not a hereditary system and all the *mansabdars* were responsible and answerable to the Emperor. This factor reduced the chances of disaffection and revolts by military and civil officers.[25]

Mansabdari system also provided an efficient army and an organized structure of administration and this systemization of bureaucracy helped the Mughals in organizing and managing their campaigns against rebellious groups, revolts and maintaining peace and order.[26] This bureaucratic structure served the civil and military offices on the parallel grounds.[27]

This system also helped the collection of revenue and running the provincial administration and gave a platform for the recruitment of army for internal and external defence. Akbar got popular support of the local Indian rulers and petty kingdoms under the titular guardianship of *mansabdari* system. Akbar's bent of mind tailored this system into patrimonial bureaucracy.

So, the Mughal administrative structure was a blend of various institutions which merged into each other and performed well during the reign of the Great Mughals. These institutions coordinated with each other in revenue collection and in the maintenance of peace and order. However, by the close of seventeenth century widespread dissatisfaction of the chieftains with the imperial power weakened the economic and administrative power of the Mughal Empire.[28] One of the important factors of the decline of the Mughal Empire is believed to be the failure to maintain *mansabdari* system, whose efficient working was essential for the survival of the central administrative system of the Empire. On the contrary it is also asserted that the fall of Mughals was due to the result of this very system.[29] However the Mughals achieved peace and order and economic prosperity due to the collaboration of the chieftains and *zamindars*. It is believed that the administration system developed by Akbar and maintained by his three successors had power and vitality that not even the chaos of the eighteenth century could completely destroy it. It was taken over by the early administrators of East India Company.[30]

Administration of India under British
During eighteenth century wars of succession, anarchy and foreign invasions weakened the Mughal power in India. In 1764 after the victory of British in Buxar, Mughals survived till 1857 as British dependents.[31] Nature and working of administration in India under British period went through various changes. During the company rule there were Warren Hastings administrative reforms,[32] Cornwallis administrative organization, nineteenth century administrative reforms and establishment of Indian Civil Service.[33]
India had its own deep rooted tradition of governance but within a generation after the assuming of power by British,

India experienced administrative, legal and political reforms.[34] Warren Hastings, the first governor general of India (1774-85) acted like other Indian rulers and used whatever means to maximize his power.[35] He tried to continue with the Indian traditions of administration through appointed servants for tax collection and maintenance of peace.[36] Hastings was of the opinion that the Indian territories must be ruled according to local customs.[37] Hastings was also the first Governor General who clearly spelled out the role of the Company's employs. The East India Company's bureaucracy was named Covenanted Civil Service (CCS). Members of the CCS were appointed by the Court of Directors of the Company. The other Service was Uncovenanted Civil Service (UCS) whose officers were appointed locally by the Fort William authorities.[38]

Under the company rule like in the Mughal period, the land was the main source of wealth and exploitation.[39] Cornwallis (1786-1793) introduced the institution of private property, first time in the history of India through permanent settlement in 1793. It was decided to formally recognize the *zamindars* as the owners of the lands and taxation was collected at fixed rate through permanent settlement.[40] So, the *zamindars* were given the rights of land in return to pay the fixed taxes. *Zamindars*, however were not allowed to retain personal army and a separate police force was established.[41] The judicial system was introduced by Cornwallis. But it was too slow, ineffective and alien to local norms and ultimately failed.

In contrast to Cornwallis, Munro, a capable civil servant argued to use the native institution and offices in administration.[42] He was in favour to establish direct contact with the peasants instead of permanent settlement. Munro school criticized the transfer of property rights to *zamindars* instead of peasants to make revenue administration compatible with old tradition.[43] Munro school gave importance to district level administration headed by the collector. It was advised to give strong executive powers to handle local disputes and problems. Munro argued in favour of executive power superior to judicial because in his opinion, Indians were used to arbitrary rule.[44] The arguments of Munro school prevailed and the collector also became head of police and acted as district magistrate as in Mughal India. In 1812 the *ryotwari* settlement was restored in Madras.[45] The

village *panchayats* as in Mughal India were restored and made an effective contribution in rural justice system.

William Bentick, Governor General of India from 1828-1835 realized the weakness of the administrative system and reconstituted it on the lines of Mughal India. Hierarchy of administrative sub-units like provinces, divisions, districts and sub districts was established. These sub units were governed by collector-magistrates having executive authority.[46] From the battle of Plassey to 1857, Company had come back to the old Mughal system that all executive powers must be concentrated in the hands of local officials.[47]

After 1857 under the sovereignty of the British Crown, efforts were made to reinforce the bonds between the sovereign and Indian elite, who were followed by the masses.[48] The British realized, as Akbar the Great in sixteenth century, the importance of chieftains as powerful allies to stabilize British rule in India. In Punjab some chieftains were granted administrative as well as limited judicial powers in 1860.[49] The British Raj revived the Indian tradition of *darbars* and conferring titles and honours. An efficient Indian Civil Service was also established. The British governed India through *maharajas*, chieftains and bureaucracy and there was no substantial change in subcontinent's culture of power.[50]

From the ancient time there was no practical distinction between civil and military power in India. However, British tried to separate military from civil functions by establishing a professional army with operational proficiency. The formulation of strategy remained in civil hands. British followed the ancient and Mughal tradition of governing subcontinent as continental bureaucratic empire with serious efforts to reform the nature of the state.[51] Indian civil service functioned as *mansabdars* in Mughal period.

Indian Civil Service
The Indian Civil Service (ICS) was the backbone of the power of British Raj in India. Before 1833 there was no element of competition and the Court of Directors remained supreme in the selection and appointment of Civil Servants. After the Act of 1833, the Company's Civil Service came under much strict disciplinary control of British government.[52] In the Charter of

1853 the old power and right of Court of Directors as an appointing authority was ceased. On 26 January 1855 the Board of Control framed regulation for the examination of candidates.[53]

On the top of Indian administration stood the officers of the All India Services (AIS) included the Indian Civil Service (ICS), the Indian Police Service (IPS), and the Forest Service, Engineers, the Medical Service, the Agriculture Service and the Veterinary Service. The final appointing authority of AIS was the Secretary of the State for India after the passing of competitive examination. The provincial Services, comprised mainly by native Indians, covered the provincial civil administration of the field.[54] The Central Services included the Indian Railways, the Indian Post, Telegraph Service and Imperial Custom Service. The officers of Central Service were appointed by the central government.

Nearly one thousand and five hundred members of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) functioned like *mansabdars* of the Mughal Empire. However, the mode of their appointment, transfer, promotion was different. The Civil Service, the department of Police, Custom and Forestry etc. were constituted under the law. The recruitment, transfer, and promotion were held on merit basis and the Governor General had limited powers of appointment, transfer and dismissal over the civil servants. The officers of Indian Civil Service entered in service through competitive examination and were well trained in the matters of administration. The unity and cohesion of Civil Service was also remarkable as compare to earlier bureaucratic elites.[55] The members of ICS also tried to maintain high moral values.[56]

The ranks of Civil Service were open for all caste, creed, color or religion in principal after the proclamation of the Queen in 1858.[57] British changed the culture of political appointment of state officials in India and introduced merit. The 1870 Act of India empowered the government to elevate Indians to the Covenanted Service from Uncovenanted Service without examination if their performance and ability was exceptional.[58] This gave opportunity to Indians officers to compete with European officers and secure promotion into the Indian Civil Service. The first four decades of Twentieth Century saw the Indianization of the ICS and Indian military.[59]

The main objective of ICS was to maintain law and order in a huge country of India and to provide advice to Governor General and his council in the matters of public policy. The ICS helped in tax collection and implementation of effective fiscal policy. The British carefully planned districts administration. Interestingly, between 1858 and 1947 there were seldom more than one thousand members of Civil Service who controlled near about population of four hundred million Indians.[60] The British introduced a new paradigm in India which contributed to alter the culture of power in India.

Introduction of Local Self-Government under British
Another important aspect of British rule in India was that they also brought with them the principle of elections and rule of law. They realized the fact that to administrate such a large empire, an efficient system of local self-government was necessary.[61] Municipal corporations and district and rural boards were established and were made self sufficient through self taxation.[62] These local administrative bodies lessened the burden of provincial and central governments. It was argued that the introduction of local self-government would be a step towards the establishment of representative councils in the provinces and at the centre.[63] It was the policy of British government to associate popular elements with administration by introducing the elective principle in the organization of municipal and local bodies. The principle of election in local boards and municipal corporations was introduced much earlier than provincial and central councils. Local funds were raised through taxation to meet the local requirement of development such as education, sanitation, public health, roads, irrigation and famine relief.[64]

Local self-government in India was divided into presidency corporations, district municipalities and rural boards at district and subordinate levels. The pattern of metropolitan corporations in India was provided by municipalities which developed in the presidency towns.[65] The case studies of the cities of Gujranwala and Sialkot are interesting in the context of efficient working of self-government system in British India. The Gujranwala Public Works Department maintained the government building in the district. The Electric Supply

Company was established through public and private partnership. The Gujranwala District Board established in 1892 worked as an advisory body as well as supervised the activities of taxation, education, medical and public works.[66] The income of Gujranwala municipality in 1934-35 through various taxes was about Rs 536,190 while its expenditure was Rs 528,216.[67] Under local self-government the civic facilities, its status as a trade centre and overall condition improved at great extent. On the other hand, through efficient working of self-government Sialkot became an Industrial city. It became the centre of sports goods and surgical instruments. The city exports amounted to Rs. 1,000,000 in value annually during twentieth century.[68]

From the account of the development of these local governments in India it is observed that the immediate idea behind self-taxation and local self-government was to create local agencies to relieve Provincial and Central governments both financially and administratively. Financially, it was difficult for the centre Exchequer to meet the local demands such as education, health facilities, sanitation and famine relief etc. On the other hand administratively, it was also difficult to cater all the complaints and small issues.

Conclusion
To sum up, Mughals and British were able to achieve political unity and stability for a long period of time through an efficient administrative system which helped them to consolidate their rule in India. Under Mughal Empire, an efficient administrative structure was devised which was a blend of various institutions. Smooth functioning of these administrative institutions contributed in revenue collection and in the maintenance of peace and order. Although British administration borrowed the features of Mughal administration, it was in spirit a reformed version. The British developed an efficient bureaucracy which developed a uniform system of administration in India. Although an improved version, Indian civil service functioned as *mansabdars* in Mughal period. The system of self-government in particular regions during British period also functioned successfully in India. Although, British to great extent restored the efficient administration of the Great

Mughals there were also fundamental changes in administrative structure, British introduced in India. Both the empires however devised an efficient administrative machinery, which was mostly similar in nature and spirit, helped smooth functioning of different departments, particularly in maintenance of law and order and collection of revenue.

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