

## The Authority of the *Padshahs* in Sixteenth-Century Mughal India



**Balkrishan Shivram<sup>1</sup>**

I.

The Mughal, or Timurid, empire that was founded by Zahir ud-Din Muhammad Babur between 1526 and 1530 was by the seventeenth century the most powerful empire the Indian subcontinent had ever known. Underlying it were the superior military capabilities of a generation of Central Asian soldiers, but it owed much to the reign of Jalal ud-Din Muhammad Akbar (r.1556-1605) when the institutions that defined the regime were set firmly in place and the heartland of the empire was defined; both of these were the accomplishment of Akbar. It was the Akbar works that laid the foundation for the good fortune of a series of long-lived and competent descendants. The Mughal Empire was one of the great dynastic powers of the medieval Islamic world and its nature has always been of captivating interest to historians of India and Europe alike. There is considerable disagreement among historians concerning the strength and competence of the Mughal state, with some describing it as a huge leviathan, others a paper tiger. The models or typologies used in the study of authority in medieval India – patrimonialism, feudalism, the territorial state, aristocracy, bureaucracy, absolutism, and so forth – have been developed by European and American scholars out of their own culture. Their application in the Indian context has not been, on the whole, convincing.

---

1. Balkrishan Shivram is a fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla.  
E-mail: bkshivram@rediffmail.com

Sociologists and world historians classify the Mughal Empire as an example of Oriental despotism or bureaucratic empire. Karl A. Wittfogel (1981:5-6) presents despotism as a forerunner of modern totalitarianism. Without delving at length into his conception of hydraulic society, its political correlates, and the controversy concerning it, he describes the political system of such societies as dominated by a bureaucratically despotic state. S. N. Eisenstadt (1969:10-12) employs centralized bureaucracy as the defining characteristic of a general category of societies, which he calls 'centralized historical bureaucratic empires', and places them between patrimonial societies, feudal societies, and city-states on one side and modern societies on the other in the scale of political development. Wittfogel and Eisenstadt both stress the presence of the powerful, centralized bureaucracy as the vital characteristic of historical empire. Stephen P. Blake (1991:278-303) derives a conception of 'patrimonial-bureaucratic empires' from Max Weber and contends that the Mughal regime fits in this category better than bureaucratic despotism. Weber's model of the patrimonial state describes the regime as an extension of the household of the ruler, whose authority is an expansion of that of the father in a patriarchal family. Marshall G.S. Hodgson (1974:17-18) and William H. McNeill (1982:95-8), accepting the idea of bureaucratic dominance, assert that the diffusion of firearms, especially siege artillery, explains the increase in central power which brought the Mughal Empire into being. One may describe their view as the gunpowder empire hypothesis.

I share Farhat Hasan's (2006: introduction) dissatisfaction with the attempts to portray the Mughal state merely on the basis of fiscal and military terms. He observes that the state does not only extort revenues but also redistributes them. Correspondingly, the state not only uses force but also manufactures consent to ensure obedience. Hasan, sees the state from the perspective of localities and asserts that the Mughal state was buttressing the local system of power in the localities and was concomitantly opening up negotiated space for the assimilation of forces resisting them in the political system. Burton Stein's (1980;1998:133-88) model of 'segmentary state' distinguishes two kinds of sovereignty in medieval kingdoms – 'political sovereignty', consisting of the direct rule or control exercised by local powers in their immediate localities, and 'ritual sovereignty', the loose and custodial hegemony

exercised by the king at the top of the pyramidal, segmentary structure. Scholars have confined 'segmentary state' model's application to early south India and refrained from its application to Mughal India.

There is far-reaching disagreement amongst historians concerning the model that best describes the Mughal state. Typologies of this sort, which depict Mughal Empire as a bureaucratically centralized system – as well as the opposing attempts to characterize it as a decentralized feudal system – view the Mughal Empire alone and deal with it from the traditional socio-economic pattern of studies. The purpose of this paper is to offer a model for categorization of the Mughal authority with special emphasis on the symbolism and ceremonial elements – or rather its capsule description – to facilitate comprehension of its significance in Indian history, rather than to classify it with external and general perspectives. The description rests on an effort to understand the human action that takes place within a 'symbolic field' wherein all utterance and expression is suffused with meanings. According to David F. Lindenfeld (1988:35), the ubiquity of this type of mental activity prevents it from serving as a description of the narrower, more specific roles that explicit ideas play in history. Lindenfeld further asserts that the study of such roles, whether for purposes of documentation of the past or dialogue with it, constitutes an essential part of history. In recent times, a number of specialists in India and abroad have now shifted their academic interest from the traditional pattern of Mughal studies to the various aspects of culture, thought and mentality.

According to the Mughal theory of sovereignty, the emperor, or *padshah* (the title indicating legitimate succession to the Timurid throne) possessed absolute authority in the empire. The persona of the emperor embodied the state and to challenge him, his name or anything that symbolized his authority, was to challenge the empire. The Mughals claimed a set of symbols, metaphors and ceremonial acts to represent this authority. Many historians, as for instance Charles Nuckolls (1990:529-59), consider symbols and ceremonials as instruments for consolidating authority (see also Price 1987; Adamson 1999). Lindenfeld (1988: 30-50) believes that the 'symbols' or in a broader category, 'embodiments' – as they are acted out dynamically not meant for introspective purposes – condense complex meanings of parts of system of

thought into a single expression. The symbols, physical objects and ceremonial acts, can easily transmit ideas and values because they are simple and are therefore understood by the majority. A symbol is usually understood in an intuitive manner rather than by a complicated process of interpretation and articulation. Just as the symbols of the imperial sovereignty conveyed the ideas and values that were part of the Mughal authority, so their extensive use implemented a very direct and formalized means of control. Any attempt to abuse or defy the rules and regulations laid down by the Muslim *padshah* was punished summarily in an efficient, personal way depending upon the violator and the nature and depth of infringement.

The consolidation of imperial authority depended upon the capacity of the *padashah* to organize manpower and economic resources and mobilize political support; the ruler had to establish a bureaucratic apparatus which provided efficient instruments of political and administrative action. Although this bureaucracy was characterized by some degree of autonomy and independence, *padashahs* attempted to hold on to a high degree of control by keeping nominations to administrative offices in their own hands, demanding loyalty and committed service of their staff. Despite the development of these centralized-bureaucratic polities the emperor's control was not necessarily based upon written fundamental law. A framework of common cultural [including broad set of beliefs, assumptions and court rituals<sup>1</sup>] and political symbols and identities formed the basis for a potentially universal ideology which transcended territorial and other limits within the empire (Eisenstadt 1968, vol.v:41-9)

II.

The Mughal empire once rested upon a firm base of military power, sustained by the loyalty of the men of talent to the central figure of authority, the emperor. The emperor's authority, effected in the first instance by military conquest, was then perpetuated by an elaborate structure of symbols and rituals. Although the rituals and symbols were significant appurtenances of emperor's public persona, it seems in itself

to have conveyed no power of authority. Rather, it was the stylized patterns symbolizing the imperial authority, or the embroidered image of the *padshah*.

Among *padshah's* symbols of authority were the throne (*awrang*), the umbrella (*chatr*) and the fan (*sayaban*), the two globes (*kawakaba*), the flags and standards (*alam*), the emblem of the sun (*shamsah*) (Abul-Fazl 1994, vol.i:52-3; Aziz 1937:186-88; Verma 1976:41-5). The use of these royal symbols was an exclusive imperial right. Several other prerogatives were reserved for the *padshah*. For example, nobody was allowed to imitate the size or scarlet colour of the royal tent, and certain dresses, cloth, headgear and footwear as well as jewellery and the weapons were also banned (Ansari 1974:1-15,106-07). Governors were not allowed to construct a *jharoka* (viewing), hold court or *darbar* of their own, compel men to perform *taslim* (form of salutation), or require imperial officers to remain standing in their presence, or to mount guard duty (Jahangir 1978: 205/117; Nathan 1936:213-14 entry by a slash refers Persian text). These articles outwardly distinguished the emperor from his servants. The symbol of Islamic legitimacy, the *khutba* (the sermon read in the *padshah's* name in the Friday prayer service in the mosques throughout the realm), and the *sikka* (coins minted in the *padshah's* name), also augmented the authority of the imperial power. These symbols alone, however, would have been insufficient to sustain the dynasty without further territorial expansion and constant reinforcement of the *padshah's* position through rituals in which his subordinates reaffirmed their obedience and invested them with his authority.

The question which arises is not only how much power and authority the Mughal actually held, but how they transformed that power into the authority and what kind of authority they possessed. Contemporary historians, scholars and literary writers depicted the Mughal emperors as shadows of God on earth whose authority to rule was a divine right, inherited in a line of descent from the first four *Caliphs* to Amir Timur and his successors. The historically legitimated superior status of the dynasty 'justified the submission of the chiefs of the proudest clans to its suzerainty' (Athar Ali 1991:267-68).

The Mughals claimed authority over Muslims as guardians of the Islamic revelation and the *shari'a* (the canon law of Islam). While Islamic religious thinking

had generally restricted the religious function of the emperor to mere protection of law, Abul-Fazl, the imperial chronicler, invested the Mughal *padshah* Jalal ud-Din Muhammad Akbar with a paramount spiritual authority (Abul-Fazl 1994,vol.i:3) . According to the *Akbarnama*, the extensive biography of Akbar written by Abul-Fazl (1998; 1994, vol. i: 172-76), the *padshah* enjoyed a special relation with God which raised him above the status of mortal beings whose mystical experiences demonstrated divine inspiration and guidance. The moral authority which he gained by his reputation as a mystic and spiritual guide did not derive from any particular religion but directly from God and therefore he legitimized his position as ruler for Muslim and Hindu alike (Athar Ali 1991:268). Besides his historical and religious claims to authority, Akbar introduced a third, rational element into the Mughal theory of sovereignty which originated from the earlier Muslim political thinkers. According to Athar Ali (1991:268), the sovereign power of the *padshah* was claimed in reference to the 'theory of social contract'. This rational concept demanded obedience in fulfilment of a mutual, contractual duty and helped to justify the sovereign's claims over the individual subject. The strength of this theory lies in its secular character and its foundation on alleged social needs. The world view of Muslims and Hindus identically rests on the 'broad assumption that human society and cosmic reality are linked in one chain of being' and that 'man's activity in society should be shaped by his moral endowments – for Muslims, the one created by God, for followers of Hindu traditions, the one created by past deeds'(Hardy 1986:49-50). The task of the Mughal *padshah* was to preserve society, which consists of complementary elements or groups and to compose an organic hierarchy (Hardy: 50). Thus, the *padshah* is depicted as a physician to a social body whose health and equilibrium is to be maintained by appropriate adjustment of rank and degrees.

The historical, rational and religio-spiritual claims to authority invested the *padshah* with an unprecedented legitimation of rule which corresponded to the Muslim and Hindu ideals of the universal monarch. The image of the ideal ruler so created was fostered and transmitted through a complex system of symbols, rituals and regular ceremonial acts which communicated the imperial authority in various ways to the different strata of society. Although the Mughal *padshah* did not stand above the

*shari'a* there existed no constitutional check on his power. The Mughal *padshah*, in a formal sense, possessed the highest and most absolute authority in the empire. The persona of the *padshah* embodied central authority of the state; royal commands were supreme and opposition to them was severely punished. It has been suggested that the Mughal *padshah* 'occupied the pivotal position as the source of authority, claiming the unquestioned allegiance and absolute loyalty of all his subjects irrespective of religious, tribal or regional affiliations or personal or social status' (Rashid 1979:140).

The Mughal *padshah* was the commander of the armed forces and functioned as chief executive, highest judicial and the only legislative authority, with law-making authority in the fields where their law-making competence was not limited by religious or customary law (Rashid: 141). Usually, the *padshah* led military campaign in person, supervised the administration and the financial affairs of the empire and personally held the regular audience at court in which all internal and external issues were dealt with. Since the Mughals saw themselves as guardians and promoters of the happiness and welfare of their subjects, the Mughal state created a tradition which made the ruler always accessible to his subjects.

The mobile imperial capital, containing all the facilities of court and civil administration, meant that the *padshah* could always conduct and supervise imperial policy directly. Neither military campaigns nor hunting expeditions were periods of absence in the sense that the imperial centre was vacant, paralyzed or ineffective. Even supposing Mughal *padshah* spent more than forty percent of their time in camp or on tours (Blake 1991: 298-99; Gommans 2002:101-02),<sup>2</sup> whilst at the same time they performed their daily routine in the administration of the empire –even if they were in the campgrounds or at the mansions of the nobles visited by the *padshahs*. In September 1573, whilst as guest of Itimad Khan Gujrati at Ahmedabad, Akbar resumed the routine matter of administration (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol. iii: 89/63; Badauni 1973:172-73/169-70). During his expedition to Patna, while dwelling at Khan-i-Khanan Munim Khan's mansion in August 1574, Akbar convened a war council of his principal military officers concerning the capture of Hajipur, which ultimately led to the crumbling of Sultan Daud Khan's power in Bengal (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol. iii: 135/96;

Ahmad 1936, vol.ii:444).In Shahjahan's reign 'the King of Hindustan seldom fails', writes Bernier 'even when in the field, to hold the assembly twice in a day on the same pattern as he has done in the capital. The custom is regarded as a matter of law and duty, and its observance is rarely neglected' (Bernier 1983:360).

III.

Abul-Fazl explains that the 'success of the three branches of the government [those concerning the army, the household, and the empire], and the fulfilment of the wishes of the subjects, whether great or small, depend upon the manner in which an emperor spends his time' (Abul-Fazl 1994, vol. i: 162-65). Thus the vision of the empire started with the *padshah*, and extended outwards to the household, then on to the kingdom. The responsibility of the *padshah* to make himself accessible to all persons for the redressal of grievances appears to be an important part of the Iranian tradition of kingship. It is worth mentioning that many of the Mughal court rituals and norms of conduct – especially the prostration before the *padshah*, the several forms of salutation, custom of distribution of gifts, titles and offices on special occasions or festivals like the new years – are of Iranian attribution, traceable to the Sasanian court (c. AD 224-651) (e.g. Tusi 1978:13-14; see also Alam 2004; Marlow: 1993). One hardly needs to reiterate here that the Mughals showed unprecedented interest in patronizing Persian culture during their rule.

To begin with ordinary court routines, Abul-Fazl and Thomas Roe describe the routines of Akbar and Jahangir in similar form. Akbar began his day with personal religious devotion, and then came to the *jharoka*, the small balcony from where Mughal emperors showed themselves to the general public. Jahangir also began his public day by visiting the *jharoka*. Here, Thomas Roe's (1990:84-7) account is instructive:

This course is unchangeable, unless sickness or drink prevent yt; which must be known, for as all his subjects are slaves, so he in a kynd of reciprocal bondage, for he is tryed to observe these howres and customes so precisely that if he were unseene one day and noe sufficient reason rendred, the people would mutinie; two days noe reason can excuse, but that he must consent to open his doores and bee seene by some to satisfye others.

Although Thomas Roe was referring to Jahangir's court, his comments are relevant to Akbar's reign as well. The custom was called *jharoka-i-darshan*. *Darshan*, literally seeing, is a basic feature of the interaction between Hindu spiritual teachers and their disciples. According to Abul-Fazl (1994, vol.i:164-65), the general population, 'soldiers, merchants, peasants, trades people and other professions', gathered at dawn in order to see his Majesty [Akbar]. From the *jharoka* Mughal *padshah* usually went to the *diwan-i-am* (hall of public audience) or *darbar* where they conducted the main business of their offices, giving justice, in civil and criminal matters, including official misconduct. Abul-Fazl (1994:165) describes the time in the *diwan-i-am* as the second occasion during the day 'when people of all classes can satisfy their hearts with the light of emperor's countenance' (Abul-Fazl 1994, vol.i:165). Although it was called hall of public audience every person was not allowed to attend the *darbar*. In *Ain 73*, Abul-Fazl (1994, vol.i:165) writes the regulation regarding admission to court or *darbar*:

Admittance to court is a distinction conferred on the nation at large; it is a pledge that the three branches of the government [those concerning the army, the household, and the empire] are properly looked after, and enable subjects personally to apply for redress of their grievances. Admittance to the ruler of the land is for the success of his government what irrigation is for a flower-bed; it is the field, on which the hopes of the nation ripen into fruit.

All members of the imperial nobility or *amirs* were expected to visit the court recurrently and undergo a ritual, which, through a complex gradation in gestures and presents gave expression to rank and honour. The beating of a drum announced Akbar's presence in the audience hall. The individual who had the privilege of attending the *darbar* acknowledged the sovereign by performing the *kurnish*, the placement of the palm of the right hand on the forehead and bending the head downwards. The *kurnish* 'signifies that the saluter has placed his head (which is the seat of the senses and the mind) into the hand of humility, giving it to the royal assembly as a present, and has made himself in obedience ready for any service that may be required of him'.<sup>3</sup> The officers coming to court had audience at the *darbar*, promotions and appointments were announced, and officers and others presented and received gifts on these occasions. These kind of court rituals best symbolized personal loyalty of the subordinate to the *padshah* and the exchange of patronage for service.

The Mughal court represented the centre of imperial power. At the court, the *padshah* performed his governmental duties; he received his nobles and foreign embassies, directed the departments of the state, dispensed justice and inspected the army. All officers from top to bottom functioned under a rigorous discipline and feared mortally of being called to account for the dereliction of duty. The utmost form

of chastisement inflicted on the topmost officers was to forbid their attendance at the royal court: they were not permitted to attend *darbar* and offer salutations to the *padshah*. This caused them great mental and physical torture. The contemporary chronicles of Mughal empire recount copious incidents of this nature. To explore the contours of a broad world of the sovereign's displeasure; let us focus on the narratives in the chronicles of Akbar's reign which recorded several incidents of condemnation of an officer's ingress in the court.<sup>4</sup> In August 1574, Sadiq Khan was outlawed to make *kurnish* as he had not taken proper care to send the spoils of Bengal including two noted elephants to the court (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii:149/107; Qandahari 1993:225/195). Similarly, in March 1586, Raja Bhagwan Das was forbidden to perform *kurnish* for negotiating unjustified terms of peace (22 February 1586) with Mirza Yusuf, the ruler of Kashmir (Ahmad 1936, vol.ii:612-13). Bhagwan Das felt greatly embarrassed and struck himself with a dagger in order to save his honour. The court admissions of Qulij Khan (in November 1596) and Rai Rai Singh (in January-February 1597) were banned on the charges of distressing the people in their *jagirs* (revenue assignments).<sup>5</sup>

Rules and regulations of appearance in the imperial court at the capital or in the mobile encampment were elaborately laid down. The Mughal court code reminds us of Erving Goffman's formulation that the code that covered ceremonial rules is incorporated in what is called etiquette. The refusal to show an expected act of deference was, in the words of Erving Goffman, an indication that rebellion was brewing (Goffman 1956:473-502). Strict adherence to an elaborate code formulation of conduct in the Mughal court was expected from each and every noble, and anybody infringing it was severely punished. Shah Abul Maali (close companion of Humayun) was imprisoned for the reason that he tried to offer *kurnish* while sitting on the horseback in April 1560 (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.ii:134/88; Badauni, vol.ii:33/39; Ahmad 1936, vol.ii:242). Lashkar Khan (in June 1571), Shujjat Khan (in August 1573) and Shaikh Jamal Bakhtiyar (in October 1581) were imprisoned for the reason that they had not followed the proper rules of the *turah* (etiquette or code) in the court (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.ii:529/364).<sup>6</sup> Arif Qandahari (1993:172/136-137, 225/195)<sup>7</sup> also observed that Akbar was conscientious regarding

the *turah* to be maintained in the court. Several other factors (see below) could apparently result in the rejection of officers' entries in the public audience hall or palace.

#### IV.

The *padshah* directly supervised and coordinated the offices and institutions of the empire. The daily public appearance of the *padshah*, his frequent tours of his domain and an efficient information system provided many opportunities to the *padshah* to be informed about the state of affairs in the realm and grievances that may have arisen. The character of the *padshah* and the personal ties which he created between himself and his elite played a significant role in the establishment of the authority of any particular *padshah* and, thus the strength of the role of the *padshah* himself. Emperor Akbar created a special image of himself, and some of his personal qualities and virtues later served as a model for his successors.

Apart from the personal qualities of the emperor, several other aspects of the relationship between emperor and his officers deserve attention. Even when not at court, officers were at the physical disposal of their master. Abul-Fazl gives a complex set of regulations for mounting the guard of the emperor and his household at the palace or in the encampment. In theory all officers served at the court for a month, mounting guard duty once a week, so as to have an 'opportunity to come to the court and to partake in the liberality of his Majesty [Akbar]' (Abul-Fazl 1994, vol.i:267-68; Blake: 289-90). Akbar inspected each soldier personally. This ceremony doubtless enhanced the personal relationship of the ruler with his officers. Father Antonio Monserrate (1993:90) observed:

In order to prevent the great nobles becoming insolent through the unchallenged enjoyment of power, the king summons [them] to court ... and gives them many imperious commands, as though they were his slaves – commands, moreover, obedience to which ill suits their exalted rank and dignity.

Imperial rules and procedures applied to all parts of the empire and to all servants – unless exempted for some special reason. The emperor determined the physical location of his officers even when they were stationed elsewhere. When the *mansabdars* (holders of specified numerical ranks) were not at the court, the reciprocal exchange of gifts still occurred regularly by way of imperial messengers. When *mansabdars* received robes (or *khilats*) and promotions, they would prostrate to the imperial *farman* (decree) and the messenger who brought it, as they would before Akbar himself.<sup>8</sup> These rituals made Mughal *mansabdars* symbolic extensions of the ruler and strengthened the ties between the ruler and his officers.

Most *mansabdars* spent their careers either in a court post or in attendance at court, in a post in the provinces, or in transit between court and post. *Mansabadars* rarely received permission to be anywhere else – their *watans* (homelands) or *jagirs* most frequently – and departure from their posts without permission, even to go to court or *jagirs*, was an offence (Streusand 1989:145-46). In September 1574, Khan Alam Iskandar Khan who came to the court without being summoned from the Bengal expedition was dealt with severely (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol. iii: 147-48/106).<sup>9</sup> Hakim Ain-ul-Mulk was not allowed to attend court and salute the emperor as he came without orders from his *jagir* in December 1590 (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol. iii: 886/584). In August 1597, Shahbaz Khan was identically punished for similar reason (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol. iii: 1092/732). Flight from the court constituted rebellion. Amir-ul-Umara Mirza Sharafuddin Husain Ahrari was declared an insurgent and his *jagir* near Ajmer and Nagaur was resumed in October 1562, when he fled from court to his *jagirs*.<sup>10</sup> Dastam Khan (in April 1601) and Dalpat Rai (in October 1601) were also reprimanded for leaving the court without approval (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol. iii: 1181/789, 1196/798). The personal relations between the emperor and the elites were frequently and carefully renewed in various court ceremonies and rituals of subordination. The

personal bond between each member of the elite and the emperor determined the position, status and the wealth of the individual. Ambitious and competent men could climb the ladder of success by offering their service with unreserved loyalty. The bestowal of the honours for loyalty brought the noble nearer to the person of the emperor and to the aura surrounding him. It has been suggested in another context that power relationships were indicated by the image of near and far, in and out, or movement in either direction, less so by the modern western metaphor of up-down and front back (Lewis 1988:12-13).

Unambiguously, nearest to the emperor were the *khanazadas*, the sons of the house or the house-born ones (Streusand 1989:146-148; Richards 1984:255-289). Another way to become closely attached to the emperor's household was to bestow one's daughters on the imperial harem. This was the option chosen by most of the Rajput *rajās* of Rajasthan, especially those of the Kachhwahas of Amber and the Rathors of Marwars (Lal 2005:176-87). In the same spirit, physical contact was an act of political attachment and incorporation. Gestures such as the emperor approaching the *amirs*, or laying his hand on the *amir's* back, or even embracing him, were all signals of the *amirs'* special ties to the emperor household. There was other ways in which imperial corporation could be achieved for almost every single serving *amir* of the empire. This was almost the routine bestowal of *khilats*, or robes of honour, by the *padshah* upon his *amirs*, hence the importance attached to the public wardrobe. In principle, the *khilats* had been worn by the *padshah* himself and, therefore, their acceptance symbolized the incorporation of the *amirs* into the body of the emperor who incarnated the empire. As drastically expressed by F.W. Buckler (1985:176-87), the *amirs* became the *membra corporis regis*, in other words, participants and sharers in body politic. The reciprocity of the receipt of the *khilat* was the offering of *nazr*, gold coins, and other presents, the amount and value being carefully graded and related to the rank of the person making the presentation.

V.

Public praise and acknowledgement by the *padshah* lifted the chosen individual noble above other court nobles. It considerably increased his prestige, and strengthened his

identification with the idea of the empire. This question is all the more important in a period when status rather than wealth was the ruling concern. References to the wealth of the nobles or fight over money in medieval Indian texts are very skimpy and resonate throughout with anecdotes of tension over symbols of status, especially signs of proximity to the *padshah* or a visit to their houses by the *padshah* (Mukhia 2005:73-4) . The visit of the *padshah* to an amir's mansion was a matter of extraordinary favor, and testified to the noble's prominence and influence. It was the utmost honour that a noble could ever hope for. The form of these visits articulated the relationship of the *padshah* and his *mansabdars*. These visits were centrally concerned with incorporation. Nobles were, through visit rituals, subordinated and symbolically incorporated into the body of the *padshah*. During these visits, the exchange of the gifts and joint banqueting of the nobility and the *padshah* reinforced this incorporation. Abul-Fazl notes: '[Their] mansions received celestial glory by the radiance of his Majesty [Akbar] advent. The [nobles] tendered rare and exquisite presents and stood ready to sacrifice [their] life for his Majesty' (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol. ii: 188/123).

Despite the fact that Mughal texts abound in references to such royal visits, no scholarly attention has been hitherto paid to their ceremonial significance. The instances given below are taken from the four major chronicles of Akbar's reign namely, *Akbarnama* of Abul-Fazl, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* of Abdul Qadir Badauni , *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* of Nizamuddin Ahmad and *Tarikh-i-Akbari* of Muhammad Arif Qandahari. These visits need not be confused with imperial religious visits. It has been recorded by numerous scholars that the tomb and the *dargah* remained an important part of Akbar's imperial visits throughout his reign and that established a precedent of *ziyarat* (the act or place of performing pilgrimage).<sup>11</sup>

In general, *Padshah* Akbar visited the nobles while travelling in the region of their postings. Only rarely did he travel particularly from the capital to the mansion of nobles to fulfil their long cherished demand. The giving of rich presents to the emperor was an acknowledgement of this honour. Competitive lavishness amongst nobles was a step in their rise to the emperor's favour. Akbari chronicles witness innumerable instances when the *padshah* accepted invitations to visit the residences

of his nobles. Of course, some of whom were his relatives. On these occasions, nobles threw sumptuous feasts (*ziyafat*) and the *padshah* would spend a couple of days at these feasts. He and the accompanying courtiers would be entertained and offered valuable gifts.

During Akbar's onward journey to Lahore, when he arrived at Dipalpur, he visited the house of Khan Azam Mirza Aziz Koka (Akbar's foster brother) in April 1571 and stayed there for a few days. Nizamuddin Ahmad writes in the *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* (364-365/231-32) concerning the lavish gifts presented by Mirza Aziz Koka on the last day of the feast:<sup>12</sup>

Arab and Persian horses with saddles of silver, huge elephants with chains of gold and silver, housings of velvet and brocade, gold and silver, pearls and jewels, and invaluable rubies and garnets were presented. Chairs of gold and silver, vases and vessels of gold and silver, luxurious dresses of Europe, Turkey and China and other precious things were presented. Similar presents were also offered to the young princes and the *Padshah's* wives. Every soldier of the army accompanying the *padshah* also received presents.

On another occasion, Arif Qandahari provides rich and poetic details of the *padshah's* visit and gift transactions at the newly built and profusely decorated house of Muzaffar Khan (finance minister) at Agra on 4 January 1572. Waxing eloquent about this visit, Arif Qandahari (175-78/138-44) notes:<sup>13</sup>

Every possible apparatus for the grand celebration in all manners of festivities and enjoyment was affixed. The entire passage, measuring two thousand yards, from the royal palace up to his residence [Muzaffar Khan's] was decorated with various cloths such as *zarbaft*, Chinese silk, European velvet, *atlas* and *kamkhab-i-Yazdi* for the emperor's steps.... From all sides, the edifice was canopied with brocade and velvet ... A large tent, made of felt cloth outside and brocade and velvet inside, was fixed there. The floor of brocade, velvet and silk was further decorated with rugs from Khurasan and Iran ...The perfect and amicable arrangements impressed the emperor and he cast his affectionate eye on the Khan, conferred a white *khilat* [robe of special quality] with other honours ... such as swords, studded-daggers and jewelled belts.

The finest pieces of cloth such as *zarbaft* of Rum, velvet of Europe, *kamkhab-i-Yazdi*, *atlas-i-Khatai* of Bukhara, studded *dupatta* and turbans, Deccani jewelled boxes, golden thread of Gujarat and the royal Muslin of Sunargaon were presented .... The *mahavats* had decorated the trappings of their mountain like elephants with velvet and brocade of Europe.... A special (*khasa*) elephant, whose tusks covered with gold and decorated with precious rubies and gems, ornamented dresses with cornelian and precious pearls were also presented.... For the blessed princes, who are

the pearls of crown and throne, beautiful, angel like maid servants, diamond, ruby and *firuz* were presented. The princes appreciated all the presents. The Khan presented gifts to his near and dear ones along with his servants and attendants of the *padshah*.

Likewise, a feast was also held by Abdur Rahim Mirza Khan (now Khan-i-Khanan) in September 1582 at Fatehpur- Sikri, to celebrate his appointment as *ataliq* of prince Salim (future Jahangir), and invited the *padshah* to grace the occasion. 'The latter could not refuse the request', says Abul-Fazl. Near contemporary chronicle further avers (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol. iii: 583/393-394; Hayy 1979, vol.ii:105):

The path from the fort up to his residence was strewn with flowers of gold and silver and near his residence rubies were scattered. At the entrance, cloths of *satin* and velvet were spread on the ground to walk on. Within the compound a dais was erected at the cost of Rs.1, 25,000. When the *padshah* took his seat on it, Mirza Khan presented precious jewels, expensive garments and sophisticated weapons of war. The emperor was so pleased with the celebration that he bestowed on Mirza Khan a drum, a *charquali*, a banner and all the insignia pertaining to a royal prince as a mark of favour which were never given to ordinary officers .... It was said that even ordinary nobles carried off several things.

Choicest presents of jewels and jewelled things were also presented to the *padshah* when he visited the houses of Said Khan (May 1577) and Qutbuddin Muhammad Khan Atka (September 1579) on the occasions of their appointments as *ataliq* of prince Daniyal and prince Salim respectively (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol. iii: 288/204-05,401/274-75; Badauni, vol. ii: 278/270). On April 1592, Zain Khan Koka (foster brother) also entertained the *padshah* at his house. He covered a *chabuttra* (terrace) with *tus* (goat's hair) shawls which were very rare in those days and placed three tanks in front, one filled with rose water of Yazd, another coloured with saffron, and the third with argaja with over 1,000 dancing girls (*tawaiif*) in the tanks. Streams of milk mixed with sugar flowed and rose water was sprinkled instead of water in the courtyard (to settle the dust). Filled baskets and vessels decorated with jewels were presented as *peshkash* (tribute or present to the ruling power) along with noted elephants (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol. iii: 973/613; Hayy, vol.ii:1027-28). At the residence of Sharif Khan Atka, the *padshah* passed his time listening to vocal and instrumental music. Sharif Khan Atka

presented him with nine elephants and twenty-seven Iraqi and Arab horses and various fabrics as tribute (Badauni, vol.ii:293/285; Ahmad, vol.ii:538-39).

Akbar also visited the mansions of his most trusted and highest-ranked nobles on certain specified occasions.<sup>14</sup> During the Narouz festival (the Persian New Year's Day), it became customary for the great nobles to invite him to their houses and give choice presents (e.g. Abul-Fazl 1998, vol. iii: 557-58/378-79; Ahmad, vol.ii:555-56). From the recorded visits of Akbar to the houses of his nobles it seems that, Zain Khan Koka (Akbar's foster brother)<sup>15</sup> and Birbar (Akbar's courtier or poet, distinguished for fidelity and intelligence)<sup>16</sup> were honored five times. Bhagwan Das (father-in-law of Jahangir)<sup>17</sup> and Abdur Rahim Mirza Khan's (*khanzada*)<sup>18</sup> houses were visited by Akbar four and three times respectively. The repeated visit of the *padshah* to their houses shows their intimacy with him. It appears, from the contemporary chronicles, that no other noble had such favours more than two times. On these occasions the nobles made offerings in accordance with their ranks. The *padshah* would accept either the entire or a part of the offerings. At times he would simply glance and feign as having accepted the presents (Jahangir: 23). In the January 1578, Mihr Ali Sildozi had the honour of entertaining the *padshah* at his house. Only a few of his gifts were accepted by Akbar (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol. iii: 328/232). During Akbar's fifth visit to the house of Zain Khan Koka in January 1595, the latter presented 170 elephants, 'only a few of them were accepted', says Abul-Fazl (1998, vol.iii:1044/698). Presents offered by unfaithful officers were generally not accepted (e.g. Abul-Fazl 1998, vol. iii: 12/8). The different levels of gifts exchanged were indicators of each official's status in the empire. A higher status in society became synonymous with frequent visits of the *padshah* to the house of the noble and greater presents given to *padshah*.

The examples mentioned above suffice to exemplify that the Mughal rituals of welcoming and entertaining the *padshah* were not just lavish but on an epic scale. Splendour on such a scale was unheard of in Europe. Such rituals and functions strengthened the bond between the sovereign and the aristocracy. It dazzled the subjects who participated either by being spectators or by rendering numerous services such as arranging and cooking on such a grand scale. Nevertheless, it is important to note that continual reference to materials of gold in these feasts indicate

the prosperity of the monarchy. More importantly the visits of the *padshah* to the house of the nobles also reflect the prosperity of the nobles and their standing in the hierarchy. The *padshah's* visits were confined to very senior nobles. Akbar's visits reaffirmed devotion and sincerity in the behaviour of the nobles. It elevated them as the distinguished members of the court. On various auspicious occasions – like the construction of houses, laying out of gardens and marriage ceremonies – Akbar was invited by nobles to their houses. This symbolically demonstrates that the world was under the *padshah's* protection. Since Akbar was constructed as the centre of a realm, it was likely that those honoured by such visits were seen as blessed.

The Mughal theory of sovereignty had several significant features. The unifying ideology of the regime was that of loyalty expressed through Persian culture forms. Loyalty was constructed on the person of the *padshah*, the apex of a pyramid of perpendicular bonds. Abul-Fazl fostered a new image of Akbar not only as a military and strategic leader, but also as a patron of the holy and the learned. This was expressed in theoretical writings and also in various imperial rituals. The same rituals consolidated the imperial authority and symbolized the loyalty of the *mansabdars*. The ceremonials of the court served in large measures as a reconfirmation of the status achieved by *mansabdars* in military-political-administrative terms. While the ceremonials were the discernible indicators of this status, court saw the acting-out of changing political relationship and rivalries within the state. It served as a mirror of political relationship. In the rituals of the court, the precise relationships between the ruling power and the *mansabdars* were given visible form and substance, symbolizing the grant of patronage and protection, on the one hand, and clientage and service, on the other. These rituals also linked imperial authority to divine authority, the source of all earthly power. The central institution of ceremonial interaction was the court, and the *padshah* who was, if not at all times the focus, the chief actor in that ceremonial. To attend a ceremonial assemblage at court and the presentation of gifts to the *padshah* was an acknowledgement of allegiance. Likewise, departure without order from the court and improper behaviour in the court was a sign of contumacy and

disobedience. It was the court rituals, more than any other of the royal appurtenances which distinguished the *padshah* from predecessors and that set him apart from the other nobles.

## End Notes

---

- <sup>1</sup> For symbolic conception, I refer to Inden, Ronald (1998:41-9).
- <sup>2</sup> On the question of itinerant monarchy see, Melville, C. (1993:195-225).
- <sup>3</sup> For forms of salutation, see Abul-Fazl (1994, vol. i: 167/166).
- <sup>4</sup> See, Abul-Fazl (1998, vol.ii:401-02/269-70; vol.iii:356-57/247,550-51/375,554/377,605-06/408-09,818-19/538, 1117-18/748, 1134/758).
- <sup>5</sup> Abul-Fazl (1998, vol.iii: 1066/715-16, 1066-68/717-19, 1215/809-10).
- <sup>6</sup> Abul-Fazl (1998, vol.ii:529/364; vol.iii: 89/63-4,545/371-72).
- <sup>7</sup> See also Badauni (1973, vol.ii:187/184, 396/383; Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii: 89/63-4,834/549, 1104-07/740-41, 1140/763).
- <sup>8</sup> For, e.g., see Abul-Fazl (1998,vol.iii: 185/130-31) and Nathan, Mirza (1936, vol. i:74, 228,261-63,297-98).
- <sup>9</sup> See also for more examples, Abul-Fazl (1998, vol.iii:885-86/584,1082/724-25,1110/743,1183-84/789-90,1188/793);Badauni (1973, vol.ii: 396/383).
- <sup>10</sup> None of the chroniclers explains his departure beyond saying that he had developed groundless suspicions of Akbar (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.ii: 308-21/198-207). For detail account, see Trimmingham, J. Spencer (1971:92-5) and Schimmel, Annemarie (1975:365).
- <sup>11</sup> The religious imperial visits by Akbar and successive Mughal rulers has been studied and discussed in detail by Ebba Koch.
- <sup>12</sup> See also, Abul Fazl (1998, vol.ii: 528-29/ 363-64); Qandahari (1993: 171/132-33); Hayy, Abdul and Shah Nawaz Khan (1979, vol.i:319-20).
- <sup>13</sup> Neither of the contemporary nor near contemporary sources contains these details with the exception of Qandahari (1993:175-78), who devotes seven pages to this visit and the exchange of gifts. Abul Fazl (1998, vol.ii:531/365-66) only mentions,

---

'His quarter was spiritually and physically illuminated by the advent and there were great rejoicing', devotes no attention to the exchange of gifts.

- <sup>14</sup> For comprehensive examples of nobles entertaining Akbar in their houses, see Abul-Fazl (1998, vol.ii: 97-8 /64-5,177/116, 187-88 /122-23,204-05 /132-33, 214-21 /138-43,228-29 /147-48,345/224-25,411/277,428/291,437/298,496/339,513/352,516-17/356- 57,528-29/363-64;vol. iii: 88-90/63-4,91/65,135/95-6,288/204-05,310/220-21,322/228,362/250,514/350-51,547/378, 617/415,652/434, 661/ 440,705/468,721/478-79,749/494,775/508,790/517,793/519-20, 827/542-43,840/553,851/559-60,855/565-66,858-59/567-68,865/571-72,868 /574,923-24/605, 985/641, 995/647,1005-06/655-56,1027/869,1033-40/673-76,1074/720-21,1082-83/724-25,1085/726, 1116/747,1120/749,1141/763-64,1181/788-89,1189/793,1256/839); Badauni (1973, vol.ii:44-9/49-52,137/133, 173/169-70, 293/285, 419-20/405-06); Ahmad (1936, vol.ii: 224-25,250-51,254,256-57, 324,355, 364-66, 420-22,508,538-39,638);Qandahari (1993:171-72/134-35). These visits will be dealt some other occasion.
- <sup>15</sup> Akbar's visits to the house of Zain Khan Koka: September-October 1583 at Etawah (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii: 617/415); December 1585 near Attock-Banaras, in Panjab ( Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii: 717/476); April 1592 in Panjab (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii:937/613);September-October 1593 at Lahore (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii: 991/644);January 1595 in Panjab (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii:1044/698). His house was also visited twice after his death at Agra: November 1601 and April 1603 (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii:1197/799, 1229/819).
- <sup>16</sup> Akbar's visits to the house of Birbar: January 1583 at Fatehpur-Sikri (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii: 587/397);October 1583 at Fatehpur-Sikri (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii:615/414);November 1583 at Akbarpur, near Allahabad ( Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii: 617/415); September 1584 ( Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii: 657/438); January 1586 at Lahore ( Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii:720/478).
- <sup>17</sup> Akbar's visits to the house of Bhagwan Das: May 1569 at Amber ( Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.ii: 496/339); October 1581 at Lahore (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii: 546/377); February 1583 at Fatehpur-Sikri ( Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii: 677-78/451; Badauni 1973,

---

vol.ii:352/341; Ahmad 1936 ,vol.ii: 599);May 1586 at Lahore ( Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii:748/494) .

<sup>18</sup> Akbar's visits to the house of Mirza Khan: September 1582 at Fatehpur-Sikri ( Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii: 583/393-94); November 1589 at Lahore ( Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii: 881/581-82); October 1599 at Malwa (Abul-Fazl 1998, vol.iii: 1141/763).

### **Bibliography**

Abul Fazl (1994) *Ain-i-Akbari*. Ed. H. Blochmann. Calcutta 1867-77. Tr. of vol. I by H. Blochmann, revised by D.C. Phillott, vol. II and III by H.S. Jarrett, revised by Sir Jadunath Sarkar. Delhi: Delhi: Low Price Publications.

Abul-Fazl (1998) *Akbarnama*. Ed. Maulvi Agha Ahmad Ali and Maulvi Abdur Rahim. Calcutta 1876-87.Tr.Henry Beveridge, 3 vols. Delhi: Delhi: Low Price Publications.

Adamson, John (ed.) (1999) *The Princely Courts of Europe: Ritual, Politics and Culture under the Ancient Regime, 1500-1750*. London: Wayland Publishers.

Ahmad, Khwaja Nizamuddin (1936) *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*. Ed. Brajendranath De and Muhammad Hidayat Husain and Tr. Brajendranath De, 3 vols. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal.

Alam,Muzaffar (2004) *The Language of Political Islam in India, c.1200-1800* . Delhi: Permanent Black.

Ansari, M. A. (1974) *Social Life of the Mughal Emperors, 1526-1707*. Delhi: Gitanjali Publishers.

Athar Ali M. (1997) *Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Athar Ali, M. (1991[1978]) 'Towards a Reinterpretation of the Mughal Empire'. In Hermann Kulke (ed.) *The State in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Aziz, Abdul (1937) 'Thrones, Chairs and Seats Used by Indian Mughals'. *Journal of Indian History* 16, 186-88.

Badauni, Abdul Qadir (1973) *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*. Ed. Maulvi Ahmad Ali, Kabiruddin Ahmad and W.N. Lees. Calcutta, 1868. Tr. vol. I by E.S.A. Ranking, vol. II by W. H. Lowe and vol. III by T.W. Haig. Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delhi.

- 
- Bernier, Francois (1983) *Travels in the Mughal Empire, 1656-68*. Tr. Archibald Constable. Delhi: S. Chand & Co.
- Blake, Stephen P. (1991[1979]) 'The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals'. In Hermann Kulke (ed.) *The State in India, 1000-1700*. Delhi: Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Buckler, F.W. (1985) 'The Oriental Despot'. In M.N. Pearson (ed.) *Legitimacy and Symbols: The South Asian Writings of F.W. Buckler*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Eaton, Richard M. (ed.) (2003), *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (1969) *The Political System of the Empires*. New York: Free Press.
- Eisenstadt, S.N. (1968) 'Empires'. In David L. Sills (ed.) *International Encyclopedia of the Social Science (IESS)*. New York: Mac-millan and Free Press.
- Giasuddin, Ahmed Syed (1982). 'A Typological Study of the State Functionaries under the Mughals'. *Asian Profile* 10, no. 4.
- Goffman, Erving (1956) 'The Nature of Deference and Demeanor'. *American Anthropologist* 58, 473-502.
- Gommans, Jos (2002) *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and High Roads to Empire, 1500-1700*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hardy, Peter (1986) 'The Authority of the Muslim Kings in Medieval South Asia'. In *Purusartha* 9, 49-50.
- Hasan, Farhat (2006) *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relation in Western India, c. 1572-1730*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hayy, Abdul and Shah Nawaz Khan (1979) *Maasir-ul-Umara*. Ed. Maulvi Abdur Rahim and Ashraf Ali and Tr. Henry Beveridge, revised and completed by Beni Prasad, 3 vols. Patna: Janki Prakashan.
- Hintze, Andrea (1997). *The Mughal Empire and Its Decline: An Interpretation of the Sources of Social Power*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Hodgson, Marshall G.S. (1974) *The Venture of Islam*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

- 
- Inden, Ronald (1998) 'Ritual, Authority and Cyclic Time in Hindu India'. In J.F. Richards (ed.) *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Jahangir, Nuruddin Muhammad (1978) *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*. Tr. Alexander Rogers and Ed. Henry Beveridge. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Lal, Ruby (2005) *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Lewis, Bernard. (1988) *The Political Language of Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lindenfeld, David F. (1988) 'On System and Embodiments as Categories for Intellectual History'. *History and Theory* 27, 30-50.
- Marlow, Louise (1993) *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- McNeill, William H. (1982) *The Pursuit of Power*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Melville, C. (1993:195-225) 'From Qars to Qandahar: The Itineraries of Shah Abbas I (1587-1629)'. In J. Calmard (ed.) *Etudes Safavides*. Paris and Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran.
- Monserrate, Father A. (1993) *The Commentary of his journey to the Court of Akbar*. Tr. J.S. Hoyland and annotated by S.N. Banerjee. Jalandhar:
- Mukhia, Harbans (2005) *The Mughals of India*. Oxford and Delhi: Blackwell Publishing.
- Nathan, Mirza (1936) *Bahristan-i-Ghaybi*. Ed. and Tr. M. I. Borah, 2 vols. Guwahati: Government of Assam Press.
- Nuckolls, Charles W (1990) 'The Durbar Incident'. *Modern Asian Studies* 24, 3, 529-59.
- Price, Simon and David Cannadine (eds) (1987) *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
- Qandahari, Muhammad Arif (1993) *Tarikh-i-Akbari*. Ed. Sayyid Moinuddin Nadwi, Sayyid Azhar Ali and Imtiaz Ali Arshi. Rampur, 1962. Tr.Tasneem Ahmad. Delhi: Pragati Publications.
- Rashid ,S. Abdur (1979) 'The Mughal Imperial State'. In R. J. Moore (ed.) *Tradition and Politics in South Asia*. Delhi: Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.

- 
- Richards, J.F. (1984:255-89) 'Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers'. In Barbara Daly Metcalf (ed.) *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*. Berkely: University of California Press.
- Schimmel, Annemarie (1975) *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press.
- Stein, Burton (1980) *Peasant, State and Society in Medieval South India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Stein, Burton (1998) 'All the King's *Mana*: Perspectives on Kingship in medieval South India'. In J.F. Richards (ed.) *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Streusand, Douglas E. (1989) *The Formation of the Mughal Empire*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Thomas Roe, Sir (1990) *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to India, 1615-19*. Ed. Sir William Foster. Delhi: Low Proce Publications.
- Trimingham, J. Spencer (1971) *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Tusi, Abu-Ali Hasan (1978) *Siyast Nama*. Ed. and Tr. H. Darke. *The Books of Government or Rulers of Kings*. London:
- Verma, S. P.(1976) 'Ensigns of Royalty at the Mughal Court (in the sixteenth century)'. *Islamic Culture* 50, 1.
- Wittfogel, Karl A. (1981) *Oriental Despotism* .New York: Vintage Books.

### **An Abstract:**

The Mughal Empire was one of the great dynastic powers of the medieval Islamic world and its nature has always been of captivating interest to historians of India and Europe alike. As we all know Mughals *padshahs* (emperors) had claimed a varied set of symbols, metaphors and ceremonial acts to represent their authority. The purpose of this paper is to offer a model for categorization of the Mughal authority out of the ordinary accents on the symbolism and ceremonial elements –

---

or rather its capsule description – to facilitate comprehension of its significance in Indian history, rather than to classify it with external and general perspectives.