
Unit 10 ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE*

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit would acquaint you with the overall working of the Mughal polity. After going through the Unit, you will learn about:

- the evolution of the Mughal administrative structure;
- the major administrative departments at the central level;
- the principal provincial officers, their duties and responsibilities;
- the administrative setup at the local level and its linkage with the central authority; and
- some basic features of town and port administration.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The basic objective of the Mughal administrative set-up was to exercise control over the different parts of the Empire so that recalcitrant elements challenging the Mughal sovereignty could be checked. You will appreciate the difficulties if you could visualize that each part of the Mughal Empire was inhabited by diverse set of people over whom their respective rulers or dominant chieftains exerted considerable influence. The ingenuity of the Mughal polity lies in the fact that it not only incorporated these refractory rulers and chieftains into its administrative set-up but also enrolled them into military service (for details, refer to Unit 11 of this Course). The logical corollary of sustaining the huge administration was to appropriate maximum rural surplus in the form of land revenue for which the Mughal polity was geared to.

10.2 CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION: ITS EVOLUTION

The Mughal Empire had a Pan-Indian character. Babur and Humayun for reasons of their brief reign and that of being busy in military matters could not concentrate on establishing a definite system or pattern in administration.

By the end of Akbar's reign, we find establishment of elaborate offices with assigned functions to the heads of offices. The rules and regulations guiding both their public and private conduct had all been fixed so that the officers were converted into what can be termed the Apparatus of the Empire.

10.2.1 The Emperor

The ancient Indian traditions had always supported a strong ruler. The Muslim jurists and writers also held the same view. Thus, the concept of divine origin of monarchy could easily find credence among the Indian people. It is not surprising that the Mughals publicized their *jharokha darshan* with great deal of pomp and show in which the Emperor appeared at an appointed hour before the general public, the myth being that a mere look of his majesty would redress their grievances.

With such popular perception of the ruler, it is obvious that all officers in Mughal administration owed their position and power to the Emperor. Their appointment, promotion, demotion, and termination were subject to the ruler's personal preference and whims.

10.2.2 *Wakil and Wazir*

The institution of *wizarat* (or *wikalat* since both were used interchangeably), according to some accounts, can be traced back to the Abbasid Caliphs. Under the Delhi Sultans, the *wazir* enjoyed both civil and military powers. But under Balban his powers were reduced when the Sultan bifurcated the military powers under *diwan 'arz*. As for Sher Shah, this office remained almost in abeyance under the Afghans.

The position of the *wazir* revived under the early Mughals. Babur's *wazir* Nizamuddin Muhammad Khalifa enjoyed both the civil and military powers. Humayun's *wazir* Hindu Beg also virtually enjoyed great powers.

The period of Bairam Khan's regency (1556-60) saw the rise of the *wakil-wazir* with unlimited powers under Bairam Khan. In the 8th regnal year (1564-65), Akbar took away the financial powers of the *wakil* and entrusted it into the hands of the *diwan-i kul* (Finance Minister). Separation of finance gave a jolt to the *wakil's* power. However, the *wakil* continued to enjoy the highest place in the Mughal bureaucratic hierarchy despite reduction in his powers.

10.2.3 *Diwan-i Kul*

We have already seen how Akbar strengthened the office of the *diwan* by entrusting the revenue powers to him. The chief *diwan* (*diwan-i kul*) was made responsible for revenue and finances. His primary duty was to supervise the imperial treasury and check all accounts.

He personally inspected all transactions and payments in all departments. He maintained direct contact with the provincial *diwans* and their functioning was put under his vigil. His seal and signatures were necessary for the validation of all official papers involving revenue. The entire revenue collection and expenditure machinery of the Empire was under his charge. No fresh order of appointment or promotion could be affected without his seal. To check the *diwan's* power, the Mughal Emperor asked the *diwan* to submit the report on state finances daily.

The central revenue ministry was divided into many departments to look after the specific needs of the Empire. For example: *diwan-i khalisa*, *diwan-i tan* (for cash salary), *diwan-i jagir*, *diwan-i buyutat* (royal household), etc.

Each branch was further subdivided into several sections manned by a secretary, superintendents and clerks. The *mustaufi* was the auditor, and the *mushrif* was the chief accountant. The *khazanadar* looked after the Imperial treasury.

10.2.4 *Mir Bakhshi*

The *mir 'arz* of Delhi Sultanate changed its nomenclature to *mir bakhshi* under the Mughals. All orders of appointments of *mansabdars* and their salary papers were endorsed and passed by him. He personally supervised the branding of the horses (*dagh*) and checked the muster-roll (*chehra*) of the soldiers. On the basis of his verification, the amount of the salary was certified. Only then the *diwan* made entry in his records and placed it before the king. *Mir bakhshi* placed all matters pertaining to the military department before the Emperor. The new entrants, seeking service, were presented before the Emperor by the *mir bakhshi*. He dealt directly with provincial *bakhshis* and *waqai navis*. He accompanied the Emperor on tours, pleasure trips, hunting expeditions, battlefield, etc. His duty was to check whether proper places

were allotted to the *mansabdars* according to their rank at the court. His *darbar* duties considerably added to his prestige and influence.

The *mir bakhshi* was assisted by other *bakhshis* at the central level. The first three were known as 1st, 2nd and 3rd *bakhshi*. Besides, there were separate *bakhshis* for the *ahadis* (special imperial troopers) and domestic servants of the royal household (*bakhshi-i shagird peshā*).

10.2.5 *Mir Saman*

The *mir saman* was the officer in-charge of the royal *karkhanas*. He was also known as *khan saman*. He was the chief executive officer responsible for the purchase of all kinds of articles and their storage for the royal household. Another important duty was to supervise the manufacture of different articles, be it weapons of war or articles of luxury. He was directly under the Emperor but for sanction of money and auditing of accounts he was to contact the *diwan*.

Under the *mir saman* there were several officers, including the *diwan-i buyutat* and *tahvildar* (maintained supply of raw materials to the artisans).

10.2.6 *Sadr-us Sudur*

The *sadr-us sudur* was the head of the ecclesiastical department. His chief duty was to protect the laws of the *Shariat*. He was also connected with the distribution of charities – both cash (*wazifa*) and land grants (*suyurghal, inam, madad-i ma'ash*).

Initially as the head of the judicial department, he supervised the appointment of *qazis* and *muftis*. Before Shah Jahan's reign, the posts of the chief *qazi* and *sadr-us sudur* were combined and the same person held the charge of both the departments. However, under Aurangzeb, the post of the chief *qazi* (*qazi-ul quzzat*) and the *sadr-us sudur* got separated. It led to sharp curtailment of *sadr's* power. Now in the capacity of *sadr*, he supervised the assignment of allowances and looked after the charitable grants. He also looked into whether the grants were given to the right persons and utilized properly. He scrutinized applications for all such grants, both fresh and renewals, and presented before the Emperor for sanction. Alms were also distributed through him.

Qazi-ul Quzzat

The chief *qazi* was known as *qazi-ul quzzat*. He was the head of the judiciary (We have already mentioned that prior to Aurangzeb's reign his powers were combined in *sadr-us sudur*.) His principal duty was to administer the *Shariat* law both in civil and criminal cases.

In the capacity of the chief *qazi*, he looked into the appointment of the *qazis* in the *suba, sarkar, pargana* and town levels. There was a separate *qazi* for army also.

Besides the *qazi-ul quzzat*, another important judicial officer was *mir 'adl*. Abul Fazl emphasized the need to have a *mir 'adl* in addition to *qazi*, for the *qazi* was to hear and decide the cases while *mir 'adl* was to execute the orders of the court.

The *muhtasibs* (censor of public morals) was to ensure the general observance of the rules of morality. His job was to keep in check the forbidden practices – wine drinking, use of bhang and other intoxicants, gambling, etc. In addition, he also performed some secular duties – examining weights and measures, enforcing fair prices, etc.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Discuss the position of *wakil* under the Mughals.

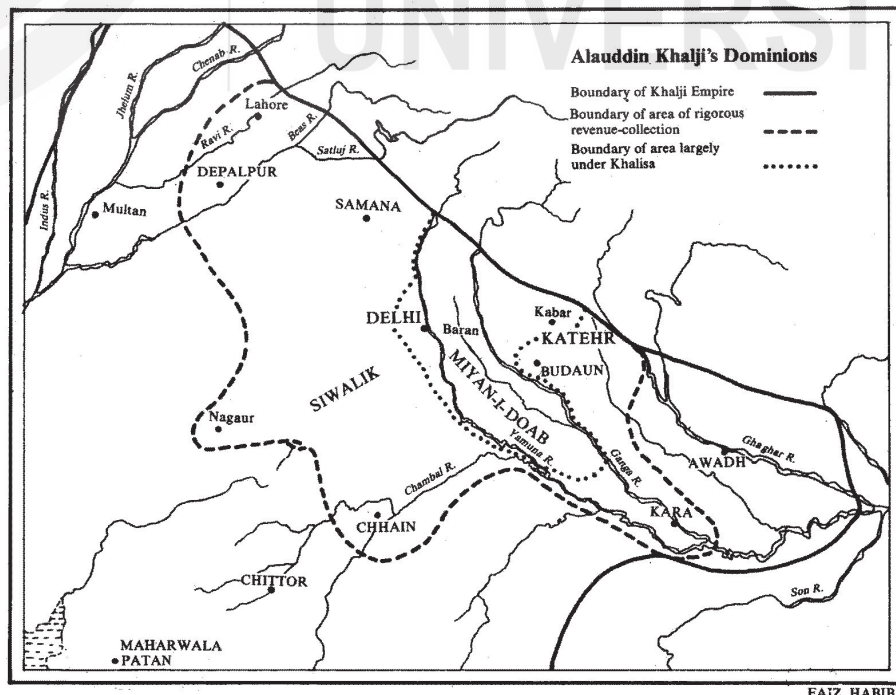
- 2) What were the functions of *mir bakhshi*?

- 3) Match the following:

i) <i>Tahvildar</i>	A) Treasurer
ii) <i>Muhtasib</i>	B) Incharge of the revenue department
iii) <i>Mir Adl</i>	C) Maintained supply of raw materials to the artisans
iv) <i>Fotadar</i>	D) Public Censor
v) <i>Diwan-i Kul</i>	E) Executer of the court orders

10.3 PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

In 1580, Akbar divided the Empire into twelve *subas*: Allahabad, Agra, Awadh, Ajmer, Admadabad (Gujarat), Bihar, Bengal (including Odisha), Delhi, Kabul, Lahore, Multan and Malwa. After the Deccan conquest three new *subas* were added i.e. Berar, Khandesh and Ahmadnagar. Each *suba* was divided into a number of *sarkars* and these were further divided into *parganas* and *mahals*. During Shah Jahan’s reign, another administrative unit *chakla* came into existence. It was a cluster of a number of *parganas*.



Map 10.1: Administrative Divisions (Subas) of the Mughal Empire, 1601
 Courtesy: Based on Habib, Irfan, *An Atlas of the Mughl Empire*, 1982, New Delhi: Oxford University Press

Source: EHI-4: *History of India from 16th to mid-18th Century*, Block 2, Unit 6, p. 27

10.3.1 Provincial Governor

The governor of a *suba* (*subadar*) was directly appointed by the Emperor. Usually the tenure of a *subadar* was around three years. Among the duties of the *subadar*, the most important one was to look after the welfare of the people and the army. He was responsible for the general law and order problem in the *suba*. A successful *subadar* was one who would encourage agriculture, trade and commerce. He was supposed to take up welfare activities like construction of *sarais*, gardens, wells, water reservoirs, etc. He was to take steps to enhance the revenue of the state.

10.3.2 Diwan

The provincial *diwan* was appointed by the Emperor. He was an independent officer answerable to the Centre. He was the head of the revenue department in the *suba*.

The provincial *diwan* supervised the revenue collection in the *suba* and maintained accounts of all expenditure incurred in the form of salaries of the officials and subordinates in the *suba*.

The *diwan* was also to take steps to increase the area under cultivation. In many cases advance loans (*taqavi*) were given to the peasants through his office.

A *roznamcha* (daily register) was maintained by the *diwan* which carried entries of amount that was deposited in the royal treasury by the revenue officials and *zamindars*. A large number of clerks worked under him. Thus, by making the *diwan* independent of the *subadar* and by putting financial matters under the former, the Mughals were successful in checking the *subadar* from becoming independent.

10.3.3 Bakhshi

The *bakhshi* was appointed by the imperial court at the recommendation of the *mir bakhshi*. He performed exactly the same military functions as were performed by his counterpart at the Centre. He was responsible for checking and inspecting the horses and soldiers maintained by the *mansabdars* in the *suba*. He issued the paybills of both the *mansabdars* and the soldiers. It was his duty to prepare a list of deceased *mansabdars*, but often news reporters (*waqai navis*) of the *parganas* directly sent information to the provincial *diwan*. Often his office was combined with *waqa'inigar*. In this capacity his duty was to inform the Centre the happenings in his province. To facilitate his work, he posted his agents in the *parganas* and various important offices.

10.3.4 Darogha-i Dak and the Secret Services

Developing a communication network was very essential to govern a vast Empire. A separate department was assigned this important task. The imperial postal system was established for sending instructions to the far-flung areas of the Empire. The same channel was used for receiving information. At every *suba* headquarters, *darogha-i dak* was appointed for this purpose. His duty was to pass on letters through the postal runners (*mewras*) to the court. For this purpose, a number of *dak chowkis* were maintained throughout the Empire where runners were stationed who carried the post to the next *chowki*. Horses and boats were also used to help in speedy delivery.

At the provincial level, *waq'ai navis* and *waqai nigars* were appointed to supply the reports directly to the Emperor. Besides, there were also *sawanih nigars* to provide confidential reports to the Emperor. Many reports of these secret service agents

are available to us. They are very important sources of the history of the period.

Thus, the Mughals kept a watch over their officials in the provinces through offices and institutions independent of each other. Besides, the Mughal Emperors' frequent visits to every *suba* and the system of frequent transfers of the officials after a period of three years on average, helped the Mughals in checking the officials. But the possibility of rebellion always existed and, therefore, constant vigil through an organized system of intelligence network was established.

10.4 LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

In this Section, we will discuss the working of administration at the *sarkar*, *pargana* and *mauza* (village) levels.

10.4.1 Sarkars

At the *sarkar* level, there were two important functionaries, the *faujdar* and the *amalguzar*.

Faujdar

He was the executive head of the *sarkar*. But his area of influence seems more complex. He was not only appointed at the *sarkar* level, but sometimes within a *sarkar* a number of *faujdar*s existed. At times their jurisdiction spread over two full *sarkars*. We hear different *faujdar*s appointed to *chaklas* as well. It seems his duty was mainly to take care of rebellions, and law and order problems. His jurisdiction was decided according to the needs of the region.

His primary duty was to safeguard the life and property of the residents of the area under his jurisdiction. He was to ensure safe passage to traders within his jurisdiction. As the chief executive of the region, the *faujdar* was to keep vigil over the recalcitrant *zamindars*. In special circumstances, he was to help the *amalguzar* in matters of revenue collection.

Amalguzar

The most important revenue collector was the *amil* or *amalguzar*. His primary duty was to assess and supervise the revenue collection through other subordinate officials. A good *amil* was supposed to increase the land under cultivation and induce the peasants to pay revenue willingly without coercion. All accounts were to be maintained by him. Daily receipts and expenditure reports were sent by him to the provincial *diwan*.

10.4.2 Pargana Administration

The *parganas* were the administrative units below the *sarkar*. The *shiqqdar* was the executive officer of the *pargana* and assisted the *amils* in revenue collection. The *amil* looked after the revenue collection at the *pargana* level also. His duties were similar to those of the *amalguzar* at the *sarkar* level. The *qanungos* kept all the records pertaining to the land in his area. He was to take note of different crops in the *pargana*.

The village was the lowest administrative unit. The *muqaddam* was the village-headman while the *patwari* took care of the village revenue records. Under the Mughals, the pattern of village administration remained almost on the same lines as it was under Sher Shah.

10.4.3 *Thana and Thanadar*

The *thana* was a place where army was stationed for the preservation of law and order. They were to arrange provisions for the army as well. These *thanas* were established specifically in disturbed areas and around the cities. Its head was designated as *thanadar*. He was appointed at the recommendation of the *subadar* and *diwan*. He was generally placed under the *faujdar* of the area.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) Discuss the physical sub-divisions of the Mughal administrative set-up.

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- 2) What were the role and functions of a Mughal *faujdar*?

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.....

- 3) Define each of the following in two lines each:

Amil.....

Bakhshi.....

Waqai...navis.....

10.5 TOWN, *QILA* AND PORT ADMINISTRATION

To administer the cities and ports, the Mughals maintained separate administrative machinery.

10.5.1 *Kotwal*

For urban centres, the imperial court appointed *kotwals* whose primary duty was to safeguard the life and property of townsmen. He may be compared to the present day police officer in the towns and cities. The *kotwal* was also to maintain a register for keeping records of people coming and going out of the town. Every outsider had to take a permit from him before entering or leaving the town. The *kotwal* was to ensure that no illicit liquor was manufactured in his area. He also acted as superintendent of weights and measures used by the merchants and shopkeepers.

10.5.2 *Qiladar*

The Mughal Empire had a large number of *qilas* (forts) situated in various parts of the country. Many of these were located at strategically important places. Each fortress was like a mini township with a large garrison. Each fort was placed under an officer called *qil'adar*. A cursory survey of the persons appointed as *qiladars* reveals that *mansabdars* with high ranks, generally were appointed. He was in-charge of the general

administration of fort and the areas assigned in *jagir* to the *qiladar*. Sometimes, the *qiladars* were asked to perform the duties of the *faujdar* in that region.

10.5.3 Port Administration

The Mughals were aware of the economic importance of the sea-ports as these were the centres of brisk commercial activities. The port administration was independent of the provincial authority. The governor of the ports was called *mutasaddi*, who was directly appointed by the Emperor. Sometimes the office of the *mutasaddi* was auctioned and given to the highest bidder. The *mutasaddi* collected taxes on merchandise and maintained a custom-house. He also supervised the mint house at the port. The *shahbandar* was his subordinate who was mainly concerned with the custom-house.

10.6 NATURE OF MUGHAL ADMINISTRATION

Some historians (Irfan Habib, Athar Ali etc.) hold that Mughal administrative structure was highly centralized. This centralization is manifested in the efficient working of land revenue system, *mansab* and *jagir*, uniform coinage, etc. But Stephen P. Blake and J.F. Richards, while they accept the centralizing tendencies, point out that the Mughal Empire was patrimonial bureaucratic. For them, everything centred around the imperial household and the vast bureaucracy. For Streusand, despite being centralized, the Mughal structure was less centralized at its periphery. Chetan Singh supports this view. He is of the opinion that even in the 17th century the Mughal Empire was not very centralized. For him, the centralized structure controlled through the efficient working of *jagirdari* seems to hold little ground. According to him, *jagir* transfers were not as frequent as they appear, and the local elements at the periphery were quite successful in influencing the policies at the centre.

The extent to which the Mughal Empire was centralized in practice can be a matter of debate (for details, refer to Unit 8 of this Course). However, theoretically the Mughal administrative structure seems to be highly centralized and bureaucratic in nature. The Emperor was the fountainhead of all powers, and bureaucracy was mere *banda-i dargah* (slaves of the court).

In spite of the vast range of powers enjoyed by the central ministers, they were not allowed to usurp and interfere in each others' jurisdiction nor to assume autocratic powers. The Mughals through a system of checks and balances prevented any minister or officer from gaining unlimited powers.

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) Identify the true/false statements:
 - i) The *kotwal* was the chief police officer at the *pargana* level.
 - ii) The office of the *mutasaddi* was sometimes auctioned to the highest bidder.
 - iii) Ports were separate independent units of administration under the Mughals.
 - iv) Mints were placed under the charge of *shahbandar*.
- 2) Define each of the following in two lines each:

Kotwal.....
.....

Mutasaddi.....

Qiladar.....

10.7 SUMMARY

The Mughals tried to establish a ‘highly centralized bureaucratic’ machinery which was based on ‘direct’ command. The Emperor was the head of all powers. A number of central ministers were directly appointed by the Emperor to assist him in the administration. Similarly, to keep them in check, he adopted the principle of checks and balances.

To have an effective administration, the Empire was divided into *subas* (provinces), *sarkars*, *parganas* and villages. The provincial administration was on the lines of the Centre, headed by separate officers. Here also none of the officer enjoyed supreme powers. Both the *subadars* and *diwans* worked independently and were responsible to the Centre only. Cities and port-towns had separate administrative machinery. The *kotwal* in the cities and *mutasaddis* in the port towns normally took care of the law and order situation. The Mughals had certain military outposts as well where separate *qila’dars* were appointed. At local level, the *pargana* was the most important administrative unit while the villages formed the smallest unit of administration.

10.8 KEYWORDS

<i>Amin</i>	Revenue assessor
<i>Jagir</i>	Territories assigned to <i>mansabdars</i> /nobles in lieu of their salary
<i>Khalisa</i>	‘Crown’ land whose revenue was reserved for the Sultan’s treasury
<i>Muqaddam</i>	Village headman
<i>Patwari</i>	Village accountant
<i>Shariat</i>	Islamic law

10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

1. See Sub-section 10.2.2
2. See Sub-section 10.2.4
3. i) C ii) D iii) E iv) A v) B

Check Your Progress-2

1. See Sections 10.3
2. See Sub-section 10.4.1

3. See Sub-sections 10.3.3, 10.3.4, 10.4.2

Check Your Progress-3

1. i) × ii) ✓ iii) ✓ iv) ×
2. See Section 10.5

10.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

Hasan, Ibn, (1967) *The Central Structure of the Mughal Empire and Its Practical Working upto the Year 1657* (Lahore: Oxford University Press).

Ray, Anuruddha, (1984) *Some Aspects of Mughal Administration* (Ludhiana: Kalyani Publishers).

Saran, P., (1988) *The Provincial Government of the Mughals, 1526-1658* (Jaipur: Sunita Publications).

Tripathi, R.P., (1959) *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot).

10.11 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECCOMENDATIONS

The Mughal Administration

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUom7d1E9Kk>

Mughal Administration in India

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQaZHCawQUk>