

Kings and Chronicles The Mughal Courts

NCERT TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS SOLVED

1. Describe the process of manuscript production in the Mughal court.

Ans. Process of manuscript production in the Mughal court included the following:

- (a) Paper-maker's responsibility was to prepare the folios of the manuscript.
- (b) Skill writer, i.e. scribes or calligrapher copied the texts.
- (c) Guilders, illuminated the pages of the manuscript.
- (d) Miniature painter illustrated the scene from the text.
- (e) The book binders gathered the folio and gave it to the original shape of a book.

2. In what ways would the daily routine and special festivities associated with the Mughal court have conveyed a sense of the power of the emperor?

Ans. The daily routine and special festivities associated with the Mughal court observed the following:

- (i) By representing the status of the court.
- (ii) In form of salutation of emperor.
- (iii) Jharokha Darshan.
- (iv) Meeting held by sultan in Diwan-i-Am and Diwan-i-Khas.
- (v) By honouring the mansabdar on special occasion with special gifts and jagir.

3. Assess the role played by women of the imperial household in the Mughal Empire

Ans. (i) The term "haram" is used to describe the domestic world of the Mughals. This word is taken from the Persian word haram, which means a sacred place.

(ii) The Mughal household consisted of the emperor's wives and concubines, his near and distant relatives (mother, step- and foster-mothers, sisters, daughters, daughters-in-law, aunts, children, etc.), and female servants and slaves.

(iii) Polygamy was practised widely in the Indian subcontinent, especially among the ruling groups. Both for the Rajput clans as well as the Mughals marriage was a way of cementing political relationships and forging alliances.

(iv) The gift of territory was often accompanied by the gift of a daughter in marriage. This ensured a continuing hierarchical relationship between ruling groups. It was through the link of marriage and the relationships that developed as a result that the Mughals were able to form a vast kinship network that linked them to important groups and helped to hold a vast empire together.

(v) In the Mughal household a distinction was maintained between wives who came from royal families (begams), and other wives (aghas) who were not of noble birth.

(vi) The begams, married after receiving huge amounts of cash and valuables as dowry (maahr), naturally received a higher status and greater attention from their husbands than did aghas. The concubines (agha or the lesser agha) occupied the lowest position in the hierarchy of females intimately related to royalty.

(vii) The agha and the aghacha could rise to the position of a begam depending on the husband's will, and provided that he did not already have four wives.

(viii) Love and motherhood played important roles in elevating such women to the status of legally wedded wives. Apart from wives, numerous male and female slaves populated the Mughal Household. The tasks they performed varied from the most mundane to those requiring skill, tact and intelligence.

(xi) Slave eunuchs (khwajasara) moved between the external and internal life of the household as guards, servants, and also as agents for women dabbling in commerce.

4. What were the concerns that shaped Mughal policies and attitudes towards regions outside the subcontinent?

Ans. (i) The Safavids and Qandahar: The political and diplomatic relations between the Mughal kings and the neighbouring countries of Iran and Turan hinged on the control of the frontier defined by the Hindukush mountains that separated Afghanistan from the regions of Iran and Central Asia. A constant aim of Mughal policy was to ward off this potential danger by controlling strategic outposts – notably Kabul and Qandahar. The fortress-town Qandahar had initially been in the possession of Humayun, reconquered in 1595 by Akbar. The Safavid court retained diplomatic relations with the Mughals, it continued to stake claims to Qandahar. Jahangir sent a diplomatic envoy to the court of Shah Abbas in 1613 to plead the Mughal case for retaining Qandahar, but the mission failed to achieve its objectives. Persian army besieged Qandahar in 1622. The Mughal garrison was defeated and had to surrender the fortress and the city to the Safavids.

(ii) The Ottomans: pilgrimage and trade: The relationship between the Mughals and the Ottomans ensured free movement for merchants and pilgrims in the territories under Ottoman control. This was especially true for the Hijaz, that part of Ottoman Arabia where the important pilgrim centres of Mecca and Medina were located.

The Mughal emperor combined religion and commerce by exporting essential goods to Aden and Mokha, and distributing the proceeds of the sales in charity to the keepers of shrines and religious men there.

(iii) Jesuits at the Mughal court: European received knowledge about India through the accounts of Jesuit missionaries, travellers, merchants and diplomats. After the discovery of sea route to India, the Portuguese merchants set up their trading network stations in coastal region. The Portuguese was also interested in the spread of Christianity with the help of the missionaries of the Society of Jesuits. The Christian missions who sent to India during the sixteenth century were part of this process of trade and empire building. The first Jesuit mission reached the Mughal court of Mughal emperor Akbar at Fatehpur oikri in 1580 and stayed here for about two years. The Jesuits spoke to Akbar about Christianity and debated its virtues with the ulema. Two more missions were sent to the Mughal court at Lahore, in 1591 and 1595. The Jesuit accounts are based on personal observation and shed light on the character and mind of the emperor. At public assemblies the Jesuits were assigned places in close proximity to Akbar's throne.. The Jesuit accounts corroborate the information given in Persian chronicles about state officials and the general conditions of life in Mughal times.

5. Discuss the major features of Mughal provincial administration. How did the centre control the provinces?

Ans. (i) The head of the provincial administration was the governor (subadar). He reported directly to the emperor.

(ii) Each suba was divided into sarkar,

(iii) The local administration was looked after at the level of the pargana (sub-district) by three semi-hereditary officers, the qanungo (keeper of revenue records), the chaudhur (in charge of revenue collection) and the qazi.

(iv) Each department of administration maintained a large support staff of clerks, accountants, auditors, messengers, and other functionaries who were technically qualified officials, functioning in accordance with standardised rules and procedures, and generating copious written orders and records.

6. Discuss, with examples, the distinctive features of Mughal chronicles.

Ans. (i) Chronicles commissioned by the Mughal emperors are an important source for studying the empire and its court. They were written in order to project a vision of an enlightened kingdom to all those who came under its umbrella. The authors of Mughal chronicles focused on events related to life of the ruler, their family, the court and nobles, wars and administrative system.

(ii) These chronicles were written in Persian. This language flourished as a language of the court and of literary writings, alongside north Indian languages, especially Hindavi and its regional variants. As the Mughals were Chaghtai Turks by origin, Turkish was their mother tongue.

(iii) Chronicles narrating the events of a Mughal emperor's reign contained, alongside the written text, images that described an event in visual form.

(iv) When scenes or themes in a book were to be given visual expression, the scribe left blank spaces on nearby pages; paintings, executed separately by artists, were inserted to accompany what was described in words.

7. To what extent do you think the visual material presented in this chapter corresponds with Abu'l Fazl's description of the *taswir* (Source 1)?

Ans. (i) Drawing the likeness of anything is called *taswir*. His Majesty from his earliest youth, has shown a great predilection for this art, and gives it every encouragement, as he looks upon it as a means both of study and amusement.

(ii) A very large number of painters set to work.

(iii) Each week, several supervisors and clerks of the imperial workshop submit before the emperor the work done by each artist, and his Majesty gives a reward.

(iv) Paintings served not only to enhance the beauty of a book, but were believed to possess special powers of communicating ideas about the kingdom and the power of kings in ways that the written medium could not.

(v) The historian Abu'l Fazl described painting as a 'magical art' in his view it had the power to make inanimate objects look as if they possessed life.

8. What were the distinctive features of the Mughal nobility? How was their relationship with the emperor shaped?

Ans. Recruitment, rank of the nobility and relationship with the emperor:

(i) Mughal chronicles, especially the *Akbar Nama*, have bequeathed a vision of empire in which agency rests almost solely with the emperor, while the rest of the kingdom has been portrayed as following his orders, if we look more closely at the available information the histories provide us about the apparatus of the Mughal state, we may be able to understand the ways in which the imperial organisation was dependent on several different institutions.

(ii) The most important pillar of the Mughal state was the nobility. The nobility was recruited from diverse ethnic and religious groups which ensured that no faction was large enough to challenge the authority of the state.

(iii) The officer corps of the Mughals was described as a bouquet of flowers (*guldasta*) held together by loyalty to the emperor. In Akbar's imperial service, Turani and Iranian nobles were present from the earliest phase of carving out a political dominion. Many had accompanied Humayun; others migrated later to the Mughal court.

(iv) The holders of government offices were given the ranks (*mansabs*) comprising two numerical designations: *zat* which was an indicator of position in the imperial hierarchy and the salary of the official (*mansabdar*), and *sawar* which indicated the number of horsemen he was required to maintain in service.

- (v) Akbar, who designed the mansab system, also established spiritual relationships with a select band of his nobility by treating them as his disciples (murid).
- (vi) For members of the nobility, imperial service was a way of acquiring power, wealth and the highest possible reputation. A person wishing to join the service petitioned through a noble, who presented a tajwiz to the emperor.
- (vii) If the applicant was found suitable, a mansab was granted to him. The mir bakhshi (paymaster general) stood in open court on the right of the emperor and presented all candidates for appointment or promotion, while his office prepared orders bearing his seal and signature as well as those of the emperor. There were two other important ministers at the centre: the diwan-i ai (finance minister) and sadr-us sudur (minister of grants or madad-i maash, and in charge of appointing local judges or qazis)
- (viii) The three ministers occasionally came together as an advisory body, but were independent of each other.
- (xi) Akbar with these and other advisers shaped the administrative, fiscal and monetary institutions of the empire. Nobles stationed at the court (tainat-i rakab) were a reserve force to be deputed to a province or military campaign. Nobles were duty-bound to appear twice a day to express submission to the emperor.
- (x) They also had to share the responsibility for guarding the emperor and his household round the clock.

9. Identify the elements that went into the making of the Mughal ideal of kingship.

- Ans.** (i) According to Akbar's court poet, Abu'l Fazl Mughal kingship as the highest station in the hierarchy of objects receiving light emanating from God (farr-i- izadi). According to this idea, there was a Hierarchy in which the Divine Light was transmitted to the king (Mughal Emperor) who then became the source of spiritual guidance for his subjects.
- (ii) Mughal chronicles present the empire as comprising many different ethnic and religious communities – Hindus, Jainas, Zoroastrians and Muslims. As the source of all peace and stability, the emperor stood above all religious and ethnic groups, mediated among them, and ensured that justice and peace prevailed.
- (iii) Abu'l Fazl describes the ideal of sulh-i kui (absolute peace) as the cornerstone of enlightened rule. In sulh-i kul all religions and schools of thought had freedom of expression but on condition that they did not undermine the authority of the state or fight among themselves. The ideal of sulh-i kul was implemented through state policies – the nobility under the Mughals was a composite one comprising Iranis, Turanis, Afghans, Rajputs, Qeccanis – all of whom were given positions and awards purely on the basis of their service and loyalty to the king.
- (iv) Akbar abolished the tax on pilgrimage in 1563 and jizya in 1564 as the two were based on religious discrimination. Instructions were sent to officers of the empire to follow the concept of sulh-i kul.
- (v) All Mughal emperors gave grants to support the buildings and maintenance of places of worship. However, it was during the reign of Aurangzeb, the jizya was re-imposed on non-Muslim subjects.
- (vi) Abu'l Fazl defined sovereignty as a social contract. According to him the emperor protects the four essences of subjects, namely, life (jan), property (mal), honour (narnus) and faith (din), and in return demands obedience and a share of resources from the people. Only sovereigns were thought to be able to honour the contract with power and Divine guidance.