



## GRANDEUR OF THE MUGHAL'S MOVING COURT

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### ABSTRACT:

Mughal Empire was one of the greatest Empires during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries. It covered all the Indian sub-continent during its heyday. It was one of the centralized Empire and the Mughal Emperor was the supreme authority. They led very luxurious and pompous lifestyle. So, through the present research paper, an attempt is being made to examine the grandeur and magnificence of the Mughal Royal Camps with the help of accounts of European travellers, who visited India during the Zenith of Mughal Empire. Moreover, the paper also p

rovide an insight into the daily routine of the Mughal Emperors in the Mughal Camps.

**KEYWORDS:** Grandeur, Mansabdars, Ahadis, Farrash, Iran, Turan, Encampment, Mir-i-Manzil, Mughal, Diwan-i-Khanah-khas-o-Aam, Akashdiya, Ghul-khanah, Qur-Khanah, Miwah-Khanah, Kanate, Omrah, Darshan.

Mughal Empire was one of the largest centralized kingdoms during medieval times. Their wealth and grandeur was proverbial. The magnificence and sophistication of the Empire impressed many observers particularly scores of European travellers who came to India during the Mughal period. The Court ceremonies and etiquettes, poetry, music, paintings and Imperial Court reflect aristocratic grandeur of the Mughals. Even Manucci in his account writes about the magnificence. He writes that most of the Europeans assume that the grandeur of their own Kings and princes was very great but richness and magnificence of Mughal Court cannot be compared to anyone.<sup>1</sup> If so was the magnificence of the Mughal court, the magnificence of the Mughals during march was not less than Mughal Court in any way. So, the Mughal Imperial Camp, with large number of army *mansabdars*, royal household, domestic servants and others presented a picture of a well-planned city, moving from one place to another place.<sup>2</sup> The Mughal Camps during the time of Emperor Akbar and his successors were very grand in comparison to his predecessors.

Vincent Smith writes that the Mughal Camp was like a moving city from one place to other.<sup>3</sup> However, the means of transport during those days were confined to oxen, bullock carts, chariots, elephants, mules, horses, palanquins etc. with which it took months and sometimes years to traverse long distances. Jean Baptise Tavernier while discussing about the mode of travelling in India observed that manner of travelling in India is very convenient like Italy or France.<sup>4</sup> The vastness and magnificence of Mughal Camp was such that it could be testified by the statement of

Abul Fazl, who writes that it would be very difficult to describe a large encampment.<sup>5</sup> Father Monserrate, who accompanied Emperor Akbar on a Kabul expedition, gives a detailed account of pomp and magnitude of the Imperial Camp.<sup>6</sup> Abul Fazl also writes, “Each encampment required for its carriage 100 elephants, 500 camels, 400 carts and 100 bearers. It is escorted by 500 troopers, *mansabdars*, *Ahadis* besides, there are employed a thousand *Farrashes*, native of Iran, Turan and Hindustan, 500 pioneers, 100 water-carriers, 50 carpenters, tent makers and torch bearers, 50 workers in leather and 150 sweepers.”<sup>7</sup> Mughal Imperial Camp moved very slowly with great magnificence. The Emperor’s procession always preceded by a part with a camel carrying a white cloth which is used to cover any unpleasant thing found on the road, in addition, stones were added to the corners of the cloth, so that cloth may not be blown away by the wind.<sup>8</sup> Alongwith this advance party, there were watermen, who continuously sprinkle water on the road in order to prevent the dust from rising and disturbing the Emperor.

Niccolao Manucci gave description of Emperor Aurangzeb’s visit to Kashmir, he writes that Mughal Emperors travel with great and dignity and magnificence.<sup>9</sup> The Mughal Emperor marched slowly and with great dignity. Father Monserrate writes that the distance travelled by Emperor during each march was measured with a ten foot rod. The distance was measured by a special officer who was instructed to follow the Emperor.<sup>10</sup> These measurements were very useful in calculating the area of the province and distance of the far places. Two hundred lengths of ten foot rod makes one *kos* which is equal to two miles.<sup>11</sup>

Mughal Emperors, when decided to go on a march, some officers went in advance to select a suitable place for the Imperial Camp. It was the duty of the Mir-i-Manzil (master of the stages) to select a location for encampment. However, a great care was taken that the symmetry of the royal camps was preserved.<sup>12</sup> There were always two sets of royal tents which were identical in appearance. When the royal court moved, the other set of tents and other equipments moved ahead of the royal procession. So, there was always a fully prepared camp for the Emperor on his arrival. Francois Bernier gives the description of the royal camp and writes, “whenever the King travel in military pomp, he had always two private camps, that is to say, two separate bodies of tents. One of these camps being constantly in advance of the other, the King is sure to find at the end of every journey a Camp fully prepared for his reception.”<sup>13</sup>

The Mughal Imperial Camp was laid very beautifully and in a systematic way. Manucci writes that Mughal Camp had indescribable magnificence and very difficult to describe the royal camp owing to its beauty, order and the number of people and it look like a great city travelling from place to place.<sup>14</sup> Every kind of facilities were available in the Mughal camps like markets, sports, pastimes, gold, silver. Manucci described Mughal Camp as “all that could be looked for in a flourishing city is to be found in the Camp.”<sup>15</sup> Francois Bernier has also given the full account on the Mughal Camp and also its order and magnificence. He writes that sixty elephants, two hundred camels, one hundred mules and one hundred porters were required to

transport one set of the royal tent.<sup>16</sup> The large tents were carried by the elephants, camels carried the smaller tents, other luggage and kitchen accessories were carried by the mules.

As soon as the tents reached at the place of encampment, grand Quarter Master alongwith his assistants selected suitable location for the Camp. Then the whole of the selected area was covered with *kanates* or screens which were seven or eight feet in height.<sup>17</sup> The screen or *Kanate* which cover the camp were made of a strong cloth lined with printed Indian calico, representing large vases of flowers.<sup>18</sup> The entrance to the royal Camp was very spacious and magnificent. The largest tent in the royal camp was *Diwan-Khanab-i-Khas-o-am* being the place where Emperor and his nobility assembled twice a day. Another feature of the royal court is that a space of about sixty hundred yard was left vacant and in the midst of this place “Akashdiya”, a big lantern was installed. This *Akashdiya*, was about 40 yard high and supported by sixteen ropes.<sup>19</sup> The light of the *Akashdiya* can be seen from great distance. The second important tent was *Ghusl-Khanah*<sup>20</sup> or the place of bathing. The nobles meet here every evening. Another important tent in the royal camp was *Kaluet-Kane*<sup>21</sup> where only prominent nobles and principal ministers of the state had access.<sup>22</sup> Adjoining the royal tents, there were tents belonging to royal ladies and princess. These tents were enclosed from each side by *kanates* or screens.

Moreover, all the departments of Imperial household such as *Qur-Khanah*,<sup>23</sup> *Kirkiraq Khanah*,<sup>24</sup> *Miwah-Khanah*,<sup>25</sup> *Matbakh*<sup>26</sup> were stationed in the royal camp. All the Imperial quarters were heavily guarded from all the sides by efficient soldiers. The tents of the Emperor were red in colour and their position in the royal camp was always in the centre. The tents of various nobles i.e. officers were pitched around the royal tent but strictly according to the rank of a person. However, their position in the Imperial Camp was unchangeable. The tents of the nobles were also very large, as Francois Bernier writes, “the Chief Omrah and great Rajas pride themselves on the loftiness of their tent.”<sup>27</sup> But they took great care that their tents should not be larger than royal tents. The nobles and Rajas also owned two sets of tents. However, they also took full care that the exterior of their tents should not be red in colour as red tents were used exclusively by the Mughal Royal family.

Mughal Camps also had *bazzars* for the requirements of their troops.<sup>28</sup> Francois Bernier and Father Monserrate gave the details of the *bazzars* in the Mughal Camps. Father Monserrate write that separate *bazzars* were established for the Emperors, princes and chief nobles. The *bazaar* which were meant for Emperor and princes were very large and well stocked with all kind of merchandise.<sup>29</sup> These *bazzars* were very well stocked and seems like belong to some city instead of to a royal camp.<sup>30</sup> Francois Bernier writes that the main *bazaar* was laid down in the form of a wide street passing through the Camp.<sup>31</sup> These *bazzars* were called as Urdu.<sup>32</sup>

In order to protect the royal camp from thieves and robbers, guards were posted to keep regular watch on the Camp. Bernier writes that in order to prevent robberies, every noble was provided with watchmen and guards were posted around the whole camp. Besides these guards and watchmen, *Kotwal* sent his soldiers in

every direction for patrolling during nights.<sup>33</sup> The Mughal Emperors followed the same daily routine in the Camps as he practice in the Capital. However, it was curtailed to some extent according to the Camp requirement.<sup>34</sup> Mughal Emperor after performing the morning prayers gave *darshan* to his nobles and public, after which he held morning assembly in *Diwan-i-aam-o-khas*. The evening assembly was held in *Gusl-Khana*. Regarding these assemblies, Bernier writes that Mughal Emperor never fails to hold his assembly twice in twenty four hours.<sup>35</sup> These assemblies were obligatory for all the nobles present in the Camp and it was rarely neglected.

From the above, it is amply clear that during the heyday of Mughal Empire, its glory and splendour was proverbial. The aristocratic grandeur was reflected in socio-economic life of the Mughal Emperors and Nobility. Mughal Royal Camp was such an example of magnificence and grandeur of Mughals. The magnificence and splendour of Mughal Camps was not less than their capitals. Thus, it can be summarised with the statement of Vincent Smith who writes that the Mughal Camp was like a moving city from one place to another place with all its paraphernalia.

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<sup>1</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor, (Eng Tr.) William Irvine 'Mogul India', Vol.I*, London, 1906, p.308

<sup>2</sup> M.A. Ansari, *Social life of the Mughal Emperors (1526-1707)*, New Delhi, 1974, p.147

<sup>3</sup> Vincent A. Smith, *Akbar the great Mogul*, 1917, p.266

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India, Vol-I*, New Delhi, Reprinted, 1977, p.32

<sup>5</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol.I, tr. H. Blochmann, p.47

<sup>6</sup> Father Monsorette, *The commentary of Father Monsorette*, tr. J.S. Hoyland, Oxford University Press, 1922, pp. 76-78

<sup>7</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol.I, tr. H. Blochmann, p.47

<sup>8</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor, (Eng Tr.) William Irvine 'Mogul India', Vol.I*, London, 1906, p.308

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Father Monsorette, *The commentary of Father Monsorette*, tr. J.S. Hoyland, Oxford University Press, 1922, p. 78

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> M.A. Ansari, *Social life of the Mughal Emperors (1526-1707)*, New Delhi, 1974, p.151

<sup>13</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in Mogul Empire 1656-1668*, Eng. Tr. A. Constable, rev. V.A Smith, New Delhi, 1968, p.359

<sup>14</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor, (Eng Tr.) William Irvine 'Mogul India', Vol.I*, London, 1906, p.69

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in Mogul Empire 1656-1668*, Eng. Tr. A. Constable, rev. V.A Smith, New Delhi, 1968, p.359

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*

- <sup>19</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol.I, tr. H. Blochmann, p.51
- <sup>20</sup> It is the private apartment in the Mughal Palace.
- <sup>21</sup> Place of Privy Council.
- <sup>22</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in Mogul Empire 1656-1668*, Eng. Tr. A. Constable, rev. V.A Smith, New Delhi, 1968, p.361
- <sup>23</sup> Armoury
- <sup>24</sup> Wardrobe
- <sup>25</sup> Fruitary
- <sup>26</sup> Kitchen
- <sup>27</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in Mogul Empire 1656-1668*, Eng. Tr. A. Constable, rev. V.A Smith, New Delhi, 1968, p.366
- <sup>28</sup> M.A. Ansari, *Social life of the Mughal Emperors (1526-1707)*, New Delhi, 1974, p.154
- <sup>29</sup> Father Monsorette, *The commentary of Father Monsorette*, tr. J.S. Hoyland, Oxford University Press, 1922, p. 75
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in Mogul Empire 1656-1668*, Eng. Tr. A. Constable, rev. V.A Smith, New Delhi, 1968, p.365
- <sup>32</sup> Father Monsorette, *The commentary of Father Monsorette*, tr. J.S. Hoyland, Oxford University Press, 1922, p.76. In Turki, Urdu means the Camp or horde, Though originally it meant a royal encampment but it came to be applied to the mixed language which grow in the Court and Camp.
- <sup>33</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in Mogul Empire 1656-1668*, Eng. Tr. A. Constable, rev. V.A Smith, New Delhi, 1968, p.369
- <sup>34</sup> M.A. Ansari, *Social life of the Mughal Emperors (1526-1707)*, New Delhi, 1974, p.155
- <sup>35</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in Mogul Empire 1656-1668*, Eng. Tr. A. Constable, rev. V.A Smith, New Delhi, 1968, p.366