

Working Classes in Mughal India (1556-1605 A.D.)

Abstract:

India has always been considered a feudal society based on "Asiatic Model" as observed by Karl Marx in his letters of Tribune. So, the existence of feudal classes made the whole infrastructure of Indian economy. The other professional groups who generated their income on the basis of their skills are hardly mentioned in broader framework of Mughal Indian economy, although contemporary sources indicate the presence of agricultural and non-agricultural classes in Mughal India. Even the merchant classes have their link with the world commerce. In the theory of kingship these skilled-workers attached with royal palaces, imperial household, petty officials of the state, construction of the buildings, crafts, transportation and people belonging to other professions. This paper analyses the existence of various groups of skill - workers and their wages in the time of Mughal king Akbar (1556-1605). The assumption of stagnant social structure in India controlled by "Asiatic Despotism" tends to minimize through this study¹. It also indicates that consolidation of Akbar period provided opportunities for working classes to get a sustainable share or wages in his period. The production relations of Akbar's India although not turned into capitalist relations but it created possibilities to take an optimistic view of social change.

Introduction:

Society was not divided into classes, no concept of property, no state, no kingship, and no internal wars only tribal system was intact through petty tribal wars in India. As mode/Instruments of production grew, the concept of private property and classes emerged in the society. Since then history and history of classes leading to slave society.² According to Marxist approach slave society led to feudal then capitalistic and ultimately in its ideal form the socialistic society, where the classes are abolished only on the basis of highest development of production and social wealth. This approach is only valid for western societies.

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This idea of primitive communism is imposed on the individual (man) by extreme backwardness of production not by the abundance of production as historical materialism projected. Every production was the outcome of collective labor, private production, property; consumption even private household was not possible in the evolutionary phase of society. Individual labor has the capacity to produce a surplus of labor for other members of society. In the words of Engles,

"a self-acting armed organization of people which had no special machine force, state to regulate its affairs since then it was not divided into contradictory classes based on private property. With the rise of private property monopoly and concentration of property in the hands of a small group of exploiters resulted in the starvation of majority to the weak and property less to the poor householders."³

In hunter-gatherer society animals were tamed and bred. Their taming fulfilled the food as well as breeding requirements. A number of tribes made their major work, first taming the animals later breeding and tending them. The pastoral tribes separated themselves from the mass of other barbarian tribes, the first great division of labor occurred. The pastoral produced surplus and possessed more resources i.e. milk products, meat and also skin, wool, goat hair and spun and the woven fabrics. Thus regular exchange became possible. At the earlier stages occasional exchange occurred particularly in the matter of skill, tool making led to temporary division of labor. So the society became familiar with the division of labor. Family professions over-ruled which provided space to the slavery. Private property based on slavery had over-thrown collective property based on freedom and equality. As work and wealth grew it demanded the division of labor, conflict raised between rich and poor, exploiters and exploited. The new production forces had made land as on the major means of production along with cattle and handicrafts. The conflict of irreconcilable contradiction gave birth to state (Rajyum), which naturally belonged to the dominant classes. Now ruling classes pour their injections in the subject population in the name of divine order. So the existence was based upon fear inspired by the force and exercised by the state. Violence, slave ownership and greed replaced mutual co operation, peace and love. Representatives of power imposed taxes (the right of the king). Subjects had to pay 1/6 of the total product. Indian society was the feudal society by and large ⁴ as Karl Marx noted, "Feudalism as distinct form of the Asiatic model". Feudal classes have their own economic interests. They did not stand for the other classes like merchants, skill workers and labor classes (all getting lowest wages) were not the part

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of social infrastructure.⁵ Agriculture and non- agriculture sectors constructed are the blocks of Indian economy.

Indian society was divided into various classes with the establishment of Muslim rule in India. Sultans had the upper class of nobles and religious people in their state. There was a visible discrimination against those slaves who belonged to the poor classes in India. They did every drudgery jobs throughout the day even getting nothing out of it. Ala -ud-din Khalji had 50,000 slave and Firoz Shah Tauluq owned 1, 80,000 slaves. Nobles and Ulemas were so powerful under Iqta system (piece of land for some assignment) after the establishment of Muslim rule in India. They have a number of lower classes which work only for the king, nobles and religious people.⁷

As Babur mentioned, " India has unnumbered and endless workmen of every kind".⁶ Indian studies narrated the types of working classes but they differ on a question, kind of production relations obtaining in Mughal India into capitalistic relation without the intervention of any external agency. Richard Jones observed that the artisans of towns in India drew their wages from surplus revenue land- a fund the greatest part of which was distributed by the state and its officers; migration from one state to another was basically the shift of aristocratic customers.⁸ Political environment and caste system played a vital role in checking commercial expansion. IrfanHabib emphasized upon the rural monetization that was almost the result of the need of transfer surplus and agricultural produced in the towns.⁹

IqtidarAlam justified the presence of middle classes in Mughal India.¹⁰ ShireenMoosvi compared the wages of Akbar's period with the income of labors of 19th century. This comparison showed the over-all decline in the wages of labor classes¹¹. This demand was restricted only to the urban centers of Mughal India. The wages were declined in the British period especially in urban centers. The wages of skilled and un-skilled workers were high in the period of Akbar as they were able to purchase basic needs like wheat, rice, ghee (oil) and even cloth. The lowest income of un-skilled worker was 2 dam per day he had much quantity of food then in the latter half of 19th century. The higher urban wages in 1600 does not mean that the level of consumption (on rural and urban level) was also higher. A large extraction of agriculture surplus by the level of land revenue, its distribution in the urbanized class placed Mughal towns in more favorable position with regard to the supply of agriculture produce than in decaying towns of nineteen century. The data of 16th and 17th centuries is not available so the per capita consumption for the population on the basis of higher wages is visible in 16th century.¹²

K.N Raj also applied the sociological definition for the specialized skill as property taking a different form.¹³ But it does not confine only to the middle classes. Society is a patch work of different working classes. There is always a thin line between middle and poor classes of a society. Sometime these classes were also victimized by the exploitation of the state nobles especially in Mughal India. Angus Maddison identified 10% of labor force in Mughal India from the tribal sector as it was 5 % in British period (1900).¹⁴ Moreland is of the view "since the wages in the Ain are those of imperial establishment, these had an up-ward basis; and should therefore be held comparable only with the wages of present at the center of greatest demand in Northern India".¹⁵

Professional groups and skilled workers fall in the category of working classes. In the contemporary sources of Mughal India, Akbarnama appears as a basic source of professional classes which were attached to the government service or imperial household. There were two categories of working classes i-e permanent and temporary or hired for some mega projects. They were attached with minting department, Harem, architecture, royal army, navy, stables and department of hunting etc. The large skilled labor had its corollary low wages especially for those artisans owned their tools. The competition only existed to sharpen their skills rather than to improve their tools although expensive for them. Karl Marx saw (relative because Marx never visited India) in Indian village community two phenomena which were contradictory but well integrated. Firstly, lack of the development was division of labor which resulted in the domestic union of agriculture manufacturing pursuits, secondly. There was a development on the opposite extreme, the establishment of an unalterable division of labor based on caste system with the irresistible authority of law of nature, the hereditary individual artificer, the smith,¹⁶ the carpenter and so on.

All invader and conquerors obtained a larger surplus by exploiting the community solidified as it was the exploitation of individuals who composed the social circle. Karl Marx consulted Francois Bernier's travel account and quoted him. He gave the sweeping statement about oriental societies, "In the East--- Turkey, Persia and Hindustan is to be found in fact no property in land existed. This is the real key even to oriental heaven". Bernier also having the same opinion about Indian commune. This commune broke with the advent of skilled workers and division of labor sharpen the gulf among different classes of Indian society.¹⁵

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There were different categories of skill workers attached with the major departments of the Akbar Empire:

Working Classes In the age of Akbar:

Department of Minting:

Darogh: In-charge of minting department to check the efficiency and smooth running of the work.

Sayrafi: Who purified the metals? He maintained honesty and used all skills to purify gold, silver and other metals. AbulFazal narrates the method of metal purifying especially gold in detail.

Banoari: An expert of melt who checked the color and brightness of melt.¹⁶

Amin: Assistant of Darogh who helped the in-charge to perform his duties.

Mushrif: Accountant who wrote the daily expenditure and maintained a day book.

Merchants: who sold and bought gold from the open market, got their profit. They paid a reasonable share to the state. They could get maximum share if peace and justice prevailed in the Empire.

Treasurer: The person who checked the profit and regularized state dealings. He also prepared salaries for the lowest staff. The lowest rank in the department were Ahadis and weigh men who checked the weight of the coins and his wages were paid on the spot.¹⁷

Metler of the Ore:

The one who made trenches and settle the tablets of clay, he besmeared and greased then. He poured melts to cast them into ingots. He also sprinkled ashes in case of copper which melted. Their salaries varied according to their posts. Those who were involved in activity of gold got higher wages as compared to the silver and copper.

Plate makers:

An expert who made plates of gold with a mixture .Then he carried them to the assay master who stamped them so there will be no alteration in the quality check. Basically they maintained check and balance in minting department.

Metlers of Gold:

The one melted the plates of gold. His fee was 3 dams when he melted 100 gold plates. They have many assistants under them. The work was performed by the poor people sometimes by little boys who performed very skillfully and quickly. However, none of these people knew how to enamel gold.

Zarrab:

The cutter cut the various melts and formed into various shapes and designs according to the need of royal treasury. Their wages vary according to the type of metal. Sometimes it differs due to the weight of the metal.

Engraver:

A man who pasted special dies on the coins. He holds the rank of Yuzbashi (commander of one hundred). His monthly wages were 600 dams.

Sikkachi:

He holds a huge hammer and placed the round pieces of metals between the dies. His wages were determined upon the quantity of coins. Sometimes engraver gave him 1/6 wages to hammer out of his salary. There was no other allowance for him.

Sabbak:

Silver plates refiner, used to receive 54 dams for 1000 rupees weight.

Qurs-Kub:

The person who refine silver by heating and beatings of hammer though it lost its smell, he assisted hammerer and helped him long hours of his jobs.

Chashnigir:

An expert who tested gold and silver and fixed the quantity of its purification, his wages were 3 dams a day.

Niyariya:

A trained man who collected neat dust, washed it and separated gold from this dust for extracting gold from the ordinary dust, wages were 20 dams per month.

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Paniwar:

The man, who melted the kharal and separated copper from silver, normally received one and half dam for every tola. He had to pay 300 dams to Diwan after making profit.

Paikar:

Who brought raw material from the open market. He paid 17 dams on every 40 kg for saloni and 14 dams for kharal to the ex chequer.

Nicho-i- Wala:

The man who brought copper coins which were mixed with silver after processing 100 tolas of silver he had to separate third half for Diwan. He also paid duty to the state for this.

KhakShoy:

Those men who were involved in purification of different metals, had to pay fixed duty to the state because they earned a large amount of profit. Many workers of minting department had to pay 3 dams to state as tax on their wages.¹⁸

Establishment of Army:

The match bearer were receiving maximum salaries in Mughal Army. Their wages were given according to their grades. There were five grades and wages started from 110 to 300 dams.

Royal Stables:

Mughals maintained a number of stables of elephants, horses, mules etc. There was a large establishment of workers sometimes based on hereditary profession.

Mahawat:

An expert, who drove elephant, his monthly salary was 20 dams. It increased in the case of trained elephant then he got 224 dams.

Bhoi:

Assistant of Mahawat (elephant driver) in training, for this activity, he received 110 dams per month.

Meths:

The fodder-fetcher, who assists the above two in caparisoning elephants, got 4 dams daily means 120dams per month.

Faujdar:

Akbar established many groups (Halqa) and appointed a superintendent of this group. They look after the animals of royal stables. Sadi was the highest in post. He looked after twenty elephants. The organization of this department was as under i-e faujdar, Sadi, Bistis, Dahbashi, Hazari. Their wages vary according to their grades. Bisti got 30 rupees per month, Dahbashi, 25-20 rupees and Hazari, 16-12 rupees per month.

The servants of royal stables were thousand in number. There were three types of stables

- 1- country-bred.
- 2- Si-aspni.
- 3- Bist- aspni.

In these stables Naqbis and Ahadis were appointed who have 30 people for their assistance. They received wages 100 dams to 12 dams. The Sai,s of royal stable got 170 dams. The salary of Jilwadar and Payk runner started from 120dams according to his speed and types of service. Foot soldier received 160 dams per month. They fell in the lowest ranks of Mughal army. Abkash monthly income was 100 dams, khasa received 130 dams, a khakrub (Akbar gave them a name Halalkhur) 60 dams and coolly 2 dams per day means 60 dams per month. The wages of herdsmen in the stable of camels were 200 dams. He had five assistants for grazing and they received 2 dams per day. Irani and Turani were appointed for the stables of Mules. The pays of Irani and Turanis were on higher side as compared to the pays of Indians. They received 400-192 dams and Indian got 240 to onward. Keepers of royal stables got 400 dams per month.²⁰

Emperor Akbar introduced Mansabdari system for Mughal army. The ranks and salaries of Mansabdars depend upon the number of soldiers he had and the number of animals he looked after for army. Ahadis (Ahid- one) were the immediate servants of the Emperor. They got 500 dams even more than that. Ahadis have to muster after every four months. Officially they got the salaries of nine months. Ahadis also got certificate after the inspection of their animals. The amount which deducted from their salaries was actually the amount for the breeding of animals into four equal installments.²¹

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Awara-Navis:

They were the part of infantry. The 1st class got 500 dams, 2nd class 400 dams, 3rd class 300 dams and 4th class 240 dams.

Matchlock-Bearers:

12000 matchlock-bearers were employed in Akbar's army. Mughal required an experienced Bitikchi, an honest treasurer and an active Darogha for this department. The pay of the officers was in four grades. First class got 300 dams and 2nd class 280 dams, 3rd grade and 4th 260 dams. Other Banduq-chis (gun-bearer) were divided into five classes and each class got good salary.

Royal guards (Darbans):

Thousand active guards were employed for the protection of the palace. Their pays were in five folds, 200-160-140-130-120 dams respectively. A common guard received 100-120 dams per month.

Khidmattiyyas:

They were part of infantry and appointed for the security of the palace. They received salaries in 3 grades. The people belonged to Mewatis caste, were very notorious for robbery and theft. In Mughal administration they were appointed as servants. Their chief received the title of Khidmat Rai and those who worked under his subordination were known as khidmattiyyas.²²

Mewars:

They were Mewati served as spies and performed the most intricate duties. Their wages were the same.

Shamsherbaz:

There were many categories of gladiators. They performed astonishing feats with very much skill, swiftness and agility. They were under the supervision of Ahadis. Their salaries varied from 80 to 600 dams.

Chelas:

Manumitted slaves, they got salaries from 30 to 0.75 dams according to their class and grade.

KuharsPalki Bearer:

Several people were appointed in the royal court. The head of the palki bearer got 384-192 dams and a common bearer received 160-

120 dams .There were many non-commissioned officers in this department and palki bearer were among them.

Meurah:

Runner/ messengers got their wages from 4.5-2.5 rupees per month.²³

There was a complete process of payments of salaries in royal army. Firstly, all salaries were paid in dam. When the value of rupee was raised to 40 dams to one rupee then the salaries were converted into rupees. Every year salary of one month was subtracted in form of the breeding of the horse. Sometimes it was deducted due to in efficiency. The commander of every contingent was allowed to keep 1/20 part of the pay of his men, which was reimbursed for various expenses. Sometimes government facilitates army officers, providing those loans and benefits. If they got loans then nothing was charged in first year of loan. In the 2nd and 3rd years they have to pay minimum of the loan amount. After ten years the amount of the loan was doubled and there was no increase in it.

The Admiralty:

A voyage was the compulsory part of the Naval training in the age of Mughals and their wages varies. The naval head Nakhuda got 400 dams per year. The assistants were paid after every voyage. A common sailor received 40 rupees. His daily food was also supplied by the government. A sailor on the port of Camby got 800 rupees and rest of the navy received in that proportion in the hard seasons. On the port of Achin 15 rupees, on the port of Portugal 25 rupees, Malacca 20 rupees, Pegu and Dahnasari 10-30 rupees respectively. The wages varied according to the distance and hardship they bore in case of long journey. Boatman charged 100-500 dams per day.²⁴

Department of Hunting:

The wages of hunting department were released into four categories. The senior one got more as compared to the junior. Senior got 300 dams and junior 110-100 dams. In the birds section many Mansabdars were employed. In the categories of foot soldiers Kashmiri and Hindustani were employed. The wages of Kashmiri soldier got higher as compared to the Hindustani.²⁵

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Labors in Royal Buildings:

Gil-kar:

He arranged the lime tablets in the royal buildings. There were three categories of Gilkar and they received 7-6-5 dams according to their class.

Sang-Tarash:

They cut the stones and engraved them according to the measurement of a piece of stone. They got 20 dams for cutting and engraving.

Carpenters:

First class carpenter got 7dams, second class 6dam, third class 4 dams, fourth class 3 dams ,fifth class 2dams and simple carpenter charged 1 dams and 70 Jetals for one yard of piece of wood.

Pinjara-Saz :

The first class charged 48 dams per yard and 2nd class 40dams.

Arra-kash:

The wages depends upon the type of wood. In case of sisau wood two and half dams for a piece of one yard wood and nazhu wood it cost 2 dams. The labor was on daily wages and they received 2 dams a day.

Bildars:

There were many classes of Bildars. First class received three and half dams, 2nd class 3 dams per day. If Bildars were employed for fortress then they received 4 dams per yard for the foundation of the building, two and half dams for the walls and 2 dams for the ditches. These labors had their own yard stick for measurement and they charged as per the measurement of their own sticks.

Chah- kan:

The well digger who received amount according to their class, first class charged 2 dams per yard, 2nd and third class one and half dams per yard.

GhotaKhur:

These were divers who cleaned the well especially of drinking water. They charged as per seasons. In winter 4 dams per day and in summer 3 dams per day. If they were hired on some contract for certain time period then they charged 2 dams for the cleanness of one yard.

KhishtTarash:

He was a tile maker. The size of a tile was defined. His fee was 8 dams for 100 tiles.

Surkhi-Kob:

He was expert in making colored tiles. He assisted in placement of tiles and also determined the size and quality of tiles.

Glass-Cutter:

He charged 100 dams per yard for cutting as his fee.

Bamboo-Cutter:

He had the skill of cutting of bamboos and his wages were 2dams per day.

Chapper/Patal Band:

He took 24 dams for 100 yards, in case of copper, 1 dam for 4 yard in patal band.

Lakhira:

They cut all kinds of wood in pieces and variance them. They charged 2 dams per day.

Abkash:

Water carrier also charged according to his class, 4 dams for 1st class, 2dams for 2nd class . Those who were attached with Gilkar to mix lime and mortar for building charged 2dams per day. These workers were also used in the construction of bridges. A known Mughal bridge Jaunpur in 1567-68 was constructed with the help of these workers.²⁶

Establishment of Mughal Harem:

The personal establishment of the Emperor (Darun or interior) comprised of many male, female and eunuchs servants. The monthly salary of female servants and concubines varied from 51-20 rupees and 40-2 rupees. The external part of the imperial palace consisted of many male servants because of Purdah in Mughal Harem. In the department of encampment alone there were thousand tent pitchers, carpet setter, spade wielder, water carrier etc. There were thousand tent pitchers, five hundred spade-wielders, a hundred water carriers, fifty carpenter and tent repairer and torch bearer, thirty leather workers and one and fifty sweepers. The monthly salaries of the encampment department ranged from 3.25 to 6.38 dams. In most of the external imperial departments servants were paid monthly salaries or daily wages. It was divided into two categories, ordinary servants and head (mirs). The monthly salaries within the same departments varied greatly; for example while the highest salary was 60 rupees and the lowest 30 per month. On the other hand, in the painting department the maximum and minimum was not too much; the highest was 30 and the lowest 15. It shows the salary of the skilled worker was higher as compared to the ordinary one (unskilled).²⁷

Petty officials of the State:

AbulFazal also mentioned the salaries of local administration. These salaries were rarely high beyond the limit of 500 dams per month. Local officers serving in a paragna from the side of the state received 10-17dams per month.²⁸ The Amils got 133-116 and 50 dams per month according to the distance and revenue of any province. These salaries have been distributed on the basis of Iqta system created by many revenue officials. There was corruption on the provincial and local levels. Qanungos produced fake record with the help of Patwaris and levied heavy taxes on the local level.²⁹ Badaoni also mentioned that many people died by the hands of Todar Mal for the state demand of revenue and they were imprisoned still languishing in the jail till 1594.³⁰

Syed Ali NadeemRizvi mentioned 42 doctors (Tabib) of Akbar's age. Only 8 doctors hold Mansabs and 34 were hired on temporary basis.³¹ The local demand for the services of the physicians was very low as indicated by W.H Moreland.³² According to Rizivi all physicians received royal patronage, Inams (prize) grant but quacks were also there. It was significant that after Akbar period feudal patronage of the physicians was steadily shrunk.³³

Conclusion:

Mughal society was starkly unequal. Money was circulated only in Urban India. In rural India there was hardly any circulation of money. The entire rural labor force was made up of virtual serfs who were merely fed. In towns, there were labor markets from where the workers hired for daily wages or on the contract. But that didn't make any difference in the economy. The wages of their labor were so low that their condition was little better than rural serfs. The best paid workers in Mughal India were those in the service of the Emperor. The wages of these workers were first time fixed by Akbar according to their skills. Unskilled workers got 2 dam per day while skilled worker charged 3 or 4 dams, carpenter 3 to 7 dams and builder 5 to 7 dam per day. The monthly salary of a sweeper was 60 dams per month, a camel driver 65 dams and a wrestler 70 dams. The lowest grade slave got one dam per day- three fourth of rupee per month- which probably was enough for his survival. Mostly workers of that age drew monthly salaries. Daily wages were only confined to the lowest categories like sweepers, bamboo cutters, grass-cutters and helper boys in the royal stable. The water carrier and sweepers were liable to lose 1/4 of their monthly salaries if the horses became lean. Otherwise there was a system of rewards when the emperor mounted on the elephant and a horse but these occasions were likely to be rare in career of ordinary staff.

India people were more desperate in 1900 as compared to the 1600 when the average expectation of the life of an Indian male had fallen to 22.6 years to 19.4 years by the end of next two decades.³⁴ A comparison of urban wages at Agra in 1595 with the wages of colonial rule (rule which was justified by Karl Marx in his letters) reveals that the unskilled town laborer in 1595 was better off in respect of food though he could buy less cloth and other things.³⁵

Article	Price Per Maund (40 kgs)
Wheat	3.36
Barley	5.04
Jowar	4.03
Bajra	5.04
Ghee (Oil)	0.38
Sugar	0.31
Salt	2.52

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Indian had developed and exceptional degree of manual skill in medieval times. According to Bernier, "handsome pieces of workmanship made by persons destitute of tools.....sometimes they imitate so perfectly articles of European manufacture that the difference between the original and copy can hardly be discerned". There was the abundance of skill labors, owing the low subsistence cost. The development of the skill mean specialization was not common. This specialization was only confined to the royal taste only. The picture is corroborated by Abul- Fazal description of different occupation within mint, weighing, ore smelters, and gold plate maker. Refined melt smelter, ingot casters, engraver, silver refiners, assayers, gold and silver separators. This specialization brought about by a socially set division of labor which was influenced by caste system in India. There was a fixed caste for every skilled work which extended their work from father to son as observed by Babur. Max Weber argument, " caste created segregation of skills and prevented inter-craft mobility was to Indian environment." This thesis was challenged many times but the caste domination in working classes would not be denied in India even today. This domination is a hurdle in scientific developments. This process was very slow in India especially in medieval times. The priorities of Mughal Emperors were different in 17th century. The Mughal produced not a single worthwhile text on crafts, agriculture or industry, however many volumes of poetry or history might be on their credit. Hereditary skilled labor was there, having no tools for advanced industry. As compare to the European world which had started their journey of advancement in technologies in 16th and 17th centuries although by plundering their colonies. They have the realization of class consciousness. The making of English working classes radically changed their societies but Indian society adopted it very late. This fact is clear that oriental despotism of Akbar's age gave more opportunities of work to the labour classes of India in form of his mega projects like FatehpurSikri and other architectural plans. It is also worth mentioning that Akbar's age was better in form of the payments of wages even a sweeper who was getting 2 dam per day could easily afford his family necessities as compared to colonial rule, which was very much justified by Karl Marx and other historians of that age.

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