

‘Zat and ‘Sawar’:

During later years of his reign, Akbar introduced the rank of ‘Zat’ and ‘Sawar’ in the Mansabdari system. The first number is called ‘Zat’ and the second number is called ‘Sawar’. This means that the person will have a certain clear position in the Mughal system of administration; it will determine his position in the court and the Sawar number means that he will have to maintain a certain number of cavalry. His salary and other allowances are dependent on the maintenance of this.

Different views have been expressed regarding these terms. According to Blochmann, every mansabdar had to maintain as many soldiers as were indicated by his rank of ‘Zat’ while the rank of ‘sawar’ indicated the number of horsemen among them. In the early 20th century the British historian William Urwin said that the two numbers meant that the Mansabdar had to maintain two contingents of cavalry. . Abdul Aziz the Indian scholar said that the statement of Urwin is not correct; the first number means his position and the second number means the ‘sawar’.

According to Dr. R.P. Tripathi, the rank of sawar was given to mansabdars to fix up their additional allowances. A mansabdar was paid rupees two per horse. Therefore, if a mansabdar received the rank of 500 sawar he was given rupees one thousand additional allowance. Dr. A.L. Srivastava has opined that while the rank of zat indicated the total number of soldiers under a mansabdar, the rank of sawar indicated the number of horsemen under him. During the reign of Akbar, the mansabdars were asked to keep as many horsemen as were indicated by numbers of their ranks of sawar. But, the practice was not be maintained by other Mughal emperors.

In 1966 M. Athar Ali, in his book ‘Some aspects of Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb’ had clarified the position and confirmed the views of Aziz. He said the first position is the personal – it determines his rank and salary and it is called ‘Zat’. The second one which is called ‘Sawar’ determines the number of contingents he would keep and the money that he would get for this type of contingent. He is also given the salary.