

Q) Write a short note on Muhtasib.

A Muhtasib was a supervisor of bazaars and trade in the medieval Islamic countries. His duty was to ensure that public business was conducted in accordance with the law of sharia. Encyclopaedia Iranica provided the information that in the pre-Islamic Sasanian Empire there was an official called the 'wazarbed', meaning 'market overseer', or 'market inspector' who supervised weights and measures in the market. Anne F. Broadbodge (*'Academic Rivalry and the Patronage System in Fifteenth Century Egypt', Mamluk Studies Review, vol.3, 1999*) said that, in Egypt the duties of the Muhtasib included the regulation of weights, money, prices, public morals, and the cleanliness of public places, as well as the supervision of schools, teachers and students. According to Caroline Stone (*'The Muhtasib', Saudi Aramco World, September/October, 1977*), the Muhtasib was also expected to keep a close check on all doctors and also inspected public eating houses.

During mughal period the duties of Muhtasib included prevention of nuisance, removal of obstructions and encroachment upon public streets, prevention of burying people in the lands owned by others, prevention of cruelty to servants and animals, encouraging regular attendance at the mosque. In his capacity as the superintendent of markets the Muhtasib went through the city daily accompanied by a detachment of subordinates, inspected provisions to see if they were adulterated and tested weights and measures. The Muhtasibs with all the duties as noted above existed in the Mughal administration and were to be found in the capital, as well as at the headquarters of the provinces and their subdivisions.

According to Satish Chandra (*A History of Medieval India*), Muhtasibs were appointed in all the provinces. These officials were asked to see that people lived their lives in accordance with the sharia. Thus, it was the business of these officials to see that wine and intoxicants such as bhang were not consumed in public places. They were also responsible for regulating the gambling dens, etc., and for checking weights and measures. In other words, they were responsible for ensuring that things forbidden by the sharia and the zawabits were, as far as possible not flouted openly. Satish Chandra said, in appointing Muhtasibs, Aurangzeb emphasised that the state was also responsible for the moral welfare of the citizens, especially the muslims. But these officials were instructed not to interfere in the private lives of citizens.

The Muhtasib in Mughal administration was generally a prosecutor of canon law and instituted prosecution on behalf of the government.