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Use of Perfumes, Their Market Prices and Trade During the Time of Akbar

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ABSTRACT

Perfume is a kind of scent used to give some blandness to human body, animals, food objects etc. Various archaeological findings all over the world show that men used perfumes from very old age. This was further supported by some of the very ancient texts. Like all other countries India also has a very long tradition of the use of presumes. This was further supported by some texts also. Earlier in ancient period men used perfumes for the freshness of the body. If we look into some of the ancient Indian literary evidences there, we could find many references of the use of perfumes. In Mughal period especially in the period of Akbar perfume industry was highly developed under his direct patronage. This article critically analyses the development of various types of perfumes in his reign along with its prices and the contribution of different types of materials which were used in the preparation perfumes in the growth and development of a brisk trade network along with the trade of other commodities.

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INTRODUCTION

Perfume is one of the most ancient ingredients that men and women use to make himself or herself more acceptable to anyone. It is a kind of scent used to give some blandness to human body, animals, food objects etc. It also gives us a pleasant scent. It is a mixture of various compounds of fragrance. The use of perfumes could be traced back to the earliest human civilization and we could get references of that in a large scale from the various ancient texts. Moreover, various archaeological findings throughout the different archaeological sites all over the world gives references of the use of perfumes in the then time. Jennifer Peace Rhind, said that “The use of the fragrance certainly dates from pre-Egyptian time, preceding 5000 B.C. since antiquity scented flowers have been used for personal adornment” (Rhind 2012, 14). Peoples of various ancient civilization like, the Mesopotamians, Egyptian, Harappan and Chinese initiated the used of perfumes in long time ago. From a 2nd millennium BC tablet of found at Mesopotamia we could get the name of a women perfume maker, Tapputi (Strathern 2002, 19). An Egyptian tablet of 4th century B.C. bears the evidences of the preparation of perfumes by two ladies. In India the use of perfumes has a long history. However, it got a special importance during the mughal period.

Objective of the study: The objective of the study ids to show –

- i. How perfumes become an integral part of the Mughal court during the time of Akbar.
- ii. To look into the use of various soaps (solid or liquid form) during the time of Akbar.
- iii. Akbar’s role in the development of Khusbu-khana.
- iv. Trade related to various fragrances and scents.

Use of Perfumes in India during Pre-Mughal Period:

Like all other countries India also has a very long tradition of the use of presumes. From very time ancient times perfumes were used by the Indian in various ways. In this regard we could highlight a reference of Jain text ‘*Kalpasutra*’ where a student (*brahmachari*- one who learn lesson in the house of his master or teacher as a capacity of a residential student.) at the time of his *samabartana* (the day when a student get certificate from his master or teacher after finishing his lesson) applied scent in his body which was carried by his relatives for him (Kirste 1889, Line 10.4). In the epic period we could also get the references of the use of chandana (sandal wood) and some other fragrances to make body beautiful and to get a good scent from the body. Moreover writing on the chapter III ‘On the Arts and Sciences to be studied’ of *Kamasutra* author Vatsyayana mentioned sixty four arts or *Kalas* for a women to satisfy the demands of a man and while taking about the arts or kala no. 43 he said that to attract men a women should always use perfumes in her hair and body (Vatsyayana 1883, 14). Moreover in Chapter-I of Part-IV when Vatsayana writing regarding ‘On the Manner of Living of a Virtuous Women, and of Her Behaviour during the Absence of Her Husband’, said that when a woman wants to approach her husband in private she should use a little scent (Vatsyayana 1883, 91). In the sultanate period the Sultans of Delhi and the regional or provincial Sultans were also fond of Luxurious life and for maintaining their status, luxury and gravity they used perfumes in a large scale. This claim is further supported when we see the imported items of that time. There we could see that a large volume of fragrance oil and sandalwood were imported from the various countries through trade. Thus these examples give references of the use of perfumes in ancient period and Sultanate India.

Use of perfumes in India in the Mughal Period: During the time of Akbar:

A dozens of research work have been done by the scholars on the social, economic, political as well as on the cultural history of Mughal India. Many historical debates and theories are continuously coming up on this period. Though, research on this topic is extremely rare. Most of the historians discussed on the socio-political and Economic history of the Mughal period but surprisingly neglected this topic. Writing on the topic of the ‘social condition of Mughal India’, P. N. Chopra discussed about the dress, ornaments, kitchens, intoxicants etc. along with the toilets of the time but the use of perfumes which was an important part and parcel of the private life of the Mughal emperors were totally overlooked by him (P.N. Chopra 2007, 679–82). Recently R. Nath has done a wonderful work on this topic (Nath 2005). However, in describing many terms he just merely adopted the same description as

described by Abul Fazl in his book. Though, in this paper an effort has been done on describing the terms used by Abul Fazl, to get a clear idea.

As far as the use of the fragrance in the Mughal period are concerned, it will easily be understood by anyone who is a student of history that the Mughals were came from Persia or modern Iran which was known for the Iranian culture in the medieval world. So, being a descendents of the Iranian culture the Mughals also has some special contribution in this regard. Many historians of Mughal India have paid so much attention in the various spares of Mughal history like social, economic and political history. However, the topic under discussion is a very rare and historians paid little attention to this. It has a great contribution in shaping the cultural history of our country of the then time.

Akbar was highly addicted to the use of perfumes. Perfume industry was highly developed under his patronage. He believed that good scents can bring the purity of heart. So according to his will the Mughal court (*Darbar*) was always scented with ambergris (*Latin: Ambra grisea*) Ambergris has been mostly known for its use in creating perfume and fragrance. Ancient Egyptians burned ambergris as incense while ancient Chinese called the substance "dragon's spittle fragrance" (Graber 2007, 2) , various types of incenses along with aloewood or agar wood. In Europe agar wood was referred to as *Lignum aquila* (eagle-wood) or Agilawood. In India it is known as various names like aguru, agor, sasi or sashi etc. and the agarwood oil as agor/agoro or attor. These were regularly burnt to get a good scent. Among the scents which were used in the court-hall of Emperor Akbar, some were in use from ancient period and some were newly invented under the patronage of Akbar.

Beside the materials mentioned above a good number of scented flowers were also used during the time of Akbar. It is a fact that the unique cosmetic and magical powers of flower oils have long been recognised. The Egyptian Queens Cleopatra and Hatshepsut, who were famed for their beauty and magnetic attractiveness, were well aware of the properties of many flower oils. Flower oils are the ideal means to care about skin, whatever age might be. Apart from their highly efficient effect, they have a positive impact on mental well-being and personal energy. There were two sharp reasons behind the use of scented flowers during the Mughal period. Firstly, these flowers spread good smell all over the court-hall and secondly, the oils that extracted from the flowers were off highly medicinal used. In Ayurveda it is believed that the oil of some of the flowers like Rose, Jasmine etc. are antidepressant, antiseptic, antispasmodic and antiviral. So keeping all these importance the Mughal emperors used the oils of these natural products to keep their skin healthy and to maintain a regular growth of their hair. In one of his portrait we could see Emperor Akbar holding a beautiful rose in his hand and taking its smell (Joshi 2008, 54). In this way he not only immortalized rose in Indian painting but also this portrait symbolises the deep connection of Akbar with the Ayurvedic medicines. Akbar also established a separate department for the preparation of various types of scents. This department was known as *khusbu-khana* (Department of Perfumery) (Abul Fazl 2006, 78) . A list of scents that were prepared during the reign of Akbar as gleaned from *Ain-i-Akbari* is giving below.

- 1) Santuk was prepared from Chambeli essence, Rose-water and Oil of Civet or Zabad¹. It was used for keeping the skin fresh (Abul Fazl 2006, 79) .
- 2) *Argaja* (Abul Fazl 2006, 79) was a scent prepared from various natural sources viz., Sandalwood, Iksir, Violet root or banafsha², Gehla, Camphor, Rose water, Mid and Chuwa. According to Abul Fazl Mid is the dried bag of the civet cat, pounded and boiled in water or the greasy substance which rises to the surface while Chuwa is the is the distilled wood of aloes (Abul Fazl 2006, 85) .

¹ A Civet (Zabad) is a small, lithe-bodied, mostly nocturnal mammal native to tropical Asia and Africa, especially the tropical forests. The term civet applies to over a dozen different mammal species. Most of the species diversity is found in Southeast Asia. The best-known civet species is the African Civet, (Scientific name is *Civettictis civetta*) which historically has been the main species from which was obtained a musky scent used in perfumery. The word civet may also refer to the distinctive musky scent produced by the animals. In Bengal it was known as 'Khatash'.

² Violet or *Viola odorata* is indigenous to India and found in Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh (Chamba) and Kumaon hills. The leaves are found to contain an essential oil, alkaloid and a colouring matter. It has a very agreeable flavour and is used for high grade perfumes.

- 3) *Gulkama* (Abul Fazl 2006, 79) was prepared from the mixture of Ambergis, Ladan, best musk, wood of aloes, *Iksir-i-Sabir*³, juice of *Gul-i-surkh*⁴, rose water, a juice of flower called *Bahar-i-Naranj* (the blossom of Orange flower) (Abul Fazl 2006, 79), and juice of black Rayhan⁵ (also called black Nazbu). These materials were proportionately added in the various stages of preparation.
- 4) Another important fragrance of Mughal India was *Ruh-afza* (Abul Fazl 2006, 79) (The thing which enhances or Augment the joy of the heart). It generally used for burnt in household affairs during the time of Akbar. It was prepared by the mixing of Aloewood, Sandalwood, Ladan⁶, Iksir, Luban (Frankincense) Dhup⁷, violet-root, Ushna⁸ and rose water.
- 5) Aloewood, Ladan, Luban, Sandalwood, Iksir, Dhup, violet-root and Musk⁹, Ushna, refined sugar and rose water were used for the preparation of a scent named *Kishta* (Abul Fazl 2006, 79).
- 6) *Bukhur* (Abul Fazl 2006, 80) was prepared from Aloewood, Ladan, musk, Sandalwood, Iksir, refined sugar and rose water.
- 7) *Fatila* (Abul Fazl 2006, 80) prepared from Aloewood, Ladan, Lubun, Sandalwood, Iksir, refined sugar and rose water.
- 8) *Barjat* (Abul Fazl 2006, 80) was prepared after a process of distillation of Aloewood, Ladan, musk, Sandalwood, Luban and Camphor.
- 9) *Abir-Iksir* (Abul Fazl 2006, 80) was a mixture of Sandalwood, Iksir and musk.

Beside the above mentioned fragrances and soaps some shops were also prepared during the reign of Akbar. Sometimes these were solid or liquid. Among the solid and well known shops *Opatna* and *Abirmaya* were worth mentioning while *Ghasul* was a liquid soap. *Opatna* soap was famous for its attracting scent. It was prepared through the mixing of various kinds of medicinal plant like Aloewood, Ladan, *Bahar-i-Naranj* (Orange Flower), musk, Sandalwood, *Sumbul-t-tib* (in India it was called *Chhar*), *Ushna*, *Pacha* leaves, apples, violet root, *Dhup*, *Ikanki* (a kind of grass), *Zurumbad* or *Zerumbet*¹⁰, *Luban*, rose water, etc. Another soap named *Abirmaya* prepared from Aloewood, Sandalwood, violet root, *Sumbul-t-tib*, *Duwalak*, *Khata* (Cathey), Ladan, *Bahar-i-Naranj* etc. while the liquid soap *Ghasul* was prepared from Sandalwood, musk, *Chuwa*, Camphor, rose water etc. I guess that it was mainly prepared for the purpose of hand wash. So, one could simply assume that the preparation of all these soaps mentioned above were a very complex process and at the same time lengthy process.

The preparation of these soaps and fragrances not only mention the achievements of the workers of *khusbu-khana* but it also reveals His Majesty's involvement or attachment with the Ayurvedic medicines on one side and his high sense in respect of the natural science. Besides these Abul Fazal in his work prepared a complete list of those scents used in the time of Akbar. For the sake of discussion I have categorise perfumes into three broad divisions based on their prices. However in *The Ain-i-Akbari* there were no such divisions. The names of these perfumes and their prices are as follows (Abul Fazl 2006, 80–81) :

³ In India now it is called *Yakshi* which is an Indian flower. *Yakshi* incense has a milder, softer, perfume-like fragrance.

⁴ It is a Persian name of a pink coloured Rose blooms in spring.

⁵ *Reyhan* is derived from Arabic: رائحة, *rih* or *riha* "odour, fragrance". During the period under review this Black Rayhan was available in a huge quantity in Arabian countries. In India its well known species is the sacred Basil or Tulsi which is popular for medicinal importance.

⁶ Ladan also called *Labdanum*, *ladanum*, or *ladanon*, is a sticky brown resin obtained from the shrubs of the two types of flower namely *Cistus Ladanifer* which can be seen in the western Mediterranean region and *Cistus Creticus* of eastern Mediterranean region. This flower is mainly a species of *Rockrose*. It is generally used in the preparation of herbal medicine and as a perfume ingredient.

⁷ Actually it is an Urdu word and in Arabic Frankincense is called *Al-Luban*. It is a fragrant, aromatic resin, or gum resin, burned as incense in religious rites or for medicinal fumigation. It is largely available in India.

⁸ Name from Muslim origin meaning "the fragrance of flowers" or simply fragrance.

⁹ Musk is a class of sweet-smelling substances commonly used as base notes in perfumery. The use of Musk can help the scent a long stay instead its application much before.

¹⁰ In India it is called *kachur*.

Perfumes of High Range (From highest to lowest rate)		
Perfumes		Prices
1.	Bhimsini Camphor	3 Rupees – 2 Muhars per tola (approximately 11.66 gram)
2.	Ambar i ashhab	1-3 Muhurs per Tola
3.	Zabad (Civet)	½ Rupees – 1 Muhurs per Tola
4.	Nafa-yi mushk	3 – 12 Muhars per ser
5.	Zafaran-i Kamandi	1 -3 Muhars per ser
6.	Lignum aloes or Agar (in India)	2 Rupees- 1 Muhars per ser

Perfumes of Comparatively High Range (From highest to lowest rate)		
Perfumes		Prices
1.	Gaura	3-5 Rupees per tola
2.	Mid	1 -3 Rupees per tola
3.	Luban (from Sargard)	1/3 – 3 Rupees per Tola
4.	Must	1-4/1/2 Rupees per Tola
5.	Chuwa (Dstilled wood of Aloes)	1/8 Rupees – 1 Rupee per tola
6.	Sandalwood	32 – 55 Rupees per man
7.	Kalanbak (Calembic)	10 – 40 Rupees per man
8.	Zafaran	12 – 22 Rupees per ser
9.	Sugandh Gugala	10 – 13 Rupees per ser
10.	Zafaran-i Kashmiri	8 – 12 Rupees per ser
11.	Silaras	3 -5 Rupees per ser
12.	Duwalak (In India it was known as Chharila)	3 – 4 Rupee per ser
13.	Ambar-i Ladan	1/1/2 – 4 Rupees per ser
14.	Azfar-ut-tib	1/1/2 – 2 Rupees per ser
15.	Kafur-i China	1 -2 Rupees per ser
16.	Luban (other kinds)	1 – 2 Rupee per ser
17.	Violet-root	½ - 1 Rupees per ser
18.	Barg-i Maj (brought from Gujrat)	½ - 1 Rupees per ser
19.	Alak, (In India it was known as Chhar)	¼ - ½ Rupee per ser

Liquid Perfumes (From highest to lowest rate)		
Perfumes		Prices
1.	Araq-i Fitna	1 – 3 Rupees per bottle
2.	Araq-i Bed-i Mushk	1 – 4 Rupees per bottle

3.	Rosewater	½ - 1 Rupees per bottle
4.	Araq-i Bahar	1 – 5 Rupees per bottle
5.	Araq-i Chambeli	1/8 – ¼ Rupees per bottle

Beside those above mentioned perfumes Abul Fazl has also mentioned the name of four perfumes, Gehla, Sud, Ikanki, Zurumbad but unfortunately he has not mentioned the market price of these perfumes in his work. From the above list of the perfumes we could simply assume that all those perfumes mentioned above by Abul Fazl were totally made for the use of those persons who belongs to the upper class of the then society. But, what about the common peoples- was not mentioned by him in his work.

Another interesting thing was the development of a long distance trade to acquire various types of materials used for the preparations of different perfumes also developed during the time of Akbar. As we have already seen that some of the materials used in the preparation of a variety of perfumes were not easily available in India. So, to acquire those things great attention has been paid in the foreign trade during this period. *Civet (Zabad)* which was used in the preparation of Santuk was not easily available in Indian subcontinent. The tropical forest areas of Asia and Africa and some parts of South East Asian countries was best known for the availability of this type of mammals. Therefore, to get the oil of civet Mughal India developed a direct trade relation with those countries which fall under these tropical parts of Asian and African continent. However, we come across the name of 'Khatash' (which is as same as Civet) in Bengal. So, there may have been possible that Civet of Bengal was also used in the preparation of Santuk. But the Bengal civet was itself a rare species. Likewise Civet another important material named black Rayhan (also called black Nazbu) which was used by the workers of khusbu khana of Akbar was available Arabian countries. However, in our country this Rayhan was known as sacred Tulsi. But whether this Indian Tulsi was used in the preparation of *Gulkama*- was not clearly mentioned in *Ain-i-Akbari*. Here we could know only about black Rayhan which was of Arabian origin. So trade of this product was also cast its effect in the growth and development of Mughal trade. Besides, Ladan came from both western and eastern Mediterranean region. Though things like Luban (Frankincense), *Iksir-i-Sabir* (Yakshi flower), Violet root or banafsha, sandalwood, Rose etc was largely available in the various parts of Indian subcontinent. So, internal trade of these resources were also got o momentum during the period of Akbar.

CONCLUSION

So from the above discussion we could simply assume that, Akbar played a vital role in the growth of fragrance industry in India. With the establishment of Khusbu- khana under his direct patronage a new era started in this field. Akbar was the first Mughal Emperor who took a keen initiative for the production of various flower-oil as scents which gradually evolved as perfume industry in this country. He can be regarded as the 'father of perfume industry in medieval India'. Besides he also patronized the development of Ayurvedic research as the workers or perfumers developed various kinds of the mixtures of Ayurvedic substances in the royal industry of perfumes (*khusbu khana*). Thus research on Ayurveda also got a momentum under his direct guidance. A good inland as well as international trade network was also developed based on these perfume industry during his rule. Thus in this way the perfume industry which was undoubtedly a small scale industry developed under the personal care and supervision of Akbar became a big or flourishing industry in his time. He was not only responsible for future development of perfume technology in India but also cast his important role in the history of the development of science based on Ayurvedic experiments.



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