Chapter - IV

THE CHEROS OF PALAMAU

Many tribes rose to power in the period following the decline of the Palas. The most prominent among them were Bhars (a dominant community in the eastern Uttar Pradesh and Central Bihar), the Kharwars (in Son valley) and the Cheros in South Bihar. But the Cheros emerged as the most powerful state of the region. They established small principalities in Shahabad, Saran, Champaran, Muzaffarpur and Palamau regions of Bihar and remained a force to reckon with for about three hundred years (1150 to 1450 AD).\(^1\)

It seems that the Cheros\(^2\) were able to establish their power in Western Bihar in the first quarter of 12\(^{th}\) century, and area over which they ruled, extended from the east of Banaras to the west of Patna and Bihar Sharif and from the south of the Ganga to the north of the Vindhaya range (Kaimur). They were described as the masters of the Gangetic plains.\(^3\)

According to local traditions during 12\(^{th}\) century, four prominent Chero chiefs belonging to Kolarian tribe of Dravidian origin, held large area in the

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2. The Cheros are a semi aboriginal or semi Dravidian tribe who with Bhars and Sawars dominated the whole of the province of Bihar particularly the district of Shahabad, which according to Cunningham may be identified with the ancient Kukradesh of Puranas. Col. Dalton found their affinity with people speaking Mundarian and Kolarian language. While Elliot considered them as a branch of Bha tribe. *(Mirzapur District Gazetteer, J.B.R.S. March, 1955, p. 108)*. However Buchanan says that Cheros belonged to the Princes of Sunaka family who ruled over Kikat region (Magadh) in the time of Gautama Budha (Francis Buchanan : ‘An Account of the District of Shahabad’, p. 40).
3. According to a tradition, Chero chief killed Mansur Hallaj Shahid the eldest son of the Sufi saint Shaikh Qadir Makhdum Owais in southern Muzaffarpur. It is said that Mansur with his proselytizing zeal attempted to erect a mosque on the ruins of a mound of a Basasrh and invited the wrath of the Chero chief. This incident probably took place in 13th century A.D. The traces of the forts and towns of the Cheros Rajas have been found elsewhere in the Chapra and Muzaffarpur districts (K.S. Singh, op.cit. Also *the Comprehensive History of Bihar*, op.cit., p. 260).
south of Bihar or Kikat region (Magadh) in general and Bhojpur in particular, were ruling in this region\(^4\). Bihia was the headquarters of the *Chero* chief Ghughulia who is still remembered in folklores. The headquarters of the second kingdom was Tirawan, about a mile from Dumraon, in the heart of Bhojpur region. Raja Sita Rai, son of Ramchandra Rai was the ruling chief during this period. Chainpur was the headquarters of the third principality with Raja Salabahim as the ruler.\(^5\) Raja Phulchand was the *Chero* chief of the fourth kingdom which included Chakai, Tulsipur, Ramgrawa, Piri, Biri, Jogibar, Bhairia and Ghosia; the headquarters of this kingdom was Deo Markande in the *Pargana* Dinara in Sahasram.

They were however, expelled from many places by *Ujjainia* of Bhojpur with whom they seems to have been engaged in frequent fights from 14\(^{th}\) to 16\(^{th}\) century.\(^6\) The Afghan sources mentions that the *Cheros* were quite powerful in Shahabad region. The author of *Tarih-i-Sher Shahi* writes that Maharata *Chero* had become so powerful that Sher Shah had to send Khawas Khan, one of his most competent military commanders to punish him. Khawas Khan moved swiftly into *Chero* chief’s headquarters but before the campaign could be affectively taken up Sher Shah overtook Humayun at Chausa and full scale war with the Mughals appeared imminent.\(^7\) Therefore Khawas Khan was called back and the campaign against *Chero* chief was temporarily suspended. However soon after his conquest, Sher Shah dispatched Khawas Khan again and the *Chero* chief was defeated and killed. Despite Maharata *Chero* defeat, according

\(^4\) See chapter on *Ujjainia*.

\(^5\) A part of Chainpur appears to have been occupied by another chief.

\(^6\) *Tawarikh-i-Ujjainia*, II, pp. 32-33.

to Niamatullah, the *Cheros* used to come out of their stronghold in the hills and forests and harass the peasants of South Bihar and entirely closed the road to Gaur.\(^8\) Ahmad Yadgar the author of *Tarikh-i-Shahi* narrates another incident about a clash between the armies of Sher Khan and Maharata *Chero*.\(^9\) He writes that Sher Khan wanted to take possession of a white elephant called *Shayam Sundar* from Maharata *Chero*. On Maharata *Chero*’s refusal, Sher Shah ordered Khawas Khan to punish the Raja and capture the elephant. Khawas Khan marched from Rohtas at the head of 4000 horses, crossed a river and passed through a very difficult mountain defile. The *Chero* chief was besieged and compelled to surrender the elephant. Khawas Khan returned to Sher Khan along with the coveted white elephant and huge war booty.\(^10\) The destruction of the *Chero* chief is mentioned as one of the three great achievements of Sher Shah.\(^11\)

We have given above a brief account of the four *Chero* chieftaincies of Kikat region. None of these, however, remained important during Mughal period. The *Chero* chief of Palamau in extreme south Bihar, in the Chotanagpur region emerged as the most powerful ruler among the *Cheros*, during Mughal period. In the present chapter we have discussed in detail about their relations with the Mughal rulers.

Palamau is situated at Auranga river about 20 miles south-east of Daltenganj.\(^12\) It is beyond southern limits of Bihar; spread over an uneven land,

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9. Ahmad Yadgar Khan, *Tarikh-i-Shahi*, p. 191. Also *Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi*, p. 76.
11. The three great works accomplished by Sher Khan were the destruction of the Maharata Chero, the capture and destruction of Raisin and the re-establishment of Islam in Nagor by the expulsion of Maldeo (Rizkullah Mustaqi, *Waqiat-i-Mustaqui*, op.cit., p. 110).
leading to the plateau of Chotanagpur in the south-east and the central provinces in the south-west. The area is full of broken mountains and hills with many rain fed rivers but unfit for navigation and yielding no assured supply of water for irrigation. The southern part of the district is extremely rocky and barren with only small patches of dense forests at some places. In the northern part, the valleys are a little wider and more fertile; but no where in the district it is possible to get more than six or seven miles of cultivable land available at one place. From the summit of a ridge or hill, the country appears covered by a waving sheet of low forest, with all sign of human habitation concealed from view except perhaps a glimpse of here and there of a low red filled roof, a distant grove of trees, or an occasional herd of cattle.\textsuperscript{13} Palamau, according to Mughal Historians, lay south of Patna, the distance from latter to the northern boundary of the former being 71 miles. It is likely that the \textit{Cheros} territory extended upto Daudnagar or Arwal, where the remains of the \textit{Cheros} forts have been found. Toward the north-east, the \textit{Cheros} were mentioned by Abul Fazl as the Principal \textit{zamindar} in Chai Champa (Ramgharh) and Pundag (Palamau).\textsuperscript{14}

The \textit{Chero} chiefs of Palamau appear to have been descendents of Raja Salabahim of Chainpur. It is believed that a \textit{Chero} chief of Shahabad, Bhagwant Rai took service under the Raksel Rajput chief, Man Singh of Palamau, and after murdering him\textsuperscript{15} founded his own kingdom in around 1572.\textsuperscript{16} Thereafter we have no account of any other \textit{Chero} ruler until Anant \textit{Chero} a contemporary of Emperor Akbar.

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{13}] O'Malley, op.cit., pp. 2-3, 6-9.
\item[\textsuperscript{14}] Abul Fazl, \textit{Ain-i-Akbari} ed. Saiyid Ahmad Khan, Delhi, 1856, p. 418.
\item[\textsuperscript{15}] Hunter, op.cit., pp. 455-56.
\item[\textsuperscript{16}] \textit{The Comprehensive History of Bihar}, op.cit., p. 269. Also O'Malley, op.cit., pp. 19-20.
\end{itemize}
In the contemporary Persian historical works, Anant Chero is referred in the account of 1590-91, when Raja Man Singh the governor of Bihar launched an attack against refractory chiefs of Bihar. There in it had been mentioned that after suppressing the chiefs of Kharakpur and Gidhaur, Man Singh attacked Anant Chero of Palamau. Anant Chero made a desperate attempt to check the advance of Raja Man Singh by blocking his path, but he miserably failed to do so. However the Cheros offered strong resistance to the invading army but they were outnumbered; a large number of them were killed and many of them were taken prisoners.\(^{17}\) Raja Man Singh captured valuable booty including fifty four elephants which were dispatched to the imperial court\(^{18}\) and apparently Palamau was brought under Mughal administration. However from Akbarnama and other contemporary accounts it is not very clear as to what sort of understanding was reached between the Mughals and Anant Chero. Generally in the terms of understanding reached between a chieftain and Mughal imperial authority, besides accepting overlordship of the imperial authority, the chieftains also used to agree to pay either Peshkash or paid malguzari or offer military service. In the case of Cheros we do not get any reference to indicate that Anant Chero formally accepted any of these conditions. However, the Cheros did not create any problem against Akbar till his death. But soon after his death Anant Chero drove out the imperial troops from Palamau and declared his independence. Due to the rebellion of Khusrau, it seems that no immediate action could be taken against the rebels. In 1607 after the appointment of Afzal Khan as the governor of Bihar and Iradat Khan made his diwan and bakhshi, the Emperor ordered both

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18. The Comprehensive History of Bihar, op.cit, p. 268.
of them to lead an expedition against Anant *Chero*. Afzal Khan along with Iradat Khan launched an attack against the rebels but, Afzal Khan suffered from an incurable disease and died within two weeks of the launching of the offensive.\(^{19}\) The campaign therefore was given up. But soon afterwards the Mughal officers launched repeated attacks on the *Cheros* and inflicted heavy losses on them. The situation became so bad that the *Chero* chief shifted his capital deep into his territory to protect themselves.\(^{20}\)

During the same period another branch of *Chero* chief led by Kumkum Chand Jharap was also involved in a bitter struggle with the *Ujjainias* of Bhojpur. *Tawarikh-i-Ujjainia* had discussed in detail the struggle of the *Cheros* to regain their lost position which continued for almost four years (1607-1611).\(^{21}\) As mentioned earlier *Cheros* were extremely hostile to *Ujjainias* because they had expelled them from Bhojpur region which was their ancestral homeland. Around 1607 a number of *Chero* chiefs combined together and launched an spirited attack on *Ujjainias*.\(^{22}\) One of the descendents of Sita Ram Rai of Bhojpur, Kumkum Chand Jharap, expelled the *Ujjainias* and recaptured a major part of their territory. Jharap was a courageous and powerful *Chero* chief. He defied imperial armies stationed at Arwal, Sherghati and Aurangabad, and plundered and pillaged a large number of villages.

The *Ujjainias* could not offer much resistance because their chief Raja Narayan Mal who had usurped the throne after deposing the weak *Ujjania* Raja Mukut Mani in 1607, had gone to the Mughal court to get his confirmation as the


\(^{21}\) *Tawarikh-i-Ujjania II*, pp. 28-33.

\(^{22}\) For details see Chapter on *Ujjainias*, pp. 44-46.
ruler of the Ujjanias from emperor Jahangir. As a consequence, the Cheros succeeded in driving out Ujjanias from large part of Bhojpur region. It seems Raja Narain Mal came to know of the attack of Cheros while he was still at imperial court. He brought these developments to the notice of the emperor and also got assurance of the imperial support against the Cheros. Thereafter he immediately returned to his people and set up his headquarters at Buxar. To check the further advance of the Cheros he raised a strong army and deployed it from Buxar to Tirawan along the Ganga. This action of Narayan Mal further confirms our suggestion that Ujjanias had been driven to the Ganga and the Cheros had virtually re-occupied their old territory. With the arrival of Narayan Mal the Ujjanias regrouped and started making strong efforts to recapture their lost territories. Kum Kum Chand Jharap realized that he will not be able to resist the onslaught of Narayan Mal alone for long and appealed to Cheros of Sonepari region to come to his help. The Sonpari Cheros responded favourably and a large number of them led by Rajas of Kaddhar, Anandichak and Balaunja (Japla) joined Kum Kum Chand Jharap to counter Ujjanias. They repaired the trenches around the Tirawan fort, reinforced it with war material and other provisions and deployed their own retainers from Tirawan to Kaddhar and upto river Sone.

The rival armies faced each other for twenty one days. On the twenty-second day, the Cheros made a determined attack, showering arrows from all sides to expel the Ujjanias from their secure positions. The Ujjanias moved cautiously in a row firmly behind their shields and succeeded in repulsing

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23. Tawarikh-i-Ujjania II, p. 28.
Cheros from their positions. They moved further and launched a surprise attack on the fort of Tirawan. The besieged were under tremendous pressure because of the shortage of food and fodder and other war materials. The morale of the besieged was so low that they contemplated of vacating the fort. Fortunately just about the same time Raja Madha Mundra of Lohardaga came to their help. He made a spirited speech to motivate them to continue their battle against the Ujjainia as follows:

"Brothers do not lose heart. This is a battle field. To run away from it, is shameful. This is our forefather's land. To die for it, is our duty. In the world of courage and bravery always prevail. It is a matter of sorrow that a handful of Ujjanias should put us to rout. The enemies are nothing. There is dissension among them. Victory is ours, let our swords and axe drink their blood. Let us put them to sword and spare none."

Heartened by these words, the Cheros fought bravely and foiled the attempt of the Ujjanias to capture the fort. A large number of Ujjanias were killed, and forced to retreat. Pratap Singh, brother of Raja Narain was in front of the retreating Ujjanias army. The Cheros mistook Pratap Singh for Narain Mal and surrounded him. About the same time Thakur Rai Kalyan Singh, Bakhshi of the Mughal imperial army who was left at Buxar by Narain Mal with half of the army, reached Bhojpur and joined Narain Mal. Words spread in the Cheros camp that imperial army had arrived to help Ujjanias. The Cheros once again got demoralized with this new development; however they continued their struggle. On the other hand, with this reinforcement Narain Mal launched an

attack on the *Cheros* from all four sides with renewed vigour. *Cheros* too responded vigorously; all male members of the community joined the battle and their females helped them by throwing stones with slings. A fierce fight ensued and in hand to hand engagement commanders of both the armies showed great valour. But the *Ujjainias* succeeded in completely defeating the *Cheros*. A large number of *Cheros* including Saran Jharap, the *Raja* of Lohardaga, Haratpal and Raja Madha Mandra were killed in the battle. Those who escaped the slaughter, were drowned in river Sone. A huge booty came into the possession of *Ujjainias*. Deogon and Kothi, the two important forts of the *Cheros* were razed to the ground as discussed earlier. This important battle was fought in 1611 on the ninth day (*navami*) of the Dushehra. After this victory Narain Mal was accepted as the undisputed leader of the *Ujjainias*. He successfully destroyed the power of *Cheros* and expelled them from Bhojpur region. However after ruling for a decade he was killed by his own kinsmen in a family feud.

Surprisingly we don’t find any reference of Anant *Chero* in this war with *Ujjainias*. There is also no reference of Anant *Chero* in Mughal chronicles after Afzal Khan’s failed expedition against him. Anant *Chero* died in 1619 and was succeeded by his son Bhupal Rai who also died within a year.

Raja Bhupat Rai was succeeded by Medini Rai (1620-34), the greatest *Chero* ruler whose period of reign had been described as the age of the peace and prosperity. However in one of the inscriptions at Palamau Medini Rai, is mentioned as the son of Anant Rai, who was the son of Bhagwant Rai. Bhupal Rai is not mentioned in the said inscription. It seems that Medini Rai might have

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captured the kingdom after defeating his elder brother, Bhupat Rai in family feud which was common in the chieftaincies.\textsuperscript{28}

After consolidating his position Medini Rai started making efforts to expand his chieftaincy. He invaded Khokhra in Chotanagpur region, defeated Durjan Sal its chief and ransacked his capital. He also extended his sway over south Gaya and set up posts at Kothi (\textit{Pargana} Sherghat in Gaya), Kunda (Chatra subdivision of Hazaribagh), and Deogan (Palamau). The first two outposts were on highway to Palamau and Deogan might have been some kind of a fort before it was re-built by Bharat Rai, at a later date.\textsuperscript{29}

Medini Rai also conquered some of the Rajas of smaller kingdoms who paid him tributes. These kingdoms were Belounja Siris, Jupla, Kutumba and Sherghati in Gaya, Kunda Karnapura and Ramgarh in Hazaribagh and portion of Surguja.\textsuperscript{30}

Medini Rai's claim of being one of the greatest ruler of the \textit{Cheros} rests not so much on his conquests but for establishing peace and prosperity in the chieftaincy. He founded villages, constructed irrigation works, encouraged reclamation of lands and settled tribals like the Paharias. Medini Rai also distributed lands to the landless people. In a popular folklore it has been mentioned that in his time, every household was provided with bread and butter \textit{(Raja Medinia ghar ghar baje bathania)}.\textsuperscript{31}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} \textit{The Comprehensive History of Bihar}, p. 269.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 269.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 270.
\item \textsuperscript{31} \textit{The Comprehensive History of Bihar}, op.cit, p. 270.
\end{itemize}
The most remarkable building constructed by him was a fort build on a hill overlooking the river Auranga. It was more elegantly constructed than the old fort and was essentially a military fort. The structure was completed according to a bilingual inscription (in Persian and Devnagiri) which addressed Medini Rai as ‘Maharaja’ and begins with an salutation to both Allah the great and Ramchandraj in February 1634. Medini Rai died towards the end of 1634 A.D. He was succeeded by his son Raja Pratap Rai (Singh).

According to one tradition, it is pointed out that Abdullah Khan, the governor of Bihar attacked over Palamau in 1637. But it is quite clear that Abdullah Khan had not invaded Palamau in 1627-28; during this time he was engaged in reducing the rebel Raja Pratap Ujjania. In the same year Shaista Khan was appointed the governor of Bihar in place of Abdullah Khan. It appears that during the years of governorship of Abdullah Khan the Cheros became more defiant. One of the invasions took place during 1641-43 which has been described in details in Badshahnama.
According to Lahori, rulers of Palamau taking advantage of dense forest in their chieftaincy which were almost inaccessible and mountain fortress showed no sign of obedience to the governor of the Suba Bihar. \(^{36}\) Shaista Khan informed the Emperor about the state of affairs. The emperor ordered him to drive away Pratap Chero and to clear the country from the enemy.\(^ {37}\)

Leaving charge of Patna to his son, Shaista Khan marched towards Palamau on 12\(^{th}\) October 1641 along with Zabardast Khan, Atash Khan Dakhini and Sayyid Mirza, brother of Mukhtar Khan, at the head of 5000 horse and 15000 infantry, which included some troops of certain local chiefs. Before entering in the territory of Palamau, he organized his army in battle formation and marched on to Palamau in that order. The whole area was so hostile to the Mughal that when they halted at some place, to protect the camp from surprise attacks trenches were dug and earth work was completed around the camp. A large number of wood cutters were employed to clear the forest and widen the roads for the smooth movement of army. Inspite of all these precautions been taken the Cheros often succeeded in making surprise attacks on Mughal army.\(^ {38}\)

Clearing road blocks and repulsing surprise attacks the Mughal army succeeded in reaching close to the northern side of the fort of Palamau on 26\(^{th}\) Jan., 1642. He pitched his camp on the bank of a river which flowed past the fort of Palamau. The Cheros launched several attacks on Mughal positions but they failed to push them back. But in the mean time in a surprise attack the imperialists occupied a hillock commanding the fort; and opened heavy artillery

\(^{36}\) Badshahnama II, op.cit., pp. 248-49.  
\(^{37}\) Ibid.  
\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 249.
fire on the rampants of the fort. Pratap became alarmed of this new development and sent a message to Shaista Khan with the offer of submission along with a peshkash of Rs. 80,000. He also promised to present himself before the governor at Patna. The terms offered by the Cheros almost fulfilled all the demands of the imperialists; moreover Shaista Khan was also anxious to end the war before the fast approaching rainy season. Therefore Shaista Khan immediately accepted the offer and returned to Patna on 12 Feb. 1642 after receiving the Peshkash.39

Although by offering very favourable terms to the Mughals, Pratap had succeeded in saving Palamau from plunder, but the people of Palamau were not happy. It appears that Pratap made no efforts to either pacify the common people or his chiefs. Lahori writes that the common people specially the chiefs were so unhappy with the policies of Pratap that they started making efforts to overthrow him. Dariya Rai and Tej Rai his paternal uncles came to Patna and met Itiqad Khan the governor of the Suba and sought his help in getting Pratap removed from the chieftaincy. They also promised to capture Pratap and hand him over to the governor. The governor, it seems, assured them of complete cooperation. Therefore, after returning from Patna, they imprisoned Pratap and Tej Rai assumed the charge of the chieftaincy. As soon as Itiqad Khan came to know of these development, he ordered Tej Rai to immediately send Pratap to Patna. Tej Rai, however, failed to comply the orders making false excuses.

Dariya Rai one of the close associates of Tej Rai became unhappy with him soon after he became head of the chieftaincy and along with some leading chiefs met Itiqad Khan and apprised him of the misdeeds of Tej Rai. They

requested him to dethrone him and help Dariya Rai to assume the headship of
the chieftaincy. To show his fidelity to the Governor Dariya Rai offered to
surrender Deogan to the Mughal authority. Dariya Rai and the two
commanders of the fort waited in person on Zabardast Khan, the Mughal
commander, when he arrived to take possession of the fort, but only a section of
the inhabitants of Deogan submitted although the imperial government promised
to protect them. Soon after the transfer of the fort to the Mughals a large number
of people rose in revolt, but they were suppressed by the imperialists.

The occupation of the Deogan fort gave the Mughals an strategic
advantage for leading an invasion on Palamau. Zabardast Khan who was posted
there strengthened the fortification of Deogan with more troops and huge
provision. Inspite of his best efforts to win Itiqad Khan to his side, Darya Rai
could not get the chieftaincy of Palamau. On the other hand the presence of
Mughal troops at Deogaon provoked Tej Rai to launch an attack on Mughal
position. He dispatched his vakil Madan Singh Thakurai alongwith some of his
chieftains to attack Baoli Chewan and detachments to expel imperialists.
However in the battle fought with the Mughal forces the Cheros were defeated
and they took to flight. Meanwhile the Bihar governor sent further
reinforcements to the assistance of Zabardast Khan. He ordered ‘Abdullah Khan
Najm-sani, Bakshi of Bihar, to march towards Palamau with Dariya Rai and also
promised to join him as soon as possible.

40. A village situated in the extreme north-east of the district. It contains the remains of an interesting
old fort of the Cheros. It was once a flourishing town with 52 streets and 53 bazars (Palamau

41. A mauza which lies about ten miles south of Deogan.

About the same time, according to Lahori, Surat Sen and Sabal Sen, sons of the vakil Madan Singh Thakurai, taking advantage of the absence of Tej Rai from the capital who had gone on an hunting expeditions reinstated Pratap as the ruler of Palamau. The change was so sudden that Tej Rai and his followers could hardly do anything to retrieve the situation. But it is really surprising that Tej Rai left the fort on a hunting excursion at a time when the Mughals were advancing towards Palamau at the instigation of Dariya Rai. Zabardast Khan also marched to Palamau in support of the invading army. Pratap (who was already reinstated as chief) realized that in the given situation he was in no position to offer resistance, to the Mughal army. Therefore he approached Zabardast Khan and offered him his submission. Zabardast Khan insisted on his submission before the governor of Patna. After some hesitation the Chero chief agreed to present himself before the governor but demanded an assurance of personnel safety from Zabardast Khan. To assure him, Zabardast Khan accompanied Pratap to Patna and on reaching there presented him before Itiqad Khan.

Pratap Chero presented Itiqad Khan an elephant and a Peshkash of 100,000 rupees. Itiqad Khan was much pleased with the offering of Pratap and sent a favourable report to the Emperor. He also recommended that Pratap may be given a mansab of 1000/1000. The jama of Palamau was fixed at 250,000 rupees (one crore dams) and the entire area of Palamau assigned to him as his tuyul (March, 1644).

43. L.R. Forbes write that Tej Rai now changed his mind and was determined to return to his allegiance to Pratap Rai after a prolonged intervene feud with Dariya Rai. This fact has got no support in the imperial chronicles (op.cit., JASB, 1871, p. 131).
J.N. Sarkar says that the tribute fixed by the Mughals at the end of the second Palamau campaign was exorbitant and that it was beyond the capacity of the Raja to pay it regularly. The state naturally fell in arrears and relations with the imperial authority started deteriorating. Besides that the cattle raids of the Cheros across Bihar frontier further complicated the situation. Sarkar adds that these evils increased during the war of succession. However in Persian chronicles from 1643 to 1660 we do not find any reference of the Cheros which seems that Raja Pratap did not pay the Peshkash regularly. But surprisingly no action was taken against Pratap.

In 1660 Aurangzeb ordered Daud Khan, the governor of Bihar to conquer the territory of Palamau. On the receipt of the imperial order Daud Khan marched towards Palamau in March 1661 at the head of a large army along with important military commander such as Mirza Khan, Faujdar of Darbhanga, Tahawwur Khan, Jagirdar of Chainpur and Raja Bahroz zamindar of Monghyr. There were two strong forts in the vicinity of the town of Palamau, one on a neighbouring hill and the other on the plain. A big river flowed below the two forts. The forts were also surrounded by lofty hills and dense forest. Three other forts were close to the borders of the province of Bihar, viz. Kothi fort, which was at a distance of about 50 miles from Palamau, the second fort Kunda, which

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46. Palamau is incomparably less fertile and smaller in cultivable area. Pratap heritage had been reduced by the cession of a productive tract in the north-east corner to the Mughals (in 1643) and much of his territory was held on service tenure, yielding no revenue in cash or grain. Under the British, the current demand of land revenue (1905) is only Rs. 109,000 (Gaz. 139). But in 1643 the gross revenue of Palamau, to be collected by the Rajah had to pay nearly half of his income to the paramount power and could not have possibly maintained himself and his retainers much less kept state, on the balance, unless the standard assessment was collected every year without fail, which was never the case in such a primitive and sterile country. Subject to the calamities of the reasons (History of Aurangzeb, vol. III, p. 38).

47. Jaduath Sarkar, op.cit., p. 38.

48. For the conquest of Palamau see Alamgirnama, 649-660.
was about 18 miles from the Kothi fort to the eastward, and the third Deokan or Deogan fort which was at a distance of about 25 miles from the Kothi fort to the westward. Daud Khan decided to capture the Kothi fort first. He arrived in front of that fort on 24th April. The Cheros being alarmed by the news of a huge army marching against them, evacuated the fort and fled long before the arrival of Daud Khan. The fort was thus captured without a fight. Daud Khan after making arrangements for the protection of the fort marched towards Kunda. The fort was built on the top of a hill, and was sufficiently equipped with all necessary weapons of defence. Though the distance from the Kothi to this fort was only 20 miles, yet the route lay through dense forest, and about half of the way passed through a narrow defile over a high ridge. After forest were cleared Daud Khan marched towards Kunda. As soon as the enemy came to know of the movement of army towards the fort, they became frightened and abandoned the fort. Daud reached at the fort on 23rd May 1660 and occupied it without any opposition and completely dismantled it, so that in future it could not become the seat of disorder.

As the rains had set in by this time, Daud Khan decided to stay at Kunda, till the end of the rainy season. But to protect his army from surprise attacks of the Cheros and to keep roads safe for the regular supply of provision, Daud Khan built mud fort at a distance of every 7 or 8 miles and garrisoned them with 100 horsemen together with musketeers and troops of zamindars.49

After the end of the rainy season, Daud Khan made preparations to attack and storm Palamau. Having come to know of the movement of Mughal army,

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Pratap approached Daud Khan and offered to accept complete subordination of the Mughal and also agreed to pay annual tribute regularly provided he withdrew his invading army from Palamau. Daud Khan did not accept the proposals and continued his march towards Palamau. He organized his army in battle formation as soon as he reached close to Palamau. The commander of the vanguard was given to Mirza Khan and the left and right wings were give to the charge of Tahawwur Khan, Shaikh Tatar and Raja Bahroz respectively. Daud Khan himself commanded the centre and five hundred horsemen of his own contingent formed the rear guard. A large number of wood-cutters were engaged in charge of imperial officers and the Khan’s own men were ordered to clear the forest and make a road to Palamau, so that the enemy might not have cover to lay ambush and harass the army on march. Posts were also established all along the route and garrisoned with troops. The army moved slowly because clearing of forest and building roads used to take lot of time. They could cover above about 20 miles in 9 days.\footnote{50}

On 23\textsuperscript{rd} October 1661, they reached the village Loharsi\footnote{51} from where the fort of Palamau was at a distance of 17 or 18 miles, and encamped there. On the arrival of the invading army at this place, Raja Raja Pratap became alarmed, and sent his trusted and confidential \textit{vakil} Surat Singh, to Daud Khan with an offer of not only of complete subordination to the imperial authority but also an assurance of continued cooperation with the governor of Bihar. Raja Bahroz was

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{50} Alamgirnama, pp. 651-653.
\footnote{51} The printed Persian text (Alamgirnama, p. 653) has Narsi, corrected in the index as Tarhasi, Blochmann takes it to be Tarhasi – Mangarh (\textit{JASB}, vol. XL, Pt. I, 1871), name which I have not been able to trace on the map. I read Loharsi (Incl. At. Shet 104) which is 12½ miles S.S.W. of Koonda. Kuthi is given in Renell’s Atlas, sheet 8, as Kooty. In the Indian Atlas, 104, the position corresponds to that of Fort 6 miles south of Imamganj, at the junction of the Chotko and Morhur rivers (\textit{History of Aurangzeb} op.cit., pp. 41-42).}
\end{footnotesize}
also won over by him to intercede with the Khan. Raja Pratap further offered to pay one lakh of rupees as *Peshkash* to the emperor, and half a lakh to Daud Khan. The latter reported the offer to the imperial court and waited for emperor’s reply. Meanwhile he received information that about 17 or 18 miles from his encampment the enemy had attacked and plundered a convoy of provisions for the army. Although Pratap apologized for this act through his *vakil*, and asserted that it had been committed without his knowledge or instructions and immediately sent Rs. 50,000 out of the promised *Peshkash* to appease Daud Khan but the latter refused to accept his plea and decided to take action.52

He ordered his army to march forward and pitched his camp near the post of Palamau. On 29th Nov. *Cheros* came out of the fort to resist any further advance of the imperial army. About the same time Daud received Emperor’s reply wherein the Emperor had agreed to accept the proposal of the *Chero* chief only on the condition of his conversion to Islam. Daud Khan communicated this order of the Emperor to the chief, and waited for his reply. But the invading army was impatient to fight, and reluctant to sit idle. On 24th December, Tahawwur Khan Barlas who was leading the campaign was so impatient to fight that he launched an attack on the *Chero*. When Daud came to know of attack, he also moved forward to reinforce Tahawwur Khan’s advance guard. A pitched battle was fought for the whole day and a number of soldiers of imperial army were killed. After the sun set they returned to their camps. In the dead of night, the *Cheros* brought up two cannons from the fort, and began to bombard the imperial army. As Daud’s troops were on lower ground, they suffered heavy casualities. Next morning Daud Khan launched a series of attacks on the *Chero*’s

52. *Alamgirnama*, pp. 653-55.
position but could not achieve much success because of the enemy positions
were located on the top of neighbouring hills. However after putting in much
efforts Daud Khan ultimately succeeded in positioning some of his guns on the
hill and bombard the Chero’s lines more effectively. It had desired effect; the
Cheros began to lose courage, and retreated further back, entrenching
themselves on the bank of the river that flowed by the side of the fort. The road
from Daud Khan’s encampment to this entrenchment lay through thick forests.
Two or three days were spent in having the forest cleared. When the road
became passable for troops, Daud advanced and attacked the Chero’s positons.
The battle lasted for about 6 hours. Many gallant deeds were performed by
Daud’s troops. Ultimately the Cheros were defeated and suffered heavy
casualties. Those who were able to save their life took refuge into the fort.
Without waisting any time and taking advantage of the great victory which his
troops have achieved, Daud Khan launched an attack on the fort. The Cheros
were taken by surprise by sudden attack and in the face of total defeat they
retreated to the lower fort and the hill entrenchments. The provisions and other
valuables stored in the fort were also brought to the lower fort. He sent away all
his women and children into the forest but believing in the impregnability of the
position, he himself stood his ground with a band of trusted followers. He fought
with dogged courage and resolution. The imperialists, however, broke through
the outer fortifications and entering the town, reached the gate of the fort and
stormed it. The fight raged furiously till three hours of night, had passed when
the besieged began to give way and chieftain himself escaped through a gate
leading into the forest. Both the forts were thus captured by the invading army
and the whole country was brought under subjugation. In this fight 61 men of the
invading force were killed, and 177 wounded. The casualties on the other side were very heavy. After a few days the Scouts brought in the news that the Cheros had regrouped, entered the Deogan fort, and were making preparations to give a fight again. Daud deputed Shaikh Safi with a detachment of troops to crush them. The latter pushed on with all speed toward Deogan and besieged the fort. The Cheros abandoned it in a panic and fled.  

The invasion sounded the death knell of the Chero kingdom. Palamau was directly placed under the Governor of Bihar. The Cheros outposts at Kothi and Kunda were taken away from them; their capital lay in dust and desecrated. Their defeat was complete. It also marked the beginning of the growing dissension among different power groups the Chero Raja, his agents (Babuans) and their Rajput Diwans (Thakurais). Chero chiefs no doubt slowly recovered from the defeat, but their recovery was never complete. The invasion was also unique in the sense that it formed the subject of a painting, representing the siege and capturing the fort of Palamau in which costumes were very well lit off; the Palamau chiefs and their army were drawn in painting as hill-men with bows and arrows. The map, now preserved in the Mannulal Library at Gaya, as graphic. 

53. Alamgirnama, op.cit.
54. "The Chero Raja's fort, drawn rather elaborately in plan, comes next, and the picture ends in a map of great wooded hills, into which the Raja retreated. The Chero boost is for the most part portrayed, holding its ground, but in sad plight between the hills from which they had been dislodged and the river. The Chero cavalry were evidently posted in the bed of the river, a very respectable body, as well mounted as their foes; but many are galloping up and down the sands of the river in a purposeless manner, some badly wounded. They are all with one or two exceptions of fair complexion and dressed as Hindustans; and amongst the Chero foot soldiers there are a number of fair-complexioned and well dressed men, showing that in those days, as at present, there was a considerable sprinkling of Aryans amongst the Palamau population. But the majority are black with only a loin cloth, and bare heads and bare feet, bows as above described with only one curve and plenty of arrows, besides which some have spears, and some swords and some shields. The proportion of the matchlock-men to bow-men is small, but even the imperialists are shown to have more of the latter than of the former. The artist has not altogether failed to grasp some of the ethnic characteristics of the Palamau aborigines. The black men have all receding chins and foreheads, and are probably Kharwar (or Cheros). Daud's flank movement was apparently the only piece of strategy employed. Strong as he was in cavalry, he might have easily cut off the retreat of the Raja to the hills beyond the fort; but seems that his intelligence department was at fault. It is noticeable that the imperialist did not advance their guns when attacking the second position; they were left at their place and no field artillery was employed". 
Daud Khan was honoured and rewarded by the imperial court. Many *zamindars* from various parts of Bihar who participated in the Mughal expedition against the *Cheros* were recognized for their role. Mahinath Thakur of Darbhanga displayed such valour in the course of the conquest of Palamau and Morang that he was given extensive *jagirs* in Monghyr and other parts of Bihar and Bengal.\(^55\)

The history of the *Cheros* during the next sixty years is marked by internal feuds. Shitab Rai's account sheds\(^56\) light on the history of Chotanagpur till the advent of the British. The Nagbanshi ruler is described as the overlord of the Palamau (*Chero*), Badam and Ramgarh *ghatwals*. The *ghatwali* system had by then been fully established. Many parts of Gaya (Sher, Sherghati), Hazaribagh (Karanpur, Kothi, Badam) and Palamau (Jabla, Belaunja, Deogan, Paloon, Surguja) were settled with Hindu and Mughal (Rohilla) *jagirdars*. The settlement effected by Bihari Das shows that the different estates fetched a revenue of Rs. 1,40,874. This included duties on the hill merchants (Rs. 4,000), which showed that the area was opened up for trade, and the *Peshkash* of the Palamau *jagirdari* was Rs. 4,140. The *Cheros* had not only lost their far flung territories such as Ser, Sherghati, Kothi and Sirguja but also the territories nearer their seat of power such as Deogan, Japla, Belaunja, etc.\(^57\)


Social and Economic Condition of the Cheros

An interesting account of the Cheros and their way of life is available in the Tawarikh-i-Ujjania written about three hundred years after their power had been destroyed. The account though mainly based on family records of the Ujjanias contains interesting information.

The Cheros who lived in forests in tortuous conditions called themselves original masters of the region where they lived and ruled as rulers once upon a time. Their population was large, they were black in complexion, middle sized, rash and illiterate.

The administration of the state was run in accordance with age old tradition. They realized one-fourth of the produce in kind from the peasants and one eight of the forest produces (anidhan dera). They did not tax mango crop and fish. It appears that they took their share of the Mahua flowers. They did not know counting; therefore they kept in their houses big earthen vessels (mataka) filled with pieces of bricks to facilitate counting. Transactions (or exchange) were oral; there were no documents regarding loans counting was done by tying knots: small knots denoting advance of loan and big knots its realization.

They were good shots and hunters. They could trace out tigers from their footprints. No matter how a man moved, the arrow would not fall from his guiver (chilla). They shot arrows on targets (Kamath), lying down, which could hit wild animals two to three miles away.

Their food consisted of fruits (and probably forest produce such as tubers), vegetables such as patal kohanra which used to be roasted in fire and
eaten with honey. They consumed more of Mahua flower, and relished wine and roasted meat of animals.

They wore dhoti, mirzai, vest (ganji) and a turban of thick (mota) clothes. Their women wore ornaments of kori and ghonghochi. They carried a packet of tobacco in their waist, kamath and arrows, khapri or kheri, Palamau barrel gun, sword (khanra), spear (Tega), in their hands. Their weaponry included broad-blade Jamdhar, sang ghagra, sakhi, sama and axe (tangi). The Cheros extracted iron from rocks called lohsan. They used earthen lamps (dia), cooking utensils (karahi) bowl (katora).

They were devotees of Devi. Important sites of Devi worship are those of Bhagiri Devi in the forests of Jagadishpur, Jarvati Bhavani in village Bhalami and Taradevi in Sahasram hills. These sites were also the centers of fairs in the past. They also worshipped Koradhangr.

Cheros were good hosts. To this day in the hills to the south, the head of the house serves chironji and roasted meat with his own hands to the guest on the first day of his arrival. On the second day the guests are entertained in the normal course. They assembled on a high terrace covered with carpets (farsh) made of the forest grass. In those days forest produce and country-made thick clothes were popular. Different kinds of carpets (Sitalpati) ghalicha were made out of the sheep hairs.

Their marriage customs are interesting. Their settlements and those of Santhals exist in Palamau and Chotanagpur. They had no contact with the outside world or with any foreign power. The Cheros were mostly rajas in their localities.
At first, their population was large but they have deteriorated owing to their preoccupation with drinking and hunting. The Cheros did not depend on pillage and brigandage for building up their chieftaincy and keeping it going for well above two hundred years; their two surviving magnificent forts, the new fort is a fine piece of architecture and their tributes to the Mughal Emperor speak for a rather high stage of development and acculturation. They encouraged cultivation and settlements, particularly in the Orange-Amanat Valley which they opened up. Extension of cultivation and foundation of settlements were also twin conditions which were laid down in their areas. They constructed reservoirs (ahars) and they were particularly good at constructing wells of large diameter and cylindrical shape including underground wells (Ba’ulis), which still survive.

The early accounts of Palamau in 1575 describe rich and fertile tappas: these constituted the source of agricultural surplus which the Cheros mopped up, they did in Shahabad at the rate of one-fourth of the crop produce and one-eight of the forest produce. Moreover the yields from Khas villages, and there were largely intact under the Cheros rulers till 1660 must have been substantial. They also collected taxes of a few cowries (Cheros’s currency and medium of exchange) per village, the customary madad from the peasants in kinds. They also started hats and fairs, some of which may have developed from tribal matrix, which served as outlets for such products as cotton for the territories extending as far as Surguja and Mirzapur. The existence of a Chero township and of a large colonies of traders and merchants pointed to significant commercial activities.

58. K.S. Singh, the Chero (MS)