Chapter – I

INTRODUCTION

During the Mughal period we find references of a large number of territorial chiefs in almost every part of Northern India. Locally they were known as rajas, ranas, rais, raos, rawats etc. while in the contemporary and near contemporary Persian chronicles they have been referred as zamindars and marzabans and usually as Kalantaran and Buzurg. They were mostly hereditary chiefs who ruled over their respective territories. In short these autonomous or semi-autonomous zamindars constituted an important element in medieval Indian polity. They commanded not only a considerable part of the economic resources of the empire but also military power. After the conquest of Hindustan, Babur informs us that one-sixth of its total revenues came from the territories of the chiefs. He writes:

“The revenue of the countries now held by me (1528 A.D.) from Bhira to Bihar, is fifty-two crores as will be known in detail. Eight or nine crores of this are from the parganas of rais and the rajas who have submitted in the past (to the Sultans of Delhi), receive allowance and maintenance”.

According to Arif Qandhari, one of the contemporary historian of Akbar’s reign, there were two or three hundred rajas and zamindars who were for long in possession of strong forts. Each of these rajas and

1. Abul Fazl in Akbarnama, has used the last three words.
Zamindars commanded an army of their own generally consisting of their clansmen and the total numbers of their troops as Abul Fazl tells us, stood at forty four lakhs comprising 384,558 cavalry, 4,277,057 infantry; 1863 elephants, 4260 guns and 4500 boats.\(^5\)

Moreland was the first historian to draw our attention to the importance of the chiefs in medieval India. He defined zamindar as "vassal chiefs". He also pointed out that the zamindars could not exist in territories under the direct control of the Mughal state.\(^6\) However according to him Bengal was an exception to this practice.\(^7\) After him, P. Saran in his work *Provincial Government of the Mughals* has highlighted the position and role of the chieftains in the Mughal empire by listing the principalities of a few of them. He also defined zamindar as 'vassal chiefs' and like Moreland he also believed that the zamindars could not be found in all parts of the empire.\(^8\) But Irfan Habib who on the basis of the study of *Ain-i-Akbari* pointed out that the zamindars were to be found in every part of the empire questioned this opinion.\(^9\) Actually Moreland committed this mistake because of an error in Blochmann's standard edition of the *Ain-i Akbari*. Blochmann did not reproduce the statistics under the Account of the Twelve Provinces in their original tabular form. He not only dispersed with the columns of the original tables, but also dropped, without any explanation, the column headings. Moreland therefore could not notice the

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5. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. I, ed. Saiyid Ahmad Khan, Delhi, 1856, p. 120.
7. Ibid., pp. 191-94.
names of the castes entered against each *pargana* in these tables which belong to a column headed *zamindar* in the manuscript.\(^{10}\)

As a result of this mistake, Moreland assumed that the *zamindars* were not found in all parts of the empire. However, Irfan Habib in the chapter on the *zamindars* in his book *Agrarian system of Mughal India* had made a detailed discussion on the rights, privileges, genesis and the composition of the *zamindars* in general. He also mentioned the two categories of *zamindars*: the autonomous chiefs who enjoyed "sovereign power" in their territories and the ordinary *zamindars* who exercised superior rights in land and functioned as collectors of the land revenue.\(^{11}\)

Nurul Hasan has accepted the universal character of the *zamindars* and has described the position and the role of the chiefs in the Mughal empire. However, he divided the *zamindars* into three categories\(^{12}\): (i) the autonomous chiefs, (ii) the intermediary *zamindars* and (iii) the primary *zamindars*. Discussing the features of the autonomous chiefs which is the theme of the present work, he observes that the Mughals (i) admitted a large number of chiefs in the imperial service by conferring *mansab*, important governorships and military commands. (ii) asserted the principle which came to be known as that of 'Paramountcy' according to which they reserved to themselves the right of recognizing the successor of a deceased

\(^{10}\) In the original tables there are eight columns with the following headings: *Parganat* (parganas), *Qila* (forts), *Arazi* (measured area), *Nagdi* (revenue stated in cash), *suyurghal* (revenue grants), *zamindar* (or Bumf), *sawar* (cavalry) and *Piyada* (infantry). In Blochmann's edition all the headings are emitted except for *suyurghal*, *sawar* and *Piyada* (Irfan Habib, op.cit., pp. 170-171).

\(^{11}\) Irfan Habib, op.cit., p. 147-89.

raja. Thus making a chieftain dependent for his position on the good will of the emperor rather than on his inherent rights, (iii) imposed the obligation of military services upon the chieftains but they were not granted mansabs. (iv) entered into the direct relationship with the chieftains and reduced their powers and created a new class of allies. (v) attempted to treat the hereditary dominions of the autonomous chiefs as ‘watan jagir’, which meant that theoretically they were supposed to have the status of ‘jagirdar’. (vi) succeeded in compelling the autonomous chiefs to confirm to imperial regulations especially in regard to the maintenance of law and order and the freedom of transit as well as claimed the right to dispense justice to those who appealed to the imperial government against their chiefs.\(^{13}\) Nurul Hasan also touches upon the different roles the chiefs must have played in the economic and cultural life of the country before and after their submission to the Mughals. However his observations based, as they are on a general survey of the Mughal empire covering a period of about 150 years, need a close region wise and period-wise scrutiny before they can be accepted.\(^{14}\)

Ahsan Raza Khan in his book ‘The Chieftains in the Mughal empire during the reign of Akbar’ has tried to analyse the position and the powers of the chieftains of the Akbari provinces of Delhi, Kabul, Lahore, Multan, Gujarat, Ajmer, Malwa, Agra, Oudh, Allahabad, Bihar and Bengal and their relation with the Mughal imperial authority. He has identified the principalities of the various chiefs and then examined the manner of their


\(^{14}\) Ahsan Raza Khan, op.cit., p. 7.
subjugation and the nature of overlordship established by the Mughals over them.\textsuperscript{15} Ahsan Raza Khan has indeed made an in-depth study of the zamindars, but his study is confined only to the reign of Akbar and besides that the work is in the nature of a general survey as he had covered the zamindars of the whole of Akbar's empire. Another shortcoming of his study is that it is mainly based on Persian chronicles with the exception of only few Rajasthani sources. Hence the picture of the zamindars and their problem presented to us is from the perspective of imperial court. The reaction of the zamindars of the imperial policy adopted towards them hardly find any place in the chronicles. Besides that it may also be pointed that baring few articles and research papers on detailed study on the zamindars of a particular region or of a (Mughal) suba including Bihar so far has been made of Mughal period.

In the present study an attempt is made to present a detailed study of the zamindars of a particular region, Bihar during the period of the Great Mughals (from the time of Akbar to the death of Aurangzeb). Besides, using Persian sources we have also consulted a number of local sources including family records in preparation of the present work. However unlike the zamindars of the suba of Ajmer about whom we get a large number of source material, information about the zamindars of Bihar, is very little both in Persian chronicles as well as in local records.

The first problem before us was to identify the prominent zamindar families of Bihar because no detailed study of this nature so far had been

\textsuperscript{15} Ahsan Raza Khan, op.cit., pp. 167-176.
attempted. Another problem with which we were faced during the course of our study was, as mentioned above, the paucity of source material about the zamindars of Bihar particularly about their relations with the Mughal court after their acceptance of the subordination of the imperial authority. However, we have been able to identify Kharakpur, Bhojpur, Palamau, Gidhaur, Kokhra, Darbhanga, Champaran (Betia Raj), Kalyanpur (Hathwa Raj), Panchet, Seor etc. as important chieftaincies of the suba. Some of these chieftaincies were very large having a group of parganas under their sway while others were so small that they held only a part of a pargana. But still the information about their relation with the Mughal administration was so little that it would not have been possible to make a correct assessment of their position in the Mughal political structure. Therefore we decided to prepare detailed biographical account separately of all the well-known chieftaincies including biographies of their chieftains on the basis of information collected from all possible sources: the contemporary, near contemporary and later Persian sources, European travel accounts, local sources, family records, survey reports and district gazetteers. In this matter we were able to get a lot of information about their relations with the imperial government and in our concluding chapter in the light of these information, we have discussed in detail the relationship of the zamindars of Bihar with Mughal administration. It may however be added that we have taken into consideration only those zamindars who enjoyed autonomous control over their possession.

It seems now important to briefly discuss the geography of the suba with particular reference to the areas under the control of the chieftaincies.
Abul Fazl records that the area of suba of Bihar from Gardhi\textsuperscript{16} to Rohtas was about 120 Kos (300 miles) and its breadth from Tirhut to the northern mountains (Himalayas) was 110 Kos (275 miles). On its eastern boundary was suba of Bengal and to its west was suba of Allahabad and Awadh. On the north and south it was bounded by hills comprising of the Himalayas and Vindhyas mountains respectively.\textsuperscript{17} Abul Fazl does not mention any suba bordering with suba Bihar in north and south. It seems that because of hilly tract and forest areas on both sides of the suba, Abul Fazl failed to mention the name of any territorial unit on the north and south of the suba, although, on the north of Bihar suba, lies Nepal and on the south was Orrisa. Some of the important rivers that flowed over Bihar were Ganga, Sone, Maner, Gandak, Karamnasa and Punpun.\textsuperscript{18}

The suba of Bihar had seven sarkars which were divided into 199 parganas. During the reign of Akbar the suba was divided in two broad and equal portions of territory, north and south of the river Ganga.

The northern territory was a vast sheet of flat land and it comprised of Saran, Champaran, Hajipur and Tirhut sarkars. Tirhut being the most easterly one, contained a strip of lands adjacent to the north of the course of the Ganga in North Bihar and formed the part of sarkar Munger. The sarkar of Munger chiefly lay to the south of Ganga.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16} Gardhi is the old fort now known as Teliagarhi a little to the west of Sahibganj at the point where the Santhal Hills touch the Ganga.

\textsuperscript{17} Ain-i-Akbari, vol. II, p. 66.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} “Beams contribution to the Political Geography of the subahs of Awadh, Bihar, Bengal and Orrisa in the Age of Akbar” (ed) by B.P. Ambasthaya, p. 42.
The southern territory lay to the south of the Ganga and extended up to the range of Vindhaya hills, which separated the lower plains from the elevated mountainous region. In the west, the southern territory is separated by the river from the sarkar of Chunar in suba Allahabad. On the east, it is separated from Bengal by a branch of southern hills. The sarkar of Bihar in the middle covers about half of the whole of the flat and level area of this great southerly division. The plains of the sarkar Munger on the east covered it’s a fourth (1/4) part of the entire district with all its mountainous dependencies. The sarkar of Rohtas, the southerly and western one situated chiefly between the two rivers of Sone and the Karmanasa. But subsequently the sarkar of Shahabad (Bhojpur) was carved out of the old sarkar of Rohtas of Akbar’s reign.20

The southern most region of Bihar suba was upland of Chota Nagpur which comprised the sub-division of Palamau, Ramgarah and Chotanagpur. This upland of Chotanagpur is also known by the appellation of Kokrah, more commonly called Nagpur. Beams is of the view that the name Nagpur was derived from the diamond mine of the region.21 It may be pointed that the entire region was not included in any of the sarkars of suba Bihar apparently because the zamindars of the area could not be fully subjugated.

A general survey of the geographical distribution of chieftaincies in Bihar shows that most of them were located in the peripheral regions, amidst forests and the hilly tracts of south Bihar. For example, the chieftaincies of

20. Beams contribution to the Political Geography of the subahs of Awadh, Bihar, Bengal and Orissa in the Age of Akbar (ed) by B.P. Ambasthaya,, pp. 42-44.
21. Ibid., pp. 43-44.
Kokhra and Palamau were located in south Bihar and were full of forests. The hilly tracts of Munger had the largest number of principalities such as Kharakpur, Gidhaur, Seor etc. Similarly the principalities of Hathwa and Betia Raj in north Bihar were situated by and large in those regions of Saran and Champaran where the forest abounded. The territory of Ujjainias of Bhojpur was also full of forest. The remarks of the Mannucci and Palsaert that in Hindustan the tracts ruled by the rajas and the ‘princely’ zamindars are usually to be found only behind mountains and forests seems in complete agreement with the geographical distribution of chieftaincies in Bihar.

The thesis is divided into ten chapters including introduction and conclusion. After the introduction the next eight chapters are devoted to the study of chieftaincies. To illustrate the context of the problem we have prepared detailed political biographies of the chieftains especially from the time of Akbar to the end of Aurangzeb’s reign including the events of the war of succession among the sons of Shahjahan. While writing about the chieftains we have taken note of all the developments that have taken place in their relations in the suba (of Bihar) as well as at the imperial court. We have also discussed the carrier and achievements of the chiefs at the Mughal court particularly mentioning appointments, awards of mansabs, promotions etc. We have particularly mentioned the nature of relationship established after the chieftains accepted the overlordship of the Mughal imperial authority.

In the preparation of the thesis we have consulted almost all the available Persian sources in print as well as in manuscript. We have also used

a number of official documents such as imperial *farmans, nishan and hasbul hukm* issued by Mughal emperors and the princes. European travel accounts have also been used with utmost care. But baring the reign of Akbar the information in Persian sources for the reign of Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb is only in bits and pieces. Similarly in European travel accounts also only brief reference of few chieftaincies are available. Therefore we have also consulted a large number of family records and regional histories which are housed in the Bihar State Archives, Patna, Khuda Baksh Library, Patna; K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna; Patna University Library, Patna; and *Mahafiz Khana* of Darbhanga Raj, Darbhanga. Some of the family accounts such as *Tawarikh-i-Ujjainia, Tawarikh-i-Kharakpur Raj Darbhanga, Bhojpur mein Paramaron Ka Itihas 1577 Tak and Ain-i Tirhut* have greatly helped us in filling the gaps and reconstructing the history of some of the chieftaincies. Apart from these works, we have also consulted District Gazetteers, Imperial Gazetteers, Buchanan’s Survey accounts of the different districts of Bihar, *The Statistical Accounts of Bengal* by W.W. Hunter, M. Martin’s accounts of Bihar in *Eastern India* and Firminger’s Fifth Revenue Report in the preparation of our work. Research papers and books published in English, Hindi and Urdu on the theme connected with our topic have also been used in the preparation of the present study.