



## The Autonomous Chieftains: Genesis and Growth (1540-1545 A. D.)

### KEYWORDS

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Sher Shah Suri (1540-1545A. D.) recongnized the hereditary rights of the autonomous chieftains and established cordial relations with them. However, a harsh policy has to be pursued in the cases of recalcitrant chiefs.

They constituted an important place in the polity and economy of the country. They had the patrimonial estates, forts and manpower. They also commanded a considerable part of the economic resources of the country. When Babur conquered Hindustan, he found that one-sixth of the total revenues came from the territories of such big and small chieftains.

Usually, a zamindari right emerged when a village was settled by a person who has its virgin land brought under cultivation by client peasantry, or it might be arise out of supervision of the peasant right when persons of superior non-peasant status imposed their control over the village by buying out the rights of the peasants. But both these modes of creation of the zamindari right in particular villages, presuppose the previous existence of the zamindari class of persons with resources and power enough to settle and purchase land.

The origin of chiefdom generally reveal a long process according to a set pattern. There was first a settlement by members of a caste or clan, perhaps, dominating other peasants themselves. Then another clan appears, drives them; and then still another. At some stage, if not from the beginning, the dominions of the victorious caste crystallizes into zamindari rights, held by various leading members of it over different portions of the subjugated territory.

It appears from the point of view of their origin, there were two types of the bhomias (autonomous chieftains). First, those who had emerged on the basis of their thikana or conquest made by their ancestors and whose zamindari rights prevailed in one or more villages on the basis of their caste or clan affiliations. The rulers of Amber were themselves such bhomias. Second, there was a clans of bhomias created by the rulers of Amber, who were granted bhom land for some special reasons. Attempts were made by the later group of bhomias to also assume the position of jagirdari on the behalf of the Amber rulers.

Qanungo while discussing the origin of the principality of Bikaner by Rao Bika of Jodhpur, tells us how a thikana was settled. In 1454 A.D., Rao Bika, brother of Rao Jodha, the ruler of Jodhpur, left the homeland of the Rathors in search of an independent thikana for himself in the territories of the Bhattis and the Jats of Jangaldesh (Bikaner state). The pattern of Rajput aggression had three stages; first, to enter the territory of another tribe as inoffensive squatters in distress; to foment and exploit the internal feuds of the lawful masters of the land and

thirdly, to crash their erstwhile allies and hosts and set themselves up as the lords of the lands. The foundation of Bikaner state over the ruins of the independent Jat republics of Jangaldesh on the northern fringe of the desert of Marwar followed this pattern. Bika's first thikana was at Karamdesar, in the Jangal country and there he seated himself on the gaddy in 1529.

It is noteworthy that Zahiruddin adds something new about the origin of the Ujjainiya principality of Shahbad in Bihar. He writes, "The zamindars of Shahbad belonged to the Parmar caste of Rajputs who had in the early decades of the fifteenth century, 1423-1437, settled in this territory originally owned and inhabited by the Cheros, a wild tribe of the peasants and highway robbers. They claimed their descent from Bhojpur of Dhar in Malwa, who accompanied by his son Devaraj 11 and close companions left his homeland in search of asylum, and ultimately came to his land on the invitation of Mukuand, the Chero king of Kekat. Mukand gave shelter to the immigrants, and lands as jagirs to their leader near the Ganges on the northern side of Shahbad. With the incoming of numerous adventures, several Rajput families clusters sprang up over a wide expanse of the country. The enterprising settlers cleared the vast wastelands and forests for cultivation with the help of local labour. They were collectively called Ujjainiyas after the name of Ujjain from where they had migrated.

When Babur conquered north India in the early years of 16<sup>th</sup> century, India had a large number of principalities held by the autonomous and semi-autonomous chieftains of varying stature. They were locally referred to as raja, rana, rai, rawal and rawat etc. They were also called in the contemporary Persian chronicles as zamindars and marzbans, kalatran and buzurg. They ruled mostly hereditarily in their respective territories.

It is clear from the above discussion the chiefdom or the zamindari system had emerged when a village was settled by a person. He has his own land and did cultivation with the help of client peasantry. The chieftains had forts and large armies. They even controlled the large part of the country's financial resources. The chiefdom was originated only in the similar caste or clan and the chieftains dominated the peasantry. Sometimes, the chiefdom originated when the clan members conquered new territory and subjugated it. Keeping in view of the above details regarding the origin of a chiefdom we come to the conclusion that it usually originated in one of the three ways, e. g. origin of through inheritance, conquest and after clearing and bringing under cultivation vast waste land and forests and settling a particular territory. Force and clan of course, played a vital role in the establishment of a chiefdom.

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