

Jat Zamindars in Ain-e-Akbari

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Abstract

The social transformation of the Jats of northern India is a result of a process of social and economic changes that occurred in 14th and 15th century. They evolved out of their modest background and adopted agriculture and fertile lands in northern India. Gradually the Jats became peasant proprietors and by the end of 16th century, emerged as *Zamindars*.

Keywords: Jat, Peasant, Zamindar, Pargana, Ain-e-Akbari

INTRODUCTION

The Jats of northern India underwent a prolonged process of mobility, change and transformation during 14th and 15th century. During this period, they occupied fertile tracts of Panjab, Haryana and Upper Gangetic doab, and consolidated their social and economic position as peasant proprietors.¹ By the end of the 16th century, the Jats emerged as *Zamindars*, wielding revenue and military power in the Gangetic territories of the Mughal empire.

Ain-e-Akbari provides a detailed account of the Jat *zamindars* during the Mughal empire at the end of Akbar's reign. *Ain-e-Akbari* was written by Abul Fazl in 1595² to record pargana-wise details of revenue-collection and military assignments conducted by the *Zamindars* of Mughal empire. *Ain* is the main source of information regarding the caste status of the Mughal *Zamindars* of each pargana. The record of the *Ain* is a valuable evidence of *Zamindars* not only as tax collectors but also as leaders of existing castes and communities. It helps us to ascertain the relative position of each community and their contribution to the Mughal administration. The *Ain* provides comprehensive lists of the Jat *Zamindars* of different parganas and sarkars belonging to the four Subas (provinces) of the Mughal empire, namely Multan, Lahore, Delhi and Agra. It is important to note that the Subas of Delhi, Agra, Multan and Lahore which consisted of considerable strength of Jat *Zamindars*, were contiguous to each other. Here, we shall try to analyze the evidence of each pargana of these Subas and evaluate the position of the Jat *Zamindars*. This study deals with the nature of information provided by *Ain-e-Akbari* regarding Jat *Zamindars* and throw light on the process of social change among the Jats.

The term *Zamindar* means 'the controller or holder of *zamin* or land.'³ The term loosely refers to a number of classes such as peasant proprietors, landlords and autonomous

¹Kalika-Ranjan Qanungo, *History of the Jats: Contribution to the History of Northern India*, New, Delhi, 1982.

²Irfan Habib, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

³Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707*. New Delhi, 2006, p. 169.

chiefs. The *Zamindari* rights in Mughal empire was an outcome of socio-economic process in which various feudal communities played an important role in acquiring sizeable land and consequently appropriation of rights in land.⁴ The Jat *Zamindars* belonged to the category of intermediary *Zamindars* who were authorized by the king to collect revenue from the peasantry on his behalf. Therefore, the Jat *Zamindars* received and exercised their rights as the instruments of the Mughal state.⁵

The suba of Delhi comprised a vast region including Upper Jamuna-Ganga Doab, Kumaon and Rohilkhand. It corresponds to modern Haryana, western U.P. and Uttaranchal. There were 8 sarkars in the suba of Delhi, out of which the Jat *Zamindars* are found in 6 sarkars (Delhi, Rewari, Hisar Firoza, Saharanpur, Sambhal, and Sirhind). These 6 sarkars of Delhi consisted of 48, 47, 36, 12, 27 and 33 parganas respectively.⁶ This clearly shows that the Jats had entrenched themselves in the core areas of Gangetic doab by the end of 16th century.

In the Sarkar of Delhi, out of 45 parganas, 17 parganas are said to have Jat *Zamindars*. In other words, this clearly shows Jat *Zamindaris* in 38% parganas of Delhi sarkar. However, the Jats are exclusively found in 11 out of 17 parganas (25%), while they shared *Zamindari* rights with other castes in the rest of the parganas. In the sarkar of Sambhal, the Jat *Zamindaris* are about 16%, with Jats inhabiting in 6 out of 39 parganas. Here too, the Jats enjoyed exclusive land rights in 4 parganas (10%) only, and shared rights with other communities. In Saharanpur sarkar the Jats are found in 6 out of 35 parganas (17%), and exclusive Jat *Zamindaris* found in 4 parganas (12%). In the sarkar of Rewari, the Jats enjoyed *Zamindari* rights in nearly 36% of the parganas, i.e. 4 out of 11. In the Sarkar of Hisar Firoza, the Jats had substantial population (approx. 67%) with their presence in 18 out of 27 parganas. The Jats with exclusive rights are found in one pargana only (4%). Out of its 33 parganas, Sirhind sarkar comprised of 13 parganas with Jat *Zamindaris*. This shows that about 40% of the parganas had Jat population, and 10% (3 parganas) exclusively belonged to the Jats.

The suba of Agra is located in central Jamuna-Ganga Doab and the region west of the Jamuna river. The prosperity of this suba is mainly on account of its rich agrarian base, and proximity to trade routes. The suba of Agra had 13 sarkars, out of which 7 sarkars (54%) showed Jat *Zamindars*, namely Gwalior, Bayanwan, Agra, Kol, Narnaul, Sahar and Alwar. Out of 33 parganas in the sarkar of Agra, the *Ain* shows Jat *Zamindars* in 6 parganas (19%). Only one Jat *Zamindar* was found in each of the three sarkars of Kol, Gwalior and Alwar, consisting of 21, 13 and 41 parganas respectively. The percentage of Jat presence in these sarkars is 5%, 8% and 3% respectively. The solitary parganas reported from the sarkars of Gwalior and Alwar are exclusively Jat parganas. The *Ain* records 6 Jat *Zamindars* (23%) in the list of 26 parganas of Bayanwan sarkar, one of which had Jat *Zamindar* only. The Narnaul

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁵ Irfan Habib, *Proceeding of Indian History Congress*, Varanasi, 1969, pp. 153-194.

⁶ Abul Fazl, *Ain-e-Akbari*, vol. 2. Trans. H.S. Jarret, 2006, pp. 291-301. Also cited by Irfan Habib, *Jutts of Punjab and Sind*, p. 101; Jigar Mohammad, 'The Jat *Zamindars* of the Suba of Agra, Delhi, and Punjab Regions in *Ain-e-Akbari*. *The Jats: Their Role and Contribution to the Socio-economic Life and Polity of North and North-West India*. Ed. Vir Singh. vol. 2. Delhi, 2006, p. 78.

sarkar included 2 Jat *Zamindars* (13%) in the total of 16 parganas, one of which belonged to the Jats only. The *Ain* refers to 5 Jat *Zamindars* in the list of 6 parganas of Sahar sarkar, two of which are exclusively Jats. The percentage of the Jat *Zamindars* here is 84%, and that of exclusive Jats is nearly 34%. These figures reflect the proliferation and rise of strength of the Jats in the nodal areas of the Mughal territories.

The Suba of Lahore included fertile plains of Punjab, irrigated by Indus and tributaries. On account of its strategic importance in Central Asian politics, and its material resources, this region played an important role in the transformation of the Jats in medieval period.

Among the 5 sarkars of the Lahore suba, the *Ain* records the existence of Jat *Zamindars* in 4 sarkars, namely, Bari Doab, Bet Jalandhar Doab, Chanhat Doab, Rechnau Doab respectively. The *Ain* record shows that the Jats had consolidated their position in 80% of the sarkars of the suba of Lahore. But there was no uniform pattern of their settlement in the entire province as regional variations are clearly visible in different sarkars and parganas. The *Ain* shows one exclusive Jat *Zamindari* among 4 Jat parganas mentioned in the list of 42 parganas of the sarkar of Bet Jalandhar Doab. Therefore, the Jats are found in 10% of parganas of this sarkar. Out of 29 parganas of the Bari Doab sarkar, the Jat *Zamindars* are found in 12 parganas, (42%). With exclusive rights in 9 out of 12 parganas, the share of exclusive Jat *Zamindaris* in Bari Doab is exceedingly 75%. The proportion of the Jat *Zamindars* is 43% in the sarkar of Rechnau Doab, inhabiting 17 out of 40 parganas. Exclusive Jat *Zamindaris* in this sarkar are approx. 15%. The total number of parganas with Jat *Zamindars* in the sarkar of Chanhat is around 5 out of 15 (33%). Out of these the Jats have exclusive rights in one pargana only.

The suba of Multan had Jat *Zamindars* in two of its three sarkars indicating an impressive 67% Jat strength in a frontier province. Out of 38 parganas of the sarkar of Multan, 6 parganas, (16%) are cited with Jat *Zamindaris*. Of these, two each appear in the Bet Jalandhar and Rechnau Doab, and one each in the Bari Doab and Sindh Sagar Doab respectively. However, 3 parganas (50%) exclusively belong to the Jat *Zamindars*. The figures are equally impressive in the sarkar of Dipalpur where the Jats are reported in 35%, that is, 9 out of 26 parganas. Here too, the Jat settlements are distributed in the fertile tracts of Bet Jalandhar-4, Bari Doab-1, Rechnau Doab-2, and Birun Panjread-2 respectively.

The abundant information supplied by *Ain-e-Akbari* shed a good deal of light on the social and economic status of the Jats in medieval India. With the help of the lists of *Zamindars* in each pargana, one can easily calculate the relative strength of the Jat settlements in the Mughal provinces. The range of information in terms of exclusive Jat pargana or mixed caste pargana is extremely important for a scholar of social history to judge the precise status and socio-economic strength of the Jats of north-western and northern India. The utility of *Ain-e-Akbari* lies in the nature of its copious historical data which can be analyzed in a number of ways to gain insightful understanding of community history.

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