

Understanding Mughal Bihar through Abul Fazl's Account

TAHIR HUSSAIN ANSARI

Associate Professor

CAS, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (U.P.) India

ABSTRACT

In this paper I have made an attempt to understand Medieval Bihar through the two most important Persian chronicles of Akbar period *i.e.*, *Ain-i-Akbari* and *Akbarnama*. It has been always challenging for medieval scholars to study regional histories in the light of the contemporary Persian chronicles due to the paucity of information available in these sources. The good thing about Abul Fazl is that he has given a detailed account of Akbar period including polity, society, and economy of centre as well as twelve provinces of his empire. Bihar was one of the important *subas* of Akbar period and the Afghans were very powerful and had their strongholds in eastern India especially in the *suba* of Bihar. Akbar faced a lot of difficulties in the suppression of continuous Afghan's rebellion in Bihar. The territorial chiefs also rebelled against Akbar and sometimes they made alliance with the Afghans and became formidable force against the Mughals. Abul Fazl has recorded some other information about Bihar which is quite interesting and informative.

Key Words : Mughal Bihar, Abdul Fazl's Account, Medieval Bihar, *Akbarnama*, *Ain-i-Akbari*

INTRODUCTION

Since the ancient period, Bihar has been economically socially, and politically quite rich state. According to Abul Fazl, the *suba* of Bihar stretched 300 miles from Gardhi¹ to Rohtas, covering an area of around 120 kos, and 110 kos from Tirhut to the northern mountains (Himalayas) (275 miles). The *suba* of Bengal surrounded it on its east, and the *suba* of Allahabad and Awadh were on its west. It was bordered on the north and south by hills that made up the Vindhya and the Himalayas, respectively². There are no *subas* mentioned by Abul Fazl that border the *suba* of Bihar to the north or south. It seems that because of the hilly tract and forest areas on

both sides of the *suba*, Abul Fazl failed to mention the name of any territorial unit to its north and south, although, Nepal lies to its north and Orissa to its south. Bihar was crossed by several significant rivers, including the Ganga, Sone, Maner, Gandak, Karamnasa, and Punpun³.

The *suba* of Bihar had seven *sarkars*, which were divided into 199 *parganas*. During the reign of Akbar, the *suba* was divided into two broad and equal portions of territory, north and south of the river Ganga. The northern territory was a vast tract of flat land and it comprised the Saran, Champaran, Hajipur and Tirhut *sarkars*. Tirhut, being the most easterly, contained a strip of lands adjacent to the north of the course of the Ganga in north Bihar and formed the part of the *sarkar* of

1. 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.
2. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, ed. Saiyid Ahmad Khan, Delhi, Private Press: 1856, vol. II, p. 66.
3. Ibid.

How to cite this Article: Ansari, Tahir Hussain (2023). Understanding Mughal Bihar through Abul Fazl's Account. *Internat. J. Appl. Soc. Sci.*, 10 (3&4) : 215-223.

Munger. The latter chiefly lay to the south of the Ganga⁴.

The southern territory lay to the south of the Ganga and extended to the range of Vindhya, which separated the lower plains from the elevated mountainous region. In the west, the southern territory was separated by the river from the *sarkar* of Chunar in the *suba* of Allahabad. On the east, it was separated from Bengal by a branch of the southern hills. The *sarkar* of Bihar in the middle cover about half of the flat and level area of this great southerly division. The plains of the *sarkar* of Munger to the east covered a fourth of the entire district with all its mountainous dependencies. The southern and western *sarkar* of Rohtas was situated chiefly between the two rivers of Sone and Karmanasa. Subsequently, the *sarkar* of Shahabad (Bhojpur) was carved out of the *sarkar* of Rohtas⁵.

The southernmost region of the Bihar *suba* was upland of Chota Nagpur, which comprised the sub-division of Palamau, Ramgarh and Chotanagpur. Chotanagpur is also known by the appellation of Kokrah, more commonly called Nagpur. John Beams is of the view that the name Nagpur was derived from the diamond mine in the region⁶. It may be pointed out that the entire region was not included in any of the *sarkars* of the *suba* of Bihar apparently because the *zamindars* of the area could not be fully subjugated.

The Suba's gross revenue was 22 krsors, 19 lakhs, 19,405 dams, approximately in Rs. 55, 47, 98,513. Out of 199 parganas, 138, paid revenue in cash from crops

charged at special rates. The extent of measured land was 24 lakhs, 44,120 bighas, yielding revenue of 17 krsors, 26 lakhs, 81,774 dams (Rs. 43, 17,044) in cash. The remaining 61 parganas were rated at 4 krsors, 22 lakhs, 37,631 dams. (Rs. 12, 30, 94, 0125), out of which 22 lakhs, 72,174 dams were *suyurghal* (Rs. 56, 80, 3810). The province furnished 11,415 cavalry, 449,350 infantry and 100 boats⁷.

A General Aspects of Bihar:

The *Ain-i-Akbari* gives the account of Bihar, 'Its chief rivers are the Ganges and Sone. Whatever of wood or leather and the like falls into the river Sone, becomes petrified'⁸. It seems that Abul Fazl realized the religious importance of the Sone River which accommodates a large number of stones and these stones were considered pious as symbol or idol of different gods and were worshiped by the Hindus. At the same time the people also worshiped the rivers as incarnation of different goddesses. Then Akbar's court historian further writes that head springs of three rivers, the Sone⁹, the Narmada¹⁰ and Johila¹¹, bubble up from a single reedbed in the neighborhood of Gadha (Mangla)¹². The three great rivers, Narmada, Sone and Mahanadi¹³, rise in a sacred pond at the Amar-Kantak, a village in the Rewa state, only three miles from the eastern border of the Garh Mandla district of the Central Provinces, where the Maikal range begins. The Johilla, a very small river, is really a feeder of the Sone River and after flowing north

4. John Beams, 'Subah Bihar: Fifth Report to the House of Common's in England A.D. 1812,' in B.P. Ambasthya, ed., *Beames's contribution to the political geography of the Subahs of Awadh, Bihar, Bengal and Orissa in the Age of Akbar*, Janaki Prakashan, Patna, 1976 p. 42.

5. Ibid. pp. 42-44.

6. Ibid., pp. 43-44.

7. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, ed., vol. II, Saiyid Ahmad Khan, Delhi, Private Press: 1856, p. 165.

8. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 2, tr. Colonel H. S. Jarrett, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 2010, p. 162.

9. The Sone River is the principal southern tributary of the Ganges (Ganga) River, rising in Madhya Pradesh. It flows north past Manpur and then turns northeast. The river cuts through the Kaimur Range and joins the Ganges above Patna, after a 487 mile (784 km).

10. The Narmada River rises from the Amarkantak Plateau in Anuppur district in Madhya Pradesh.

11. The Johila river rises from Jawaleshwar which is ten km away from Amarkantak and it joins the Sone River.

12. Ibid.

13. The Mahanadi River is a major river in east Central India. It drains an area of around 132,100 square kilometres and has a total length of 900 kilometres. Mahanadi is also known for the Hirakund Dam. It flows through the states of Chattisgarh and Orissa and finally falls in the Bay of Bengal.

and west from its source for a little more than a hundred miles as a thin stream loses itself in the Sone, in the north-west corner of the Rewa state, 13 miles east of Bandhugarh. It should not, therefore, be counted as separate from the Sone River, which does not really rise from the same tank at Amar-Kantak but some distance to the east of it. The third great river with its source at the same place is the Mahanadi, which Abul Fazl has entirely left out. The Mahanadi flowing eastward across half the breadth of the Indian peninsula, falls into the Bay of Bengal in Orissa, more than 1800 miles from the mouth of its twin-sister the Narmada, in the Arabian sea, though both rivers started from the same cradle¹⁴.

The sacred tank at Amar-Kantak is 8 yards long and 6 yards wide, and surrounded by a brick-wall. It is situated 90 miles due east of Mandla city. Tiefenthaler has quoted an English engineer's report. "The Narmada in issuing from its source is only one yard in breadth. The Sone is visible only for a distance of half a mile from the tank, and then it descends in a water-fall 25 yards high, and after a course of five miles, it loses itself in the sand, but newly acquiring greater volume it (finally) becomes a large river"¹⁵. The Sone used to fall into the Ganges near Maner, when Rennell made his survey¹⁶ but the junction is now about ten miles higher up, at Koilwar railway station.

The Sone River was pleasant in the taste, wholesome and cool; flowing in a northerly direction, it joined the Ganges near Maner. The Gandak flew from the north and united with the Ganges near Hajipur. Abul Fazl records that the drinking water from Gandak river developed a swelling in the throat, (goitre) which gradually increased, especially in young children to the size of a coconut¹⁷.

Abul Fazl further gives some interesting description about a stone or idol of God. The *saligram*¹⁸ was a small

black stone or idol which the Hindus considered among divine objects and paid respect and prayer with great veneration. If the stone was round, small and unctuous, the Hindus held it in the highest regard and according to the variety of its form, different names and properties were ascribed to it. They generally had a single perforation, others more and some were without any. They contained gold ore. Some said that a worm was bred within which ate way through; others maintained that it worked its way in from the outside. The Hindus had written a considerable work on the qualities of this stone. According to the Brahmanical creed, every idol that was broken loses its claim to veneration, but with these, it was not so. They were found in the Sone for a distance of 40 kos between its northernmost extremity and the south of the hills¹⁹.

The Karamnasa flowing from the south united with the Ganges near Chausa. Its waters were regarded with aversion.²⁰ Its name signified 'the ruin of religious merit'. No person of any caste would drink its waters. The reason of its impurity was said to be that a Brahman had been murdered by a Raja of the Solar line, a saint purified him of his sins by collecting water from all the streams of the World and washed him in their waters which were collected in the spring from which the Karamnasa originated. The Punpun flew also from the south and joined the Ganges near Patna. The smaller rivers of this Subah could not be recorded.

The summer months were intensely hot, while the winter was temperate. Warm garments were not worn for more than two months. The rains continued during six months and throughout the year the country was green and fertile. No severe winds blew nor clouds of dust prevailed. Agriculture flourished in a high degree, especially the cultivation of rice which for its quality and quantity was rarely to be equaled. *Kisari* (*Lathyrus*

14. Ibid., footnote, pages- 162-63.

15. Joseph Tiefenthaler (27th August 1710- 5th July 1785) was a Jesuit missionary and one of the earliest European geographers to write about India. (Joseph Tiefenthaler, *Descriptio Indiae*, I, pp. 416-417).

16. James Rennell, *A Bengal Atlas: Containing Maps of the Theatre of War and Commerce of That Side of Hindoostan*, 1772.

17. Ibid., pp. 162-163.

18. A species of black quartzose found in the Gandhak containing the impression of one or more ammonites conceived by the Hindus to represent Vishnu. This river is also known as the *Saligram*.

19. Ibid., p. 163.

20. Ibid.

sativus) was the name of a pulse, resembling peas, eaten by the poor, but was unwholesome. Sugarcane was abundant and of excellent quality. Betel-leaf, especially the kind called *Maghi*, was delicate and beautiful in color, thin in texture, fragrant and pleasant to the taste. Fruits and flowers were in great plenty. At Maner, a flower grew named Muchakand,²¹ somewhat like the flower of the *Dhatura*, very fragrant and found nowhere else. Then Abul Fazl writes about *Kewra* flower and says that its petals had thorns as they grew at different places, they were not same. In the midst of the flower, there was a small branch with honey-colored threads with smell. The flower smells even after it was withered. Hence the people put it into clothes as perfume remained for a long time. The stem of the tree was above four yards high; the leaves were those of the maize, only longer, and triangular, with three thorns in each corner. The *Kewra* bloomed from the fourth year²².

Milk was rich in quality and cheap. The custom of dividing the crops was not here prevalent. The husbandman paid his rents in person and on the first occasion presents himself in his best attire. The houses for the most parts were roofed with tiles. Good elephants were procurable in plenty and boats likewise. Horses and camels were scarce. Parrots abound and fine species of goat of the Barbary breed which they castrate: from their extreme fatness they were unable to walk and were carried on litters. The fighting cocks were famous. Game was abundant. Gilded glass was manufactured here²³. The Akbar court historian has given the description about the minting of coins in the different part of the India. He mentions that the silver and the copper coins were minted at Patna along with other cities of India²⁴.

In the Sarkar of Bihar, near the village of Rajgir did a quarry of stone resemble marble, of which ornaments were made. Good paper was manufactured here. Gaya the place of Hindu pilgrimage was in this province: it

was also called Brahma Gaya being dedicated to Brahma. Precious stones from foreign ports were brought here and a constant traffic carried on²⁵. It seems that Abul Fazl had misunderstood the Gautam Buddha with Brahma as he had pointed out Gaya the Centre of Brahma.

In the Sarkar of Hajipur the fruits *Kathal* (it was known as Jack fruit) and Barhal (was a small and round fruit and yellow in color) grew in abundance. The Jack fruit attained such a size that a man could with difficulty carry one. In the Sarkar of Champaran the seed of vetch *Mash* (*Phaseolus radiatus*) was cast on un-ploughed soil where it grew without labor or tilling. Long pepper grew wild in its forests²⁶.

Tirhut has from immemorial time, been a seat of Hindu learning. Its climate was excellent. Milk curds were kept for a year without alteration. If those who sold milk adulterate it with water, some mysterious accident befell them. The buffaloes were so savage that they would attack a tiger. There were many lakes and in one of them the water never decreased, and its depth was unfathomable. Groves of orange trees extended to a distance of thirty kos, delighting the eye. In the rainy season gazelle and deer and tiger frequent together the cultivated spots and were hunted by the inhabitants. Many of these with broken limbs were loosened in an enclosure, and they took them at their leisure²⁷. It is quite interesting to note here that during Mughal age, large areas were under the forest and a large number of animals and bird's species were found in Medieval Bihar. In the course of the period from the Mughal to the present time, a vast forest land had been cleared due to population explosion and pressure and burden on the land on the name of development and settlement. Presently the forest areas have shrank to such level that a large number of animal, bird, plant and insect species are extinct.

Rohtas was a stronghold on the summit of a lofty mountain, difficult of access. It had a circumference of

21. King of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Calcutta, suggest that this may be the *Jasminum pubescens*. The flower resembles a miniature *Dhatura* flower and is very fragrant.

22. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 1, tr. Colonel H. S. Jarrett, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 2010, p. 88.

23. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 2, tr. Colonel H. S. Jarrett, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 2010, pp. 163-164.

24. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 1, tr. Colonel H. S. Jarrett, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 2010, p. 32.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

26. *Ibid.*, pp.164-165.

27. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 2, tr. Colonel H. S. Jarrett, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 2010, p. 165.

14 kos and the land was cultivated. It contained many springs, and wherever the soil was excavated to the depth of three or four yards, water was visible²⁸. So we can draw from this statement that the ground water level was quite up during medieval period and it was easy to fetch water from the well or tube well only digging few yards. It is quite obvious that how in the course of period from the 16th century to 21st century, has brought a lot of changes in the nature and environment. Presently, the ground water level has gone deep down and it is difficult to get water in wells as most of the wells are dried. Although with the modern technological development people are using tube well and Submersible pump for fetching water from the ground for daily uses. Bihar receives very less rains in present time in comparison to contemporary period because of climatic changes. The Historian also mentions that the elephants were found in the suba of Bihar, in the neighborhood of Rohtas and Jharkhand²⁹.

Abul Fazl gives some other kind of interesting information about Bihar. In the rainy season many lakes were formed, and more than two hundred waterfalls gladdened the eye and ear. The climate was remarkably healthy³⁰. It can be easily understood the changes from 16th century to present time, presently it is difficult to trace out so many waterfalls in whole of Bihar which have been recorded by Abul Fazl.

Akbar's Imperial Process:

Abul Fazl gives information about the imperial process and its difficulties in Bihar. He describes about the Mughals subedars and the commanders who were assigned the responsibilities during the reign of Akbar to conquer and subjugate the territorial chiefs of Bihar and suppress the rebel Afghans of eastern India. He mentions

Raja Sangram Singh as the *zamindar* of Kharagpur and identifies Kharagpur as a *qasba*³¹. The first reference to Sangram Singh in the sources occurred in the events of 1573-4 when Akbar went to Patna along with Munim Khan to suppress the Afghan rebellion. Abul Fazl writes that the Afghans could not withstand the Mughal troops and fled without offering battle. After that Raja Sangram Singh, the *zamindar* of Kharagpur and many other zamindars of the suba of Bihar presented themselves before the emperor and offered their submission³².

Abul Fazl mentions how the Afghans were very powerful in eastern India and they rebelled against the Mughal authority in Bihar and created troubles during 1583-4. The local chieftains like Raja Sangram Singh of Kharagpur, Dalpat Ujjainia of Bhojpur and some other chieftains of Bihar supported the cause of the Mughals under Shahbaz Khan. The Afghans were defeated and their rebellion was suppressed³³.

There were references of the enmity between certain chiefs of Bihar. Raja Puran Mal of Gidhaur and Sangram Singh of Kharagpur, the two neighbouring chiefs were bitter enemies on account of some family feud³⁴. It also appears from the Persian chronicle *Akbarnama*, that two chieftains of Bihar became independent and continued to defy the imperial authority. When Raja Man Singh was appointed governor of Bihar during 1587 the refractory chiefs like Raja Sangram Singh and Raja Puran Mal accepted the overlordship of the Mughal and offered *peshkash* of elephants and other rarities of the area³⁵. He further adds that during Raja Man Singh's conquest of Orissa in 1592, Raja Sangram Singh of Kharagpur, Raja Puran Mal of Gidhaur and certain other chiefs of Bihar accompanied him³⁶.

Abul Fazl then describes about the different territorial chiefs of Bihar and their relation with the

28. Ibid.

29. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 1, tr. Colonel H. S. Jarrett, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 2010, p. 129.

30. Ibid.

31. Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, ed. Maulvi Abdur Rahim, Calcutta, ASB, 1877, vol. III, p. 107.

32. Ibid., pp. 107-108. (Persian text)

33. Ibid., P. 418.

34. Ibid., 460-61.

35. Ibid., p. 576.

36. Ibid., p. 611.

Mughals and the Afghans. Bhojpur was a mahal in the sarkar of Rohtas of the Bihar subaduring Akbar's reign³⁷. The strongholds of the Ujjainias were the forts of Shergarh and Jagdishpur³⁸. During the rule of the Sur dynasty, there was complete peace in the Bhojpur region. Gajpati not only consolidated his position as the most powerful chief of north-west Bihar but also extended the boundaries of his chieftaincy up to the borders of the Jaunpur sarkar³⁹. The services of Rampat Ujjania were also utilized by Munim Khan in Orissa against Daud Khan, the Afghan chief in 1575⁴⁰.

Akbar now dispatched Husain Quli Khan-i-Jahan to Bengal as its governor on 15 November 1575 and deputed Raja Todar Mal to assist him in this campaign against the Afghan rebel, Khan-i-Jahan Lodi. The Ujjainia chiefs played significant role in the suppression of Afghans⁴¹.

During the absence of Muzaffar Khan from Bihar and probably one or two months before the battle of Rajmahal, the Ujjainia chief, Raja Gajpati unfurled the banner of rebellion against the imperial authority in 1576⁴². After giving a long trouble to the Mughals Raja Gajpati and his family members were defeated and forced to submit to the Mughals⁴³.

Around 1580 Afghans along with DalpatUjjainia of Bhojpur rebelled against the Mughals⁴⁴. The Mughals mobilized a number of competent commanders against Dalpat Ujjainia and the Afghans and after much more difficulties they were defeated and submitted to the

Mughals⁴⁵.

DalpatUjjainia, after remaining under the subordination of the imperial authority for about eight years, rebelled again in 1599. Abul Fazl writes that he had become rebellious on account of the strength of his place and of his abundant equipment. He informs us that Prince Daniyal, who had been appointed as the governor of Allahabad, was ordered to check Raja DalpatUjjainia who had become defiant in his attitude. He further adds that when Daniyal reached Hajipur, Raja DalpatUjjainia came and submitted before the prince and presented elephants to him⁴⁶. Soon after, out of 'smallness of wisdom he fled from the court and rebelled'. However, within a short time he was captured and brought back⁴⁷. Dalpat was pardoned and allowed to go home. From a reference in the *Akbarnama*, it appears that a daughter of Dalpat was married to Prince Daniyal and in 1604, a son was born to them. Akbar named him FarhangHushang⁴⁸.

Palamau, according to Mughal historians, lay south of Patna, the distance from the latter to the northern boundary of the former being seventy-one miles. It is likely that the Cheros territory extended up to Daudnagar or Arwal where the remains of Cheros forts have been found. Toward the north-east, the Cheros were mentioned by Abul Fazl as the principal zamindar in Chai Champa (Ramgarh) and Pundag (Palamau)⁴⁹.

In contemporary Persian historical works, Anant Chero is referred to in the account of 1590-1 when Raja

37. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, ed., Saiyid Ahmad Khan, Delhi, Private Press: 1856, p. 71.

38. Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, ed., Maulvi Abdur Rahim, Calcutta, ASB: 1877, vol.III, pp. 186-9.

39. *Ibid.*, p.168.

40. *Ibid.*, p.121.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 179-81.

42. Abul Fazl writes that 'Due to his inverted fate and evil nature...this ill conditioned mischief monger took to the highway robberies and began to oppress the weak more than before' (*Ibid.*, p. 169).

43. Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, vol. III, p. 169-70.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 323.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 323-25.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 750.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 323.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 826.

49. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, ed., Saiyid Ahmad Khan, Delhi, Private Press: 1856, p. 418.

Man Singh, the governor of Bihar, launched an attack against the refractory chiefs of Bihar. It mentions that after suppressing the chiefs of Kharagpur and Gidhaur, Man Singh attacked Anant Chero of Palamau. Anant Chero made a desperate attempt to check the advance of Man Singh by blocking his path but failed miserably to do so. 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 prisoner⁵⁰.

In the Chotanagpur region of Jharkhand lay the very important chieftaincy of Khokhra. Abul Fazl however, locates it between Orissa and the Deccan⁵¹. In the course of the campaign led by Shahbaz Khan against the Afghans during 1585, the emperor had also asked him to launch an attack on Khokhra⁵². It appears that Madhukar Rai, the ruling Khokhra chief, had refused to accept the overlordship of the Mughals and ignored the imperial authority because, as Abul Fazl writes, his area was full of forests and mountains, and was not easy to access. Shahbaz Khan marched into the Khokhra region and conquered it. A huge booty fell into his hands. Madhukar Rai submitted to him and agreed to pay *malguzari* (land revenue)⁵³. No further details of this settlement have been discussed by Abul Fazl. The position he enjoyed *vis-à-vis* the Mughal administration is not made clear by him. However, in 1590-1, Madhukar Rai was asked to serve in the imperial army along with his retainers⁵⁴. Many Rajput landholders of Bihar, such as Sangram Singh of Kharagpur, Puran Mal of Gidhaur, Rupnarain Sisodia and others joined Raja Man Singh. Yusuf Khan, the ex-ruler of Kashmir, along with Raja Madhukar Rai and others, led a force into Orissa by way of Jharkhand⁵⁵. They defeated the Afghans, and some of important rebels like Nasib Khan and Jamal Khan, sons of Qatlu and Jalal

Khan Khaskhel were captured and handed over to the emperor in 1594. Madhukar Rai played a very important role in this expedition against the Afghans⁵⁶.

In *Ain-i-Akbari*, Gidhaur is mentioned as a mahal of the sarkar of Bihar⁵⁷. In the next few years, we do not notice any reference to Puran Mal in the Persian chronicles. But during 1580-1, he openly rebelled and joined the rebel, Masum Khan Kabuli and his supporters. Abul Fazl notes that Puran Mal rescued Masum Khan Kabuli and his supporters from Munger where they were trapped by the imperial army. Beside this we do not get any reference to his activities in the Bengal campaign or after. In his account of 1580-1 when a rebellion of the imperial officers broke out in eastern provinces, Abul Fazl writes that Puran Mal took advantage of this, abandoned his loyalty towards the Mughals and helped the Afghan rebels.

During 1585-6, we find the only reference that Puran Mal serving was Shahbaz Khan, the Mughal commander, in his expedition against the Afghans. For some time, Raja Puran Mal remained loyal to the Mughals but rebelled against the imperial authority again during 1590-1. Abul Fazl informs us that his ego, pride and confidence in the strength of his fort made him defy the Mughal authority⁵⁸. Raja Man Singh, who had been appointed the governor of Bihar in 1587, led an expedition against Raja Puran Mal. He captured his forts and plundered his territory. Puran Mal came forward with an apology and submitted to Raja Man Singh. He presented the latter some elephants and valuables. He also gave his sister in marriage to Chandrabhan, the brother of Raja Man Singh⁵⁹. After this, Raja Puran Mal remained loyal to the Mughals.

In his thirty-seventh regnal year, (1592-3), Raja Puran Mal served the Mughals in Orissa against the

50. Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, ed., Maulvi Abdur Rahim, Calcutta, ASB: 1877, vol. III, p. 576.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 479.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 479-80.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 611.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, ed., Saiyid Ahmad, Delhi, Private Press: 1856, p. 418.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*

Afghans and a number of Afghan chiefs were defeated and captured by the Mughals⁶⁰. In this campaign against the Afghans, Raja Puran Mal proved to be very useful for the Mughals.

Darbhangha was one of the mahals in the sarkar of Tirhut during the reign of Akbar⁶¹. The Betia Raj, another important chieftaincy of north Bihar, comprised the mahals of Samru, Mehsi and Majhora in the sarkar of Champaran⁶². Abul Fazl mentions Udai Karan as the *zamindar* of Champaran⁶³ but has not described the exact location and extent of the Betia chieftaincy. Since there is no reference to any other chief in Champaran at the time of Akbar, we may assume that Udai Karan was the leading chief of area holding the bulk of it known by this name.

The term Champaran was applied to a wide tract of land covered with Champa trees. Abul Fazl informs us that 'in the sarkar of Champaran, the seed of the Vetch Mash (*Phaseolus radiatus*) is cast on unploughed soil where it grows without labour or tilling. Long pepper grows wild in its forest'⁶⁴. Abul Fazl writes that Udai Karan offered his submission and joined Muzaffar Khan Turbati, the governor of the suba, to recapture Hajipur⁶⁵, which had been occupied by a band of Afghans led by Taj Khan Panwar, Sulaiman Panwar, Fath Khan Musavai, Shahbaz Khan 'Arbi' and Than Rai. These Afghans had killed about 100 troopers, including Muhammad Shaukati, who was holding Hajipur on behalf of Muzaffar Khan Turbati. Udai Karan helped the imperial army to cross the swollen River Gandak under cover of darkness at some distance to the north of Hajipur. The enemy was taken by surprise and suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the imperial army. The fort of Hajipur was

captured⁶⁶.

The chieftaincy of Kalyanpur (Hathwa Raj) comprised Sipah and Huespur, the two mahals of the sarkar of Saran.⁶⁷ We find another reference to Raja Kalyan Mal when Noor Mohammad, son of Tar Khan Diwana, and Khawaja Abdul Ghafoor rebelled against the imperial authorities during 1582-3. They tried to plunder a caravan of salt merchants that was passing through the Saran district. The merchants put up a strong fight against them. At the same time, the rebels came to know of the approach of Khan-i-Azam Mirza Aziz Koka who was marching from Jaunpur. Therefore, they retreated and took refuge at a place near Tirhut. When Khan-i-Azam arrived there with his contingents, he found the rebels on the other side of the Ganga. He began to construct a bridge across the river. As the bridge neared completion, the rebels lost courage and fled. They went to Kalyanpur to take shelter but Raja Kalyan Mal refused to help them⁶⁸.

This was another chieftaincy that lay in the middle of the sarkar of Bihar. In the *Ain-i-Akbari*, Seor is mentioned as a mahal of the sarkar of Bihar with a strong fort on a high hill⁶⁹. Abul Fazl writes in the *Akbarnama* that the chieftain of Seor submitted in 1577-8 without offering any resistance to Muzaffar Khan Turbati who had encamped there after suppressing the rebellions of the Afghans of south Bihar. The Ratanpur Chieftaincy was another important chieftaincy of north Bihar. In the *Ain-i-Akbari*, Ratanpur is mentioned as a mahal of the sarkar of Rohtas with a strong fort⁷⁰. The Kahalgong (Colgong) Chieftaincy was a mahal in the sarkar of Munghyr⁷¹.

60. Ibid., p. 611.

61. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, tr., H.S. Jarrett, Kolkata, The Asiatic Society: 2010, vol. II, p. 168.

62. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, ed., Saiyid Ahmad Khan, Delhi, Private Press: 1856, vol. II, p. 69.

63. Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, ed., Maulvi Abdur Rahim, Calcutta, ASB: 1877, vol. III, p. 136-7

64. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, p. 67.

65. Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, III, pp. 136-7.

66. Ibid.

67. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, ed., vol. II, Saiyid Ahmad Khan, Delhi, Private Press: 1856, p. 69.

68. Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, ed., vol. III, Maulvi Abdur Rahim, Calcutta, ASB: 1877, pp. 396-7.

69. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, ed., vol. II, Saiyid Ahmad Khan, Delhi, Private Press: 1856, p. 68.

70. Ibid., pp. 68-9.

71. Ibid., p. 69.

Conclusion:

Abul Fazl gives some interesting description about the *suba* of Bihar. He has recorded a number of natural species of medieval Bihar. He mentions the fauna and flora, the different rivers, lakes, springs, wells, fertile soils, different varieties of fruits and flowers and he further pointed out how the major areas of the *suba* was full of forest. It seems that presently these natural resources have been used or misused and various species of animals and birds and varieties of plants and trees are extinct in the course of four and five hundred years. He mentions how the *suba* of Bihar was full of forest as the local *zamindars's* chieftaincies were situated in the dense forest and therefore they resisted the Mughal authority

against their subjugation.

Another significant aspect which Abul Fazl understands well is the strategical location of this province in terms of Afghans's power and position in eastern India and how they created problems for Akbar in his imperial process in this region. The Afghans made the alliance with the local territorial chiefs and they became formidable power against Akbar. Akbar faced a lot of difficulties against the Afghans and the local *zamindars*. Akbar was able to defeat and subjugate some of the prominent Afghan chiefs and the powerful chieftains of Bihar by mobilizing huge army along with some prominent Mughal nobles like Raja Man Singh, Shahbaz Khan, Munim Khan, etc., in Bihar.
