

A Political Biography of an *Ujjainia* Chief of Bhojpur: Raja Gajpati

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The *Ujjainias* were one of the most powerful local chiefs of south-west Bihar.ⁱ Bhoj Raj the ancestor of *Ujjainias* claimed descent from Raja Vikramjit and is believed to have emigrated from Ujjain to Bhojpur region in early 14th century and joined service under Mukund, the *Chero* chief of Kikat.ⁱⁱ In due course of time through stratagem Bhoj's son, Dev Raj killed Kikat chief and established himself as the ruler of the area. He founded the city of Bhojpur and established the chieftaincy of *Ujjainias*ⁱⁱⁱ (1324). The long history of *Ujjainia* chiefs from Dev Raj to Onkar Deo (1324 to 1489) is full of wars with neighboring chiefs, Sharqui rulers of Jaunpur and struggle within the family.^{iv}

After the accession of Durlabh Deo, *Ujjainias* succeeded in consolidating their possession and gained some prestige among the territorial chiefs of the area. But Jamal Khan the Lodi governor of Bihar attacked Bhojpur and forced him to seek shelter in the forests.^v Durlabh approached Hasan Khan Sur and with his help met Jamal Khan, and accepted the sovereignty of the Lodis and regained his chieftaincy. Between Durlabh Deo and Hasan Sur extremely cordial relations were established.^{vi} Durlabh Deo's son Badal Singh also became friendly with Sher Khan.^{vii} When everything looked good for the house of Durlabh Deo, violent clashes started between him and his step brothers and in one such clash Badal who had succeeded his father Durlabh Deo, was killed and his wife and his two minor sons Gajpati and Bairi Sal were expelled. They had to pass their life in great distress. However after her sons became 18 and 15 years old, the Rani met Sher Khan in 1532 and requested him to help her sons to get their chieftaincy. Bodhraj tells us that with the army sent by Sher Khan, Gajpati, the eldest son of Badal Singh defeated and killed his uncle Shivram Singh and succeeded to the throne at Jagdishpur in 1534 A.D.^{viii}

After this very close and cordial relations were established between Gajpati and Sher Khan. Gajpati was so much obliged to him that in the same year 1534 on his call to help him against Mahmud Shah of Bengal, he immediately proceeded towards Surajgarh at the head of two thousand horses.^{ix}

Sher Khan defeated Ibrahim the commander of Sultan Mahmud in the hotly contested battle at Surajgarh.^x Bodhraj writes that Ibrahim Khan was slain at the hands of Gajpati and all the camp equipment, elephants and artillery of the Bengal army fell into the hands of the Afghans and *Ujjainias*. Sher Khan was so highly pleased with Gajpati's valour that as a reward, the region of Buxar was also assigned to him.^{xi} Sher Khan also gave a sword to Bairisal, the brother of Gajpati.^{xii}

In the meantime an unfortunate development took place which created further dissension in the *Ujjainia* family. Mahipat's (the son of the youngest wife of Durlabh Deo and uncle of Gajpati who was murdered in the family feud due to succession struggle) widow along with her son Dalpat, at this time approached her brother Birbhan of Arail^{xiii} and requested him to help her son in getting back the chieftaincy of *Ujjainias*. Birbhan who knew fully well that Gajpati had cordial relation with Sher Khan, decided to seek the help of Emperor Humayun.^{xiv} In 1538 when Humayun marched towards Barkhanda (in Palamau district of Bihar) in pursuit of Sher Khan, Birbhan met him on the way and requested to help his nephew to get back his old position in the *Ujjainia* chieftaincy. It seems that he also apprised him of Gajpati's close relation with Sher Khan, an enemy of the Mughals. Humayun agreed to help him and also provided some retainers. It is believed that with this army Dalpat was able to defeat Gajpati and establish himself in Jagdishpur. With the passage of time, he also established his control over Buxar and Bhojpur.^{xv}

Birbhan felt deeply obliged to Humayun and gave him sincere support in his clash with Sher Khan. When Humayun was defeated in the battle of Chausa and was hotly pursued by Mir Farid Gaur, an Afghan commander of Sher Khan, Birbhan personally came to meet the emperor and provided him with all necessary provisions. He helped him in crossing the Ganges near Mirzapur and requested him to proceed to Agra, assuring that he would deal with Mir Farid with his own army firmly and decisively. Hence Humayun was able to reach safely to Agra.^{xvi}

Raja Gajpati on the other hand being dispossessed of his estate joined Sher Khan with a strong contingent of *Ujjainias* soldiers. Though Bodhraj and Munsii Binayak Prasad are silent about his role in the battle of Chausa (1539) but after critically analyzing all the facts connected with the battle one comes to a definite conclusion that Gajpati took a leading part in the battle and contributed substantially in the success of Sher Khan. We find that soon after the victory at Chausa, Gajpati apparently with the support of Sher Khan launched an attack on Bhojpur, defeated Dalpat and captured Bhojpur. Sher Khan also conferred on him the title of *Raja* and the *Sarkars* of Rohtas and Shahabad were also assigned to him. Gajpati constructed a fortress at Jagdishpur and made it the capital of his chieftaincy.^{xvii}

During the rule of Sur dynasty, Bhojpur entered into peace and prosperity. Gajpati got a good opportunity to consolidate his position as the most powerful chief of north-west Bihar. He was able to further improve his position during the weak successor of Sher Khan by extending the boundaries of his chieftaincy up to the borders of Jaunpur *Sarkar*.^{xviii}

With the reestablishment of Mughal rule in North India, under Humayun (July 1555) there was a possibility of Gajpati being displaced by Dalpat with whom emperor Humayun had some personal relations. But before Dalpat could contact Humayun,

Humayun suddenly died of an accident. Therefore the situation remained unchanged for Raja Gajpati.

After the accession of Akbar, Bairam Khan appointed Ali Quli *Khan-i-Zaman* to expel Afghan rebels from the eastern region. He achieved some success against the rebels and established his headquarters at Jaunpur. But while the operations against Afghans were in progress, Raja Gajpati who had cordial relation with them also started opposing the Mughal army. According to Badauni "Gajpati whose army and strength was such that for the space of two years he had kept the *Khan-i-Zaman* uselessly employed in jungle cutting and even at that jungle was not as clear as it ought to be"^{xix}

From the above it appears that Ali Quli failed in his efforts to subdue Raja Gajpati. In the meantime Bairam Khan was dismissed and those nobles who were opposed to Bairam Khan got an upper hand at the court. As Ali Quli *Khan-i-Zaman* and his relations were considered very close to Bairam Khan, they were singled out for harassment. Finding all doors of negotiations closed, Ali Quli along with his relation and clansmen rebelled. Almost for four years (1564-67) the entire resources of the Mughal Empire were pooled together to suppress the rebellion. In 1568 Ali Quli was killed in the battle and the rebellion came to end but it strengthened the power of the Afghans and local chiefs of the eastern region. The military might of the empire which could have been used against Afghans was wasted in suppressing their own rebel. The Afghans utilized this opportunity to further improve their position.

However after the suppression of the Uzbek revolt in 1568, Munim Khan was appointed as the governor of Jaunpur. Soon after reaching Jaunpur he started making efforts to bring under imperial control the local chiefs and other recalcitrant elements of the area. Bayazid Bayat writes that during 1568-69, Raja Gajpati submitted before Munim Khan and agreed to pay a sum of Rs. 5 lakhs per annum as *malguzari*.^{xx}

The entry of Raja Gajpati into the imperial service not only extended the Mughal frontiers eastward but also placed the Mughals strategically in an advantageous position in respect of the Afghans of Bihar.^{xxi}

In Feb-March 1573, the Afghans under Lodi Khan rebelled and captured Zamaniya. Lodi Khan launched an attack on Jaunpur which was the headquarters of the Mughal commander Munim Khan. The Afghan's attack surprised Munim Khan. He hastily mobilized the available troops at Jaunpur and sent a detachment under the command of Mirza Hasan Khan, Jan Muhammad Bihsudi, Tenger Quli and Raja Gajpati to oppose Yusuf Mohd. The garrison of Ghazipur was ordered to cooperate with them. The imperial forces met the Afghans on the left bank of the Ganges and forced them to cross back to the side of Zamaniya after a brief battle. When the news of Afghan invasion spread, the Mughal officers began to pour into Jaunpur with their contingents. The armies of Tardi Muhammad Mirza, Hasan Khan, Jan Muhammad Bihsudi, Tenger Quli and Raja Gajpati were placed under the command of Nazar Bahadur and were

ordered to cross the Ganges at Banaras and harass the enemy by making lightning attacks from the rear.^{xxii} Nazar Bahadur was defeated at the fort of Sirsi near Ghazipur. Munim Khan now collected all the Mughal forces and rushed towards Ghazipur to retrieve the situations. But when he reached there Lodi Khan opened negotiation for peace to which he responded favorably. But his demands were such that no agreement could be reached. Only two alternatives remained before Munim Khan; either to give a battle or retreat from Ghazipur or suspend further operations till Akbar's returns from Gujrat. He was more inclined to the second alternative, but to avoid taking the entire responsibility on himself for such a step, he convened a Council of War and placed the issue before the officers. The proposal of a retreat was opposed vigorously by Raja Gajpati and Bayazid Beg in the course of discussion, when Munim Khan pointedly asked Raja Gajpati to express his opinion on the issue, the Raja exclaimed impatiently; After all, will you offer a battle to the Afghans or not? Munim Khan took serious exception to this retort from the Raja and accused Bayazid Beg of inciting him. Bayazid Beg and Raja Gajpati remained firm in their views and argued that postponing the battle would not only create disorder in the army but encourage Afghans to harass the imperialist. Ultimately it was decided that the Qaqshals would launch a night attack upon the enemy's camp and if they succeeded in creating confusion a general assault would be delivered.^{xxiii} The plan of night attack could not materialize owing to the dubious attitude of Qaqshals. However Munim Khan came out of the fort of Ghazipur and engaged the Afghans in an open battle. At the same time the bridge of boats built, by the Afghans over the Ganges was destroyed by a dust storm. As a result, Lodi Khan's line of supplies across the Ganges was disrupted and there prevailed an acute scarcity inside the Afghan camp. As the situation in the Mughal camp was also no better, both the parties negotiated a settlement and the Afghan left for Patna.^{xxiv}

But Munim Khan's efforts could not make much impact on the strongly entrenched Afghans. As soon as Akbar was free from the Gujrat affairs he advanced towards eastern region at the head of a large army and flotilla of boats in 1574. After a halt at Chausa and Maner, Akbar reached Patna. After having surveyed the fort of Patna, he also decided that the capture of Hajipur was an essential step. Raja Gajpati along with M. Ali Alam Shahi, Sayyid Shams Bokhari and his sons under the command of *Khan-i-Alam* were dispatched to launch an attack on Hajipur. However the emperor himself personally supervised the entire operations. The imperialists defeated the garrison and Hajipur was captured. The fall of Hajipur sealed the fate of the fort of Patna. Daud Khan taking the advantage of the night secretly slipped away to Bengal.^{xxv}

Akbar himself returned to Agra after appointing Munim Khan as the governor of Bihar and Raja Todar Mal was appointed as the *diwan* of the *Suba*. Raja Ram Das Kachwahas was also deputed as the deputy of the *Diwan*. Besides that Muzaffar Khan was appointed to capture the fort of Rohtas which was then held by the Karrani Afghans. Soon after, the Mughals defeated the Afghans in different areas and captured places like

Surajgarh, Munghyr, Bhagalpur and Kahalgaon which were then the strong holds of the Afghans.

In the same year (1574), Munim Khan dispatched Rampat *Ujjainia*,^{xxvi} son of Raja Gajpati under the command of Raja Todar Mal to suppress the rebellion of Afghans under Daud Khan in Bengal. The rebels were defeated after a number of skirmishes during October 1574.^{xxvii} The services of Rampat *Ujjainia* were also utilized by Munim Khan in Orissa against Daud Khan in 1575.^{xxviii} While Munim Khan was busy in his campaign against Daud he was suddenly taken ill and died after a brief illness in the same year.^{xxix}

Akbar dispatched Husain Quli *Khan-i-Jahan* to Bengal as its governor on 15th November 1575, and deputed Raja Todar Mal to assist *Khan-i-Jahan* in this campaign. Some of the Mughal officers of Bengal in the meanwhile had left that province where they had been suffering because of its bad climate and they marched to Bihar through Purniya and Tirhut route. This exodus was stopped at Bhagalpur through the efforts of *Khan-i-Jahan* and Raja Todar Mal who had already reached there. Teliagarhi was recovered and *Khan-i-Jahan* took up his residence at Rajmahal as the rains had set in.

Muzaffar Khan, who had been directed by the emperor to re-in force *Khan-i-Jahan*, with the forces from Bihar, proceeded along with Shujat Khan, Muhibb Ali Khan, Masum Khan Kabuli, Mir Muizzul-Mulk, Samanji Khan, Mirzada Ali Khan and Tarkhan Diwana etc. from Patna to Bhagalpur and he joined the army of *Khan-i-Jahan* at Rajmahal. After holding joint consultation they decided to attack the enemy immediately. In the hotly contested battle fought at Rajmahal on the 12th July 1576, Afghans were completely defeated. Junaid was killed in the fight and Kalapahar was severely wounded.^{xxx} Daud Khan was arrested and beheaded. The Afghan rule thus came to an end once for all.

During the absence of Muzaffar Khan from Bihar, and probably one or two months before the battle of Rajmahal, Raja Gajpati, the *Ujjainia* chief of Bhojpur and Jagdishpur in the western part of south Bihar, unfurled the banner of rebellion against the imperial authority in 1576.^{xxxi} Saeed Khan Chagta who was officiating as the governor of Bihar during the absence of Muzaffar Khan, was ordered to immediately proceed along with Makhus Khan and other officers of Bihar to the assistance of Shahbaz Khan Kamboh who was specially deputed to put down the revolt of Raja Gajpati.^{xxxii}

Although Raja Gajpati had submitted and joined Mughal service and also cooperated with Munim Khan in dealing with Afghan rebels as mentioned above, but it seems that *Ujjainia* could not be fully integrated in the Mughal political structure. He was neither given a rank nor any administrative responsibility by the imperial administration. It is also important to note that Raja Gajpati was shown no special favour by the emperor who had come to Bihar to suppress the Afghan rebellion in 1573-74 and possibly met him during the campaign.

Raja Gajpati arrested Peshrau Khan, who was sent by the imperialist to negotiate with him, and besieged Arrah where Farhat Khan had taken shelter.^{xxxiii} Farhang Khan, the son of Farhat Khan whose *Jagir* lay to the east of River Sone, with a view to relieve his besieged father, advanced towards Arrah along with Qarataq Khan. But both of them were killed in hand to hand fight with Gajpati. This stirred up Farhang's father to come out of the fort but he also shared the same fate.^{xxxiv} Gajpati took hold of the town of Arrah and its fort and being emboldened with victory, he crossed the Ganges and rushed towards Ghazipur to arrest the family-members of *Khan-i-Jahan*.^{xxxv} Meanwhile Shahbaz Khan Kambo reached there and compelled him to leave Ghazipur. But he was over taken by Shahbaz Khan and a battle was fought in which Gajpati was defeated and put to flight. Pursuing him, the imperialists reached the fort of Moheda^{xxxvi} which was then held by a local chief, named Sangram. Under the pressure of imperial army the Raja surrendered the fort to Shahbaz Khan.^{xxxvii} Gajpati however escaped and took shelter in the dense forests of Bhojpur. The area was almost in assessable for the Mughal cavalry. In spite of his best effort Shahbaz Khan failed to reach Gajpati's headquarters. At this juncture Sangram the local *zamindar* who had recently joined imperial service came to his help. On his direction the Mughals attacked Dawa,^{xxxviii} which was the home of Gajpati and put it to pillage and plunder. Gajpati immediately rushed toward Dawa and to save the town made a night attack on the Mughal army. But he was defeated and forced to flee. He took shelter in Jagishpur which was situated around a thick forest. Shahbaz Khan dispatched a strong army and Jagdishpur was put to siege. The siege operation continued for about three months and ultimately Gajpati was defeated. Although the fort and several of his family members, huge amount of money and the entire chieftaincy came into the hands of the imperial authority but Gajpati along with his brother Bairisal and son Sri Ram (Rampat *Ujjainia*) managed to escape.^{xxxix}

Bairisal along with Sri Ram took shelter in neighboring hilly forest and defied imperial authority for some time. But the Mughals made a surprise attack and defeated and killed Bairisal. Almost at the same time Gajpati was also killed and the career of a powerful territorial chief came to end in an uneventful manner.^{xl}

From the above discussion one may conclude that the Mughal imperial administration so far, had no clear cut policy towards the *zamindars* of Bihar. We have seen that even after Gajpati accepted the subordination of Mughals and agreed to pay *malguzari* of 5 lakh of rupees, he was neither admitted in imperial service nor given any official position in Bihar administration. Apparently the Mughal officers posted in Bihar were given complete freedom to deal with them depending on the local conditions.

Gajpati and his son Sri Ram continued to cooperate with Mughal administration until Munim Khan was in charge of the affairs of Bihar. During Muzaffar Khan's tenure also he remained loyal to the Mughals. But after the arrival of *Khan-i-Jahan* Gajpati's attitude completely changed. He declared his independence and attacked imperial officials posted at Arrah.

The sources are completely silent about the causes of the revolt but by a closer examination of *Akbarnama* it appears that Raja Gajpati was extremely unhappy with the attitude of *Khan-i-Jahan* and we find that in the course of rebellion he directed his all energies in capturing the family and belongings of *Khan-i-Jahan*. Besides that Gajpati may also have noticed that under *Khan-i-Jahan* the Mughal resistance has grown weak and it would be possible for him to recover his territories from the imperial control.

Notes & References

1. M.S. Bodhraj of Pugal. The author of the document is Bodhraj who belonged to Pugal in Bikaner state (Rajasthan). He was interested in the collection of materials for the history of Paramars. He came to Jagdishpur (Bhojpur) in 1663 A. D. and stayed there for six months. The *Hindi* document which is available in Khuda Bakhsh Library (Patna) is known as M.S. Bodhraj of Pugal. It is an important historical record which gives the account of the *Ujjainias* of Bhojpur tracing back their descent directly to the famous Raja Bhoj of Dhar in Malwa. It abruptly ends after giving the accounts till 1577 (*J.B.R.S.*, Jan-Dec, 1961, vol. XLVII, parts I to IV, p. 423).
2. Kikat is the ancient name of the people of Magadha.
3. M.S. Bodhraj of Pugal.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. M.S. Bodhraj of Pugal.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. Ambashthaya, B. P., *The Decisive Battles of Sher Shah*, Janaki Prakashan, Chowhatta, Patna, 1977, p.22.
13. Arail was *Pargana* in the *Suba* of Allahabad.
14. M.S. Bodhraj of Pugal.
15. M.S. Bodhraj of Pugal.
16. Jauhar Aftabchi, *Tazkirat-ul-Waqiat* (photograph in the Library, CAS, Deptt. of History, A.M.U., Aligarh) p.25. Gulbadan Begum's account *Humayunnama* also corroborates Jauhar's narration (p.53).

17. Prasad, Munsii Binayak, *Tawrarikh-i-Ujjainia*, Nawal Kishore Press, Lucknow, vol. III, P.15.
18. Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama* III, p.168.
19. Badauni, A. Q., *Muntakhab-ul-Tawarikh*, II, pp. 179-80; Ahmad, Nizamuddin, *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*, p.313.
20. Bayazid Bayat, *Tarikh-i-Humayun-wa-Akbar*, ed. by Hidayat Husain, Bib. Ind. Series, Asiatic Society of Bengal, p. 319.
21. Alam-Khan, Iqtidar, *A Political Biography of a Mughal noble, Munim Khan*, p. 109.
22. Bayazid Bayat, *op. cit.* p. 321.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 326-27.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Akbarnama* III, p. 98, *Tabakat-i-Akbari* II, p. 291.
26. The geneological table of the *Ujjainia* Rajputs and their descendants who have settled in Shahabad district (Bihar) is available in Khuda Baksh Library, but it does not give the name of Rampat *Ujjainia*. It, however, gives one Ram Singh, the son of Gajpati, in Hindi Ms. in Khuda Baksh Library known as *Ram Das Kachchawahas Ki Varta*, which shows Rampat *Ujjainia* to be the son of Gajpati *Ujjainia* of Bhojpur in Shahabad district and who accompanied Kishan Singh to Patna in the fight against Daud. Hence Kunwar Rampat *Ujjainia* is no other than Ram Singh or Sri Ram, the son of Raja Gajpati, as found in geneological table (B.P. Ambashthaya, *The Accounts of Safdar Ali*, the Mir Munsii of Todarmal and *Ram Das Kachchawahas* by Kanha Bard of Kachchawahas of the village Achalpurah in Jaipur State, *J.B.R.S.*, XLIV, March-June, 1958, Pt. I & II, p. 68).
27. Ambashthaya, B.P., *The Accounts of Safdar Ali*.
28. *Akbarnama* III, p. 121; *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*, II, 304; *Muntakhab-ul-Tawarikh* II, p. 193.
29. *Ibid.*, p.160.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 179-81.
31. Abul Fazl writes that "Due to his inverted fate and evil nature...this ill-conditioned, mischief monger took to the highway robbery and began to oppress the weak more than before. *Akbarnama* III, p.169.
32. Nizamuddin says that Gajpati rebelled when Muzaffar Khan went with reinforcement to *Khan-i-Jahan* "leaving Bihar void of troops". *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* II, p. 334.
33. *Akbarnama* III, p. 169.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

36. The Survey map shows Moheda about 7 miles west of Bhojpur.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 185-86.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 188-89.