

Changing Status Of The Nobility In Amber And Marwar During 1707-1725

Anand Kumar

Department of History Motilal Nehru College University of Delhi, Email- anand_ashoo@yahoo.com

Introduction

The nobility in Marwar and Amber underwent many changes after the death of Aurangzeb. The concept of Bhai-bandh was prevalent in Marwar during the 16thc. According to this the territory conquered by the Rathor rulers or their sardars with the co-operative effort of the clan, was considered to be a kind of joint state.¹ The Rathor sardars, by virtue being the descendants of the Rathor rulers, proclaimed equal rights with the ruler. This relation ship was based on the concept of Bhai-bandh and the rulers themselves allowed their family members to enjoy semi-independent status in their respective territories. This system of parcelling out the conquered territories among the princes and sardars was known as bhai-bant. The territories of Merta, Jaitaran, Siwana, Phalodi and Satalmer (Pohkaran) were held by the descendants of Rao Duba, Rathor Uda, Rao Bija, Rao Hamir and Rao Govind respectively in the beginning of the 16thc.²

These sardars could proclaim themselves independent under a weak ruler. Rao Maldeo was the first Rathor ruler who realised the problems caused due to the concept of Bhai-bandh. He therefore asserted that the concept included the concept of 'Bhai-band-Chakar' which implied the subordination of the Rathor sardars to the ruler. Maldeo dislodged the Rathor Sardars or princes who refused to serve under him. He asserted that a sardar was dependent for position on the goodwill of the Raja rather than on his inherent lights. To implement this principle Maldeo started the

practice of assignment of the pattas (land revenue grants) to his sardars who were serving in his army. These pattas were assigned in the territory of Marwar as well as in the territories outside Marwar where Maldeo held his control. These assignees were not free to exercise their power independently under the new pattern. They were granted territories or pattas against which they had to perform certain obligations. However, the practice of granting pattas and territories made no specific changes in the character of the nobility. The nature of their holding was more permanent by virtue of their kinship ties and clan status in their respective territories.

After the death of Rao Maldeo, Marwar lost its independence and came under the control of the Mughals. The system of administration was reorganised according to the Mughal pattern.³ The old relationship based on the concept of kinship and brotherhood was replaced by a new relationship which was based upon a hierarchy of ranks. Sur Singh fixed the ranks of his kinsmen and converted their status to that of a nobility of the Mughal type. Their status in the court was also determined. At the court they were divided into two wings, called davi and jimani or left and right. In the right wing were placed the descendents of Rao Rinmal and the headship of the wing was bestowed to the Champawats of Auwa. In the left wing were placed the descendents of Rao Jodha, and the headship of wing was bestowed to the Mertias of Ria. Rao Sur Singh also introduced some new elements in the Jagirdari system in the state

and started assigning land revenue grants to the nobles for service to be rendered.⁴ Though the practice of grant of pattas was prevalent in Marwar it is difficult to determine the exact nature of the land revenue grants before the time of Raja Jaswant Singh.

In Amber Bharmal made an attempt to raise the status of some of the nobles above the rest during the 16thc. There was no fixed criterion to determine the grade and rank of nobles in Amber. The hereditary nobles were headed by the class known as 'Bhai Beta' or kinsmen. Nobles of this class claimed their share in the state territory under established practice. Bharmal had to face a tough opposition in his attempt to usurp the chiefship of Amber, which rightfully belonged to Askaran, his nephew and son of his brother Bhim. In order to appease his brothers he created a class of special nobles known as 'Bara Kotris'. Some of the groups that constituted it were Natahawati, Chaturbhujot, Khangrot, Balbhadrot, Sultanot, Kalyanot, Puranmalot, Pichyanot, Kumbhawati, Banvirpota, Sheobrahmapota and Kumbhani.⁵

The Kachhawaha nobility consisted of the chiefs who occupied allodial states as independent rulers, blood relations of the ruling family, persons who sought refuge from the state, hereditary in faithful employees of the state, etc. The two major factions of nobility were the Narukas and the Shekhawats, and commanded vast territories of the state land known as Narukhand and Shekhawati. The ruling chief of the Kachhawaha clan was the fountain head of all powers and was the ultimate authority. The Mughals hardly interfered in the internal matters. Jai Singh ostracized these sub-clans as they were suspected of sedition. But he also acted in a patient and conciliatory way which helped in the territorial expansion.⁶

The factional fight among different groups came to the fore. This was closely related to the activities and position of their kings which was changing as the imperial authority was weakening. The rulers tried to find new ways of legitimising their authority and many symbols- new and old were used.⁷ Sawai Jai Singh took various measures to segregate people on caste and religious lines to control some of the defiant religious groups. He attempted to establish a socio- religious order based on orthodox Brahmanical norms. In the case of Jodhpur, after the death of Maharaja Jaswant Singh different sardars took different sides and there was no unified plan of action. The Rathor sardars who accompanied Jaswant Singh to Jamrud and the sardars at Jodhpur differed in their approach.

The Peshawar section held the view that in the absence of any male issue the Mughal Emperor had the right to keep Jodhpur under khalisa or to make alternative arrangements with which the Marwar sardars didn't agree. The Rathor sardars in Peshawar urged the sardars in Jodhpur to maintain law and order and not to create any disturbance in the functioning of the Mughal authorities even if it was aimed at taking over the administration by them. It signified the might of the Mughal empire. It seems that the question of watan was not so important for them as they were ready to be content with the occupation of other areas if Jodhpur was not granted to them. The Jodhpur section of the nobility led by Raghunath Bhati thought otherwise and decided to challenge the attempt of the Mughal authorities to take control of Jodhpur.⁸ Taking advantage of the rift between the two sections, some of the Rathor sardars started plundering some of the parganas.⁹ This was a new practice on the part of the nobility who felt confident to indulge in such activities.

The Peshawar section of the nobility wanted to have conciliatory approach. They got some success when Aurangzeb reacted favourably to the news of the pregnancy of the two Ranis and issued a farman stating that Jodhpur alongwith Jaitaran and Sojat would be bestowed on the son of the deceased Maharaja on the condition that he appeared before the court¹⁰. It was quite often that the rivalry among different claimants to the throne would come out in open after the death of the incumbent king. These rivalries were settled only with the intervention of the Mughal authorities. Indra Singh found this opportunity favourable and made representations to the Emperor for the grant of Jodhpur to him. The demand was declined by the Emperor and it was made clear that Jodhpur would be bestowed on the sons of the deceased king. The hostile attitude and activities of the sardars of the Jodhpur section created a suspicion in the mind of Aurangzeb and the farman was withdrawn. Mir Khan who was stationed in the hilly areas of Jodhpur also suggested to the Emperor that the farman be withdrawn till the time he returns from Jodhpur. An attempt was made to win over the Jodhpur section of the nobility and no changes were made in their service conditions and pattas. The Marwar sardars changed their earlier decision to resist when they came to know about the attitude of Aurangzeb who gave Merta to the Mughal army.

The strength of the ruler was an important factor in keeping the nobility under control. Taking advantage of the weak position of the ruler and the help provided by the Maharana the Rathor sardars started plundering the imperial thanas. Indra Singh who had been appointed by the imperial authority couldn't control the situation. Sonag Rathor and Bhati Ram expelled the faujdar of Jodhpur and Ajmer.¹¹ Dhawacha Sujan Singh took possession of the

fort of Siwana and Durgadas Rathor took possession of the city of Jalor.

The factional rivalry among the sardars was settled for a while and in the absence of Durgadas Sonag Rathor was accepted as their leader. They renewed their offensive action in the parganas of Merta, Sojat and Jodhpur and inflicted heavy losses to the Mughals. They also started realizing land revenue from the cultivators in various parts of Marwar. The faujdars of these areas were compelled to buy peace with them¹². It was agreed that Ajit Singh would be granted Jodhpur and a suitable mansab. But due to the death of Sonag Rathor the agreement could not be put to the Emperor. After the death of Sonag Ajab Singh Champawat, other Champawat sardars like Udai Singh Champawat and Ajab Singh Champawat became the leaders and there was no dispute on the question of leadership. Infact they were nominated by the Rathor sardars. The absence of Durgadas Rathor didn't affect their activities. Despite the might of the Mughals and the problems of their soldiers, they were able to challenge the Mughal officials at many places like Sojat, Mandal, Sarwarpur, Toda, Nagaur, Jaitaran. etc. The Bhils and Meenas were employed by the Marwar sardars against the Mughals.¹³ The Rathor sardars of Champawat, Udawat, Kumpawat, etc., and Bhatias, Chauhan, Sisodia and their relatives were also employed. There were about sixty leading Rathor sardars during this time but no united attempt was made to oust the Mughals from Marwar.¹⁴

Durga Das also made an attempt to consolidate his power by winning over Rathor sardars and others. He never refused to associate himself with other Rathor sardars against the Mughals. Udai Singh and his followers had established their influence over Ajit Singh. Durgadas Rathor, while keeping himself aloof from Ajit Singh, made efforts to consolidate his position

through the support of the Rathor sardars. After strengthening their position the Rathor sardars again attacked the Mughal posts. The arrival of Ajit Singh in public strengthened the position of Udai Singh Champawat. Ajit Singh sent instructions to the sardars for the collection of the revenue from their villages.¹⁵ Another tax, faujbal was also revived. It may be noted that it was similar to the tax levied during Jaswant Singh's time but now its rate was increased.

The Mughals on their part tried to secure the support of the local sardars and started granting them land on ijara. As a result of this policy many Rathor sardars and others joined the imperial service.¹⁶ The practice of ijara was a significant feature of the land revenue administration of Marwar. The appearance of Ajit Singh and arrival of Durgadas Rathor compelled the Mughal commanders to change their policy in Marwar. The Mughal officers had realized that without a mass defection among the followers of Ajit Singh it would be impossible for them to maintain their hold in Marwar. The presence of Ajit Singh was expected to make the situation more difficult for the Mughals. Shujat Khan adopted a policy of conciliation with the Rathor sardars.¹⁷ Accordingly, he offered the mansabs to the Rathor sardars and asked them to take the jagirs on ijara.¹⁸ Shujat Khan also sanctioned the chauth and the rahadari to Ajit Singh. But no official order was issued. Shujat Khan tried to open negotiations with Ajit Singh and asked the latter to reach Ajmer so that he could be given the mansab. But the proposal did not materialise as the Mughal Commander was suspected of treachery.¹⁹

The Mughals made a very significant change in their policy and started negotiating directly with Durgadas Rathor. The stature of Durgadas had increased due to his role in solving the political

crisis in Mewar. The Mahrana had requested for the services of Durgadas which was duly done by him. For Durgadas it was quite a favourable opportunity. He was not certain about the support of prince Akbar. The Mughals tried to placate him and he also adopted a favourable attitude towards the Mughals. As soon as he received the mansab, he accepted the faujdari of Sorath and left Marwar in a state of uncertainty. Durgadas succeeded in securing a very high mansab for himself and his family members.

It was a notable change in the position of a noble when the mansab of a noble was higher than that of the ruler. While Durgadas was granted a mansab of 3000/2000, Ajit Singh was granted mansab of 1500/500.²⁰ The mansabs bestowed upon Ajit Singh was considerably low in comparison. Durgadas took the advantage of the situation to further his interests. As soon as he received the mansab he left Marwar to its fate and went away to Sorath. This created a problem in the politics of Marwar. It seems that Maharaja Ajit Singh, after taking possession of Jalor, took less interest in the affairs of the state. He had appointed a number of officials to look after his jagir.

The Mughal authority was still strong enough for both the groups and on the intercession of the Mughal faujdar peace was concluded.²¹ Durgadas also decided to return to Marwar as he was facing the attack from the imperial commander Afzal Khan. The sardars didn't like his return. But the Mughals could not establish their hold on Marwar. They allowed the Rathor sardars to live in their thikanas and they paid some lump-sum amount to the Mughal officials and continued with their old rights. Such arrangements gave them opportunity to turn these patta villages into their watan jagirs.

Taking advantage of the situation Ajit Singh occupied Jodhpur in 1707 and tried to revive the old administrative pattern. He decided to change the office of Pradhan who was the chief officer and was directly responsible to the Maharaja. In the absence of the rulers, the pradhan used to be the chief commander of the army also. The offices of desh-diwan and tandiwan were considered second and third in the rank of the administrative hierarchy. The other important office was that of Bakhshi. He was the head of the military department and the chief representative of the sardars. Hakim and shiqdar or kotwal were another important officers who enjoyed both civil and military powers. The shiqdar was another important functionary in the administration. In Marwar the term shiqdar was synonymous with the kotwal who was solely incharge of the town administration.

Jai Singh made sub-assignments and subleases in order to extend his watan. It was also done through acquisition of tankhawah jagirs and ijaras. The assignees were selected either from his own clan or from reputed people of other areas. Later the areas under the Khalsa increased and the areas under assignment. The Rathor sardars and other sardars of various Rajput clans were eliminated from the state administration during the reign of Maharaja Ajit Singh which caused a serious political crisis in the politics of Marwar after his death. Although all important administrative offices remained in the hands of non-Rathor sardars, the position of the Rathor sardars in the Marwar nobility remained predominant. The number of the Rathor sardars was considerably higher than that of the non-Rathor sardars and others. Among the Rathor sardars, the Champawats held the highest Position in the nobility. This suggests that in spite of strong opposition the Position of the Champawat in the Marwar nobility remained intact. Among the non-Rathor sardars, the Bhatias and the Chauhans

had an edge over the other non-Rathor sardars. In this respect a comparison with the nobility of the time of Jaswant Singh reveals that among the non-Rathor sardars, the Bhatias and Chauhans retained their Position. The Kachbawahs who held third Position among the non-Rathor sardars were eliminated from Power during Ajit Singh's reign.²² It seems that as the Kachhawah sardar, held their pattas only in the jagirs of Jaswant Singh Outside Marwar, they did not participate in Marwar war and consequently were excluded during Ajit Singh's time. But in the case of the Bhatias and Chauhans the situation was quite different. They had their thikanas and bhoms in Marwar and served Ajit Singh during the time of adversity.

Jagir assignments were generally of three types-Tankhawah Jagir, Ghar Baitha ki Jagir and Miscellaneous.²³ The tankhawah Jagir was the most usual form of assignment. Ghar baitha ki Jagir was granted to those who had rendered outstanding service to the state. The holders of tankhawah Jagir had to maintain a number of contingent and his salary was fixed upon the size of contingent he maintained. There was no mansab or grading of Jagirdars. The Jagirdar earned his income from his Jagir mainly by land revenue collections. His share ranged from one half to one-sixth of the produce in different places. The Jagirdar was entitled to a talab (claim) in case the actual collection was less than the standard assessment. In such cases the deficit was either compensated by a cash payment from the state treasury or by an additional Jagir. The assignee was also entitled for a takhfif (reduction).²⁴ The Tankhawah Jagirs were always subject to renewal and each year the sanad had to be shown for inspection failing which there would be confiscation of the Jagir.

There was an undercurrent of tussle between the Jaipur rajas and the Jagirdars. The Rajas

emphasised that the jagirdars tenure depended on service and loyalty where as the Jagirdars claimed their tenure by right of heredity. The service conditions of the Jagirdars reduced many of the bigger chieftains (territorial thikandar) to the position of Jagirdars.