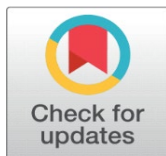
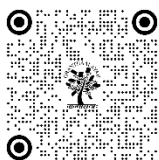


AKBARNAMA-- DELINEATING TERRITORIAL EXPANSION UNDER AKBAR

Birendra Kumar¹✉

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of History, Rajdhani College, University of Delhi, Delhi



Corresponding Author

Birendra Kumar,
bkumar@history.du.ac.in

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i5.2024.4449](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i5.2024.4449)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



1. INTRODUCTION

If one studies Akbar Nama in a thematic context or as a primary source, he/she finds it as one of the most important sources for the construction of the history of territorial expansion under the reign of Akbar. Translator & Editor Wheeler M. Thockston admits that “when ‘imperialism’ and ‘expansionism’ have become redundant in the international lexicon, Abul Fazl establishes territorial expansion as ‘Ibadat’ [a true act of divine worship]’ for the Badshah Akbar. For him, by paraphrasing, any expansion of territory that brings order bestowed by the ‘wisdom-adorning one who graces the throne’ [aurangnishin -i- farhang -ara] to the benighted world of chaos outside the cradle of empire is not merely praiseworthy but a true ‘act of divine worship’ [Ibadat]”¹.

Delineating the history of territorial expansion under the rule of Akbar as was mentioned by Abul Fazl in his magnum opus ‘Akbanama’, it is very pertinent to understand the prelude of the establishment of Mughal Empire by his grandfather Babur. Geopolitics of central Asia like penetrable terrain and passes of Hindukush, Kirthar, Karakoram/Godwin Austin, Kyunlun, erratic climatic conditions, humid and arid zone across the geographical boundaries as was propounded by Humboldt, prevalence of monsoon as well as extremely volatile political conditions and fraternal tribal wars in central

ABSTRACT

The notion of territoriality is coterminous with the construction of history of imperial expansion under the reign of the Mughal Badshah Akbar. It becomes more impressive when it is constructed on the basis of primary sources like Akbarnama of Abul Fazl. In this article, I have endeavoured to construct the history of territorial expansion under Akbar particularly in the very context of ‘endogamous processes’ followed by vertical, horizontal and assimilative processes of state formation, acculturation of tribal populations and integration of local foci and religious cults as well as practices resulting in the consolidation of the Mughal empire under the reign of Akbar. Here, an effort has been made to construe the frontier policy of Akbar and how the geo-strategic location were extremely important for him at that time and space or for any other rulers of the present times.

Keywords: Aurangnishin -I- Farhang -Ara], Ibadat, Lexicon, Notion of Territoriality, Endogamous Process of State Formation, Imperial Kingdoms

Asia with powerful tribes like Uzbeks, Yusufzais, Gillzais, Afridis and Khatiks etc. compelled Babur to move to India as a safe haven and garrison strategic locations of Kashmir, Kabul, Baluchistan, Makran and Sindh. To safeguard external borders of Kabul [Afghanistan] from northern and southern areas, it was felt that the new ruler of India must have strategic control over Badakshan and Balkh to Oxus river in the north and up to Helmand river in the south.

Rulers of Delhi Sultanate like Iltutmish, Balban, Alauddin Khilji and Muhammad Bin Tughlaq also faced rampant incursions of Mongols' during 13th & 14th centuries. These rulers also tried to safeguard north-western regions of India by recruiting military officials and through the construction of forts. To a limited extent they had used diplomatic means also to not to involve India in the central Asian affairs as was done by Iltutmish when he refused giving asylum to Mangabarani who was being chased by Changiz Khan - the person who used to declare himself as scourge to God. However, they did not try to make Trans- Hindukush region as a scientific frontier to safeguard India from the foreign invaders. When Babur took over the reign of India, he also had to face these problems. Akbar's frontier policy or territorial expansion can be delineated in this very context as is evident from the descriptions of Abul Fazl.

In the same vein or in a historiographical sense territorial expansion is coterminous with notion of territoriality or the state formation. Here, the theory of 'endogenous processes' of state formation or the territorial expansion propounded by B.D. Chattopadhyay² and Herman Kulke³ can be replicated. They have identified three historical processes 1. Vertical and Horizontal expansion of state polity and society, 2. The assimilation and acculturation of earlier tribal population and 3. The integration of local religious cults and practices. Herman Kulke in his seminal work on Orissa entitled 'Kings and Cults', argues that the large tribal population and the many scattered centres of settlement in medieval Orissa provide an exceptionally vivid illustration of how the growth of regional polities dovetailed into the incorporation of indigenous deities and the peasantization of tribal societies. On that basis Herman Kulke has formulated a scheme of the progressive stages of medieval state formation from chiefdom to early kingdoms to 'imperial kingdoms. Akbar's territorial expansion in north west region required three important factors to be dealt with immediate effect: First, control over Yusufzai, Khatik and Afridis to keep the communication with Kabul and Hindustan, Second, to consolidate the Mughal's position in Balkh and Badakshan region to check the activities of Uzbeks and Thirdly, to establish strategic control over Kandahar instead of Persia. Interference of Uzbeks in the tribal affairs of north-western frontiers and their incitement to the tribals against the Mughals posed a tremendous challenge in front of the new ruler. Besides this, Subedars of Kabul and Ghazni were appointed amongst the Mughal princes who used to raise their hand in rebellion. Humayun and his son Akbar had to deal with the similar problems created by their brothers Kamran- the Subedar of Kabul and Haqim Mirza respectively. Frontier policy was indispensable not only for internal security but also from the trade and commerce perspective. On the tip of two important trade routes were there- [1] From Lahore to Kabul and [2] Multan to Kandahar. Kabul was one of the biggest entry points where traders of not only India and Persia but also western China and Europe met. These two trade routes were extremely busy as has been illustrated by European traveller Manrique or Christian missionary Benedict Goetz.⁴ Hence, it necessitated the defensive frontier policy, so, as to safeguard trade, traders and improvise the internal security.

Mughal's ambitious policy on north -west frontier regions and Central Asia is a direct manifestation of their aspirations of territorial expansion. They not only wanted their flag fly high amongst their neighbouring kings but also wanted to fulfil their imperial aspirations, defence and military needs. It is evident from the appointment of Mughal military officials from north -west frontier regions and Central Asia. Notwithstanding, the north -west frontier policy was initiated by Babur but consolidated not by Humayun but his ablest grandson Akbar as has been described by Abul Fazl in his Ain-e Akbari.

At the onset of accession to the throne in 1556 Akbar was a minor and novice and political volatility was prevailing in the north -west frontiers. Mughal -Uzbek relations became very complex on account of cultural and political aspirations of the two warring dynasties. Humayun was asked to maintain peace and tranquillity with the Uzbeks in lieu of war, secondly, tribal issues were mixed up with the Uzbek issues. At this juncture, Uzbeks started plotting against the Mughal by financing the tribes of the region. When Akbar was involved in internal affairs of India, Uzbeks like Mirza Hakim invaded India in 1567 & 1581 which was crushed by Akbar. However, keeping in mind the political expediency of the region, the rule of Mirza Hakim was reinstated. Moreover, Akbar wanted to use Kabul as a buffer state between Hindustan and Central Asia. Death of Hakim Mirza in 1585 necessitated merger of Kabul with Hindustan. Political volatility ended after the appointment of Raja Man Singh as the Mughal governor of Kabul.

Conquest and merger of Kabul and Zabulistan⁵ into the Mughal Empire changed the geo-politics of central Asia. Touching upon the borders of Abdullah Khan Uzbek who had captured Samarkand, Fargana, Balkhand Badakshana in 1584 and wanted to capture Khurasan which was not possible without the help of the Mughal Badshah, started feeling intimidated upon the possibility of an alliance between the Mughal emperor Akbar and the Shah Abbas of Persia. Hence, Abdullah tried to establish rapprochement with Akbar, though he captured Khurasan without the help of Akbar. Likewise Abdullah Uzbek, Shah Abbas of Persia also wanted the same against the Uzbeks and sent their emissary to the Mughal's court in 1591 to launch a combined attack against the Uzbeks. Abul Fazl

Describes in his *Ain* that Akbar accepted the offer of the Shah of Persia [Iran] and sent an expedition against the Uzbeks which was accompanied by his younger son. Notwithstanding this entente

with Persia [Iran] remained inconclusive because Akbar had turned older and he did not repose his faith in the faithfulness of his son Salim [Jehangir]. Akbar did not concede to the Persian Shah's offer on account of capture of Kandhar by him in 1590, though this problem had been persisting since the days of Babur before he captured India in 1526 as has been described by Rushbrook Williams. However, the emperor also felt that the Uzbeks had the propensity to rebel and provoke the tribes of frontier regions against the Mughals which would have been detrimental to the Mughal interests in Central Asia. To repulse the Uzbek incursion into Kabul and establish peace and tranquillity by swaying over the frontier tribes Akbar garrisoned Rawalpindi and stayed there for 13 long years.

From Rawalpindi Akbar transferred his capital to Attock and launched his onslaught against Yusufzais of Bazaour region and Kashmir. Bazaour expedition against Yusufzais were led by Jauna Khan Kokaltash and joined by Raja Birbal and Hakim Abdul Fatah. In this expedition Birbal was killed by Yusufzai tribes when he was returning back on account of antagonism with the Mughal Commander of the expedition Jauna Khan Kokaltash. To suppress this Yusufzai rebellion Todar Mal was sent to lead the expedition and

he succeeded in suppressing them by his constant attack while at the same time Raja Man Singh was sent against Jalal Roushnia of the Khaibar Pass. Since Abdullah Khan was a great threat to the Mughal who had the propensity to fish in the troubled water kept

supporting financially to Jalal Roushnia and Jalal kept fighting against the Mughal until he captured Ghazani in 1600, though he died soon. Subsequently other Mughal contingents suppressed the Mandar tribes of Sama Plateau.

To safeguard his frontier regions and consolidate his empire Akbar completed the subjugation of Kashmir in 1587-88 and Baluchistan in 1595- the region which were very adjacent to Central Asia. Consolidation of Akbar's power in central Asia Abdullah Khan Uzbek felt intimidated and proffered Akbar to marry his son with his [Akbar] daughter which was not responded by him [Akbar]. Finally Uzbek question ended with the success of Akbar and death of Abdullah Khan Uzbek in 1598, however, Badakshan & Balkh regions of central Asia remained unresolved and Akbar returned back to Agra. Although he succeeded in establishing the internal peace and security, external threat remained as it was before.⁶

Before Akbar returned back to the capital Agra, succession war started amongst the Kachchawaha clans. Being governor of Punjab subah, Raja Todar Mal offered to put the fiefs of this clan in order which was dismissed by the emperor and indicated that if the disobedient lords of northern hills could be persuaded by good advice to come into obedience, they should be promised imperial pardon; if not, they should be reduced to naught and their lands and dwellings forfeited to imperial warriors⁷. In a very short span of time emperor's orders were carried out and many of the local rulers of the hills apologized and submitted to the empire, while several received their due and were driven away. When the imperial banners had cast their shadows over the Caliphal capital, Raja Bhagwan Das and Raja Todar Mal prostrated themselves at the imperial threshold⁸

Territorial expansion under the reign of Mughal Badshah Akbar would not be complete without the description of Mughal-Rajput relations. Mughal territorial expansion in Rajputana can be studied in terms of a relation between a powerful king and a Zamindar. Before the establishment of Turkish rule in India, Rajputs were the rulers of India who were involved in the exaction and collection of taxes and maintenance of internal security. However, in subsequent years, their position was relegated to a Chaudhari, Khutta or a Muqdam [during the Sultanate period] and to a Zamindar during the Mughal period. They were assigned the work of collection of taxes which was envied by the royal officials. It is also

noteworthy that the Zamindars were Hindus and rulers Muslims. Hence, the on the question of collection of taxes controversy arose which were given religious tinge by the contemporaneous theologians. The issue of sectarian question was further aggravated by the colonial rulers during the 19th century. Iqtadar Alam Khan asserts that the Akbar's compromise /settlement with the zamindars of Rajputana can be analysed in this context.⁹ A.B. Pandey argues cogently that without the co-operation of Rajputs not only the expansion and consolidation but also internalization and legitimization of the Mughal empire was not possible¹⁰ which gave it a "national stature". In fact, Mughal Empire was a "joint venture" of the administrative officials of the Mughals and other chieftains and Zamindar in which 1/3 were comprised of the Rajputs.¹¹ Mughal imperial interest or the expansion and consolidation of the Mughal Empire would not have been possible without the support of the Rajputs.

Mughal's territorial expansion and consolidation hinged on the support of internal claimants of power who were relegated to the status of zamindar i.e. Rajputs, Afghans and rulers of Deccan kingdoms. In this context Abul Fazl mentions [in his work *Ain-e-Akbari*- a detailed account of the organization and administration,¹²] adoption of Machiavellian political principles/tricks, expounded in the 'Prince', Kutilya's Arthashastra or Vishvajadatta's Mudrarakshasa by the emperor Akbar in dealing with the internal elements especially the Rajputs. He made it very clear by his activities that the emperor is neither interested in the internal affairs of the Rajputs nor in their socio-religio-political activities. R. P. Tripathi opines that Akbar created a new 'imperial confederation'¹³ where he sought Rajput's allegiance which hinged on four important factors- 1. Rajput rulers had to pay a fixed amount of revenue, 2. Rajputs would not be able to draft their foreign policy and wage wars with their neighbouring states without the prior permission of the emperor, 3. They would send a contingent of their army in the imperial service at the time of exigency and 4, Rajputs would have to treat themselves as an integral part of the Mughal Empire and not as a separate entity. Akbar's Rajput policy was very pragmatic in the sense that if any of the rulers went recalcitrant, they were decimated and its vice-versa was also possible. If any of the defeated Rajput kingdoms surrendered, their status, prestige and respect as well as territorial rights of exaction and collection of revenue were restored and they were conferred upon the title of 'Raja', made an integral part of the Mughal Empire. Paraphrasing Akbar's relationship with the Rajputs, one can say that he evolved the policy of patrimonial bureaucracy with regards to the monarchy as the Mauryan ruler Ashoka-the great evolved as well as the policy of conciliation and diplomacy where matrimonial relations [just like the policy of Gupta ruler Samudragupta's policy of Prashbhodharan- total merger and Grahamokshanugraha- seize and liberate] played extremely important role in maintaining internal peace and tranquillity as well as safeguarding the north-west frontiers from the Uzbek onslaughts, in the decimation of internal rebellions and in the exaction and collection of revenue which culminated in the consolidation and legitimization of the Mughal imperial rule.

For the expansion, consolidation and legitimization of his rule he started the policy of matrimonial relations with the Rajput princesses. First in the row was the ruler of Amber Bharmal who gave in his daughter to Akbar in 1562 which was followed by the rulers of Bikaner and Jaisalmer in 1570 and While the Surjana Hada of Ranthambhour.¹⁴ While the work of assimilation and consolidation was going on, internal suabbles also kept surfacing between 1562 and 1567. So, Akbar strived hard to get the support of Khurasanis, Indian Muslims and the Rajputs by making them an integral part of not only the Mughal nobility but also the administration to curtail the power of Turanis. He gave highest Mansab of 5000 to the Rajput rulers of Amber- Bhagwan Das and Raja Man Singh. Arif Qandhari considers Akbar's Rajput policy as the most appropriate policy adopted by the new emperor. While Farid Bhakkari considers it in terms of 'national inevitability'. Iqtadar Alam Khan asserts on the political utility of the Rajputs in not only the internal rebellions but also the external invasions in the north-western parts of Hindustan. Similarly, Satish Chandra emphasizes on the matrimonial relations with the Rajput kingdoms and adoption of conciliatory policies towards his Hindu wives, princesses, kings and subjects. Satish chandra's policy of matrimonial relations has been corroborated by Normal Ziegler and Dirk Herbert Arnold in the consolidation and expansion of the Mughal empire under the reign of Akbar¹⁵. As far as Mughal's relations with Rajputs and consolidation as well as expansion of the empire is concerned, a very pragmatic policy towards Rana Pratap of Chitor out of the purview of their hierarchical structure. It is noteworthy here that the Rajput race and their nationality was confined to their clan as has been cogently put forward by R.C. Hallissey. In fact, internal structure of Rajputs were based on dynastic clan relations in which the racial element was strong. On the pretext G. D. Sharma assert that Rana Pratap did not concede the offer of Akbar instead he was more afraid of losing the war with the Mughal. Had he accepted the offer of joining the Mughal administration, the Rajputs would have lost their identity and religious freedom. Akbar wanted to seize Chitor fort at any cost even after the refusal of Rana Pratap. Akbar found most opportune time in 1574 when two of the chieftains of Rana Pratap rebelled against him---the ruler of Jodhpur-Chandrasen and ruler

of Bundi-Had, the son of Surjan Hada. This was the most appropriate time for Akbar to attack Chittor and seize it and he did so. As a result of the seizure of his fort Rana Pratap was driven away to the jungles.

Description of territorial expansion under Akbar would be incomplete without mentioning Irfan Habib's 'Atlas of the Mughal Empire'. Prof. Habib prepared this Atlas on the basis of illustrations given in the Ain-e-Akbari of Abul Fazl. W.M. Thockston also presents the map of Mughal subas in the first seven pages of his translation of Akbarnama. Abul Fazal gives a list of 12 subas in his Ain as is evident from the maps enshrined in the book. Irfan Habib gives a list of 2737 Mahal in all 12 Subas in 1595-96. Addin 32 for Khandesh and 242 for Bihar. The text actually has 142 Mahals for Berar. Thus, we get a total of 2979 mahals which is still less than the actual number of the mahals whose names are furnished¹⁶. In the nutshell we can say that Akbar had not only expanded but also consolidated a big empire ranging from Kandhar to Khandesh and Gujarat to Bihar and Bengal as has been illustrated in the Akbarnama of Abul Fazl.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Abul Fazl: Akbarnama, [The History of Akbar, translator: W.M. Thackston], Vol.6, page 8
- B.D. Chattopadhyay: the making of early medieval India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994, in Vipul Singh's interpreting medieval India, page 316.
- Herman Kulke, Kings and Cults: State formation and legislation in India and Southeast Asia, Manohar, 2001. In Vipul Singh's interpreting medieval India, vol. 1, page 316
- H.C. Vema: Medieval routes to India, page 179-180, in Madhyakalin Bharat [1540-1761] ed. Harishchandra Verma, page-179-180
- Abul Fazl: Akbarnama, [The history of Akbar, translator: W.M. Thockston, page- 29-31
- H.C. Verma [ed.] -Madhyakalin Bharat [1540-1761, Vol. 2, Page 182-83, DU.
- Abul Fazl- Akbarnama, [The history of Akbar, Translator- W. M.Thockston, page-36
- Ibid, 36
- Iqtadar Alam Khan: The nobility under Akbar and the development of his religious policy, Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, 1968, page 30-36
- A.B. Pandey:
- M. Athar Ali: Towards an interpretation of the Mughal Empire', Journal of Royal Asiatic Society; no. 1, 1978
- Abul Fazl: Akbarnama[the history of Akbar, Translator- W.M.Thockston], page 1, intro.
- H. C. Verma[ed.]: Madhyakalin Bharat [1540-1761], vol. 2, page 216
- Abul Fazl- Akbarnama [the history of Akbar, Translator- W.M.Thockston], page 33
- H. C. Verma [ed.]: Madhyakalin Bharat [1540-1761], Vol-II, page. 216-17
- Irfan Habib: An Atlas of the Mughal Empire, intro, page 1-5