

From Clan Allegiance to Imperial Dependence: The Mughal Remaking of Rathor Politics in Marwar

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Abstract

The incorporation of Marwar into the Mughal imperial order precipitated a significant reconfiguration of Rathor political authority and aristocratic relations. This article examines the ways in which Mughal intervention, particularly through the institutions of mansabdari and jagirdari, reshaped the relationship between the Rathor ruling house, its subordinate elites, and the imperial centre. The incorporation of Rathor sardars into imperial service and the assignment of tankha jagirs within Marwar increasingly situated regional elites within networks of imperial patronage and accountability. The distribution and redistribution of territories in Jodhpur, Sojat, Jaitaran and Merta reveal how the Mughal state deployed territorial resources to cultivate influential local intermediaries while simultaneously circumscribing the autonomous authority of the Rathor rulers. The article argues that Mughal patronage did not simply absorb Rathor elites into an established imperial framework; it reconstituted the political field of Marwar by transforming patterns of allegiance, access to resources and elite negotiation. Jagir assignment thus functioned not merely as a fiscal arrangement but as a significant mechanism of imperial integration and political regulation.

Keywords: Marwar, Mughal Empire, Mansabdari, Jagirdari, Imperial Patronage, Regional Elites.

Introduction

The Mughal incorporation of Marwar¹ constituted a critical phase in the transformation of political authority in early modern Rajasthan. The death of Maldeo Rathor and the subsequent succession disputes within the ruling house created opportunities for increasing Mughal intervention in the internal affairs of the kingdom. Imperial recognition gradually acquired greater significance in the determination of succession and political legitimacy, thereby altering the conventional relationship between the Rathor ruler and the wider aristocratic establishment. The political autonomy of the ruling house was consequently negotiated within an increasingly pronounced imperial framework.

An equally consequential dimension of this transformation was the incorporation of Rathor nobles into Mughal imperial service. Prominent sardars, particularly belonging to the Jaitawat and Kumpawat branches, entered the mansabdari establishment and received *tankha* jagirs² in different parts of Marwar.

Their incorporation into imperial service created new channels of political and fiscal dependence that did not operate exclusively through the Rathor court. The Mughal assignment of territorial resources consequently became an important means through which the imperial state could cultivate local alliances, regulate competing aristocratic interests and extend its authority into the political structure of Marwar. The redistribution of territory was therefore more than an administrative exercise. It constituted a mechanism through which imperial patronage intersected with existing patterns of kinship, lineage and political authority. The allocation of jagirs in Jodhpur, Sojat, Jaitaran and Merta demonstrates the ways in which the Mughal state intervened in the distribution of resources among Rathor elites and, in doing so, reshaped the terms on which aristocratic power was exercised.³

Mughal Patronage and the Reconfiguration of Rathor Nobility

The distribution of jagirs provides important evidence of the depth of Mughal intervention in the political and territorial organisation of Marwar. During the reigns of Udai Singh, Sur Singh and Gaj Singh, Mughal emperors continued to assign jagirs to Rathor mansabdars, thereby embedding sections of the regional aristocracy within the institutional structures of the empire.⁴ When Jodhpur was assigned to Mota Raja Udai Singh, he received fourteen of its eighteen *tappas*,⁵ while Asop and Bilada were allocated to Rathor nobles and the remaining territories were retained as *khalisa*.⁶ Such arrangements reveal the differentiated manner in which territorial resources were distributed among the ruler, imperial administration and aristocratic beneficiaries.

The political significance of this arrangement becomes more apparent in the case of Jaitaran, Sojat and Merta, where territorial assignments were repeatedly modified among Rathor sardars and imperial nominees.⁷ Merta is particularly instructive in this regard. Initially retained as *khalisa*, it was subsequently subject to redistribution among different Rathor nobles. Its assignment to Sur Singh and, subsequently, to other Rathor sardars illustrates the capacity of the Mughal state to intervene in the allocation of valuable territorial resources and thereby influence the configuration of local political power.⁸

Such redistributive practices also illuminate the changing relationship between Rathor nobles and the imperial court. The evidence suggests that nobles could increasingly approach the Mughal centre to advance, defend or recover their territorial claims. The case of Rathor Kesho Das is particularly revealing.⁹ Dissatisfied with the distribution of villages in Merta, he attached himself to the Mughal camp and successfully sought imperial intervention. His actions demonstrate that the imperial court had become an important arena for the negotiation of intra-Rathor interests. Mughal authority consequently operated not only through coercion or formal administrative incorporation but also through arbitration, patronage and the selective recognition of competing elite claims.

The significance of these developments lies in the emergence of a political order in which Rathor identity and lineage continued to constitute important bases of aristocratic power, yet their effective political expression increasingly depended upon access to imperial patronage.¹⁰ The Mughal state did not simply displace existing structures of authority; rather, it penetrated and reconfigured them by creating new institutional and material incentives for regional elites.¹¹

Conclusion

The Mughal reorganisation of Marwar transformed the institutional and political relationship between the Rathor ruling house and its aristocracy. Through the incorporation of Rathor sardars into imperial service and the allocation of jagirs within Marwar, the Mughal state established new channels of allegiance, patronage and accountability that increasingly operated alongside, and at times beyond, the authority of the Rathor ruler.

The emergence of Rathor nobles with direct connections to the imperial establishment was central to the consolidation of Mughal authority in Marwar. Jagir assignment functioned not merely as a mechanism of revenue distribution but as an instrument through which the empire negotiated with, incorporated and regulated regional elites. Territorial redistribution also enabled the Mughal state to intervene in intra-Rathor rivalries and to position the imperial court as an arbiter of competing aristocratic claims.

The experience of Marwar therefore demonstrates a broader feature of Mughal imperial expansion: imperial authority was frequently consolidated not through the wholesale displacement of regional elites, but through their selective incorporation into structures of imperial patronage. The Rathor nobility retained its social and genealogical significance, yet its political power was increasingly mediated by the institutions and patronage networks of the Mughal state. In this sense, the transformation of Marwar was not simply a story of conquest and subordination; it was a process of elite reconfiguration in which imperial power entered the existing structures of clan, territory and aristocratic authority and reshaped them from within.

Notes and References

¹ Marwar was originally a larger area, especially a descriptive name for desert/waterless tract. According to *Ain*, it was one hundred *kurohs* (about 250 miles) in length and sixty *kurohs* (150 miles) in breadth and comprised of the Mughal *sarkars* of Jodhpur, Nagaur, Sirohi and Bikaner. When Abul Fazl talks of Marwar, he has in his mind not the desert rather the conquests of Rao Maldeo (1532-1562) who added to his hereditary dominion (Jodhpur) some forty parganas which included Bikaner, Didwana, Ajmer, Jodhpur, Sanchor, Sojhat, Jaisalmer, Merta and Barmer. During the seventeenth century, a narrower identification with Rathor Principality of Jodhpur developed and has continued to govern ordinary usage till this day. Nainsi uses the word for nine parganas viz., Jodhpur, Jaitaran, Sojhat, Merta, Pokaran, Siwana, Jalor, Phalodi and Gajsinghpura. Sanchor was added in this list later. See Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, ed. Blochman, vol. I, Bib. Ind., Calcutta, 1867, p. 505; Nainsi Muhnot, *Marwar-ra-pargana-ri-Vigat* (henceforth *Vigat*), ed. Bhati, N.S., vol. I, Rajasthan Prachyavidya Pratishthan, Jodhpur, 1968, pp. 23-27 and pp. 146-47.

² *Tankha* jagirs were revenue assignments granted to mansabdars in lieu of, or as part of, their remuneration for imperial service. Since such assignments remained subject to imperial transfer and did not confer proprietary rights over the land, they constituted an important instrument of both fiscal administration and political control.

³ Sharma, G.D., *Rajput Polity: A study of Politics and administration of the state of Marwar (1638-1749)*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2020, pp. 30-31; See also, Sethia, M.T., *Rajput Polity*:

Warriors, Peasants and Merchants, Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 2003; Sato Masanori and Bhadani, B.L., *Economy and Polity of Rajasthan*, Publication Scheme, Jaipur, 2018, pp.1-29.

⁴ Ibid. (Sharma G.D.)

⁵ *Tappa* signified the sub-division of a pargana: a small tract or a sub-division of a region.

⁶ *Vigat*, vol. I, p.77. *Khalisa* applied to lands of which the revenue remained the property of the state; land or villages controlled directly by the state.

⁷ Ibid., vol.I, p.389 and p. 496, vol.II, p.72; Jodhpur-Khyat, vol.I, (*Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner*), p.97.

⁸ Ibid.,vol.II,p.73

⁹ Ibid., p.72.

¹⁰ Sharma, G.D., *Rajput Polity: A study of Politics and administration of the state of Marwar*, p.31.

¹¹ Ibid.