

**LIFE OF RAJA TODARMAL – HIS BRAVERY, HIS TAXATION POLICY, HIS PLACE  
OF BIRTH, AND HIS CASTE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper deals with the life of Raja Todarmal who was one of the nine gems in Akbar's court. Among other evidences presented, this work contains highlights about Todarmal in Akbarnama of Abul Fazl – all the three volumes. Todarmal's novel contribution that we know to-day is his Taxation Policies.

This work shows that he acquired valuable experience in the court of Sher Shah who had reformed the taxation system in India. Todarmal's approach was fair, reasonable and scientific.

This work also deals with his place of birth and his caste which have been widely debated amongst the Indian Historians.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Raja Todarmal was one of nine gems in Akbar's court, and his name appears very extensively in Akbarnama written by Abul-Fazl [1]. This book is written in three volumes. It provides us the information that Todarmal had acquired excellence in levying taxes on Akbar's subjects and his taxation system was arrived at on a fair and very scientific basis. Extensive use of statistics was made which we see for the first time in the Indian History.

Akbarnama has been written in chronological order. The year is stated in Islamic calendar where the first year of the Islamic year begins in AD 622 during when the emigration of the Islamic prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, known as the Hijra, occurred

One can find many articles, papers etc [2-4] written about Raja Todarmal. The objective of this paper is to provide the readers with the description that exists in the original source but which however, is a voluminous document. Here, the authors have sifted through the Akbarnama as translated by Beveridge [1] and are presenting the salient points about Todarmal...

The paper also discusses the reasons or the causes of Raja Todarmal's excellent experience in the kingdom of Sher Shah, a very progressive ruler of India as far as his subjects were concerned. Raja Todarmal's service in Sher Shah's court was first then he joined the service of Akbar.

## **2. TODARMAL IN SHER SHAH'S COURT**

Sher Shah's father, Mian Hasan's jagir (vassal-land), consisting of the parganas of Sasaram and Khawaspur-Tanda, was situated in district Of old Shahabad but presently Rohtas and Kaimur, in South Bihar. In the neighborhood were the Doda branch of the Paramars of Ujjain in Rohtas .

Sasaram, the home and headquarters of Mian Hasan, is now a small town and has a railway station of the modern Eastern Railway on the Grand Chord line. About 25 miles due south of Sasaram lies the mighty fort of Rohtas.

Sher Shah's name was Farid Khan at birth and used to have problems with his step mothers in his childhood. So, he left his father's house and had gone to Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh. Later on, he came back to Sasaram and was asked to look after his father's jagir.

Sher Shah Suri's (1486 –1545 ) was Farid Khan at birth. When he slew a tiger then his name became Sher Khan [5]. Sher means a tiger in Urdu or Hindi. He was the founder of the Suri Empire in North India, with its capital at Delhi. An ethnic Pashtun, Sher Shah took control of the Mughal Empire in 1540 after defeating Moghul king Humayun. After his accidental death in 1545 while sieging the Kalinjar fort , his son, Islam Shah, became his successor.

Sher Shah first served as a private before rising to become a commander in the Mughal army under Babur and then as the governor of Bihar. In 1537, when Babur's son Humayun was elsewhere on an expedition, Sher Khan overran the state of Bengal and established the Suri dynasty.

He was a brilliant strategist, a gifted administrator as well as an able general. His reorganization of the empire laid the foundations for the later Mughal emperors, notably

Akbar the Great, son of Humayun. Akbar's system of administration continues to a large extent in to-day's India after several evolutions during the British rule.

During his five year rule from 1540 to 1545, he set up:

- ( I ) A new civic and military administration,
- ( ii ) Issued the first Rupiya ( currency ),
- (iii) Re-organised the postal system of India,
- (iv) Developed Humayun's Dina-panah city and named it Shergarh
- (v) Revived the historical city of Pataliputra as Patna which had been in decline since the 7th century CE, and
- (vi) Repaired and revived the Grand Trunk Road from Chittagong in Bangladesh to Peshawar in Pakistan.

Many think that he built the Grand Trunk Road for the first time but the authors think that building the entire stretch of highway system in five year's rule is not possible. This highway must have pre-existed Sher Shah's time. He did want to link Sasaram, his initial capital, to Agra, the capital of Moghuls. Fig. 1 shows his tomb at Sasaram and the Grand Trunk Road passes right in front of this tomb.

During the era of Sher Shah Suri, the this highway had caravan - sarais (highway inns) at regular intervals, and trees were planted on both sides of the road for shade for the travellers [6]. There are some well-maintained water wells along the road in Taxila ( now in Pakistan) which were built for travellers during this period. The road had milestones along the whole stretch. Some of these milestones can still be seen along the present Delhi-Ambala highway.

### **3. ADMINISTRATION OF SHER SHAH SURI [7-9]**

His empire was divided into 42 Sarkars each of which was again subdivided into Parganas. There were four ministers appointed and they were in-charge of day- to-day routine work of administration.

Land was surveyed on a uniform system, each holding being separately measured. The assessments were liberal yet the collections were strict;1/3rd of the

gross produce of land was taken as revenue. People could pay the taxes in kind or cash.

The rights of the tenants were duly recognized and the responsibilities were clearly defined in the kabuliyat (deed of agreement), which the state took from him ( the tenant), and the patta (title-deed), which it gave to him in return.

Remissions of rents were made, and probably loans were advanced to the tenants in case of damage to crops caused by the encampment of soldiers, or the insufficiency of rain [8]. These revenue reforms increased the resources of the State and at the same time were conducive to the interest of the people. The importance of Sher Shah's land revenue administration lies in the fact that his system carried the earlier system a step further and helped the evolution of Akbar's revenue administration.

Sher Shah also introduced various other reforms. He introduced a reformed system of currency. The silver rupee of 180 grams containing 175 grains of pure silver became the standard coin. Secondly, to facilitate movement of the troops and of goods in commerce, Sher Shah improved the Grand Trunk Road which ran from East Bengal to Peshawar. He also built several other routes. He is also said to have built 17,000 rest houses for the travelers. Thirdly, Sher Shah introduced a system of horse-posts or mail service carried by the horses for civil and administrative uses.

Todarmal, prior to becoming a celebrity under the reigns of Akbar as Raja Todarmal, was groomed in Sher Shah's administration. Whether, he did any finance and revenue related works with Sher Shah is not clear, but it is believed that he acquired considerable experience in revenue affairs.

Todarmal was selected in Lahore after Sher Shah's victory - to construct the famous Rohtas fort. This selection by Sher Shah was based on Todarmal's capability [10].

#### **4. TODARMAL IN AKBAR'S COURT [1]**

Akbarnama very vividly describes bravery and competence of Todarmal. Akbar ascended the throne in the year 1556 (first year)

When Akbar was busy with his warfare in Gujarat, Daud Khan, an Afghan, of Bengal invaded Jamania near Ghazipur. The Afghan army captured the Jamania fort. Akbar ordered the governor of Jaunpur, Munim Khan, to proceed against Daud.

In the 19th year (1574 AD), Todarmal under Munim Khan was ordered by Akbar to Bengal after the conquest of Patna. In the battle with Daud Khan when Khan Alam had been killed, and Munim Khan's horse had run away still Todarmal held his ground bravely, and achieved victory.

After settling several financial matters in Bengal and Orissa, Todarmal went to the Akbar's court, and was employed in revenue matters.

In the 21st year (1576), he took the spoils of Bengal to court, among them were 3 to 400 elephants. In the following year, he was again sent to Gujarat, while arranging matters with Vazir Khan at Ahmedabad, Muzaffar Husain, at the instigation of Mihr Ali Kolabi, rebelled. Vazir Khan proposed to retreat to the fort, but Todarmal was ready to fight, and defeated Muzaffar in the 22nd year, near Dholqah, which lies 12 kose (there are approximately two miles to a kose) from Ahmadabad. Vazir Khan would have lost this battle, if Todarmal had not come to his assistance. Muzaffar, after his defeat, fled to Junagarh. In the same 22nd year, Todarmal was appointed a Vazir (minister).

When the news of Muzaffar's death and the occupation of the whole of Bengal and Bihar by the rebels reached Akbar, he sent Todarmal, Sadiq Khan, Tarson Khan, from Fatehpur Sikri to Bihar. Muhibb Ali, Governor of Rohtas, and Muhammad Maqum Khan Farankhudi were appointed auxiliaries. The latter joined the Raja with 3000 well equipped horse. The Bengal rebels, under Maqum i Kabulí, the Qaqshals, and Mirza Sharafuddin Husain, with 30,000 horse, 500 elephants, and many ships and artillery, had collected near Munghyr, and Todarmal, from fear of treachery among his auxiliaries, shut himself up in the fort of Munghyr, instead of risking a general engagement. During the siege, two of his officers, Humayun Farmili and Tarkhan Diwanah, joined the rebels. Though suffering from want of provisions, Todarmal held himself bravely, especially as he received timely remittances from court. After the siege had lasted for some time, Baba Khan Qaqshal died, and Jabari, son of Majnun Khan Qaqshal left. The rebel army dispersed; Maqum i Kabulí went to South Bihar, and Arab Bahadur made a surprise move to Patna, and took possession of the Imperial treasury,

which Pahaṛ Khan had safely kept in the fort of that town. After sending Maqum i Farankhudí to Patna, to assist Pahaṛ Khan, Todarmal and Sadíq Khan followed Maqum i Kabulí to Bihar. Macum made a fruitless attempt to defeat Sadíq Khan in a sudden night attack, but had to retreat; he found a ready asylum with Isa Khan, a zamíndar of Oṛíssa. Todarmal thus reported to Akbar that South Bihar, as far as Gaṛhí, was re-annexed to the Dehli empire.

In the 27th year (1586), Todarmal was made Díwan, or rather Vakíl. During this year he introduced his financial reforms which have made him so famous. The third book ( Volume 3 ) of the Akbarnama contains his new rent-roll, which superseded Muzaffar's assessment.

The most important reform introduced by Todarmal is the change in the language and the character used for the revenue accounts. Formerly they had been kept in Hindí by Hindu Muharrirs (clerks). Todarmal ordered that all government accounts should henceforth be written in Persian. He thus forced his co-religionists to learn the court language of their rulers—a circumstance which may well be compared to the introduction of the English language in the courts of India. The study of Persian therefore became necessary for its pecuniary advantages.

Due to the Todarmal's order, and Akbar's generous policy of allowing Hindus to compete for the highest honors, Man Singh was appointed the first commander of seven thousand. Before the end of the 18th century, the Hindus had almost become the Persian teachers of the Muhammadans; secondly, that a new dialect could arise in upper India, the Urdu, which without the Hindus as receiving medium, never could have been called into existence. Whether we attach more influence to Todarmal's order or to Akbar's policy, before the times of Akbar, the Hindus, as a rule, did not study Persian, and stood therefore politically below their Muhammadan rulers.

In the 29th year ( 1585), Akbar honored him by paying him a visit.  
In the 32nd year(1587), a Khatrí, due to private hatred, wounded Todarmal.

When Raja Bírbal had been killed in the war with the Yusufzaís, Todarmal. was ordered to accompany Man Singh, who had been appointed commander-in-chief. In the 34<sup>th</sup> year ( 1589) , when Akbar went to Kashmír, Todarmal. was left in charge of Lahore. Soon after, he applied for leave to go to the banks of the Ganges, as he was old and

wished to die on the banks of Ganga. Akbar let him go; but he recalled him from Hardwar, and told him that looking after his duties was more virtuous than sitting on the banks of the Ganga. Todarmal unwillingly returned, but died soon after, on the 11th day of the Muslim year 998 (November 1589).

## **5 AKBAR'S TAXATION [11]**

Akbar set about reforming the administration of his empire's land revenue by adopting a system that had been used by Sher Shah Suri. A cultivated area where crops grew well - was measured and taxed through fixed rates based on the area's crop and productivity. However, this placed hardship on the peasantry because tax rates were fixed on the basis of prices prevailing in the imperial court, which were often higher than those in the countryside. Akbar changed to a decentralized system of annual assessment, but this resulted in corruption among local officials and was abandoned in 1580, to be replaced by a system called the dahsala. Under the new system, revenue was calculated as one-third of the average produce of the previous ten years, to be paid to the state in cash.

This system was later refined, taking into account local prices, and grouping areas with similar productivity into assessment circles. Remission was given to peasants when the harvest failed during times of flood or drought. Akbar's dahsala system is credited to Raja Todarmal, who also served as a revenue officer under Sher Shah Suri and the structure of the revenue administration was set out by the Todarmal in a detailed memorandum submitted to the emperor in 1582-83.

Other local methods of assessment continued in some areas. Land which was fallow or uncultivated was charged at concessional rates. Akbar also actively encouraged the improvement and extension of agriculture. The village continued to remain the primary unit of revenue assessment. Zamindars of every area were required to provide loans and agricultural implements in times of need; to encourage farmers to plough as much land as possible and to sow seeds of superior quality. In turn, the zamindars were given a hereditary right to collect a share of the produce. Peasants had a hereditary right to cultivate the land as long as they paid the land revenue. While the

revenue assessment system showed concern for the small peasantry, it also maintained a level of distrust towards the revenue officials. Revenue officials were guaranteed only three-quarters of their salary, with the remaining quarter dependent on their full realisation of the revenue assessed.

Todarmal became the finance officer (Mushrif-i-Diwan) of Akbar in 1575 and Diwan-i-kul (Chief Finance Minister) in 1582 and introduced the reforms also known as Todarmal's rent roll, the book of land records in Mughal Empire [12].

Raja Todar Mal is best known for introduction of the following reforms:

1. Land measurements
2. Dahasala System
3. Karori / Crori System [13]

In the Karori system all the Parganas and fiscal unions of the nation were measured and every piece of land which produced revenue worth 1 crore was placed under the officer known as Crori.

The result was not good as expected. Much of the land was waste and the cruelty of the Croris made the peasants sell their wives and children. The rules were made but were not monitored. Many people lost lives due to torture of the revenue officers.

## **6 PLACE OF BIRTH AND CASTE OF TODARMAL**

Agrawal writes that Todarmal belonged to a Khatri family of the town of Laharpur in the modern Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh [14].

However, there is a general agreement about his place of birth but the question of caste remains unresolved even to-day as is evident from the minutes of the Asiatic Society going back to 1871-1872, shown in Appendices A and B where these two issues were discussed.

As we have seen in the discussions in these appendices as well as Todarmal's assignments at Lahore in Sher Shah and Akbar's time, the confusion about his being a Khatri has arisen.

It is agreed that he was born in Laharpur but his caste remains debatable as Kayasthas come from Uttar Pradesh where Laharpur is located at. Kayasthas have been employed in civil services of kings much before Akbar's time. This is why the Britishers had doubts or uncertainty about his caste. On the other hand, the discussions point to Todarmal being from a Khatri community also.

In a nut shell , the evidences presented about his caste are not solid but mostly hearsay.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

Raja Todarmal began his career in Sher Shah's court and acquired valuable experience in the matter of taxation. After the defeat of Afghans, he joined Akbar's court where he had varied assignments. He proved to be a very capable administrator and a brave military commander. He was a trusted vazir of Akbar where he rose from being a clerk in the beginning.

He came up with his taxation document in 1582 and was written after considerable experiences in Sher Shah's and Akbar's courts.

His place of birth and his caste were not mentioned in Akbarnama. His place of birth is generally agreed by historians to be Laharpur in the district of Sitapur but difference in opinion exists about his caste which could be either a Khatri or a Kayastha; no conclusive evidence about his caste is known to the historians until to-day.

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## APPENDIX A [15]

Col. G. E. Evezard, Magistrate of Poona, proposed by Mr. W. T. Blanford, seconded by Dr. F. Stoliczka.

Col. A. D. Dickens has tendered his resignation as a member of the Society.

The following letters were read —

*From M. L. Ferrar, Esq., O. S., Seetapore, Audh, regarding the birthplace of Rajah Todar Mall.*

*" In Fase. IV, of your translation of the Ain Akbari, you record that Rajah Todar Mall was born at Lahor. Would you kindly inform me which of the native Historians gives his biography. I ask this, as the people of Laharpur, a large town of 11000 inhabitants in the parganah of the same name, in this district (Sitapur) and included in the Ain Akbari in ' Sirkar Khairabad' all believe that he was a native of their town. I am inclined to think that they have good grounds for their belief, for in the first place the Rajah was not a mythical personage, like Ram Chandr or king Birat, whose birthplace is claimed by many places—and secondly, hard by Laharpiir is Rajdapur, called after the Rajah, and having a yearly mela in his honour. At the present time, there is a large community of K'hattris (the Rajah's caste) at Laharpiir. I think the point is worth clearing up"*

*Mr. Blochmann said—*

*On the receipt of Mr. Ferrar's letter, I looked up several MS. histories, and found that the Maasir Ul Umara and the Tafrih ul Imarat call the Rajah a Lahauri. The Maasir must have derived ' his information from the Akbarnamah, though I have not yet*

*found a passage in that work, where the Rajah's birthplace is given. I then asked Mr. Ferrar, to obtain more particulars regarding Todar Mall's father, who is not mentioned in the histories, as I thought that the Laharpuri Rajah might be the Todar Mall Shdhjahdni, a distinguished Hindu courtier of Shahjahan's time. But the Laharpuris evidently mean Akbar's renowned minister of finances. Mr. Ferrar replied."*

*I will make more enquiries from the Laharpur people about Todar Mall, and shall let you know the result of them. Meanwhile, and since my last, I have been informed by a respectable Brahmins of that place that Todar Mall's father was a \* Panjabi K'hatri,' and came and married the daughter of a Chapari K'hatri. in Laharpur, where the son was born. The latter seems to have lived there during his boyhood.*

*" Laharpiir contained 11000 inhabitants in 1869—and probably 15000 in the Nawbi. It takes its name from Lahari Mall, a Passi, who 500 years ago invaded the surrounding country. Up to then it had been known as ' Tughluqpur,' having been founded by the Emperor Firoz Tughluq (1357—1388, A. D.), who passed through there on his way to the Bahraich shrine of Sayyid Salar. I hope that we may be able to settle the birthplace of such a notable personage as R. Todar Mall was."*

## **APPENDIX B [16,17]**

‘Láhūrpūr was originally Láhúrpūr (لاهور پور), shortened into Láhūrp and now very commonly called still shorter Lahūrpūr. The name is spelled in the first manner in a sanad granted by Todar Mall himself to the ancestors of the present Qánúngo.

‘Todar Mall’s only son, Dhárú Mall, was slain in battle, and died without issue. And there are no descendants of the Rájah, on either side, existing in Láhūrpūr.

‘There can be no doubt whatever that the local belief is correct; the man was not a mythical hero, but a veritable officer of King Akbar. Strange that in a note to Elphinstone’s History of India, fifth edition, page 510, he is said to have been a Káyath!’

Mr. Blochmann said—

Mr. Ferrar’s first letter regarding Todar Mall, which was published in the Proceedings for September, 1871, (p. 178), has been read with some interest in Láhōr, and Maulawí Muhammad Husain of the Láhōr College lately wrote a note on this subject to Bábú Rájendralála Mitra, of which I shall read a few extracts in translation.

1. The opinion generally received in Upper India is, that Todar Mall was a K’hatrí of Láhōr. Elphinstone calls him a Káith; but the syllable *Mall* in Todar Mall’s name renders this altogether impossible.

2. There is a Mahallah in Ágrah, where the funeral ceremonies (ماونى) are held by all K’hatrís, and every one there knows that it was the Mahallah where Todar Mall used to live. In fact he had chosen his residence there in order to be present at funeral ceremonies of members of his caste.

3. Todar Mall’s name often occurs in old popular songs in which he is invariably called a Ṭunan (ٹنن) K’hatrí of Láhōr.

4. An old Bráhmaṇ of Láhōr says that one of his ancestors had been a Purohit to Todar Mall. The Bráhmaṇ had often heard from his father that Todar Mall’s father was a Tunan K’hatrí of Láhōr; he had been a very poor man, and used to sell *g’hungní* in the streets. Once Akbar’s *Mámú*\* had made a conspiracy to murder the Emperor, and Todar Mall’s father had given information to Akbar’s mother, to which fact Todar Mall owed his promotion.

5. The *Maásirul Umará* clearly states that he was a Ṭunan K’hatrí of Láhōr.† There are also several buildings in Láhōr and a tank, ascribed to Todar Mall.

Thus, it will be seen that the people of Láhōr are not willing to rest their claim on Todar Mall. On the other side, the fact that Todar Mall first served Akbar in Audh may be looked upon as supporting Mr. Ferrar’s account.



**FIG. 1 SHER SHAH'S TOMB AT SASARAM  
COURTESY - PRADIP SHARAN**