

**PATNA –AZIMABAD AS SOCIO-CULTURAL
CENTRE (PART-2)
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PATNA –AZIMABAD AS SOCIO-CULTURAL CENTRE

The town got a new name-Azimabad- and increased eminence towards the end of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's reign (1658-1707), and during the *subahdari* of his favourite grandson Prince Azim (d. 1712). The prince got the emperor's permission to rename the town after himself, around 1704. It may be clarified here that the new name was after the Prince's personal name, Azim, not his title, '*Azimu's Shan*', which he got later in the reign of his father Bahadur Shah (1707-12). The *pargana* was also re-named Azimabad , as was the name of the mint. Coins bearing the now mint town, Azimabad, are still available from the year 1705-06 onwards.

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The Prince got many public buildings constructed or renovated , established charitable institutions and *sarais* (inns), and encouraged eminent scholars and skilled persons to come and settle in the town. He is said to have made administrative arrangements from the division of the town into different wards, named after the people of different racial groups living there, such as *Lodikatra*, *Mughalpura*, etc. or the professional groups settled there, such as *Zargartola* (embroidery workers' quarters), *Mir Shikar Toli* (Bird-Hunters, Falconers, etc.).

The Prince wanted to make Azimabad ‘**a second Delhi**’ . Due to the political upheavals (1707-22) and the blood-bath

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at Delhi(1738-39 , Nadir Shah's sack of Delhi), there was exodus from there, and part of it flowed down to Azimabad. The town acted as a magnet to the indigent as well as the adventurous. The period witnessed some sort of cultural renaissance. Many eminent scholars, poets, sufis, historians and anthologists came and settled in the town. Among the more eminent personages, mention may be made of the famous historian Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabataba'i and Nawab Ali Ibrahim Khan. A more famous name, though belonging to an earlier period, was that of Abdul Qadir, poetically named Bedil (1646-1720). Several non-Muslim scholars and administrator too achieved excellence in Persian and distinguished themselves in different fields.

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The *Diwan* (Collection of poems) of Raja Ram Narain, poetically named Mauzun who was *na'ib nazim* of Bihar and a disciple of famous persian poet , Hazin, and the history of Raja Kalyan Singh , *Khulasatut Tawarikh*, are well known. There were others whose works have remained unpublished, or are known only to us through stray references. They were among the finest products of the of the composite Indo-Persian culture of which Azimabad was a notable centre. Even after the high tide of glory had passed away, Mulla Ahmad Bahbahani , a visitor from Persia, wrote admiringly at the end of the 19th century, about the scholarship and urbanity of the scions of some of these families.

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A new phase began in the town's history after 1740. From his base at Azimabad, Nawab 'Alivardi Khan Mahabat Jung' (governed Bihar, and then Bengal-Bihar, 1734-1756) founded the virtually independent Nawabship of Bengal after defeating Nawab Sarfaraz Khan, grandson and successor of Nawab Murshid Quli Jafar Khan. He appointed his nephew and son-in-law, Zainuddin Khan Haibat Jung as his deputy in Bihar. Haibat Jung governed ably well (1740-48) but the period of his *nai'b nizamat* (deputy governorship) was like the proverbial last glow of flickering lamp. He was assassinated and Azimabad put to plunder by a section of his disaffected soldiers and commanders.

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Cut away from Delhi's control, Bihar got drawn into vortex of mid 18th century Bengal politics. The British won the crucial Battle of Plassey (1757) and fugitive Mughul heir-apparent Ali Gauhar , later crowned as Shah ,Alam II (1759-1803) came to Azimabad in a bid to seize the town and proclaim his sovereignty. His attempts were thwarted by Raja Ram Narain who was helped by the East India Company troops. A better coordinated attempt by the Prince, joined in by the Nawabs of Bengal Mir Qasim, and that of Awadh, Shujau'ddaula was decisively crushed in the Battle of Buxar (1764). There followed the Grant of *Diwani* (right to collect land-revenue) of Bengal, Bihar and

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Orissa(1765) which marks the virtual end of Mughul rule in Bihar –Bengal.

During the early period of British rule Bihar became a sub-province of the sprawling and populous Presidency of Bengal. Azimabad, now more frequently called Patna, as the seat of a Circuit Commissioner and Lieutenant – Governor got pushed away from the foreground , politically and administratively. Still later, the laying of the railway line , (built in this section in 1862) affected the river-borne goods traffic, one of the bases of the town's prosperity and importance . This, however, is another story deserving a separate treatment. (concluded)