



had built, as if in supreme defiance of the imperial authority, only 13 miles south of Delhi ( $1\frac{3}{4}$  miles south of the Qutb minār.) Najaf's heavy fire drove the rustic garrison from the walls and the fortalice was taken by a single assault of infantry clambering over the mud walls sword in hand. In another quarter, a Jat detachment from Farrukhnagar attacking the *garhi* of Harsaru was defeated and despoiled by the Mirzā's lieutenant Najaf Quli Khan, on 5th October.\*

Marching from Delhi by way of Bārapula and Badarpur, Najaf Khan reached Ballabgarh, 25 miles south of the capital. Here he received a highly important accession to his strength in the person of Ajit and Hirā Singh, the dispossessed heirs of the founder of that great fort,—the northernmost bulwark of the expanded Jat kingdom. They offered to assist the invaders with their local knowledge and influence if Najaf Khan would promise to restore their patrimony to them after it had been wrested from the Jat Rajah's agents. The defection of such men at the very outset of the campaign "broke the waist of Nawal Singh's resolution", and he fell back from his first post at Bāwni-Kherā (six miles south of Palwal) to Baijchāri, nine miles further south,

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\* Maidangarhi.—*Ibrat*, i. 212 (year wrong.) G. Ali. iii. 34. *Chahar Gulzar*, 492b. Najaf's advance.—*DC*, *Ibrat*, i. 231-234. G. Ali. iii. 36-39. *Chahar Gulzar* 492b-493b. Muna Lal 151. *CPC*, iv. 628.





where he entrenched his camp. While Mirzā Najaf himself halted at Sikri-Fathpur Biloch, five miles south of Ballabgarh and nine miles north of Palwal, his captain Najaf Quli, newly arrived from his successful operations in Mewāt, was sent off with the vanguard (8th October) to clear the way. This captain advanced, daily fighting skirmishes and driving back the Jat patrols. Nowhere was any defence offered, and the villages in the north Jat territory lay helpless before the invaders. "As the autumn crop was then ripe, the Nawab's soldiers fed themselves and their horses on the standing millet crop along their route. They plundered every village that lay in their path, set fire to it, and carried off all the cattle and sheep &c., which they sold at low prices or ate; especially the beggarly Ruhelas of Mullā Rahim-dād, whose leanness turned into fatness from eating the plundered provisions, and whose appearance after being clothed in plundered apparel changed from the look of wild beasts to that of human beings." [*Ibrat*, i. 231, *Miskin* 290.]

So greatly were the Jat troops demoralised by the example of their craven chief that one day (10th October) they abandoned their camp at Banchāri in a ridiculous panic: "while they were at their midday meal, they mistook a dust cloud on the west for the approach of Najaf Khan's army and fled away in fear, leaving their entire camp standing. The cloud moved like a spiral. The



villagers of Banchāri, on seeing the helpless condition of the fugitives, looted their camp. On the news of this reaching Najaf Khan's encampment in the rear, every man went out of it and looted what remained of the Jat camp, and at night fell back to their own base." [*Ibrat*, 233-'34.] Nawal Singh took refuge near Kotban, 4 miles south of Hodal (and 8 miles s. e. of Banchāri),—amidst its abundance of jungles and broken ground.

Mirzā Najaf, profiting by the advice of his two Jat allies, decided not to attack Nawal Singh there, but to manœuvre him out of his position and force him to offer battle at a disadvantage. Leaving Kotban in his rear, he turned aside and marched sacking the villages in the Chhata and Sahar parganahs further south and east. Vast quantities of spoils in cash and kind were taken here. At this, Nawal Singh issued from Kotban to the plain east of Barsānā, 14 miles in the south. Najaf's base was now near Sahar, seven miles east of Barsānā.

§ 6. *Battle before Barsana ; Jat disaster.*  
*Fall of Kotban.*

After skirmishes for ten days, the decisive battle was fought on 30th October, midway between Sahar and Barsānā.\* This was the first

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\* Battle.—*Chahar Gulz.* 493b. *Ibrat.* i. 236-240. G. Ali iii 40-44. DC. CPC. iv. 638. Sack of Chhata, G. Ali iii : 38.





1773]

battle in Upper India (outside the Bengal Presidency) in which sepoy battalions drilled by Europeans and European-trained gunners were ranged on both sides. Hence the contest was prolonged and the mortality exceptionally heavy; the victors lost 2,300 men in killed and wounded, and the Jats about 2,000, but Sombre's battalions were severely cut up. The Jat army was thus drawn up:—a strong force (probably 5,000) of Nāgā monks armed with muskets under Bālānand Gosain on the left, Nawal Singh himself with his Jat clansmen in the centre, and nine battalions of sepoys under Sombre with their artillery on the right. The Jat Rajah's own guns were ranged in front of the centre and chained together for breaking cavalry attacks. The imperial right was formed by Rahim-dād Khan and his 5,000 Ruhelas; in the centre Najaf Quli was placed with the Mughalia horse; on the left four battalions of disciplined sepoys under Razā Beg Khan and Rahim Beg, commandants; the artillery formed the first line. Like a modern general Mirzā Najaf deviated from the old Indian practice, and mounted a fleet horse instead of an elephant, so as to be able to gallop to any threatened point and push up succours wherever needed. On his own elephant he placed Masum

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*Ch. Gulz.* 493a.) Sack of Mathura by Najaf Quli (*Ch. Gulz.* 494a.) *Ibrat.* names the battlefield *Shāhpur*, which I cannot find by local inquiry. (? Tatarpur).





Ali Khan, who was naturally mistaken by the enemy for the generalissimo and paid for the false personation with his life. Between the rival forces a dense plantation of tall millets intervened.

The battle began shortly after noon with an exchange of artillery fire which lasted for four hours. Then, with only one hour of sunlight remaining, the two sides closed together. The Ruhela infantry on the Mughal right charged the Nāgās, who fired volleys in succession; but the Ruhelas dodged the bullets by promptly falling down on the ground, then rising up and resuming their run, till they came up with the Nāgās before they could load again. After a bloody combat, the Nāgās broke with the loss of a thousand of their men. At the other end of the line the Emperor's sepoy battalions advanced against Sombre's. "The former had reserved their fire till they would come to close quarters, but fate did not give them the necessary time for it. The first salvo of Sombre's guns killed these two commandants, and their sepoys threw their muskets down and hid themselves among the tall crops." This was the crisis of the battle. But Najaf's superior generalship gave him the victory over the inert and timid Jat chief. The Mirzā, on seeing his left wing dissolved, galloped up to his centre and ordered that division (all cavalry) to charge the Jat centre. The Mughalia horse, cutting passages through the line of linked enemy guns in front, attacked Nawal Singh at the gallop.





Here the Rajputs and Jats offered a desperate defence. But Nawal Singh's heart failed him as usual, he fled away, and his centre division ceased to struggle any longer.

The victorious imperialists, including even their higher officers, at once dispersed for plunder, as the fabulously rich Jat royal camp was just behind the field of action. But the battle had not yet been won; Sombre maintained his position, forming his infantry into squares and working his guns in front. Under shelter of this disciplined force, Jodhrāj the Jat diwān formed his 500 horse ready for action. Najaf, mad with vexation at the disorderly conduct of his troops, with only a few personal attendants round him made a charge upon Jodhrāj's horse, carefully skirting Sombre's sepoy. He himself received a spear thrust which penetrated his armour and cut his left thigh open to the bone; but Jodhrāj was routed. Then only did Sombre withdraw from the field, his sepoy marching away with the utmost steadiness and order. They were saved by a splendid rearguard action fought by his French second-in-command, who coolly kept his place and repelled charge after charge of the Mughal horse by the discharge of his guns. At last Najaf Khan succeeded in hunting out a number of his plundering artillerymen and turned a gun upon the enemy, the second shot of which killed this gallant Frenchman. Then all resistance ceased; but there was no pursuit; discipline





and European leadership saved Samru's sepoys even in the midst of such a complete defeat.

The Mughal army now marched on to Nawal Singh's camp which had been left standing with its "wealth beyond imagination". The spoils included all the Jat artillery, elephants, horses and camels, besides money and apparel. The newly built city of Barsānā was sacked and reduced to a state of ruin which continued for more than a century. "The famished Mughalia troopers appeased their hunger no longer with the growing crops, but with good cooked meals." The imperialists halted at Barsānā for some days in order to attend to the many hundreds of their wounded comrades and to secure the unmanageably immense spoils of victory.

In the strategic moves before this battle, the imperialists had marched southwards along the eastern route from Hodal by Chhata and Sahar, leaving Kotban untaken behind them. But after the utter wreck of the Jat field force at Barsānā, Mirzā Najaf's first care was to secure his rear by sending a detachment under Rahim-dād against Kotban which was held by Sitārām, the father-in-law of Nawal Singh. Strong reinforcements arrived under Najaf Quli to assist in the siege. The place was now completely invested and its provision supply cut off. After 19 days, Sitārām silently evacuated it one night (end of November), and next morning the imperialists gained possession of it with all its guns and "immense quantities



of provisions powder and shot, tents, &c." [Ibrat, i. 240-'2. *Ch. Gulz.* 493b.]

§ 7. *Najaf Khan captures Agra fort.*

Thereafter the Mughal generalissimo gave up the plan of pursuing Nawal Singh and wasting months in the siege of his impregnable forts. He made a sharp turn to the east and arrived before Agra on 11th December. The city gave him peaceful possession as his firmness saved its people from plunder and molestation. He owed several months' pay to his army, but he nobly rejected the proposal of his lieutenant to wipe off his heavy debt by giving his soldiers licence to sack the city. The *fort* of Agra,\* however, held out under its Jat commandant, a brother of Dān Shāh. But even this great fortress of Akbar could make no prolonged defence, thanks to Najaf Khan's good fortune. This needs explanation.

By the treaty of Benares (7th Sept. 1773) Shujāuddaulah had secured from Warren Hastings an assurance of British armed aid in the defence of his own territory and in his projected annexation of Rohilkhand. The news of the murder of the Peshwa Narayan Rao whetted his

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\* Najaf's siege of Agra.—*DC.* Muna Lal 152. *G. Ali.* iii. 45-51. *Ibrat.* i. 245-249. *Ch. Gulzar* 493b. *CPC.* iv. 904. 907 (11) Etawa.—*CPC.* iv. 731, 736. *SPD.* xxix. 263.





appetite for extending his own dominions in the Doab by seizing the now defenceless Maratha possessions there. [CPC. iv. 584 & 626.] No interference was to be feared from the Deccanis, now entangled in their homeland for years to come. The Jat Rajah, left half dead by the Maratha expedition of 1770, was going to be crushed by Mirza Najaf Khan from Delhi. As the imperial attack developed, Nawal Singh made frantic appeals to Shujā—as he did to Zābita and every other enemy of Najaf—to save him. But the loyal service of Suraj Mal to Safdar Jang was forgotten; Shujā's one aim was to fish in these troubled waters and embark on a career of annexation, now that he was secure about his own realm. The Jat Rajah even offered to cede the fort of Agra to Shujā as the price of his aid in saving the rest of his kingdom from Najaf Khan. So, Shujā marched into the Doab with a large army and began to approach towards Agra, after wresting Etawa from its weak Maratha garrison (*circa* 15 Dec.) by a siege of four days.

But Najaf Khan's rapid and decisive success against the Jats foiled the Oudh Nawab's plans. His siege of Agra at first made no progress owing to his want of breaching guns, and he called on Shujā for help in the name of their common master and religion. In response, Shujā detached a large force with many sepoy battalions and heavy artillery in charge of Major Polier (a Swiss engineer of high capacity) and the eunuch Basant





Ali Khan, from the Doab. Taking over the siege trenches opposite the Shāh-burj, Polier heavily bombarded the fort. By the 8th of February 1774, five thousand balls had been fired on the walls. "The wall of the Bangala-burj was soon cracked and the stones began to roll down like tulip petals during a strong wind." The garrison lost heart, though they had already inflicted a loss of 300 men on the Mughal side. On 13th February the Jat commandant came out and interviewed Mirzā Najaf. Terms were quickly arranged and he agreed to vacate the fort in return for safety to life and property. He took back with himself a guard from Razā Beg's battalion, who set up the Emperor's flag and outpost at the fort gate. Safety was proclaimed to the inmates. In five days the fort was completely evacuated and Mirzā Najaf entered it, on 18th February. Shujā was baulked of his prey just in time.

At Shujā's request to the Emperor to join him in the expedition against the Pār Rubelas and divide the conquest equally with him, the Emperor sent Najaf Khan to the Nawab of Oudh for settling the terms and removing a certain misunderstanding created between Najaf and the Nawab by mischief-makers. The Mirzā met Shujā at Etawa on 27th Feb. and received a royal welcome, with gifts worth a lakh of Rupees and the offer of the deputy wazirship at the royal Court on his behalf. He was pressed to induce the Emperor to join the Rohilkhand expedition





in person and thus give the royal sanction to this war of aggression. Najaf hurried back to Delhi in the company of Shujā's agent Elich Khan (28 March.) The Emperor set out from his palace on 5th April, and proceeded as far as Ghāziabad when his own weak health and the severe illness of his favourite son Akbar Shah made him give up the journey and return (16 April.) Najaf Khan, however, was given *congee* for the Oudh Nawab's camp and actually set out from Shāhdara on the 22nd. But he was too late to be of any use to Shujā, who had crushed the Ruhelas at Mirān Katra on the 23rd of this very month. Najaf, after interviewing Shujā, came back to Delhi with empty hands (12 June.) The Emperor had done nothing for Shujā and could expect nothing from the spoils of Rohilkhand, though the imperial band in Delhi palace played joyous notes for this victory of his wazir over rebels to his throne!

We may here note other Jat losses at this time. The fort of Ballabgarh was captured from the Jat Rajah's garrison on 20th April 1774, and Farrukhnagar on 6th May. Worst of all, Sombre deserted the Jat service with his trained battalions and well-equipped artillery and came over to the Emperor on 20th May. He was sent to bring the Panipat district back to obedience. Next month René Madec joined Najaf Khan. [CPC. iv. 1184.]



§ 8. *How Abdul Ahad set the Emperor against Mirza Najaf.*

Meantime, Abdul Ahad Khan, after gaining unrivalled sway over the Emperor's mind, was playing a double game. He pointed out that all the conquests made by Mirza Najaf had merely aggrandised him without bringing the least gain in territory or revenue to the Emperor, though the Emperor's personal troops had cooperated with Najaf's in making these acquisitions. The Emperor's poverty had, in fact, only deepened in consequence of Najaf's adventures.\* The districts round Delhi, north and west, which had formerly belonged to the privy purse, as well as the recent conquests from the Jats, namely south and south-west of Delhi and in the middle Doab, had all been appropriated by the Mirzā's officers on the plea of providing their soldiers' pay. At the same time the rapid growth of Najaf's armed forces and military prestige, after his brilliant victory over Zābita and Nawal Singh, constituted a serious danger to the Emperor's security. What if this Persian adventurer should

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\* In June 1774 the Emperor wrote to Col. Champion that during the last three years the income from his territories had shrunk to 12 or 14 lakhs annually, and that the recent Sikh raids and drought had reduced the collection of revenue still further. [CPC. iv. 1152.] His household expenses were Rs. 1½ lakhs and that of his guards &c. over 2¼ lakhs a month. [*Ibid.* 913.]





imitate Najibuddaulah, appropriate all the forces and revenue of what still remained of the Empire, and reduce the Emperor to the position of an impotent beggar dependent on his vassal's charity? Then Shah Alam would be even worse off than he had been under the regency of Najib-ud-daulah,—because he had now broken with the English, destroyed the bridge for his return to their shelter, and lost the annual tribute of 26 lakhs promised by them. Mirzā Najaf was a Shia and a kinsman of the Nawab of Oudh. Oudh was now insured against all danger by British bayonets, its territory had expanded northwards up to the Himalayas by the recent annexation of Rohilkhand and westwards across the Ganges into the Etawa district of the Doab, within easy reach of Agra. Mirza Najaf, though once threatened with death by Shujā, had now made up with him and become his favourite. What was more natural than for these two Shias to join forces together, march upon Delhi, and reduce the Emperor to bondage as the Sayyid brothers,—Shias like them—had done sixty years earlier?

Abdul Ahad fomented these suspicions of the timid Emperor. He suggested, as a counterpoise to Najaf, the raising of Zābita Khan to the imperial Paymastership and actual control of the Delhi army. He forgot that Zābita was a broken reed, as the utter extinction of his power by the Marathas in 1772 had proved. Zābita was





presented to the Emperor by Abdul Ahad on 9th October 1773 and kept at Court for some time during Najaf Khan's absence on the Jat war. But he realised that he could do nothing to counteract Mirzā Najaf or spoil his Jat enterprise; so he retired to his jagir on 22nd November, leaving his son behind as his agent. Soon afterwards (January 1774) the Ruhela chief was kept busy by the Sikh raids into the upper Doab, and could return to the Court only on the same day as Najaf Khan (12th June).

§ 9. *Najaf stays in Delhi, counteracting Court intrigues.*

From 12th June 1774 to 21st April 1775 Mirza Najaf remained in Delhi; all his energy paralysed by Court intrigues, and the utmost he could do was to keep his head above the water. The Emperor demanded from him (i) a division of his new conquests with his sovereign, (ii) the delivery of Agra fort to the Emperor's nominee, and (iii) the reduction of his army to a number consistent with his rank as a servant. The other causes of friction were (iv) Najaf Khan's wilful use of the Chancellor's seal (entrusted to him by Shujā who had made him Deputy Wazir) and granting sanads for lands and offices without consulting the sovereign, and (v) his seduction of Sombre from the Emperor's service to his own.





Throughout August 1774 discussions on these points went on between the two sides, without any result. Early in September the Mughalia captains made a friendly intervention; Najaf agreed to give up a share of the conquered lands and the keys of Agra fort to the Emperor, who promised in return to confirm him in the post of Deputy Wazir; these captains stood security for Najaf's fulfilment of his conditions. But this settlement proved a hollow truce; the quarrel broke out afresh as Abdul Ahad taxed his hated rival with breach of faith and usurpation of Crownlands, seduction of the royal troops and the raising of inordinate forces.\* One day (*circa* 15 Oct.) Mirzā Najaf was insulted by the imperial guards, who under Ahad's general orders refused him admission into the fort of Delhi when he came to attend the *darbār*. [*CPC*. iv. 1359.] For two months after this the Mirzā sulked in his mansion, keeping away from the Court altogether. At last (22 Dec.) the Emperor brought the two ministers together and reconciled them in his presence. They exchanged visits; but the agreement was merely superficial and the mutual bickerings broke out again. Abdul Ahad had brought Zābita to Court

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\* Long list of charges against Najaf. *CPC*. iv. 1360. Also 973, 912, 1184 (has raised too vast an army.) Shuja defends Najaf, 1362.





once more on 18th November, and sent imperial letters inviting the Sikhs and the Marathas to the Presence for entering the royal service and reconquering the lost dominions. All these plots failed through the Kashmiri's weakness of nerve and lack of political insight. If the Mirzā was to be crushed it could be done only by a rival capable of taking the field at the head of a superior army. Abdul Ahad had no stomach for warfare; he could not leave Delhi and Waziran, a professional dancing-girl whom he had married and who was the only solace of his grey beards; so, he went on weaving very fine cobwebs of intrigue and moving his pawns like Zābita and the Sikhs on the political chess-board for checkmating his martial rival, who merely laughed when these plots were reported to him by his spies. Zābita left the Court on 16 Jan. 1775, and the Sikhs employed that winter in raiding the lands of loyal subjects of the Empire and rebellious vassals with equal vigour.

Early in the year 1775 Mirzā Najaf fell ill and was confined to bed for months together. The Emperor paid him a visit of consolation on 4th April. On the 21st of the same month, Najaf, being somewhat recovered, left Delhi on his second Jat campaign. He had already drawn to his side Sombre and Madec with their regular battalions and improved artillery, and soon afterwards received the adhesion of the Comte





de Modave, though this last partisan leader could raise no force of his own.\*

§ 10. *Najaf invades Jat-land again, 1775.*  
*First stage of campaign: capture of*  
*Kama; victory and reverse.*

Mirzā Najaf's second Jat campaign (1775-1776) need not be described in detail, though we possess full accounts of it, unequalled by any other Indian war, from the pens of two eyewitnesses,—the graphic memoir-writer Tahmāsp Khan Miskin and that highly cultured keenly observant and marvellously acute European critic the Comte de Modave.

From his sick bed in Delhi Mirzā Najaf had sent his trusted lieutenants Afrāsiyāb Khan and Najaf Quli Khan into the middle Doab and Mewāt respectively for attacking the Jat possessions there. The former conquered parganahs Sadabad, Jewar &c., and after a three months' siege secured the capitulation of Rāmgarh, the strongest Jat fort in the Doab, by a money composition (April 1775), and named it Aligarh after the patron saint of these Shias. At exactly the same time, on the south-western front Najaf Quli captured the fort of Kāmā belonging to Jaipur, by a reckless assault under his subordinate Mullā

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\* DC. *Ibrat*. i. 250-251. G. Ali iii. 50-58. Muna Lal 158-162. CPC. iv. 1241, 1267, 1277, 1291 (besides those cited before.)





Rahim-dād and other Ruhelas. At the latter place a contribution of 25 lakhs was exacted from the rich traders who had taken shelter there.

The loss of Kāmā roused the Rajah of Jaipur; he formed an alliance with the Jat Rajah and hired a few thousand Maratha horse who had been left in Hindustan to collect tribute, and directed this vast force to recover Kāmā at any cost. The danger brought Mirza Najaf from Delhi to the scene; he recalled his detachments from the Doab and encamped near Barsānā. The Jats, on their part, advanced from Dig and entrenched a position some miles south of the imperialists. After petty skirmishes for some days, a battle on a larger scale took place on 18th May, when some 3,000 Mughal horse advanced without their commander too far into a defile near the enemy's position and were heavily outnumbered and hard pressed by the enemy. After some exchange of musket fire they effected a safe retreat, though pursued by the Marathas and Rajputs. The total loss on the two sides mounted up to a thousand men, besides hundreds of horses. However, the Jat army was eventually forced to take refuge in the fort of Dig and could not be tempted to come out.\*

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\* Najaf's second Jat campaign—Modave (tr. by me in *Bengal Past & Present*, 1936.) Madec's *Mémoire*. DC. G. Ali iii. 59-60, 87-92. Miskin 303-314, 317-320. Muna Lal 162-165, 172. *Ibrat*. i. 261-274, 276-285. *CPC*. iv. 1886. v. 306, 370.



Nawal Singh lay dying of a long illness and the Jat defence was conducted by his younger brother Ranjit Singh. During this interval Sombre's diplomacy succeeded; he had opened negotiations with the Jaipur leaders and very quickly effected a settlement, the Rajputs agreeing to abandon the cause of the Jats and march away on condition of Kāmā being restored to them in return for Rupees seven lakhs to be paid down and a promise of eleven lakhs of tribute to the imperial Government every year. [Modave 256.] The fort of Kāmā with its environs had been promised by the Mughal general to Rahim-dād Khan as an incentive to his efforts for its capture, but after the conquest the promise was not kept and the fort was handed back to the Rajputs. Rahim-dād in disgust went over to the Jats with his veteran Ruhela corps.

On 10th June the imperialists got a fine opportunity and promptly seized it. It was a holy day of the Hindus, being the tenth of the new moon in the month of Jyāishtha, and the Jat Rajah went from Dig to the sacred city of Govardhan for a ritual bath. His forces were strung out north of his route in order to guard against any enemy attack. Najaf Khan, who had got intelligence of this design, marched south from Barsānā in two divisions,—Madec with two battalions on the extreme right (i.e., west) bearing down upon Dig, and Najaf himself in the extreme left (east) bound for Govardhan, some seven miles





separating the two. The encounter took place at Guhāna, five miles north north-east of Dig. The hordes of Jat and Ruhela horse attacked Madec, but Afrāsiyāb Khan, detached from the Mughal left with reinforcements to Madec's corps, made a counter charge ; the enemy broke and fled, and the imperialists reunited and returned to their camp. Near Govardhan Najaf Khan too had achieved a victory, routing the enemy and capturing many horses, camels and carts from them. After this Nawal Singh's Rajput and Maratha allies totally forsook his sinking cause.

Mirzā Najaf Khan had arrived before Kāmā at the beginning of May. Here he had been joined by three battalions of trained sepoy from Oudh ; but these aids were recalled by their master after a short while. Mirzā Najaf, weakened by this loss, fell back some sixteen miles to Hodal. His soldiers, starving from their pay being in arrears, supported themselves by plundering the villages around, and "thus gained strength". Then he moved forward again and made Barsānā his permanent camp, sending out raiding parties towards Dig every day, as "there was not one Rupee in his coffers". In August he shifted his camp to Govardhan.

The rainy season had arrived already and put an end to active operations. But during this interval, René Madec was overwhelmed by disaster. He had gone to defend his jagir of Bāri, which had been invaded by Mullā Rahim-





dād in the Jat interest. Some ten miles from Fathpur-Sikri his rain-drenched troops were surprised by the Ruhelas (29th July) and routed with the loss of all their artillery, camp and equipage, and half his Europeans and 1,000 sepoys killed. The next two months he had to spend in building up and training a new contingent at Agra. [Barbé 231. Modave. *Ibr.*]

§ 11. *Ranjit Singh Jat recovers Dig from Rahim-dād's Ruhelas.*

Nawal Singh died on 10th August 1775, in the fort of Dig, while his brother was absent at Kumbher. The faithless Ruhela Rahim-dād, encamped under the walls of Dig, took advantage of the garrison being distracted by mourning for their late king, to seize the gate nearest to his camp and thus easily possessed himself of the whole city. Taking the infant Kesari Singh out of the royal harem he placed him on the throne, proclaimed himself regent, and appropriated all the stores and royal property in the capital. Nawal Singh's agents were driven out of their offices.

Ranjit Singh heard of the usurpation from his castle of Kumbher. He gathered his own retainers and the loyal Jat captains together, and hiring a body of 2,000 Maratha horse under Jaswant Rao Bāblé and some Nāgā monks, made a secret night march to Dig. He himself with his personal friends entered that fort by stealth





and hid himself. His Maratha and other troops from outside attacked the Ruhela camp under the fort walls early at dawn. Here the families and property of all the Ruhelas were lodged, and therefore Rahimdād naturally hastened there from the city to defend them. Then "Ranjit Singh showed himself to the public like the Sun rising above the horizon, and called all the Government officials in the city to his side. The Jat soldiers also came out of their hiding places, attacked the Afghans and drove them in groups, beating them with sticks like oxen or sheep." For, during their short ascendancy Rahim-dād's men had treated the local people with the usual Afghan insolence and rapacity, molesting even the women. Before the rising *en masse* of the people of Dig, the Ruhelas were ultimately overwhelmed, though they at first defended themselves with courage. At least four thousand men perished in the fight and the remnant of the Ruhela mercenaries escaped through the city gate nearest to them. But they left their general's son a prisoner and abandoned all their property to the Jats. Rahim-dād, too, had to sacrifice much of his camp baggage, and took the road to Delhi, where he was enlisted by Abdul Ahad Khan as a valuable instrument and sent to wrest the Crownlands in the Hansi-Hisar district which Mirzā Najaf's men held as fiefs, but which the Emperor wanted to resume. Here the faithless mercenary chief met with his deserts while be-





sieging Gohāna (18 miles north of Rohtak), being shot dead by the troops of Amar Singh of Pātiāla, who had been set against him by Najaf (*circa* 30th December, 1775.)

The rainy season concluded with Mirzā Najaf encamped near Farāh, midway between Agra and Mathura. Recalling his lieutenant Afrāsiyāb Khan from the Doab, at its end, he marched in full strength to Dig and laid siege to that fort (beginning of December).

§ 12. *Fort of Dig described.*

The fortified city of Dig,\* which was the favourite residence of the Jat Rajahs at this time, stands eight miles west of Govardhan. Excluding its south-western off-shoot, the sharp salient called Shāhburj, it forms a rough pentagon  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles across. It is surrounded by a rampart of beaten earth of a considerable width, rising to a height of nearly thirty feet. The entire northern and eastern and half the western faces are protected by a deep ditch. But the southern face does not need this artificial defence as it is naturally protected by a very wide morass, extending south-east for miles towards Govardhan. A few hundred feet west of it is a large and deep tank, running from the middle of the southern face

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\* Thorn, *Memoir of the War in India*, 413-414. Pester, *War and Sport in India*, 369. A fine plan in Martin's *Wellesley Despatches*.



of the fort for miles towards the south-west and skirted on its left by a range of low hills at the northernmost point of which stands the separate fort of Gopālgarh.

This Shāhburj crowns a rocky height at the northern end of a ridge, and is joined to the south-west corner of Dig by prolongations of the southern and western walls of the fort, enclosing a long and narrow angle. The Shāhburj is almost a fortress in itself, with a small area of about 50 yards square on the inside, and presenting four lofty bastions facing the four cardinal points. About one-third of a mile south of the Shāhburj, at the other end of the same ridge stands Gopālgarh, another square mud-fort with round bastions at the four corners. Between these two works lie the extensive royal gardens with a profusion of shady trees, oranges, myrtles and mangoes. Inside the fort are the Rajah's palace—"a very noble structure containing a fine hall of audience and other State apartments in a similar style of elegance," and a large and beautiful tank full of protected fish, a romantic garden, besides the usual crypts for burying the royal treasure,—a square citadel (a quarter of a mile across) surrounded by high and thick ramparts, three bastions on each face and a deep ditch faced with masonry and massy gateways and towers of considerable height. There were also the mansions of nobles and rich men, and a





crowded bazar (Jawāhir-ganj) necessary for supplying the needs of such a vast population.

§ 13. *Najaf Khan's siege of Dig.*

From its situation Dig could be attacked only from the plain south-west of it, as the English found out in 1804. Najaf Khan, anticipating Lord Lake's siege of exactly 29 years later, cut his first trenches in the same month and week as the British conqueror (the middle of December), opposite Gopālgarh and the Shāhburj.

The Mughals were singularly inept in conducting sieges by sap and breaching, and "the bizarreness and ignorance displayed in the Delhi army's operations" justly moved the cultivated French captain to a sneer: when they asked for his opinion, Modave "frankly replied that if apes attacked each other they would undoubtedly construct such siege-works." Half the Mughal army faced the Shāhburj, and the other half (under the supreme General himself) the outwork Gopālgarh.

A regular blockade of such a vast circle by his small force being impossible, Najaf Khan at first tried a *coup de main*. A body of Hindu warrior monks in the Jat service occupied the garden between the Shāhburj and Gopālgarh, from which position they used to make sallies, raid the siege-trenches or cut off grain convoys. Hence scarcity of provisions raged in the Mughal



camp. One day Mirzā Najaf attacked them in person. After a long and obstinate fight, in which many imperialists (including Najaf's favourite slave Khusrau Beg) were slain, these Nāgās were defeated. They removed themselves to within the fort, their deserted post was occupied by the Mughals, and Gopālgarh was thus isolated from the parent fort. "This victory struck such terror among the Jats that the garrison gave up coming out of the fort into the open country for bathing and other necessary purposes."

About the middle of January 1776 a night attack was attempted. René Madec was sent at midnight with seven companies of sepoys and three French officers to surprise a bastion flanking the Kāmā gate on the western face of the fort, north of the Shāhburj. Spies had reported to the Mughal general that this gate was negligently guarded by the defenders. A part of the assailants scaled the tower unperceived. But Gallic impetuosity and Persian lethargy robbed them of the promised success. Madec, without waiting for the rest of his detachment to ascend, fired a volley which was the pre-arranged signal for supports being pushed up to him from Najaf's trenches. No ramp had been made in the escarpment of the bastion to enable the rest of the sepoys to mount in column formation and extend right and left on the ramparts, so as to secure a lodgement on the walls and hold them till the supports should arrive. "The defenders being thus





wakened, crowded from all sides upon the men who had gained the bastion, killing and wounding most of them, while the rest leaped down from the ramparts. By the time Najaf Khan arrived below, the Sun had risen; the garrison, throwing open the Kāmā gate, rushed out in thousands and attacked the Mughals in their turn, while the fort guns created havoc among the imperialists crowded on the plain below. Men and horses began to fall fast, and the Mughals took to flight in groups in such panic that one pursuing Jat infantryman overcame ten fleeing Mughal cavaliers." [*Ibrat*, i. 281.] At this crisis, Sombre arrived "with lightning speed" at the head of one battalion and two guns and dispersing the exultant Jats by his accurate fire saved Najaf Khan who was standing alone, deserted by his own troops.

Two other attempts at escalade also failed because the plans became known to the garrison beforehand and they concentrated heavy forces at the threatened points. As the siege dragged its weary length along without success seeming any nearer, Najaf Khan's position grew more intolerable day by day. He owed nine months' salary to his troops; the scarcity of provisions in his camp drove them to the verge of starvation; and they frequently broke out in mutiny against him or his officers, or refused to go out on the service ordered in the hope of thereby forcing him to pay them. At the same time, as difficulties



thickened round him and he became more and more tied to Dig for the sake of his prestige, his enemies at the Delhi Court became more and more jubilant and active in weaving plots against him and raising a rival to his power by caressing Zābita Khan. But nothing could exceed the coolness and composure of mind of this Persian soldier-statesman; he pursued his operations without showing the least distraction or anxiety, as the French Count in his camp noted with admiration. On the other hand, there was no union, no leadership, no intelligent selfishness even, among the Jats. "There were many factions within the city, where the uncles of the Rajah disputed his authority, and on some occasions even made war on him...If the Jats had been united among themselves, I do not think that the Nawab would even have been in a condition to approach their capital, much less to lay siege to it." [Modave, 295.] The Jat Government as then conducted had not even the sense to employ a part of their vast wealth in retaining their tried mercenaries for defence.

§ 14. *Dig completely blockaded.*

In March the two Gosāin generals, Himmat Bahadur and Umrāogir, with their 6,000 brave mercenaries and 30 or 40 guns, after being driven out of Oudh service by the English, joined Najaf Khan, agreeing to subsist by plunder and not to expect any regular pay from him. The Mughal





generalissimo now changed his tactics ; he turned the siege into a blockade. His bands of horsemen, both Mughalias under Najaf Quli or Miskin and Gosāins, patrolled the southern road from Kumbher and the northern road from Kāmā by which provisions used to enter Dig so freely that grain actually sold cheaper in the fort than in the besiegers' camp. The Mughal horse did their work so well that the coming of provisions to the garrison was soon totally stopped. The stores within the fort were exhausted in a few weeks, because an immense population from the districts around had taken refuge within its walls, besides the garrison of 60,000 Jats. A terrible famine now broke out in the beleaguered city, and no relief was in sight. The people perished daily by the hundred, poisoning the air with their corpses and those of the animals....The survivors ate everything without distinction." [*Ibrat*, i. 282, Modave 298.]

Unable to bear this agony any longer, the Jat soldiers began to slip out of the fort at night in groups, so that the garrison was reduced from 60,000 to 10,000. The poorer people were allowed by Ranjit Singh to go to the siege-camp in search of food. Mirzā Najaf nobly refused to drive them back into the fort for the purpose of intensifying the famine there and hastening its fall. He set up "a standard of safety" beneath which the refugees took shelter and were protected by his own followers. Encouraged by his generous



conduct, many rich men too left the city for his camp. Even bankers and members of the Jat royal family sought this means of escape.

§ 15. *Fall of Dig.*

In six weeks famine completed its work in that crowded den. Finally, in the night of 29th April 1776, Ranjit Singh himself fled away with the remnant of his troops and took the road to Kumbher, after some skirmishes with Himmat Bahadur's horsemen who barred his path. "As soon as the news of this flight reached the Mughal camp, the soldiers rushed into the fort with impetuosity for plundering. There occurred during the first shock much tumult and bloodshed; a number of women and children were killed. The plunderers set fire to the city. The gunpowder of which there was an enormous quantity, was stored in many different buildings. During three consecutive days, explosions leaped up at every moment from the magazines, which were fatal to the victors and the vanquished alike. The Musalmans took delight in showing their contempt for the religion of the idolators by filling their pagodas with the entrails heads and bones of oxen and kine." Three widowed Jat Ranis committed suicide to avoid outrage. [Modave, 298-299, 231. G. Ali, iii, 91.]

When day broke, Mirzā Najaf entered the fort and appointed Zain-ul-abidin Khan to prevent plunder and outrage by his troops. But





it took three days to restore order, and Najaf Khan gained very little out of the spoils of his victory. In the citadel and the fortified mansion of Badan Singh the defenders held out for a day more, regardless of Sombre's guns turned upon them at point-blank range. At night, after massacring their women in the Rajput fashion, the survivors sallied forth and were killed to a man, though they slew a greater number of their enemies.\*

Besides the abundance of arms, cannon, and munitions found in the fort, some buried treasure (said to amount to six lakhs) was secured by the Mirzā. But it was quite inadequate for discharging the long arrears of his soldiers' pay, and he was overwhelmed by their clamour. "His distress even after such a victory was so great that Najaf Quli and Afrāsiyāb proposed to him to give up the city of Agra to his army for plunder, on the condition that this concession would pay off everything which was due to them by the Nawab. But he rejected these vile counsels." [Modave, 299. *CPC.* v. 306, 370.]

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\* "The whole of the Jat territory was now reduced to subjection, and it was only at the intercession of Rani Kishori, the widow of Suraj Mal, that the conqueror allowed Ranjit Singh to retain the fort of Bharatpur with an extent of territory yielding an income of nine lakhs." *N.W.P. Gaz.* viii. Muttra 163.





his overgrown army. So **NAJAF KHAN**,  
the Dig enterprise, he sent away his lieutenants  
to collect revenue in their respective jagirs. The  
rainy season which followed the fall of Dig was  
spent by Najaf in renewed military preparation  
near Agra. Shortly before its close, early in  
October, Afrāsiyāb Khan crossed the Jamuna at  
Mathurā and entering the south-western corner of  
the Aligarh district began to establish his  
authority over the refractory zamindars of the  
region, mostly Jats and Gujars whom Suraj Ma  
had first subjected to his rule. The chief of these  
was Phup Singh (a Tenwa Jat unconnected by  
blood with the house of Bharatpur) who had made  
himself master of Mursān and Sāsni and assumed  
the title of Rajah, (accession in 1749, death in  
1798.) In December 1776 Najaf arrived before  
Mursān, after his letters from Agra had failed to  
bring this rebel to obedience. Afrāsiyāb and  
other generals were called up and with an over-  
whelming force he laid siege to Mursān. His big  
guns breached the walls in a few days. Though  
the garrison fought bravely, wounding Himmat  
Bahadur Gosāin, the place became untenable in  
17 days, and one night (3rd January 1777) the  
Rajah fled away from it to Sāsni. Mirzā Najaf  
followed him thither; Phup Singh now made a





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...pid  
...Marra-Bhamauri, 25 miles  
east of Aligarh. By this time January had ended,  
and Najaf Khan received an urgent call from his  
master to another field.\*

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\* Doab campaign, Oct. 1776—Jan. 1777.—DC. Ibrat. i.  
290-291. Miskin 321. Muna Lal 176. Atkinson, N.W.P.  
Gazetteer, ii. 435-441 (Mursan.) 444 (Bhamauri.)





## CHAPTER XXIX.

**LAST STRUGGLES OF ZĀBITA KHAN,  
1776-1778. SIKH OCCUPATION OF  
CIS-SATLAJ.**§ 1. *Court intrigues for setting up Zābita Khan  
against Mirzā Najaf.*

While Mirzā Najaf Khan was engaged in war with the Jats from May 1775 to January 1777, his rivals at the imperial Court were busy plotting his overthrow. But so despicable was the character of these intriguers, that their plans proved utterly futile, and the natural reaction of their failure was to leave the Emperor even more dependent upon the Mirzā than ever before. We have seen how Hisām-ud-daulah, envying the rise of a mere youth and new-comer like Najaf, had induced the Emperor (in January 1773) to reject Najaf's advice and appoint Zābita Khan Mir Bakhshi. By this single stroke of policy he hoped to placate Zābita's patron Tukoji Holkar and also to baulk Najaf of the second highest office in the Empire.

But Zābita Khan was now the mere shadow of a great name. The sack of Shakartāl and Pathargarh in 1772 had robbed him of all his wealth and prestige and broken up his father's famous veteran corps. The son of Najib-ud-daulah had acted as the henchman of the Marathas in Holkar's Rohilkhand raid of March



1773. Instead of being, as Najib had been in his lifetime, the acknowledged leader and protector of all the Afghans settled anywhere in North India, Zābita used to make frantic and futile appeals for aid to the trans-Ganges Ruhelas every-time that the least danger threatened him. The consciousness of his own military impotence also kept him back from siding with these Ruhelas in their fatal war with Shujā in 1774. And yet his weak and inconstant character led him to listen secretly to proposals for a pan-Afghan coalition against Shujā. The secret leaked out, and after Shujā had crushed the Ruhelas at Miran Katra (April 1774) he kicked away the timid double-dealer and coolly annexed all the trans-Ganges dominions of Najib's house, including Najibabad itself. Thereafter Zābita Khan's possessions were confined to the Saharanpur district and certain places in the Mirat district, which he held as jagirs from the Emperor and for which he had to promise regular tribute like any ordinary mansabdār. Though he still retained the title of Imperial Paymaster-General, the functions of that high office were performed by Mirzā Najaf, so that Zābita had absolutely no share in the actual administration of the Empire.

In May 1773, Hisām fell, and his place as the regent and keeper of the Emperor was taken by Abdul Ahad Khan, who at first pretended to be an ally of Najaf Khan, but soon followed Hisām's example by secretly trying to thwart and





weaken Najaf. While that general was absent on the Jat war, Ahad brought Zābita to Court, entertained him in his own house, and presented him to Shāh Alam, exerting his boundless influence in favour of the Ruhela. Ahad counselled Zābita to unite all the Afghans under himself and put down the upstart Persian adventurer and his Mughalia clientele, who had become supreme in the State. Zābita was thus to be the sword-arm of the cowardly Kashmiri intriguer in removing his rival. But Zābita had suffered many a blow of adversity in his short life. He knew his own weakness. The veteran Afghan armies, both of Ali Muhammad Ruhela's colony and of his late father, had by now been completely broken up and dispersed, and a wholesale transplantation of the respectable families from Rohilkhand to the south beyond the Jamuna had been carried out by Shujā, while the remnant of the male fighters of this race had entered Najaf Khan's service for a living. The dreaded Durrāni conqueror was dead ; and even the magic of Najib-ud-daulah's name could no longer call up an Afghan horde. Zābita's sole defence now was the hired sword of the Sikhs and he stooped to every humiliation to secure their aid. He, therefore, declined to become Abdul Ahad's cat's paw. This disappointment made the omnipotent favourite furious ; his former patronage of the Ruhela chief turned into a deadly hatred, and he schemed to ruin him.





§ 2. *Zābita defeats imperial army under Abul Qāsim and persists in contumacy.*

As Zābita had obstinately defaulted in paying the annual revenue of his jagirs (most of them former Crownlands), Abdul Ahad easily persuaded the Emperor to send a force against him. The leader chosen was Abul Qāsim Khan\* (surnamed Azam-ud-daulah), the younger brother of Ahad. He was endowed with great administrative capacity, personal bravery, and political wisdom. In spite of his reluctance and repeated protests, he was appointed faujdar of Saharanpur district, and sent from Delhi in October 1775, "to regulate the crownlands and other mahals there" now in Zābita's possession. His force consisted of a body of Mughalia horse and two battalions of disciplined sepoy under Gangarām and Bhawāni Singh commandants. Qāsim left the Court prophesying "My brother is sending me to my death." Arrived in the upper Doab he gained unopposed possession of Mirat and some other forts as the Ruhela agents withdrew before him; but for four months he carefully avoided an armed conflict and kept negotiating with Zābita for a peaceful settlement by the payment of tribute. Qāsim knew that his Mughalia mercenaries were traitors at heart and not dependable in action.

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\* DC. Ghulam Ali iii. 62-71, Muna Lal 169-171. *Ibrat*. i. 298-299. *CPC*. v. 87, 280. Bihari Lal (tr. by me in *I.H.Q.* 1935.)



But Abdul Ahad would not listen to reason ; he goaded his brother on to a fight. So, on 4th March 1776, Qāsim began his offensive, though fully convinced of its futility. In the meantime, Zābita had hired a strong Sikh force. The fatal encounter took place at Amirnagar, eight miles north-west of Muzaffarnagar, on the 11th of the month. Zābita Khan had placed the Sikh horse in his van and his Ruhela clansmen in the second line, while he discreetly kept himself unseen far in the rear. The Sikhs began the combat in the Parthian fashion, making a show of attack on the imperialists and then falling back in pretended flight before the warm artillery and musket fire with which they were greeted by the Mughals. The two sepoy battalions of Qāsim advanced in thoughtless pursuit of the fleeing enemy and became far separated from the main division of their comrades. But the wily Sikh horse made a rapid wheel and fell upon the rear of the imperial army, dispersing the Mughalia troops who made a mere show of defence. Thus, a great confusion fell upon the Delhi army ; Abul Qāsim was left alone in the field with only 50 followers round him ; the Ruhelas encircled him completely ; he scorned to flee and kept discharging arrows kneeling on the ground (for he was lame of both legs) till a musket shot killed him. His head was cut off and carried to Zābita.

Then the sepoy battalions found that the day had been lost and they were utterly unsupported





against an enemy cavalry flushed with victory. They threw themselves into the mud fort of Garhi Dubhar\* (16 miles west of Amirnagar), and held out there against the blockading Sikhs for two days,—after which they were released by Zābita Khan on surrendering their arms. The victorious Ruhela sent Abul Qāsim's corpse in a richly draped coffin to Delhi, with a letter to Abdul Ahad Khan offering condolences and profuse apologies for his brother's death, which was ascribed to the chances of war and not to deliberate design.

After the funeral cortege had reached Delhi, Ghulām Qādir Khan, who was then staying at the imperial Court as his father's representative, took to flight (6th April) and joined Zābita. Abdul Ahad, after mourning for his brother, induced Zābita Khan with solemn promises of fidelity to come to Delhi, presented him to the Emperor (6th June) and secured a pardon for his late rebellion. But he also planned to arrest the Ruhela chief when a guest at his house, but was induced to give up this wicked design, and Zābita returned to his own fort two days later.

Thereafter, Zābita Khan persistently refused to pay revenue and only returned harsh and insulting replies to the royal envoys sent to reason with him. In this attitude he was encouraged by his uncle Sultān Khan who had an exaggerated

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\* Also known as *Garhi Miān Bhāi Khān*.



idea of the Ruhela fighting strength and contempt for the Emperor's present forces. At last the patience of the Court was exhausted, and war against Zābita was decided upon. When Mirzā Najaf returned to the Emperor (12th Feb. 1777), the expedition was organised. Even then a summons was sent to Zābita to come and settle the account of his money obligations so as to avert war. He paid a visit to the imperial camp at Loni (13th to 27th April), the Oudh general Latāfat Ali Khan acting as his mediator and trying to save him. But he would neither pay money nor yield back the Crownlands he had usurped. The negotiations broke down; the Emperor honourably allowed him to return in freedom, and on the 28th the royal army began its march on Ghausgarh, the only stronghold now left to Zābita Khan. The office of Mir Bakhshī even in name was now taken away from Zābita and conferred on Mirzā Najaf with the title of Amir-ul-umara which accompanied it (17th May.) On 23rd May the Emperor encamped at Rāipur, four miles south of Ghausgarh.\*

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\* Ghausgarh campaign (and relations with Zābita before it).—*DC. Ibrat*, i. 295-297, 300-312. Muna Lal 173, 177-202. G. Ali iii. 96-117. Miskin 323-335 (present.) Bihari Lal (in *I.H.Q.* 1935.) *CPC*, v. 708. Atkinson, *N.W.P. Gaz.* iii. 674-'6 (Ghausgarh and Jalalabad), 735-'40 (Thana Bhawan), 702 (Lohari.)



§3. *Ghausgarh fortifications and environs described.*

Thirteen miles north-east of the city of Shamli in the Muzaffarnagar district, and close to the boundary between that district and Saharanpur, stands the fort of Ghausgarh built by Najib-ud-daulah, in the midst of a predominantly Afghan population in the upper Doab. It is located within a triangle formed by the three cities of Thana Bhawan (in the west) Luhari (in the east) and Jalalabad (at the northern apex.) Each side of the triangle is about three miles in length. A little river named the Krishni drains the tract, running through the triangle roughly parallel to its western side and separating Ghausgarh and Luhari from Jalalabad and Thana Bhawan. There are some extensive marshes west of Jalalabad and south of Luhari, and the country is full of ups and downs so that any heavy shower creates deep pools here and there, expands the swamps into the fields around and turns every lane into a streamlet and every stream into a torrent. Today this region presents a doleful picture of decay, depopulation, poverty and epidemics; malaria and insanitary conditions of living have completed the work of desolation begun by the ruin of the house of Najib-ud-daulah in the 18th century. But in 1777 it was the home of a dense and prosperous Afghan population,—Jalalabad being an Orakzai Pathan colony,





Luhari an Afridi and Ghausgarh an Umarkhel Ruhela settlement; cultivation extended for a considerable distance outside the above four cities, and there were besides many villages thickly dotting the surrounding district. In 1777, after the loss of Najibabad, Ghausgarh was the last refuge of the proud Ruhelas whom Najib had raised to supreme glory in the realm, and here were concentrated the last remnant of that hero's army led by the elders of his tribe, especially his brother Sultān Khan; here were lodged the wives and children of all the leading men of the tribe. Here in 1777 the Ruhelas fought with their backs to the wall, and it is no wonder that their conduct in this war has extorted the admiration of every eulogist of the imperial Court whose memoir has come down to us.

The Afghan defence was materially aided by the condition of their enemies. The terrain was full of hollows and mounds and overspread with swamps, which admirably favoured the Afghan tactics of ambuscade and night attack. Therefore, the imperialists had to avoid any advance close to the forts and rash assaults on them, especially as the Emperor's person had to be safeguarded. But their weakness, in spite of their superior numbers and powerful artillery, lay in their divided command and the determination of Abdul Ahad to cross every plan of Najaf Khan so as to rob him of the credit of victory. Najaf Khan was no doubt the Mir Bakhshi or supreme head of the





army, but Abdul Ahad,—the grey beard, broken in health, broken in heart by the death of his dancing girl wife Waziran, and a Kashmiri by blood,—had got himself nominated as second Bakhshi! His absolute sway over Shah Alam's mind turned him into the defacto commander-in-chief, over the head of Mirzā Najaf. The open wrangles between these two chiefs and their mutual recriminations after every reverse stiffened the Ruhela resistance and damaged the imperial prestige, so that everywhere lawless men began to raise their heads and plunder the highways without fear. Hence, a decisive issue was unduly delayed, and the coming of the rainy season inflicted unspeakable hardship on the royal army in that low swampy region, especially as the rainfall that year was abnormally heavy. The end came very quickly only after Najaf Khan had called up his able lieutenant Afrāsiyāb with his powerful contingent from the middle Doab and conducted the war on his sole initiative.

§ 4. *Siege of Ghausgarh ; constant indecisive fighting.*

The Emperor at first halted at the village of Rāipur ( $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles south of Ghausgarh), his left protected by the Krishni, his right by a large swamp, and his front by a branch of the same river. Najaf Khan led the vanguard with his own contingent. On 8th June he advanced in full force and attacked Luhari, the eastern corner





of the triangle, easily occupying the gardens south of that village. The Ruhela patrol fell back after a little skirmishing; the Mughals followed in reckless chase "driving the villagers away like droves of sheep" and thus fell into the ambush prepared by the Afghans with their customary skill in the broken ground outside the village. Two hundred of the imperialists were shot down; the rest broke and fled away. Najaf Khan, coming up with his artillery, arrested the counter pursuit, rescued the fugitives, and held his own trenches. On Zābita's side the brunt of the fighting fell upon the Sikhs, and on the imperial side upon 2,000 mounted Maratha spearmen under Wāgh Rāo, who formed the respective vanguards. The attack was repeated on the 11th. The Sikh horse made a detour and turned the right flank of the imperial trenches; but they were repulsed by the steady fire of Latāfat Ali's *najib* battalions and field artillery. The engagement was mutually broken off at sunset, after the Ruhelas had lost a thousand men.

Najaf Khan's spirit was now up. The small Afghan rustic militia had successfully repulsed the entire imperial army, four or five times their own number and led by the Commander-in-chief of the Empire, acting under the eyes of the Emperor himself. The enterprise promised to be even more disgraceful than Muhammad Shah's Bangarh campaign against Ali Muhammad Ruhela. In the race against the approaching





rainy season it was essential for the imperialists to win a decision before this month was over. So a third attack was launched, on 13th June. This time the defences on the Thana Bhawan side, or the western corner of the triangle, were probed, but with no better result ; "about two hundred of the imperialists were slain ; the Afghans fought well, but were finally driven back to their trenches, and the engagement broke off at 2 p.m."

Thereafter the imperialists used to ride up daily and waste their powder by firing at the Ruhela trenches, without being able to tempt the enemy to come out into the open. Nine days passed in this kind of inaction, and then on 23rd June, both sides engaged in a regular battle, which raged with greater obstinacy and heavier slaughter than usual till some hours after sunset. But again the Ruhela trenches were not carried and Najaf Khan had to fall back without victory. This fourth repulse within sixteen days led to bitter public wrangling in the Emperor's presence: Mirzā Najaf taunted Abdul Ahad with enjoying the spectacle of the battle from a house-top safe in the rear, and wilfully causing the defeat by holding back the reinforcements which might have turned the drawn battle into a victory for the imperialists. The Kashmiri retorted by charging the Commander-in-chief with blindly leading his men into a useless butchery. The Emperor sided with his favourite, and Najaf





Khan in disgust retired to his tent to sulk in idleness for some time.

§ 5. *Rainy season ; sufferings of the imperial camp.*

And now the rains set in with more than usual violence, turning the camping ground on the eastern bank of the Krishni into a vast quagmire and causing indescribable distress to the royal officers bred up in long years of ease and luxury. The enemy took advantage of the internal dissensions among the Mughals and their water-logged position, and one night in the midst of a shower the Sikh horsemen forded the river near Thana Bhawan and broke into the Mughal camp, penetrating close to the Emperor's own tents. It was only the guns of the Red Paltan (imperial guards) that repulsed them.

But the locality was untenable. So, Shah Alam moved (4th—13th July) on to the western bank of the Krishni, to the higher ground southwest of Jalalabad, that is, facing the western side of the triangle instead of the southern, with two marshes guarding his rear and right flank. Day after day the exultant Afghans used to make sorties and engage the Mughals without any result except that of harassing the invaders and denying them rest, though with heavy slaughter to their own side whenever they ventured within too close a range of the well-served Mughal artillery.





Najaf on his part made one night attack, sacking an Afghan village and returning without loss.

The war had now reached the point of stalemate, and peace parleys were opened from the imperial side. But though Zābita himself was ready to make terms, his uncles and their veteran followers, intoxicated by their recent successes, refused to yield an inch and sent the envoys back with defiance to a combat *à l'outrance*.

The invaders were now themselves beleaguered. Their sufferings from the monsoon were so great and their supply of provisions was so reduced by the Afghan roving bands and private highwaymen that many old officials and hereditary servants of State began to sneak away to Delhi. Imperial authority collapsed with the fall of the military prestige of the Government, and public disturbances broke out throughout the country. A large convoy of grain, loaded on pack-oxen, when coming from Delhi was hemmed round by the Sikh allies of Zābita Khan, but on the news reaching the Emperor in good time he detached his Maratha auxiliaries (under Wāgh Rāo) to rescue them, and at the same time sent a strong force under Najaf Qulī and Latāfat Ali to raid the Sikh camp below Thana Bhawan which was now defenceless in consequence of the march of the men to intercept the convoy. The perfect timing of these two enterprises led to their complete success; Wāgh Rāo safely escorted the grain porters to camp, while the other detachment



looted and burnt the Sikh tents without opposition (*circa* 3rd August.) The Sikhs, after losing all their camp and property, abandoned the south-western corner and moved further north towards Jalalabad. Then Zābita sued for peace (12th August), but his uncles again overbore him.

Meantime Mirzā Najaf had been utilising the monsoon respite to seduce Zābita's allies and to call up heavy reinforcements to his own side. The Sikhs refused to break their faith to the Ruhela chief for money, but the Orakzai Pathan zamindars of Jalalabad,—Dilāwar Ali and Qalandar Ali,—who feared the annexation of their city by Zābita, yielded to Mughal gold and secretly promised to come over to Mirzā Najaf if he attacked the trenches near Jalalabad (the northern end), of which they were the guardians.

§ 6. *Final attack on Ruhela lines, 14 Sept. 1777.  
Fall of Ghausgarh.*

The rainy season was drawing to a close. At the end of August Afrāsiyāb Khan arrived from Aligarh and Dāud Beg Khan Kurji from Agra with their fresh troops and copious supply of munitions. Everything being now ready on his side, Mirzā Najaf sought the decision, with every confidence and in full strength, on 14th September. His vanguard (under Afrāsiyāb) was formed by the sēpoy battalions, no less than 10,000 bayonets, marching in four columns and enclosing an empty space in their midst where the cavalry





was stationed. They carried their artillery with them. The Mughal line stretched for over two miles and moved slowly against the entire western face of the triangle. While the other divisions merely detained the enemy forces at the southern end (Thana Bhawan) and centre of this face, the real attack was delivered by Afrāsiyāb on the trenches at Jalalabad at the northern extremity. Zābita Khan, with all the effective garrison of Ghausgarh, came up crossing the river to the aid of this hard pressed sector of the defences and soon became entangled with the assailants. Then the treacherous chiefs of Jalalabad played their agreed part; they came over to the Mughals, guided them through the trenches and the town and even turned their artillery on Zābita's right flank and rear. The Ruhelas fought with desperate valour, regardless of heavy losses, and even made a counter-charge, scattering the foremost battalions of the imperialists and the cavalry of that division and seizing their guns. Afrāsiyāb's horse was killed, but he immediately jumped up, took another mount and galloped forward to cheer his men. Rai Na'mat Singh (the son of Mirzā Najaf's officer Bakhtāwar Singh Kāyath) charged from the line of guns but was shot down. Miskin (now a noble and a *Daulah*) was wounded and fell down senseless. But at last numbers and discipline triumphed, and the resistance of the small Ruhela band was quenched in blood. Zābita and his comrades, finding their





near cut off and unable to return to Ghausgarh, were driven further away from that fort into the Sikh force holding the Thana Bhawan sector against which only a feint had been made. The Afghan line was pierced at several points; the battle was lost beyond hope, and Zābita galloped away with his Sikh protectors, abandoning his family and citadel.

On the field of battle Zābita's son Ghulām Qādir and Sultān Khan's son were made prisoners. Not a soul was now left to defend Ghausgarh. Mirzā Najaf immediately pressed forward across the river and blockaded that fort. It capitulated on the 23rd; the garrison was assured of life and freedom, but all the property within it was attached. Ten elephants, 73 camels, about 250 horses, and forty cart-loads of tents copper-pots &c. were escheated to the State, and the rest of the spoils left to Mirzā Najaf. Worst of all, the entire family of Zābita Khan and those of all the Ruhela leaders and military officers were captured in Ghausgarh. "The braggart Afzal Khan had hidden himself among the women in fear of death. The Qalmaq female slaves sent to search the Ruhela harem discovered him and dragged him before the public with insult". The captive women and children were sent to Agra fort for detention. The treasure hunt in the fallen city being concluded, the Emperor set out on his return on 11th October and entered Delhi on 20th November, 1777.





The branch of the Ruhela power created by Najib-ud-daulah was thus crushed as completely as Ali Muhammad's section had been by Shujā-ud-daulah's campaign of 1774.

§ 7. *Survey of Delhi Government's foreign relations 1772—1788.*

Within six years of Shah Alam's coming to Delhi his Government was relieved of the menace of the overgrown vassals who had usurped the lands round Delhi and so long successfully defied imperial authority. The Ruhela who had seized the upper Doab was crushed, partially in March 1772 and completely in September 1777; his fellow-clansmen of the trans-Ganges colonies, had been extirpated in April 1774 and rendered incapable of joining any pan-Afghan revolt against the Delhi throne; the Jat Rajah had been shorn of all his enormous new acquisitions and turned into a petty zamindar worth only nine lakhs a year, (April 1776.) From 1775 to 1782 the dreaded Marathas were so heavily entangled in a contested succession at home and a war with the English abroad that they could not spare a single soldier for Hindustan. Even after the Peshwa's Government had made peace with the English in 1782, it did not find itself left with enough strength to repeat the large-scale northern enterprises of Raghunāth Dādā and Sadāshiv





Bhāu, or even the attempt of Ramchandra Ganesh ~~सिंधी~~ Visāji Krishna. After 1782 the Maratha revival that took place in the north was not the work of the Puna Government but the private undertaking of one of its semi-independent generals, Māhādji Sindhiā, and even the early efforts of this Māhādji were thwarted by the indigenous forces of the Delhi Government or its nobles till the end of 1788. It was only after ~~the~~ Boigne had shaped for Sindhia a weapon stronger than any in India outside the British army that Mahadji was able to make himself master of Delhi beyond challenge.

Thus, from 1777 to 1788 Shah Alam could have been reasonably expected to utilise this freedom from external danger in re-establishing his authority from the Satlaj to the Ganges and from the Himalayas to the Chambal, and even in asserting his suzerainty over his vassals in Oudh and Rajputana. But it was not to be. On one side was his weakness of character and lack of able and loyal instruments; on the other there was a new factor which made itself increasingly felt in North Indian politics from 1763 onwards and came to dominate the entire country north and west of Delhi from the Indus to the Ganges throughout the "Great Anarchy" which was ended only by the British conquest of the early Nineteenth century.





§ 8. *The Sikhs : their military organisation and efficiency.*

These were the Sikhs. That sect was mostly recruited from the sturdy Jat peasantry with large additions in the form of converts from other castes. They carried to perfection the work which Suraj Mal Jat had begun on the same ethnic basis, but which had been undone by his worthless descendants. The Sikhs owed their success to their religion of full brotherhood and the democratic organisation of their society, while the Jats of Bharatpur were caste-ridden Hindus, living under an oligarchy of the heads of family groups. The strength of the Sikh army before it was Europeanised by Ranjit Singh lay in its predominance of cavalry and preference for offensive tactics, while the Jat soldiery were mostly infantry and excelled in the defence of fortified positions.\*

The Panjab is a vast breeding ground of the best horses found in India, and the blood of their Scythian ancestors made the Sikh horsemen the best skirmishers and guerilla-fighters after the Turks. As a Swiss officer wrote after observing them in May 1776, "Five hundred of Najaf Khan's horse dare not encounter fifty Sikh horsemen".

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\* Sikhs.—*Asiatic Annual Register* for 1800, Mis. Tracts, p. 34. G. Forster, *Journey*, i. 285-291 (containing a quotation from Polier.) Cunningham's *History*, 2nd. ed. 104. Williams in *Calcutta Review* Vol. 60 (1875), pp. 28-29. Forrest's *Selections*. Foreign Dept. iii. 1123-1124 (W. Hastings's views.) Francklin *Shah Aulum*, ch. 5.