



This astounding superiority, man for man, over all the other fighting forces of India was due to the Sikh character, training and organisation. As the same European observer remarks:—

“The Sikhs are in general strong and well-made; accustomed from their infancy to the most laborious life and hardest fare, they make marches and undergo fatigues that really appear astonishing. In their excursions they carry no tents or baggage, except perhaps a small tent for the principal officer: the rest shelter themselves under blankets, which serve them also in the cold weather to wrap themselves in, and which on a march cover their saddles.

“They have commonly two, some of them three, horses each, of the middle size, strong, active, and mild-tempered. The provinces of Lahor and Multan, noted for a breed of the best horses in Hindustan, afford them an ample supply . . . Though they make merry on the demise of any of their brethren, they mourn for the death of a horse.

“The food of the Sikhs is of the coarsest kind, and such as the poorest people in Hindustan use from necessity. Bread baked in ashes and soaked in a mash made of different sorts of pulse, is the best dish, and such as they never indulge in but when at full leisure; otherwise vetches and tares, hastily parched, are all they care for . . . Their dress is extremely scanty: a pair of long blue drawers, and a kind of chequered





plaid . . . with a mean turban, form their clothing and equipage.

“Their success and conquests have largely originated from an activity unparalleled by other Indian nations, from their endurance of excessive fatigue, and a keen resentment of injuries. The personal endowments of the Sikhs are derived from a temperance of diet, and a forbearance from many of those sensual pleasures which have enervated the Indian Muhammadans. A body of their cavalry has been known to make marches of 40 or 50 miles, and to continue the exertion for many successive days.

“Their military force may be said to consist essentially of cavalry ; . . . their infantry, held in low estimation, usually garrison the forts . . . A Sikh horseman is armed with a matchlock [of large bore] and sabre of excellent metal, [and also a spear], and his horse is strong and well formed.

“Their manner of attack: a party from forty to fifty, advance in a quick pace to the distance of a carabine shot from the enemy, and then, that the fire may be given with greater certainty, the horses are drawn up, and their pieces discharged ; when, speedily retiring about a hundred paces, they load and repeat the same mode of annoying the enemy. The horses have been so expertly trained to the performance of this operation, that on receiving a stroke of the hand, they stop from a full career.”



§ 9. *Sikh polity and society.*

Major Polier designates the Sikh political system "an aristocratical republic. It is properly the snake with many heads. Every zamindar [*i.e.*, yeoman farmer] who, from the Attock to Hansi Hisar, and to the gates of Delhi, lets his beard grow, cries *wah guru*, eats pork, wears an iron bracelet, drinks *bhang*, abominates the smoking of tobacco, and can command from ten followers on horseback to upwards,—sets up immediately for a Sikh sardar; and, as far as is in his power, aggrandises himself at the expense of his weaker neighbours, . . . Hindu or Musalman, and even among his own fraternity."

"A large vein of popular power branches through many parts of the Sikh Government. No honorary or titular distinction is conferred on any member of the State . . . The chiefs, who often command parties of not more than 50 men, being numerous, the motions of a Sikh army are tumultuous and irregular. An equality of rank is maintained in their civil society, which no class of men, however wealthy or powerful, is suffered to break down."

But it was the equality of the savage state of Nature. "From the spirit of independence so invariably infused amongst them, their mutual jealousy and a rapacious roving temper, the Sikhs this day are seldom seen cooperating in national





concert," but they are actuated by the influence of personal ambition only.

Such was the great weapon which Guru Govind's martial creed had forged and which long years of injustice and oppression under the dissolving Mughal Government had beaten hard and at last turned against their oppressors.

The chance of the Sikhs came during the eclipse of the Delhi monarchy which began in 1760 in consequence of the murder of Alamgir II by his wazir, the prolonged Durrāni invasion, and the knocking out of the Marathas from the North Indian political ring at Pānipat in January 1761; and they were most prompt in seizing it. While the Panjab proper remained for a generation afterwards a debateable ground between the Durrāni governors and the Sikh sardars, the Cis-Satlaj country came, soon after that battle, to be dotted with Sikh principalities, large and small, which swept away all other local proprietors and Governmental authorities from the Satlaj in the west to the Jamuna in the east, and from the foot of the Himalayas to the southern border of the modern Karnal district (the 29th degree of North latitude.) And even beyond this region the Sikh power overflowed fitfully into the upper Doab and the north Delhi portion of the Rohtak district, and through Haryana to Narnaul on the Shekhawati frontier.

We have seen (Ch. 24 §§ 4-5) how at the end of 1763 the great conqueror Ahmad Shah



Durrāni had practically to admit defeat at the hands of the Sikhs, and their national rising reached its crowning success in the capture of Sarhind (Dec. 1763) and Lahor (April 1764.) The fall of Sarhind, which was the capital of the Cis-Satljaj country in the geography of the Mughal empire, was followed by a rapid and complete transformation of the political map of this tract. Mughal administration disappeared and Sikh rule set in, though it took the Khālsa nebulae some years to solidify into regular States and baronies in this region. As soon as Zain Khan, the last Muslim governor of Sarhind, had fallen in battle and his city had been sacked, the victorious Sikh confederates seized the country round. "Tradition still describes (as Cunningham wrote in 1849) how the Sikhs dispersed as soon as the battle was won; and how, riding night and day, each horseman hurled his belt, his scabbard, his articles of dress, his accoutrements, till he was almost naked, into successive villages to mark them as his."

§ 10. *Sikhs overspread the Cis-Satljaj country; names of their chiefs and their seats.*

Less than a decade after the fall of Sarhind we find a new political order\* that has replaced the old in Cis-Satljaj Panjab:—Amar Singh Jat

\* *Ambala Dist. Gazetteer* (1883), 16-18, 40, also Ch. VI. *Karnal D. Gaz.* (1883), 33-46. My list differs in a few points from that given by Browne in his *India Tracts* (quoted in Dr. N. K. Sinha's *Rise*, 104.)





(a Phulkia Sikh) had been recognised by Abdali as ruler of Patiala and faujdar of Sarhind with the title of "Rajah over Rajahs" in 1767. Before his death fourteen years later, he had systematically extended and consolidated his territories, acquired Sirsa and Fathabad (*i.e.*, the western side of the Hisar district) and made himself the greatest Sikh potentate in this tract. A lesser Phulkia Sikh, Gajpat Singh, founded in 1764 the State of Jhind (capital 42 miles west of Panipat), and seized Karnal for a time. On his death in 1786 he was succeeded by his son Rajah Bhāg Singh, who continued to rule till 1819. Thirty-five miles north of Jhind and the same distance south of Patiala, lies Kaithal, where another Phulkia, Bhāi Desu Singh, founded a kingdom in 1767. On his death in 1780 his son Lāl Singh succeeded, dying in 1818.

Twenty-eight miles north-east of Kaithal and in the same latitude as Saharanpur lies the city of Thāneshwar, seized in 1764 by Mith Singh, a Manjha Jat of the Dallewala *misl*. On his death in 1777 his heritage was divided between his two nephews,—Bhangā Singh described as "the savage master of Thāneshwar" or "the greatest robber among the little chiefs" (d. 1815), and Bhāg Singh (distinct from his namesake the Jhind Rajah.) Both of them increased the family estates by force. Ladwa, 12 miles east of Thāneshwar, and Babain, 7 miles north-west of Ladwa, were respectively the seats of Gurdāt



Singh and Sāhib Singh of the Dallewala *misl*. They also seized Shāmgarh Karnal and some villages of the Panipat district. Sāhib Singh, nicknamed Khonda and killed in a battle near Saharanpur in 1781, was one of the foremost warriors of that age.

The natural leader of the Krora Singhia *misl* during the last 35 years of the 18th century was Bāghel Singh, one of the most active and renowned chieftains of this race. His seat was Chalaundhi, three miles to the east of Ladwa. His comrade in many an adventure was Rāi Singh Bhangi, the master of Buriā and Jagādhri (21 and 23 miles north-east of Ladwa, and close to the west bank of the Jamuna), who was another most notable Sikh sardar of the Cis-Satlaj region. But the nominal head of the Krora Singhias had his seat at Chhachrauli, (26 miles north-east of Ladwa); here ruled Guru-Bakhsh Singh, the founder of the Kalsia State, and after him his son Jodhā Singh. A fourth Phulkia State was Nābhā (with its capital 15 miles west of Patiala) which Hamir Singh founded in 1755. Here Jaswant Singh succeeded his father Hamir about 1772.

The historian of Delhi during this period is not so intimately concerned with the Sikh principalities of the Ambala district, such as Ambala town, founded by Guru-Bakhsh Singh of the Shāhid *misl* (died without issue in 1783),—Malodh, 8 miles north of Maler Kotla, founded about 1750 by a nephew of Ala Singh, who was





succeeded by his sons Dalel and Bhāg Singh,—Radaur, seven miles north-east of Ladwa, held by Dalja Singh Krora Singhia,—Shāhābād, 13 miles north of Thāneshwar, founded by Karam Singh Nirmala, and far off places like Mani Majra, Ropar and Rahoon (the last two bordering on the Satlaj.)\* But the State of Kapurthala, though lying on the western edge of the Jalandhar Doab beyond the Satlaj, deserves mention, as its founder, the ex-brewer Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, was one of the greatest Sikh leaders of his time.

§ 11. *Sikh disunion and weakness ;  
effect of their rule.*

Besides these founders of ruling houses, the Sikh captains who took the title of sardar were beyond count, because any one of them might "command not more than 20 or 30 horsemen" and still be called a sardar. They combined only on the occasion of forays, and even their *mists* were not patriarchally ruled clans, but merely confederacies formed for joint enterprises of profit without any affinity of blood. The Sikh sardars, when not engaged in foreign wars and raids, spent all their energy and resources in ceaseless mutual hostility. As Captain Francklin noted in 1793, the Sikh forces, "from want of union among themselves, are not much to be

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\* In the Ambala district in 1882 the Sikhs held 35 out of its 38 jagirs.



dreaded by their neighbours. Divided into distinct districts, each chief rules over the portion appropriated to him with uncontrolled sway ; and tenacious of his authority, and jealous of his brethren, it seldom happens that this nation makes an united effort ! . . . The discordant and clashing interests of the respective Sikh chiefs prevent almost the possibility of a general union." But Warren Hastings in 1784 had predicted the rise of a Ranjit Singh to unite the sect. [Forrest, iii. 1124.]

But in spite of these internal quarrels, Sikh rule was not without a beneficial effect. It did not escape the observation of Polier, who wrote, "In their intestine divisions, there is this difference from what is seen everywhere else, that the husbandman and labourer, in their own districts are perfectly safe and unmolested, let what will happen round about them." They also gave absolute protection and security to bankers and traders who preferred to seek asylum in their territories in that troubled age.

Outside their own possessions, the Sikhs used to go forth for exacting blackmail exactly in imitation of the Maratha *mulkgiri* or *chauth*-collecting expeditions. "As regularly as the crops were cut, the border Sikh chieftains crossed over [into the imperial territory in the Upper Doab] and levied blackmail from almost every village, in the most systematic manner. Their requis-





tions were termed *rākhi* [i.e., price of protection.]\* Each of them had a certain well-known beat or circle, well recognised and clearly defined . . . . The collections varied with the ability of the people to pay, averaging from two to five Rupees a head. Two or three horsemen generally sufficed to collect them, for 2,000 or 3,000 more were never very far off . . . Refusal was fatal."

§ 12. *Zabita Khan turns Sikh, raids the Doab (1778), is defeated by Afrasiyab and Najaf Quli. His complete submission.*

When in the last fight before Ghausgarh Zābita Khan was cut off from his fort by the advance of Afrāsiyāb Khan's column and driven into the Sikh camp, he found himself possessed of nothing except the clothes he stood in. All his property and treasures, all his wives and sons had been left behind in Ghausgarh, and these passed into the hands of the imperialists in the course of a week. The destitute Ruhela chief and his vanquished Sikh allies fled fast from the Doab and retired to the Sikh settlements in the Karnal district west of the Jamuna. Here Zābita Khan lived for many months after, on the bounty of his former allies. He had no money or follower and no landed possession now; but the Sikhs had enjoyed

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\* Forster reported in 1786 that the *rakhi* seldom exceeded 4 or 5 p.c. on the produce. (*Poona Res. Corr.* i. No. 95.) This tax was two annas per Rupee of the fixed revenue [*DY.* i. 108] in the north of Delhi region.





1777]

ZABITA KHAN TURNS SIKH

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subsidies from his father year after year, as his munshi Mansukh Rāi reminded them, and they generously took up the cause of the penniless friendless exile. To cement their alliance, Zābita made a public profession of the Sikh religion, being baptised as Dharam Singh. To such a depth had fallen the heir of the champion who had held aloft the banner of Islam in Northern India for thirteen years! \*

The winter of 1777-'78 passed away without Zābita Khan venturing on any attempt to recover his Doab possessions. After the capture of Ghausgarh, Najaf Quli Khan had been placed in charge of that Ruhela stronghold and the government of the Saharanpur district, while Afrāsiyāb Khan had been posted further south in the Doab as governor of Aligarh and the surrounding district. Here the two continued to strengthen their hold for some months after, by suppressing the rebel landlords.

But by February 1778 Mirzā Najaf Khan had become deeply entangled in a contest with the Rao Rajah of Alwar then in league with the Rajahs of Jaipur and Bharatpur. His position was rendered still more difficult by his jealous rival Abdul Ahad Khan, who swayed the policy of the pliant Emperor and secretly encouraged

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\* Bihari Lal in *I.H.Q.* (1935), p. 651. Miskin 336-338. *Ibrat*. i. 324-342 (full details of the Doab campaign.) *DC*. G. Ali iii. 130-131.



the Mirzā's enemies and promoted defection among his retainers. Thus was the Rajput resistance stiffened, and a large body of Mughalia horse (under Murād Beg Khan and others) tempted to leave the Mirzā's camp and go to Delhi, where they arrived on 25th March. The Mir Bakhshi's troubles were Zābita Khan's opportunity. In the company of his Sikh allies—who had been pining at missing their annual raid into the Doab this winter,—he crossed into the Doab. His name acted as a rallying cry for the local enemies of the imperial Government and his knowledge and influence helped the progress of the raiders.

They swept through the upper Doab with scarcely any opposition and their advanced detachments penetrated to Sikandrabad and even further south. At Khurja they were repulsed by Afrāsiyāb Khan with his abundant fire arms. They then invested Najaf Quli in Ghausgarh for some time. Afrāsiyāb could not come promptly to the rescue of his colleague, as he had to visit the Court and try to remove the hostility of Abdul Ahad by personal suasion (8-20 April.) But when he at last joined Najaf Quli, the invaders fled away and the two imperial generals crossed the Jamuna on their heels and defeated the Sikhs in a running fight up to Karnal and Budakhera. Then Gajpat Singh, Rajah of Karnal, who was harbouring Zābita, opened peace parleys. But while he and Dalel Singh (of Malodh) favoured



submission to the empire, Bāgh Singh (the Thāneshwar chieftain) remained defiant. So, the imperialists marched four miles north of Budakhera and captured the fortified village of Barāgāon\* where the Sikh sardars had lodged most of their baggage. Then only did all these chiefs come to terms: they gave their word not to shelter the Emperor's enemies in their territories, nor to raid Mirzā Najaf's jagirs in future. Zābita Khan came over to the Mughal generals and with them crossed back into the Doab at Jhanjhana. Here a letter was received from the Mirzā ratifying the peace with Zābita Khan and promising him a high post with jagirs and the release of his family as soon as he would sue for the Emperor's pardon in person. The three Khans decided to set off for Agra and meet Mirzā Najaf there.

On their way down the Doab they spent a long time in reducing many refractory Jat and Gujar zamindars and laying heavy fines on them, —at Doghāt (15 miles north-west of Saharanpur), Parichhatgarh (the home of Gulāb Singh Gujar, 14 miles east of Mirat), Rohāna and Sāinpur (the strongholds of Makni Rām Jat, 8 miles north of Muzaffarnagar) and Kutesra (the seat of Sarāpā Gujar, 6 miles west of Rohāna.)

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\* *Budakhera*, 4 m. north-east of Karnal city. *Barāgāon*, 4 m. north of Budakhera.



The campaign having been brought to a most successful issue, the three generals crossed the Jamuna at Mathura and hastened to Agra, where they met with a most cordial welcome from Mirzā Najaf. Zābita Khan was given back every article of his property seized at Ghausgarh and now stored in Agra fort; his wives and children as well as the families of his officers were freed from captivity, and he received a rescript for his seven mahals in Saharanpur along with the fort of Ghausgarh. In gratitude, the Ruhela chieftain offered the hand of his daughter to his generous patron. (20 Sept. 1778.)

This settlement finely illustrates the far-sighted statesmanship of Mirzā Najaf. He set up Zābita Khan as a buffer against the Sikhs in the upper Doab and also as his own *protege* and partisan for counteracting the intrigues of Abdul Ahad at Court, so that while he himself was fighting the Jats and the Rajputs west of the Jamuna, his trans-Jamuna possessions in the middle Doab would be safe and he would be free from any anxiety about that quarter. The peace was completed by Zābita Khan's visit to the Court, where the Emperor pardoned him and gave him a robe of honour and a letter patent for the district of Saharanpur, (30 January, 1779.)

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## CHAPTER XXX

FALL OF ABDUL AHAD KHAN ;  
EVENTS OF 1778 AND 1779.§ 1. *Najaf Khan's last Jat campaign.*

During the four months in the middle of 1777, when Mirzā Najaf was involved in the Ghausgarh campaign and exaggerated rumours were flying round that the imperial army had been reduced to its last gasp, all over the country rebels began to raise their heads once more. Chief among them was Ranjit Singh, the Jat Rajah of Bharatpur, who now tried to win back his father's vast domains snatched away from him by the Mirzā a year ago. In this work he found a great helper in Pratap Singh, the aspiring chief of Macheri, who had just entered on the threshold of his career of independence and begun to fish in the ever-troubled waters of Mewāt and Shekhāwati.

This Rao Pratap Singh, a Jaipur vassal of the Nāroka branch of the Kachhwa clan, had at first been banished by his overlord Mādho Singh of Jaipur, but had soon afterwards won his sovereign's pardon and restoration to his fiefs by his patriotic assistance in the battles with Jawahir Singh Jat in February 1768. During the next ten years (the reign of Prithi Singh, 1768-'78) he



remained loyal. But when on 15th April 1778 the throne of Jaipur passed on to Sawai Pratāp Singh, an imbecile and feeble lad, the new sovereign's weakness and folly and the consequent confusion in his State roused his Nāroka vassal's dreams of territorial aggression and independence. The Macheri chief had already begun to fight for his own hand in the Agra-Mathura districts and Mewāt, now as the ally of the Jat Rajah and now as a partisan of the imperial general, as he found profitable.

Hiring the aid of the Macheri chief and Ambāji Ingle (a Maratha captain posted in the Gwalior district), the Jat Rajah tried to recover Dig, then held by Najaf Khan's agent, but without success. His threat to Agra city also failed through the skilful defence measures of Muhammad Beg Hamadāni, Mirzā Najaf's local deputy. But the rebels made a successful night-raid on Farāh (15 miles north-west of Agra), slew the Mughal collector, looted the city, and turned the country up to the walls of Agra into a "lampless desolation" (July-August 1777.) No relief could be sent at that time to the hard pressed imperial agents in this region.

This revival of Jat disturbances in the newly conquered Agra-Mathura district recalled Mirzā Najaf to the scene as soon as he was freed from the siege of Ghausgarh. Leaving Delhi on 25th November, 1777, only five days after his return to the capital from the Ruhela campaign, he



pushed rapidly on towards Agra, putting the rebels down and setting up his own authority again. He stormed and demolished the mud fort of Sonkh (midway between Mathura and Kumbher), massacring three thousand of its Kuntel Jat defenders and selling their women and children into slavery. This one act of frightfulness had immediate effect, and his further advance was scarcely opposed. Kumbher, that famous stronghold of the Jats, was captured in a few days. Ranjit Singh and his step-mother Rāni Kishori fled to Bharatpur, which was next invested. In two months they were brought down to their knees. The Rāni personally waited on Mirzā Najaf and humbly appealed for mercy to her husband's house. The Mirzā had the statesmanship to convert a vanquished foe into a friend by restoring the Bharatpur region, with a revenue of seven lakhs of Rupees, to Ranjit Singh and leaving the fort of Kumbher to Kishori as a personal gift (c. February 1778).\*

§2. *Rao Rajah of Macheri (Alwar), his war and peace with Najaf Khan.*

Meantime, while the Jat Rajah was invested in Bharatpur, Najaf had turned to settle accounts with the Macheri chief. This noble had utilised the recent eclipse of the Jat power to make

\* Mirza Najaf's third Jat campaign.—*DC. Ibrat*. i. 317, 345-347. *G. Ali* iii. 118-120. *Miskin* 335.





himself master of Alwar and Lachmangarh by corrupting their Jat custodians. Mirzā Najaf advanced to Lachmangarh, 20 miles south-east of Alwar, and laid a regular siege to it.\* His lieutenant, Himmat Bahādur Gosain, lured away the Maratha mercenary Ambāji by a higher bid. The Macheri chief became helpless, and sent to beg for peace, but the Mirzā rejected his offer. In the midst of these operations, the Rajah of Jaipur, Prithi Singh, had died, on 15th April, and a new scene opened at the imperial Court where the favourite Abdul Ahad Khān tried to thwart Najaf's work by making terms with Macheri and Jaipur over the Mir Bakhshi's head. Tempting the Emperor with the hope of getting the tributes of these two Rajahs himself without having to give a share to the Mir Bakhshi, he announced that the sovereign would march to that region in person. The Jaipur and Macheri chiefs sent envoys to Delhi and tried to secure easier terms than Mirzā Najaf's. They were welcomed at Court and promised royal orders extending protection over their masters and repudiating the action of the Mirzā. The slothful Shah Alam was forced by his overbearing favourite into making a formal start for this expedition by entering into marching tents at Tālkatorā outside Delhi (24th May.) The mere

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\* On 20 May 1778, Mous. Visage writes that Najaf Khan was still besieging Lachmangarh. (Barbé, 247.)





report of this step stiffened the Rajahs' resistance to Najaf.

The commander-in-chief had to attend to this new danger first. He wrote to Abdul Ahad entreating him not to ruin their common master's cause by this interference at the moment of success; but the letter only misled the Kashmiri into thinking that Najaf was now helplessly at his mercy and could be easily squeezed out of his wealth and lands! Afrāsiyāb Khan who went to Delhi on a mission for smoothing the relations between these two chiefs, returned after twelve days of wasted efforts (21 April.) The Mirzā now took quick and decided action; he sent orders to his lieutenants Najaf Quli and Afrāsiyāb to march from their posts to Delhi and awe the Emperor into dismissing his marplot favourite. The news of this move at once cowed the cowardly Kashmiri intriguer; he dismissed the Jaipur and Macheri envoys with empty hands and made the puppet Emperor sneak back into his palace (29th May), saving his face by the pretext that he had delayed stepping out of the fort on the 24th so long that the auspicious hour had expired and an evil star had risen to the ascendant in the meantime, so that this journey must be cancelled for his safety!

The Macheri envoys, cursing the spineless double-dealing minister, went back to their master, who had no help but to seek peace at Mirzā Najaf's hands by agreeing to pay an indem-





nity of 33 lakhs in three years,—out of which three lakhs were paid down and security given for the balance of the first instalment (c. 6 July 1778.) The three lakhs with which the Macheri chief had bought off the imperial generalissimo, were a loan from the Jaipur treasury, and the Nāroka now tried to evade repayment of it.\* Therefore, the Jaipur diwān Khushhālī Rām Bohrā called in the aid of Mirzā Najaf.

An imperial force under Zain-ul-abidin Khan (the son of a nephew of the Mir Bakhshi) was despatched and joined the Jaipur army. A confused and wavering battle followed on 8th August 1778, in which, after an initial success, the Macheri chief was deserted by his Maratha allies, and each side fell back on its camp. Next day the Nāroka, after again heavily subsidising the Maratha mercenaries, set off to raid Kot-Putli and other places in the Jaipur dominion with their help. But he thought it advisable to come to terms with the imperialists first and then turn his undivided forces to making annexations at the expense of the Jaipur kingdom.

So the Macheri chief with his Maratha allies came to Lohāgarh, won over Nawal Singh (of Nawalgarh) and other discontented Shekhāwat

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\* *Ibrat*, i. 347, says that Khush-hālī Rām [corr. Daulat Ram] Haldia, a fugitive from the Jaipur Court, who had become prime-minister of the Macheri Rajah, spitefully advised his new master not to pay!



vassals of Jaipur, and advanced to Najaf Khan's camp for paying a visit of submission. But he was suspected of harbouring the design of making a treacherous attack on the imperial general, and so Mirzā Najaf stood carefully on his guard. Rao Pratap Singh visited Najaf Khan, on 29th November 1778, but haughtily refused to pay any tribute. The Mirzā, through Gosain Himmat Bahādur, seduced Ambāji and his Marathas with a bribe of four lakhs, and with their aid surprised the Macheri camp early at dawn, a few days later. Pratap Singh, who had just bathed and was engaged in worshipping his idols, had barely time to cut his way through the ring of his enemies with a few followers; but "all his property and camp equipage, worth 20 lakhs of Rupees, and artillery were looted." The Rajputs fought desperately with the Mughals who barred their path, but effected their retreat to Rājgarh.

The imperialists now poured into Macheri territory, ravaging the country, capturing the fortalices and occupying the villages. It was already December and the complete submission of the Macheri chief to the Mughal invaders seemed imminent when the news came that Abdul Ahad was taking the Emperor out to Rajputana in order to rob Mirzā Najaf of his command in that region. So the Mirzā at once patched up a truce with the Nāroka, by agreeing to an indemnity of two lakhs only, and set off to meet





this new threat to the very foundations of his power.\*

§ 3. *Emperor's march to Jaipur; Rajah Sawai Pratap Singh offers homage and tribute, 1779.*

Shah Alam had no wish to give up his life of ease and pleasure in Delhi palace and face the hardships of a campaign or even those of marching and sleeping in tents. But he was completely in the power of his favourite. Abdul Ahad pointed out how Mirzā Najaf had been campaigning successfully against the Jat and Macheri Rajahs for a year but had not paid a single pice of revenue or the least share of the spoils of war into the public treasury. Moreover, the new Rajah of Jaipur was bound by custom to pay a heavy succession fee, which would be swallowed up by Mirzā Najaf unless the Emperor went to the scene in person. In the meantime, the troops raised by Ahad for the Emperor in Delhi were clamouring for their pay, which the empty royal treasury could not supply. If the Emperor marched into Rajputana the Rajahs and chiefs along his route were sure to present themselves and offer tribute in awe of majesty, without any resort to arms.

The Emperor yielded and issued from Delhi palace on 10th November 1778. Najafgarh was

\* Rise of Rao Rajah Pratap S. of Macheri and his wars with Najaf Kh.—DC. *Ibrat*. i. 313-321, 347-353. G. Ali iii. 118, 120-125. Miskin 335 (brief.) *Vamsh Bhask*, v.





reached on 17th December and then Rewari (where its Rajah Mitrasen Ahir interviewed and was saddled with a tribute of Rs. 1,25,000). On the 23rd the camp arrived at Kanud, 28 miles west of Rewari, when the local Rajah Bhagwant Singh was received in audience and a tribute of four lakhs was laid on him. Next day the camp was pitched beyond Narnaul (15 miles south of Kanud), to which Badil Beg was posted as imperial faujdar. In Rajputana proper, several local chiefs were received at Court,—Nawal Singh Shekhawat the Rajah of Nawalgarh on 31st Dec., Basant Singh the Rajah of Patan on 5th January 1779, and Nathu Singh the Rajah of Manoharpur (35 miles south of Patan) on 16th January. The furthest point reached was the village of Aminpur, in parganah Amirnagar, near Jaipur, on 17th January. Here the Kachhwa diwan Khushbhāli Rām Bohrā came (19th) to arrange for his master's presentation to the throne. But Mirzā Najaf himself arrived in the camp (23rd) with a strong and well-equipped army, and after some argument with his rival it was settled that these two ministers should jointly fix the Jaipur tribute.

On 19th February Sawāi Pratāp Singh was introduced to the Emperor by Najaf Khan. He presented a *peshkash* of two lakhs, and his tribute was settled by mutual agreement at 20 lakhs. The Emperor with his own finger put the *tikā* or paint-mark of Rajahship on his forehead, and then sent him back with many robes of honour



and gifts ; all his territory, including Narnaul, was restored to him. Najaf Khan undertook to collect his tribute, and leaving Himmat Bahadur as his agent for the purpose, he set out in the royal train (26 February) for the return to Delhi, which was entered on 21st April.

But the Macheri Rajah had again turned refractory, and on 26th March Najaf was given his *congee* from the imperial camp for punishing the rebel.\*

§ 4. *Abdul Ahad with Prince Farkhunda  
 Bakht invades Sarhind province.*

Abdul Ahad Khan, though holding the regency of the Empire, knew his own military weakness ; he had been long planning how to secure an instrument for overthrowing Mirzā Najaf Khan. Zābita had shrunk from such an enterprise ; the Jat Rajah and the Macheri Rao had been crushed by Najaf's superior force and statesmanship ; the Marathas were involved in a life and death struggle with the English and the domestic traitor Raghunath Dada. Only the Sikhs were left, and with them Abdul Ahad began to coquet.

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\* Abdul Ahad's plots against Najaf ; Emperor's journey to Jaipur.—*Ibrat*, i. 316-319, 319-321, 353-357. G. Ali iii. 121-130. Muna Lal 207-215. Miskin 339. DC. (details.)

Of Najaf Khan's operations against Macheri from April 1779 we have no information in any Persian work. CPC. v. 1568 gives some news about him written from Delhi on 26th and 29th July.



On 23rd September 1778 he sent his lieutenant Bahrām Quli Khan to welcome Sāhib Singh and some other Sikh sardars who had encamped near the Shālimār gardens north-west of Delhi. Then he persuaded the Emperor to confer the title of Najib-ud-daulah II on Mallu Khan, a younger son of the great Najib and now a Sikh *protege*, as a counterpoise to Zābita Khan who had become an adherent of Mirzā Najaf, (28th Sept.) The day after this, Ahad himself visited the Sikh sardars in the garden of Yaqub Ali Khan and gave them robes of honour in the Emperor's name. The pampered allies of the impotent Government celebrated the Dasaharā day (1st Oct.) by riding out and demolishing a mosque at "the Guru's bangla" near Rikābganj and ravaging the cultivated fields. [DC.] "*Jihad* in the path of Allah" is contagious.

Then followed the Emperor's journey to Jaipur which kept the Court away from Delhi till the 21st of April 1779. A new political game was now played. Abdul Ahad, seeing the path of his ambition barred on the east, south and west, turned to the north of Delhi and planned to establish his own authority in the name of the Emperor in the Pānipat region. For this purpose he had got his son-in-law Sayyid Ali Khan appointed faujdar of the Sonapat-Pānipat district (5 Feb. 1778.) But this tract was dotted with Sikh strongholds and some places in it were also held





by Najaf Khan's collectors. Ahad's men could establish themselves there only by superior force.

So, immediately after the return of the Court from Jaipur, Ahad called up the Sikh sardars of the Karnal district to his side for maturing a pact with them. The Emperor refused to admit them to his audience, as it would be acting contrary to Najaf Khan's avowed policy. Just then Rajah Amar Singh of Patiala sent an envoy with rich presents to Ahad to beg for imperial support. He was in chronic antagonism with the other Cis-Satlaj chiefs, and particularly with Baghel Singh. But the Sikh sardars then present in Delhi deluded the minister with false promises of their support in case he marched to the region north of Delhi and in concert with Amar Singh tried to restore imperial rule in the Cis-Satlaj districts ; they even held out a vision of reconquering Lahore and Multan for the Empire!

The old fool swallowed the bait, and urged the Emperor to set out on this campaign. Shah Alam declined ; it was midsummer, he had recently had an attack of fever ; and Najaf Khan could not be expected to join with the only efficient army under the royal banners. But Ahad overawed him by saying that if no expedition was undertaken the Sikh allies and the imperial troops would mob him for their outstanding subsidy and pay. The helpless sovereign ordered his son Mirzā Jahān Shah (Farkhunda Bakht) to march with the minister,—the eldest Jahāndār



Shah having wisely evaded the task on the plea of illness.

Abdul Ahad now got together a large horde of recruits and a train of artillery and set out from Delhi with the prince on 3rd June 1779, giving himself the airs of a generalissimo. As he moved north, along his route Mirzā Najaf's collectors were expelled and his own agents installed in their places ; those who resisted were attacked and their lands laid waste. When the expedition reached Karnāl, the local zamindar Gajpat Singh loyally waited on the prince and was forced to promise a tribute of two lakhs. Many other Sikh sardars also presented themselves and offered their adhesion in return for pay. "Gajpat Singh became Abdul Ahad's chief confidant and factotum for all Government business in that region. By his advice the Khan advanced and enlisted every Sikh who came in search of service and he gave to every Sikh sardar who interviewed him elephants, aigrettes &c. according to his rank. He planted Sikh *thanahs* wherever the ryots had fled away from the villages in fear of the royal troops." [Miskin, 340.]\* He spent the rainy season near Karnal.

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\* Abdul Ahad's Patiala campaign.—Br. Mus. Or. 25,021, ff. 246 b—270b (daily occurrences 9 Sep.—7 Oct. 1779.) Miskin 340-342 (present.) DC. *Ibrat*. ii. 1-5. G. Ali iii. 132-136. Muna Lal 216-220. CPC. v. 1568, 1509 (Ahad had raised 30,000 troops by May.) DY. i. 24 (Zābita cowed into neutrality.)





§ 5. *Abdul Ahad's expedition fails ; his disastrous retreat, October 1779.*

A fierce light beats upon Abdul Ahad's character from the records of this campaign. We happily possess minute daily reports of his sayings and doings and the incidents around him for the critical four weeks between 9th September and 7th October which marked the turning point of this expedition. They vividly illustrate his utter incapacity for war and management of men alike, his lack of the sense of reality in politics and his weak vacillating character. He shows himself an imbecile old man, swayed this way and that by his counsellors or by his own changing caprice,— in contrast with his rival's clearness of vision, firmness of will, and unfailing tact in dealing with others. Abdul Ahad had started with the two objects of taking possession of the Crownlands in the Sonapat district and exacting tribute from the numerous Sikh chieftains who had overspread the Panipat and Ambala districts. For accomplishing this task his instruments, in addition to the raw and nondescript levies recently raised by him, were some mercenary Sikh sardars whose brethren he was going to squeeze. His policy was further complicated by his relations with the Patiala Rajah. Alā Jat's progeny, in addition to the land-hunger common to all chiefs, were puffed up with boundless pride in consequence of the territorial confirmation and superlative title which Amar



Singh had bought from the Durrani conqueror. The hand of the Patiala Rajah was against every other Cis-Satlaj Sikh sardar of note, and their hands were against him. In particular, he treated Bhai Desu Singh of Kaithal as his vassal and tributary.

Thus, a hopeless conflict was introduced into Abdul Ahad's policy when he marched north at the invitation of Amar Singh and yet proposed to get his work done by the help of the other local Sikhs. Their adhesion to him depended solely on the cash nexus, and was sure to be lost as soon as he began to default in paying their monthly hire or demanded tribute from their leaders. Amar Singh had called in the Mughal premier only because he hoped to crush his rivals easily by using the awe of the Emperor's authority and the prestige of his son's presence. Therefore, as soon as Abdul Ahad made terms with the other Sikh sardars (like Desu Singh) and extended his protection to them, he thereby antagonised Amar Singh and was driven to declare war against his ally of Patiala as the only means left for recovering the vast expenditure he had incurred in coming there at the call of that ally.

Even then the imperial regent might have achieved a creditable degree of success and secured no inconsiderable payment of money, if he had possessed the practical wisdom to strike a bargain promptly and prefer a realisable moderate tribute to impossibly high demands. The royal minion





who had spent all his life at Court and whose sole weapon was his smooth deceitful tongue, found himself utterly at sea amidst the conflicting interests and tangled politics of the Sarhind province. And he made the situation worse confounded by mingling his private passions with his public duties and daily shifting his ground, instead of firmly following one clear-cut policy, as Najaf Khan used to do.

In the camp at Karnāl, Abdul Ahad was waited upon by Bhai Desu Singh, the chief of Kaithal. The regent, under the Machiavellian counsel of Gajpat Singh, on 12th September placed under arrest all the Sikh sardars then on a visit for paying their respects to him and the prince.\* This stroke destroyed all men's trust in the imperial Government's good faith, and henceforth the Sikhs kept aloof from him in well-grounded suspicion. Ahad first asked for three lakhs of Rupees from Desu Singh, and when the latter agreed to two lakhs, the royal minister raised his demand to five lakhs! At last the Kaithal chief's diwan agreed to 6½ lakhs on

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\* At night Gajpat Singh privately told Ahad, "It is difficult to extract money from Desu S. Therefore, as a political device, you arrest all the sardars including myself. Afterwards release us and keep Desu S. under confinement for realising the tribute." Majduddaulah, calling...[five sardars] inside his tent, arrested all of them. Then Tāj Md. Kh. reported that Gajpat and [three] others were agreeable to paying their tributes. Majd set them free, with the exception of Desu S. (*Akh.* 249 b).



condition of Desu Singh's estates being confirmed to him by imperial rescript and guarded from the Patiāla Rajah's encroachment.

Unaware of the real limits to his armed strength and swollen with a pride which would have been justified only by the complete subjugation of the Sarhind provniece, Abdul Ahad vowed to punish Desu Singh for his share in the defeat and death of his brother Abul Qāsim in the Doab in March 1776 ; one day he threatened to annex to the Crown all the estates of the Kaithal chief ; another day he demanded from his captive the surrender of all the guns and camp property of Abul Qāsim which he had looted after the Khan's defeat and all the contributions levied from imperial territory by this Sikh raider during the past four years. [*Akh.* 250 b.]

All this time Amar Singh, the foremost supporter of the invaders, kept himself aloof from the imperial camp. His diwan, however, came (13 Sept.) with bankers' bills for five lakhs of Rupees in favour of Abdul Ahad, on condition of his marching back and not menacing Patiāla territory. He even offered to add a quarter lakh of Rupees as *nazarāna* for the honour of the prince's visit. But Ahad angrily replied, "I have come here at your call. I shall exact from you all the money spent by me, in every way that I can." [*Akh.* 249 a.] It had become a point of honour with Abdul Ahad to make Amar Singh come to a personal interview. He was so obsessed with





the idea that he would not accept the Patiāla tribute from the Rajah's diwan, even when the latter raised his bid to seven lakhs in the hope of inducing the imperial army to retreat. But after Ahad's treatment of Desu Singh, the Patiāla Rajah would not venture within the Mughal minister's reach. He fled away from his capital, leaving its defence to his wife and her brother Mahā Singh, while he sent to buy the aid of Jasā Singh, Tārā Singh Ghebā and other formidable Trans-Satlaj Sikh leaders. The loyal Gajpat stood security for Amar Singh's tribute and urged Ahad to retire, but the imperial favourite was deaf to reason and entreaty alike. [*Akh.* 254 a.] He obstinately pushed on towards Patiāla and sent his vanguard to attack that fort and ravage the Rajah's territory. He even tore up the bankers' bills offered to him by the Patiāla diwan and insisted that Amar Singh must present himself at least once. The inevitable result followed this folly.

Turning north-west from Karnāl, and crossing the Saraswati rivulet near Pehowā (23rd September), the main imperial army under the prince and the minister pushed on to Ghurām, 15 miles south-east of Patiāla, on the 28th. Their base remained here, while their vanguard consisting of Sikh auxiliaries and some Mughalia horsemen was sent ahead to raid the villages up to Patiāla and its environs. This they did for some time till they were driven back by Amar



Singh's allies newly arrived from beyond the Satlaj under Tārā Singh Ghebā and some other sardars, in a strong body of 15,000 horsemen. At the same time Abdul Ahad's Cis-Satlaj mercenaries demanded the full payment of their promised pay before they would move one step in support of his campaign. [*Akh.* 265 *b.*] The friendly Sikhs negotiated between Ahad and Amar Singh and a deputation of them was, after much entreaty, induced to go to Patiāla (5th October) in order to persuade Amar Singh to come. The Rajah agreed and even fixed a day for the interview and set out from his capital, but went back from the way. Nothing but open war was left now, and Ahad sent up a strong division from his camp for attacking Patiāla. On the 7th a great battle was fought between them, Amar Singh fell back and shut himself up in his fort; the victorious imperialists encamped five miles outside Patiāla and laid siege to it. [*Akh.* 267 *a.*, 270.]

For two days there was an exchange of fire with the fort. It was ineffective, and Ahad was too faint-hearted or too wise to attempt an assault as the prince had rashly suggested. The tide now turned decisively against the imperialists. The condition of their camp was hopeless: "mutinies broke out in our army from the enmity between the Turks and the Afghans (the latter prompted by Zābita Khan), the refusal of Ghāzi Khan and other [Mughalia] captains to work as there was no money for paying their soldiers, and the tumult





created by Hurmat Khan, the chief favourite of Abdul Ahad. After Tārā Singh had arrived and joined the Patiāla Rajah, most of the Sikh sardars lately engaged by the prince suddenly deserted him, being lured away by Amar Singh's gold." [G. Ali, iii. 134.] To crown the Delhi minister's misery, another Sikh army, its number swollen by rumour to two lakhs of men, was reported to be coming in response to Amar Singh's appeal for help.

Abdul Ahad's position was now utterly untenable. On 14th October, early at dawn, he began his retreat from the environs of Patiāla. The enemy continued in pursuit of him up to Pānipat; but Bhāg Singh and a few other loyal Sikh chiefs fought heroic rearguard actions against their own brethren.\* Ahad kept his army together, sitting all day on his elephant and coolly surveying his troops in their running fight. The artillery proved the most effective defence of this compact and well-handled force against the myriads of Sikh horsemen hovering round. At Pānipat the pursuit ceased, and the harassed imperialists found their first camp and day of rest. They returned to Delhi on 5th November.

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\* The prince's presence undoubtedly proved the salvation of the Mughal army. The glamour of the imperial name had not yet totally disappeared, and the Sikhs shrank from going to an extreme in their attack on the Padishah's son, contenting themselves with loot only. If Abdul Ahad had been alone, he would not have returned alive from this ill-judged and ill-conducted invasion.





§ 6. *Panic at Court, Mirza Najaf recalled for defence.*

This abortive enterprise precipitated a crisis in the government of Delhi. By undertaking it Abdul Ahad Khan dug his own grave. When, on 16th October, fast couriers brought to the Emperor the news that his son had begun his retreat from Patiāla two days earlier, hemmed round by lakhs of Sikh horsemen, the royal Court was filled with utter consternation and despair. The only army under the Emperor's own control seemed doomed to annihilation and his beloved son to an ignominious end in that far off field. And after that sure disaster the tumultuous flood of Sikh mounted musketeers would sweep resistlessly southwards and take Delhi, now left without a single defender. The one ray of hope was Mirzā Najaf, then campaigning in the south with a large and efficient army and very capable lieutenants. Frantic orders were despatched to him to come immediately to the rescue. The Mirzā hurriedly called in his outlying detachments and his officers from their fiefs, and gathering his force together set his face towards Delhi. At the news of the royal invitation to Najaf, Abdul Ahad abandoned everything in his camp and hurried back to Delhi with the prince in order to forestall his rival in the possession of his master's ears.

Early in November 1779, Abdul Ahad Khan returned to the capital, a bankrupt in finance,





a bankrupt in military strength, and a bankrupt in prestige. The Emperor was naturally angry at this result of an enterprise by sanctioning which he had alienated Najaf Khan. But the smooth-tongued Kashmiri quickly recovered his lost ground ; he made much of having saved his master's son and brought his army back, and he whispered into the weak Shah Alam's ears the old tale of Mirzā Najaf's ambition and irresistible power which would enable him to set up and depose Emperors like the Sayyid brothers if he was given control over the capital and the Emperor's person. So, at Ahad's dictation the Emperor now wrote to Najaf Khan countermanding the first order to come to Delhi. But that general, disregarding this letter (received only two days' march from the capital), pushed on and encamped, on 12th November, in the southern suburbs at the Kishandas Tank.

Nothing was now left for Abdul Ahad but to make friends with his irrepressible rival. On 14th November, taking Prince Akbar Shah with himself on his master's behalf, he advanced to Najaf's camp to welcome him and conduct him to the Presence.\* Inside the fort and at its gates were posted Ahad's own troops under his son-in-law Qutbuddin Khan, with orders not to molest Najaf's men. The Mirzā, before his own coming,

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\* Fall of Abdul Ahad.—*DC. Ibrat*. ii. 7-16. *G. Ali*, iii. 136-139. *Muna Lal* 222-225. *Miskin* (present) 342-344.



had sent his strong-willed lieutenant Afrāsiyāb Khan with 1,000 horse and two battalions of sepoy's ahead. These men came to the fort gate and little by little edged their way in by jostling the guards, who had orders not to fight and whose captain was confounded in the absence of his master. When the courtyard was filled with his own retainers, "Afrāsiyāb Khan drove Abdul Ahad's men out of the fort like a flock of sheep." The 'Red Battalion' or Imperial Guard of sepoy's, at first demurred to vacating their quarters in the palace unless their arrears of salary were paid; but Afrāsiyāb Khan satisfied their captain with some money and more promises. The inner fort of Delhi now passed entirely into Mirzā Najaf's hands.

And then only did that general arrive from his camp, seated on the same elephant with the prince, but modestly in the back seat which is reserved for servants. At his audience he presented a *nazar* of 100 mohars and kissed the Emperor's toes, receiving in return a royal embrace, a turban and other robes of honour. His comrade Zābita Khan was also honoured.

### § 7. *Abdul Ahad's dismissal and captivity.*

The audience over, Mirzā Najaf Khan took his leave, and Abdul Ahad came out of the hall hand in hand with him in order to conduct him to the gate as a mark of honour and friendship. Najaf's lieutenant Afrāsiyāb Khan and his wakil





Manirām were waiting outside the Diwan-i-am ; they had urged Najaf to place Ahad under arrest and thus effectually prevent him from committing any more mischief, but Najaf had declined to create a scene in the Emperor's presence ; he hesitated long to imitate the Sayyid brothers and share their infamy. "When Abdul Ahad, clasping the hand of his rival, arrived outside the door of the Audience hall, he saw from the atmosphere and the look on his adherents' faces that he was now in the claws of his enemy ; he became alarmed and cast glances this way and that in bewilderment. But his friend Latāfat Ali Khan had smelt out the plot and, taking a hurried leave of the Emperor, ran out of the Audience Chamber, thrust himself between the two ministers and snatched away Ahad's hand from that of Najaf into his own. Afrāsiyāb now urged the Mirzā not to let this opportunity slip ; but Najaf would not even then consent, he left all his troops within the fort under Afrāsiyāb, while he himself went out and sat down in Raushan-ud-daulah's mosque."

Ahad passed all that afternoon and night at the gate of the Diwan-i-am, watched by Afrasiyab's men as sentries and by his own friends and the Emperor's servants as defenders. Negotiations with regard to his fate went on before the Emperor. Shah Alam was highly displeased at this restraint on his first servant and could not but take it as an insult to himself. Najaf's





emissaries, Maulvi Atāullah and Rajah Manirām, came and protested their master's loyalty and devotion to the throne. But Shah Alam strongly objected to surrendering Ahad and affirmed that minister's devotion to the throne. Next Mirzā Shafi Khan brought a second message from Najaf, reciting Abdul Ahad's long succession of hostile and treacherous acts; but the Emperor angrily turned his face away and ordered Shafi to warn his master not to touch a king's friend.

After Shafi had left, Latāfat Ali begged the Emperor to permit him to summon his own contingent into the fort through the river gate which was not yet occupied by Najaf's men, and clear the fort of the usurpers by opening musket fire on them. While the Emperor, as characteristic of him, was hesitating to make a decision, crowd after crowd of Ahad's partisans gathered on the river bank and filled the sandy plain below the fort as far as the eye could go. Shah Alam worked himself up to a high rage; he put his armour on and taking a bow in his hand issued from the harem on a portable litter, surrounded by the princes and eunuchs, vowing to expel Najaf's men. But by the time he reached the Diwan-i-am his courage had evaporated; his cowardly followers advised him to go back lest the opposite side should fail to show the respect due to royalty. He therefore returned to his bedroom, the tumult died out, and mediators again began to pass to and fro. Najaf Khan continued



till sunset seated in that mosque and humbly asking for permission to take Ahad out of the fort, and the Emperor as persistently refusing.

By Najaf's order his troops sent their horses out of the fort back to their camp, while they themselves remained inside and passed the entire night on the alert. The city was filled with tumult throughout the night, "as on Doomsday. A terrible noise arose from every lane and house ; none knew what was happening in the fort which was occupied by Najaf's followers while Abdul Ahad's retainers stood outside its walls, their hearts set on bloodshed." [*Ibr.* ii. 9-12.]

In their anxiety for the favourite's safety, the Emperor and his harem did not sleep a wink that night. By his order the princes went to the ante-room of the Diwan-i-am and sat down in a circle round Ahad to prevent him from being dragged into captivity. But very soon Najaf's intrigue and gold began to tell. As Abdul Ahad's cause appeared manifestly hopeless, his followers began to desert to Najaf's side and were eagerly welcomed there. At last when even Latāfat Ali and Mir Sayyid Ali, so long his chief lieutenants, went over to his enemy's camp, the fallen favourite gave up the struggle and sent to Najaf Khan to offer his entire submission. The Mir Bakhshi took oaths to protect the life and property of Ahad, saying that his only object was to exclude the mischief-maker from the Emperor's presence. Then Ahad went back to his master, took leave



of him, and was escorted by Afrāsiyāb to Najaf's camp, where he was lodged in all comfort in a separate tent (15th November.)

§ 8. *Mirza Najaf becomes supreme regent.*

The field being thus cleared and the last trace of opposition being removed, Mirzā Najaf Khan, at the Emperor's invitation, presented himself again at Court (16th Nov.) His thanks-offering consisted of two lakhs of Rupees in cash and some trays of jewels, besides twenty suits of costly apparel and five horses on behalf of his sister. The last repinings of Shah Alam for his favourite's fate were smothered under this load of gold, and he appointed Najaf Khan as his Regent Plenipotentiary (*Wakil-i-mutlaq*.) The other high posts so long held by Ahad were now transferred—the Second Paymastership to Prince Jahandar Shah, the command of the artillery to Prince Farkhunda Bakht, and the Superintendence of the Select Audience *cum* the diwani of the Crownlands to Prince Akbar Shah, nominally. But Najaf Khan as the deputy of these three princes henceforth became all in all in the actual administration; all *parwanahs* were to bear his seal, and all *sanads* that of the Wazir, whose deputy and substitute at Court was Najaf.

Unity of command was at last restored to the Delhi Government; there could no longer be any conflict in the policy emanating from the same source, and above all, the executive head of the



State was at last a veteran soldier with a strong army and capable lieutenants under him.

The effect of the change was at once felt. Mirzā Najaf by command took up his residence at the capital, in ex-wazir Qamruddin Khan's mansion near the Ajmeri Gate and began to attend Court daily in the place of Abdul Ahad. He sent Mirzā Shafī against the Sikhs in the upper Doab and the Sonapat-Panipat region, Afrāsiyāb Khan to the middle Doab, Muhammad Beg Hamadāni to Agra and the Jat country, and Najaf Quli Khan to Mewāt and Shekhāwati. Internal peace at last returned to Delhi, and external peace was assured by the regency of a soldier whose strength of character and military genius revived the memories of Najib-ud-daulah. We can therefore understand the raptures of our invaluable memoirist-captain Tahmāsp Khan (Miskin), now settled with his family in Delhi in affluence and peace after his long wanderings and privations. He writes: "There was now general happiness among all and sundry at the capital. Marriage and rejoicing were seen in every house; buying and selling went on in all quarters of the city; new houses were built or purchased. And all this through the gracious and competent administration of Mirzā Najaf Khan. All the chiefs, Turāni Irāni and Hindustāni, were happy, prosperous and exalted." [p. 344.]

But this happiness was destined to last for barely two years and four months.





## CHAPTER XXXI

REGENCY OF MIRZA NAJAF AND HIS  
FAILURE.§ 1. *Najaf Khan's moral degeneration after  
becoming regent.*

Mirzā Najaf Khan held the regency of Delhi for a little over two years,—from 19th November 1779 till his death on 6th April 1782. He lived at the capital all this time and was never able to go out on tour or campaign. A march to Rajputana for tribute-collection in the company of the Emperor, or at least one of his sons, was twice proposed, in March and October 1780, but both times the project was given up owing to illness of the leader or lack of funds for fitting out the royal train. The first half of the next year was taken up in making arrangements for the gorgeous celebration of the marriage of the Emperor's favourite son Akbar Shah. And in August 1781 Najaf fell into a decline which grew worse in time and by the end of the year was found to be a hopeless case of consumption. For the first three months of 1782 he continued to linger, but more dead than alive. Therefore, his period of actual work as regent extended over twenty months only, namely from 11th December 1779 when he removed to the regent's





official residence, the mansion of Qamruddin, to the beginning of August 1781. In this period only two expeditions were undertaken, *viz.*, the joint attack on Jaipur by Murtaza Khan Barech and Mahbub Ali Khan (April 1780—Feb. 1781) and Mirzā Muhammad Shafi's long campaign against the Sikhs (Feb. 1780 to 1782.) Both of these will be described later.

About Najaf Khan's internal administration and the condition of the Court the capital and the districts still under the sway of the Crown, we possess daily bulletins for 8½ months, supplying information with a degree of detail and authenticity unequalled by any other period of Mughal history. They cover more than a thousand pages of the Persian manuscripts transcribed for Claud Martin at Lucknow and now preserved in the British Museum (Or. 25,020 and 25,021.) These months are so fully typical of his administration that the absence of newsletters for the other months hardly affects our judgment. They throw a lurid light on the character of Najaf Khan, the misery endured by the helpless Emperor and his household, the sufferings of the subject population and the disintegration of the army, and they prove the regent's utter incapacity as a civil administrator.

A poor solitary adventurer from Persia, who had not a single relative or patron among the Delhi nobility, a Shia soldier whose only kinsman in India, the Nawab of Oudh, long pursued him



with deadly malignity, had now become the supreme director of the empire of India at the early age of forty-two. He had achieved this feat by sheer merit, which shone in unmistakable light by contrast with the worthless peerage and effete royalty of the later Mughals. But if Mirzā Najaf's rise was astounding, the end of his career was no less meteoric.

As the first officer of the administration, Najaf had henceforth to reside at Delhi, and Delhi proved the grave of his body and of his reputation in two years. The hardy abstemious soldier who had never tasted forbidden drink or unhallowed love before, soon turned into a typical Nawab in his private life. The diplomat whose coolness calculating power and strenuous activity had won the admiration of the Europeans who had seen him, now became a sluggard with a fuddled brain, whose highest skill was displayed in putting decisions off from day to day and evading difficulties by making smooth promises. The serpent that caused his fall was Latāfat Ali Khan, an eunuch general formerly in Oudh service and a brother Shia. This man introduced to Najaf Khan's notice a woman of bewitching fascination but abandoned character whom Latāfat had wedded; and she, entering Najaf Khan's private wine parties as a hand-maid in attendance, soon made herself his mistress and the minister of his pleasure in respect of other women. The regent began to





spend his days and nights in attending singing and dancing by professional women. He frequently dined out with Latāfat or his friends and every dinner was followed till late at night by carousal and dancing in the harem. Of this we have mention with tiresome frequency in the daily reports of his doings that went to Lucknow.\*

Excess in wine and women quickly sapped Najaf Khan's vitality. Delhi was an exceptionally unhealthy city in 1780, 1781 and 1782 and we read of repeated illness and child mortality in the royal family throughout this period. Najaf's friends complained that his constitution could not bear the change from his former active open-air life in camps and fields to the enforced inactivity of the close insanitary capital. He began to be troubled by long fits of sickness as early as October 1780, and though the doctors pulled him through, he would not listen to their advice to practise temperance, and after a year of such excess a slow secret fever seized him in August 1781 which ultimately developed into consumption and conducted him to a premature grave in 1782.

To any one who has followed Najaf Khan's campaigns against the Jats or Ruhelas, it would be incredible, but for the most authentic contemporary evidence in our possession, that this

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\* Br. Mus. Or. 25,020 and 25,021 (chief source.) *Ibrat*, ii. 25. *Zikr-i-Mir*, (printed), p. 138.



great general could now indulge in freaks of insane frivolity worthy of imbecile voluptuaries like Abdullah Qutb Shah of Golkonda or Wājid Ali Shah of Lucknow, as the following incident illustrates:—"On 4th and 5th June 1781, the Amīr-ul-umara taking his entire harem with himself, in the company of Latāfat Ali Khan made an excursion to Wazirabad [i.e., Wazirpur, north of Delhi fort.] At four *gharis* of the night he ordered the women of his *zanāna* to loot the melon-beds on the bank of the river near which his tents were pitched. Then he attended dancing till midnight; also next morning till one quarter of the day. The baskets filled with these melons were ordered to be sent to his mansion in Delhi." [Or. 25,020, f. 312.]

§ 2. *Misrule and administrative breakdown,  
State bankruptcy and universal suffering.*

Latafat Ali, as the minister of the regent's pleasure, practically ruled the State. His servants did as they liked to the people of Delhi and no redress could be had from their oppression by appealing to Najaf Khan or to the helpless sovereign. His Mughalia troopers, who had a suburb (called Mughalpura) north-west of the walled city to themselves, defied the custom officers and police and beat them with impunity. Even the Emperor's retainers living in the city were robbed and insulted by Najaf's servants, and Shah Alam's indignant complaining produced no effect.





In fact, while the regent revelled in pleasure, the administration of the realm broke down. As Shah Alam complained, "Owing to Mirzā Najaf's neglect of the administration, the empire is falling to pieces; the soldiers, receiving no pay, are dispersing in bitterness of mind." And again, "There is maladministration in all the territories under Najaf Khan, and yet he is sunk in pleasure and repose in the company of Latāfat Ali Khan, and takes no step to remedy this sorry state of affairs. Latāfat has gained such a hold on his mind that he agrees to everything that this man tells him." [*Ibid.*, f. 260 & 302.]

In the ceaseless pursuit of pleasure, Mirzā Najaf neglected the business of the State and left the administration in the hands of his Kashmiri diwans and Shia eunuchs, who acted as they pleased. The result of this rottenness in the head of the Government was the suffering of the people, even in the capital itself, and the failure of revenue collection. The oppressed peasantry in the masterless realm rose in despair and fought the local collectors; then an armed force had to be sent to crush them and sack their villages, which meant that this source of revenue was ruined for years to come. The highest statesmanship and unremitting attention to detail alone could have remedied this evil; but these virtues were nowhere to be found in the kingdom of Delhi then. The mischief was aggravated by a prolonged drought and failure of crops which



began to rage throughout upper India from 1780. While the price of grain and fodder kept the famine level, the State could get no money for paying its servants or feeding its troops and their mounts. Every one starved—the Emperor, his vast harem, the numerous *salātin* (or former Emperors' grandsons and great grandsons) in their fort-prison, even the menials and guards of the royal household,—and the blame for it was laid on Mirzā Najaf. And rightly, because he had gained the regency in the place of Abdul Ahad by swearing before Shah Alam and putting his seal on a *Qurān*, which the Emperor held as a pledge of his fidelity, that he would supply the Emperor's monthly subsistence money more punctually than his Kashmiri rival had done. And now when Najāf proved even more in default of payment than ever before, an intolerable situation was created.

In his financial distress, Mirza Najaf at one time thought of releasing Abdul Ahad from captivity and restoring his mansion and property to him in return for a ransom. He made Najaf Quli Khan his intermediary in these negotiations and a payment of four lakhs was mutually agreed upon. But the Kashmiri diwans set the Mirzā against the liberation of his rival as dangerous, and Najaf then changed his mind, thus putting Najaf Quli Khan in a false position. He showed a similar lack of firmness and sagacity in respect



of the Jaipur tribute, by constantly swaying to and fro between different and mutually jealous counsellors, so that in the end he actually received little, whereas by following a moderate but consistent line from the outset he could have given an early peace satisfactory to the Jaipur Rajah and promptly secured a reasonable but much larger sum. In the matter of the demand on Bhai Desu Singh's heir Lāl Singh, we see the same vacillation and folly on his part. Evidently he had ceased to be his own master.

When driven into a corner, he tried to escape by giving bills on his bankers, especially Lālji Mal, but these were returned dishonoured as he had long before exhausted his funds with them and even the advances that could be taken by hypothecating the next season's revenue. The unhappy regent sought to put off a declaration of his bankruptcy by every imaginable trick of evasion and false promise, till at last his countless creditors lost all faith in his words. His one remedy was persuasion (*fahmānidan*), and this he sent with his agents who were bidden to run after disgusted and mutinous captains and other creditors of the State and try to pacify them with words. But this magic pill by a too frequent use had lost all its efficacy. They would not take his words, they insisted on something more substantial. Almost every day there was an angry scene in his office made by his starving





captains and the agents sent by the starving Emperor to dun him. They openly taxed him with evasion and cried out, "We cannot any longer accept your promises to pay us tomorrow. Give us a plain refusal and dismiss us, if you like, but do not try to befool us like children."

The Emperor called him a hardened liar, a man of deceit, and in the bitterness of his soul cried out, "Abdul Ahad was a hundred thousand times better than you. I have no faith in you, nor ever had." The ladies of the imperial harem, equally exasperated by the withholding of their allowances, vowed to link their arms together and drown themselves in the Jamuna rather than constantly whine for their subsistence money and yet not get it for months together, while their credit with the shop keepers was exhausted. They even went into a hunger strike for some days. To the emissaries who came to offer Najaf Khan's excuses for his default of payment, "His Majesty said things which were not fit to be spoken." One day, driven to extremity by his distress, he told his slave Qambar, "If you eat any meal today, it will be drinking swine's blood. Go to Najaf Khan's house and sit down before him [in *dharna*.] Don't eat anything but prevent him too from eating, till the allowance of the harem is realised in full." Another day he told Maulavi Atāullah, "My condition has come to this that I have no second coat in my wardrobe." Then,





before his sons and nephews he wrote the verses:—

“The master of the world is ruining the world  
Through Najaf Khan and Afrāsiyāb.”\*

Another day he cried out, “I am sick of this life, —no subsistence money, overwhelming debt to the bankers and traders of Delhi. I cannot bear the shame of it any longer. O God! quickly mingle me with the earth!”

Mirzā Najaf at last realised that in grasping at the supreme office in such a State he had only gathered a Dead Sea apple as the fruit of his life’s endeavour. One day, when weakened by illness he came to Court, he laid his head down on the Emperor’s feet, and wept in shame. Not only did he fail to show the least spark of statesmanship and administrative genius during these two years, but he had not even the business instinct of discovering able and honest instruments and trusting them with power and his confidence in their work. He lived and died a mere soldier, though a fine soldier for that age, no doubt.

This single redeeming feature of Najaf’s character as regent comes out most clearly in the daily news-letters which tell us of his passion for getting new and better guns cast (especially by European experts like Mons. Levassoult), his frequent testing of the guns old and new, his

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\* *Jahān-rā Jahān-dār dārad kharāb, Ze dast-i-Najaf Khān wa Afrāsiyāb.* [Or. 25,020 f. 92 a.]



personal inspection of artillery practice and the parade of sepoy battalions, and his eagerness to raise disciplined battalions in the place of the rabble of indigenous troopers. Even amidst strangling financial distress, he could not resist the temptation of engaging a renowned and experienced captain like Shaikh Kabir and setting him to raise battalions of sepoys drilled in the European fashion, though he had nothing but promises of jagir to offer in payment.

As the historian plods his painful way through these thousand and more pages of daily reports of Najaf Khan's regency, he feels that he is visiting the world of shades, by a dolorous path, through a murky air, with the hopeless shrieks and agonised groans of the living who are calling for death ever ringing in his ears. He wonders not why the Delhi empire fell but how it could continue even after this. He understands the nature of the burden which Mahadji Sindhia took upon his shoulders and which all but crushed him.

§ 3. *Financial difficulties of Mirza Najaf as regent. Capture of Kanud fort.*

The new regent's one engrossing need was that of money. In order to overawe the opposition of Abdul-Ahad's party, he had enlisted an army of 30,000 men. The backbone of this force was a well-found artillery and battalions of trained sepoys who could not fend for themselves