

was in a position to resume his offensive north of the Chambal.

Sindhia's one true and steady friend was Ranjit Singh, the Jat Rajah, whom he had conciliated by the cession of his ancestral forts and promises of restoration to the glory of Suraj Mal's reign. The instinct of self-preservation made Ranjit Singh, like the Rao Rajah of Macheri,\* cling to Mahadji. The avowed aim of Ismail Beg was to recover all the Jat territory that Mirza Najaf Khan had once conquered and thus reduce the Jat kingdom to a petty zamindari, as it had been under Badan Singh. Ranjit had made use of the two months following Sindhia's retreat beyond the Chambal to increase his levy of his brave clansmen and he also took advantage of Ismail Beg's want of money to seduce (through the agency of Shah Nizam-ud-din) his starving and discontented mercenary troops. One of these former deserters from Sindhia, namely, Malik Muhammad Khan, on seeing his jagirs, Koil and Jalesar, seized by Ghulām Qādir Khan and that Ruhela chief now joined to Ismail Beg, left the Beg and came over to Ranjiit Singh,

---

\* The Rao Rajah of Macheri (Alwar) had appealed to Sindhia thus,—“If you come to my support the ruining of Jaipur would not be difficult. But if your design be otherwise, tell me plainly, so that I being a zamindar only may make terms with the Jaipur Rajah.” And again, “By joining the Maharajah [Sindhia] I have made all others my enemies. If he marches away to that side my kingdom would be lost.” [Akh. SJ. ms. 92, 196.]





along with Mons. Lesteneau (2 battalions) and Jahangir Khan (one battalion), on promise of better payment. "Every day numbers of cavalry and infantry used to leave Ismail and Ghulām Qādir for the Jat camp. Ismail Beg formed a pact with Ghulam Qadir for partitioning the entire Jat country between themselves, as well as the Maratha acquisitions in the north, marking out their respective boundaries beforehand." [*Ibr.* iii. 106.]

The Jat Rajah made a pressing appeal for reinforcements to Mahadji whose hands had been recently freed by his suppression of all the Rajput invaders and local rebels of Malwa and strengthened by the near approach of a body of fresh Deccani troops raised by his agents in Jambgaon (but none of the Peshwa's promised reinforcements.) On 16th March 1688 he despatched a strong body of horse with one battalion of sepoy and a few guns across the Chambal to join the Jats. [*PRC.* i. 208.] The strength of his enemies had been increased by Ghulam Qadir joining Ismail Beg near Agra (c. 24 March.) But the aims of the two chiefs were conflicting, and after a few days the Ruhela went back to the Doab (c. 31 March) in order to press his attack on Firuzabad. But during his short stay in Agra, the Maratha detachment that had crossed the Chambal was driven back with loss across the river after three days' skirmishing (25th-27th March) by a southward advance of Ismail Beg.





[DC. PRC. i. 208-210. *Ibr.* iii. 107-108.] This forward movement was a feeler on the part of Mahādji Sindhia, and it failed because the detachment was too small, the Jat Rajah was not prompt enough in uniting with it, and Ismail Beg was too quick in crushing it in its isolated condition.

On 4th April, a much larger, but still light, force was sent across under his ablest general Rānā Khan. It consisted of 10,000 horse and De Boigne's two battalions of musketeers. Hearing of the Maratha advance, Ismail Beg again left a thin screen in the siege trenches before Agra and marched south. At his approach, this Maratha division fell back from Rupbās to Dholpur without venturing on a battle, and the Beg lay encamped at Rupbās and then near Dholpur, watching the ford on the Chambal. Rānā Khan, Rāyāji Patil, Jivā Dāda, and other Maratha generals next made a rapid detour, forded the Chambal unperceived some miles to the west of Dholpur, and being joined by the Jat army on the way turned Ismail Beg's rear and surprised the besiegers of Agra. These last, in their depleted strength could make no resistance; their commanders, Ismail Beg's old father and Umrāogir Gosāin, had lost heart and were quickly defeated, the Gosāin being carried away as a prisoner and their baggage, horses and elephants plundered (7th April.) The victors fell back on Āchhnerā. [DY. i. 233, 285, 298. Sat. i. 132. HP. 518, 520. *Ibr.* is confused.]



On hearing of this reverse, Ismail Beg hurried back to Agra, confirmed his pact with Ghulām Qādir, called him to his side with his troops from the Doab, and the two exchanged turbans and dined together in sign of full brotherhood. As agreed before, the two chiefs, masking their siege of Agra fort, set out to conquer Bharatpur. Their combined strength at this time was reported as 12,000 horse, 25,000 infantry and a hundred guns. The Jat and Maratha armies when taken together were numerically as strong; but the Marathas were disheartened by repeated defeats and the brave Jats had no worthy leader; moreover, they were incomparably inferior in field artillery and heavy cavalry. Therefore, the only tactics they could pursue were to circle round the Muslim army at a safe distance and cut off its provisions. This they successfully did for some time. On 19th April the two armies came in contact, and next day at Kiraoli, four miles south of Achhnera, a severe battle was fought with heavy casualties, the slain numbering one thousand and the Jat army losing 12 guns and many standards. The Jats and Marathas fell back on Bharatpur, and the victors advanced to lay siege to that city. The Jat Rajah heartened the Marathas and induced them to continue the struggle. A last battle was fought, at Jaginā, two miles north-east of Bharatpur, on 1st May, which produced no decisive result, though Rānā Khan





received a bullet wound.\* The historian Khair-ud-din ascribes the Maratha failure to the treason of their ally Jahāngir Khan, who had joined Ranjit Singh with two battalions and ten guns, and fired only blank charges at Ismail Beg's army, and when Ismail had thus entered his ranks unharmed, Jahāngir opened real fire on the Jats and Marathas advancing behind him. "At last Rānā Khan retreated in the evening, the victors seizing much of his property in the field. But owing to the slaughter of thousands that day, neither side had any strength left for fighting."

§ 5. *Third stage of contest: Ismail Beg's disastrous Jat invasion and consequent Maratha predominance.*

So, Ismail Beg deemed it unwise to attack Bharatpur,† and in company with Ghulām Qādir proceeded to capture Kumbher which was poorly garrisoned and whose defences had been suffered to fall into neglect. The garrison of Kumbher, with no commander of ability or courage to lead them, lost heart after only one afternoon's bombardment and evacuated the fort at night. Next morning (3rd May) the two Khans entered the fort and seized all the property accumulated there since the days of Rajah Suraj Mal. Thousands

---

\* PRC. i. 217. Ibr. iii. 108-109. DY. i. 287.

† Ibr. iii. 109-114. DY. i. 288, 297. PRC. i. 219. G. Ali. iii. 260. ML. 330-331.





of muskets and swords and immense quantities of grain and munitions were thus gained.

Ismail Beg pressed for an attack on Dig before the Jats could recover from the shock of the loss of Kumbher. Leaving their booty in the conquered fort, the two generals marched on Dig. At night Ismail Beg ordered ladders to be made of all the flagstaffs in his army after detaching the colours, in order to deliver an escalade. Arrived at the village of Bhaj two miles east of Dig, the impetuous Hamadāni reconnoitred the fort and ordered an assault that very afternoon. Dismounting his troops, he himself led them on foot, sword and shield in hand. Coming near the fort wall he sat down, utterly exposed, without any shade or tent, and sent his men on to scale the wall. "The scene that followed was like Doomsday. The fire from the walls killed hundreds of the Muslims at that short range and the cannon balls rebounded again and again. On the immediate right and left hands of Ismail Beg, forty men were struck down and a soldier seated at his elbow had his head blown away by a shot. Once the assailants reached the counterscarp and tried to descend into the ditch for climbing the wall opposite. The garrison crowding on the ramparts showered on them shot, bullets, rockets, powder-balls (*huqqa*), large stones, blazing naphtha and logs of wood and brick-bats that came to hand. Hundreds were





slain and thousands wounded; the remnant fled away" (c. 18 May.)

At last Ismail Beg retreated from this hopeless attempt. The Maratha and Jat armies, biding their time, now fell on the abandoned Muslim camp and plundered everything there. Rānā Khan and the Jats chased the fugitives up to Fathpur Sikri, effectively cutting off their provision supply, so that grain sold in the Muslim camp at five seers to the Rupee. After refreshing his troops as best he could for a week at Fathpur, Ismail Beg left the place with his ally on 25th May and encamped in the Bāgh Dehra garden outside Agra.

As soon as the two Khans retreated from the disastrous attack on Dig, Mahadji Sindhia sent a strong detachment of his best cavalry (stiffened with more new arrivals from the Deccan) to cross into the Doāb and plunder Ghulām Qādir's newly acquired territories there.\* Knowing full well his own inferiority in numbers and artillery and the demoralisation of his troops, Sindhia formed a very judicious plan of campaign which quickly succeeded. He kept the enemy enveloped by roving Deccan horse from a safe distance and greatly distressed them for provisions, while his newly arrived fresh troops from Maharashtra were sent to raid the Doāb and thus compel Ghulām Qādir to hasten to the defence of his

---

\* Dy. i. 278, 295, 285, 300. HP. 518, 520-522. PRC. i. 220, 222. *Ibr.* iii. 114-117 (unsupported.)





own possessions there. This would leave Ismail Beg alone, and then it would not be difficult for the Marathas to crush him in his isolation. As a Maratha envoy wrote, "The troops of the Jat Rajah and Sindhia hover at a distance of 8 to 10 *kos* around the army of Ghulām Qādir and Ismail. In whichever direction these two Khans turn their faces, our men do not stay but flee away, being too afraid to stand a fight."

The Jāmbgāon contingent, 5,000 horse led by Devji Gavlé, was now advanced from its post near Mania (nine miles north of Dholpur) northwards across the Utangan to join Rānā Khan's division. Avoiding the still beleaguered fort of Agra, these troops first entered the Mathura district and expelled Ismail Beg's posts there and occupied Vrindāvan. One of the enemy battalions 700 strong with two guns posted here, in trying to escape into the Doāb, was overtaken on the bank of the Jamuna, four hundred of the men were killed, some others perished in trying to ford the Jamuna and also in the sinking of two ferry boats, and all their fire-arms (700 muskets and the two guns) as well as 25 horses were taken.

Then the victorious Devji hastened 16 miles northwards to Chirghāt and thence crossed into the Doāb, in order to convulse that country and cut off the grain convoys coming from that tract to the two Khans' camps before Agra. The Ruhela thanahs at Mot and Mahāvan were driven





out with slaughter and seven guns were captured here (4-10 June.) Koil city was sacked for six hours. The new strategy bore the expected fruit at once. Ghulām Qādir would listen to no appeal of Ismail Beg, but immediately sent away the bulk of his army from Agra to the defence of his own Doāb possessions. The rising flood of the Jamuna threatened his communication across it, and in alarm he himself crossed over with the rest of his army (15 June.)

For some weeks past the Marathas had been also making predatory night incursions on Ismail Beg's baggage camp with success, always taking care to run away with their spoils before they could be brought to an action. Ismail Beg, deserted by his ally, now found life unbearable: his provision supply was totally stopped, his starving ragged soldiers with their captains were daily deserting him for the Jat camp. Lesteneau and many Mughalias and Telingas had gone over to the enemy many weeks ago. And then, within two days of Ghulām Qādir's departure the crushing blow descended on the Hamadāni (17th June.)

§ 6. *Fourth stage of the contest: Ismail Beg finally crushed at Agra, 17th June 1788.*

In this decisive battle\* of the entire campaign, Sindhia's planning showed consummate

---

\* DY. i. 300, 303. HP. 524-527. Sat. i. 137. Ibr. iii. 116-119. PRC. i. 223. G. Ali iii. 264-267. ML. 331.





generalship and promptness of movement, joined to unfailing combination. The Jat-Maratha alliance had by this time been perfected; the courage and endurance of the Jat peasantry had been hitherto unavailing for the lack of capable leaders; but now the Marathas supplied this brain power, while the French-led musketeers added the necessary steadying element to the mobility of the Deccan light horse. These facts explain the completeness of the victory.

As soon as Ghulām Qādir began to transport his troops from Agra back into the Doāb, Rānā Khan sent fast couriers to recall Devji Gavlé from the Doāb to his own side. The junction was promptly effected and then the general set out in full strength to attack Ismail Beg. Meantime, Sindhia had heartened his troops for the critical contest by sending Rs. 113,000 and a hundred horses for distribution among them and attached ten pieces of artillery to the battalions of Lesteneau and De Boigne. The Telinga commandant Rāmru with four battalions and sixteen guns under him, was worn out by his privations in Ismail Beg's thankless service, and offered to desert to Rānā Khan. The pact was confirmed by a promise of Rs. 60,000 to him in bankers' bills, besides a jagir, on the eve of the battle.

In the fateful morning of the 17th of June, Rānā Khan massed his French-led infantry in the centre with the artillery in front. His two wings were formed by two powerful bodies of horse,





while a third cavalry division was posted behind the infantry with orders to wheel round at the right moment and fall upon the enemy's rear.

As the Maratha-Jat army came in sight of Ismail Beg's camp in Bāgh Dehra, a suburb of Agra, his captains took it for the usual daily demonstration of their timid enemy and did not care to arm for battle. But the steady advance of Rānā Khan and the fire of his artillery soon precipitated an action. Ismail Beg's guns in position replied with a lively cannonade which caused much greater loss to the Marathas, whose artillery was smaller and moving. Then Ismail Beg, with an impetuosity and courage worthy of Muhammad Beg Hamadāni's heir, charged the Maratha horse in person without waiting to form his battle order. The Deccan cavalry met the attack with equal bravery and crowded upon him from the two wings, "so as to strike his force in the waist." Gunfire ceased on both sides, and a severe fight at close quarters raged for an hour. But the disciplined sepoys of De Boigne and Lesteneau crushed all opposition before them by their cool and successive volleys, while Ramru with his four battalions withdrew from Ismail Beg's side without firing a shot. By the end of this time the Maratha reserve cavalry had made a detour and fallen upon Hamadāni's rear camp and set fire to the tents. Thus enveloped, first the servants and then the soldiers of the Muslim army took to flight and plunged into the Jamuna for





the Doāb. Ismail Beg, engrossed in the fight, cast his eyes on his right and left and found none but a few friends present. In despair, he sought to court a soldier's death by galloping into the thick of the enemy. But he had already received three wounds and Najaf Ali Khan (the son of Muhammad Beg) seizing his bridle turned him back from the lost field. The fallen general entered Agra city with only fifteen troopers, took his favourite mistress on his own steed, and going to the Jamuna bank drove his horse into the river and crossed into the Doāb. His wife, however, was drowned in trying to cross the river on an elephant.

Ismail Beg's defeat was complete and irretrievable. His army ceased to exist as an instrument of war. Excluding the four battalions of Rāmru which went over to the Marathas during the battle, Ismail Beg had about sixteen battalions of sepoy (including many who had deserted Mahadji at Lālsot) and five thousand Mughalia horse under him; and these were soundly beaten. The slaughter that ensued among his broken troops was terrible, while many who escaped the sword were drowned in fording the swollen Jamunā. "For one *kos* from the field to the river bank, the ground was strewn with the corpses of men and horses." A Maratha despatch inflates his losses to 8,000 battalion sepoy slain and 2,000 Mughalia cavalry and foot musketeers drowned in the river [HP. 525.] On





the Maratha side about 250 men were reported as slain and six hundred as wounded besides 2,000 horses killed. But among their officers the casualty was heavy, five being slain.

But it was a cheap price for such a decisive victory. The spoils of the victors consisted of a hundred pieces of artillery (including those abandoned in the trenches before Agra fort), 5,000 camels, 2,000 horses, twelve elephants, all the standards, band, muskets, tents and other property of Hamadāni's army.

§ 7. *Emperor's campaign against Najaf Quli Khan, Feb.-March, 1788.*

We now turn to another event, which like the episode of Prince Jawan Bakht's adventure did not influence the main contest in any way. While Ghulām Qādir and Ismail Beg were waxing in power and the Maratha star in North India was rapidly setting, the Rajah of Jaipur was induced by his ministers to invite the Emperor to issue from Delhi and join his faithful Rajput vassals in an attempt to reconquer the lost possessions of the Crown from the local usurpers. Pratap Singh's ministers hoped that if their plan succeeded the grateful Emperor would be thenceforth planted as a lawful barrier against any future Maratha attempt to dominate the Delhi Government or encroach on Rajputana.

From the Jaipur point of view the nearest and most harmful of these usurpers was Najaf



Quli Khan,\* who was carving out a principality for himself in Mewat and the Narnol region at the expense of the Shekhawati districts of the Kachhwa kingdom. He was equally hateful to the Emperor for his insolent contumacy to his Sovereign and seizure of Crownlands.

Sawai Pratap Singh's agent in these negotiations was the Gosain Himmat Bahadur who had been his mediator at Court in Mirza Najaf's time and after. The Emperor was tempted with the hope of gaining large sums as tribute from the Rajput princes if only he appeared among them in person. So, leaving Delhi on 4th January 1788, Shah Alam reached Bharawas, six miles south of Rewari, and here the Jaipur envoys Himmat Bahadur and Daulat Ram Haldia, as well as Bhim Singh the Marwar Bakhshi, waited on him on the 28th of the month. The Jaipur Rajah had his first audience on 3rd February. The two Courts remained encamped here for a month which was spent by the Emperor in dunning the Rajah for the promised tribute and the Rajah in replying that his realm had been devastated by Mahadji Sindhia and he had no money to give. After these vain parleys, Pratap Singh was glad to take his Sovereign's leave by giving bankers' bills for Rs. 25,000. [DY. i. 262, 279, 274.]

\* Shah Alam's expedition against Najaf Quli.—DC. DY. i. 281, 272, 274. HP. 518. *Ibr.* iii. 122-127. ML. 318-325. G. Ali. iii. 252-256.





Shah Alam now tried to settle accounts with Najaf Quli Khan. His own position<sup>1</sup> was precarious. As the Maratha envoy writes, "Money is nowhere to be seen. The Emperor is accompanied by five to seven thousand troops, but owing to fasting, fifty to a hundred men out of them are daily leaving him." In fact, Begam Samru's private army was the Sovereign's only defence. Najaf Quli lay encamped under the walls of Gokulgarh (two miles north of Rewari) with a force equal to his master's, but obstinately refused to restore that district and its forts or even to wait upon the royal visitor. On the contrary he laid claim to the post of Regent, as the only surviving "adopted son" of Mirza Najaf Khan, and to jagirs worth seven lakhs a year which appertained to that high office.\*

Shah Alam had to do something before his army should totally dissolve through lack of pay. A week after the Jaipur party's departure, he ordered an attack on the rebel. Entrenching his camp, and placing Samru's force on his right and his Hindustani generals on the left, he sent one division under Badal Beg Khan and other Mughalia sardars ahead towards the rebel position. These Mughalia troops used to pass all

---

\* "Najaf Quli is staying four *kos* from the imperial camp, with 1,000 horse, five battalions, and 35 guns, and declines to come to the Emperor's audience. The Emperor commands 2,000 horse, three battalions and 30 to 35 guns, but has nothing to eat. [DY. i. 281.]



the night in licentious revelry and drinking and fall asleep before daybreak. Najaf Quli learnt of it, and though himself a gay toper, he delivered a night attack on the slack and sleepy Mughalias (12th March), doing great havoc. Shah Mir Khan, Itiqad-ud-daulah and some smaller officers were slain; the rebel's Sikh allies charged up to the Emperor's residential tents. But Himmat Bahadur drove the raiders out of the trenches. Shah Alam rode off and took shelter within the square of Begam Samru's European-led infantry, who by their rapid and accurate artillery and small arm fire put Najaf Quli to flight at last.

But the Emperor had not the strength to crush the rebel, nor any money for supporting his inflated army. Summer was fast approaching. So, at Begam Samru's welcome mediation, he agreed to patch up a peace. On 19th March Najaf Quli was presented to him, by the same lady, with his wrists tied together with a handkerchief, like a penitent captive rebel, in order to soothe imperial dignity. "His offences were forgiven and he was given a *khilat*, . . . restored to his offices and left in charge of his districts as before"!

After this conclusion, as lame and ludicrous as Muhammad Shah's Bangarh expedition, Shah Alam at once returned to Delhi (23rd March.) "This failure has made his prestige light." [DY. i. 274.]





## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## GHULAM QADIR'S TRIUMPH AND FALL.

§ 1. *Ghulām Qādir is admitted to Delhi by nāzir Manzur Ali and appointed Mir Bakhshi and Regent, Sept. 1787.*

The story of Mahadji Sindhia's contest with Ismail Beg Hamadāni has taken us to the middle of 1788. It is now necessary to go one year backwards in order to study the acts of a less efficient but more harmful enemy at the royal Court. This was Ghulām Qādir Khan, the son and successor of Zābita Khan Ruhela. He had entered into his dead father's heritage (21 Jan. 1785) without paying the customary succession fee to the Emperor or his Regent. His house, like that of all Afghans, was torn by internal dissensions. Ghulām Qādir had once run away from his father to Sindhia's camp for refuge. He now imprisoned his paternal uncles and mother and attached their property. Sindhia courted his help against the Sikh raiders of the Cis-Satlaj and upper Doāb tracts, in oblivion of the fact that these men had been made by Zābita Khan the prop of his house.\* In February 1787, Sindhia

---

\*In 1777 Zābita publicly professed the Sikh faith and took the name of Dharam Singh. Hence the saying: *ēk Guru-kā dō chele, ādhā Sikh ādhā Ruhēlē*. [Ch. 29 § 12.]



detached Ambāji Inglé to Karnal for controlling the Sikhs in that region by making a pact with Ghulām Qādir. But the young Ruhela Chief showed no eagerness to accept the invitation, and when at last he did come to see Ambāji (mid April) he left him abruptly.

The defection of Muhammad Beg Hamadāni from Sindhia's side (25 May) was Ghulām Qādir's opportunity. Ambāji was recalled with his troops to Rajputana and the Ruhela began to drive out the Maratha collectors from the upper Doab and seize the imperial territory there. The Maratha retreat from Lālsot fanned his ambition to the fullest blaze; Ghulām Qādir would become Mir Bakhsbi like his father and grandfather and conduct the government of the Empire. So, he marched his army to Bāghpat (21st August) and sent to ask for an interview with the Emperor. There was a conflict of policy in the royal council. Sindhia's representatives at Court were Shah Nizāmuddin (a former religious mendicant of saintly pedigree) and Lādoji Shitolé Desmukh (Mahadji's son-in-law), and these two tried to uphold his cause though unable to back it with adequate strength of arms. Against them were ranged Manzur Ali Khan the all-powerful superintendent of the harem (*nāzir*) and the old ministerial clique of Mirzā Najaf's time. The *nāzir* bore implacable hostility to Sindhia and wanted to use Ghulām Qādir as his tool for overthrowing the hated Hindu control over the





Government. Indeed, he had saved the child Ghulām Qādir's life by throwing his mantle over him at the imperial sack of Ghausgarh and now spoke of him as his nurseling. [DY. i. 232.]

Delhi fort could have easily held out for months, if only there had been a man to lead its defence, for the river was now in high flood and the invading Ruhela army on the east bank was starving and daily dispersing. But Sindhia's cause at Court was ruined by the incapacity and cowardice of his two agents there and his own bankruptcy which made the unpaid garrison of Delhi rise frequently in mutiny and mob these ministers throughout the Lālsot crisis. And now when Ghulām Qādir appeared at Shahdara, opposite the capital, Shāh Nizāmuddin rashly decided to play the soldier. Instead of defending Delhi by holding the line of the river as military experts advised him to do, he sent a force across the raging Jamuna to attack. The detachment was too small and "his raw levies had not yet learnt how to hold their muskets." Immediately on landing on the east bank, they were attacked by the Ruhelas, led by a Frenchman named Baise (?), defeated in a twinkling and driven back into the river, where a few of them were drowned and the rest escaped, after abandoning all their muskets and one piece of artillery. Mādhō Rao Phālké who had been sent to the eastern bank three days earlier with a small troop of Maratha horse, had no time to save this detachment and





promptly admitted defeat by shutting himself up in Shahdara and finally surrendering to Ghulām Qādir. [DC. PRC. i. 164. *Ibr.* iii. 24-25 (full.) DY. i. 229.]

This encounter happened in the morning of the 23rd of August, within sight of all the people of Delhi. The Emperor was now induced to open friendly parleys with Ghulām Qādir by sending his slave Tamkin to him. On hearing of it, Sindhia's two agents fled away from Delhi that night. The city mob rose against them, and 20 camels laden with Deshmukh's property and some carts conveying Nizām-ud-dīn's treasure and belongings were plundered by the soldiery. Next day the Emperor placed Shah Nizām-ud-dīn's house under attachment and threw his brother into prison. [DC. DY. i. 227.]

Into the capital, now swept clear of every enemy, the Ruhela chief came on the 26th and was presented to the Emperor by the nāzir. Then he crossed over to the Delhi side with his troops and occupied Shah Nizāmuddin's garden-house in the southern suburb between the Delhi Gate and the Turkman Gate of the city. He laid claim to the post of Mir Bakhshi and the control of the imperial administration as in the days of his grandfather and offered to march out with his army for the reconquest of the Jat country and Agra district, which legally appertained to the Mir Bakhshi's office, as soon as the necessary *jāgirs* were assigned to him for the support of his





contingent. The nāzīr was his intermediary and patron. On 5th September Ghulām Qādir entered Delhi at the head of 2,000 Ruhelas and established his rule over the royal city. The Emperor had no help but to confer on him the post of Bakhshi-ul-mamālik with the titles of Amir-ul-umara Raushan-ud-daulah Bahadur and the customary robes of honour and presents. From hard drinking his eyes were inflamed and he was in an uncontrollable mood. The trembling Emperor invested him with the robes of the Regent and ordered rescripts to be issued for granting him *jāgirs* corresponding to his rank and office, and also for placing the control of the Crownlands in his hands. When the royal servants whispered, "He is unworthy of this post," Shah Alam silenced them by saying, "I must turn this calamity out of Delhi somehow or other; if not, should the Ruhelas lay hands on the city nobody can save it. It is expedient to humour him."\*

§ 2. *Ghulām Qādir turns against the Emperor, Oct. 1787. His conquests in the Doab. Prince Jawān Bakht's futile adventure.*

But the drunken Afghan youth could not yet have all things in his own way at Delhi. The

---

\* DY. i. 228. "When Ghulām Qādir went up to the Emperor to present a *nazar* of thanks offering for his sword of office, not a single gold coin for the purpose could be found anywhere. Such is the condition of the Mir Bakhshi." (Maratha envoy at Delhi.)



widow of Walter Reinhard, popularly called Begam Samru, was present at the capital with her compact French-led army of four battalions of disciplined sepoy and 85 guns, to guard the throne. She refused to take her orders from the new Regent, and then there was a rupture between the two. The lord of Ghausgarh could expand his possessions towards Delhi only at the expense of the principality of Sardhāna in the same region which Begam Samru was building up. The remainder of September passed in their wrangles and parleys. The Emperor's policy was to use the Begam as a shield against the Ruhela dictator; he honoured her and her stepson Zafar-yāb Khan, and with her help and that of the Sikh sardar Bhangā Singh, manned the walls and trenches of Delhi to resist Ghulām Qādir, who crossed back into the Doab (12th September) in order to avoid a clash with Begum Samru, on the west bank.

The nāzir's political sagacity was shown by the fact that within a month his *protege* the new Regent was bombarding his master's palace. On 7th October, Ghulām Qādir from the east bank opened fire on Delhi fort. At first Salimgarh suffered from the cannonade, and finally on 30th October twelve large balls fell inside the palace, killing a child in the courtyard of the Diwān-i-ām. [DC.] The Emperor wrote frantic appeals for help to every side, but the nāzir frightened him into countermanding his order to Mahadji Sindhiā





to come to Delhi. Hence, Sindhia's envoy Ambāji Inglé had to return baffled from his audience (14th Nov.) The *nāzir* at the same time conveyed to Ghulām Qādir his sovereign's pardon for the outrage on the palace. A month after this rebuff to Sindhia, his power in the north suffered an utter collapse when Ismail Beg drove him beyond the Chambal (20 Dec.) and the jungle of the Delhi monarchy was left masterless for the unfettered play of the rival ambitions of the local Muslim nobles.

Prince Jawān Bakht (Jahāndār Shāh)\* arrived at Delhi at his father's call on 8th December, 1787. But the worthy heir plotted to seize the palace by surprise, confine his father and make himself *de facto* sovereign. His own want of character and capacity and utter lack of material resources destroyed all hope of his ever being able to play the role of the saviour of the Delhi monarchy. At last Shah Alam was glad to get rid of him after thirteen days, by sending him with the rank of governor (*subahdār*) to Agra,—a province which had yet to be conquered. The prince reached Agra on 24th December, but finding Ismail Beg unwilling to serve him and having no independent force of his own, wisely rejected the pious *faqir* Khair-ud-din's counsel to assassinate Ismail Beg

---

\* The Prince's movements and policy are described in the fullest detail by Khair-ud-din (his unheeded Mentor) in *Ibr.* iii. 41-101. Dates in *DC.* G. Ali, iii. 238-247, 250. *HP.* 183. *DY.* i. 253, 232.



and left the place soon afterwards to see if he could have better luck with Ghulām Qādir in the Doab. This hoped for Afghan patron attempted to kidnap his master's son but the plan was foiled by the prince's firmness. At last in utter disappointment, Jawān Bakht sneaked back to his refuge in British territory (end of February 1788.) His only gain from this adventure was to take back with him his wife and children whom he had left behind in Delhi when escaping from that fort in April 1784.

From the barren interlude of the prince's adventure, we now turn to the history of Ghulām Qādir. Immediately after being created Mir Bakshshī, the Ruhela chieftain renewed his career of usurping the Crownlands in the Doab,—both the Emperor's privy purse estates (*sarf-i-khās mahals*) and the jāgirs of the Marathas, as the only means of finding subsistence for his growing army. He had already seized Jhijnbhāna, Barnāwa, Baraut, Budhāna and other districts up to Mirat city. The Maratha outpost at Mirat held out for some time, but the defence broke down when Mahadji retired from before Agra at the end of the year. Ghulām Qādir pushed on southwards through the Doāb, occupying the country and driving out the agents of the lawful jāgirdārs. [DY. i. 226, 230.] Further south, Himmat Bahadur had laid siege to the Maratha fort of Firuzabad, Phup Singh Jat and Yaqub Khan Pathan had recovered their respective seats of





Mursan and Khurja, and Malik Md. Khan and Himmat Bahadur established their own rule over the entire tract from Sikandrabad to Firuzabad and Aligarh. [*Ibid.* 246, 248] The conflicting ambitions and plotting for treachery among these nobles prevented any concerted action by them against Mahadji. In the earlier months of 1788, while Malik Muhammad was seizing lands round his jagir of Koil-Jalesar, Ghulām Qādir remained involved in the siege of Aligarh (which fell to him on 17th February) and Ismail Beg in that of Agra fort. But when at the end of March Sindhia renewed his offensive north of the Chambal, Ismail Beg made a pact with Ghulām Qādir, brought him over to Agra (9 April) and joined forces with him. How the campaigns of these two allies failed in the end and left the Jats and Marathas undisputed masters of that field, has been already narrated in the last chapter.

§ 3. *Ghulām Qādir with Ismail Beg reappears and takes possession of Delhi city. The nazir's treason. July 1788.*

We now turn to the history of these two allies after their crushing defeat on 17th June in the outskirts of Agra. From that fatal encounter Ismail Beg Hamadāni arrived in Ghulām Qādir's camp on the opposite bank with only the clothes he stood in. Nor could he find any relief here. The Ruhela's own position was unsafe, because next morning the cannon-balls of Sindhia's army



began to fall into Ghulām Qādir's camp from across the river, and the news came that the victors were attempting to cross the Jamuna higher up at Mathurā and cut him off from his base in the upper Doāb. So, the two allies parted company: Ismail Beg first went towards Firuzabad, but on being sternly refused admission into Oudh territory he fled to Patparganj opposite Delhi and sent to beg an audience of the Emperor, which was at once declined and the city gates were shut against him as a precaution. So, he had to return to Ghulām Qādir.

That Ruhela chief, after breaking camp at the Nur-āfshān park opposite Agra, went to Aligarh, replenished his military strength by taking guns and munition out of its vast magazine, and marched to Shahdara (1st July 1788.) He mercilessly robbed the populous cities of Shahdara, Patparganj and Ghāziabād, which were rich emporia of the trade of the Doab coming to feed the capital. Ismail Beg here joined him and formed a new pact for the division of the lands and spoils seized in the proportion of two to one between them.

The Emperor and the capital again trembled. A feeble attempt at defence was made through Himmat Bahadur, the only faithful general left to him, but the attempt failed through the Sovereign's lack of personal courage and will force, the disloyalty of his nāzir and the treachery of his Mughalia troops, who were now the only garrison





of Delhi. A troop of Maratha horse, only 2000 strong, had been sent up by Mahadji from Mathura ((8th July), under Rāvloji and Bhagirath Rao (his clansmen), and these reached Bārāpulā, 10 miles south of Delhi three days later, and interviewed the Emperor. But events now moved too fast, and the Ruhela, working in secret concert with the eunuch nāzir Manzur Ali and the grocer Rām Ratan Modi who dominated the Emperor's mind, anticipated the Marathas in the possession of the capital. These two traitors sent 200 ox-loads of powder and shot from the fort-stores to Ghulām Qādir, and intrigued for his success.

Immediately after hearing of the Maratha victory over Ismail Beg at Agra, the Emperor had sent two courtiers with the highest robes of honour and presents to Mahadji (24th June), inviting him to Delhi. But the nāzir and other courtiers of the old gang were mortally afraid lest Sindhia should now punish them for their late treachery and hostility. They clung to the hope of saving themselves by placing Ghulām Qādir Khan in charge of the capital. At first Shah Alam took up a strong attitude of opposition to the Ruhela and ordered the city to be held against him. But he had no longer the efficient corps of Begam Samru at his back. His only generals were Himmat Bahadur Gosāin and Badal Beg the Mughalia leader. The exactions of the Gosain had roused the entire Delhi population against him, and his troops also were weakened by starvation. Badal





Beg and the entire Muslim force at Delhi were corrupted by Ghulām Qādir through his friends at Court.

On 14th July the Ruhelas crossed the river at Barāri Ghāt, in the north of Delhi fort, at three quarters of the day. The imperial army was sent forth to oppose them. But treason had done its work; Badal Beg and his Mughalias went over to the enemy; and then the loyal Hindu generals, Himmat Bahadur and Ravloji Sindhia, also withdrew from their positions to avoid being caught in a trap. That very night these two retreated to Faridabad, 17 miles south of Delhi, and the capital lay defenceless. On the 18th the Afghan-Hamadāni army took full possession of the city. But the *palace-fort* could still have held out, as it was garrisoned by the loyal Red Battalion (*Lāl Paltan*.) Resistance within its impregnable walls could have allowed time for an adequately strong army to come up from Mahadji's camp to its relief. But the imperial cause was ruined by the treachery of the nāzir.\*

On the 15th the weak Emperor was tricked by his nāzir into granting an audience to Ghulām Qādir. Thus began the last Afghan occupation of Delhi which lasted for two and a half months, from 18th July to 2nd October, 1788. It inflicted unspeakable suffering and dishonour on the royal

---

\* *Ibr.* iii. 128-134. *DC.* ML. 334. *G. Ali.* iii. 267. *DY.* i. 301, 304, 308, 309. *HP.* 528. *PRC.* i. 225.





family and ruined the prestige of the empire beyond recovery. Shah Alam was deposed (30 July) and blinded (10 Aug.), tender children and helpless women were done to death by denying them food or drink for days together, princes were flogged, princesses were dishonoured, servants were beaten till they died, the entire palace area, as well as the mansions of the rich outside the fort, were turned upside down by digging for concealed treasure, the palace was denuded of its property and the royal family of its youthful beauties to gratify the Ruhela's passions. It was a dance of demons for nine weeks.

§ 4. *Mahadji Sindhia's policy and action during Ghulam Qadir's usurpation vindicated.*

What was Mahadji doing during these days of agony? Can he be blamed for having been too slow in going to the rescue of a master who had publicly cashiered him? A study of his movements and position at the time will furnish the answer to this question.

After the great victory at Agra on 17th June, Rānā Khan could not promptly follow up his success and make an end of his enemies by a relentless pursuit, because when Ghulām Qādir broke up camp next day, he sank all the boats of that ferry and dragged away their crew with himself. Rānā Khan, therefore, had to move up to Mathura and there collect fresh boats and boatmen to ferry his army over into the Doab.



In the meantime the river level was daily rising. Thus a fortnight was lost, during which the two defeated Khans reached Delhi. On 4th July, Mahadji Sindhia himself arrived at Mathura, and here Ranjit Singh Jat joined him four days later. From this place a small force was detached to Delhi on the 8th, but neither Mahadji nor his main army under Rānā Khan moved to the capital.

It should not be forgotten that Sindhia's position even now was far from secure. His recent victory had been almost accidental and reflected the errors and misfortunes of his enemies rather than the undisputed superiority of his own arms. The sepoy battalions and Mughalia horse that had deserted him before and had come over to his side during that battle, might turn traitors a third time. The Emperor himself had warned Sindhia about the character of these faithless mercenaries. [DY. i. 229.] Sindhia knew that he had not a single real friend north of the Chambal except the Jat Rajah, and he was not going to repeat Sadāshiv Bhāu's mistake by leaving his secure base in Jat-land, advancing a hundred miles northwards among a hostile population and there living "in the air" with a long and precarious line of supply and communication. With an inveterate enemy like nāzir Manzur Ali constantly at the Emperor's ears and that Emperor a wax doll in the hands of any strong-willed courtier by his side, it was unsafe for Mahadji





to go to Delhi, except in overwhelming force [HP. 530.]

But his Deccani troops refused to march to Delhi unless they were paid their dues, and their arrears ran back for nine years to the time when he had led them into Gujarat for fighting General Goddard. It took long to "persuade" them through Jivā Dādā Bakhshi to be satisfied for the time being with fractional payments and more liberal promises. [HP. 537.]\*

In addition to this, he had at last been disillusioned about the value of the reinforcements promised to him by his master at Puna, or rather that master's master, Nānā Fadnis. During the long months of agony and suspense, when his future hung in the balance, persistent reports came from the Deccan that the Peshwa's Government had decided to break their unsuccessful general in the north and supersede Sindhia by Ali Bahadur or Tukoji Holkar in conducting the Maratha interests at the Delhi Court and collecting the tributes of Rajputana. The British Resident reports such a plan again and again in his despatches to the Governor-General. This was the unkindest cut of all from the Chitpavan Machiavel whom Mahadji fondly called his brother. [PRC. i. 226.]

---

\* Why Sindhia delayed.—PRC. i. 225-227. HP. 537. His new policy of conciliation.—PRC. i. 224. Sat. i. 165. DY. i. 330 (Raghogarh.)





Therefore, Sindhia must first know clearly where he stood, and he must build up a reliable foundation of alliances. For this he reversed his former policy as Regent; he would no longer assert the full rights of the Crown against powerful military chiefs by resuming their usurped imperial territory or calling them to a strict muster of the contingents that they were paid to keep. No, he would now revert to the facile and mischievous policy of Mirzā Najaf Khan by parcelling out the Empire as fiefs to the military leaders and thus entrench himself amidst a coalition of selfish interest. For this he had abased himself before an inveterate enemy like Umrāogir Gosain when brought a prisoner in arms against him (7th April) Sindhia gave him every honour and comfort and facility for escape (on 18th May.) He conciliated the Rāghogarh Rānā by restoring him to liberty and his estate. And he now offered to every Muslim captain and professional commandant of mercenary battalions,—even to Ghulām Qādir and Ismail Beg—an agreement to confirm them in their landed possessions, if only they would be friends with him. These negotiations, conducted by the sly old fox Shāh Nizām-ud-din,—took time to mature, and during the necessary interval before Mahadji felt himself strong enough to march to Delhi, Ghulām Qādir struck at the Emperor. Shah Alam's cowardice and his imbecile dependence upon the faithless nāzir robbed him of the least chance of





defence, or of holding out for a month or two only, during which the starving Ruhela hordes would have dispersed of themselves and Sindhia's relief army could have reached the walls of the beleaguered capital.

§ 5. *Causes of Shah Alam's downfall analysed: his character, his domestic enemies and faithless advisers.*

But it was not to be. No man can rise above destiny, as the wise of ancient days have truly said. Destiny is only another name for character, and Shah Alam's character alone was responsible for the fate that now overwhelmed him and his house.

The Pādishāh was extremely weak and inconstant, but not treacherous nor incapable of right thinking. He only lacked firmness of purpose and the capacity for action. The bleak penury of the first fifty years of his life and then the habitual use of opium (as an aphrodisiac sedative) had paralysed his will power, while leaving his intellect unclouded. Hence, with all his intelligence, his daily study of scripture and history, and his life of piety and abstinence (except in making additions to his harem), he only proved another example of how cowards die many times before their death.

His clear brain recognised that among all the competitors for power at Delhi, Mahadji Sindhia





was the only man capable of managing the Regency and enabling him to realise his heart's wish which was, in the homely phrase that he used to the Maratha envoy, "to eat his bread for a few days in peace." Every one, including the British Residents, perceived this preference of the Emperor. Shah Alam had cherished an unshaken faith in Mahadji's loyalty and capacity ever since the march from Allahabad in 1771, and he knew that the great Maratha's rivals for the Regency were fools or knaves. As for the English, though Shah Alam in days of extreme fear to his life or throne used to appeal to the Governor-General for armed aid or an asylum in British territory, it was his consistent resolve never to make himself a puppet in their hands as the Nawab of Oudh was. Nor did he wish to be daily insulted by an English keeper as he had been during his years of sojourn in Allahabad. But in spite of his spineless character, Shah Alam could have been saved if only he had a more honest servant than Manzur Ali the eunuch as his keeper and a worthier counsellor than Ram Ratan the grocer at his side during the eclipse of Mahadji's power at Delhi.

Over the fortunes of Delhi royalty at this time lay the blight of Shah Alam's character. To make things still worse, he had the bitterest enemies under his own roof. A dynastic feud helped to bring about his ruin, though that ruin ultimately overwhelmed the rivals of his blood





no less than his own sons and grandsons. The line of Alamgir II had gained the throne of Delhi by ousting the branch of Muhammad Shah reigning before, had blinded and killed the last legitimate sovereign of that branch and kept that hapless Emperor's descendants in grinding poverty within the cells of the royal prison in Delhi fort (called the *Salātin* quarters.) This had gone on for thirty-four years without any relief.\*

Shah Alam's miserliness had grown with age and the increase of his treasure hoards. Though he had made large accumulations from the Bengal tribute after his treaty of 1765 with Lord Clive, and from the spoils of Pathargarh and Ghausgarh, he refused to give his captive kinsmen anything beyond the coarsest daily bread. Even that bread did not always reach them, and the famished grandsons and nephews of former Emperors used to make a deafening clamour which penetrated beyond their prison-walls to the ears of the foreign visitors to the royal audience, such as

---

\* *Ibr.* iii. 140. When prince Akbar appealed to his friend the newly crowned Bidār Bakht to relieve the sufferings of his hungry and thirsty children, Bidar replied, "The Empire of Hindustan belongs to my forefathers. During the thirty years that your father has been Emperor, what hardships and sorrows did we not endure? For thirty years we have borne it patiently. Now the turn of kingship has come to me."

Row by starving prisoner-princes: Modave's *Journal du Voyage* tr. by me in *Islamic Culture*, 1935. Pester, *War and Sport in India*.



Comte de Modave (in 1775) and Captain John Pester (in 1804), like the howls of ravenous beasts in a neglected zoo. These princelings were driven to desperation by their monotonous sufferings and the utter vacuity of their lives. They were ever ready to join any usurper of the Regency who would raise them to the throne and give them a few days' relish of the joys of kingship, even though they knew that deposition and murder would most probably close their brief reigns.

And the females of the species nursed even greater malignity. Mālīka-i-Zamāni, the honoured chief widow of the Emperor Muhammad Shah, who lived in her own mansion outside the fort walls, had nursed her step-son Ahmad Shah, the Emperor, and could not forget that Shah Alam's father had seized the crown by robbing Ahmad Shah of his heritage and eyesight. So, she now offered Ghulām Qādir twelve lakhs of Rupees as the price of replacing Shah Alam by Bidar Bakht, the captive son of Ahmad Shah, and she was known to have amassed much wealth of her own. Sāhiba Mahal, another widow of Muhammad Shah and the mother of the great Durrāni conqueror's wife Hazrat Mahal, joined her in this project. [DY. i. 309. But *Ibr.* iii. 137 gives ten lakhs.]

§ 6. *Ghulam Qadir's vindictiveness towards Delhi royalty.*

A second vendetta mingled with that of the princes of Timurid blood, to make the ruin of





Shah Alam II complete and accentuate its agony and shame. Najib-ud-daula had been regent of the empire for ten years, but his son had roused Shah Alam's wrath and had been defeated and his two seats at Pathargarh and Ghausgarh had been sacked with every cruelty and their treasures plundered by the victors. Now was the turn of Zābita's son. Ghulām Qādir saw visions of his father and grandfather chiding him for not avenging the wrongs of their house on the effete Timurids of Delhi. He believed himself to be the divinely appointed instrument for purging the royal house of Hindustan; with his manly Afghan clansmen at his back he claimed to be "the Scourge of God," (*Qahar-i-Khudā*.) He must abase into the dust the cowards and lechers who soiled the throne of the Empire of India. The Afghan spirit of revenge\* would not be satisfied unless he recovered by force every article taken away from his father by the imperialists and exacted compound interest on it. This explains the brutality, the long drawn out torments and the dishonour of royal ladies which marked out his sack of Delhi from every other atrocity of the kind known in the blood-red annals of Islam.

The torture and dishonour inflicted by Ghulām Qādir Khan on the Delhi royal family, on its tender babes and aged women, on its servant-girls, eunuchs, petty store-keepers and

---

\* Ghulām Qādir's revenge.—*Ibr.* iii. 154 (*Qahar-i-Khudā*), 141, 143 (guns of Najib-ud-daulah taken back.)



humble valets as well as the highest princes,—form a long chapter, which fills, in my manuscript of Khairuddin's Persian history, 33 foolscap folio pages, with 20 lines to the page and drags on from day to day for two months. But a modern historian cannot conduct his reader through all the agonised circles of this Inferno of the living; he must pass over the horrid details and give only a brief general sketch of the kinds of suffering borne by the Timurid royal house, not a hundredth part of which was endured by the house of Capet, whose misery too found a mercifully speedy end on the guillotine.

§ 7. *Ghulām Qādir deposes Shah Alam and crowns Bidār Bakht, 31 July 1788.*

After Ghulām Qādir and Ismail Beg had been admitted into the palace by the nāzir who forbade any resistance by the Red Battalion guarding the gates (15th July 1788), they occupied Delhi city (18th.) Then they began to press the Emperor for money to furnish forth their army for a holy war against the infidels from Maharashtra. Shah Alam had to yield to every demand they made, and sent his son Sulaiman Shukoh (24th) as a hostage for his good faith to their camp, to accompany them in the projected *jihad*. Meantime, the Dowager Empress Mālīka-i-Zamāni had made a pact with Ghulām Qādir to give the throne to her grandson Bidār Bakht in return for twelve lakhs of Rupees; and this agreement was now to be implemented.





On 30th July the two Khans came to the fort and swore on the Qurān to be true to Shah Alam. The loyal commandant of the Red Battalion offered to resist their entry, but the trustful Emperor forbade any opposition. Thus, two thousand Afghans took over control of the palace and drove out the king's own guards, without a blow. Then Ghulām Qādir abused and threatened the Emperor and kept him and his sons confined in the chapel,\* while he with Ismail occupied the Diwān-i-khās and the Haiyāt Bakhsh garden all night, amidst the loud weeping of the harem ladies.

Early next morning, the rebel chiefs enthroned Bidār Bakht,—the son of the ex-Emperor Ahmad Shah,—in the Diwān-i-khās, under the title of Nāsir-ud-din Muhammad Jahan Shah, and sent Shah Alam and his 19 sons into the prison-quarters called the *Salātin*. The plunder of the palace by the Ruhelas had begun the evening before and it continued till the last day of Ghulām Qādir's stay in Delhi.\*

---

\* Deposition of Shah Alam II.—DC. PRC. i. 228. *Ibr.* iii. 137—139. (Alacuna in my ms. of ML. G. Ali gives only a few verses.) DY. i. 310, 311.

DC and a Persian news-letter to W. Palmer state that Ghulam Qadir deposed Shah Alam on discovering that Emperor's letter of appeal to Sindhia. But Khair-ud-din among his minute details mentions no such breach of faith on the old sovereign's part. Moreover, after 15th July, Shah Alam was a mere cypher and the *nāzir* all in all within the fort.





§ 8. *Shah Alam blinded. Imperial family and palace servants put to torture, Oct.-Nov. 1788.*

The deposed monarch was pressed to divulge his treasure hoards. When he replied that had nothing more beyond what had been already found in the treasury and stores, he was threatened and insulted. Ghulām Qādir sat down by his side, passed his arm familiarly round his neck and blew his tobacco smoke into his sovereign's face! Then the unhappy king was kept seated in the sun, without food or drink.

On being urged again and again to disclose the hiding place of his wealth, Shah Alam at last replied in bitterness, "What I possessed, you have already found in the store-rooms. Have I kept anything hidden in my belly?" The Ruhela's retort was, "May be your belly will have to be ripped open". On 10th October, in a frenzy of vindictiveness and avarice, Ghulām Qādir had needles driven through the eyes of Shah Alam. Next day, in unimaginable brutality, he called for the Court-painter and bade him draw a picture of himself as he knelt on his half-dead master's bosom and carved out one eye-ball with his dagger, while the other eye was extracted by Qandahāri Khan. The wounded old man was left for days together without a drop of water; three valets were killed and two water-carriers were wounded by Ghulām Qādir with his sword, in





order to deter others from relieving the royal distress in secret.\*

The maid-servants of the palace were subjected to inhuman and disgusting tortures, and the eunuchs were beaten to death to make them confess where the fort treasure lay buried. The screw was next put on the princes and princesses; all members of the royal family were kept without food or drink for three or four days, till many of the children and old ladies sank into death and one wife of the new Emperor died from utter terror. Two ex-Empresses died of privation, and one of them was by the Ruhela's order left unburied for three days until the stench became unbearable. Maniyār Singh reported that in two days 21 princes and princesses had died and others were in a dying condition.

Revenge is sweet, but it may be bought at a price which turns it into gall and worm-wood, as Mālīka-i-Zamāni now found to her cost. She had secured her grandson's accession by forming a league with the Ruhela and had used her brief days of power to plunder the houses of the wives of Shah Alam and send them away to Salimgarh

---

\* G. Q. went up to Shah Alam, whose eyes were still running blood, and pulling him by the beard cried out, "Served you right. This is the return for your action at Ghausgarh." [*Ibr.* 147.] Afghan vengeance may sleep for decades, it never dies.

G. Qadir's atrocities.—*Ibr.* iii. 136-174 (fullest.) *DC.* *PRC.* i. 227-235. *DY.* i. 309-314, 344, 327. *HP.* 530, 537, 538. *Sat.* i 150.





prison without a change of clothing, and beat their servant-girls for their mistresses' wealth. But when she asked Ghulām Qādir to hand the palace over to her now that he had collected more than the promised twelve lakhs from it, he replied that the contents of the palace treasury were the former spoils of his father's capitals, and that her debt to him must be satisfied out of her private property. He began to beat the princes and even a sister of Shah Alam for extorting their wealth, and on 22nd August, had Mālika-i-Zamāni and Sāhiba Mahal brought away from their mansions in the city with only the clothes they were wearing and ordered them to be placed on the terrace of the Octagonal Tower, exposed to the gaze of the public on the river bank, and subjected to unslaked thirst for hours together. Their mansions were dug up and swept clear of everything found there above or below the ground by the Ruhela's agents.

One almost feels a grim satisfaction that divine justice did not sleep over the prime cause of these princely sufferings, the arch-traitor nāzir Manzur Ali. His turn came next. When he could produce no more money from the palace, his Afghan foster-child turned sharply on him and asked, "Even maid-servants have been revealing the hiding places of gems and gold. How is it that you, who have long been superintendent of the Emperor's household, do not know them?" A fine of seven lakhs was laid on him and he him-



self was beaten, dragged into a latrine and threatened with having his mouth stuffed with excrement unless he paid it. His house was sacked and yielded Rs. 40,000, besides 5000 gold coins, gold and silver ware, jewellery and costly clothing (23rd Sept.).

§ 9. *Ghulām Qādir's brutality of speech,—  
dishonours queens and princesses.*

The young Ruhelā Chief's avarice and vengeance were accompanied by a brutality of speech and manners which is surprising, because in a habitual drunkard like him one often finds a certain bonhomie and intervals of frankness and liberality. But Ghulām Qadir was without pity, as he was without shame or truthfulness. When his Court-patron Manzur Ali appealed to him to spare him torture by recounting how he had saved the child Ghulām Qādir's life at Ghausgarh, the Ruhela's reply was, "Do you not know the old proverb, 'To kill a serpent and spare its young, is not wise'?" He forced Prince Akbar Shah, the heir to Shah Alam's throne, to get drunk and dance, though dancing by a male is considered a most despicable act in Indian opinion. At the sight of the poor terrified youth's tottering steps, the Ruhela laughed and cynically remarked, "If you and your family had not been singers and dancers, I should not have come to this position." One day he cried out, "I shall order my Ruhelas to drag away the Mughal princesses to their





houses without wedlock, so that from their seed a manlier race may spring." Many more examples of such taunting are given by Khair-ud-din.

Murder for the throne and torturing for treasure are familiar things in palace revolutions in the East and were not unknown in mediæval Europe. But the worst offence of Ghulām Qādir in the eyes of Indian society was his dishonouring of the women of the imperial family. Some of them were beaten, many starved to death, and the two most honoured widows of Emperor Muhammad Shah and the queens of Shah Alam were exposed to public view without any screen around the place or over-all (*burqa*) on their persons. He went even further. Hearing of the beauty of the youthful daughters of two Shāhzādas, he called them up before him at night in the Moti Mahal, stripped them of their veil and wimple, showed them to his boon companions, asked indelicate questions about them and hugged their persons.\*

The unhappy princesses were at last rescued and restored to their families by Maniyār Singh commandant. So greatly was the Delhi royal house still honoured by all classes, amidst its decline poverty and defeat, that even the rudest rustics and most ferocious brigands would refuse to insult a Mughal princess by look or act. Only

---

\*This is my mild translation of *Az har eke insāf-i-bemāli-e-ānhā mikhwāst; wa tā bahār eke ikhtilāt-i-nashaista dar miān dāsht*. [Ibr. 153.]





six years after this, a very clever English civil servant named Thomas Twining made a private journey to Delhi. On his way back, near Bulandshahar, his slender escort of 20 sepoy was threatened by a band of 150 to 200 strongly armed Gujars, the most fierce and dreaded class of habitual robbers. He quickly had his own *palki* screened round and bade his guards cry out *Padishahka haremki Bibi Sahib* ("A lady of the imperial seraglio"), and at once this large robber horde withdrew after making him a cold salam! (*Travels in India*, 269.) Even savage Gujars and hardened robbers shrank from a deed which the son of one imperial Regent, the grandson of another and himself a Regent by office did not blush to commit.\*

The merit of efficacy cannot be denied to the Ruhela's methods of torture. However inhuman their character, they bore speedy fruit. Maid-servants through fear of torture or greed of reward or spite, divulged the secret chambers where coins, gems, gold and silver plate and costly clothing were kept concealed. Some of these, from having been buried underground or kept in cellars (*sard-āba*) for generations, had become utterly discoloured. Some of the cloth of gold

---

\* From *HP*. 530 we learn that a selection of choice beauties from the imperial harem was taken away to his palace at Ghausgarh. *Ibr.* is silent on the point, but speaks of the handsomest dancing girls in the palace being ordered to be transferred to his harem.



and diamonds and pearls now dug out were so rare and precious that when Ghulām Qādir asked the Delhi jewellers to value them, they confessed that they had never before seen anything of such high value and could make no guess at their prices, nor could a single purchaser for them be found nowadays. The total spoils of Delhi, in cash and kind, were estimated by his own wife at twenty-five *krors*\* of Rupees [*Ibr.* iii. 175], and some more coins and jewels were found by Rana Khan and the palace servants among the *debris* left behind by his excavations. The champion of crescentade against the *Kafirs* from the South, removed the gold coating of one cupola of the Jāmi' Masjid and sold it, but was prevented from similarly stripping the remainder by Maniyār Singh who warned him that such an outrage on the holy edifice would rouse the entire city population in arms against him. [*Ibr.* 158.]

§ 10. *Ismail Beg's policy and conduct: condition of Delhi city, Aug.-Sept., 1788.*

What was Ismail Beg Hamadāni doing while the drunken Ruhela was thus rioting in the palace? Their contract was that the spoils should be shared between them, one-third going to the Mughalia leader and two-thirds to the Ruhela Chieftain. When Shah Alam was deposed on 31st July and ill-treated, Ismail Beg remonstrated with

\* A more sober estimate is fifteen lakhs in cash, besides rich clothing and furniture for which there was no market.





his colleague, but in vain. When nothing was paid to him out of the plunder of Delhi palace which had now begun, Hamadāni left Ghulām Qādir in anger and encamped in a distant quarter of the city. His ally's attempts to conciliate him failed, as Ghulām Qādir would not give him his full share, but offered small sums only. Henceforth there was an armed neutrality between the two new lords of Delhi, the wards and gates of the city being divided between them, while Ghulām Qādir alone occupied the fort. At one visit paid by the Ruhela to Ismail, the Mughalia officers tried to seize him and hold him to ransom for their master's dues, but Ghulām Qādir was saved by his sepoy commandant Maniyār Singh who formed a square round the Afghan's person. [*Ibr.* 163.] At last on 25th September, he sent to Ismail Beg Rs. 40,000 out of the spoliation of the *nāzir*, a ridiculously small sum when compared with his gains from the palace hoards.\*

For nearly two months the city of Delhi lay a divided realm at the mercy of the Afghans and Mughalias, who often came to blows in the streets in the act of plunder. In these encounters, the Ruhelas were worsted, because the Mughalias had many friends and fellow-clansmen among the

---

\* Rupture with Ismail Beg.—*DC.* *Ibr.* iii. 141-143, 163-167. *DY.* i. 313. At the end of September Sindhia agreed to give Ismail Beg  $1\frac{1}{2}$  lakhs of Rs. in cash and the fief of Rewāni which was to be wrested from Najaf Quli, *DY.* i. 342; 339 (or Ghausgarh.)





resident population and traders of Delhi, where the Afghans were always unpopular. But utter want of money and scarcity of provisions made Ismail Beg's position very unsafe; his starving soldiers at last began to leave him and go over to the Marathas. Finally, when near the end of September the Marathas began a new offensive against Delhi, Ismail Beg made a pact with Sindhia and joined the forces of Rānā Khān openly (28th Sept.) in attacking the Ruhelas then holding the city and fort. On the 7th of October he was sent away by Sindhia's orders to attack Najaf Quli in Rewāri.

§ 11. *Rānā Khān reconquers Delhi city and fort,*  
*2—11 October, 1788.*

This brings us to the Maratha reconquest of Delhi. We have already seen that the small body of Maratha horse sent by Mahādji on 8th July from Mathurā to Delhi had failed to stem Ghulām Qādir's entrance into the capital and had therefore fallen back to Faridabad along with Himmat Bahadur who was now a servant of the Emperor (14th July.) Two months passed away before Sindhia was in a position to strengthen this detachment. But during this interval Deccani horsemen crossed over to the eastern side of the Jamunā and by plundering the grain caravans seriously affected the food supply of Delhi, [19th Aug. DC.]





At last, on 14th September Sindhia sent off a large force under his best general, Rānā Khān, to Delhi,\* who was followed about twelve days later by another division under Jivā Dādā Bakhshi. His failure to clear the arrears of his men's pay delayed their start and progress. But they were "persuaded" by their generals, and at last arrived at Faridabad, and after confirming their pact with Ismail Beg began their attack on the Ruhelas. On 28th September they occupied Old Delhi, immediately south of Shah Jahan's city. Thence they advanced into the capital and occupied it on 2nd October. After some skirmishing, all the Ruhela troops were driven into the palace-fort, against which the Marathas with Ismail Beg and Begam Samru on their side opened fire from their trenches. [DY. i. 344.]

Ghulām Qādir could no longer maintain himself in the fort, especially as his troops there were starving from the effective Maratha raids in the Doab. So, he began to cross his booty, baggage and army over the river by way of Salimgarh, *en route* to Ghausgarh, but still kept a garrison of his own in the palace. His treasure convoy on the way to his home was looted by the Sikhs and Gujars in concert with the Marathas who had now entered the upper Doab in large numbers and helped to "make the country from

---

\* Maratha reconquest of Delhi.—*Ibr.* iii. 170-172. DC. PRC. i, 234-236, 243. Sat. i. 156. *Aili Patravayav.* 266. DY. i. 320, 324, 325, 338, 342, 344, 315. HP. 538.