

AURANGZEB

*** BY THE SAME AUTHOR**

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Portrait of a Chief Minister—Biography of Bansi Lal

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AURANGZEB

MUNI LAL



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To
my brothers
(Bharaji, Mohan Lal and Jagdish)
and sisters
(Rattan and Toshi)

O' ye gods, render me
worthy of their love.

PREFACE

If it is a sin to subordinate the means to the end, then Aurangzeb was perhaps the most offending of all Mughal Emperors. There was no ambiguity in his mind about the ends he was born to work for. He was equally convinced that the means *per se* were outside the realm of good and bad, and that they drew their ranking in ethical values from the righteousness or otherwise of the ends themselves.

On the understanding of this bias in favour of the end depends, to a very large extent, the judgment that may in the end be passed on Aurangzeb's actions in war and in peace. His was a personality compounded of obsessions with many ends. That these ends were most often at conflict with one another made his make-up a puzzle hard to sort out. To try to assess him in unqualified words will, therefore, be at best a vain exercise in uselessness. There was not one Aurangzeb, but many Aurangzebs in his anatomy vying with each other for dominance. In the end, on the death bed, all these Aurangzebs vanished into thin air; they all acknowledged defeat, and sought forgiveness for their lapses and trespasses. This was perhaps the finest hour of a monarch who yearned to go down in history as the protector of what he considered the noblest spiritual values known to man. In sorrow and in penitence, he rose to heights not scaled by any of his illustrious ancestors.

In men of the highest character and dazzling genius there is to be found invariably an insatiable desire for honour, command, power and glory. Aurangzeb was amply endowed with these inner urges. He yearned for honour; hence his deep-rooted hostility to the faction at Agra that looked down

upon him for his views on religion and kingship. He wanted to have the laws of Hindustan under his commandment; hence the war of succession, with all its brutalities and ruthless suppression of all forms of opposition to his will. He was desperately in search of supreme power; hence his unending wars in the Deccan against the Sultanates and the Marhattas. He was in search of glory in this world and the next; hence his daring championship of the rules and ways of life enunciated by Islam.

Aurangzeb's ambitions were most aroused by the trumpet clang of the popularity of Dara Shikoh in the north and Shivaji in the south. The means he chose to realise his dreams were, in his reckoning, the necessities forced on him by Providence. The vindictiveness with which he used them was a measure of his desperation; it reflected perhaps also his fears and his conviction that his footsteps were guided by the Supreme Master. The imprisonment of his father and the slaying of his three brothers were only unsavoury corollaries to his fixation with the right of survival. The belief in him was firm that Shah Jahan, as also Dara Shikoh, Shuja and Murad, would have done to him what he did to them had he failed to do what he did. His fears were, perhaps, not unfounded. Ambition and suspicion always go together.

The foregoing observations are not an apologia for the crimes committed by Aurangzeb, but only an attempt to understand the heartless aggression let loose by one pledged to live by the principles of Islam. He ate simple food, said his prayers five times a day even on the battlefield, shunned luxury in all its forms, earned his living by stitching his own garments, seldom let the strains of music sully his soul, eschewed wine and inebriating herbal concoctions, restricted himself to the Islamic injunction of not possessing more than four wives at a time, fasted on all days in the month of Ramadan, attended to official work even on days when he was gravely ill, distributed alms to the poor with his own hand on holy days, underlined the principle of equality by sleeping at night on hard ground when in camp, built magnificent mosques all over the empire, encouraged religious studies by giving liberal grants and stipends to saints and scholars, removed from the

walls of royal apartments all paintings and works of art, wore no pearls and jewels and robes of silk—in fact, he lived for the best part of his four score years and nine as a hermit sworn to practise in word and in deed the preachings of the Holy Prophet.

How come then that such a man as this razed history-crusted temples to the ground, desecrated places of worship, trampled underfoot the susceptibilities of millions of his peace-loving subjects, cut to pieces all those who seemed to oppose either his religious or political will, threw his own sons and daughters in prison at the slightest evidence of disloyalty, imposed extreme economic and social hardships on all those whom he classified as non-believers, and did many an un-Islamic act in the name of Islam? This is a poser that admits of no single answer. The personality of Aurangzeb was a complex of contraries difficult to analyse and understand. To comprehend correctly his mental structure has been the despair of the medieval and modern historians. The best that can perhaps be done is to examine his character in parts, and give praise where praise may be due and pass strictures where condemnation may be called for. There is no such homogeneous totality as Aurangzeb. There is only a bundle of parts, some good and inspiring, others bad and dissipating, that goes by the name Aurangzeb.

This is the sixth work in the series mooted in 1974 to cover the life-stories of the Mughal Emperors. The focus has always been on the monarch himself, not on the abstractions of kingship and the modes of governance. This is the strength and also perhaps the weakness of these presentations. An attempt is made to interpret events in terms of the Emperor's likes and dislikes, distrusts and loyalties, loves and hatreds, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, beliefs and aspirations, and also his vision and the lack of it. The story of the life of Aurangzeb is fascinating in that it provides an opportunity to have a good look at various stages of the evolution of a ruler who began by being an unrelenting iconoclast and ended as a conscience-stricken penitent. Aurangzeb's youth was, according to modern norms, a blunder, manhood a grim, uncompromising struggle and old age a regret. At forty he was everything,

at eighty nothing.

The first half of Aurangzeb's tempestuous career was spent largely amidst the hurly-burly of intrigues and jealousies in the north, and the second half amidst continuous wars in the south. The Deccan turned out to be his Waterloo. His lowly grave near Daultabad is a sharp reminder to all aspirants for power that ambition, having reached the summit, loves to descend, and it also proclaims loud and clear that distrust and aggression are the worst enemies of man. Aurangzeb had the seed of ruin in himself. He lost the empire in trying to establish what he thought would have been God's kingdom on earth. He accepted the inevitable defeat with grace. Truth sits upon the lips of dying men.

There is a lesson in all monarchs' lives. If this work succeeds in bringing home the lessons of the life of Aurangzeb, the time and labour spent on it will not be in vain. The blood was his argument and God his refuge—a contradiction that could not but land him in waters too rough to swim. Religion does not mix with statecraft.

Mistrust and murder will out—sooner rather than later—despite efforts to hide them. The official court chroniclers, principally Mirza Muhammad Kazim and Musta'idd Khan, suppressed the stories of Aurangzeb's atrocities and religious persecutions. They restricted themselves to recording the details of such developments as changes in taxation and the land revenue system, postings of *Subedars*, and *Bakhshis*, births and deaths of members of the royal family, travels of the Emperor and the princes, marriages and engagement ceremonies in the imperial House, bestowal of honours and *jagirs* on members of the nobility, etc. Seldom did they expand on subjects of controversial nature, and neither did they at any time refer to defeats and setbacks suffered by the imperial army in the Deccan and in Rajasthan. They were past-masters in the art of interpreting reversals in terms of the will of God, and victories in terms of the invincibility of the Mughal arms.

This lacuna in reporting was filled, among others, by unofficial contemporary historians like Khafi Khan, Bhimsen, Aqil Khan, Mir Muhammad Masum and Shahab-ud-Din Ahmad. They dilated on what they saw and heard without

letting their imagination get the better of their discretion, and without letting fear overcome their respect for objectivity. However, the value of their works cannot be overestimated. It is on their evidence that many a conclusion in this work is based.

Aurangzeb revelled in writing lengthy letters to his sons, daughters and other senior members of the family. It is fortunate that a large number of these communications were preserved in the form of collections by his secretaries and news-writers. They make fascinating reading, and reveal in no uncertain way Aurangzeb's views on war and peace, place of religion in polity, duties of a king, obligations of the people in general and the princes in particular, the message and meaning of Islam, origin and achievements of the Mughals, etc. His last letters* to his sons Azam and Kam Baksh, written from the deathbed reveal more of Aurangzeb than all the works of all the medieval and modern-day historians put together.

The travel accounts of Bernier, Tavernier and Manucci, as also of many other lesser known European visitors to India in the seventeenth century, provide invaluable sidelights on the public and private lives of Aurangzeb. Though these narratives are based largely on court and bazaar gossip, they contain enough material to give one a fairly good idea of the types of folly, noise and sin prevalent in the country and at the court. It is from these writings that we learn that Aurangzeb found earth not rosy but grey, heaven not fair of hue but grim. His bias in favour of the religion of his birth is also brought out clearly by these foreign travellers. "Islam is the beginning and the end of the Emperors life: one wrong to a Mussalman is, to him, an insult to God", wrote Manucci. Since these reports were meant primarily for the European reader, the writers could afford to use exaggeration as a means to make a point. Nevertheless, these travelogues, individually and collectively, form an important part of the literature on Aurangzeb's India. At times they do bear the imprint of biased descriptions. We need to read them with a degree of guarded scepticism. There is always some part of reality in

* The full texts these of letters are given in the last chapter of this book.

things imaginary.

I would like to express my gratitude to the staffs of the Nehru Memorial and the India International Centre Libraries for the ready assistance in making available the materials needed for the preparation of this work. The manner in which this help was extended—always with a smile—made my task very pleasant.

Also, I am obliged to my son, Akash, for his valuable suggestions to improve the clarity and readability of the narration.

MUNI LAL

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CHRONOLOGY

- Birth of Aurangzeb— Sunday, 24 October, 1618**
Death of Jahangir—22 October, 1627
Shah Jahan ascends the throne— 4 February, 1628
Death of Mumtaz Mahal at Burhanpur—1631
Aurangzeb receives first military rank—ten thousand *sawai* and *zat*—13 December, 1634
Aurangzeb appointed supreme of military expedition to Bundelkhand—1635
Fall of Orchha, capital of Bundelkhand— 2 October, 1635
Shah Jahan reaches Orchha, capital of Bundelkhand—November, 1635
Aurangzeb appointed Viceroy of Deccan—14 July, 1636
Aurangzeb marries Dilraz Begam, daughter of Shaniwaz Khan— 8 May, 1637
Birth of Zaib-un-Nissa, first child of Aurangzeb and Dilraz Begum at Daultabad— 15 February, 1638
Marries Nawab Bai, daughter of Raja Raju of Rajouri, Kashmir—1639
Birth of Muhammad Sultan, son of Aurangzeb and Nawab Bai—19 December, 1639
Death of Asaf Khan—1641
Birth of Muhammad Muazzam, second son of Aurangzeb and Nawab Bai—4 October, 1643
Birth of Zinat-un-Nissa, second child of Aurangzeb and Dilraj Begum at Aurangabad— 5 October, 1643
Festivities at recovery of Jahanara Begum from sericus body-burns— 25-30 November, 1644
Aurangzeb appointed Viceroy in Gujarat, leaves for Ahmedabad—14 February, 1645
Balkh taken by Murad Baksh—1646
Aurangzeb reaches Lahore—26 January, 1647
Aurangzeb appointed imperial Ruler in Balkh and Badakhshan— September, 1647

- Birth of Badar-un-Nissa, daughter of Aurangzeb and Nawab-Bai—7 November, 1647
- Leaves for Balkh—10 February, 1648
- Reaches Balkh—25 May, 1648
- Victory against Abdul Aziz in the battle of Balkh—15 June, 1648
- Hands over Balkh to Nazar Muhammad and orders return march to Kabul—1 October, 1648
- Appointed Governor of Multan and Sind—3 December, 1648
- Appointed Supreme Commander of expedition to Qandhar—mid-March, 1649
- Birth of Zibatad-un-Nissa Begum, third daughter of Aurangzeb and Dil'az Begum at Multan—2 September, 1651
- Persians repulse invasion; Aurangzeb forced to retreat—5 September, 1649
- Appointed Supreme Commander of second Qandhar campaign—March, 1652
- Reaches outskirts of Qandhar—2 May, 1652
- Second invasion of Qandhar beaten back, another retreat—3 July, 1652
- Aurangzeb posted as Viceroy to Deccan for the second time—1652
- Birth of Muhammad Azam, first male child of Aurangzeb and Dilraz Begum at Burhanpur—28 June, 1653
- Third expedition to Qandhar under Dara Shikoh; invasion foiled—1653
- Aurangzeb marries Aurangabadi Mahal—1654
- Aurangzeb marries Zainabadi (Hira Bai)—1656
- Assault on Fort of Bijapur—29 March, 1657
- Birth of Muhammad Akbar, second son of Aurangzeb and Dilraz Begum at Aurangabad—17 September, 1657
- Death of Dilraz Begum, first wife of Aurangzeb, at Aurangabad at the age of thirty-eight—8 October, 1657
- Aurangzeb marches out of Aurangabad—first move in the war of succession—25 January, 1658
- Raja Jai Singh and Sulaiman Shikoh inflict defeat on Prince Shuja near Benaras—14 February, 1658
- Aurangzeb departs for Burhanpur—26 March, 1658
- Murad Baksh leaves Ahmedabad to establish contact with Aurangzeb—25 February, 1658
- Murad joins forces with Aurangzeb near Ujjain—14 March, 1658
- Victory in the battle of Dharmat, 15 April, 1658
- Dara Shikoh moves out of Agra at the head of a huge army—18 May, 1658

- Battle of Samugarh; Dara defeated—29 May, 1658
- Aurangzeb reaches Agra—1 June, 1658
- Shah Jahan surrenders fort of Agra to Aurangzeb—8 June, 1658
- Dara Shikoh flees Delhi—12 June, 1658
- Aurangzeb leaves Agra—13 June, 1658
- Aurangzeb leaves Delhi in pursuit of Dara Shikoh—9 July, 1658
- Aurangzeb ascends the throne near Delhi and assumes the title Alamgir—10 July, 1658
- Muhammad Shuja defeated by Aurangzeb at Khajura near Allahabad—4 January, 1659
- Dara Shikoh defeated by Aurangzeb in battle of Dorai near Ajmer—12 March, 1659
- Second coronation of Aurangzeb—13 May, 1659
- Dara Shikoh executed—30 August, 1659
- Shivaji kills the Buapur commander, Afzal—Khan—16 November, 1659
- Muhammad Shuja killed, presumably by tribesmen in the hills of Arakan—May, 1660
- Murad Baksh executed—4 December, 1661
- Birth of Mehr-un-Nissa, daughter of Aurangzeb and Aurangabad Mahal—18 September, 1661
- Sulaiman Shikoh executed—May, 1662.
- Suppression of the peasants' revolt—1662
- Aurangzeb falls ill—12 May, 1662
- Aurangzeb leaves Delhi for Kashmir—8 December, 1662
- Shivaji's night-attack on the camp of Shaista Khan—5 April, 1663
- Shivaji's sack of Surat—6 January, 1664
- Aurangzeb's return to Delhi—18 January, 1664
- Aurangzeb ratifies accord reached by Raja Jai Singh with Shivaji—23 June, 1665
- Shivaji leaves for Agra—5 March, 1666
- Shivaji reaches Agra—9 May, 1666
- Shivaji escapes from detention—19 August, 1666
- Shivaji arrives safely at Raigarh—20 November, 1666
- Birth of Muhammad Kam Baksh, son of Aurangzeb and Udaipuri Mahal—26 February, 1667
- Death of Mirza Raja Jai Singh—2 July, 1667
- Yusafzais rebel—1667
- Jat rebellion—1669
- Death of Badr-un-Nissa—9 April, 1670

- Death of Roshanara Begum—11 September, 1671
- Abul Hassan ascends the throne of Golconda—19 August, 1672
- Public execution of Shah Muhammad Tahir, 1672
- Rebellions of Satnamis and Afridis—1672
- Aurangzeb leaves for Hassanabadi—7 April, 1674
- Shivaji crowned king at Rajgarh—6 June, 1674
- Rout in Afghanistan of the armies of Mahabat Khan and Shujat Khan—1674
- Aurangzeb himself takes the field against Afghans—June, 1674
- Execution of the ninth Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur, 1675
- Death of Muhammad Sultan, eldest son of Aurangzeb—3 December, 1677
- Death of Raja Jaswant Singh in the North-West—10 December, 1678
- Aurangzeb sets out for Ajmer with the intent to capture Marwar—9 January, 1679
- Aurangzeb once again moves to Ajmer to supervise military operations against Marwar—17 August, 1679
- Invasion of Rajasthan—30 November, 1679
- Fall of Udaipur—4 January, 1680
- Rana Raj Singh of Mewar defeated—24 January, 1680
- Aurangzeb returns to Ajmer—22 March, 1680
- Death of Shivaji—4 April, 1680
- Prince Akbar leaves Mewar for Jodhpur—20 June, 1680
- Prince Akbar proclaims himself Emperor—1 January, 1681
- Aurangzeb defeats the forces of Prince Akbar and Durga Dass—16 January, 1681
- Zaib-un-Nissa imprisoned in Gwalior fort for alleged abetment of revolt by Prince Akbar—February, 1681
- Prince Akbar, escorted by Durga Dass, crosses the Narbada to take asylum at the court of Shambuji—9 May, 1681
- Shambuji ascends Marhatta throne—16 January, 1681
- Aurangzeb leaves Ajmer for Deccan—8 September, 1681
- Aurangzeb arrives at Aurangabad—22 March, 1682
- Prince Azam and Dilir Khan summoned to explain reason of failure of setback against the Marhattas—25 July, 1683
- Siege of Bijapur begins—15 April, 1685
- Sikandar Adil Shah surrenders Bijapur—11 September, 1686
- Sikandar Adil Shah leaves Bijapur—12 September, 1686
- Aurangzeb enters Bijapur—19 September, 1686

- Aurangzeb leaves Bijapur for Hyderabad, capital of Golconda—30 October, 1686
- Prince Muhammsd Akbar leaves Goa for Persia—3 February, 1687
- Shah Alam and his four sons arrested at Hyderabad—21 February, 1687
- Golconda formally annexed to the Empire—5 July, 1687
- Prince Muazzam imprisoned, 1687
- Fall of the fort of Golconda—21 September, 1687
- Start of campaign to subjugate Shambuji—20 January, 1688
- Muhammad Akbar received at the Persian court at Isfahan—24 January, 1688
- Aurangzeb reaches Bijapur—15 March, 1688
- Shambuji and Kavi Kailash hacked to death, limb by limb—11 March, 1689
- Raja Ram crowned king of Maharashtra—middle of April, 1689
- Prince Muazzam restored to honour, 1695
- Fall of the fort of Jinji—December, 1697
- Death of Raja Ram—2 March, 1700
- Aurangzeb captures fort of Satara—21 April, 1700
- Death of Sultan Sikandar Adil Shah—3 April, 1700
- Death of Zaib-un-Nissa Begum at Delhi—26 May, 1701
- Death of Muhammad Akbar in exile in Persia—1704
- Aurangzeb's last military campaign in the Deccan: capture of the fort of Wagingera—27 April, 1705
- Aurangzeb reaches Ahmednagar—20 January, 1706
- Prince Muhammad Azam arrives at Ahmednagar—end of March, 1706
- Death of Aurangzeb—Friday, 20 February, 1707
- Death of Zibadat-un-Nissa,—7 February, 1707
- Prince Muazzam proclaims himself emperor near Lahore with the title of Bahadur Shah—3 June, 1707
- Bahadur Shah defeats Prince Azam in battle near Samugarh—July, 1707
- Death of Muhammad Azam (slain in the war of succession)—8 July, 1707
- Death of Guru Gobind Singh—7 October, 1708
- Bahadur Shah defeats Kam Baksh in a battle near Hyderabad—13 January, 1709
- Death of Muhammad Kam Baksh (slain in the war of succession)—13 January, 1709
- Death of Muhammad Muazzam (Bahadur Shah I)—8 February, 1712

Chapter One

BORN PURITAN

The royal *zenana* tents were pitched on a rectangle of raised ground near the edge of a meadow abloom with wild flowers green and gold and of other mixed hue. Both Emperor Jahangir and Prince Khurram had camped in these other-worldly surroundings before. Natural beauty is the food of epicures. The House of Babar revelled in things which made the heart beat faster.

Known to Jahangir was every part of the realm that God had embellished with deft, delicate touches of His big, broad brush. Camp sites were invariably chosen by him personally in advance. The still solitude of the village of Dohad,* midway between Baroda and Ujjain, fascinated the Emperor and Malika Nur Jahan. The miles of jasmine-scented countryside around it were, in the words of Jahangir himself, "playgrounds of the angels come to earth for rest and recreation."

There was exhilaration in the October sun that engulfed Dohad and its neighbourhood. The royal entourage reached here on 23 October 1618, on its return journey from Gujarat to Agra. Military campaign in the Deccan had been a success in that Malik Ambar was contained for the time; his attempt to revive the fortunes of the Sultanate of Ahmednagar stood foiled. The Mughal suzerainty in the south was now no longer in doubt. The stars of Shahzada Khurram were in the ascendant. His term of Viceroyalty of the Deccan coincided

*Dohad is a compound of the Hindi words *do* (two) and *had* (border)
From Dohad roads branched off to Gujarat and Malwa.

perhaps with the most glorious period of the reign of Jahangir. The euphoria of success uplifted every heart in the imperial army. They were all in a mood to live in the present and forget all about the past and the future. Dohad and its surroundings could not but increase their desire for pleasure. The Emperor himself set the tone by holding a *mahfil-i-tarab* on the very day of his arrival in the village. Khurram received many honours at this function. His many successes had made him the apple of the eye of Jahangir. For her own reasons Nur Jahan played the proud mother with a flamboyance all her own. She presented the Prince many a rich gift before a bevy of beautiful dancing girls jingled into the magnificent, moonlit red tent. When the gala entertainment finally shut nearabout the midnight hour and the Emperor and the Malika retired to their private quarters nearly everybody was in a state of exhilaration. Persian wines went more to the soul than to the head. Yet another tribute had been paid to the craftsmanship of nature in Dohad.

Khurram, as a prince, had the will to do and the soul to dare. Unlike other princes, he had not laid his youth to waste with riotous living. He drank wine, but moderately. He liked occasionally to hear good music and draw pleasure from classical dance forms. He did not, however, run after pleasure as did his father. His sights were clear and his purposes well-defined. These qualities led him to the throne and, thereafter, to the creation of many a miracle in marble and stone. It was not till the last decade of his six dozen years and four that his heart became unsteady and his mind fickle. Adversity is a cruel examiner of man.

From the *mahfil*, Khurram went straight to the *zenana* where his twenty-six-year old wife, Arjmand Banu, was waiting for his return. She was with child eight months plus and the strain of the journey had to some extent sapped the reserves of her energy. Conjugal felicity sustained her. Whether in palace or in the camp never did Khurram retire to bed without whispering a soulful 'Khuda Hafiz' in the ever-receptive ears of his beloved Arjmand. As the maid-in-waiting, Muntizir Khanum, announced the arrival of the prince, Arjmand sat up on the divan and, as usual, made ready to greet her husband

with a smile that told him more clearly than any words could convey of her undying love for him.

Khurram told Arjmand briefly about the music, dance and the honours bestowed upon him by the royal couple, and then made inquiries about how she felt and whether Hakim Asadullah Khan had attended on her that evening. As was her custom, Arjmand replied to all his questions with smiles ranging from the faint to the luxuriant. Khurram was then at peace with himself. He knew instinctively that Arjmand was waiting cheerfully and with calm the arrival of their sixth child. There was no panic in her voice, no fear in her heart. Rooted deeply as she was in Divine spirit, Arjmand derived great strength from her faith and her total surrender to his will. Her belief in the supremacy of the Creator and her faith in what she called the balanced order of nature gave in turn a remarkable poise and dignity to the life of Khurram. He seemed to be aware of the debt he owed to his wife. It is this equation of unity in separateness that gives the Taj Mahal its unmatched serenity. Shah Jahan after the death of Mumtaz Mahal in 1631 was a far cry from the Khurram of the days when he was sustained by the moral force that was Arjmand Banu.

The people of Dohad—soldiers of the ploughshare as well as of the sword—considered it a great honour to have in their midst the one whom they liked to call the Maharaj Adhiraj of Bharat and his valiant son, conqueror of the Sui states of the regions beyond the river Narbada. They flocked at vantage points around the camp in a bid to have a peep at the celebrities. When Jahangir came to know of this expectation of the villagers he, at the advice of Nur Jahan Begum, set up a community kitchen in the heart of the hamlet, and he had it announced by the beat of drum that the Emperor and his son would “give their loyal subjects an opportunity to have their *darshan* soon after the afternoon prayers the next day”.

The village was all agog when the sun arose amidst a chilly haze the next day. Men and women of all ages, as also children, began gathering at the appointed place well before the sun completed its halfway journey across a clear blue sky.

The Emperor and Prince Khurram came in a procession flanked by a hundred Aahidis dressed in glittering uniforms. The crowd chanted the traditional welcome songs as the royal cavalcade sped by. The setting for the royal pageantry was almost perfect. In Dohad there was no bad weather, only different types of good weather. Jahangir was in his element. When an old woman, clad in a colourful costume of an unusual pattern, cried aloud beseeching the Emperor to stop for a while and talk to her and the people gathered to greet him, Jahangir responded with a gracious nod of his head, gestured compliance to the commander of the bodyguard, and pulled up his white horse to a stop.

Delighted at her request having been granted, the woman and the cluster of persons around her rushed forward to pay their respects to the Padshah Salamat and the Prince Charming. What followed is a legend worthy of record in the Nature's book of miracles.

"My name is Nalini, O' son of God, and my profession is to read the lines on the brows of men of fortune", she said as she came forward to touch the royal stirrup. A picture of benevolence, Jahangir asked the grey-haired lady to decipher "the nature's handwriting inscribed on the fair forehead of my son, Shahzada Khurram". The old oculist was beside herself with joy and, turning her piercing gaze towards the young Prince, she raised her right hand Heavenward and went into a short trance before speaking thus:

What I have seen, O'Dispenser of bread to the rich and the poor, is difficult to condense in words. Before my eyes there is a Prince whose greatness will be impossible to measure either in riches or in rank. He is unique in that his fame will arise from his woes. Forgive this humble servant if what I say jars Your Majesty's ears. When I speak I speak the truth; else I will lose powers of interpretation the Lord has bestowed upon me. Heed my words, O' Protector of the world. The child which is now in the womb of the Prince's wife will be supremely brave and fearless. His enemies will shudder at his thunderings. To friends he will bring solace and comfort. His place in

heaven will be high and he will sit by the side of those who live by faith in the supremacy of the Lord. In his hands will rest the destiny of the incomparable Shahzada whom we have had the privilege of bowing our submissions today.

In all, the Shahzada will be blessed with four sons. Daughters are of little consequence in the scheme of royal dynasties. The male progeny, it is written clear on his brow, will engage itself in manly pursuits of the sword. The Khandan-i-Mughlia is not likely to profit therefrom. Your Majesty may rule over Hindustan till eternity. The third son of the Prince stands high in the plans of destiny. I am unable to read anything more in the scribblings of Fate. One last observation and I close the book which I began to read at Your Majesty's order: we begin to die at birth. The end flows from the beginning.*

Jahangir was chilled with anxious thoughts at Nalini's prediction. In a bad mood, he might have ordered the old woman to be flayed alive. His temper that day remained unruffled despite the provocative forecast about the oncoming third son of Shahzada Khurram. The ears of kings are normally not made to hear unfavourable dissertations on life and death. The occasion warranted however, a controlled reaction, and both the Emperor and the Prince showed no sign of resentment at what they considered was only the expression of a degenerated, senile mind. They trotted away with seeming unconcern of what had happened and, to further deceive themselves into a transitory peace of mind, they instructed the Chamberlain to give Nalini a reward of rupees five hundred for her professional courage. She was outwardly happy to receive the silver coins but at heart she grieved to visualise the turmoil that the Shahzada's third son was fated to spread. What she had left unsaid was of far greater import than what she had had the courage to divulge. She kept the evil forebodings to herself till her death a decade later a year after Shah Jahan

*This passage is a literal translation of a Gujarati folk-song ascribed to a popular bard, Ram Bhandare, of the seventeenth-century.

came to the throne following the assassination or imprisonment of all those who could be considered his rivals for kingship. Nalini left a note behind: "The writing on his forehead is unmistakable. He will do well to keep a close watch on his third son".

The next day—Sunday, 24 October*—Hakim Asadullah, one of Khurram's most talented physicians, came after the evening prayer-time to inform that Arjmand Banu would in all probability deliver the child in the next twelve *gharis*. The Prince relayed the news quickly to the Emperor. Malika Nur Jahan repaired to her niece's tent and supervised operations herself till Aurangzeb leapt into the world—hapless, naked, piping loud like a child in travail. Never before had Arjmand Banu suffered as much.

Fairer than all her previous five children, Arjmand on seeing the infant thanked Allah for his mercy, and she involuntarily recited a Persian saying: "One born fair lives to spend a long and happy life". She had not known anything about Nalini's prediction. Khurram remembered, however, to the end of his days that the first breath was the beginning of death. When he went to see the new-born infant prince the next morning, he carried with him a copy of the *Quran*, a replica of the sword of Timur and a plaque of gold on which was inscribed in Jogh Bai's** own handwriting the moral dictum of her grandfather: "Courage is the mother of all virtues".

For Arjmand, Khurram took with him a set of rubies valued more for their rarity than for their worth in money. Hakim Asadullah accompanied him. The physician told him about the painful delivery the Princess had gone through, suggesting that it would be advisable to spend only a few minutes with her. "She needs rest and a spell of quiet medication to

* There are conflicting accounts about the date of Aurangzeb's birth. Stanley Lane-Poole records the date of his birth as November 4, 1618. Sir Jadunath Sircar (*History of Aurangzeb*) affirms it to be October 24. I tend to agree with the latter. His accounts are based on primary Indian sources.

** Jogh Bai was Shah Jahan's mother. She was the daughter of Mota Raja of Jodhpur.

recover her energy", said Asadullah. Khurram took note of the counsel, spoke not a word and entered the artistically adorned gate of the seraglio along with half a dozen maidservants carrying on dainty silver trays the usual knick-knacks considered essential in the Orient for invocation of Divine blessings on a new-born child. The Mughal culture was an eye-catching amalgam of the Persian, Turqi and Hindustani ways of life.

A pale, exhausted Arjmand Banu greeted her husband with the never-failing smile on her lips and a tear in her eye. To Khurram she looked more beautiful than ever before. When a smile is set plainly on a sad, sombre face the effect is of lightning bursting out from a dark cloud. Khurram quickly bent over the divan on which lay Arjmand, clasped her hand and gestured to the maidservants to come forward with their shimmering trays. When he slipped around his wife's slender neck the string of priceless rubies, there came from her an irresistible moan of half joy, half surprise. Her body was bathed, as it were, in peace which no evil force could break. She tried to raise herself up with the help of a *kaniz* but Khurram gently pushed her head back on the pillow. The advice of Asadullah rang in his ears. She needed rest and a spell of tryst with the Creator.

When the Prince raised his hands in prayer, everybody in the bedchamber followed suit. At this stage one of the senior *anagas* brought in the infant prince. Khurram looked at him intently. There was a strange lustre in the young one's eyes and a gleam on his face. Khurram stroked softly his third son's pallid cheeks. No, no, Nalini could not be right, he mused. The infant was a picture of health and good looks. His birth could mean nothing but prosperity and enhanced prestige for the dynasty as also for the Empire. The prescribed ceremonial of sprinkling holy waters and raining flowers over the head of the child was quickly gone through. The last act—presentation of symbolic gifts to the newest member of the royal family—was performed with due solemnity. Arjmand Banu remained throughout a quiet spectator of these traditional pleasantries. The father-son exchanges, seen and unseen, amused her greatly. She had no strength to laugh.

Her knowing smiles more than made up for that incapacity.

When the time came for Khurram to leave, Arjmand was sad. Her woman's instinct seemed to forewarn her of something she did not know what. There was haze in her eyes. She took out the *tasbeih* from under her pillow. This was the best she could do to allay her indefinable fears. She pretended to be happy. Her husband's *Khuda Hafiz* that morning had a peculiar ring, she imagined. Soon she went to sleep. The strain she had gone through got the better of her will.

In success Jahangir invariably found the earth not grey but rosy, heaven not grim but fair of hue. The birth of yet another grandson could not but feed his optimism. He was convinced that Khurram was the Prince of the future and that his (Khurram's) sons were sent out by Fate to play some significant role or other in the consolidation and expansion of the Empire. To be born in the course of a triumphal journey was considered by him, as also by the court astrologers, a good omen for the future of the kingdom and its guardians. Though he had profaned his God-given physical strength yet his spirits remained lively and robust. He wanted to have a look at "the harbinger of good fortune" before the customary lapse of four days and four hours, but Nur Jahan Begum counselled compliance with tradition*. The stay at Dohad was accordingly extended for a week and an auspicious hour was fixed for the Emperor to give his blessings to one whom he insisted on calling the child of fortune.

On 29 October the Emperor, accompanied by Malika Nur Jahan and Prince Khurram, went to Arjmand Banu's tent a *ghari* and a half after the mid-day prayer hour. Still not permitted to leave her bed, the Princess did homage to the Emperor sitting up; she wore a pink silk costume and a Gujarat gold embroidered *dopatta* to match. Her effort to rise and touch the feet of her father-in-law was foiled by Nur Jahan. "Intention is as good as action", she remarked and asked her

*In accordance with a Persian tradition a child born in the course of a journey was to be seen by grandparents only after four days and four *gharis*. For those born at home the banned period was forty-one days.

niece "not to let your reverence for the Padshah get better of the care enjoined by the Hukma". Arjmand covered her head and, sitting upright, bowed as low as she could to pay her respects to the Royal couple. Jahangir gave an affectionate pat on her head and then asked the head *anaga* who stood nearby: "where is the young creature whom Allah has sent to bring glory to this House"? The infant prince was quickly brought in from the adjoining tent, and what followed next is told best in the words of a maidservant who narrated the sequence of conversation to a contemporary historian many years later.

It was a very touching occasion. The Emperor beamed in delight as *anaga* Shirin brought in the Prince. She first took the child to Her Highness who, after assuring herself that he was properly attired, handed him over with utmost deference to Zil-i-Ilahi. The latter took him fondly in his lap and, turning to Malik-i-Muezzama, exclaimed: "He is the fairest of our grandsons. Allah be praised for His generosity. May he live long and bring greater splendour to the Empire. The glow in his eyes tells me that he is cast in a mould different from others. Let all the court astrologers join their heads to prepare his horoscope. His features are no less striking. Our artists will find it difficult to capture their refineness. Perhaps the great God has sent him to us as a momento to our victory in the Deccan. Let us now raise our hands in thankfulness to the great Benefactor".

After the prayers were said, the soft-hearted and open-handed King-of-Kings gestured to the Chamberlain that the gifts for the Prince and his mother be brought up to him. With a surfeit of love in his heart, he then handed over to the Begum Sahiba a medium-size ivory box containing nobody knows what. That the Emperor chose not to divulge the nature of his gift was generally taken to mean that its value was beyond human calculation.

The Emperor named the young prince Aurangzeb and, while performing this pleasant task, he bestowed upon him many a robe of silk and satin overlaid with pearls and diamonds of the purest hue. Gifts of great value were also given

to six *anagas* and twelve maidservants in attendance on Her Royal Highness. This insignificant person was among those who had the good fortune of receiving gifts at the blessed hands of the Malika of the realm.

On leaving, the Emperor planted a holy kiss on the fair forehead of the freshly Christened Prince Aurangzeb. To the amazement of all, the infant Prince gave a big, broad smile. Before leaving Jahangir invoked Allah's blessings upon him. The six days old Prince seemed to know what was happening around him. Truly, his reactions were a phenomenon hard to explain. Such good looks and such innate wisdom were seldom seen in a new-born prince before.

The march to Ujjain, capital of Malwa, was resumed on the eleventh day after Aurangzeb's birth. No public festivities were held in Dohad to mark the occasion. The Emperor preferred to keep the customary fireworks, wine parties, dance and music performances pending till the victorious army reached Ujjain. Once there, following leisurely progress through some arid and some lush green regions, Jahangir went on a merry-making spree that lasted till the middle of December. He was ever in search of occasions to indulge his lust for drinking inebriating wines.

Aurangzeb was a born puritan. To welcome the arrival on world stage of such a man with unceasing bouts of Bacchanalia was a hidden impropriety which could not but have within it the seeds of a deadly conflict. Adults are adults. Infants never forget.

Chapter Two

SEARCH FOR RIGHT PATH

Aurangzeb was born in the heyday of his father's ascendancy at the court. Already he had been given the high title Shah Jahan and an unprecedented Mansab of forty thousand *zat* and *sawar*. As Viceroy of the Deccan he had the pick of the Imperial Army under his command. His eldest brother Sultan Khusrau had practically run himself out of the race for throne*. Sultan Parvez, the next claimant to succession, was known to be on the edge of extinction because of riotous living. The Hukma had forewarned the Emperor of the likely consequences if the Prince did not cut down on heavy drinking of spirits and wines. In the circumstances it was but only human that Shah Jahan should see visions of wearing the crown after his father's death. Ambition feeds on hope, and hope in a way draws sustenance from ambition. They are in fact the two sides of the same coin, namely, a compulsive desire in man to be better than what he is.

Aurangzeb was thus a child born amidst an unsettling uncertainty about the future. The intrigues launched by Begum Nur Jahan with the aim of persuading the Emperor to fix succession on Shahryar** increased tensions that could not but generate in Shah Jahan's heart the thoughts of a rebellion.

*Sultan Khusrau was the eldest son of Jahangir. His mother was Man Bai (title Shah Begum) sister of Raja Man Singh. He revolted against his father in 1607. The rebellion was quickly put down. Khusrau was partially blinded and imprisoned.

**Shahryar was the youngest son of Jahangir by a concubine. He was married to Ladli Begum, daughter of Nur Jahan by her first husband, Sher Afghan.

Fears made him a potential traitor. The chiefest enemy of man, lack of trust in his parents, cast a shadow on the Shahzada's household. All the perfumes of Persia and all her sparkling smiles could not hide the real intentions of the Malika.

At one stage Nur Jahan made an oblique suggestion that Khurram accept the hand of Ladli Begum in marriage, but the proposal came to naught; Shah Jahan loved Arjmand Banu too dearly to swallow the bait. This rejection hurt Nur Jahan's pride, and when that happens to a vain, powerful woman not only no trust can be placed in her words, she becomes more noxious than a viper. Outwardly, she gloated over Shah Jahan's military and diplomatic achievements in the Deccan. But inwardly she hatched schemes of lowering his prestige. First she sent him to Rajasthan in the hope that Mewar would turn out to be his Waterloo, but that was not to be. Shah Jahan's successes against Rana Amar Singh enriched his image as a military genius and a Prince with a bright future. Thwarted, Nur Jahan thrust on him a second time the task of taming Malik Ambar and bringing the Deccan Sultans within the Empire as junior vassals.

Shah Jahan took up the challenge, and for all practical purposes brought the recalcitrant South within the sphere of Mughal influence. The peace treaty with Malik Ambar (1621) marked a new high in the fortunes of Shah Jahan. Having almost forgotten the taste of defeat, he made ready for the realization of his long-cherished dream of capturing the throne after or, if the circumstances so warranted, before his father's death. He was resolved not to give another chance to his step mother to work out her plans in favour of her son-in-law.

Ambition is one thing, revolt another. Shah Jahan waited for an opportunity to openly defy the Queen's will. Nur Jahan was at war between self-interest and the interest of the Mughal dynasty. The woman in her willed one thing, the Queen another. The former won the day. She prevailed upon the Emperor to issue a court order appointing Shah Jahan commander of the campaign to safeguard the distant Qandhar from encroachments by Shah Abbas I of Persia. Shah Jahan saw the real intent behind the *firman*, and he

hesitated to transport himself to far-away regions at a time when the health of the Emperor was a source of alarm in court circles. At first he delayed his departure from the south, and then refused to march beyond Fatehpur Sikri on plea that the force at his command was inadequate for the task ahead. This was not a signal for revolt, but revolt itself.

Jahangir was at the time not in Agra; he was on his way to the capital from Kashmir. The moment, Shah Jahan thought, was opportune for a *coupe de main*. He struck at Agra with force but failed to capture it. The local Governor defended the capital valiantly. Then in a pitched battle near Delhi, the imperial forces, led by Mahabat Khan, inflicted on the rebel Prince a defeat decisive and humiliating.

Shah Jahan fled to the south. His wife and children went with him. This was the first experience of retreat for the five-year-old Aurangzeb. In later years he recalled it as a "chastening event that gave me a peep into the halarus of kingship". The imperial army, headed by Sultan Parvez, went in hot chase of the rebels. Shah Jahan's flight through Telangana, Orissa, Bengal and Bihar to Jaunpur, and then return to Deccan by the same route was a see-saw saga in adventurism rich in deeds of valour and patient endurance.

The fourth son of Shah Jahan and Arjmand Banu. Murad Baksh was born in the fort of Rohtas in south Bihar on 29 August, 1624—an event regarded by many astrologers as the beginning of the end of Shah Jahan's days of distress.

Shah Jahan's illness and submission to Sultan Parvez in the Deccan complete the outlines of a revolt that in the last analysis paved the way for his ascension to the throne on 6 February, 1638. The terms of surrender to Shah Parvez stipulated, among other things, the immediate transfer to court as hostages of the princes Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb. They were taken to Lahore and placed there in the charge of Nur Jahan Begum.

Jahangir died at Chungizhai, midway between Rajouri and Bhimbar on 22 October, 1627. He was on his way from Kashmir to Lahore when the end came. Malika Nur Jahan was with him till he breathed his last. Her last desperate act of instigating Shahryar secretly to capture the throne by force

was a foul profanation of her status. The bid to defeat the royal army, led by Asaf Khan, near Lahore ended in disaster. Shahryar and all those who could possibly stake a claim to the throne were done to death at the orders of Shah Jahan. Joined by Mahabat Khan, the Prince rushed to Agra from Sind. He ascended the throne on 4 February, 1628*—an event that marked the end of nearly five years of wanderings in the dreadful wilderness of a revolt that could not but fail.

Aurangzeb was now nine years old—an age at which one is not young enough to be a child and not old enough to be a full-fledged boy. He and Dara Shikoh were brought to Agra from Lahore by Asaf Khan himself. They were met, two stages from the capital, by their mother Mumtaz Mahal and the four-year-old brother Murad Baksh on 26 February, 1628. The reunion was an emotional affair complete with prayers, round-the-clock alms-giving and fanciful exercises by famed men of the court in astrology, chronography and poetic excellence.

For two days the fond mother talked to her children about their experiences in Lahore, their courses of study, their outings for recreation and change, their teachers and maidservants, their hours of work and play—in fact of everything that concerned the daily life of a young prince in the Mughal household.

Not a choleric word fell from the lips of Mumtaz Mahal in the course of these exchanges. She loved her children with the passion of a queen devoted to her husband and full of pride in the dynasty she had the good fortune to belong. The flat blasphemies of the selfish courtiers and their wives, as also the dubious ways of her over-ambitious aunt Nur Jahan, did not tarnish in any manner the child-like purity of her outlook. She tended to regard their sins as accidental, not a trade. This benevolent approach gave Mumtaz Mahal the charm that

*Shah Parvez died in the Deccan in October 1626. Some historians are of the opinion that Shah Jahan had him poisoned as he had done Sultan Khusrau in 1623. The stopgap Emperor Dewar Baksh, son of Sultan Khusrau, was installed by Asaf Khan after the death of Jahangir. He was put to death at the orders of Shah Jahan before the latter reached Agra.

endeared her to Shah Jahan. She regarded her children as gifts of God, worthy of the best that Destiny could offer. Dara Shikoh aroused her admiration for reasons different from those which made her dote over Aurangzeb. One was noble and good-hearted, the other virtuous and fearless. Different in nature, they shared a common pride in their heritage. Both had read fairly extensively about the conquests of Amir Timur, Babar and Akbar. Admiration of their heroic exploits charmed Mumtaz Mahal who read in this trait of their characters a yearning for comparable greatness. A devout Muslim, Mumtaz Mahal prayed soulfully that her progeny help enhance the splendour of the Empire.

On the second day she escorted them to a Saint's *nizar* a few miles away, and watched them pray jointly and praise Allah for His munificences. The priest, Mulla Anfis Ansari, gave the young Princes souvenirs moulded out of clay from under the grave of the holy man. Both received these gifts with a show of extreme reverence and kept them as their cherished possessions for long years. In fact, Aurangzeb gave them a pride of place in his personal library. Often in later years he was seen to look at them intently with a degree of intriguing awe and respect. In a letter to his son Muhammad Azam he alluded to these souvenirs as "gifts that at the time gave me faith and also confidence in myself". Although Aurangzeb pretended throughout his life to be above superstition and other failings of a weak mind yet there is evidence enough in his writings and records of his conversations that the lives of saints and seers elevated him spiritually and that he derived much inspiration from their faith and simplicity.

The three Princes also bowed their heads on the return journey at the shrine of Salim Chishti at Fatehpur Sikri. Dara and Aurangzeb had read about the part the Chishti played in giving a spiritual aura to the reign of their ancestor Akbar Padshah. They were excited to see for the first time the various monuments of the reign of Akbar and also to pay their homage to the saint who, according to Abul Fzl and other historians of the day, interceded with God for the boon of a son to their great grandfather. History fascinated Dara Shikoh more than it did Aurangzeb. The latter found it inspiring in that one

profited by learning the course of dynastic evolution. On the other hand, it stirred Dara Shikoh to the soul. The past, he held, was the Providence's book of reference for the future. Not only that: he equated the study of history with the study of scriptures. "Both uplift man to heights of spiritual realisation that paves the path for merger with the universal spirit", he told Jahanara Begum in the heyday of his quest for the ultimate. Dara and Aurangzeb were different in essentials, alike in reactions to the transitory.

The queen and the Princes, escorted by Asaf Khan and many other junior Umra, reached Agra on 2 March, 1628. Shah Jahan, ignoring protocol, received the party at the west gate. The two princes did their customary homage to the Emperor a little before the midday prayer hour. Mumtaz Mahal was present at this family get-together after a lapse of nearly two years. Shah Jahan was at his gracious best, and he bestowed upon his children many a gift of pearl and purest Gujarat silk. Much had happened since he parted with them at Nasik following the collapse of a revolt that brought his fortune to the lowest ebb ever. It was a miracle that he had since then risen to be the Emperor of Hindustan. For that happy turn in the course of fate Mumtaz Mahal was unceasing in the praise of Allah's benevolence. Though less articulate, Shah Jahan was perhaps more beholden to God for turning what he called "the pitch darkness of a fearful night into the bright sunshine of a joyous day". Both Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb were apparently looked after well by Nur Jahan Begum in Lahore. They told their parents many a story of hunting expeditions at which *Anma-Dadi* spared herself no pains to make the excursions enjoyable. In the course of one such expedition, Nur Jahan shot dead a tiger from the back of an elephant and, in celebration of the feat, a glittering entertainment was held in the jungle itself. Both Dara and Aurangzeb were presented with gifts of mini-rifles at this function. Aurangzeb liked the gun more than he did the hunt. The same could not be said about Dara. He was more excited about the natural beauty of the jungle and its wild inmates than anything else. The mini-rifle left him comparatively cold.

The 14-year-old, sprightly Jahanara* was excited to be reunited with her brothers. She played the elder sister with a touching aplomb. To her privy purse of rupees fifty thousand a month was added rupees thirty thousand** for the two senior princes. Though young in age and limbs, Jahanara was in judgment old and mature. Both Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal considered her a paragon of feminine virtues, and they virtually gave her the charge of looking after the Princes in the *zenana*. They were yet not old enough to be allocated independent apartments in the fort. That privilege was normally given to a Mughal prince at the age of fourteen. Jahanara performed her new duties with much affection and efficiency.

Though his early education was to a large extent haphazard Aurangzeb possessed in ample measure the wish to learn. His first tutor, Sadullah Khan, a Hindu convert, was a scholar of eminence. He held that education was not a process of driving a set of prejudices down a student's throat. His liberalism was a trait that endeared him to Shah Jahan. Besides the customary studies in Islam, he embarked on giving his ward a peep into comparative religions, history, sciences and sociology.

This wide-ranging curriculum did not suit the genius of Aurangzeb who one day told his preceptor that the Quran, and Quran alone, was the source of real, lasting knowledge. "The rest is not education, but only the means to 'now what is already contained in the holy book'", he ventured to explain.

Sadullah Khan was struck by the cogency of Aurangzeb's remark. He carried the observation to the Emperor and suggested that Islamic divines be inducted to give the Prince an in-depth knowledge of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. "Children should be led on to the right path not by imposition but by bringing out the spark of talent that lies within them", he submitted. Shah Jahan agreed with the principle enunciated by Sadullah Khan, and immediately appointed Muhammad

*Jahanara Begum was born at Ajmer on 23 March, 1614.

**The royal princes below the age of fourteen were normally given a stipend of rupees five hundred a day.

Hakim of Gilan, who had lived and studied in Mecca and Medina for fourteen years before coming to Hindustan, as a member of the team of tutors entrusted with the education of the Shahzadas. It was under his guidance that Aurangzeb imbibed the essence of the lofty teachings in the Quran, and thus came in time to live partly by the precepts of the Prophet.

Aurangzeb learnt the Quran and *Hadis* by heart. Besides acquiring a working proficiency in the two court languages, Turki and Persian, he could read and write fairly fluently in Arabic and Hindi. Fine arts and sciences did not arouse his interest, nor did the philosophical cobwebs of Hinduism and other religions. Theological works on different aspects of the Islamic way of life were read by him with undivided attention. In later years he made three copies of the Quran, and they were presented to the head priests in Mecca, Medina and the *Dargha* of Khwaja Nizam-ud-Din Auliya in Delhi. Poetry of the ordinary type repelled him. However, the works of Saadi, Hafiz and Maulana Rum enchanted him. Not only did he know every verse of their compositions by heart; he excelled in quoting them freely in support of his argument or to demolish the opinions of those who happened to be in disagreement with his views.

Aurangzeb's reactions were sharp and wit razor-like. The vulgar in art or in any other field aroused in him bitter revulsion. Music was the only form of sensuous entertainment which he did not equate with sin. With advancing years his views changed, and in the tenth year of his reign he banned the hearing and singing of musical improvisations in all parts of the realm. The stoic in him was noticeable even in childhood. Never did he attend till the age of seventeen any of his father's famous gala entertainments. He preferred instead to spend his time reading the works of Muhammad Ghazali or Mulla Abdullah Tabakh—two writers on theology who commanded his respects.

Once when Shah Jahan invited him to attend a music festival on his fortieth birthday, the Prince begged forgiveness for not being able to obey the Royal command, saying that "the call of the music of the holy book is more compelling

than the call of the music that comes from the human throat”.

Women singers were described by Aurangzeb as painted pictures of indecency and not long after his accession he ousted from the Royal harem all those who traded in song and music. Aurangzeb was a quiet introvert as a child and as a boy; in adolescence he became fairly vocal in opposition to what he regarded as the cult of the senses, and after his rise to supreme authority he was quick to read the requiem for all forms of sensual pleasure. No wonder the arts languished in his reign and Hindustan became the ruins of a once magnificent edifice of artistic skills.

The contingents of *Ahl-i-Murad* not only lost Royal patronage; they became, as it were, second rate citizens despised in this world and doomed to burn in hell-fires in the next. The glory of a nation rests by and large on its authors and artists. It is, therefore, no surprise that from the middle of the seventeenth century an erosion of art skills gradually led to the erosion of nearly all forms of creative activity in this country. A puritan Padshah is a good advertisement; it produces, however, neither plenty, nor prosperity, nor peace. The story of the Mughal Empire from the time Aurangzeb sat on the throne is the story of decay.

Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan embellished Hindustan with architectural masterpieces combining the artistic skills of the profoundest builders of India, Persia and Turkey. It is they who brought into being what is called the Mughal India. The pragmatist Aurangzeb reversed the trend. He created virtually nothing except a few matter-of-fact inns and resting places on highways to the west and the east of the capital. The Mughal in him shrank to a miniature man of modest vision. He destroyed more than he created: here lay the tragedy of a great soul caged within the narrow confines of religious dogma. Every religion has two parts—essential and inessential. It was unfortunate that Aurangzeb tended to elevate the inessential to the level of the essential and thus failed to direct the Mughal ethos to its logical end. If Akbar was ahead of his time by nearly three centuries, Aurangzeb trailed behind his age by at least half as many hundred years. Evolution is never a straight run; it is a case of four leaps

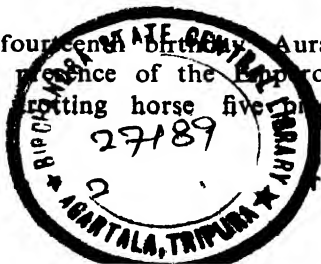
forward and six backwards. Progress and retrogress chase each other in nature.

An event of intense poignancy came to pass in Aurangzeb's life when he was thirteen. Mumtaz Mahal died suddenly at Burhanpur in the Deccan at child birth. The news grieved the young Prince so much that he went on a fast for two days and three nights, and absented himself from all public activities for forty-one days. Though he was no poet, he composed a six-stanza ode in praise of "my revered mother, the great lady who garmented invariably in the light from her own virtues". Paying tribute to her piety, he said : "Her beauteous benevolence made the bright world look dim, and everything beside seemed like the flying image of a shadow".

Aurangzeb loved his mother very dearly. To the end of his days, whether in camp or in palace, he kept under his pillow at night the one hundred one-pearl *tasbih* Mumtaz Mahal used to say her prayers with. "Mothers never die; they live in their children's soul", he told the young sister Roshanara when one day she was heard bemoaning the passing away of "my bibi, my amma".

The course of academic studies Aurangzeb went through till he reached the age of fourteen varied little from the traditional pattern of education for Royal princes. Lessons in archery, rifle-shooting, horse-riding, wrestling, falcon-hunting and other outdoor activities were given regularly by coaches from various parts of the Empire. Special mention needs to be made of one Mustafa Kamal of Bijapur whose accuracy with the gun was the envy of European mercenaries serving in the armies of the Deccan. Aurangzeb liked him for, unlike others, he never shook his expertise in the face of his pupil. He hated by-roads in instruction and patiently initiated the Princes in the right use of the deadly weapon. He regarded repetition as the mother of all education, and he would persist for hours with an exercise before calling it a day. Under his guidance, Aurangzeb developed into a good marksman.

On his fourteenth birthday Aurangzeb demonstrated his skill in the presence of the Emperor by shooting from the back of his trotting horse five pigeons flying at heights



ranging from one to five hundred metres. Shah Jahan was much impressed with the Shahzada's uncanny performance, addressed him as Steady Hand (*Dast-i-Istwar*) while presenting to him a *khilat* of special distinction. This was perhaps the first honour received by Aurangzeb at the hands of his father. The five pigeons, duly cured and mounted on silver pedestals, were also presented to the Prince a few days later. Though Aurangzeb had good reason to be pleased with himself, yet he kept his thoughts to himself. Silence gave him a grace that could not but impress everyone around him. The only words he spoke were to thank Mustafa Kamal for the patience with which he had instructed him. Shah Jahan gave Mustafa a special award of five hundred gold *mohars*.

The fight between two famed elephants, Sudhakar and Surat-Sundar, on 28 May, 1633 was perhaps a stage show put up by Providence to proclaim that Aurangzeb was brave, fearless. The two giant-like animals, prepared for the bout for many weeks and fed on milk, honey, almonds and herbal intoxicants, came to what looked like a death-grapple in the presence of a vast crowd on the bank of the Jamuna. The Royal family had come to watch the much-advertised tussle from a marble *chabutra* built specially for the occasion. The three princes—Dara Shikoh, Shuja and Aurangzeb—were reluctant to be mere spectators; they rode their exquisitely turned-out horses and trotted about the arena in the capacity of supervisors and umpires.

At a time when Aurangzeb happened to be very near the snarling beasts Sudhakar disengaged himself and charged in the direction of Aurangzeb. Keeping his cool, the latter stood his ground firmly and veered his mount in a position from where he could brave the challenge. There was panic all around. Fire-works were let off to frighten the runaway animal into passivity. Raja Jai Singh galloped in to the rescue of the prince. Aurangzeb's horse, in the meantime, took fright and reared on its hind legs. The Prince was thrown to the ground. Sword in hand, he stood up defiantly, waiting for the attack. As Sudhakar approached him with a thunderous roar, Aurangzeb thrust his sword into its jaw with such force that the weapon was lost in the wound. Taken

aback, the elephant halted, veered right, and dashed towards the river like a hero-abandoned deer struck by the hunter's dart. Meanwhile, Jai Singh and a posse of Aahidis, armed with lancers and spears, reached the scene. The retreating tusker received many a spear and sword cut before it broke through the cordon of armed men and jumped into the river. Aurangzeb was saved from the jaws of what at one stage looked like certain death.

Shah Jahan and members of the nobility soon reached the spot to felicitate the Prince on his heroism and also to invoke on him the blessings of the Almighty. They found Aurangzeb sublimely unperturbed and completely oblivious of the danger he had passed through. He seemed to possess a spirit without a blemish and a heart without fear. Shah Jahan embraced him, saying: "Your defiance of death is a matter of great pride to us. Babar and Akbar live in you again. May Allah give you a long life".

Aurangzeb showed no sign of elation at what had happened. Submitting with utmost reverence that he had done what the circumstances called for, he expressed surprise that no one except Raja Jai Singh came forth to subdue Sudhakar. He ended on a note of gratitude to God for giving him the courage and presence of mind to do what he had done. "We are all instruments of His will. Nothing ever happens or can happen except under Divine direction", he observed. The Emperor was much pleased not with what he said, but with the manner in which he said it. There was honesty in his tongue and faith in his heart. As customary, the Royal *niaz* comprised, among other acts of benevolence, mass distribution of alms and mass feeding of the poor for two days.

Special honours awaited Aurangzeb on his fifteenth birthday which fell on 24 October, 1633. In full court, the Prince was weighed against gold pieces, and as a result six thousand five hundred *mehars* were set apart for charity in his name. In addition, the title Bahadur (Brave) was conferred on him and the Poet Laureate Saidai Gilani, popularly known as Bedil Khan, composed an ode describing the valour of the Shahzada and invoking God to grant him "the strength to live up to the faith that surges in his young heart". Shah

Jahan was much gratified with Gilani's composition. A reward of rupees five thousand for the poet was announced there and then.

In the summer of 1634 Aurangzeb was invited to accompany the Emperor to Kashmir. The trip became a landmark in his intellectual development in that the natural beauty of the valley gave him a new insight into the grandeur of God. He was happy and excited to see for himself the breath-taking pageantry of colour and symmetry that makes Kashmir an abode for the angels. Gala entertainments held by Shah Jahan and Jahanara Begum *en route* and in Srinagar did not interest him overmuch. His leisure hours were spent either in prayers or in basking in the sunshine of Nature's splendour.

The general poverty of the people of Kashmir distressed Aurangzeb. He could not understand the phenomenon. "Nature is at its happiest best here and the population at its saddest worst", he told his tutor Muhammad Hakim and requested for an explanation for what he called "this seemingly unequal dispensation of God". Hakim pondered for a while and replied: "Beauty amidst poverty is more enchanting than beauty amidst affluence. This is one of God's ways of pronouncing that material riches and spiritual beauty go ill together". From that day it is said, Aurangzeb discarded wearing silk and pearls. He wanted to enter Paradise through the gate of indigence.

The descriptions of Kashmir recorded in his memoirs by his grandfather Jahangir were known to Aurangzeb. He made it a point to visit the forests and gardens mentioned in the Tuzk. At Anantnag he happened to meet an old man whose daughter, Zarina, had helped "the great, gracious Emperor Jahangir pick fruit from our orchard". Aurangzeb accompanied the old man to the self-same orchard and picked apples himself to re-enact a scene from Mughal history. His reward to the guide comprised a woollen costume and one hundred silver coins.

Aurangzeb was now sixteen – an age where academic education came generally to an end and practical instruction in governance began. Mughal princes went not to Yale Colleges and Harvards but to military camps to get training for the

battle of life. Aurangzeb was well prepared for the plunge. The years of study under the watchful eyes of Sadullah Khan and Muhammad Gilani had not entirely satisfied his inward urges. There was something missing in the normal curriculum, he felt, and hoped that the battlefield would provide what the school-room had failed to give him. Aurangzeb was a well-composed young man with clearly defined ideas about what was good and bad for him. The great difficulty about education, he told Jahanara, was to get experience out of ideas. He was essentially a man of action. The teacher, the schoolroom and the set texts of Syllabi went against his grain. The hazards and discomforts of the camp, he was convinced, would help his search for the Right Path more than committing to memory the events of the dead past. Shah Jahan was aware of this gnawing dissatisfaction in Aurangzeb's mind and, in consultation with Sadullah Khan, he decided to nominate him as the head of the military expedition planned to be sent for containment of continuing unrest in Bundelkhand.

Before outlining briefly the course of his education on the battlefields of India and Central Asia, it may perhaps not be out of place to give excerpts from a communication he sent after coming to the throne to one of his old tutors. The latter, looking for favours from his old pupil, made several attempts to get an audience with the Emperor. Aurangzeb divined his intentions and wrote to him some of the unkindest words ever addressed by a king to his one-time tutor.

After the customary salutations to one who had "in some ways taken part in moulding my character", Aurangzeb wrote :

You have been knocking at my door for several months. What do you want from me? Do you really believe that you are fit to be appointed one of the Vazirs of the court? If you do, then I must tell you plainly that you are not made of the stuff of which the Umra are made. Your knowledge of history is poor and your understanding of the languages very sketchy.

You will remember having told me that the kings of Portugal, Holland, England and France were like our junior

vassals. Preposterous! They rule over great empires in wealth and tradition. To denounce them as mere Rajas was to betray your ignorance of the course of history.

Also you may recall your insistence on drilling in me the grammar and words of the Arabic language. I am aware that Arabic is the language of the holy book and that its knowledge is to some extent essential for a Muslim king, but you forgot that for a ruler of Hindustan it was far more important to know the languages commonly used in this land.

Equally inadvisable was stress on teaching me the wingy mysteries of philosophy nobody understands. You confused my mind with airy notions about life and death and the world beyond. Your dissertations on the ultimate and the universal spirit, drawn I believe from the books of the infidels, deserved to be written on water. You wasted much of my valuable time in exercises which had no relation to the tasks that confronted a Mughal prince.

It would have been immeasurably more useful had you chosen to give me instruction in good governance, social laws and traditions of the people of Hindustan, systems of economy prevalent in various *subas*, military science and the duties and obligations of a king. Instead, you waxed eloquent on subjects of no practical utility.

I am not an ingrate. At the same time, as a king, I cannot extend any sort of material help to one who distinguishes himself in nothing but stupidity. My advice to you is to go back to your village and start learning afresh the subjects you think you know best. Do not waste my time any more. There are more important things to be done than to listen to the petitions of ignorant egoists.

These observations are freely quoted with frills and feathers by European chronicles of Aurangzeb's reign*. It is likely that they made some additions with a view to emphasise the

*Bernier gives a fairly lengthy account of this incident. His narrative, savours, however, more of fiction than of fact. He puts in Aurangzeb's mouth phrases and similes typically European in character. Aurangzeb could not possibly have used that language and idiom.

Emperor's disdain for the ritual. There is, however, enough in the excerpts to reveal to some extent Aurangzeb's ideas about education. He was by nature a pragmatist, one who wanted to learn to be able to act and not merely to learn for the sake of learning.

Aurangzeb was moulded out of many faults, and he became better for being a little bad.

Chapter Three

SUPREMO AT SEVENTEEN

Aurangzeb received his first military rank—a Mansab of ten thousand *sawar* and *zat*—on 13 December, 1634. This honour heralded a long career on the battlefield, one which uncovered not only his genius in warfare but also his infinite faith in the protective hand of God. At sixteen, he stood out among his brothers for courage, pluck and perseverance. No cause was for him too big or too small to take up if it was rooted in the glory of Islam. All other considerations, including the splendour and stability of the Empire, were secondary in his calculations. It is in this light that a judgment will have to be made in the end on his successes and his failures. His victories were twice themselves as he fought invariably in His name and his setbacks were half their magnitude as he attributed them to the fabled hand of Destiny. It is apparent that he regarded himself as an instrument of the Divine will. He himself took no credit and owned no mistake. Allah was all, he a non-entity.

Having himself risen to the top via the battlefield, Shah Jahan waited for an opportunity to let Aurangzeb too be baptised in war and thus be conditioned for an illustrious place in history. Events in Bundelkhand—a jungle territory this side of the Narbada captured by Garhwal Rajputs in the sixteenth century—since the death of Bir Singh Deo* were a cause of grave concern to Shah Jahan. Not only

*Son of Raja Ramchandra, Bir Singh Deo became an agent of Prince Salim for the murder of Abul Fazl. Consequently he gathered infinite wealth and honours in the reign of Jahangir.

did the deeds of self-assertion by Jauhar Singh* create an anti-Mughal sentiment; they also gave comfort to the Sultans of Deccan who for long years had been trying to throw off domination by armies from the north. The Bundhela religion was war and its creed plunder. They created hostilities, if there were none around, to satiate their illimitable hunger for loot. These devout worshippers of the goddess Vindhya lived and died by the sword. To them freedom of action was the greatest virtue and dependence the biggest sin of all. The loyalist Bir Singh kept them from coming into conflict with the Mughals. Jauhar Singh was of a different kidney. He made no secret of his distrust for the alien rulers, and he strove his utmost to whip up tribal nationalism to satisfy his pride and patriotism.

Shah Jahan had not enriched his sword with some of the noblest blood in the realm to see it disintegrate into parts. Soon after accession he sent a big force to bring Jauhar Singh to book. The latter panicked, surrendered, and was pardoned by the Emperor on pledges of loyalty and payment of an annual tribute of several hundred thousand rupees. The promises made by Jauhar Singh were only the means to gain time. He abrogated them as soon as the Imperial army left the capital Orchha**. Not only that; he attacked and spread ruin in the old Gond capital Chaurgarh, slew Raja Prem Narain, and stationed in the conquered territory a large army to signal its merger with Bundelkhand.

Shah Jahan's reaction to these developments was quick and firm. He charged three of his most reputed generals, Syed Khan-i-Jahan, Abdullah Khan Firoz Jang and Khan-i-Dauran with the specific task of "capturing Jauhar Singh and producing him before me in the court in robes of chains". He further ordered that "in case the Bundhela rebel is not captured alive, his head should be cut and sent to me for

*Eldest son of Bir Singh Deo, Jauhar Singh is also known as Jaujhar Singh.

**Situating on the river Behat, which runs midway through Bundelkhand, Orchha was made capital in 1531.

identification". Shah Jahan's anger was great and his resolve to liquidate Jauhar Singh greater.

As the three generals were of near equal rank, the Emperor appointed Aurangzeb as the Supreme Commander—a post that was meant to be an opportunity and a challenge for the seventeen-year-old Prince. Shah Jahan knew that Aurangzeb was not cut out to play the second fiddle to any general howsoever high in rank and experience; so he made it clear in the royal *firman* that "responsibility for the conduct of the campaign will rest with the Supremo. The three generals will advise the Prince and, having done that, they will carry out his decisions jointly or separately as the situation may warrant".

Thus Aurangzeb was not a nominal head; his authority was not in any way circumscribed by considerations of the generals' age and experience. The Emperor gave him a free hand, and so he began his schooling on the battlefield not as a pupil but as a senior doyen. Shah Jahan's faith in his abilities was almost total. So young a body with so old a head—this was a sight that could not but inspire the men and officers under him to deeds of heroism that shone brilliantly in an otherwise colourless war of aggression against a weaker enemy.

A well coordinated assault from three sides resulted in the fall of Orchha on 2 October 1635. However, Jauhar Singh escaped capture. He fled to the citadel of Dhanmani and made ready there to weather the storm which had descended upon the motherland. He cut off all routes to the fort, stationed troops at advantageous points to harass the pursuing Mughal forces, destroyed hoards of foodgrains in villages *en route*, rallied all tribesmen to his side on grounds of patriotism, issued appeals to the neighbouring Rajas and Jagirdars to make common cause with him and stem the tide of Mughal invasion. But it soon became clear that the massive might of the Imperial Army could not be countered with bows and arrows and the armoury of religious sentiment. The odds were heavily against him. Nevertheless, he stood his ground firmly, praying and hoping that the goddess Vindhya would somehow come to his rescue and save her devotees from the

ignominy of subjection to what he regarded as the armies of the Devil.

Though in time the savage bull may bear the yoke, but the Bundhela chief was not cut out for that subservient role. He would rather perish fighting than capitulate into a life of slavery. The spectre of defeat failed to dim his ardour for self-respect. He reminded his followers of their great heritage* and urged them in heroic words to live up to the ideals of their ancestors and lay down their lives, if need be, in defence of their identity. "The crown of life is gained by those who win unequal wars", he told his son Yograj** and added that "the truth and righteousness are on our side and the enemy, howsoever powerful, will find it impossible to triumph over us".

These were bold words. In medieval times, the eloquence of courage seldom won wars; it only made defeats noble. A well-finished soldier, Aurangzeb knew his strength as also the weakness of his foe. Not wasting any time in festivities over the fall of Orchha, he sent Khan-i-Dauran in pursuit of Jauhar Singh with instructions that "even the hell-pains of traversing through a territory infested with the wildest human tribe on earth should not deter our forces from laying their hand on the wily, disloyal disturber of peace".

The Khan went in hot chase. The size of the army was a disadvantage that slowed down his progress. A virtually impassable jungle and tribal snipers took a fairly heavy toll of the Imperial force, but it kept on advancing till the ramparts of Dhanmani came in sight. Then it halted for a breather and also to await Jauhar Singh's reaction to the doom that must have begun to stare him in the face. Demands for surrender, sent through captured tribal holy men, drew blanks, Jauhar Singh was under a vow to the family deity to carry on the struggle till the last breath. To one of the

*The mythical geneology of the Bundhelas is traced back to Raja Pancham, a devotee of goddess, Vindhya, and even beyond him to Lord Rama.

**Yograj was attached to the Mughal army in Deccan in the early years of Shah Jahah's reign. He left Belghat secretly when Jauhar Singh revolted against the Mughals.

messengers, he told to "go and tell the Khan that a Rajput never surrenders; he only wins or dies on the battlefield". This was the end of the verbal offensive launched by the Mughal general. Thereafter, he gave orders for bombardment of the fort and made ready to capture it by assault from two sides. A mystery explosion inside the citadel, caused perhaps by a direct hit from the Imperial artillery, turned out to be the beginning of the end of Jauhar Singh's resistance.

Sensing danger, the ladies of the Rajput harem prepared for the traditional *jauhar*. A few were stabbed to death by their guardians and a large number strode on to funeral pyres for self-immolation. Jauhar Singh's mother, Parvati was one of them. Hardly had the fires laden with Rajput glory come to a smouldering extinction when two contingents of the Mughal army scaled the ramparts and entered the fort. Their desperate search for Jauhar Singh turned out to be futile. The Bundhela chief had escaped through a secret gate at the back many hours earlier. He headed for the safety of Chaurgarh beyond the Narbada and on the other side of the Vindhya. When informed of Jauhar Singh's escape, Khan-i-Dhauran exclaimed "I shall go to the farthest corner of the earth to cut short the days of his freedom. We leave at the dawn tomorrow".

The chase was relentless. almost dramatic. The Rajput love of liberty was pitted against the Mughal considerations of prestige. The race through the jungles of Gondwana became at times a breath-taking hide-and-peek affair of great ingenuity. At times the hounds failed to catch the hare by the proverbial hair-breadth. On other occasions the pursued mocked the pursuers by hopping away from one place of safety to another in utter disregard of the human and natural hazards that barred their way. Jauhar Singh was the first to reach Chaurgarh but it was clear that his reprieve would be short-lived. The Mughal army closed in from two sides in an attempt to block all routes of exit from the fort. Jauhar Singh read the writing on the wall, and fled away once again to the jungles of the Gond territory. There the loot-hungry tribesmen killed him, not knowing who he was and whither he was going.

The Mughal scouts came upon the body of Jauhar Singh many days later. In a pocket of his coat was found a note scribbled in Brij Bhasha: "Death is liberty which no misfortune can depose, no despot can destroy, no enemy can annihilate, no dictator can enslave. I die a free man. Goddess Vindhya be praised for Her mercy". The Khan foamed in the mouth when the note was read out to him; he ordered the head of the fallen Rajput to be cut and sent to Aurangzeb. The Prince was pleased no end to receive the gory trophy. He sent it to Agra under a strong escort with the following communication:

The Royal command has been carried out. In proof, I send to Your Majesty the head of the Bundhela rebel who defied the Imperial authority and invoked on himself the wrath of Allah. The forts of Orchha, Dhanmani and Chaurgarh are now under our control. All the treasures which have fallen in our hands have been stored in chests and sealed in my presence. These will be sent to Agra as soon as arrangements for their safe transport are made.

Our victory has largely been due to the benign favour in which the Almighty holds the dynasty of the Mughals. The Bundhela infidels were a blemish on this fair territory under their rule. We are taking steps to cleanse this region of the stains of heresy.

In my opinion and in the opinion of the generals under my command, it would serve the interests of Islam and the Empire if Your Majesty show the royal flag personally in Orchha. Further, the countryside is endowed abundantly with the munificence of Nature, and it would be an apt acknowledgment of the great God's gift of victory to the Imperial forces if Your Majesty travel to Orchha in thankfulness and see for yourself the little Paradise that has been thrown into our lap.

The great secret of success at the Mughal court was to direct Royal vanity to the desired objectives. Aurangzeb was a born diplomat in that he knew instinctively the weaknesses of the man he wanted to please as also the strength of those whom he was called upon to confront. Jauhar Singh's head

alone was, in his view, not sufficient to arouse the Emperor's admiration for the manner in which the campaign was conducted; an invitation to visit Bundelkhand and to see for himself beautiful territory which had been added to the Empire would, in his calculation, arouse a pleasure-seeking Emperor's enthusiasm more than the mere news of victory, and thus enlist his support for ambitions that had already taken root in Aurangzeb's head.

As envisaged, Shah Jahan responded to the suggestion with a degree of unusual readiness. Orders for completion of plans for the journey were issued straightaway. The bloodless head of Jauhar Singh was forgotten after being hoisted on a pole for a week in front of the main gate of the fort. At heart Shah Jahan was an epicure. Vengefulness was a necessary evil forced on him by the exigencies of governance.

Meanwhile, Aurangzeb set about "cleansing Bundelkhand of infidels and infidelity". Ancient temples in Orchha and other places were converted into mosques, the families of the nobility were given the options of conversion or death, ladies of Jauhar Singh's harem were distributed among officers and men of the Imperial army, idols of goddess Vindhya and other deities were broken up and thrown unceremoniously into the river Behat. Muslim priests went from village to village converting the peasantry into "the religion of the Prophet", heavy punishments were meted out to those who refused or hesitated to relinquish the faith of their forefathers, young Hindu women were forced to sell their bodies to a rapacious army, mansions belonging to the family of Jauhar Singh were converted into barracks for the victorious forces, sounding of temple bells was banned throughout Bundelkhand—in fact everything possible was done to make the newly-conquered domain a Hell for non-Muslims and a Paradise for the followers of Islam.

Syed Khan-i-Jahan and Abdullah Khan Safdar Jang cautioned the Prince discreetly against driving the Rajputs to desperation, but Aurangzeb was deaf to all counsels of sanity. He had induced himself to believe that God sent him to Bundelkhand to wean the territory away from *Kufr* and to make it safe for the faithful. Aurangzeb at seventeen had

imbibed fully the fixities that tarnished his reign later. Whereas religion is the one common guardian of men, it can also be their one common oppressor. Aurangzeb would have been a far greater Muslim had he been a little better human being.

Shah Jahan reached Orchha towards the end of 1635. His first act was to install Devi Singh* as the new Raja and to reverse in some ways the processes of doubtful wisdom started by the youthful Supreme Commander. It is likely that the Emperor acted on the advice of his two seniormost Umra Asaf Khan and Mahabat Khan. Perhaps the three generals on the spot also expressed their opinions against the repressive policies Aurangzeb had initiated. Shah Jahan was a father not too old to dote over everything that his son did. Bundelkhand put the Emperor on the alert. He realised for the first time that Aurangzeb was a curious compound of good and bad—more bad than good.

The sight-seeing Safari began in February 1636. The whole paraphernalia of high entertainment—ranging from nautch girls to *pahlwans* of noble pedigree accompanied the royal entourage right up to Daultabad. The leisurely four-month march through a territory sublimely rich in fauna and flora ended in the first week of July. On the fourteenth of that month, Aurangzeb was designated Viceroy of Deccan—a post that broke him for handling the complexities of war and peace in a land of diverse faiths and religions.

Departure of Aurangzeb and Shah Jahan from Bundelkhand did not, however, mean that the rebellion there had come to an end. Far from it. The struggle was carried on till the end of the century by the valiant chief of Mohaba, Ganpat Rai, and his son Chatar Sal. Bundelas lived to fight, and fought to live.

*An estranged relative of Jauhar Singh, Devi Singh actively fought with the Imperialists against the Bundhela chief. The Rajputs called him "Twice a fool who neither knew his own interests nor the interests of the clan",

Chapter Four

FORSAKEN BY GOD

The Sultanates were virtually in a melting pot when Aurangzeb took charge of his challenging post of Viceroy of Deccan. Ahmednagar was in a state of near-anarchy following the surrender and capture in 1633 by the Mughals of Hussain Shah, last king of the Nizamshahi dynasty. This capitulation created in the Sultanate a political and military vacuum that could not but be exploited to their advantage by patriotic adventurers like Shahji Bhonsla and others. The latter saw in the armies of the north nothing but heartless agents of destruction and repression of the foulest vintage. Though victims of loot and plunder, the people sang their praises, equating them with "liberators of the chained souls" and exhorting them not to be content with anything less than the whole of the territory belonging to their ancestors.

Like religious fanaticism, patriotism is a lust that feeds on itself. The Marhatta star, it seemed, was in the ascendent. Aurangzeb realized early that it would be out of his military power to contain these fast-spreading forces without first defusing the influence and authority of the kingdoms of Bijapur and Golconda—a task which Aurangzeb failed to see at the time was, to say the least, not easy to accomplish. He was young, ambitious, and on the verge of blooming into an implacable religious fanatic. Shiite faith was to him a rag as red as the idol-worship of Hinduism. His mind was made up: the bases of *kufri* in the south must be destroyed once and for all if the Mughal Empire was to hold on to what it possessed.

Aurangzeb had a massive army at his command; it yearned

for action. The lure of plunder fired the imagination of both Muslim and Hindu mercenaries. The hidden treasures of the Sultanates were, no secret. Bards and story-tellers had made the wealth of these kingdoms look many times their actual magnitude. Aurangzeb pondered for a while over the pros and cons of alternatives open to him, and it did not take him long to conclude that the surge of nationalism sweeping through the region could be stemmed effectively by force and force alone.

The news of preparations by the Imperial army for an all-out offensive gave cold feet to Sultan Abdullah of Golconda. He decided for peace at any cost. Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb could not have wished for a more fortunate development. The price of truce was fixed at an annual tribute running into millions of rupees, acceptance of Mughal suzerainty by striking a new series of coins in the name of Emperor Shah Jahan, reading of *khutaba* acknowledging Mughal overlordship from the pulpit of every mosque in the Sultanate, handing over keys of all important forts to the Imperial Viceroy, public denial of support to Shahji Bhonsla and his followers and lastly, disbandment of the Golconda army and transfer of the famed war elephants to the Mughal field commander.

The faint-hearted Abdullah accepted these conditions, and thus became the butt of sneers and taunts by all those who valued honour more than material riches. This success resulted in an increase of Aurangzeb's salary to rupees six million a year—an emolument equivalent to a Mansab of fifteen thousand *zat* and *sawar*.

Bijapur was a more difficult nut to crack. Notwithstanding the spread of unparalleled ruin in the kingdom by Mughal forces, the valiant Adil Shah withstood the demand for unconditional surrender. In the end when both sides had bled themselves to a standstill, a treaty of peace was worked out, the main burden of which accord was denial by Adil Shah of all support to the Marhatta guerillas and the ouster of Shahji from the Sultanate. This less-than-total victory led Shah Jahan to send a boastful communication to the Shah of Persia, warning him obliquely against encroachment on Mughal territories in Central Asia. Shah Jahan praised in

this letter the role of "our devoted son Aurangzeb whose loyalty to the Empire can be matched only by his loyalty to the tenets of Islam". Here was yet another reminder to the Shah of his abortive material and moral support to the Shiite Kingdoms. Shah Jahan never lost sight of ominous developments in Qandhar. The Shah needed to be told clearly of the striking power of the Mughal arms.

Aurangzeb was never content with what he possessed; like all men driven with high-octane ambition he yearned ever for more. Bijapur was a thorn in his side. He wanted to reduce it to dust not so much for its political influence but because of its being a bastion of Shiite faith in the south. He regarded Shiite as inferior men, not worthy of enjoying equality with the faithful. One day he told his principal adviser Shaista Khan*: "Suffer a non-Muslim once to be at an equality with you and from that moment he will be your superior". This fixity drove him often to acts of extreme irrationality so much so that envoys from the court of Adil Shah were required to stand in a pit half a *gaz* below the floor surface and they were not permitted to address their submissions to the Viceroy directly but via the Chamberlain who stood at a hearing distance from the pit and the throne. In a letter written to Jahanara Begum in 1643, he said that "of all the wild beasts on land or water the wildest is an apostate, one who casts even the slightest doubt on the supremacy of Prophet Muhammad".

It was about this time that Aurangzeb became increasingly distrustful of his elder brother Dara Shikoh. Representations made by him to Agra for reinforcements or for additional funds and equipment invariably elicited half-hearted, elusive replies under the seal not of the Emperor but of Dara Shikoh. The cause of a Mughal prince's dissatisfaction almost always lay in another prince, not in principles or specific matter of state. Rightly or wrongly, he came to believe that Dara Shikoh was jealous of his successes and that he was doing his worst to prejudice the Emperor's mind against his decisions and plans for future action. Further, the much-advertised liberalism

*Shaista Khan was brother of Mumtaz Mahal Begum.

of the Prince Royal was to Aurangzeb a form of heresy that deserved condemnation not only by the Emperor but by all right-thinking Muslims. In more than one communication he poured out his heart to Jahanara Begum, not knowing perhaps that the latter admired Dara Shikoh for what she called "the largeness of his heart and the bigness of his soul".

In a letter to Jahanara towards the end of 1643, Aurangzeb wrote :

I am deeply grieved at reports of goings-on in Agra. It is becoming increasingly clear that a heretic finds it much easier to do ill than well. Every suggestion that I make for consolidating our gains is turned down by the heir-apparent without proper examination. In the circumstances, it might be better for me to live in a corner of the jungle than to waste my time living in the Viceregal Lodge at Aurangabad. Time is gliding past quickly. We have to act promptly if the forces of infidelity are not to be allowed to gain the upper hand. All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of unbelief. The consequences of what is being done at the court in the name of liberalism will, in my reckoning, be disastrous for the unity of the Empire. I should be grateful if my fears are conveyed discreetly to Ali Jah Padshah Salamat.

The selfish courtiers, like wayward women, are always buying and selling something. Beware of their trade. For their own small gains they are more likely than not to betray the interests of Islam and the Empire. To me Islam comes first, everything else afterwards.

It is not known whether Jahanara showed this communication to Shah Jahan. In all likelihood, she thought it prudent not to do anything which might bring the simmering hostility between brothers to the boil. Meanwhile, the cup of Aurangzeb's discontent spilt over and, in a fit of desperation, he retired temporarily to a quiet corner in the Western Ghats. Shaista Khan did whatever he could to persuade the Prince out of his self-imposed exile, but to no avail. At one stage, Aurangzeb thought seriously of repairing to Mecca and leave

the Viceroyalty to take care of itself. At a time when he was wavering between Will and Will Not there came to pass an event which jolted him out of his disquiet; Jahanara lay on the brink of death as a result of severe burns sustained when her clothes accidentally got entangled in a *mishal* and caught fire while she was returning to her chamber from the private apartment of her father. Every member of the family rushed to Agra to be by the side of much grieving Emperor. Forgetting for a while his own troubles, Aurangzeb hastened to the capital with a team of Deccanis Hukma reputed for their skill "in healing wounds as deep as the sea".

Despite his rift with the Prince Royal, the name of Aurangzeb was in high account at the court. The orthodox Muslims looked upon him as a Messiah of hope, and they left no doubt as to where their support lay in the event of a showdown between brothers. Though the trumpets of a war of succession were at this stage not audible yet those few who sat on the fence had both their ears pinned to the ground so that they could catch the sound waves of a distant conflict which ultimately upset tradition and changed the course of history.

The Emperor received Aurangzeb with extreme cordiality, giving no indication whatever of his knowledge of the cause of his reported escape to the hills. Anxiety over Jahanara's worsening condition perhaps drove away everything else from his mind. To him, Jahanara came first, everything else afterwards.

When the famed physicians of the Empire and Persia had pronounced their inability to save the Princess, the lowly slave Arif Muhammad prepared an ointment and presented it to the Emperor, submitting :

Allah is great. This ointment may do what the medicines prepared by the great physicians of the world have failed to do. This insignificant slave desires neither fame nor riches. Recovery of the Ornament of the Universe will be my only reward. Pray, O'meriful master, give this ointment a trial. This is the same soothing balm which healed the wounds sustained by Prince Hindal in the battle of Kabul a hundred years ago.

The Emperor pondered for a while and then ordered the royal physician Mumana to apply the balm on the princess's burns. A miracle came to pass. Jahanara showed signs of recovery from the first day. Within sixty days not only were the burns completely healed there was not a scar or a blemish left on her body. There was joy all around. Festivities such as had never before been seen in the captial began on 25 November, 1644, and lasted for well over a week. Arif was offered by the Emperor himself a reward of rupees one hundred thousand, but the self-effacing slave begged permission "to say no to the Royal munificence as Allah would never forgive me for deriving material profit from a boon given to the family by a holy man many many years ago". He further submitted that it would be reward enough if he was permitted to serve the Princess for the remaining active years of his life.

Shah Jahan was dumbfounded at the fear of God and serene simplicity writ large on Arif's face. He asked him to come near him, called him *farzand*, and assured him in terms tender and affectionate that his wish was granted. Aurangzeb, who stood nearby fascinated by the slave's mien of complete surrender to the will of God, strode up and inquired the name of the Saint who bequeathed to his ancestors the boon of the miracle ointment. Arif hung his head down, and kept quiet. The Prince repeated the query. At this Arif spoke thus :

O' pious Prince, you are known throughout the realm for your courage and piety—two virtues which raise man to the level of the heroes of the great epics of the world. I am under a pledge, given on the holy book in the presence of my father, to maintain silence in respect of everything connected with this balm. Sire, I am certain you will not like me to break a sacred pledge. I am prepared to lay down my life at your feet, O'valiant Shahzada. I believe, the ointment will lose its healing touch the moment the promise I made to God is violated. I will speak no more, my master. Perhaps already I have said more than I should have. The great Allah will forgive me the lapse.

Aurangzeb embraced the slave. The two were rooted in a

mysterious awe of Divine forces. Shah Jahan watched the dramatic Prince-slave hug in admiring silence. In due time Arif rose to the post of Master of Aurangzeb's household. In later years, Jahanara wrote a poem to laud "a slave's firmness in obedience to God". She never forgot the good that Arif did to her.

As part of the festivities, Dara Shikoh, who governed while Shah Jahan reigned, held a glittering entertainment at his river-side mansion. All members of the Royal family were invited to attend the function. Despite his deep distrust of the Prince Royal, Aurangzeb was one of the first to reach the villa. This gesture of goodwill apparently pleased the host who took him around the sprawling palace and its gardens personally. An underground chamber with a single door opening on a bank of the Jamuna gave Aurangzeb the impression of a grave. He made haste to come out of it without waiting to be explained the architectural niceties of the massive chamber. "The cool of the neither world does not attract me", he told his unsuspecting brother. The two came out by the narrow entrance they had used to go in. They perhaps knew each other's thoughts. The time was not yet opportune to exchange their fears and their assessments of each other.

In the affairs of state what begins in fear often ends in folly. When later in the evening, Dara Shikoh escorted the Emperor and other members of the family to 'The Grave', Aurangzeb did not enter the chamber; instead he sat cross-legged in front of the narrow doorway in what looked like a mood of obedience to some inward command. To the anxious inquiries of the Begums and Shahzadas, he gave no reply. Shah Jahan was puzzled at the Prince's odd behaviour and, at the instance of Jahanara Begum, he sent Prince Murad to find out the reason of his brother's "untimely exercise in self-upliftment". Aurangzeb sent him back with a sneer in which were compounded conviction, resolve, distrust, fear, self-righteousness and many other passions of soul in revolt against the wicked world. The Emperor was indignant and left the mansion much earlier than expected.

The first thing Shah Jahan did the following morning was to

issue a *firman* under his own seal, dismissing Aurangzeb from his post in the Deccan and ripping him of all honours, jagirs and personal titles. His "dramatic demonstration" was considered by the Emperor as a piece of pre-meditated affront to the Wali Aahad—an act of disrespect and disobedience which could not be allowed to go unpunished. There was consternation in the capital. The festivities ended on a note of conflict which in the opinion of many an old-time courtier could not but entail serious consequences. The Mughal dynasty, some felt, had touched the lowest ground in the last one hundred years and that the slide-down might be seen as a prelude to the end of a chapter of history. The loyalists, whose number was decreasing everyday, hoped that the fever-point of a civil war would not be reached for as long as the Emperor was in control.

Despite the storm his action had raised and despite the forfeiture of all his properties and honours, Aurangzeb kept his cool. He neither sought an interview with his father, nor did he make an effort to see his influential elder sister. The mystery thickened as the days went by. Not being able to remain for long as idle spectator of what looked like a crisis in the affairs of the family, Jahanara broke the ice and went to see Aurangzeb in his private apartment in the fort on 3 September, 1644. She pleaded with her brother for hours before the latter gave the reason for his squatting in front of the doorway. He said :

Respected sister, I am neither a fool nor a rebel. I am one of those whom God whispers in the ear at crucial moments. A voice told me clearly that the Emperor would not come out alive from that Dark Inn once he entered there alone in the company of Dara Shikoh. I was told to keep a vigil at the doorway while the Emperor was being shown around the mansion. It was not my purpose to be disrespectful to the Emperor. But I could not bring myself to ignore the voice of Allah. My action was inspired by the highest motives of obedience to God and service to my father, the Emperor. Perhaps you and many others will discredit this story as the vain imagination of an over-

wound, whimsical visionary. My conscience is clear and my faith firm. Material rewards and riches are mere shadows. These empty things leave me cold. Obedience to Allah is the crown of life. Never, never shall I disobey His dictates. True, I am cast in a mould different from others. But that does not make me an enemy of our dynasty, our Empire. I shall serve them to the end of my days. My ears are for ever attuned to listen to His voice.

Although in his explanation Aurangzeb gave the impression of being above the common laws of propriety and etiquette, Jahanara was to a degree taken in by his argument. The part of the brief which cast a doubt on the intentions of Dara Shikoh made no mark on her; the rest of the dissertation, particularly the part that emphasised the imperative of heeding the inner voice, struck within her a sympathetic chord. The honesty with which the Prince expanded his thesis also impressed her.

Jahanara gave the Emperor a near verbatim report of what Aurangzeb had said and, without waiting for his reaction suggested in her own feminine way, that the interests of family unity would be served best if the earlier *firman* was withdrawn and Aurangzeb restored to honour. "His was not an error of intent but an error of judgment", she submitted.

Shah Jahan was puzzled at Jahanara's intercession. To condone Aurangzeb's behaviour was to cast a doubt on Dara Shikoh's faithfulness – a shift in stance that Shah Jahan was not prepared to make. It was not that his admiration for Aurangzeb was less but that his love for Dara Shikoh was greater. The dilemma he was faced with was not easy to resolve. Jahanara sensed her father's thoughts and, in her innate womanly wisdom, suggested that the demands of justice would perhaps be met if Aurangzeb was transferred from the Deccan to the less prestigious post of Governor of Gujarat. The implication that his properties and honours be given back to Aurangzeb was in effect the more substantive part of her suggestion. Shah Jahan accepted the recommendation as a good way out of the crisis. Jahanara took upon herself the responsibility of assuring the two Princes that the *firman* was amended in

the larger interests of the Empire and Mughal dynasty.

The court heaved a sigh of relief when on 14 February, 1645, Aurangzeb left for Ahmedabad to take charge of his new post. The dexterous diplomatist Jahanara had scored her first major success in that capacity.

Removal of Aurangzeb from the Deccan was not due entirely to the ungainly posture he took at the mansion of Dara Shikoh. Historians speak of some incidents which had convinced Shah Jahan that Aurangzeb was too fanatic a Sunni to hold the post of Viceroy for long in the predominantly Shiite Deccan. His strong-hand tactics in Bijapur and Golconda had fanned the fires of regional nationalism—a development that ultimately led to Marhatta ascendancy in the south. Nothing is more foreign to a religious fanatic than the art of conciliation. During his eight-year term of Viceroyalty*, Aurangzeb won many battles but he lost the war for Mughal dominance in the region.

As compared to the rough seas around Aurangabad, the situation in Gujarat was like a standing pool of stagnant water. Here was an opportunity for Aurangzeb to dwell for a while in the inner recesses of his self and sharpen his piety and consciousness of the might of God. The sword was laid aside for a while and the *tasbeih* taken out. The two years in Gujarat were for Aurangzeb a period of search and reaffirmation of his religious faith and spiritual convictions. In a way, the short stopover in Ahmedabad gave him the strength and stamina to face the hazards that lay ahead.

In January 1647, came to him an urgent communication from Agra in which the Emperor summoned him to Lahore for consultations in regard to the proposed second military expedition to subdue Bokhara and its dependencies Balkh and Badakhshan. Prince Murad Baksh had refused to stay on in Balkh and consolidate the gains of his victory over Nazar Muhammad**. The vacuum created by his departure against

* Aurangzeb's first term of Viceroyalty of Deccan sprcad over eight years, from 14 July, 1636 to 28 May, 1644.

** Nazar Muhammad was the younger brother of Imran Kuli Khan, King of Bokhara. He became King after the latter retired to Medina in 1640.

the advice of the seniormost Vazir Sadullah Khan needed to be filled quickly. The choice lay between Shah Shuja and Aurangzeb. The latter selected himself because of his proved courage and tenacity of will-power on the battlefield, Shah Jahan saw in him a conqueror of the calibre of Changez and Amir Timur. His heart was set on capturing the territories beyond the Hindukush which, in his view, belonged to the Mughals by the right of inheritance.

Over-ambition blinded Shah Jahan to the ugly realities of distance, climatic rigours and the daredevilry of the Tartars and Uzbeks who considered Central Asia as their exclusive hunting-ground. The teams of sycophants at the court encouraged Shah Jahan in his plans of expansion. The price he paid in the end for a reckless folly was indeed very heavy. In fact, the erosion of the Mughal Empire began in Balkh and Badakhshan.

Aurangzeb reached Lahore on 26 January, 1647, and Balkh and Badakhshan were conferred on him the next day. The famed Persian General Ali Mardan Khan was appointed chief adviser. In addition, ten commanders of the rank of five thousand and above were called out for the campaign. Shah Jahan was resolved to take no risks. A large Uzbek force under the command of the stout-hearted Abdul Aziz, son of Nazar Muhammad, was hovering in the neighbourhood of Balkh to block Mughal reinforcements. In his parting message, he reminded the supreme commander, that the God of war hated those who hesitated, and added: "Experience tells me that in armed hostilities there is no place even for a sound mistake. Be careful! Uzbeks are a wily foe. May Allah protect you".

Aurangzeb took leave of the Emperor on 10 February, 1648, and as was his custom issued a stirring message for twenty-five thousand men under his command. After spelling out briefly the task entrusted to them, he said :

In war, as also sometimes in peace, we must leave room for strokes of fortune and accidents that cannot be foreseen. But take it from me it is only the faithless and the weak of heart who are chastised by Fate. The brave and those who have no fear in their chests seldom fail to reach their goal.

Our task is not easy, and it is exactly for that reason that the Emperor has chosen us to do it. Our number may be small* but we are blessed with the good wishes of our Emperor and the support of the Almighty Allah. What is more: our cause is just. Evil cannot triumph over righteousness. In that faith let us push forward to consolidate what belongs to us by the right of succession. Good luck to all of you.

Except for a few skirmishes with roving Tartar and Uzbek predators, the three-month march to Balkh was virtually eventless, Bahadur Khan and Aslat Khan, joint Governors of Balkh, came out to welcome the Prince on 25 May, 1648. They briefed the new Royal representative on situation in the city and outside, and also apprised him of the problems of food and other scarcities being faced by the garrison. In his characteristic manner Aurangzeb told them that the sinews of effective occupation were faith and determination. "Allah will look after the rest", he philosophised.

Believing as he did that "in any action we must be speedy", Aurangzeb lost no time to meet threat held out by a large Uzbek force under the young Abdul Aziz. Mughal scouts brought news of an imminent attack on the city and gave alarming pictures of the preparations in the enemy camp for ousting the armies of Hindustan from Central Asia.

In consultation with Ali Mardan Khan and the experienced Bahadur Khan, Aurangzeb decided not to wait for the attack but to carry the war to those who were out to wage it. On the fourth day of his arrival Aurangzeb, seated on a magnificent elephant (a rare sight in Transoxiana) moved out at the head of nearly thirty thousand men with the declared intention of "quenching the fire before it develops into a blaze". The morale of the Mughal army was high. The sight of Aurangzeb in the glittering gold houdah was an inspiration that dwarfed their fears; they had little doubt about the result of the coming clash of arms.

Following a few clashes with groups of wandering

* The size of the army placed under Aurangzeb was less than half of the force which accompanied Prince Murad to Balkh in 1646.

“cossacks”, the battle was joined on 15 June with the main Uzbek force led by Abdul Aziz. The engagement was hot and bitter right from the beginning. For six hours the fortunes fluctuated from one side to the other amidst an unusually heavy loss of men and horses. A few *gharis* before sunset an event came to pass which immortalised Aurangzeb and gave the Mughals a no mean victory : on hearing a distant call for the evening prayer, Aurangzeb, hypnotised as it were by the name of Allah, ordered the *mahout* to bring the elephant to the sitting posture and, unmindful of the arrows and bullets flying all around, took off his armour, descended to the ground and spread there a *janamaz* to keep his time with the Creator. The sight of the Mughal Prince saying his prayers in the midst of a roaring battle unnerved the enemy. The spectacle alarmed Abdul Aziz and he immediately called a halt to the fighting, saying “this man of God will never be beaten. Let us go back to our camp”.

Aurangzeb did not look either this way or that till the prayer exercise was completed. When at last he made ready to go up the elephant, a group of Uzbek captains came up to express their admiration for his faith and to announce their decision “not to fight any more against one so deeply entrenched in God”. The battle was over. Aurangzeb became invincible in the eyes of the people of Central Asia.

Aurangzeb returned to Balkh riding high on the wave of new popularity, new self-confidence. Shah Jahan complimented him on his success in words of high affection. “You have restored the dignity of our arms. Your deeds make a proud father prouder. We have little doubt that greater successes await you. Apply yourself now to weaving these ancient lands of our forefathers into the texture of the Empire”, he wrote.

The victorious Prince had reason to be happy at “what Allah gave me the power and wisdom to do”. Little did he know that Nature with its snows, extreme cold, shortages of the necessities to sustain life, blizzards and storms was a greater enemy of the forces of occupation than the Uzbek and Tartar hordes. As the winter approached with all its travails and

and torments, Aurangzeb sensed a threat which he could ignore at the peril of well over fifty thousand men under his care. It did not take him long to realize that "he loses only half who gets away with half his men intact". The time was running out fast. Once the pathways were blocked with snow, it was clear, he would be at the mercy of the enemy. To endure the rigours of Balk in winter was not given to men from the temperate climes of Hindustan. Discontent among troops was rising every day. All delays are dangerous in war. Aurangzeb had learnt this lesson the hard way. He could not persuade himself to postpone a decision which, he thought, was unavoidable. After a day's seclusion in the company of God, he gave orders for the army of occupation to withdraw to Kabul without waiting for the Emperor's approval for that vital step. A couple of commanders hinted discreetly that it might be advisable to await Royal permission. "When winter begins the doors of hell fly open", he told them. It was impossible to argue him out of a plan he had worked out after careful thought.

On 1 October, 1648, Aurangzeb handed over Balkh to Nazar Muhammad* and began a withdrawal which soon developed into a disastrous retreat. Though in battle array, the forces found it difficult to cope with continual snipings by fast-moving Tartar predators. The Hindukush with its death-traps, snowfalls and blizzards added to the travails of the Imperialists. More than ten thousand men perished on the way. The number of elephants, horses, camels and mules who fell to the hazards of terrain and climate was proportionately higher. It is estimated that the expedition cost the Mughal treasury nearly rupees forty million—an expenditure completely unrelated to the gains Shah Jahan expected to gather therefrom.

This failure devalued Aurangzeb's prestige as also his fame as soldier. In Kabul he had to wait for months before the Emperor received him in audience. A day later, he was

Negotiations for peace between Nazar Muhammad and Aurangzeb were unduly prolonged and complicated as the former wanted to stretch them till the onset of winter.

named Governor of Multan and Sind—a post considerably junior to Viceroyalty either in Deccan or in Gujarat. Aurangzeb waited for an opportunity to rehabilitate his honour.

Governorship of Multan and Sind

During his four-year tenure as Governor of Multan and Sind (1648-1652) Aurangzeb can be said to have made up some lost ground in that he put down Baluchi tribesmen with a firm hand and also took some bold steps, including the construction of a new port, to facilitate trade with Persia and Central Asian countries.

In 1649, following quick suppression by him of an insurrection by Nomani tribesmen, Aurangzeb's Mansab was raised to fifteen thousand—a promotion in which many a senior courtier read a signal for his appointment to an important military command. Unlike Jahangir, Shah Jahan gave honours and awards not haphazardly but with some purpose governing his calculations.

An astrologer, more shrewd than learned, told Aurangzeb following the hike in his Mansab that “when the sun of Royal benevolence arises, the gods make heaven bigger”—a quotation from Hafiz that underlined the imminence of new opportunities the Prince was waiting for. Aurangzeb disliked flatterers, and he told the fortune-reader: “Not always. Sometimes the Devil comes into play and makes *dozakh* double its size”.

Both Aurangzeb and the astrologer were partly correct in their readings of the book of nature. In mid-March 1649, came to Multan an urgent *firman* appointing Aurangzeb Supreme Commander of an expedition to wrest Qandhar from the hands of Shah Abbas II of Persia. Here was an opportunity the ambitious Prince was looking forward to. His first reaction was to make the great resolution to accept the command without a thought of heaven or hell. The task before him was to establish the invincibility of his arms.

Following the betrayal of Shah Abbas I in 1638 by Ali Mardan Khan, Qandhar came under the *de facto* control of the Mughals. This occupation greatly hurt the Persian sense of honour. When Shah Abbas II came to the throne in

1646, the first task he set before himself was to capture this "first line of defence against an invader either from Central Asia or from across the Hindukush". A short but intensive siege, combining force with fraud, yielded unexpected results. The commandant of the fort, sixty-two-year old Daulat Khan* capitulated on assurance of safe passage to him and his family to India. This was a great blow to the Mughal prestige, and Shah Jahan, who at times was as impetuous as he was ambitious, took a vow not to rest content till Qandhar was rejoined to the Empire.

The Persians were equally vehement in their determination to hold on to their "rightful possession", and they strengthened the defences of the city to a point "where no invader could look at it without losing his eye". They were not as much afraid of losing the territory as ashamed of it; to be thrown out once again was to them the very disgrace and ignominy of their self-esteem. Thus one stern resolution was matched against another.

The person Shah Jahan chose to do the battle on his behalf was Aurangzeb. He knew the stuff his third son was made of, and his faith in his abilities, despite Balkh, was almost total. The Emperor was aware that pale-hearted fears held no sway over him, and that his religious fervour would be worth many a well armed division against the Shiite armies. Aurangzeb never trusted a battlefield without his prayers—a fact that sent his stock soaring high in the engagement against Abdul Aziz and his Uzbeg followers a year earlier. Soulful prayers was to him the only road or ready way to victory. Such a one, Shah Jahan was convinced, could not fail to oust the Persians from Qandhar.

To make the assurance double assured the Emperor selected twelve topmost generals, including Sadullah Khan, Ali Mardan Khan, Bahadur Khan and Raja Jai Singh, to assist Aurangzeb. An army of nearly fifty thousand well-trained combatants was raised for the expedition. As if to leave nothing to the vagaries of chance, Shah Jahan himself repaired to Kabul for

* This veteran Mughal general, Daulat Khan, who distinguished himself as a soldier in the Deccan, is also known in the history as Khwas Khan,

effective supervision of the campaign. Steps were taken to guard against "the trivial and vulgar ways of treachery often pursued by the Persians". Never before had a Mughal army of such high purpose and efficiency been raised, for fighting on the other side of the Hindukush.

Aurangzeb advanced towards Qandhar from Multan and Sadullah Khan from Lahore *via* Kabul. The Uzbek raiders and hordes of Tartar adventurers *en route* were virtually trampled under foot by these two massive wings of the Imperial army. Aurangzeb stood before the massive, hallowed walls of Old Qandhar* in the first week of May 1649. The siege began on the sixteenth of that month.

For eighty harrowing days, Aurangzeb and his generals used every known tactic, including secret offers of large-scale bribery to defending officers, to overpower the defences, but to no avail. The ramparts of the fort stood firm against heavy bombardment by medium and long-range guns. On the other hand, the superior Persian artillery took a heavy toll of the slowly advancing Mughal sappers and miners. The approach of winter worsened matters. Another Balkh stared the superno in the face. His hope of a quick knockout blow had come to naught. For the second time the weather threatened to beat him. His disappointment was great. To face the reality was to own defeat—an admission hard to make in view of the pledges to himself and to Allah. The questions that confronted him, though puzzling admitted of only one rational answer : retreat before the snows began to fall.

A meeting of the generals was called, and a dispirited Aurangzeb concluded his summation of the situation on a note of sad relentment. "It will be futile to argue nature out of its fury with guns. It is a poignant confession. We just do not possess the means to break the defences of the citadel. To ignore this reality will be an act of suicide. God wills it that way. We are helpless before His might. Let us be courageous to own that nature is stronger than man", he said. The gloom in the camp thickened as the commanders, one by

* Old Qandhar was said to have been built by Alexander the Great and destroyed by Nadir Shah in 1738.

one, bowed agreement with the Prince's remarks.

The siege was lifted on 5 September, 1649. The retreat was as hazardous and as costly in men and beasts as that from Balkh in 1648. Foul whisperings were around that the Persians contemplated a hot pursuit to decimate the invaders to a man. On top of this, the thick-coming hit-and-run attacks by prowling guerilla Uzbek forces kept Aurangzeb from rest. He supervised personally all aspects of safety, and spared himself no effort to thwart the plans of the enemy.

The miserable have no better medicine than hope. The badly-shaken force expected the weather to be merciful as it advanced slowly towards Kabul. The gods are invariably with the victors; thus it was futile for Aurangzeb to hope for good going. When the army, or what remained of it, finally entered the last stretch to Kabul, it bore the look of a loser from head to foot. The morale of the officers was low, their physical condition unseemly, and their outlook about their future anything but optimistic. Shah Jahan's expectations were sky-high; it was, therefore, only to be feared that his wrath at the failure would have in it an element of bitter disappointment.

Their apprehensions turned out not to be ill-founded. Not only Aurangzeb but none of the four top generals was received in royal audience for over a month. When at long last Aurangzeb had an opportunity to explain the causes of failure, the Emperor cut him short, saying "for Heaven's sake, keep poor God out of it. He helps only the brave and the courageous". The implied rebuke stung the Prince's ego; he took the blame squarely on his shoulders and offered no further alibis and excuses. It took some time for Shah Jahan to accept the reality of a humiliating defeat at the hands of the youthful Shah Abbas II.

When a general informed Shah Jahan that the Persian commander of Qandhar, Mehtab Khan, died on the day the siege was lifted, the Emperor's response was sharp and sudden: "What! you could not beat a man on the verge of death. Our armed might has come to a sorry pass. Allah gave a greater heed to our enemy's prayers than He did to the prayers of Shahzāda Aurangzeb. Obviously, there was

something wrong somewhere". Shah Jahan tended to attribute the debacle to "our over-selfconfidence, our lack of guts and stamina and our excessive reliance on the potency of the *Tasbih*".

Aurangzeb disagreed openly with this diagnosis. He held firmly that the Imperial army was beaten by the vastly superior gun-power of the Persians. He prepared a lengthy memorandum on the subject and submitted it to his father "for the future guidance of our officers". Shah Jahan praised the pains Aurangzeb had taken to formulate a cogent argument in defence of his decision to abandon the siege. The document was placed in his personal library. Copies of it were also supplied to all *Subedars* and *Bakhshis* with instructions that steps should be taken to "improve the quality of our guns as also the training of our artillerymen in marksmanship". The breach with Aurangzeb was partly healed.

Second Siege of Qandhar

A minute's failure wipes out the successes of years. Despite his brilliant campaigns in the Deccan, Rajputana and Bundelkhand, Aurangzeb's name as a military commander was at discount in court circles. Balkh and Qandhar had dimmed the aura that once enveloped his head. He returned to his post in Multan a man wrapped in helpless grief and yearning for a chance to rebuild his reputation. God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers, but he took nearly three years to throw in Aurangzeb's lap a gift with a gaunt. Shah Jahan's ambition to conquer Qandhar could not be stilled by one reverse. He raised a bigger and better army for the second attempt and, notwithstanding opposition by the Dara Shikoh faction he once again called upon Aurangzeb to take charge of the post of Supreme Commander. It seemed as if the thunder of his silent prayers had demolished doubts in the Emperor's mind about his military skill. The royal *firman* came to him in mid-March 1652, and he quickly gathered all his forces, all his horses and elephants in order to be able to comply with the Emperor's wish that the siege should begin not later than the first week of May. The Imperial Order,

which bore the imprint of the Emperor's right palm* noted :

Experience shows that all wickednesses are but little to the wickedness of weather. It is our intention that operations in Qandhar must come to a successful conclusion before the onset of September. Four months should be enough to overpower even the Himalayas. The army under you will possess the necessary armament to be able to finish the job in quick time. Special units of artillery have been mobilised to give sharper teeth to the force. Nobody knows it better than you do that in war it is safer being fierce than meek. The Persians need to be given a lesson in rectitude. The promises and pledges made by them over the last three years are only fit to be written on air. We are convinced that you will accomplish this task within the time-table drawn up. *Khuda Hafiz*.

As if in haste to pluck the Persian beard in their own den, Aurangzeb took the shorter, western route whereas Sadullah Khan led the main army from Kabul *via* the traditional rough road to Qandhar. The two forces joined hands near the outskirts of Qandhar on 2 May, 1652. Imbued with a sense of urgency, Aurangzeb assumed command of the entire army the very next day and, in consultation with senior commanders, drew up a time-bound plan of action.

For seven days the Prince either supervised arrangements or prayed; he knew of no other way to success. The generals worked day and night to give final touches to a scheme of assault prepared by the Supremo himself. Men of fickle and changeful loyalties were discreetly shifted to duties in the camp or in some non-sensitive areas.

The king-pin of the planned assault was Raja Rajrup who was assigned the task of leading his Rajput contingents at night to the top of a hill at the back of the citadel and, from that position, to launch a surprise attack at a gun signal from

* Only urgent communications, calling for immediate action, bore the imprint of the Emperor's right palm. This was a Shah Jahan innovation.

the main artillery unit. The Rajput attack was to synchronise with a massive diversionary assault by Mughal infantry divisions on the main northern ramparts. The success of the plan depended on the secrecy with which the two-pronged movement was carried out.

As ill-luck would have it, the besieged came to know about the Mughal intentions through a mischance that God often devises to deflate pride. The two thousand braves at the Raja's command sallied forth like drunken devils on hearing the gun signal. The shouts of *Har-Har Mahadev* rent the sky; they also reached the ears of the Persian garrison who lost no time in turning their guns to meet the unforeseen threat. The Rajputs were only ten yards from the ramparts when their frenzied advance was halted by volleys of devastating fire from the top of the citadel. Rajrup retreated after losing nearly half his force in the fray. The Imperialists thus lost a golden chance of breaking through the Persian defence.

Aurangzeb was furious at the indiscretion committed by the Rajputs. "Nothing that is worth knowledge in war can be taught", he snapped at the discomfited Raja. No further part in the campaign was assigned to him and his contingents. To reverence authority and to accept a fact though it may humiliate him was, in the eyes of Rajrup, the final test of a soldier. He made no protest and offered no explanation. He bade his time in the camp with fortitude. Virtue is silent and bravery never boastful.

Notwithstanding heavy, round-the-clock shelling, Aurangzeb ordered the construction of covered pathways called *sabat* to the foot of the fort. This was a device used by Akbar to capture Chitor eighty-five years ago. For two months the engineers worked like beavers and took every risk to complete the "tunnels" for use of the assault force. The operation Hidden Hand began on 20 June. Aurangzeb's heart expanded in the glow of expectation of a quick victory as nearly seven thousand crack troops reached the vicinity of the fifteen-foot wide moat. Mini-bridges for crossing this last watery hurdle were ready to be flung across when the Persians let loose a rain of heavy shells on the Mughal positions. The sound of

guns roaring from all directions out-thundered thunder. This was war at its cruelest. Five thousand men in uniform lay dead or dying at the foot of the fort within less than an hour. Seldom before had death gone to a feast so lavish as this. War is a rough, violent trade. The massacre of a large part of his force benumbed Aurangzeb. The thought of yet another defeat at the hands of Persians went like a sword through him. The hopes of reviving his military reputation wallowed once again in the dust. A pullback to the base camp outside Old Qandhar was ordered.

The garrison celebrated the destruction wrought by its artillery with ingenious fireworks that arose from all parts of the citadel like lilacs blue and green and red. The intensity of gloom in the Mughal camp could be compared only to the intensity of jubilation in the castle. Dumbfounded by the reverse, the Imperial commanders awaited orders from Kabul for the next move. The magnitude of the loss of life shocked Shah Jahan. He concluded, perhaps rightly, that there was little use re-pitching a defeated force against the victorious foe. Retreat was the only option open to him. Aurangzeb was distressed to receive the Royal command for orderly withdrawal to Kabul. The ruin, the disgrace and the woe of another retreat sat heavily on the Prince's heart.

Before leaving Qandhar, Aurangzeb tried what might be called the last fling of a gambler without luck: The Persian commandant Muhammad Usar was offered virtually "a new heaven, a new earth" for surrender. Back came the reply, "Perhaps it would be better if you accompany me to join the service of the Shah. You will receive greater honours in Tehran than in Kabul or Agra". Aurangzeb's attempt to corrupt Usar failed. The orders for return march to Kabul were issued on 3 July, 1652.

Man and nature joined hands to spread ruin among the retreating Mughal army. Another ten thousand men lost their lives *en route*. Defeat nourishes vengeance. That is exactly what happened in the hearts of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb.

At Kabul the court was in virtual mourning as the remnants of the expeditionary force trooped in. Aurangzeb's requests for an audience evoked no reply from the Emperor.

Thereon followed a bitter correspondence between father and son. Shah Jahan accused Aurangzeb of "unpardonable laxity in the conduct of the campaign", and Aurangzeb complained that "unfortunate developments are bound to take place where there are hosts of generals of equal rank and where so-called Supreme commander has to await instructions from the Emperor for even the meanest manoeuvre".

It may perhaps not be wrong to surmise that it was after the second debacle in Qandhar that relations between Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb took a deep, downward plunge. In a huff, the Emperor posted Aurangzeb back to the distant Deccan. There was no place for him anywhere between Multan and Aurangabad. Dara Shikoh thus became an apparent heir to the throne. The three other Royal princes had, according to Shah Jahan, proved their unworthiness to wear the crown.

Shah Jahan yearned for revenge. His heart lay in Qandhar. The two reverses failed to bring home to him the infinite difficulties of a military campaign on the other side of the Hindukush. A year later he chose his favourite son, Dara Shikoh, to lead yet another mighty force for the conquest of Qandhar. He met with the same fate as did Aurangzeb. The three futile campaigns cost the Imperial Exchequer nearly rupees one hundred million—a loss that made Shah Jahan so wretched that he wanted to be forgotten even by God. Advancing years and illness bred in him a mysterious apathy towards life—a state of mind that cast its shadow not only on the Royal family but also on the Empire. Preparations for a struggle for succession were perhaps a logical corollary to the Emperor's crumbling physical defences.

Chapter Five

SPRING DAYS OF THE HEART

Passion for feminine beauty is the instinct of all great men. In fact, it is this driving force which goads them up the winding road to the top. Some call this force libido, others *elan vital* and still others the blind fury of nature; without this fuel neither ambition, nor high purpose, nor even piety, would run its full course.

Aurangzeb was a Puritan prince averse to luxury in its many forms. He did not drink wine, he wore no purple satin and fine linen, he banished music from the Empire, he said his five prayers a day even on the battlefield, he ate coarse meals and made a fetish of religious injunctions in fixing his daily menu, anything he did or said on the affairs of state was in the name of Allah; yet when his eyes fell on the fair figure of Dilraz Banu, daughter of Shah Nawaz Khan,* his heart, the soul and the senses were bathed in joy. He was then twenty, a Prince not yet hardened into the bone of full manhood. The Viceroyalty of Deccan ill-fitted his continuing quest for religious excellence. There were doubts and uncertainties within him which led him often to find escape in the still wilderness of the *Ghats*. Yet when he met by chance the faultlessly beautiful Dilraz Banu at the home of the Persian dignitary his limitless passion carried him off his

*Shah Nawaz Khan was son of Mirza Rustam Khan, a scion of the royal house of Safvis of Persia. Mirza Rustam was brother of Mirza Muzaffar Hussain who migrated to India in the reign of Akbar. A daughter of Muzaffar Hussain was married to Shah Jahan. Two daughters of Mirza Rustam were married to Princes Parvez and Shuja.

feet. He was engaged to be married to her in early 1637.

On 15 April, 1637, Aurangzeb reached Agra for marriage. The Emperor gave him a cordial reception, announced a nominal increase in his Mansab and also bestowed on him additional Jagirs and honours to suit the occasion. A team of court astrologers reached a consensus that four hours before dawn on 8 May was the most propitious point of time for the *Nikah* ceremony. One of the star-gazers, Mian Muhammad Bashir Ahmad Khan, told Jahanara Begum that "this union of the Mughal and Safvi Houses might become a landmark in the history of the Empire". He quoted many celebrated astronomers to support his reading that "planetary positions on 8 May will be such as influence the course of history and the destiny of man".

When Shah Jahan came to know of this prediction, he summoned Mian Bashir to a private audience, and he is reported to have asked him to "transform your abstractions into specifics and prepare a chart of changes that are likely to come about as a result of this union". The Emperor's disquiet was in proportion to his love for Dara Shikoh. Whether or not the astrologer completed the exercise assigned to him is not known.

Wedding rituals at the homes of the bride and the bridegroom began on 5 May. The next three days were packed with such traditional ceremonies as *hanabandi*, exhibition of wedding gifts by the two families, feasts and get-togethers at the homes of close relatives, presentation of gifts by the royal princes, princesses and Umra, alms-giving and prayer meetings in private mosques, display of fireworks at the banks of the Jamuna, staging of elephant fights, wrestling bouts and other popular sports events such as kite flying, pigeon races and falconry.

On the wedding day, Prince Murad and Yanin-id-Dowla Asaf Khan escorted Aurangzeb in an eye-catching procession to Shahnawaz Khan's mansion across the Jamuna. Accompanied by Jahanara and Roshanara Begums, the Emperor came to the bride's house by boat an hour after midnight. The reception given by the Persian prince to the Mughal royal guests was a fairy-tale function aglitter with pageantry

combining art with colour.

In keeping with the Court procedure, the Khan presented to the Emperor gifts worth nearly rupees two hundred thousand. Shah Jahan beamed a gracious smile of gratification at the gesture but the occasion did not warrant acceptance of the presents. In chaste Persian he asked "brother Shahnawaz Khan" to accept these gifts back from him. However, in token of his gratitude for the Emperor's presence, the Khan begged acceptance of a walnut-size rubie which, he said, should be considered not a gift but a seal of everlasting friendship between the Mughals and the Safvis. Shah Jahan touched the shimmering red stone with his right hand—a gesture of acceptance with pleasure that evoked soulful praises of God from the members of the two Houses.

The *Nikah* ceremony, culminating in the brides yes to the proposal for marriage brought in by the Shaikh-ul-Islam, Maulvi Waliullah, was performed strictly in accordance with the time-table charted out by the astrologers. The marriage contract was declared to be worth rupees four hundred thousand. The following day a reception was hosted by Aurangzeb at his riverside residence. Shah Jahan was also present at this function. After a three-month stay in Agra, Aurangzeb left for the Deccan in September. Dilraz Banu accompanied him.

From all accounts it appears that Dilraz Banu was not dissimilar in character to her husband. Both were strong-willed, pious and comparatively indifferent to the normal scheme of material values. Aurangzeb respected her virtues as also her judgement. Her death* in 1657—just before the first shots were fired in the war of succession—evoked from Aurangzeb the lament, "I have lost a companion, a friend and a general. In her passing away has vanished a perennial source of my inward strength". A magnificent tomb was built over her grave in Aurangabad. This mausoleum was repaired and partly rebuilt by her son Muhammad Azam.

During twenty years of married life, Dilraz Banu (later

*Dilraz Banu died in childbirth at Aurangabad on 8 October, 1657, at the age of thirty-eight.

Dilraz Begum) bore Aurangzeb five children, three daughters and two sons. The eldest, Zaib-un-Nissa*, became a legend in her life-time because of her unceasing patronage of art and languages. As chaste as a dew drop, she spent the major part of her youth and middle age repairing discreetly the damage done to the study of fine arts by her father's callous indifference to subjects other than religious. She learnt Urdu and Persian under the watchful eye of Hafiza Mariam, a tutor of wide learning and wider sympathies. At the age of seventeen she bloomed into a poetess of extreme sensitivity to beauty in its many forms. She would often compose her poems at midnight in the silence of the sleep time and keep them under her pillow for several days before sharing with her friends and tutors the thoughts that inspired them. Abstract beauty, like other mere abstractions, bore for her "the cold look of an aged, loveless aunt".

Generosity in a woman was classed by Zaib-un-Nissa as "one of the most beautiful creations of God", and she wrote many a heart-catching verse on "the real beauty that makes women the glory of the state". She wrote often under the pen-name Makhfi; her attempt always seemed to be to express her feelings freely without thoughts of Jannat or Dozakh or even without caring for the pattern of life in the present, and it was that trait of character which gave her works a dynamism that inspired and captivated.

Some historians tend to believe that compositions in *Diwan-i-Makhfi* are not her creations but those of many sycophants and versifiers who sought her favour and patronage. One of them was said to be Aqilmand Khan, a handsome youth whose name was linked with hers in a romance that never got off the ground. These are conjectures which may or may not be true. The hard-core fact remains that she was endowed with qualities of the head and the heart that gave some colour to the prosaic tenor of life in the reign of Aurangzeb. Her popularity was undeniable and her influence at the court positive.

Most Mughal princesses spent their lives in a state of

*Zaib-un-Nissa was born at Daultabad on 15 February, 1638.

single blessedness. Worthy partners for them were not easy to come by. Love in high places, specially for the fair sex, was looked down upon as an unbecoming expression of passion in medieval times. Considerations of propriety and royal honour dominated their lives. Zaib-un-Nissa was no exception to this rule. When she died at Delhi on 26 May, 1701 at the age of sixty-three people mourned her passing away as that of a mother. Providence denied her, however, the privilege of motherhood in the great right of her being a beautiful woman. She was buried outside Kabuli Gate in the Tees Hazari garden. Her modest tomb became a place of pilgrimage for those who valued spirit above matter. Zaib-un-Nissa became more popular after death than in her life-time. Her grave in time became a rallying point for those who took up arms against the *Farangis* in 1857. The British rulers of Delhi quietly removed her coffin and the marble slab on which was inscribed her name and *ayats* from the holy book to the tomb of Akbar at Agra. The transfer of the relics was officially described as a move to facilitate the construction of a railway line—a brazen lie that deceived nobody except perhaps the officials in the Home Office in London. She imbibed and nurtured the finest values of the Indian civilisation. Her life and works will continue to inspire and uplift the people of this country. She was, as it were, a perennial spring of benevolence and understanding—virtues that transform a beautiful woman into a goddess worthy of worship and adoration.

The second child of Aurangzeb and Dilraz Begum, another daughter, was born at Aurangabad on 5 October, 1643. She was named Zinat-un-Nissa, glory of womanhood. Later she came to be known as Padshah Begum, an appellation that bespoke of her influence at the court. A spinster, she did not spend her days chanting pale hymns to the fruitless moon; instead she occupied herself with welfare schemes to bring succour to the poor. Her charity transcended considerations of race and religion. It is believed that more than half of her privy purse was spent monthly on acts of generosity ranging from carrying out repairs to places of worship and providing dowries for marriage of girls whose parents were not in a

position to incur that expenditure.

At the age of thirty-seven, Zinat-un-Nissa undertook a project to construct a number of small inns on the highway linking Oudh with Bengal. This laudable effort evoked high praise from Aurangzeb. "She has lived up to her name", he said. The project took seven years to complete. Thereupon, the Emperor doubled her yearly pay and allowances and also gave her the title Padshah Begum.

A pious Muslim, Zinat-un-Nissa built several good-looking mosques in and around the capital at her own cost. When she died her body was laid to rest in the proximity of one of them, Zinat-ul-Masjid. People flocked there in large numbers after Friday prayers every week and paid silent homage to her memory. This remembrance of a daughter of the last of the great Mughal Emperors was a thorn in the side of the British Governor of Delhi; the grave was removed to an unknown place after the first war of independence. Imperialism, thy name is heartlessness.

On 2 September, 1651, was born Zibadat-un-Nissa at Multan. Dilraz Begum was openly disappointed to have given birth to yet another daughter. As a symbol of high status in the harem nothing counted for more than a son. Consequently, the Begum, who was now over thirty, went on a pilgrimage to all the holy shrines in Sind, beseeching Allah for the boon of a male child. Her heart expanded in thankfulness when the keeper of a famous Muslim shrine outside Bhakkar told her of a dream in which a saintly old man told him that the Begum would be blessed with two sons within a period of five years. Her offerings at the shrine touched the high one hundred thousand rupee mark.

Zibadat-un-Nissa was given in marriage in 1673 to Spehr Shikoh, second son of Dara Shikoh—a gesture of reconciliation that pleased many hearts. She died thirty-four years later on 7 February, 1707. It is significant that no comets were reported to have been seen on the day she passed away: that phenomenon was reserved by astrologers for days on which died the unwed ladies of a royal family! Marriage, it was believed, dimmed the halo around a fair person's head.

The first male child of Dilraz Begum, Muhammad Azam

was born at Burhanpur in the Deccan on 28 June, 1653. His life-span of fifty-four years* coincided more or less with the years of Aurangzeb's reign. The end reflected to a degree the high voltage of his ambition and way of life.

The second promised son of Dilraz Begum, Muhammad Akbar was born at Aurangabad on 17 September, 1657. This was also the date of Dilraz Begum's death. Akbar died in exile in Persia in 1704 and was buried at Mashad. The story of his life, as that of Muhammad Azam, will be unfolded in the course of the narrative of the reign of Aurangzeb. Here it only needs to be recorded that Dilraz Begum is remembered more for her daughters than her sons.

Nawab Bai

Where beauty prevails, considerations of religion fold up. At nineteen, Nawab Bai**, daughter of Raja Raju of Rajouri State in Kashmir, was endowed with such grace and charm as overpowered Aurangzeb's strong religious preferences. He married her while he was the Governor of Multan, gave her first the name Rahmat-un-Nissa, then Nawab Bai, and for a while he seemed to have found in her "a perfect companion, a perfect consort and a perfect friend and adviser".

Nawab Bai had in abundance in her bosom the milk of human kindness—a gift of God that Aurangzeb considered the most graceful ornament of a woman. Further, the good Instructor Time had taught her to be patient, a trait of character that fitted in well with her royal husband's moods of depression and religious fervour. In medieval times, the harem was the school for women of princely families, and they learnt at no other. The young but shrewd Nawab Bai leant on elderly ladies of the seraglio for support. This spirit of dependence and accommodation endeared her even to her rivals for the Prince's attention. Her ascendancy in Aurangzeb's household

* Muhammad Azam was slain on 8 June, 1707 in the war of succession following Aurangzeb's death.

** After the death of Aurangzeb, court historians fabricated a long-winded story that Nawab Bai was not a Hindu but a blue-blooded Muslim. They traced her parentage to Syed Shah Mir, a scion of the famous divine Syed Abdul Qadir.

was, however, short-lived. The bloom of her youth faded away quickly after she gave birth to two sons—Muhammad Sultan and Muhammad Muazzam – and a daughter, Badr-un-Nissa.

A woman is by nature a religious animal. When good looks left her, Nawab Bai took refuge in the *Quran* and the *tasbih*. She prayed incessantly for courage to bear her sorrows with fortitude. The imprisonment of her sons on charges of disloyalty left her a physical and mental wreck. At her death-bed in Delhi in 1691, looking back at the chequered panorama of her life, she told her *kaniz* of twenty years, Mehra Khanum, that “arrogance of beauty must sooner or later submit to be taught by age”—a thought which has since been set in beautiful verse by many an eminent poet.

On hearing of Nawab Bai's lament, Aurangzeb came to comfort her. He spoke of his duties as a Muslim and as an Emperor in a frank bid to explain the reasons that led him to limit the activities of her sons. On that last day of her life, Nawab Bai spoke not in words but in tears. Her deep anguish at last came to an end as the lamps were extinguished in her apartment. A week's mourning was ordered by the Emperor. His last known comment on the passing away of the mother of his three children was that “never does a dying woman say one thing and wisdom another”.

On ascending the throne, Bahadur Shah felt that his mother's parentage was a stain on his high ancestry. A myth was, therefore, created that Nawab Bai in fact belonged to a celebrated Syed family. That the new lineage given to her was no more than a canard can hardly be doubted. Nawab Bai should be judged in the context of her real parentage. She came to where she died by virtue of her good looks, not high Muslim stock.

Aurangabadi Mahal

Aurangzeb named his second-rung wives after their birth-place. Daughter of a high Persian dignitary of Bijapur, Aurangabadi Mahal was hardly eighteen when the then Viceroy of Deccan (Aurangzeb) asked for her hand. From what little account is available of her youth, it appears that to see her was to love her, and love her for ever. Aurangzeb chanced to

have a look at her when, accompanied by her parents, she came to attend a New Year celebration at the Mughal Court. Picturesque out of doors, she beguiled what she was (a grown-up child) by seeming otherwise. Her poise and her demeanour struck the Prince as angelic. Passion overcame his patience, and the very next day he sent to the Persian dignitary a proposal "to have the honour of welcoming your daughter in my household as a life-companion". This was not a proposal but a demand which, if not conceded, could have led to unforeseen consequences. The marriage was solemnised within a week. Aurangzeb was a puritan but when his passion was aroused, the purities of form and tradition were cast aside with impurity. His first loyalty was to himself, everything else came afterwards. The bruised susceptibilities of others never deterred him from possessing what he had set his heart on possessing.

Aurangabadi Mahal was already engaged to be married to a high-ranking Bijapur commander, but that commitment was for the Mughal Viceroy a further incentive to wed her. The friendly glow on her fair face was irresistible. She knew what was what, and that was as high as her pragmatic wit could fly. It did not take her long to forget the past and adjust herself to the somewhat exciting life in the Mughal harem. Beauty has powers above the stars and fate to manage love. Though Aurangzeb was aware that all womanly activity was a trade, yet he persuaded himself to believe that his new, youthful wife was a thing out of this world.

However, the nature's law that a woman is made to mourn soon came into play. Long spells of illness eroded Aurangabadi's vitality and she became one of those whose siege is in the mind. The fact that she bore Aurangzeb no male child also perhaps depressed her spirits. She died at Bijapur in 1688 following an attack of bubonic plague. Contemporary historians took virtually no notice of her passing away. It is apparent that for many years she had been a forgotten figure of Aurangzeb's harem. Those who are very beautiful in youth can be very lonely in old age. Aurangabadi had no other wares to sell except good looks. Her intellectual equipment was neither sharp nor wide. Perhaps in death she

found a real friend in need: it is silliness to live, she bemoaned, when to live is to lament. The Mughal harem spawned many tragedies. The life of Aurangabadi was one of them. Her only child, Mehr-un-Nissa was born on 18 September, 1661; she was married to her first cousin, Izzad Baksh, son of Murad Baksh, on 7 November, 1672. Aurangabadi died in June 1706.

Udaipuri Mahal

To be first a concubine of Dara Shikoh and then to be a wife of Aurangzeb, well, that was a miracle of the pleasant vices Udaipuri excelled in. She drank wine copiously, her heart said one thing and her tongue another, her religion was cupidity and her creed to allure, her ever soliciting voice was low, soft and gentle, her manners pert and full of passion, though her nimble wit sped too fast it never tired quickly, the elegance, facility and the golden cadence of her music evoked admiration and longing, the angelic rhetoric of her eyes swept away resistance to her silent call—in fact, her every limb and gesture was cut out to tell man that this beautiful world was made for enjoyment and not for exercises of philosophy and religious debates.

After Dara Shikoh fled Delhi leaving behind all his treasures and all his women in the care of Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb took some time to dislodge the Emperor from the seat of authority and decide for himself what part of his brother's possessions were to be brought under his custody. Udaipuri Mahal was the first to be brought into the victor's palace. Aurangzeb assessed her by judgment of the eye, not heart. Bearing the appearance of an innocent flower, she soon became the centre-piece of Aurangzeb's life. However, it took him nearly six years to decide to marry her.

The only child of this marriage—Muhammad Kam Baksh—was born in Delhi on 24 February, 1667. He was a wayward child, a wayward youth and a still more wayward prince. But for Udaipuri's intercessions, he would have spent a major part of his forty-two years of life in imprisonment. Aurangzeb neither trusted him nor had he confidence in his abilities as an administrator. Sensuous pleasure was the end of his life,

He was slain in the war of succession near Hyderabad on 3 January, 1709.

As her name reveals, Udaipuri Mahal was a Rajputni of high descent. She came to Dara Shikoh on an errand of mercy; not only was she able to secure release from prison of a distant cousin charged with disloyalty, she enmeshed the Prince Royal in the charm of her looks. Dara inquired if she would consider making Agra her home. Udaipuri made no reply to this sudden poser. The Prince came nearer and repeated the inquiry in notes which made it clear that the only answer he would have was a bashful yes. The Rajput charmer divined his thoughts, and meekly hung down her head in obedience. Her decision was written clear on her brow bent and in the eyes that looked not up but in the direction of a bunch of red roses lying on a low table in the centre of the room.

Her was a silent pledge that gladdened Dara's heart. For six years Udaipuri dominated not only the Prince's seraglio but also the councils that decided on matters relating to Mughal-Rajput relationship. A rare vintage woman, Udaipuri became a symbol of liberalism Dara championed. Concubinery in all ages has been a fine art in the technique of love-making. Udaipuri was a Bohemian who took life as it came with the clear purpose of deriving as much pleasure from it as it could offer. All other values were secondary in the profession that good looks had thrust upon her.

Zainabadi

Under the clear, blue skies of September in Aurangabad a casually dressed girl of nearly twenty was humming softly the words of a popular Urdu poem as she picked mangoes from a tree in the garden of the house of Mir Khalil, husband of a sister of Mumtaz Mahal Begum. The sight of the youthful girl and the sound of her melodious voice arrested the attention of Aurangzeb who was just going out after a call on his aunt. Spellbound, he stood at the gate watching, listening and admiring.

As the girl was about to leave, he called her not in the stern notes of a Viceroy but in the voice of one trying to say something which he could not. With caution in one eye and

innocence in the other, the girl came up to him apparelled like the spring and still humming the tune which she apparently liked. For a few embarrassing moments the Prince stood facing her, not knowing what to say and how. There was an emotional turmoil raging within him. All his defences crumbled down as the dark-eyed, comely youth inquired if he wanted some help. "No, no, I only wondered who you are and what are you doing here", said Aurangzeb. Thereupon, the sprightly singer put down the basket of mangoes on the grass-green turf and, betraying no concern or fear, gave out her name as Hira Bai, profession domestic aide, and address villa de Mir Khalil. Aurangzeb smiled broadly little realizing that the Cupid's arrow had hit bull's eye. He scanned Hira Bai from head to foot not with the cold eye of an impartial judge but with the impassioned gaze of a man surprised into love. "God be praised", he said in a voice loud enough to be heard by Hira Bai, and retraced his steps to re-enter the mansion. The girl followed him.

Aurangzeb's aunt told him that Hira Bai was a talented singer of Benaras and that she was "under the protection of Mir Khalil". When her royal cousin suggested that he would "like to bask in the sunshine of Hira Bai's company", the elderly aunt expressed alarm, saying that her husband would never, never let her go to another household. "His life depends on her. Every evening he listens to her music, without her he would be like a broken reed. He will kill anybody who tries to snatch her away from him". "I would suggest that you pursue this matter no further", she said in half tear half warning.

Aurangzeb kept quiet as if there was some monster in his thoughts too hideous to be revealed. He left in a huff, inwardly resolved not to rest content until Hira Bai was brought to his harem. He is believed to have shared his disquiet with the Dewan Maqsd Quli Khan, who used his influence and persuasive tongue to prevail upon Mir Khalil to agree to exchange Hira Bai with another more competent and more beautiful dancing girl Chhattar Bai.

Aurangzeb gave Hira Bai the name Zainabadi.* Well-versed in the arts of love, the latter taxed her royal lover's patience to a point where he was prepared to sacrifice even his *eman* for the sake of possessing her. "Who desires my body desires only trash; it is something nothing", she told him one evening in the seclusion of his apartment. Aurangzeb insisted that his love for her transcended lust and body attraction. In proof thereof, she demanded that the Prince drink a cup of wine from her hand. Aurangzeb's heart virtually turned to stone as he ordered the kaniz-in-waiting to bring in a flask of shiraz wine and two gold cups. He filled the cups with the shimmering red liquid and was about to raise one to his lips when Zainabadi snatched it away, saying "this is enough, my master. No further proof of your love for me is required. It was never my intention to make you do something which I know is against your religious susceptibilities. I am a woman, not a demon. Bid me share your thoughts, your feelings, your desires, your urges. This insignificant person is ready to obey. You are born to command, I to sue. In obedience and in surrender shall I seek henceforth my self-realization".

Aurangzeb was delighted beyond words at the climax of the dramatic act staged by Zainabadi. The winter of his long spells of depression was suddenly made glorious spring by this daughter of the ancient city of Benaras. For the next two years he laid aside life-burning heavinesses and for once became a cheerful, light-hearted person ready to enjoy life as it unfolded its bright, enchanting panorama. "The best is life, let us enjoy it", he is known to have told Zainabadi when the latter came to felicitate him on his thirty-seventh birthday a few days after her formal entry into his harem. It is recorded by many Western historians, in particular by Manucci and Bernier, that she did the remarkable act of ringing all fanatic savagery out of Aurangzeb's heart. This was obviously a miracle brought about by her music, her looks and her well-controlled passion. Had she lived longer the story of Aurangzeb might have taken a turn away from the unromantic conservatism that came to characterise

* Zainabadi meant the resident of Zainabad, a township where she lived in the Deccan.

his reign. A woman has powers above religion and philosophy. Zainabadis and Nur Jahans not only chasten; they also inspire and uplift.

Zainabadi literally played the swan and died in music at the age of twenty-five. The last song she sang to Aurangzeb was a Khusrau ode in praise of the kings and queens "who serve their subjects with love and through sacrifice". After she was laid to rest, Aurangzeb had this ode written in silver for his personal library. For many years Zainabadi's modest tomb in Aurangabad remained one of the prime attractions of the city. People from all over Hindustan went there to pray and to imbibe the spirit of love and sacrifice she came to symbolise. Aurangzeb visited the mausoleum many times during his long reign.

Dil-Aram

The job of young maids in wealthy families in all ages : to smile without being happy, to inwardly despise mistresses and to fall in love with their youthful masters. Dil-Aram was charming, chaste and seventeen when she entered Aurangzeb's service at Multan as a junior maidservant. Promotions came to her thick and fast. By the time the Prince left for Qandhar, she had come to occupy the top household post of lady-in-waiting to Dilraz Begum. Well-equipped with the untaught, innate wisdom of a working woman, Dil-Aram sensed early that there was a soft place for her in the Prince's heart. Feigning complete ignorance of what she knew was the truth she used every ploy known to the grand-daughters of Eve to stoke the fires that burnt within Aurangzeb.

On return from the ill-starred expedition to Qandhar, the Prince made bold to shed false pretences and sprang a surprise by inviting Dil-Aram to be "a partner in my sorrows and a few joys". A female child was born of this unwed relationship. She was married to an officer of the Royal Bodyguard about ten years after Aurangzeb's ascension to the throne. Dil-Aram died in 1700 following a short illness. Her tomb in Delhi was visited by Aurangzeb two years later. He placed thereon an inscribed plaque stating that she was a loyal and faithful servant. The things that he said about her were far less signi-

ficant than those which remained unsaid. Western historians are unanimous that at one time Aurangzeb's relationship with Dil-Aram verged on infatuation. On her part, Dil-Aram had given to Aurangzeb her all on earth, and more than all in heaven. Her love for the Prince was spawned by loyalty on one hand and suppressed passion on the other.

Children

Of the ten officially recognised children of Aurangzeb, the half were born to Dilraz Banu, three to Nawab Bai and one each to Aurangabadi Mahal and Udaipuri Mahal. The ratio of male to female children was fifty-fifty. Some details about the progeny have already been given. Following summary will complete the picture:

Dilraz Begum (5)

1. Zaib-un-Nissa : born at Daultabad on 15 February, 1638; died at Delhi on 26 May, 1701.
2. Zinat-un-Nissa : born at Aurangabad on 5 October, 1643; died at Delhi in 1703.
3. Zubadat-un-Nissa : born at Multan on 2 September, 1657; died at Delhi, February 1707; married to first cousin Spehr Shikoh, son of Dara Shikoh on 3 January, 1673.
4. Muhammad Azam : born at Burhanpur on 28 June, 1653; slain on 8 June, 1707.
5. Muhammad Akbar : Born at Aurangabad on 17 September, 1657; died in exile in Persia in 1704; buried at Mashad.

Nawab Bai (3)

1. Muhammad Sultan : born near Mathura on 19 December, 1639; died in prison on 3 December, 1671.
2. Muhammad Muazzam : born at Burhanpur on 4 October, 1643; died on 8 February, 1712; ascended throne after Aurangzeb in the title Bahadur Shah I; also known as Shah Alam.
3. Badr-un-Nissa : born on 7 November, 1647; died on 9 April, 1670.

Aurangabadi Mahal (1)

Mehr-un-Nissa : born on 18 September, 1661; died in June 1706; married to first cousin Izzad Baksh, son of Murad Baksh, on 7 November, 1672.

Udaipuri Mahal (1)

Muhammad Kam Baksh : born at Delhi on 26 February, 1667; slain in war of succession near Hyderabad on 3 January, 1709.

Ten children from the wombs of five legally-wedded wives is a poor tally for a Mughal Emperor. Puritanism and fecundity go ill together.

Chapter Six

ON WAY TO THE THRONE

Two hundred and ten days is a long time to reach the Deccan from Agra, and that is exactly the period Aurangzeb took to travel to Burhanpur, capital of Khandesh, from the seat of Imperial authority*. Shah Jahan was understandably upset over this slow pace, but Aurangzeb, the mighty master of unceasing duplicity, paid little heed to the messages urging him to quicken his speed. "Peace in the Sultanates is an imperative that cannot wait", wrote the Emperor in one of his communications, and he impressed upon him the desirability of relieving Shaista Khan at the earliest of the temporary charge of governor of Deccan. The Prince was, however, in no hurry to get entangled in the thorny politics of the half-sovereign Shiite states. His thoughts were set firmly on the Peacock Throne, and he used the comparative quiet of travel-time to develop his plans for the future. He had tasted earlier the sweets and bitters of conflicts in the south. Once he was there, he knew, the realities of the present would demand all his time and all his attention. The Deccan post was for him only a ladder to the throne.

Aurangzeb was a reluctant traveller to the distant Deccan. He would have preferred the proximity to capital either of Multan, Punjab or even Afghanistan. Dara Shikoh's nearness to the Emperor was a thorn in his side: the hatred for his elder brother had already sunk deep into his soul. Shah

*Aurangzeb left Agra on 7 July, 1652; he reached Burhanpur on 30 January, 1653.

Jahan had already designated Dara heir-apparent and extended to him privileges and honours far in excess of those held out to other sons. The orthodox sections of the Muslim community viewed this development with a degree of understandable agitation. In their eyes, Dara was an apostate, one in whose hands the fate of Muslims would be in jeopardy. They had already made secret approaches to Aurangzeb "to save the realm from the impending catastrophe". These appeals fitted in well with Aurangzeb's ambition and belief that Destiny intended to crown him the king of Hindustan.

During his stay in the north Aurangzeb had raised a legion of informers in and outside the court to keep himself abreast of developments at the Darbar. His fanaticism was not of the heart but of the head. Every temple he demolished and every mosque he built was with an eye to contest and counter the much-trumpeted liberalism of Dara. There was a method in his bigotry. He extended his patronage to a virtual army of Ulema and religious priests in the hope that they would directly or indirectly prevail upon the Emperor to set Dara aside from succession. Aurangzeb's head was as full of schemings as the egg is full of meat. The six months he took to travel to Burhanpur were used for strengthening friendships and convincing his foes that enmity to him was enmity to Islam and the Empire. It is open to conjecture whether he would have reached the top more easily had he been a little less Machiavellian. Every move on his part could not but generate the will to resist in Dara's camp.

Aurangzeb's second term of Viceroyalty in Deccan (1653-58) is important, in so far as the limited scope of this work is concerned. For the manner in which Dara Shikoh opposed nearly every request and suggestion made by Aurangzeb for consolidating Mughal interests in the Deccan. His submissions for greater financial assistance and more military reinforcements were turned down, or accepted reluctantly at much reduced level, on pleas that were at best unconvincing and at worst malicious. In one of his communications, Dara Shikoh reminded Aurangzeb that of the total yearly revenue of Mughal Deccan of approximately rupees thirty-two million, roughly twenty-six million were assigned

to himself and his sons—a rebuke that led the proud Prince to swear on the *Quran* that never, never would he again ask for an additional paisa from the Imperial treasury. Instead, to swell his coffers, he went on looting sprees first in Golconda and then in Bijapur such as were unmatched in callous savagery in the history of Mughal wars in the Deccan.

The ensuing correspondence between Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb touched a new low in mutual distrust and recrimination. When the Emperor asked the Prince to send to the court full details of the material gains of the two wars, as also the lists of presents received by him and his sons from the defeated Sultans, Aurangzeb's reply was written "with a pen dipped in the ink of extreme resentment". While pointing out that the booty that fell to his hands was distributed, as per Mughal tradition, among the soldiery, he remarked:

The insinuation in your Majesty's communication is unmistakable that I and my sons have misappropriated a part or whole of the gains of wars for our personal use. It is my conviction that Your Majesty is too broadminded to entertain such an ungenerous thought as this. Apparently the charge was made at the instance of those who are bent upon ruining my reputation and poisoning Your Majesty's mind against me. Let me confess, the most respected father, that I am committed to God and the Empire to scrupulously observe the standards of honesty traditional in Islam. There is not an advantage that dishonesty can give like that it takes away.

The presents that were given to me by the rulers of Golconda and Bijapur were not of any great value. I shall place them before Your Majesty when I have the good fortune to kiss the threshold of the royal chamber. In the meantime, it would be only appropriate if tell-tale women and glib men* of the royal family are restrained from filling Your Majesty's ears with unvarnished lies. It seems that honest reporting at the court is as rare as corn in chaff.

* This remark is in all probability made against Jahanara Begum and Dara Shikoh.

Another cause of Aurangzeb's disenchantment was that envoys were sent to the courts of Golconda and Bijapur directly from Agra without prior consultation with the Viceroy. When Aurangzeb came down in 1656 on Golconda like the wolf on the fold and was on the verge of rubbing out the kingdom from the map of Deccan, Shah Jahan ordered halt, accepting terms of peace conveyed to him by his envoy in Hyderabad. Aurangzeb was greatly upset over this development. But for the advice of Shaista Khan and Prince Muhammad Sultan he might have ignored the Royal command and completed the work that he believed the great God had assigned to him. However, he agreed to a ceasefire only when the aged mother of Qutb Shah, wearing a black shawl, came to his tent and begged for peace. An indemnity of rupees ten million, payable in three instalments, was the focal point of the peace agreement.

Aurangzeb was convinced that jealousy led Dara Shikoh to advise the Emperor against "a big military achievement going to my credit". Probably he was not wrong in his assessment. But it needs to be pointed out that the type of aggression let loose against Golconda was hardly justified by a few sins of faithlessness alleged to have been committed by Abdullah Qutb Shah. The angels of death and destruction were relentless in the manner they caused havoc in Hyderabad and other cities. Aurangzeb, it is believed, agreed to implement the Emperor's *firman* only after the queen-mother presented to him one of the biggest and most lustrous diamonds from the mines of Golconda. Conscience was to him a word that only cowards spoke. He needed money for the realisation of his ambitious dreams, and no ploy was too ungainly to secure the ability to achieve his goal. He squeezed Golconda of a large part of its famed wealth, and sent to Agra a report that the expenses of the campaign far exceeded the indemnity received. Neither Shah Jahan nor Dara Shikoh believed this canard. If anything, their distrust of Aurangzeb's motives became firmer.

The four years Aurangzeb spent at Aurangabad, official capital of Mughal Deccan, were in a way the years of preparation and self-searching. Besides sharpening his resolution for

the conflict ahead, he spared himself no effort to gather around him men of intellect and proved administrative abilities. One such person was the Persian Mir Jumla, Vazir of the Sultan of Golconda. The Jumla-Qutb Shah rift over Karnatka* was skilfully used by the Mughal Viceroy to win over to his side one of the most talented personalities of the age. In time he became the Prince's firmest friend, the first to support and the foremost to defend his cause.

When Shah Jahan appointed Mir Jumla Prime Minister following the death of Asadullah Khan in 1557, he acted as a secret agent of Aurangzeb and kept him informed of what was transpiring in the highest counsels of the court. Imprisonment of Mir Jumla's family by the Sultan was one of the reasons for Shah Jahan sanctioning the invasion of Golconda. Later, Jumla returned to the Deccan and actively assisted Aurangzeb in his plans to wrest the throne. On the eve of his thrust northwards, Aurangzeb arrested Jumla on the much-trumpeted charges of treason and disloyalty—an ingenuous move to save Jumla's family in Agra from coming to harm at the hands of Dara Shikoh. The intensity of the Prince's concern for the welfare of those who were loyal to him could be matched only with the intensity of his hatred for the disloyal. Never was he a slave of the noblemen that chose to serve under him: rather, he chastened them to act as vehicles for his will and wishes. Mir Jumla was one of the principal architects of his victory in the war of succession.

Ever keen to amass the wherewithals to finance his grandiose plan to capture Agra, Aurangzeb did not hesitate to invent *causis belli* if none existed. During the life-time of Muhammad Adil Shah he laid low and treated Bijapur as a "friendly country, an honoured partner of the Empire in consolidating peace in the Deccan". The ageing Sultan, on his part, lived by the treaty of 1636, and he expected the Mughal Viceroy to live likewise. Aurangzeb bade his time

* Mir Jumla conquered Karnatka on behalf of his master, Abdullah Qutb Shah, and then refused to vacate it on the spacious plea that the conquered territories belonged to him.

patiently, waiting for an opportunity to do to Bijapur what he had done to Golconda.

The death of Adil Shah in November 1656, and ascension to the throne of his eighteen-year-old son, Ali Adil Shah II, gave him the opportunity he was long waiting for. Not only did he question the legality of succession*, he accused the new Sultan of arrogating to himself the airs of a senior partner and trespassing the privileges and functions of the Emperor. On these pleas he requested the Emperor to sanction an invasion of Bijapur. Simultaneously, he mounted a campaign of large-scale bribery to senior noblemen in the Sultanate with aims of disrupting their loyalties and to nurse them for treachery when the time came for deployment of that hideous weapon of war.

After a period of initial hesitation, Shah Jahan gave out the green signal for an invasion; the pictures that Aurangzeb drew of fabulous material wealth that he expected to gain by war with Bijapur proved a lure too great for the Emperor to resist. The assault on fort Bidar was launched on 29 March, 1657, by Mughal forces under Muhammad Sultan. Accidental death of the garrison commander, Siddi Marjan, an abyssinian of near-equal military talent to Malik Ambar, resulted in panic and surrender without conditions.

A terrific slaughter and the orgies of loot that followed all over Bijapur were of the same vintage as let loose in the past by Chingez and Timur. The reports of the carnage sent to Agra by Malika Bari Sahiba at the instance of Chief Minister Khan Muhammad, made Shah Jahan sit up in anguish. For their own reasons, Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum stoked the fires of royal anger. They recommended immediate stoppage of hostilities, as also acceptance of peace terms offered by the Queen. Shah Jahan knew that her utter helplessness and not her will had induced the Malika to sue for peace. Though he was inclined to accept the request, yet he could not bring himself to fix a comparatively low price for terminating the hostilities. In consultations with Dara Shikoh but without

* Aurangzeb mustered fake evidence to establish that Ali was not the son of Adil Shah, but a boy of low origin whom he adopted in 1639,

referring the matter to Aurangzeb for his views, the Emperor issued a *firman* under the imprint of his right palm that the war should be ended immediately provided Ali Adil Shah undertook to pay an indemnity of rupees twenty million. A few minor adjustments of territories were also stipulated as a precondition for ceasefire.

A relay of fiery-footed steeds carried this Royal order to the Deccan. Aurangzeb was taken aback; he suppressed the command till the "operation plunder" was completed, and even then withdrew his armies only after the Queen had given him gifts of jewels and diamonds of the value of rupees one million. Aurangzeb's lust for money was insatiable.

Mir Jumla, Dilir Khan and Raja Jai Singh were the three top generals of the Deccan command when the war with Bijapur began. Dara Shikoh believed that this celebrated trio would desert Aurangzeb the moment he decided to rebel against the Emperor's authority. Their loyalty to Shah Jahan, he reckoned, was unquestioned. Events proved him to be over-optimistic. None of them had faith in Dara's ability to vanquish Aurangzeb in a military showdown. The imminence of a war of succession was becoming more and more apparent every day. Shah Jahan was stricken with a gastric ailment that for weeks defied diagnosis and cure by leading physicians of the realm. Rumours spread quickly that he was dying if not dead already. The supporters of each of the three princes stationed at Agra sent out urgent messages informing their respective patrons of the preparations at hand to proclaim Dara Shikoh Emperor. As soon as Shah Jahan breathed his last there was great panic throughout the Empire.

A feeling of uncertainty filled the cool November air in Agra. Dara was maintaining a round-the-clock vigil by the side of his ailing father. All important affairs of the State were handled by him on behalf of the monarch. Shah Jahan was too ill and too weak to attend to any business. His weight dropped by nearly one-half, his appetite and digestion showed no signs of improvement, spells of intense abdominal pains left no spark of lustre in his eyes, wrinkles on his face and brow deepened into furrows of bloodless yellow, his hair thinned and his limbs bore the appearance of lifelessness. The general

consensus among Hukma was that the ailment had reached the stage of no recovery. People prayed that the angel of death save the Emperor from further suffering.

Then a miracle came to pass. One of the physicians in attendance saw the Emperor in a dream talking to Begum Sahiba about the medicinal virtues of the *tulsi* and mint plants. Shah Jahan was saying that his recovery began the day he took a cup of broth seasoned with *tulsi* and mint leaves. The physician, Hakim Tabinda, woke up in great agitation, convinced that a cure for Shah Jahan's ailment was revealed to him. He shared his dream, as also his belief, with Masih-uz-Zaman and other members of the panel attending on the sovereign. They all agreed that a light soup of the type suggested could do no harm.

The "revealed treatment" began the same evening and, to the great joy of the Hukma and the Royal family, Shah Jahan showed unmistakable signs of recovery within twelve hours. In six days' time the Emperor took a stroll in the palace garden. A *Sham-i-Schat* was held on November 29, 1657, and the news about "the mercy of Allah in granting another lease of life to our beloved sovereign" was sent not only to the three Princes but also to all Governors of the realm, as also to the Kings of Persia, Turkey and other foreign domains.

The general joy in the capital was, however, tampered with panic generated by wild rumours floating around the concerted plans of Aurangzeb and Murad Baksh to advance on Agra. Muhammad Shuja was also reported to be on the move out of Rajmahal, capital of Bengal. Outwardly his plan was to "go to the rescue of my revered father and to save the Empire from falling in the hands of my rebellious brothers", but in actual fact his aim was to seize the throne before Aurangzeb and Murad could implement their plan of action. The war of succession had begun. Shah Jahan had not been told about these developments. The heir-apparent Dara Shikoh thought it advisable to shield his ailing father from these disturbing reports.

Now that Shah Jahan was back in the seat of authority, he learnt with anguish of the ominous ramifications of his three-month illness. Dara briefed him on the assumption of sovereign

powers by Shuja in Bengal and Murad in Gujarat and their reported resolves to make a bid for the throne. Shah Jahan was relieved somewhat to know that the "white shake", name given to Aurangzeb in childhood by Mumtaz Mahal, had so far not adduced to himself the privileges of a sovereign ruler. However, he tended to believe that considerations of strategy and not loyalty to himself were keeping Aurangzeb quiet for the time. He told Dara Shikoh: "Beware of the man who keeps his thoughts to himself. The Viceroy of Deccan is slow because he knows that they tumble who run fast. His cloak of inaction is a snare. Keep a close watch on his movements."

Aurangzeb kept his plans to himself, known as he did that two might keep counsel, putting one away, he corresponded both with Shuja and Murad with a view to forge a common front against "the infidel Dara Shikoh", but never, never, did he spell out the means that he contemplated adopting to achieve his ends. At one stage he told Murad that there was no intention in his heart to capture the throne. "My resolve is to save the Empire for Islam. Once that objective is gained, I propose to retire to a hut in the holy land. The crown will sit better on your head than mine", he wrote. Honesty to him was a useless ploy unless it could serve as a ladder to the throne. He was the very pink of truthfulness when truthfulness could win him gold and diamonds; else, righteousness had no place in his code of moral values.

While inviting Murad to join forces with him for an assault on infidelity, Aurangzeb addressed his younger brother as "Your Majesty" and ended with "your loyal supporter and well-wisher". He wrote similar letters to Shuja as well. The latter knew him better than did Murad. His lies and soft words served only to deepen Shuja's distrust of Aurangzeb's intentions. Murad was more ambitious and less circumspect. He took Aurangzeb at his word, and thus agreed to his own destruction.

Shah Jahan was quick to realize the gravity of the fast-developing crisis. First he sent letters to his sons, restraining them from such hasty action as might throw the Empire into a tumult. Simultaneously, two mighty armies were raised, one under Sulaiman Shikoh and Raja Jai Singh to proceed

against Shuja and the other under Maharaja Jaswant Singh* of Jaipur to stem the tide of the combined armies of Aurangzeb and Murad. Shah Jahan's instructions to the commanders were "to soothe the rebels, not to kill them".

The two Rajas accepted the assignments after much hesitation. They had not learnt, in the words of Jaswant Singh, "to fight with their hands tied at the back". Shah Jahan appreciated their difficulty, but he could not persuade himself to sanction a do-or-die war against the Princes. He was hoping all the time that the rebels would cave in against the show of strength by Imperial armies. Little did he realize that like madness is the quest for glory in this life, and that the Shahzadas would rather perish than compromise with their run-away ambitious and mutual distrusts. In his letters to Aurangzeb, as also to Shuja and Murad, he underlined time and again that he was completely recovered and that a war for succession at the time was a superfluity that could not be justified on any score. There was no gall in his ink; rather he wrote with a goose-pen dipped in honey. He even hinted at his willingness to apportion the Empire among his four sons and thus "save ourselves from the calamity of a civil war". He appealed to them in the name of religion, as also in the name of the traditions of their dynasty, to desist from scattering ruin and anarchy in the country. His requests and arguments went abegging. Aurangzeb was convinced that these letters were forgeries, brain-children of Dara Shikoh and a small number of his camp-followers. How prone are the over-ambitions to be distrustful!

Shah Jahan raised yet another army to clear Gujarat of Murad who had been designated Governor of Berar, a province under the Viceroyalty of Aurangzeb—a seemingly clever move to bring about discord between the rebel Princes. The command of this third army was given to Qasim Khan.

*Raja Jaswant Singh was the son of Raja Gaj Singh of Jodhpur. He was appointed Governor of Malwa with a mansab of seven thousand. He became Maharaja of Jodhpur in the thirty-seventh year of Shah Jahan's reign. His elder brother, Amar Singh, was denied throne at the request of Gaj Singh.

a soldier-statesman of no mean talents. Further, in a bid to weaken the courts at Aurangabad, Rajmahal and Ahmedabad, Shah Jahan issued orders for recall of all senior Umra from these centres. Aurangzeb openly defied the imperial *firman*, fakely arrested Mir Jumla, and on 25 January, 1658, marched out of Aurangabad at the head of twenty-five thousand devoted men. Though none of them knew precisely his mission and destination yet all of them felt uplifted when Aurangzeb, seated on the mountain of an elephant, reminded them of the duties of a soldier as enjoined by Islam. There was fierce determination in his face, his eyes, his every limb as he asked them to "put your trust in God and follow me, without a semblance of fear in your hearts, in the great enterprise of protecting truth and trampling underfoot all forms of heresy". A thunderous shout of Allah i-Akbar went up as the Prince stood up in the howdah and raised his hands in prayers for divine guidance and help. Nothing emboldens aggression more than religious frenzy. The comparatively small army of Aurangzeb bore the imprint of invincibility as it trotted out of the Mughal capital in Deccan. The event was history-making. A royal son was on the march forward to defuse his brothers, sisters, father and all those who stood between him and the throne.

A master tactician that he was in the art of keeping his foes guessing, Aurangzeb halted at Burhanpur for nearly two months, waiting ostensibly for news from Agra on the one hand and Ahmedabad and Rajmahal on the other. During this period of stock-taking he shared his thoughts with none, held no Darbar, partook of no festivity even of a minor nature, said his prayers in the private mosque five times a day, fed himself sparingly on two simple meals a day, and took such steps as were needed to weld his force into a fighting force of unmatched fury.

One such step was the imprisonment of his father-in-law, Shahnawaz Khan*, who was suspected of being in liaison with Dara Shikoh on the one hand and Murad Baksh on the

*Shahnawaz Khan was also the father-in-law of Murad Baksh. One of his daughters was married to the youngest son of Shah Jahan in 1641.

other. Shahnawaz's daughter, Dilraz Begum, had died four months earlier at Aurangabad at the age of forty-two. Her passing away was a non-event in so far as the incarceration of her father was concerned. Family relationship counted for nothing in Aurangzeb's scheme of conduct of wars. He did not hesitate to throw even his own sons into jail at the slightest doubt about their faithfulness. Kingship, thy name is brutal herat !

On 26 March, 1658, Aurangzeb set out from Burhanpur—a carefully calculated plunge in the whirlpool of a totally unpredictable conflict. Before proceeding on his quest for the throne, Aurangzeb went out to seek the blessings of the celebrated saint Shaikh Burhanuddin. As a rule, the Shaikh did not receive “men of the world”, but he made an exception in the case of Aurangzeb at the intercession of another saintly person Shaikh Nizam. For fifteen minutes the Prince sat on the floor in the presence of the man who, it was believed, spoke only when God wanted him to say something. When Aurangzeb got up to take leave, the Shaikh raised his hands in prayers for “justice, equity, welfare and victory”. At this, Shaikh Nizam told Aurangzeb, “the kingdom is now yours”. After ascending the throne, the first act of the new Emperor was to order the construction of a pearl mosque near the Shaikh's dwelling.

Prayers were on his lips as Aurangzeb mounted the elephant Zabardast for the first stage of the thrust northwards. It may perhaps not be wrong to say that Aurangzeb never prayed for any man but himself. He himself was the focus of his invocations to Allah; ideological and wingy religious abstractions meant little to him. Convinced of his own Divine mission, he felt that his victory would be a victory for Islam. There was never a doubt in his mind that he was the custodian of the religion propounded by Prophet Muhammad. Here was an illusion that ultimately converted his victories into defeats.

Before leaving Burhanpur Aurangzeb sent another letter to Murad* in which he offered to him a formal alliance for the

*Murad left Ahmedabad on 25 February, 1658, and wandered about in the vicinity of Narbada waiting for the arrival of Aurangzeb.

specific purpose of capturing Agra. There were more lies in this communication than are to be found in the post-revolution maps of China. Not only did he project a completely erroneous picture of what was happening in Agra; he also equated his intentions with what he had no inclination to do. He dangled before Murad the lure of one-third share in booty and, in case of victory, complete sovereignty over Sind, Punjab, Kashmir and Afghanistan.

Made up as he was of vanity, boastfulness and babbling drunkenness. Murad gloated over the terms of alliance, and he wrote back in gratitude that everything he possessed was at his (Aurangzeb's) disposal for the prosecution of war. In a proxy-sism of euphoria, he speared to death his Diwan Ali Naqi* and ransacked Suart and the adjoining areas for wealth and the Portuguese weaponry of war. A savage, shallow thing, Muard was no match for the highly purposive intelligence of Aurangzeb. The moment he joined forces with Aurangzeb near Ujjain on 14 Mørch, Murad virtually signed his death warrant. The long embrace in which Aurangzeb held him was perhaps a hug more deadly than a bear ever gave to its prey.

Besides Mir Jumla, who was appointed commander of the rebel army, the principal noblemen on Aurangzeb's side were Aqi Khan, Shah Mir, Khan-i-Khanan, Qabi Khan, Wazir Khan, Muhammad Tariq, Nijabat Khan and Shams-ud-Din—a galaxy of officers noted for their courage, faith and honesty, as also for their experience and skill in warfare. They were all of the same element as Aurangzeb, fiercely fanatical in their religious views and full of unyielding resolve not to let Dara Shikoh wear the crown of Hindustan. There were no Trojan Horses in their ranks—a fact in sharp contrast to the character of nobility in Agra. There they were all Trojan Horses and no faithfuls. Men generally shut their doors against the setting sun. The belief that Shah Jahan was dying had gained firm

*Ali Naqi was a trusted servant of the Empire. He was posted at Gujarat to help Murad increase the revenue from this flourishing *suba*. He was murdered by Murad in open court on charges of loyalty to Dara Shikoh. A forged letter was the only evidence of treachery on Naqi's part.

ground, and Dara Shikoh was not considered an equal to Aurangzeb in qualities that made successful monarchs.

In an attempt to defuse an embarrassing military confrontation, Jaswant Singh sent a letter to Aurangzeb affirming his infinite loyalty to the House of the Mughals and expressing great concern at the prospect of his having to engage himself in a battle against a Royal Prince. "Duty beckons me one way and conscience the other", he wrote. Back came the reply, "let your conscience prevail. A place of honour awaits you on my side". The Rajput in Jaswant Singh stirred at this rebuff, and he reminded himself of an ancient saying that a war which cannot be avoided is just. The full alert was sounded. The battle began on the narrow fields of village Dharmat two hours before sunrise on 15 April.

O' war, thou son of hell ! Within six hours seven thousand Rajputs lay dead on the battlefield. Desertions at crucial stages added to the troubles of the Imperial army. The rebels fought as one man and, despite their inferior numbers, they never looked like losing. Aurangzeb and Muard led their contingents with exceptional heroism. God is commonly with the big battalions against the small ones, but in this case the Lord chose to side with the courageous. Jaswant Singh escaped with blood streaking out from nearly every pore of his body. Among the Rajput generals killed were Rattan Singh Rathor, Arjan Singh Gaur, Surjan Singh Sasodia and Mukand Singh. The defeat of the Imperialists, though not a foregone conclusion, was not unexpected. Unity seldom fails to triumph against divisions. In this conflict, the Rajputs in Jaswant's army pulled one way and the Afghan and Mughal divisions the other. The latter, throughout the eight hours of grim fighting, were at best only passive instruments in the hands of necessity, and at worst active agents of the enemy. It would have been surprising had the imperialists carried the day.

Every man has a saint and a wild best within him. The ferocious in Aurangzeb having routed "the foes of Islam", the sage in him took over; he offered prayers on the battlefield, ascribed the success openly to "the gallantry of my lion-hearted brother Murad Baksh", waxed benevolent in announcing the "gains of victory will be shared by those who made it possible",

abandoned the idea of a hot pursuit of the fleeing enemy, declared the next two days to be "a period of rest for the soldiers of Islam", and honoured the senior commanders not by gifts of gold and silver but by lauding their "deeds of heroism" in words chosen from the *Quran*, the holy book which he raised to his head and described as the "purest essence of the human soul".

On the third day, after laying the foundation stone of Fatehbad (city of Victory) at a place where the thanks-giving prayers were held following Jaswant's retreat to Jodhpur, Aurangzeb marched triumphantly to Gwalior, a place not too close to Agra for a defensive position and not too far for a jumping-board for the final assault. There he camped for nearly three weeks during which period he regrouped his forces, made up the losses in manpower suffered at Dharmat by a fresh recruitment drive also by accepting into his service hundreds of deserters from the Imperial army. This period of "rest and rededication" was used by the Prince to recharge his force with such unrelenting crusading zeal as had brought him victory in the opening round. His eyes and ears were constantly fixed at the Imperial capital. The happenings there, reported to him by his agents and well-wishers in and outside the court, were of crucial importance in so far as his own plans of action were concerned. Aurangzeb was not merely a bag of religious prejudices; shrewd intelligence and a high sense of realism were an integral part of his anatomy.

Dara Shikoh was engaged for most of the time in what may be called transcendental moonshine. He was a dreamer of dreams which in the context of the seventeenth century state of society were difficult to realise. His liberalism was a corollary of Akbar's New Order, and it is not surprising that both these commendable efforts at disassociating state from religion did not fructify. The age was against them. Also opposed to Dara Shikoh was the hard-to-ignore fact that he was only a favourite son of the Emperor and not an emperor himself. His writ ran in no part of Hindustan. His hob-nobbling with Sufism alienated a large segment of the nobility. Though they were with him for convenience, they were not for him. Their hopes rested on Aurangzeb—an expectation that determined to

a large extent the final outcome of the conflict.

Dara Shikoh was a good man, not a good soldier, much less a good administrator. Officially Governor of Punjab and Sind, he lived for the best part of a year in Agra, helping his ailing father to discharge the functions of the state. Shah Jahan loved him dearly. The criss-cross of brotherly jealousies and court intrigues drew the Emperor more and more to the side of his eldest son. The unspeakable tyrant High Ambition did the rest. Neither Shah Jahan nor Dara Shikoh possessed the capacity to contain this monster. The diplomatic drive they launched to bring about reconciliation with Aurangzeb and Murad on the one hand and Shuja on the other failed. Undoubtedly they possessed the resources to raise big armies but they did not possess the dynamism to convert those armies into fighting machines of high-octane courage and daring. Shah Jahan was perhaps aware of this shortfall in their charisma, but he felt that greater numbers might neutralize that disadvantage. He gave Dara Shikoh the title Shah Bulland Iqbal (king of high status) and hoped that the high-sounding appellation would give him the extra lustre the circumstances called for. He also extended to him the rare privilege of taking his seat in open Darbar on a mini-throne placed on the Emperor's right. Shah Jahan could certainly give him honours but he could not give him the qualities he was not endowed with.

The stunning news about Dharmat reached Shah Jahan at Baluchpur, eighty miles north-west on the way to Delhi from Agra. Panic seized the Royal entourage as rumours spread that Aurangzeb was positioning himself for an assault on the capital. Jahanara Begum, who had been given the title Nawab Qudsia, advised the Emperor to immediately retrace his steps to Agra, and to take into his own hands the preparations for defence. Orders were issued simultaneously to the Governors of all northern and western *subas* to send to the capital their quotas of men and horses. An army of resistance was required to be raised without delay. Reports of large-scale desertions from the Imperial force that engaged the rebels at Dharmat added to the confusion. Loyalties of a large number of the nobility were also suspect. In the

circumstances, the task of raising a new, dependable army bristled with almost insuperable difficulties.

The threat of a real danger aroused the sleeping warrior in Shah Jahan. His decision to lead the campaign himself steadied many a faint heart. Within a week, the capital bore the look of an armed camp with a hundred thousand horses, twenty thousand foot and a hundred pieces of long and medium-range guns assembled to march out at short notice. Shah Jahan also sent urgent messages to the victorious Jai Singh and Sulaiman Shikoh to abandon the chase of Shuja's forces* and turn westwards for a coordinated, diversionary attack on the rebel armies. In his younger days the Emperor had a healthy hatred of the policies of drift. At sixty-six, the self-same streak of character came into play once again. He moved with a burst of speed that surprised both his friends and foes. He was all set to save the Empire from falling into the hands of religious bigotry.

However, at the eleventh hour, the counsels of Jahanara Begum prevailed. The command of the grand army was entrusted to Dara Shikoh. The Emperor, she felt, was too weak to undergo the rigours of a hard military campaign. Here was an opportunity for the heir-apparent to establish his right to the throne by means of arms. The drama of succession was moving rapidly towards a climax. Though the part given to Dara did not suit his genius, yet he strove his best to play it with zest. On 18 May he moved out of Agra in a golden chariot drawn by a team of eight grey horses—a solemn reminder in Hindu tradition that he was going out to fight the demon of unrighteousness let loose by his brothers. Shah Jahan and Jahanara rained incense on him as the glistening chariot passed from under the balcony of the fort. A "Dharam Yudh" was in the offing. Dara seemed to revel in the role assigned to him. There were, however, many who believed that he was on the windy side of the war.

Two days later there came to Agra a messenger with reply to a letter written by Shah Jahan to Aurangzeb at Gwalior.

*The Imperial army under Raja Jai Singh and Sulaiman Shikoh defeated Prince Shuja near Benaras at Dharampur on 14 February, 1658.

After stating briefly the reasons "which left me no choice but to resort to the arbitration of the sword", the Prince bluntly told his father :

The mind of this servant can only be at peace when the two mischief-makers (Dara Shikoh and Muhammad Shuja) are driven out of the protected Empire. So long as the head of the heir-apparent is on its neck, disturbances will continue to envelop the kingdom. I want peace, not anarchy. The Lord knows that I am not telling a lie. My sole concern is to save Islam and also to save the Empire. Your Majesty may consider withdrawing the army despatched under my infamous elder brother. He will not have a chance against me and my Protector. Also I would like to tell Your Majesty that nearly half of the Imperial army will be fighting for me. This is not a boast, but the honest confession of an honest man. Even a hundred Daras will not be able to make a dent on the army of *Mujahidin* under my command.

In a mood of belligerence, Shah Jahan ordered the messenger to be imprisoned. He was convinced that the *Wali-Aahad* had enough dependable soldiers on his side to be able to beat back the rebels. The talk about God and His support for those whom Aurangzeb called the fighters for religion was, to Shah Jahan, no more than the reverie of an over-heated imagination. The phrase "arbitration of the sword" echoed in his ears. There was no reason, he thought, why this arbitration could not go in Dara's favour. The results of war are always unpredictable. "Aurangzeb's assertions are mere wishes", he told Shaista Khan.

Aurangzeb and Murad dashed out of Gwalior in a bid not to let the Chambal stand between them and victory. They crossed the swollen river at an unknown ford on 23 May and entrenched themselves at Samugarh, six miles from Agra. The Imperialists, who stood guard with their guns and arrows and spears at ferry points down stream, were taken by surprise by the rebels' daredevilry; balked, they now prepared "to throw the invaders back into the river".

Long-range artillery roared for five days, but without provoking Aurangzeb into a hasty offensive. He waited calmly for Dara to run out of patience and launch an attack on his slightly raised position. The expected came to pass soon after sunrise on 29 May. Seated on a magnificent Sri Lankan elephant, Dara led his vast army virtually into the mouth of a hungry tiger. The fight that followed turned out to be a war to the knife. For six hours the two armies were locked in a grapple that sent creeps even up the spine of the angels of death. Fortunes shifted from one side to the other till the traitor Khallullah Khan crossed over to the rebels with his thirty thousand men. Throwing caution to the wind, Dara Shikoh at this stage made the fatal mistake of dismounting from his elephant and taking to a horse in an attempt to rally the tottering left wing for a do-or-die assault on the rebels' centre. There stood Aurangzeb's elephant, his legs double-chained in precaution against the unpredictables of battle. The magnificent tusker on which rode Muard Baksh was also similarly chained. This safeguard against accidental retreat by the animals was Aurangzeb's way of leaving nothing to chance. In war, he trusted nobody, not even God.

Following the Afghan betrayal, Dara was like a man tossed between the wind and the billows. He did not know how and where to begin the retrieving act. In the mounting confusion, he seemed to run out fast of whatever little military genius he possessed. His mind was taken up completely by the fatuous idea of launching fierce, concentrated attacks on the elephants on which rode Aurangzeb and Murad. To him there appeared to be no other way of coming back into the fight with a chance to win. The Rajput contingents led by the famed and dauntless Chattar Sal of Bundi responded to his call with a spontaneity which is the crown of their race.

First they fell in strength on the gigantic mount of Aurangzeb but only to be cut to pieces by the defending divisions of the rebel Prince's bodyguard. The yellow-robed attackers made in the end a desperate attempt to sever the beast's legs, but in vain. Aurangzeb's artillery units, manned by European gunners under Mir Jumla, played havoc with the waves after waves of Rajput suicide squads. Unruffled by the

deafening din of the clash of arms, Aurangzeb sat atop his elephant steadfast in the resolve to live, to win and to rule. A spear hurled at him by Ram Singh Rathor missed the target by less than an hair's breadth, the howdah was riddled with arrows shot at him from all angles, the mahout was killed by a bullet fired from close range, the elephant roared in agony as missiles after missiles of steel and stone hit him all over the body. The elephant did not, however, either kneel or try to break the chains and retreat. The pressure on the rebels' centre was relieved in the end by men under the command of Mir Jumla on the right wing and Nijabat Khan and Khan-i-Khanan on the left. Over six thousand Rajputs lay dead in heaps around Aurangzeb's elephant as the imperialists, in a desperate gamble, turned their fury towards Murad at the left wing.

Murad was generally taken to be a sensualist indifferent to the problems of war and peace, but at this crucial stage of the battle he showed himself to be a valiant soldier of unmatched courage. He fought back the Imperialist avalanche with such valour as evoked from Aurangzeb the remark, "bravery salutes him, so does Islam. We are all grateful to him. He was superb. Rustam could not have done better".

Not only did Murad repulse the onslaught: he counter-attacked with such ferocity as left the Imperial army no choice but to flee. Chattar Sal, Ram Singh and many other chiefs of Rajput clans perished fighting. Rustam Khan, whom Shah Jahan gave the title Firauz Jang (Victory in War) a few months earlier, fell to an arrow shot by Muard himself. This was the end of the battle.

Dara Shikoh wept as his aides "turned the bridle of his horse towards Agra". Spehr Shikoh, bleeding from two wounds on the right shoulder, cried aloud at the misfortune that had befallen his father. Crossed with ill-luck, the two galloped away to a modest hunting lodge four miles from Samugarh. Only a dozen faithful noblemen accompanied them. The halt at the lodge could not but be brief. A pursuit party was on their heels. The approaching sound of kettle-drums was a warning that their lives depended upon a quick get-away. A bubble afloat in a mist of doubts and despair, Dara at first refused

to listen to the advice of his companions, saying, "If I am destined to die at the hands of the enemy, it would be better to die here than anywhere else. Agra is near, but it is a forbidden city for me. With what face can I show myself to the people there? Even shame is ashamed to sit on my brow. Let me die. I will not go."

When an old-time loyal nobleman observed that what was gone and what was past help should be beyond grief, the fatalist in Dara gained heart. The party left for Agra within minutes. Spehr followed his father like a shadow. He knew his father needed him at this hour of crisis. A son like him was a rarity in the family of the Mughals. The future was to test further his love and loyalty. Spehr was ready for all contingencies. He was both good and faithful.

Chapter Seven

O' WAR, THOU SON OF HELL

Dara's despair was in proportion to his hopes. In Agra he virtually hid himself in a modest lodge belonging to Jahanara Begum. Invitations from Shah Jahan to see him in the fort were replied to by him in words full of pathos and self-accusation. "I am responsible for the catastrophe that has overtaken us. My hatred of myself is limitless. Revered father, do not please insist on my seeing you. Your sacred eyes will burn up at the sight of my calamitous face. It is my intention to leave Agra shortly—for where I do not know", he wrote in one of the six letters that passed between him and Shah Jahan in as many days. The Emperor, crest-fallen and grief-stricken, consoled him with quotations from the holy book, bearing on what he called "the decree of fate" and the will of the Almighty Allah. Dara was not to see Shah Jahan again. Their farewells were exchanged in written words, not by way of the mouth.

Aurangzeb was a victor; that was his religion. The commandments of the holy Prophet on filial duties were to him the irrelevancies of a bygone age. After he reached the outskirts of Agra on 1 June, Shah Jahan took upon himself the role of a conciliator, and urged "my brave and far-sighted son" to heed the voice of Islam and to seek self-fulfilment in peace and "obedience to one whom you love". Aurangzeb's rejoinders to these "traps and snares" were brutal exercises in vitriolic criticism of Dara Shikoh and his policies rooted allegedly in self-interest and that alone. "The more crimes he had to his credit, the more dear he became to you"—this was a remark that seared the old monarch's heart. In half

agony, half anger, Shah Jahan wrote back : "You claim to be a Mussalman. Do not forget that according to the Prophet the greatest of evils and the worst of crimes is heartlessness. Repent over your follies and come to the path of righteousness even at this late stage. A place of high honour awaits you at the court." Aurangzeb sent no reply to this rebuke. He had no use for such religious commands as could not give him the throne. His sights were straight and his mind made up. He would be content with nothing less than the whole Empire.

On the fourth day, Shah Jahan played the only card that was left in his hand. He sent Jahanara Begum to persuade her brother out of belligerency and accept a solution that left him in near-sovereign power in the northern *Subas*. Aurangzeb received her with touching courtesy, escorted her to his tent, and there he confronted her with a sheaf of letters written by her and the Emperor to Dara Shikoh at Samugarh. The earth slipped away, as it were, from under the Princess's feet as she saw these communications. They were, one and all, indictments of Aurangzeb and reminders to Dara that "the resources of the Empire are at your beck and call in this war against unrighteousness". The fair emissary prepared to leave without saying a word in explanation, but Aurangzeb counselled forbearance and requested her in chaste Persian to listen to what he had to say. Without waiting for her assent, he said :

I have no real quarrel with His Majesty except that he is an abettor of the crimes committed by my unworthy brother. Execute him or send him for a period of soul-searching in Mecca, and I will place my head at the feet of my father. There can be no compromise on that point. Many times before have I recounted the sins of that infamous infidel. There will be no peace for as long as he lives. What God has given me no man shall ever take that away. God will take care of that. Islam is the breath of my life. Nobody should tell me what to do, or what not to do, in the name of that religion. God has chosen me to be the custodian of that faith in Hindustan. These duties shall be carried out by me with every resource at my

disposal. *Kufr* is my enemy number one. I shall not let Islam perish. This is my vow. This is my pledge to the Creator.

Now you may return to the safety of the *Lal Qila*. Please tell His Majesty that I shall not let that bastion become the refuge of apostates, *Khuda Hafiz*.

Shaista Khan and Muhammad Amin Khan, son of Mir Jumla, were the first to come and pledge loyalty to Aurangzeb. Others followed suit. It was not uncommon for the nobility in medieval times to shut their doors against the setting sun. They all believed that Dara Shikoh would never be able to stage a comeback. His defeat at Samugarh was too decisive to leave any doubt about his fate. Shah Jahan was ill and broken-hearted. The chances were, in their reckoning, that he would abdicate in favour of the victorious Prince. Aurangzeb's position was unassailable. He was in their eyes the future Emperor of Hindustan.

Though Dara was not naturally quick on the uptake, he was so sometimes by compulsion. He left Agra with five thousand men before Aurangzeb, true to his word, ordered a siege of the fort. A bulk of his treasures and nearly all of his women except Nadira Begum were left in the custody of his father and his sister, Jahanara. Shah Jahan wrote a *firman* with his own hand to the Governors of Delhi and Lahore that the forts there, with all their hoard of wealth, should be placed at the disposal of the *Wali-Aahad*. "Treat him as you would treat me", he commanded, and left no doubt as to where his support lay. Till the last he hoped to tame Aurangzeb by hook or by crook.

The siege was spearheaded by Aurangzeb's eldest son Sultan Muhammad. A garrison of nearly two thousand foreign slaves put up a heroic resistance but when Aurangzeb ordered stoppage to the fort of all water supplies from the *Jamuna*, the resistance crumbled down like a house of cards. Shah Jahan chided his son: "You are a strange Mussalman. The plan to deny water to your father and sisters is the foulest form of apostasy." But these harsh words failed to thaw Aurangzeb's resolve to neutralize the Emperor before

marching out on a chase of Dara Shikoh. The gates were thrown open on 8 June, third day of the siege. Shah Jahan was a prisoner.

Aurangzeb had a decisive mind, and he knew it. The formal surrender, it was clear to him, was not the end of Shah Jahan's plottings to restore Dara Shikoh to power. The emissary sent by the Emperor with a letter explaining the reasons that "led me to spare further bloodshed" was told by him in terms harsh and unequivocal :

Go and tell His majesty that to speak a lie for personal gain is the essence of inhumanity. The surrender was a ploy to gain time for the fugitive *Wali-Aahad*, not an act of mercy for those actually engaged in fighting. I have no illusions about the Emperor's capacity for corrupting his enemies. His attempt to win over Muhammad Sultan to his side failed miserably. We have no dissenters in our ranks. All of us are united in our resolve to make the Empire safe for Islam and righteousness. We shall foil all attempts to divide us. Allah is our guide. The Emperor would do well even at this late stage to sever all links with one who has little political wisdom and less religious faith. He should be sent out of this world or at least out of the Empire. That is the only way whereby tranquility can return to this country. The least the Emperor can do is not to stand in our way. The intriguing infidel will never be able to escape our net. His days are numbered. We are determined to send him to the hall of penitence in purgatory. God has willed it that way.

Shah Jahan could seldom resist a temptation to intrigue. Unmindful of Aurangzeb's warnings, he made a hazardous bid to lure Murad to his side. The attempt misfired. Womanly jealousy on the one hand and Aurangzeb's vigilance on the other led to the disclosure of the plot soon after it was launched. The conspiracy sealed the fate of Murad. Aurangzeb did not give the right to exist to anyone who, actively or passively, lent himself to become an instrument for maintenance of the *status quo*. He was obsessed with

the idea of a Divine command to take the reins of the Kingdom in his own hands; the means were of no consequence to him. The end powered his energies.

Excitable without being wise, it might perhaps be correct to say that Murad was half ass, half wolf. Stupidity blinded him to the game that Aurangzeb was playing. and over-ambition led him on to capers that annoyed his wily companion in arms. The decision to get rid of him was a natural corollary to Aurangzeb's compulsive intent to wear the crown. The airs of sovereignty, Murad had begun to assume, were in fact an invitation to Aurangzeb to send him to a place from where neither his acts of self-love could be seen nor his voice of arrogance heard. The task was not difficult. Even his own army and his own noblemen despised Murad for his want of moral restraint and princely poise. He had the aspirations of kings and the propensities of quadrupeds. There was no place for him in the scheme of Aurangzeb's arithmetic.

The history of the Mughals is a series of conspiracies to gain some advantage without paying for it. The plot that Aurangzeb formulated to defuse Murad was one such nefarious design. Two marches from Agra on way to Delhi, he presented to Murad two hundred forty Persian horses, a corps of selected Ceylon war elephants, a bevy of slave-girls whose beauty could be matched only with the magnetism of their youth, and rupees two and a half million in cash. These gifts, he wrote to Murad, were in the nature of "my carnes less to share with you the gains of the war we have fought and won together". Aurangzeb praised to the skies "the valiant deeds of my much adored brother" and invoked on him the blessings of Allah for "a future in which you are undoubtedly to play a big, constructive part".

The unashamed artificer, Aurangzeb then invited his brother to "a gala feast that is my intention to hold in your honour". Murad was quick to accept the *Dawat-Nama* despite the subtle warnings of the faithful eunuch Basharat*. "I see a snake lurk-

*Some historians give the name of this eunuch as Shahbaz. Perhaps it was a double name Basharat Shahbaz. There are also different versions of the manner in which Basharat was in the end separated from Murad.

ing in this inordinate burst of flattery and show of love", he told his master, and suggested that the invitation should be acknowledged in "words plucked from the firmament of chaste writing", and its acceptance deferred till Delhi was reached. Murad laughed at Basharat's apprehensions, and said that "to suspect an elder brother's generosity to be a trap was not only morally indefensible but also against the traditions of the House of the Amir." "I am going. You may come with me if you like", he cut the argument short. Basharat sulked away. He thought his master was more nice than wise in ignoring the call of caution. He prepared to accompany the Prince to what he called the lion's den.

Aurangzeb was not a saint; he was a shrewd man of the world, almost sly and heartless. He received Murad at the entrance to his camp, led him with a rare show of respect to his blue-and-red *khaima*, shared the *dastarkhwan* with him at a fairly-tale feast, and to the surprise of everybody present invited his brother to drink *Ab-i-Ncab*, a Persian special wine known for its soft inebriating effect.

When Murad requested leave to depart after consuming one cup of the shimmering wine, Aurangzeb said loud and clear : "Stay on, my dearest brother and ally, I want to see you happy. Drink to your heart's content. For your sake, I broke my pledge not to offer a drink of liquor to anyone. This is the night of nights. I would like to see you swim joyfully in its quiet waters."

Murad needed no further persuasion to indulge his penchant for "the waters that gave life". Aurangzeb left shortly afterwards, perhaps to prepare the sets for the next act. Murad was escorted to a fabulously decorated tent three *gharis* after sunset. The ever-watchful Basharat accompanied him. When the half awake, half asleep Prince lay down to rest on a divan, a group of enchanting slave-girls, wearing exotic dresses, appeared on the scene out of nowhere, as it were, to lull the Prince Charming to sleep. They quietly asked Basharat to repair to the adjoining tent, and immediately set about plying the wiles of their trade to win the confidence of their handsome guest. First they stood deferentially near the divan waiting for the Prince to unbuckle his sword and other weapons,

Murad looked at them with lust beaming in one eye and calculation showing out of the other. In a few suspenseful moments, the lust triumphed; he stood up to lay aside the weaponry of defence, and then asked for a cup of *Ab-i-Naab*. The most alluring of the female attendants, Arzu, complied with the Prince's wish with a smile that hid nothing. The other girls disappeared from the scene as quickly and as quietly as they had trouped in.

Alone, the Prince relaxed and submitted himself to a gentle massage with a soothing balm of exquisite fragrance. Two more cups of wine brought the drama to its climax. Murad was in the lap of deep slumber. The wily Arzu, who had apparently learnt her part well, tiptoed out of the tent, taking along with her the princely weaponry Murad had laid aside.

In a couple of moments a team of seven burly soldiers walked in, scanned the tent for hidden enemy, and then began securing their prey with chains around his legs and arms. Murad woke up with a start, his first reaction being to look for his sword. When the reality of the hideous plot dawned on him, Murad cursed Aurangzeb in no uncertain language, invoked God for help, swore vengeance on all partners in the conspiracy, called aloud for Basharat, and when his helplessness became too patent to be shook out of existence, he burst into an avalanche of tears and sought forgiveness for his sins from the Emperor and also from the holy Father in heaven. The curtain dropped when an exhausted Murad was bodily carried out, leaving behind little trace of the fairy time the tent was enveloped in a short while ago. Murad was a prisoner – a poignant end to a career full of stupidities, Bacchanalia, spasms of unmatched arrogance, fits of temper as also of the deeds of valour that made the enemy quiver.

Perhaps the saddest part of Murad's mental anatomy was that he charged his mind with meanings that Aurangzeb never intended. Unsuspecting credulity turned out to be his worst foe. At best he was a reckless soldier and at worst a fiend more foul than the sea monster. In a way it can be said that he invited the fate that befell him.

Lodged first in the fort of Salimgarh at Delhi, Murad was

transferred to the State prison in Gwalior before Aurangzeb went in chase of Dara Shikoh. There his attempt to escape was foiled by Saraswati Bai, a concubine permitted to keep him company in the fort. Seeing in him a continuing threat to his hegemony, Aurangzeb sought the help of Islamic law to get him executed on Wednesday, 4 December, 1661. The charge brought against him was the murder of his Vazir Ali Naqi at Ahmedabad in 1658. Murad did not defend the case. "If my brother wishes to kill me, let his will be carried out. I shall not defend", he told the presiding Quazi. He certainly died bravely.

With Murad out of his way, Aurangzeb decided to mount a full-scale chase of Dara Shikoh before directing his attention to counter the threat of Muhammad Shuja in the east. The likelihood of a secret pact between Shah Jahan and Shuja was not lost upon him. In the wisdom and confidence of one whom nature had helped win two crucial battles, he discounted the ability of the Bengal army to come to the assistance of the imprisoned monarch. Dara was his foe number one. For as long as he was at large, thought Aurangzeb, the war of succession could not be regarded as over.

A full one month separated Aurangzeb from his prey—a distance that was well within his capacity to narrow once the pursuit began in right earnest. Despite Shah Jahan's secret advice to the contrary, Dara fled Delhi on 12 June. Nadira Begum and Spehr Shikoh accompanied him. An army of ten thousand men that he was able to muster could not be said to be attached to him with bonds of loyalty; cash payment was the sole nexus between him and his soldiers. In Mughal times the men in arms were greatly lured by opportunities for plunder. Dara's need for money was perhaps greater than that of those who chose to fight for him. Thus there arose between them a mutual understanding that all was fair in a flight that held little promise of a victorious comeback. Booty-hungry mercenaries swelled his forces as he crossed the Sutlej and prepared to make a stand against the pursuing army. Panic seized him as the news came that Bahadur Khan was advancing fast with a number of boats on carts on the back of elephants to help him negotiate the watery hurdle. In despair,

he owned that "I will never be able to beat the victor at Samugarh", and ordered his men to move as fast as they could towards Lahore. With luck, he reckoned, it might be possible to hold that northern bastion till help came to him either from Kabul or from the east by way of a diversionary attack by Shuja.

Before the story of the great chase is resumed, a brief account needs to be given of Dara's meeting with a saintly woman midway between Sirhind and Lahore. She was Allima Mooltani, well-read, unwed and nearly sixty. Her dwelling was a mud-and-straw hut in the middle of mango grove. She lived there alone with her God and her never-expressed sorrows. A woman of few words, she spoke only when she thought the great Prompter wanted her to say something. Behind the wrinkles and misty eyes there lay a face which could not but have been attractive in youth. It is said that Shah Jahan made it a point to spend some time with her whenever he went either to Lahore or Kashmir.

A few years before his death, Jahangir was known to have been struck virtually dumb at the spiritual glow that enveloped her. In the hope that she would shift her residence there he bestowed on her for life a two-acre mango garden near Agra. Mooltani accepted the endowment, but with utmost politeness requested the Emperor to "let me grow old amidst the surroundings where I roamed about as a child and where in early youth I sang praises of God for the glorious gifts He has given to the humankind". Jahangir pressed her not and, at the instance of Nur Jahan, invited her to visit Agra once and see "the greatest and the most beautiful city in the world". Mooltani remained silent. She never left her grove.

Dara Shikoh had met her once before in the company of Shah Jahan. Then he was the *Wali-Aahad*, now a fugitive for safety. This turn in fortunes made no difference to Mooltani. She received the Prince, as on the previous occasion, with a present of freshly picked mangoes and spread a piece of time-worn carpet under a tree for Dara and his two companions, Nadira Begum and Spehr Shikoh, to sit upon. She herself squatted on the dusty grass and began reciting *Quranic*

verses in homage to the "high and mighty Master of all mankind".

Discerning the inward disquiet Dara was trying hard to hide behind a pretence of calm assurance, Mooltani broke her pact with God and asked "if this insignificant person can in any way help alleviate the pain that apparently afflicts Your Highness's "heart". Dara stood up and then bent his knees, touched with both hands the feet of the saint, and said in a voice broken with emotion :

You know all. I have not to tell you about the happenings of the last three months. Aurangzeb has made the Emperor a prisoner in the fort at Agra. Deceit and disloyalty undid the royal armies in two major battles. There was no option for me but to flee the capital. Aurangzeb's forces are hard on our heels. We are at present not strong enough to give him a fight. Our hopes rest on Lahore, Kabul and Muhammad Shuja. If Providence helps, we may be able to turn the tide in our favour. Our future is uncertain. Do pray for us *Mohtrinma*. Saints are the guardians of all that is good in human affairs. Your intercession would help us defeat injustice. Raise your angelic hands Allima, and we shall not have to bow in subservience to unrighteousness. Our fate is in your care.

Mooltani heard Dara's plea as if in a trance. It seemed she was in communion with the Guiding Spirit for assistance. She took Dara by the arm and asked him by gesture to take his seat by the side of Nadira Begum. Then she ran the long, lean fingers of her right hand through the greying unkept hair of her head and, following in embarrassing spell of silence, she spoke thus :

All of us are subject to the dictates of fate. To argue with her is to deny the existence of the Super-Power that controls the affairs of man. Sorrow can mend no bones. Neither can a spell of pleasure reserve for one a place in heaven. Both joy and grief are diseases of the mind. These ailments can be cured through upliftment of the soul to a point where duality ends and unity takes control. O' Prince of

princes, you are well-read in the mathematics of the spirit. There is no place in it for doubt and speculation. Faith is the only key to unmixed bliss. At all the lower stages of development, man remains a prisoner of his ego, his doubts, his fears and his aspirations.

It is no secret that you differ from Aurangzeb in mental disposition, chiefly in your greater tenderness and less selfishness. His toughness is the product of many lusts, not of beliefs and convictions. On the other hand, your comparative gentleness arises from your scholarship, your study of man and its Maker, your preoccupation with the spirit and its manifestations. Aurangzeb and you are created by nature for different purposes. He will die with his death. You may live for ever. He may wear the crown. That headgear will not, however, give him a place among the immortals of history. O' Prince, you may be slain by your enemies but, heed my words, they will have no power to rub your name out of the annals of the Mughals. Carry on. Nobody has the power to alter one's destiny. The lines on the palm of the hand can neither be changed nor erased. The realization of the inevitability of fate defuses grief; it also makes pleasure less pleasant.

Just as a lewd woman never forgets her sex, a soldier never forgets that his profession is to kill. Aurangzeb is at best a soldier and, at worst a pretender. Beware of him. He belongs to the freak species who rise by sin. To kill for him is nothing but the final argument. The throne is his end. He is one of those who will try even to eliminate God if He stands in his way to the high seat.

I have said all the Lord prompted me to say. Prayers and acceptance of the pre-ordained go ill together. My good wishes are, however, with you. The road before you is long and full of traps and pitfalls. May the great God protect you. To accept His will is to be saved.

As Mooltani stopped speaking, tears rolled down the cheeks of Nadira Begum. She understood the import of the saint's words. They were doomed to perish either in exile or at the hands of the pursuers. The young Spehre looked at his mother

with deep anguish, but he said nothing. For once Dara showed no sign of either fear or panic. Exuding faith in himself and faith in the Designer of Destinies, he expressed his gratitude to the Allima, saying :

Respected Yogin, the words of wisdom spoken by you are a source of solace to us. We accept unreservedly that what Providence has ordained, and flinch not from the path of duty and righteousness. Let my brother Aurangzeb rise by sin; we are prepared to fall by virtue. The ways of Nature are inscrutable. There is no such thing as ill-fortune. Human limitations act as blinkers over our eyes. The Father can do no harm to the child. In that faith, we take leave of Your Holiness. Perhaps we shall have an opportunity to bow at your feet again. May you continue to spread peace and tranquillity for many years to come. Your good wishes will sustain us in moments of despair and loneliness. Our hearts are clean and our faith firm. The rest we leave in the hands of God.

Goodness in a vanquished Mughal prince was nothing but a form of degeneration. It was apparent that Dara was without hope, without a concrete plan to fight a rearguard action and without many loyal friends. His faith in righteousness was born out of desperation and a near-conviction that he would never be able to dislodge Aurangzeb from the position of advantage he had come to occupy by virtue of two decisive victories.

Indecision further aggravated Dara's woes. He could not make up his mind whether to put his trust in the nobility of Kabul or Lahore. At the instance of the ever faithful Daud Khan he opted in favour of the comparatively affluent Punjab. The argument that it would perhaps be easier to launch an invasion on Agra from Lahore than from the distant Kabul clinched the issue. If the worse came to worst, the zig-zags of lower Sind and the Indus Valley, reasoned the experienced Daud Khan, could provide greater safety than the narrow route to Kabulistan. The fugitives whose number had by now risen to nearly thirty thousand headed towards Lahore, hoping that the Imperial forces there would join them in repulsing the

fast-advancing Bahadur Khan.

After making Shah Jahan a well-guarded prisoner in the fort, Aurangzeb left Agra on 13 June resolved to capture Dara before he crossed into territories too distant from the capital. The pace he set was fiery. Delhi was reached in three days. Though the population gave him a fairly warm welcome, yet he felt that there was in the city an element of dissenters who would like to restore Shah Jahan to power. His fears were not the product of a guilty mind; evidence had come to his hand of a Shuja-inspired plot to liberate the Emperor and to crush the rebels with coordinated attacks from the east and north-west. The threat was real, thought Aurangzeb. He took no time to decide that it would not be advisable to leave Delhi while the Empire was still in the flux and uncertainty obsessed people about the final outcome of the war of succession. Accordingly, he chose one of his most devoted generals, Bahadur Khan, to go in pursuit of Dara. He left Delhi on 23 June with instructions to "ferret the infidel out, if need be, from the holes of hell and produce him before me to answer charges of waging a senseless war against Islam and the Empire". Thus began a chase that marked a new low in the Mughal thirst for vengeance.

As days went by and there was no news about an engagement with Dara's forces, Aurangzeb became fidgety. The thought of Dara escaping the net disturbed his equanimity during the day and kept him from sleep at night. For the thief every bush is a soldier and every turn of the track a pitfall. Aurangzeb had reached a point in guilt consciousness where he trusted nobody, not even Bahadur Khan. He saw the hand of Shah Jahan, as also of Muhammad Shuja, in all that happened around him. This self-induced hallucination could end only when Dara was finally out of his way. To that end, he resolved to join the pursuit himself. The dissident conspirators, he reckoned, could be dealt with effectively later. He left Delhi on 9 July, taking with him a small force as mobile as it was loyal and efficient.

A day later on 10 July, in the picturesque Shalimar Gardens eight miles from Delhi, he shed all pretence and donned the crown imperial at a simple ceremony presided over by the camp

head priest. It was here that he assumed the title Alamgir and swore not to be content till the rule of Islam was established in every part of Hindustan. This coronation, he calculated, would end the lingering uncertainty about the future and make it clear to friends and foes that a new chapter in the history of the Mughals had begun. He wanted to go in chase as an Emperor, not as a rebel. His orders henceforth could be disobeyed by anybody at the rise of his life. The beat of drums in all big cities set the seal on the new reign.

Aurangzeb's one big aim was to humiliate Dara, to wound his self-esteem, and to exhibit him in public as a museum-piece of wretchedness. Pursuit, to him, was only the means. The end was the gallows or the mighty stroke of the executioner's sword. Dara was aware of this base design; so he chose to play the hare and hop away from one hiding place to another; eluding the hounds with feints, false starts, and following unfrequented tracks and byways. A day separated him from Bahadur Khan in Lahore. Not prepared to give a fight, he fled to Sind through Multan and therefrom to the watery zigs and zags of Bhakkar and Sukkur. The chase at places became as dramatic and as nail-biting as any modern-day hunt can be. At Multan he escaped from the backdoor as Bahadur Khan's men entered the fort from the main eastern gate. His cup of misery was full to the brim by the time he reached Bhakkar. There he did the inexplicable act of asking Daud Khan not to follow him any further. "My fate is sealed. I do not want you to suffer any more for my sake", he told the bewildered general. The latter protested, saying "I would rather perish with you than court the ignominy of a surrender". For reasons best known to him, Dara did not yield to his requests. In utter despair, Daud Khan retraced his steps and later joined the service of Aurangzeb.

Leading during the march a life of extreme simplicity, Aurangzeb followed Dara up to Multan. There the news came of Shuja's advance on Agra from the east. The gravity of this not unexpected development could not be ignored. Aurangzeb immediately called off the pursuit, and did the miracle of storming back into Agra in time to beat off Shuja's challenge at Khajura near Allahabad, on 4 January, 1659.

The battle was grim and furious but once Aurangzeb had reached the scene with his crescent-bearing green penants the result was never in doubt. Even the treachery of Jaswant Singh, who crossed over to Shuja's side on the eve of the battle, failed to tip the scales against Aurangzeb. Superb in resolve and stamina, he covered himself with glory in the fighting that lasted for nearly seven hours. "Allah has won", exclaimed he when the news came that Shuja had fled to the east. As was his custom, Aurangzeb alighted from the elephant and bent his knees in thankfulness to "my guide, my inspiration, my Allah". The commanders followed the example of their leader and when the prayers ended the battlefield of Khajura virtually shook with shouts of Allah-i-Akbar by a soldiery drunk with success. Here was a victory that broke the back of Shah Jahan's sympathisers. Dara Shikoh was not wrong in his assessment when he declared after crossing the Sutlej that "it will be impossible to beat this man Aurangzeb". He fought with the conviction that God was on his side.

The pursuit of Shuja by Mir Jumla and Daud Khan was as relentless as that of Dara Shikoh (after Bhakkar) by Saf Shikan Khan and Shaikh Mir. Shuja escaped to the hills of Arakan in May 1660 and he was presumably killed there by tribesmen to whom life was nothing, loot everything. Dara bore with rare fortitude the sufferings that the crossing of the Kutch involved, entered Gujarat but he failed to raise an army strong enough to challenge Aurangzeb's seizure of power. Cornered into a hopeless defensive position, he was defeated in the battle of Deorai, near Ajmer, on 12-14 March, 1659.

The story of Dara's escape and his bid to cross over into Persia *via* Baluchistan is a saga of despair and heroism unmatched in its pathos and dramatic moments. The death of Nadira Begum soon after he entered the tribal Baluch territory and the treacherous betrayal by Malik Jeevan were events that savour of a gripping Greek tragedy. Aurangzeb was not content with the humiliation suffered by Dara when he was paraded on the back of a miserable-looking elephant through the streets of Delhi; he ordered the once *Wali-Aahad* to be dragged in chains to his presence. He changed his decision only when

Shaista Khan expressed himself against that step. "The people of Delhi may rise in anger against that extreme form of ignominy", he submitted.

Aurangzeb went into a spell of *khilwat* while Dara, a picture of forlorn wretchedness, waited in blazing sun for the result of his brother's dialogue with the deity. Aurangzeb did everything in the name of Islam. He took note of Shaista Khan's fears, and set up a panel of Qazis to try Dara for "his innumerable sins against the Prophet and the Empire". The verdict was "death by severance of neck from the trunk by a single blow of the executioner's sword". The sentence was carried out before sunrise on 30 August, 1659*.

Even this punishment did not satisfy the lust for vengeance raging in Aurangzeb's heart. He had the head washed, dressed in the jewellery of an heir-apparent, and had it sent to Shah Jahan by the hand of a special messenger. On the silver casket containing the head were inscribed the words "a gift from the Emperor to his father". When Jahanara Begum opened the box, she fell back in horror at the sight of its contents, Shah Jahan wept like a child, and he cursed Aurangzeb time and again for "the unpardonable blasphemy you have committed in the name of justice". The wailings in the fort lasted till the early hours of the morning. Shah Jahan was demented temporarily. Memory forsook him. It was on the ninth day that he asked Jahanara: "What have you done to the head of your brother?" She kept silent. Aurangzeb's "trophy of the war" was hung on a pole outside the fort. An Urdu poet Ustad Karimullah wrote a heart-searing six-stanza piece on this episode in which he described war as the son of hell and victory as the coffin-maker of destiny. Aurangzeb sent him to the District prison in Multan!

Aurangzeb won the war. He lost the Empire. The sword alone cannot sustain a kingdom. There must be an element of high-minded generosity in the man who wears the crown. Blazing iniquities cannot but bring disaster.

*Dara Shikoh's eldest son, Sulaiman Shikoh, was executed in May 1662.

Chapter Eight

AIRY PRETENSIONS

On return from Ajmer after virtually destroying Dara Shikoh in the battle of Deorai, Aurangzeb camped for nearly a month by Khazirabad, a suburb of Delhi. This stopover was in deference to a pronouncement by the court astrologer Abdul Hamid Quandhari that "the planets Mars, Jupiter and Saturn will deem it a rash act of misadventure if the monarch enters the capital before 12 May".

Though Aurangzeb's faith in astrology was only half-hearted, he did not want at this stage to do anything which might estrange the heavenly bodies. His victories were scored at great cost and peril and it would be unwise, he reckoned, to run even the slightest risk of a setback at the hands of nature.

It was at Khazirabad that the thought struck him of reinforcing his title to the throne by staging a second coronation "more splendid than any held in the history of Islam in India". The one held a year earlier near Delhi in July 1658, was a symbolic exercise to fill a vacuum; now was the time to proclaim to the people of India and outside that all opposition was crushed and that he was the unchallenged ruler of Hindustan. Orders were issued accordingly to all Departments of the State, as also to the Provincial Governors, that arrangements for the coronation should be coordinated in consultation with representatives of the Ulema, leading priests and *Aahl-i-Nijoom* (astrologers). Letters were also sent to Persia and friendly states in Central Asia, inviting them to send representatives for participation in coronation festivities. Royal *firman* went out to all Mansabdars that they should be ready with their choicest contingents of cavalry to take part in the coronation parade.

Among the dancers summoned to Delhi were two sisters

Najima and Azima, of Hyderabad, whom Zainabadi had introduced to Aurangzeb in 1655. Both of them were ravishingly beautiful, high-spirited and, according to a contemporary chronicler, "there was heaven in their smiles". The galaxy of female *Aahi-i-Murad* who gathered in Delhi was, to quote the same historian, "brighter than *Banat-ul-Nash* and more enchanting than all the houris of Paradise". The puritan Aurangzeb, at forty, admired ladies young and fair. "Their winged spirits are feathered off-times with heavenly words", he once told his best-loved wife, Udaipuri Mahal. The surfeit of life-force in him expressed itself in different ways at different times. Tenderness of the soul was for him perhaps a manifestation of the selfsame force as the callousness of heart. Aurangzeb is a very complex subject to understand and interpret.

A team of court astrologers, led by Abdul Hamid Qandhari, reached a consensus after seven days of consultation that "the sun, the stars and the moon will be ready in their golden chariots on 13 May, "to salute the new monarch when he takes his seat on the hallowed throne." Aurangzeb gave his approval for this date on 4 May after consultations with the ladies of the harem. He went out to say prayers in the camp mosque that day, and declared afterwards: "The will of Allah be carried out. Hindustan will bear a new, brighter look on the thirteenth day of May. Let this decision be announced by the beat of drum in every part of the Empire."

It seems strange that a monarch committed by oath and conviction to the Islamic principle of simplicity should opt for "unmatched glamour and pageantry" when it came to spelling out the form the coronation ceremonial was to take. A sum of rupees five million was initially sanctioned for expenses of what promised to be the greatest show on earth. The hoards of pearls, diamonds, rubies and other types of precious stones in the vaults of the Imperial forts were made available to the decorators for embellishment of the pillars of the Hall of Public Audience as also the interiors of other venues in the Red Fort where the various parts of the ceremony were to be staged.

The *Diwan-i-Am* on 13 May, in the words of the court

historian, bore the look of "a sea of gold on which surged waves of the purest pearls and diamonds—a spectacle that bewildered imagination and left the tongue groping for words to describe it". Seven hundred master decorators worked day and night for two weeks to convert the fort into "an abode of angels from whose walls and ceilings shone brilliantly the rarities of gold and pearl singular in design and craftsmanship". Never before in the reigns of five previous Mughal kings had such display of the pieces of art been seen. Aurangzeb, the austere, planned to ascend the Peacock Throne amidst infinite material affluence. His motive perhaps was to create an illusion of Divine sanction for the means he chose to seize the throne. Display of wealth was in a way a short-cut to ease his conscience.

As required by astrological readings in regard to the propitious hour, Aurangzeb entered Delhi four *gharis* after sunrise on 12 May in a procession whose size and colour left the population aghast. Twelve brass bands led the cavalcade which comprised in that order four contingents of war elephants, a full brigade of cavalry in lustrous uniforms, five hundred infantrymen and as many musketeers. Then came the tallest elephant of the royal stables, Koh Buland, on which sat Aurangzeb in a howdah resembling in shape the famous black marble throne in the fort at Agra. The turban he wore was studded with alternative rows of diamonds, rubies and sapphires—an arrangement that struck a new vog. in the royal Mughal sartorial scheme. Gorgeously dressed Aahidis flanked the elephant on the right and left; they also followed the Imperial mount in full battle dress. Handfuls of gold and silver coins were flung from over the elephant—a traditional Indian exercise to ward off the evil eye. These coins were meant to be picked up by the waiting poor after the procession had passed the next milestone.

When the Emperor entered the fort by the Lahori Gate, teams of famed Shahnai players struck traditional tunes of welcome. Dressed in a light blue outfit, Roshanara Begum came out like the spring to greet her brother. At steps leading to the balcony, fragrant water was sprinkled on the Emperor and betel leaves wrapped in gold paper were offered

to him on a silver tray studded with stones of many hues. At the balcony the ladies of the harem slipped behind the Gujarat embroidered screens, and Aurangzeb stood there in the company of his leading Umra to acknowledge the salutations of thousands of people gathered outside to have a look at the hero of the war for survival.

The only discordant note of the day was struck by a bearded, grey-haired mendicant clothed in tatters who challenged the Emperor in a voice loud and clear to prove that 'in incarcerating your royal father you have not violated the fundamentals of a religion you claim to protect'. Aurangzeb heard the charge, vaxed surprise that there existed a man with courage to cast on him an accusing finger, and he asked the mahout to break formation and take the elephant to the faqir watching the procession from a distance of about fifty yards. The Emperor did not dismount; instead he gave the seemingly fearless faqir a benign look and threw to him a purse containing an undisclosed number of gold and silver coins, saying "I admire your courage. The king of Hindustan salutes you. Accept this token of my regard for honest expression of views. We shall discuss the subject you raised some other day. Meanwhile, rest assured. O' holy man, that Aurangzeb would never, never, violate the injunctions of the Prophet".

The holy man did not pick up the purse from the ground, cast his two piercing eyes on the Emperor, and walked away briskly. Aurangezeb did not pursue him. Neither did he make any comment on the incident. In later years, it is said, he made a vain attempt to locate his whereabouts. The purse he threw to him was kept in the King's library till the court migrated to the Deccan in the middle of the reign.

The astrologers fixed the time of accession on 13 May at three hours fifteen minutes before sunrise. The invitees assembled in the Hall of Public Audience an hour after midnight and spent the next two hours admiring the decorations, listening to high-brow classical music by famed Ustads, inspecting art objects and also praising the poems and chronograms composed to mark the occasion. The Emperor, flanked by Shaista Khan on the right and Bahadur

Khan on the left, arrived nearly fifteen minutes before the appointed hour. He was in full regalia from top to toe, and he looked every inch an Oriental potentate of infinite majesty and illimitable faith in his rights as the messenger of God on earth. He sat on a high seat that created the illusion of "a rocking chair in the garden of Adam in Paradise". Described by Inayatullah Bokhari as "a piece of Divine poetry written in gold, diamond and velvet", the seat was the brainchild of the master craftsman Maudoodi and it had taken him ten full days to "realize the vision that inspired it". Seventy craftsmen helped him complete the assignment within the short time available.

Aurangzeb sat there happy and well-content with himself and the world around him. The most striking part of his anatomy, two searching eyes aglow with a light mysterious, mixed well that night with the strings of priceless pearls that adorned his headgear, his waistcoat, his robe of royalty and the Imperial weaponry he carried around his waist. He was magnificent. The hollows in his cheeks and the dark furrows on the forehead were not visible; they were drowned, as it were, in the sea of sublimity that enveloped him.

Two minutes before the propitious time, the trumpets were sounded and Aurangzeb, a picture of controlled joy, walked up to the shimmering Peacock Throne, waited there for a few seconds for the Shaikh-ul-Islam to lead him to the steps of the fabulous canopy, and when the sand of non-propitious time finally ran out of the earthen jar, Aurangzeb ascended the throne amidst recitations from the holy book and a rising crescendo of congratulations from the large gathering.

Ascension is the climax of an Islamic coronation ceremony. Crowning is a secondary exercise of no great significance. Aurangzeb dispensed with what he called "inessential showmanship". The turban was his insignia of royalty. When the recitations ended, he placed on his head a gilded copy of the *Quran* and read out a pledge to "live and rule by the directives inscribed in this most sacred of all books in the universe". A murmur of 'Alhamd-i-Lillah' rose in the Hall, and the distant guns roared in salute to the new Emperor.

The fireworks that followed turned the banks of the

Jamuna and the outskirts of Delhi into "a land where angels sang and fairies danced and where bliss bloomed in colours too numerous to define". To quote the court historian again, "the fort floated for a while on the waves of joy that swept the ancient city". These moments in the life of Aurangzeb marked the fulfilment of a dream, the realization of an ambition that brooked no opposition and feared no hurdle.

The Emperor descended the throne and bent his knees in prayer as the head priest of the Jama Masjid, Kari Abul Mansoor Ansari, began reading the *Khutba* from the pulpit of the royal mosque. He invoked "the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-pervasive Allah" to guide and inspire the new monarch, Abul Muzaffar Muhiuddin Muhammad Aurangzeb Bahadur Alamgir Padshah Ghazi, to follow steadfastly the path of Islam and to serve the brotherhood of Mussalmeen with dedication and without faltering from the road of righteousness. He also declared in a voice as clear as the bell that the new Emperor was the image of God on earth and that it was incumbent on all citizens of the realm to obey, honour and serve him as they would obey, honour and serve the Omnipotent Creator. When the Kari ended, Aurangzeb raised his hands in what seemed to be a soulful approach to Allah for grant of wisdom and courage to follow without faltering the course chalked out for rulers by the holy Prophet. All present joined in this stirring finale to a ceremonial rich in tradition and emotional upsurge.

After the Lord was officially apprised of the change in the occupancy of the Imperial throne, the courtiers came forward, strictly in the order of rank and seniority, to pay their homage to "their King, their master, the keeper of their conscience". The salutation took the form of a low bow with both hands raised to the forehead. The *Zamin Bos* which was in vogue till the middle of the reign of Shah Jahan was outlawed by Aurangzeb as un-Islamic. The *Taslim* and *Kornish* introduced by Jahangir were also considered *ultra vires* of the code of etiquette prescribed by Islam. Aurangzeb was content with a symbolic gesture of submission by his courtiers.

At the end of the Act Homage, the bearded Chamberlain Abdul Hamid Gilani announced that new coinage had been

struck "to commemorate the history-making event that we have had the good fortune to witness this fair morning". He informed that the new *rupiah* bore on one side the inscription "This coin has been stamped on earth, like the shining full moon, by King Aurangzeb, the conqueror of the world". The reverse of this coin bore the name of the city where it was minted, the year of reign and the Emperor's full titles.

The Chamberlain also announced that "in his great wisdom and with the guidance of God, the Emperor had ordered (1) the use of the lunar calendar in all official business, (2) abolition of some burdensome taxes, (3) discontinuation of the celebration of Nauroz, (4) appointment of Protector of Public Morals in all cities with a population of ten thousand and above".

This proclamation caused little surprise. In more ways than one Aurangzeb had already spelt out his priorities. Islam, as he understood it, was the Alpha and Omega of his code of public and private ethics. However, in forgetting that he was the ruler of a multi-religious state he did a signal disservice to himself and his liberal ancestors. His motives were high but restricted in their sweep and application. The good that resulted therefrom was transitory, the bad more lasting. Had the God consciousness Aurangzeb was endowed with been used for the welfare of all his subject, it is likely the story of the Mughals might have taken a different turn.

Nonetheless, credit must go to him for an honest attempt to provide a strong moral base to his reign. Just as Akbar's *Din-i-Illahi* was a glorious mistake, Aurangzeb's over-concern for one religion alone was an error rooted in noble thoughts. His greatness lies in that he did not live or rule for pleasures of the senses. His sights were pitched high on the attainment of spiritual upliftment. To understand him is to understand first the age in which he lived; it also requires an objective appreciation of the circumstances that conditioned his reactions to developments in the state as also to events that in his view tended to weaken Islam. One thing is clear: Aurangzeb was cast in a mould different from those of other kings and emperors of the age. His virtues, as his sins,

reflected a mighty battle that raged within him between the ideal and the real; a third combatant for supremacy, ambition, added a baffling dimension to the struggle. Aurangzeb can be interpreted best in parts, not as a whole. This is a measure of the contradictions inbuilt in his character.

The ceremony in the Diwan-i-Am lasted for two hours and forty-five minutes. The trumpets sounded again when the time came for him to repair to the harem and receive the greetings and congratulations of the senior ladies. Roshanara Begum received him at the gate of the *Zcnana* and led him, amidst song and prayer, to a hall where "fragrance, youth, feminine beauty, poise and elegance coalesced to create a harmony more enchanting than any produced by the harpists of the heaven". Aurangzeb was in his element. He cast aside protocol and engaged himself in lively conversation with all those who came forward "to felicitate him, sprinkle on him rose-water, and offer him the traditional *ilaichi* and *mistri* for luck and prosperity".

When the informal get-together was over, there entered from a side-door the sisters Najima and Azima in a dance formation of exquisite elegance. The jingling of bells around their anklets was a signal for quiet and readiness to partake of a feast of dancing by two celebrated, young artistes from the south. The only male in the assembly, Aurangzeb was charmed at what he called "the most pleasant surprise of my reign so far" and he did the uncommon act of walking up to the swirling sisters and talking to them for a while about nobody knew what. When Aurangzeb returned and took his seat on a raised platform near the eastern wall, Najima came leaping forward, did the obeisance with typically Deccanese decorum, and then slid back to take her stand in the middle of the hall. The younger sister Azima did one better. She bowed low in deep respect and then pranced forth to present to the monarch a red rose plucked from her tresses gathered in the shape of a lotus at the back of her shapely neck. Aurangzeb accepted the gift with a smile more eloquent than any words, and in appreciation of her gesture rewarded her with a diamond plucked from his waistcoat. For the next thirty minutes, the two performers kept the assemblage enthralled

with their artistry and their beauty. The nature of the reward given them is not known. What is recorded in history is that both Najima and Azima entered the royal seraglio by the end of 1660.

An hour and fifteen minutes spent in the harem by Aurangzeb were in the words of a poet, Mir Khalil, "an epoch of bliss Rumi, Khusrau and Tulsi yearned for". Before leaving, the Emperor announced a cash gratuity of rupees five hundred thousand for Roshanara Begum. His four daughters were given four, two, one and a half and one and a quarter hundred thousand rupees seniority-wise.

The concluding act of the coronation was staged in the hall of Private Audience which too had been adorned, as it were, "with stars plucked from the dome of space". Here the Emperor received the felicitations of his sons, other members of the royal family and fifty-one topmost representatives of the nobility. The four sons were presented three, two, two and one hundred thousand rupees in the order of seniority in age. Appropriate *khillats*, robes of honour and jagirs were given to noblemen whom Aurangzeb described as "the pillars on which rests the dignity and splendour of this empire".

The ceremony in the Diwan-i-Khas lasted for nearly three-quarters of an hour; it ended with a fanfare of trumpets from all four corners of the fort, an age-old mode of letting the world know that a new era had begun and that the Empire was safe in the custody of the new ruler. The rejoicings that followed in and outside the fort were so managed, thought Manucci, as to underline that heresy had given place to faith, injustice to justice, evil to righteousness and chaos to order. Mass prayers, mass show of charity and mass feeding of the poor, combined with explosions of dance and music at every cross-road in the city, tended to create the illusion of a new beginning, a new dawn and a new age of plenty. Long-term prisoners were released from jails, as pigeons from their cages, to underscore the promised change from subjection to the fullness of heart.

Aurangzeb was a stage director of unmatched genius. The task before him was immense. He had not only to make the best use of the present, but also to obliterate some parts of the

ugly past. It is apparent that some images haunted him : Shah Jahan under detention at Agra, Dara Shikoh fleeing for his life in the eerie desolation of Sind and Baluchistan, Shuja hastening to the jaws of death in the hills of Arakan and Murad, his partner in victory at Samugarh, languishing in the State prison at Gwalior—these and many other hideosities seemed to sit heavily on him. The dread of retribution often kept him from rest and sleep. Even Islam could not rescue him from these hobgoblins of the mind. The pageant of prayers and high-minded generosity, he thought, might help erase these awesome realities. His hope was vain and his ploy fortuitous. Till the end of his life Aurangzeb was doomed to wrestle with his fears, suspicions and distrusts. The Grand Coronation was in a way an escape, a retreat from himself. Indications are, however, not lacking that the long drawn-out festivities helped only to increase his dread of the future.

Towards the end of June came the news of the betrayal of Dara Shikoh by Malik Jeevan. Here was another occasion for jubilation, for an exercise in rubbing out the ugly with the resplendent. The period of festivities was accordingly extended up to 19 August, a concession to showmanship that showed clearly the fires that were burning within Aurangzeb.

The Peacock Throne, glory of the reign of Shah Jahan, thus came to be set with any pretensions and false hopes.

Chapter Nine

PERIOD OF REST AND STOCK-TAKING

War is the greatest plague that can afflict a people; it destroys religion, it destroys the state, it ruins families, it dwarfs the mind and impoverishes the body. This is exactly what happened to the Hindustan over which Aurangzeb was called to rule in 1658. The coronation festivities could set no broken bones and heal no wounds. The pride, pomp and circumstance of a fratricidal war could not but transform the paradise that Shah Jahan had tried to build into a near-perfect type of hell. Distrust animated every heart. Fear clouded understandings, unruly ambitions ran riot, making a mockery of the traditions of loyalty and respect for law.

Though outwardly he maintained a pose of uncompromising firmness, "the conqueror" himself saw an Aurangzeb in each of his four sons. The nobility was considered noble only in name; its movements and actions were watched and reported to the ruler by an army of secret and super-secret agents. Even the sanctum of the seraglio was scanned regularly for signs of disaffection and conspiracy. A police state, with its manifestations of spiritual decadence, had gradually come into existence. Aurangzeb seemed to stand guard on it. The famous Timurid sword Alamgir, which Shah Jahan presented to him following his successes in the Deccan, was the symbol of his authority. The title he chose for himself on ascending the throne reflected in many ways the obsessions of his mind. His broad aim was perhaps not to subdue the world but to destroy all opposition with the ruthlessness of the Amir. His trust in the sword turned out to be the boomerang that in the end wrecked the foundations of the Empire.

Dara Shikoh was executed on 30 August, 1659, eleven days after the coronation celebrations officially came to a close. This was the beginning of the Operation Elimination he had planned to mount. The defection of his eldest son, Muhammad Sultan, to the side of Shuja in the eastern sector, was a development that could not but cause him great concern. In November, he moved himself to Garh Mukteshwar with a fairly large army to meet any eventuality. The alarm was, however, not warranted by an alliance rooted in purblind opportunism. Sultan repented and surrendered himself to the Imperial generals in February, 1660. The next twelve years of his life were spent behind the stone walls of the State prison in Gwalior. Disloyalty was a sin unpardonable in the eyes of Aurangzeb. Parental compassion had no place in the scheme of the puritan Emperor's moral values.

Sultan's rehabilitation to Royal favour in December 1672 was followed by bestowal on him of high honours and gifts. Aurangzeb's "presents" to him included three fair wives in four years : first he was married to Dostdar Banu, daughter of Dara Shikoh; in 1675 entered his seraglio Bai Bhut Devi, daughter of the hill Raja of Kishtwar; in August 1676 a niece of Daultabadi Mahal became his third legally wedded wife. The following year on 3 December, Sultan died at the age of thirty-seven—an end that evoked from his ageing father the lament : "O' Lord, forgive him. The death of a son is a finality that cannot but lacerate the heart of a parent. He was a part of my body and soul."

Muhammad Shuja constituted little threat to the pursuing forces led by Mir Jumla. The latter drove him out of Hindustan in May, 1660. Presumably, he was killed by tribal roughnecks in Arakan. Shortly afterwards, Aurangzeb, feeling safer, returned to Delhi early in 1660.

Murad Baksh and Spehr Shikoh were shut up in the fort at Gwalior. They were no threat to the throne. Aurangzeb made sure they had no contact with the outside world. He was, however, a victim of his own fears. It was understandable that he felt unsafe for as long as the prince who proclaimed himself Emperor in 1657 was alive. He waited for the right time to close once and for all "the inglorious chapter of his

life". Murad was beheaded in 1661 on charges of murdering Ali Naqi at Ahmedabad in 1657. Thus ended the male progeny of Shah Jahan in direct line of succession. Spehr Shikoh, thought Aurangzeb, could be allowed to live. "He has no wild aspirations", he told Jahanara Begum when in later years he arranged the prince's marriage with one of his daughters.

Sulaiman Shikoh, eldest son of Dara Shikoh, was brought to Delhi in heavy chains in December, 1660. The Raja of Garhwal (who gave him asylum) abandoned him for fear of Aurangzeb's wrath. There is a story current to this day in Garhwal that Sulaiman, who married one of the Raja's daughters, had made plans to retire to "a distant, inaccessible place in the Himalayas" and offered to his father-in-law twenty-four chests of gold and precious stones in lieu of his help in making good his escape. The Imperial generals threatened, however, to raze his principality to the ground if the prince was not handed over to them before the set date. The Raja panicked. With tears rolling down his cheeks, he obeyed the command. His daughter, wearing a black cloak, bade her husband a tearful farewell. She and other members of the Raja's family followed the captive Sulaiman up to the border of the state, and then returned "wailing and beating their breasts in agony".

When informed of this story, Aurangzeb suggested that "this poor, lone lady of many virtues" be brought to Delhi and given a place of honour in the household of Nawab Bai. Sulaiman burst into tears and begged the Emperor to "spare this free bird of the hills the agony and humiliation of spending the rest of her life in a golden cage". Aurangzeb did not press further. Sulaiman spent two miserable years in a lonely corner of "the hell that is Gwalior fort" before he was executed in May 1662. The indictment against him, read out by Qazi Fazl-ul-Haq, ran :

This son of the apostate Dara Shikoh shared his father's indifference to the interests of Islam. That was not all. He abetted the crimes that paved the pretender's way to the portals of hell. He waged a war against justice and

against the precepts of the holy Prophet. Such a one has no right to continue to pollute the atmosphere with his foul breath. The penalty for his evil-doings is death by a single blow of the sword on his neck. He may be permitted, however, to say his prayers in public and seek forgiveness for his sins before this sentence is carried out.

All opposition to his reign, real or potential, having been demolished, Aurangzeb now diverted his attention to the complex public relations task of winning goodwill at home and abroad. Ambassadors came thick and fast to Delhi not only from the outer Muslim world but also from "countries across the seas and across the mountains in the north and the east". The lavish hospitality extended to these envoys was in proportion to the depth of wounds he had inflicted on his conscience in the course of transformation from a third-in-line prince to Emperor. Millions of rupees were spent in four years on their entertainment and on presentation of appropriate gifts to them and to the monarchs they came to represent.

The teams that "came to felicitate the Padshah Salamat from the kingdoms of Persia and Turkey were so impressed with the magnificence of the court that in their despatches they sang high praises not only of the Emperor and the nobility but also of the peace and affluence prevailing in the land of Hind". The exercise P.R. was undoubtedly a success in that within a short time men of letters and men of arts flocked in Delhi from all parts of the world. Mughal patronage was at a premium; it was reckoned an acquisition more valuable than rewards and honour elsewhere. This phase of the court of Aurangzeb did not, however, last long. The sky changed, as it were, when the Emperor felt that his place on the throne was secure.

Diplomacy is a means, not an end by itself. Once his purpose was served, Aurangzeb had no use for ambassadors, poets, artists, story-writers, musicians, dancers, acrobats and the like. Gradually he veered towards asceticism till a point was reached at which the court became as dreary and bleak as ashbuds in the frost of March in England. The change was dramatic; it impinged gradually on all walks of life in the

Kingdom. The creative mind languished as never before in the last one hundred and fifty years. The *Azan* was the only music in cities and sword-play the only art. Even the historians were ordered to "stop chronicling the ephemeral present and cease perpetuating the evil-doings of the mortal man".

The resultant atrophy of the intellect snowballed rapidly into the darkness of ignorance, scepticism, prejudices, fanatical religious dogma and superstition. The fairfields of research and literary production wore the look of deserted gardens without fences. Religion in a vacuum, by itself, is a flame that cannot but scald; it is only in association with the impurities of the senses that it inspires and elevates. Aurangzeb failed to see the relationship between good and evil. The result was disastrous. In time, the good itself became evil. The decline of the Empire was rooted in the stagnant purity of religion.

It may perhaps not be wrong that austerity feeds on itself. It is the man whose inside turns upside down when he spends a dirre that acquires the shameless lust for hoarding pounds and sovereigns. Aurangzeb who wore cotton clothes and fed himself on bowls of barely broth and half cooked pulses soon began to yearn for the treasures of gold and precious stones that lay in the vaults of the fort at Agra. Shah Jahan had hitherto refused to surrender them to his son. Peacock Throne was the only item he agreed to transfer to Delhi at the time of coronation. Persuasion having failed, Aurangzeb now threatened to apply force if "the rightful possessions of the Emperor" were not handed over to him voluntarily.

Shah Jahan dilly-dallied for nearly a year, and in November, 1662 gave in to his son's demand. The transfer took place in two thousand carts guarded all the way by thirtyfive thousand troops of the highest distinction. The sight of the sealed chests gladdened Aurangzeb's heart, and he ordered that inventories should be reprepared and checked with the existing ones before "the treasures of the five generations" were allotted their secret places in the fort.

The storage was supervised personally at every stage by Roshanara Begum. She countersigned every inventory, making

sure that "not a pearl, not a fragment of gold" was missing. It is said that Aurangzeb would himself go to the vaults at night and "derive much satisfaction by setting his eyes on the possessions that gave him glory, strength and limitless resource". Often he would open a chest and spend hours checking every item against the inventory. Once when two stones were found missing in a sword-belt belonging originally to the House of Lodis the Emperor summoned the officers who had signed the inventory, questioned them searchingly on the mechanics of inventory preparation, and demoted them to junior posts for their failure to detect and record the shortfall.

These Imperial treasures were carted back to Agra when the court moved to that city following the death of Shah Jahan in 1666. Three years earlier Aurangzeb commissioned four Indian and two Persian jewellers to evaluate the hoard. The Persian trader, known for his expertise in assessing the value of diamonds and rubies, observed: "Your Majesty, just as love cannot be reckoned in terms of quantity, similarly this fabulous collection defies description in terms of money. Every piece of jewellery here is priceless, every object of art a creation of unmatched genius. To determine their value will be like determining the value of a sea whose sands are pearls and water nectar. Their value lies in their beauty, their price in the eye of the beholder. I cannot make a more concrete assessment."

Similar views were expressed by the other five connoisseurs. Aurangzeb was inwardly pleased with the wordy enunciations of their helplessness, but outwardly he maintained what is known as the stiff upper lip to underscore his unconcern for material wealth. His parting comment was significant: "To me it is immaterial whether they are worth a *Padam* or a paisa. I value them as family heirlooms. Simplicity is my creed and Allah my refuge. They are at best the symbols of Mughal greatness. They are also the symbols of God's mercy. Woe to the man who tries to snatch them away from me." Aurangzeb had a flair for converting every event and development into *Quranic* values.

In the middle of 1661 there came to Delhi a *Qalandar*

from across the Hindukush. His home was in the northern region of Kabulistan, and he took pride in being the only scion alive of the family of holy men associated with the famous House to which belonged Afghania*, wife of Babar Padshah. His worldly goods comprised an earthen utensil for water, a long, blue robe that he wore during the day and a cotton sheet he slept under at night. The quiet of open spaces and harvested fields fascinated him. He spent most of his time sleep-walking, as it were, in search of peace and spiritual calm. His bodily needs were few. He ate whatever the people gave him. Often he went without food for days. Three or four gulps of water at a running stream and a handful of berries and other wild fruit gathered from under trees as he walked along were sufficient to sustain him in praises of God and His blessings. The shine on his swarthy cheeks reflected perhaps an inner tranquility that eluded most men. His big brown eyes looked at Nature to admire and to praise. The ugly was to him a reflection of ones own mind. The world around was very beautiful, very enchanting. This was the burden of a song he sang softly as he trudged along green meadows and at times dusty, trackless paths.

This man of God had met Aurangzeb many years ago in Kabul. He was then struck by the Prince's courage and faith, and had made bold to predict that "many years will not roll by before the third son of Shah Jahan becomes the first man of Hindustan". Aurangzeb remembered this prophesy. When he came to know that the self-same *Qalandar* was in town, he sent for him. What transpired between the two is not written by any contemporary Indian historian. It is, however, recorded in a Bhojpuri folksong that the wandering faqir did not hide his revulsion for bloodshed and said that "the law of retribution stands above Fate and pre-destination". Aurangzeb tried to explain his actions in the last four years, but he was not able to convince the man in the long, blue coat that "orchards

*Afghania was the popular name of Babar's Afghan wife, Bibi Mubarika. She was the daughter of Shah Mansur, chief of the Yazafzai tribe. It was she who carried Babar's body to Kabul in 1539. Her brother Malik Jamal, rose to power in the reigns of Humayun and Akbar.

can ever bloom in a garden watered by the blood of brothers and other relatives”.

Aurangzeb became pensive, came down the marble throne and, taking the man in his embrace, requested that he pray for his forgiveness. The *Qalandar* looked at the Emperor intently, and said “I will pray Shah-in-Shah, but I am not certain that the law of retribution can be rubbed out even by invocations to the Lord”. There was repentance in Aurangzeb’s eyes and “the Baba” lifted his earthen utensil from the ground and made ready to leave. They spoke no more, and parted in silence that could not but be disquieting to both.

Exactly six months after this meeting, on 12 May, 1662, Aurangzeb fell ill. With all his faith in God, as in himself, he could not help thinking that the hour of nemesis had come. As the illness grew in intensity and the court Hukma were unable to arrest it, the Emperor spoke many a time in clear voice to seek forgiveness from Allah for his sins and to laud His love for the humankind. It was clear that his conscience disturbed him more than the body aches. The physicians despaired of alleviating the excruciating pains in the lower abdomen region that kept him from sleep and rest. High fever added to his discomfiture. According to the court historian, the temperature for days remained constant at such great intensity as “scorched his skin, dried up his throat and tongue like cinders and virtually made ashes of the organs that sustain life”. Fear for his life swept through Delhi and, in true Mughal tradition, the Emperor’s sons prepared to contest the right of succession.

In desperation, on the seventh day, the royal *Jarrah* resorted to blood-letting as a means to “lower the heat of the burning body”. Excessive discharge of blood induced such weakness “as left the Emperor look like a pale shadow of himself and he was unable to either move his limbs or utter a word”. The ladies of the harem jam-packed the royal chamber in their “clothes of sorrow and affliction”. Their wailings and sorrow-stricken faces seemed to suggest that the worst had already come to pass. The tumult turned into a bedlam as the *Masih-uz-Zaman* left the chamber in a mood of extreme agony. At this stage, *Roshanara Begum* took charge and dragged out by the hair many a lamenting lady. Included among

them was Nawab Bai, mother of the Emperor's second son, Prince Muazzam (later Bahadur Shah I) who, felt Roshanara, was more concerned about her son coming to the throne than the Emperor's illness.

Meanwhile, Aurangzeb hung perilously between life and death. That he managed to survive is more a tribute to his will-to-live than to the skills of the physicians. The latter had stopped administering medicines when they felt that only a miracle could save his life. They watched his body movements from a corner of the room; it seemed they were reluctant at this critical stage to come between him and his God. A little after when the solitary lamp in the chamber was lighted and Aurangzeb was seen trying to turn on his right side, there came a flicker of hope on the faces of the watching attendants. They all remained silent, their eyes fixed on the divan in the centre.

Impelled by an upsurge of sisterly love, Roshanara stepped forth and helped the Emperor turn sides. Aurangzeb opened his eyes a little, gave a faint look of gratitude and simultaneously called three times for Allah in a voice that seemed to come right from the soul. The crisis had passed. Aurangzeb was on the way to recovery. The miracle had happened. The Baba's prayers had been answered. Retribution was deferred for the time.

The nature of Aurangzeb's illness has not been specified anywhere. Perhaps it was an infection of the intestines which afflicted many Mughal princes and princesses. High fever and a sensitive conscience complicated matters and made recovery a very slow process. The extra-simple foods he had chosen to subsist on hindered early return to full health. His penchant for work, despite much weakness and in spite of the physicians' advices to the contrary, made convalescence a lengthy affair. He insisted upon making the customary appearance at the *Jharoka* every alternate day; he also made it a point to say his prayers in public every Friday. Besides, bed-side interviews with high dignitaries and occasional visits to the Halls of Public and Private Audience taxed overmuch his depleted store of energy. It was, therefore, not surprising that the *Ghusl-i-Sehat* (bath of recovery) was not taken before 24 June—an event that was celebrated with much rejoicings in a rd outside

the palace. The grand entertainment held by Roshanara Begum was perhaps the last gala function of Aurangzeb's reign. Soon thereafter, a ban came into force on public performances by musicians and nautch-girls. This was one of Aurangzeb's ways of saying thanks to God.

A letter written by Aurangzeb from his sickbed to Prince Muazzam who at the time was just nineteen, reveals amply the agony that ravaged him when he came to know that his sons were positioning for a war to settle succession. After assuring him that "with the grace of God, my illness is now a story of the past", he wrote :

It is a painful realization that for the sake of material wealth and worldly glory you and your brothers were planning to plunge the Empire into a civil war. That I was not yet an inhabitant of the world beyond made your plan to resort to arms still more reprehensible. I would like to tell you that the war that brought me to the throne was a crusade against injustice and infidelity. The great Allah whispered in my ear that I should fight the forces of unrighteousness let loose by my brother Dara Shikoh. Never was it my intention to seize the throne after defeating the forces of heresy. His excessive love for Dara Shikoh led the Shah-in-Shah to condone apostasy and abet crimes against Islam. I was in the end left with no choice but to take power in my own hands and rescue from desecration the faith that is the beginning and the end of my life.

The point I am trying to make is that you will be free to do to me and your brothers what I did to my father and my brothers if you find that your brothers, in complicity with me, are out to destroy the roots of our religion, our traditions and our culture. The principles of Islam are the principles of justice and equity. In their defence, one should be prepared to wage not only one war, but a thousand wars if needed.

I shall consider it obligatory to abdicate if anyone can accuse me of having acted even once against the precepts of Islam. To me the throne is a sacred trust in the name of Allah. Neither love for children nor respect for parents

should take precedence over man's obligations to the Creator. Heed my warning, do not deviate again from the path of obedience. I shall not permit anybody to come between me and my Allah.

Aurangzeb's eldest son, Muhammad Sultan, was already lodged in the State prison at Gwalior. The warning given to Muazzam was stern. Though it bore the look of a sermon, there was no mistaking the purpose behind it. In fact, Aurangzeb underlined that disloyalty in any form would not be tolerated; one could oppose his will at one's own peril. The choice before his sons was obedience or obliteration.

Apprehensive all the time that his glory might fade, Aurangzeb embarked after recovery on establishing what might be called a police state. The key administrative posts in Delhi and in the provinces were given to "men of strong will, strong loyalty and strong faith in Islam". His general instructions were that "rebellions should be rooted out before they sprout and apostates eliminated before they have a chance to do mischief".

These stern measures yielded results in that the dissidents, in particular the sympathisers of Shah Jahan and Dara Shikoh, lay low for fear of reprisals; the Rajputs and other non-Muslim communities also decided not to raise their heads till the circumstances took a turn for the better. The big-stick tactics created the illusion of peace from one end of the Empire to the other. The tribal chiefs also offered to cooperate with the imperial agencies for what Aurangzeb called "the strengthening of the bastions of justice and righteousness". The mercenary soldiery, who often indulged in acts of loot and lawlessness, were given opportunities to enlist themselves in the imperial army as also in the forces maintained by high-ranking Mansabdars.

Credit must go to Aurangzeb for the realization that a general state of tranquillity was the only means by which a vast Empire could progress towards prosperity. War was no longer considered an instrument of progress; rather, an impression was sought to be created that conflict as such was an evil that needed to be fought with every resource available.

Aurangzeb's mood of pacifism had a deep purpose behind it. For as long as Shah Jahan was alive there remained a question-mark to the legality of his reign. The former Emperor, he reckoned, could become a rallying point for his opponents. It was therefore important, in his view, that peace prevailed and conflict outlawed for the time. Wars could be waged, if needed, when Shah Jahan was no more.

With all sensitive administrative posts in the hands of trusted men, Aurangzeb's thoughts turned towards a holiday in Kashmir. The physicians recommended a get-away from the heat of the plains for at least a year. His illness left the Emperor weak and apparently in need of rest away from the din and dust of Delhi. He had been to Kashmir before in the company of his father. The valley enchanted him; its trees, flowers, fruit and clear blue waters were to him manifestations of the greatness of Allah. "God made the beauties of nature to inspire and uplift man", he told Shaista Khan in one of his letters to him from Srinagar. The grandeur of hills invariably sparked within him a turmoil that often found expression in prayers, long sessions of meditation and act of generosity towards the fellow human beings.

Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan went to Kashmir in search of the pleasures of senses. Aurangzeb was different. He made plans to spend some time there so that "I can see God at play in the sands of time". He was convinced that he would recover completely from his illness only when he could merge with nature. Kashmir beckoned him. Orders were given towards the end of 1662 that preparations for an eighteen-month trip to Kashmir be taken in hand. The Emperor wished to spend two months *en route* in Lahore. Providing for a three-month travel time, the tour plan envisaged arrival in Srinagar by the end of April or in early May. As customary, scouts and teams of engineers, road-builders and sappers and miners were sent in advance to repair tracks, renovate bridges and layout a complete chart for royal travel. Halting stages were pin-pointed and steps taken to ensure adequate food supplies on the way.

The French physician Bernier, who accompanied the Emperor, has written at some length about the composition of

the "expedition", mode of travel by members of the royal family, camp activities and general organisational matters. Allowing for the usual exaggerations, the account gives a fairly good idea of the splendour in which "the puritan emperor" embarked on his first pleasure trip after ascending the throne. The size and magnificence of the paraphernalia which marked Akbar's travels to Kabul and Kashmir astounded the Christian missionaries. The statistics of Aurangzeb's entourage left the French traveller dumbfounded. "Such majesty, such decor, such attention to detail is a rarity in the affairs of kings and queens of Europe and other continents", he observed.

Aurangzeb was simple in personal living, not in matters that impinged on the dignity of the court. He knew instinctively, as did Akbar, that the way to the heart of the people of Hindustan lay through unceasing show of grandeur. He also knew that austerity in the personal life-style of a monarch aroused respect and admiration in a people with a long tradition of high spiritual values. He might have acquired for himself a place of honour in the gallery of Indian kings had he not made the mistake of believing that a religion—any religion—could be broken into pieces by hammers. He was an iconoclast, a monarch who deluded himself into the conviction that the way to heaven could not but be littered with fragments of idols removed from their pedestals in ancient temples. Aurangzeb forgot that, except in algebraical equations, the minuses did never become a plus. Greatness could be attained only by far-sighted positive affirmations, not by negative voids of reason.

The expedition that assembled in Agra for travel to Kashmir was a humming township of nearly four hundred people. Among its constituents, excluding a hundred thousand men of the armed forces, were traders, priests, school teachers, shepherds with their herds of goat and sheep, butchers, craftsmen, water-carriers, sweepers, wood-cutters, road-builders, masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, physicians, vegetable-sellers, grocers, money-lenders and whom have you in a city of half a million.

The size and composition of the camp astounded foreign travellers. The facility with which this multi-purpose juggler-

naut functioned evoked from Bernier passages after passages of praise and wonderment. "The whole thing is incredible", he concluded. One wonders what would have been his reaction had he seen Akbar's "Agra on wheels" when in 1585 he left Fatehpur Sikri on a specific mission to show the flag in the north-west. Aurangzeb's entourage did not include the battalions of female beauty Akbar invariably carried with him. The sedate Aurangzeb was content with a team of two wives, seven mistresses and a dozen concubines of more than one religion. His fanaticism ended where pleasure began. That his hours of pleasure were far less than those of his ancestors is a different story.

The fortyfive-year old Roshanara Begum, bright-eyed, divinely poised and most divinely fair, was the leading light of the royal entourage. Just as a happy bridesmaid makes a happy bride, a cheerful sister brought cheer to the heart of Aurangzeb. When, attired in a quiet-coloured Persian outfit, she rode out on the tallest elephant in the cavalcade, there was a sight to make old women envy the manner in which she carried her years. Riding a gold-and-silver palanquin in the middle of the procession, Aurangzeb was apparently enchanted by "the stately stance of my true and honourable sister" and he later told his physician, Sajjad Ali, that but for Roshanara he could not have pulled through his illness as quickly as he did. "She and her prayers saved me", he said.

Aurangzeb believed that illness came upon him for his sins. In his arithmetic the moral lapses for which God took him to task were not of commission but of omission. "Had I not taken the advice of my feeble-minded counsellors and razed to the ground the houses of heresy that lay within my reach to demolish, the great Allah would have spared me the torments of a long ailment", he wrote to his son Muhammad Sultan. He added : "Allah in His mercy may condone sins of lesser gravity but never, never shall He let go unpunished the abetment of infidelity. Heed my words. Neglect is a bigger crime than other offences."

The realization that Roshanara attended on him with devotion and relieved his sickness with tender love made Aurangzeb look upon her as an angel come to earth to rescue

him from his follies. Thus for him the very sky changed when she was happy. The assistance given by her in the civil war was, of course, valuable but more valuable in his eyes was the manner in which she played the Nightingale during the days of his physical distress. A beaming Roshanara astride the finest tusker in the realm was a spectacle that sent Aurangzeb praying that "her beauty be as indestructible as her goodness". He recalled this scene in letters written to his sons from Srinagar. For a time Roshanara came to represent the new monarch's conscience. Her ascendancy was, however, short-lived. Romance with a junior palace officer angered Aurangzeb so much that he had her poisoned to a slow death. In fact, her power waned when Jahanara Begum regained favour at the court following the death of Shah Jahan in 1666. Her passing away* on 11 September, 1671, went unlamented. No senior member of the royal family was present at her funeral. The Mughal court was a seesaw of astonishing ups and downs both for the nobility and members of the royal family.

Aurangzeb left Delhi on 8 December, 1662 and returned after a thirteen-month stay in Kashmir on 18 January, 1664. Hunting was the principal pastime both during the outward and home-coming journies. Roshanara's successes with the gun aroused the admiration of Bernier who said that there were few women in the world who could match "the eye and accuracy of this daughter of Mumtaz Mahal". Aurangzeb liked to engage himself in battles against the big-wigs of the jungle, and it was not unoften that he shot dead a tiger or a *nilgai* at the first attempt. Once the royal elephant was attacked all of a sudden by a man-eater from behind a cluster of trees to the left of the main party. Not only did the Emperor not panic; she shot the beast through the head as it gave the warning roar and was preparing to make the deadly leap. Aurangzeb, calm and fearless, dismounted from the elephant, walked up to the "fallen king" patted it on the head and said, "the odds were against you. Nevertheless, I salute your valour."

According to Manucci, Roshanara's body was "swollen out like a hogshead" as a result of poisoning. She was in a state of coma several days before the end came.

The beauty of Kashmir bewitched Aurangzeb. He thought there was a moral behind the abandon with which nature bloomed in the valley. "God is all, man nothing", he said when his eyes fell on the rows of stately *chinar* trees a few miles before entering the magnificent metropolis of Kashmir. In Srinagar and in the neighbouring places he walked about like a child, curious and wide-eyed, in search of what his soul yearned for—peace without end. Forgotten for the time were the stresses of the past five years. Aurangzeb was on a mission to discover new dimensions of the Creator and the creation. He prayed no longer for courage and the allied kingly virtues; instead, he beseeched Allah for understanding to enjoy and appreciate "the elegance of nature clothed in chastity". Here was for Aurangzeb a new vision of the glory and greatness of God. In a short letter to his son Muazzam, he wrote :

God is the substance of all that is beautiful. In this valley there is abundance of things that enchant the eye and fire the imagination. God is on display here everywhere—in orchards, in gardens of trees laden with fruit, in clear blue waters of the Sutlej, in wild flowers that bloom everywhere, in the simplicity of the men and women of this strikingly beautiful land. *Buzargwaram* Jahangir Padshah perhaps erred grievously when he found fault with the living habits of the Kashmiris. Their clothes may not at times be white and clean, but their souls are without a stain. Faith in Allah is their badge of cleanliness. I have talked to the rich as also to the poor of the valley. They are all rooted in God. The faith is their riches and poverty their asset. Good looks are the reflections of their good minds. Our ancestor Mirza Yadgar recognized their virtues. His memory is widely respected by the local Ulema. He ruled here for over a decade before succumbing to the dictates of Fate. How I wish our ancestors had regarded Kashmir not merely a hunting-ground for pleasure but a place for holding converse with the Creator.

With God's grace, I have shed completely the after-effects of an enervating illness. To be in Kashmir is to be under the benign care of the Big Benefactor.

This was a good letter, one that reflected correctly the mind and mood of the monarch. However, a mild shock was in store for him—a reminder that perfect bliss is an abstraction that does not exist. There came to his palace in Srinagar a middle-aged man, fair but dead of looks, who insisted on having a private audience with “Alamgir Padshah”. When the camp commandant refused permission, the man threatened to “lay down his life at the threshold of one known for piety and God-consciousness”. The request was then referred to Aurangzeb who not only granted it but instructed that no one should be present at his meeting with “the man who obviously wishes to pour his heart out to me”. There is no recorded version of what happened when the man was ushered into the king’s presence. The following narrative is constructed from stories told sometimes in the valley around woodfire in bleak winter months* :

The man was in tears. He wore infinitely haggard, distracted looks. Perhaps he was demented. Aurangzeb respected grief, specially that which showed in the eyes of the indigent. He received the visitor with a show of uncommon courtesy and asked him “what mountain has fallen that you have come to share your sorrow with the king of Hindustan ? I am all attention. Speak up. Tell me the truth. Allah may help me to help you. Have no fear. There is no one around. Your secret will be safe in my keeping.”

At this encouraging note, there came to the man’s face a light of hope. Walking up as if in a trance, he bent low in an attempt to kiss the royal feet. Aurangzeb dissuaded him from “this un-Islamic act” and invited him, in the manner of a father, to tell him “who has wronged you and in what way ?” The man stood there like a weather-beaten, disfigured statue

* There are different versions of the name of the man; one has it as Yusuf Abdullah and the other Pirzada Shah. In a story told at Anantnag, he was referred to as Shaikh Qadir.

and then, bracing himself up to “uncover his soul before the ruler”, he began thus :

Sire, I am the second of four brothers in a fairly affluent and respected family. My father is the head villager and my grandfather, a man of saintly character, was in his days a *Munshi* of this *Riyasat*. He was respected widely for his wisdom and sympathetic nature. No less than a thousand people came to attend his funeral five years ago. He was truly a good man. I would have gone to him had he been alive in this hour of crisis in my life. I come to you instead for advice and guidance. I am in search of neither money nor rank. A word of wisdom may heal my wounds. You are a man of God. Allah will whisper in your ear the way He wishes me to act. It is only good men who can advise correctly and with effect. The matter may look trivial to you, but for me there rests on it the very justification for life. I believe there is nobody around. Allah, of course, is present. Listen, my master.

Three years ago, I married a girl of my choice. She comes from the same village as I do. At eighteen, she was ravishing in looks. There was rejoicing when the two houses were united. God knows that I loved and admired her. Once I trudged seven miles in murky weather to secure a single rose with which to welcome her home. She was then a very beautiful girl. I was perhaps no match for her vivacity, her charm and her cunning.

She gave birth to a child who, I now know, was not mine. She confessed it when I chanced to see her treachery with my own eyes. Far from being ashamed of her disloyalty, she asked me to “do whatever you like to me, but do no harm to him”.

What should I do now, O' king ? I still love her, but this love, let me confess, is patched with hate. My first reaction was to kill the man involved. Family considerations dissuaded me from that mad resolve. Then I thought of running a hatchet through my wife. Fear unnerved me. Had she been penitent, I might have persuaded myself to live

with my sorrow. She thinks it was her right to do what she did. I may divorce her. What would then happen to the child who calls me *abba*? God has been unfair to me. You are the king. I come to you for counsel. Guide me, Alamgir, guide me. A man in your *sultanat* is very unhappy, very miserable. It is your duty to rescue him. You owe it to God to bring cheer to the lives of your subjects. Throw me not out unceremoniously. I am not mad. I am in search of an honest answer to a complex question. What do I do? Enlighten me. Else I will have the right to think that God is not your friend.

Today I am young and lusty. Tomorrow I will be old and passionless. Then the memory of her planned unfaithfulness will be unbearable. Would you believe, O' the world conqueror, that after going through the convulsions of passion in the company of her young lover, she would prepare the same bed with uncommon care for my amorous advances. I used to come home late. Farm work often kept me busy till after midnight. The arch-deceptor, my wife would feign ecstasy when making love to me. In fact, there was no place for me in her heart. She was a dissimulator, a pretender, a liar. The thought of her treachery drives me mad. Still I do not possess the courage to ask her to leave my house. I know Islam sanctions, *teclaq*, but somehow I cannot persuade myself to part finally with her and the child who believes that I am his father. Enlighten me, O' Shah-in-Shah, with words drawn from sacred books. My confusion is great and my pain greater. Beauty, I thought, was the other side of goodness. Events have proved me wrong. It seems all forms of evil spring from attractions of the human form. Woman is an intriguing mystery. With all her villainy, I still love my wife. To part with her will be to bid farewell to happiness, and to live with her will be to live for ever with sorrow. This is a dilemma that baffles me. I wait for your directive.

Aurangzeb listened to the young man's tale of woe with attention. Once or twice he fidgetted in his seat to underline his concern for human misery, but on the whole he remained

relaxed. Though slow to react, his advice was clear and pointed. "Your anguish is proportionate to your love for your wife. It would be good if you divorce her, but it will be better if you ignore her lapse. Ask her if she would like to marry the man of her illicit love. Her yes or no to this straightforward question should show you the way out of your dilemma. Old age is not without its passions. Have no worry on that account. Angels will honour you for a show of forbearance. Sufference is the badge of saints, pleasure of sinners. Go to your wife with love in your heart. She will tell you what to do. Evil patched with goodness becomes more virtuous than virtue itself. I have nothing more to say. Good luck. Grief is its own cure."

That a woman was unfaithful to a man did not surprise Aurangzeb; what anguished him was that the beauty of nature was not reflected in those who lived amidst it. This apparent duality shook his faith somewhat in the concept of oneness. However, he found little use for philosophy in the cool of Srinagar. *Tasbih* was enough for his requirements.

A remark said to have been made by him a couple of days after his meeting with "the distracted lover" reveals a significant aspect of Aurangzeb's faith and personality. "Love and sorrow are as much parts of man as limbs and bones. They are inseparable. In that knowledge there lies hidden a ladder to happiness", he told Roshanara Begum when she asked her brother if man was made to mourn.

Aurangzeb possessed the mind of the philosopher and the soul of one obsessed with religion. Here was a conflict that in the end left him without a mind and without a proper understanding of relationship between religion and kingship. He was an enigma both to himself and the world around him.

It was perhaps in Kashmir that Roshanara became emotionally involved with a *one-hazari* officer of the royal household. A short poem she wrote in Srinagar contained a couplet saying "except that when he is with me the cuckoo has no music"—an admission that convinced the ever-suspecting Aurangzeb that his sister had gone off the rails of court morality, and that she was no longer worthy of the honours he

had bestowed on her. Kashmir thus became the grave of Roshanara's ascendancy—a fall from grace implicit in Aurangzeb's terse observation that "the heart is its own avenger".

The return journey to Delhi was for the princess a slow, cheerless march to the disgrace that awaited her. The comeback to favour of Jahanara Begum after the death of Shah Jahan in 1666 completed the story of her downfall. Her death on 11 September 1671 at the age of fifty-six was in all probability the result of slow-action poison administered to her at the orders of the Emperor. In the code of Islamic conduct the penalty for profligacy was death. Aurangzeb was either a friend or a foe. The middle relationship was foreign to his nature.

The imperial entourage returned to Delhi on 18 January 1664. The 490-day absence from the capital was for Aurangzeb a period of rest and stock-taking. A war-torn past could not but presage a rough future. All forces of opposition had, however, for the time been silenced. Complacency being not one of Aurangzeb's failings, he prepared himself to meet force with force if the need arose. He kept his eyes wide open, maintaining a close watch on Shah Jahan and his sympathisers on the one hand and Hindu revivalists on the other. He was ready to quench every fire without letting it grow into a blaze. His army was thus kept on its toe and the Mansabdars on full alert to take the field at short notice. The past frightened him. There was reason enough for him to distrust even Fate. He who believes in Destiny is the more likely to be scared of it. Aurangzeb at this stage was a curious mixture of resolution, fear, suspicion, distrust, faith, piety and belief in the Divine will. Every noble crown on earth is, and will for ever be, a crown of thorns.

Chapter Ten

HALF SUCCESS, HALF FAILURE

Sahibji was a wife with a strawberry breath, cherry lips, apricot cheeks and a soft velvet head full of infinite intuitive wisdom. Her husband was Amir Khan, the Mughal Viceroy in Kabulistan for twenty years (1678-1698)—the longest spell of Viceroyalty enjoyed by any nobleman in the three hundred years of Mughal rule in Hindustan. He was the son of the supremely brave Khalilullah Khan, and she a daughter of the Persian prodigy Ali Mardan Khan. The two together worked wonders in Kabul. They not only established comparative tranquillity in the province; they also won over to their side the local chieftains whose creed for centuries had been depredation and religion hostility to government.

Using shrewd diplomacy and money-power, they tamed the Afghans into swearing unswerving loyalty to the Emperor. Forgotten for the time were the wars of the yesteryear in which thousands lost their lives on either side. Aurangzeb had reason to be pleased with Amir Khan's performance. The three stunning reverses suffered by the Mughal armies since his rise to the throne in 1658 were a clear evidence that the Afghan tribesmen could not be subdued by force. The terrain and traditions of guerilla warfare were on their side. They could be won over with tact and understanding but never conquered by arms. Credit goes to Amir Khan and his prudent wife for seeing this reality and making their thoughts known to the Emperor. In a communication addressed to Jahanara Begum, Sahibji wrote :

Mohtrima Begum Sahiba, it is our earnest request that the Emperor visits Kabul to see for himself the transformation

that has come about in this once turbulent province. Robberies, demonstrations of violence and killings for loot are now a thing of the past. The Afghans, Persians and Hindus live in this city like a family. We are often invited by local chiefs for participation in their joys and sorrows. It is not unoften that we entertain them in the fort. The exchange of presents is a practice that has helped promote mutual understandings. Common *madrarssas* have been established in mosques in the city and its neighbourhood. Not long ago an Afghan child was seldom seen in *masjids* frequented by the Mughals and Indians. This show of separatism is now on the way out. A most heartening development is that the Afghan nobility no longer hesitate to swear allegiance to His Majesty. Rather, they take pride in acknowledging him as their overlord.

Most tribal chiefs have one trait in common: they all like flattery and presents of gold and silver. Like children they gloat over the gifts that we give them from time to time. They are a simple people rooted in tribal honour and tradition. To be called Khan Sahib is considered by them an honour high and proper. They respond positively to any show of courtesy. Equally strong are their responses to discourtesy and show of big-brother patronage. They are only grown-up children—likeable, unsuspecting and loyal.

My husband has already informed the Emperor of the changes that are taking place in the minds of men in this region. It is our belief that, Insha Allah, we shall not be called upon to wage expensive wars in Kabulistan again. I am reminded of an Akbari maxim: "If a people can be subjugated by love, why resort to a show of arms?" It is our conviction that Afghanistan will for ever remain a loyal domain of the Empire.

This was a good letter, very perceptive and very constructive in its approach. Sahibji's summing up of the Afghan character was an evidence of the depth of her own insight. She saw clearly what first the British and then the Russian failed to discern. A thousand years of freedom and religious euphoria have bred in them an infinite desire to

remain the masters of their own destiny. Material adversity has strengthened them in their belief in Fate, their faith in the will of Allah has manifested itself in a robust unconcern for life.

The Turks of Indian clans called Pathans combine in themselves the basic characteristics of the two races. In addition, the hills, the snows and the resultant scarcities of food and other essentials of life have generated in them qualities of camaraderie that defy assessment in terms of the present-day norms of social behaviour. Bounded as they are on three sides by the rivers Sind, Kabul and Swat and on the fourth by the lower Kashmir hills, they could not but feel that they were indestructible. All those forces that aimed, however slightly, at restricting their movements became their enemies. The gun in time became an integral part of their anatomy, and brigandage their profession. They lived intensely in the present. The past was past, beyond recall, and the future was in the hands of God. This broad perspective of life could not help making the Pathans what they are—a proud people determined to maintain their identity and their independence.

Sahibji hit the nail right on the head when she wrote that the Afghans could not be subjugated by force. To try to dominate them was to go in search for something which was not there. Her thoughts were conveyed by Jahanara Begum to the Emperor. Aurangzeb remarked: "Intuitive wisdom of a prudent woman is a force that can subdue any fort." Sahibji was given a jagir worth half a million rupees a year. This award was unique in that it was the first time that a woman other than a member of the royal family was given a jagir in her own right. Some foreign travellers hint at Aurangzeb's emotional involvement with "the married daughter of a Persian nobleman", but there is no evidence available to substantiate this suggestion. In fact, Aurangzeb is known to have met Sahibji only once, and that was when Amir Khan came to Delhi in 1675 to make a report on his overtures to Yusufzais for stoppage of armed clashes. Aurangzeb was

then fifty-seven and Sahibji a little over fifty.

In the beginning of the reign of Aurangzeb, the Afghan daredevil, Bhaku, created a stir by declaring Muhammad Shah—a scion of the ancient kings—as the ruler of “the land of our forefathers”. The blood-letting in the war of succession, he calculated, had left Hindustan weak and weary. The time was opportune, he thought, to throw the Mughals out of Afghanistan and to revive the ancient glory of the kingdom. Mulla Chakak, an orator of uncommon brilliance, gave his support to Bhaku, and the two together generated such mass hysteria against the Chughtais and the Timurids as led Aurangzeb to send large reinforcements for Mughal posts beyond the Sind.

At the touch of nationalism everybody turns a poet. The Pathans, young and old, were so inspired by Mulla Chakak’s eloquence as to fill the sky with songs of patriotism and songs in praise of the ancient kings who preferred death to slavery. Thousands rallied under the banner of Muhammad Shah, and they all swore on the *Quran* not to rest content till the Mughals were ousted from their territories. They attacked and captured the imperial posts in Attock, ransacked villages, looted Mughal properties and made it clear that their aroused spirits would not be satisfied with anything less than total victory.

Nationalism blinds all men alike, both the reasonable and the foolish. In their uncontrolled frenzy, the Afghans could not but make many blunders which in the end led to their defeat at the hands of the better equipped Mughal and Rajput contingents. The imperial war machinery, once it was in gear, could be ruthless in mowing down all opposition. Over two thousand Yusufzais lay dead on the battlefield as the Rajput cavalry rushed out from Peshawar to engage them near Attock. In keeping with the Mughal tradition, a pyramid of the heads of slain Afghans was erected at the site of the engagement. This heinous act of vengeance stoked the fires of revolt. Though defeated, the three tribal clans—Yusufzais, Akhizais and Malizais—retreated to the hills and kept up resistance to the Mughal arms from their hideouts at advantageous positions.

The first decade of Aurangzeb's reign ended in a military stalemate in the north-west. A prolonged smouldering conflict aroused Aurangzeb to more positive action. When the dust of the civil war had finally settled down, he chose the Paymaster General Muhammad Amin Khan, one of the seniormost Umra of the Empire, for the post of supreme commander of a large army raised to deal once and for all with the festering problem of the north-west.

An old warrior rusts not at 63. Muhammad Amin was full of new ideas how best to suppress the tribal insurrection. His plan of combat hinged on novel tactics to draw the ever-elusive enemy from the zigs and zags of hills to open spaces and then to demolish them with the help of better arms and superior numbers. On paper the plan looked promising; it combined caution with controlled aggression. Aurangzeb went through it carefully, phase by phase, and approved it after consultations with other generals. The care with which he studied it indicated in no small way the importance he attached to the campaign.

Peace in the north-west was considered an essential condition for the realization of his dreams. For the conquest of Deccan, he needed the Afghans more than any other racial group for his armies. His instructions to Amin Khan, therefore, were to tame the tribes, not to humiliate or kill them. "They are a stout, brave people", he said and stressed the need of making peace with them without capitulating any ground.

The Khan left Delhi in June 1667. The force placed under his charge numbered nearly ten thousand—a size considered big enough to wage a successful war against the comparatively ill-equipped guerilla tribesmen. The forces already stationed at Peshawar, Jalalabad and Attock were also placed under the Khan's overall command.

Amin Khan captured Swat, a stronghold of the Yusufzais, without meeting much opposition. The tribal forces abandoned their posts at the sight of the imperial army and took shelter in the inaccessibility of remote hills.

Then there ensued another period of abortive assaults and skirmishes. Despite the lures and baits thrown by Amin Khan, the wily Yusufzais did not come out from their hiding places

to risk a battle in the open. Offers of "everlasting friendship" made by the Khan also drew blanks. In one of his secret communications to Bhaku, Amin Khan wrote :

The Mughals are your friends, not enemies. We respect your desire for independence. Together we can convert this beautiful land into a region of heaven. Let us forget the past and work for a new future. If your friendship for the Mughals becomes as strong as is the Mughal friendship for you, what knife can cut our friendship in two? The Emperor is ready to receive you at the court with honour. War is a hazardous affair at the end of which lies ruin, poverty and degeneration. I shall wait for your response to this offer of peace before recommending to the Emperor a further line of action.

Bhaku was too shrewd a warrior to fall into Amin Khan's trap. He did not send a reply to the latter's overture for stoppage of hostilities. He merely told the messenger verbally : "Tell your master that in war there is either defeat or victory, never a patched-up truce. We are prepared to fight on till eternity. God willing, we shall win."

This was a rebuff the imperial camp found hard to swallow. Amin Khan stepped up forays into the hills, but to no avail. The loss of life on the Mughal side rose precipitately. One act of recklessness led to another till a point was reached where it became obvious that victory was impossible unless massive reinforcements were received "Even a God at war with these phantoms could not be sure of success", wrote Amin Khan to the Emperor and suggested that new and bigger armies be raised for reduction of the hidden Yusufzai citadels.

Aurangzeb was not surprised to receive this note of despair. For days he pondered over the pros and cons of the request, but he was not able to make up his mind till the news came of a bigger and more formidable danger. The Afridis, known for their hearts of oak and limbs of steel had gone on the rampage under their leader Akmal Khan. The latter, a full-bearded, broad-chested soldier of fortune, had established himself as a friend of the Afridis, enemy of the Mughals and a

champion of liberty. For many years he was kept in check by bribery and promises of help against rival tribes. The Mughal failure against the Yusufzais encouraged him to hit while the imperial prestige was at its lowest. His men descended from the hills like swarms of locusts, closed the vital Khyber Pass, and engaged themselves in acts of plunder that made earlier plunderings by tribesmen look like "garden walks by the side of a placid river".

The reports of these depredations shook Aurangzeb out of his near complacency; he quickly designated Amin Khan as the Viceroy of Afghanistan and instructed him to mobilise every available resource to put down the insurrection. At the same time he sent seven thousand crack Rajput and Mughal troops to strengthen the defences of the province.

The speed with which the Afridis moved left Amin Khan standing. He was a good soldier in fair weather but when it came to marshalling his troops through a tempest, Amin Khan's nerves wilted and, unlike his father Mir Jumla, he failed either to inspire his men to heroic action or to lead them to safety according to a plan. He was haughty, overbearing and self-willed. At the height of the crisis he raved like a madman, giving conflicting orders to officers under his command. The result was a catastrophe greater than that experienced by the army of Raja Birbal in February 1586. Ten thousand men, two thousand horses, mules and other beasts of burden lay dead on a narrow battlefield within hours of the firing of the first gunshot. Confusion rose high as the never-ending waves of Afridis overwhelmed the bewildered imperialists. They let loose an avalanche of boulders that came hurtling down the hills like roaring waters. Amin Khan managed somehow to flee to Peshawar. His mother, wife and daughter were made captives. Among the slain was his thirty-year old son Mir Abdullah.

The disaster was gruesome in every respect. Hardly a few hundred men escaped unscathed. The devastating fury of the shouting tribesmen swept away all resistance. Their battle-cry was "a *jihad* for liberty, honour and self-respect" and their promise "a riddance from the foreign yoke around our necks". They faught like drunken devils, and they halted the massacre

only when no enemy was left to be killed. The Afridis built no pyramid of heads; they left them where they fell for vultures to feast upon. The stink that enveloped the hills for days was, in the words of Amanullah Khan, "a nauseating mixture of death, rotting flesh and putrid blood that made even jackals sick and scamper away in disgust".

This rout cast out fear from the heart of Aurangzeb. Laying diplomacy aside, he made up his mind to pay back the Afghans in their own coins. Large sums of money were set apart to wage "a war for a hundred years if needed". Prince Muhammad Akbar was given supreme command of the campaign. First Mahabat Khan and the Governor of Lahore, Fateh Khan, were entrusted with the task of "punishing the Afghans for their crimes against the forces of Islam" and when they failed to bring the enemy to its knees, the two most experienced generals of the Empire, Shujat Khan and Raja Jaswant Singh, were commanded to proceed to Kabul and take charge of military operations in that province.

The smouldering fires of a seven-year old conflict turned into a roaring blaze as the two, riding high on their honour and prestige, made daring thrusts into tribal hideouts with the declared intention to demolish all resistance to the Mughal arms. At one stage, Jaswant Singh, acting on information by a group of *qalandars* in the imperial pay, advised a degree of circumspection in venturing into a narrow pathway leading to what was known as the Azad Valley, but Shujat Khan considered it a counsel of cowardice and, in a bid to take the enemy stronghold by surprise, rushed in with all his men, all his cavalry and all his light artillery. Hardly had this well-equipped force of nearly seven thousand men marched a few miles into the "death-trap", the Afghans leapt into the field from three sides and obliterated a Mughal force bewildered by the suddenness of the attack. Weather conditions added to the Chughtai woes. A severe snow-storm was a disadvantage the imperialists found difficult to contend with. Nevertheless, they put up a heroic resistance till "the dusk descended and the blood froze in their veins".

The invaders perished to a man—a catastrophe that led the famed Pashto poet Khushal Khan to declare that "he who goes

to war against the soldiers of liberty is void of all reason". This calamity came to pass in the sixteenth year (1674) of Aurangzeb's reign—a coincidence that reminded him of a prophesy made by a court astrologer in the days of his second Viceroyalty in Deccan that the multiples of the number eight went ill together with the stars that governed his destiny. Seldom again did Aurangzeb take a vital decision or stage a battle that ran against this prophesy. Even the hours of the day which infringed that astrological warning were not utilised for initiation of acts of any consequence. Aurangzeb was not by nature a superstitious man, but he took care "not to offend the stars and planets, the heavenly bodies that manifest an order rooted in the perfection of Providence". He preferred to remain on the right side of nature. His superstition was not a morbidity but an acknowledgement of the greatness of God.

The fifth and last child of Aurangzeb and Dilraz Banu Begum, Muhammad Akbar was seventeen when he was given this first military assignment. Aurangzeb considered him a genius, a prince that nature threw in his lap at a critical period of his life. Dilraz Begum died at Burhanpur in 1657, a month after he was born—an unlucky circumstance that endeared the bonny infant not only to his father but to every inmate of the harem. His eldest sister, Zaib-un-Nissa, took him under her wings and played the "mother" with a touching show of love till he was married at the age of fifteen to a grand-daughter of Dara Shikoh.

In the Mughal history, the favourite royal child invariably turned out to be a rebel, a dissenter whose ambitions were in proportion to the affection given him in childhood. Muhammad Akbar was no exception to this rule. In 1679, following military operations in Rajputana, he questioned the authority of his father, declared himself Emperor, and made ready to give battle to the loyalists. The outcome of his act of disobedience was a foregone conclusion. Being no match for Aurangzeb in speed and skill, he fled for shelter to Marhatta court in the Deccan and therefrom to Persia. The Shah gave him asylum but no material support for waging a war against Aurangzeb. Dissiprited, he donned the green clothes and spent

the rest of his life at Mashed in bewildering seclusion. He died in 1704—an event that Aurangzeb described as “the passing away of a son infinitely disloyal and ungrateful who did his worst to wreck the peace of Hindustan”.

To resume our story : Muhammad Akbar was ill-suited even for nominal headship of a military campaign in the testing terrain of the north-west. Not only did he take no part in the fighting that went on intermittently for nearly a year, he returned to Hassinabdal against the advice of his guardian Asad Khan, Asghar Khan and Raja Jaswant Singh, who had together scored some spectacular victories to the west of Peshawar, were anguished at this development and they urged the Emperor to send reinforcements “to enable us to complete successfully the task Your Majesty assigned to us”.

Despite the return of Muhammad Akbar, the Emperor was not prepared to call it a day and order his generals to relinquish their hard won positions. The request of Asghar Khan was granted. A force of several thousand Mughal and Rajput troops was sent under the command of Mukarram Khan. Also he ordered Fidai Khan to move out westward from Peshawar and join forces with imperial troops already in Kabul.

The north-west is a land of surprises. Military prowess counts there for less than reckless daring. The unpredictable Pathans first waylaid Fidai Khan's army between Peshawar and Kabul and three months later in September 1675 demolished three-fourths of the force under Mukarram Khan. But for a supremely daring rescue act by Fidai Khan himself, the destruction of the Mughal Army would have been total. In recognition of his dauntless courage against heavy odds, Aurangzeb gave Fidai Khan the title Azam Khan Koka.

Towards the end of 1675 the situation stabilised somewhat. The Mughal generals succeeded in plugging the known exit routes for guerilla warriors, and the Emperor considered it time to return to Delhi. The campaign, like previous military operations in the region, was half success, half failure. Though some of their positions were taken, the Pathans remained unconquered. They continued to disturb peace, and live by loot. The terrain was their strongest ally. Aurangzeb realized they were invincible and did the shrewd act of being

content with defending what the Mughals had over the years come to possess. Aggression was a boomerang that had hit the Mughal armies repeatedly in the last ten years. The losses suffered by Aurangzeb were enormously high. He took a somewhat self-compromising decision not to chase his losses and not to spread ruin to assuage his hurt ego. Enough was enough, he calculated and, making a virtue of necessity, declared his resolve to live at peace with his co-religionists of the north-west. "Islam is more dear to me than all the treasures of the world", he said in a *khutba* that was read out in his name from the pulpits of the principal mosques in Kabul.

It was in pursuit of this new-found policy of peace that Amir Khan, son of Khalilullah Khan, was appointed Viceroy of Afghanistan in 1677. Thus began the two decades of what has come to be known as the Amir Khan era in the history of the Mughal-Afghan relationship.

Mention needs to be made of the appearance of Prince Muhammad Muazzam on the Afghan stage for a short spell in 1676-77. This second son of Aurangzeb, who ascended the throne in 1707 in the name of Bahadur Shah I, was a pitiable mixture of cowardice, inefficiency and lust for pleasure. It was not surprising, therefore, that Aurangzeb soon realized his error of judgment in entrusting Muazzam with a task that was apparently beyond his organizational potential. He had failed dismally in the Deccan to contain Shivaji and his Marhatta followers. Not only that, he was suspected of harbouring thoughts of revolt in complicity with the Sultanes. His mother Nawab Bai travelled to Burhanpur to bring him to the path of obedience. Her task did not turn out to be difficult as Muazzam was not cast in the mould of strong-willed adventurers. He was at best a young man whose ambition for a short period of time got the better of his discretion; at worst he was a stupid prince prone to revel in the company of self-seeking flatterers.

A stern warning sent to him by Aurangzeb left him "grovelling in the dust of penitence" and he conveyed to his father in most submissive words the assurances of his loyalty "for as long as the sun continues to rise in the east and set in the west". Nawab Bai herself brought to the court her son's

written denial of "reports spread by disgruntled noblemen" and she succeeded in convincing the Emperor of the prince's innocence. Aurangzeb took no further notice of the complaints, but he was too shrewd an administrator to let Muazzam stay in the Deccan any longer. The prince was recalled to the court in June 1673—a move partly perhaps to offset the comeback to favour of his eldest son, Muhammad Sultan. The latter, however, died in 1676 at the age of thirty-seven, thus leaving Muazzam gloating in the thought that sooner or later he would ascend the Peacock Throne by the traditions of Mughal inheritance.

Three years later, Aurangzeb, forgetting the past and ignoring the known weaknesses of his son, gave Muazzam the prestigious title Shah Alam, thus confirming the general belief that he was to be the next Emperor. Muazzam's favourite and senior wife, Nur-un-Nissa, celebrated the occasion with a lavish feast for the capitals one hundred thousand poor which cost her more than half as many rupees. Fifteen kitchens were set up to cover the city in a way that no one had to walk more than half a mile to be benefited by her munificence. She visited every camp during the day to ensure that overbearing officials did not in any way upset the arrangements. Nur-un-Nissa was a generous lady, as full of compassion as she was of gratefulness to God for His mercies. She was beautiful to a fault. Famed artists despaired of catching "the divinely strange face" that gave her looks an indefinable character. Whereas Shah Alam loved her because of her looks and grace of mind, she loved him for his defects. His blemishes were reasons enough for her to protect him with all that she possessed. She stood by him steadfastly when he came under a passing cloud in 1670. Her loyalty charmed him. Though a seeker after pleasure, Shah Alam's admiration for Nur transcended the adoration that passion inspires. They supplemented each other. The resultant whole was a rarity in the Mughal concept of matrimony.

Soon after elevation to the title of Shah Alam, Muazzam was sent to Afghanistan. His mission was not to conquer, but to restore the lost Mughal prestige by deft diplomacy. This was a challenging assignment beyond the skills Muazzam was

endowed with. Nur-un-Nissa did whatever she could behind the scenes to assuage Afghan hostility, but the task called for a big drive in the open if the Afghan chiefs were to be persuaded to acknowledge Mughal sizerainty. Muazzam was out of his element in the extreme cold, as also in the extreme unfriendliness, of Afghanistan. He requested for recall to the court. Aurangzeb lost no time to oblige. Muazzam's 417-day stay in Kabul was as unproductive as it was eventless. Aurangzeb's choice for the next Viceroy of Afghanistan fell on Amir Khan.

Muazzam accompanied Aurangzeb to the Deccan in 1683. Ill luck gathered thick over his head at Burhanpur. The disastrous Konkan expedition undid him. Aurangzeb lost faith in his leadership. The suspicion of complicity with the enemy led to his arrest in 1687. This was not all; the secret agents accused Nur-un-Nissa of secret liaison with an enemy agent. A team of eunuchs dragged her by the hair from the harem. She was lodged in a prison many miles from Aurangabad. Shah Alam knew little of the insults meted out to her till he was released in 1695. An ailing Aurangzeb needed him. Considerations of succession overrode the acts of treason he was charged with. Nur-un-Nissa was also rehabilitated. Their return to power was a surprise both to their friends and foes. The history of the Mughals is a history of staggering ups and downs.

For the remaining part of his reign, Aurangzeb was content to hold what he possessed in the north-west. The Deccan, where he spent the best part of the second half of his reign, turned out to be the tomb of his hopes and aspirations. He failed to contain the rise of Marhatta power. The Afghans, led by the irrepressible Khushal Khan*, mocked at him from across the river Indus. Afghanistan remained a part of the Empire, but it did not belong to the Mughals. The rift was unbridgable.

*The bitterest enemy of Aurangzeb, Khushal Khan, chieftain of the Kathak tribe, was a prisoner in Delhi from 1660-1666. He joined the Imperial army for action against the Yusufzais. Later, he made a common cause with Afridis against the Mughals

Chapter Eleven

BLIND SPOTS

A king in spiritual distress is like a flower in the red-hot Indian summer, a phenomenon that impresses one because of its rarity. Aurangzeb after the war of succession was a manifestation of nature that intrigued somewhat both the eye and the heart. The ravages of the war produced in his mind doubts about the purpose of life and kingship. This surge of scepticism aroused in him new ideas, new urges and new visions about the future. He had fought and won in the name of Islam, and it was in the name of the self-same idealism that he yearned to alleviate the infinite misery and economic ruin that he had unwittingly caused. The *Quran* obsessed him. Not only did he know the sacred book by heart; he had already made a copy of it in his own luxuriant handwriting and sent it as a gift to the Shaikh of the holy shrine in Mecca. It did not take him long to find in the words of the Prophet answers to the queries that agitated his mind.

A penny-weight of relief to the poor, it dawned upon him in the beginning of 1660, was worth many times more than a pound of power. He consulted the Ulema as to the best and the most speedy way to lessen distress and restore normality in the affairs of state. Religious scholars and experienced administrators were unanimous that the key lay in the lowering of the prices of foodgrains and other essential commodities. How? It took Aurangzeb and the revenue officials nearly three months to work out the modalities of a plan to reduce the burden of taxation on traders, and thus to facilitate a downward revision of the price structure.

The last argument that convinced the Emperor of the correctness of the planned reduction was his chance meeting with a group of aged peasant women near the tomb of

Humayun Padshah in Delhi. They all cried aloud for help, and said that never in the last twenty-five years had they found it more difficult to save themselves from the jaws of hunger. Aurangzeb questioned them searchingly on their sources of income and their daily expenditure. One yellow-cheeked lady with snow-white hair burst into a torrent of tears when she confessed to having sold her only child for half a *maund* of wheat. "Who was the buyer?" asked Aurangzeb. The lady was not able to give a precise answer. Thereupon, the Emperor ordered the *kotwal*-attendance to "trace the boy, restore him to his mother, and produce the slave-trader in court before the rise of the next full moon".

What happened to the boy and the trader is not known. What is recorded in history is that before the next full moon was seen in eight days, all inland travel duties, ten per cent of the value of merchandise, at every ford, ferry, hill pass or provincial boundary were abolished by a royal *firman*. The Governors of all *Subas* were ordered to assure that the abolition was implemented faithfully at all points. The official historian, Khafi Khan, mentions eighty items in respect of which the said levy was done away with. The total loss to the Treasury amounted to rupees ten million a year, or roughly one-twenty-fifth of the gross revenue of the state. This was a heavy cut, but Aurangzeb at the time was not in a mood to calculate in terms of money. The wreckage of the war sat relentlessly on his conscience, and he was resolved to live by the Islamic injunction of carrying succour to "the door of those unfortunate ones who do not possess the wherewithal to buy their daily bread".

Aurangzeb made no distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim traders in the enforcement of this decree. Poverty was indivisible, he told a group of Ulema, and added that the relief he had ordered admitted of no discrimination on the basis of religion. Some of the divines were not inclined to accept the validity of this enunciation, but there was little they could do to bring the Emperor around to their interpretations of Islamic justice. The war and its consequences were the fixities that spawned in Aurangzeb ideas that seemed to run counter to the known facets of his character. Human personality is an

enigma. The character of Aurangzeb is an enigma wrapped in the mysteries of ego, ambition, spiritual cravings and disenchantment with material lusts. His personality defies a cogent analysis.

Inland transit duties in the seventeenth century enjoyed the sanction of tradition. Firuz Tughlak in the fourteenth and Akbar Padshah in the sixteenth centuries made the bold experiment of first abolishing them altogether and later reducing their percentage, but these economic innovations came virtually to naught because of official apathy and material lusts of the Jagirdars. The revised regulations were respected to some extent in provinces around Delhi, but were ignored completely in regions beyond the ken of the Central supervisors. Both Firuz and Akbar were dismayed at the failure of their experiment; there was little they could do to enforce universal acceptance of the measures. Distance and the human greed were against them. Akbar gave deterrent punishments to some breakers of the regulations, but these were not sufficient to give understanding to those whose creed was to accumulate riches through means fair and foul. In the end he was content with the thought that "it is easier for them who have never lived by the law to sneer at law". According to Abul Fazl, it was because of this failure that Akbar formulated the famous saying that reform without education was like beating a drum with a hole in it. Though never withdrawn, the regulation in time became as dead as a dodo. Jahangir and Shah Jahan not only turned the blind eye towards the culprits; they in some cases increased the rates of these levies by twenty-five per cent. A part of the expenditure on the construction of Taj Mahal was met by this and other additional cesses.

Aurangzeb was made of a metal different from that which went into the making of Akbar and Firuz Tughlak. Religious motivations gave him a greater drive, a greater purpose, and a greater awareness of the needs of the poor. The cult of the blind eye ran against his grain. It is commonly a weak man who is inclined to fall in line with Allah's will in all he does or plans to do. This was not the case with Aurangzeb. Though rooted deeply in God, he never forsook responsibility for his failures and lapses. Throughout his long reign, he used every

tactic known to Oriental potentates to get the reform implemented throughout the Empire. His success, though far from complete, was greater than those of his two illustrious predecessors.

In the first half of Aurangzeb's reign, the prices of foodgrains and other thirty-nine items of daily consumption listed by Khafi Khan fell by nearly thirty per cent. As a consequence, the poor became less poor and the rich less rich. The experiment emboldened him, without perhaps his knowing it, to venture into fields of puritanism seldom trod by Indian rulers before.

Aurangzeb waged a near crusade against poverty because, in his view, it led people to believe that God could achieve anything. The omnipotence of Allah, he declared, did not absolve man from the obligation to strive for a better world order. This obligation devolved all the more on those who were in a position to make laws and enforce compliance by force or persuasion. Aurangzeb regarded himself as one chosen by God to protect the people of Hindustan from material and spiritual exploitation. It was in that conviction that he set about in the beginning of his reign to eliminate such wasteful expenditures as, in his calculation, led to the devaluation of his basic priorities.

The first to be stricken off the Royal calendar was Nauroz, a festival that marked annually the acme of the Mughal splendour. The Zoroastrian New Year day was chosen by Akbar for celebration as a symbol of his liberalism. The beauty of form, balance and colour enchanted him. Ladies of high rank and fame for their looks and attainments were invited every year from all parts of the realm to participate in the festivities. All religions, races, sects and faiths assembled in Agra under the banner of unmatched Oriental pageantry to proclaim, as it were, the virtues of unity and equality. Rajput and Mughal princesses supervised personally the stalls at which were sold the choicest merchandise of Hindustan and from across its land and sea borders. Robed in clothes of gold and silver, the Emperor normally showed up at the fair after dusk when the lamps turned the glittering panorama into a sight fit for gods and their marble-limbed

entourage of angels and fairies. The Emperor often bought indigenous and foreign rarities worth millions of rupees, and not unoften "he would bestow upon the fair youthful sellers the unique honour of inviting them to join his seraglio".

Nauroz gave the nobility the much sought-after opportunity to present their young ones to the King. Famed dancers and musicians displayed their arts under tents laced with silk and brocade, and the decorations inside comprised, among other things, pieces of rare jewellery and handiwork of breathtaking, ingenious designs. Foreign merchants, mostly from Persia and Turkey, formed an important part of the festival.

The extravagance of Nauroz appalled Aurangzeb as much as its non-Islamic character. He prohibited its celebration through an edict issued in all provinces. The next step in austerity measures was to abandon the practice of weighing the Emperor against twelve precious items on his lunar and solar birthday. Presents to the monarch on special occasions, as also tributes, were to be given on shields, not on trays of gold and silver. Even the use of gold and silver inkpots in the royal palace was prohibited. Orders were issued that the Umra should not come to the court attired in expensive silken dresses. The gold and silver railings in the Hall of Public Audience were removed. Whereas in previous reigns, no less than five hundred varieties of food were cooked in the royal kitchen everyday, the ceiling was now fixed at twenty.

The Emperor himself set the example by not taking more than one dish, and that too of the simplest variety, at any meal. The royal princes and princesses, as also the inmates of the harem, were advised to "eat to live and not live to eat". Extreme simplicity in personal living became a hallmark of Aurangzeb's life. He slept on a board of cheap, unpolished wood, saunned alcoholic beverages, ate little meat, wore hand-made cotten dresses, darned his own socks, and often walked many a rough mile to save expenditure on additional wages to Palki-bearers. Though not a miser in the common acceptance of that word, he adopted a way of life that led many observers to think he was. His simplicity was not spawned by the love of money but by the

hatred of wastefulness. He spent lavishly where the interests of the state were involved. For example, the expenditure on the reception and entertainment of foreign emissaries and other dignitaries in the first five years of his reign ran into such sums as made many an old-time *khazanchi* stroke his beard in incredulity. Similarly the amounts of money he sanctioned for equipment of the imperial forces bore comparison with those incurred by any of his predecessors. To him the state, that is, Islamic state, came first and the individual nowhere. "If I show my love of God in a particular way, what business is it of those who are born to follow me", he told a group of Ulema assembled to voice their opinions on the alleged non-Islamic character of some of his early economic measures.

Aurangzeb's puritanism, as also his disregard for personal comforts, was in fact the essence of Islamic principles as he understood them. "Whoever lives simply is in communion with God", he wrote to Jahanara Begum in 1669 while explaining to her the reasons which induced him to stitch his own clothes. The Begum agreed with her brother but she, a product of the splendour of Shah Jahan's reign, could not help pointing out that "those who do not spend their time stitching their own garments also possess the great right of conversing with the Creator". Aurangzeb did not press the point, "It is no use entering into a serious argument with women", he observed many years later in the Deccan when he made his periodic visit to the tomb of his first wife, Dilraz Begum. Though he regarded women as "lesser men", yet he gave them a high place in the scheme of social evolution. "A woman is not an instrument that can be hung against the wall when you have played on it; she is man's equal partner in the grand drama of creation", he was reported to have told Syed Wilayat Hussain Khan, a celebrated interpreter of Islamic law relating to women. He enjoined upon his wives and other inmates of the harem the supreme obligation of practising austerity and to live by the virtues enshrined in the holy book.

It is with Islamic principles, as with ghosts; everyone talks of them, but all dread them. Aurangzeb was an exception. To spend his days by *Quranic* injunctions was for him the only means of self-realisation. His obsession with religion

could not but project itself in fields other than that of austerity.

Following his first coronation in June 1659, Aurangzeb prohibited the stamping of the *Kalima* on coins lest the words of God were polluted by the touch of unworthy hands. For eight hundred years the coins struck by Muslim kings had carried in one form or another the words of the Prophet to underline Islamic dominance. The break with tradition was not favoured by a section of the fundamentalists for fear of an impression being created that "Allah is no longer in control of the monetary affairs of the population". These objections were brushed aside by Aurangzeb without a second thought. "With me at the helm of the state, nobody will have a chance to entertain a fear of that type. I am nothing if not a reflection of the will of Allah", he told Mufti Nizam-ud-Din who submitted to the Emperor the apprehensions of the Ulema.

Having come to throne on the plea to save Hindustan from the liberalism of Dara Shikoh, it was only to be expected that Aurangzeb would take stringent steps to outlaw such public and private acts as infringed the Islamic code of conduct. To that end was appointed in the second year of his reign a *Mohassib*, invigilator of morals, whose duty was to keep a close watch on the collective and individual behaviour pattern of the population and to stamp out, by punishment or by persuasion, such practices as violated the *Quranic* concepts of righteousness. This was an assignment too big and too complex for anyone to fulfill readily. The odds were thus against Mulla Aiz Wajah, a Turkish theologian of repute who was handpicked by the Emperor for the post. Though a large number of divines, secret agents, investigating personnel and *korwals* were deputed to assist him, yet the results achieved in the first two years were far below Aurangzeb's expectations. To enforce a set brand of morality on a heterogeneous people is more difficult than to chain the waves of a rising ocean.

The *Mohassib* banned prostitution, made it obligatory on women of easy virtue either to marry or leave the realm, declared unlawful the singing of obscene songs, prohibited drinking of alcoholic beverages, outlawed usury, made it obligatory on all to say five prayers a day, proclaimed

any violation of dietary regulations in the month of Ramadan punishable with long terms of imprisonment, forbade cultivation of all varieties of *bharg* throughout the Empire, ordered one hand and one foot to be cut of those found trading in forbidden foods and drinks, spent immense amounts of money to get repaired all old-time mosques and monasteries, made adultery punishable with death by stoning, purdah regulations were ordered to be enforced strictly from the age of twelve, private and public festivities in the month of Muharram were made a major offence warranting imposition of heavy fines, gambling in any form could result in the confiscation of the properties of the offenders, and so on down to the prescription of dress forms for men and women for daily use.

These regulations were more a declaration of intent than a serious attempt to bring the entire population under Islamic jurisprudence. They were enforced with a degree of firmness in Delhi, Agra and many provincial capitals. In lesser cities, towns, as in the rural areas, they were respected more in the breach than observance. In the beginning deterrent penalties were imposed on some offenders, but by and large the *mohassib* came to be regarded a symbol of Aurangzeb's narrow unyielding religious prejudices, nothing more. Gradually, these regulations succumbed under the weight of their own unpopularity. It was towards the end of his life that Aurangzeb realized the impracticability of the moral code he chose to formulate. "Education comes first, moral laws afterwards", he told his eldest son, Shah Alam, in the course of an informal discussion on the obligations of a Muslim monarch.

Aurangzeb's puritanism was thus not absolute. The blind spots in his vision of morality were cured partly by the healing touch of years. In the evening of his life when no more battles were to be won and when ambition had yielded all that ambition could, he declared : "Whoever lives truthfully has the right to enter the portals of paradise"—a pronouncement as liberal as any yet formulated by the genius of man. It may be said that his concept of turth was different from that of Sufis and non-Muslim theologians, but to deny him plus points because of that conjecture may not be fair. Truthfulness is

indivisible, and it transcends the differences of interpretation. It may perhaps not be wrong to presume that Aurangzeb used the word in its broadest meaning and that he had come to the stage of spiritual awareness where truth is equated with God itself.

The most inexplicable part of Aurangzeb is reflected in the measures he took to denounce all religions other than Islam as apostatic. His formulation that where there was no Islam there was sin defies understanding even if one is inclined to take a lenient view of his religious fixities. He razed many a magnificent Hindu temples to the ground, built mosques in their place, desecrated images of Hindu gods and goddesses, banned all forms of music, prohibited the use of Hindu modes of salutation, declared astrology and allied sciences to be atheistic in character, discontinued the *tilak* ceremonial when Hindu Rajas came to the court to pay tributes, dispensed with the age-old Mughal practice of the Emperor appearing at the *Jharoka* every morning for people to have a look at their monarch, forbade the ancient Hindu custom of *sati*, Deepavali and other Hindu festivals were outlawed, additional taxes, including the *Jazia*, were imposed on the Hindu population for the benefit of the faithful, many a Hindu seat of learning was ordered to be closed, persecution of the Sikh Gurus was carried to a new vengeful high Parsi and Christian places of worship were turned into stables for the Imperial cavalry, Hindu children were allowed to be castrated for employment as eunuchs in the homes of Muslim nobility, the sale of Hindu girls to foreign traders was encouraged "to rid the country of the abomination of heathenism", Hindu Rajas and chieftains were reminded again not to keep Muslim women in their seraglios, and lastly he arranged "to be transported to hell" many a Shite, Bohra and Sufi saint who stood firm in their respective beliefs and spurned the Emperor's invitation to toe the orthodox Sunni line.

Aurangzeb's sins were scarlet against non-Muslims as also against those who interpreted the Islamic doctrine with a degree of liberalism. Yet he managed to win sufficient popular esteem to enable him to rule for half a century in comparative peace. The ground he lost because of his

intolernace was regained because of his puritanism. Throughout the ages the ascetic king has never failed to catch the imagination of the people of Hindustan. Perhaps unwittingly, Aurangzeb lived partly up to the highest traditions of the ancient Hindu society. It might have been a different story had he been an iconoclast without becoming a symbol of extreme simplicity in personal life.

The liquidation of the Bohra divine Qutb-ud-Din and his two followers will for ever remain an idelible stain on Aurangzeb's mode of governance. Rivalry between the Shite and Sunni factions of the Bohra community sparked a civil distrurbance that warranted firm handling. Without going into the merits of the dispute and without instituting an inquiry either at the administrative or priestly level, Aurangzeb in a fit of anger ordered the execution of the Shite protagonists. "The sword that severed Qutb-ud-Din's head from the trunk cried aloud for mercy", wrote a Shite chronicler Abu Talib. Not only had he taken no part in the agitation; he was at the time on way to a holy shrine in Qandhar where lived his aged parents and a number of his followers. In fact, the Emperor's wrath fell on the saintly man because of the report that he had lent his blessings to Dara Shikoh when the latter fled to Multan after defeat in the battle of succession at Samugarh. The disturbance was only an excuse to still yet another voice which was known to have spoken in favour of one whom he regarded as his deadliest foe.

Execution of Muhammad Said (pen-name Sarmad) was also a corollary to Aurangzeb's unyielding hostility to the friends and associates of Dara Shikoh. A Persian Jew, Sarmad migrated to Hindustan in the latter half of Shah Jahan's reign in quest of spiritual peace. He embraced Islam in Sind and then turned to Sufism for enlightenment. Merger with the universal spirit became with him a passion that found expression in soul-stirring songs of extreme devotion to the deity. The outpourings of his heart caught the ears of Dara Shikoh who introduced him to the Emperor. The emotional richness of Sarmad struck a sympathetic note in Shah Jahan's heart, and he conferred on him the high honour

of inviting him for audience in the privacy of the Royal chamber.

Sarmad's poems and songs became so popular as to arouse the hostility of the orthodox priestly class. The latter sent to their patron, Aurangzeb, complaints against the alleged profanities at the court. They were indignant particularly at Sarmad's recourse to nudity for affirmation of his oneness with nature. They also based their criticism on Sarmad's infatuation with a handsome Hindu youth Abhey Chand. "His open defiance of the Islamic norms of morality is an abomination that cannot be condemned too strongly", they wrote to Aurangzeb and requested him in the name of Allah to do whatever he could to "get this heretic punished suitably for his blasphemies".

Aurangzeb was helpless. As heir-apparent Dara Shikoh was all-powerful at the court, Shah Jahan was under the spell of his eldest son. The complaints of the Ulema, therefore, went unheard. Sarmad continued to walk naked the streets of Delhi and Agra, singing his compositions in praise of the Lord and His manifestations. Abhey Chand followed him wherever he went bound fast, as it were, with the cord of spiritual love the saint professed for him. "I see in Abhey the universality that haunts me day and night. He is unique. He is supreme" thus ran the opening stanza of a lyric he wrote in defence of his passion.

In defiance of the voices of protest, Dara Shikoh allotted Sarmad for residence a two-room apartment within the Red Fort. They met once or twice a full moon and exchanged views on Sufism and other allied cults. His influence on the *Wali Aahad* became known to the Emperor. Little did Dara know that this proximity was the sword he was fashioning for his own destruction.

Soon after his second coronation in 1659, Aurangzeb sentenced Sarmad to death for his nakedness as also for the infidelities he was alleged to have committed during his wanderings in Hindustan. Sarmad faced the executioner with a rare show of boldness. He sang soulfully in praise of the Spirit and, addressing the sword in the hand of the burly

agent of death, said :

“I see the Spirit in thine shine. Your face is familiar. Come and take possession of my body. That is all thou can do. Yet I despise thee not. The Spirit that is reflected in thy sharp edges is something to be adored. Thou art my friend, my saviour.”

This said, Sarmad mounted the scaffold, bent his head as if in obedience to some unknowable power, and the next moment his head lay on the ground covered partly by blood and partly by dust. Aurangzeb thought Sarmad was rubbed out of existence. History remembers him, however, with a degree of veneration.

In 1672 Aurangzeb did another diabolical act : He ordered the execution of Shah Muhammad Tahir, a poet-philosopher who became a legend in his life-time. He equated love with the universal spirit and consigned everything else to “the wreckage of ignorance, ego and pride”. Aurangzeb summoned him to the court in the summer of 1671, reprimanded him for feeding the people on “heresies under which lies hidden a revolt against the holy Prophet and his enunciations about the good and evil as also about the real and the unreal”.

Muhammad Shah denied the charge, saying that “my respect for the Prophet is great but my veneration is greater for the values that made him great”. Aurangzeb pondered over the reply and then, as was his wont, he asked a panel of orthodox Ulema to pronounce a judgment on the poet’s formulation. For three days the seven leading interpreters of the *Quran* debated in private on different aspects of Tahir’s pronouncement, and in the end they gave the verdict that “no principle, precept or transcendental value can be classed above the Prophet who is the quintessence of all virtues, all truths and all forms of excellence”. However, they left the sentence of punishment to the Emperor with a recommendation for mercy provided “the guilty heretic is penitent and undertakes on oath to live and write in future by the views of the panel”.

Shah Muhammad asked for time to give his reply, and he was permitted to retire to his hut in the vicinity of Sirhind for

“consultations with my conscience, my spirit, my supreme being”. At the end of a two-month period of reprieve, Shah Muhammad sent to the Emperor by the hand of one Munna Khan a poem in which he, besides singing the praises of “the colour, beauty and elegance of all animate and inanimate creation”, observed that “a man whose love for nature is not an all consuming passion has sucked a sow”.

The implication was too patent to be lost upon Aurangzeb. Shah Muhammad was not penitent. He stood firm by his views about God and Nature. The Prophet was a great human phenomenon, but the values of the spirit he taught and stood by were greater. The Emperor considered the poem an insult to the fundamentals of Islam. The penalty for propagating such infidelities as penned by the so-called saint of Sirhind was death. Shah Muhammad was executed publically in 1672. He did not protest against the sentence. Rather, he welcomed it as a means of liberation and merger with the supreme, all-pervasive reality. His last words “God is love” have inspired many poets and philosophers to expand the theme either within or outside the framework of Islam.

If one tries to reason about Aurangzeb’s deeds and misdeeds, one is sure to lose one’s reason. Even he himself might not be able to offer logical explanations of his many acts of commission. The execution at Delhi in 1675 of the ninth Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur, was one such act of inexplicable madness. The barbaric tortures inflicted on the Guru’s followers, in particular on Bhai Mati Dass, Bhai Dayala and Bhai Sati Dass*, were such as made one wonder if the milk of humanity within him had dried out completely. The charge against them, as also against the Guru himself, was their refusal to be converted to Islam. They were all in love with honour and had, as a consequence, developed the quality of superhuman boldness without knowing it. They were basically men of peace and goodwill to all. They had done nothing to disturb the peace of the realm. In fact, the Guru

* According to the Sikh tradition, Bhai Mati Dass was sawed alive into two, Bhai Dayala was made to sit in boiling oil, and Bhai Sati Dass was padded up with cotton and set ablaze.

was instrumental in prevailing upon the King of Assam to sign a treaty of peace with the Mughal general Raja Ram Singh. Aurangzeb appreciated the Sikh leader's good offices and offered him a "place of honour" at the court.

The Guru turned down the invitation with utmost politeness, saying that the eighth Guru, Har Kishan, called him to the *gadi* to serve the Sikh community and to show them by example the path of truth and righteousness. To accept an office, whatever its form, at Delhi, he argued, would be a violation of his pledge to God and the people he had vowed to look after. Aurangzeb understood the plea and did not press the offer.

In the heart of hearts, it seemed, the Emperor was resolved to wean Tegh Bahadur away from Anandpur, a small township not far distant from Kartarpur, which had become the seat of undeclared Sikh sovereignty. The Guru was not prepared to swallow the bait thrown by the ever-suspicious Emperor. Aurangzeb ignored the rebuff, but he did not forget it.

Also, it needs to be remembered the seventh Guru, Har Rai (1644-61) gave his blessings to Dara Shikoh when the latter fled to Punjab after his defeat in the battle of Samugarh—an act which in the eyes of Aurangzeb amounted to high treason and hostility to the forces of Islam. On his deathbed, Guru Har Rai nominated his six-year-old son, Har Kishan, as his successor. The supercession of the eldest son, Ram Rai, was a pointed rebuff to Aurangzeb. Over the years, Ram Rai had proved himself to be a power-hungry opportunist who did not hesitate to align himself with the forces of religious intolerance the Sikh leadership had taken upon itself to combat. After the sudden death of Guru Har Kishan in 1664, Aurangzeb pulled many a string through the friendly Rajas of Punjab that the Guruship should go to Ram Rai. His manoeuvres failed. Instead Tegh Bahadur, youngest son of Guru Har Gobind, was elevated to the high position as a result of consensus among the faithful disciples. Tegh Bahadur became the Sikh chief; he also became the centre of Aurangzeb's hostility to all those who were outside the fold of Islam. It was not surprising, therefore, that he met with the fate that he did in 1675; the surprising thing is that for over a

decade he was permitted to preach the virtues of tolerance, honour and oneness.

“It is easier for them who have never been honoured to sneer at honour”, the Guru wrote in reply to a remark by a hill Raja that the concept of *izzat* was only a pretext for rebellion and non-cooperation with the established order. He also wrote many a thoughtful hymn on the subject. “He who finds no honour finds nothing”, he penned in anguish at the plight of the Kashmiri Brahmins wallowing in extreme degradation because of massive conversion drive launched by the local Governor. He decided to stake his life, if needed, in defence of the religious freedom of non-Muslims. Aurangzeb summoned him to Delhi, cast him in prison and, in the end secured against him a *fatwa* branding him a traitor and an enemy of Islam. The executioner Jalaluddin did the rest. Tegh Bahadur became a legend and a rallying point for Sikh militarism. The Khalsa was born.

Tegh Bahadur's son, Gobind Singh, was only nine when Destiny called him to be the guardian of the daily-increasing Sikh brotherhood. Anandpur was his seat and his mother “the light that guided his foot-steps”. It was not till he came to the years of decision that Aurangzeb saw in him a threat to his religious policies in Punjab. As a child and as an adult, Gobind Singh showed himself to be a sensitive individual imbued with considerations of faith, honour and freedom. The continuing persecution of non-Muslims led him gradually to believe that the Mughal intolerance could be checked only by force. To that end he converted every Sikh into a soldier, preached the virtues of simplicity and self-sacrifice, and transformed Anandpur and other places associated with the spiritual activities of the previous nine Gurus into fortresses of resistance to Aurangzeb's challenge to the rights and privileges of the Sikhs.

This revolutionary development could not but cause alarm in the Mughal ranks. Aurangzeb sent fairly large armies first under Piande Khan and Daria Beg and later Syed Khan, Ramzan Khan and Wazir Khan to storm the Khalsa strongholds into submission, but the successes gained by them

were only partial. The Guru's four sons* and his mother perished in the hostilities which spread over a period of nearly two decades. The Guru himself underwent infinite hardships, as Rana Pratap and Rana Amar Singh in the reigns of Akbar and Jahangir, in defending his rights, honour and heritage.

A scholar of Persian and Sanskrit, Guru Gobind Singh wrote hair-raising *shlokas* in praise of courage, freedom and generosity; his denunciation of the sins of aggression and treachery were equally soul-stirring. "The Lord will abhor both the bloodthirsty and deceitful men", he told his disciples before setting his hand to the golden pen with which he wrote his last letter, known in Sikh history as Zaffar Nama, to Aurangzeb. In this high-spirited communication, the Guru told the Emperor point-blank about the sins he had committed against man and God; he also spelt out fearlessly the fate that inevitably fell upon those "who prayed with their lips and dissembled in their double-heart". Here was a soul-searing warning from a man of the spirit to a monarch who ignored what the Guru called the fundamentals of life and death. The tone and contents of this letter stirred Aurangzeb's conscience. Sad at heart, he called a halt to operations against the Guru. It is said that he was never the earlier religious megalomaniac again. Eighteenth months later, he passed away—perhaps a penitent but more likely than not a man dismayed at the failure of his life mission. Hindustan remained entrenched in the multiplicity of its religious and spiritual values. Akbar too failed to attain unity, but his failure was patched with good intentions. This cannot be said about the setback suffered by Aurangzeb. The one was a glorious retreat, the other an ignoble debacle. Both the goal and the means chosen by Aurangzeb were suspect in the eyes of the majority of population.

This said, credit needs be given to Aurangzeb for pursuing with unyielding consistency a policy that he believed was the

* The Guru's eldest son, Ajit Singh, was born in 1687, the second Jajhar Singh in 1691, the third Zorawar Singh in 1697 and the fourth Fateh Singh in 1699.

command of Allah. He was a man of the spirit. That the spirit which he induced himself to be guided, by ran against the tide of tradition is a different story.

In the war for the throne which followed Aurangzeb's death, Guru Gobind Singh threw in his weight on the side of Bahadur Shah—a shrewed political move that gave the Sikhs a status of honour at the court. The victor invited the Guru to attend the coronation ceremony. After consultations with his followers the Sikh chief decided to associate himself with the crowning of the new Emperor. In Delhi, Guru Gobind Singh was received with a touching show of courtesy. A week after the coronation, Bahadur Shah presented to the Guru a robe of honour at a specially convened assembly of nobility. The past seemed to have been forgotten. The Guru thus embarked on a new phase of service to the Path. The consensus among his followers was that the consolidation of the Khalsa into an organisation capable of defending its rights and religious values could be effected more easily from within the Imperial court than from without.

The Guru accompanied the Emperor to the Deccan not long after his reconciliation with the Imperial power. His objective was to establish contact with a large number of Sikhs who had settled in Central and South India. *En route*, he was often invited by the Emperor to the royal tent for discussions on religious and spiritual matters. Bahadur Shah was greatly impressed with the Guru's knowledge of the Persian and Sanskrit classics. An equation of close relationship gradually developed between the two. This development caused concern among a section of the nobility who had earlier been responsible for perpetrating atrocities against the Sikhs in general and the house of the Guru in particular.

When a man has once perpetrated crimes against a public figure he will do everything possible to deny the victim an opportunity for revenge. Wazir Khan, the Nawab of Sirhind, had put to death* the two youngest sons of the Guru following the latter's flight to the wilderness of Machiwara when it

* According to the Sikh tradition, the two sons, Zorawar Singh and Fatch Singh, were walled up alive at the orders of Wazir Khan.

became clear that Ropar could not be held against the Imperial army. In the Guru's friendship with the new Emperor, Wazir Khan saw a real threat to his life. A pre-emptive strike was a course that suggested itself. The foul act was perpetrated by a set of paid assassins while the Guru was camping in the luxuriance of Namded on the bank of the Godavari. The valiant Sikh chief put up a stout resistance, but to no avail. The injuries sustained by him, in particular a deep sword-cut on the right shoulder, proved fatal. The Guru died on 7 October, 1708.

With the passing away of Gobind Singh ended the line of the Gurus. Thereafter the holy Granth was to be regarded as the symbol of all the ten Gurus. The hymns in the Granth exhorted Gobind Singh on his death-bed, should be looked upon as a constant reminder to the Sikhs of their faith, their traditions, their rights and duties as also of their ultimate destiny. In fact, hereafter, the Granth became the everlasting, indestructible Guru of the Sikhs.

Had Aurangzeb not died when he did, it is likely that Gobind Singh might have met at his hands the same fate as did Tegh Bahadur. In his code of Kingly duties there was no place for religious tolerance. Sooner or later he would have found the Guru's teachings an unbearable insult to Islam. The penalty for alleged spread of infidelity in any form was death. Aurangzeb knew no middle course. Intolerance is a habit. Over the years he had developed the practice of subduing religious dissent by the sword of the executioner. Age did not dampen the faith in his own infallibility.

To the end, Aurangzeb remained as constant as the North Star in his belief that Islam was truth, all other religions blasphemy. Here was the seed of disintegration that led to the breakup of the Empire even during his own life-time.

Chapter Twelve

PITILESS IN PARSON'S GARB

Aurangzeb was not a fool; he was an unwise man, unimaginative and stubbornly irresponsible to public opinion. It was, therefore, not surprising that early in his career as a monarch he was called upon to hatch the eggs which his own errors or judgment had produced. The type of fierce religious intolerance he chose for the basis of his state policy could not but yield widespread suspicion, distrust and strife. Though the many minor and a few major rebellions were crushed by a massive use of force, yet the seething discontent remained throughout his reign a menace no arms could put down effectively. Perhaps he died as a disillusioned man, inclined to blame the nobility for his own mistakes. Whatever be his own assessment of himself, the strong and patient judge History, cannot condone his lapses from the path of justice and equality. Aurangzeb's successors paid a heavy price for his miscalculations. The law of retribution transcends time; it also transcends the individual life-span.

As a prince Aurangzeb committed many an act of indiscreet highhandedness against non-Muslims. After ascending the throne with the much-trumpeted objective of making Hindustan a preserve of Islam, he was left with no alternative but to live by his pledges. Conversions to Islam by persuasion, bribery or by force became a cornerstone of what the official historians called the "imperial policy of social reform".

Kashmiri Pandits were the first to protest against this proselytising drive. The Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur, took up their cause and paid the penalty with his head. His son and

successor to the spiritual leadership of the Sikhs, Gobind Singh, took up the challenge and waged a running unequal war against the imperialists and their friends for nearly three decades before Aurangzeb died in 1707. The hardships undergone by the Guru, his family and his followers are a tale of heroism and selfless devotion to a cause which they believed was rooted in truth. The Indian tradition and the Indian way of life weathered the storm with admirable elasticity. This is a testimony to the success of Sikh leadership. This is also a testimony to Aurangzeb's failure.

The Mughal oppression of non-Muslims aroused the anger of peasantry in northern India. Several abortive attempts were made on the life of the Emperor. The local *Faujdar*s and other officials were instructed to punish the villagers collectively—a mode of revenge that made mockery of justice. Dissatisfaction spread rapidly in the non-Muslim areas adjoining Delhi and Agra. Tales of atrocities by the Imperial gendarme against innocent farmers and their families spread widely in Oudh. The spiritual centres of the Hindus, namely Mathura, Brindaban and Varanasi, were subjected to such acts of desecration as led the people to band themselves together for defence of their faith. They also prayed publically for the Lord's mercy. "Thou have been our refuge from generation to generation. Deliver us now from the snare and the hunter. Under the shadow of thy wings, 'O'Lord, shall be our haven. Save us from persecution. O'God, thou art our helper and redeemer", thus ran a hymn that was sung day and night in all temples in Mathura and Brindaban.

Aurangzeb was unmoved by these "appeals to gods of stone and to men whose faith is faithlessness". Instead, he appointed as *Faujdar* of Mathura a man dreaded for his brutality and animal passions. He was Murshid Quli Khan Turkoman who, at fortyeight, had established himself as the most rapacious of all junior Mughal commanders. Neither pity nor considerations of humanity touched his heart. Hindu men, he wrote, were meant to be squeezed for their wealth and Hindu women for their beauty. In Mathura he would spirit away young Hindu women from temples, bathing *ghats* and religious assemblies, subject them to his lusts for a couple

of weeks and then hand them over to such officers as expressed a wish to possess them. Wanton and licentious, he was impervious both to the quilms of conscience and the voice of reason. He grinned like a dog whenever a complainant came to him for redress of his grievances. He had become a monster; as it were, to the population of Mathura. Petitions addressed to the Emperor against the Turkoman's acts of hideous debauchery remained unanswered. Their patience was soon exhausted. They prepared for a showdown. Lord Krishna, they believed, would fight on their side.

In the middle of 1660, Murshid Quli Khan was stricken with paralysis of the right leg, right arm and a part of the fearsome facial set-up. The priests of Mathura tended to believe that their call to the Lord was answered. The unpenitent Turk fought grimly for life and with patient treatment of the miracle-man Ghyas-ud-Din, he recovered in about six months. In the meantime, Aurangzeb decided to replace him by Abdin Nabi Khan, a protege of the Prime Minister, Sadullah Khan.

The new appointee shared Aurangzeb's views about the superiority of Islam over other religions, and he set about methodically to demolish the glory and sanctity of Mathura and its temples. His first act was to build a Jama Masjid in the heart of the city and to prohibit the Hindus from "singing, dancing and indulging in other heretic abominations in the vicinity of the mosque". This was an order that could not but fan the somuldering fires of communal bitterness. Though his words were smoother than oil, the actions of Nabi Khan left no one in doubt that he was a stern and stubborn individual ready to play the tune that his master wanted him to play. Hinduism was to him a profanity that needed to be humbled and, if possible, rooted out from the soil of Hindustan.

To gain the favour of the Emperor he launched a mini-invasion of the famed temple of Keshav Rai, divested the images of the precious stones of incalculable value and carried away the rich ornamental gold and silver decorations presented to the sacred shrine in his heyday by Dara Shikoh. This last act of brigandage pleased Aurangzeb more than any other

deed of desecration. To him Dara Shikoh represented a heresy that needed to be rubbed out completely from the book of history. Nabi Khan was given the title Azhar-ud-Din, his Mansab was raised by five hundred *zat* and *sawar* and a jagir worth rupees fifty thousand a year was added to his emoluments. These awards were officially described as "a recognition of Nabi Khan's services to Islam".

Power and folly are generally close companions. Nabi Khan's new status gave him the additional indiscretion to commit acts offensive to non-Muslims in general and the Hindus in particular. Extortion of large sums of money from the peasantry, all in the name of land revenue, was a provocation that could not but spawn a revolt. The cry went up that the King of Delhi had no jurisdiction over the land of Krishna. The farmers of six districts rallied to a man under the banner of Gokal Narain, local chieftain rich in heritage and courageous to the point of being a desperado.

There is something in valour which narrow souls cannot admire. Nabi Khan scoffed at what he called the "get-together of jackals", and he sent out a casually equipped contingent of the militia at his command to put down the uprising. This force was repulsed by a purposeful foe with such ease as made the *Faujdar* sit up in surprise. In a huff, he decided to take the field himself without waiting for reinforcements from Delhi. The result was another morale-raising victory for "the army of the Lord". The Khan fell to a gunshot soon after the battle was joined about twelve *kos* from Mathura. The Mughal militia, numbering over two thousand, retreated in disorder. Riding high on the wave of jubilation, Gokal asked his inspired men to push forward to Mathura. "Victory is our's, the Lord is on our side", he shouted from the back of a spitefully steed that perhaps sensed correctly the joy in its master's heart. His intention was to capture the city and "obliterate from its face the ugly marks that defile its Divine dignity". "We are the people of the Lord's pasture and the soldiers of His army", he sang soulfully as the men gathered around him for the traditional thanks-giving ritual. Gokal would have none of it. The proper place for prostration before the Lord would be the central hall of the shrine of the

Charioteer of Arjuna, he told his comrades.

Gokal had one defect in this anatomy. He did not keep his ardour for ever. The voice of joy and elation soon gave place to doubts about his ability to storm Mathura into submission. A round of consultations with his friends and allies consumed several precious days. In the meantime, Aurangzeb, sensing danger, threw into the fray ten thousand crack troops under the command of Radandez Khan—a move that reflected the seriousness with which the Emperor took the debacle suffered by Nabi Khan. The revolt had already spread to the district of Agra. The Vazir Sadullah Khan advised a massive onslaught against Gokal's forces. It was significant that Aurangzeb himself moved to the affected districts. He was not the man to take chances. The rebellion needed to be crushed before it spread to other parts of the realm. Gokal was fearless and popular and, therefore, to be checked before the Rajputs and other dissatisfied segments of population made a common cause with him. The battle that took place a few miles to the west of the district of Mathura was a head-on collision between courage on the one hand and superior weaponry on the other. Fighting like inspired monsters, the rebels broke through the Imperial centre before Radandez, throwing caution to the winds, veered from the right with his four thousand reserves and dealt a blow that sent Gokal's men reeling on all sides.

Courage was repulsed, but not beaten. The peasants came back in waves of heroic defiance, but only to be mowed down by the guns of the enemy. No less than fifteen thousand men lay dead on the battlefield as the sun went down the western horizon in utter disgust, as it were, at the callousness of the human heart. Gokal and his family were taken prisoner. They were carried to Agra on the backs of asses smeared with dirt and dung. There Gokal was found guilty of high treason and of waging war against the state. The sentence passed against him by a panel of nine *Qazis* was the most diabolical of the reign of Aurangzeb. He was cut to pieces, limb by limb, on a platform specially erected in front of the main gate of the fort. Thousands saw the barbaric spectacle in suppressed horror. Gokal saw his limbs fall apart from his

trunk till the time came for the executioner to strike the last blow at his head. Gokal never uttered a cry of anguish or protest. He died as he lived—in full faith that courage was the final good.

The defeat of Gokal spread a pall of gloom all over northern India. The silent majority were woe-stricken like pelicans in wilderness. The best they could do was to pray for God's mercy and to take solace in the workings of *karma* and *kismet*. They sent a round robin to Aurangzeb quoting chapters and verses from the *Quran* itself to underline that religion and persecution went ill together. The Emperor's answer was to publically consign the petition to a blaze of fire in front of the court of Justice. The only remark he was reported to have made on the subject was that the great Allah did not throw the Empire into his lap for it to be transformed into a cradle for apostasy. To argue him out of this position was not given to any man. He was convinced about the infallibility of his belief. Self-hypnotism could not have produced a faith more firm. Aurangzeb will for ever remain a mystery to the students of human behaviour. He was religious to a fault, also irreligious to a point where that negative quality became synonymous with faith itself.

The peace that followed the suppression of the peasants' revolt (1661-62) was no more than the quiet of the graveyard. Fear gripped the Jats and other farming communities. The revenue collectors bled them white with the yearly increasing demands. Akbar's system of a uniform land revenue network was in the shambles. The psychology of *Jaziya* raised its ugly head in all fields. As second class citizens, non-Muslims were made to pay more than the Muslims for the services provided by the state. Dissatisfactions and uprisings were inbuilt within this discrimination.

An uneasy decade rolled by before the accumulated dismay of the aggrieved community found expression in what has come to be known as the revolt of the Satnamis. The explosion was triggered by a minor scuffle between a party of drunken solidiers and a group of shaven-headed *sadhus* belonging to Satnamis, an ancient ecclesiastical order that equated God with truth. Founded in the mid-sixteenth

century by a wandering minstrel, Birbhan, this sect was of a piece with the movement of reform begun by Guru Nanak.

The Satnamis believed in one God and established for themselves a code of conduct rooted in truth and righteousness. They scorned at wealth and all its material adjuncts. They regarded the universe as their home and mankind their family. A simple people, they were scrupulously honest and straightforward in their business dealings. Their creed was more of a way of life than a spiritual system. Their needs were few and their avocations such as in which greed, avarice and pride—the three cardinal blemishes of human behaviour—had little play. A majority of them lived by the sweat of their brow, and a few on charity. They sang songs in praise of the creations of God, and did whatever they could to equate themselves with nature. They made no distinction between Hindus and Muslims, but oppression wherever it came from anguished them. By and large they lived with their sorrows patiently, praying all the time for His mercy, His guidance and His help.

When in 1672, a party of the royal bodyguard set fire to their bamboo huts in a village in the district of Narnol, nearly seventy-five miles from Delhi, the word went round that the time had come for calling a halt to what they called "the lunacies of the power-drunk agents of the Padshah at Delhi". The Satnamis rallied to a man in response to the call of Mata Menakshi, an old woman believed to be in possession of occult powers for a sustained effort needed to safeguard the honour of the sect. There was a fanatic in her gut, as also in her cut; she walked barefoot for miles, telling people in impressive phrases that the world had glittering prizes to offer to those who had stout hearts and righteous causes to fight for. There was magic in her speech and magnet in her piercing gaze. At the meetings she addressed in the villages, at farms, at cross-roads and near market places, she did not pray for mercy, pity, peace and love; instead she invoked the heavenly King for courage, perseverance and resolution to fight tyranny. She was a stormy woman with a wild voice, conscious perhaps of the hold she had come to exercise on her co-sectarians. The amulets and trinkets she distributed for luck generated infinite

belief in the success of Satnamis in a showdown. These charms were stitched to the banners under which the protestors chose to march to the district headquarters. They styled themselves servants of the people, gathered whatever weaponry they could lay their hands on, pledged themselves to victory or death, and offered to follow "the mother" in quest of what they called "a place of honour in the land of Bharat".

The response to Menakshi's call was a miracle of faith. In four days twenty thousand Satnamis were ready to march to Narnol. Whirled into unbounded religious fanaticism, this ill-equipped force took the Mughal officers by surprise. The latter fled in panic for Delhi and other minor bastions of Mughal strength. The snowy-beard *Faujdar* of Narnol, Fateh Shah, lost his life in a battle that was decided before it began. The Satnamis were jubilant at their successes. The supernatural powers of Menakshi, the conviction grew, were the decisive factor in the struggle. They decided, in a euphoria of self-confidence, to push on to Delhi while the charms on the banners were intact and effective. Their number swelled as they marched along the dusty road to the capital. Great honours, it was believed, were in store for them once the citadel of the Mughal authority was stormed into surrender. They chanted hymns in praise of the Mata, they invoked the blessings of Guru Birbhan on the expedition and they challenged the *Padshah* to save himself from the impending doom. In this mood of recklessness, they committed some acts of indiscretion which aroused the wrath of Aurangzeb. When that happened, it meant woe for the enemy. Aurangzeb could outsturm the worst storm in savagery.

A shrewd tactician that he was, Aurangzeb decided to beat the Satnamis at their own game. In the capacity of a *Zinda Pir* (living saint) he wrote with his own hand many a sacred word and phrase from the *Quran* and had them stitched to the Imperial green banners. The Hindu sorcery, he told Prince Muazzam, could be neutralised easily by the magic of Islamic incantations. This tactic paid dividends. The panic-stricken Mughal forces gained heart. They went into battle under Radendez Khan fully convinced that the angels of Islam would carry the day against what they called the devils of

infidelity.

Ten thousand armed men of the Imperial army clashed with twenty-five thousand slogan-raising Satnamis twenty miles east of Delhi. The result was a carnage that transformed the battlefield into "a blood-red carpet interwoven with the intestines of the infidels". It is said that not a single Satnami escaped the Mughal net. In recognition of his "valour against an enemy as wily as a snake", Radendez Khan was given the title Shujat Khan. His Mansab was raised by one thousand, and a part of the district of Narnol was added to his jagir for life.

Radendez Khan was acclaimed as the toughest general of the time. The intensity of his will to win could be matched only by the intensity of his callousness. To this day his name remains a terror for the Hindus of Oudh. To keep their children indoors, mothers often tell them that "Radna Rakshish" is prowling outside. A story has it that in 1857 at the height of the uprising against the British a six-year old child asked his mother if Radna was white in colour. He had apparently seen some British soldiers carry away their dead. The boy held his tongue and spoke nothing when the mother replied in the negative, but it was clear there was much pain and grief within him. His young soul was disquieted and full of heaviness. For many years he continued to hold that white men were the fiercest species of the devil.

The revolt of the Satnamis was of far less importance than the manner in which it was crushed. The dissident Rajputs and other warrior classes had virtually been served a stern warning of the consequences if they at any time chose to rebel against the Imperial authority. The fact seems to be that Aurangzeb was afraid even of his own shadow. The past, in particular the manner in which he came to the throne, weighed heavily on his mind. His puritanism too was perhaps a shield against the profanities he had committed. He did not possess a clear heart, and there was a dread within him of the future. Sin and fear are seldom found apart. There is no excellent man that has no strangeness in his proportions. Aurangzeb was in more ways than one an excellent man; he was also strange.

Chapter Thirteen

LESS HUMAN FOR BEING DEVOUT

Fanned fire and forced faithfulness never did well yet. Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Marwar (Jodhpur) was a Rajput first and a commander of the Mughal armies afterwards. The Hindus generally and Rajputs in particular looked up to him for guidance and support. That he had opted to serve Aurangzeb following the latter's victory in the war of succession deceived nobody. At the imperial court he remained the main prop of the much-harassed majority community. The Emperor was well aware of this duality in the Maharaja's loyalty, but for reasons not difficult to guess he decided to put up with the Rajput ruler's pretence of faithfulness.

The rise of Marhatta power in the Deccan was a development that could not but compel Aurangzeb to maintain peace in Rajasthan. The eventuality of war on two fronts was a disquieting thought. Aurangzeb moved his knights and knaves with utmost circumspection. Jaswant Singh was sent to the distant north-west at the head of an expedition to tame the unruly Afghan tribesmen. Jaswant in the wilderness of the rocks of Khyber was comparatively harmless than Jaswant in the intrigue-ridden corridors of the fort and palaces in Delhi. The veteran Marwar ruler accepted the assignment with feigned gratitude, feigned assurances of loyalty and feigned determination to bring peace to the disturbed region. He repaired thither with an army of twenty thousand Rajput braves and many wives, mistresses and concubines. Jaswant was a Hindu Mughal. He loved pleasure and pegeanty. A man of sense, he at times behaved like a madman, but never

like a fool. To him loyalty and war were the same thing. There was a design in his submission. Whom we hate most, to them we flatter the most. This was his way of combating distrusts and planned treacheries. Aurangzeb was perhaps more than his match in this game of double-dealing. He hated the Maharaja for his past misdeeds, but feigned admiration for him because of his usefulness in the complex task of governing a multi-religious state. Both he and the Maharaja were conscious of their dishonest professions. In love, as in hidden hostility, he who deceives the most is the conqueror.

Aurangzeb never forgot, much less forgave double-crossing treason. Nearly two decades ago, Jaswant Singh fought against him in the battle of Dharmat. The Rajput chief wrote to him an impudent letter before the drums of war were sounded, asking the then rebel prince to lay down arms and "kiss the threshold of obedience to the Emperor Shah Jahan". Aurangzeb laughed out this audacity as irrelevant egotism. The Maharaja suffered a humiliating defeat in the battle, fled to Jodhpur, and licked his wounds for over a year before taking up the sword again—this time for Aurangzeb against Shah Shuja. His deceitful desertion to the enemy before the field at Khajura became red with the blood of Shuja's Bengal army was believed to be an act of revenge for the ignominy he suffered at Dharmat.

Disloyalty is its own worst enemy. Jaswant's defection made no difference to the outcome of the war. Aurangzeb won handsomely. Later he pardoned Jaswant's faithless perfidy, saying that it required far more genius to be treacherous than to command armies. Apparently, he needed the Rajput soldiers more than Jaswant needed the imperial robes of honour.

The story of the Marwar ruler's traitorous acts was not yet over. He carried a friendly dialogue with Dara Shikoh before the latter was finally defeated at Deorai. The fact seems to be that for as long as Aurangzeb was a crusader against the writ of Shah Jahan, the Rajput chiefs were lukewarm in their support to him. Their loyalties changed after he became the Emperor. Such has ever been the way

of disobedience : to rise it stoops.

Jaswant Singh, old in limbs but young at heart, died at Jamrud in the north-west on 10 December, 1678. It was a sad day for his twenty thousand Rajput soldiers and sadder still for his women in enchanting Rajput dresses. Two of his wives, seven mistresses and a dozen rare vintage concubines perished with him on the funeral pyre. The rest, numbering several hundred, were escorted to Lahore by Rajput bodyguard. A large part of the Rajput force was disbanded and permitted to return to their homes in Marwar. The rest opted to continue serving in the north-west under lesser Rajput commanders.

There thus came a vacuum in the leadership of Marwar. Jaswant had no male descendant. His elder brother, Amar Singh, was a *persona non grata* at the court in Jodhpur. He was deported by his father because of alleged involvement in grotesque immoralities. His son, Indar Singh, was a junior Mansabdar at the imperial court. Not in possession of either intelligence or ambition, he grew up to be a mediocrity of little charm and less pride in his heritage. These negative virtues endeared him to Aurangzeb. For many years he harboured plans to instal him on the Marwar *gaddi*. The time had now come to make Jodhpur a principality of the Empire. The death of Jaswant Singh became the beginning of a new Mughal policy in Rajasthan. In medieval times kingship was a game in which the king always cheated. Aurangzeb was a super-star at this sport of sovereigns.

The strategic importance of Marwar was not lost upon Aurangzeb. The trade route from Gujawat to the Arabian sea and therefrom to the ports of Persia and Turkey passed through this territory. To capture this Rajput stronghold was to assure safety for Muslim traders who often lost fortunes in running scuffles with hostile tribesmen. Also in the event of necessity Marwar could serve as a springboard for launching Mughal armies in the ever hostile kingdom of Mewar (Udaipur). These advantages lured Aurangzeb into a decision to occupy Marwar. The vacuity left by the death of Jaswant Singh was a circumstance that favoured the imperial plan. Aurangzeb was not a day-dreamer. He

acted first and dreamt later.

A huge army of thirty thousand men and units of the light and heavy artillery were quickly raised for the intended invasion.

On 9 January, 1679, the Emperor himself set out for Ajmer which city had over the years become a watch-tower for operations in Rajasthan. No less a general than Khan-i-Jahan Bahadur Khan was sent out to subjugate Marwar and to place its administration in the hands of trusted Mughal officials. The havoc that followed beggars description. Ancient temples, known as the pride of Jodhpur, were pulled down to the ground. The sacred images of Rajput gods and goddesses were desecrated and cast under the steps of hurriedly constructed mosques. Young Rajput girls were profaned and forced to serve the lusts of a rapacious soldiery. Muslim priests were sent out on missions of mass conversion. Except for a few faint-hearts, the people of Marwar preferred death to change of religion. They sacrificed themselves with the beat of drum at the altar of their faith and tradition. Gaily dressed women joyfully embraced flames as they jumped on to blazing pyres at the sight of priests with rosaries in their hands. Self-immolation became, as it were, an eagerly sought gateway to the palaces of Rajput paradise. Even bands of saffron-clothed children sang praises of the Lord and submitted themselves to fires roaring in every village.

The heartless Bahadur Khan did not recall his contingents of proselytising Maulvis till he saw a hymn-chanting girl in bridal clothes set herself aflame in front of the royal palace. Her name was Jodha. The Khan rushed out to save her. The charred body was lifeless as he stood there bewildered at her beauty and courage. In the gold-embroidered pocket of her brocade blouse was found a hastily scribbled note to her husband : "Forgive me, master. A Rajputani without honour is ashes, cinders, dust. I die that others may live. Rejoice. There is no place for grief in the book of faith. Har Har Mahadev."

Bahadur Khan was wonder-struck at this expression of honest pride. He ordered a ceremonial cremation for the girl, recalled the brigades of roving missionaries, and issued

instructions to field commanders that the chastity of the women of Marwar needed to be safe-guarded even at the risk of their own lives. Aurangzeb endorsed this order of the day, and complimented the general on the steps he initiated to put down the orgy of licentious lawlessness. Thus ended for a time the rape of Marwar. Acts of brigandage in other forms, however, continued unchecked.

The properties of Jaswant Singh and his relatives were confiscated. Art treasures from the palaces and forts were carted away to Delhi. Plunder of the mansions of the nobility was organised on a planned basis. Not satisfied with the quantum of loot, Bahadur Khan felt that the accumulated riches of Marwar were perhaps hidden underground in shrines of antiquity. Muslim divines believed to be blessed with "the sixth sense to see what lay below the surface of the ground" were summoned from Delhi, Agra and Ajmer to assist the army in a carefully planned treasure-hunt.

At the instance of a team of twelve men with "telepathic eyes" one hundred eighty sites in and around Jodhpur were dug up, but the exercise yielded little wealth. When two boxes of silver containing nearly five hundred pieces of ancient gold coins were found under the floor of a small temple outside the eastern gate of the royal mother's mansion, hopes of a rich haul in the vicinity went up. For twelve days the sappers and miners laboured round the clock in anticipation of unearthing "the world-famous Jodhpur jewellery of fabulous diamonds and still more fabulous rubies, pearls, amethysts and other precious stones." They drew virtually a blank. A copper urn containing an assortment of the kingdom's coinage in the previous three hundred years was the centre-piece of a few odd knick-knacks that struck their shovels. The divines were beaten. Aurangzeb gave up the chase. He told Bahadur Khan to be content with what he had acquired and not waste his time any more in following the clues given by "the so-called saints who apparently do not possess the powers they claim to have been endowed with". The monthly stipends of all the twelve disappointed divines were stopped.

Meanwhile, there unfolded in Lahore a drama gripping in its mysterious dimensions. At the dead of night on 14 February, 1679, one of the wives of Jaswant Singh, Rani Bhagmati gave birth to a son posthumously. There were suppressed jubilations among the Marwar nobility who had taken upon themselves to safeguard the interests of the Maharaja's family. Hopes of a lineal descendent of the House of Jodhpur ascending the Marwar throne rose high. Communications about the "happy event" were promptly sent to Delhi, suggesting that the new-born son should be proclaimed the Maharaja of Marwar with a council of regency headed by Durga Dass, the seniormost nobleman in the Marwar camp at Lahore.

Aurangzeb, a prey of his own fears, dismissed the "posthumous child" story as "a fraud, a lie, a hoax staged by same self-seeking saboteurs." He ordered the Governor to verify the authenticity of the birth and to take steps to ensure that the infant was not spirited out of Punjab.

As expected, the Governor upheld the Emperor's apprehensions. The child, he wrote, was in fact the son of a Hindu physician married to a young peasant girl of a village near Lahore. In the I-told-you-so mood of self-righteousness, Aurangzeb issued instructions for removal of the baby to the harem of a local Amir, but before these orders could be carried out, the Rani and the child evaporated, as it were, into the refined cold air of the north-west. Nobody knew how and when they slipped out of the well-guarded mansion. The books of history are silent about their fate.

This was, however, not the end of the Rajput search for a successor to Jaswant Singh. Yet another Rani, Padamjit, gave birth to a male child posthumously. This time the daring Durga Dass and his equally courageous colleagues sent no petition to the Emperor. They secretly appointed the infant as king and, in his name, addressed to the people of Marwar an exquisitely worded message in which were recounted the virtues of courage, loyalty and patriotism. "Courage rules the court, the hills and the deserts, and men below and saints above; it demands all and has a right to all. Listen, only the brave enjoy noble and glorious deaths. Those whose firm

nerves never tremble deserve the fair. Your land is your treasure, your heritage, thy kingdom. Our gods never withhold their aid to those whose chests are full of courage and whose hearts are athrob with high patriotism"—thus ran a rousing sermon that asked for nothing and held out no promise.

A relay of Rajput desperados carried this "high-minded" hymn to the bards of Marwar, and within days the chant went up in cities and villages that Lord Mahadev was in deep agony at the fate that had befallen the people of Marwar. Soon the commotion swelled into songs of patriotism that stirred every heart. The Mughal generals were quick to realize the dangers they were faced with. Messengers on fire-footed steeds were sent to Delhi to seek instructions on the best way to defuse the situation. Aurangzeb was understandably upset over the "perfidious treason" of the Marwar nobles. His first reaction was to instal Indar Singh, son of Jaswant Singh's elder brother Amar Singh, on the throne of Jodhpur. Instructions were simultaneously given to put down the "rebellion of bards and hymn-writers" with unflinching firmness. Consequently, thousands of Rajput men and women were sent to prison on charges of spreading disaffection and inciting people to rise against the imperial power.

To prevent the baby Maharaja to repeat the elusive act staged by the first posthumous son of Jaswant Singh, the Emperor took as was his wont, to the use of deceit and trickery. He wrote to Durga Dass a very polite letter inviting him to escort the "rightful ruler of Marwar" to Delhi. Honours befitting his high status and heritage, wrote the Emperor, would be extended to him. He also assured the regent-designate that Mughal officials and the imperial army would be recalled from Marwar as soon as the ceremonies connected with the coronation were over. This communication bore the royal seal as also the imprint of Aurangzeb's right hand—a double pledge that every word he had written would be kept in letter and in spirit. Never before had he resorted to this device of Shah Jahan to underscore the inviolability of his pledge.

Durga Dass and his colleagues were taken in by this

uncommon covenant of honour and agreed, after much debate, to accept the invitation. They began their journey from Lahore after assiduous consultation with many a renowned master of astrology. They all forecast "a brilliant, though tempestuous, career" for the new chief who was yet in his swaddling clothes. At the instance of a stargazer of Sirhind, Champat Bhivani, the child-king was given the name Ajit Singh—a concession to the dream Bhivani dreamt a few days earlier that Maharaja Jaswant Singh, sitting on top of a hill in the Aravellis, had called his son by that name.

Drums were sounded as the ever-loyal Durga Dass took the child in his arms and marked a saffron *tilak* on his inordinately broad and bright forehead, saying "May the Lord give Maharaja Ajit Singh victories at the court, victories on the field and victories against the devil of *adharmā*". The small band of dutiful loyalists around took up the prayer and chanted it soulfully till Rani Padmajit and her son boarded the *palki* for the long trek. Rajput bodyguard, with swords drawn, flanked the palanquin as the cavalcade moved out of Lahori Gate on the first stage of journey to the imperial capital. The Governor, Shahab-ud-Din, bade the Marwar nobles farewell, not knowing perhaps the turmoils that lay ahead of the party.

There are three things that cannot be hidden: love, treachery and one riding an ass. Two stages from Delhi there came to see Durga Dass an elderly junior Mansādar whom Jaswant Singh had once rescued from the jaws of certain death in the early round of the battle of Dharmat. He had come, the visitor told the Rajput chief, "to pay a debt of gratitude and to save the innocent son of my benefactor from the ill fate that awaits him." Durga Dass was brave; hence impatient. He wanted to know at once, without notes of explanation, the details of the plot. The visitor sensed the urgency in the mind of the Rajput, and replied:

The Emperor is waiting anxiously for you and the Maharaja's son. All arrangements are complete to transport you promptly to the fort prison at Gwalior. The child will be converted to Islam and placed in harem under the charge

of Zaib-un-Nissa. The imperial army is ready in the wings to deal with the small force at your command. Beware, it will not be easy to escape the net spread out by Alamgir. He is ruthless in anger. In no circumstances will he permit the Rani and her entourage to proceed to Jodhpur. All routes to that city are closed. Imperial scouts are maintaining a close watch night and noon on all points of exit from Delhi.

I have paid my debt. Now it is up to you to devise ways to counter Aurangzeb's conspiracy.

Courage laughs at scouts and guardsmen. Durga Dass lost no time in doing what Rajputs had done in such circumstances from times immemorial. Fires were lit promptly for the ladies to perish before the Mughal soldiers fell on them. Every soldier got ready to fight his way to the motherland. A contingent of one hundred one steel-chested sons of Marwar was detailed to guard the infant. Fifty death-defying desperados offered themselves to serve as live human bombs in case the need arose for such an act to spread panic among the enemy. "Courage, thou art absolute, sole Lord of Life and death", thus began an address by Durga Dass to his five thousand followers. Fully mailed and their eyes aglow with the expectation to attain immortality, they covered the remaining two stages to Delhi in less than half the normal time. The Dewan-i-Sultanat, assisted by Prince Akbar, welcomed the advance party at the western gate and asked to be taken to "the regent and his royal ward". A look of embarrassed hesitation by the Rajput captain aroused Prince Akbar to repeat the request in a voice that savoured of an order. The stony Rajput faces made it clear the Mughal plan was known to the Marwar nobles. Sensing resistance, the Dewan shed the pretence of courtesy and beckoned his aide to read the royal proclamation which stated :

In his Divine wisdom, the Emperor desires that before proceeding to Jodhpur, the infant prince should be his honoured guest for two weeks in the harem of Begum Sahiba Zaib-un-Nissa. Arrangements have been made

for the child's comfort. Rajput nurses have been detailed to feed him and to cater to his other needs. Rani Padamjit will be housed in separate quarters in the fort. Raja Durga Dass and other Marwar nobles will be the guests of the imperial government for the period. It is ordered that the Rajput forces escorting the infant should be disarmed and disbanded. The safety of the prince, the Rani and the nobles is now our responsibility. Disobedience of this order will tantamount to an act of treason.

When informed of this royal *firman*, the fortyone-year old Durga Dass* gathered his sword, raised it to his forehead, and alerted his five commanders to be ready to "fight for your honour, your king and your *matr bhoomi*. To the youthful messengers he said, "Go and tell Prince Akbar that a Rathor Rani cannot be ordered to part with her child. Maharaja Ajit Singh is too young to be separated from his mother. The imperial order is irrational, vicious. We shall resist it with our lives. The truth will prevail in the end. We were deceived by the royal palm.

What followed is a grim tale of brutality on the one hand and bravery on the other. A show of courage by the leader teaches even asses to jump hurdles with remarkable facility. The onslaught let loose by Prince Akbar was met by the small Rathor force with lion-hearted pluck. A fierce battle raged in the streets of Delhi for several hours before the evening shut and the darkness of the night took partial control of the gory proceedings. At this point the fifty "human bombs" set themselves alight and rushed full speed ahead to break the enemy lines. This act of collective daredevilry yielded the result aimed at. Under the cover of rising panic, Durga Dass somehow managed to escape with the Rani and the infant Maharaja. Staging a rearguard action with fearlessness born of desperation; the Rathors held the imperial army long enough to enable Durga Dass to convey Ajit Singh and his mother out of the danger zone.

* Son of a Minister of Maharaja Jaswant Singh, Durga Dass was born at Jodhpur in 1638.

But for the uncommon daring of commander Raghunath who, with blood oozing out of nearly every pore of his body, led his hundred odd men to throw back a rapidly advancing Mughal contingent with heavy losses, Durga Dass would have found it impossible to make good his dash to the safety of Jodhpur. This deed of dauntless devotion to duty touched every Rathor heart. He and Durga Dass became national heroes worthy of unmixed adulation by bards and writers of folk-songs. "Every Rathor mother should have sons like Durga Dass and Raghunath", thus ran the closing lines of a *doha* written by Sant Amin Chand.

The Mughals cut to pieces every Rajput soldier that remained behind to continue an unequal battle. The pursuit of the fugitives was abandoned at the halfway stage to Ajmer. Aurangzeb was disappointed, and he marshalled his genius at deception to proclaim that the real Ajit Singh was safe in the harem of Zaib-un-Nissa and that Durga Dass fled for his life, leaving the child in the custody of two junior commanders. Official Mughal historians confirmed this report, saying that "the *jaali* son of Jaswant Singh was converted to Islam and given the name Muhammad Raj. He was given a Muslim burial when he died many years later".

This story was apparently a concoction to confuse the Rathor mind. There is abundant evidence to support the general belief that Durga Dass succeeded in transporting Ajit Singh to the safety of Mount Abu. He grew there to adulthood under the watchful eyes of Rathor tutors. The last phase of the war in Rajasthan was conditioned to a great extent by the dynamism, patriotic fervour and the military genius of this young ruler of Marwar. He and Durga Dass were in the end mainly responsible for driving home to the Mughals that the Rajputs, like the Afghans, could not be conquered.

In disappointment, as in anger, the destructive elements in Aurangzeb gained the upper hand. Baulked by Durga Dass, his ire fell on Indar Singh and the Mughal officers placed in Jodhpur for the governance of Marwar. The former was deposed and ordered to leave Rajasthan with his family members "before the rise of the next full moon". The

Faujdar of Jodhpur was recalled to Delhi to face charges of "inefficiency and neglect of duties". A strong force was sent to Marwar under Sarbland Khan, a commander known for his unyielding savagery on the battlefield. On 17 August, 1679, Aurangzeb himself moved to Ajmer for personal supervision of operations against the rebels. His orders were to "scatter ruin in Marwar and to rub out from the face of earth such heretic insurgents as Durga Dass and his allies in revolt".

This directive was of a piece with the god-less code of Sarbland Khan. Any show of resistance by tribal chiefs was virtually trampled underfoot by a soldiery with hearts of fire and chests of steel. Once again the hallowed, holy ground of Marwar was scorched to ashes, villages plundered, sacred places desecrated, stocks of foodgrains siezed or set ablaze, women dishonoured, bards and story-tellers done to death for "spreading heresies of the reddest hue", Hindu priests pelted with bricks and stones to eternal silence, foremost Rathor captains of the time subjected to hideous insults and tortures, conversion to Islam fixed as the irreducible price for clemency by the Mughal general, saboteurs and informers thrown bodily into cauldrons of boiling oil, old mosques renovated and new ones built on sites of demolished temples, music of any form forbidden in the vicinity of schools and Government offices—in fact, Marwar was reduced to a jungle where the only law was of the gun and the gallows.

For a while Raj Singh, chief of a Rathor clan, aroused loyal passion when he chose to block the passage of the Chughtai force to Jodhpur. An otherwise temperate *zamindar*, he manifested the qualities of a dauntless crusader for independence when confronted with an army hell-bent on destruction. He was one of those sons of Rajasthan who never sold honour to serve the hour. The fight he put up against incalculable odds was as heroic as it was hopeless. His entire force, numbering about three thousand, perished in the combat. Much against his will, he was persuaded to flee westward when it became clear the enemy had overrun all opposition. His last words to the three aides who escorted him out of the fray were: "History will never forgive me for this act of desertion. My helplessness, not my will, consents to quit. I throw myself at

the mercy of the Lord". Raj Singh galloped away. What happened to him thereafter is not known.

With the dissolution of resistance put up by Raj Singh there ended the saga of pitched battles fought by Rajputs against the Mughals. A dark-browed sophist, Sant Gulzari Mal, was reported to have advised Durga Dass to take a leaf from the Marhatta book and resort to guerilla warfare instead. The hills and gorges of the Aravelli favoured that mode of combat. "You may not win, but you will never lose in that type of struggle", the Sant argued. Speechless, making no further remark, he left chanting a prayer that the benign Brahma might bring victory to truth and honour.

It did not take Sarbland Khan long to annex Jodhpur and to divide the state into units governed by military commanders responsible to Delhi. The rule of *Faujdar*s in Marwar stung to the quick conscience and pride of the entire Rajput community. The Sisodias of Mewar were the first to join hands with Rathors—a historic alliance that used the scripted peaks of the Aravellis as bases for a war of attrition against the Mughals.

Rana Raj Singh was convinced that the real Ajit Singh had escaped the Mughal net and that he was safe "somewhere in Rajasthan" biding his time to come to his inheritance. He had good reason to be in full knowledge of the dramatic get-away from Delhi. Rani Padamjit was a Mewar princess and she had since then reached Udaipur by travelling on uncharted routes through the zigs and zags of a baffling rocky terrain. She told the Rana that her son was safe in the custody of the devoted Durga Dass and his band of selfless Rathor soldiers. Padamjit's evidence disproved all doubts. The Rana, endowed amply with the qualities of self-reverence and self-reliance, made preparations for a war to defend Rajput honour. The fortifications of Chitor and other forts were strengthened. A call was given to the people of Mewar to be ready to "lay down your lives at the altar of Lord Eklinga for the preservation of our glory and high standing among the warrior classes of Bharat". He also sent a message to Durga Dass by the hand of a niece of Rani Padamjit who was engaged to be married to

the son of a Rao Raja of Jodhpur. The communication read in part :

We are relieved to know that the infant Maharaja Ajit Singh is safe in your charge. The defence of his rights is the collective duty of all Rajput states. We fully share the present agony of Marwar. Our forces are on the alert for combined operations against the common enemy. Let us meet and chalk out a plan for the ouster of the foreign freebooters from our soil. We are aware of the risks involved in a do-or-die combat. The truth is on our side. We cannot but succeed. Some sufferings are inevitable, but these will be a small price to pay for the achievement of our goal. We rise or sink together.

Durga Dass could not have wished for a more favourable turn in the affairs of Marwar. An understanding was soon reached between the two most patriotic Rajput clans—Sisodias and Rathors—with regard to the manner in which the campaign was to be conducted against the forces occupying Jodhpur.

When Aurangzeb came to know of this secret pact, he resolved instantly to strike a pre-emptive blow before the allies could coordinate their efforts for the liberation of Marwar. On 30 November 1679, he himself left Ajmer in a bold bid to defuse the danger. An advance division of seven thousand men under Hassan Ali Khan was rushed to remove from the way such man-made and natural hurdles as might retard the progress of the main army of thirty thousand well-equipped soldiers.

Hassan Ali did the job assigned to him with remarkable efficiency. Not only did he clear the pockets of Rajput resistance without suffering much loss, he also used the money-power discreetly to win over to his side many tribal groups who lacked the patriotism to fight an unequal war. In a land devastated many a time by unbridled plunder, rupees and paisas spoke a language which everybody understood. Though the number of men who responded to bribery was small, yet they gave comfort to the invading army in that its scouts and spies

found in them a source of useful information. The fury of Hassan Ali's thrust gathered momentum as he advanced in a mood to make Mewar a principality of the Empire. Udaipur fell without a fight. Hassan Ali entered the capital on 4 January, 1680 after making it known by the beat of drum that the punishment of those that might choose to resist would be more than they would be able to bear. The rank and file of the Rajput soldiery took to the hills. Their hopes lay in guerilla warfare. The Rana and his courtiers abandoned the city not from fear but in accordance with a plan to lure the Mughals into the bewildering bleakness of the uplands of the Aravallis. Their strategem yielded quick results. The elated Hassan Ali, relying on his superior numbers and superior armament, went in chase of the fleeing Mewar detachments, and he paid the price for his reckless adventurism: three thousand Afghans under his command lost their way in the rocky labrynth and underwent extreme hardships before the rescue parties were able to establish contact with them.

The part played in this relief drama by Mir Shahid-ud-Din a junior Mansabdar of extraordinary courage and resourcefulness, came for high praise from the Emperor. "But for the daring and alertness of the Mir, the entire pursuit party under Hassan Ali will have been demolished either by hunger or by bands of Rajput cutthroats lurking in the perplexing pathways to the peaks where gods alone exist", wrote the official chronicler of the campaign. The Mansab of Sahid-ud-Din was raised by one thousand and he was extended the privilege of taking into his harem two princesses of the House of Mewar. A child of this concession later rose to a place of honour in Aurangzeb's court in the Deccan.

It is not dying for honour that is so hard; it is living up to it that is difficult. The Rana and his small band of faithful went through adversities of extreme poignancy in a valiant bid to escape capture and to be in a position to launch harassing attacks on the stray Mughal columns. This hob-and-nob with death called for infinite daring on the one hand and extreme circumspection on the other. For sixteen perilous days the Sisodias played hide-and-seek with Hassan Ali's forces before they were cornered into a position where a pitched battle could

no longer be avoided. Raj Singh was defeated on 24 January in an engagement that could have only one result.

The triumphant Mughal army went on a spree of plunder and destruction such as could not but send waves of shock throughout Rajasthan. No less than one hundred seventy-two temples famed for their age and sanctity were turned to heaps of ruins in a frenzy of fierce religious fanaticism. The sacred images of Lord Eklinga and other gods and goddesses held in high respect in the land of Sanga and Pratap were subjected to unspeakable desecrations and then thrown unceremoniously into the Udaisagar Lake. Chitor, the pride of Rajasthan, was once again in the hands of the Mughals. Aurangzeb was jubilant at the success of his armies. He nominated Prince Akbar for the post of Governor. A more injudicious choice could not have been made. The Empire's stars were on the decline.

Chapter Fourteen

FURY AND DESPAIR

Convinced that he had achieved what he had set out to accomplish, Aurangzeb returned to Ajmer from Rajasthan on 22 March, 1680. Little did he know that his conquest of Mewar was only a curtain-raiser for Mughal ouster once and for all from territories made rich by the blood of Rajputs who fell fighting over centuries to preserve their independence. The mistake he committed was not an error of miscalculating the score of the campaign; it was an error rooted in the misreading of the character of Rajputs. Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan fought fairly long wars in Rajasthan, but at no time did they aspire to convert it into a province of the kingdom. They recognised that Rajasthan with its traditions of chivalry could not be erased from the map of Hindustan. They too plundered and profaned this land of Baba Rawal and Sangram Singh, but only to hand it back to the native rulers for governance in accordance with their traditional laws. The Ranas of Mewar never attended the Mughal court. Neither did they at any time send Mewar troops to engage in a war on the side of the Mughals.

Aurangzeb made the cardinal mistake of aspiring to change this relationship based on compulsions of history, geography and tradition. He sent his youngest son, Prince Akbar, to consolidate the gains of victory over Raj Singh and to administer Mewar as a Muslim Governor would manage the affairs of any other province of the Empire. The young prince was not the ideal man for a task of that complexity.

His shortcomings were many, but somehow his prestige was high at the court.

Being the Governor of a newly-conquered territory is a whole-time job. Akbar's nights and evenings were not his own; they belonged in part to his enchanting entourage of concubines, mistresses and nautch-girls. The daily dates with pleasures of the senses cast their shadow on the rest of the hours which the prince could call his own. The more the people of Mewar saw him, the less they liked him. The fort of Chitor, headquarter of the Shahzada, soon became a pleasure-house that echoed every day after sunset to the rhythmic jingling of dance bells.

No man that breathes with human breath has ever longed for the sweat and tears of life behind the ramparts of a citadel. The twelve thousand soldiers under Akbar's command could not but be affected by the sensuality of the supremo. Mewar became a playground for the passion-propelled plunderers of the material and spiritual wealth of the region. The writing on the wall was clear. Akbar was heading for disaster.

There is no king on the top of hills, only gods. When Raj Singh and his followers fled for the peaks of the Aravallis, they were aware that their future was in the hands of the super-powers that rule man. Their confidence in Destiny was such as only the brave of spirit could appreciate. Neither hunger nor wild beasts blunted their resolve to remain the masters of their own fate. The Bhils and other tribes rose to a man to assist them. They cut off the Mughal supply lines, looted imperial granaries and armament depots, and instituted relay parties for maintaining supplies of provisions to the Rana and his army. The sufferings they underwent were infinite. But that did not deter them from doing what their Dharma, they believed, wanted them to do. On his part, Raj Singh practised what he preached in that he shared his hiding place with twelve juniormost men of his force, ate such food as was cooked for the rank and file, slept at night in unlit groves that gave little protection against the wind and the wild beast, often went hungry to save the precious flour for the rainy day, dug holes in the rocks himself to make room for storage of foodgrains; in fact he forgot that he was the Rana. He

remembered only that there lurked in the plains below an enemy that needed to be beaten whatever the cost in travail. The more his men saw him the greater became their respect for him. In a matter of days the sunlit peaks were converted into a citadel humming with activity. Images of Lord Eklinga were placed in temples built hurriedly at points overlooking the rocky pathways below. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, hymns in praise of the Lord rang through the rocks of silence and made it look as if a new earth had sprung under a new sun.

The Aravallis had not seen a spectacle like this before.

Ready to sacrifice their all for liberty, twelve thousand sons of Mewar waited patiently in their hideouts for an opportunity to pounce upon an unwary foe. They also waited for news of war preparations in Mewar. Durga Dass had signed with his blood a pact for the ouster of Mughals from Rajasthan. Twenty-five thousand Rathor horsemen under his command were inebriated, as it were, with the love of the motherland, and they all looked skywards in anticipation of the hour of trial. Though Jodhpur and the surrounding areas were under the control of the Mughals, the Rathor soldiery held sway over the hearts of the people everywhere. They were prepared to engage the enemy in the hills and on the planes at a signal for action by Durga Dass. The latter had become a symbol of Ajit Singh, also a symbol of resistance to the yoke that Aurangzeb had put around their necks. He was to Marwar what Raj Singh was to Mewar. The alliance between the two augured ill for the forces of occupation. Aurangzeb was no Akbar Padshah. Ugly realities repelled him. He saw only what he wanted to see. This is the way to lose empires, not to consolidate them.

It did not take long for the wayward Akbar to be called upon to hatch the eggs his own folly had produced. The desolation scattered by his loot-hungry hooligans boomeranged on the Mughal camp itself. Scarcities of food began to corrode the morale of the soldiers when supplies from Ajmer failed to reach them in time. With their bows and arrows, as also with their daggers and spears, the Bhils played havoc with the Mughal convoys, and thus virtually brought the imperial war machine to a standstill. When Akbar at long last woke up

from his slumber to face the grim development, the bulk of the army was on the verge of desertion. The prince was advised to go into action straightaway and thus save a rapidly deteriorating situation. This was exactly what the Sisodias wanted. They would rather take on the Mughals in the knotty mazes of the Aravellis than in the lowlands around Udaipur.

To make up the time lost, Akbar committed yet another blunder. His order "to catch the lion in his own lair" was nothing but a mockery of military leadership. Raj Singh and his generals let the imperial army ascend the heights unmolested till a stage was reached where retreat was self-annihilation. Then the Mewaris encircled the tired advancing columns from three sides, sealed the few routes of escape, and then attacked with shouts of "Har-Har-Mahadev" on their lips and daggers in their hands. The resultant carnage sealed the fate of the invaders. The losses suffered by them were very heavy. Those few who somehow managed to breakthrough the semi-circle of steel reached the base camp in a state of utter bewilderment.

Raj Singh decided against a hot chase. He preferred the safety of the hills to the hazards of the plains. Twenty-five thousand Rathor horsemen under Durga Dass could be depended upon to trample underfoot the Chughtai challenge in the lowlands. In April 1680 the Mughal garrison at Zafarnagar was captured by Gopal Singh, a Rathor commander who later became famous for a piece of advice he gave to the young Ajit Singh. "Touch not a disloyal person but with a three-yard long bamboo stick", he told the Maharaja when asked to sum up in a few words his counsel on how best to wage a war. A famous bard, Lakshmi Narain, took up the theme and ended a fifteen-stanza song deprecating disloyalty as a sin that even God could not forgive. This is how the words "Rajput's loyalty is Rajput's faith" came to be inscribed in gold on the front panel of the famous black-and-white marble throne of Marwar.

Not long afterwards, prince Akbar himself was caught, so to say, rowing against the current. When the news of his army's rout in the hills reached Chitor, he came out of the

fort in a huff, declaring that the Emperor had not sent him to Mewar to see the armies of Islam driven away by the forces of *kufr*. His intention was to stage what might be called a flag march to Udaipur and to impress upon the population the invincibility of the Mughal arms. Three thousand men, riding sure-footed steeds of high Persian pedigrees, followed him in the blue-and-red uniforms of august Aahidis. A unit of light artillery, led by two Portuguese gunners, brought up the rear. All went well till the cavalcade reached the outskirts of the capital when all of a sudden a party of Rajputs, led by a woman of dazzling beauty in male attire, emerged as if from nowhere, hit them like lightning, and bolted away to the safety of the hills before Akbar knew what had happened.

Though the casualties in this surprise ambush were light the jolt it gave to the prince's morale was very heavy. At Udaipur he shut himself in the ancient royal palace and wondered, in verse, if the heavenly spirits could cherish resentment against one "who loves beauty in all its forms, worships no idols, counts the beads of the rosary every morning, acknowledges the authority of the Prophet, does service to his father, and sees the hand of Allah in all that happens around him". This soul-searching continued for a few days which he later described as a bad dream, and then there began to be heard now and again after sunset the sound of music and the jingling of the *pazeb* from inside the royal apartment. Akbar came alive again. The solitude of the palace gradually burgeoned into a crescendo of pleasure. "Akbar is born to enjoy, not to grieve", he was reported to have told Mahrukh, a Circassian charmer of extreme female magnetism. The latter played a major role in the dramatic events that ended in Akbar's flight to Persia.

Lack of courage and a cough cannot be hidden for long. The news of the ambush convinced Aurangzeb that the need of the hour was a commander endowed with a heart stouter than that of Akbar. His choice fell on the twenty-seven year old Prince Muhammad Azam whose passions were of a more positive character. There are many fields of cowardice as there are many of immorality. Akbar was timid, a faint-heart, who

lacked the boldness to take a timely decision. On the other hand, Azam was a short-tempered, impetuous commander who acted before he thought. Having done that, he invariably became yellow with the fear of consequences. His daredevilry sprang from anger, not from convictions. Aurangzeb was aware of Azam's lack of tenacity in pursuit of a cause, but in his reckoning this weakness was preferable to the spinelessness that Akbar suffered from.

Azam was inordinately vain. He never failed to flaunt in public and private audiences that in his veins ran the bluest blood of the Safvis of Persia. His mother, Dilraz Begum, was the daughter of a scion of the royal house of Safvis. This pride of high descent expressed itself more often than not in gruesome violence of word and deed. When aroused in anger he would roll up his sleeves and challenge the offender to a duel or a trial of strength in the wrestling arena. His aides pacified him by flattery and many a lesser forms of sycophancy. There was no dearth in his entourage of noblemen who made it a fine art to polish rotten apples. When his head was wild with rage, a discreet reference to his "deeds of valour and generosity" would promptly bring in his eyes a gleam of understanding, and he became void of offence to God and man. Though he was a lewd prince of the baser sort, yet there was something in his anatomy that endeared him to Aurangzeb. The fact that he was the first male progeny* of his marriage with Dilraz Begum accounted perhaps for this bias in his favour. He was the only one of Aurangzeb's five sons not to have known the ignominy of imprisonment. His name was once linked with a conspiracy by Amir Khan, Governor of Allahabad, to overthrow the Emperor. The latter discounted the report and contended himself with giving Azam a long lecture on the virtues and benefits of loyalty. Amir Khan's properties were, however, confiscated and for the next twelve years he remained confined in the fort at Gwalior.

Aurangzeb thrust the supreme command in Mewar on Prince Azam in the belief that his bravado would force Rana Raj

*The first three children of Aurangzeb by Dilraz Begum were girls, namely, Zaib-un-Nissa, Zinat-Un-Nissa and Zubadat-un-Nissa.

Singh to surrender. The Providence thought, however, otherwise. Anger is a monster fearful and hideous. Azam was a misfit as supremo. Therein lay the reason for Sisodias' successes against the Mughal arms and their ability to keep intact their sovereignty. This was the hour for the dauntless spirit, not for the flaming fury of a wayward prince. The price the Mughals paid for this mistake was heavy. Aurangzeb tried to rectify his error of judgment by establishing a dual command in Mewar under Prince Azam and Prince Muazzam. The future Bahadur Shah, who was at the time in mid-thirties, was a reluctant campaigner, quick neither in thought nor in action. His appointment was yet another blunder that sealed the fate of operations in Rajasthan. The fact is that none of the sons of Aurangzeb possessed the intuitive skill to outwit the Rajputs. The result was chaos, mismanagement and retreat.

In virtual disgrace, Akbar left Mewar on 20 June, 1680. In giving him the command of the campaign in the less hostile territory of Marwar, Aurangzeb gave his favourite son yet another opportunity to retrieve his prestige.

The transfer to Jodhpur hurt Akbar's pride. It was, therefore, not surprising that he bent over backwards in a desperate bid to contain Durga Dass and his guerillas. The terrain and the high morale of the Rajputs were, however, the factors he failed to contend with successfully. The Mughal forces, stationed at strategic points, suffered setbacks after setbacks in lightning battles that ended before they began. The elusive freedom-fighters sought no quarter and gave none in skirmishes that inflicted heavy losses on the over-weight invading contingents. Akbar was distressed at the continuing reverses suffered by his men. It seemed he had no answer to the speed and daring of the forces of resistance. They cut the supply lines from Ajmer and created such scarcities of food and ammunition as left the imperial commanders groping hopelessly in the darkness of uncertainty. Bewildered, Akbar sent to Delhi no less than one hundred twenty-two letters in six months in which he tried to explain the reasons for "unfortunate rebuffs" and to plead most abjectly for understanding as also for reinforcements. His words were soft like solitude and

his tone meek and subservient. Like a dying *darvesh*, lean and fragile, who totters forth wrapped in a grey, worn out blanket, Akbar bade his time in Marwar waiting for the royal wrath to take its course.

It was at this stage that a lovely lady garmented in the light of her own beauty came to Akbar's rescue. She was Mahrukh. Her hold over the prince transcended passion. "The beauty of her mind", wrote the poet Jaswant Rai, "made the bright world dim and everything beside her seemed like the fleeting image of a shadow." She knew intuitively that Akbar's stars were on the decline and that nothing but a complete break with the past could perhaps save him from obliteration. Aurangzeb had no use for men defeated in the tasks assigned to them. Mewar was enough for Akbar's fall out of favour. Marwar, she calculated, had wrecked completely the ship of his fortune. Revolt suggested itself. She made her plans secretly with the help of another inmate of the harem, Mehtab, who volunteered to slip out of the palace in the garb of a *bahishti* (water-carrier) with a message to Bhim Singh, second son of Rana Raj Singh, whose forces were the spearhead of Rajput hit-and-run attacks against the Mughal. Akbar wrote :

Intrigues against me by my brothers leave me no alternative but to seek my destiny in independence. To that end, I seek your support. Together, we may be able to recreate a state where all men will be equal and all religions will enjoy equal status. The policies of religious intolerance pursued by the Emperor cannot but result in disaster for the Empire. The events of the last one year in Rajasthan confirm me in the belief that the policies of *Sulah-i-Kul* followed by my great ancestor Akbar Padsha hold the key to prosperity in this vast country.

The officers and men under my command are ready to hoist the banner of independence. An alliance with the Rana, as also with other rulers in Rajasthan, will assure the success of the plan to overthrow the Emperor.

I shall await your reaction to my offer before suggesting a date and place for a meeting between our representatives.

The bearer of the communication is a loyal member of

my entourage. Her integrity is beyond question. You may trust her with such message as you may not at this stage like to put in writing.

Wise is he who has learnt to read the causes of things. Bhim Singh was quick to realize that defeats he had suffered, and not the intrigues of his brothers, were at the back of the offer Akbar had made. An alliance with him at this stage, he reckoned, would serve the Rajputs well in that Aurangzeb would be hard put to it to crush the revolt much less convert Rajasthan into a province of the Empire. He saw in Akbar's proposal a God-sent opportunity to assert the sovereignty of Rajasthan as also to neutralise the advantage the Mughals had gained by their initial heavy assaults on Mewar and Marwar. His reply ran :

It is not possible to measure the possible with the actual. Yet I see in your proposal a chance to undo the damage done to Rajasthan and to the Empire by the short-sighted policies of your father. Your offer is being conveyed to revered Rana with a recommendation that it be accepted. I will get in touch with you before the birthday of Lord Krishna. In the meantime, I am instructing my troops to remain on the defensive pending further orders.

Akbar had reason to be satisfied with this reply. He used noble thoughts to justify what was obviously a wrong-doing. Fear of Aurangzeb, and that alone, motivated his decision to rebel. Liberalism and equality meant nothing to him. He was aware that his professions sprang from a timid, doubting mind, not from convictions strongly held. This realization saddened him, but the sprightly Mahrukh played the evening beam that smiled the clouds away. Akbar waited anxiously for the next move. The vision of independence and the throne imperial dispelled the doubtful disputations that at times raged within him. He, too, ordered his generals to go slow in operations against the elusive enemy.

The mark-time period ended in December 1680 with Rana

Jai Singh* and Durga Dass on the one side meeting Prince Akbar and Tahwur Khan on the other at a secluded village on the border of Mewar and Marwar. A formal pact of mutual assistance was signed. The rebellion became a reality. On 1 January, 1681, Akbar proclaimed himself Emperor and made plans, in concert with his allies, to advance on Ajmer.

Treachery begets teachery. Akbar's *volte-face* could not but induce second thoughts among his generals. Not only was Aurangzeb a master of military strategy, he was also known to be merciless in dealing with unfaithfulness. Though acutely conscious of moral values, whatever was done in war was considered by him to be beyond good and evil. The punishments he gave for infidelity were barbaric. It was, therefore, not surprising that a number of minor captains led by the veteran Shahab-ud-Din Khan broke away from the rebels and, notwithstanding the hazards confronting them, they marched to Ajmer. The forces at the beck and call of the Emperor, at this stage, were not sufficient to meet the challenge held out by the angry Akbar. Their plan was to try to bypass the Rajput forces and to reach Ajmer by following an uncharted track before the prince was in a position to launch an assault on the holy city. This daring contrivance could not remain hidden for long. Tahawur Khan, who had been designated Prime Minister by Akbar, ordered a rebel contingent to go in pursuit of the loyalists and to do whatever they could do, with or without the support of Durga Dass's guerillas, to foil Shahab-ud-Din's programme of action. The attempt failed. Luck favoured the brave imperialists, and they reached Ajmer before the advance rebel contingents moved out of Jodhpur. Delays can have serious consequences. Akbar's slothfulness lost him the first preliminary round.

Aurangzeb was relieved somewhat when Shahab-ud-Din and his officers "kissed the royal threshold" and affirmed their unswerving allegiance to the throne. The news of the revolt had caught the Emperor on the wrong foot; he had neither the time to secure reinforcements from Delhi nor the means to

*Rana Raj Singh died on 22 October, 1680. He was succeeded by his eldest son, Jai Singh.

keep the allies at bay for any length of time. "I am utterly defenceless", he told Shahab-ud-Din, and added

Allah is my trusted ally. Though at present I am in a vulnerable position, yet there is no reason for me to lose hope that somehow the evil designs of my unfortunate son will be checked and defeated. This is not the first testing time of my career. The great God helped me before many times to come out unscathed from situations more grave and more bereft of hope. My trust in him is total. Let us plan to die in defence of His will. There is no better way of assuring oneself of life with honour. At this stage I do not know who is the brains behind this uprising—the Rana or the Prince. If they do not move fast, we should be able to contain them. Who can beat me if Allah is on my side ?

In moments of stress, Aurangzeb first thought of God and then of the way to ward off the evil day. Deceit was a ploy he never hesitated to use if other means, including the sword, held little promise of success. They are by nature treacherous who swear by Allah at every step that they would be guided by His will, and that alone. Aurangzeb was one of those self-deceiving individuals who believed that Allah was the prompter of all his actions—good and bad. When the devil in his genius suggested a plan to run a wedge in the Rajput-Akbar alliance, he went to the holy Dargah to pray for its success. As he came out of the courtyard, he told Shahab-ud-Din that the Chishti had whispered blessings in his ear with a pledge to demolish the enemies of Islam before they ventured a military assault on the city. Emboldened by this assurance, Aurangzeb drafted a letter for Akbar which, in parts, read :

Ferzand-i-Danishmand, your clever move is indeed inspired by Allah. The idol-worshipping Rajputs will now be at our mercy. Encourage them by soft words to form the vanguard of your force. We are ready to annihilate every infidel who sets foot in this city. The forces at your command should be kept in the rear. At the roar of guns

from our side, they would attack the forces of the Rana from behind and make sure that not a single non-believer escapes our net. Rajasthan is now ours. God be praised for giving you the wisdom and inspiration to lure the accursed Rajputs into our trap. Highest honours and awards await you in Delhi. The Empire, it is my conviction, will be safe in your hands. None of the brothers can match your skill in diplomacy and governance. We are proud of your achievements in Mewar and Marwar. The end of the Rajputs is now in sight. Your latest manoeuvre will be written in the letters of gold by Mughal historians. Good luck ! May God protect you to ascend the Peacock Throne after me.

A team of four trusted scouts was detailed to plant this letter in the camp of Durga Dass as and when the allied force reached within firing distance of Ajmer. The assignment was difficult, but in medieval days there was nothing that could not be done with the help of beautiful women. Promise of a hundred thousand *ashrafis* lured the soft-spoken Mahrugh to deliver this letter to Durga Dass at the mid of night on 14 January 1681. The latter was struck all of a heap as he read the communication bearing the Emperor's seal. After a moment's thought, he rushed to Akbar's tent and, confronting him with the letter, enquired if he had an explanation to offer. The Prince pleaded ignorance and hinted at a plot to disrupt the alliance. The Rajput chief was in no mood to take him at his word. The evidence against him was too clear to be distrusted. In panic, the Prince offered to accompany Durga Dass to the camp of Tahawur Khan for check-up on the authenticity of the communication. Lo and behold ! The Khan was not to be found in his tent. Another woman, sister of his wife, had induced him to flee to Ajmer lest the king's wrath fell on his sons and daughters living in Delhi. The suspicion of Durga Dass was confirmed. Apparently there was a deep-rooted plot to unharm the Rajputs at the last minute. There spread panic among all sections of the allied force. Thousands of Rajputs fled to their homes in disgust. The Mughal camp, too, was hit by large-scale desertions. They preferred the uncertainty of

pardon by Aurangzeb to the certainty of defeat on the battlefield. The revolt had collapsed. A general retreat would have been an invitation to Aurangzeb to come and occupy Rajasthan. In desperation, Durga Dass decided to take the field with whatever force was left with him. Akbar followed his example. He was at pains to prove his innocence and also to affirm in deed his readiness to come to grips with his father.

Aurangzeb, joined by Shahab-ud-Din and Prince Muazzam, came out of Ajmer with his customary flourish. The smallness of the force at his call was made up to considerable extent by the words of faith in God. He addressed to them on reaching the historic battlefield of Deorai. "Allah shuns disloyalty", he roared from the back of his elephant Mastana, and added: "Our number is small, but our hearts are big. We will crush the enemy under our feet. My son consented into disloyalty at the instance of the heretics. Let us fall on them like an avalanche. Victory is our right, our absolute prerogative."

Without waiting for an offensive by the enemy, Aurangzeb ordered the war trumpets to be sounded. The allies, or whatever remained of the allied force, fled in panic at this show of intent-to-kill by the imperial army. Victory came to Aurangzeb without resort to arms. 16 January, 1681 became a day to remember in the history of Mughal wars in Rajasthan.

With a band of three hundred fifty followers and a hundred ladies, Akbar fled to the safety of an ancient fort near Jodhpur. His one wife, two sons and three daughters were captured in a village not far from Deorai. They were brought to Ajmer on 21 January in a state of virtual stupefaction. Aurangzeb received them with kindness. The five children were sent to Agra with instructions to the Fort superintendent: "Take good care of these sons and daughters of Prince Akbar. Give them everything except liberty." The wife, Zinhar Begum, was sent to Gwalior for internment there alongwith Zaib-un-Nissa. The latter was found to have secretly encouraged Akbar to proclaim himself Emperor. Heavy punishments were meted out to the captured officers of Akbar's army. Tuhawur Khan insisted upon wearing his arms when called upon to

present himself to the Emperor. Aurangzeb acceded to his request, but only to see his head chopped off as he stepped forward to profess his guilt and seek the royal pardon. Treachery at high places was unpardonable in the eyes of Aurangzeb.

The internment of Zaib-un-Nissa, eldest child of Aurangzeb and Dilraz Begum, was a step that underscored the Emperor's resolve to crush the revolt for once and for all. A poetess of considerable merit, she wrote occasionally on such subjects as the dignity of man and his relationship with the Creator. In a six-stanza poem penned in 1680, she stressed the equality of all religions, saying "to equate one man superior to another is a verdict against God and His creation". Aurangzeb took this observation as a criticism of his religious policies. In a sharp note, he reminded the princess of "the banner of Islam under which I fought and won all my wars". Zaib was greatly hurt at this unmerited rebuke from her father. In one of her letters to her younger brother, Muhammad Akbar*, who was at the time in command of the imperial forces in Marwar, she wrote :

It seems we are forbidden to express ourselves honestly on matters of the spirit. In my poem I did not degenerate Islam. Far from it, what I said was that the humankind was born equal. This enunciation makes the so-called holy wars unholy. My soul rejects the supremacy of any religion. God is one, and so are all those who breathe with human breath. This is not apostasy. This is the ultimate truth. His Majesty thinks differently. He is the ruler, arbiter of the destinies of his subjects. A partial king, howsoever great and pious, is a contradiction in terminology. Makhfi** cannot hide her feelings from a brother she loves dearly. My good wishes are with you.

This letter fell into the hands of the secret agents who

* Muhammad Akbar was the fifth and last child of Aurangzeb and Dilraz Begum.

** Makhfi was the pen-name under which Zaib-un-Nissa wrote her poems.

spied over the activities of all members of the royal family. It was not surprising that Zaib, once the most powerful lady at the court, was detained at Gwalior till her "dear brother" took refuge in Hedjaz. She died in 1701. Her last words had a ring of the last words of Nur Jahan. "Bury me in a secluded corner of Delhi", she instructed. Pomp and glitter repelled her. The real Zaib had died many years earlier.

Aurangzeb was sadly disappointed at Akbar's escape. The fear of his return at the head of Rajput forces haunted him. The ruse played on the rebel prince, he realized, could not remain hidden for long. In desperation, he first sent Shahab-ud-Din and then Prince Muazzam to hunt him down. Both failed in their missions. The daring Durga Dass took Akbar under his wings when the latter's flight to Marwar made it clear that he was in no conspiracy with the Emperor. He shielded Akbar from the wind and weather as also from foes across the border. Within seven days he was escorted into Gujarat and therefrom into the safety of the hills of Mewar. Rana Jai Singh extended to Akbar a cordial welcome, and he made arrangements, in concert with Durga Dass, to transport the Prince to the Marhatta court. He knew that all enemies of Aurangzeb were friends of Shambuji, the Marhatta chief who was under a vow to oust the Mughals from the Deccan. A messenger was sent in advance to apprise Shambuji of developments in Rajasthan and to enquire if the rebel Prince would be given asylum in the south. The reply came before Durga Dass crossed the Narbada with his ward on 9 May, 1681, that "those who have the courage to fight with arms the religious fanaticism of Aurangzeb will find in our court a base for their operations."

Happy at this assurance, Durga Dass escorted Akbar to a fortress in Konkan where Shambuji was engaged in giving final touches to a planned offensive against the imperial forces. The flame-like vigour with which Durga Dass conducted himself throughout the arduous journey led Akbar to take a pledge that "Never, never, will this namesake of the Great Mughal depart from the course of liberalism and never will he let go the hand of friendship held out by the Rajput and Marhatta chiefs." All the ladies of his harem were lodged

in apartments inside the weather-beaten castle. Special arrangements were made for their preferences in food and other living habits. Believing in the righteousness of his cause, Akbar engaged himself with touching enthusiasm in preparations for a show-down against "the forces of repression and intolerance".

It is generally believed that Khan-i-Jahan Bahadur Khan, Mughal Governor in the Deccan, secretly assisted the Prince in eluding the pursuing imperial troops. One of Bahadur Khan's daughters, Naseem Akhtar, had long been engaged to be married to Akbar. In the Prince's flight to the south, he saw an opportunity to "raise himself in the hierarchy of the court and to build for himself a place of honour in the House of the Mughals". To Aurangzeb every nobleman was a sinner unless he proved himself otherwise. It did not take him long to link Akbar's escape to the ambitions of the Khan. Not only was he transferred promptly, Naseem Akhtar was invited by Zinat-un-Nissa (Padshah Begum) to spend sometime with her in Agra. She did not go back to her parents until Akbar chose to find asylum in Hedjaz. Aurangzeb served and worshipped himself more than he served Islam.

The increased tempo of war in the Deccan could not but result in a stalemate in Rajasthan. It was at this stage that Aurangzeb took the fatal decision to transfer his capital to Burhanpur. A treaty of peace was signed with Rana Jai Singh who, in lieu of recognition of his sovereignty, ceded some parts of Mewar to the Empire. The inept, opportunistic Rana, fearing further devastation of his domain, did the rather unworthy act of accepting a rank of five thousand *sawar* and *zat* in the order of high imperial nobility. Two months later, the legendary Bhim Singh whose deeds of reckless bravery struck terror in the hearts of the Mughals also joined the imperial service. This climb-down marked perhaps the saddest moments of the lives of the two hard-pressed freedom-fighters.

Despite the signing of a treaty of peace, Aurangzeb was resolved to reduce Rajasthan to the position of a dependency. To that end he ordered his booty-hungry brigades to scatter destruction in the planes of Mewar and to let the Rana bide his time in the lofty seclusion of the hills. Mewar writhed

in anguish. Jai Singh and Bhim Singh were left with no alternative but to accept the reality that hunger was a poor companion for those trying to uphold the banner of liberty. Aurangzeb was jubilant at the success, though partial, of his arms. O' aroused lust for power, to what can thou not compel the heart of man.

Partial victories are more often not worse than defeats. They neither inspire nor satisfy. The result is disenchantment that spawns a fresh searching of the heart. This is exactly what happened to Aurangzeb. *De facto* suzerainty over Mewar led him to reassess the pluses and minuses of the campaign. The Rana still held sway in the hills. By and large the people were with him. The red flag of the Sisodias commanded respect wherever it was unfurled. The Mughal forces of occupation were hard put to it to consolidate their authority, much less win the trust of the population. In fact, the deeds of destruction and religious desecration their eyes had beheld were to them a constant reminder of the pledge taken by Rana Pratap that "never shall the alien Turks be allowed to dominate our lives in our motherland". The loss of life the imperialists had suffered was out of all proportion to the material gains of the war.

Aurangzeb seldom shared his misgivings with his commanders and senior officers. He regarded himself an envoy of God on earth. His powers and responsibilities were total, beyond question by any man born of a woman's womb. In case of doubt he secluded himself to hold secret conversation with the Lord. This is precisely what he did in September, 1681. For three days he did not come out of his prayer-room in the palace. The great Allah, he told the waiting Umra, had instructed him to slow down the tempo of hostilities in Mewar. Muslim blood was too precious to be sacrificed to gain ascendancy in the land of the heretics. The campaign in Mewar thus ended in a draw. Jai Singh was relieved to see the Mughal troops march out of Mewar step by a hesitant step. They were all sent to the Deccan. Allah had apparently whispered in the Emperor's ear that the heretics of the Deccan were more heretic than the heretics of Rajasthan.

The story was, however, different in Marwar. The trade

routes to Persia and Turkey lay through that land. No effort was to be spared to maintain control over these lines of communication. Durga Dass was however, more than Aurangzeb's match in fanatical pursuit of a cherished ideal. Independence was, to him, everything; material gains nothing. For two eventful decades he and his followers kept the Mughals at bay. Pestilences like the bubonic plague and cholera made the havoc wrought by the sword look like a leisurly jaunt in the garden. Aurangzeb died in 1707, acutely aware perhaps of the damage suffered by the Mughal prestige in Marwar.

Two years later Ajit Singh entered Jodhpur on an unmistakable note of triumph. The Mughal Emperor recognised his sovereignty. Discretion warranted that course. No more did the gods whisper in the king's ear what to do and what not to do. The Aurangzeb era ended on a dismal note. Rajasthan stood straight and proud, master of its own destiny. The marriage of Ajit Singh with a niece of Rana Jai Singh was an event of great significance in that it marked the beginning of a new chapter of mutual assistance in the annals of the two strongest Rajput states. The scourge or disunity had lost Mewar, as also Marwar, many a war with the rulers of Delhi. The marriage alliance was a card played by Durga Dass to underline the oneness of the two Houses. The people of Rajasthan rejoiced as the bridegroom accompanied by a thousand relatives, friends and noblemen reached Udaipur amidst a panorama of colour, music and dancing. The wedding ceremonial, spread over a period of six hectic days, was a mixture of high dignity, high decorum and high revelry. The presents given to the bride by the Maharana were estimated to be of the value of two and a half million rupees. The farewell given to her by the luxuriously dressed maidens of Mewar was a heart-catching blend of sobs, sighs and songs of traditional purity. As the gold-and-silver palanquin with its load of bashful chastity came out of the gates of the palace, there began to fall what may be called the rain of coins for the benefit of the waiting poor. Coins of the value of rupees one hundred thousand were thrown over the heads of the bride and the bridegroom— an act of conventional charity meant to

invoke God's blessings on the newly-wed couple. A million Shahnais, wrote a Mewar poet, joined in and made the spectacle a sight for the angels.

Similar scenes were witnessed when the *Barat* returned to Jodhpur. Famed astrologers were at hand to exercise their skills in star-gazing. They all predicted endless joys for the Maharaja and Maharani of Marwar. One foreteller, of Bikaner, Pandit Mahadeo, ventured, however, to strike a discordant note. After taking into account all the stars and all the satellites, the Brahmin said that "a trouble weighs upon the lady and that disturbs her night and noon." An agitated Ajit Singh carried this reading to the Rani and enquired if there was truth in what the divine had said. She became pensive. No word came out of her lips. The Raja repeated the inquiry. The exquisitely fair lady again gave no answer. When Ajit Singh spoke for the third time, there was impatience in his voice. The Rani moved closer to her husband and, speaking in a voice soft and gentle, said : "My master, the holy man is not wrong. A turmoil does rage within me; it arises from the dying words of my mother. She said the honour of dynasties rested more on its women than on men. With a gentle pat on my head, she asked me to remember that bravery, honesty and faithfulness were the finest ornaments a princess could adorn herself with. My burden, O' controller of destinies, is heavy. The honour of the two great Houses now rests on me. In the event of a conflict between the two states, I shall succumb under the weight of my dual responsibilities. Show me the way out, my overlord."

Ajit Singh understood the import of her words. He took her in his arms and pledged there and then that, whatever the differences, never will he take to the sword against Mewar and he went on to add that never would he align himself with those seeking to wage war against Mewar. A gleam of happiness came over the face of the Rani. Ajit Singh kept his word to the end of his life. The honour of the great Houses does rest on their women.

For some months Akbar remained shut up in the seclusion and safety of Konkan. He was one of those princely phenomena who desired everything without initiating effective action

to get anything. In the hope that God and the Marhattas would somehow win the empire for him, he spent his days making airy plans for an unknown future. Shambuji put forth some concrete proposals for engaging the imperial forces in hit-and-run battles, but Akbar did not seem interested in undertaking unequal conflicts. The galaxy of women who accompanied him to the Deccan used their infinite allures to trample underfoot the embers of revolt that were still smouldering in his heart. Solitude and passivity are the two worst enemies of man. The once rebellious Akbar thus gradually became a prisoner of his weaknesses and waxed contentment with his lot. Only if the fools persist in their follies they would become wise. Akbar lacked the stamina to persist in his wrong-doing. The fate of the rebellion was sealed.

When Aurangzeb marched to the south after making peace in Mewar, the writing on the wall for Akbar became clear. All other interests become dumb when the rostrum is taken by self-survival. Akbar was like a broken bow. In desperation he accepted the advice of his Marhatta and Rajput well-wishers to take refuge in Persia. The Shah had expressed willingness to give him asylum. His planned departure on board a merchant vessel was kept a well-guarded secret till he reached Hedjaz.

When he came to know of the Prince's escape, Aurangzeb exclaimed: "Good riddance! Misfortune is a curse that never comes alone. I shall now wait for the news of his death."

Akbar died in exile in Persia in 1704. He was buried at Mashad. In one of his angry letters to the errant prince, Aurangzeb forecast that "the disobedient son will take the road to hell before the angels escort his father to the palace in heaven". It is difficult to know who went to hell and who to heaven. Aurangzeb was, however, right in predicting that he would die after his disloyal son.

Chapter Fifteen

PATRIOTIC TREACHERIES

The death of Muhammad Adil Shah of Bijapur in November, 1656, marked the opening of a new scene that gave rise to new hopes, new fears and new war strategies in the Deccan. His successor, Ali Adil Shah II, was one of the species of man who alienate nature for lack of courage. As Viceroy, Aurangzeb was at the time poised to humble both the Marhattas and the Sultanates. The ever-circumspect Shivaji, at thirty, roamed about the hills of Konkan like a rugged Russian bear—fearless, full of ego and hell-bent on demolishing all opposition to his will. His skirmishes with the Mughals on the one hand and the Sultanates on the other had already become sagas of patriotic treachery. Qutb Shah of Golconda, not knowing where his interests lay, made mockery of political and military alliances by playing the hare and the hound at the same time. He met the fate that invariably befalls those who are the enemies of all and friends of none.

Aurangzeb was the shrewdest of the contenders for hegemony in the south. His firm nerves never trembled at the sight of danger, and he went on the rampage like a wounded lion when diplomacy failed to accomplish what he wanted to achieve. Often was he heard to hum gently a Hafiz aphorism that none but the brave deserved the fair. Islam was his religion and courage his creed. He knew by experience that the only thing constant in the seventeenth century Deccan was inconstancy. The loyalties in Bijapur and Golconda were on sale at a price; he bought them easily whenever the

circumstances warranted recourse to that stratagem. In fact, everybody distrusted everybody in the Deccan, and when that happens the power of money becomes greater than the power of sword.

The things were in a flux when in January, 1658, Aurangzeb left Deccan to stake his claim to the throne. Shah Jahan was reported to be dying, if not dead already. The Prince Royal, Dara Shikoh, was at hand in Agra to wrest the throne as it fell vacant. Both Shuja and Murad Baksh declared themselves Emperor in Bengal and Gujarat, respectively. Their armies were on the move for a trial of strength with one or other of the aspirants for the crown. Old in treacheries, Aurangzeb proclaimed at Aurangabad that his heart lay in Mecca, not in the imperial capital. To save the Empire from falling in the hands of the infidel Dara Shikoh, he said time and again, was the one objective of his life. He gathered around him his loyal noblemen and brave soldiery and pushed northwards to seize the throne either by force or by duplicity. There was no haze in his sight. He knew full well the weaknesses of his brothers as also the vulnerabilities of his dying father. The Deccan was of little consequence in the struggle that lay ahead. Shivaji, Ali Adil Shah and Qutb Shah, he felt, could be depended upon to keep one another at bay till he returned as Emperor to demolish and devour their little kingdoms.

Faith consists in believing what is not within the power of reason to believe; it is not enough for a thing to be possible for it to be believed. The belief that he was chosen by God to confound the ruling junta in Agra was an article of faith with Aurangzeb. He won the war of succession and proclaimed himself Emperor near Delhi on 10 July, 1658. This development had grave implications for the protagonists for power in the Deccan. They knew that Aurangzeb would not be content with anything less than the merger of their domains in the Empire. They also knew that he knew their internal weaknesses and that he would leave nothing undone to exploit them for his advantage. While they virtually rang bells when he left, now they were near to wringing their hands in

anticipation of the imperial wrath that was sure to fall on them.

In this crisis of self-confidence, efforts were made by rulers in the south to forge a semblance of unity among themselves, but in vain. Self-interest raised its hideous head at every level and at each stage of negotiations, thus leaving the field wide open for the treacherous Viceroy of a treacherous Emperor. Shivaji was the only one to discern a different design of nature in Aurangzeb's victory. "If heaven had looked upon the throne of Delhi as something valuable he would not have given it to such a scoundrel as Aurangzeb", he told his counsellor Raghunath. The Marhatta chief thwarted the imperial plans and he succeeded in carving out for himself a kingdom that became an historical phenomenon of infinite political significance. The rise of Marhatta power marked the end of the Shiite ascendancy in the south; it also marked the decline of the Mughal sun in the north. The stewards of the mysteries of history stood against at this turn of the tide. It seemed the processes of evolution changed their course to facilitate introduction in the Orient of new ideas, new urges and new concepts about the destiny of man.

Between January, 1658, and March 1682, when Aurangzeb returned to conquer Deccan many an event took place that led the common man to believe that Shivaji was outside the compulsions of cause and effect. A miracle man came to earth to humble the big battalions with the dauntlessness of spirit. The only child of the profoundly religious Jija Bai, daughter of a nobleman of Ahmednagar, Shivaji spent the best part of his childhood in the company of his mother. His father, Shahji, chose to live separately with his favourite wife and her son. The stories of Shahji's many successful and many more unsuccessful fights against the Mughal and Bijapuri forces left Shivaji cold. He thought his father's actions lacked cohesion and firmness. He often went to the family temple of goddess Bhiwani at Pune and meditated there for long hours seeking answers to questions that puzzled him. The discerning eye of Jija Bai saw the struggle that was waging in the child's mind as a sign of his future greatness. She fanned the fires that

burned within him with stories of Rajput bravery read out to him in the glow of the lamps that were lit in the temple courtyard after sunset. The exploits of his ancestors aroused in Shivaji the brand of patriotism that subjugates means to the end. Freedom became for him an all-consuming obsession that permitted of no compromise, no firm alliances with a foreign, alien power.

Mothers are partial to their sons. They think every son divinely-inspired when he is going to the camp or the gallows. Jija Bai was no exception to this rule. She prayed to goddess Bhiwani noon and night for grant to Shivaji of the steel that made resolutions irreversible. Each day when he came in the morning to touch her feet in reverence, she invariably blessed him, saying "you may fall, but you must never yield". These words became for Shivaji a command to be obeyed with his life if needed. At crucial hours he forged many a submissive treaty with Bijapur, as also with the Mughal Viceroys, but only to break them to rehabilitate his honour. The widespread loot he indulged in was to provide himself with the means to terrorise his enemies into acknowledging his right to independence. The love of lucre, he told his mother, was a disease more repellant than laprosy. The destruction he spread in the name of liberty, he believed firmly, was not destruction but "the scattering of seeds for a future sans slavery, sans servitude to suppression of the soul by those who have no souls."

Jija Bai was a lonely person. Shivaji and God were her only two companions. All her time was spent in invoking the one for the glory of the other. Shivaji found in her a spiritual ally who inspired him and guided his destiny. Never did he go out to wage a war or defend a partner-in-arms without first laying his sword at the feet of his mother. She would, in turn, lift the weapon in silent reverence, raise it to her head, and then hand it over to her son, saying: "Whatever you do, do it to the glory of your race and your God. The merciful Bhiwani will protect you. Have faith in her. I shall wait for your safe return. Good luck" The departing look he gave to his mother was a promise, a pledge, to abide by her commandment. No words could have been more eloquent of

his profound respect for and faith in Jija Bai. The son-mother equation between the two had burgeoned into a relationship of a disciple to his deity. In the evening of his life he proclaimed to his noblemen that "all the blessings of the gods come through the mother". This was not a vain enunciation. He meant every word of what he said. For him there was no other God but the mother. She ruled his life with the magic of her love and chaste simplicity.

A fool looks wise to a fool, a liar to a liar. The treacherous Aurangzeb saw in Shivaji the self-same qualities of character that won him the throne at Agra. He was deceitful, a religious fanatic, ruthless, one who had induced himself to believe that he was born to command, not to obey. In Shivaji, Aurangzeb recognised his own image, a religion-propelled maniac hard to check and harder to beat. Pressing developments in the north kept him from travelling southwards for nearly half the period of his reign, but he never lost sight of the reality that in Shivaji there existed a threat to Mughal authority. The Viceroys he chose to govern the southern sector of the Empire were all men of high talent and proved trustworthiness. Prince Shah Alam held that high office for eleven years, Bahadur Khan for six, Shaista Khan for four and Jai Singh for two years. In addition, their deputies and senior commanders were hand-picked by Aurangzeb himself with an eye to their diplomatic and fighting qualities. Reports of developments there came to him by the hand of special couriers at fixed, regular intervals. Not unoften did he scrap important engagements to be able to devote his time to study and analyse these despatches personally and issue orders to his representatives. The remote control he thus exercised was a clear evidence of his political and military priorities. As a prince he had spent a major part of his life in the south. He knew the region and its intricate political zig-zags as intimately as he knew the lines on the palm of his hand. The Deccan meant to him more than a mere area for expansion; it was the seat of apostates (Hindus and the Shiites) that needed to be uprooted once and for all.

Shivaji dreaded Aurangzeb as Aurangzeb dreaded Shivaji. The departure of Aurangzeb to the north was a god-sent

opportunity for the Marhatta chief to consolidate his position in Konkan. His guerilla forces surprised and captured many minor forts and thus he set up a base for the establishment of a kingdom that was to be a thorn in the side of Aurangzeb for as long as he lived. Shivaji's devastating raids, more than his victories, sent a wave of alarm in Bijapur. The Dowagar Queen detailed no less a commander than Afzal Khan to mount an expedition against the Marhatta strongholds. The *firman* issued to him mentioned specifically the desirability of capture of Shivaji and destruction of the forces that caused havoc in Bijapuri territories. Ten thousand crack troops with supporting units of artillery under European gunners were placed under his charge. Though the opposing Marhatta forces numbered nearly sixty thousand, the hitting power and high training of Bijapuri troops compensated for the comparative smallness of their size. Further, Shivaji's forces were spread over a large area that made numbers more a handicap than an advantage. Even Afzal Khan split his men into small mobile units and made plans to beat the Marhatta at their own game.

However, before taking recourse to force, Afzal Khan tried guile to lure Shivaji into his trap. Treachery was more in fashion in the days of Aurangzeb and Shivaji than ever before. Braver behind the castle wall than outside, the Khan wrote a secret letter to Shivaji in which he made tall promises and taller pledges to tell the Marhatta chief :

We are sons of the same soil. Our aims are common and our destinies interlinked. In forgetting that we have a common foe in Mughal imperialism, we are forgetting our responsibilities to the generations to come. Let us unite and make plans to rid our land of the Mughal scorpion. To that end I invite you to a meeting in my camp. Have no fear, my honoured friend. Your honour is mine and your safety the responsibility of every soldier under my command.

Nobody will be present at the meeting except a couple of unarmed advisers on either side. Whether we agree or disagree, no hurdle will be placed on your safe return to

the fort. This is a pledge on oath before the great God. The venerable queen is a party to this guarantee. I shall wait for your reply with hope that the initiative taken by me will not go waste.

The receipt of this letter stirred in Shivaji some hope, some doubt and plenty of hard thinking. Everything with him was either God or Devil. He cared for no intermediary agent. The decision he was called upon to take bristled with possibilities good and bad. His thoughts turned to goddess Bhiwani, and he prayed to her for guidance. It is believed the family deity came to him in the garb of a singer of popular hymns and, with her eyes full of Divine compassion, she sang to him a famous Marhati invocation to Lord Brahma for victory. The melody of the sacred chant swelled Shivaji's heart to believe that the supreme being was with him in this hour of crisis and that he should accept the invitation and go to meet Afzal Khan without fear or doubt.

The Marhatta chief called Afzal Khan's envoy, Krishnaji Bhaskar, to his presence and asked him, in the name of the universal spirit, if Afzal Khan contemplated treachery. The whiskered envoy remained silent for a few embarrassing moments, and then he apparently struggled with himself to answer the question in vague generalities about religion and statecraft. Full of eyes within, Shivaji could read like an open book the changing lines on the envoy's face. He was convinced that the Bijapur commander could not be taken at his word. The reply he handed over to Bhaskar stated, among other things :

Your words encourage me to picture to myself the vision of an independent, sovereign kingdom of the Deccan. The alien power you have referred to is no doubt a stigma on our honour. I will gladly go to the farthest end of the earth to plan its ouster.

While accepting your thoughtful invitation, I would suggest that we meet on neutral ground without body-guard, armed escorts and large teams of advisory officials. It is suggested that there should not be more than four

counsellors on either side.

I have explained my thoughts at some length to Krishnaji Bhaskar. He will, no doubt, apprise you of my views on the subject raised in your letter of invitation.

When buying a horse or when making preparations for a war to fight evil, it is my practice to shut the eyes and throw myself at the mercy of God.

Afzal Khan was jubilant at the prospect of capturing Shivaji alive. However, death laughed at his optimism. Little did the wily Khan know that Shivaji was more than his match in duplicity. The Marhatta chieftain carried a larger quantum of cunning in his little finger than Afzal Khan had in his whole body. The odds were heavily against him.

The conditions set by Shivaji were accepted. A tent was pitched on a piece of neutral ground near the fort of Partapgarh. Afzal Khan and his team of four advisors were the first to arrive there on 10 November, 1659. Shivaji and his men entered the tent at an astrologically auspicious hour near sunset. All smiles, Afzal Khan stepped forth to welcome the Marhatta leader. The embrace that followed became a legend in double-crossing. The burly Khan planned to crush the slightly-built Shivaji with the force of his arms. The hidden armour foiled the Khan's tactic. Realising that Shivaji was prepared to checkmate foul play, Afzal Khan took out a sword concealed under his long robe, but before he could strike a blow, Shivaji thrust into the Khan's soft under-belly a steel claw worn on his right hand. Afzal collapsed in pain before any of his men could come to his rescue. In the resultant panic, one of the four Marhatta counsellors silenced the Khan for ever with a dagger. His head was severed from the trunk and carried away as a trophy of war. The carnage that followed marked a new low in savagery. The hidden Marhatta forces sprang into action at the sound of a signal from Shivaji. They routed all the enemy forces and then went on to slay the slain. Though slightly hurt on the right shoulder, Shivaji reached the safety of Partapgarh before the gruesome scene was enveloped in the darkness of the night.

The news of this setback suffered by Bijapuri forces alarmed

Aurangzeb in that it underlined the growing strength of Marhattas. It seemed the fortunes of Shivaji were on the rise and that unless steps were taken quickly to contain him, the Mughal forces in the Deccan would be hard put to it to meet the threat. However, Aurangzeb's hands were more than full at the moment. The war of succession had left the Empire seething with discontent and diminishing loyalties. Continuing scarcities of foodgrains, it was feared, would generate conditions helpful to the enemies of the Empire.

Aurangzeb could hardly be called an unjust man though he had committed many heart-rending injustices. Religious considerations narrowed his vision, but that myopic condition did not deter him from sending out Rajput generals to fight their co-religionists in the south. In the appointment of Maharaja Jaswant Singh as deputy to the Viceroy Shaista Khan there lay hidden a strategy to kill at least three birds with one stone. He wanted to appease the Rajputs and, through them, to keep a watch over the activities of the Shiite Shaista Khan. He also reckoned that if Jaswant Singh was true to his salt, he might perhaps be able to soothe Shivaji with comparative ease. His objective at this stage was not to destroy Shivaji but to make friends with him for the subjugation of Bijapur. Already he (Shivaji) had suffered some stunning defeats at the hands of the Abyssinian Salabat Khan. He was thus in a mood to come to terms with the Mughals. In fact, the triangular war for supremacy in the south was a war of treacheries. The sword came in only when cunning failed to gain its end.

Though his fortunes were at a low ebb, Shivaji kept both Shaista Khan and Ali Adil Shah guessing about his next move. He was resolved to run or ruin the kingdom of Bijapur. His resolution was equally firm with regard to the ouster of Mughals from the Deccan. Aurangzeb was aware of these yearnings in the heart of the "Marhatta monster", and his wily eye saw in these twin cravings an opportunity to rub him out of existence. However, he waited for a more opportune moment to deliver the *coup de grace*.

From the communications received by Shaista Khan from Agra it became clear that the Emperor wanted him to test

Shivaji's strength by carrying probing raids into his kingdom. For the next year (1662-63) the Khan did exactly that and he came very near to dislodging the Marhattas from Konkan. Shivaji held on, however, to the southern part of his domain and he used the forts there as bases for his forays into territories held by the Mughals. The capture of Pune and Chakan by the imperialists were blows that shook somewhat Shivaji's confidence in his ability to call a halt to Shaista Khan's sustained offensive. For a while he felt as if his vessel was upset and his masts broken; it seemed he was poor for life. He was, however, not yet ready to throw in the towel.

At this stage, as always when in trouble, Shivaji turned to his mother for advice and support. Calm and collected, Jija Bai reminded her son that the glory was to bear the setbacks with fortitude. "Have faith. As a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, one success will turn the tide in your favour. Do not faint, but pray. The day is not distant when the Mughals will be on the run. Who will have the capacity to stand against you if God is on your side? Go, my son, the blessings of a mother will never go waste"; she told her Shiva. These words infused in Shivaji a new life, a new hope and a new resolve to carry on the fight whatever the hazards. He prostrated himself at the feet of his mother, swore loudly by goddess Bhiwani never to succumb to faint-heartedness again, and came out chanting praises of the Lord for giving him a mother so inspiring, so noble and so firm in faith. Perhaps the daring night-attack on Shaista Khan four days later originated in the words of encouragement spoken by Jija Bai.

On the fifth day of April, 1663, Shivaji "took his seat on a golden chariot drawn by reckless courage", and he did something which made his friends and his foes believe that he was endowed with such magical powers as could "make him walk the crowded streets unseen and fly high up in the sky at the speed of lighting". To carry out an assault on Shaista Khan right in his bed-chamber and then to escape unscathed was an exploit, wrote bards and historians, that could not have been possible without the support of forces beyond the ken of man.

Shaista Khan had taken residence in Pune in the mansion

where Shivaji spent a major part of his boyhood. Every part of the house, as also its exits and entrances, were known to Shivaji like he knew the colour of his hair and the texture of his skin. At the mid of night when the city was asleep Shivaji and a band of his light-weight commandos descended, as if from the blue, in the middle of the room where Shaista Khan was half-asleep following the customary hectic late evening with his concubines and mistresses. The pandemonium that broke out in the harem took by surprise the battalions of guardsmen stationed outside. Alarm trumpets were sounded and men and officers of the imperial force struggled with one another to find their way to the Khan's apartment. In the meantime, the Marhattas went on the rampage. A couple of fair inmates lost their lives in the scramble before a concubine displayed an extraordinary presence of mind in putting out the only lamp that was shedding light from a corner of the chamber. In the resultant darkness, Shaista Khan, bleeding profusely from sword cuts on his thumb and left shoulder, slipped away by way of a secret passage through an anteroom, to the safety of the commandant's apartment in the courtyard. By the time the imperial bodyguard came in with their torchlights and other paraphernalia of a night rescue act; the elusive Shivaji and his companions had left by an underground passage dug before the raid was launched. Every face was a picture of astonishment at what had happened. Most men suspected treachery and most women black magic.

In the morning Maharaja Jaswant Singh was the first to come and enquire about the Viceroy's condition. Shaista Khan's remark that "I thought you had fallen defending my camp residence" was significant. Suspicion was widely shared that the raid was facilitated by Jaswant Singh and his Rajput captains. This surmise was not entirely without reason. Jealousy and differences of religion have in all ages been the common enemies of loyalty.

The news of this night-raid shocked Aurangzeb. He attributed "the Marhatta effrontery to woeful laxity in safety measures". His wrath fell on Shaista Khan for what he called an irresponsible neglect of duties. He was transferred to Bengal—a problem state rich in inconveniences and poor in

the joys that made Viceroyalty a coveted post. Bereft of honour, Shaista Khan gradually became something nothing, a wreckage of the glories of the yesteryear.

Shivaji was a soldier of fortune. The departure of Shaista Khan was taken by him as a signal from the gods to indulge freely his penchant for plunder. The flourishing city of Surat (population two hundred thousand) was a lure he found hard to resist. Its wealth, its trading depots, its vulnerable defences and its inept, spineless Mughal Governor, Inayat Khan, were the dream of a desperado like Shivaji. The British and Dutch factories in this west coast city were known to contain valuable art objects from the capitals of Europe. Their fabulous gifts to the Emperor and his representatives in the Deccan excited the envy of the Sultans as also of the Marhatta chieftains. Emboldened by the dramatic success of his Pune night-attack on Shaista Khan, Shivaji made plans to ransack Surat of its riches and also to terrorise the population into dissatisfaction with its rulers. Impelled by the lust for loot, he broke through the feeble outer defences of the city after midnight on 6 January, 1664, set fire to big mansions and trading depots, ransacked shops and godowns, and used the sword indiscriminately to demolish all opposition to the raid. The Governor's bankruptcy of the will to resist was underlined by his decision to remain grounded behind the stone-walls of the fort and to let the money-hungry Marhattas have a field day for as long as they liked.

On the third day, Inayat Khat sent an envoy to Shivaji's camp ostensibly with proposals for peace but in actuality with a treacherous design to let a hidden dagger hold the final argument with the Marhatta chief. Shivaji received the ambassador in his yellow tent and asked him in a tone more rough than polite about the purpose of his mission. Saying "I will let you know presently", the lean Afghan whipped out a dagger from under his robe, hurled it at Shivaji, and then made a desperate bid to escape. The guards overpowered him and, before many people knew what had happened, the visitor's head lay in a pool of blood outside the tent.

Though taken aback at the suddenness of the attack, Shivaji kept his calm and immediately ordered investigation

into the circumstances that led to the "grave omission" of letting an armed emissary come to his presence. The injury received by him on the arm took many weeks to heal. Had the missile lodged where it was intended, the result might have been fatal. Shivaji ascribed his escape to the "protective hand of my mother, my saviour". In reprisal, he ordered the execution of hundreds of prisoners taken in the course of the four-day raid.

Many western chroniclers have written about "the resolute resistance put up by the British and Dutch settlers in Surat". This is perhaps not true. The more credible version is that the "shopkeepers of Europe hid themselves behind the iron gates of their establishments and they came out only when the Marhattas had left the city with booty of incalculable value". Had the white traders chosen to fight the invaders with all the mechanised weaponry at their command, the city would have certainly been saved the devastation it suffered. Nearly three-fourths of Surat was in ashes before Shivaji ordered stop looting.

In Shivaji's eyes, the raid achieved what it was intended to accomplish, to remind the Mughals that the growing Marhatta power was a factor to be reckoned with in the south and that it would be a folly to ignore their rights and aspirations. Shivaji was a plunderer with a purpose, not a ravager who counted his gains in terms of material wealth alone.

Acting on the general dictum that when a commander errs the captain is not innocent, Aurangzeb replaced Maharaja Jaswant Singh with a more brilliant Rajput campaigner, Mirza Raja Jai Singh. Full of bravery from top to toe, the Raja, at sixty, retained much of his military and diplomatic genius that distinguished his career of nearly half a century at the Mughal court. The task assigned to him was the subjugation of Shivaji who was gradually reconquering the forts and territories wrested from him by Shaista Khan. The new Viceroy, Prince Muazzam, was given instructions to give the Raja a free hand in the discharge of his duties. In fact, the Raja was given an independent command with instructions to send his reports directly to the Emperor. A galaxy of distinguished Rajput and Muslim generals was deputed to assist him on and off the field.

Aurangzeb's faith in Jai Singh's capacity to tame and overpower the "Marhatta villain" was so great that he made plans to visit Aurangabad for victory celebrations.

Crossing the Narbada on 30 January, 1665, Jai Singh lost no time in launching first a diplomatic offensive against Shivaji. All the known arts of the duplicity of the pen—flattery, tall promises, fake pledges, offers of bribery, appeals in the name of religion and mild threats of consequences if his overtures were not headed—were used by the Raja prior to buttressing his argument with the sword, the spear and the gun. The Marhatta-held forts fell like nine-pins before the imperial onslaught. The Mughal speed and tactics became the despair of Shivaji and he was forced to sue for terms of peace. An envoy, Raghunath, was sent to the Raja with an offer of surrender provided, *a la* the Rana of Udaipur, he was exempted from attending the court personally. Jai Singh was jubilant at yet another success of his long military career. Accepting the offer in principle, he invited Shivaji to call on him for detailed discussion on the terms of a treaty. The following letter sent by Shivaji to Raja Jai Singh reflects the stuff he was made of :

Brother Jai Singh, I have no alternative but to accept your invitation. Your forces are strong and in good heart, mine are comparatively weak and exhausted. Further resistance by me will be suicidal. The supremacy of your arms is acknowledged with a heavy heart. Let me confess that my weakness and not my will consents to the humiliation of seeking for terms of peace. But please note that the Marhatta honour is not negotiable. The forts and territories are a different matter. We may discuss them but never, never, shall I be a party to any give-and-take about matters bearing on personal and national prestige. As a son of the sacred soil of Rajasthan, you should be able to appreciate our values and our priorities.

I have conveyed to the envoy my decision to discuss personally with you the terms of a lasting treaty on the presumption that the Emperor would not insist on our accepting such conditions as were not found acceptable

by the Rana of Udaipur. We acknowledge our setbacks in war, but that does not mean that our spirits are broken. Death will be preferable to the surrender of soul.

I shall come unarmed and without bodyguard. My life and honour will be in your hands. I can trust a Rajput.

Unescorted, unarmed, Shivaji reached the Mughal camp in the vicinity of the fort of Parrandar midway between sunrise and noon the next day. Senior Rajput officers escorted the Marhatta ruler to Jai Singh's heavily-guarded red-and-blue imperial tent. The victor came up to the narrow entrance to receive the vanquished foe. This was a moment of history fit for the eyes and ears of the gods of war. Both were products of the time—wily, alert, watchful, courteous but firm, smileless, purposeful, conscious of their duties and obligations, aware of the common bonds of religion, ambitious, ready to make pledges meant to be broken, God-fearing, well-read in history and prone perhaps to exaggerate their virtues and belittle their vices. Jai Singh extended his arms for an embrace. Shivaji responded with wariness. Afzal Khan was still fresh in his memory. The mutual suspicions vanished as the two sat down to take stock of the realities and to plan ways to bring about peace. Both were conscious of the immensity of the issues at stake. Jai Singh's military advantage was offset by the hundreds of rough miles that separated Agra from Aurangabad. On the other side, Shivaji could not but take account of the loss of Mughals in recent months of many a strategic fort and position. Peace was a necessity the Marhatta chief could not for the time ignore. The cost, he reckoned, was of little consequence if a period of respite was to be gained. The circumstances thus precluded rigid stances. Both Jai Singh and Shivaji were in a chastened mood. The talks were more friendly than business-like. It did not take them long to agree on the following irreducible minimum for a treaty of peace :

- * Shivaji to surrender the twenty-three forts he had reconquered in the last two years.
- * Twelve forts, including the prestigious citadel of Rajgarh, to be left in Shivaji's possession.

- * Pledge by Shivaji of service and loyalty to the imperial throne.
- * Exemption to Shivaji from attending the imperial court in person; instead his son, Shambuji, to attend the court at Agra with a Mansab of five thousand.

The four-hour meeting ended amidst smiles with the customary embrace by the two negotiators. The next day, 14 June, 1665, Jai Singh presented Shivaji a richly-caparisoned elephant and two equally well-dressed horses—a ceremonial which underlined equality and brotherhood. The treaty was no victory for the Mughals, and neither was it a defeat for Shivaji. The accord was ratified by Aurangzeb at Delhi on 23 June.

The climax of the three-month expedition satisfied the Emperor's ego. The bitterest enemy of the realm had set his hand to a treaty that acknowledged him as overlord of the Marhatta kingdom. The role of Jai Singh in this happy outcome was lauded by Aurangzeb in no uncertain words. "Your splended achievement is a matter of pride to us. Your abilities were never in doubt. Honours commensurate with your success await you in Delhi", the Emperor told him in his own handwriting. He also suggested that efforts should be made to avail of Shivaji's services in the planned hostilities against Bijapur.

This high praise could not but go to the head of the Rajput supremo. His despatches to Delhi at this stage reveal not modesty in success but a degree of boastfulness that ill-behoved a courtier of his status. This swagger did not go unnoticed by the sharp-eyed monarch who reminded him obliquely more than once that "Allah, not man, is the architect of victories on and off the battlefield". Jai Singh took the hint and he began writing praises of the Lord for "throwing in our lap gifts that reflect His benevolence". Aurangzeb accepted the veiled apology. The time was not opportune to deflate the Raja of his self-esteem. Aurangzeb forgave Jai Singh, but he did not forget to bring him to earth at the earliest opportune moment. Aurangzeb never left a dignitary, nor even a royal prince, to gather such strength, nor even

the illusion of strength, as might induce disobedience. Suspicion was inbuilt in his anatomy.

No man is demolished but by himself. In his bid to please the Emperor, Jai Singh induced Shivaji to visit Agra. The Marhatta chief was at first reluctant to accept the suggestion, but he gave in when Jai Singh told him that the Viceroyalty of Deccan would be the prize for that gesture of friendliness. Here was a bait that Jai Singh threw without authorisation from the Emperor. He reckoned perhaps that the vain promise would be lost somewhere in the rigidities of the court protocol and that it would never boomerang on him. He did not, however, take into account the self-revealing attribute of truth; neither did he calculate correctly the quantum of ambition and circumspection in Shivaji. The latter kept Prince Muazzam informed secretly of the gist of all that transpired between him and Jai Singh. When Aurangzeb came to know of this uncalled for diplomatic bluff, he asked Jai Singh for an explanation. The supreme commander denied the report, and he attributed it to "high-placed agents in Aurangabad who are resolved to see me out of their way in Deccan". The Emperor did not press the complaint further. The tone of *firmans* issued hereafter was, however, sterner. It is clear that Aurangzeb tended to believe that the Raja over-played his hand. He had no intention to appoint Shivaji as his representative in Deccan. The very idea was repugnant to him. Once an enemy, and always an enemy—this was an article of faith with Aurangzeb. His admiration for Jai Singh gradually degenerated into dissatisfaction. Later events confirmed this change in his estimation of the man.

After taking stock of its advantages and disadvantages, the proposal for a visit to Agra was approved by the Marhatta Council of advisers. Shivaji subordinated his scepticism to the lure of an opportunity to demolish the Sultanates with the help of Mughal arms. This was perhaps the biggest miscalculation of his life. Aurangzeb was too astute a monarch to leave himself only a single enemy to face in the south. His plans were laid differently. He aimed at neutralising Shivaji before waging a total war against the Shiite kingdoms. Both Aurangzeb and Shivaji were aware of each other's innermost

thoughts and both were at pains to catch the other on the wrong foot. Shivaji's acceptance of the invitation to visit Agra was a gamble that might make or mar his future.

Before leaving on 5 March, 1666, Shivaji took steps to ensure in his absence smooth administration of Marhatta territories. The saintly Jija Bai was made regent with a team of six counsellors drawn from different parts of the kingdom. To Shivaji his mother was like a goddess all-beneficent, all-powerful. Jija Bai was a saint, he told Murli Shankar Bhandare, and added that those who were deputed to assist her should obey her in spirit and in letter.

On the day of his departure, Shivaji sought her blessings as he was wont to do at crucial moments of life. The softspoken lady, who possessed the heart of a lion, patted him gently on the head, helped him buckle the sword, put a vermilion mark on his forehead, gave him to chew a piece of candy and leaves of the *tulsi* plant, and then spoke thus: "Go, my son. Fear nothing. With God on your side, who can be against you? All things work together for good for those whose hearts are full of courage and faith. Goddess Bhiwani will protect you."

Shivaji went on his knees to touch his mother's feet. A tear of love rolled down his bearded cheek as Jija Bai bade him rise and do his duty to the people and the kingdom. Shivaji braced himself and came out with aplomb without turning his head again to have another look at one who, he believed, was the guardian of his destiny. Four thousand troops and a team of eight counsellors, including his eldest son Shambuji, accompanied him on what he called the journey to keep date with a Divine decree.

Sixty-four days later, on 9 May, 1666, Shivaji reached the suburbs of Agra where he was received by a group of junior Mansabdars headed by Kanwar Ram Singh. This low-key welcome made Shivaji wonder if it reflected the shape of things to come. An urge to retrace his steps seized him. But at the advice of his counsellors he condescended to go ahead with the scheduled programme to present himself at the court a few weeks later on the fiftieth lunar birthday of the Emperor.

At Agra, Shivaji and his counsellors were lodged in a mansion belonging to a Rajasthan prince. This was yet another insult which Shivaji found difficult to swallow. Retreat at this stage was impossible. His fears deepened as the days went by. Neither a royal prince nor a front-rank nobleman called on him for presentation of customary courtesies. It became increasingly clear to the Marhatta ruler that Aurangzeb had no intention of extending to him the honours and privileges enjoyed by the Rana of Udaipur. Though crestfallen, he decided to persevere in the sufferance of indignities till such time as he could leave Agra in assurance of safety. His mother's parting advice "quit you like a man, be fearless" sustained him in this hour of suspense. Impatience in the circumstances, he thought, would not be bravery but an invitation to Aurangzeb to discard the mask of friendship and carry into practice the evil designs that apparently filled his head. The treatment meted out to him betrayed unmistakably the treachery in the Emperor's heart.

The day of Shivaji's appearance in the Hall of Public Audience dawned dull and sultry. The high heat and humidity forebade ill for the long-awaited meeting. Dressed in the yellow and purple of a Marhatta ruler, Shivaji carried around his waist the family sword made rich over the years by the blessings of Jija Bai. Kanwar Ram Singh ushered him into the Hall at which point the Chamberlain, a grey-bearded nobleman of about fifty years, took charge of the proceedings. He conducted Shivaji in slow-step to about twenty feet from the throne, announced in a clear voice the arrival "for self-exaltation of the Marhatta chief Shivaji", and retraced his steps a few feet after making a profoundly reverential bow to the Emperor.

A picture of injured dignity, Shivaji did the three ritualistic *salams* in a manner that reflected more his own disquiet than his reverence for the Emperor, and he stood there erect waiting for Aurangzeb to address him. The Emperor, looking at the "demon of Deccan" with a gaze that would turn an eagle blind, used brusque brevity as a means to injure his susceptibilities. "We are pleased at your submission", he said, and then raised his hand a little to signal permission for

presentation of gifts and *nazrana*. Two Marhatta aides came up with silver trays, one containing fifteen hundred gold *mohars* and the other six hundred rupees. Shivaji walked up to the throne, bowed his head a little, and asked the Emperor to "accept these tokens of esteem from a friend and an ally". Aurangzeb touched a gold piece with his right hand—a gesture of formal acceptance—and asked the Chamberlain to escort Shivaji to the place assigned for him in the Assembly. The proud Marhatta was like a broken mast when he was taken to the third row on the right of the throne and shown a place to stand among the five *Hazari* Mansabdars. This was the climax of humiliations suffered by Shivaji since his arrival in Agra. He could put up with them no longer. His heart burned within him as he asked Ram Singh who was the nobleman standing just in front of him. "Raja Jaswant Singh", came the reply. Shivaji burst into a laughter full of hate and sneer. "O, this man. My soldiers have seen his back many times", he said in notes high and clear. There was commotion in the Hall. Noblemen looked at one another in half surprise, half incredulity. The buzz of excitement reached the Emperor's ears. He asked Ram Singh the reason for agitation. The Rajput prince gathered his wits and replied: "Your Majesty, a beast of the jungle is ill at ease in these civilised surroundings. He will get used to them before long." Aurangzeb gave a wry smile, and he asked the Prime Minister to present the next item on the day's agenda.

Resolved not to endure insults any more, Shivaji feigned a swoon. As he fell down, a group of noblemen carried him to the ante-room for medical attention. Aurangzeb adjourned the assembly. He possessed eyes that could see below the surface and a mind that was always alert to the sequence of cause and effect. Shivaji was now a prisoner along with his son and seven advisers. A heavy guard was placed all around the house they were lodged in, a villa outside the city. Secret agents kept a close watch over their movements. Communications to the court, as also to their friends in the city, had to be channelled through the deputy *kotwal* stationed outside the house. They were not permitted to receive visitors except with the prior permission of the *kotwal*. In case of illness, physi-

cians were sent in to examine them in the presence of security officers. Shivaji fretted and fumed under these restrictions, but there was little he could do to get them removed. He sent to Aurangzeb many appeals in the name of God and fair-play, but to no avail.

One bleak evening in a philosophic mood, Shivaji comforted his son with the thought that "the day will dawn when this plight shall be sweet to remember". Shambuji made no reply. Unschoolled in woe, he had not learnt how to suffer unhappiness. He possessed neither his father's will to live nor his faith in destiny. Shivaji was despondent at times but he never forsook the hope for liberty. Optimism was the badge he wore throughout life. His famous remark that if there was no imprisonment there would be no freedom, was strung into a stirring folksong by Bard Goverdhan.

When direct appeals to Aurangzeb for permission to return to the south yielded no result, he wrote to him a letter in these words :

O' Padshah of Hindustan, you have today control over my movements, nay, even my life. But remember that the law of truth is more powerful than the law of the state. The Prophet of Islam fought his battles under the banner of righteousness. In his victories the truth shone like a bright star. In my incarceration what stands out is not truth but violation of pledges taken and promises made by your representative. I am not asking to be appointed your Viceroy in the Deccan. Never did I take seriously that assurance by Jai Singh. However, I would like to repeat my pledge to fight the Bijapuris under the Mughal banner if freedom and honour are restored to me. My son, Shambuji, will also join the imperial service and take part in a joint campaign against the House of Adil Shah. This is not an artifice to get away from Agra, but an assurance by one who recognises in Bijapuris a deadly, daunting common foe. Together we may be able to rid the south of an abomination that fouls its political and civil life. Forty thousand well-armed Marhatta soldiers will join hands with the imperial army to fight against the forces of evil. Our

victory will be a victory for truth and righteousness. It is in this belief and in no other ulterior motive, that I have taken the initiative to suggest joint action. I shall await your reply with optimistic hopefulness.

Aurangzeb's reaction was one of deep scepticism. "Allah, I wonder, what fool it was who first invented feigned honesty", he quipped as he shared the communication with the high Vazir Jaffar Khan. The latter guessed correctly the Emperor's thoughts, and he expressed himself against accepting Shivaji's suggestion. Normally, Aurangzeb took time to make important decisions, but in this case a reply was sent before the dawn of the next day "You ask for too much in lieu of too little", he wrote, and let Shivaji make his own guess about the price he was expected to pay for freedom. Neither side pursued the matter further.

For sheer self-survival, Shivaji did not let himself run out of patience. First, he requested Aurangzeb for a private audience and on receipt of "a refusal wrapped in a few words of politeness", he sought to have a meeting with Jaffar Khan. The Prime Minister received him in the Library shortly after the mid-day prayers. No sooner had the two sat down for talks intended to "resolve different readings of developments in the Deccan" than a messenger brought to the Vazir a letter from his wife. Jaffar Khan left instantly with a faint apology to Shivaji. They never met again. The surmise is perhaps not unreasonable that the letter contained a warning based on the general belief that Shivaji possessed the magical power to gaze an enemy blind as also to stab a foe with weaponry not discernible by the human eye. Jaffar Khan's wife was sister of Shiasta Khan. It was during her brother's term of Viceroyalty in the Deccan that she had come to know of what she called "the Satanic traits of the Marhatta maurauder's character". She is believed to have urged her husband neither to look Shivaji straight in the face nor to sit within striking distance from him. She is also said to have written that the solitude of the Library did not lend itself for meeting with a man possessed of magical powers. Jaffar Khan's ready

acceptance of the warning reflected perhaps his own fear and distrust of Shivaji.

Following this setback to his plans, Shivaji resorted to underhand diplomacy through the good offices of the wife of an old Brahmin friend residing in Agra. She offered to carry a secret letter to Roshanara Begum who was known to have harboured sympathy for the stranded Shivaji. In his appeal for help, Shivaji referred feelingly to the role she had played in the war of succession, and he assured her that if given an opportunity he would strive his utmost to consolidate the interests of the Empire in the Deccan. This pledge was related perhaps to the offer of viceroyalty to him by Mirza Raja Jai Singh. The Begum, it is believed, did take up the matter with her royal brother, but she could not muster enough arguments to convince Aurangzeb that Shivaji at heart was a friend of the Mughals. "He cannot be a well-wisher of our dynasty who has fought many wars against us, seized our territories and committed atrocities against our soldiers. No, I will never trust a heathen", he retorted. Roshanara gave up the attempt. She felt that Aurangzeb had made up his mind not to let Shivaji return home.

The best soldiers in the world are Captain Stout Heart. Captain Daring Duplicity and Captain Hush Hush. Shivaji combined in his person the qualities of these three warriors. The apathy and callous indifference to his fate by all those whom he regarded his supporters did not make him despair. He took upon himself the task of gaining freedom from the Mughal hold. He shared his thoughts with nobody, not even with Shambuji, till the last scene of a dramatic get-away was about to be enacted. Two things give heart to a man at arms : faith in destiny and faith in his own courage. Shivaji possessed these two qualities in abundance. Never did he doubt even for a moment that the ruse he had planned would misfire. In that belief, he feigned illness and for two weeks sent out every morning baskets of sweets for distribution to the poor as also for propitiation of gods Vishnu and Brahma whose images stood on a silver pedestal in a temple near the eastern border of the city. These baskets were carried on *benghis* by hired men. For the first few days the guards carried

routine checks of the baskets, but in time their vigil relaxed and they would clear the carriers without asking a question. The word had gone round that Shivaji was fighting for his life and that it would be a miracle if he could ward off death for much longer. On 19 August, 1666, he took his step-brother, Hiraji, in confidence and asked him to play the ill man by living on the divan that had served as his own resting place for the past many days. Hiraji resembled Shivaji in many respects; he had the same cut of beard, the same style of hair, the same lean frame and, what was more, the self-same shape of feet. Shivaji asked his brother to lie with his feet tucked out of the white sheet that covered the body and to emit occasional groans to suggest spasms of pain and discomfort. Before the sun rose above a cluster of trees in the east, Shivaji and his son took seats in the two waiting baskets and were then carried out on their shoulders by the heavily bribed *kahars*. No guards challenged them. The two men chanted *bhajans* as they jogged along the dusty road to the temple, and then veered westward at a crossing a furlong away from the abode of Lord Brahma. Not far away, at a secluded hermitage, two horses awaited the historic *benghi* and its carriers. At a signal from the *kahar* in front, the Marhatta escapees jumped out and before anyone knew what had happened they fled away on the backs of steeds that seemed to know that on their speed depended the fate of Shivaji, his son, and perhaps also of a kingdom in the heart of the Western Ghats.

At Muttra, Shivaji shaved off his beard, dressed himself in the saffron robes of a *sadhu*, and hastened eastwards via Allahabad, Banaras and Gaya. Shambuji had to be left behind at Muttra in the care of three Deccanis Brahmins—Kashi, Visaji and Krishnaji—who gave Shivaji a solemn pledge to look after his son with their lives if needed. Shambuji had neither the strength nor stamina to be able to keep pace with his wiry father. From near Patna, Shivaji veered south-westwards through Gondwand and Golcanda—the route taken by Shah Jahan following his defeat near Allahabad (1624) in revolt against Jahangir. His arrival at Raigarh on 20 November, 1666, was a miracle of dauntless courage and faith in Providence. The three-month dash from Agra could have ended in disaster

anywhere on the way. Wild beasts and more wild roughnecks of the forests infested the uncharted track for hundreds of hazardous miles. On top of this, the fear of the unknown and the fear of being pursued by Mughal forces weighed heavily on the minds of the small band of devoted men who accompanied Shivaji.

"I am by the grace of God where I am", Shivaji told his mother. Jija Bai was touched no end when her son emptied at her feet the contents of the hollow of his staff—gems, pearls, rubies and diamonds which he carried with him to Agra. She picked up a couple of lustrous pieces and laid them at the foot of the pedestal on which rested the bronze image of goddess Bhiwani. "She is our refuge and strength, and our real help in trouble", she sang in low, almost inaudible, notes. Then, she picked up the seal of Regency from a golden shelf on the right of the image and, handing it over to Shivaji, said: "My duty is done. The great goddess helped me at every stage. Her protective hand saved you from enemies in Agra and in the course of your flight to Raigarh. No praise is too high for her benevolence, her mercy. Jai, Jai, Mata Bhiwani !"

Shivaji watched this solemn act of thankfulness in ecstatic devotion. On leaving the chamber, he touched once again the feet of his mother, and pledged himself to work unceasingly for the good of the kingdom. This was the Marhatta way of taking over charge of the affairs of state. A new chapter began in the history of the Deccan.

A great turmoil reigned in Agra at Shivaji's escape. Aurangzeb let loose a witch-hunt for capture of all those who might have, directly or indirectly, assisted in the Marhatta leader's get-away. Mass arrests were made on mere suspicion of complicity. The city police chief Faulad Khan was ripped of his rank and dismissed from service for neglect of duty. The guardsmen at the house from where Shivaji slipped away were thrown into torture chambers for information leading to the apprehension of plotters. What intrigued the investigating officers most was that Hiraji, who played the ailing Shivaji for more than twenty-four hours, could not be traced either. Understandably, Aurangzeb felt that Kunwar Ram Singh, who was in overall charge of the safe-keeping of Shivaji and his entourage, was the king-pin of the conspiracy. Not only was he

divested of his Mansab and Jagirs, his father, Mirza Raja Jai Singh, became a target of the Emperor's wrath. Prince Muazzam was ordered to relieve the Raja of his command—a humiliation that the ageing Rajput could not long endure. He died at Burhanpur a broken-hearted man on 2 July, 1667. The charge of treason, or mere suspicion of an ignoble breach of faith, seared his soul. On death-bed he dictated a letter to the Emperor which told of the unbearable anguish of his heart. Pleading innocence, he said :

When Rajputs hear treason mentioned, they make haste for merger with the universal spirit. For nearly half a century, I have served the Empire with devotion. Now when I am about to leave for eternal rest the words of an ancient seer ring in my head like bells. The pleasure of death, according to him, is in dying with a conscience clear of guilt. That seventeenth century commonality called treason is a plant that normally does not grow in the soil of Rajasthan. Sweet is the death purchased with loyalty and undiminished obedience to the throne. Bijapur balked me. All my skills and all my wealth were spent in an endeavour to rub out that state from the map of Deccan. For His own mysterious reasons, the all-knowing God denied me the honour of victory in the campaign. That setback confounded me like rain after sunshine. Let me assure you, sire, that my retreat from within ten miles of the fort had an element of success in it. Bijapur is not unconquerable. We have proved its vulnerability. I was defeated not because of treason in my heart, but because of a set of circumstances beyond my control. In renewing my pledge of loyalty from what seems to be my death-bed, I have no intent to double-cross the diety. He knows all. Jai Singh wishes the Empire greater glory than he has ever known before.

Aurangzeb was touched by the apparent sincerity of this letter. "He was born out of the time", he commented and ordered Jaffar Khan to let the house of Jai Singh enjoy its jagirs, honours and privileges. Ram Singh was also restored to partial honour. The suspicion against him of connivance with Shivaji could not be substantiated. The general belief that he

escaped on the wings of occult powers gained ground. Aurangzeb gave little credence to this un-Islamic reading of Shivaji's vanishing act.

Back in the familiar zig-zags of the Ghats, Shivaji was in his element. He never quarrelled either with his sword or with his tongue to gain the maximum advantage from Mughal hostility for Bijapur. Also he exploited fully the rifts that had arisen within the imperial camp. Muazzam was, like most Mughal princes, inefficient, pleasure-loving and devoid of imagination. His running quarrels with Dilir Khan with regard to war strategy and his deep distrust of Jaswant Singh wrecked the morale of the imperial army. The divisions in the ranks of the army took a communal turn—a development that pleased the sharp-eyed Shivaji. At this stage he played his cards very dexterously. His plan was to “humble the Adil Shahis with the help of the Mughals and to further demoralise the Mughals with assistance from Bijapur and Golconda”. His letters at the time to Aurangzeb, Prince Muazzam and Jaswant Singh are masterly in that the many lies he tells bear the look of truth and the few truths he chooses to share with them seem to be the call of the Divine spirit. Despite his intuitive distrust of Shivaji, the Emperor in 1668 agreed to make peace with him and to muster his cooperation in suppressing revolts in the north-west. This was Shivaji's finest hour and perhaps the most melancholy of the reign of Aurangzeb. The Yusafzais held out a threat that could not be met effectively unless the compulsion of stationing a large army beyond the Narbada was made redundant. Shivaji held the key to that change in priorities. For once the policies of Agra came to be remote-controlled from Raigarh, Aurangzeb was, of course, unhappy over this development. His inability to control events was the measure of Shivaji's ascendancy.

The failure of Mughal commanders to subjugate Bijapur and keep Shivaji in check galled Aurangzeb. The Jai Singh campaign (1665-67) cost the imperial exchequer rupees twenty million with no gain in the ledger. Thereafter Dilir Khan and Bahadur Khan suffered ignominious setbacks at the hands of Bijapuri forces. The latter were assisted by Marhatta and Goncanda armies whenever it suited their broad military purpose to fight the Mughals to the last Bijapuri soldier.

The Mughal camp was a house divided against itself; its

helplessness against Marhatta nationalism on the one hand and Adil Shahi chauvinism on the other. The Mughal operations were, however, not a series of continuing defeats but a series of successes followed by a series of bigger defeats. The net result was a compound of increasing material losses and crippling blows to imperial prestige. Aurangzeb was impelled to call a halt to hostilities in Rajasthan and to take the field himself in the Deccan.

No account of Mughal operations against Bijapur, howsoever brief, can be considered a fair summary without inclusion in it of the part played in her country's defence by the youthful Shahara Banu (Padshah Bibi). Sister of Sultan Sikandar Shah, she was as pretty as she was intelligent. Bijapuris loved her. To see her was for them a comfort and an inspiration. Her smile was bewitching and the gracious nod of her head a virtual shower of Divine blessings. On Tuesdays, and Fridays, near about the evening prayer-time, she used to ride an elephant through the main streets of the capital. Not only Bijapuris but people from other parts of the Deccan as well would wait for hours on either side of the route to have a good look at the "fairy princess". The sight of old men and women with hunger in their eyes anguished her heart, and she would bestow on them gifts of money and clothes as she passed by. In turn, they blessed her and begged Allah in voices loud and plaintive that all their remaining years be added to her span of life. Shahara was the beginning and the end of their prayers. She was also the first and last in their thoughts. Bijapuris were proud of their benevolent Bibi. They also adored her.

When in 1679, the gutless regent Masud* suffered an ignominious setback, Aurangzeb demanded Shahara's hand in marriage for his son, Azam. The whole of Bijapur stood up as one man against this suggestion. They could not brook the idea of their

*Adil Shah died in May 1666 following two decades of steady expansion of the kingdom of Bijapur. His successor, Ali Adil Shah reigned for sixteen years with a fair degree of success. His death in 1672 brought to the throne the four-year-old Sikander and a line of regents inefficient, self-seeking and utterly devoid of political wisdom. Khwas Khan (1672-73), Bailok Khan (1673-77) and Siddi Masud (1678) became in turn the architects of Bijapur's decline and ruin.

Bibi leaving the kingdom for any length of time. Noisy demonstrations were held in Bijapur and other places to urge the Sultan to turn down the request. Twelve women threatened self-immolation in case Shahara was given away in marriage to Azam. The court held several meetings to take a decision on the Mughal terms for peace. All noblemen expressed themselves strongly against the proposed marriage. A memorandum to the Sultan was signed by one hundred forty-seven first-rank "servants of the kingdom". It stated :

The Bibi Sahiba is our national asset. Her presence is essential for our honour, our pride and our self-fulfilment. Her departure (Allah forbid) may bring on us the wrath of the people. Give to Aurangzeb, O' Sultan, all the pearls and diamonds and rubies the kingdom possesses. The only jewel that we will not like to part with is our Bibi. She is the soul of Bijapur, its very life-breath. Without her the kingdom will be like a faded flower ready to fall apart in pieces sans fragrance, sans colour. The loyal well-wishers of the House of Adil Shah request that the Mughal Emperor be told clearly that our Bibi is too precious to be made a condition for stoppage of hostilities. We are prepared for the worst. No calamity will be more calamitous for the people of Bijapur than the disappearance from our midst of Mohtrima Shahara Banu Sahiba.

When Shahara came to know of this petition, she repaired to the *hujra* for consultation with the mighty dead of the dynasty. For a whole day she meditated and prayed for "a signal from beyond the stars and the skies". She was swathed in spiritual glow when she came out and told her brother that duty to the nation came before all other considerations. "I will marry Azam that Bijapur may be saved further desecration", she said.

Shahara left Bijapur on 1 July, 1674. Thousands of people lined the streets of Bijapur to bid her farewell. Every eye was wet as she passed by on the back of her favourite elephant *Al-Aman*. The light went out of the lives of Bijapuris as the cavalcade crossed the border of the kingdom.

It is perhaps not realized that her sacrifice infused a new vigour in Bijapur's war-weary limbs. A fierce invasion by Dilir

Khan a year later was repulsed with heavy losses to the imperial army. It is true that Aurangzeb conquered the kingdom six years later. That there was an element of defeat in that victory cannot be doubted. Sacrifices by chaste, high-minded women seldom go waste. Aurangzeb gained Shahara Banu for his son's harem, and he lost the Empire in the bargain. To make the Bibi, a bargaining counter for peace was to invite God's displeasure and wrath.

Chapter Sixteen

RUIN UPON RUIN

When the words of a ruler are not in accord with his life, it is but inevitable that doubts and divisions hold the stage. Aurangzeb earned his living by stitching his own clothes, and he thanked God for his mercies and sought forgiveness for his sins five times a day. This was an impressive performance in personal morality, and it generated for him near universal respect. Old men and wise counsellors, however, stroked their beards in incredulity when he gave orders for reduction of Mewar to a heap of ruins to desecrate its temples and throw the images of Rajput gods and goddesses into ponds of water compounded with human and animal excreta. Even the loyal faithfuls could not hide their abhorrence at these acts of sacrilege. Aurangzeb was good to a point. The bad in him was too bad to be covered by his virtues. The result was discord, dissatisfaction, dissent and disobedience at nearly every level of administration.

The cry of Islam paid dividends in war, not in peace. Both Marwar and Mewar were partially subjugated. However, these centres of hostility to alien domination retained their identity. Akbar had shown the way to convert them into friends and allies. None of his successors, the least of all Aurangzeb, trod the path of reconciliation he chalked out. Their failure to realise that war begets war was a bloomer that lost them the empire.

While Aurangzeb's hands were more than full in Rajasthan, Shivaji had a virtual field day in the Deccan. His plunderings* and raids into Mughal territories alarmed the Emperor. There seemed to be no way to tame him, much less subdue his ambition

*Shivaji plundered Surat for the second time in 1672. The havoc he wrought was incalculable in terms of money. However, the booty he carried away was estimated to be of the value of Rupees even million.

to become the sovereign ruler of the south. He would have proceeded himself to the Deccan straight from Rajasthan had the rising of the Yusufzai Afghans not taken an alarming turn. Reports came in thick and fast of their raids on the Mughal strongholds. The local commanders were hard put to it to check their lusts for liberty and loot, and they sent frantic requests for reinforcements. In one raid near Khyber they killed over a thousand imperial troops and carried away five hundred camel loads of arms and ammunition. If not extinguished quickly, Aurangzeb realised, the revolt might find sympathisers in northern India and thus develop into a conflagration not easy to put out.

In fact, Aurangzeb was prone to magnify dangers out of all proportion to their real or potential threat. Fear of Divine retribution obsessed him both in war and in peace. He tended to take no chances with his enemies, specially those enemies who believed in the same God as he did, said the same prayers, and who professed spiritual allegiance to the same Prophet as he did. Wars with those whom he considered heretics was a different matter. In such conflicts, he believed, the angels could not but be on his side. The banners and battle-cries of the Pathans were not dissimilar to those of the Mughals. The faith in Islam was his strength. The same could be said about the Yusufzais. On whose side would Allah throw His weight? This line of thought at times confused and unnerved Aurangzeb, but he was too ambitious and too crafty a soldier to be overpowered by these abstract apprehensions. After all, his armies were much bigger and his resources vastly superior. It would be a poor Divinity, he perhaps thought to himself, that would choose to assist the weaker, younger brother.

Throwing all doubts aside, Aurangzeb decided to wind up the campaign in Rajasthan and proceed himself to the troubled north-west. The Rana and also Shivaji could be tackled later. The angels, the archangels and all the armies of heaven could be depended upon to give him victory over them.

Armed with these thoughts, Aurangzeb left for Hassanabdal on 7 April, 1674. A very large army accompanied him. Trusty commanders, both Hindu and Muslim, were put in charge of the units of infantry, cavalry and artillery. They were all second to the Emperor, none below another general—an experiment in

diversification that was expected to cut across jealousies and family enmities that had bedevilled the campaign in Deccan. As a super-supremo, the Emperor conducted personally all aspects of the campaign for nearly two years before returning to Delhi. The Yusafzais were suppressed but not converted to obedience to the Mughals. As in Rajasthan, Aurangzeb had to leave unfinished the task of subordinating the valiant Pathans to his will. Shivaji rode high in the south and it was time, the Emperor reckoned, to remind the Marhatta desperado that the Mughal role in the Deccan could not be discounted.

Even the best pilots are willing to take advice from passengers in bad weather. Aurangzeb called a meeting of the 'Top Ten' to decide whether or not to lead an army personally to the south. The consensus was against the suggestion for Mewar and Marwar were yet far from settled and the voices of dissent came now and again from either side of the river Sind. The death of Maharaja Jaswant Singh and the thorny question of succession in Marwar added to the compulsions that forced the Emperor to concur with the opinion of his counsellors. However, substantial reinforcements in the form of men, new captains, new generals and even a new Viceroy were rushed to Aurangabad. The Emperor's *firman* to imperial commanders laid stress on the irreducible necessity of cutting the wings of Shivaji and bringing the Sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda to "the path of reason and adjustment to the reality of imperial presence beyond the Narbada".

Despite these steps to rehabilitate Mughal prestige in the south, Shivaji continued to gain popularity, as also material wealth and political prestige. On 6 June, 1674, he was crowned king at a Raigarh with such lavish pageantry as left the treasury virtually empty! Money was no consideration to him for as long as there were wealthy Mughal and Bijapur-Golconda pockets for him to plunder. In one such raid a month after the coronation, he carried away no less than ten million rupees and precious stones and merchandise of the same value. He ransacked cities and towns, set fire to house and business premises, extorted "safety money" from foreign and Indian trading communities, held influential men as hostages—all in the name of religious revivalism. The crown he adorned himself with became in due course a symbol of "the will of goddess Bhivani" and a

striking landmark in the history of Maharashtra.

In astute purposeful treachery Shivaji did not lag far behind Aurangzeb. Both believed that it was a bad promise that could not be broken. Both knew each other's strong and weak points. Both lived and worked in the name of their respective religions both rated the end above the means, and to either the truth was a concept that could not but be conditioned by time and space. The letters that Shivaji at this stage wrote to Aurangzeb were so submissive in tone and in contents as to lead one to believe that the Marhatta ruler had given up the claim to sovereignty and that he would be well content to be a train-carrier of the Emperor. Dilating on his negotiations with Bahadur Khan for peace and joint attack on the Sultanates, he wrote to Aurangzeb in 1776 :

We, on our part, forsake war as an instrument of Marhatta policy. Peace is the prime need of the day. We are ready to acknowledge Your Majesty as the Emperor of Deccan in return for an assurance that the imperial armies will be gradually pulled out of the territories which have traditionally belonged to us. We solemnly abjure any design for expansion. Peace is our aim. To underline this pledge, we shall return to you such forts and territories as at any time formed part of the Mughal empire. Further, it is proposed that my eldest son, Shambuji, joins the imperial service in such rank as you may wish to confer on him. We promise to abide scrupulously by the terms of the treaty contemplated to be signed. The past needs to be forgotten. Together, the Mughals and the Marhattas can convert the peninsula into a paradise overflowing with milk and honey. We undertake in all solemnity to eliminate once and for all the forces of disruption that are plying havoc with the well-being of our domains. Your Majesty's able representatives in the Deccan are in principle agreed on the need for a treaty of everlasting peace. I implore Your August Majesty to give assent to the terms of the proposed accord.

Shivaji, endowed as he was with superfluity of patient pursuit of a purpose, followed up this submissive communication with others more submissive, more abject and more accommodating. In a way, he recognised Aurangzeb as his overlord and endured

meekly the humiliation implicit in these representations. Aurangzeb was, however, not taken in by Shivaji's show of obedience. He knew full well that the Marhatta ruler was only playing for time and that he would abrogate his promises as soon as he felt himself strong enough to defy the Mughal military plans. Aurangzeb merely acknowledged these letters through his representative, giving no indication whatever of the blueprints of war that were forming in his head.

A pastmaster in hiding his thoughts even from himself, the Emperor kept Shivaji guessing for over a year about the fate of the proposed alliance. He reckoned the Marhatta king as his chiefest enemy, and at no time did he take seriously the friendly overtures from Raigarh. Instead, he instructed Bahadur Khan to make preparations for a showdown with the Marhattas with or without the help of Bijapur. He was ready to march himself to the Deccan at short notice. He knew that Shivaji was too elusive an enemy to be defeated decisively save by an all-out offensive supervised and directed by himself; here was a ready-reckoner in his anatomy that seldom went wrong.

The developments in Rajasthan culminating in the revolt of prince Akbar and his flight to the Deccan led to a change in the Emperor's priorities. It was only after defusing his son's rebellion that he left Ajmer for the Deccan on 8 September, 1681. In the meantime, the scenario in Deccan changed in a way that could not but cause Aurangzeb deep concern. Shivaji died following a two-week illness (dysentery-cum-high fever) on 4 April, 1680. His eldest son, Shambuji, ascended the throne formally on 16 January, 1681, after quelling a coup staged by the supporters of his ten-year-old step-brother, Raja Ram. Shambuji was a wayward pleasure-seeker unblessed with the wisdom, tact and daring of his father. His outrage against a married Brahmin woman a year earlier was still fresh in the people's memory. The Marhatta soldiery also remembered his defection to Dilir Khan in protest against the punishment meted out to him by Shivaji for that act of high immorality. For a time he served in the Mughal army with a rank of seven thousand, and he was generally looked down upon as a turncoat not worthy of the crown worn with such distinction by Shivaji.

However, Shambuji succeeded in rehabilitating himself because of intrigues and jealousies that divided the Marhatta nobility

following Shivaji's death. Keen to prove his worthiness to succession, Shambuji began his reign with a spree of plunder that amazed both his friends and foes. His reckless attacks on Burhanpur and Aurangabad made Shivaji look like a hymn-chanting hermit. Aurangzeb was alarmed at reports of these sackings. He vowed not to be content with anything less than total obliteration of the Marhatta raj.

The flight of prince Akbar to the south emboldened Shambuji. He not only gave him asylum but also saw visions of conquering Delhi with his help. The worldly-wise Durga Dass encouraged both Shambuji and prince Akbar in these day-dreamings, and he actually worked out a plan for a "grand march" to the north via Rajasthan. The proposed invasion was still-born as the Rana of Mewar was reluctant to "interfere in the circumstances over which he had no control". The disgruntled supporters of Raja Ram and his wily mother, Soyra Bai, also played a part in bringing the conspirators to earth. Their plot to poison Shambuji and to place Raja Ram on the throne under Akbar's tutelage was too crude in conception to have a chance of success. Shambuji was wild with rage when he came to know of the plot from a loyal maid-servant. The punishments he gave to the "dissatisfied junta" were brutal. Soyra Bai was tortured to a slow death. His uncle, Harji Farzand, who master-minded the plot, was too sent to the torture chamber. He was never seen again.

Aurangzeb's three sons—Shah Alam, Muhammad Azam and Muhammad Kam Baksh—accompanied him to the Deccan. None of them could be trusted to hold charge of the capital in his absence. Similar misgivings about their loyalty led him to include every influential commander in the huge army raised for the campaign. His rule was to trust no one and to have no regrets afterwards. Senior ladies of the harem were also invited to make the journey for much the same reasons: not that he wanted to take them with him for company, but because he did not want to leave them behind lest they became centres of intrigue and may be insurrection. In fact, his entourage contained all the important men of the court and all the important women of the harem. Delhi and Agra bore a dreary look throughout the remaining period of his reign. The mediocrities that were left behind possessed neither the wit nor the following.

to incite trouble. Administration gradually slipped into hands feeble and inefficient. Northern India thus became in due time the grave of the Empire. Human history is a race between trust and suspicion, between love and hate and finally between war and peace.

Aurangzeb arrived at Aurangabad on 22 March, 1682 and took for his residence the palace in which he lived as Viceroy before venturing into the hurly-burly of the war of succession. When he entered the room where Dilraz Banu, *raba* of the "age", died twenty-five years earlier, he stood still struck, as it were, by an avalanche of memories, and then he raised his hands in prayer. Mother of his two sons—Azam and Akbar—and three daughters—Zaib, Zinat and Zubdat—Dilraz occupied a place of honour in Aurangzeb's heart. The revolt of Akbar grieved him no end. Dilraz had breathed her last a couple of hours after giving birth to her this last child. The Emperor perhaps invoked the great Lord to bring his favourite son to the path of obedience. If so, his prayer drew a blank. Akbar had gone too far in insurrection to retreat with honour.

Since June 1681, Akbar was living in the Deccan as "an honoured guest and ally" of Shambuji. Both had a broad common end—demolition of Aurangzeb—but they had not agreed so far on the means to attain that goal. Whereas Akbar aimed at the conquest of Delhi, Shambuji was content with the limited objective of ousting the Mughals from the Deccan. They had met several times to narrow down their differences, but the schism was too fundamental either to be ignored or to be spanned by superficial shifts in their stances. What was more, inwardly they distrusted each other—a fallout of suspicion from a century of Mughal-Marhatta hostilities. Theirs was a friendship of convenience, not of the heart. Shambuji regarded Akbar as a useful pawn for consolidation of his gains, no more. Similarly, Akbar hoped to use the Marhatta ruler as a tool for the success of his *coup* attempt. Neither he was a patriot nor a heroic soldier. Their alliance was foredoomed, and the astute Aurangzeb hastened with his customary speed and duplicity to demolish them. The presence on the scene of the Sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda and the three foreign trapping powers—the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English—gave the Emperor the additional means to play the one

against the other. The odds were heavily in favour of Aurangzeb. His resources, his experience and his big battalions were a weaponry that Akbar and his allies found hard to counter.

The time-machine ticked at a fierce pace. The Mughal generals wanted quick action. The distance from the granaries of northern India and the Marhatta sneak attacks on their supply lines were factors that Aurangzeb could not discount. In a moment of high confidence in his men and arms, he decided on a knockout blow against Shambuji. He was perhaps not wrong in assuming that there was little chance of bringing Akbar to his knees for as long as Shambuji was not humbled. Two of his topmost commanders, Shahab-ud-Din Khan and Khan-i-Jahan were asked to mount offensives against Marhatta strongholds with "all your men and all your recourses". He even invited Sultan Sikandar of Bijapur to join in the attack, but the offer went abegging. The never-ending jealousies of the Adil Shahi nobility blocked the proposed alliance, and the Mughals proceeded to engage the enemy single-handed.

The Marhatta strategy of waging a defensive war with weapons of offence yielded high dividends for the hard-pressed garrisons. Famine and pestilence also took a heavy toll of the invading armies. To make matters unbearable, the audacious Marhatta horsemen used the wheeling tactics to launch surprise attacks on the comparatively unguarded Mughal positions at the rear. The result was a disaster. Both Khan-i-Jahan and Shahab-ud-Din were forced to pull out of the Marhatta domain before the rains set in. Jubilation in Shambuji's camp was as high as anguish in that of Aurangzeb. The whole campaign was a tale of woe and retreat except for the heroic resistance put up a few miles from the fort of Ramsej by Prince Azam's wife, Jahanzeb Banu (Jani Begum), daughter of Dara Shikoh, when her entourage was attacked from two sides by Marhatta detachments. Riding an elephant, the fearless princess rallied her small Rajput force to beat back the attackers with heavy losses. A contingent of her bodyguard, headed by Anuradh Singh responded to her call with recklessness born of desperation. They fought gallantly and won. The wounded Anuradh Singh was rewarded by the Begum on the spot with a pearl necklace she was wearing. This piece of jewellery was a gift to her by Aurangzeb on her twenty-

first birthday. The report of her bravery pleased the Emperor. Besides bestowing on her the title 'Be-Khauf', (fearless) he presented her with a set of diamonds, belonging originally to Nur Jahan Begum, valued at rupees one million. He recorded later in a despatch to Agra :

Our forces suffered a setback inasmuch as they were not able to subjugate forts we had planned to capture. Scarcity of food-grains was a handicap that ultimately forced the investing forces to retire. We hope to resume the offensive after the rains. Insha Allah, these and other Marhatta strongholds will be left with no alternative but to capitulate by the end of the year.

The failure of our commanders in this campaign was, however, offset by an heroic action supervised and conducted personally by our fearless daughter-in-law Jahanzeb. Caught unawares in a low-lying area with no outlet for escape, she and her small band of soldiers fought more by faith than by the normal instruments of war. They won in the end a glorious engagement. The Princess (Allah be praised for His mercy) came out from the fray without a scar on her person. We have rewarded her suitably. Take away the type of courage she displayed and our earth is a tomb. She has been a source of pride and inspiration to our men. May Allah give her a long life.

This tribute to the daughter of his bitterest foe throws some light on the mental make-up of Aurangzeb. Enmities to him were for a purpose and for a limited period, not for all time. Death settled all debts. To carry vengefulness beyond the grave was a breach of the law of creation. Dara Shikoh was no more. The past was dead and gone. Jahanzeb was to him a brave and dauntless member of the royal family. The praise given her was well-merited; it was also perhaps a long overdue act of remorse. Aurangzeb is a mysterious riddle to all those who try to understand him.

Both Shahab-ud-Din Khan and Khan-i-Jahan were crestfallen at this defeat at the hands of an enemy whose resources in men and money bore no comparison with those of the imperial army. Their efforts to explain away the setback in terms of famine, disease and shortage of supplies left Aurangzeb cold.

He pondered for days over the whole of circumstances and came to the conclusion that there was perhaps more to the Marhatta success than what met the eye. Large-scale bribery suggested itself. The ever-distrusting Emperor could not help thinking that perhaps the two Khans, as also Prince Azam, were sympathetic to Akbar and that they had deliberately held back their punches against the Marhatta citadels. Once these apprehensions were accused, Aurangzeb was not the man to sleep over them. He ordered all divisions operating against the Marhattas in general and Akbar in particular to "return to Aurangabad within a period of sixteen days". Panic spread in all sections of the army. Some feared the Emperor was mentally disturbed and that he might be nearing his time. Tight-lipped silence by the royal Hukma lent credence to these reports.

For two weeks the Emperor secluded himself in the first floor royal apartment. Distrusts of his sons and commanders were his only companions. The fear of future haunted him. The strain of these ugly thoughts could not but affect his health and his outlook. Many times he was heard raving at night, the incoherent lamentations dominating the coherent invocations to God for light. Distrust is a kind of war that causes appalling wreckage within. For two weeks Aurangzeb was, as it were, in secret consultation with God. He met nobody, gave no audience, kept in abeyance the daily meetings of the war council, issued no orders for the commanders, ate only austerity meals twice a day, permitted no lady of the harem to intrude upon his solitude—in fact he became part of another world in which fear not hope, sorrow not pleasure, despondency not elation, and bitterness not bonhomie called the tune. These were perhaps the most wretched sixteen days of his long life. Manucci wrote that, according to a court physician, the lean Emperor lost almost one-third of his weight—a slide downwards that caused alarm and generated gloom in the palace.

The three outwardly loyal princes watched these developments with growing concern. The fourth, Akbar, luxuriating somewhere in the still solitude of South Konkan, wondered if the gods had decided to throw in their weight on his side. A dead Aurangzeb would be to him worth an army of a million men. Shambuji too saw visions of an abject Mughal retreat to the north. The passing away of Aurangzeb, he calculated, would

leave a void that would be difficult to fill by any of his potential successors. The imperial generals secretly sharpened their swords in anticipation of a war of succession. Despatches were sent by Shah Alam to Delhi and Agra to apprise local administrators of "the reverses and their likely repercussions". Secret messages were also sent to all parts of the Empire, asking the *Subedars* and *Sipah-Salars* to keep themselves ready to "meet any eventuality the revolving heavenly bodies may thrust on us". No direct references were made to the Emperor's illness, nor was it spelt out in clear words that the court at Aurangabad feared the worst.

Ambiguity at high places is the most prolific generator of rumours. By the time Aurangzeb recovered from his depression, the imperial armies stood at alert in all provinces, not knowing what would be expected of them and when. An indefinable uncertainty hung ominously over all capitals. Aurangabad itself stood virtually still wondering, hoping and at times praying for the health of the Emperor.

Amidst reports that Aurangzeb had decided to return to Delhi, there came from him a *firman*—first in three weeks—that Prince Azam and Dilir Khan would explain to him in open court the reasons for the reverses they had suffered. The day fixed for the hearing was 25 July, 1683. Panic seized both of them, and they used every means available to dissuade the Emperor from the course he had chosen to humiliate them. When it became known that Aurangzeb was not prepared to modify the order, Dilir Khan committed suicide by swallowing a lethal dose of poison and Prince Azam shut himself up in a ramshackle house in an eastern suburb and refused to let anyone come in and disturb his *khilwat*. A rumour went around that the prince intended to follow Dilir Khan's example to save himself from being disgraced in public. He sent no reply to his father's many conciliatory messages. He was said to have taken a vow not to break his silence and not to eat more than a crust of bread a day till twenty-four hours after the time of hearing on 25 July. At one stage, the Emperor ordered the house to be broken in and the prince brought to his presence if need be in chains. This *hukam* was withdrawn at the intercession of the senior ladies of the *seraglio* who feared the Shahzada might **gulp** poison to prevent arrest. Insead, Aurangzeb himself went

to the house and demanded admission on the basis of an Islamic edict that a king had the right to declare a vow void if he considered it against the interests of the state. Azam obeyed, and personally led his father to a tiny room at the back of the house where he had "held conversations with the mighty dead over the last several days". Aurangzeb was pleased to note "this streak of asceticism" in his son's anatomy, and he tore up there and then the *firman* which had provoked the silent protest.

It is not known what conversation took place between the two. Even the imaginative Manucci was not able to reconstruct the course of the fifteen-minute talks. They both came out of the house shortly before noon and went straight to the royal mosque for mid-day prayers. A possible catastrophe was averted. Aurangzeb loved his sons more than he feared them. At times, the compulsions—real or imaginary—of self-preservation led him to don the bared-teeth mask and treat his sons with almost hideous ferocity, but that show of ruthlessness did not mean that the springs of tender feelings within him had dried up; it meant only that his ego was boundless and his ambition infinite. Aurangzeb often awoke at night and prayed that his sons be spared what he called the three great anguishes—the anguish of defeat, the anguish of fear and the anguish of physical pain. He did not want even the rebellious Akbar to undergo any of these tortures; he wanted him to surrender with honour and thus become an instrument for peace, unity and integration. To him love was not an end by itself; it was one of God's ploys for squeezing out venom from the human heart.

The Portuguese settlements in Goa, Daman and Diu had over the years developed into a force to be reckoned with in the Deccan. They controlled the sea routes. Not only that: their guns and their military expertise were in demand by the three powers—Sultanates, Marhattas and the Mughals—fighting each other for supremacy in the south. The Portuguese Governors, well-tutored in the art of controlled reactions to daunting situations, did not identify themselves with any contestant; rather, they played one side against the other, hoping that their jealousies and mistrusts would become the instruments of their eventual decay and downfall. Their help was extended with the objective of keeping the belligerents in the field till they bled

themselves to disintegration. They wanted all parties to lose so that they themselves could come out victorious in the end. Divide and rule was the fundamental of the medieval European policy. It took the Hindustanis considerable time to understand correctly the implication of the Portuguese strategy. When they did realize that the foreign traders were friends of none and enemies of all, the indigenous armies had run out of stamina. Then came the time for foreign powers to fight each other for supremacy.

Shambuji waged a fairly long drawn-out war against the Portuguese in Goa and other settlements. His successes, though not decisive, could not but be a source of alarm to Aurangzeb. The Mughal Emperor's decision to send a large army under Shah Alam for buttressing up the fast demoralising Portuguese forces was motivated by considerations of self-survival, and those alone. The move to help the enemy of his arch-enemy, the Marhattas, was a fairly clever ploy to kill at least three birds with one stone. In the weakening of the growing muscle of Shambuji, he foresaw one ally less for Bijapur as also the weakening of foreign powers' distrust of the Mughals. The events that followed proved that he was not wrong in his calculations.

Shambuji got cold feet at the sight of Shah Alam's rapid advance to join forces with the Portuguese, and he fled. Prince Akbar was left behind to work out a settlement with the Portuguese and thereafter to use some stronghold in south Konkan, as a watch-tower to monitor the progress of his brother. This was a rather tall assignment, but Akbar, aided by Durga Dass, did it with a fair degree of aplomb and success. Not only did he win the goodwill and trust of the Portuguese; he also saw the mighty Mughal force beat an ignominious retreat from South Konkan. Once again the rains and an epidemic that raged with infinite fury undid the invaders. The Mughal losses in money and prestige were very heavy. The credit for this debacle could not be given to Akbar. He was one of those who were classified among the brave because they could not find the means to run away! The nature usually helps the stout-hearted, but sometimes out of spite it also lends its hand to the weak and helpless.

This piece of luck emboldened Akbar. Early in 1684, he mounted pressure on Shambuji for an attack on any of the three

Mughal citadels of power, viz., Aurangabad, Burhanpur, Ahmednagar. The Marhatta ruler, however, did not oblige. He could not see the Deccan through Akbar's eyes. The latter yearned for the Mughal throne whereas Shambuji wanted much less; he was well content with saving himself from defeat at the hands of Aurangzeb. The time was on the side of the Marhattas. Harassed by his roving horsemen, as also by rain, famine and pestilence, the Mughal forces, reckoned Shambuji, would have to quit the Deccan sooner than most people expected. He was not prepared, perhaps rightly, to take the risk of defeat in a frontal confrontation.

Akbar was disappointed. He had nothing to gain by involvement in the affairs of the Deccan. His interests were different, his objective more ambitious. Shambuji had given asylum, but he had not given him the help he needed for the success of his revolt. The influential and worldly-wise Kavi Kailash, a north Indian Brahmin in high favour at the Marhatta court, sympathised with his aspirations, but he could not prevail upon Shambuji to act against his own judgment. Kavi Kailash, known to be the wisest man that ever wore grey hair, counselled patience, but Akbar was not prepared to wait any longer. Already he had spent two and a half years in the south without any concrete gain, and he felt it would be hazardous to prolong his stay further among men of doubtful dependability. These thoughts deepened his despair and he decided, after consulting a star-gazer of considerable repute, to call it a day. He wanted to go to Golconda and therefrom to the eastern provinces in search of more reliable and like-minded friends.

The passage to the Qutb Shahi kingdom was however, barred by the imperial troops. Aurangzeb was too far-sighted a superemo to let routes to the east remain unguarded. The only other alternative was a voyage across the sea to Arabia. This plan too bristled with dangers and difficulties easy to foresee. Ready to court the lesser risk, he approached the Portuguese Governor at Goa for travel facilities in one of their cargo ships. Back came the reply in an extremely courteous note that "we will be pleased to extend to Your Highness and Your Highness' family the facility of properly executed travel documents but, it is regretted, the rules of the sea will not permit us to transport Your Highness to Arabia in our cargo ship. We will, however,

consider selling to Your Highness a small ship for the journey. Our sailors will man the ship but the voyage, it will be appreciated, will be undertaken at your Highness' own risk".

Not knowing what else to do, Akbar bought a modest-size vessel and boarded it with all his women and a few faithful followers for his first journey by sea.

When they came to know about the Prince's intended trip, Kavi Kailash and Durga Dass rushed to the ship and they, after six long hours of persuasion, succeeded in prevailing upon him to disembark. The Emperor, they argued, tired of waging costly, inconclusive wars in the Deccan, was preparing to return to Agra, and that when that happened it would be feasible to launch attacks on Aurangabad and Burhanpur. "The time is not opportune for you to leave. Wait for a few more months. The gods cannot but be on our side. It would be injudicious to quit at a time when victory is in sight. Keep faith, and we are confident the crown imperial will be in your possession before long", they told the wavering prince.

One who is a coward is bad, and one who is bad will soon be a coward. Akbar was timorous and a voluptuary in turn, seldom good and courageous. His revolt had thus a latent seed which finally demolished the uprising. Like a Bishop, he gave sermons even to his house-dog, and that was exactly not the way to win a throne. Shortly after landing, he was all but captured by the Abyssinian Sidi Yaqut whom the Mughals had hired to prevent the prince's escape by sea. Yaqut was a naval adventurer of considerable experience whose services were on sale to the highest bidder. He had made his skill as a sea-hound available to the foreign traders, as also to the Sultanates, on purely commercial basis.

Two of Akbar's newly-acquired mistresses, Savitri and Saraswati, fell, however, in the raiders' hands. They both belonged to a celebrated dancing family of Puna, and were known to possess such skills in the arts of song and dance as made them the most popular and the most sought-after bellerinas of the south. They had performed at the courts of Bijapur and Golconda as also at Rajgarh in 1683 on the occasion of Dussehra celebrations. Shambuji was enchanted by their beauty, their grace and what he called "the divine elegance of their movements". Akbar watched them whirl like nymphs in ecstasy to

the tunes of music that seemed to come right from the heaven. The ravishing enchantment of their poise and good looks aroused the Mughal prince's lust to possess them. "We are not for sale", came the reply when the deputy Chamberlain, Abdul Ghafoor, dangled before them fifty thousand gold *ashrafis* as a price for entry into the prince's harem. This refusal further stoked the fire of Akbar's passion, and he was reported to have sworn by the Lord of Creation that both of them would "consent to be my partners in love before the rise of the next full moon". His vow came true—at a cost, it was estimated, of gold and pearl sufficient in value to keep the whole of Deccan well fed for a decade.

Akbar treated them as museum pieces, objects of art rather than the objects of his heart. Savitri used to sing to him the strains of 'Dhurpada' every evening. This was the *raga* which, it is said, kept Shah Jahan alive in captivity for eight long years. Once after listening to his favourite singer, Mayanaz, at bedtime, he exclaimed: "These deathless strains have given me a new soul under aged ribs". His grandson was an equally great admirer of this Tansen composition. He declared 'Dhurpada' "the golden key that opens the palace of eternity." Akbar was essentially an epicure. The role of a rebel ill-fitted him. Capture of Nalini and Saraswati by Yaqut distressed him. His appeals for their release went abegging. The bards and story-tellers of the age are silent about their fate. A British traveller, Charles Brown, tells, however on hearsay that two artistes, of "similar description" were seen at the court of Maharaja Ajit Singh at Jaipur some years later. It is difficult to make even a reasonable conjecture how they travelled to Rajasthan.

Akbar spent the whole year from February 1684 at Rathagiri planning aery purposes without taking a concrete step to advance the objective of his revolt. When the future looked gloomy, he drew some incentive from hope and also resolution from despair. Early in 1685, he invited Kavi Kailash for consultations. The wise Brahmin, a master in the art of clothing his words in the garb of high philosophy, quoted extensively from the scriptures and from books of history to underline the virtues of patience which, he said, was the surest way to success against the Mughals. Aurangzeb, he believed, was a tried hound and that he was preparing to quit the Deccan. When that happened, he stressed, the field would be clear for "the forces of patriotism" to assert

themselves. Necessity forced Akbar to agree with this assessment. He sent a note to Shambuji, which stated :

I have discussed at some length with Mahiatma Kavi Kailash the implications of the continuing stalemate. His views are sound, rooted as they are in realities difficult to ignore. He is a shining light of ancient wisdom. The circumstances, in his reckoning, are against the imperial forces. They will have no alternative but to vacate aggression before the year is out. Then will be the time for our joint armies to hit the Mughal citadels with force. The plan to invade the north with the help of the Sisodias and the Maharaja of Marwar attracts me. Durga Dass shares my optimism. Your support of the project will, in our opinion, assure its success. This is not a wild vision. The large number of dissidents in Delhi and Agra will help our cause. The right is on our side. We will have an opportunity to realize in full the dream of my illustrious ancestor, Akbar Padshah. The religious prejudices of my father have brought the Empire to the brink of disintegration. Great will be the triumph, if it comes our way, over narrow fanaticism. Your help in the crusade will be invaluable. In the hope that you will join in the war against injustice, I have relinquished for the time my plan to spend the rest of my days in peaceful sloth in the holy city of Mecca. Both Kavi Kailash and Durga Dass gave me a new heart, a new purpose. With the help of Divine spirit we shall win. I shall await your reaction with high expectancy of enlisting your cooperation.

This was a good letter, almost modern in conception and phraseology. Kavi Kailash perhaps drafted it. Neither Akbar nor Durga Dass was equipped intellectually to say what it did. The Brahmin was well read in the history of civilisation. Akbar's experiment in "one state, one religion" fascinated him. He wanted desperately the overthrow of Aurangzeb and a position of influence for himself at the court in Agra. His support for young Akbar was not without a selfish motive. A northern Brahmin was a misfit among the Hindu priestly cadres of the south. His presence as Shambuji's adviser-in-chief was an eyesore to Brahmins of the Deccan.

Kavi Kailash's reading of Aurangzeb's mind turned out,

however, to be mere wishful thinking. The Emperor overcame his doubts and fears and was ready to stay on in the Deccan for as long as Akbar was not extinguished. Not only did he launch vigorous military campaigns against all those known to assist Akbar; he opened the strings of his purse in a bold, reckless bid to wean away by bribery to his side influential officers from the Marhatta court. The result was large-scale desertions from Shambuji's army. Even some of his well-known advisers changed sides. Taking advantage of this turmoil in the enemy camp, Aurangzeb ordered Shahab-ud-Din Khan in February 1685 to launch a massive attack on the Marhatta capital Raigarh. The fort and city of Karwar fell to the invading forces without a serious fight. Disaffections at every level demoralised the Marhattas. Even some members of Shambuji's family sought asylum in the Mughal camp.

Leaving Raigarh in the charge of the Peshwa, Shambuji himself fled to Bijapur, ostensibly to make common cause with Sikandar Shah but in actuality to save himself from capture by the enemy. The Marhattas were in a desperate situation. Aurangzeb's onslaught on their positions was reminiscent in a way of Akbar's assault on Mewar in 1568. He made it clear from the first blow that he would not be content with anything less than total victory. He had not come to the south, he told Jaffar Khan, to play ducks and drakes with those who challenged his authority. "The Mughal arms are invincible. I am out to prove the veracity of that claim", he added. The Emperor was in a pugnacious mood. Declaring that all those who gave refuge to Shambuji and Prince Akbar were his enemies, he ordered the siege of Bijapur. The two princes—Shah Alam and Muhammad Azam—and all his top generals were sent into the fray. An army of fifty thousand men supported by twenty thousand cavalry and twenty columns of the elephant corps were placed at their disposal for "a task that must in no circumstance be left unfinished". Aurangzeb staked his all on the conquest of Bijapur. Both Shambuji and Akbar were to be demolished once and for all. When aroused to anger, Aurangzeb was Changez and Timur rolled into one. Half measures left him cold. Total wars, he observed more than once, could be waged only with the totality of means at one's disposal.

Intent on leaving nothing to chance, Aurangzeb himself trans

ferred his headquarters to Sholapur from where, he thought, it would be easier for him to direct operations personally. Like Babar, he left behind the ladies of the harem and concentrated night and day on ways to subjugate the fort known for its almost invulnerable defences. The abject retreat of Dilir Khan in 1680 from the gates of the citadel was still fresh in his memory. He cautioned his generals against impetuosity and advised them to proceed step by a careful step. In every combat Aurangzeb made it a point not to let recur the mistakes of the past and to use only the tactics of proven effectiveness. In March 1685, notwithstanding the threatening postures of the Regent, Siddi Masud, and the commander-in-chief Shahrāza Khan*, the Emperor sent to the young Sultan a letter as vain as it was threatening in tone. He wrote in part:†

Our forces are poised for victory. We shall spare no ploy known to man to gain our end. Our enmity is not against the Sultanate of Bijapur, but against those whom you have chosen to give shelter. We will be glad to spare the fair city of Bijapur the fate that awaits it provided the Marhatta chief and his accomplices in hostility towards the Mughals are handed over to us within forty-eight hours. We also demand an assurance that in future the territory of Bijapur will not be converted into a haven for rebels against our authority.

Also we would insist on your paying to the imperial exchequer the amounts of annual tribute which, in your youthful indiscretion, you have not paid for many years. We shall consider with sympathy your request for payment of these arrears in convenient instalments. What is important is that you recognise our suzerainty and pledge yourself to pay the agreed amount of tribute regularly in future. We have no intention to annex Bijapur. At the same time, it will be wrong on our part to deny ourselves the rights and privileges of a paramount power. The great Allah gave us this position of advantage. It will be a sin unpardonable to disobey His command.

We shall expect a reply to this communication within a week.

*The original name of Shahrāza Khan was Syed Makhdum. He was to Sikanḍar Shah what Bairam Khan was to Akbar after Humayun's death.

This threatening letter caused a stir in the Bijapur court. Every tongue was still and every face turned rapt upon Sikandar as the Regent read it out in slow, measured voice. Never before had a Mughal monarch been so forth-right, so demanding and so uncompromising. Both Siddi Masud and Shahraza Khan preferred to hear the young Sultan's reaction before venturing comment. A picture of gravity, Sikandar did not keep them waiting for long. After a few suspenseful moments, he asked the Regent to hand over the communication to him. Then in a voice stern and fearless, he declared that none of the demands was acceptable to him, and that he would rather die fighting than live in abject subjection. These words gave heart to the courtiers, and they all bowed agreement with their ruler. Sikandar tore into bits the two-page letter, and said that a communication of that offensive nature warranted no reply. At this the doyen of the *ulema* ventured a remark that no reply might be misconstrued as a sign of indecision and weakness. "Let us answer the brick by a bigger brick, and put the record straight for posterity" he submitted. The Sultan turned on a quarter smile, and ordered Masud to prepare "a solid brick baked in roaring fire and send it to Sholapur in a casket of uncut stone".

The court regained composure. Sikandar Shah supervised personally the work of strengthening the city's defences. Appeals were issued to the people to spare no effort to beat back the imperialist invaders. Hand-picked commanders were posted at strategic points with instructions to block all routes to the capital. This wave of uncommon patriotism swelled into a frenzy of self-confidence such as had seldom been witnessed before. National songs were on the lips of everybody everywhere. Racial differences were for the time forgotten. Bijapur faced the biggest crisis of its history. The city had to be saved whatever the sufferings. In the event of a Mughal breakthrough, the ancient metropolis was to be set on fire. "The feet of the enemy must not be allowed to desecrate our streets, our squares and our gardens", ran an order of the day when it became clear that an attack was imminent. If words could win wars then it was clear the Mughal forces would be hurled back to Burhanpur.

As commander-in-chief, Shahraza Khan kept to himself the plans for defence of the fort and the royal palaces. That general

knows little who tells his captains all that he knows. The result was a show of misgivings in certain quarters about the steps taken to safeguard the monarch and his family. A rumour went around that the Khan was bought over by the Mughals and that he would cross over to the other side as soon as the battle was joined. Sikandar himself came out to nail these lies with assurances that everything possible was done to preserve the sanctity of the citadel and its palaces. Shahraza Khan swore on the *Quran* in every mosque to deny plans for a treacherous crossover. "Thus the intrigues of the enemy again came to naught and the people of all ages and all races stood shoulder-to-shoulder in readiness for the oncoming trial with Fate", wrote the historian Muhammad Jilani.

To make unity still more united, the Regent, after consultations with the Sultan, entrusted the defence of the fort to Chintu Maharaj, a Brahmin believed to possess infallible occult powers to meet dangerous situations. He was also a distinguished soldier with a record of meritorious victories against the Mughals, the Portuguese and the Marhatta. When Aurangzeb came to know of this appointment, he exclaimed: "The battle of Bijapur is as good as won. Infidelity will find itself helpless against the faithful".

The siege of Bijapur began on 15 April, 1685. Here was a death-grapple on which rested the fate of the Deccan, as also of the Empire. The will-to-win was pitched against the equally strong will-to-repel the invaders. Thirty thousand Bijapuri troops garrisoned the fort, and an equal number was sent out to disrupt the Mughal supply lines. On the other side, Prince Azam was given the supreme command of an army of nearly eighty thousand men—the largest ever assembled for action in the south. The two greatest Mughal generals of the day—Rahulla Khaf and Qasim Khan—were given charge of separate divisions under the overall command of Prince Azam. Several senior posts in the Mughal army were held by Rajput chiefs of proved trust. For nearly a whole year, the two armies stood face to face, probing, testing and trying to find out loopholes in each other's defences. Neither side attempted an assault for fear of a setback. Both Aurangzeb and Siddi Masud pinned their faith on time. The Emperor aimed at starving the Bijapuris into surrender. Sikandar, on the other hand, hoped to repel the invaders by

cutting their supply lines. Neither side felt itself strong enough to pull out the knockout blow.

Help came to Bijapur from Golconda. The Marhattas also sent two more crack divisions of horsemen for straffing duties. Sikandar himself welcomed these much-needed reinforcements, and declared with a degree of jubilation that the whole of Deccan was united in opposing the northern threat. "We cannot lose. Our cause is just, our armies full of confidence", he told the commander of the Marhatta force. The newly-arrived forces were deployed speedily on duties in the vicinity of the fort—a manoeuvre meant to tell the Mughals that Bijapur did not stand alone; the entire south was behind the effort to preserve its sovereignty. Aurangzeb took note of these developments, but he chose to describe them as irrelevancies that could not affect the result of the conflict. "We have the strength to beat a hundred Bijapurs and their allies", he told Azam Khan when girding him with a replica of "Alamgir", the sword that over the years had become a symbol of the invincibility of Mughal arms.

At this stage when Aurangzeb was contemplating an assault, the chance interception by Mughal scouts of a letter to Shambuji from Qutb Shah of Golconda led to a change in the Mughal strategy. Addressing the Marhatta ruler as a "brother-in-arms", Qutb Shah wrote :

We are facing a common enemy, an ogre, who will not be content with anything less than swallowing our kingdoms. Already I have sent a fairly large force to buttress up the morale of our brother Sikandar Shah. It is understood the Marhatta forces are also planning to make a common cause with him. The northern hordes must be bound and thrown into the Narbada. Our common interests demand a common plan of war against the foreign invaders. I propose a joint thrust against them as soon as the imperialists cross the borders of Bijapur. They will find it impossible to wage a war on two fronts. Our blow, it is my belief, will knock them out of the ring. Absolute secrecy is the key to the success of my plan. I would be glad to meet your representatives anywhere outside the range of Mughal guns. There is no time to lose. We need to move with utmost speed and circumspection. I shall await your reply in Hyderabad.

Aurangzeb first thought the letter was a forged document and that it had been planted to alarm the Mughal army into abandoning for the time the planned assault. He was not inclined to heed the danger implicit in the communication. The watchful Qasim Khan prevailed upon the Emperor, however, to verify the authenticity of the document and to delay the attack, if needed, for a few weeks. In the meantime, steps could be taken to find out "what is happening at the other side of the hill", and to neutralize the implicit threat either by force or diplomacy before delivering the *coup-de main* against Bijapur.

Aurangzeb accepted the advice not because he was afraid of defeat but because he wanted to make victory doubly sure. The stakes he was playing to were high. Even a minor setback, he realized, would be a grievous blow to his prestige. Bijapur had to be erased from the map of Deccan. A few weeks' delay would hardly make much difference. It was essential, he felt, that the second front spectre was dispelled once and for all. To that end he ordered a massive invasion of Golconda. The charge of the expedition was entrusted to Shah Alam with instructions to 'set fire to Hyderabad, ransack villages and destroy everything that comes in the way of victory'. Speed was the demand of the hour, the Emperor emphasised, and he told his son in no uncertain words that Qutb Shah was to be defused before the siege of Bijapur could be pressed. Shah Alam, impetuous and dutiful, swore on the holy book there and then to carry out the royal command with "faith in the hitting power of our arms, faith in the wisdom of Ali Jah the Emperor, faith in the courage of our generals and finally faith in the righteousness of our mission".

Aurangzeb was delighted at the pledge taken by his son. He decorated him with robes of the highest honour, wished him success, and accompanied him a couple of miles to stress his happiness at the determination with which he had undertaken the command of the expeditionary force. Drums were beaten and trumpets were sounded as Shah Alam, finally took leave of the Emperor and rode away majestically for a conquest on which, he had come to believe, rested the glory of the Empire.

God truly helps those under whose chests surge the waves of courage and determination. Hyderabad fell before the imperial armies reached the city. Panic seized Qutb Shah, and he sur-

rendered without a fight. The terms he agreed to without a whimper of protest were the most abject in the history of the Sultanate. In fact, he became a camp-follower of the Mughals and undertook solemnly not to do anything which might impede the progress of the imperial armies against Bijapur, as also against the Marhattas. The annual tribute he agreed to pay ran into millions of rupees. Shah Alam had kept his pledge. Aurangzeb was jubilant at his son's performance. After stationing a "supervisory force" at Hyderabad, the prince returned to Sholapur to join his father in what was to be the hammer-blow against the Adil Shahi kingdom. The Mughal morale rose sky-high at the news, of these developments. The fate of Bijapur seemed as good as sealed. A triumphant Aurangzeb was like a wave that could sweep away mountains before it. The Mughal force bore the look of an avalanche hard to resist.

For reasons best known to them, the gods decided, however, to give the mighty Mughals a fright. A pestilence of the most virulent variety hit the territories occupied by the invading forces. Famine added to the discomfiture of the Mughals. Supplies from the north came only in trickles. Horses, camels and elephants began to die at an alarming rate. Disease and exhaustion took a heavy toll of men in uniform. Several generals and numbers of the royal entourage fell to the raging epidemic before the teams of bewildered *hukma* could give them assistance. Aurangzeb read in these heart-rending developments "a command of Allah to lift the siege and retreat to safer regions". He secluded himself for a whole week to hold consultations with the mighty unseen agents of the spirit, and when he reappeared in public the sorrow on his face left no one in doubt that the gods had told him to quit. There was concentration around. A retreat at this stage, it was felt, would be a surrender to the forces of *kufir*.

Prince Azam, however, stood his ground firmly. Jealousy, not faith, sustained him in this crisis. The victory of Shah Alam in Golconda necessitated that he became the hero of Bijapur. Whatever the hazard—disease, famine or scarcities of supplies—he proclaimed his decision to stay on in Bijapur with his wife and two sons. "Let everyone go. I shall carry on the fight till there is strength in my hands to hold fast to the sword girded

around my waist by the Emperor himself. Victory and defeat are the dispensations of God. My resolve is firm. Mine is not an act of disobedience, but it is an act of obedience to the highest authority known to man. My conscience and my soul rebel at the thought of throwing over to the winds all our gains for fear of a few more deaths through hunger and disease. Natural calamities are meant to be overcome; they cannot be allowed to overcome the spirit of man. Permit me, sire, to mount the planned assault. Insha Allah, I shall kiss the royal threshold after the mission entrusted to me is successfully completed", wrote the prince to his father when he came to know that a general withdrawal was contemplated.

Aurangzeb sent to Azam his "good wishes and blessings" in a communication written with his own hand. He had reason to be gratified at the sentiments expressed so forcefully by his son. For once Aurangzeb changed his mind because of reasons advanced by a lesser person. A *firman* was issued the very next day, putting the forces on alert and asking them to be ready for the long-awaited thrust forward.

Heartened by Azam's dauntlessness, Aurangzeb rushed reinforcements under Firoz Jang, a soldier whose motto was "victory at any cost". Intent on delivering the *coup de grace*, the Emperor himself reached the outskirts of Bijapur early in June, 1686—an event that marked the beginning of the end of the glory that was once Bijapur. Shah Alam, as full of ambition as he was of antagonism for brother Azam, accompanied the Emperor. Wearing as he did the badge of the conquest of Golconda, he was loath to let Azam steal any part of his new-found renown by storming Bijapur into subjection. Spite fired by covetousness led him to commit the indiscretion of sending secret messages to Sikandar for laying down his arms without a fight. He wanted the Sultan to surrender to the Padshah, not to Azam or anyone of the generals. A reply sent by Shahrāza Khan on behalf of the ruler fell in the hands of a contingent of imperial scouts. Firoz Jang could not believe his eyes when this letter was brought to him. It read :

The wise Sultan has desired me to acknowledge your approach and to say in clear words that battles are won by the sword, not by words of intrigue. Your wish that he should not own

defeat to Prince Azam is based on the presumption that Bijapur is ready to kiss the dust of humiliation. Far from it; we will fight on till the invasion is repulsed. The guardians of Bijapur are proud of their heritage of honesty on the battlefield, honesty behind the walls of the fort, honesty at the court and honesty in the streets of this celestial city. To try to corrupt us is to betray ignorance of the history of this land.

Allah forbid, if we are ordained to suffer defeat, we shall acknowledge as conqueror whosoever enters the citadel first. The gracious Sultan wants me, however, to proclaim loud and clear that the portals of the fort of Bijapur stand firm and steadfast. They can be broken open by no mortal man. Neither you, nor Azam, nor even your king belongs to the army of soldiers from the other world. This is a warning. You will do well to heed it.

The Sultan further desires that secret messages of ill-intent should not be sent to him in future. Our trust in truth and righteousness is not open to negotiations.

This was a bold rejoinder spawned perhaps by extreme desperation. The difficulties of the hard-pressed garrison were increasing every day. Azam and Firoz Jang were on the kill. They had mustered all their guns and all their balls of metal and stone for the final strike. Aurangzeb was distressed to know of Shah Alam's underhand manoeuvre. He summoned the prince to his presence and censured him strongly for "an act rooted in selfishness and extreme irresponsibility". Shah Alam made no reply. His silence was a confession of guilt. Aurangzeb feigned forgiveness. The time was not propitious for punishing the prince who forced Qutb Shah to his knees. The fight for Bijapur was in full swing. Shah Alam's act of malice against his brother could be dealt with properly later. Aurangzeb's schedule of priorities was iron-cast. Bijapur came first, everything else afterwards.

When Prince Azam failed to force the gallant garrison to submit to his repeated onslaughts, Aurangzeb himself swung into action. For seventy scorching days he rammed the ramparts with the fury of the elements out to disrupt and destroy before the besieged realized the uselessness of further resistance. A tight blockade and unceasing bombardment caused untold

physical and mental havoc among the defenders. The point was at last reached when it became clear that stout hearts alone could silence no guns. The city of Bijapur lay in ruins. The devastation wrought by the Mughal soldiers was appalling. Heaps of dead bodies and the wailings of the starving, maimed and the wounded made the city a virtual rendezvous for ghosts and the beasts of land and air who revel in the foul smell of death.

The time had come for a party of the beleaguered *ulema* to come out with black scarfs around their necks and appeal to the Emperor, in the name of Islam, as also in the name of humanity, to stop further bloodshed and propose terms for an honourable peace. "My only condition is that Shambuji and other sons of perdition are handed over to me", retorted Aurangzeb. In vain did the learned theologians try to argue the Emperor out of his rigid stand. He would be satisfied with nothing less, he said firmly and gave them leave to depart. A week later, on 11 September, 1686, Sikandar Adil Shah ordered the gates of the fort to be flung open. Human misery had a limit beyond which it could not be endured. Bijapur had fallen. The cost of victory to Aurangzeb was heavy. His succinct remark that "who is the fool who does not wish his enemy were dead" summed up a part of the mental anatomy of this great monarch. Historians are unanimous that in this victory lay hidden somewhere the defeat that finally extinguished the dynasty of the Mughals.

Medieval despots, as a rule, went inordinately callous in defeat and they became pictures of generosity in victory. Aurangzeb had achieved what he had set out to accomplish. Now he could afford to be suave and benevolent. The Sultan's representatives were received with courtesies complete with *khilats* and robes of silk and satin. Gone from his face was the austere look that made the sunshine cheerless and darkness dreary. The almost inextinguishable smile in his narrow, purposive eyes reflected peace within himself. No more had he any quarrel either with the Sultan or with those who were in sympathy with him. The costly *nazranas* the emissaries presented were accepted with a grace that spread optimism all around.

The symbolic act of surrender completed, Aurangzeb asked the Bijapuri officials to take off white scarves from around their

necks. "Now we are friends and allies in the crusade against infidelity", he declared. The Chamberlain led them to their pre-allotted places in the third row of the court dignitaries. There, they stood respectfully till the Sheikh-ul-Islam. Allama Muhammad Jabbar, finished recitations from the *Quran* in praise of "the all-powerful, the all-merciful and the all-knowing Allah who in His infinite mercy has given us an opportunity to work for the good of the faithful". Then a royal proclamation, accepting the offer of unconditional surrender, was read out by the chief Imam. A copy of the *firman* was handed over to the leader of the visiting team. The Imam announced that the Emperor would receive Sikandar Adil Shah in public audience in the camp hall two *gharis* before the mid-day prayers the next day. Victory celebrations in the form of prayers and almsgiving continued till the sunset. Aurangzeb spent a large part of the night in silent meditations.

The dawn of 12 September, 1686, was for the people of Bijapur the dawn of a day dismal and dolorous. The news had gone around that their ruler was to pass through the main streets of the city not long after daybreak. The entire population lined the route Sikandar's elephant was to take for the Sultan's last journey out of his realm. Women beat their breasts and men cried openly as Sikandar, wearing a look of dignified sorrow, mounted his favourite elephant Nilgiri for the five-mile slow ride to the camp of the Mughal Emperor. Old women wept bitterly as they saw their "son and sovereign" pass by in silence. No drums were beaten as he left the palace. The usual lines of bodyguard were conspicuous this time by their absence. The lone Nilgiri, neither preceded nor followed by giant jumbos from the royal stables, seemed to know that never again would the master ride him again. He ambled along step by a sorrowful step, and never raised his trunk, as was his wont, to say hello to the spectators. Sikandar himself sat motionless in a houdah divested of the royal insignia, his head bent slightly to the right and his eyes transfixed, as it were, at the uncertainty of the future. As the Sultan reached the main square, a grey-haired septugenarian in robes of green and saffron shouted loud and clear: "In age you are my son, in status my king. My sorrow at your departure is beyond words. May the great Saviour protect you. This is the common prayer of all

your subjects". Sikandar raised his head a little and looked in the direction from where came the mournful lament. He recognised the man. There stood in the crowd a saintly figure who initiated him long years ago in the mystiques of spiritualism. Sikandar took off the necklace of sacred, black beads he was wearing, and threw it to him without uttering a word. For many subsequent years this necklace was kept in the Badshahi mosque as a sacred memento—parting salute of a monarch to his people. When Sikandar crossed the outer wall of Bijapur by the eastern gate, there came to an end a dynasty of rulers that gave the Deccan many a new dimension in administration, religious tolerance and patriotic zeal.

Once again, Aurangzeb was at his gracious best when the chiefest member of the nobility. Rahulla Khan, announced the arrival at the court of "Sikandar Adil Shah, last ruler of Bijapur faithful vassal of the Empire, man of faith and courage, one who recognises the futility of maintaining unfriendly relations with the king of kings of Hindustan". Aurangzeb gave a broad, almost brotherly smile, came down the throne and held the handsome youth in a fairly long, cordial embrace. The protocol of a formal obeisance having been abandoned, the Emperor personally led Sikandar to a seat next to his grandson Muiz-ud-Din. Then began the proceedings for a formal declaration of victory. As on the previous day, the Chamberlain read out a declaration praising Allah for the triumph of Mughal arms, and at the same time lauding the wisdom of Sikandar Adil Shah in bowing his head to the will of God. In the end, the *firman*, written in words of extreme cordiality, conferred on Sikandar the title of Khan and fixed for him a stipend of rupees a hundred thousand a year. When a copy of this proclamation was handed over to the Sultan, he rose up to do homage to the Emperor and to say the usual things about God and His mercy, Aurangzeb was impressed at the manner in which the young defeated ruler conducted himself in this hour of crisis. Though the presents he gave to Sikandar were costly in value, they were of little historical significance. The robes conferred on him were without the customary dagger and the sword, and the citation hailed in no uncertain words his decision to spend the rest of his life in service to God and the Emperor. These were hard words not easy to digest for one who not long ago took pride in the

martial traditions of his dynasty. There was a hush in the camp hall as Sikandar bowed to Aurangzeb three times, walked backwards a few differential steps, and then veered left to take his seat by the side of Muiz-ud-Din.

The Chamberlain then read a second proclamation in which the two highest ranking dignitaries of Bijapur, Hahraza Khan and Abour Rauf Khan, were given the prestigious titles Rustam Khan and Dilir Khan, respectively. Aurangzeb knew the best way to break an enemy was to honour him. The two men, standing behind Sikandar Shah, begged permission of their former master to accept the honour. At Sikandar nodding a gracious assent, the couple walked up to within twenty feet of the throne and did the prescribed ritual of salutations to the Emperor. The robes of their new ranks were then conferred on them.

Nobody could give Aurangzeb better advice than he himself. For seven days he rested in the safety of his camp, and took discreet steps to ensure that Bijapur came to life again. Cart-loads of foodgrains and other essential items were rushed to the ruined city and distributed free among the starving population. The Mughal soldiers were restrained, on pain of instant death, from indulging their lusts for plunder and animal passion. A battery of forty adventurers charged with violating the imperial order were hanged to death in public inside the city, and it was announced by the beat of drum that the honour and property of the people of Bijapur were safe in the hands of the Mughals.

The smouldering anger of the population having thus been assuaged somewhat, Aurangzeb entered the city in full regalia on 19 September, 1686. Four divisions of cavalry and two of infantry accompanied him in a spectacular cavalcade of armed strength. The Emperor's entry into the fort and later in the palace of Sikandar Shah was marked by massive alms-giving—the only mode of celebration Aurangzeb permitted himself in later years. The inmates of the former ruler's harem were assured of "a fair treatment", and such ladies as expressed a wish to gain freedom were escorted to their families with honour. The remainder were given liberal stipends—ranging from rupees twenty thousand to rupees five thousand a year—and suitable apartments for lifetime. An appropriate allocation of eunuchs and maid-servants was also made. The seniormost lady was

given five maids, twenty slave girls and ten eunuchs, all of whom were to draw their monthly salaries from the imperial treasury. A concubine with a year's stay in the seraglio was to be content with rupees five thousand a year, four slave girls and a eunuch. As before, a common kitchen with twenty cooks and a team of fifty *mussalchis* was set up. Every inmate was required to pay ten per cent of her stipend towards the expenses of food and other services; the balance was met from the funds of the imperial Government. Many foreign travellers visiting Bijapur in the next five years learned from their "friends and official guides" that there was a general satisfaction about these arrangements. A British trader, Michael Angleman, observed, however, that some of the ladies were known to supplement their income through sources not open to them in the days of the Sultan. The harem guards, he said, normally turned a blind eye towards "unauthorised, influential visitors" for a gratification of five to ten rupees an evening. It is, therefore, little wonder that Aurangzeb ordered the harem to be closed early in 1690. The stipends continued, however, to be paid according to the original dispensation.

While in Bijapur, Aurangzeb rested for six hours in the palace of Sikandar. He was awe-stricken at the "vulgar decorations and ordered that all "paintings and other un-Islamic objects of art" should be either defaced or dumped into the river "before sunset". It is estimated that within the short span of four to five hours art treasures worth a billion rupees were lost in a frenzy of indiscriminate destruction.

Aurangzeb returned to the camp before nightfall. He left behind a Bijapur in tears. The city was a virtual heap of ruins. The long war had bled it to a slow, painful death. Never again was it to regain the glory that once made it the "noblest metropolis of the east". The victory gained by Aurangzeb turned out to be a very costly business. Another such success would have ruined him. As it was, the extent of his losses in men and material resources was frightening. His sons and his generals were in dismay. The south repelled them. They all yearned to return to their homes in Delhi and Agra. They had seen enough of the Deccan; it could never match the beauty, the affluence and the climatic excellence of the north. Aurangzeb induced himself, however, to believe that Allah wanted him to extinguish apostates,

both Shiites and Marhattas, from the peninsula. He committed many mistakes in the name of religion. The decision to defy the laws of distance, terrain, communications, as also the law of love for home, was perhaps a blunder that disrupted the Empire.

Sikandar was found a berth in the state prison at Daultabad. The deposed king of Golconda, Abul Hassan, was also lodged in that fort. The two seldom met. The Mughal commander kept a close watch over their activities. "Even their shadows can conspire and intrigue", he wrote to the Governor at Burhanpur. These restrictions were relaxed somewhat on Id days when they sat at the same *dastarkhwan*, but were not permitted to enter into any type of conversation.

Aurangzeb made it a point to take them with him in turn on military expeditions against the Marhattas and other lesser foes. It was in the course of one such expedition near the fort of Sitara that Sikandar died of an ailment no physician could diagnose correctly. Contemporary historians of the Deccan suspected poisoning. Perhaps, Aurangzeb believed that next to no enemy a dead enemy was best. The date of Sikandar's death is given as 3 April, 1700, by the Mughal historians. Some Deccani chroniclers differ. They put the date a year earlier.

At the time of his death Sikandar was between thirty-one and thirty-two years of age—a young man even by the measure of the medieval life-span. Nearly half of his life was spent behind the stone walls of the fort prison, and the other half as a stooge of conscienceless, roguish Regents. His body was taken to Bijapur and buried there near the mausoleum of Shaikh Fatehullah, a man of high spiritual values who spent many years instructing the young Sultan in the fundamentals of metaphysics and religion. Aurangzeb perhaps thought that the concession extended to the dead ruler would condone some of the sins he committed in waging a war of aggression against Bijapur. If God did acquit him then God is not, God forgive me, what God should be.

Chapter Seventeen

DARING AND DECEIT

To believe only in possibilities was to Aurangzeb no faith; but mere philosophy. After Bijapur, what? Golconda was the obvious next target of his ambition. The Qutb Shahi kingdom had, in his reckoning, been guilty of many unpardonable sins; it was most irregular in payment of the annual tribute agreed to by the former Sultan Abdullah* many years ago; it aided and abetted Bijapur's resistance to the Mughal arms; it helped first Shivaji and then Shambuji in their encroachments on the imperial territories; and lastly it was openly sympathetic to the rebellious Prince Akbar—a bundle of crimes that Aurangzeb could not ignore, much less condone. He had come to the Deccan on a grandiose mission of annexation and waging religious crusades against the Shiites on the one hand and the Marhattas on the other. The rebellion of Akbar gave this twin-undertaking an urgency that brooked no delay. The Emperor's sights were clear. Unless Golconda was humbled once and for all, he could not hope to accomplish quickly his self-assigned tasks. He could not wait for the possibility of Abul Hassan making a surrender of his own will. Golconda had to be conquered by the sword. There was no alternative to this imperial compulsion. Aurangzeb's mind was set on the campaign. There was to be no respite for him till the only remaining Sultanate was annexed and obliterated from the map of the

*Abdullah Qutb Shah (1626-72) was the sixth Sultan of Golconda. Both Bernier and Tavernier who visited Hyderabad several times during his reign describe him as a profligate who took little interest in the affairs of state.

Peninsula. There was no time to be lost. The armies of Shah Alam and Muhammad Azam were ordered to be ready for the campaign.

Though outwardly firm in its resolve not to give in to the mounting diplomatic pressures, Golconda was in a state of such moral decadence that it could not hope to withstand the Mughal invasion for long. The pleasure-loving Abdullah bequeathed to his successor, Abul Hassan, a legacy of debauchery and mal-administration that ate at the vitals of the state. Bernier, who visited Golconda several times between 1660 and 1670, wrote that King Abdullah "made sensuality proud of his novel devices to derive pleasure from the female frame." At entertainments held every full moon he would watch for hours scantily dressed women sing and dance past him in voluptuous frenzy. He confessed unashamedly of having in him immoral longings and whenever he had in his possession a new lass forgotten for days was all business of the state. Sweet to him were the uses of sensual innovations. Even in old age, he was strong and lusty. Hot liquors, prepared specially for him in the royal brewery at Hyderabad, were his favourite companions at all hours of all days. It was, therefore, not surprising that during the forty-six years of his reign, the administration was first in the hands of his mother, Hayat Baksh Begum and later after her death in 1666 in those of his eldest son-in-law Syed Ahmad. Both of them lacked the skills to make Golconda strong and prosperous.

The Begum was a heartless authoritarian who made more enemies than friends both in and outside the state. On the other hand, Syed Ahmad was a kindly intellectual who concerned himself primarily with expanding the areas of his knowledge, letting the affairs of governance be carried out by his arrogant wife, Ma Sahiba. She was described by an English traveller, Hitchcock, as "a lesser man" who sought to enlarge her image by diminishing those of others around her. The result was dissatisfaction in all ranks of the nobility. By the time Abdullah died in 1672, the kingdom of Golconda was in the shambles—poverty-stricken, full of dissensions and immorality.

In a desperate bid to secure succession for her husband, Ma Sahiba literally came out of the palace sword in hand and she challenged to a duel all those who stood in the way of her

husband becoming the Sultan. The army of eunuchs and slave girls she headed melted away at the first sign of opposition to her claim. A majority of the nobility favoured for the throne Abul Hassan*, husband of the third daughter of Sultan Abdullah. They moved unitedly with speed, imprisoned Syed Hassan, prevailed upon Ma Sahiba to accept the will of the Lord and retire honourably to the harem. The new ruler donned the crown on 19 August, 1672, and thus dawned in Galcanda yet another era of corruption, decadence and profligacy.

Abul Hassan began his reign with good intentions and with some good acts to alleviate the misery of the people, but he soon degenerated into a wayward voluptuary. Like his predecessor, he spent nearly all his time in the mighty world of song and beauty. Bernier wrote that over two-thirds of the kingdom's income (rupees thirty million a year) was spent on satisfying the young Sultan's "yearnings for the sweet sounds of the dainty dancers' ankle bells". Immorality touched a new low during his reign. Hyderabad was described by Tavernier as a metropolis as beautiful as it was full of vice. The number of prostitutes in the city swelled to over thirty thousand which meant that every third woman one passed in the streets of the capital was for sale after dusk. "This city which is the mother of Harlots and all abminations awakes at night and sleeps during the day", wrote Zain-ul-Abdin, a Persian traveller who spent forty days in the city in 1678. The trivial and vulgar ways of amassing pleasure that Abul Hassan pursued became popular vogues not only among the wealthy classes but also among those who lived from day to day by the sweat of their brow.

There never was and there never will be a road or ready way to vice. A general atmosphere of depravity is the climate in which sin flowers. The Sultan's unceasing violations of moral decorum became, so to say, the sanctuary of evil; the bulk of the people of Golcanda took refuge in it. In this hour of grave

*Abul Hassan was not of royal descent. He was hurriedly chosen from the inmates of a hermitage to wed the third daughter of Sultan Abdullah. The original bridegroom, Syed Sultan, a protegee of Syed Hassan, was done to death a few hours before the wedding ceremony. A substitute groom had to be found before the astrologically auspicious hour passed away. The choice fell on the handsome Abul Hassan.

moral crisis in the history of Golconda, the reins of government came to be held by the wily Brahmin Madhanna (title Surya Prasad Rao) and his equally corrupt brother Akkanna. Coming as they did from a poor family, the power that Providence thrust on them went to their heads and while the people of Golconda wallowed in misery they rode in golden palanquins, ate food in plates studded with diamonds, dressed in robes of silk and brocade, lived luxuriously in mansions of marble and red stone and, what was worse, exercised their authority with despotic heartlessness. Abul Hassan raised no objection to their ways of governance for as long as he was supplied with the wherewithals to cater to his lusts. The net result of this Brahmanic tyranny in a Shiite state was high communal tension and higher dissatisfaction at all levels of administration. Petitions to the Sultan against the alleged injustices committed by the brothers remained unacknowledged. The Mughal envoys apprised the Emperor of the "pro-Marhatta policies pursued by Madhanna and his partners in conspiracy against Islam".

These reports infuriated the Emperor who declared openly that he would not rest content till "these two infidels of infinite insolence and pride in their heresies are despatched to the realm of non-existence". However, diplomatic pressures brought on Abul Hassan bore no fruit. The Brahmin brothers persisted in their "blasphemies and plunders" without paying any heed to the warnings sounded by Aurangzeb. They were convinced the fort of Golconda was impregnable and that the Mughals would not dare lay siege to it. However, their calculations turned out to be wrong. The will to conquer that animated Aurangzeb was beyond measure by mortals made of ordinary clay. Advancing years had stolen from him his pleasures one by one; they had already snatched away his humour, his loves, his passions and his flair for sustained argument. But the age had made no dent on his will-power ; if anything his resolution increased in tenacity as the time wrote wrinkles on his face. Thirty years ago, the ramparts of Golconda repulsed him. That setback rankled within him. He yearned to do what Abkar and Shah Jahan had failed to accomplish. His was not a mission of mere conquest ; his was the task of establishing in Hindustan the Kingdom of Islam. His spurs were sharper, his wings stronger.

The Brahmin self-seekers were unable to realize the strength of his motivations. In dealing with Aurangzeb they were not dealing merely with the guns and other weaponry of the Mughals ; they were pitted besides against a faith that made him the despair of his opponents. Madhannas and Akkannas were no match for his ingenuities in diplomacy and in warfare.

As has already been narrated briefly in the previous chapter, Aurangzeb sent Shah Alam with a big force to neutralize Golconda before mounting the siege of Bijapur. The Mughal forces suffered heavy losses before Abul Hassan fled the capital and took refuge in the fort, with a thousand women known, in the words of Khafi Khan, "for their good looks, artistry in classical dance forms, excellence of voice in songs of love and passion, near-perfection of body curves and enchantment of the glow of their skin". Madhanna objected to the Sultan taking shelter in the citadel ; he wanted him to resort to a distant place and leave the fort, to be defended, in case of need, by trusty commanders. Abul Hassan turned down the suggestion on advice from a widow of Sultan Abdullah : she suspected treachery and a move on the part of the Brahmin brothers to seize the kingdom and make the fort a base for their defence against the Mughals

This distrust snowballed quickly into a campaign to get rid of the tyrannical rule of the non-Muslim junta. Four ladies of the harem—two widows of Sultan Abdullah and two favourite concubines of Abul Hassan—played crucial roles in a drama that ended in Madhanna, Akkanna and their nephew, Yashwant (title Rustam Rao) coming to inglorious deaths at the hands of the agents of their enemies. They were stabbed to death in the streets of Hyderabad and their bodies were dragged through the highways of a bewildered city to ensure that there was no life left in them. Their lofty mansions were razed to the ground, their properties looted, their women disgraced, and lastly their heads were cut and sent to the Emperor as an assurance against non-Muslim interference in the affairs of Golconda. These peace offerings, more than anything else, led Aurangzeb to accept Shah Alam's recommendation that the Sultan be pardoned on condition that the arrears of tribute, amounting to eleven million rupees, be paid at once and that in future the agreed annual tribute (rupees two hundred thousand) was

deposited in the imperial treasury in the first week of the month of Muharram.

These were the terms of a truce Aurangzeb never meant to keep. The success of the siege of Bijapur depended, on a large extent, on the non-partisanship of Golconda. At the same time he could not let the war on Bijapur drag on for long. The time factor was against him. His acceptance of surrender by Abul Hassan was only a tactic to annihilate him after Sikandar Adil Shah was defused. Thus freed from the fear of a stab in the back, Aurangzeb mustered all his forces for a massive onslaught on Bijapur. Sikandar bowed to the inevitable on 12 September, 1686. Forty-eight days later, on 30 October, he left for Hyderabad, with the declared intention, as the historian Bhimsen* puts it, of "making the Deccan safe for Islam". Within three months he was in sight of the walls of the fort he had set his heart to conquer.

Lodged in the safety of a fort reputed to be under the protection of angels and archangels from heaven, Abul Hassan was reported to have laughed at the "child-like impudence" of Aurangzeb when told that the Mughal forces were preparing for an assault. "The old man is crazy. To attack Golconda is the surest way to hell", he told an exquisitely graceful ballerina, Naz Niaz, and asked her with a flourish of his kingly hand to "go on such a whirl of dancing that the gods may come to earth to celebrate with us the doom that awaits the arrogant mad man of the north". For six hours Naz Niaz and her troupe of "twenty peerless charmers from paradise" displayed their art, as also the allures of their divinely fair bodies, with such frenzy as led the Sultan to declare : 'Allah cannot be but on our side. The plunderer from the north is already beaten. Go and tell him that aggression has within it the seeds of defeat. The sooner he discards the pretence of a God-man the better it will be for him. The home of God is here, here and here. If he disobeys the divine decree, he will die full of misery and wretchedness of the soul. The fool does not know that God resides where there are women like Naz Niaz.' '

*Bhimsen was a court historian who accompanied Aurangzeb on nearly all his military campaigns in the Deccan.

These were words half of wisdom, half of desperation born of fear. He chided Aurangzeb for his self-assumed role of a missionary for he knew that the type of fanaticism the Emperor brought to bear on his military campaigns was not easy to counter by manpower alone. He had to muster on his side whatever God-force he could gather to have a chance to repulse Alamgir. His impassioned references to angels, archangels, as also to gods and goddesses and their abodes on earth, did arouse the garrison to believe that they could not be overpowered by muscle-power alone. The fight they put up against the vastly superior Mughal forces became a legend in the history of the Deccan. In the end, they were beaten, not by force but by treachery. The ramparts of Golconda stood firm and inviolable against the guns of Aurangzeb: they could, however, not protect Abul Hassan and his "army of goddesses come to earth to safeguard the sanctity of the citadel" from treason.

The siege began, like all sieges, with probing attacks and counter-attacks by either side. In one such skirmish serious injuries were sustained by the fifty-three-year old Qalich Khan, founder of the Nizam dynasty of Hyderabad. His right shoulder was shattered by a splinter of steel fired from one of the fort guns. The broad-chested warrior, known for his courage and faith in Divine justice, was carried to his camp in a condition that caused anxiety for his life. Pain seemed to have no command over the grey-haired Khan who sipped coffee and exchanged pleasantries with his aides as the royal surgeon, Hakim Nur-ud-Din, set about repairing the damage with red-hot knives and pliers. Never did the Khan twitch his muscle or utter a cry of anguish during the two-hour search for splinters deep inside the body. Once he asked for a glass of water and after taking a sip asked the *jarrah* with a smile, that had in it more faith than cheer, to "continue tailoring a new robe of skin for me". When at least Nur-ud-Din praised Allah for His mercies and proceeded to bandage the gaping wound after sprinkling on it a mixture of salt and lime water, the Khan asked for a horse so that he could take the field again. The Hukma dissuaded him from responding to that "call of duty" and took steps to ensure that he rested for at least a week before returning to the front. On the third day, Qalich Khan died without a moan or a com-

plaint on his lips. Physical pain, it seemed had no sway over him. This triumph over the knife was in medieval times considered the test of human endurance.

The history of the Mughals abounds in stories of such victories of will-power over pain. Mirza Kamran defied pain with rare boldness when red-hot needles were thrust into both his eyes at the bidding of Humayun. Babar asked the surgeon to wash with salt water the wounds he sustained at Kanwaha. Akbar inflicted upon himself a deep sword-cut to test his power of endurance. Rani Durgawati pulled out from her body arrows without a murmur. Rana Sangram Singh rode his horse for twenty miles with blood oozing out from every pore and an arrow stuck in the middle of the right eye. Khusrau sang praises of God when his eyes were punctured at the orders of his father, Jahangir. Prince Hindal exclaimed "O' pain, where is thy sting?" when a team of surgeons mended his broken bones after the battle for Kabul. Khan-i-Jahan played *chaupat* with a favourite mistress, Naznin Bai, as he sat down to get a bullet extracted from his back. The Sikh Gurus underwent unspeakable tortures without a whimper. Women did not lag far behind men in this defiance of physical pain. To yield to pain was considered an affront to manliness, nay, an insult to God itself. Qalich Khan's quiet submission to sufferance was commendable in that he upheld the highest traditions of the age. Self-control is a corollary of self-esteem, and that in turn is a deduction of divinity in man.

The campaign on the Mughal side was thrown into confusion by continuing rivalry between Shah Alam and the *Sipahsalar* Firoz Jang. As at Bijapur, the Prince worked out his strategy with one eye on the throne and the other at his rivals in the campaign. Firoz Jang, a commander of very high stature, made elaborate plans for "waves of assaults that could not but force Abul Hassan to surrender". If that plan succeeded, the credit for the conquest of Golconda, the Prince feared, would go to Firoz Jang. That development, he reckoned, would be a setback to his image, his prestige and his chances for succession. Muhammad Azam lurked in the wings as a serious contender for the crown. To fail to win the glory of being the conqueror of Golconda was to run the risk of losing the Emperor's favour. Swayed by these fears, he secretly embarked on a course of

hush-hush negotiations with Abul Hassan. His aim was to cajole or bribe the Sultan into capitulation and thus improve his score as a skilful negotiator. Aurangzeb was known to be keen on a military decision, and thus to leave no room for another lease of kingship for the Qutb Shahi dynasty. He specifically asked Firoz Jang to "reduce Golconda to dust so that it may not be able to raise its hideous head again". Shah Alam was aware of his father's intention. Ambition led him, however, to aim differently. The price he paid in the end for "this covert design of disobedience" was heavy indeed.

In a secret letter sent to Abul Hassan by the hand of Gohar Sultan, a slave girl of good looks and good intelligence, Shah Alam wrote :

The guns of Firoz Jang are poised for the kill. The Emperor has ordered him to leave no ploy unused to reduce the fort. An army of over fifty thousand braves is ready to sacrifice their lives in what they have been led to believe is a *jihad* for the preservation of the best in Islam. Golconda is no doubt a bastion of near-impregnable defences. You may, however, not be able to withstand a siege that may continue for a hundred years if need be. The Emperor is resolved to conquer this citadel whatever the cost in men, money and materials. In the circumstances, you will be ill-advised not to heed my advice and surrender without a fight. The Padshah, I feel confident, will appreciate your gesture and accept my recommendation to pardon you once again. You may also be allowed to retain your kingdom in lieu of a pledge of loyalty. Count me as your friend, not an enemy. Your interests are dear to me. I shall not betray your trust. Surrender to me, and you will continue to be the ruler of Golconda. Defy, and you will soon find yourself a prisoner at Daultabad.

One last piece of advice : Do not enter into any type of negotiations with the arrogant, self-centred Firoz Jang. His one aim is to subjugate the fort by means fair or foul. Throw insult in his face if he approaches you with a proposal for peace. Trust not his word. He is a serpent wrapped in man's skin.

You may send your reply by the word of mouth if you so

wish. Gohar Sultan is fully trustworthy.'

Unfortunately for Shah Alam, this communication did not reach Abul Hassan. It is not known whether Gohar Sultan developed cold feet and delivered the letter to the imperial camp commander or whether she was waylaid by the imperial scouts and taken to Firoz Jang with the incriminating message. What is, however, known is that Gohar Sultan never returned to the Princes harem and that the communication was in due time presented to the Emperor in evidence of his son's intended treacherous designs.

Aurangzeb preferred to watch and wait rather than take a hasty step against the erring prince. However, the vigil on Shah Alam's movements was tightened. Aurangzeb was apparently in search of more incriminating evidence before taking the prince to task for his indiscretions. He did not have to wait for long before a report reached him that no other than Nur-un-Nissa, favourite wife of Shah Alam, had paid a midnight visit to the fort in the guise of a fisher-woman. The agents of Firoz Jang did not capture the princess for fear of an open rebellion in the camp; rather, they made sure that she returned to her camp safely and that the prince did not suspect that her mission was no longer a closely-guarded secret. A week later, a letter to Shah Alam from the Sultan was intercepted. In this cryptic message, Abul Hassan, after praising the princesses's beauty, intelligence and scholarship, affirmed his pledge not to lay down arms before "the ungodly, unkind and unmanly fool Firoz Jang"; it also hinted at the possibility of "our making peace with such elements as may respect our right to the territories that have belonged to us for more than five hundred years".

Aurangzeb's fears were confirmed. Disciplinary action against Shah Alam could no longer be delayed. Steps were taken to isolate the prince's divisions from the main army. Firoz Jang was authorised to use force, if the need arose, to deal effectively with any show of rebellion. On 21 February, 1687, Shah Alam and his four sons were invited for an evening meal in the royal camp. After a brief session of "consultations about the progress of the siege", the prince and his sons were escorted to a tent at

the rear for what the official historian called "discussions with senior commanders and their aides on the future of the war at hand". As the prince and his sons sat down for "talks", the Chamberlain began to read aloud a royal order which, after dealing briefly with "the hazards confronting the imperial force" concluded by saying that "His Majesty, in his wisdom and faith in the voice of Allah that guides his footsteps, has decided most regretfully to curtail the liberty of movement of Shahzada Shah Alam and his four sons".

There was a hush in the tent as five gendarmes, standing outside as guardsmen stepped in to handcuff the prince and his sons. Shah Alam, his face turned pale with fear, offered no resistance. His eldest son, Muiz-ud-Din flared up, however, in anger and laid his hand on the hilt of his sword. Shah Alam intervened with a frown that told clearly: "you will draw the sword only to be slain with it". Muiz-ud-Din gave in. The five prisoners were hustled away to the camp jail from where they were taken within a fortnight to the state prison at Daultabad. For the next seven years they lived in almost solitary confinement—without good food, without the drinks that cheer, without friends and without relatives. Shah Alam was not permitted even to cut his hair. Only one visitor a week was allowed to see him, and that too in the presence of the commander of the fort. Letters to him were read at three stages before they were delivered to him. Similar procedure was followed in respect of letters written by him to friends and relatives. Copies of all communications that passed between him and the outside world were sent to the Emperor by the hand of special messengers. During the first two years, the security was so tight, to quote Khafi Khan, that not a whiff of fresh air could reach him without first securing the permission of the commander. His physical condition worsened in May 1689. A letter addressed by him to the Emperor in the beginning of June made pathetic reading. He wrote in parts :

This dreary prison has been my home for the last two years. The food served to me is so bad that even dogs turn away at the sight of it. Solitude is my only companion at all hours of the day and night, and owl songs the only entertainment. Though

I have in a way become a friend of my¹ travails, yet this spirit of comaraderie cannot cure the ailments I am afflicted with. The physician who comes to attend on me once a week seems hesitant to cure the diseases lest he be taken as a sympathiser of this unfortunate man. The servants who are sent to cater to my needs seem more intent to discomfort than comfort me. At times I pray for death and to be forgotten even by God. My sons are permitted to see me on what are called festive days. For me, O'revered father, there is no joy, no festivity left. Gloom surrounds me day and night. There is pain in every bone of my body. My brain seems to have frozen inside the skull. There is a limit to human endurance. I would therefore, beg your Majesty to command the angels of death to take me to the other side of the gate that separates existence from non-existence. What makes my plight miserable beyond words is that up to this day I have not been told of the crime that merited such punishment. I did not conspire to secure victory for Abul Hassan. What I aimed at was that our forces should win without bloodshed. Anyway, I bow to your Majesty's judgment. Allah knows, however, that I was not guilty of treachery.

Aurangzeb was distressed greatly to read this lament. He took the letter to the senior Begum Aurangbadi, and he was reported to have done what he never did before : He cried aloud in the name of justice, and said that the Fate had been cruel to him in forcing on him decisions as a king which he would never have taken as a father. His heart was choked with anguish at the thought that four of his children had come to grief because of his obligations to himself and to the Empire : the eldest son, Muhammad Sultan*, died in prison in 1671; the eldest daughter, Zaib-un-Nissa, was languishing in the state prison at Delhi; the eldest surviving son, Shah Alam, was a captive lodged in the fort at Daultabad; and his favourite son, Akbar, was a rebel with the intent to capture the throne with the help of the

*Muhammad Sultan was married to the second daughter of Sultan Abdullah Qutb Shah. He was imprisoned by Aurangzeb because of his alleged subversive role in the war of succession.

enemies of the Empire."

The childless Aurangabadi comforted Aurangzeb by humming softly a Saadi couplet that "A king has no sons and daughters; his subjects are his progeny". Aurangzeb gained heart, tore up Shah Alam's letter and went on his knees to seek from God forgiveness for forgetting momentarily that his obligations to Islam and to his subjects were far more pressing than his obligations to his children. Shah Alam, he decided, must remain where he was far as long as the "release orders are not whispered into my ears by the all-knowing Allah". No reply was sent to him. Instead, the fort commander was instructed not to forward to him any communication from the prince that did not contain in it "a specific request, inquiry or suggestion bearing on the affairs of war and peace".

Aurangzeb continued the siege with a single-mindedness that took no note of appeals by the Shiite clergy, neither was he deterred from action by dissensions and rivalries in the ranks of his own commanders. He supervised personally the construction of *sabats* and high platforms for guns. Materials for filling up the moat that ran all around the fort were secured at great cost. The generals whose loyalty was even slightly in doubt were either imprisoned or sent to inconsequential posts at the rear. Many high-ranking Persian Shiite officers in the imperial army, including Saf Shikan Khan, were removed from sensitive positions and they were given charge of civilian duties in other Mughal territories. Daily the Emperor inspected the divisions which had been hand-picked for the planned assault. The unceasing cannon-fire from the fort hampered the preparations somewhat, but Aurangzeb was geared to such a high pitch of resolve for the conquest of Golconda that no amount of enemy activity by way of gunfire or stray assaults dampened his spirits. Here was Aurangzeb at his most pugnacious, ready to stake his all for victory. For months he subsisted on one austerity meal a day and slept at night on the floor to underline his equality of status with men suffering hardships in the front line of operations.

On 16 May, 1687, Firoz Jang, tired of what may be called ping-pong exchanges, attempted a daring escalade which came very near success but for the barking of a stray dog. A hundred

commandos reached the top of the eastern balcony by stairs of short iron bars hammered in the rampart as they ascended. The hazardous operation was almost complete when the barking of a dog alerted the half-asleep guards. The alarm trumpets were sounded, and the garrison rose to a man to meet the danger. The seventy odd troops at the top were thus trapped into certain death. They put up whatever resistance they could, but were quickly overpowered by superior numbers. Fifty-two of them died fighting; the remainder were captured and produced before the Sultan the next day. Abul Hassan pardoned them and let them return to the Mughal lines—a gesture aimed at telling Aurangzeb, according to Qutb-Nama that the Shiites and the Sunnis belonged to the same faith and that a war between them was an affront to God itself.

The dog that helped repel the intruders was honoured with a robe of gold and silver, and the Sultan ordered that the animal be treated as “a royal guest” for the rest of its life. Given the name “Dost Danishmand”, the dog was lodged in a room close to the Sultan’s apartment. Abul Hassan personally gave it a piece of goat’s bone every morning. When told of the treatment accorded to the dog, Aurangzeb quipped : “the Sultan perhaps does not know that a dog often snaps at the hand that feeds it”.

Despite this and other minor setbacks, the resolve to subdue Golconda never relaxed its hold on Aurangzeb. He even took to writing with his own hand incantations on flags carried by his forces, and he repeatedly exhorted his men in the name of the Prophet to shed fear and to have faith in the leadership of “this humble missionary of Allah on earth”. Austere living and acts of piety further helped to strengthen belief that he was a living saint, and that no mortal, howsoever strong and resourceful could ever stand up against him for long. To prove that God was his friend and protector he one day took off his armour after prayers and walked calmly into a zone within the range of enemy gunfire. Many a ball of stone and steel fell to his right and to his left, and not a splinter, according to Khafi Khan, touched his “sacred person”. No further proof was needed of the “occult powers the Padshah-i-Padshaan is endowed with”. His men, thereafter, came to look upon him as “a personification of

divinity", and never did they hesitate even for a moment to undertake the most hazardous of assignments given them. This defecation of Aurangzeb, though pronounced un-Islamic by the Shiite ecclesiasts, went a long way to raise the morale of the tired imperial forces and to inject in them an almost fanatical will to win. Aurangzeb was a master tactician. What he could not achieve by force, he tried invariably to accomplish first by resort to the supernatural argument and then, if that ploy did not work, by means of massive bribery and other acts of treachery. These acts of blatant dishonesty were, according to Aurangzeb and his chroniclers, sanctioned by God in the interests of Islam and the spiritual and social values that that faith upheld. Golconda became a testing ground for Aurangzeb's saintliness as also, in the end, for his villainy.

Torrential rains, scarcities of food and the outbreak of a virulent epidemic added to the difficulties of the besiegers. Large-scale deaths and desertions caused the Emperor considerable anxiety, but these calamities did not panic him into making changes in his plan. He shunned what he called dreary drifting with the tide; his strength lay in unrelenting purposiveness, a trait of character that lifted him out of the ranks of the ordinary and gave him a place among the elite commanders of the age. He took firm steps to stop desertions, and made it known by the beat of drum that the penalty for defection was death. He also issued a proclamation based on *ayyats* from the holy book that betrayal by a soldier was a sin not only against the king but also against the almighty Allah. "The Emperor, therefore, makes it clear that no mercy will be shown to those who leave their posts without permission. Their sins will recoil on their families at home in case they manage to escape capture for the present. This is a warning to all would-be absconders whatever their status", the *firman* ended. This show of firmness yielded the desired result. The spate of truancy came to a stop. A few successes that came the way of the imperial forces at this stage raised the morale of the fighting men. It began to look that the day of victory was not far distant.

On 20 June, 1687, there happened something that very nearly shook Aurangzeb's belief that God was on his side. Considerable spadework went into the planting of mines under the nor-

thern ramparts of the fort. A whole division of crack troops was at hand to rush in as soon as a breach was effected. This was a moment of destiny, according to Bhimsen. One of the mines was lighted a little past midnight, and what happened thereafter is best described in the words of the official chronicler :

The explosion was deafening in its intensity. A blaze of fire rose high. Here was a signal for nearly three thousand troops standing by to rush forward in a bid to take the garrison by surprise. The Fate willed, however, otherwise. The blast ricocheted and the flying steel and stone enveloped the waiting Mughal troops, killing on the spot at least half of them and causing serious injuries to others. There was consternation and confusion all around. It seemed the Day of Judgment had come. The dead were dead and the dying were beseeching Allah for death. Deep agony filled the air. The commanders did not know what had happened. Reinforcements were sent to the scene of disaster. They found, however, to their bewilderment, that the ramparts were intact. An assault was, therefore, ruled out of question.

Seeing the tumult outside, the garrison launched a fierce attack on the Mughal positions. The loss of life among our men rose to nearly five thousand—a tragic occurrence that left everybody guessing, wondering and praying for mercy.

No sooner had the confusion died down a little than another mine was exploded with similar results. This time there were, however, no Mughal troops nearby to die. Firoz Jang was slightly hurt in this explosion. Hearing this news, Aurangzeb himself advanced with ten thousand reserves at his command. His resolve to take the fort by assault was, however, foiled by a tropical storm that broke out as the Emperor approached the site of the incident. It seemed that the gods of rain conspired with the gods of wind to thwart the Emperor's plan. It became impossible to see, much less move forward, in the whirlpool of wind and water turned on by nature. The helplessness of the Mughals was yet another opportunity—third in the day—for the Deccanis to come down on them in force. The hand-to-hand fighting that ensued was the most savage of the day. The numbers were on the side of the Mughals. They managed to

contain the counter-attack and then beat a hasty retreat to their positions as the sun slid down the hills in the west. The Emperor spent the night in Firoz Jang's camp.

What has the night to do with sleep for a defeated lover as also for a defeated soldier? Aurangzeb kept awake praying and meditating till the sun arose in all its June fury. The heat was intense, and the spirits of the imperial commanders very low. Aurangzeb called a meeting of the generals and, for the first and only time in his life, confessed to having lost faith in his instincts. Firoz Jang, sensing danger in the Emperor's mood of despair, submitted that the previous day's reverses were only reminders that no man ever truly knew the schemes of nature. "We need to try once again", he suggested with utmost deference. Aurangzeb woke up, as it were, from a trance, his face brightened a little, and he nodded agreement with what Firoz Jang had said. The Emperor decided at the spur of the moment to lead himself a contingent of fifteen thousand men for yet another attempt to take the citadel by assault. Before the sun had gone around its daily semi-circle of the blue heavenly dome, Aurangzeb stood under the ramparts of the "red stone refuge of Abul Hassan" supervising arrangements for yet another blast.

The third mine was fired two *gharis* after sunset, but to the bewilderment of Aurangzeb and his commanders there arose no blaze and no explosion took place. Dismay was on every face, and deep wonderment in every eye. Were the gods at play or the devil? Holding aloft a green banner with *Quranic* inscriptions in silvery white, a team of sappers was ordered to explore the cause of the failure of the mine to explode. It took them a while to discover that the mine was defused, in all probability by the Deccani scouts and that the vicinity of the ramparts flooded with water to put out of action any other mines that might have been planted. Aurangzeb felt as if he was cheated by Fortune. A return to the base camp was ordered. This time the garrison did not send out commandos to harass the Mughals. The number of the assault force deterred them from undertaking adventurous forays. It was during this return march that the Emperor realized the futility of trying to

storm Golconda into subjection. The fort could be captured by treachery, and that alone. Honesty in war, he told Prince Azam, was an evil as great as dishonesty in peace. A new strategy thus came to be formulated : Either the garrison should be starved to surrender or its leaders bribed to play the Trojan Horse. There was no other way to victory. Aurangzeb ordered wooden and stone walls to be built all around the fort and, at the same time, authorised large sums of money to be paid to such Deccani officers as might be in a position to affect the course of the siege.

The overall command of the two-pronged operation was entrusted to Prince Muhammad Azam. The wounded Firoz Jang was named Adviser to the Emperor. Under a proclamation signed by the Emperor on 5 July 1687, the whole of Golconda was formally annexed to the Empire. The administration of the kingdom—ranging from revenue collection to appointment of *Muftis* and security officers—was taken over by the Mughals. "Let us now see for how long will Abul Hassan be able to remain shut up behind the walls of the fort", remarked Aurangzeb when Prince Azam reported that all routes to the fort were sealed and that there was no way by which foodgrains could reach the besieged. Aurangzeb also told his son that he was prepared to carry on the siege for as long as there was left in him even a flicker of life. "Golconda must be taken. This is a pledge—both to myself and to my God", added the Emperor. Determination showed in his face, his eyes, his every limb. There was no going back for him on his decision. He staked the Empire, as it were, on the future of Golconda.

Meanwhile, the scarcities of food and the high-raging pestilence reduced the city of Hyderabad, in the words of Khafi Khan, to a heap of the dead piled over the mounds of devastation wrought by man and nature. Hungry men and women looted lofty mansion-houses, sold their children for a cake of *bajra*, subsisted for days on grass and whatever herbage they could muster, and in the end killed each other to remain alive a little longer on human flesh. "People drank blood and made powder of the bones of their kith and kin to prepare something to eat. Misery like this had not been known in Hindustan before. Despite these tales of woe, Aurangzeb was not prepared

to relax his hold over the Sultanate. Every available grain of food was secured for the use of his army which had by now swelled to over fifty thousand men.

The news of the plight of his people was sent to Abul Hassan by friends and foes alike. He did not know what to do. To surrender was to lose his kingdom, and to be adamant in resistance was to lose his soul. He often cried aloud for Divine guidance in that hour of travail. Some of his counsellors advised fight to the bitter end, others were of view that there was a limit beyond which resistance ceased to be a virtue. This division of opinion inside the fort was an opportunity Aurangzeb waited for. He threw his net of bribery wide and high to catch the moderates. He cajoled them, he promised them rich awards and honours, he invoked their help in the name of religion, as also in the name of humanity, in fact he used every deception in his armoury to wean them away from the path of loyalty. In the circumstances, it was not surprising that the waverers gathered courage to let down their master. The end thus seemed near to Aurangzeb. He had reason to be happy. The gods, it appeared, had revised their alignments. The Mughals were in their favour once again.

The zero hour came in the early hours of 21 September, 1687. Without a thought of hell or of the Day of Judgment, the two-time deserter Abdullah Pani* left the back gate of the fort open for Ruhillah Khan and his two thousand Afghan followers enter unchallenged. Taken unawares, the guards were quickly overpowered. The garrison commander rushed out in his night clothes to see what had happened. His head rolled on the ground with a single blow of Ruhillah Khan's sword. Panic engulfed the fort like wild fire. It seemed all was over before Abul Hassan was given the news of the surprise development. The Sultan pulled hard at the alarm rope. There was little response to his call for help. His apartment was already surrounded by the fierce-looking imperial guards. Meanwhile, five thousand more Mughal soldiers entered the citadel. The

*Abdullah Pani, title Sardar Khan, was an Afghan who first entered the service of Sikandar Shah of Bijapur in 1670. He defected to the Mughals in 1681 and then to Golconda three years later.

bewildered garrison put up only a symbolic resistance. The traitors did their assigned duties well. They exhorted the rank and file to lay down their arms as "to fight is to court certain death and to resist a defiance of the will of God". Even Abul Hassan succumbed to this line of argument. He ordered the few loyalists to "accept defeat with grace and not give the enemy a chance to take pride in testing their swords on your necks". He himself surrendered to Rahillah Khan with "dignity that comes with the calm acceptance of reality". Within an hour, all was quiet inside the famed citadel of the Qutb Shahi dynasty. A fairly long chapter in the history of the Deccan came to an end.

The news of the successful operation was conveyed to the Emperor by the firing of three multi-coloured rockets in the air. There was jubilation in the royal camp. Aurangzeb's pledge to himself and to God was fulfilled. Golconda was at long last a part of the Empire. The seven-month siege was a fairy-tale of daring, dauntlessness and deceit. The Mughals won. In their victory lay hidden the seed of the final extinction of the Empire. The south turned out to be the self-dug grave of the Mughals.

Unruffled by the events of the morning, Abul Hassan sat down to breakfast, as was his wont, in the company of his wives, mistresses and concubines. He invited Rahillah Khan to "join me in this last meal at the seat of the Sultanate". The Khan agreed on condition that every dish offered to him was first partaken by the Sultan himself. "Only the treacherous think of treachery. There is none in my head", observed Abul Hassan as he made room for the victor to sit on his right. The meal was taken in such silence as could be heard all around. The occasional sighs and sobs that came from the broken female hearts climaxed the drama that ended with an announcement that "Prince Muhammad Azam representative of the Emperor of Hindustan, has entered the fort by the main gate to accept a formal surrender of the keys by the Sultan".

The ceremonial of submission took place in the fort's throne room. Azam set on the five hundred-year-old marble *Masnad-i-Padshah* as Abul Hassan came forward to offer to him the keys of the citadel on a silver platter. Azam received the symbolic submission with "a smile that died down before it

dawned". Then he alighted from the majestic *Masnad* and held the defeated enemy in a light embrace—a gesture of feigned chivalry that brought tears to many eyes. Ruhilla Khan, a picture of egoistic serenity, then asked Abul Hassan to conduct the prince around the fort and thereafter to accompany him to the royal camp. In other words, the Sultan was a prisoner. He did what he was bidden to do. When he walked behind the prince in chains of sorrow, as it were, there broke out a virtual storm of grief among the women of the harem, as also among the few loyalists who stood deferentially, their heads bent low, to bid farewell to their monarch. Everyone knew that Abul Hassan would never tread again the hallowed ground of Golconda. They were sad and lonely.

In the evening, the deposed Sultan presented himself before the Emperor. Here was a moment of triumph Aurangzeb had been waiting for a long time. His goal reached, the Mughal king could now permit himself the luxury of gracious affability. He talked to Abul Hassan about famine, pestilence, grapes and guavas, but he did not speak a word about the war he had won. He presented him with a robe of silk and also fixed for him a stipend of rupees fifty thousand a year for life. He also announced that suitable accommodation was arranged for him in the fort at Daultabad! The meeting ended with Abul Hassan praising Alamgir for his piety and concern for the future of Islam. In return, Aurangzeb gave a smile that had in it more gall than goodwill.

No account of the siege of Golconda will be complete without mention of the heroic last act of the Sultan's ever-loyal aide Abdur Razzak Lari. The surrender seared his soul. In a gesture of reckless defiance, he spurred his horse to full gallop through what was virtually a wall of steel formed by the Mughal soldiers. Spears and swords drew blood from nearly every part of his body as the horse sped like a winged angel from the main gate of the fort. Covered in blood from top to toe and blinded in one eye, he fainted on alighting in a garden outside Hyderabad. The pursuing Mughal troops found him "more dead than alive" and brought him to the royal camp. The Emperor was in a gracious mood. He praised Lari's gallantry and bade his personal physicians and surgeons to "instil new life in this brave

and fearless man". The royal order was carried out faithfully. Abdur Razzak was on his feet again in six months. The seventy wounds he sustained were completely cured. The eye could, however, not be saved.

The conquest of Golconda was a landmark in the history of the Deccan as also in the annals of Mughal India. Prince Akbar and Raja Shambuji were still at large, hoping against hope that somehow by some stroke of fortune they would be able to join the Rajputs of Rajasthan in a bid to capture Delhi while Aurangzeb was busy celebrating victories in the Deccan. This was a hope vain and fortuitous. Aurangzeb was too astute and too farsighted a campaigner not to take suitable timely steps to block their escape to the north. The events of the last two years were in his favour.

Chapter Eighteen

SAVAGE REVENGE

The web of Shambuji's life was of a mixed yarn, good and evil together. He was patriotic, occasionally brave, purposeful, pugnacious and fiercely conscious of his high heritage. On the other hand, he gave the appearance of labouring day and night against his own interests. In the wilderness of defiance to the Mughals, in particular after the obliteration of Bijapur and Golconda, he found only sorrow and strife. His friends were dishonest and self-seeking, his officers by and large corrupt and untrustworthy. He himself was always in search of money, means and maidens fair, and so was without real comrades. Administration in the Kingdom fell to pieces. Loot became the only source of revenue and brutal suppression the means for checking lawlessness. In his many proclamations he stressed the benefits of liberty, but in his personal life the liberty he reckoned above all other liberties was the liberty to kill and the liberty to take into his harem any woman he liked. In a dialogue with an English factor, John Mitchell, he was reported to have remarked : "Don't you know I am a Marhatta ? When I am happy, I must have a woman by my side".

Though early in life Shambuji had a nimble wit, the years befogged his mind. Chewing the food of sweet and bitter fancy, he sometimes envisioned himself as the emperor of Hindustan, sometimes the overlord of Deccan and sometimes an ally of the Rajputs in restoring to its original brilliance the glory of Hindustan. His mind wandered aimlessly in search of avenues of fame which he perhaps knew inwardly he could not attain. At best he was a dreamer who often woke up with a start to

find that his day was night. To live as Shambuji did was to be made of passion and lusts that blinded him to his duties as the ruler of a kingdom symbolising the renaissance of an oppressed religious community. His threats to the Mughals on the one hand and the rising European powers on the other lacked sting ; they were like the howling of Haryana wolves against the moon. Aurangzeb was aware of Shambuji's ineffectiveness both within and without his realm, and he made preparations to extinguish once and for all his only remaining enemy in the Deccan. Akbar was no more than Shambuji's camp-follower. He could not exist, much less be a threat to the imperial authority, without the Marhatta umbrella.

After chastising those chieftains and zamindars who were known to have given moral and material assistance to Bijapur and Golconda, Aurangzeb entrusted Prince Azam with the campaign to subjugate Shambuji. An army of forty thousand men with proportionate divisions of cavalry, the elephant and camel corps, as also the artillery, was raised for the task. The Emperor bade Azam good luck and invoked on him and the accompanying commanders the traditional protection of Allah on 20 January, 1688. It took the huge army nearly fifty days of rough going through hills and inhospitable territory to reach the south-west region of Bijapur where Shambuji was reported to be luxuriating in pompous idleness.

En route, the prince carried out the Emperor's instructions to "raze to the ground such strongholds of infidelity (i.e., temples) as cross your way and to build in their place grandiose houses of God (i.e., mosques) such as would do credit to our mission". The mosque built inside the fort Sagar was a magnificent piece of Mughal workmanship*. In the course of his sweep to Bijapur, Prince Azam demolished eight ancient temples and desecrated many more by sacrificing calves at the sacred altar. At some places, the small armies of the local Raja's offered resistance, but they could make no impression on the gigantic Mughal force. When nearing Bijapur Azam, riding high on the wave of

*The fort of Sagar was captured by Khanzada Khan, son of Ruhilla Khan, from Pran Nayak, a powerful chieftain who gave help both to Bijapur and Golconda.

successes, announced rich rewards for the victorious commanders, and he recommended to the Emperor that their ranks be raised suitably.

The people of Bijapur trembled with fear at the approach of the imperial army. The continuing scarcity of food and the death-spreading epidemics as also the tyrannical rule of the Mughal Governor, had reduced the population to a mass of miserable-looking men and women who had virtually forgotten how to be happy. The drainage system of the city was wrecked during the long war. The canal which provided the bulk of the city's drinking water was badly breached, and no step was taken in the last one year to repair the damage. There were no old people left in the city; they had all died of hunger and thirst. The comparatively young men and women walked the streets of Bijapur like ghosts, not knowing from where will come their next cake of any type of grain. Prince Azam was shocked at the plight of these walking skeletons. He ordered the army to forsake for a while its privilege to plunder. He also instructed the commanders to release small quantities of grain from the stores of the imperial army for the use of the starving people. These gestures, according to Khafi Khan, improved somewhat the morale of the population.

On the third day of his entry in the city, a thousand Bijapuris, of all ages and ranks, gathered in front of the royal palace "to praise Allah for presence in their midst of a ruler kind of heart and liberal of mind". The prince acknowledged their greetings from the balcony of the palace. This was the first time a Mughal prince had come to the balcony from where Sultan Sikandar used to invoke on his subjects the blessings of Allah. Nostalgic memories of the days gone by anguished many hearts. Gone were the years when the Adil Shahi Sultans with their Sultanas, grown-up daughters and senior members of the nobility used to appear on this balcony every alternate day and also on festive occasions and look into the happiness on the faces of their subjects gathered below. Those days of prosperity and plenty were now a part of history. Prince Azam saw unhappiness, not happiness, on the pale, tired faces of the crowd below. In their eyes shone hunger and misery and in their feeble invocations lay hidden appeals for assistance. Azam responded posi-

tively to these silent communications.

On return to his apartment, the first thing he did was to send a despatch to the Emperor in which he described briefly the conditions in Bijapur and also sought the royal approval for his contemplated plan to repair the damages of the war and to bring succour to the suffering people either by means of money doles or by providing them with gainful work. Aurangzeb, who was already on way to Bijapur, complimented Azam for his concern, saying that "good schemes need no sanction". He urged him to do whatever he could to alleviate sufferings and added : "I should reach Bijapur within the next twenty days or thereabout. Major reconstruction works will be initiated by me in consultation with engineers, agricultural experts and, of course, our commanders".

Aurangzeb reached Bijapur on 15 March, 1688. Prayers for the Emperor were said in all mosques, and the community kitchens set up by Prince Azam gave Mughlai food to the poor, nay, to all those who came to partake of imperial munificence. These kitchens set up at seven major crossroads, were run non-stop for fifteen days. Thereafter only one meal a day was served for the duration of the Padshah's stay in the capital. According to Bhimsen, the total expenditure of "this generous exercise in feeding the needy" came to nearly a hundred thousand rupees. Once or twice a week, the Emperor himself came to these centres to supervise service and to ensure that the officers incharge of these canteens did not use corrupt practices for personal gain. These free catering houses turned out to be a master-stroke in public relations. Wrote Khafi Khan: "Within a short time the confidence of the people was restored, and they began to go about their normal businesses without fear".

To meet the shortage of drinking water, the Emperor ordered the cutting of a canal from the river Krishna. The work was entrusted to Mir-i-Alla Mukhlis Khan who earned high praise for completing the assignment within six months—a feat of administrative and engineering skill that convinced the Bijapuris that the Mughals meant well and that under their rule prosperity would soon return to the territory. Teams of physicians were sent to all parts of the newly-created *suba* with instructions that suitable steps should be taken to contain the raging

epidemic and to alleviate the sufferings of those who were-stricken by the deadly plague.

Many members of the royal family, including the Emperor's much-favoured wife Aurangabadi Mahal succumbed to the dreaded disease. Raja Jaswant Singh's son, Muhammad Raj*, was among the one hundred thousand persons who perished of the scourge. The stricken persons, in case they managed somehow to escape death, invariably suffered paralysis of some limb or faculty of the mind. Among them was the valiant commander Firoz Jang who became blind in both eyes. The Emperor was grieved no end at these fallouts of the epidemic. Mass prayers were held morning and evening in every mosque for mercy. Aurangzeb himself led these prayers at least twice a week. Despite these appeals to God and despite the frenzied efforts of the squads of physicians, the pestilence could not be checked before the year was out. The loss of life was appalling. In the midst of this natural calamity, the need to neutralise Shambuji was partly forgotten. It was only when the things returned to near-normal that the expeditionary force was directed to pursue its main objective which was to "rub out Shambuji and his companions-in-heresy from the face of the peninsula".

Meanwhile, the rebellious Prince Akbar continued to bide his time in Marhatta territory hoping that Shambuji would help him to realise the dream of staging a triumphal march to Delhi via Rajasthan. Durga Dass and Kavi Kailash did whatever they could to prop up his morale which at times showed signs of collapse under the weight of fear and uncertainty. The Marwar nobleman waxed optimistic about the success of the plan, and the Brahmin Peshwa held out tall promises which he was at the time not in a position to fulfil. The Marhatta treasury was all but empty, and the once formidable army of Shivaji was reduced to a mere shadow of its former size and hitting power. There were no surplus troops or war material which could be diverted to the proposed new front. Inertia bred in Akbar such lusts and passion as degenerated him to the level of blinking

*One of the sons of Raja Jaswant Singh was brought up from birth in the Mughal harem—an honour bestowed rarely on the children of the highest-ranking nobility of the realm. He was named Muhammad Raj—a christening innovation to underline his Hindu origin and Muslim upbringing.

idiot. To bear forced idleness became for him sweating labour, and that in turn led him to seek cheer in luxuriant wines and women. Akbar tried to forget that the Mughal army was on the prowl to capture him dead or alive. The result was frustration and a feeling of hopelessness that crippled whatever was left of his bodily and mental vigour. There were moments when he knew that his end was near. Durga Dass and Kavi Kailash also came to realize that they would not be able to keep the prince afloat for long. The Mughal net was closing in fast.

Ishwardass Nagar, a court historian, tells us about the letters that Aurangzeb, at this critical point of time, wrote to Akbar, asking him "to surrender and be restored to honour". The Emperor said:

By now you must have realized the hopelessness of your ill-advised plan to seize the throne. Even at this late stage we are inclined to pardon your acts of disobedience and restore you to honour provided you lay down arms unconditionally. In case no reply is received to this communication within fifteen days we shall have no option but to order the army to invade in force your hideout, destroy the small force at your command, and bring you to our presence in chains. This is the last chance to save yourself from dishonour and may be annihilation. The integrity of the Empire has to be safeguarded at any cost. Come to me, and you will be received with honour. Refuse, and you will be reduced to dust unmercifully.

Aurangzeb waited in vain for a surrender letter from Akbar. Despite the revolt, despite his making friends with one whom the Emperor reckoned to be his worst enemy, and despite his declaration of independence and assumption of the title of Emperor, Aurangzeb continued to have a soft corner in his heart for this fifth and last child of his much-adored wife Dilraz Begum*. In the slender hope of weaning him away from the path of confrontation, he sought the help of Zinat-un-Nissa Begum (Padshah Begum) who loved "brother Akbar" tenderly.

*Dilraz Begum died twenty-one days after giving birth to Akbar at Aurangabad on 21 September, 1657.

It was she who brought up Akbar after the death of their mother, Dilraz Begum. The following brief letter, written in her own handwriting, was carried to Akbar by Syed Muhammad, a scholarly individual who for many years was a tutor to the royal princes in Arabic and history:

We are all deeply distressed over the happenings of the last few years. Walid-i-Bazurgwaram is prepared to forgive and forget because of the great love he bore for our saintly mother. He will be very happy if you sit once again by the side of his throne. I beg of you, in the name of our great dynasty and in the name of our God-like-mother, to accept gratefully the offer His Majesty made to you a few weeks ago. That way lies our happiness as also the grandeur of the Empire.

This appeal to tender emotions "awoke Akbar from his slumber". He assured Syed Muhammed of his loyalty to the Emperor and offered to "disband his army and represent himself at the imperial court to seek forgiveness for his sins". This reply gladdened Aurangzeb's heart, and he sent Akbar another letter asking him to "come quickly and join hands with us in fighting that child of perdition, Shambu".

For a while there was jubilation among the small circle of nobility who were in the know of Akbar's decision. Aurangzeb felicitated his daughter at the outcome of her approach. Arrangements were made for the reception of the errant prince. The Emperor kept his hand, however, close to the chest. Many an experienced courtier doubted that Aurangzeb would in fact forgive Akbar and consider his rebellion a closed chapter. His distrust of his sons was rooted in his own distrust of his father. Forgiveness was a word not to be found in his dictionary of kingship. The "white snake", as was Aurangzeb (in childhood) called by Shah Jahan, waited impatiently for Akbar to walk into his trap.

More warriors are flattered into surrender than bullied out of defiance. The veiled threats held out by Aurangzeb gave Akbar the cold feet at the last minute. Discounting the offers of pardon as subtle snares to seize him, Akbar changed his mind, and he decided instead to make an effort to implement his pre-

vious plan to escape to Persia. To that end he gathered whatever remained of his hoarded wealth and embarked on a desperate bid to wriggle his way to the Portuguese territory of Goa. The news of the *volte face* led Aurangzeb to declare that "eternal misery has taken possession of my luckless son", and he ordered Prince Azam and three other generals to block his way and also to prevail upon the Governor of Goa not to give asylum to the rebel prince. The pursuit launched by the imperial contingents soon developed into a breathtaking hide-and-peek drama. The daredevilry and the wits of Durga Dass helped Akbar elude the imperial hounds and reach the outskirts of Goa before Prince Azam could establish contact with the Portuguese authorities. Meanwhile, Kavi Kailash had chartered a small-size vessel, commanded by a British naval officer, for the contemplated dash to Persia. Akbar boarded the craft with nearly a hundred companions, the half of whom were women, on 27 January, 1687. The last-minute difficulties with regard to travel documents gave a touch of drama to the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Large-scale bribery and the presentation of a rare rubie to the port commander saved an ugly situation.

The vessel finally set sail on 3 February—a few hours before a Mughal envoy reached Goa on what was given out to be "a mission of supreme importance". The report of Akbar's departure evoked from the surprised Ambassador the self-solacing remark: "An abomination unto the Prophet has been got rid of. The other side of the sea is not a place worthy to live but to die in". The ship weathered many tropical storms before completing the voyage. Akbar was received at the Persian court in Isfahan on 24 January, 1688. Thus came to an end the revolt that gave Aurangzeb many sleepless nights and many more days of hard thinking. Akbar died in exile a free man in 1704, Aurangzeb waxed relief at his passing away: "I knew he would die before me. Now we can breathe fresher air", he wrote in a letter to Shaikh-ul-Islam, Syed Nur Ilahi.

Akbar's revolt was a link in the chain of events that weakened and finally led to the collapse of the Mughal Empire. It is doubtful whether Aurangzeb would have shifted his headquarters to the Deccan had Akbar not made the peninsula a base for his operations. The encouragement and help he received from

Shambuji could have led to serious consequences had the latter been a little more purposeful and a little less preoccupied with his own animal lusts. The Marhatta king frittered away his opportunities literally for the pleasure of listening to the jingling of the ankle bells of the dancing girl. The Sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda were well-inclined to join forces with the Marhattas for toppling the bigoted Aurangzeb and securing the imperial throne for the broad-minded Akbar. Shambuji was, however, a prisoner of his own weaknesses. The clear-sighted Emperor saw in Shambu's failings an opportunity not only to extinguish Akbar's revolt but also to annex the two remaining Sultanates. The task he set out to perform was indeed difficult but, true to his character, he completed it within a decade. At what cost? That is a different story. Parts of it will be told in the succeeding chapters.

Meanwhile, the Marhatta territory was in the shambles. Long wars ruined the economy of the kingdom. Plunder was the only profession left for the people to practise. Dissatisfaction against Shambuji and his principal adviser, Kavi Kailash, mounted high as the news came of military reverses against the Mughals. Desertions from the army increased to an alarming level. Rumours about conspiracies against the ruler were afloat everywhere. One such report held that Shambuji was done to death and that there raged in the capital a furious battle for succession. Since no one knew the truth, this and other similar rumours gathered momentum. One thing was, however, clear: misery made Shambuji's days and pleasure his nights. His lust for women was compulsive, as was his desire for spicy wines. In the circumstances, the writing on the wall for him and his supporters became clearer every day. Aurangzeb directed all the might of his forces against him. "The only good Marhatta is one who is dead. They are only splendid on the funeral pyre", he told. Prince Azam while entrusting him with the command of twenty thousand crack troops for encirclement and destruction of what remained of the Marhatta force. Aurangzeb would not be content with anything less than complete obliteration of Marhattas from the map of the Deccan. This was a pledge he made when setting out for the south from Ajmer in 1678. The time had come to redeem his promise.

Rumours, if not quenched in time, tend to become a reality. The gathering anger against the Marhatta administrators became an open revolt in October, 1688. The court offices in six principalities were set alight by infuriated mobs demanding the ouster of Kavi Kailash. Three palatial residences of the Peshwa were ransacked, their costly furnishings looted, women of the family dragged into the streets and left there to beg for their next meal. The regional forces sided with the people in this show of resentment. Kavi Kailash managed to escape by jumping a rear wall while the mobs were clamouring for his life outside. The five slave-girls who formed a human staircase to enable the Brahmin to flee to safety were stripped naked and exposed to public ridicule for two days before they were given asylum in a hermitage run by a Shute saint. Eleven women of the Peshwa's household, ranging in ages from eighteen to sixty-three also found shelter in the same rickety dwelling. The mutineers sent out parties in pursuit of Kavi Kailash, but the "wily phantom" hid himself, as it were, in the womb of the earth. The rebels were disappointed at not being able to lay their hands on the target of their wrath. It was learnt later that he escaped in the garb of a washerman to a secret haunt about one hundred miles from Kolahpur.

In times of stress, a degenerate individual generally regains the alacrity of spirit and clarity of mind. The news of the insurrection and the flight of Kavi Kailash aroused in Sambuji the qualities that lay atrophied because of his preoccupation with pleasure. If not checked quickly, the revolt, he realized, would spread to other territories and the resultant conflagration might engulf and destroy the kingdom. Hurriedly gathering an army of ten thousand Marhatta horsemen, he stormed out of Raigarh with a solemn pledge before the goddess Bhiwani that the rebels would be "trampled underfoot before the rise of the next full moon". The pace he set was fiery. Forgetting for the time the golden flasks and the black-eyed beauties of his seraglio, he covered nearly two hundred miles in less than a week, fell upon the insurrectionists like an avalanche, punished the guilty with the ferocity of a devil come to earth to make misery an end by itself, set up provisional offices of administration, instructed the new *kotwals* and new *daroghas* to spare no inhuman ploy, if

the need arose, to forestall repetition of events that led to the flight of Kavi Kailash. This was Shambuji at its most vengeful hideosity. The revolt was no doubt put down, but in its place arose the silent, stifled voice of the suffering humanity that could not but seal the fate of the kingdom that Shivaji built.

Every storm is followed by a period of pleasing quiet. On his return trip to Raigarh, Shambuji halted for rest at a place of ravishing scenic enchantment twenty-five miles east of the city of Ratnagiri. Here Shambuji the relentless relapsed once again into Shambuji the raveler. The little-known village came to such vibrant life as it had never done before. The two rivers Alaknanda and the Verun gave the place a glitter that dazzled the eye and uplifted the heart. Shambuji was in his element.

Debauchery is like foolishness: it cannot be hidden. The word went round that Shambuji was luxuriating in sin completely forgetful of the dangers that lurked everywhere. Not only were the stray rebel groups on the lookout for him; the forces of Prince Azam had fanned out in a planned manoeuvre to catch him dead or alive. The Mughal scouts kept Aurangzeb, as also the commanders in the field, informed of Shambuji's movements. In the vanity of an unabashed egotist, the Marhatta ruler tended to believe that he was indestructible and no enemy could dare intrude on the privacy of his pleasure resort. So imbued he was with self-confidence generated by his recent success that even the normal security measures were left unenforced. The Marhatta horsemen and their commanders too shed caution and, following the example of their master, "swam blissfully in the calm waters of natural grandeur."

On 3 December, 1688, there came to Shambuji's camp a man in rags and tatters with hunger in his eyes and his face showing signs of untold sufferings. He was Kavi Kailash. The Peshwa found his way to the camp after long, lonely marches through hostile territories. Shambuji restored him to his previous position—a move as ill-advised as it was provocative to the Marhattas still in rebellion. Though he had declined into the vale of years, the northern Brahmin was full of guile and his head brimful of schemes to overthrow Aurangzeb and his sons. He conferred in high secrecy with Shambuji on ways to realize his dream, not knowing that the gods of his native Benaras had set their faces

against him. The angels of death hovered instead over him. The fate of Shambuji too hung precariously in the balance.

Shaikh Nizam, a defector from the court of Abul Hassan Qutb Shah, was, like most defectors, more loyal to the Empire than the Emperor himself. His youth and fire endeared him to Aurangzeb. Elevated to the high position of a Mansabdar of six thousand *zat* and *sawar* he was named deputy *salah-kar* to Prince Azam and given the special assignment to devise ways to corner Shambuji into submission. Though he was no real enemy of Shambuji, yet his new-found place of prestige in the imperial camp induced him to stake his all for the success of the task entrusted to him. The news of Shambuji's sojourn in the unguarded "garden of gods" reached Nizam while he was on his way to Kolahpur. Here was a golden opportunity to pounce upon and seize his prey. For once there was no conflict within him between reflexes and reflection. Within hours he ordered the small, mobile force at his command to change course and to be in full readiness to engage the enemy at short notice in an unequal battle. Nearly three hundred miles separated him from his target. The normal norms of military marches were thrown overboard. Hail, rain or high wind, Shambuji was to be surprised into captivity before he moved into the inaccessibility of the hilly zigs and zags of thick forests. "We must reach the place within six days", he commanded. The fleet-footed steeds seemed to understand the urgency of the mission, and they galloped away, as it were, on the wings of high speed to keep the date with an opportunity such as might never come their way again. Nizam asked himself no question, neither did he reason about the practicability of his plan. To doubt and to argue with himself, he reckoned, was to lose self-confidence and waste the moments whose preciousness could not be measured in terms of time alone.

Three horses of the purest Persian pedigree collapsed under Nizam before he came to a hamlet where at the nighfall could be seen the dim glow of lamps in the Marhatta camp. "We have captured and put chains around his legs", exclaimed an excited Nizam as he stood up in his stirrups and narrowed his eyes to make sure that what he saw was no day-dream. He alighted from his mount and spread the *janamaz* with his own hand.

a la Aurangzeb himself, to thank Allah for assistance in the task assigned to him. He had to wait at this tiny village for two days before the rest of his force joined him. Utmost secrecy was the need of the hour. Trusty scouts were sent across to ascertain the number and disposition of the Marhatta army, and, what was most, whether the enemy was prepared to meet a surprise attack. Nizam took no chances. He knew there were as many hazards in a battle as sea-shells on the shore. "Our attack must succeed", he told his Paymaster Miandad Khan, and he asserted, again like Aurangzeb, that God was on their side.

Early in the morning of 11 January, 1689 Shaikh Nizam led himself a division of cavalry for an assault as well-planned as it was ferocious in execution. Taken unawares, the Marhattas were beaten before they knew what had happened. A force of five hundred bodyguard on duty all around Shambuji's camp, put up some resistance, but they were unable to defer for long what Ishwardass called the hour of reckoning. In the smoke and stir of battle that lasted for two hours, Kavi Kailash and Shambuji donned the dresses of Muslim ecclesiasts and managed somehow to slip across to a weather-beaten brick-and-stone house belonging to a brother of the Peshwa. There the two hid themselves in a fifteen-foot deep grain storage space, and waited for the storm to blow over.

Finding that Shambuji and Kailash had fled the camp, the infuriated Nizam gave orders for a massive search within a radius of twenty miles. As always, a maidservant came to the Sheikh with "a conjecture that the two are hiding in a house two or three *kos* from the site of the camp". Nizam hastened thither with a contingent of two hundred troops, surrounded the house, and sent in well-armed men to "verify the veracity of the woman's guess". It did not take them long to discover the two men in a corner of the underground cellar. Nizam ordered that they be dragged out by their hair, chained fast into bundles of immovable limbs, and brought to him in baskets with nails stuck on all sides. Nizam kicked and spat at them when the "basket-fuls of abomination" were placed near the divan he sat upon. After the ritual of identification was gone through Nizam asked the camp commandant, Azhar-ul-Haq, to dress them suitably for parade in the village. They were soon clothed in the tradi-

tional garbs of buffoons complete with horn, bells and a splash of cow dung on their naked bodies. Then the drums were sounded and an announcement was made that "the ruler and Peshwa of Maharashtra will shortly proceed to exhibit to the people the disgrace and dishonour they brought upon themselves by acts of sin against God". Then they were seated on miserable-looking donkeys and taken on a round of the camp to the jeers and jests of a soldiery as unmannerly as it was ferocious on the battlefield. Khafi Khan paints a graphic word-picture of the procession, concluding that seldom before in the history of the Orient had such shame fallen on a ruler and his high vizir. Similar treatment was given to nearly fifty other high-ranking Marhattas arrested in the attack.

The news of Shambuji's capture was sent to Aurangzeb by the hand of a former *Qanungo* in the court of Bijapur. He was Sikandar Ali Khan, a man of high learning who won the respect of the Emperor by his piety and unfailing concern for the needy. Aurangzeb loaded him with honours at "the happiest tidings of my life" and, as was his custom, he sent in thanks-giving large gifts of money to the shrines of Muslim saints in the Deccan. The occasion was truly great for him: the whole of Hindustan was now under his commandment and, what was perhaps more to him, "all the citadels of infidelity have finally been demolished". The empire that Babar built was, he reckoned, now safe for Islam. His life's work was done. Orders were issued peremptorily for the demolition of all remaining temples in the Marhatta territories. Faith, fanatic faith, once wedded fast to some dear falsehood, hugs it to the last.

Shaikh Nizam was lauded to the skies for his courage, daring and devotion to duty. Given the title Khan-i-Zaman Bahadur Fateh Jang he joined the elite band of nobility with a Mansab of seven thousand. His son, Ikhlās Khan, not only received a rise of two thousand in his grade, but he also became the Governor of the erstwhile Marhatta kingdom. Later, he received the title Khan-i-Azam.

The captives were brought to Bahadurgarh in the self-same attires of lunatics as had been given them by Shaikh Nizam. Camels, not donkeys, were their mounts when they were driven to the gate of the royal palace. Therefrom they were made to

crawl to the presence of the Emperor. Aurangzeb did not speak a word to them. His eyes, his face, his every limb were, however, eloquent of the high hatred he had for both of them. The hall of audience was packed to capacity to witness what the court historian called "the greatest event since the victory of Babar Padshah at Panipat one hundred and sixty years ago".

Enmity is nothing but the egotism of two. Aurangzeb's triumph was the victory of his ego against the ego of Shambuji. In their own ways, both considered themselves parts of the Supreme Being, missionaries of God on earth. Though thrown into a dungeon of the prison at Bahadurgarh, the ego in Shambuji exploded as it had never done before when Ruhilla Khan came in to get information about the hidden Marhatta treasures. Not only did he abuse him in the foulest words he could muster, Shambuji called the Emperor "a bundle of the most squalid sins ever committed by man", and he shouted at the top of his voice to proclaim that "all his daughters are spiders and his sons serpents". When the Khan asked him to stop "raving like a mad man", the Marhatta burst into a rage and said that "this madness is not the madness of a mad man, but the pride of one who will not tone down his words even if your king, that pack of abominations, were to send to him for amusement his daughters every night."

This barrage of swearing and slander took Ruhilla Khan by surprise. He controlled his anger, and left without another word of protest or remonstrance. Not having the courage to report verbatim to Aurangzeb the coarse vilification resorted to by Shambuji, the Khan merely mentioned that the Marhatta was mentally deranged, and that in the course of a brief conversation he used many a sentence derogatory to the Empire, the Mughals and the Prophet. Aurangzeb's blood boiled, and he asked the much-embarrassed Khan in a voice unusually stern to tell him exactly what Shambuji said. The Khan replied :

Your Majesty may order me to be slain, but my tongue will never have the audacity to repeat the language used by Shambuji. The best I can say is that he is gone crazy. His mind is in a muddle, his soul in torture. Sanity has taken leave of him. His ego is shattered. He is worse than dead. It is little use, sire,

to take notice of the words of a demented man. Allah will punish him for his blasphemy.

Aurangzeb pondered for a while over the Khan's plea. His face showed signs of appreciation of the Khan's reluctance to obey. He rose from his seat, and placed his right hand on the shoulder of the ever faithful commander—a gesture of approval that put the Khan's mind at ease. "The tongue is an instrument to relay good news, not to echo bad words", he submitted in utter humility. The Khan was decorated with a special robe of honour and a bejewelled dagger. Shambuji was blinded the same evening in both eyes. Kavi Kailash's tongue was cut into twelve pieces, salted, and thrown out as snacks for dogs. Aurangzeb was a tyrant. He was also endowed with a heart that acknowledged loyalty.

For the next two weeks Shambuji and Kavi Kailash were subjected to barbaric tortures in an attempt to seek information about the hidden wealth. Neither broke his silence even when they were put on wheels over a blaze of fire. They were more dead than alive when the Mufti gave them the death sentence on charges of infidelity. On 11 March, 1689, they were hacked to bits, limb by limb, on the bank of the river Bhina fifteen miles east of Puna. Their flesh and their bones provided a feast for vultures hovering overhead. Their heads were stuffed with straw and paraded on poles in all major cities of the Deccan. Thousands of men and women watched these grim processions with tears in their eyes. None dared to protest against this show of barbaric brutality. The king and the high vizir of Maharashtra were no more, but the Marhattas were yet far from suppressed.

Raigarh was in deep mourning at the manner in which Shambuji was done to death. Anguished, the garrison commanders, one by one, swore to avenge the hideous act. Many distraught women of the *zenana* sought self-fulfilment in the traditional act of *Sati*. The eleven leading members of the court met in a conclave on four consecutive days to decide on the future course of strategy but, as ill-luck would have it, they failed to agree on a mutually acceptable plan. Self-interest split them into two factions—one supporting succession, with a council of regency, for Shahu, six-year-old son of Shambuji, and the

second favouring enthronement of Raja Ram, younger brother of Shambuji, as king. The latter group won the day on an understanding that Shahu would replace Raja Ram on attainment of age. The coronation ceremony took place on a note of subdued rejoicings in the middle of April.

The rise of yet another Marhatta ruler was to Aurangzeb a rag of the reddest hue. He lost no time in ordering a siege of Raigarh with instructions to 'seize the pretender and restore the *gaddi* to the rightful claimant'. Aurangzeb aimed at nominating his own stooges to the council of regency and thus clipping for the time the wings of Marhatta nationalism. The command of the siege was entrusted to Itqad Khan, Prince Azam being busy in operations against other strongholds of Marhatta power. The morale of the garrison was low and its number not large enough to withstand the Mughal assault for any length of time. Within a few weeks, the once impregnable fort was forced to surrender and open its gates for a jubilant Itqad Khan to enter with a fanfare of triumphal booming of small and medium-range guns. The victorious commander's joy turned, however, pale when it became known that Raja Ram had fled the fort, with five hundred followers, twelve hours earlier. This was the second time the new Marhatta ruler had eluded capture by the Mughal forces. Earlier, he managed to get past the imperial guards near Puna in the robes of a Mughal captain. This time he donned the yellow outfit of a mendicant to confound apprehension by Itqad Khan's battalions. The escape of the Marhatta ruler upset the Mughal general who, without waiting for the Emperor's instructions, sent out a thousand horsemen to track down Raja Ram and his companions in flight. The Marhattas were overtaken on the bank of the river Tangbhadra. In a fierce hand-to-hand battle that raged for nearly an hour all but a few Marhatta fugitives were slain. It was, however, a miracle of miracles that the elusive Raja Ram was not found among the dead. Once again he played the phantom and took shelter in the house of a local chieftain from where he escaped to Madras with the help of the Rani Sahiba of Bedour—an old friend whom once Shambuji saved from humiliation at the hands of a group of tribal bandits. The Rani, a woman of exceptional talents and good looks, was pardoned by Aurangzeb at the instance of the Prime

Minister, Asad Khan. A story is current to this day in Maharashtra that Asad Khan's son, Itqad Khan, was in secret love with the Rani, and that Raja Ram's escape to the extreme south was a fairly complicated tale of love's conflict with loyalty.

The fort of Raigarh was finally taken over by the imperial forces in October 1689. Prince Shahu was captured along with nearly three hundred male and female members of the house of Shivaji. Aurangzeb treated them all with unusual kindness, gave them liberal annual stipends and made sure that no harm came to them at the hands of the Mughal military and civilian officials. On Shahu he conferred the title of Raja and a high Mansab of seven thousand—a rank reserved for members of the royal family and in exceptional cases for members of the nobility for outstanding services to the crown. The custody of Shahu was, however, given to the seniormost lady of the imperial family—a charge which in fact meant that the young Marhatta Raja was a virtual prisoner and that no member of Shambuji's family or any member of the Marhatta nobility was permitted to see him. Shahu's two younger brothers, Madan Singh and Madhu Singh were, however, given the formal liberty of living with their mothers and other relatives. Nevertheless a strict watch was maintained over their movements as also on the activities of those who came to see them.

The Marhatta sovereignty and independence thus came to an end. The Deccan was now a part of the Empire. Aurangzeb's dream of achieving greatness greater than that of Akbar and Shah Jahan became a partial reality. His greatness did not, however, bear comparison with the heights of greatness that comes unsought; he wanted to be a great monarch, hence he never became truly great. He was at best like an eagle; he built his nest in lofty solitude. He made no attempt to change the spirit of the age; he merely made medievalism more medieval, and suppressed completely the forces of liberalism initiated by his predecessors.

A great man leaves clean work behind him and requires no sweep-up of the chips. When Aurangzeb died nearly two decades later the Empire was no more than a jumble of chips and, as ill-luck would have it, there came forth no man of worth to clean up the mess. No, it will be difficult to class

Aurangzeb among the great rulers of the world. He was only a singularly good actor playing throughout his own ideal of a good ruler. History cannot judge him by his own standards. If a great man could not make his compatriots understand him, then he could not be great. To understand Aurangzeb is the despair of most historians. The best that can be said about him is that he was a good Muslim in some basic values of that religion. His ego, his avarice and his over-ambition were the blemishes of the mind which, like the blemishes of the face, increased with advancing years. As has been said many times before his personality will for ever remain a mysterious and incomprehensible puzzle.

Chapter Nineteen

END OF HOPE

Even if all the world's earth is used to bury them, foul deeds will arise before man's eyes. Aurangzeb's tyranny and treachery sent a wave of desperate anger throughout the territories ruled by Shambuji. Every Marhatta became a soldier, and every Marhatta house a fort. Poets and bards whipped up the people's passions to a point where the continuation of war against the Mughals became a part of the *dharma* and where vengeance came to be reckoned as the flowery gate through which ran the way to heaven. Raja Ram became a symbol of defiant nationalism, worthy of respect and assistance by the rich and the poor, as also by the young and the old. Women played a big role in what poet Keshave Pandit called "giving to their menfolk the call to duty and reminding them through song and dance that a moment of conflict for defence of honour is preferable to years of pleasure in servitude". This national hysteria for "keeping alive the flame of patriotism lit by the heaven-residing Shivaji and his son" took the form of do-or-die battles against the pockets of Mughal authority throughout the Peninsula.

Though the odds were heavily against the "fighters for freedom" yet they scored many spectacular successes against the better equipped and numerically larger Mughal forces. At one point it seemed that fortune, at long last, had unhanded Aurangzeb and that he was on the verge of quitting the Deccan for good. The alternatives before the anguished Emperor were either retreat with dishonour or to continue to suffer losses till victory came his way. He chose the lesser evil. To him, courage was the soul of heroism, and he exhorted his sons, his generals

and his forces not to be cowed down by what he called the "platoons of paganism", and he urged them in the name of Islam, as also in the names of Timur and Babar, to "carry on the holy crusade till the armies of infidelity are trampled under-foot".

This was an act of desperation, and not many Mansabdars in the councils of Aurangzeb agreed with it wholeheartedly. A silent discontent thus took root in several loyal hearts. With more false daring than thoughtful discretion, they accepted the commands entrusted to them. A victory here and an abject retreat there became the general pattern of war for the next two years. The losses suffered by the Mughals were inordinately heavy. It is estimated that this madness, which was apparently devoid of either a method or a hidden purpose, cost the badly-bleeding Empire a hundred thousand soldiers and at least three times as many horses, elephants, camels and other animals for carriage of arms and baggage every year. Continuing famines, pestilences and shortages of supplies from the north added to the woes of the Mughals, but Aurangzeb was not prone either to yield or to compromises. He reckoned himself one of those whom God spoke in confidence, and he truly believed that the great Allah had told him unmistakably not to rest content till the Marhattas were "made to eat dust from the bowl of ignominy".

Not only was he not open to argument on this point; he gave heavy punishments to those who ventured to express contrary views. His orders were the commandments of Allah, and woe befell those who disobeyed them. He told Vazir-i-Azam Asad Khan one gloomy evening when the news came of a stunning setback suffered by Qasim Khan at the hands of Dhana Singh Jadhav: "There is nothing either victory or defeat; it is all the will of God. We are undergoing a Divine test. In that faith, we reckon defeats as stepping-stones to successes more brilliant than ever fell in our lap before". A self-appointed envoy of God that he was, he could marshal out reasons and words of comfort for any misfortune that befell him or his armies. He was not poor in calculating to his advantage the pluses and minuses of Divine dispensations.

The escape of Raja Ram from Raigarh humbled to some

extent Aurangzeb's pride and self-confidence. As told before, an army of seven thousand horsemen, trained in all the wiles of the chase, was sent in hot pursuit of the new Marhatta king. The overall command of the campaign was given to Zulfiqar Khan. The daring Dalpat Rao was placed under him with a crack division of Bundhela cavalry. The two used every known ploy, ranging from bribery to scorch-earth, to catch the fugitive, but to no avail. With the help of petty Rajas, zamindars, bands of bandits and even of women of ill repute, Raja Ram managed somehow to elude the fast-moving forces in pursuit. A master manipulator of facial muscles that he was, he was equally skilful in rolling the eye-balls, changing his voice from the shrill to the full-throated bass, playing the paralytic beggar and moving his head in ecstatic rhythms to suggest spiritual ravishment. His repertory of disguises included those of a monk, a barber, a washerman, a beggar, a bridegroom, a grave-digger and many other professions high and low. Once he entered the enemy camp as a barber and plied the scissors and the razer with such efficiency as to elicit from the *darogha* an offer of employment at rupees five a month. All apologies, Raja Ram explained his inability to avail of the generous offer for reasons of family commitments. "Perhaps I will be able to join the camp on its return journey. I would like to have an opportunity to use a blunt razer to shave the beard of this swollen-headed scoundrel Raja Ram". The officer gave the spirited *hajjam* an extra farthing for the quip!

The Marhatta folklore is full of stories underlining the skill and daredevilry of Raja Ram and his followers in their tactics to escape falling into the hands of the imperialists. Following hair-raising deeds of deception and valour, the Marhatta ruler reached the fort of Jinji on the east coast early in 1689. Hardly a day's march from Pondicherry, this bastion of Marhatta power in the extreme south used no fireworks to herald the arrival of Raja Ram. The presence of European powers in the neighbourhood, together with the awareness of the Mughal resolve to capture it by means fair or foul, cast on the garrison a pall of indefinable gloom. The fort commander and the generals accompanying the ruler differed on how best to handle a situation as tricky as it was threatening. The three European trading companies were known to be against taking any pro-Marhatta stance

which might antagonise Aurangzeb. In affirming their neutrality, they could not but turn down politely Raja Ram's requests for assistance. The French and British gunners were in demand both by the Mughals and the Marhattas. The Dutch were comparatively weak in military manpower and expertise. Their stores of wealth, however, attracted notice. They all preferred to wait and watch before getting involved in a war which might drag on for years. None of them could afford to be on the losing side. Their hesitation was to the advantage of the Mughals. Neutrality is nearly always a boon to the aggressor, bane to the aggressed. The efforts of Kesho Trimbak, chief adviser, and Prahlad, a shrewd diplomatist of the highest rank, to persuade the white men out of their non-alignment failed.

With an eye to strengthen their position in the struggle for dominance among the foreign traders themselves, the British offered to pay Raja Ram, a sum of rupees one hundred fifty thousand for purchase of what later came to be known as fort St-David. Raja Ram went through the deal notwithstanding objections by some of his senior counsellors like Dhana Singh Jadhav, Santaji Ghorpare and Parashuram Trimbak. He needed money badly for strengthening the defences of the complex of fortresses forming the citadel of Jinji. The country was in ruins economically. The Marhatta treasury was almost empty. The Hindu Rajas and chieftains of the east coast, in particular the Raja of Tanjore who was Raja Ram's first cousin, helped the Marhatta cause with men and money, but these acts of assistance were not sufficient for the needs of the hour. The Marhatta forces were so hard pressed for funds that they took to loot and extortion to meet their requirements. These plunders stirred up considerable resentment among the local Brahmins who sent strongly-worded appeals to Raja Ram for stoppage of "these acts of irresponsible lawlessness".

One such communication reminded the ruler of his high heritage, and told him that "the bunch of advisers you are guided by are yet not out of their school". Another appeal made by the zamindars, after giving details of the rapacity of the soldiery, ended on a note of philosophic warning: "Be thou as strong as Ravana, as courageous as Sugriv and Meghnath, thou shalt never be able to overpower the Rama of fate. The way to victory in

this war against the Mughals lies through kindness to your own people. You will ignore this note of caution at your own peril."

Raja Ram took heed of this advice. An order was issued to stop plunder. The garrison were asked to tighten their belts and be prepared for a long siege. Zulfiqar Khan had already dug trenches, and he was reportedly making plans to launch a series of assaults on the stronghold. "The time is not for quarrels among ourselves. It will be better to die of hunger than to live on the grain looted from the hamlets of our compatriots", Raja Ram told Shankaraji Malar in a bid to raise the morale of his men. Raja Ram's addresses at this stage to his bewildered officers and men were rhapsodies of magnificent words and phrases. His dauntless enunciations of Marhatta aims were music to the ears of his followers. They all swore by the Lord and by their honour to defend the castle with their lives. This was perhaps the finest moment in Raja Ram's short military career. The six forts of the Jinji complex buzzed with activity day and night. Every available gun was given a place on the hollowed ramparts and every man a duty to perform for the motherland. The images of goddess Bhiwani were placed at all points considered vulnerable: this was in a way a call for Divine protection and help in the event of a crisis. All women were sent to the safety of the topmost hill fort of Rajgarh. Arrangements for their safety were made for all contingencies. In no uncertain words did Raja Ram assert that "not even a shadow of Mughal soldiers will be allowed to fall on the chastity of our women".

Every day Raja Ram went on a tour of inspection to make sure that every gun was in its place and every man at his post. A well-trained reserve force was kept under his own command to meet any eventuality. Each fort was placed under the command of a general of the highest rank. At times he spoke daggers to erring guardsmen, but he used none. It was a war of the people, by the people, for the people. Every evening Raja Ram joined his men to partake of the same food as they ate. He slept on the ground as they did, wore the same dress, and went every morning to pray in the temples in which they gathered to pledge their services and their lives to the goddess that inspired Shivaji to acts of incredible heroism. When the temple

bells rang shortly before sunrise, the complex of Jinji forts wore the look of such sanctity and defiance as uplifted friends and sent waves of terror in the hearts of the enemy. In comparison, the shouts of war slogans from the trenches outside sounded as false as the dicer's oaths. Jinji was in good heart. It was prepared to meet any challenge; it was also ready to make any sacrifice.

The army of Zulfiqar Khan failed to make a dent on the defences of Jinji. The siege dragged on for a whole year without a single major victory to its credit. On the contrary, it suffered heavy losses by way of deaths and desertions. The blockade boomeranged on the besiegers in that the countryside became a desert where nature itself became rank; it smelt to heaven. Supply routes from the north were cut off by guerilla horsemen. The sufferings of the Mughal forces increased every day. Whereas hunger made the garrison reckless and brave, it turned the Mughals into malcontents and deserters. Zulfiqar Khan panicked at the growing number of defectors every week. Urgent messages were sent to the Emperor for reinforcements. Aurangzeb read in these despatches more than what was meant to be conveyed. Distrust was throughout life his chiefest enemy. He thought that Zulfiqar Khan was perhaps in secret league with Raja Ram, and that the both saw material gain in a continuing stalemate. He sent, therefore, not only large-scale reinforcements, but also the two seniormost men in his entourage—Prime Minister Asad Khan and Prince Kam Baksh—to keep watch over the ambitious Zulfiqar Khan.

The three-headed command of the campaign was a familiar device to curb disobedience at the top and ensure against the enemy attempt to buy loyalties. Aurangzeb looked at every man, whatever his rank and status, with one suspicious and one friendly eye. Even the faithful Turk, Asad Khan, was not exempt from this mistrust. Though his faithfulness was beyond question, the Emperor doubted if he would rise above parental love and punish his son, Zulfiqar Khan, if the latter was found hob-nobbing with Raja Ram. His much-loved son of the old age, Kam Baksh, was chosen to accompany Asad Khan not for reasons of proved military skill but for reasons of his known hostility to the Vazir: he was the best man available to play the

role of a watch-dog. The assignment, Aurangzeb felt, would suit full well the prince's stature and his prejudices.

Asad Khan knew the working of the Emperor's mind more than any other man. He had sorry nights and wretched days as he visualised the complexities of the command thrust upon him. He considered his son a hostage to Fortune for, in his reckoning; Zulfiqar would impede rather than help his enterprise. The presence in the camp of a much-pampered royal prince would, he apprehended, serve as a brake on his initiatives and thus thwart such moves as he might have up his sleeve to corner Raja Ram into submission. "The advice of an inexperienced royal son is more likely to be worthless than useful, but woe betide the commander who does not to take it", he told his life-long friend and counsellor Muhammad Rafiq as the two rode out after making the customary parting salutations to the Emperor. Prince Kam Baksh followed a day later at the head of a glittering array of bodyguard on horses floating, as it were, on the surface of a rough sea. Aurangzeb bestowed on him rich presents and jewelled weaponry to underline faith in his ability to demolish the Marhatta stronghold.

The two armies marched independently for several stages before a unified command was put into gear with Asad Khan at the wheel and the Prince taking a back seat for rest and leisure. Fifteen women, including two wives, accompanied Kam Baksh on his first major military assignment. The shrewd Asad Khan provided the Prince on the way with opportunities at frequent intervals to indulge his passion for hunting as also to initiate him in the pangs and pleasures of camp-life. Apparently, the Vazir was in no hurry to reach Jinji. The march at one stage became so slow that the Emperor sent a special messenger to remind Asad Khan that an urgent job was to be done at Jinji. Even this mild rebuke failed to stir Asad Khan into quick step. He persisted in covering not more than six or seven *kos* a day—a pace of progress that tended to confirm the Emperor's suspicion that both Zulfiqar Khan and his father were in a conspiracy to let Raja Ram strengthen his position in the south. In desperation, he sent a sternly-worded *firman* to the Vazir which read in parts :

It is deeply regretted that, despite my instructions to accelerate the pace of the march, the expedition is still nowhere near Jinji. Zulfiqar Khan is eagerly waiting for reinforcements. The Marhatta mood is reportedly becoming more and more aggressive everyday. It is, therefore, imperative that the hitherto leisurely progress is converted immediately into a hasty run to go to the rescue of your much-harassed son whatever the difficulties and whatever the hazards *en route*. These orders, which are issued after careful consideration, must be carried into effect without delay. There is a heavy responsibility on your shoulders. We trust you will discharge your duties faithfully. We had never known a Turk commander to move so slowly as you have done in this campaign. It was at your request that the command of this campaign was entrusted to your hands. You boasted many times of your ability to achieve quick results. So far you are months behind time. Press on. We must not allow the Marhattas to consolidate their position and to continue scoring victories over our troops.

Conceit in old bodies arouses strongest words. The Emperor's veiled threat stung at the most sensitive spot in Asad Khan's heart. A lacerated ego found expression in loud denunciations of his stars, his son, and the "self-seeking servants of the state who prompted the sovereign to record such scathing strictures on the conduct of the campaign." The pleasures and pastimes of the Prince were also openly given out as reasons for the slow pace. Nobody escaped tongue-lashing by the haughty Turk. To the Emperor he wrote, however, a "submission of explanation" in which the stress was laid on the nature of the terrain, tribal hostilities, scarcities of food and the "morale-depressing diseases which have taken a heavy toll of our men." No mention was made by Asad Khan in this communication of the hunting expeditions of the Prince nor of any other causes which involved personalities. He was soft, almost servile, to Aurangzeb, only to be hostile, almost cruel, to everybody around him. This was the beginning of the end of unity in the camp. Kam Baksh took advantage of this opportunity to strengthen his position *vis-a-vis* the Vazir and win over many a captain to his side.

When at long last Asad Khan reached the precincts of Jinji in the middle of December 1691, the bulk of the reinforcing army gave the look of a machine moving on a broken axle. Zulfiqar Khan went out two stages to receive his father and to pay the customary homage to the royal prince. His summations of the state of siege were too depressing to arouse enthusiasm in the hearts of the newcomers. They listened to the youthful commander with a degree of disbelief and distrust. The stories of Zulfiqar's alleged tie-up with Raja Ram were no longer a secret. The Prince and his followers hoped that Asad Khan would give vent to the turmoil that apparently raged in his heart. However, he kept quiet, preferring to defer to a later day the seemingly inevitable confrontation with his son.

A week later, on 22 December, Asad Khan took into his hands the supreme command of the entire army, numbering nearly fifteen thousand men assembled at Jinji for forcing Raja Ram to surrender. This concentration of responsibility in one hand could not but displease Kam Baksh who considered himself equal in status, if not superior, to Asad Khan. Jealousy at the top bred jealousies at nearly every level, and that development in turn gave rise to dissensions, defections and all other unfortunate fallouts of division and mutual distrust. The siege thus became a prolonged exercise in assaults that lacked coordination, in bombings that lacked purpose, and retreats and comebacks that lacked order. For a whole year, Asad Khan tried in vain to make a breakthrough. The Marhatta defences stood firm. Despite a stringent blockade, Raja Ram was able to secure food supplies for his seven thousand men through friendly tribesmen in the know of secret passages to the backyards of the forts. Courage and disregard for life were the weapons they used to terrorise the besiegers and to instil in them a near-conviction that Jinji was a seat of gods beyond the power of man to subdue.

He that is overambitious forgets easily the virtues of loyalty and steadfastness. Asad Khan's discomfiture stimulated new aspirations in the foolish head of Kam Baksh. Also, the secret reports of Aurangzeb's illness slept sweetly in the prince's imprudent ears. Could he capture the throne with the help of the:

Marhattas ? The rebel in him was aroused and he sent secret messages to Raja Ram for a common front against Aurangzeb and his agent, Asad Khan. At first the Marhatta ruler considered these overtures a trap, but later when a young, comely courier bared her breast to show on it the imprint of the prince's right hand, Raja Ram's scepticism vanished, and he replied in his own hand to suggest a meeting in the fort for "preparation of a carefully worked-out plan to give the contemplated *coup* a feasible form". There was nothing sweeter to Kam Baksh than the thought of marching northwards in triumph after defusing "the senile religious fanatic who brought disaster to the Empire through his policies of intolerance and imperialistic adventurism".

Encouraged by this initial success, Kam Baksh sent yet another envoy to Raja Ram with a letter detailing the terms of accord and suggesting that as a first step to "our becoming joint rulers of Hindustan", Asad Khan and his son should be "arrested, chained by our commandos immediately after the evening prayers on Friday next". The day was considered auspicious for the prince by astrologer Kidar Nath who, in the words of Bhimsen, was "the keeper of the Prince's conscience and the guardian of his earthly interests". This letter was to be the last diplomatic exchange between the conspirators before the take-over bid. The Prince's planned crossover to the fort seemed to be progressing well to a triumphal climax when the angels of destiny took over the conduct of events in their own hands and left Kam Baksh at the mercy of the imperialists. In the dead vast and middle of a winter night, the prince's agent, Inayatullah Khan, fell unexpectedly in the hands of a patrol party guarding the western gate of the Vazir's camp. Inayatullah panicked and made a desperate bid to escape under the shield of darkness, but in vain. The guards overpowered him and recovered the incriminating message to Raja Ram from inside the double sole of his shoe.

The evidence against the Prince was incontrovertible. Asad Khan and his son moved with extreme caution and, without sounding a general alarm, they encircled the Prince's camp with the help of contingents of their personal bodyguard. The Prince was in his haram when the Kaniz-in-waiting, Swaran Mahal,

announced the arrival of the Vazir-i-Azam on "an urgent business of the state". Reduced almost to jelly with fear, Kam Baksh came out barefoot in his night clothes, and he was immediately seized by the waiting guardsmen and dragged roughly out of his camp. Meanwhile, Dalpat Rao came to know of the dramatic events. He rushed to the Prince's camp and stopped with a stern voice "the manhandling of the son of the Emperor." He seated Kam Baksh on his elephant and took him personally to the presence of Asad Khan. In an uncontrollable state of anger, the latter addressed Kam Baksh as "you son of a harlot", and confronted him with the letter he had written to Raja Ram. Kam Baksh said nothing. He stood there, head down, praying, as it were, for forgiveness of his act of indiscretion. More in sorrow than in anger, Asad Khan questioned him briefly about other participants in the plot. The Prince spoke not a word. He waited calmly for what Fate had in store for him. Asad rose up, walked up to him, and said in a voice tender and almost respectful :

I am here, O' Prince, to safeguard the interests of the Empire. The great and gracious monarch chose me to lead this arduous campaign for reasons best known to His Majesty himself. I shall be failing in my duty if I do not strip you of the command of operations, place you under house arrest, and report the contemplated revolt to the Emperor. As the son of the King, I respect you. But as one who plotted with the enemy to seize the throne, I cannot but regard you as a traitor. Nobody will be more happy if the Emperor forgives and restores you to honour. My job is done. In the end, I would thank the great Allah for saving us all from a great calamity.

Kam Baksh was taken to an apartment in the Vazir's camp. Nobody was permitted to see him. Neither was he allowed to correspond with anybody in the camp or outside. Suitable arrangements were, however, made for his personal comfort. The ladies of the Prince's haram continued to receive the courtesies and services due to them. Except for a few moments in the first stage of Kam Bash's apprehension, Asad Khan, a man of lofty ideals and unflinching worldly wisdom, gave the coup

attempt an understanding but no tongue. He knew that Aurangzeb loved Kam Baksh dearly. He also knew of the Emperor's lurking distrust of Zulfiqar Khan. The situation was indeed very complex. It needed to be handled with extreme care. His was "the way of the silence" to meet a threat that could lead to grave consequences if suitable precautions were not taken at the initial stage. As it was, the rebuke he flung at the Prince in the flush of anger was a blunder which could cost him his office, his properties, nay, his very life. Dalpat Rao was the only witness to the Vazir's explosion of temper. To him, he apologised for the indiscretion, and said that little useful purpose would be served if the incident was carried to the Emperor's ears. The Bundhela chief made no reply. His silence was ominous. There were wheels within wheels in court rivalries. Asad Khan knew his tongue had for a moment got the better of his discretion. He could not call back his words. There was no alternative but to take refuge in the hope that Aurangzeb, in the event of his coming to know that he indirectly equated Udaipuri Mahal with a harlot, would understand the circumstances and take a lenient view of the lapse. Acting on the principle that what was past help should be past care, Asad Khan busied himself in preparing a report of the events leading to the arrest of Kam Baksh.

Aurangzeb, who lived in the world more as a shrewd spectator of mankind than as a species, read the account of the conspiracy with deep anguish. The innate distrust of his sons led him to believe every word of what Asad Khan wrote. He cursed his stars for a progeny born to disobey and discredit the Empire. He agreed with the Vizir's recommendation to raise the siege for the time and to return to Jinji at an opportune moment with a new army, new leadership and new ideas on how best to conquer the fort. The failure of the present strategy was a proof, if one was needed, that there were other ways to subdue the Marhatta citadel. The spectre of an ignominious retreat very nearly broke his aged heart, but in the face of Kam Baksh's planned treachery he could muster few cogent arguments to persist with the campaign. The Marhattas were reportedly on the offensive, taking full advantage of the lowest ever morale in the imperial camp. As on the previous occasions, the bared-teeth, nature, with its scarcities of essential materials, famine,

floods, storms of heavy rain, and dreadful array of new and old diseases, was ranged against the invaders. "Peace has to be bought at any price", wrote back the Emperor. There was a trembling in Aurangzeb's voice as he dictated this *firman*. Bhimsen noticed a swell of water in the narrow, wrinkled eyes, but Aurangzeb did not let a drop fall on to his yellow cheeks. His control over emotional reflexes was like his hold over passions base and carnal. Even the suggestion of a defeat seared his soul, but he managed somehow to put up a bold, unruffled front. The imperial order he sent to Asad Khan was a dexterous exercise in self-deception. He insisted on the necessity of a total victory without mentioning even once that a virtual defeat had been suffered. His thinking was of a mind that envisioned itself as part of the divine spirit. He could not be beaten, neither could he suffer a setback in the planning and execution of a strategy. He reckoned himself above the weaknesses of a mortal man. Every word he wrote was the word of Allah and every gesture he made was the gesture of the Almighty. Such men are born to rule while they live. They are also born to be forgotten as soon as they die.

Asad Khan understood correctly the implications of the royal command. He put his sword in the scabbard, and brought out the money bags from iron chests in the strong room. The rupee-power, he believed, would achieve what the armed strength had failed to attain. Every policy-maker in the fort was bribed heavily before an envoy was sent to Raja Ram with an offer of peace provided the imperial army was allowed to retreat without molestation. Khafi Khan hints that Raja Ram was himself paid "a huge amount" before the offer was conveyed to him. This suggestion was not without reason in that the Marhatta chief accepted it in the teeth of opposition from some commanders. Asad Khan was relieved to receive the assurance sought. Ceasefire was immediately ordered on all fronts. Three days later, on 23 January, 1693, began the retreat to Wandiwash—a withdrawal that meant different things to different people. To Aurangzeb, it was a strategic victory against a combination of man-made and natural hazards; to Raja Ram here was a defeat for the Mughal arms that warranted rejoicings in the Marhatta camp; to Asad Khan and his supporters it meant the triumph

of money-power over stupidity; and to the prisoner Kam Baksh, it was nothing more nor less than the end of his aspirations for the throne.

The imperial army found Wandiwash a pleasant change from the rigours of Jinji. Food here was plentiful, the surroundings pleasant. The place was ideally suited for rest, recreation and reconstruction of the depleted forces. The four months spent here were for Asad Khan and his son a period of stock-taking, an opportunity for preparing a balance-sheet for presentation to the Emperor. Before the onset of rains, that is near about the middle of May, Asad Khan marched out of this heaven of tranquillity" for the imperial headquarters where the Emperor was waiting to hear first hand the full story of his son, Kam Baksh's alleged treachery. First, the Vazir planned to present the Prince himself to the Emperor but later, at the bidding of Aurangzeb, the task of ushering Kam Baksh to the royal presence was entrusted to the prince's sister, Zinat-un-Nissa. What happened between the father and son is not known, but it is clear from what is recorded in the official chronicle that Kam Baksh was pardoned. At the same time, the Emperor discounted the charge by the Prince that it was Zulfiqar Khan who opened the dialogue with Raja Ram with the aim of seizing power himself. Aurangzeb was too shrewd a reader of human character to be taken in by this charge. He told the Prince to ascertain facts before making an accusation of that gravity". Kam Baksh did not press the point.

Meanwhile, there spread a rumour that Asad Khan had taken poison in a suicide bid to save himself the ignominy of punishment for hurling abuse at the Prince. Aurangzeb rushed to the Vazir's camp, and he was much relieved to find the rumour unfounded. He invited Asad Khan to private audience, and later conferred on him high honours for "loyalty and fearless discharge of duty". Thus ended an episode which, if not handled with discretion, could have created, infinite divisions at the court and in the army.

Aurangzeb approved Asad Khan's strategy both before and after Kam Baksh's detention, and thought that the policies he followed were the only way to wrest initiative from the hands of a wily and determined foe. He had a particular type of

aversion against everything concerning the Marhattas. To him the voice of the people of Maharashtra was not the voice of reason, much less the voice of God; that prerogative, in his thinking, belonged only to his own voice. He spoke in short, well-turned phrases when relaying to his generals what he believed was the command of Allah. To Asad Khan and other commanders, he told after a week's *khilwat* in a hutment near the tomb of a Muslim saint:

It is the weak who are prone to compromise and lay aside their cherished objectives. We came to the Deccan to fight a war against apostasy. We have succeeded in obliterating the Shiite Sultanates. The Marhattas are still in the field. It is the holy command that we demolish them completely. To that end, we now need to bend our energies, our resources, and all our armed strength.

To Jinji we shall return after reducing to rubble all other strongholds of Marhatta authority. Raja Ram must be left with no place to take refuge in after he is ousted from that fort. The command of Allah is clear and unequivocal. The assignment given to me by the Lord of Lords must be completed before I die. I will consider myself an incompetent servant of God if that task is left unfinished.

Make plans for a total war against infidelity in every form. I did not acquire the Empire to let it be disrupted by a handful of faithless unbelievers. There is no alternative to the decision I have come to. Anyone of you who is downhearted and homesick may quit his post and leave for the north. For me there is no going back on the pledge given to the Supreme Master. The choice before you is between the hell of desertion and the heaven of loyalty. I have little doubt you will all opt for the right path.

This plea, which was also a warning, created a stir in the camp. All the captains and commanders were weary of a war that had kept them away from their homes for over two decades. They all hoped the Emperor would call it a day, and order a phased return to the pleasures and prosperity of Delhi and Agra. The rebuff given to their inward wishes by Aurangzeb was sharp

and sudden. The option given them was in fact a trap, an invitation to disgrace and possible destruction. Though their hearts were full of woe, they could not but applaud the Emperor's faith and grit.

Within a fortnight, blueprints of assaults on Marhatta positions were submitted for the approval of Aurangzeb. These plans were coordinated by no other than Asad Khan himself within a framework of royal priorities. Before the year was out, the forces of Qasim Khan, Khanzada Khan, great grandson of Mumtaz Mahal, and the valiant Safshikan Khan were battling against Marhatta guerillas and Marhatta forts all over Konkan and neighbouring territories. The losses suffered by the Mughals were heavy. The elusive forces of Shanta Ghorpare and other lesser Marhatta generals inflicted many a crushing defeat on the invaders. At one place, the imperial commanders had to pay a ransom of rupees two and a half million to secure an assurance of state passage for the trapped forces.

The reports of these military setbacks, as also of the havoc resulting from natural calamities, drove Aurangzeb to desperation. He hurled in the fray large-scale reinforcements led by Prince Badar Bakht, son of Prince Azam, and Firoz Jang Bahadur. The war of attrition that followed went on for nearly two years before the legendary Ghorpare was defeated and killed in a battle against Firoz Jang. Shortly afterwards the hero of heroes, Dhana Singh, was overwhelmed by the vastly superior Mughal forces in a battle almost savage in terms of mutual destruction. His head was cut by Firoz Jang himself and sent to Aurangzeb as a trophy of war. The tide against the Mughals had turned. The Emperor celebrated these victories with the customary prayers, alms-giving and the feeding of the poor. The head of Dhana Singh, stuffed with straw, was displayed in all major cities of the Deccan. Aurangzeb's pledge to God was nearly fulfilled. The time had come to mount another invasion against the still unconquered Jinji.

• Shanta Ghorpare and Dhana Singh are legendary figures in Marhatta history. Their deeds of valour are preserved for posterity in many a heart-catching folk-song. Though their characters and approaches to the problems of war and peace were different, yet they brought to bear a unique, like-minded

attitude in their hostility to the Mughals. In his book "History of Aurangzeb", Sir Jadunath Sircar has summed up their respective strengths and weaknesses as follows :

Santaji had an inborn genius for handling large bodies of troops spread over a wide area, changing his tactics so as to take prompt advantage of every change in the enemy's plans and condition, and organising combined movements. The success of his tactics depended on the rapid movement of his troops and on his subordinates carrying out his orders punctually to the minute. He, therefore, insisted on implicit obedience from his officers and enforced the strictest discipline in his army by ruthless punishments. As Khafi Khan writes, "Santa used to inflict severe punishments on his followers. For the slightest faults he would cause the offender to be trampled to death by an elephant".

The man who insists on efficiency and discipline in a tropical country makes himself universally unpopular and, therefore, we are not surprised to learn that "most of the Maratha nobles became Santa's enemies and made a secret agreement with his rival Dhana to destroy him".

The two lifelong rivals, Santa and Dhana, were both army leaders and organisers of the highest ability, courage and activity, but with contrasted characters. Dhana made war like a gentleman. He knew that the fickle goddess of Fortune might desert him in the field any day ; therefore, he never went to an extreme. He was moderate in victory, generous to the vanquished, polite in his address, practised in self-control, and capable of taking long views and making statesmanly arrangements. His inborn courtesy to the Mughal generals who had the misfortune to encounter him, is noticed with praise by the Muslim historians. Moreover, he served his country's Government unselfishly for many years.

Santaji Ghorpare, on the other hand, was in comparison with Dhana, a barbarian devoid of culture or generosity, unable to restrain his passions or to take thought of the distant future. The hour of his victory was the hour of gratification of his vindictiveness. He showed no mercy and expected none. Therefore, he excited among the Mughal generals, as well as his

Maratha adversaries a feeling of mixed terror and revulsion.

By his temperament, Santa was incapable of cooperating with others and he had not the patriotism to subordinate his own will to the needs of his nation. He lived and died merely as a most successful brigand and selfish adventurer and exercised no influence on the political history of the Marathas or even on the general effect of Aurangzeb's campaigns. He flashed through the Deccan sky like a lonely meteor, without ever having a companion or ally or even sharing the counsels of his nation's leaders, among whom he might have naturally claimed a place.

Sircar, it is felt, is unnecessarily harsh on Shantaji. Far from being a self-centred savage, he was a man of high purpose and patriotism. His one aim in life was to make the Deccan a Marhatta homeland. To him, the means was nothing, the end everything. True, he was at times harsh to his subordinates and merciless to the foe. It needs, however, to be remembered that he waged a total war, and total wars cannot be waged with words coated with sugar and swords fashioned out of scented wood. The enemy dreaded him, and that was enough reason for the bards to sing praises of "this man of steel" at village fairs and on special occasions to commemorate holy days in the Marhatta calendar. To disparage Ghorpare is to disparate freedom itself.

Dhana Singh was equally purposive in thought and action. There was oak in his softness, and granite in his gestures of gentlemanliness. He and Shantaji were the two sides of the same coin. Both were unyielding enemies of the alien ruler, and both took pride in waging what they called a war of liberation. Not only Maharashtra, but the whole of Hindustan salutes them for their courage, patriotism and valour.

Genius is never responsible. If it is asserted that Aurangzeb acted irresponsibly, as is done by many Western historians, in ordering a massive, many-pronged assault on Jinji after the liquidation of the forces of Shantaji and Dhana Singh, no aspersion is cast on his perception of the need of the hour. He thought, perhaps rightly, that the time was ripe for a knockout blow. The Marhatta territories were reeling under the blows

of the Mughal generals. Economically, the kingdom founded by Shivaji was in ruins. The morale of the Marhatta masses had sunk to its lowest ever depth. The natural calamities, like famine, disease and vagaries of the weather, held the stage without a letup. The besieged were hard put to it to meet their essential needs of food and equipment. The foreign traders were gradually gaining ascendancy in terms of prestige and striking power. Aurangzeb took a careful stock of these factors, and he decided, in consultation with Allah, that the hour had come to keep the date with destiny.

The command of the campaign was entrusted once again to the comparatively young Zulfiqar Khan. His past experiences, in the Emperor's reckoning, would entail such military advantages as could not be discounted. For the time, Aurangzeb forgot all about Zulfiqar's towering ambition, his deeds of doubtful loyalty, and his many errors of judgment that lost the imperial forces many a valuable opportunity to reduce Raja Ram to zero.

The siege of the six forts—the last remaining strongholds of Marhatta power—was begun in February, 1697. Many a determined attack on positions considered vulnerable were repulsed with heavy losses. Khafi Khan suggests that for reasons of personal gain Zulfiqar Khan was intent on prolonging the siege and thus giving Raja Ram sufficient time to escape to the north. It is difficult to accept or reject this reading of the situation as the circumstantial evidence for and against this surmise is anything but convincing. The fact remains, however, that when in the middle of December Aurangzeb, perplexed at the continuing stalemate, issued a sternly-worded *firman* for the seizure of Jinji "whatever the hazards, whatever the cost", the imperial armies swung into action from three sides and forced the hard-pressed garrison to lay down their arms unconditionally. The last decisive blow was struck by Dalpat Rao who, following a fierce engagement lasting for nearly two hours; entered the main fort at the head of a contingent of five hundred Bundhela commandos. At the same time, Daud Khan pulverised the western defences for an equal share in victory. After disarming the besieged force of nearly seven thousand men, both these

generals carried out an intensive search of every nook and corner of the citadel and its satellites, but no trace could be found of the whereabouts of Raja Ram. The wily Marhatta chief had escaped capture once again. He fled to Vellore sixteen hours before the assault was mounted by Dalpat Rao.

This getaway lends some credence to Khafi Khan's suggestion that Zulfiqar was in secret collusion with Raja Ram, and that it was he who gave enough time to the Marhatta chief to make good his escape. It will be an exercise in futility to probe further into this conjecture. The all-important fact was that Jinji had fallen. The Marhatta kingdom was all but extinguished. Raja Ram was on the run. At long last, Aurangzeb reached his hour of triumph. The whole of Hindustan was under his sway. Neither Asoka nor Samadargupta had ruled over such a vast empire as this. Was Aurangzeb the greatest of the great? To give a correct answer to this question is as difficult as making a monk out of a donkey. History stands intrigued at this culmination of a career marked by faith, fanaticism, self-confidence, intolerance, distrust and hard-hearted scepticism.

The Devil is most devilish when it sees young, beautiful women trapped in their own honour and helplessness. The five fair wives of Raja Ram, lodged for reasons of safety in the top-most fort, did not know what to do when a lady envoy of Zulfiqar Khan, bade them come out with or without their belongings and their children. They bewailed their misfortune as if with the tongues of maniacs, and they cried aloud for help by the family goddess Bhivani. Their deathless words in praise of the deity, however, left the unseen powers unmoved. When ordered to make a decision before "the last ray of the sun casts its parting glow on the western rampart", four of them put faith in the unknown and came out wearing black scarves over their heads. The forty-year old senior-most Rani took her future into her own hand and jumped to death from the balcony of her apartment. She did this act of self-destruction after saying prayers in bridal clothes before the silver image of "the divine guardian of the house of Shivaji". She shed no tear, made no lamentation, and she went to the "lap of the mother" with hymns of chastity on her lips. The red stone terrace where she

fell became in due time the holy, hollowed ground for pilgrimage by Marhatta women of all ages.

The four wives, who put their trust in Fate, lived only to rue their decision. Treated first with a show of courtesy, they were later allotted "homes" in the harems of junior commanders who expressed "the willingness to give them refuge". Little is known of what happened to them in later years. Perhaps their identities were lost quickly in the zig-zags of large *zenanas*. Three sons and two daughters of Raja Ram were kept as hostages till the end of their father's life. Later, according to Bhimsen, the girls were given the option either of "conversion and marriage or of return to their families". The boys, according to the same source, were given employment in the imperial army.

Raja Ram fled northwards, in the words of a Marhatta chronicler, on "the back of invisible horses with wings of angels". He reached the safety and comparative affluence of Vishalgarh in three months. Zulfiqar Khan made much threatening noise over the Marhatta ruler's yet another act of elusion, and he chose to go in pursuit himself, taking a vow on the holy book not to rest content till the prey was in his bag. For eight weeks he used all the ploys of the hunt to catch Raja Ram, but in vain. In the end, he despaired and wrote to Aurangzeb a most apologetic despatch with regard to his inability to track down the fallen foe. The Emperor was naturally disappointed at what he called the admission of defeat, and he summarised his grief in these words :

Sorrow comes with years. We never hear children weeping. My ageing heart is full of distress at this newest rebuff to our arms. Jinji was captured in vain. I shall have to live for some more years to taste total victory against the enemies of Islam. At eighty, I deserved a better dispensation at the hands of Allah. However, I submit to His will in faith and in humility.

Aurangzeb, a master in the art of producing positive results by negative means, did not reply to Zulfiqar Khan's submission. The thunder of the Emperor's silence led the dejected commander

to spread ruin in Marhatta territories and to leave nothing undone to force Raja Ram to give himself up. His efforts did not, however, succeed in taming the Marhatta pride. For a whole year, Raja Ram eluded capture, fleeing from one secret hideout to another in the rocky labrynth of Konkan. Towards the end of 1699, Aurangzeb entrusted the command of the "operation pursuit" to Prince Badar Bakht. The army placed at his disposal combined high mobility with higher hitting power. He pressed hard in a reckless bid to corner the Raja into accepting the inevitability of surrender.

Raja Ram fled to the fort of Satara, hoping that from there he would be able to wend his way to the inaccessible Vishalgarh. His morale did not waver, neither did his determination falter. The Fate had, however, different plans up its sleeve. At Shahgarh, the fleeing ruler was suddenly laid low with high fever. A few days later, on 2 March, 1700, Raja Ram breathed his last. A handful of faithful followers were by his side when the end came. He left behind no last will, no testament. His life-story was a testimony to what he wished and lived for. While he lay lifeless in the rights of an undefeated king, on his head could be seen the crowns of patriotism, pugnacity and puresighted purposiveness. Raja Ram was dead, not the spirit of dauntlessness he had come to symbolise. The small entourage mourned the passing away of their leader. Their grief was not hopeless in that it contained within it the passion to be the masters of their own destiny. The obsequies were solemnised the next day with tears that told clearly the tale of a life spent in the pursuit of a noble cause.

The news of the death of Raja Ram was a shot in the arm of Aurangzeb. Irked by the slow pace of his generals, he himself had left Islamapuri a few months earlier with the aim of first reducing Satara and then subduing other forts still held by the Marhattas. The long purse, not the sword, was the weapon he intended to use against these strongholds. In return for a bribe of rupees five hundred thousand, the commander of the garrison at Satara opened the gates of the fort on 21 April, 1700. Perhaps the death of Raja Ram and the mini-war of succession that followed were the causes of the Marhatta general's unwillingness to resist the Mughals any longer. The

writing on the wall was clear. The Mughal army was too big and too well-equipped to be checked by the leaderless Marhatta guerillas.

Within the next three months, the forts of Parli, Pinhalla and Panngarh were captured in quick succession without much fighting though in each case there was hard bargaining for the price of surrender. At eighty plus, money was of little value to Aurangzeb. What mattered the most was the realization of his life-dream of making the whole of Hindustan a Mughal property. Old age had made him wiser and more foolish. He forgot the ancient Persian saying that what was not won by the sword was not worth possessing. He devalued Mansabs, robes of honour, *khillats* and distributed them freely to the erstwhile foes in the conviction that the result would be peace, tranquillity, prosperity and the glory of Islam.

How stupid were some western travellers who expressed the view that the age had cured Aurangzeb's religious myopia. If anything, the years gave a new, sharper edge to his illiberalism. He could not bear the thought of facing God on the Day of Judgment empty-handed. He wished desperately to carry in his pocket the whole of Hindustan. This obsession haunted him both in youth and in the decline of life. He did not surrender to apostasy in old age; rather, the nearer he came to the grave, the more impatient he became in his dealings with the forces that retarded the achievement of his goal. He confronted boldly the furies of nature, as also the furies of man, in a bid to extinguish once and for all the elements that constituted, individually or jointly, a threat to his success.

When the imperial camp at Khwaspur was flooded as a result of non-stop torrential rains for over sixty hours, Aurangzeb walked up through hip-deep swirling waters to a nearby hillock and engaged himself there in prayers for mercy. He returned to what remained of the camp only when the elements became quiet. When nearing the site of the royal tent, he stumbled against the roots of a fallen tree, fell heavily, and dislocated his right knee. Despite the best efforts of the court surgeons, he remained lame for the rest of seven years of his life. This "inheritance of Amir Timur" became for Aurangzeb an inspiration to outdo his great ancestor in bending the world to

his will. The limp never dispirited him.

In retreat, the swollen rivers held out a threat far greater than any presented by the enemy pursuit parties. The Krishna in spate was a demon that gave no quarter; it devoured all those that happened to come within the reach of its rough waters. Aurangzeb had a taste of their fury when incessant rains forced him to order withdrawal of forces, from the vicinity of Satara. The river, risen high and wide, flowed menacingly between him and the dry ground across. A large number of ferries were swept away by waters rushing at a speed that caused terror in the hearts of the trapped soldiery. A solitary oarsman who offered to ply his ferry from a ford seven miles downstream demanded one gold *mohar* a passenger for the hazardous crossing. Had he so desired, Aurangzeb could have ordered the man, on the pain of death, to do service to him at the normal charge of half a paise per passenger, but he chose to accept the price he asked for. At the end of the six-hour strenuous operations from one bank to the other the *mallah* received a bagful of gold coins together with a leaf of tree on which was written *shukria* by Aurangzeb with his own hand. The Emperor thus lived up to the Indian dictum that no fighting man is a soldier who is not fair to those that serve him.

Though Aurangzeb captured nearly every important Marhatta fort in the three years he spent on the field, the losses suffered and hardships endured by the Mughal forces were exceptionally heavy. Both Khafi Khan and Bhimsen give a graphic picture of the travails of the troops who were "at times forced to go without food for days on end". The following passage by Khafi Khan is a sample of the stories of woe written by several authors :

An army of seven thousand exhausted men was fettered fast in hunger and hopelessness. A large number of their companions-in-distress had perished in the last few weeks. Diseases, which raged in the form of epidemics, added to the woes of hunger and thirst. A point was now reached where camaraderie became non-existent. Every man lived for himself. Even the son-father relationship no longer generated tender emotions. A fearsome death stared them all in the face. For food they pin-

ned their hopes on blades of grass, and for drink on their own urine. All animals had already been slain for morsels of uncooked meat. A few hard-hearts had resorted to keeping themselves alive on the flesh of their dead comrades. The situation worsened every day. There was no sign of supplies coming from Islamapuri. All pathways were no more than narrow lanes of quagmire. The rains and floods halted all movement in the territory.

The Emperor shared in full the misery of his men. For weeks he subsisted on one coarse meal a day, and he restricted himself to consuming not more than one flaskful of fresh water in twentyfour hours. The royal princes and commanders followed the Emperor's example. Notwithstanding the danger of snakes and poisonous insects, they all slept at night on the ground in sympathy with their suffering men. Seldom before had such destitution been seen in the Mughal camp. Their hope rested on supplies reaching them somehow from somewhere. Alamgir prayed night and day for Divine help. The victories he scored were worse than the worst defeats. The otherwise fertile peninsula bore the look of a forbidden, life-less desert. The angels of death hovered everywhere. It was perhaps here that Aurangzeb took the decision to call it a day and return to Agra. It is wiser being discreet than reckless. The failure of years ago-nised him. The type of success he looked forward to was nowhere in sight. The forts had fallen. In their place had arisen untold destitution. The Deccan was in ruins. If there was ever defeat in victory, it was here, it was here, it was here.

The story of Aurangzeb's campaign was indeed too grim for words. A protracted war had resulted in protracted woe. More than once was he heard to beseech death to take possession of his body and soul. By his rambling directions, he knew that the years had got the better of his alacrity. It was, therefore, not surprising that he decided to take stock of developments in the Marhatta camp before taking fresh initiatives. Wife Udaipuri, son Kam Baksh, daughter Zinat-un-Nissa, as also the ageing Prime Minister Asad Khan, were waiting for him in Islamapuri. However, he spent the next few months in meditation and in defending before his own conscience the opinions held by him

with regard to religion and its place in the fundamentals of kingship. The doubt that had arisen in his mind soon disappeared. His self-owned mission, he decreed to himself, must be fulfilled before a return to Agra was contemplated. So the war against Marhattas continued for another eighteen months. The pattern of fighting, as also the pattern of results, was the same as before. Six lesser forts were captured more with bribery than with gunfire, and in each case the net losses were several times heavier than the net gains.

The capture of Wagingera—situated midway between Bijapur and Golkanda—was the last abortive victory of Aurangzeb in the Deccan. For several weeks, princes Azam and Badar Bakht struggled in vain to force the tribal chief Nayak to surrender. When the Emperor was contemplating a massive assault led by himself there came a secret offer for capitulation provided a safe passage was given to Nayak's mother and other members of the chief's family. The communication said that Nayak had fled the fort in a fit of mental derangement, and that there was no one in the stronghold, except his mother, with authority to negotiate peace. Aurangzeb was delighted at this unexpected development. He accepted the offer and sent Nusrat Jang to implement the accord. The latter discovered, however, that the overture was only a means to gain time and that Nayak was neither mad, nor had he fled the fort. This revelation, according to Bhimsen, made the Emperor virtually foam in the mouth, and he ordered the ever-loyal Dalpat Rao to storm the citadel and not to return until it was captured. The dauntless Bundhela carried out the royal *firman* in letter and in spirit. Riding a huge war elephant, he led a force of five thousand desperados to launch a frontal attack on the eastern gate. In a savage battle lasting from sunrise to midday nearly a thousand Bundhelas fell to the guns of the enemy. Two of his mahouts were killed before the garrison raised the white flag on the rampart. The gate was soon flung open and Dalpat Rao, standing atop his elephant, called out loud and clear to his men to "enter the fort, disarm the garrison, and bring Nayak to my presence before the sun is set". The battle was over. The search for Nayak began in high hope, but it ended soon on a note of deep disappointment. The tribal chief, it was learnt, had escaped by a secret tunnel as soon as

the Mughal attack was mounted. Several pursuit parties were despatched to capture Nayak, but to no avail. Here was yet another defeat in victory which saddened Aurangzeb. As always, he suspected treachery. Perhaps Dalpat Rao, he thought, had connived at Nayak's escape. Aurangzeb never forgot that the ties of religion were stronger than the ties of service and loyalty.

The fort was captured on 27 April, 1705. Aurangzeb was now eighty-seven—an age that brought him the monumental pomp of years; it also brought him the lamentations of longevity. His old age was particularly sad as it meant the end of hope. The roving Marhatta chiefs were still in control of fairly large tracts of the peninsula. His conquests looked hollow, without real content. The tranquillity that comes with self-fulfilment eluded him. In the circumstances, the ruling to retrace his steps to Ahmednagar was understandable. The time had come for him to prepare for the last journey.

Chapter Twenty

RELUCTANT PENITENT

Wars of succession were invariably disastrous in consequences. The results were all the more calamitous when the battle for the throne was fought not on the field, but in the seraglio of the deceased ruler. Raja Ram passed away, leaving behind many legitimate and illegitimate minor sons and as many wedded and unwed, ambitious wives and mistresses. The clash of female wills-to-win that followed could not but demoralise the few remaining patriotic courtiers and thus bring the kingdom to the verge of ruin. This development was also an opportunity for Aurangzeb to impose his will on the warring women and capture indirectly by sweet talk what he had failed to attain by hard words. He failed again: this was the decree of heaven, not the victory of Marhatta nationalism.

Raja Ram's eldest son Karan was installed king within two days of his death. All factions of the Marhatta court were unanimous in supporting his candidature. They forgot for a while that Shahu, the eldest son of Shambuji, was alive and waiting at Islamapuri for his turn to don the crown. Perhaps they believed that for too long had he been in the custody of the Mughals to merit consideration for the *gaddi*. They were perhaps not wrong in their judgment. Aurangzeb would have been glad to see the end of the lineage of the wily Raja Ram. The ailing Shahu would fit in well with the Emperor's scheme of ruling the kingdom by proxy.

As ill-luck would have it, Karan died within three months of his accession. An attack of small-pox proved fatal. Highly skilled physicians from all parts of the Deccan plied their expertise

in vain to save him. A Konkaneese Sadhu came very near to bringing about a cure, but his efforts were foiled by a wife of Raja Ram who insisted on his ouster from the palace "as he is virtually nude and not fit for the gaze of the attending ladies". The sadhu was, on his part, stubborn in his refusal to "bedeck myself in clothes that are an affront to the spirit of my pledge". While leaving unceremoniously, he wished the erring lady well, saying "thy will be done. A chapter is concluded. The story is not yet ended. God knows more than we do".

Karan died in a fit of convulsions a few hours after the Sadhu left. Some persons in attendance thought "the flame of life was extinguished by the parting course of the fakir" and that the king could come to life again if the sadhu was brought back with honour. A hunt for the man proved abortive. He was never seen again.

Thereafter, following lengthy discussions among the high-ranking nobility, a son of Tara Bai, the second seniormost lady in the seraglio, was planted on the throne in the title of Shivaji III. This move enjoyed the backing of the chiefest Marhatta nobleman, Ramchandra, who had for long years looked after the administration of Marhatta territories on the west coast. His support, alleged some inmates of the 'harem', was bought by Tara Bai with the fabulous gift of a diamond, worth nearly a hundred thousand rupees. Thus began a chain of recriminations and counter-recriminations that ended in Tara Bai's surrender and request for help to the Mughal Emperor.

The principal contender of Tara Bai for the title of queen-mother was Rajas Bai, mother of Shambuji II. She was ambitious without being dexterious, as also beautiful without being chaste. Her supporters included many lesser *musahibs* who saw in Ramchandra's rise to supreme power a threat to their material interest. The battle between these two ladies was fought in and outside the palace with the fierceness of wounded tigresses. The court was paralysed from top to toe because of this continuing rift. In the end, the Tara Bai-Ramchandra combination gained the upper hand, and for some time an uneasy peace descended on the strife-torn seraglio. Tara Bai emerged from the struggle a lady with supreme power—intelligent, dynamic and forward-looking. She realized that an honourable compromise

with the Mughals was the only sure way for her survival in power. Not knowing that Aurangzeb was more dead than alive, she made to him an overture for peace. Whereas she was ready to cede seven forts, she asked in return for a Mansab of seven thousand for her son and an undertaking that, like the Ranas of Mewar, he would never be called upon to attend the Mughal court in person.

Aurangzeb's old age was not of the mind, but of the body alone. He was quick to perceive in the offer a defeat for his cherished aim of establishing a rule of Islam in the Deccan. A Mewar in the south was, to him, unthinkable. It did not take him long to reject the proposal off hand. "To accept it would be a surrender to infidelity", he told Prince Azam, and asked him to find out if Tara Bai would shed the pretence of sovereignty and become for the rest of her life a distinguished citizen of the Empire. Meanwhile, he detained the Rani's envoy as a means of pressurising her into unconditional submission. Tara Bai paid little heed to Azam's feelers. She could have accepted the suggestion at her own peril. Ramachandra had not carried on the struggle against Mughal imperialism for over thirty years to become a helpless onlooker at the liquidation of the Kingdom. He was firm as a rock in living by the ideals of Shivaji and his sons. He told the wavering queen-mother unequivocally: "The fight must go on. We cannot surrender to evil, come what may". Tara Bai's reply to Azam was a polite no. However, she explained that her original offer was an honest move to bring peace to the Deccan. "There was no ulterior motive hidden therein. The Emperor would do well to reconsider it", she added.

Aurangzeb could trust his sons and daughters with his chests of gold and silver, but never with his inward thoughts. He distrusted them all as potential enemies. To Azam his response to Tara Bai's renewed offer was an intriguing silence. To the inquisitive Zinat-un-Nissa, he merely read out some *ayats* from the *Quran* which purported to underline the subordination of man to God's will. The Emperor kept his cards close to the chest, revealing nothing and making no observation that might give an indication of his intentions. A few days later he invited Yesu Bai, mother of Shahu, for a private audience. There is no record available of what transpired between them. However, it

is not difficult to make a rational conjecture about the trend of talks. Within a week some Marhatta chiefs who were on the side of the Mughals ever since Shivaji gave the call for liberation came to call on the ailing Shahu. Prominent among them were members of the families of the mothers of Shambuji and Raja Ram. The official chroniclers are silent about their mission. It was, however, clear that plans were afoot to instal Shahu not as king, but as the head of the proposed Marhatta principality within the Mughal Empire.

Aurangzeb never admitted to himself even that the sands of his life were running out fast, and that the chances of his success were receding rapidly. This was a subject of dread to him. Nevertheless, he continued the struggle with faith, guile and some, small hope. His eyes were fixed on Shahu, who had been a virtual prisoner in his camp since the age of nine. Only if he and Yesu Bal would swallow the baits he dangled before them there was the likelihood of his ending his stay in the south on a note of joy. The son of Shambuji was, however, not only the chip of the old block, but the old block itself. He rejected scornfully the offers of gold and silver, as also of Mansabs and robes of rare honour, and he stuck steadfastly to his insistence on liberty. Nothing short of complete sovereignty would satisfy him.

In protest against continued detention, Shambu went on a partial hunger strike, subsisting for months on uncooked food only. "The prisoner of an imperial power has no right to the luxury of dainty meals", he told his mother. Persuasions and threats by Aurangzeb's agents failed to dissuade him from the course he had chosen. The gathering physical weakness in time affected his mental health. A team of court physicians was deputed to attend on him. Shahu even refused to take "medicines polluted by the hands of foreign imperialists". The Emperor laughed out his obdurance as "madness wrapped in pale patriotism" and commended him for treatment by a Muslim saint known for spiritual powers to heal the maladies of the mind. Shahu turned down the suggestion, saying that unconditional freedom was the only cure for his frailty.

For reasons not difficult to guess correctly, Aurangzeb did not want Shahu to die. He was the only means available to him for

a partial redemption of his promises to Providence. Victory on the battlefield was now out of the question. The *de jour* king and his guardians, were unresponsive to his pleas for a compromise. Shahu was the one man he looked to for assistance. To that end he invited the royal captives at Jinji—Raja Ram's four wives, three sons and two daughters—to live with Shahu in the camp of Prince Kam Baksh. In a further gesture of goodwill, Aurangzeb gave his consent for Shahu's marriage to a daughter of Bahadurji, son of the celebrated Rustam Rao. A daughter of Shambuji was married to Muhiud Din, son of Sikandar Adil Shah.

These subtle moves aimed at weaning Shahu away from his stance of defiance failed to produce the desired result. Aurangzeb had by this time entered the year of his death. His will slackened gradually, his mind became feeble. What after him? The fear of the unknown overwhelmed him at times. He felt like one left alone after a glittering banquet, the lights dead and the flowers faded. A series of illnesses, one major and other comparatively minor, had sapped his will to live, as also the will to intrigue. The nearer he came to the grave, the less concerned he became with the kings and cabbages of the Deccan.

The spectre of a war of succession among his own sons haunted him day and night. The story of his own seizure of power forty-seven years earlier perhaps lay heavy on his soul. His last letters to Princes Azam and Kam Baksh revealed in a way the anguish and fears of a reluctant penitent. He had made for himself in the Deccan a nest of sorrow, and the many contrivances he used to convert it into a perch of pleasure turned out to mere devices in self-deception. The war in the Deccan, stretching as it did over a period of nearly thirty years, resembled rather defeat than victory. He was disillusioned, as also disenchanted. Though there was no Shivaji in the field, nor even a Shambuji, neither a Raja Ram, the Deccan by and large stood dauntless against the Mughal invaders. Bijapur, Golconda and Jinji reminded Aurangzeb of an ancient Turkish truism that "the more we engage ourselves in war the nearer we are to destruction". For too long had he waited for the glory of a complete victory. The time had now come for him to wind up his affairs in this world and prepare for the next.

In the confusion that followed Aurangzeb's death in 1707, Shahu escaped to the safer regions of the south. Prince Azam perhaps connived at his release from the Mughal bondage. O', the lure of the throne, to what canst thou not compel the heart of an ambitious Prince!

Aurangzeb died amidst the strains of 'Lailah' ringing in his ears. The Marhattas lived on to give a new orientation, a new meaning to the history of Hindustan. Their many defeats on the field were in fact victories for their spirit of resistance.

Chapter Twenty-one

SAD FAREWELL

War and peace, it is said, are natural exaggerations. Maybe. These exaggerations become hard realities when assessed in terms of desolation in one case, and in terms of abundance in the other. The three decades of war in the Deccan involved untold misery and ruination on either side. The number of the dead ran into five figures every year.

The magnitude of destruction was such as to render food virtually unavailable. Humanity gave way to barbarism, and fellow-feeling to a heartless struggle for self-survival. The ancient arts and traditions of learning faced complete extinction. Philosophies and sciences gathered dust in all corners of the peninsula. Saints and scholars stood aghast at what man could do to man. Children died of hunger in the laps of their bewailing mothers. The steel held sway over the minds of men everywhere. The sound of galloping hooves struck terror in the hearts of helpless peasantry. To rob and kill became the law of the land. Immorality spread its many hideous forms in towns and cities. Women sold their honour for a loaf of bread. Young girls considered chastity a superfluity not worth preserving. The roving gangsters indulged their low lusts without a thought of heaven and hell. Law and order were conspicuous only by their absence. Administration was no more than a means to defraud the poor and sanction illegalities for the rich. Corruption gathered unmixed respectability. All forms of religion decayed in values of the spirit. The gods seemed to have forsaken their votaries. The Devil was in command on the fields, in the hills,

on the rivers and in the streets of metropolises once famous for their beauty and prosperity.

No, no, the war in the south was no exaggeration; it was a hideous reality that made even Aurangzeb look back longingly to the past and exclaim, "O" would Allah restore me the years that are fled".

After the capture of Wagingera (1705) Aurangzeb realized the futility of it all. He wanted to return to Delhi and walk once again the holy, hollowed ground enriched by the footsteps of his ancestors. This desire gathered impatience as an illness kept him in bed for nearly a month at Devaspur, eight miles from Wagingera. He urged his physicians, in the name of the Divine Dispenser, to put him on his feet again. "Delhi calls me", he told Hakim Hunza, and added with a swell of water in his otherwise dry eyes that he yearned to have some more time to settle his affairs. The aged physician consoled him, saying: "Nobody knows better than Your Majesty that the laws of life are under the command of the faithful. Never was there a king who trod the path of righteousness so steadfastly as your august self. That God would not be a God who did not respond to Your Majesty's wish".

Though weak in every limb, Aurangzeb continued to hold court every day, meet diplomats and dignitaries, listen to reports from Delhi and other *Subas*, dictate orders and, what was more, carry out faithfully the schedule of prayers without a break. He was in many respects a remarkable individual. His will to live for some more time could not but be respected by the Almighty Allah. Aurangzeb recovered quickly, everyone agreed, not because of the skills of the physicians in attendance, but because of his resolve to recover. On 22 October, 1705, he signed personally the *firman* for march to Ahmednagar via Bahadurgarh. This was a bold decision. Neither his health nor conditions in the countryside permitted a trek which might take many months to complete. There was no dissuading him from his resolve. He wanted to go out of the Deccan by the same gate by which he entered it twenty-five years earlier.

Intuition played a big role in Aurangzeb's crucial decisions. The demands of reason came a long way behind in his calculations. "The advice of the inner voice is like the advice of a

faithful queen. Woe to the king who does not take it", he told Asad Khan when the latter made an approach to him for prolonging the stay in Devaspur for some more weeks. Arguments by the Prime Minister were of no avail. Aurangzeb's heart was set on the decision he had taken. He thought his illness was the beginning of the end—a knock at the door prior to arrest. He could delay departure for some time, but the decree of heaven could not be cancelled. Aurangzeb dreaded death, but he dreaded more the humiliation of leaving a mission half-fulfilled.

The march northwards began in studied simplicity rather than in the usual fanfares of *shahnais* and trumpets. Though not a retreat, the departure from Devaspur connoted a sad farewell to the Deccan, an adieux to the hills and planes where Aurangzeb practised the rules of war, as also the rules of pragmatic partnerships, for the best part of his term of kingship. A wooden palanquin, carried on the shoulders of twelve soldiers, was the means of travel that old age thrust on Aurangzeb. Covering not more than ten miles a day, Bahadurgarh was reached in forty-six days. Here on the bank of a placid rivulet there came to call on the Emperor an old, worshipful gentleman, Allama Muhammad Jan Mashriqi, who had spent his life travelling from one holy place to another all over Hindustan. Aurangzeb had met him many years back at Aurangabad when he was Viceroy in the Deccan. Mashriqi had then told him that to know a little of the south was to know that it could not be retained for long by an invader from the north. The Emperor remembered these words, and he asked the Allama why had he chosen to tell him what he did. Back came the reply with utmost respect:

Your Majesty is not only a king, but a saint as well. I ventured to give the veiled advice to a man of the spirit, not to the man of the sword. I thought the import of my cautious exhortation would not be lost upon the mind that knew all. At that time you were young, ambitious and in search of a kingdom. Your success was written large and clear on your visage. There was no mistaking about the purpose for which the all-knowing Allah put you in the womb of a queen. I feared that success might breed indiscretion, and that you might take upon yourself the nearly impossible task of uniting the north and the

south into a spiritual and administrative unity. This has been the dream of many a great monarch of this vast land. No one succeeded in realizing that ambition. Ayudhya is a far cry from Lanka. Perhaps Your Majesty knows now the significance of what I spoke when I had the honour of meeting you long years ago.

This humble admirer of Your Majesty's faith and courage believes in the impregnability of cultural and spiritual values. It is not difficult to scale the Himalayas. The crossing of the Narmada is beset with greater hazards. To be friends with the south is to conquer it. To be its enemy, forgive me O'lord of the universe, is to achieve nothing.

I have given the answer to Your Majesty's question. A great monarch is one who has learnt to read the causes of things. O'Alamgir, on me turn your steel if you so decide. I spoke what I thought is the truth. To compromise with oneself is a living death.

Holding his bent head between his hands, Aurangzeb pondered over the explanation for a few slow-moving moments, and then asked the snow-haired Allama to "come and sit by my side". The Emperor's reaction was a silent admission of the correctness of Mashriqi's submission. He invited the sage to be a member of his entourage, but the latter declined the offer with utmost politeness, saying, "Sir, sweet solitude is my childhood's friend. To unhand this faithful companion at this age will be an unpardonable betrayal". Aurangzeb gave a knowing sympathetic smile. He did not press the invitation. The Allama left the royal camp four days later when the night was lit softly by a moon full and bright. The call of solitude was perhaps too compulsive to resist. He never met Aurangzeb again. On his death-bed two years later, the Emperor was heard to call faintly for "Dost Mashriqi". Zinat asked if he wished to see the sage. Aurangzeb gave no reply. What would a historian not give to be able to read the black box of the 'ying monarch's thoughts. The mystery of Aurangzeb is the mystery of a dual soul. Though his sins were scarlet, yet some parts of the story of his life have the potential to uplift and inspire.

Aurangzeb spent the holy month of Ramadan in the quiet

serenity of Bahadurgarh. Notwithstanding the pleas of his physicians, he fasted every day of the month. The meals he took in the evening were simple affairs without any meat ingredients. Recitations from the *Quran* and other holy books filled his days. He personally distributed food to the poor when the time came for them to break the day-long fast. The schedule of official work remained undisturbed throughout the fasting period. The day of Id was celebrated with around-the-clock prayers, feeding the poor, and recitations from sacred books. The customary evening get-together of members of the royal family set the pattern for simplicity at all levels in the camp. The Emperor shunned every form of ostentation and extravagant living. The generals followed his example. A group of soldiers found drunk late in the evening were given long sentences of imprisonment.

Superstition is often the fruit of frailty. For the first time in Aurangzeb's long military career, astrologers were consulted before the march was resumed on 14 January, 1706. The timetable—hour, date and month—pronounced auspicious by a panel of three Persian and two Hindustani scholars of astronomy was followed to the minute. The Emperor boarded the *palki* at two and a half *gharis* after sunrise, and the palanquin-bearers were instructed to proceed three *kos* to the east before turning northwards on the track to Ahmednagar. There was never a rationalist nor a religious fanatic who did not look skywards when nearing the end of life. Aurangzeb knew intuitively that his sojourn on earth was fast coming to a close. He did not wish the angels of death to find an excuse for taking possession of him before the appointed hour; hence his insistence on propitiating them by remaining in step with heavenly bodies like the moon, the planets and the stars. O' death, thy fear transcends reason, religion and all the realms of knowledge.

Long years ago, Aurangzeb read in *Shahnama* that a man should always be at war. This was the reason, said Amir Timur, that one should never be content with what he possessed. At eighty-eight, this piece of syllogism appeared faulty to Aurangzeb both in premises and in conclusion. On reaching Ahmednagar on 20 January, the first thing he did was to call a conclave of the *Ulema* assembled there to greet him. The debate on war and

peace that lasted for seven consecutive days extinguished once and for all the half-holy look on Aurangzeb's face. He became a sad and utterly disillusioned man. War was nothing, peace everything, he declared in a voice choked with penitence, and he ordered that steps should be initiated straightway to end hostilities against the Marhattas. Conciliatory messages were sent to the Sirdars who were on the rampage in Aurangabad and in Gujarat. For the first time he extolled the virtues of what in modern parlance may be called peaceful co-existence. "Let us work together for the benefit of the people in the south and in the north", he said in one of the communications, and thus waived aside unconditional surrender as the price of peace. In other words, Aurangzeb confessed defeat and expressed a wish to make amends for the mistakes of the past thirty years.

His repentment came, however, a bit too late in the day. The Marhatta hordes were riding high on the waves of their depredations. It was now their turn to call the tune and force the Mughals to leave while the going was still good. Some historians hold that Aurangzeb's peace offer was only a means to gain time; others see in it a real change of heart and a willingness to live and let live. These conjectures, though puzzling, are not hard to sort out. The two surmises were, in all probability, partly wrong and partly right. Old age and the spectre of a humiliating retreat chastened Aurangzeb. He wanted to shake hands with the past. The yearning for peace was perhaps only a corollary of the confusion that seized him.

Prince Azam arrived in Ahmednagar towards the end of March 1706. Over-ambition led him to believe that the Emperor did not have many more months to live. Assuming the airs of a *de facto* heir to the throne, he went about rather indiscreetly to win support of the key commanders and to vilify his elder brother Muazzam for alleged inefficiency and disloyalty. He also maligned Kam Baksh for what he described as "indecorous living and lack of political wisdom in his bloated head". This concentrated campaign against his brothers could not but reach the ears of the Emperor. At first the old man distrusted these whisperings as mere concoctions of jealousy, but when the details of a plot to kill Kam Baksh were made available to him, he summoned Azam for a private audience, chastised him severely

for "sowing the seeds of a civil war", and issued a *firman* posting the prince as Governor of Malwa. Azam tried in vain with tears and oaths of loyalty to disprove the charges against him. The ever-distrustful Emperor had, however, made up his mind to disperse his sons and not to let Ahmednagar become a beehive of intrigues and counter-intrigues. Though the blemishes of age showed clearly on his face, Aurangzeb's mind had not suffered any serious disfigurement. He stuck to his decision, saying "Malwa needs your services. Let Ahmednagar to me".

In a partial bid to assure Azam, Aurangzeb also gave marching orders to Kam Baksh. This much-loved Prince was posted to Bijapur with instructions "not to do anything which may worsen our relations with the Marhatta chiefs and not to create disunity in our own ranks". Kam Baksh was concerned more with the pleasures of youth than with the complexities of war and peace. He left Ahmednagar within ten days. When he came to bid farewell to his father, Aurangzeb was moved to tears. "I may never see you again", he said in a voice full of deep love for his youngest son.

The end years of the life of Aurangzeb, like that of any man who overstays on this earth, were full of heart-breaks that made him a very unhappy man. No period of one's life is as distressing as when his sons and daughters and grandchildren begin to leave. His errant son, Akbar, died in exile in 1704. His talented daughter, Zaib-un-Nissa*, died in detention in Delhi three years earlier. In 1706 his daughter, Mehr-un-Nissa, and her husband, Izad Baksh, died near Delhi in quick succession. His sister, Gauharara Begum, passed away after a short illness in 1705.

*Zaib-un-Nissa, a poetess who excelled in putting across extempore verses of remarkable linguistic purity, came under Aurangzeb's wrath because of her emotional attachment to Aqilmand Khan, a young poet of liberal ideas. She was placed under detention and was not allowed to meet any commander for nearly a decade. She died in 1701, at the age of sixty-three, a broken hearted spinster, her lament is clearly recorded in 'Diwan-i-Makhfi', a collection of her poems. Aurangzeb also believed that she encouraged her brother, Muhammad Akbar, to revolt.

Buland Akhtar*, son of Akbar, also died in the same year. His best loved and much admired daughter-in-law, Jahanzeb Banu, succumbed to high fever in Gujarat in 1705. Bereavements like these could have demented any man; when to these quick-coming shocks is added the apprehension of a war of succession, as also the memory of the manner in which he himself seized power half a century ago, the misery of Aurangzeb took the blackest of the black hue. He was truly in deep agony. Wherever he looked there was nothing but reminders of death. At times he wished to die, but was not able to—a state of despair which was perhaps worse than death itself.

Chased by ill-forebodings, Aurangzeb sent for Azim-ush-Shan** third son of Muazzam, from Patna. He was known to be a capable young man, dutiful and loyal, who had worked hard in the last few years to restore calm in the eastern states. It is believed the Emperor harboured for a short while the thought of naming him his successor. The Mughal tradition prevented him from side-stepping his sons. He chose, therefore, to write letters to the three sons, exhorting them in the names of Allah. Timur and all that he thought was noble in the Mughal way of life, to refrain from war and to partition the Empire among themselves in case they could not come to a peaceful decision with regard to succession. He knew that his pleas would fall on deaf ears. He himself had turned down with contempt similar suggestions by Shah Jahan in 1657. Yet he hoped against hope that a blood-bath would be avoided. Death is the king of terrors; it can induce man to even hope for hope.

*When Aurangzeb left Rajasthan for the Deccan in September 1681, he left behind Akbar's infant son, Buland Akhtar, and his daughter, Safaiyut-un-Nissa, in the charge of Asad Khan. The prince and the princess were kept in Marwar virtually as hostages till they were restored to the Emperor by Durga Dass in 1698, through the good offices of the historian, Ishwar Dass. Following a series of submissions and revolts, Ajit Singh ascended the throne of Marwar as Maharaja in 1708 after Aurangzeb's death. The Mughal Governor at Jodhpur was ousted and the fort cleansed with the Ganges water before Ajit Singh entered the stronghold of his ancestors.

**Prince Azim-ush-Shan, assisted by Shaista Khan, played a significant role in abortive negotiations with the British factors in Bengal which ultimately led to the sack of Hugli in 1686.

On one pretext or another, Azam delayed his departure from Ahmednagar. His eyes were set on capturing the royal treasure as soon as Aurangzeb was out of the way. A large number of field commanders had assured him secretly of their loyalty. When the Emperor developed high fever towards the beginning of February 1707, Azam moved with speed to take advantage of the ultimate when it came to pass. He even conspired with the *hukma* for "bringing the Emperor's agony to an early end". The seemingly indestructible Aurangzeb recovered, however, sooner than expected. His prayers and his *tasbih* helped him pull through a critical period. He applied himself to official work without waiting for the nod of approval by Masih-uz-Zaman. Aurangzeb considered himself outside the normal rules of recovery and recuperation. The divine spirit, he believed, sustained him : He would merge with the infinite only when the order for that merger came from the all-knowing Allah. No mortal possessed the power to dissolve or resuscitate him. Men of faith, he asserted time and again, died only once; it were the weak and the wavering who died more than once.

When he came to know that Azam had put off his departure for Malwa to March, Aurangzeb's suspicion of the Prince's intentions needed no further proof. He issued a proclamation expressing surprise that his orders were not yet carried out, and laid down a firm time-table for his journey. Even this command failed to stir Azam to quiet obedience. He regarded the directive as a "testimony of the Emperor's deteriorating mental condition" and he sent to his father a lengthy submission seeking permission to prolong his stay in Ahmednagar till the second full moon of the next month. The reasons he gave were based partly on personal ill-health, partly on unpreparedness of the force to accompany him, and partly on "the concern over Your Majesty's state of health".

This representation could not but arouse the Emperor's wrath. He told Azam in words stern and unambiguous that non-compliance with the schedule chalked out would be an act of disobedience; and that appropriate steps would in that case be taken to discipline him. There was now no mistaking the Emperor's resolve. Azam left for Malwa on 12 February. The Emperor did not confer on him any farewell honours. Neither

did he invite him to the customary family get-together before departure. Azam was a suspect. Aurangzeb suggested to the Prime Minister that a close watch should be maintained over his movements.

Azam was in no haste to reach his destination. The pace he set was that of a reluctant traveller. He had been advised by some court physicians that the chances of the Emperor suffering a fatal relapse could not be discounted and that it would be advisable for him to remain for as long as he could within easy reach of Ahmednagar. Their forecast came true. Hardly had Azam travelled fifty miles out of the royal headquarters when there came the news that the Emperor was dead. His agents urged him to retrace his steps immediately. "The throne is empty. The sooner it is occupied by you the better. We are waiting for your return", said the communication received by him from one Mian Mullah. The prospect of his becoming Emperor gave Azam, as it were, the wings of high hope. He reached Ahmednagar within two days. Outwardly in deep mourning, he consoled the members of the royal House, in particular his sister, Zinat-un-Nissa, with borrowed words of spiritual wisdom. The body was sent under a high-power civil and military escort to Khuldabad near Daultabad, for burial in close proximity to the tomb of the most revered Shaikh Zain-ud-Din.

Death is proverbially a lean fellow that beats all conquerors. Aurangzeb fell to it on Friday, 20 February 1707*, after a struggle lasting for five days. The weaponry he used to avert defeat comprised a pearl *tasbih* a copy of the *Quran* written in letters of gold, and a *jaenamaz* he used sixty years earlier in the battle of Samugarh. High fever struck him on 15 February. Ignoring the pleas of his physicians, he continued to perform his religious and administrative duties till the eighteenth when a semi-coma seized him. Though his tongue could utter no word, his lips continued to move up and down in prayers for the

*There is no consensus about the day and date of Aurangzeb's death. In official records nearly every Mughal Emperor took birth and died on Friday. Some European travellers place the date of Aurangzeb death at 21 February, others a day later.

next forty-eight hours. The fingers which held the *tasbeih* kept tune with his lips till the end. It is said that his fingers and lips maintained the prayerful rhythm some time even after the soul had fled the body. So softly did death succeed life in him that the small group of relatives and courtiers present failed to notice the change. The manner in which he passed away brought glory to all his life.

Prayers went up in all the mosques of Ahmedagar as it became known that Alamgir had gone to eternal sleep. Who next? Every face was a question-mark and every heart an exclamation of dread. Uncertainty stalked the streets of the city where the conqueror of Bijapur, Golconda and Jinji returned to dust. A high drama was in the offing. The princes, courtiers and all those who had any stakes in the Empire, prepared for the next act.

Aurangzeb was laid to rest, according to his wishes, in a lowly, open-air grave at Khuldabad. The burial ground he chose for himself bore the imprint of the footsteps of thousands of pilgrims who went there every year to seek the blessings of the saint-scholar Zain-ud-Din. Aurangzeb's admiration for him was such that he invoked his help before taking any major military or political decision. He was to Alamgir what Khawaja Obaidullah was to Babar—a source of upliftment that gave them courage and self-confidence.

Aurangzeb's grave, like those of Nur Jahan in Shahdra (near Lahore) and Jahanara Begum in Delhi, is bereft of beauty either of stone and marble or of flower that grow not in wilderness. Simplicity was with him an obsession. He carried that fixity with him to the grave. Aurangzeb was a phenomenon of extraordinary dimensions. The like of him are born only rarely. It is said that when his body was lowered into the grave a peel of thunder, arising as it were from nowhere, broke the grim silence of Khuldabad. Before the obsequies ended, there fell a light shower of rain that led the faithful to believe that the heaven itself was in tears at the passing away of one who strove throughout his life to discover and develop the spirit in man. At nightfall, it is affirmed in many a folk-song and story, there came, to sit on the grave a pair of white pigeons who flew away in the direction of the Kaaba at the rise of the morning star.

Whether real or imaginary, these stories serve to underline the influence of religion on Aurangzeb's concepts of good and bad. Gold and silver lured him more as a means to the consolidation of Islam than as an instrument for achieving material grandeur. Personal glory was outside the realm of his aspiration. In his own words, he seized the throne for Islam, reigned for half a century in the name of Islam and committed all his acts, good and bad, for promotion of values enshrined in that religion. The *Quran* was his Plato, Marx and Nietzsche rolled into one. Everything else for him was redundant, irrelevant. He did not rest content with that affirmation of faith alone. His mistakes arose from his taking upon himself the obligation to destroy, directly or indirectly, all values and all groups that tended to uphold and laud other forms of spiritual and social beliefs. He forgot the words of Shaikh Saadi that there never was a man who saved himself by destroying others. His end was tragic in that his hopes and his aspirations perished with him. There was no one after him ready to carry forward the banner of fundamentalism he held aloft for fifty long years. It can be said that though his faults were many, his life-story would be read with interest for as long as religious faith remains a badge of honour in the common eye.

Aurangzeb died a very sad and lonely man. His mission remained unfulfilled, his hopes unrealized. The struggle for the throne he strove hard to prevent began on the day his body was consigned to dust. How true was Hazrat Amir Khusrau when he said that trust, not distrust, held the key to peace.

Chapter Twenty-Two

SINKING SHIP

Life, with all its yields of joy and woe, hope and fear, seemed empty to the Mughal princes unless there was a reasonable chance of their coming to the throne in due time. It was, therefore, understandable that they revelled in intrigue and factionalism right from the time they became aware of the opportunities and hazards that lay ahead. Gradually there came a point in each one's career when he yearned that his father was out of the way and that he would rather let the sword decide his destiny than to let God be the arbiter of his fate. Every royal prince maintained his agents at the court, kept a sizable army for use in any emergency, and constantly wooed his sisters and other senior relatives for support. Though the tradition of primogeniture held the field, yet it did not prevent the younger sons from aspiring to be the emperor.

With his load of four score years and eight, Aurangzeb appeared vulnerable to death any time after he reached Ahmednagar in January 1706. Old age in itself is a curse that never comes alone. Repeated illnesses and the cares of a war that seemed unending had left blemishes on his body as also on his mind. Always a grim travelling companion, old age in Aurangzeb's case was a drag that limited his capacity to quieten the fires that burnt all around. It was not for him to enjoy the grandeur and exquisiteness of old age. He knew that his days were numbered. He also knew that his three surviving sons—Muazzam (Shah Alam), Azam and Kam Baksh—were ready in the wings to wage a war of succession. Further, the knowledge that his court was divided in its sympathies and that he was at

nearly six months' distance from the capital filled the cup of his agitation. He knew who was who, and who was planning what. The Prime Minister, Asad Khan, himself a weary man of seventy-three, stood by his side, firm in loyalty and firm in the belief that a civil war would somehow be avoided. He corresponded with the three claimants regularly; exhorting them on their obligations and duties to the Empire and the House of Amir Timur. "Loyalty demands all, and has a right to all", he one day told the ailing Emperor when the latter asked him to spell out the boundaries of faithfulness. The reply pleased Aurangzeb who, thereafter, left the conduct of State affairs in the hands of the Vazir.

The Emperor took his last breath early in the morning of 22 February, 1707. The news was relayed to the three princes by special messengers wearing black scarves around their necks. Azam was the first to know of his father's passing away. He returned to Ahmednagar within forty-eight hours and, with the help of Asad Khan, solemnised the obsequies with crocodile tears and much pretence of sorrow. On the sixth day, 28 February, he went through with considerable fanfare the illegality of proclaiming himself Emperor and issuing *firman*s to all *Subedars* that his ascension to the throne be announced from the minarets of all mosques in their states. Realizing that force could do much, but that money could do more, his first act after accession was to seize the royal treasury which at that time, it was estimated, contained roughly a hundred million rupees. With this hord of wealth in his possession, Azam became generous to a point where generosity savoured of weakness and an inexplicable agitation of mind. Big-size gifts of money and jagirs were given to all those whose support he wished to enlist on his side in the war ahead. Asad Khan and his son, Nusrat Jang, received no less than ten million rupees for their pledge to help his cause. The junior commanders of an army of twenty thousand foot and an equal number of horse received prestigious *jagirs*, honours and robes of honour for their readiness to serve him. Arrears of salaries of all serving men were cleared within ten days of his donning the crown imperial. Fresh recruits to the army were enlisted at a huge cost, and vast sums of money were spent in procuring stores of arms and foodgrains.

His son, Badar Bakht, was decorated with the highest honours, and he was sent to Gwalior at the head of an army of ten thousand men. His mission was to establish contact with his father-in-law, Najib-ud-Dowla, who was the Viceroy at Agra, and to muster a force of gallant Rajputs for an assault on the capital.

Azam, no doubt, chose the right means to gain his end but, as luck would have it, all his plans and preparations were reduced to nothing because of his ill-temper, distrust and pleasure lust. He possessed virtually a township of mistresses with smooth, alluring limbs. He knew what to do when the long, dark winter evenings came, as he knew also the way to fill the soft, moon-lit nights of the summer. Nautch-girls and singers of repute were always at hand in his entourage to cater to his craving for dance and music. Aurangzeb admonished him times without number against his quest for "vulgar pleasure", but to no avail. Azam swore obedience to the Emperor's wishes but he placed his pledges on the shelf as soon as his eye fell on a well-proportioned daughter of Eve. The strains of a *ghazal* or a classical melody worked on him like a bowl of sparkling *Ab-i-Hayat*.

Azam had only two moods—one of ecstatic pleasure and the other of high temper. There were no intervening points between these two extremes of his personality. At the slightest provocation his tongue would burst into foul, indiscreet speech, leaving everyone aghast at the fury with which he let out murky phrases and words that no prince ever uttered. When in anger, he symbolised in action and in speech the proverbial stupidity of an irate man. His foolish heart often expanded in the lazy glow of his spasms of benevolence, and on these frequent occasions, he let money spill out from his hand like water through a sieve. It was, thereafter, little wonder that his millions dwindled into thousands before he set out to seize the Peacock throne. In the natural fog of the mind of an implacable hedonist, Azam paid little heed to the values of time, speed and quick decisions. He wasted at Ahmadnagar no less than twenty-one valuable days before marching out northwards on 17 March.

The inhuman airs that Azam often put on before his senior and junior commanders could not but breed discontent. Deser-

tions on a fairly large scale gathered momentum as the Army approached the scene of action. Even Asad Khan and his son had second thoughts about the advisability of their alliance with the unpredictable, wayward prince. Meanwhile, Badar Bakht fretted and fumed in Gwalior at his father's lack of the sense of urgency. At one stage he contemplated marching to Agra without waiting for Azam's arrival, Azim-ush-Shan from the east and Muazzam from the west were converging fast on the capital. Frantic messages by Nazib-ud-Dowla to his son-in-law for quick action went unheeded.

Azam sent strongly-worded instructions to Badar Bakht not to move out of Gwalior till a single, unified command was formed under his own leadership. Distrust has been the ruin of many an aspirant for greatness. Azam feared that his son would never give up the throne once it was captured by him with the underhand help of the Viceroy of the capital. It was a sad day for Badar Bakht when he learnt that Agra was besieged by the fast-moving Azim-ush-Shan, and that the forces of Muazzam under Munim Khan were fast closing in on the city from the west. The initiative had apparently slipped out of his hands. The battle for Agra, he thought, was all but lost. Yet he hoped that his father's army of fifty thousand men would be able to tilt the balance in their favour.

Muazzam* was at Jamrod in the north-west when the news reached him on 20 March of the death of his father. The three main components of good leadership—honesty, manhood and good fellowship—were amply present in his anatomy. What was more, he possessed in Munim Khan an adviser of great ability and greater courage. The two had foreseen correctly the aftermath of the passing away of Aurangzeb, and had kept a mobile force of forty thousand men ready at Jullundur to spring into action at short notice. In Azim-ush-Shan, Muazzam had a

*Prince Muazzam was imprisoned by Aurangzeb in 1687 for alleged conspiracy to facilitate Sultan Abul Hassan's escape from the fort of Golconda. For seven long years he remained in detention before liberty was restored to him. When the Empire seemed to be crumbling around him, Aurangzeb appointed Shah Alam Governor of Punjab and Sind. Later, Afghanistan was added to his charge.

son as vigilant as a cat to steal the cream. He was in Bihar when Aurangzeb died. Without waiting for a signal from his father, he rushed out of Patna with whatever men and money he could muster, his objective being to reach Agra ahead of any other claimant to the crown. Badar Bakht could have beaten him in the race had Azam not deterred him from leaving Gwalior alone. The fates were calling Muazzam.

Every part of Muazzam's anatomy was blessed with graciousness. His men and his officers adored him despite the ugly reality that he had no millions to disburse. His money-bag at Jamrod contained less than a million rupees—an amount woefully inadequate for waging a war against one in possession of the imperial chests at Ahmednagar. His followers did not expect high awards from the prince at that initial stage. The realization that they had taken up arms for a just cause was its own reward. Shah Alam was the eldest surviving son of Aurangzeb, and it was only right and fair that he should succeed his father. Mughal tradition was also on their side. The astute Munim Khan took full advantage of these factors in Muazzam's favour. He urged his men to defy even death, if needed, in defence of what he proclaimed to be the edict of Allah.

The pace Muazzam set was scorching. Despite rivers and swollen streams and despite the intense heat that enveloped the planes of north India, he covered nearly five hundred rough miles in less than a fortnight—a burst of speed that would have brought credit to a Babar, a Sher Shah or an Akbar. Twenty miles from Lahore, at the bridge of Shah Daula, he proclaimed himself Emperor in the title of Bahadur Shah. A solemn ceremony of ascending the throne was held there with traditional rituals.

When the van of Muazzam's army reached the proximity of the besieged capital, a halt was called to regroup the columns for an assault. Azim-ush-Shan welcomed his father two stages from Agra, apprised him of the disposition of his troops, and a strategy for the attack was worked out. At the instance of Munim Khan, a communication was sent to the Viceroy in the name of "the Emperor of Hindustan, the King of Kings Bahadur Shah", asking him to open the gates and offer his homage to one whom Allah had called to the throne. The communication stated :—

Perhaps you are aware that I, Prince Muazzam, eldest son of the late Emperor Aurangzeb, ascended the throne in the title of Bahadur Shah near Lahore on 3 June last. All other claimants to the throne are mere pretenders driven by high ambition and the lust of lucre. Sympathy with them will be an act of disobedience worthy of the severest punishment.

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful Master, you are hereby commanded to open the gates and surrender the city to us intact in every respect. The commander of the fort, Baqi Khan Quli, should be instructed forthwith to lay down arms and hand over the keys to our representative.

Failing compliance of this order within twenty-four hours, we shall be left with no alternative but to reduce the citadel by force. You will disobey the *firman* at your own peril.

Both the Viceroy and the commandant had cold feet at the receipt of this strenuously-worded order. They capitulated without a murmur. Bahadur Shah entered the city in triumph. His first act was to offer prayers in the snow-white royal mosque and the second to seal the treasury vaults wherein lay, at a conservative estimate, rupees two thousand five hundred million, the largest hoard of wealth accumulated by any royal dynasty in the medieval world. Though the new Emperor sat on the Peacock Throne the next day, 20 June, the war of succession was not yet over.

No old enough to be senile, the pleasure-hunter Azam seemed to be in the prime of stupidity when he at long last reached Gwalior on 11 June. A despondent Badar Bakht briefed him on developments in and around Agra, but these fore-bodings made no mark on his madness. As a popular village chant had it, "he laughed like a monkey, drank wine like a fish and ate meats like a hungry wolf." The cruel lunacy of lust, honey of poison-flowers, filled his days and nights—a state of disconcert for the struggle ahead that disenchanted Asad Khan and many other senior commanders. They made secret plans to unhand Azam and to join forces with Bahadur Shah. However, Badar Bakht kept up his morale and courage, and he prepared for the fight with a degree of uncommon pluck. His bravado bred some optimism in the ranks of the army, and they

made ready to give battle to Muazzam. "Fear is a devil, there is no evil angel but the craving for safety", began a proclamation signed by Badar Bakht. Exhorting his followers not to hesitate to lay down their lives at the altar of duty and faithfulness, he ended with the famous words "courage triumphs even over the battalions of Providence. It is only the brave who have the right to govern and rule".

Badar Bakht's bluster aroused even the sleepy Azam to action. Spurred perhaps by ambition on the one side and danger on the other, he began even to say *Islam Elakam* as a declaration of war! The change that came on him as soon as the army marched towards Agra was only seen to be believed. All his dancing girls and musicians were left behind at Gwalior. No wife, mistress nor a concubine accompanied him. The burden of his proclamations was "onward to Agra", and he issued them at the frequency of at least one a day. When within striking distance of the capital, the news came that Muazzam's ten thousand men, supported by war elephants and heavy artillery, were advancing fast to meet the challenge, Azam took to the tallest tusker in his force, brandished his sword in defiance, as it were, of God and nature, urged his men to trample the enemy under their feet, and beckoned his bodyguard to fire a shot in the air to signal a thrust forward.

The battle was joined in blazing sun about four miles from Samugarh where Aurangzeb changed the course of history fifty-years earlier. The noise of the galloping hoofs, roaring guns, and the cries of the dying soldiers on either side filled the sky as the engagement developed into a death-grapple. Before the sun began its descent to the west, no less than fifteen thousand men lay dead on the narrow field. Both Badar Bakht and his brother Wala Jah fell in the "rain of stone and steel" in the first hour of the combat. Azam himself was killed in a hand-to-hand encounter with four enemy desperados. The news of his death spread quickly, and it was not long after that Munim Khan raised the victory flag. Azam's army, or whatever remained of it, fled in complete disorder. There is no saving an army in panic fright.

. Bahadur Shah's victory was decisive. He thus became the seventh Mughal Emperor of Hindustan. Kam Baksh still re-

remained in the field as a self-proclaimed Emperor. His claim, however, merited no serious thought. Bijapur was not Agra. He could be dealt with at will after the new monarch's authority was consolidated in the north.

Kam Baksh's dream of wearing the crown was rooted in the foolish belief that Aurangzeb wanted in to be the Emperor. For nearly a year following Aurangzeb's death he assumed to himself the airs of an independent ruler. He also went through the ritual of proclaiming himself Emperor and having the 'Khutba' read in his name from the pulpit of the Badshahi mosque. Aurangzeb went to eternal sleep in the south. It was therefore, logical, argued Kam Baksh, that his successor should remain and consolidate his authority first in the Deccan. Bahadur Shah tried his best to dissuade his step-brother from his adventurism. When persuasion failed, he led an army to the south and defeated the "unfortunate pretender" in a battle near Hyderabad on 13 January, 1709. Kam Baksh was killed in the engagement.

Thus came to an end, the last echo of the reign of Aurangzeb. There was left no internal opposition to Bahadur Shah either in the north or in the south. He was the unchallenged ruler of all his father's possessions. He was also the inheritor of all the costly mistakes committed by Aurangzeb. His patrimony was mixed. In more ways than one, Bahadur Shah became the captain of a sinking ship—no more.

Aurangzeb came to the throne after imprisoning his father and putting to the sword his three brothers and many other blood relations. In the grave he must have writhed in pain at the deaths of his two sons and three grandsons in the struggle for succession that followed his passing away. O', the Law of Retribution, thou art truly God's instrument for dispensing social justice.

Chapter Twenty-Three

PANGS OF PENITENCE

On the death-bed, Aurangzeb suffered grim and comfortless pangs of penitence on the one hand and the stabs of despair on the other. The former increased his misery and the latter his feeling of hopelessness. Seized with these two related spasms of agony, he wrote a letter to Prince Azam and another to Prince Kam Baksh—last communications to his sons—that reveal to some extent the extent of his deep distress.

The dying Emperor also wrote with his own hand the last will in which he envisaged partitioning of the Empire as the only means to save bloodshed after his death. This document, coupled with another twelve-point directive of what should and what should not be done at his death, gives a fairly lucid picture of Aurangzeb's fear and hopes, as also of his piety and devotion to the ideals of Islam.

These three papers, taken together, sum up important facets of Aurangzeb's personality. The texts are reproduced below:

Last letter to Azam

Peace be on you!

Old age has arrived and weakness has grown strong. Strength has left my limbs. I came alone and am going away alone. I know not who I am and what I have been doing. The days that have been spent except in austerities have left only regret behind them. I have not at all done well the governance of the realm. Neither have I looked after the peasantry as I should have.

Life, so valuable, has gone away for nothing. The Master

has been in my house, but my darkened eyes could not see His splendour. Life lasts not: no trace is left of the days that are no more; and of the future there is no hope.

My fever has departed, leaving only the skin and husks behind it. My son Kam Baksh, who has gone to Bijapur, is near me. And you are nearer even than he. Dear Shah Alam is farthest of all. Grandson Muhammad Azim has, by order of the Great God, arrived near Hindustan (from Bengal).

All the soldiers are feeling helpless, bewildered, and perturbed like me. I am now in a state of trepidation like quicksilver. They think not that we have our Lord Father with us forever. I brought nothing with me into the world, and am carrying away nothing with me except the fruits of my sins. I know not what punishment will fall on me. Though I have strong hopes of His grace and kindness, yet in view of my acts anxiety does not leave me. When I am parting from my own self, who else would remain with me ?

Whatever the wind may be

I am lurching my boat on the water.

Though the Lord Cherisher will preserve His slaves, yet from the point of view of the outer world, it is also the duty of my sons to see that God's creatures, specially Muslims, are not unjustly slain.

Convey to my grandson Bahadur (i.e. Badar Bakht) my parting blessing. At the time of going away, he is not with me. The desire of meeting him remains unfulfilled. Though the *Begum* is, as can be seen, afflicted with grief, yet God is the master of hearts. Shortness of sight bears no other fruit than disappointment.

Farewell ! farewell ! farewell !

Letter to Kam Baksh

My son, you are always close to my heart.

Although in the days of my power I gave advice for submission to the will of God and exerted myself overmuch on this issue, however, God willed otherwise. No one listened to me. Now that I am dying, it will be useless to harp on the same subject. I shall carry away with myself the fruits of all the sins, I have done. What a marvel that I came into the world alone

and am departing with this large caravan. Wherever I cast my eyes, no caravan-leader save God comes into my view. Anxiety about the army and camp-followers has been the cause of my depression of mind and the fear of final torment. Although God will undertake the protection of His people, yet it is also obligatory on my sons to protect them, specially the faithful. When I was full of strength, I could not at all protect them ; and now I am unable to take care of myself ; My limbs have ceased to move. The breath that subsides, there is no hope of its return. What else can I do in such a condition than to pray? Your mother Udipuri Begum has attended me during my illness ; she wishes to accompany me to the next world. I consign (my dear ones) to God. I am in trepidation. I bid you farewell.

Worldly men are deceivers. They do not do any work in reliance on their fidelity. Work ought to be done by means of hints and signs. Dara Shikoh made unsound arrangements and hence he failed to achieve his goal. He increased the salaries of his retainers to more than what they were before, but at the time of need he got less and less work out of them. Hence he was unhappy. Set your feet within the limits of your carpet.

I have told you what I had to say and now I take my leave.. See to it that the peasantry and the people are not unjustly ruined and that Mussalmans are not slain lest punishment should descend on me.

Last Will

Note : This document is said to have been written by Aurangzeb with his own hand and left under his pillow on the death-bed.

I was helpless in life and I am departing helpless. Whichever of my sons has the good fortune of gaining the kinship, he should not trouble Kam Baksh if the latter is content with the two provinces of Bijapur and Hyderabad. There is not, nor will there ever be, any Vazir better than Asad Khan. Dianat Khan, the Diwan of the Deccan, is better than other imperial servants. With true devotion entreat Muhammad Azam Shah—if he agrees to the mode of partitioning the empire which was

proposed in my life-time—that there is no fighting between armies and no slaughter of mankind. Do not dismiss my hereditary servants, nor molest them. The occupant of the throne should have one of the two *Subas* of Agra and Delhi, and whoever agrees to take the former will get four '*Subas*' of the old kingdom—Agra, Malwa, Gujarat, and Ajmer—and the villages dependent on them, as also the four *Subas* of the Decan, namely Khandesh, Berar, Aurangabad and Bidar and their ports. And whosoever agrees to take the latter (i.e., Delhi) will get the eleven *Subas* of the old kingdom—Delhi, Punjab, Kabul, Multan, Tatta, Kashmir, Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Allahabad and Oudh.

Another Will ?

Note. Another alleged will of Aurangzeb is given in the *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri* ascribed to Hamid-ud-Din Khan Bahadur. It runs thus :—

Praise be to God and blessing on those servants of Him who have become sanctified and have given satisfaction to Him.

I have some instructions to leave as my last will and testament :

First—On behalf of this sinner sunk in iniquity (i.e. myself) convey an offering of cloth to the holy tomb of Hasan (on him be peace !) because those who are drowned in the ocean of sin have no other protection than seeking refuge with that Portal of Mercy and Forgiveness. The means of performing this great auspicious act are with my noble son, Prince Alijah Azam; take them.

Second—Four rupees and two annas, out of the price of the caps sewn by me, are with Aia Beg, the *mahaldar*. Take the amount and spend it on the shroud of this helpless creature. Three hundred and five rupees, from the wages of copying the *Quran*, are in my purse for personal expenses. Distribute them to the faqirs on the day of my death. As the money got by copying the *Quran* is regarded with respect by Shia sect, do not spend it on my shroud and other necessaries.

Third—Take the remaining necessary articles from the agent of Prince Alijah, as he is the nearest heir among my sons, and

on him lies the responsibility of the lawful or unlawful practices at my funeral; this helpless person (i.e. Aurangzeb) is not answerable for them, because the dead are at the mercy of the survivors.

Fourth—Bury this wanderer in ‘the Valley of Deviation from the Right Path’ with his head bare, because every ruined sinner who is conducted bare-headed before the Grand Emperor, is sure to be an object of mercy.

Fifth—Cover the top of the coffin on my bier with the coarse white cloth called gazi. Avoid the spreading of a canopy and innovations like processions of musicians and the celebration of the Prophet’s Nativity.

Sixth—It is proper for the ruler of the kingdom (i.e. my heir) to treat kindly the helpless servants who in the train of this shameless creature (Aurangzeb) have been roving in the deserts and wilderness of the Deccan. Even if any manifest fault is committed by them, give them in return for it gracious forgiveness and benignant overlooking of the fault.

Seventh—No other nation is better than the Persian for acting as clerks. And in war, too, from the age of the Emperor Humayun to the present time, none of this nation has turned his face away from the field, and their firm feet have never been shaken. Moreover, they have not once been guilty of disobedience or treachery to their master. But, as they insist on being treated with great honour it is very difficult to get on together with them. You have anyhow to conciliate them and should employ subterfuges.

Eighth—The Timuri people have ever been gold-diggers. They are very expert in making charges, raids, night-attacks and arrests. They feel no suspicion, despair or shame when commanded to make a retreat in the very midst of a fight. They are a hundred stages remote from the crass stupidity of the Hindustanis, who would part with their heads but not leave their positions. In every way, you should confer favours on this race, because on many occasions these men can do the necessary service, when no other race can.

Ninth—You should treat the Syeds of Barha, who are worthy of blessing. According to the *Quranic* version, “Give unto the near relations of the Prophet their dues”, and never

grow slack in honouring and favouring them. Remember, the blessed verse, "I say I do not ask of you any recompense for it except love to my kinsmen". Love for this family is the wages of Muhammad's Prophethood. You should never be wanting in respect for them, and it will bear fruit in this world and the next. But you should be extremely cautious in dealing with the Syeds of Barha. Be not wanting in love of them at heart, but externally do not increase their rank, because a strong partner in the government soon wants to seize the kingship for himself. If you let them take the reins ever so little, the result will be your own disgrace.

Tenth—As far as possible the ruler of a kingdom should not spare himself from moving about; he should avoid staying at one place, which outwardly gives him repose but in effect brings on a thousand calamities and troubles.

Eleventh—Never trust your sons, nor treat them during your lifetime in an intimate manner, because, if the Emperor Shah Jahan had not treated Dara Shikoh in this manner, his affairs would not have come to such a sorry pass. Ever keep in view the saying, "THE WORLD OF A KING IS BARREN".

Twelfth—The main pillar of government is to be well informed in the news of the kingdom. Negligence for a single moment becomes the cause of disgrace for long years. The escape of the wretch Shivaji took place through carelessness, and I had to labour hard to the end of my life as the result of this lapse.

Twelve is blessed (among numbers). I have concluded with twelve directions.

If you learn the lesson, a kiss on your wisdom,

If you neglect it, then alas ! alas !

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