





**Sher Shah**

# **Sher Shah and His Successors**

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*To my Mother*



## PREFACE

Since Dr. K. R. Qanungo's scholarly monograph went out of print some 15 years ago, students of medieval Indian history have been feeling the need of an authoritative work on Sher Shah and his successors. Though this small work does not claim to be as exhaustive or scholarly as its predecessor, it is hoped that it will at least meet the requirements of Degree and Post-graduate students in our universities. It is based on a careful study of the original sources in Persian, and embodies the results of latest researches on the subject. Sher Shah's career and administration have, in recent years, become a subject of controversy. Scholars have held diametrically opposite views on certain measures of reform undertaken by him, [and one of them has gone to the extent of indulging in invective. While taking into careful consideration the views expressed by various scholars, I have tried to avoid controversy and needless discussion. References and footnotes have also been avoided in order to make the book as readable as possible.

My indebtedness to my predecessors in the field is obvious. I have freely made use of the labours of my respected teacher, Dr. K. R. Qanungo, as also the works of other writers. My thanks are due to Maharajkumar Dr. Raghbir Singh of Sitamau for supplying me with the place and exact date of Sher Shah's battle with Maldeo of Marwar, and to Dr. K. B. Bhatnagar for going through the MS. before it was sent to the press. My sons, Dharma Bhanu, M. A., and Daya Bhanu, have laboriously read the proofs, and prepared the map and the index. But for Dharma Bhanu's care and attention the book would not have been free from printing errors.

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## CONTENTS

Chapter	Pages
<i>I</i> EARLY LIFE AND TRAINING	
Boyhood and Education; Manager of his father's jagir; In the service of Sultan Muhammad; A period of adversity; Deputy-governor of South Bihar; Early conflict with Humayun.	1—14
<i>II</i> IN THE RUN FOR THE EMPIRE	
Contest with Bangal; Humayun's march against Sher Khan; Fall of Chunargarh; Fall of Gaur; Break with Humayun; The Mughul occupation of Bangal; Battle of Kanauj or Bilgram. ... ..	15—36
<i>III</i> CONQUESTS	
Pursuit of Humayun; Gakkhar country; New administration of Bangal; Malwa; Raisin; Multan and Sindh; War with Maldeo; Rajasthan; Bundelkhand; Death of Sher Shah. ... ..	37—56
<i>IV</i> ADMINISTRATION	
Sher Shah a reformer, not an innovator; Extent of his empire; Central administration; Provincial administration;	

Local administration (i) Sarkars & (ii) Parganas; Army; Finance; Currency reforms; Trade and commerce; Justice; Police; Roads and sarais; Intelligence department; Religious policy; Buildings. ... .. 57—91

V CHARACTER AND ESTIMATE

His daily routine; As a soldier; As an administrator; Place in history. 92—105

VI ISLAM SHAH

Early Career; Accession and struggle with Adil Khan; Suppression of the old nobles; The Niyazi rebellion; Rebellion of Shujaat Khan; Death of Khawas Khan; Last days and death; Administration; Character. ... 106—121

VII SUCCESSORS OF ISLAM SHAH

Firoz Shah; Muhammad Adil Shah. 122-127

BIBLIOGRAPHY ... 129—131

THE SUR DYNASTY ... 132—133

INDEX ... .. 135—142

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Sher Shah Frontispiece
2. Tomb of Sher Shah at Sasaram.
3. Map : Sher Shah's empire.

## CHAPTER I

### *Early Life and Training*

#### **Boyhood and Education.**

Sher Shah, the hero of the Afghan revival in India and the rival of Humayun, whom he drove out of the country, was the son of an humble Afghan *jagirdar*. His original name was Farid. His grandfather, Ibrahim, was an Afghan of the Sur tribe and belonged to the hilly tract of Roh near Peshawar. Not faring well in his profession of dealing in horses, he came to our country in quest of military service in the early years of Bahlol Lodi's reign. He and his son, Hasan, entered the service of Mahabat Khan Sur and Daud Khan Sahu Khail, *jagirdars* of Haryana (9 miles from Hoshiarpur) and Bakhala, both in the Hoshiarpur district in the Panjab. They settled down at Bajwara, two miles south-east of Hoshiarpur, where Farid was born in or about the year 1472. A little after his birth, his grandfather transferred his service to Jamal Khan Sarangkani of Hisar, and his father, Hasan, took up service under Umar Khan Sarwani who enjoyed the title of *Khan-i-Alam*. On Ibrahim's

death Hasan was promoted to his father's place under Jamal Khan and when his new master was transferred to Jaunpur by Sikandar Lodi, he conferred on Hasan a *jagir* of the *parganas* of Sasaram, Khawaspur and Tanda in Bihar. Farid spent the early years of his life at Sasaram; but during his boyhood he must have been far from happy, as his father neglected his mother and bestowed his attention on his younger wife, who seems to have been a concubine. Hasan had married four wives and had eight sons. Farid and Nizam were sons by his first wife. Sulaiman and Ahmad were born of the youngest wife. Hasan, though a capable soldier, was a failure in the management of his household. Greatly under the influence of Farid's step-mother, he showed indifference to his eldest son. Tormented by the jealousy of his step-mother and the neglect of his father, Farid left his father's home in 1494 at the age of 22 and went to Jaunpur in order to shift for himself in the world. Jaunpur was those days an important place of Islamic learning and culture and was considered the 'Shiraz of India'. Here Farid devoted himself to study and by steady application acquired a good knowledge of Persian language and literature and committed to

memory the well-known Persian works, the *Gulistan*, the *Bostan* and the *Sikandarnamah*. His indefatigable industry, devotion to his studies, and attractive personality won him many friends, and his father's patron, Jamal Khan, brought about a reconciliation between him and Hasan and successfully persuaded the latter to appoint the youthful Farid as the manager of his *jagir*.

#### **Manager of his Father's Jagir.**

Farid now returned to Sasaram and ably carried on the administration of his father's *parganas* for about 21 years (1497-1518) during which period he suppressed rebellious *zamindars* and established a good revenue settlement based on the measurement and classification of the soil and the actual produce of the land. He protected the interests of the agriculturists and administered even-handed justice. He consistently followed the policy of keeping the unruly Afghan soldiers and the rapacious revenue officials under his strict control. Little did he know then that he was serving as an apprentice and preparing himself for the more exalted role of the ruler of northern India. His successful administration, however, roused his step-mother's jealousy and drove him once

again from his father's house ( 1518 ). He went to Agra to secure the grant of his father's *jagir* in his name from Ibrahim Lodi, who was then the ruler of Hindustan. Ibrahim, however, refused to favour Farid, for he did not form a good opinion of one who had a complaint to make against his father. But Hasan's death occurred soon after and Ibrahim, without reluctance, granted the *jagir* of Sasaram, Khawaspur and Tanda to Farid. He returned with the royal *farman* and took possession of the *parganas* sometime about 1520 or 1521.

#### **In the Service of Sultan Muhammad of South Bihar : A Period of Adversity.**

Farid did not, however, enjoy his *jagir* for long. His step-brother, Sulaiman, who had held possession of the *parganas* during the later years of his father's life, fled to Muhammad Khan Sur, *jagirdar* of the *pargana* of Chaund ( modern Chainpur in the Shahabad district of Bihar ), who, out of spite for the deceased, Hasan, proposed a division of the *jagir* between Farid and Sulaiman. But Farid refused to partition the *parganas*, as they had been granted to him by the king. Anxious to secure the protection of a powerful patron, in order to

counteract the hostility of Muhammad Khan Sur, Farid now took up service under Bahar Khan Lohani, who, for all practical purposes, was acting as an independent ruler of South Bihar ( 1522 ). His honest and faithful service won him the good opinion of his new master who conferred on him the title of *Sher Khan* for his having killed a tiger single-handed in a hunting expedition. His ability and loyalty were further recognised by his well-deserved promotion to the post of Deputy ( *Vakil* ). He was also appointed tutor of Bahar Khan's son, Jalal Khan. Sher Khan's rapid rise and good reputation excited the jealousy of some of Bahar Khan's Lohani nobles, who poisoned the latter's mind against him. He was absent on leave, as certain matters relating to his *jagir*, which was in the charge of his younger brother, Nizam Khan, had required his personal attention. At this time northern India was convulsed by Babur's invasion which had culminated in the death of Sultan Ibrahim Lodi and the extinction of the Afghan kingdom. Sher Khan's enemies complained to Bahar Khan, who had now set himself up as an independent king under the title of Muhammad Shah, that he was planning to join Mahmud Lodi, a brother of the late

sultan Ibrahim against the king of South Bihar. Consequently, Sultan Muhammad appointed Muhammad Khan Sur of Chaund arbiter to settle the dispute between Sher Khan and his step-brother, Sulaiman. But Sher Khan again refused to divide the *jagir*. Thereupon Muhammad Khan Sur attacked his agent and obtained possession of the *parganas* on behalf of Sulaiman. Sher Khan was thus once again driven out of his home by an adverse fate. His only hope was now to seek the intercession of Babur who had become king of northern India. He got into touch with Junaid Barlas, the Mughul governor of Kara and Manikpur. Through this nobleman he entered Babur's service in April, 1527, and remained in his camp up to June, 1528. When Babur undertook his campaign against the Afghans of Bihar, Sher Khan rendered useful service and was, therefore, restored to his *jagir* ( March 1528 ). He won the gratitude of his former enemy, Muhammad Khan Sur, by restoring to him Chaund which had come into his possession during the above Mughul expedition.

#### **Deputy-Governor of Bihar.**

Towards the end of 1528 Sher Khan, who



had seen enough of the Mughuls to discover glaring weaknesses in their administrative arrangements, quitted the Mughul service in order to unite the Afghans against them. He once again repaired to the court of Sultan Muhammad of South Bihar and was reappointed tutor and guardian of his son, Jalal Khan. Muhammad having died shortly after (1528), his widow, Dudu Bibi, became the regent of her minor son. She appointed Sher Khan as her *deputy*. As deputy governor Sher Khan reorganised the administration, purged the army of its defects and strengthened his own position by loyalty and devotion to his master. He gathered round himself a band of faithful followers, mostly Sur Afghans, who were ready to sacrifice their all for his sake.

Sher Khan's fortune, however, again met with a temporary set-back in 1529. That year Mahmud Lodi, a younger brother of the late Sultan Ibrahim, who had fought along with Rana Sanga against Babur at Khanua in March 1527 and retired to Mewar after the Rajput defeat, arrived in Bihar at the invitation of the prominent Afghan nobles of the province. The Afghan leaders put their heads together and evolved a plan of action against the Mughuls.

Almost all the Afghans now rallied under the banner of Mahmud Lodi who took over the government of South Bihar, promising to restore the province to young Jalal Khan after his success against their common foe (Babur). Sher Khan, who was aware of the incompetence of Mahmud Lodi and of discord among his principal followers, showed no enthusiasm for the Afghan cause and retired to his *jagir* on the pretext of making preparations for joining the proposed expedition. In fact, he was anxious not to show open hostility to the Mughuls. But Mahmud Lodi, who wanted the co-operation of all the important elements among the Afghans, insisted on Sher Khan's joining the enterprise. It was, therefore, decided that the Afghan army should proceed by way of Sasaram in order to persuade Sher Khan to join it. After some hesitation Sher Khan accorded him a royal reception and joined him with a contingent of his troops. The Afghan army proceeded to Ghazipur and captured Banaras; but, on the approach of Babur, Mahmud Lodi fled without fighting a single pitched battle. Many of the notable Afghans, including Sher Khan, submitted to Babur. Jalal Khan, the boy-king of South Bihar, who had taken refuge in Bangal, came

back and waited on Babur on 16th May, 1529. The Mughul emperor restored him to the greater portion of his kingdom on his agreeing to pay him an annual tribute. Sher Khan, too, was restored to his *jagir* and became a Mughul vassal.

After Jalal Khan's restoration, which took place soon after the battle of Ghaghara (May 1529) and Babur's return to Agra, Dudu Bibi invited Sher Khan and re-appointed him guardian of her son and also deputy governor of Bihar as before. The small principality of South Bihar, situated as it was between the two powerful kingdoms of Bangal and Delhi, was in great danger of being drawn into a quarrel between them and of falling a prey to their aggression. Moreover, its administration and economy had suffered greatly, as it was compelled to become a theatre of war between Mahmud Lodi and Babur. A wise administrator of the calibre of Sher Khan alone could restore it to its former prosperity. Sher Khan applied himself to the task of rehabilitating the province and improving its administration. The Regent, Dudu Bibi, died shortly after, and Sher Khan became the virtual head of the government of South Bihar, while the minor king, Jalal Khan, remained the

nominal ruler. Sher Khan strengthened the army and won it over to his cause. He appointed his trusted followers to key positions in both civil and military administration and took steps to increase his power and prestige in every way possible. One of the most pressing problems facing South Bihar was the adjustment of its relations with Nusrat Shah of Bangal (1518—33), who wanted to extend his dominion at the expense of his weak neighbour. In order to save the infant kingdom Sher Khan cultivated friendly relations with Makhdum-i-Alam, who was governor of Hajipur on behalf of the king of Bangal and was on bad terms with his master. Sher Khan's policy was to use him as a counterpoise against Nusrat Shah. This roused Nusrat's hostility, who attacked his brother-in-law, Makhdum-i-Alam, and killed him. Sher Khan thereupon appropriated the huge treasure hoarded by Makhdum. Nusrat Shah now invaded South Bihar, but was badly defeated by Sher Khan (1529). The victory over the powerful king of Bangal enhanced Sher Khan's reputation beyond measure, and this, together with his complete control of administration, roused the jealousy of the Lohani nobles who could not tolerate the domination of one whom they had looked

upon as a mere servant of their chief. They won over the minor king, Jalal Khan, to their side and planned to murder Sher Khan. But the conspiracy failed owing to the latter's vigilance. Sher Khan now made an attempt to reconcile the Lohanis by proposing to share power with them. But his proposal was rejected. The prominent Lohanis, with their minor sovereign, Jalal Khan, fled to Nusrat Shah of Bangal with a view to coming back with his assistance and uprooting Sher Khan. With the desertion of the young Jalal Khan, Sher Khan became the virtual king of South Bihar; but he refrained from assuming any regal title and contented himself with the lesser designation of *Hazarat-i-Ala*. He acquired the powerful fortress of Chunar by marrying Lad Malika, the widow of Taj Khan, a former governor of the place, and thus acquired not only a secure place of refuge but also an immense treasure that was found buried in that fortress. His ambition increased as he attained success in his schemes of self-aggrandizement and he showed a marked desire to act as an independent ruler.

#### **Early Conflict with Humayun.**

There was, however, another turn of

misfortune which brought about a temporary suspension of Sher Khan's schemes. Although his principal Lohani rivals were refugees in Bangal and he was king of South Bihar in all but name and was doing everything in his power to unite the Indian Afghans and to improve their material and moral condition, he had a hostile element within his own race to contend with. Some of the important Afghan officials looked upon him as an upstart and could not tolerate his rise to leadership. They invited Mahmud Lodi, who was passing his days as a refugee since his defeat at the battle of Ghagahra. In response to their invitation he appeared in South Bihar in 1530. The time was propitious for a fresh Afghan attempt to have a trial of strength with the Mughuls, whose sovereign, Babur, had died at the end of December, 1530. Sher Khan was compelled to retire to his *jagir*. Mahmud Lodi tried to win him over by promising him in writing that the whole of South Bihar would be restored to him as soon as he had acquired success against the Mughuls and become master of some territory elsewhere. He personally paid a visit to Sher Khan in his *jagir* and persuaded him to join the enterprise. Sher Khan thus became an unwilling member of the

Afghan confederacy. After many months' preparations, a campaign was now organised against the new Mughul emperor, Humayun. The Afghans, under Mahmud, occupied Banaras and marched on Jaunpur. The Mughul governor, Junaid Barlas, abandoned his post and retreated towards Agra. Then they proceeded as far as Lucknow and occupied it. Humayun, who was besieging the fort of Kalinjar, patched up a hurried peace with the raja and proceeded eastward to check the advance of the Afghans. A battle took place at Daunrua, in the modern Nawabganj Tehsil in the present Barabanki district in Awadh, in August, 1532. The Afghans were defeated and their leader, Mahmud, fled into Orissa where he was compelled to spend the rest of his life as a fugitive, dying in 1542. Sher Khan, who was an unwilling participator in the enterprise, now recovered South Bihar and again became its ruler.

After his easy victory over Mahmud Lodi, Humayun proceeded to besiege Chunargarh which belonged to Sher Khan, who, as we have seen, had acquired it by marriage with Lad Malika in 1530. On the approach of the Mughul army, Sher Khan placed the fortress in the charge of his second son, Jalal Khan, and himself

withdrew into the interior of Bihar. The siege lasted for four months ( September to December, 1532 ). Humayun, found it difficult to capture the fort and, as he received alarming tidings regarding the hostile movements of Bahadur Shah of Gujarat, he agreed to make peace and allow Sher Khan to remain in possession of the fortress on the latter's agreeing to place 500 Afghan troops commanded by his son, Qutub Khan, for service in the Mughul army. These terms were accepted by both the parties, and Humayun returned to Agra in January, 1533.

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## CHAPTER II

### *In The Run For The Empire*

#### **Contest With Bangal ( 1533-37 ).**

After Humayun's departure Sher Khan returned to South Bihar from the vicinity of Chunargarh and made preparations for an invasion of Bangal, whose king had displayed consistent hostility towards him. He strengthened his army and, summoning the Afghans from various parts of India as well as from Roh, gave them employment and whatever salaries they demanded. Then he proceeded against the new king of Bangal, Ghiyas-ud-din Mahmud, in 1533. Sher Khan threw up earthen redoubts and thus prepared himself to face the Bangal army led by an eminent commander, Ibrahim Khan, son of Qutub Khan. A severe battle was fought at Surajgarh in 1534. Sher Khan, by a clever stratagem, lured the enemy into an ambush and defeated him with great slaughter. The result was what the shrewd Afghan chief had foreseen. "The whole of the treasures, elephants and a train of artillery ( of the Bangal army ) fell into the hands of Sher Khan, who was thus supplied

with munitions of war and became master of the kingdom of Bihar and much other territory besides." Thus the battle of Surajgarh proved to be a turning point in Sher Khan's career.

The victory against Bangal whetted Sher Khan's appetite for further conquest. He followed up his success by invading Mahmud's dominion, while Humayun was absorbed in a campaign against Bahadur Shah of Gujarat. Mahmud was repeatedly beaten and his territory west of Teliagarhi was promptly occupied by the victor. Hard pressed by the relentless aggrandizement of Sher Khan, Mahmud sought the help of the Portuguese of Chinsura and the allies took steps to defend the passes of Teliagarhi and Sikrigali. Avoiding the passes, Sher Khan, however, in 1536, cleverly worked round the allies' flank and threatened Gaur, the capital of Bangal. Mahmud could do nothing except enter into negotiations for peace and purchase temporary immunity from attack by the Afghan chief by surrendering gold worth Rs. thirteen lakhs. The peace gave Mahmud only a temporary respite, for Sher Khan was fired by the ambition of conquering the whole of Bangal. Moreover, he was aware of the negotiations between Mahmud and the Portuguese

and was anxious to prevent an alliance between them. Hence within a year of the treaty of 1536 he made arrangements for an attack on Bangal on the pretext that Mahmud had failed to pay the annual tribute. Mahmud, who was no match for the invader, took refuge in Gaur and appealed to Humayun for help (1537). Sher Khan sent his son, Jalal Khan, and his most capable and loyal officer, Khawas Khan, to besiege Gaur and to finish the conquest of Bangal before Humayun could proceed to the succour of Mahmud. At the same time he sent a detachment of his troops to occupy the outlying districts of Mahmud's territory, like Chittagong. The fall of the kingdom of Bangal was now only a question of time.

**Humayun's march against Sher Khan ; the fall of Chunargarh ( 1537-38 ).**

Sher Khan's rapid progress against Bangal and the enormous accession to his power at last roused Humayun, who sent Hindu Beg to Jaunpur with instructions to study the situation and send a report as soon as possible. This Mughul nobleman, who seems to have been on friendly terms with Sher Khan, reported that the eastern frontier was quiet and there was nothing to fear

from the Afghan chief. A short while afterwards, Humayun received Mahmud's appeal for assistance and, a little later, the alarming tidings that the whole of Bangal was about to fall into Sher Khan's hands. Accordingly, the Mughul emperor, who had wasted a year (August 1536-July 1537) at Agra, made arrangements for setting out towards Chunar. He entrusted the government of Agra to Meer Muhammad Bakhshi and that of Delhi to Meer Fakhr Ali and posted Yadgar Nasir Mirza at Kalpi, Nur-ud-din at Kanauj and Hindu Beg at Jaunpur, and left Agra on 27th July, 1537. On arriving at Chunar, in November, he ordered the investment of the fort which had been put by Sher Khan in the charge of his son, Qutb Khan, and brother, Ghazi Khan Sur. The fort could not be captured easily and the siege lasted for six months (October 1537-March 1538). Rumi Khan, however, managed to capture it by a stratagem. After appointing Rumi Khan commander, the emperor advanced to Banaras, wavering whether he should proceed to Gaur to the assistance of Mahmud of Bangal or to invade South Bihar in order to crush Sher Khan's rising power in the very heart of the latter's dominion. He had wasted six precious months before the walls of Chunar, whose

acquisition brought him little advantage as it did not command land routes and could have safely been left with a detachment of his army to keep watch on the Afghan garrison. During this interval Sher Khan had conquered the Bangal territory between Mungir and Gaur (July-October 1537) and besieged Mahmud's capital.

While encamped at Banaras, Humayun opened negotiations with Sher Khan, who had returned to Bihar leaving Jalal Khan and Khawas Khan to conduct the siege of Gaur. In order to be very near Sher Khan's territory Humayun now pressed on to Maner on the river Son. He asked Sher Khan to surrender all his territory in Bihar and Bangal and accept a small *jagir* in Rohtasgarh or Chunargarh or Jaunpur. The terms were, naturally, rejected by Sher Khan. Humayun now wanted the surrender of Bihar, but agreed that Sher Khan should continue to hold Bangal and pay him an annual tribute of Rs. ten lakhs. Sher Khan agreed to these terms and Humayun sent him a robe of honour and a horse. A satisfactory solution of the dispute seemed to be in sight.

### **Sher Khan acquires Rohtasgarh.**

A little before the commencement of negotia-

tions with Humayun, Sher Khan, who seems to have been aware of the emperor's designs, had acquired the strong fortress of Rohtasgarh in Bihar by a stratagem. This fort is situated on the upper course of the river Son in the heart of an extensive expanse of land covered by hills and jungles and is believed to have been built by Rohitashwa, son of the celebrated Harish Chandra. It was in the possession of a Hindu raja with whose Brahman minister, Churaman, Sher Khan cultivated friendly relations. There are two versions of the story regarding his acquisition of this strong fort which he wanted to use as a safe refuge for his family and treasure. It is said that he begged the raja to afford shelter to his women and, on the latter's agreeing to do so, smuggled into the fort, in covered litters, a large number of well-armed Afghan troops disguised as women. Once inside the fort, they threw off their mask; captured the fort and drove away the raja's men. This story has been rejected by modern writers. The other version is more worthy of credence. According to it, Sher Khan, who had bribed the raja's minister, obtained from him a promise of shelter in the fort. Although the raja remonstrated against

the minister's imprudent promise, he was obliged to agree as Churaman said that he had given his word and his honour was at stake. Soon after the Afghans were allowed to enter the fort they expelled the raja's troops and took possession of the fort (1538). Rohtasgarh, being one of the strongest forts in the country, not only afforded Sher Khan a safe retreat for his family but also gave him a huge treasure that had been piled up there by generations of thrifty Hindu kings. Having lodged his women and children there Sher Khan felt free to settle his scores with Humayun.

#### **Fall of Gaur into Afghan Hands.**

While Humayun was wavering between peace with Sher Khan and his projected campaign to Bangal, Jalal Khan and Khawas Khan, whom Sher Khan had left to conquer Gaur, were pushing on with the siege of the capital of Bangal. They made attempts to storm the fort. Sher Khan sent instructions to his son to bring the Bangal campaign to a speedy conclusion by capturing Gaur, as Humayun was likely to hasten to the support of Sultan Mahmud. Khawas Khan now redoubled his efforts. He devastated the country around and cut off

all supplies, reducing the garrison to great straits. Mahmud, being hard pressed, evacuated his capital and fled towards North Bihar. The Afghans pursued and defeated him in a pitched battle in which he was badly wounded; but he succeeded in making good his escape and retreated towards Hajipur in perturbation of mind. The two Afghan generals now occupied Gaur and established Sher Khan's rule in Bangal. Sher Khan was pleased at the news and sent instructions to his son, Jalal Khan, to transfer the huge treasure accumulated by generations of the sultans to his new fort of Rohtasgarh before Humayun could approach the western boundary of Bangal.

### **Break with Humayun; The Mughul Occupation of Bangal.**

At this time Humayun received piteous appeals from Mahmud of Bangal, who, a little later, himself arrived at the Mughul camp at Maner and sought the protection of the emperor. Humayun, who had settled terms of peace with Sher Khan, now changed his mind, gave up the idea of ratifying the treaty and decided to proceed to Bangal to conquer that province. Sher Khan rightly



looked upon the failure of the conclusion of a treaty as a breach of faith on the part of Humayun. He roused the resentment and passion of his Afghan troops by telling them that in spite of his willingness to surrender the very home of the Afghans in India and agreeing to become a Mughul vassal and paying the emperor a tribute, the latter had declined to make peace and was bent upon the complete destruction of the Afghan race. His men gave him the assurance of standing by him and fighting to the bitter end for the preservation of the Afghan race.

Humayun now resumed his journey eastward and, although Mahmud died at Khalgaon (Colgaon), Humayun continued his march to capture Gaur. Sher Khan, who had made arrangements for the transfer of Bangal treasure from Gaur to Rohtasgarh, directed Jalal Khan to proceed to Teliagarhi with his army and defend the pass against the Mughuls so as to enable the Afghans to carry away the Gaur treasure. Teliagarhi, situated seven miles east of the modern Sahabganj (on the E. I. R. Loop Line) was, in medieval age, 'the key of Bangal'. Jalal Khan did not content himself with merely defending the place, but

attacked the advance-guard of the Mughuls under Mubarak Khan. So successfully did he perform his duty of holding up the Mughuls at this pass that Humayun was delayed for one month and Sher Khan, during the interval, transferred all the treasure from Gaur to Rohtas. As soon as this work was accomplished, Jalal Khan was recalled from Teliagarhi which he left so quietly that the Mughuls came to know of his evacuation of the pass only the next day. Humayun now proceeded to Gaur, Sher Khan wisely permitting the entire Mughul army to proceed to Bangal without molestation. As soon as Humayun had entered Gaur, the Afghan chief made arrangements for cutting off his communications. He sent parties of Afghans to Banaras, Jaunpur, Kalpi and Kanauj to drive away the Mughul officers from there. The Afghans occupied Tirhut and attacked and killed Meer Fazli, governor of Banaras, and occupied the place. Next, they captured Jaunpur and thence proceeded towards Kanauj. Hindal had already abandoned his post and fled to Agra, where he set himself up as king. He killed Shaikh Buhlol for whom Humayun had great regard, and alienated important nobles and the members of the Mughul ruling family. The entire country from

Teliagarhi to Kanauj fell into the hands of Sher Khan who posted his men at important places and made arrangements for the establishment of order and the collection of revenue.

All this time Humayun was sunk in sloth and pleasures at Gaur. After eight months' inaction he was roused from his slumber by the alarming news that his lines of communication had been altogether shattered and that he had been completely cut off from Delhi and Agra as a result of the Afghan occupation of the country from Teliagarhi to Kanauj. He now hastened to retrace his steps towards Agra, leaving Jahangir Quli Beg with five thousand men to hold Bangal.

#### **Battle of Chausa ( June 26, 1539 ).**

Askari led the advance-guard, while Humayun, at the head of another division, marched a few miles behind. At Mungir the brothers joined and crossed the Ganga to its southern bank and proceeded along the old Grand Trunk Road which passed through the territory of Sher Khan. The vigilant Afghan scouts regularly communicated the movement of the Mughul army to Sher Khan who decided for an open contest with the Mughul emperor. The emperor,

however, could not keep to the Grand Trunk Road and, near Bihiya ( in Bhojpur District ), he was obliged to cross the river back to its northern bank. His mistakes and difficulties gave Sher Khan an opportunity to give up the policy of sitting on the fence and to get ready for a contest. He hovered round the Mughul army, harassed it in every possible manner, and compelled it to engage in a series of skirmishes. Harassed all the way, Humayun reached Chausa, a short distance from the river Karmanasa, which is the boundary between Bihar and the modern United Provinces of Agra and Awadh, and again crossed the Ganga over to its southern bank. Sher Khan now personally appeared in the neighbourhood, but withdrew himself a little distance in order to enable Humayun, who was crossing the river, to land on its southern bank without hesitation. This was the proper moment for the emperor to have launched an attack on the Afghan troops, who were tired as the result of several days' forced and rapid march, while Humayun's men were comparatively fresh. The delay gave Sher Khan time to fortify his camp and give his men the much-needed rest. Also a large number of Afghan troops from Bihar gathered under his banner. For the above

reasons Sher Khan, too, did not take up the offensive and the antagonists, therefore, lay facing each other for three months. In fact, Sher Khan purposely delayed the contest; his strategy was to wait till the advent of the rainy season, when he would compel the Mughuls to fight at a disadvantage.

During this interval Humayun made an attempt to avoid battle and settle his dispute with Sher Khan by peaceful means. He sent an envoy to the Afghan camp agreeing to allow Sher Khan to retain the provinces of Bangal and Bihar, if he acknowledged him ( Humayun ) as his overlord, read the *Khutba* and struck coins in the emperor's name, throughout his dominions. But, Humayun wanted him also to surrender the remaining territory. Sher Khan feigned willingness to comply, and suggested that in addition to Bangal and Bihar he should be allowed to retain possession of Chunargarh as well. Humayun, however, did not agree to this, and the negotiations fell through. But, realising his own weakness, the emperor, on the eve of the battle of Chausa, made one more attempt to arrive at an understanding and sent the saintly Mulla Mir Muhammad Parghari to Sher Khan to persuade him to give up his hostile intention. The latter reciprocated and deputed Shaikh Khalil, who, too, was reputed

to be a man of piety, to negotiate terms on his behalf. Humayun was impressed by the Afghan agent and entrusted him with negotiations on his behalf also. When Shaikh Khalil reported to Sher Khan the substance of his talk with Humayun, the Afghan leader shrewdly asked for the Shaikh's personal opinion whether the Afghans should fight for their existence or make peace with the Mughuls. Shaikh Khalil opined that they ought to fight. This was what Sher Khan really wanted. Hardly had Shaikh Khalil uttered these words when he declared that the peace talks had come to an end.

As soon as the rains set in Sher Khan got ready for the contest. The Mughul encampment, which stood on the low land between the Ganga and the Karmanasa, was flooded, causing confusion among them. On 25th June, 1539, Sher Khan marshalled his troops and gave out that he was proceeding to attack Maharatha Chero, who was the chief of an aboriginal tribe in the Shahabad district of Bihar. The news put the Mughuls off their guard. Sher Khan actually proceeded in the direction of the Chero territory, but returned after mid-night and made a surprise attack on the Mughuls who were asleep in their camps. The Afghan army, which was

divided into three divisions, under Sher Khan, his son, Jalal Khan, and his greatest general, Khawas Khan, respectively. attacked the Mughuls from three different directions. Consternation fell upon the imperialists. The tumult aroused Humayun, who sprang on a horse and tried to collect his men, but most of his troops had already dispersed and fled to save themselves. Humayun failed to reach his tent; but he was conducted out of danger by a few of his trusted followers. Sher Khan won the battle and routed the Mughuls. Humayun could not cross the Ganga on an elephant and was obliged to go to the other side with the help of an inflated skin (*mashak*) of a water carrier, named Nizam. All his camp with its splendid equipage fell into the hands of Sher Khan. Many of the ladies of the Mughul *harem*, including his chief queen, Bega Begum, were left behind in the camp. The Afghan victory was so complete that the entire Mughul army was annihilated, and not a trace of the enemy was left. Humayun himself, attended by a few men, fled towards Agra.

The victory of Chausa proved to be momentous and produced far-reaching results. Its first consequence was to bring about a radical change in Sher Khan's objective in life. The horizon of

his "ambition was immensely widened." Dr. Qanungo rightly observes that one year before Chausa he would have contented himself with the position of a Mughul vassal, if he had been left unmolested in Bangal. "Now he won, by this single stroke, Jaunpur in addition to Bangal and Bihar in independent sovereignty and could legitimately claim equality with the emperor." His ambition, now, was to drive away the Mughuls from India and to sit upon the throne of Delhi. Soon after the victory of Chausa he crossed the Ganga and occupied the country as far as Kanauj. He took steps to consolidate his new possessions and to convert them into a compact kingdom.

#### **As King of Bangal and Bihar ( 1539-1540 ).**

The victory at Chausa made Sher Khan a *de facto* king of Bihar and Bangal. He had only to expel from Gaur the garrison of Mughul troops left there by Humayun. But, in spite of his vast possessions, Sher Khan was still a private man and had no legal status. In order, therefore, to command the unquestioned allegiance and loyalty of his people it was necessary for him to go through the formality of a coronation. That step alone would raise him to a position of



equality with other rulers in this country. Sher Khan had not forgotten how, in spite of his ability and success, he had been twice brushed aside and almost all the notable Afghans had flocked under the banner of such a worthless creature as Mahmud Lodi simply because he was a descendant of Buhlol Lodi and had assumed the high-sounding title of sultan after the defeat and death of his brother, Ibrahim Lodi. Hence he decided to become king in name as well as in fact. But, being aware of the democratic character of his Afghan followers, he proceeded rather cautiously in carrying out his new project. At a meeting of the Afghan notables, immediately after their grand victory, a suggestion was made regarding the issue of letters of victory (*Fatehnamah*). Sher Khan shrewdly remarked that it could only be done in the name of a king. Thereupon, *Masnad-i-Ali* Isa Khan, guessing his chief's inner-most wishes, proposed that their leader, Sher Khan, should assume the title of king. The proposal was seconded by Azam Humayun Sarwani and Biban Lodi. Other notables present accepted the proposal with acclamation. The Afghan soldiery now urged that the coronation ceremony should be performed without delay. Accordingly, Sher Khan

“ordered the astrologers to fix an auspicious moment.” The ceremony was simple. Sher Khan took his seat upon the throne and a royal umbrella was held over his head. He assumed the title of *Sher Shah* and coins were struck and the *khutba* read in his name. After the ceremony, letters of victory were drafted and sent to various parts of his dominion.

Immediately after the coronation ceremony, which seems to have taken place at Chausa, Sher Shah sent an army to Gaur in order to expel the Mughul garrison from there. Jahangir Quli Beg Khan was defeated and slain along with his companions. The whole of Bangal was now occupied. Next, arrangements were made to establish garrisons in the country up to Kanauj and Kalpi, which had been partly reduced and occupied before the battle of Chausa. The new king settled his conquests by appointing officers to maintain peace, administer justice and collect revenues.

Simultaneously with the work of consolidating the new conquests, Sher Shah took steps to pursue Humayun. It will be recalled that some of the ladies of Humayun's *harem* had fallen into his hands at Chausa. Sher Khan had made suitable arrangements for their protection and comfort.

After his coronation ceremony he sent the ladies under an escort back to Humayun. The pursuit of Humayun seemed to have been half-hearted. Had Sher Shah really cared to intercept the fugitive emperor, Humayun would not have reached Agra in safety? But Sher Shah sent a mission to Malwa and Gujarat, requesting the rulers of those provinces not to afford any shelter to Humayun and promising them help, if they attacked the fugitive emperor. There was no response from Gujarat, as it had not yet recovered from its recent confusion. But Mallu Khan of Mandu, who had set himself up as king under the title of Qadir Shah, sent a favourable reply.

#### **Battle of Kanauj or Bilgram ( May 17, 1540 ).**

Meanwhile, Humayun, who had met with many difficulties during his flight from Chausa, reached Agra where he held consultation with his brothers, who, as usual, failed to agree among themselves. Despite many handicaps Humayun got together a fresh army to fight Sher Shah, who was rapidly approaching Agra. He had despatched his son, Qutub Khan, towards Mandu in order to persuade Qadir Shah to co-operate with him and turn Humayun's flank from that

side. Being informed of his movement, Humayun deputed Askari and Hindal to proceed against Qutub Khan, and overtake him before he could effect a junction with Qadir Shah. The latter made no attempt to join Qutub Khan, who was attacked, defeated and killed by the Mughul army near Kalpi. Askari and Hindal returned to join Humayun, who advanced towards Kanauj to meet Sher Shah. The latter had already arrived there and encamped on the eastern bank of the river.

One month (April 1540) passed and neither side took up the offensive. The only activity displayed by Humayun was that he crossed the Ganga to the side of Bilgram. On May 15, there was a heavy shower of rain, which swamped the Mughul camp. It was, consequently, decided to shift the encampment to a higher spot in the neighbourhood. As the Mughuls issued out of their camp to make a demonstration on 17th May, 1540, as preparatory to the shifting of their camp, which was fixed for the following day, Sher Shah ordered his men to take the field and launch an attack on the enemy. He thus cleverly deprived Humayun of the use of his heavy guns. Moreover, the Mughuls, who were not yet ready for battle, were taken by surprise. Humayun had

already appointed Mirza Haider his generalissimo, under whose direction the Mughul troops were quickly marshalled in battle-array. Humayun and Mirza Haider commanded the centre. The left-wing, which was near the river, was placed under Hindal, while the right wing was commanded by Yadgar Nasir Mirza. Askari led the advance-guard. The front was stiffened by 5,000 matchlock men. There was no reserve and no flanking party. The effective fighting strength of the Mughuls was 40,000, though their total touched two lakhs.

Mirza Haider estimated the strength of the Afghan army at 15,000. The total number of combatants under Sher Shah could not have been less than 40,000, as it is inconceivable that the victorious Afghan, who had become ruler of half of northern India, would have taken the risk of a decisive battle with the enemy with a tiny force of fifteen thousand troops under his command. He divided his army into seven divisions, taking his stand at the centre, which was protected by a trench. Besides a reserve, he posted flanking parties to the extreme right and left of his wings. In order to take the Mughuls by surprise and to cut them off from the river and their base, he ordered an attack on

Humayun's left wing. Hindal, who commanded the left wing, acquitted himself creditably in the initial stage of the battle and wounded Jalal Khan ; but Sher Shah sent timely reinforcement to assist his son who now took up the offensive with vigour. The vanguards of the two armies, also, came into clash, and Askari was repelled by the Afghans. As the heavy Mughul guns could not be drawn into the battleground in the hurry of the contest, the Mughul artillery played no part. Mirza Haider had to record : "not a canon was fired, not a gun. The artillery was totally useless." The Afghan attack was so vigorous that the Mughul troops began to flee, and Humayun's efforts to rally them came to nothing. He was, therefore, compelled to quit the field and flee to Agra. He crossed the river with difficulty. Many of his men were drowned and he had only a small band of followers left. On the way his small party was attacked by the people of Bhogaon in Mainpuri and he reached Agra with difficulty.

## CHAPTER III

### *Conquests*

#### **Pursuit of Humayun.**

After this momentous victory Sher Shah crossed the river and occupied Kanauj. From there he despatched Barmazid Gaur with a large force to pursue Humayun and hound him out of the country, but not to engage him in battle. Another army was sent to besiege Gwalior, while some troops were ordered to occupy Sambhal and the territory to the east of the Ganga. Barmazid pursued Humayun to Agra. On entering Agra he slew a number of Mughuls. When Sher Shah, after consolidating the conquered country, reached Agra a few days after Humayun's flight, he rebuked Barmazid for his cruel conduct and sent him and Khawas Khan to continue the pursuit of the ex-emperor. By the time Humayun reached Lahore his Afghan pursuers had arrived at Sultanpur Lodi ( July 1540 ). As the rains had set in, Khawas Khan had to halt at Sultan-

pur for about three months. Meanwhile, Sher Shah entered Delhi and took steps to organise its administration. Thence he proceeded to the frontier of the Panjab, to be in touch with the movement of the fugitive Mughul emperor.

Humayun had clear three months' respite at Lahore, and yet he failed to reunite his brothers and chalk out a plan to make a firm stand against the Afghans. Kamran felt that if he agreed to allow Humayun a permanent footing in the Panjab he would eventually have to lose Kabul and Kandahar as well. So he entered into negotiations with Sher Shah in the erroneous belief that it was safer to hand over the Panjab to him. Humayun had, consequently, to abandon Lahore as soon as the Afghans had crossed the river near Sultanpur, in the third week of October, 1540. The Mughuls fled from Lahore in great confusion. At the town of Khushab, on the Jhelum, there was an unseemly quarrel between Humayun and Kamran who would not allow his brother to pass through Afghanistan. From that place Humayun took the road towards Sindh, while Kamran, abandoning the Panjab, left for Kabul. The moment Humayun had left the boundary of Hindustan, Khawas Khan gave up the pursuit and halted on the western bank



of the river Jhelum. By this time, Sher Shah, who was supervising the activities of his men from his camp at Sirhind, arrived at Lahore and, without halting there for long, proceeded to the Chinab and reached Khushab. He then sent two parties of his troops, one under Khawas Khan and the other under Qutub Khan, to pursue the Mughuls with instructions not to engage them but to drive them beyond the borders of the kingdom. Khawas Khan pursued Humayun as far as the Panjnad river to the west of Uch, from where they returned and rejoined Sher Shah at Khushab.

#### **Conquest of Gakkhar Country.**

Sher Shah remained encamped at Khushab for a few months and received submission of Baloch chiefs, such as Ismail Khan, Fateh Khan, Ghazi Khan and some others, who inhabited the country between the Chinab and the Indus. Then he undertook a campaign for the reduction of the Gakkhar country which was a mountainous region and situated between the upper courses of the Jhelum and the Indus. Its possession for the ruler of Delhi was necessary owing to its strategic situation. Sher Shah undertook the tour of the mountainous area and

launched an offensive against the Gakkhar chiefs. He ravaged their territory, but failed to reduce them to complete submission. A few of the chiefs, particularly Rai Sarang Gakkhar, refused to acknowledge Sher Shah's authority, and continued to be hostile. The Afghan king, therefore, decided to build a fort there in order to guard his northern frontier and to keep the Gakkhars in check. He selected a strategic site in the hills, 10 miles north of the town of Jhelum, and here he built a gigantic fortress and named it Rohtas, after his well-known stronghold in Bihar. He garrisoned it with 50,000 seasoned Afghan troops under the command of his able generals, Haibat Khan Niyazi and Khawas Khan. He also tried to dislodge Mirza Haider from Kashmir by supporting Kachi Chakk, but did not succeed. At this time he received news of the rebellion of his governor of Bangal. He left the work of the subjugation of the Gakkhars in the hands of his lieutenants and hastened towards Bangal ( March 1541 ) to chastise the rebellious Khizr Khan.

#### **The New Administration of Bangal.**

During Sher Shah's absence for more than a year Khizr Khan, governor of Bangal, began

entertaining the dream of independence. He married the daughter of the deceased Sultan Mahmud of Gaur in order to enlist the support of the sympathisers of the ex-ruling family of Bangal, and began to behave as if he were an independent ruler. Sher Shah was much annoyed on hearing the report and proceeded quickly to Gaur to bring Khizr Khan to book. He dismissed the governor and put him in chains. Having decided to do away with military governorship to avert the danger of a future rebellion, he remodelled the administration of Bangal. He divided the province into several *sarkars* (districts), placing each of them under an officer called *shiqdar* with a small force under his command adequate for maintaining peace and order. They were appointed by the king and were responsible to him alone. To supervise the work of these officers and to settle disputes among them he appointed a civilian, named Qazi Fazilat, as the head of the province. This officer does not seem to have had a powerful army under his command. His duties were to see that all the districts were properly administered, that the royal revenues were regularly remitted to the central treasury and that the district officers did not enter into any conspiracy and

did not meditate a rebellion against the king. These arrangements completely "changed the military character of the provincial administration and substituted a completely new mechanism, at once original in principle and efficient in working."

### **Conquest of Malwa ( 1542 ).**

From Bengal Sher Shah returned to Agra. In 1542 he invaded Malwa, whose possession was essential for the integrity and safety of his kingdom. Mallu Khan, who had obtained possession of Mandu, Ujjain and Sarangpur in 1537 and set himself up as an independent king under the title of Qadir Shah, gave offence to Sher Shah by claiming equality with him. He had also failed to fulfil his promise of supporting Sher Shah's son, Qutub Khan, against the Mughals, and Qutub Khan had been surrounded and slain by Askari and Hindal in 1540. For these reasons Sher Shah considered it necessary to undertake an expedition to Malwa. On reaching Gwalior, which, in spite of its prolonged siege by his army, had not surrendered, he received the submission of the governor of the fortress. Then he pushed on to Sarangpur. Qadir Shah, feeling helpless before the mighty

invader, left Ujjain and waited on Sher Shah at Sarangpur. The Afghan monarch received him with courtesy and the two entered Ujjain, then the capital of Malwa. Sher Shah took possession of the place and transferred Qadir Shah to the governorship of Lakhnauti in Bangal (according to another authority, Kalpi). Qadir Shah became apprehensive of Sher Shah's intention and fled along with his family one night and took refuge with Mahmud III of Gujarat. A major portion of Malwa was thus annexed to Sher Shah's dominions and placed under the charge of Shujaat Khan. Sometime after, Qadir Shah attacked Shujaat Khan, but was eventually beaten.

On his return march from Ujjain to Agra, Sher Shah passed by way of Ranthambhor and successfully persuaded the commandant of the fortress to deliver it into his hands. He remained for one year at Agra, during which period he engaged himself in organising the administration of his kingdom.

#### **Conquest of Raisin (1543).**

The principality of Raisin in central India had risen to a place of importance during the later days of Humayun's reign. Its ruler, Puran

Mal, son of Rai Silhadi, a Chauhan Rajput, had conquered Chanderi and reduced many Muslim families that had been in possession of considerable land. In 1542 Puran Mal had waited on Sher Shah and had been honoured by the bestowal of princely gifts. But the Afghan monarch coveted the fertile principality of Raisin. Moreover he had received reports of Puran Mal's policy of subjugating the old feudal Muslim families, some of whom were reduced to poverty and their women enslaved and driven to take to the profession of dancing. He decided to punish Puran Mal, whose conduct, in his eyes, amounted to an offence against Islam. Leaving Agra, in 1543, he proceeded to Mandu and thence to Raisin which was besieged. Puran Mal seems to have been prepared for the contest and the siege lasted for a long time. Sher Shah saw no other way except starving the garrison by cutting off all supplies. Even then the brave Rajputs did not surrender. But when Sher Shah made a solemn promise sworn on the *Quran* that the lives of the Rajput chief and his followers and their property would be respected, Puran Mal surrendered, and they were lodged in a camp near Sher Shah. It is said that Sher Shah was inclined to keep his word ; but at the appeals made

by the widows of the Muslims of Chanderi who had suffered at Puran Mal's hands, he changed his mind. But he did not know how to extricate himself from the obligation of the oath that he had taken on the *Quran*. The fanatical *qazis*, however, came to his help and they declared that an oath that should not have been taken could not be binding on him. This pronouncement of theologians agreed with the innermost desire of Sher Shah himself. He made up his mind to attack Puran Mal. His elephants were kept in readiness, and the Afghan troops were posted around the Rajput camp during the night. When the day dawned, Puran Mal discovered that an attack was to be made on him. Thereupon, he killed his women with his own hands and directed his followers to despatch off their families so as not to be obsessed by the thought of their safety and be in a position to fight the Afghans and face death without fear. As they were busy in this ghastly work, the Afghans fell on them. Puran Mal and his brave troops displayed prodigious valour and, in the words of a Muslim historian, fought "like hogs at bay." But they were hopelessly outnumbered and killed to a man. Some of the Rajput women and children who remained were converted into slaves. Sher Shah's

perfidious conduct against Puran Mal is "the deepest blot on his memory."

### **The Acquisition of Multan and Sindh.**

When Sher Shah was recalled from Khushab by the news of a rebellion in Bangal he had left Khawas Khan and Haibat Khan to administer the Panjab and keep the Gakkhars in check. As these two officers could not pull on together, Sher Shah removed Khawas Khan and appointed Haibat Khan Niyazi as governor of the province with instructions to reduce the rebellious chiefs and bring the neighbouring territories under his control. The new governor had to face two rebel leaders, Fatch Khan Jat, whose depredations had made the road between Delhi and Lahore unsafe, and Bakhshu Langah, who had established himself as an independent ruler of Multan. Haibat Khan marched on Ajudhan (Pak Pattan), which was Fatch Khan's stronghold. The Jat chief fled from his headquarters and was besieged in a mud fort. He was, however, defeated, compelled to surrender and made a prisoner. Next, Haibat Khan proceeded to Multan and occupied it. Sher Shah was pleased with this achievement and rewarded Haibat Khan. He instructed the governor to



repeople Multan which, had been deserted, and not to measure land but to realise one-fourth of its gross produce, in accordance with the custom of the Langahs. While Fateh Khan Jat and Hindoo Baloch, who had been taken prisoners, were put to death, Sher Shah spared the lives of Bakhshu Langah and his son. He retained Bakhshu Langah's son as a hostage and restored his land to him. Fateh Jang Khan was put in charge of Multan. As the province of Sindh had already been acquired by Sher Shah during his stay at Khushab, in 1541, and Ismail Khan, a local chief, confirmed as its ruler, Sher Shah's conquest in the north-western corner included Multan and Sindh besides the Panjab proper.

#### **War with Maldeo : Acquisition of Rajasthan .**

After the death of Rana Sangram Singh of Mewar, the State of Marwar, with its capital at Jodhpur, had risen to occupy the first place among the independent kingdoms in Rajasthan. Its ruler, Maldeo Rathor, who ascended the throne after the death of his father, Rao Gangaji, in 1531, was easily the most notable king in the whole of central Hindustan. A gifted soldier and a clever diplomat, he entered on a career of conquest

immediately after taking up the reins of government and conquered Sojat, Nagaur, Ajmer, Merta, Jaitaran, Bilara, Bhadrarajuns, Mallani, Siwana, Didwana, Pachbhadra and Bali. He waged war against the sister State of Bikaner and annexed more than half of it. He then fought against Jaipur and captured Jalgor, Tonk, Toda, Malpur and a number of other places. He pushed his boundary in the direction of Delhi. Being an ambitious diplomat, he sent an invitation to Humayun in June, 1541, to come to Jodhpur and make an attempt to recover the throne of Delhi with his assistance. Obviously, Maldeo's object was to have on the throne of Delhi a ruler who should be his friend and ally. But Humayun appeared near Jodhpur a little more than thirteen months after the receipt of the invitation, when the political situation in the country had undergone a considerable change and Sher Shah had established himself ruler of most of northern India and consolidated his position beyond question. Moreover, some of the Rajput chiefs, notably Rao Kalyan Mal of Bikaner who had suffered defeat and spoliation at the hands of Maldeo, had joined Sher Shah and were pressing him to

invade Marwar. Sher Shah, therefore, wrote to Maldeo asking him not to give shelter to Humayun but to arrest and deliver him into his hands. Maldeo was on the horns of a dilemma and did not know what to do. His sense of hospitality and chivalry as a Rajput stood in the way of his laying hands on a royal fugitive to whom he had extended an invitation. On the other hand, Sher Shah, who had increased his power and strength so as to establish his undoubted claim to the sovereignty of the whole of northern India, was anxious to persuade the chiefs of Rajasthan to submit and pay him tribute. Besides, Sher Shah was being goaded by Maldeo's Rajput enemies to undertake an expedition against Marwar. Under these embarrassing circumstances the ruler of Marwar chose to be neutral in order not to give offence to the mighty Sher Shah. When Humayun reached Phalodi, about sixty miles short of Jodhpur, Maldeo sent him some fruits, but gave no definite promise of military assistance. Humayun sent his trusted agents to Jodhpur to find out Maldeo's intention and his attitude towards him. While at Jodhpur, one of these agents, Shams-uddin Atga Khan, noticed Sher Shah's envoy at the Rathor capital and suspected treachery on

the part of the Rathor king. This was confirmed by other agents. Humayun, therefore, had to retrace his steps towards Sindh in August, 1542, the Rajput troops harassing him on the way.

Sher Shah was not satisfied with Maldeo's dubious conduct ; he wanted absolute friendliness and submission. Above all, he wanted Maldeo to capture and deliver the ex-king, Humayun, into his hands. Secondly, the existence of such a powerful ruler as Maldeo, whose kingdom embraced not only Nagaur and Ajmer, which had, formerly been parts of the Sultanate of Delhi, but also Jhajjar, thirty miles from Delhi, which was a standing offence to Sher Shah. The kingdom of Marwar was likely to be a danger for his safety. A war between Sher Shah and Maldeo was, therefore, inevitable. Sher Shah, who was at the time of Humayun's march to Marwar not ready for settling his scores with Maldeo once for all, followed the policy of over-awing him. So, in August, 1542, he moved his troops in order to mass them on the border of Marwar. It was on account of Sher Shah's movement that Maldeo was compelled to depute Rathor troops to hound Humayun out of Marwar. Towards the end of 1543, however, when Sher Shah was free from the Raisin expedition, he marched

against Maldeo at the head of 80,000 horse, the largest and the most magnificent army that he had ever led into the field. Starting from Agra he proceeded to Didwana and thence towards Jodhpur in order to invade Maldeo's capital before the latter, who was away near Ajmer, could return to obstruct his march. As he entered the territory of Maldeo he adopted the precaution of entrenching his camp at every stage by piles of sand bags. When he reached near Merta, seventy miles east north-east of Jodhpur and forty two miles west of Ajmer, Maldeo was frightened and, at the head of his 40,000 horse, hastened back to save his capital and face the enemy in open battle. The two armies lay opposite one another for a month, at the village of Sumel, near Jaitaran, about thirty miles south-west of Ajmer. Sher Shah was reduced to great straits, as he could get with great difficulty supplies for his troops and fodder for his horses. The initiative was in the hands of Maldeo, and Sher Shah did not know what to do. He, therefore, thought of a stratagem to extricate himself from the critical situation. Having caused letters to be written to himself on behalf of Maldeo's nobles promising that they would arrest the Rathor king and

deliver him into his hands, he had them enclosed in a '*kharita*' (silken bag) and dropped them near Maldeo's camp, as if they had fallen there by accident. The *Vakil* of Maldeo picked up the *kharita* and forwarded the letters to his master. Maldeo was dismayed, and suspecting treachery on the part of his officers, decided to give up the impending fight. When the Rajput chieftains heard of their master's resolution of not giving battle and of his suspicion against them, Jayata, Kumpa and some others separated themselves from the main Rathor force, and with their 12,000 followers attacked the Afghans on January 5, 1544, in order to clear themselves from the charge of treachery. They carried everything before them and cut their way almost to the very heart of Sher Shah's camp, but were overwhelmed by superior numbers, and cut down to a man. Maldeo now saw the truth. But it was too late. His army dispersed. Nevertheless, the valour of the Rathors had so much impressed Sher Shah, whose loss at their hands was so great, that he exclaimed that he had almost lost the empire of Hindustan for a handful of *bajra* (millet). As Maldeo had retreated to Jodhpur and from there to Siwana on the border of Gujarat, the Afghan king

occupied his territory from Ajmer to Mount Abu. Having left Khawas Khan and Isa Khan Niyazi to reduce Marwar to order, Sher Shah proceeded to Chittor, the capital of Mewar. Marwar, however, did not remain for long in Sher Shah's possession. Within two months of his death, Maldeo returned from Siwana, drove away the Afghan governor from Jodhpur and re-occupied his lost territory ( July 1545 ).

There was little difficulty in acquiring Mewar. The Sisodia state, which had once occupied the pre-eminent position in Rajasthan, had sunk into insignificance after the death of Rana Sanga. At this time it was passing through one of the darkest periods of its history. Banabir, an usurper, had murdered Vikramajit and planned to kill the infant Udaya Singh, the father of the future Pratap. Mewar had thus not recovered from the evil effects of internecine dissensions that followed the accession of the boy-king Udaya Singh, in 1542. Not in a position to offer any resistance, the courtiers sent to Sher Shah the keys of the fortress on behalf of Udaya Singh. Sher Shah placed Shams Khan, brother of Khawas Khan, in charge of Chittor and obtained possession of Jahajpur. Next, he occupied Raathambhor and appointed his son,

Adil Khan, its governor. Thus most parts of Rajasthan *minus* Jaisalmer came under the suzerainty of Sher Shah, who wisely left the Rajput chiefs in possession of their states without reducing them to thorough subjection. His policy towards the chiefs of Rajasthan has been admirably described by Dr. Qanungo in these words. "In Rajasthan Sher Shah made no attempt to up-root the local chiefs or to reduce them to thorough subjection, as he had done in other parts of Hindustan. He found the task dangerous as well as fruitless. He did not aim at the complete subversion, of their independence; but their political and geographical isolation from one another, so as to make any general upheaval against the empire impossible. In short, it was something like a British occupation in the north-western frontier tribal territories, which is meant less for gain than for the safety of the Indian empire." He established garrisons of troops in important strategic places and kept a strict control over the lines of communication, connecting Rajasthan with other parts of the empire. Ajmer, Jodhpur, Mount Abu and Chittor were fortified and held by Afghan troops.



### **The Conquest of Bundelkhand ; Death of Sher Shah ( May 1545 ).**

Immediately after the consummation of the successful campaign in Rajasthan Sher Shah marched on Kalinjar. Raja Birbhan Baghela of Rewa, who was summoned to court, had taken refuge with Raja Kirat Singh of Kalinjar. On Sher Shah's request to surrender the fugitive, Kirat Singh refused and thus gave offence to the Afghan monarch. In order to chastise him Sher Shah proceeded quickly to Kalinjar and besieged the fort ( November 1544 ). In spite of all possible exertion, the strong fortress could not be captured and the siege protracted for about a year. At length Sher Shah saw no way except to make an attempt to blow up the wall of the fort. Accordingly, orders were given to dig mines and to build a high tower for mounting a battery. At the same time arrangements were made to erect covered lanes (*sabi'*) in order to afford protection to the attackers. These were ready, and the tower was so high that the interior of the fort could be easily seen from its top. On 22nd May, 1545, Sher Shah ordered an assault on the fort and himself advanced to the attack. He ascended the tower and ordered his men to bring a supply of rockets

in order to throw them into the fort. One of the rockets, when fired against the gate of the town, rebounded and fell into a heap of ammunition lying near the place where Sher Shah was standing. There was a huge explosion and Sher Shah was most severely burnt. He was immediately carried to his tent. Even in that condition he ordered his men to continue the attack. The assault succeeded and the fort of Kalinjar was taken by storm at about sunset. When the news of the capture of the fort and the slaughter of the garrison was reported to Sher Shah, "marks of joy and satisfaction appeared on his countenance ....." Soon after this he expired ( 22nd May, 1545 ).

## CHAPTER IV

### *Administration*

#### **Sher Shah A Reformer, not An Innovator.**

The administration of Sher Shah has of late been a subject of controversy. About thirty years ago, scholars of mediæval Indian history considered Sher Shah to be primarily a soldier and only secondarily an administrator of average ability. Although as early as 1854 Erskine had shown in his scholarly work entitled *History of India Under the First Two Sovereigns of the House of Timur*, Volume II that Sher Shah had more the spirit of a legislator and guardian of his people than that of a successful military adventurer, students of history did not fully revise their opinion about him till Dr. K. R. Qanungo, in his scholarly monograph, completely exploded earlier theories about this Afghan ruler and propounded a new one that he was a greater constructive genius and a better nation-builder than even Akbar the Great. During the last thirties of the present century, a reaction has set in and

some scholars, notably Dr. R. P. Tripathi and Dr. P. Saran, have opined, after an examination of Sher Shah's institutions, that his achievements had been very much exaggerated and that he was in fact a reformer and not an innovator. Opinion has now veered round that though Sher Shah was, without doubt, one of the greatest administrators of medieval India, he did not create new institutions ; he only administered the old institutions in a new spirit, and in this task attained so much success that he almost transformed the medieval Indian administration and made it serve the interests of the people. He created no new ministry ; his administrative divisions and sub-divisions were borrowed from the past as also the titles of his officers. His military reforms were of Alaud-din Khalji ; even his revenue administration was not really new and original. But he breathed a new spirit in these old institutions and turned them into instruments of popular good.

#### **The Extent of His Empire.**

Before Sher Shah conquered Delhi he had brought the provinces of Bangal and Bihar under his possession. Within a few years of his final victory over Humayun, his empire

embraced practically the whole of northern India, except Assam, Kashmir and Gujarat. It extended from Sonargaon ( now in East Bengal) in the east to the Gakkhar country in the north-west. In the north it was bounded by the Himalayas and in the south by the Vindhya Mountains. The empire included most of the Panjab up to the river Indus, and Multan and Sindh. In the south it comprised Rajputana ( minus Jaisalmer ), Malwa and Bundelkhand. Kalyan Mal of Bikaner had recognized his suzerainty and got his State back from Maldeo after the latter's defeat early in 1544. Gujarat was, however, not included, as Sher Shah had made no attempt to conquer it.

#### **The Central Administration.**

Like all rulers of the Sultanate of Delhi Sher Shah was a despot and possessed almost unlimited powers. But, unlike his predecessors, he was a benevolent despot, exercising power for the benefit of the people. Still, all the strings of policy and civil and military powers were concentrated in his hands. His ministers were in charge of the daily routine work of administration and had no authority to initiate policy or to propose a radical change in the mode of

transacting business or in the administrative set-up. It was not humanly possible for one man to look after the interest of such a huge empire without the assistance of ministers. Consequently, Sher Shah had four ministries after the model of the Sultanate period. They were : ( 1 ) *Diwan-i-Wizarat*, ( 2 ) *Diwan-i-Ariz*, ( 3 ) *Diwan-i-Rasalat* and ( 4 ) *Diwan-i-Insha*. Besides them there were minor officers, two of whom (the Chief *Qazi* and the Head of the News Department ) enjoyed fairly high rank and are placed by some writers in the category of ministers. It will, thus, be seen that the machinery of the central government under Sher Shah was exactly the same as under earlier sultans of Delhi from the time of the so-called Slave kings to the end of those of the Tughluqs.

The head of the *Diwan-i-Wizarat* may be called the *Wazir*. He was the minister of revenue and finance and was, therefore, in charge of the income and expenditure of the empire. Besides, he exercised a general supervisory authority over other ministers. As Sher Shah had intimate knowledge of the working of the revenue department he took an enlightened interest in the affairs of the department. We have it on the authority of the historians

of the age of Akbar that Sher Shah daily looked into the abstract of income and expenditure of his kingdom and made inquiries about the state of finance and the arrears due from the *parganas*.

The *Diwan-i-Ariz* was under the *Ariz-i-Mamalik*, who, in modern phraseology, may be designated the army minister. He was not the commander-in-chief of the army, but was in charge of its recruitment, organisation and discipline. He had to make arrangements for payment of the salaries of the troops and officers and to look after the dispositions of the army on the field of battle. But, as Sher Shah was personally interested in the military department, he very often interfered with the work of the *Diwan-i-Ariz*. We are told by the chroniclers of the time that he was present at the enlistment of fresh recruits and that he fixed the salary of individual soldiers and looked after their welfare.

The third ministry was the *Diwan-i-Basalat* or *Diwan-i-Muhtasib*. The minister in charge of this department may be called Foreign Minister. His duty was to be in close touch with the ambassadors and envoys sent to and received from foreign states. He must also

have been in charge of diplomatic correspondence, and sometimes the Charity and Endowment department too was placed under him.

The fourth ministry was known as *Diwan-i-Insha*. The minister in charge of this department had to draft royal proclamations and ~~dispatches~~. His duty was also to communicate with governors and other local executive officers. Government records too were in his charge.

The other departments, which were sometimes reckoned as ministries, were *Diwan-i-Qaza* and *Diwan-i-Barid*. The Chief *Qazi* was the head of the first. He had to supervise the administration of justice, besides deciding cases, whether in the first instance or appeals from the courts of provincial *qazis*. The *Baridri-Mamalik* was the head of the Intelligence department, and it was his duty to report every important incident to the king. He had a host of news-writers and spies who were posted in towns, markets and in every important locality. He also made arrangements for the posting of news-carriers at various places to carry the royal *dak*.

There seems to have been a high official in charge of the royal household and the various workshops attached to it. He may be called the



Lord High Steward. His duty was to administer the king's household department and to keep watch over crowds of servants attached to it. He was very near the royal person and, therefore, enjoyed a high prestige.

#### Provincial Administration.

There are two theories about the administrative divisions of the empire during the reign of Sher Shah. Dr. Qanungo is of opinion that Sher Shah had no higher division than the *sar'ar* and that the provinces and provincial governors were the creation of Akbar. Dr. Saran, however, differs from this view and maintains that Sher Shah did have large military governorships and that there existed provinces in India long before the reign of Akbar. Neither of these theories is absolutely correct. Throughout the Sultanate period including the reign of Sher Shah and his son, Islam Shah, there were administrative divisions corresponding to provinces, but they were not uniform in size or income. They were not called *subas* or provinces, but were known as *Iqtas*, which were assigned to important chiefs. Besides these, there were numerous autonomous Hindu states which had chosen to accept the

position of vassalage under the sultans of Delhi. Such states and the *Iqtas* did not enjoy a uniform political status and were not governed by the same system of administration. While during the reigns of earlier sultans of Delhi the control of the central government over them was nominal, under Sher Shah it was substantial and strict. It will, thus, be seen that there were military governorships in the time of Sher Shah, such as those of Lahore (the Panjab), Malwa and Ajmer. The officials in charge of these provinces were commanders of large armies.

Sher Shah established a new type of provincial administration in Bengal, which he divided into a number of *sarkars*, placing each in charge of an Afghan officer. At the head of the entire province he placed a civilian with a small army under his command. His principal duty was to supervise the work of the officers of the *sarkars* and to settle their disputes. This was done as a safe-guard against rebellion. All the provinces had governors, and a few other officers, who seem to have enjoyed the same designation in various provinces, barring which there was no uniformity in their administrative machinery or method. In fact, we have no

means of ascertaining the names and number of officers appointed to various provinces ; nor do we know whether the governor was authorised to appoint his colleagues or they were appointed by Sher Shah himself. In short the provincial administration under Sher Shah was not so well organised as under Akbar or even that of his own *sarkars* or *parganas*.

### **Sarkars (districts) .**

Every province was divided into a number of *sarkars* (districts). There were two chief officers in every *sarkar*, viz., *chief shiqdar* (*shiqdar-shiqdaran*) and *chief munsif* (*munsif-munsifan*). The first was a grandee of considerable importance and had a respectable force under his command. His duties were to maintain law and order in the district and to undertake expeditions against rebellious zamindars. He was also required to supervise the work of *shiqdars* of the *parganas* in his district. The chief munsif was primarily a judge. He had to decide civil cases. But at the same time he seems to have been a supervisor of the work of the *amins* in the *parganas*. Both these officers must have had big official establishments with scores of clerks and accountants to help them in the

discharge of their duties.

### Parganas.

Each *sarkar* comprised a number of *parganas* which were the lowest units of administration. Sher Shah appointed one *shiqdar*, one *amin* or *munsif*, one *fotadar*, (treasurer) and two *karkuns* (writers) in every *pargana*. Besides these there was a *qanungo* who was a semi-government official and was a repository of knowledge about the revenue affairs of the *pargana*. The *shiqdar* was a military officer in charge of a small contingent of troops and was charged with the duty of maintenance of peace. He was required to assist the *amin* and to punish rebellious people. The *amin's* duty was to conduct survey and to make arrangements for the settlement of land revenue. The *fotadar* was the treasurer of the *pargana*. The *karkuns* kept accounts, one in Persian and the other in Hindi.

Sher Shah wisely recognised the autonomous village communities and maintained touch with them through the village officials, *viz.*, the *patwari* and the *chowkidar*. Every village of consequence constituted a commonwealth. There was a *panchayat*, consisting of the elders of the

village, which made arrangements for watch and ward, elementary education, sanitation, irrigation and other matters. The *panchayats* also settled disputes.

### Army.

Although he had begun his life as a civilian, Sher Shah realised the importance of an efficient military establishment. Like other Afghan kings he invited Afghans from all parts of the country as well as from Afghanistan and gave them posts suitable to their status and ability. His army, therefore, consisted mostly of Afghans. But there were troops of other nationalities also, including Hindus. Realising that a feudal army was inefficient, he followed Alauddin's policy of establishing a permanent standing army which was paid partly by grant of *jagir* and partly in cash from the royal treasury, but in all cases officered and commanded by competent men, selected and appointed by Sher Shah himself. The chronicles tell us that Sher Shah took personal interest in the army and recruited troops and fixed the salary of individual soldiers by careful personal observation of individual recruits. It could be possible only for the troops who were enlisted at the capital, but he must

have permitted his officers in the provincial capitals to enlist the troops without reference to him. Sher Shah revived Alauddin's practice of branding horses in order to prevent troops from selling away the government horses and bringing in their places worthless ponies at the time of musters. Besides, he instituted the practice of recording the descriptive roll of every soldier so as to do away with the practice of sending proxies at the time of military review or battle. As a result of these reforms much of the corruption was eliminated and the army became a powerful instrument of force. The relation between the individual trooper and his immediate officer was changed "from one of personal attachment into something like an official tie." Promotion of the troops depended upon their merit and the actual service performed and was not left to the caprice of the commanding officer, but his recommendation was duly taken into consideration by the emperor. It is wrongly supposed that Sher Shah abolished the jagir system and paid salaries of his officers and troops in cash. While the troops were generally paid in cash, the officers and nobles continued to enjoy jagirs as before. Sher Shah however, introduced one

healthy reform ; it was that of paying his troops individually and not through the commanding officers or nobles.

Sher Shah's army consisted chiefly of cavalry; but he had infantry also, which was armed with muskets. He possessed a large park of artillery consisting of guns and cannon of various calibre and efficiency. His musketry was famous for its efficiency. At his capital he had 1,50,000 cavalry, 25,000 infantry armed with matchlocks and 300 elephants who were always kept in readiness for service. Besides these there were contingents of troops posted at strategic places all over his kingdom. The total strength of his army cannot be accurately ascertained. It may, however, be surmised that the strength of the provincial armies must have been equal to that stationed at the capital. There was no regular training or drill in those days. Regimental discipline was also unknown. But Sher Shah divided his army into divisions, each under a veteran commander. As he took personal interest in the organization, equipment and discipline of his forces and allowed his troops to come into close contact with him, raw recruits were transformed into good soldiers within a year or so of their enlistment. Transport and

commissariat arrangements were left to the soldiers and commanders. Nothing like the arrangement of our time existed in the medieval age. *Banjaras* or roving grain merchants provided provisions, and all other necessities could easily be had, as merchants invariably accompanied the medieval armies.

### Finance.

The revenue of the empire was derived from several sources and may be divided into two main classes—(1) central revenue and 2) local revenue. The local revenue was derived from a variety of taxes called *abwabs* which were levied on production and consumption of various trades and professions and most of them on transport. The sources of central revenue were heirless property, commerce, mint, presents, inheritance, salt, customs, *jizya* (poll-tax), *khams* and land. The state charged duty on the transport of raw materials, and finished goods. The royal mint was also a source of profit. All unclaimed property and the effects of deceased persons, who left no heirs, passed to the state. All vassals and nobles and officials and visitors were required to make presents to the ruler, which constituted a lucrative source of profit to



the state. Salt yielded much money. *Jizya* or poll tax, which was realised from the Hindus was a very profitable source of income. *Khams* or one-fifth of the plunder taken during the time of war went to the royal treasury. It brought in a huge income to the state. The main source of the government revenue, however, was the tax from land and was known as land revenue.

The land revenue administration of Sher Shah was a great improvement upon that of the sultanate period and constituted his chief title to fame. He had a first hand knowledge of the working of the revenue system in his father's *jagir* in Bihar. On his accession he introduced the system which he had worked out in detail in Sasaram and Khawaspur Tanda. The land was measured according to a uniform system and that under cultivation was ascertained for each village. All cultivable land was divided into three classes, good, average and bad, and the produce of each kind of land was ascertained. It was then added up and divided by three in order to find out the average produce per *bigha* of land. One-third of the produce was fixed as the state share. The government revenue could be paid either in cash or kind ;

but the former mode was preferred. The state share was commuted into cash on the basis of the current prices of corn. There seems to have been a separate schedule for each kind of corn. One uniform schedule of average produce of land was an impossibility for the simple reason that the quality of land and its produce differed from locality to locality. Similarly there must have been different price-rates in different localities for the conversion of the state's share of the produce into cash. The state gave *patta* (title deed) to each cultivator, specifying the state demand, i. e., revenue that he was required to pay. Every cultivator was required to sign the *qabuliat* (deed of agreement), signifying his assent to pay the amount of revenue mentioned. Both the documents contained a specification of the plots and their area in the possession of a cultivator. It is too much to think that Sher Shah established a uniform method of assessment throughout his dominions. We know from recorded evidence that he made exception in the case of Multan where he did not insist on the survey of land. Similarly it would not have been possible for him to introduce survey in Rajasthan and Malwa. It is, therefore, reasonable to hold that all the three modes of

assessment were allowed to prevail as before. They were (1) *ghalla-bakhshi* or *batai*, (2) *nasq* or *muqtai* or *kankut*, (3) *naqdi* or *zabti* or *jamai*. *Batai* means sharing the produce with the peasants, and this mode of determining the State's share seems to have been the most primitive and popular in all ages. *Batai* is of three kinds: *khet-batai*, *lank-batai* and *rasi-batai*. The first means the determination of the landlord's share while the crop is standing in the field or immediately after the seed has been sown, by a division of the field itself. According to the second (*lank-batai*), the peasant reaps the crop and brings it to the thrashing-ground where it is divided between him and the landlord without the grain being separated from the husk. The third (*rasi-batai*) means dividing the grain after it has been separated from the husk. *Nasq* or *kankut* implies a rough estimate of the produce of the soil. It is a cumbrous and disadvantageous mode of assessment for the cultivators. *Naqdi*, *jamai* or *zabti* is a sort of contract between the individual peasant and the government or *zamindar*, as the case may be, which fixes the rate of the rent in cash per *bigha* of land per year, irrespective of crops or total produce, for three years or more. The rate

depends upon the fertility of the soil and its situation. The tenant is at liberty to raise more than one crop a year and he can expect no remission for the failure of the crop owing to draught, excessive rain or any other natural calamity. Nor is the rent enhanced during the period of the contract, even if the crops raised are far more rich than the average. Of the three systems, *naqdi* or *jamai* has always been preferred by the peasants and *kankut* is the least liked by them. Over and above the land revenue proper (one-third of the produce), the peasantry was required to contribute towards the maintenance and fees of the surveyors of land and collectors of revenue when they were on active duty. This additional charge was known as *jaribana* (surveyor's fee) and *mahasilana* (tax collector's fee) and probably ranged from  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 5 per cent. of the revenue paid by each cultivator. In addition to these, every cultivator was required to pay an additional cess of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of the entire revenue payable by him. This was something like an insurance fund and it was realized in kind. The grain, so collected, was stored in State granaries and was sold at a cheap price in times of famine or other natural calamity.

Sher Shah had great solicitude for the

welfare of the peasantry. No other ruler of medieval India, except Firuz Tughluq, attempted to safeguard the interests of the teeming millions as this Pathan king who believed that the State was invariably benefited by the favour shown to the agriculturists. He gave standing orders to officers to be lenient at the time of assessment and to be strict at the time of collection of revenue. He never failed to punish those who oppressed the peasantry and made due compensation if, during the course of the march of his army, standing crops were trodden under or damaged on account of any other reason.

The main defect of the system was that in charging one-third of the average produce of the three kinds of land the third category of land was overcharged, while the first category was undercharged. But, as Moreland says, the inequality might probably have adjusted itself "by variations in the crops grown." Secondly, the State demand of one-third of the produce together with the fees for the surveyors and collectors and the additional cess of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. constituted a fairly high charge. Thirdly, the settlement, being annual, must have caused some kind of inconvenience to the cultivators as well as to the government officials. Fourthly, it is idle to

expect that all corruption in the revenue department had altogether disappeared. Service in this department was more lucrative than in other departments, and Sher Shah transferred his officers every one or two years to give a chance "to a large number of men to share the benefits and profits of *amildari*." Fifthly, the *jagir* system continued to exist, and it seems hardly credible that *jagirdars* were not allowed to manage their *jagirs* through their agents. As there were *jagirs* in every part of the kingdom, cultivators in *jagir* areas must have naturally suffered.

But, on the whole, the tillers of the soil must not have suffered much as Sher Shah was personally anxious to advance their interest and severely punished all those who oppressed or harassed them in any way. He practically eliminated the authority of the intermediary headmen, if he did not do away with them altogether. In fact, he established a direct relation between the individual cultivator and the State. His revenue system was *rayatwari*, not *zamindari*.

The main items of expenditure were the royal household and the civil and military establishments. A considerable portion of the

revenue must have been spent on building-projects and on the construction of roads and *sarais* and other works of public utility. As Sher Shah was engaged in military campaigns throughout his reign, he must have spent every year large amounts of money on his wars. Charitable institutions, must also have taken their due share of the royal income. The 'Charity Kitchen' alone, as has been pointed out elsewhere, cost to the exchequer Rs. 18,25,000 a year.

### Currency Reform.

Sher Shah's next outstanding achievement was in the field of currency reform. He found on his accession that the currency system had practically broken down for want of the specie, the debasement of the current coins and the absence of a fixed ratio between the coins of various metals. There was one more difficulty. Coins of all previous reigns, in fact of all ages, were allowed to circulate as legal tender. Sher Shah took steps to issue a large number of new silver coins, which subsequently became known as *dam*. Both the silver rupee and the copper *dam* had their halves, quarters, eighths and sixteenths. Next, he abolished all old mixed

metal currency. He also fixed a ratio between the copper and silver coins. His silver rupee weighed 180 grains, of which 175 grains were pure silver. This weight and fineness of the rupee, *minus* Sher Shah's inscription, lasted throughout the Mughul period and was retained by the English East India Company up to 1835. V. A. Smith rightly observes that it "is the basis of the existing British currency." Sher Shah's name and title and the place of mint were invariably inscribed on the coins in Arabic character. Some of his coins bore his name in Devanagari script and some had the names of the first four Khalifas in addition. Gold coins of pure metal of various weights, such as 166.4 grains, 167 grains and 168.5 grains, were executed. The ratio of exchange between the *dam* and the rupee was 64 to 1. The rates between the various gold and silver coins were fixed on a permanent basis. These currency reforms proved very useful and did away with a great deal of inconvenience which was experienced by the public, particularly by the trading community. These reforms have elicited high praise from modern numismatists. Edward Thomas, for example, observes that Sher Shah's reign "constitutes an important test-point in the



annals of Indian coinage, not only in its specific mint reforms but also as correcting the progressive deteriorations of the previous kings, and as introducing many of those reforms which the succeeding Mughuls claimed as their own."

#### **Trade and Commerce.**

Sher Shah greatly encouraged commerce by abolishing numerous duties that were charged on the boundaries of every province, every district, and, in fact, at every ferry and every prominent road. He laid down that only two duties should be charged on the transport of goods intended for sale. One duty was charged when the mercantile commodities entered the frontier of his kingdom at Sonargaon in East Bengal or at Rohtasgarh in the Panjab or at any other place, and the second at the place of its sale. We do not know the exact amount charged; it seems probable that the tax was  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent of the price of the articles. All internal customs houses were abolished. This reform encouraged trade and commerce and advanced the commercial prosperity of the country to a very great extent,

#### **Justice.**

Sher Shah is reputed to be a just mediaval ruler. His reputation was based not only on

his personal solicitude for the welfare of his subjects but also on his efficient system of the administration of justice. In accordance with the immemorial custom of the rulers of our country, he himself tried both appeals and initial cases. He held court in the evenings of Wednesdays. Next to him was the chief *qazi* of the kingdom who was the head of the department of justice and was responsible for its administration. The chief *qazi's* court was primarily an appellate court; but cases in the first instance, too, were decided by it. There was a *qazi* in every district and, perhaps, in all the important cities. The chief *munsif* was responsible for administering civil justice in the district, while the *amins* discharged the same duty in the *parganas*. Probably the *qazis* tried the criminal cases, while the *munsifs* and *amins* tried the civil cases. There was another judicial dignitary called *Mir Adl*.

Sher Shah was inspired by high ideals of justice. He was very particular in giving all protection to the poor and the weak and saving them from oppression and injustice. He invariably followed the principle of being more severe in the cases of government officials or highly placed persons than in the case of smaller and poorer persons. Moreover, he showed no

preference even for his near relatives in the matter of administering justice. An anecdote is recorded how he inflicted a condign punishment on his nephew who had thrown a betel-leaf at the wife of a goldsmith who was taking her bath in the enclosure of her house. This incident occurred while the prince was passing by the house on his elephant. In spite of the remonstrance of his nobles, Sher Shah did not desist from inflicting the punishment. Similar other instances of Sher Shah's careful and impartial justice are on record. Shujaat Khan, governor of Malwa, had unjustly withheld a part of the *jagirs* of 2,000 soldiers. When Sher Shah heard about it, he ordered due punishment, although Shujaat Khan had meanwhile rectified his mistake by restoring the *jagirs*. It has already been mentioned that Sher Shah was particularly solicitous for the welfare of the peasantry and that he made due compensation for the injury done to their crops during the course of the march of his army. The reputation of Sher Shah as a just king survived long after his death and the downfall of his dynasty. Nizam-ud-Din Ahmad, author of the *Tabqat-i-Akbari*, wrote in the last quarter of the sixteenth century that during Sher Shah's reign a merchant could travel or sleep in the desert

without any fear of being robbed of his merchandise. So great was Sher Shah's fear and his love of justice that the very robbers and thieves kept watch over the merchants' goods.

### Police.

There was no separate department of police in the time of Sher Shah. The army was required to discharge a double duty, namely, protecting the country from foreign invasions and internal disturbances, and keeping peace between man and man. The chief *shiqdar's* duty was to maintain peace and order in the *sark ur*. In fact, he was the guardian of peace in his jurisdiction. The *shiqdar* in the *pargana* exercised the same function. These officers were required to keep a strict watch on thieves, robbers and other bad characters in their respective areas and to punish them. So far as villages were concerned, Sher Shah introduced the principle of local responsibility and made the headman responsible for all the crimes committed in his village. The headman was given time to produce the culprit or to make good the loss due to theft or robbery. If he failed to do so within the specified time, he was put to death. If the crime was committed on the border of more than one village, the headmen

of the villages concerned were made responsible for the detection of the crime and for making good the loss. The system was based on the correct knowledge of the rural psychology and the condition of the people of medieval times. As a general rule, the headman of a village was well-acquainted with the bad characters of his village and hardly any offence occurred without his knowledge. But the punishment of death for failure to trace the culprit seems too severe in our eyes. Dr. Qanungo, however, justifies it. He says that it was well-suited for the age that was medieval.

Medieval historians are all praise for Sher Shah's police administration. Abbas Sarwani writes: "Travellers and way-farers, during the time of Sher Shah's reign, were relieved from the trouble of keeping watch; nor did they fear to halt in the midst of a desert. They encamped at night at every place, desert or inhabited, without any fear; they placed their goods and property on the plain and turned out their mules to graze, and themselves slept with minds at ease and free from care, as if in their own houses; and the *zamindars*, for fear any mischief should occur to the travellers, and that they should suffer or be arrested on account of it,

kept watch over them. And in the time of Sher Shah's rule, a decrepit old woman might place a basket full of gold ornaments on her head and go on a journey, and no thief or robber would come near her, for fear of punishment which Sher Shah inflicted." ( Elliot and Dowson Vol. IV. Pp. 432-433 ).

We know little about the police arrangements in the cities. There must have been an officer corresponding to the *kotwal* of the Mughul age, in every important town, to maintain peace and to keep unruly people in check. The capital city must have been provided with a suitable police administration. We are, however, ignorant of the precise details.

### Roads and Sarais.

Sher Shah was a great road-maker. Following in the foot-steps of the ancient Hindu kings, he constructed many roads in order to connect his capital with the various parts of his dominion. Four of his roads are well-known. One, which ran from Sonargaon in East Bangal through Agra, Delhi and Lahore to the Indus, was 1,500 *kos* in length. It was known as *Sarak-i-Azam* and might be identified with the modern Grand Trunk Road. The second ran

from Agra to Burhanpur ; a third from Agra to Jodhpur and Chittor and a fourth from Lahore to Multan. All the roads were well-planned and connected important towns of the country through which they passed. On either sides of the roads Sher Shah planted fruit trees. Along the roads were built 1,700 *caravan sarais* with separate quarters for Hindus and Muslims. Provision was made to station horses for the servants of the postal or news department. Each *sarai* had a well and a mosque with an *imam* and a *muazzin*. There was a police official (*shiqdar*) posted at every *sarai* for keeping peace and preventing crime. Besides being useful for travellers, the *sarais* were particularly meant to serve as rest-houses for the servants and runners of the postal department, who carried the royal mail. They were provided with ration and, as this class comprised both Hindus and Muslims, there were separate arrangements for their food. Some land in the vicinity of each *sarai* was endowed for its maintenance. In the words of Dr. Qanungo, these *sarais* were "veritable arteries of the empire" and the roads and *sarais* were "essential to the success of Sher Shah's administration, characterized as it was by frequent transfer of

officials, prompt discharge of business, and constant marching and re-marching of troops." The roads and *sarais* were useful not only for the transport of troops, but also served the purpose of *dak chaukies* or postal department, supplying the government with news from distant parts of the kingdom. The system was not new to this country, but it was revived and improved by Sher Shah.

#### Intelligence Department.

Sher Shah revived the *dak chauki* and the espionage system of Ala-ud-Din Khalji. He appointed an officer known as *darogha-i-dak chauki* as the head of the department. Hosts of news-writers and news-carriers were employed under him to furnish news of important happenings from every part of the empire. As has been stated, the royal *dak* was carried by runners posted at the *sarais*. Sher Shah kept himself in touch with every part of his kingdom through the intelligence department. Daily reports of the prices of various things also reached the king. News-runners and spies were posted in all important towns and bazars with instructions to transmit to the court whatever information they thought it necessary to be placed before the



king. This department worked so efficiently that Sher Shah got news of the dissatisfaction of soldiers employed in the provinces and rebellious intentions of the *zamindars* and bigger vassals before these became known in the areas concerned. The case of Shujaat Khan's unjustly withholding a part of the *jagirs* of his 2,000 soldiers and the latter's dissatisfaction, which reached Sher Shah through his spies even before Shujaat Khan could know of it, is an instance in point. Much of the success of Sher Shah's administration was due to the efficiency of his spy system.

### Religious Policy.

Modern scholars hold divergent views about Sher Shah's religious policy. Dr. Qanungo credits him with following an enlightened policy of toleration towards the Hindus. According to him, his attitude towards Hinduism "was not contemptuous sufferance but respectful deference." Prof. Sri Ram Sharma, on the other hand, contends that in his religious views and conduct Sher Shah did not rise above the Turko-Afghan rulers of the sultanate of Delhi. It is admitted by all, including the two historians referred to above, that in his private life Sher Shah was an

orthodox *Sunni* Musalman. He was punctilious in saying his five daily prayers, in keeping the fast of *Ramzan* and in going through various observances enjoined by his faith. He was, moreover, an upholder of the dignity and supremacy of Islam in this country. On more than one occasion he successfully exploited the religious feelings of his Muslim followers by declaring a *holy war* against Rajput kings. His war against Puran Mal of Raisin was undertaken to punish the latter for his 'excess' against Islam, and it was officially termed as *jihad*. His expedition against Maldeo of Jodhpur, though dictated by political and military motives, was, nevertheless, coloured by religious sentiments. After his victory, Sher Shah demolished temples in the fort at Jodhpur and built a mosque on their site. Similarly in the siege of Kalinjar, he did give vent to his religious intolerance. It will not be correct to say that Sher Shah was altogether free from religious bias or that his attitude towards Hinduism was one of "respectful deference." At the same time it is a mistake to place him in the category of the sultans of the pre-Mughul period, who, with a few notable exceptions, looked upon the Hindus as an inferior people and their religion not worthy of

recognition or toleration. Sher Shah's personal feelings and views apart, he was, on the whole, a tolerant ruler and did not think it wise to follow a policy of religious persecution. He left the Hindus undisturbed and allowed them to follow their own religion without let or hindrance. As far as possible, he did not mix religion with politics. Leaving aside cases of exhibition of bigotry during a campaign against a Hindu king, no attempt was made throughout his reign to break images or to demolish temples or to carry on an organized propaganda against the Hindus. Although the employment of the Hindus in the army and in the revenue department need not be taken as an evidence of his policy of toleration, as they had been employed in these departments since the establishment of the Arab rule in Sindh in the eighth century A. D. owing to political and administrative necessity, a large portion of Sher Shah's infantry was composed of the Hindus. Most of the subordinate officers, employed in the revenue and intelligence departments, must have been Hindus. Sher Shah may, therefore, be said to have been tolerant towards the religion of the vast majority of his subjects.

**Buildings.**

Sher Shah was a great builder. Anxious to strengthen the defences of his north-western frontier, he built a magnificent fort on the Jhelum and named it Rohtasgarh. Dr. Qanungo says that he wanted to build one fort in every *sarkar* and to convert the mud-*sarais* into brick buildings so as to make them serve as block-houses for the protection of the highways. But this work could not be accomplished owing to the shortness of his reign. The *Purana Qila* at Delhi is said to have been built by Sher Shah. He erected a lofty mosque inside its enclosure, and it is considered to be one of the best examples of the Indo-Islamic architecture. According to Fergusson, it is "the most perfect of his (Sher Shah's) buildings." The best example of Sher Shah's architecture is his own mausoleum at Sasaram in Bihar. It is a grand architecture of its kind in the country. "The short-lived and unstable Sur dynasty," writes V. A. Smith, "of which Sher Shah was the most distinguished member, had such a hard fight for existence that it could not have been expected to pay much attention to architecture. Nevertheless, several meritorious buildings are due to the Sur dynasty, and the mausoleum of





*Tomb of Sher Shah at Sasurain*

Sher Shah at Sasaram, built on a lofty plinth in the midst of a lake, is one of the best-designed and most beautiful buildings in India, unequalled among the early buildings in the northern provinces for grandeur and dignity. Cunningham was half-inclined to prefer it to even the Taj .....The style may be described as intermediate between the austerity of the Tughluq buildings and the feminine grace of Shah Jahan's masterpiece'. (*History of Fine Arts in India and Ceylon*, Pp. 405-406). According to Havel, this mausoleum is a portrait of Sher Shah's personality and character. Dr. Qanungo adds that while the outer portion of the building, which is rather rough, indicates the frowning exterior of Sher Shah's character, its beautiful interior, "speaks of a heart overflowing with kindness'. Percy Brown also lavishes praise on Sher Shah's buildings for their exquisite design, excellent execution, and artistic decoration. He considers the Sur style of architecture not only as a substantial improvement on that of the Sayyids and the Lodis, but also as the basis of the grander and more dignified architecture of the Mughuls.

## CHAPTER V

### *Character and Estimate*

#### **His Daily Routine.**

Sher Shah was the only Muslim sultan of northern India who rose to sovereignty without having, in his early life, any substantial connection with the court of Delhi. He began his career as a civilian manager of his father's *jagir*, and, by sheer dint of merit, rose to be the emperor of Hindustan. No ruler in India, before or after him, possessed, at the time of his accession to the throne, such intimate knowledge of all branches of administration as this Afghan monarch. Sher Shah became king at the ripe age of sixty-eight. Although he is said to have remarked that God granted him sovereignty in the evening of his life, age had not cooled his ambition, and he manifested a physical and intellectual activity that could well be an object of emulation for a youth of twenty-five. Historians are unanimous in their testimony to the fact that he devoted more than sixteen hours



a day to the business of the state. Like Asoka or Chandragupta Maurya before him, and Akbar, after him, he believed in the motto : "It behoves the great to be always active." Both Abbas Sarwani and Rizq Ullah Mushtaqi tell us that it was Sher Shah's habit to get up after two-thirds of the nights were passed. After ablution and prayer, he would sit down to attend to the business of the state. First of all, secretaries of various departments came and read their reports about the occurrences in their respective departments. "For four hours he listened to the reading of reports on affairs of the country or on the condition of government establishments. Orders that he gave were reduced to writing, and were issued and acted upon ; there was no need of further discussion. Thus he remained busy till the morning (*fajar*) arrived." (*Waqayat-i Mushtaqi* in Elliot, Vol. IV. P. 550). After the morning prayer, he went out for an inspection of the army. Musters of troops were held in his presence. Fresh recruits were enlisted, their descriptive rolls taken down and horses branded. Then came the time for breakfast. That over, he held *darbar* and there openly transacted business till mid-day. The main work that engaged his attention was

receiving nobles and vassals and envoys from foreign courts. He also inspected the revenues received from various *parganas*, and looked into the accounts of the income and expenditure. Then he sat down for another prayer at noon and retired for rest. Unless some important business needed his personal attention, he spent his evenings in reading the *Quran*, and in the company of learned men. This was the daily routine of his life. There was hardly any deviation from it, whether Sher Shah was at his capital or engaged in a military campaign.

#### **As a Man.**

Not having been born in the purple and having had to make his way in life through adversity, Sher Shah did not possess the culture and personal charm of a born aristocrat. He cannot be said to be a dutiful son, for he had serious differences with his father who was passionately attached to his step-mother. Little is known about his attitude towards his mother. It may, however, be surmised that they must have had mutual attachment as fellow-sufferers due to the indifference of their guardian and head of the family. He does not seem to have any devotion for his wives, for which most of the

Mughul rulers, though polygamous like him, have earned praise from posterity. Nor is there any evidence to show that he ever displayed special fondness for his children. It seems that his utilitarian out-look in his dealings with men and affairs stood in the way of his having any special attachment for anyone.

Though well-educated and possessed of a good knowledge of Arabic and Persian and fond of history, Sher Shah cannot, in any sense, be called a scholar. For him study of literature and history was not an end in itself. He cultivated them for their practical utility. He read the *Quran* every day, because it was necessary for a pious Muhammadan to do so. He was a patron of learned men in the sense in which other Turko-Afghan sultans of Delhi were ; but no scholar at his court produced any outstanding work of history, politics, economics or even theology, to say nothing of the sciences. Modern scholars have praised him for his patronage of learning without caring to find out whether it proved efficacious in spreading learning and producing works of merit.\* He

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\*Malik Muhammad Jayasi, a no'able writer who flourished during his time, was not known at his court and was not extended any patronage.

was, however, a great builder, and his style of architecture was an improvement on that of his predecessors.

### **As a Soldier.**

As has been pointed out, Sher Shah was not a soldier by profession; but, as he was the son of a military commander and as it was essential for everybody in that age to learn to handle weapons of offence and defence for self-protection, Sher Shah must have received military training in his boyhood. His expeditions against the rebellious *zamindars* in his father's *jagir* show that he very well understood the work of a seasoned soldier and commander. As a soldier, he possessed cool courage, personal valour and extraordinary patience and activity. As a general, he invariably displayed consummate skill and cunning in every campaign. At every stage of his halt during a campaign, he invariably threw up redoubts and dug ditches by way of precaution against a surprise attack. Never did he make a frontal attack on his enemy. Tactics that he usually followed were to throw the enemy off his guard, to make a surprise attack, to draw him away into an ambush and then to attack him simultaneously from more

than one direction. His campaigns were characterized by rapidity of movement and an attempt to gain a strategic advantage over his enemy. Unlike the Rajputs, he did not risk his all on the issue of a single battle except once, namely, in the contest with Maldeo of Jodhpur. Even there he quickly extricated himself by a cunning stratagem. Like all Turks and Afghans, he fought to win and believed that he could legitimately use any means, fair or foul, to attain his object. He was ever ready to share with his soldiers the toils of a campaign, and the joys and sorrows of fortune. He did not avoid their company, but mixed with them on intimate terms. When Humayun's emissaries visited him on the eve of the battle of Chausa, they found him digging a trench, with his sleeves rolled up, along with his troops. He had a leader's personal magnetism and was loyally served by his men.

#### **As an Administrator.**

Sher Shah was a constructive genius of a high order. Like Akbar, he combined in him the capacity of grasping broad original principles of administration with a knowledge of minute details. To him belonged the credit of not only

reviving the old and tried institutions of the land, but also administering them successfully and even improving upon them by eliminating deficiencies and adding new elements. His re-organization of administration, settlement of land revenue and the currency and tariff reforms entitle him to the rank of one of the greatest administrators of the medieval age. The most remarkable thing about him as a ruler was the spirit in which his administration was made to function. The result was that the old institutions were, in actual practice, transformed to serve the larger interests of the people. Sher Shah was a successful statesman. He clearly perceived the defects of the Mughul system of government and cleverly turned them to his advantage. He realized what the main elements of power in the country were and enlisted the support of almost all those elements in the furtherance of his own object. As far as the Afghans were concerned, he successfully curbed their tribal jealousies and kept their turbulence under proper check. He inspired them with a common ideology and ambition, and made them place the national interests above those of the clan or the family. The Afghan individualistic tendency remained under check

throughout his rule. No Afghan ruler had attained such a remarkable success in this difficult task as Sher Shah. As a ruler, he stood for the welfare of the people and worked hard to safeguard the interests of the peasantry. No oppression of any kind and no encroachment on the rights of agricultural community were tolerated, and care was taken to compensate the peasantry for any damage or loss done to their crops. Though orthodox in his religious beliefs and practices, and often exploiting the fanaticism of the Muslim soldiery in his wars against the powerful Hindu kings, he did not show religious intolerance in his dealings with his Hindu subjects. There was enough of statesmanship in him not to mix religion with politics or administration. He had foreseen the impossibility of neglecting the Hindus and, therefore, sought their co-operation in both civil and military administration.

The most important trait in Sher Shah's character as a ruler was his love of justice. He used to say : "Justice is the most excellent of religious rites and it is approved alike by the kings of the infidels and of the faithful". He looked upon it as his duty to ascertain the exact truth about the oppressed and the suitors for

justice, and he invariably administered even-handed justice. He showed no leniency to oppressors, even though they might have been his nobles or his near relations. The anecdote about his nephew's making an amorous advance towards the wife of a goldsmith of Agra and the punishment that Sher Shah inflicted on him has been given elsewhere. It might not be literally true; nevertheless, it reflects popular tradition about Sher Shah's solicitude for doing justice even though he might have to punish his own kinsmen.

Sher Shah followed in the foot-steps of most of the kings of ancient India who pursued the benevolent policy of helping the poor and the disabled. A large amount of money was disbursed in charity. We are told that a register of the poor people in the kingdom was maintained and arrangements were made for providing them with means of subsistence. Sher Shah established a 'charity kitchen' at the capital on which 500 *tolas* of gold was spent everyday. Whoever came to the court was fed. The 'charity kitchen' alone cost the treasury Rs. 18,25,000 per year. An account has already been given of his roads with shade-giving fruit-trees and his *sarais* for the comfort of



travellers. Humanitarian measures like these were designed to help the teeming millions, besides facilitating the transport of the royal armies and the expeditious conduct of the royal *dar*.

Sher Shah's success was so dazzling that most writers have failed to see the other side of his character. It is not generally realized that he was a cunning politician and that he often made use of guile and treachery in attaining his end. He acquired the fort of Chunar by questionable means. In flagrant violation of his plighted word, he seized the fort of Rohtasgarh from its ruler. Like Aurangzeb after him, he often had recourse to stratagem. He beat his rival, Maldeo, by forging letters and sowing dissension among his chiefs. His rise was as much due to his intrinsic ability as to his consummate cunning and unscrupulousness.

### **Place in History.**

Sher Shah was a most remarkable ruler of medieval India in administrative ability, strength of character, and actual achievements. He challenges comparison with the greatest medieval Indian despot, Ala-ud-din Khalji, who, in sheer ability, both as a conqueror and administrator,

was undoubtedly superior ; but, in constructive statesmanship, inferior to this Afghan monarch. Sher Shah's administrative work was more enduring and also more beneficial than that of Ala-ud-din. His institutions served the public good and have given their author a permanent place in the history of the country. It will be unjust to compare him with Akbar, who was distinctly superior both as a ruler and as a man. The theory that "Sher Shah may justly dispute with Akbar the claim of being the first who attempted to build up an Indian nation by reconciling the followers of the rival creeds" seems to be rather a tall one. There is little evidence to show that he wanted to build up an Indian nation. In fact, he had no clear idea of what a nation was. The argument that "The experiment of the abolition of *jizya* and cow-slaughter would have been extremely injudicious in an age which still breathed the atmosphere of Sultan Sikandar's reign" is also not sound. In an earlier century, Zain-ul-Abdin of Kashmir (1420-1470) had successfully tried this experiment after the extremely intolerant reign of his father, another Sikandar, known as the 'Idol Breaker', and deservedly won the title of 'Akbar of Kashmir' from the grateful posterity. The

truth, therefore, is that Sher Shah never really dreamt of building up an Indian nation. It will not be doing justice to the memory of Akbar to suggest that because "the relations between the Hindus and Indian Muhammadans were not less cordial at the accession of Akbar than at the time of his death", his policy was unwise or foolish. It is a matter of common knowledge with us that the relations between the two communities were less cordial during the best days of Indian nationalism, with the apostle of truth, non-violence and Hindu-Muslim unity at the head, than during the gloomy days of the stifling British supremacy in the country. For this strange phenomenon, however, no impartial student of history would blame Mahatma Gandhi. In both the cases, the fault lay with the grasping and aggressive character and extra-territorial affiliation of the Muslim community which would hardly believe in mutual adjustment as long as it could be possible to retain its old supremacy or manage to establish a fresh one. Sher Shah was guided by the motive of enlightened self-interest rather than by his 'national patriotism', as a modern writer has wrongly asserted. It has yet to be proved that any Muslim ruler of India, with the notable exception of

Akbar, was ever inspired by 'national patriotism' for this land. Moreover, India was not Sher Shah's "patria"; and we know that, like other Afghan monarchs, he had invited his fellow Afghans from Afghanistan and distributed land in this country among them not only to strengthen his own position but also as a duty.

Sher Shah's indefatigable industry, devotion to duty, numerous reforms and love of justice have secured for him a place of distinction in Indian history. No medieval Indian monarch, except Akbar the Great, has so much positive contribution for the welfare of the people to his credit. Whether judged as a leader of men, or as a builder of institutions or as an administrator or statesman, he stands head and shoulders above his predecessors. Despite the eulogy of the Afghan writers and some recent historians, his administration was not perfect and, therefore, not above criticism; yet it was designed to further the interests of the people as much as, if not more than, that of the monarch himself. The present writer is unable to agree with the late Sir Wolseley Haig's opinion that he was "the greatest of the Muslim rulers of India." But his place in our medieval history is very high indeed. It

is next only to that of Akbar, who, as Dr. Qanungo rightly observes, "is justly entitled to a higher place in history than Sher Shah."

## CHAPTER VI

### *Islam Shah*

( 1545-1553 )

#### **Early Career.**

Islam Shah's original name was Jalal Khan and he was the younger son of Sher Shah. As he was a well-educated man and a poet in Persian at the time of his accession, it may be presumed that he must have been given a fairly high education in his early years. But he was primarily a soldier, and had given proof of his military ability on more than one occasion before he was called to the sovereignty of Hindustan. His valiant defence of Chunargarh in 1531 had so impressed Humayun that, on the conclusion of peace, he insisted on Jalal Khan's taking charge of the Afghan contingent which Sher Shah had placed at the disposal of the Mughul emperor. In 1537, he played a prominent part in the siege of Gaur, and was subsequently entrusted with the defence of Teliagarhi, the gateway to Bangal, where the Afghans under him inflicted their first defeat

upon the Mughul army. In 1539 and in 1540, he was placed in charge of an important division of his father's army in the battles of Chausa and Kanauj, and in both these engagements he displayed great valour and military capacity. He co-operated with his father in the campaigns against the rulers of Raisin and Jodhpur. While Sher Shah was engaged in the siege of Kalinjar, Jalal was deputed to conquer Rewa; but this work could not be accomplished due to Sher Shah's untimely death.

We have little evidence to form an estimate of Islam Shah's administrative achievements before his accession. Certain it is that he must have been employed by his father in consolidating his conquests and in helping him in the enforcement of his varied reforms. Islam Shah must have, therefore, acquired a considerable administrative experience before 1545.

#### **Accession and Struggle with Adil Khan.**

When Sher Shah was burnt to death at Kalinjar on 22nd May, 1545, his eldest son, Adil Khan, was at Ranthambhor and Jalal Khan was at Rewa, 85 miles south-east of Kalinjar. Although the deceased monarch had nominated Adil as his heir-apparent, his nobles preferred

Jalal Khan, who was industrious and skilled in arms, while his elder brother was ease-loving and devoted to pleasures. Moreover, Jalal was nearer at hand, and it was then thought dangerous to keep the throne vacant for long. So the nobles, headed by Isa Khan Hajib, sent a messenger to Jalal Khan to come immediately to take his father's place as king. Jalal reached Kalinjar on May 27, 1545, and was crowned the same day. He assumed the title of Islam Shah.

He began his reign by putting the Chandel ruler of Kalinjar, Kirat Singh, and his seventy principal followers to death. In order to enlist the support of the army, he paid it two months' salary in cash, of which one month's salary was by way of reward. Next, he promoted all the 6,000 soldiers of his personal army which he had maintained as a prince—the ordinary soldiers being raised to the status of officers and officers to that of *amirs*. This unwise measure caused dissatisfaction among the old nobility. Some of the disaffected nobles turned secretly to Adil Khan. The king, feeling suspicious, wrote to his brother to come to Agra, to which town he himself had proceeded soon after his accession, and take charge of the kingdom which was his by right.



As eminent nobles like Qutub Khan Naib, Isa Khan Niyazi, Khawas Khan and Jalal Khan Julwani stood surety for his life, Adil Khan set out from Ranthambhor. But, while at Agra, Islam Shah hatched an unsuccessful plot against his life. Adil, therefore, thought it better to accept the governorship of a small province, and retired to Bayana, which was assigned to him by the king. In spite of the apparent reconciliation, however, the quarrel between the two brothers continued, and Islam Shah sent an assassin to Bayana to take Adil's life. The four nobles, who had stood surety for Adil's life, considering it a breach of trust on the part of the king, secretly went over to the side of his elder brother. Adil Khan revolted and, accompanied by Khawas Khan, proceeded to attack Agra; but he was defeated in a battle outside the town and fled to Panna and was not heard of any more. His supporters, Khawas Khan and Isa Khan, retreated to Mewat (Alwar). Islam now sent an army in pursuit of the two rebellious nobles, which was, however, defeated in an encounter at Firozpur in Mewat. The king, therefore, sent another force which compelled Khawas Khan and Isa Khan to flee to the Kumaun hills to take refuge with the local raja.

**Suppression of the Old Nobles.**

Islam Shah grew suspicious of most of the nobles. On his way to Chunar he put Jalal Khan Julwani and his brother, Khudadad Khan, to death. Qutub Khan, who, too, was a supporter of Adil, was seized with panic and fled to Lahore to take shelter with Haibat Khan, the governor of that province. Haibat Khan delivered him to the king. Qutub Khan, with several other nobles, was sent as prisoner to the fort of Gwalior and there they were blown up by gunpowder. This struck terror into the hearts of the nobles.

**The Niyazi Rebellion.**

The strict measures against those who were suspected of complicity in the rebellion of Adil Khan alarmed the old nobility and revived tribal jealousies which had been successfully kept under check by Sher Shah. The Niyazis became particularly disaffected. Said Khan Niyazi, becoming alarmed, fled to join his brother, Haibat Khan Niyazi, governor of Lahore, and persuaded the latter to lead the revolt against Islam Shah. Khawas Khan, too, joined the rebels. The situation became so menacing that Islam Shah proceeded in person to suppress the rebellion. The rebels met the king at

Ambala ( 1547 ). Khawas Khan, who had joined the Niyazis, withdrew on the eve of the battle, as Haibat Khan, who was fired by the ambition of becoming king, had declared that the "crown was the prize of the sword", while Khawas was still a supporter of Adil Khan. In the battle the Niyazis were defeated. Islam Shah pursued them as far as the Jhelum. Leaving behind a force, he returned to Agra. This army inflicted a defeat on the rebels at Dungot ( Dhankot ) on the Indus and compelled the Niyazis to take shelter with the Gakkhars. Haibat Khan, persisting in his ambition to retrieve his position, appeared in the region of the Indus ; but he was again defeated and his mother and daughters were taken prisoners. Islam Shah insulted and dishonoured them for two years and then put them to death. Those of the Niyazis who took refuge with the Gakkhars were exterminated, but only after two years' warfare. Haibat Khan was lucky to escape to Kashmir. He intervened in a dispute between Mirza Haider, the then ruler of Kashmir, and the Chakk tribe. The Chakks, after their victory over Mirza Haidar, attacked Haibat Khan. The Niyazis fought bravely, but were all slain.

Islam Shah had come into conflict with the Gakkhars who had given shelter to the Niyazis. The Gakkhar chief, Sultan Adam, was an ally of Humayun. So there appeared to be disquieting prospects of the formation of a coalition between him, Humayun, Kamran, and Mirza Haidar against Islam Shah. The latter took pains to prevent such a contingency, and built a chain of fortresses for defence ( on the eastern bank of the Chinab and 90 miles north-east of Sialkot ), and named it Mankot. Although the Gakkhars could not be completely subdued, Islam Shah had the satisfaction of seeing that the Niyazis had met their doom and his enemies had failed to make common cause against him. Freed from anxiety, he turned his attention towards other problems.

### **Rebellion of Shujaat Khan.**

Shujaat Khan, who was a top-ranking noble and governor of Malwa since the time of Sher Shah, had grown disaffected owing to the new king's policy of suspicion and tyranny. Like all other ambitious men, he now wanted to assert his independence. But, after the royal victory over the Niyazis at Ambala, he renewed his allegiance and waited on Islam Shah at Gwalior.

While there, an attempt was made on his life by a man named Usman ; but he was only wounded. Suspecting the king's complicity in the plot, he left for his province without leave. Islam Shah invaded Malwa, but Shujaat Khan retreated without any battle. He fled to Banswara and, finally, took refuge in Dungarpur. But, as the Niyazi rebellion in the Panjab had not come to an end, Islam thought it expedient to pacify Shujaat. On the request of Daulat Khan Ujiala, son of Shujaat Khan and a boon companion of the king, he forgave Shujaat and restored him to a major portion of the province, except the district of Malwa proper, which was given to some other official.

#### **Death of Khawas Khan.**

Another great noble of Sher Shah's time was Khawas Khan, who, without doubt, was the best soldier and a staunchest supporter of the Sur dynasty. Reference has already been made to his taking up the cause of Adil Khan and refusing to make common cause with Haibat Khan Niyazi at the battle of Ambala. After that event Khawas took refuge with the raja of Kumaun, who was asked by Islam Shah to surrender the fugitive. But as his request was

rejected, Islam entered into communication with Khawas Khan himself. By promising to forgive his offence, he successfully persuaded him to come down to his court. Khawas complied; but as he reached Sirsi, six miles from Sambhal, he was put to death in his tent at night by Taj Khan Kararani, governor of the last named place, at the instigation of the king ( 1546 ).

#### **Last Days and Death.**

Islam Shah was not content with the suppression and death of his high nobles at court. He wanted to put down the powerful governors of provinces of his father's time. How he reduced Shujaat Khan to submission has already been related. He removed Qazi Fazilat from the governorship of Bangal and appointed Mahmud Khan Sur in his place. In other provinces, too, he appointed men of his own choice, after removing the governors of his father's time. He brought East Bangal under his sway. In 1553, Humayun, who had got rid of his ungrateful brother, Kamran, made a feeble attempt to recover Hindustan and, as a preliminary step, set out to conquer Kashmir. Islam Shah at this time lay ill at Delhi.

When he heard that Humayun had crossed the Indus, he immediately took off the leeches from his throat and, though ill, started to face the invader. Humayun was dismayed at the promptitude displayed by his old rival's son and returned to Kabul. Now there seemed to be no danger to the Afghan kingdom and Islam Shah returned to his favourite residence at Gwalior. Here an attempt was made on his life by the disaffected nobility; but the plot was soon discovered and the conspirators put to death. This was the second attempt on his life, the first having been made early during the reign. During the later part of his reign Islam Shah passed his days in pleasure and enjoyment. Not long afterwards, however, he was afflicted by a painful disease caused by a tumour in his privy parts. Medical aid proved of no avail and he died on 30th October 1553.

#### **Administration.**

Islam Shah added East Bangal to the territory that he had inherited from his father. Besides, he succeeded in compelling Kashmir to accept his suzerainty. The Sur kingdom, therefore, extended at his death, in 1553, from the Indus on the north-west to the hills of Assam in

the east, and from the Himalayas in the north to the Vindhya in the south. The states of Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur and the provinces of Gujarat and Kathiawar, however, were not included in his empire.

Islam Shah was a good administrator. He took drastic steps to crush the power of the nobles who had acquired the position of privilege and had almost overshadowed the crown. His theory of kingship was different from that of his father. He did not believe in the Afghan practice of dividing the kingdom among his fellow Afghans. His ideal was nearer to the concept of the 'divine monarchy' of the Mughuls than to the Afghan idea of the king as *primus inter pares*, for he insisted on unquestionable obedience to his will on the part of his highest nobles. He issued an ordinance that no nobleman was to possess any male elephant. By another edict, dancing girls were forcibly taken away from them. He forbade the use of red tents by them, which was the special prerogative of the king. These measures greatly reduced the prestige and pretensions of the nobility. He issued a code of regulations, covering eighty sheets of paper, which were circulated in every district and *pargana*. He



passed many administrative laws and issued detailed instructions for the guidance of his officials. His legislation touched every department and almost every sphere of state activity. He was anxious to see that his officials and people knew their rights as well as their duties. This is borne out by Badauni's statement that "all the points of instructions were written in documents whether agreeable to Law (Shara) or not, so that there was no necessity to refer any such matter to the *qazi* or *musfi*; nor was it proper to do so." (Badauni, Vol. I. PP. 384-85) He allowed the administrative policy of his father to stand, and improved it in some details. In every district, throughout his dominion, a *darbar* was held on Fridays. Chiefs and officials of the district used to assemble under a canopy to pay obeisance to the shoes and a quiver of Islam Shah, which were placed in front of a raised platform resembling the throne. Islam Shah's ordinances were read aloud by the secretary. Nobody was allowed to offend against the majesty of the law. The historian Badauni, when a boy, was an eye witness of one of these *darbars* at Bajwara, near Bayana, and he records the fact that such *darbars* were held throughout Islam Shah's reign.

( Badauni, Vol. I. p. 385 ).

While allowing his father's military reforms to continue, he introduced greater order and organization in the army by establishing a graded system which became the basis of Akbar's *mansabdari* system. The lowest unit consisted of 50 troops, the next higher 200, the third 250 and the fourth consisted of 500 troops. There were larger divisions also, such as those of 5,000, 10,000 and 20,000 men. (Badauni, Vol. I. p. 385)

Sher Shah had built *sarais*, at a distance of every four miles, along his roads. Islam Shah added one *sarai* between every two *sarais* of his father. In these cooked and uncooked food was kept for Muslim and Hindu employees of the postal department, and probably also for the travellers. The building of a *sarai* at every *kos* was an unnecessary waste of tax-payers' money. The foolish practice of distributing charity at these *sarais*, too, seems to have been prompted, as Wolseley Haig writes, by his vanity or jealousy of his father's reputation.

### Character.

Islam Shah was a capable soldier, but very cruel, and also treacherous, to his subordinates. Although his policy of abasement of the

nobility was unexceptionable, it was pursued in a tactless manner. There is no doubt that it caused needless disaffection among the Afghan peers, and aroused their latent jealousy, tribal factiousness and turbulence. His suspicion, cruelty, vindictiveness and narrow-mindedness provoked rebellions, which lasted practically throughout his reign. It was, however, fortunate that he possessed the requisite qualities of a successful general, which enabled him to suppress his nobility and impose his will upon it.

He was, however, something more than a successful soldier. He was an administrator of marked ability. It has been mentioned that he promulgated administrative laws regardless of the fact whether they came in conflict with the religious prejudices of the age. He may, therefore, be said to be a legislator among the sultans of Delhi. Laws were made known to the people through the local *darbars* held on Fridays and they were rigorously enforced. An anecdote is related that one day one of his *amirs*, named Shah Muhammad Farmuli, in a humorous vein said to Islam Shah: "Your Majesty! last night I saw in a dream three bags descend from heaven; in one of which was

dust, and in another gold, and in the third paper. The dust fell upon the heads of the soldiers, the gold went to the house of the Hindu *dafataris* (clerks) and the paper remained in the royal treasury." (Badauni, Vol. I. P. 387). Islam Shah understood the hint and promised that after his return to Gwalior, he would look into the soldiers' accounts and pay them in gold. The story is suggestive, and shows that the lot of the soldier was hard, as it was bound to be under the rule of a strong king. It also shows the Afghan envy of the prosperity of the Hindu clerks, and that Islam Shah's government was conducted on high bureaucratic principles requiring a vast volume of correspondence.

Islam Shah was a cultured prince. He was well-educated and composed verses in Persian. He took delight in the company of learned men. He loved architecture and erected a few beautiful buildings. Sometimes he took part in theological discussions also. Though orthodox in his private life, he was not a religious bigot.

. According to Professor N. B. Roy, kingship under him lost its feudal character and became essentially modern. It must, however, be stated

that despite his enthusiasm and administrative ability, he was, at times, cruel and vindictive. It must also be admitted that he aroused the tribal and clannish prejudices of his Afghan peers and, therefore, paved the way for the downfall of his dynasty.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Successors of Islam Shah*

#### **Firoz Shah**

**1553**

Islam Shah was succeeded by his son, Firoz, a boy of 12 years. Three days after his accession he was put to death by his maternal uncle, Mubariz Khan, son of Nizam Khan who was a younger brother of Sher Shah. Islam Shah was aware of Mubariz Khan's ambition and wanted to put him out of his son's way, but he had been prevented from doing so by his wife, Bibi Bai. Mubariz Khan seized the throne and assumed the title of Muhammad Adil Shah. He was popularly known as *Adli*.

#### **Muhammad Adil Shah**

**( 1553—1557 )**

The new king, Muhammad Adil Shah, sought to conciliate the nobility by a lavish distribution of wealth. He appointed Shamsher Khan, brother of Khawas Khan, his

*wazir*. But he reposed confidence particularly in Hemu, who had started his life as a hawker of salt in the streets of Rewari and had subsequently been employed in a confidential capacity by Islam Shah. Muhammad Adil Shah was a worthless ruler. He was grossly ignorant and incompetent, and was fond of the company of low people. He was so much addicted to debauchery that he could find little time for attending to the business of state. His indifference gave the ambitious nobles an opportunity to rebel. The first to rebel was Taj Khan Kararani, the murderer of Khawas Khan. The rebel, though defeated at Chhibaramau, in the modern Hardoi district, was allowed to escape and create a great commotion in Bihar.

The next to rebel was Ibrahim Khan Sur who was the son of Ghazi Khan Sur and a brother-in-law of the king. But the king's sister, getting scent of her brother's (Adil's) evil design, helped her husband to escape from the fort of Chunar. He fled to Bayana and defeated a royal army sent against him. Flushed with victory, Ibrahim marched on Delhi and captured it. There he assumed the title of king. Adil made a feeble attempt to

recover Delhi, but failed. Ibrahim occupied Agra also.

The third nobleman to revolt was Ahmad Khan Sur, governor of Lahore and another brother-in-law ( husband of Adil's sister ) of the king. He assumed the title of Sikandar Shah.

The fourth important rebel was Muhammad Khan Sur, governor of Bangal, who took up the title of Shams-ud-din Muhammad Shah *Ghazi*. Northern India was, thus, split up into four kingdoms, namely, the Panjab under Sikandar Shah; Delhi and Agra under Ibrahim Shah; the country from Agra to Bihar under Adil Shah; and Bangal under Muhammad Shah. Each of these four rulers was anxious to establish his supremacy over the others. Owing to a perpetual struggle among them, there was a great disorder in the country, and small chieftains, such as Ghazi Khan Sur of Bayana, Haji Khan of Alwar and Yahya Turan of Sambhal, became desirous of carving out kingdoms for themselves.

Sikandar Shah of Lahore, fired by the ambition of seizing Delhi, marched against Ibrahim who brought 80,000 men into the field. A battle was fought at Farahi, 20 miles north of



Agra, in which Ibrahim was defeated (1555). He fled to Etawa, and Sikandar obtained possession of Delhi and Agra.

Taking advantage of the discord among the Afghans, Humayun, who had consolidated his position in Kabul, started in November, 1554, on campaign for the reconquest of Hindustan. Tatar Khan Kashi, who held the fort of Rohtasgarh on the Jhelum on behalf of Sikandar, evacuated it as soon as Humayun crossed the Indus. Humayun captured Lahore without opposition on 24th February, 1555. While the Mughuls were invading the Panjab, Sikandar and Ibrahim were fighting each other near Agra. That was why they could offer no effective resistance to the invader. When the Mughuls pushed towards Delhi after the occupation of the Panjab, Sikandar was aroused to a sense of his danger and sent a force to oppose the enemy at Dipalpur, which was defeated. Another Afghan army suffered a defeat at Machhiwara. Sikandar had, therefore, to proceed in person ; but he, too, suffered a defeat at Sirhind on 22nd June, 1555, and fled to the hills of the Panjab. The Mughuls took possession of Delhi.

Regardless of the epoch-making events that

were taking place in north-western Hindustan, Ibrahim, whose recent defeat had not cooled his ambition, renewed his struggle with Adil Shah. Adil sent Hemu who defeated Sikandar near Kalpi and drove him back to Bayana. Ibrahim, however, again met Hemu near Khanua, but was again defeated. Hemu now besieged him in the fortress of Bayana till he was recalled by his master, Adil, who was threatened by Muhammad Shah of Bangal. The king of Bangal had reduced the country as far as Jaunpur, and was proceeding rapidly towards Kalpi in order to occupy Delhi and set himself up as the ruler of Hindustan. Hemu joined Adil Shah at Kalpi and defeated Muhammad Shah of Bangal at Chhapparghatta, 20 miles from Kalpi, by a surprise attack. Muhammad Shah fled. Adil captured Bangal and appointed Shahbaz Khan as its governor. He then returned to Chunar and made it his residence.

The condition of northern India at this time was miserable. Owing to constant warfare, military adventurers had risen in different parts of the country. Their violence and rapacity had so much oppressed the peasantry that cultivation had almost disappeared. A famine broke out ; it was particularly severe in

the vicinity of Delhi and Agra. Nature also seemed to frown on the warring humanity. There was little rainfall that year. Grain, therefore, became scarce. *Jowar* sold one seer a rupee, and, sometime after, it was not available at all. People were compelled to live on wild herbs and roots. A pestilence broke out and caused havoc among the people. The country was depopulated. Unfortunately, there was an explosion in the old fort of Agra which shook the city to its foundation and killed a large number of people. Such was the condition of India at the time when Humayun recovered his father's throne at Delhi.

It was reserved for Akbar to put an end to the Sur dynasty. He hunted Sikandar from place to place, and made him submit to his authority. Ibrahim was driven to take refuge in Orissa, where he spent his days in poverty and ended in a violent death. Muhammad Adil Shah was killed in a battle with the king of Bangal. The end of Sher Shah's dynasty was sorry indeed.



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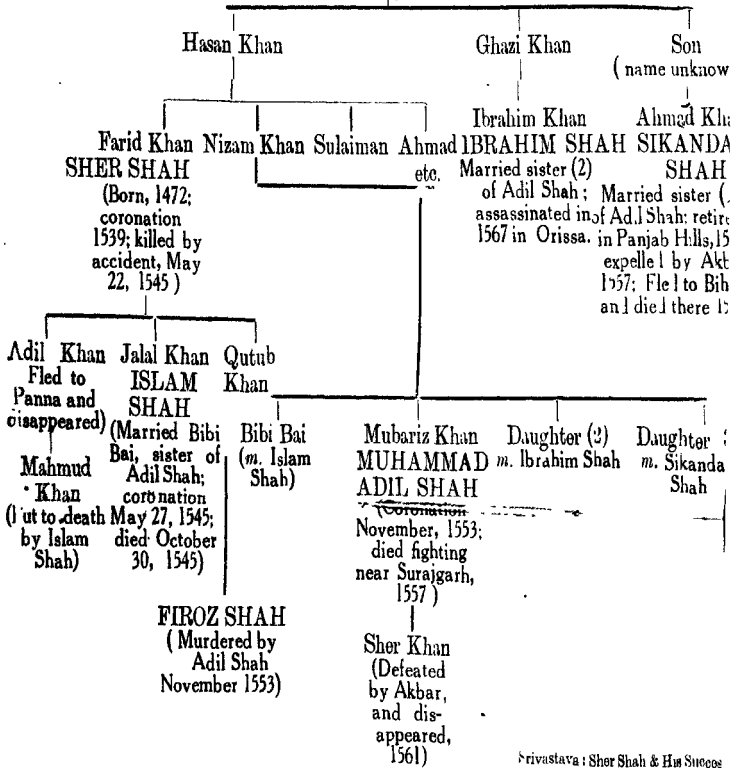
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**THE SUR DYNASTY**  
(1540—1555)

Ibrahim Khan Sur  
of Roh (near Peshawar)







## INDEX

Abbreviations : S=Sher Shah  
H=Humayun.

- Abbas Sarwani, 83, 93.  
 Abu, S. occupies, 53-4.  
 Adil Khan son of S.  
     governor of Ranthambhor, 53-4, 107-8; revolts and flees, 109-11, 113.  
 Adil Shah, Muhammad, 122 124-5; captures Bangal, 126.  
     [Mubariz Khan]  
 Agra 108-9, 111, 124-7; S. visits, 4; Junaid Barlas retreats towards, 13; entrusted to Meer Mohd. Bakhshi, 18; Hindal as king at, 24; H. flees to, 29; S. starts from, 51, 84, 100.  
 Ahmad brother of S., 2.  
 Ahmad Khan Sur, 123.  
     [Sikandar Shah]  
 Ajmer, Maldeo conquers, 48, 50-1; S. occupies 53-4, 64.  
 Akbar, the great, 57, 63, 65, 93, 97, 102-5, 118.  
 Ala-ud-din Khalji, 58, 67, 86, 101-2.  
 Ambala, 111-3.  
 Arab rule, 89.  
 Askari, 25, 34.  
 Asoka, 93.  
 Assam not under S., 59.  
 Aurangzeb, 101.  
 Azam H. Sarwani, 31.  
     B  
 Babur conquers India, 5-6; S. serves, 6, 8-9; death 12.  
 Badauni, 117-8, 120.  
 Bahadur Shah of Gujrat, 14; H. against, 16.  
 Bahar Khan Lohani, 5.  
 Bajwara, 1, 117.  
 Bakhala, 1.  
 Bakhshu Langah, 46-7.  
 Banaras, Afghans capture, 8, 13, 24.  
 Bangal rebels, 40, 106, East, 114-5, 124, 126.  
 Banswara, 113.  
 Barmazid Gaur pursues H., 37.  
 Bayana, 123, 125-6; Adil retires to, 109.  
 Biban Lodi, 31.  
 Bibi Bai, 122.  
 Bihar, South, 9, 71, 123-4.  
 Bihiya, 26.  
 Bikaner, 48, 116.  
 Birbhan Baghela, 55.  
 Brown, Percy, 91.  
 Buhlol Lodi, 1, 31.  
 Buhlol, Shaikh, Hindal kills, 24.  
     C  
 Chakks attack Haibat

- Knan, 111.  
 Chandragupta Maurya, 93.  
 Charity kitchen, 77, 100.  
 Chausa, 26, 32, 97, 107.  
 Chhapparghatta, 126.  
 Chhibaramau 123.  
 Chinab, 39, 112.  
 Chinsura, 16.  
 Chittagong, 17.  
 Chittor, S. occupies, 53-4.  
 Chunargarh, 106, 110, 123, 126, H. besieges, 13, 19; fort of, 101.  
 Churaman, 20-1.  
 Cunningham, 91.
- D**
- Daud Khan Sahukhail, 1.  
 Daulat Khan Ujjala, 113.  
 Daunrua, ( battle ) 13.  
 Delhi, 18, 48, 84, 90, 95, 114; sultans of, 119, 123-7.  
 Devanagari script, 78.  
 Didwana, 48, 51.  
 Dipalpur, 125.  
 Dudu Bibi w/o Sultan Mohd. reappoints S., 9.  
 Dungarpur, 113.  
 Dungkot, 111.
- E**
- East India Company, 78.  
 Elliot, 84, 93.  
 Erskine, 57.  
 Etawa, 124.
- F**
- Farid, left father's home, 2; manage's Hasans Jagir, 3. [Sher Shah ]  
 Fateh Jang Khan, 47.  
 Fateh Khan Jat, 39, 46-7.  
 Fergusson, 90.  
 Firoz Shah, 122.  
 Firozpur, 109.  
 Firuz Tughluq, 75.
- G**
- Gakkhar country, 39, 46; boundary of empire, 59; refuge for rebels 111-2.  
 Ganga, The, 25-6.  
 Gaur, 106; S. threatens, 16-7; conquers, 19; H; revels at 25.  
 Ghaghara, ( battle ) 9.  
 Ghazi Khan Baloch, 39.  
 Ghazi Khan Sur, 124.  
 Ghazipur, 8.  
 Ghiyas-ud-din Mahmud, 15, 17-8, 22-3.  
 Grand Trunk Road, 84.  
 Gujarat, S. sends mission to, 33; Maldeo retreats to border of, 52; not under S., 59, 116.  
 Gwalior submits to S., 42, 110, 112; Islam Shah at, 115 120.
- H**
- Haibat Khan Niyazi, 40; governor of Panjab, 46, 110; escapes, 111, 113.  
 Haji Khan, 124.  
 Hariana, 1  
 Hasan Khan Sur, 1-3.  
 Havel, 91.  
 Hemu, 122, 125-6.

- Himalayas, (boundary) 59, 116.  
 Hindal, 24, 34,  
 Hindoo Baloch, 47.  
 Hindu Beg. 17-8.  
 Humayun, rival of S, I ;  
 campaign against S,  
 13 ; peace with  
 Kalinjar, 13 ; wins  
 over Mahmud Lodi,  
 13 ; peace with S. 14 ;  
 campaign against  
 Bahadur Shah, 16 ;  
 sends Hindu Beg to  
 Jaunpur, 17 ; Mahmud  
 appeals to, for assis-  
 tance, 18, 22 ; sets  
 out for Chunar, 18,  
 negotiates with S, 19,  
 127 ; at Gaur, 24-5 ;  
 reaches chausa, 26 ;  
 defeated, 28-9 ; flees  
 to Agra, 29 ; attacked  
 at Kanauj, 34 ; made  
 a wanderer, 36-38 ; in-  
 vited by Maldeo, 48 ;  
 towards Sindh, 49, 97,  
 106, 112, 114, returns  
 to Kabul, 115, 124 ;  
 captures Lahore 125 ;  
 recaptures throne 127.  
 [ Also Sher Shah ]
- I
- Ibrahim Khan, of Bangal  
 army, 15.  
 Ibrahim Khan Sur,  
 123-5. [Ibrahim Shah]
- Ibrahim Lodi, 4-5, 31.  
 Ibrahim Sur, 1.  
 Indus, the, 39 ; (boundary)  
 59, 84, 111,  
 114-5, 125.  
 Isa Khan proposes S.  
 for kingship, 31, 108-9.  
 Islam Shah, 63, 106 ;  
 achievements, 107 ;  
 plot against Adil, 109  
 -11, builds fort,  
 112 ; invades Malwa,  
 113 ; ill, 114 ; death,  
 115, 123.  
 [ Jalal Khan ]  
 Ismail Khan, 39, 47.
- J
- Jahajpur, 53.  
 Jahangir Quli Beg holds  
 Bangal, 25 ; defeated  
 and slain, 32.  
 Jaisalmer, 54, 59 116.  
 Jaitaran 48.  
 Jalal Khan Julwani,  
 109-10  
 Jalal Khan Lohani, 5, 7 ;  
 king of South Bihar, 8-  
 9 ; flees to Bangal, 11.  
 Jalal Khan Sur besieges  
 Gaur, 21-2 ; at Teli-  
 garhi, 23 ; attacks H.,  
 29, 106-8.  
 [ Islam Shah ]  
 Jamal Khan Sarang-  
 khani, 1, 3.  
 Jaunpur, S. visits, 2 ;  
 Afghans march to, 13 ;

- Hindu Beg at, 17-9 ;  
 Afghans capture, 24,  
 126.
- Jayata Rathor attacks  
 Afghans, 52.
- Jhajjhar, 50.
- Jhelum, The, 38-9, 90,  
 111, 125.
- Jihad, 88.
- Jizya, 70-1, 102.
- Jodhpur, 47, 88, 107, 116;  
 S. invades 51-3 ; held  
 by Afghans, 54.
- Junaid Barlas, 6, 13.
- K
- Kabul, 38, 115, 125.
- Kachi chakk, 40.
- Kalinjar, 88, 107-8 besie-  
 ged by H. 13 ; taken  
 by S., 54.
- Kalpi, 18, 125-6 ; Mughuls  
 driven from, 24, 32.
- Kalyan Mal, 59.
- Kamran, 38, 112, 114.
- Kanauj, 18 ; Mughuls  
 occupy, 24-30, 32,
- Kandahar, 38.
- Karmanasa The, 26,
- Kashmir, 40, 114-5 ; not  
 under S., 59.
- Khalifa, 78.
- Khanua, 126.
- Khams, 70-1.
- Khawas Khan, 46, 109 ;  
 occupies Gaur, 21 ;  
 cuts off supplies of H.  
 22 ; attacks Mughuls,  
 29, 37, 39-40 ; joins  
 loyal rebels 110-14,  
 123.
- Khawaspur Tanda, 2, 71.
- Khizr Khan, 40-1.
- Khudadad Khan, 110.
- Khushab, 38-9, 46.
- Khutba in S's name, 27.
- Kirat Singh of Kalinjar,  
 55 ; Isiam Shah mur-  
 ders, 108.
- Kumpa, Rathor chief, 52.
- L
- Lad Malika, 11.
- Lahore, 39, 64, 84, 110,  
 124.
- Lohani nobles, 11-2.
- M
- Machhiwara, battle, 125.
- Maharatha Chero, 28.
- Mahatma Gandhi, 103.
- Mahmud III of Gujarat,  
 43.
- Mahmud Lodi in Bihar,  
 5, 7-8, 12 ; defeat  
 and death, 13.
- Maldeo Rathor, 47, in-  
 vites H., 48 ; retreats  
 to Gujarat border, 52 ;  
 reoccupies Marwar,  
 53, 59, 88, 97, 101.
- Mallu Khan, [ Qadir  
 Shah, ] 33 ; offends S.,  
 42.
- Malwa, 81, 112-3 ;

- mission to, 33 ; S.,  
 attacks and wins, 42;  
 empire of S., 59;  
 Governorship of, 64,  
 72.
- Mandu, 44.  
 Mankot, 112.  
 Mansabdari, 118.  
 Meer Fakhr Ali, 18  
 Meer Fazli, 24.  
 Meer Muhammad Bakh-  
 shi, 18.  
 Merta, Maldeo conquers,  
 48, S. reaches, 51.  
 Mewat, 109.  
 Mir Muhammad Par-  
 ghari, 21.  
 Mirza Haider, 35.40, 111  
 -2.  
 Moreland, 75.  
 Mubarak Khan, 24.  
 Mubariz Khan, 122.  
     [ Adil Shah ]  
 Muhammad Sultan of  
 South Bihar, 7.  
 Muhammad Khan Sur,  
 governor of Bangal,  
 114, 124.  
 Muhammad Khan of  
 Chaund, 4-5.  
 Multan, Haibat Khan  
 occupies, 46; empire  
 of S., 59, 72.  
 Mungir, S. conquers, 19;  
 H. at, 25.
- N
- Nagaur, 48, 50.
- Nizam, water carrier,  
 saves H., 29.  
 Nizam Khan, 2, 122.  
 Nizam-ud-din Ahmad, 81.  
 Nusrat Shah, 10.
- P
- Panchayat, 66.  
 Panjab, empire of S., 59,  
 124-5.  
 Panjnad, river, 39.  
 Panna, Adil flees to, 109.  
 Phalodi, 49.  
 Pratap, Rana, 53.  
 P. Saran ( Dr. ) 58, 63.  
 Purana Qila, 90.  
 Puran Mal, surrenders  
 to S., 44; fights  
 bravely and dies, 45,  
 88.
- Q
- Qadir Shah [Mallu Khan  
 of Mandu], 33-4,  
 offends S., 42-3.  
 Qazi Fazilat, 41, 114.  
 Qutub Khan, s/o. S.,  
 defeated and killed,  
 33-4.  
 Qutub Khan Naib,  
 109-10.
- R
- Rai Sarang Gakkhar,  
 40.  
 Raisin, 43; expedition to,

- 50, 88, 107.  
 Rana Sangram Singh, 7;  
 died, 47.  
 Ranthambhor, S. occu-  
 pies 53-4, 107, 109.  
 Rao Gangaji, 47.  
 Rao Kalyan Mal, 48.  
 Rayatwari, 76.  
 Rewa, 55, 107.  
 Rewari, 107, 123.  
 Rizqullah Mushtaqi, 93.  
 R. P. Tripathi ( Dr. ), 58.  
 Roads, of S., 84-5.  
 Roh, homeland of Surs,  
 1; S. summons Af-  
 ghans from, 15.  
 Rohtasgarh, ( Bihar ),  
 19; S. acquires 20-1,  
 101.  
 Rohtasgarh, ( Panjab )  
 customs charged at,  
 79, 90, 101, 125.  
 Roy, N. B. ( Prof. ), 120.  
 Rumi Khan, 18.
- S
- Said Khan Niyazi, 110.  
 Sarais, 77, 90, 100, 118  
 Sarangpur, 42-3.  
 Sasaram, 2, 3, 8, 71, 90,  
 -1.  
 Shahabad, 28.  
 Shah Jahan, 126.  
 Shah Muhammad Far-  
 muli, 119.  
 Shaikh Khalil, 27-8.  
 Shams Khan, in charge  
 of Chittor, 53.  
 Shamsheer Khan, 122.  
 Shams-ud-din Atga  
 Khan, 49.  
 Shams-ud-din Muham-  
 mad Shah 124.  
 Sher Shah, early life, 2 :  
 administers Sasaram  
 3, 43, title conferred  
 by Bahar Khan, 5;  
 driven out of home, 6;  
 deputy governor, 17;  
 submits to Babur, 8-  
 9 ; head of South  
 Bihar, 9 ; Lohani  
 nobles jealous of, 10;  
 acquires Chunar, 11;  
 Mahmud Lodi pays  
 visit, to, 12 ; recovers  
 South Bihar, 13;  
 peace with H., 14;  
 battle at Surajgarh,  
 15 ; threatens  
 Gaur, 16; attacks  
 Bangal, 17; besieges  
 Gaur, 19; negotiations  
 with H. 19; acquires  
 Rohtasgarh, 20-1;  
 appeals to Afghans,  
 23, occupies Banaras  
 and Jaunpur 24;  
 aware of movements  
 of H., 25; strategy, 26  
 -7; negotiations, 27-8;  
 surprise attack on  
 Mughuls, 28-30; occu-  
 pation of Kanauj  
 30 ; accession of,  
 32; wins the battle,  
 35-6 ; rebukes

- Barmazid, 37; reduces Gakkhars, 39-40; new Bangal administration, 41; wins Malwa and Gwalior, 42-3; Raisin, 44-5; rewards Haibat Khan, 46; acquires Sindh, 47; marches against Maldeo, 50, 51; occupies Marwar, 52, 53; obtains Chittor and Jahajpur and Ranthambhor, 53; attacks Kalinjar, 55; wins and dies; 56, great administrator, 58, ministry, 60.  
 [Also Humayun]
- Shujaat Khan, defeats Qadir Shah, 43, punished, 81, 87, 112, retreats, 113-4.
- Sialkot, 112,  
 Sind, H. flees to, 38, 89.
- Sikandar Shah, 102, 124 -5.
- Sikander Lodi, 2.
- Sikrigali, 16.
- Sirhind, 39, 125.
- Siwana, 48, 52-3.
- Smith, V. A., 78, 90.
- Sonargaon, (boundary) 59, customs barrier, 79, 84.
- Sri Ram Sharma, 87.
- Sulaiman, 40.
- Sultan Adam, 112.
- Sultanpur Lodi, 37.
- Sumel, 51.
- Sunni, S. orthodox, 88.
- Surajgarh, 15.
- T
- Taj Khan Kararani kills Khawas Khan, 114, rebels, 122.
- Tatar Khan Kashi, 125.
- Teliagarhi, won by S., 16, defended by Portuguese, 18, Jalal Khan at, 24, 106.
- Thomas, Edward, 78.
- Tirhut, 24.
- U
- Udaya Singh, 53.
- Ujjain, 43.
- Usman, 113.
- V
- Vikramajit, 53.
- Vindhya mountains 59, 116.
- W
- Waqayat-i-Mushtaqi, 93.
- Wazir, 60, 122.
- Wednesdays, S. held courts on, 80.
- Wolseley Haig, 104, 118.
- Y
- Yadagar Nasir Mirza



Yahya posted at Kalpi 18, 35.  
Turan of Zain-ul-Abdin, 102.  
Sambhal, 124.

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