CHAPTER 8

THE JAT'S (TILL 1764) AND THE BUNDELAS.

Section A

THE JAT STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE.

Churaman Jat (C. 1695-1721)
Badan Singh (November, 1722-June, 1756)
Suraj Mal (June, 1756-December, 1764)
Jawahir Singh (1764-July, 1768).

In the tangled web of Indian history in the eighteenth century, the Jats constituted one of the major threads. Indeed they were the most important racial element in the vast area from the Indus to Gwalior beyond the Chambal. Leaving aside the Muslim Jats in the Punjab west of the Ravi, the Sikh Jats in Central and Eastern Punjab and the Hindu Jats in northern and western areas of (modern) Uttar Pradesh and west of Agra (Bharatpur), played a most conspicuous role in the disintegration of the Mughal empire and resistance to Ahmad Shah Durrani. Well known in history, as patient and laborious peasants, infamous cattle-lifters, bold pirates and redoubtable fighters, the Jats were a dynamic race. With their sturdy physique, manly habits and experience of forays and burglaries, combined with a born love of independence, they had the making of the best infantry. But unlike the Marathas, they were unlettered and lacked intelligence and power of co-ordination (which modern warfare demanded). The lack of homogeneity among the Hindu Jats sharply contrasted with the brotherhood of the Sikh Jats. This largely explains the failure of Suraj Mal and the success of Ranjit Singh.

The Jat struggle for independence against Muslim rule which began in Aurangzeb's reign as a protest against
religious intolerance and agrarian oppression, was not an isolated phenomenon. It was, however, a stirring movement which transformed the peasant revenue-payer par excellence first into a predatory highwaymen and then into a ruling power. For a time the Jat raja became the most powerful potentate in Northern India. The first leaders were Gokla (1669), Rajaram (1686-88) and Bhajja Singh (1688-95) of Sansani, the founder of Bharatpur fort and Churaman. The Bharatpur Jats, geographically circumscribed between the Rajput states in the west, the Mughals of Delhi in the north, and the Marathas (in Malwa) in the southeast could expand only towards Agra and Mathura and east of the Jamuna. The establishment of the Jat kingdom of Bharatpur out of nothing was a political upheaval of the first magnitude.

**Churaman (1695-1721)**

The first maker of the Jat power in the eighteenth century was Churaman (1695-1721). He was a hard realist, combining the stubbornness of a Jat with the political sagacity and cunning of a Maratha, and possessing remarkable powers of organisation. By strengthening Bharatpur fort and his army including horsemen, artillery and musketeers, he captured for a time even the Mughal outpost of Sansani and gradually became the de facto ruler and law-giver of the Jats in the area extending from Delhi to Chambal. In his relations with the Mughals he gave evidence of his ability to utilise' opportunities. A new chapter began in his life when Bahadur Shah rewarded him with a mansab for plundering Azam’s army in 1707. He joined the Mughal faujdar Riza Bahadur in the expedition against Ajit Singh Kachhawah, a zamindar in Mathura district, who was ultimately overthrown. He accompanied the Emperor in his Sikh expedition in 1710 and remained faithful to him. Jahandar, for whom he had no respect, scourted him against Farrukhsiyar. But he plundered the
armies of both impartially (1713). He felt the pulse of the court, stricken with faction, during the reign of Farrukhsiyar. Chhabela Ram, governor of Agra, found him too strong, while Samsam-ud-daula (Khan-i-Dauran) sought to conciliate him. Farrukhsiyar placed the royal highway (Shah-rah) from Delhi to Dholpur ferry (the crossing of the Chambal) under his charge with authority to levy tolls on the passing traffic. This change from rahzan (highway robber) to rahdar (highway protector) enabled him to legalise his highway brigandage. Even jagirdars were alienated by his harsh and arbitrary collections. The administrative disorder during the rule of the Sayyids enabled the Jats to pursue their robbery more vigorously than before.

The rapid growth of the power of Churaman, an ally of Ajit Singh Rathor, alarmed Jaipur. But Sawai Jai Singh could not do much in his siege of Thun, stocked with provisions for 20 years (Nov. 1716 to April, 1718). The Jats intercepted trade and transport between Delhi and Agra and indulged in general plunder. Securing imperial pardon through Wazir Abdullah, Churaman attached himself to the Sayyids, especially Husain Ali. Though he joined Muhammad Shah, Churaman plundered imperial baggage in the battle against Abdullah. Virtually independent he was shrewd enough not to use the title of Raja. He allied with Ajit Singh Rathor against Jai Singh and assisted the Bundelas to keep the Mughals busy. Saadat Khan, governor of Agra, was deputed against him, but was checked by the Jats. He won over and protected Badan Singh who had been imprisoned by his paternal uncle, Churaman, but Saadat Khan failed in the campaign against the latter's son Muhkam. Churaman committed suicide as a result of a quarrel between his two sons (1721).

During Sawai Jai Singh's second Jat campaign (September-November, 1722) Badan Singh helped him against Churaman's son and successor, Muhkam. Jai Singh's capture of Thun (1722) destroyed the work of
Rajaram and Churaman. Badan Singh, now ruler of the Jats as a feudatory of Jaipur, had practically to write on a clean state.

**Badan Singh (Nov. 1722 to June, 1756)**

Unlike his predatory, rude uncle, Badan Singh was modest, quiet and politic. In his supreme task of effecting the reconstruction of the Jat state, he had to face serious difficulties, internal and external. The people, consisting of isolated, independence-loving groups of related peasant families, lacked tribal cohesion. The spirit of union by submission to a common superior was absent, though equal partnership for loot might occasionally lead to fleeting co-operation. Badan Singh was not even the undisputed head in his own family (Sansani) group. His resources were poor, without a superior force, status or hoarded wealth. The transformation of robber-chiefs' sphere of influence into an orderly dominion with an organised government was, indeed, a difficult task. But Badan succeeded by means of patient and clever diplomacy. (i) His wise dependence on Jai Singh not only disarmed the latter's suspicion but even won his sympathetic support and protection. From him Badan Singh got the title of Braja-raj (or lord of Braja or land round Mathura, hallowed by the memory of Krishna). This raised his position at home and abroad. But he did not style himself Raja but remained only Thakur (or noble) and a vassal of Jaipur.

(ii) Slowly but steadily he established his mastery over the lands and goods of the chief Jats and became a zamindar. His matrimonial alliances with local Jat families (of Kamar and Sahar) made him the virtual master of Mathura district. Then he became 'a petty Rajah, strong enough to be obeyed at home and feared abroad'. Badan Singh's Jats grew to be 'more powerful, more numerous, more hardy and more sustained' than those of Churaman. Uniting with the rebels of Mewat and acquiring territories in Biana, he
enlisted infantry and cavalry, built forts, cities and palaces with his booty and possibly hoarded wealth. A section of his cavalry was used in robbery in the plains, the Shah-rah to Delhi and the environs of Agra, while another was engaged in extension of territory, which again swelled his army.

During the decline of the empire and party dissensions at Delhi the power of the Jats grew. Villages were fortified and equipped for long defence. To replace older forts like Thun, Sansani and Soghor, destroyed by the Mughals, Badan Singh built four new ones, Dig, Kumbher, Bharatpur and Wair. Complaints against such activities were silenced by bribes to Wazir Qamaruddin. Authorised by Jai Singh, governor of Agra, to patrol the royal roads to Agra, Delhi, Jaipur and other places and realise transit duties, and assisted by the former's deputy, Badan Singh and his bands carried on their plunder systematically, demolishing buildings and mosques and collecting materials therefrom, for his own buildings. Nadir Shah's invasion was followed, as in the case of the Sikhs, by a sudden and remarkable extension of the authority of the Jats—over the environs of Delhi, Agra and the district of Mathura, as well as by completion of his older forts and constructing new ones in his recent annexations. Equipped with artillery, the lighter ones being plundered or purchased and the bigger pieces cast by the Jats, these forts were then considered to be impregnable (e.g. Kumbher). People supported him as he not only plundered but also gave the benefits of rule. Though a plebeian rebel to the Mughals, Badan Singh posed as the protector of the Hindus against Muslim misrule. Thus did he seek to establish his sovereign rule. He maintained a grand court, with leanings towards Islamic culture, the influence of which was seen in the education and upbringing of his son Pratap Singh. Badan Singh's aesthetic taste was reflected in his love of architecture at places like Dig, Wair, Kamar, Sahar and Brindaban and Badanpura outside Jaipur. His harem was large
large with 150 inmates. So was his progeny, recognised only through their mothers' names. Thus did the robber chief grow to be a peasant king. During the latter half of his reign it was his adopted son, Suraj Mal, who guided the destinies of the State. Badan Singh died at Dig on 7 June, 1756.

Suraj Mal, the adopted son of Badan Singh, was 'the ablest statesman and warrior' among the Jat leaders. Though not learned, he was the 'Plato of the Jats' (according to Imad us Saadat). Qanungo calls him the Jat Ulysses. Indeed he was intelligent with political sagacity, moderation and vision. In wisdom, administrative ability and military skill, he was unequalled except by Asaf Jah Nizam ul mulk. Notwithstanding several fine qualities like courage, perseverance and indomitable will, Suraj Mal was utterly conscience-less in the pursuit of his interests in war and diplomacy, which baffled the Mughals and the Marathas alike.

As virtual ruler during his adoptive father's reign he had already made his mark. As early as 1732 he captured the mud-fort of Bharatpur from another Jat and turned it into an impregnable stronghold. As the Bharatpur state expanded steadily under the shadow of Amber-Jaipur at the cost of its northern and western neighbours in Mewat, the fame of Suraj Mal's leadership and tough soldiers also spread. Even high personages like the Emperor, wazirs and nobles courted his assistance. The Jats fought creditably in the inglorious Rohilla campaign on behalf of the Emperor (May, 1745); fought victoriously on behalf of Fath Ali Khan against Asad Khan Khanazad near Chandaus; defeated the Marathas on behalf of his superior patron, Raja Ishwari Singh of Jaipur, at the unequal battle of Bagru (August, 1748) and also the imperial Bakhshi Salabat Jang (January, 1750). Master of Mathura, he coveted the environs of Delhi. So he helped the Jats of Ballabhgarh against the faujdar of Faridabad and Nawab Wazir Safdar Jang (1749).
Subsequently Wazir Safdar Jang engaged them in his campaign against the Bangashes and the Rohillas at Ram-Chatauni (September, 1750) and in the invasion of Rohilkhand (1751-52). In return the Wazir secured imperial grant of the titles of Raja and Mahendra on Badan Singh. Suraj Mal became Kumar Bahadur and was appointed faujdar of Mathura. So he became the governor of the two riparian areas of the Jamuna, paying tribute. This was, according to Father Wendel, 'the first step in the ascendency of the Jats', for they now ranked among the rajas with imperial sanction and were invested with imperial authority. With the support of the imperial Wazir Suraj Mal drove Bahadur Singh Bar-Gujar, a faujdar in Aligarh and occupied Ghasira fort (south of Delhi).

During the civil war (1752) Suraj Mal helped the rebel Wazir Safdar Jang against Ghaziuddin, distrusted by his uncle Intizam ud daula, and made the Emperor restore the Wazir’s viceroyalties of Oudh and Allahabad. Ghaziuddin invited the Marathas against Suraj Mal and Safdar. In October, 1753 Raghunath Rao, desiring to plunder the Jat principality, demanded a ransom of one kror of rupees. Suraj Mal offered forty lakhs. Four months of joint siege of the giant Jat fort of Kumbher (January-May, 1754) by the Marathas and Ghaziuddin failed to reduce it. Suraj Mal’s courageous queen Rani Kishori approached Jayappaji Sindhia against Holkar. Suraj Mal intrigued with the Emperor and Wazir Intizam against the possible dictatorship of Ghaziuddin, backed by the Marathas.

During the chaos caused by change of emperors, the Jats plundered the area round Delhi. In the second half of 1754 Raghunath Rao and Suraj Mal came to an understanding: Suraj Mal was not to oppose the Marathas; he was given a free hand in Agra province, then under the Marathas. Thus the Jats renewed their expansion south of Delhi, recovering Ballabgarh and Ghasira, and capturing even the Mughal fort of Alwar (c. March, 1756). But Suraj Mal could not protect his acquisitions in the Ganga-Jamuna.
Doab in the campaign of Najib-ud-daula, ordered by Ghaziuddin. Finally it was settled (July, 1755) that Suraj Mal would retain his Aligarh lands on a quit rent of 26 lakhs of rupees but vacate the fort and district of Sikanderabad. A sum of 18 lakhs would be paid to him as compensation for jagirs assigned to him in the previous reign but not redeemed: the balance of 8 lakhs was to be paid to the imperial treasury in instalments.

On the death of Badan Singh Suraj Mal had to face the rebellion of his ambitious and impetuous son, Jawahir Singh, who 'played the Mughal umara' in luxury and profusion. A settlement was made in November, 1756 by which the latter was more liberally provided than before. It was a tussle between a peasant's son and a Rajah's son.

Raja Suraj Mal (1756-64)

The first few years of the reign of Suraj Mal (1757-61) were most critical, coinciding with the Afghan and Maratha invasions. Reputed as exceedingly rich and contiguous to the danger zone, his kingdom was a sure and easy victim of the rapacious Afghan, who gave two alternatives: pay ransom or be attacked. The Marathas sought to pressurize him into combining with them in dismembering the Mughal Empire, which would have the effect of rousing all Muslim and Rajput states in Northern India and bringing the irate Afghan back. The situation was further complicated by the shifting court politics of Delhi. Suraj Mal's political sagacity, tactful and patient diplomacy and the ability of his minister, Rupram Kothari, enabled him to pass through the crisis unscathed in territory, wealth and military strength so that, at the departure of Ahmad Shah in 1761, Suraj Mal became 'the strongest potentate in India' (Sarkar).

During November, 1756—April, 1757 Ghaziuddin made peace with Suraj Mal as a counterweight against Najib-ud-daula. Ahmad Shah's forces besieged Jawahir Singh at Ballabhgarh, and plundered the Jat country, Mathura,
Brindaban and Agra, though Gokul was saved by the Naga Sannyasis. Suraj Mal saved his tribesmen by keeping them inside the forts. With Dig and Bharatpur intact, his military strength remained unimpaired. He played a waiting game through parleys and bribes to the Afghan collectors of tribute,—till the approach of summer or of the Marathas. Ghaziuddin, deprived of wazarship by Ahmad Shah, invited the Marathas ( Raghunath’s second invasion ) who restored the wazir. Ahmad Shah’s plenipotentiary, Najib, fled and got the protection of Holkar.

Suraj Mal made an informal defensive alliance with the Marathas against the Afghans ( and Najib ). The main objectives of his wise diplomacy were as follows:

(i) to oust Najib and crush the Rohillas.
(ii) to instal ( the Persian ) Shuja-ud-daula, a hereditary ruler without any loyalty to the Afghans, as Wazir in place of Ghaziuddin, then in isolation.

But the Marathas did not accept his ideas. Though Raghunath Rao and Sindhia were opposed to Najib, Holkar sought to protect the latter, crush Shuja-ud-daula and conquer Oudh, so as to bring India from Attock to Rameshwar under the Peshwa. The unstatesmanlike Maratha policy led to the crash in 1761.

During Abdali’s fifth invasion (1759-61) fugitives, both Hindu and Muslim, found a ready asylum in Jat territory. Suraj Mal nobly offered shelter to Wazir Ghaziuddin ( and his harem ) who had been his most determined enemy at Kumbher. The miserable plight of the Marathas was a joyous event for all including Hindus in Hindustan but not to Suraj Mal. He regarded them to be the surest bulwark against foreign invasion and a solid buttress to resuscitate a confederated Mughal Empire, holding the balance evenly between the Hindus and Muslims, with Shuja-ud-daula as a constitutional Wazir ( Qanungo ). The Jats kept up a guerrilla fight against Abdali before the siege of Dig ( Feb., 1760 ). Holkar now made friends with Suraj Mal but could not persuade the
latter to jointly fight Abdali without reinforcements from the Peshwa. After defeating Holkar Abdali tried to form a coalition of all powers, Hindu and Muslim, against the Marathas. He sent Hafiz Rahmat Khan to detach Suraj Mal and Ghaziuddin from the Marathas. Suraj Mal not only fought Abdali with arms but also with diplomacy and intrigue, baffling Abdali’s diplomacy by counter-intriguing with Shuja-ud-daula. Ghaziuddin soon deserted Abdali and joined the Marathas.

Suraj Mal soon came to be disillusioned by the Marathas. At first his relations with them were cordial. Gradually differences arose over policy and methods. His suggestion of adopting guerrilla tactics, supported by other Maratha leaders, was not acceptable to the Bhau. Suraj Mal again strongly protested against Maratha vandalism in Delhi palace and dissuaded the Bhau from going to Kunjpura. Forestalling Bhau’s treachery against the Jats Suraj Mal escaped from the Maratha camp. Notwithstanding his differences with the Marathas, Suraj Mal entertained the Maratha refugees from Panipat on humanitarian grounds.

Failing to become the regent of Delhi with Ghaziuddin as his stooge (May, 1761) Suraj Mal sought to extend his dominions after the departure of the Afghans and the Marathas. As Delhi had become devastated, Agra had become the richest city in the empire, the best trade emporium in Northern India, an asylum of rich fugitives, and containing the imperial stores and wealth for ages. By capturing it he got 50 lakhs of rupees, besides artillery, munitions and other goods. In the Doab he now occupied several Maratha jagirs and recovered his earlier possessions. Not only did he subdue anew some Rajput and other zamindars in Agra and Aligarh districts, but even some Jat zamindars as well. He sought to set up a small principality for his son with Mewat, Jhajhar and some other Baluch areas near Rewari. An understanding with Najib (October, 1761) resulted in the confirmation of the
Jat gains (in Jhajhar etc.), subject to payment of tribute to the Emperor. Abdali’s presence in the Punjab in 1762 set a bound to Suraj Mal’s activity. In 1763 his attempt to establish law and order in Mewat led to a rupture with Najib, the protector of the Baluchi Musavi Khan, the local highway robbers. As Musavi refused to drive out one notorious Meo named Sanulba, Suraj Mal captured his headquarters Farrukhnagar (December, 1763), with the help of his son, Jawahir. Spurning at Najib’s repeated requests, Suraj Mal faced him in battle but was killed (December 25).

Suraj Mal enjoyed ruling power for more than twenty years in his father’s reign as well as his own.

Bounded by Delhi subah in the north, Agra subah (in the territory of Jaipur) in the west, the Chambal in the south and the Ganges in the east, the Jat kingdom of Bharatpur (100 kos by 70 kos) included the districts of Agra, Dholpur, Mainpuri, Hathras, Aligarh, Etah, Meerut, Rohtak, Farrukhnagar, Mewat, Rewari, Gurgaon and Mathura. It was well cultivated and generally peaceful, yielding a revenue of 175 lakhs of rupees a year. His army consisted of 5000 horses, 60 elephants, 15,000 cavalry, 25,000 infantry (besides others in forts), more than 300 cannon pieces and proportionate munition. His dream of having Europeans to train his infantry was unfulfilled and he had no foreign soldier in his pay. His sole defect was his greed, which led him to keep robbers in his pay in order to share their booty and to be miserly, leaving even his family and army languishing in poverty. Loved by his own people, respected by his neighbours and feared by foreigners, this ‘wise, politic, valiant and grand’ ruler was ‘the eye and shining taper of the Jat tribe,—the most redoubtable prince in Hindustan for the last 15 years’—(Fr. Wendel).
Section B
THE BUNDELAS

Chhatrasal and the Marathas

Chhatrasal Bundela (son of Champa Rai) had already become 'the greatest, most persistent and most successful enemy of the empire' in Central India and Malwa during the reign of Aurangzeb. The range of his victories so widened on account of Aurangzeb's preoccupations in the Deccan that local imperial officers found him 'irrepressible'. He was appointed a mansabdar of 4000 in the Deccan, at the intercession of Firuz Jang (1705). Though he came back home to fight for independence on Aurangzeb's death, he remained a loyal feudatory under Bahadur Shah, joining the campaign against the Sikhs in 1710. He was ordered to join Prince A'zzuddin in the campaign against Farrukhsiyar. He served Sawai Jai Singh against the Marathas in Malwa and was summoned to court by the Emperor (September, 1715). As the Bundelas were engaged in occupying royal domains on the other side of the Jamuna, and also jagirs of the Mughal mansabdars in Bundelkhand, Muhammad Khan Bangash, the Afghan governor of Allahabad (1722-29) had to attack them incessantly during 1726-28 and was largely successful at first. The ambition to expand at the cost of others, coupled with the fear of Muhammad Khan, led the Bundelas to a Maratha alliance. The Mughal suspicions of the Bundelas for their sympathies with the Marathas were thus well founded. The latter also found in Bundelkhand a convenient jumping-off ground to the Ganga-Jamuna Doab, forming a part of the dominions of Saadat Khan of Oudh. From the Doab they could fan out either towards the east in Bihar and Bengal or the west to advance to Delhi. In fact Chhatrasal sought the help of the Marathas
against Muhammad Khan. The Peshwa’s army invaded Baghelkhand and Bundelkhand early in 1729. Muhammad Khan had to take shelter in Jaitpur (May), where he was besieged for three months. In August 1729 he was relieved by his son Qaim Khan. The crestfallen governor had to promise not to come again to Bundelkhand and harass Chhatrasal. Out of gratitude to the Peshwa he agreed to pay Rs. 65,000/- as chauth (annual tribute) and the Peshwa would protect and support his two sons Hirde Shah and Jagat Raj. After his death in 1731, it was converted to a jagir (e.g. Kalpi, Hata, Saugar, Jhansi, Sironj, Kunch, Gharkota and Hirde-nagar) and entrusted to Govind Pant Kher (Bundele). In 1733 the older defensive agreement was supplemented by an offensive one, by which the Bundelas agreed to give armed assistance to the Peshwa in his foreign campaigns or in his advance to Delhi. Hirde Shah sought to extend towards Orchha state and Peshwa Baji Rao agreed to share it equally. Jai Singh Sawai’s suggestion of making the Peshwa deputy governor of Malwa (1736) was rejected by the Emperor. But Bundelkhand virtually became a Maratha province together with Malwa. Thus the Bundelas followed a pro-Maratha attitude which was in sharp contrast with that of the Kachhwahas and the Rathors.