PART ONE

The Mughals, The Persians and The Afghans

CHAPTER I

DYNASTIC SUCCESSION

Section A

STRUGGLES FOR THE THRONE, 1707-12

1. Civil War after Aurangzeb's death

Dramatis Personae:

A struggle for the throne was in the tradition of the Chaghtai Turks in India ever since the time of Humayun. Sometimes it was a fratricidal war, sometimes it partook of the nature of a rebellion of a son against the father. Whatever the form, the nobles played an important, sometimes a decisive, role in such civil wars. These gave them an opportunity to exact concessions from rival claimants. At the same time these were periods of difficult decisions for them. Failure to back the right horse might adversely affect their careers.

Like most of his predecessors Aurangzeb was unfortunate in his sons. His death at Ahmadnagar on March 3, 1707, was followed by a war of succession among his three surviving sons, Muazzam, Azam and Kam Bakhsh. They
had long been exerting to win adherents in an impending struggle. Muhammad Muazzam Shah Alam, the second son born of a Hindu princess, Nawab Bai of Kashmir, became heir-apparent after the imprisonment and death of the eldest prince Md. Sultan. He too, had been imprisoned for eight years by his suspicious father during the Golkonda campaign of 1687 for alleged disloyalty. Later on he was released in 1695, appointed Governor of Akbarabad and then of Kabul (1699). Azam Shah, the third son, born of Dilras Banu, and proud of his royal Persian descent, usually called Shah i Alijah, Azamtara, considered himself as the future emperor and during the long eclipse of Muazzam tried to increase his authority and influence. As governor of Gujrat from 1701 he came to possess vast wealth and a big army. Five years later he was recalled to the capital and his eldest son, Bidar Bakht, was sent there from Malwa as his father's deputy. But there were quarrels between Azam and Kam Bakhsh. Azam was also jealous of Muhammad Azim (second son of Muazzam), Azim us Shan, governor of Bengal and Bihar, because the latter was virtually independent and very wealthy. At Azam's instigation the Emperor had recalled Azim from Patna but this had a disastrous effect on Azam's own future. However, Azam won the support of leading Iranian nobles like Asad Khan and Zulfiqar Khan and began to prepare for a struggle with Kam Bakhsh, born of Udipuri Bai, the fifth and favourite son of Aurangzeb. Apprehending a confrontation between them in the event of his death, Aurangzeb appointed him governor of Bijapur (Feb., 1707) and instructed him to go there post-haste. In the Deccan the Marathas caused trouble to the emperor's army and in case of a war of succession the Marathas would get a suitable opportunity. The prince was to be assisted by the Chief Bakhshi (Ahsan Khan) and Muhammad Amin Khan. Kam Bakhsh was learned and judicious but fickle-minded. Azam was ordered to go to suppress disturbances in Malwa
on the ground of the failure of Bidar Bakht. As Azam claimed the Deccan he was much annoyed.

Aurangzeb always apprehended a war of succession after his death. He is said to have left a will below his pillow with directions for his burial and for partitioning the empire. The terms agree with the measures of the emperor regarding the posting of his sons and hence it has been regarded as authentic. The general arrangement was somewhat vague but it was as follows: Kam Bakhsh was to be left unmolested if he was satisfied with Hyderabad and Bijapur; Muazzam was to get Delhi and Kabul; Azam was to get Agra, Malwa and Gujrat; and Aurangzeb's wazir, Amir ul Umara Asad Khan, was to be the wazir of Kam Bakhsh. Perhaps Aurangzeb hoped that Kam Bakhsh in the Deccan would be able to defend himself against his rivals with the support of some leading nobles and he also expected that this arrangement would keep the balance even and would not lay him open to the charge of favouritism as he had accused Shahjahan of partiality to Dara. But Aurangzeb's hopes were not realised and soon the rival contestants plunged into a struggle for the throne. In fact it was fought in two stages between Muazzam and Azam, and then between Muazzam (Bahadur Shah) and Kam Bakhsh.

First Stage: between Muazzam and Azam: their respective chances: At first the chances of Azam who was nearest home appeared bright. Muhammad Amin Khan whom the late emperor had sent to Kam Bakhsh soon retired to join Azam at the news of Aurangzeb's death. Wazir Asad Khan called all the nobles and made them swear to act in unison. Azam was informed of the situation by him as well as by his sister, Zinat un nisa, and urged to return and the nobles including Asad Khan declared their allegiance to Azam... Zulfiqar (Mir Bakhshi) also joined him along with Ram Singh Hada, Dalpat Bundela and Tarbiyat Khan (Mir Atish), returning from the Maratha campaign. With the support of the most
powerful nobles, the possession of royal effects and stores and park of artillery and veteran officers of the Deccan, Azam had very bright chances of victory in the civil war. He declared himself emperor on 14 March, 1707 with the title of Abul Fayaz, Qutbuddin Muhammad Ahmad Shah Ghazi, and the Khutbah was read in his name.

But the advantages of Azam were illusory indeed. Though many principal officials and generals loyally submitted to him others were indifferent. Some were not willing to take part in the civil war and were half-hearted. The powerful and influential ‘Chin’ group, the Turanis, namely Ghaziuddin Khan Firuz Jang, governor of Berar, and his son, Chin Qilich Khan, remained aloof. Azam, therefore, tried to conciliate them by giving them high mansabs and titles. Chin Qilich was made a 7-hazari and entitled Khan i Dauran. Muhammad Amin Khan (now a 6-hazari) turned back from Burhanpur to the Deccan. Ghaziuddin did not move from Daulatabad. So Azam was advised by Zulfiqar to march via Daulatabad to compel Ghaziuddin (Firuz Jang) to join him. But Azam did not want to leave the direct road to Agra and gave a haughty answer. Azam, though angry, thought it wise to dissimulate. He even appointed Firuz Jang, governor of Aurangabad (i.e., Viceroy of the Deccan) with the title of Sipahsalar so as to leave him as a friend and not as a foe. Chin Qilich Khan was made Governor of Khandesh and asked to be at the court, leaving a deputy there. But all this show of friendship was of no avail. Chin Qilich left for his province and was joined by Muhammad Amin Khan. Many soldiers recruited in the Deccan also left Azam. Even the nobles of the Irani party like Asad Khan and Zulfiqar Khan (entitled Nusrat Jang) did not want to leave the Deccan and requested Azam to keep them there to check the Marathas. The unwillingness of party leaders of both the groups to leave the south and go to the north was very significant and ominous.
Secondly, Azam had some grave defects of character and temper which accounted for his failure. A contemporary historian, Iradat Khan, attributed the half-hearted attitude of the nobles to Azam's character. Though brave and vigorous, Azam was very proud and hot-headed, despising others' advice. Further he was very niggardly in giving increments and promotions. Lastly he had Shiaite inclinations. Satish Chandra thinks that these charges are not well-founded and that his miserliness might have been due to the costly Deccan wars and the resultant bad financial condition as mentioned by Khafi Khan. He 'had not the money to be liberal with'. The salaries of soldiers were in arrears for three years which had to be paid first. Asad Khan could satisfy the clamouring soldiers with a loan of one lakh from Chin Kilich Khan. But it was a fact that Azam's refusal led to much dissatisfaction and resentment among many nobles. His haughty attitude, bitter words and bad temper also alienated his followers. The promotion of some new, untried personal favourites, disgusted many older Alamgiri veterans.

However, many difficulties of Azam would have been solved if he had occupied Agra first (i.e. before Muazzam), because Agra Fort contained the hoarded treasure of Shahjahan. This would have been possible if he had permitted his son Bidar to march from Ahmedabad to Agra. Azam unwisely suspected him of planning for the throne himself and ordered him to wait in Malwa till his arrival from the Deccan. Thus fifty precious days were lost. Clearly the previous arrival of Muazzam at Agra was considered to be dead certain. Meanwhile Azim us Shan, recalled from Bihar by Aurangzeb, had reached Agra. But Baqi Khan Qul, the commandant of the Agra fort and father-in-law of Bidar, did not give its keys to anyone except the claimant. Thus Azam alienated his best followers by his pride, haughtiness and ruined his chances by his jealousy of his own son, the ablest grandson of Aurangzeb. His army was less than half of that of Muazzam. He
made a blunder by leaving his guns behind, and facing his rival with only rockets and hand guns, unable to check the latter's fatal cannonade and slaughter of his own relations.

Md. Muazzam Shah Alam, the eldest surviving son of Aurangzeb, and governor of Kabul and Lahore, was at Kabul in 1707. He had four grown-up and experienced sons and several competent and loyal officers besides a very strong artillery served by European and mestizo gunners. With the recruiting ground of Afghanistan and the Punjab and resources of the provinces of Multan and Bengal (and Bihar) which were respectively under his two sons, Jahandar and Azim us Shan, Muazzam was in a very strong position to fight for the throne, though Azam condemned him as 'baqqal' (shop-keeper). He excelled Azam in tact, foresight and understanding. Disclaiming any desire to contest the throne and avowing a retired life, he had nevertheless organized at Kabul a body of dependable supporters and an army, ready for action by constant drill and camp life. He was ably assisted by an obscure but efficient agent, Munim Khan (1703). Appointed diwan of Kabul and deputy-governor of the Punjab, the latter had organised the finances, collected funds and animals (including camels and oxen) to drag the artillery and also boats for crossing rivers in anticipation of a showdown. Many Rajputs were also enlisted in his army through Rao Budh Singh Hada of Bundi and Bijai Singh Kachchwaha.

Muazzam got the news of Aurangzeb's death at Jamrud in Khyber pass near Peshawar towards the end of March, 1707. Thanks to Munim's secret preparations he quickly advanced, crowning himself as Bahadur Shah on the way, first to Lahore and then to Delhi. The money in the treasuries of these places amounting to 58 lakhs enabled him to partially pay his soldiers. A Sikh contingent sent by Guru Govind helped him. But many starving soldiers were discontented till he reached Agra in June. Baqi Khan Qul, the commandant of the fort, submitted to him.
Two crores out of the accumulated treasure in Agra fort were utilised in satisfying his soldiers.

Azam got the news of his rival's occupation of Agra at Gwalior. In great alarm he left his family, wazir, treasure and heavy artillery and marched to Agra. Bahadur Shah offered to partition the empire peacefully on the lines of Aurangzeb's will. To avoid innocent bloodshed he even suggested that if Azam wanted he might take Gujrat and Ajmer also besides the four Deccan provinces; if this was not agreed, the issue might be decided in a personal combat. But Azam turned down the offer of his 'bania' brother, because, as he said, a kingdom could not be shared between two kings just as two swords could not be kept in one sheath, though one blanket might suffice to cover ten people in sleep. An equal division that would be acceptable was that Azam would get from the floor to the roof, and Bahadur from the roof to the sky. Perhaps Azam was right in insisting on the unity of the empire.

The Battle of Jajau: In this situation there was no other alternative but war. The battle between the two brothers took place at Jajau or Jaju near Samugargh, 10 miles s. e. of Agra on 18th June, 1707. Shah Alam came out victorious and Azam was killed with his two sons. Azam was largely responsible for his own doom. Besides the difference in character between the two brothers and circumstances already explained before, there were other factors which caused Azam's defeat. (i) Respective strength of the armies: Shah Alam had a numerically superior and very strong army consisting of cavalry and artillery. Some say his cavalry numbered 1,50,000. This figure might be exaggerated but Azam had a much smaller army, 65,000 horse and 45,000 infantry at the most. This mostly comprised raw, untrained men and many of his nobles like Zulfiqar and Jai Singh II were half-hearted. Jai Singh deserted Azam in Malwa. In fact the ambitious and unreliable Zulfiqar betrayed Azam and this was one of the chief causes, if not the cause, of Azam's failure.
(ii) Muazzam was also stronger in finance, having strengthened his cause by collecting ample treasure at Agra whereas Azam suffered from lack of money. (iii) Muazzam was superior in artillery: he had collected heavy guns from Agra and his artillery played havoc on Azam's men, because Azam had left his heavy artillery and much equipage in the Deccan and at Gwalior, and was without big cannon mortars. In fact he made a fatal mistake in despising Muazzam's strong artillery.

Another factor which went against Azam was that he had to face Muazzam after making a very rigorous march from the south. On the sandy soil of Jajau and in the excessive heat of June, Azam's men were blinded by thick dust in a sand storm which diverted their arrows. So victory was beyond the grasp of Azam. Jajau was a mere gamble for Azam. Hoping to attack Muazzam by surprise, 'like a fierce lion dashing upon a flock of sheep', he did not formulate any plan of action. But this did not materialise and his death sealed the fate of his army. Thus the Jajau campaign was characterised by utter want of generalship and lack of planning and so differed in nature from Aurangzeb's brilliantly successful campaigns of the War of Succession. The issue was entirely determined by artillery. There was no occasion for adoption of the usual old Turkish tactics. The war of succession between Muazzam and Azam was 'a short and sharp contest' and it weakened the empire by the loss of men on the field and the subsequent lavish gifts of money, and promises of office by Bahadur Shah to loyalists and prospective adherents which had a profound effect on the financial position of the empire. Militarily the campaign exposed utter organisational weaknesses especially in the conduct of battle that came to be illustrated in 1739.

Second Stage: Bahadur Shah and Kam Bakhsh. Kam Bakhsh proclaimed independence in the Deccan and had the Khutbah read in his name after the death of Aurangzeb. Bahadur Shah had made an offer to Kam Bakhsh, similar
to the one made to Azam for division of empire. Many consider it doubtful how far Bahadur Shah was sincere in his offer. But probably his object was that if Bijapur and Golkonda remained under one Mughal rule, the problem of law and order would be better served and the Marathas would be checked better and at the same time, the unity of the Mughal empire would be maintained. Kam Bakhsh rejected this offer. But he was no match for Bahadur Shah. He did not organise a suitable counterstroke against him. In the eventual showdown Kam Bakhsh could not succeed. If he had been able to occupy the forts in Bijapur and Golkonda and won over the nobles and effected an understanding with the Marathas probably he might have succeeded. But he could do nothing of the kind. Even the Karnatak did not come under his control. The Golkonda commander (being in touch with Bahadur Shah) did not submit. Many nobles were also in secret correspondence with the latter. Kam Bakhsh again suspected the loyalty of his able officer, Mir Bakhshi, Taqarrub Khan. His imprisonment and execution made the situation worse. In the impending struggle he only had a small and dispirited group of followers who deserted him when Bahadur Shah came. After a brief and fruitless resistance he was defeated and killed in January, 1709. Bahadur Shah thus became the undisputed ruler throughout the empire. Local separatism failed for the time being but reasserted itself after seventeen years.

2. Problem of Succession, 1712.

When Bahadur Shah died at Lahore in 1712, the whole camp was thrown into confusion. His four sons were present there. Muizzuddin (Jahandar Shah), the eldest, was negligent and slack, and had neither money nor troops. The second son, Azim us Shan, outshone his rivals in ability, influence and power. He was the favourite and influential counsellor of his father. As governor of
Bengal (1697-1706) he was the wealthiest and strongest. The third son, Rafi us Shan was jealous of him. The youngest, Jahan Shah, was an invalid. Thus Azim us Shan was 'the destined victor' in the impending civil war.

It came as a matter of course. The problem of succession was ultimately connected with the problem of the Wizarat. Zulfiqar, Mir Bakhshi, again aspired to become Wazir. To realise his own ambition he interfered in the struggle for succession and adopted new tactics. First, in order to check Azim us Shan, whom he regarded as his chief obstacle, Zulfiqar tried to form an anti-Azim league of the three other princes. It was really a struggle between 'the most powerful prince and the most powerful noble'. In this respect the civil war after Bahadur Shah's death was different from previous civil wars. But being uncertain of the issue, Zulfiqar approached Azim-us-Shan for a settlement. The latter not only refused but asked Zulfiqar to submit to himself. Thereupon Zulfiqar drew up a scheme of partition of the empire excluding Azim. Jahan Shah was to get the entire Deccan: Rafi-us-Shan was to be given Multan, Thattah, Bhakkar, Kabul and Kashmir i.e., north-western India: Jahandar Shah would get the rest of India and become its emperor. Coins were to be issued in Jahandar's name and the Khutbah was to be read in his name, Zulfiqar would remain the common wazir, stay at the court of Jahandar, and exercise his functions through deputies. In other words there was to be decentralisation within the empire. The eldest brother would represent and symbolise the unity of the empire with the wazir as its hub or pivot. The emperor would reign, the wazir would rule. This was wholly a novel feature.

But everything depended on the success of the war. The issue really hinged on who would succeed,—Azim us Shan or Zulfiqar? In a sense Azim destroyed his bright chances by miscalculation. Like Azam he despised his rivals and met the same fate. He was sanguine of victory as his wealth
exceeded that of his brothers, True, his army was numerically inferior,—30,000 horse and 30,000 foot, as compared to 53,000 horse and 68,000 foot of the other three. That was why he did not and could not take the offensive. Instead of striking the enemy when still unprepared he remained on the defensive. He adopted 'the attitude of a helpless waiter on events'. Expecting reinforcements from Chin Qilich Khan and wishfully thinking that his brothers would quarrel and their armies would melt before his strong force, he hoped to win a victory without striking a blow. But this was a mistake.

On the other hand Zulfiqar seized the initiative, cut off Azim us Shan from Lahore and capturing money and artillery stored up there, attacked him on the bank of the Ravi by a numerically superior army and artillery even before the expected reinforcements from Chin Qilich Khan could come. Azim's own army was reduced by hunger and desertion. He himself was drowned in the river along with his elephant wounded by cannon. The defeat of the most powerful aspirant was entirely due to the vigour and policy of Zulfiqar, the master-mind of the league. After the defeat and death of Azim, however, the three brothers quarrelled over the division of the spoils. Zulfiqar favoured the weak and pleasure-loving Jahandar as that would give him a free hand. Bahadur Shah also had preferred Jahandar Shah on his death bed. The support of Zulfiqar was the most decisive factor in the victory of Jahandar over the other two brothers who were ultimately defeated (end of March, 1712). Jahandar ascended the throne on 29 March, 1712.
Section B

KING-MAKING (1713-20)

There were civil wars for the throne on the death of Aurangzeb during 1707-09 and also on the death of Bahadur Shah in 1712. But the struggle which resulted in the accession of Farrukhsiyar in 1713 was somewhat different in nature. It was preceded by a rebellion on his part even during the lifetime of Jahandar Shah and he owed his success to the support of the Sayyid brothers. In fact from Farrukhsiyar to Muhammad Shah the succession came to be determined not on the field of battle but in the mind of the Sayyid brothers. They indulged in the exciting game of making and unmaking kings, according to the success or failure of the rulers in satisfying their own whims.

The immediate cause of the downfall of Jahandar Shah and of his minister, Zulfiqar, was the rebellion of Azim-us-Shan’s second son, Farrukhsiyar, in Bihar. He declared himself king at Patna (April, 1712), though he had neither adequate resources nor any supporting band of nobles. But it was the support of two Sayyid brothers, Hasan Ali Abdullah, governor of Allahabad, and Husain Ali, governor of Bihar, and the Bhojpur Rajputs, which saved him and made him emperor. His army marched towards Agra and faced the royalists under young prince Azzuddin and Khan-i-Dauran at Khajwa (November). But the latter’s soldiers were dissatisfied for arrears of salary; the experienced nobles who were sent with him under Khan-i-Dauran and Lutfullah Khan against the wishes of Zulfiqar quarrelled with one another; there were large scale desertions. Finally the prince suddenly fled on the eve of the battle. Jahandar Shah now realised his real danger and left for Agra. But he was handicapped by lack of money, to replenish which gold and silver utensils, jewels, jewelled goods and golden ceilings of palaces were sold. The Rajput
rajas were requested for help but timely help was out of question. The royal army (76-80,000 horse) was superior to Farrukhsiyar's both numerically and in artillery but there was no unity of command. Zulfiqar was not effective at all, owing to difference of opinion between him and Kokaltash, a favourite of Jahandar, and rivalry between the Iranis and Turanis. The bribed Turani nobles, Muhammad Amin Khan and Chin Qilich Khan, remained neutral. The army was utterly demoralised. The result was utter failure. At the bitterly contested battle of the Jamuna (Jan. 10, 1713) the Sayyids outflanked Jahandar by a surprise crossing at an unguarded ford. Jahandar fled from the field, and appealed for protection to Asad Khan Vakil and armed support from Zulfiqar Khan Wazir. The latter distrusted Farrukhsiyar. But finally the crafty ministers lured their erstwhile master to confinement in Delhi and made him over to the victor, hoping to gain the latter's favour and retain their position and influence. Jahandar was murdered and Farrukhsiyar ascended the throne (11 Feb. 1713).

The Sayyid brothers now became king-makers for the next seven years (1713-20), virtually dictators, keeping the emperors completely under their control. Kings became their pawns on the political chessboard.

The whole reign of Farrukhsiyar was a tussle between him and his Sayyid sponsors for power. Finally the latter decided to depose him. The emperor, whom they had raised to the throne, was dragged out, blinded (Feb. 1719), imprisoned and later on murdered towards the end of April (27-28).

The Sayyid king-makers now experimented in ruling through imperial puppets. Immediately after deposing Farrukhsiyar they set up Rafi-ud-Darajat, younger son of Rafi-us-Shan, controlling the person of the emperor with the help of their own nominees. Intelligent but consumptive, he was their prisoner in life (Feb-4 June, 1719). They deposed him also and enthroned his elder brother,
Rafi-ud-Daula as Shahjahan II (June 6). He too, was a captive of the Sayyids both in his official and private life. This sick, opium-addict died of diarrhoea (Sept. 17, 1719). Then they raised Roshan Akhtar, youngest son of Jahan Shah (youngest son of Bahadur), as Muhammad Shah (Sept. 28, 1719).

With the elevation of Muhammad Shah as emperor there was some relaxation of control by the Sayyids, particularly with regard to the attendants surrounding him. But in matters of state the king remained powerless. The Sayyids wanted to rule while the imperial puppet would reign. All his officers and servants were servants of Abdullah. It were they who took him out or brought him back to the palace. Controlling his person with their own men, the Sayyids deprived him of all personal liberty.

After some time, however, there ensued a period of struggle for power, first between the king and his ministers and then between the Sayyids, belonging to the Hindusthani party and a combination of the foreign ‘Mughalia’ party, consisting of the Turanis and the Irans. The main thrust at Sayyid domination was levelled by the Turani Nizam-ul-Mulk and Muhammad Amin Khan. Husain Ali Sayyid was murdered (October 9, 1720). His elder brother, Abdullah Khan, now set up Ibrahim (brother of Rafi-ud-Darajat and Rafi-ud-Daula), in whose name coins were also struck (Oct. 14), in place of Muhammad Shah. In the ensuing artillery-battle between Abdullah’s forces and the imperial troops (Nov. 15), the former was defeated and imprisoned. Ibrahim, king for one month, was forgiven but kept in prison. Muhammad Shah emerged triumphant. The rule of the king-makers ended. Abdullah was subsequently poisoned (Oct. 1722).
Genealogical Tree of the Later Mughals

Aurangzeb

Md. Sultan (executed 1676)

Muazzam Shah Alam I
(2) Bahadur Shah I (1707-12)

(1) Azam (March-June 1707)

Bidar Bakht (killed, 1707)

Akbar (d. 1704 in Persia)

Nekusiyar (rebel, acc. and d. 1719)

Kam Bakhsh (killed, 1709)

Mubiy-us-Sunnat

(10) Mubiy-ul-Millat (or uddin)

Shahjahan III (Nov. 1759-Oct 1760)

Muizzuddin
(3) Jahan Dar Shah (1712-13, murdered)

Azim-us-Shan (killed, 1712)

(4) Farrukhistryar (1713-19, murdered)

Rafi-us-Shan (killed 1712)

Khujistah Akhtar Jahan Shah (killed, 1712)

Roshan Akhtar (7) Muhammad Shah (Sept. 1719 48)

(8) Ahmad Shah (1743-54 deposed)

(11a) Bidar Bakht (1788)

Ali Gauhar (11) Shah Alam II (Dec. 1759-1806)

Mirza Jawan Bakht (heir-apparent)

(12) Akbar II (1806-37)

(13) Bahadur Shah II (1837-57)

(7a) Md. Ibrahim (Oct.-Nov. 1720)

(6) Rafi-ud-Dawla Shahjahan II (June-Sept. 1719)

(5) Rafi-ud-Darajat (Feb.-June, 1719)
Section C

MUHAMMAD SHAH AND HIS FAVOURITES

Except for the brief interlude of Sayyid Abdullah using Ibrahim as a pawn there was no attempt at king-making during the long reign of Muhammad Shah of about 30 years (1719-48). Though not so feeble as his two phantom predecessors, he was inexperienced and weak. He escaped from the tutelage of the Sayyids but came under another type of bondage. He was so much in the grip of the favourites of both sexes that he never took any decision on his own discretion. He became a cypher in administration. He reigned but did not rule.

Section D

PUPPET OR PHANTOM SHOW (1748-1806)

Muhammad Shah “may be called the last of the rulers of Babur’s line, as after him the Kingship had nothing but the name left to it” (Siyar). From 1748 onwards succession continued to be confined to the Timurid family but was not strictly hereditary. Struggles for the throne ceased, but not intrigues or manœuvres. The persons who now adorned the Delhi throne were mere puppets without any will power or ability, set up, deposed or blinded or dominated by scheming politicians. They were virtually phantoms.

Muhammad Shah was succeeded by his son Ahmad Shah in 1748. He was utterly ignorant of the art of government and war. Sunk in wine, bhang and charas, he had surrendered full authority to Javid Khan, eunuch, paramour of his mother Udham Bai. He hardly enquired into the three foundations of the empire, — kingdom, army and
treasury. Hurled from power and blinded by the treacherous Wazir Ghaziuddin Imad-ul-Mulk (1754), Shaham Shah Ahmad Shah had to quench his thirst and agony by drinking water given in a broken earthen pot lying on the ground. Muhammad Aziz-ud-din, the second but eldest surviving son of Jahandar Shah, was released from his confinement and placed on the throne as Alamgir II (1754-59). But he can hardly be described as anything more than a shadowy and unreal king. He was 'as much a prisoner upon the throne as he was formerly in his confine-
ment'. He appealed to Ahmad Shah Abdali to save him from the oppressive Wazir's grip and, after the invader's departure, looked upon his plenipotentiary, Najib-ud-Daula as his 'potential protector'. But his efforts not only proved futile but also fatal. The irate Wazir had both the emperor and Intizam-ud-Daula killed and installed Muhiyuddin or Muhiy-ul-Millat, grandson of Kam Bakhsh as Shahjahan III on the throne (November, 1759). Prince Ali Gauhar, then in exile in Bihar, heard the news and proclaimed himself emperor as Shah Alam II with effect from 21st December. Sadashiv Rao Bhauf, the Maratha general, deposed and imprisoned Shahjahan III (Oct. 10, 1760), proclaimed Shah Alam II emperor and installed his eldest son, Mirza Jawan Bakht, as heir-apparent to carry on the government in his absence. For a time there were two emperors, one at the capital and the other outside. After defeating the Marathas at Panipat, the Abdali invader nominated Ali Gauhar, son of the murdered Alamgir II, emperor as Shah Alam, Shuja-ud-Daula as his Wazir and confirmed Najib-ud-Daula Ruhela as Amir-ul-Umara. So Ali Gauhar was now set up as Shah Alam II (1761-1806). Though intelligent, he was extremely weak, fickle and constantly changing. In him was noticeable absence of the power of work and complete inertia of will. "Had he even abilities to rule, (he) had now no subjects left to command; for he may be considered as the image of a king, set up by way of insult in the midst of the ruins of
his capital” (Dow). The Delhi empire had now shrunk to the northern half of the Ganga-Jamuna doab with a patch of land west of the Jamuna. Even in this circumscribed limits the government was not in his hands.

Emperor Shah Alam II, losing his throne after the battle of Buxar, and shorn of power, led the life of a wanderer before he stayed at Allahabad, enjoying a pension from the English. Of course Clive acknowledged this unreal sovereignty of the emperor. But Warren Hastings did not consider it reasonable at all to show due honour to the emperor, rather contemptuously referred to as ‘that wretched king in shreds and patches’. In January, 1772, Shah Alam was restored to his ancestral throne at Delhi under Maratha hegemony. But thereafter he neither led the army again nor accomplished any work himself. He had no Wazir, no general and no Vakil. It seemed as if under a crowned but unreal shadow and in enveloping anarchy the Mughal heritage of Akbar and Shahjahan would be torn to shreds. From 1784 to 1803 he appointed Mahadaji Sindhia Bakhshi and Vakil-i-mutlaq (1784) and came under Maratha protection. But the Sindhia, nominally a slave, became the rigid master of Shah Alam. Three years later Shah Alam appointed Ghulam Qadir Rohilla Mir Bakhshi and Vakil-i-mutlaq (September, 1787) on grounds of convenience. Ghulam Qadir occupied Delhi, dismissed and blinded Shah Alam and crowned Bidar Bakht (July, 1788). A few months later Ghulam Qadir himself was defeated, blinded and killed by the Sindhia. The phantom Mughal authority ended with the collapse of the Marathas at the entry of the British general Lord Lake in 1803 into Delhi. Shah Alam became a British pensioner till his death in 1806. The dynasty however, continued in name till 1857.