CHAPTER V

PERSONALITY OF ASAF KHAN AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO CULTURAL LIFE

Asaf khan started his political career in 1611 with the mansab of 500 zat and 100 sawar and tittle of Itiqad Khan.\(^1\) His mansab was increased to 1000 zat and 300 sawars in 1612 with the marriage of his daughter with Prince Khurram.\(^2\) Little of Asaf Khan was confirmed in 1614 and his mansab was raised to 3000 zat and 1000 sawars.\(^3\) In 1615 his mansab was again increased to 4000 zat and 2000 sawars.\(^4\) In 1616 his mansab was augmented to 5000 zat and 4000 sawars\(^5\) with privilege of taking out his procession a flag and drum. Then in 1617-18 to 5000 zat and 5000 sawars and his original 4000 sawar converted into do aspa si aspa mansab.\(^7\) In 1620 subah of Gujarat was assigned to him.\(^8\) In 1622 his mansab was raised up to 6000 zat and 6000 sawar and appointed as wakil-us sultanate after the death of his father Itimad-ud Daulah.

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\(^1\) Tuzuk-i Jahangiri, p. 98; Ma‘a’sir-ul Umara, vol. 1, p. 287; Zakhirat-ul Khawanin, sec. I, p. 10; Jahangirnama, (Hindi) p. 272
\(^2\) Tuzuk-i Jahangiri, p. 106; Ma‘a’sir-i Jahangiri, p. 151; Tazkirat-ul Umara, p.17; Iqbalnama-i Jahangiri, p. 79
\(^3\) Tuzuk-i Jahangiri, p. 127; Jahangirnama, (Hindi) p. 348; Iqbalnama-i Jahangiri, p. 85
\(^4\) Tuzuk-i Jahangiri, p. 155; Iqbalnama-i Jahangiri, p. 94; Ma‘a’sir-i Jahangiri, p. 235.
\(^5\) Tuzuk-i Jahangiri, p. 188; Jahangirnama, (Hindi) p. 444; Iqbalnama-i Jahangiri, p. 120.
\(^6\) Tuzuk-i Jahangiri, p. vol. 1, 381; Iqbalnama-i Jahangiri, p. 120.
He was appointed as *subahdar* of Bengal and Orissa in 1623 and same year *subah* of Bengal was assigned to him. In 1624 his *mansab* was raised up to 7000 *zat* 7000 *sawar*, *do aspa si aspa* and the same year *subahdari* of Panjab was given to him. After the end of rebellion of Mahabat Khan and before the demise of Jahangir, Asaf Khan was again appointed on post of *wakil* with the position of *subahdar* of Panjab and Multan. At the time of Shahjahan’s coronation on 6 February 1628, Asaf Khan was promoted to the rank of 8000 *zat* and 8000 *sawar*, *do aspa si aspa* and appointed as *subehder* of Lahore. In the same year, after coming from Lahore to Agra he was appointed as *wakil* with the tittle of *Yamim-ud Daulah* (right hand of the state) with the *mansab* of 9000 *zat* and 9000 *sawar*, *du aspa si aspa*. Besides this, the royal signet ring *azuk* was also entrusted to him. Shahjahan called him ‘Ammu’ as uncle. In 1628 he was appointed as *Subehdari* of Lahore and Multan. In 1631 *subahdar* of Panjab was assigned to him. Title of *Khana-i Khanan Sipahsalar* was given to him after the death of Mahabat Khan in 1634. In 1640 he was appointed as
the governor of Lari Bandar at Sind.\textsuperscript{19} Asaf Khan died in 1642.\textsuperscript{20} Among the contemporary nobles, he was the only one who received so many favours. Besides the political role and achievements, he had a good quality in managing state affairs. The following brief discussion on Asaf Khan signifies that he played very crucial role on different important occasions.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Asaf Khan: Powers and Privileges in the Mughal Court}

Apart from being a successful statesman, Asaf Khan was a man of varied interests. He was scientific in thought. He was also an elegant writer and had a correct idiom and was a good conversationalist. He was a good accountant and well versed in business. He audited and attended to the account of the \textit{amils} of the \textit{khalisa} (crown lands). He was a philanthropic having soft corner for the down-trodden.\textsuperscript{22} He had keen interest in to writing prose and had interest in book keeping. He spoke gently and a non-sensual term and never escaped his tongue. He personally examined the accounts of the officers of the exchequer and of the other officers did not require guidance in this. He had the honour of beating of drums (\textit{naubat}) at his residence. He was called as a pillar of the kingdom. He had his own seal specially provided to him by Shahjahan.\textsuperscript{23} During Shahjahan’s reign, new astronomical tables known as \textit{Shahjahani} had been completed under the expert supervision of Asaf Khan.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{English Factories in India}, vol. p. 276.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Badshahnama} of Lahori, vol. II, p. 246.
\textsuperscript{21} (See Appendix C)
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Badshahnama} of Lahori, vol. II, p. 246.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Shahjahanama} of Inayat Khan, pp. 19-20; \textit{Badshahnama} of Lahori, vol. II, p. 246
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Shahjahanama} of Inayat Khan, p. 35.
In 1622, after the death of his father *Itimad-ud Daulah*, he was posted on the prestigious post of *wakalat* and enjoyed it till his death in 1642. After his death post of *wakil* remained vacant in the entire history of Mughal administration. As one *wakil* he enjoyed various powers and privileges in the Mughal court. He was a personal advisor to both the emperors, i.e. Jahangir and Shahjahan. At a place Pelsaert emphasized – ‘If anybody obtained an audience and spoke to the Emperor he heard him alright, but never gave a definite reply, unless he consulted Asaf khan, who referred it to his sister; the queen any one of them who obtains a favour must thank to them for it, and not the king’.  

At the time of Shahjahan’s coronation, post of *wazir* was conferred to Iradat Khan by the advice of Asaf Khan. Shahjahan also consulted him during the rebellion of Jujhar sing, Khan-i Jahan Lodi and Adil Shah.

**Visits of Emperor to Asaf Khan’s House**

He had a great liking for good eating. Mughal Emperor rarely paid visits to their nobles’ houses. They would occasionally go to those families which were in matrimonial alliance with the royal house. However, Asaf Khan often organized lavish feasts and banquets and arranged them in a very nice way. In his *Tuzuk*, Jahangir also mentioned on various occasions about the invitation of Asaf Khan to him and for the ladies of royal *harem*. During the fourteenth regnal year (1619), at one place he writes that- ‘On Thursday, the 15th Asaf Khan prepared a grand assembly and a royal entertainment in his own house, which is a very fine and pleasant place, and begged to be allowed to receive

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25 Pelsaert, pp. 121-122.
me. At his request, giving him the dignity of acceptance, I went there with the ladies. That pillar of the kingdom looked on this as a bounty from the secret giver, and in the increase of his offering and preparation of the entertainment display great magnificence, of jewels of great price and delicate gold brocades and all sorts of gifts, that which was approved was selected, and I presented him with the remainder. Among the offerings was a ruby weighting 121/2 tanks, which was bought for Rs. 125000. The value of the offerings that were accepted was 167000.26

In his Shahjahanama, Inayat Khan at various places mentions about the royal visits of Emperor Shahjahan to the house of his father-in-law. He writes that-‘in the month of safar 1038 (October 1628) His Imperial Majesty paid a visit to the house of Yamin-ud Daulah Asaf Khan. After observing the paandaz and nisar ceremonies by spreading a carpet under His Majesty’s feet and scattering money over his head, he presented excellent gifts like gems, jewelled ornaments fabrics, Qibchaqi horses, and mountain-like elephants with gold and silver trappings- the total value of which amounted to five lakhs of rupees. His Imperial Majesty, in company with Her Majesty the Queen and the Princes and Princesses of high descent remained in the house of Yamin-ud Daulah as guests for three days and two nights, and returned to the place on the fourth day.’27

Again he writes that-‘In the last of the month of Shaban of this year 1038 (late

26Tuzuk-i Jahangiri, vol. II, p. 80; He described about wine party held at Asaf Khan House. Again at another place he describes about the same that- ‘a feast of cups was held, and my private servants were made happy with cups of delight. Having chosen out of his offering what I approved, I gave the remainder to him. What I took of his offering might be value of Rs. 30000.’ p. 100
April 1629), His majesty visited the house of Yamin-ud Daulah. After performing the prescribed ceremonies of spreading a reception carpet under His majesty’s feel and scattering money over his head, the said noble offered excellent gifts; and of which same worth three lakhs of rupees were accepted’.  

According to Farid Bhakkari, Jahangir visited Asaf Khan’s House two or three times and Shahjahan as his son-in-law used to come unlimited times in a month. Thomas Roe also gives detailed description of an occasion when Emperor visited Asaf Khan’s Palace. It was the highest honour which a noble could ever dream of and of huge presents had to be offered to the king as nazrana. Together with this he was a man with varied tastes. He was famous for his taste and dress. He had a great liking for good eating. An idea of the variety of dishes served at a highly placed ‘Muhammadan’s dinner’ can be had from the description of Asaf Khan’s banquet organised to welcome Sir Thomas Roe. Manrique also describes in detail about one such feast in which he was invited on the occasion. (For detail see Appendix E)

Commercial Activities

Asaf Khan had also keen interest in trade and commerce. During 17th century Mughal India various European nations like Portuguese, the Dutch, English, Danes and French also came to India for the sake of trade and commerce. Various Mughal nobles took active part in trade and commerce with

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28 Shahjahanama of Inayat Khan, p. 32.
29 Zakhirat-ul Khawanin, sec. 1, p. 10
30 Thomas Roe, Embassy, p. 421
31 Thomas Roe, Embassy, p. 421
32 Manrique, vol. II, pp. 113-20
the foreign merchants. Asaf Khan was also engaged in foreign trade. He also maintained ship for the trade purpose. Thomas Roe (quoted in the English Factories) in India discusses about Asaf Khan’s ships in his letter addressed to all his commanders of Company’s ships on January, 20 1618. As he mentioned that-‘wheras the honourable lord Asaph Chan hath selt out from the great Mogolls port of Goga (Gogha) in the Bay of Cambaya the ship called the Ghehangir [Jahangir], under the command and conduct of Eclaus [Ikhlas] captain, and Bahaud [Bahadur] pilot, to pass into the Redd sea....Asaf Khan hath encouraged some soe farr so to fraight from Goga the Gehangier, Shee hath her cartasse without stopping at Suratt.’\(^{33}\) He maintained friendly relation with foreign merchants, especially the East India Companies. He earned huge amount of money and valuables in the form of presents in turn of granting concessions to the English East India Company. Sir Thomas Roe gives us full account on day-to-day basis about conversations with Asaf Khan regarding the establishment of English trade in India and issued licenses in the form of grants and parwanas. He not only gave permission for trade but also assisted them for the establishment of trade, as has been mentioned by Roe himself that-‘and I have command the great Lord Assaph Chane that he take this contract and business into his care, that he may farther give or enlarge in all matters or seas, according as I have given my security and made agreement and what so ever the said great lord Asaf Khan shall doe Shall stand in force as well as in any articles of contracts as in all other their desires or occasions, and that what so

\(^{33}\)English Factories in India, 1618-1621, vol. I, pp. 2, 4
ever goods shall came from your knowledge hither unto mee of any kind or shall go to you from my kingdom shall receive no hindrance nor impediments, but shall pass with honour and friendship.'

Asaf Khan invited English trade at Lari Bandar port when it was under his jurisdiction. English Factories record mentions that-‘Asaph Ckaun told me …he was procureing for us a firmaen to conform all priviledge which was granted in the king first; which when it comes to my hands I shall better knowne thereof….The Naboob hath sent his parwana for Bundur Laree, to the Shabunder, that for the tyme of mansoone the English may come and trade, but not to settle a factory.’

Therefore we can say that Asaf Khan had a sharp mind in conducting business. He always maintained friendly relations with the English men. He was always eager to buy English luxury goods. He was granted a special privilege of examining pearls, gems and diamonds before offering these for sale to the Emperor. There is no evidence that he accepted bribe except Sir Thomas Roe who mentioned that he accepted huge bribe from him in the form of pearls.

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34 Thomas Roe, *Embassy*, pp. 132-133; see also *English Factories in India (1618-54)*, William Foster, Oxford Clarendon, 1913.

35 *English Factories in India*, 1634-36, mentions as-‘Governor of Bunder Laree from Asaph Ckaun, who had many years injoyed it, and farmed it to him; who in all hast poasteth thither to setle his people there and give directions for the managing of those affairs. P. 243.’

36 *English Factories in India*, 1634-36, p. 289.

37 *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, vol. 1, p. 444
Architecture

Asaf Khan had keen interest in construction of building. He built many dwellings in Agra, Kashmir and Lahore for his stay. He spent about forty million rupees in construction of building at Lahore and Akbarabad.\(^3\) Various contemporary Persian sources like Tuzuk-i Jahangiri, Sahajahanama of Inayat Khan, Badshahnama of Lahori, as well as European Travellers’ accounts discussed about his household. At Lahore, Yamin-ud Daulah had erected an elegant mansion of lofty and spacious proportions such as none of the greatest nobles have ever built up to the present time; indeed it had cost 20 lakhs of rupees, and taken 10 years to complete.\(^3\) He constructed a beautiful building at Kashmir at machchali Bhawan.\(^4\) Some of the travellers’ have their personal knowledge about dwelling of the Asaf Khan, those were regularly invited visit. Pelsaert also says about Asaf Khan’s palace at Agra as ‘exceedingly handsome and costly’.\(^4\) One portion of the building formed the diwan khana or the men’s quarters, where the nobleman received friends and suppliants, while, ‘the greater portion was occupied by their ladies and was called zenen khana.’\(^5\)

His Lahore’s residence was valued at 20 lakh of rupees at the time of his death, while the worth of other houses and gardens in Delhi, Agra and Kashmir approximately was 2 crore 50,000 rupees, apart from wealth in the form of

\(^3\)Zakhirat-ul Khawanin, p. f. 49, (See also Pant Chandra, foot note)
\(^3\)Shahjahanama of Inayat Khan, p. 122.
\(^5\)Pelsaert, p. 3.
\(^5\)Early Travels in India, p. 56; Zanan Khana was a women’s’ quarter in a mansion or palace.
jewels and coins in gold and silver, etc. In addition, he also left an estate valued at two crore and 50 lakhs of rupees, one crore and 25 lakhs of rupees in cash, 30 lakhs worth of gold and silver articles, and 23 lakhs in other valuables. The king granted twenty lakhs to each of his three sons and five daughters and gave the Lahore residence to Dara Shikoh. The rest was resumed to the crown.

Besides dwellings, he had also interest in the construction of gardens, eidgahs, sarais and well, for the people who travelled during those days. Nishat Bagh one of the finest gardens of the Kashmir, was laid out by Asaf Khan on south side of Dal Lake in 1634-35. Shahjahan was much impressed by his science artiste and magnificent locations when he visited this garden. It had twelve terraces, the fort it is also known as ‘Garden of Terraces’. It is still maintained. (See recent pictures in Appendix F IV)

Shahjahanama of Inayat Khan mentions that-‘The houses and gardens that he had constructed in the metropolis of Akbarabad, the lovely valley of Kashmir, and other places; and the serai that he had founded midway between Agra and Lahore.’ Inayat Khan writes that-‘on the day of Id-ul Fitr 1040 (2 May 1631), a gorgeous howdah studded with gems, which Yamin-ul Daulah

43Maa’sir-ul Umara, vol. 1, p. 294; Zakhirat-ul Khawanin, sec. 1, p. 10; Shahjahanama of Inayat Khan, p. 282
44Shahjahanama of Inayat Khan, p. 282.
45Maa’sir-ul Umara, vol. 1, p. 293
46Shahjahanama of Inayat Khan, p. 126 mentions that-‘Bagh-i Nishat which Yamin-ud Daulah constructed on the will slopes of Bate with elevated terraces overlooking the Dal Lake’.
49Shahjahanama of Inayat Khan, p. 282.
had constructed at a cost of one lakh of rupees and presented to His majesty, was fastened upon the state elephant. Where upon the imperial champion of Islam, having liken his scat in it, proceeded with all the pomp of solo men to the Idgah, and munificent gratuities were showed upon the spectators both in going and returning.⁵⁰

**Architectural features of Asaf Khan’s Tomb**

On the order of Shahjahan, Asaf Khan was buried close to the late Emperor Jahangir’s mausoleum, and in the memory of Asaf Khan a lofty domed edifice should be erected over his tomb.⁵¹ It is in form of an octagon and supports a dome built of bricks. Arches of its entrance were well decorated with glazed tiles and other area was covered with white marble and expensive stones. It was built in a garden with and fountain of water at Shahadra in Lahore. The structure based on a platform, the sides walls of which were covered with the red limestone. At each of the four corners of this square is a lake of water.⁵² It completed in four years with a cost of three lakhs of rupees. These days it is in a ruined condition but can still be seen.⁵³

**Asaf Khan as depicted in the Mughal Paintings**

Asaf Khan’s personality has been also shown in the Mughal paintings. We have lots of collections of paintings of Asaf Khan painted during the Mughal period.⁵⁴ There is a portrait of Asaf Khan.⁵⁵ In one painting Asaf Khan

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⁵⁰ *Shahjahanama* of Inayat Khan, p. 64.
⁵¹ *Shahjahanama* of Inayat Khan, p. 282.
⁵² Percy Brown, p. 108
⁵³ See appendix F, IV, V.
⁵⁴ See appendix F.
is shown together with the Princes Dara Shikoh, Muhammad Shuja, and Aurangzeb – who were his grandchildren (daughter’s children) – prepared on the occasion when the officers came from Lahore and presented them to the Emperor Shahjahan just after his coronation on 2 Rajab, 27 February, 1628.\textsuperscript{56}

In other painting Asaf Khan showed with Emperor Jahangir and his three grandsons namely Princes Dara Shikoh, Muhammad Shuja and Aurangzeb in a painting during Jahangir’s period.\textsuperscript{57} (See Appendix F II)

Asaf Khan was a good human being having liberal mind. He used to employ many select regular people and he had a share of good disposition, humility, fore-aberrance and modesty. He also patronized various Hindus who were expert in their field and in introduced them to the Mughal court. In 24 September 1629, Asaf Khan also brought two skilful ‘Hindus of Tirhut (Bihar) to court and presented them in this royal audience. He submitted that these two persons were able to commit to memory, on only one hearing, ten related Hindu verses which had only recently been composed by ten.\textsuperscript{58} One of the scholar of Shahjahan’s court Pandit Raja Jagannath, was a famous author of Ras Gangadhar also wrote Asafvilas into Sanskrit language in praise of Asaf Khan. Pandit Jagannath has eulogized the liberalism of Asaf Khan in his composition.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{55} See first page (Frontispiece)
\textsuperscript{56} See appendix F.I
\textsuperscript{57} Amail-i Kamtarin Khanazadan (housebred) Manohar For details of this painting see S. P. Verma’s Catalogue of Mughal Painters.
\textsuperscript{58} Shahjahanama of Inayat Khan, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{59} See Appendix D
At the end we can conclude with the words of Farid Bhakkari regarding him –‘Asaf Khan as a complete man, a man full with wisdom possessing the scientific knowledge, a master of idioms, oratory, prose writing and an expert in writing *dastur-ul amal*.60 He also regards him as ‘after almighty, he may be called the perfect man.’61

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60 *Zakhirat-ul Khawanin*, sec.1, p. 10
61 *Zakhirat-ul Khawanin*, sec.1, p. 10