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Politics of Crime and Punishment: Khusrau’s Rebellion

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In 1606, Khusrau, the eldest son of Jahangir rebelled against his father. Since Jahangir himself had been in revolt against Akbar for the last fifteen years till he became the Emperor, there were rumors that Akbar would raise his grandson Khusrau to the throne instead of Salim (Jahangir). Jahangir had put Khusrau in a State of house arrest. However, he escaped the court and reached Lahore where he gathered supporters.

The objective of this paper is to make an assessment of Khusrau’s rebellion and make a comparison with two other events of the same nature, i.e., rebellions of prince Salim and Khurram. It is also to estimate whether they met with the same kind of treatment as was done to Khusrau. In this paper, I have tried to study the details of the causes of all three rebellions and have tried to reach a conclusion that while the motive behind all these rebellions was a sort of war of succession against their respective fathers, but punishment given in all these three cases was different.

Khusrau was born on 6 August, 1587 from the first wife of Jahangir, Manbai. On his birth, Manbai was styled as Shah Begum. He was although, young but of eminently handsome countenance, agreeable manners and irreproachable character.

Akbar himself directed his training. He had commanded his education under no less a man than Abul Fazl, assisted by his brother, the learned Abul Khair. Raja Man Singh was his guardian. When Salim revolted against his father, there were speculations that Akbar would nominate Khusrau, as Khusrau had reached the age of 17 years, therefore Raja Man Singh (his Maternal Uncle) and Mirza Aziz Koka (his Father in law) too sought to place him on the throne. After the death of Akbar, Jahangir became the Emperor as nominated by Akbar when he was on his death bed.
But on 6 April, 1606 Khusrau escaped from court under the pretext of visiting his grandfather Akbar’s tomb,\(^5\) with three hundred supporters along with Abdur Rahim, and Husain Beg. His revolt terminated within three weeks after a battle was fought at Lahore,\(^6\) where Khusrau’s army was completely annihilated. Khusrau and his two staunch supporters were captured.\(^7\) Khusrau’s hand was bound with chain and, he was brought to the court. He became a prisoner. Abdur Rahman and Hussain Beg were stitched into the skin of an ox and an ass and headed towards tail of ox and ass and paraded on the roads of Lahore. Hussain Beg died within 12 hours but Abdur Rahman was released after 24 hours.\(^8\)

In 1607, another conspiracy was hatched by some of the nobles with Khusrau to murder Jahangir with the help of four hundred supporters.\(^9\) The incident has been recorded in Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri in detail which says that, it proved abortive however, Diwan of Khurram, Waisi revealed that nearly 500 men at Khusrau’s instigation got an opportunity to carry out the designs of the enemies and evil wishes towards the king. He told it to Khurram,\(^10\) who immediately reported it to Jahangir\(^11\). One of the ring leaders, Fatehullah was seated on an ass with his face turned to the tail and paraded from place to place.\(^12\) Unfortunately, Khusrau was blinded by the order of Jahangir and at the suggestion of Mahabat Khan. Later on Jahangir called a physician to restore his eye sight.\(^13\) As far as the other rebels were concerned, they were punished more severely. Nuruddin and Muhammad Sharif were executed.\(^14\) Nearly three hundred of them were impaled on the stakes, set up between the city of Lahore and the gardens of Mirza Kamran, on both sides of the road. Jahangir writes in Tuzuk that, there cannot exist a more excruciating punishment, since the wretches exposed frequently linger in time is the most agonizing torture, before the hands of death relieve them and the spectacle of such frightful agonies served a warning to others.\(^15\)

Guru Arjun Dev, the head of the Sikh religion at that time, who was living at Govindwal on the Beas, was reported to have waited on the rebel prince Khusrau, paid him homage, and put tilak on his head. Thus he was, in the eyes of Jahangir, guilty of
treason. Moreover, he had earned the displeasure of the Emperor by his prostrating activities. He was ordered in 1606 to be produced before Jahangir who awarded him capital punishment. His Children were imprisoned and his property was confiscated.16

Throughout his life Khusrau remained a prisoner and transferred from one hand to another. Finally he was murdered by the order of Shahjahan who had taken over his custody and took him along in his Deccan campaign. Wherefrom he sent a message to the Emperor that he had died due to some serious ailment, or perhaps of colic pain.17 Emperor’s partiality is quite evident here in case of Khusrau, that no one, not even the Emperor, tried to enquire about the real cause and never investigated about the reason of death of Khusrau.

On the contrary, when we evaluate the case of Salim’s (Jahangir’s) revolts, we get to know that he escaped punishment on all occasions although his revolts against Akbar continued for long fifteen years. Salim started revolting against his father in 1592 when Akbar was busy in Deccan. To keep him busy Akbar, tried to send him on a campaign to Mewar. Salim was appointed to lead a campaign against Rana of Mewar by the Emperor Akbar in 1599. But he again came under the evil influence of his associates, who urged him to take advantage of the absence of the Emperor and the Imperial army from the capital as he had left for the Deccan. Salim left the Mewar campaign half way and moved back from Ajmer towards Agra.18 Akbar rushed back towards Agra. After twelve days, Salim retreated to Allahabad. He entrenched himself within the fort and set up an independent court and sent his officers to take the charge of Bengal and Orissa. He also assumed the title of the king and started issuing farmans and granted title and jagirs.19 Thirty lakhs of rupees in the treasury of Bihar were granted by Akbar to his private purse. Muhammad Sharif was dispatched by emperor Akbar on a mission of peace and conciliation. He met the rebellious prince. Unfortunately, he joined the prince in his adventures and became the chief minister of prince who had raised a large army.20 In this predicament, Akbar summoned his most faithful counsellor Abul Fazl in 1602, who had been left in charge of the Deccan.
While on his way to Agra, Abul Fazl was assassinated by Bir Singh Dev Bundela at the order of rebellions prince.\textsuperscript{21}

This event saddened Akbar most, and he declared war on Salim. Somehow, some unfortunate incidents forced him to retreat. On the mediation of nobles and ladies of the harem, he surrendered to the court, but the arch-culprit was shielded from the rigours of justice by parental weakness, harem influence, and exigencies of the state. Salim richly deserved capital punishment, but the father and statesman in Akbar overcame the judge. No other Mughal prince was marked out by age or accomplishments for the succession as two other sons of Akbar - Daniyal and Murad were already dead. Salim’s execution would have raised a storm among the royal ladies. He surrendered to the emperor with his step mother Sultan Salima Begam (and a cousin of Akbar). He was forgiven by the Emperor when Salim threw himself at his feet and raised by him in his arms.\textsuperscript{22} Though he deserved punishment, but the prince was honoured with rich dresses, jewels, a rare elephant and a turban just taken off by the Emperor from his own head, and appointed as the heir-apparent.\textsuperscript{23}

On Nov.10 1603, Salim reached Fatehpur Sikri and after a short stay was sent back to Allahabad. Again an independent court was setup by him. Titles and grants were conferred, and he declared half independency. He again surrendered at Agra court on Nov-9, 1604, when he heard about the death of his grandmother. As a punishment Akbar took him into private apartments and severely reprimanded him. He was released, and treated as if nothing had passed between them.\textsuperscript{24}

We can compare Khusrau’s revolt with another revolt led by Shahjahan against his father Jahangir. Shahjahan (Khurram) started open revolt against his father on 24 March, 1622 when he refused to lead a campaign to Qandahar from Mandu.\textsuperscript{25} Shah Abbas had actually laid siege to the fort.\textsuperscript{26} Shahjahan was supported by most of the great nobles. Within a limited time he assembled a large majority of his followers and involved in battles against royal army in Bilochpur and Mandu.\textsuperscript{27} Then started a revolt for the eastern provinces, occupied Orissa, Bengal, Bihar, Jaipur, Banaras, Awadh
and Prayag etc. This revolt lasted for three years. Khurram’s revolt was much serious in nature than Salim and Khusrau’s rebellions. When he failed to achieve any success in front of the royal army, he surrendered to the Emperor. He was also easily forgiven by Jahangir. He was told, to instruct his officers to surrender the fort of Rohtasgarh and Asirgarh, and was then sent to court. He complied with these demands and in addition sent a present of three lakh of rupees. It is very surprising that Jahangir accepted it, and Shahjahan was forgiven.

In Mughal India, the ruler was the State and any offence against him was considered crime against the State. To rise in rebellion against the ruling monarch was considered a grave crime. But quarrel for the succession to the throne became a rule among the Mughal princes. The emperor was the highest authority in the kingdom and was the fountainhead of justice.

While imparting justice, in most of the cases, political exigency determined the nature of punishment. In the absence of any written secular law, emperor’s wish always prevailed. However, Shariat laws were also given due place in a number of cases. As far as family members were concerned, especially the male heirs, punishment for a grave crime could be mild. Somehow, in the entire history of the great Mughals of India, none of the princess met with such a harsh punishment as was done to Khusrau. Although, Salim had himself revolted against Akbar and continuously defied his instructions, he himself didn’t pardon his son Khusrau. When another son Shahjahan revolted subsequently and put before same claim, that is succession to throne, he was pardoned.

While Salim was spared with only a slap in his face, Shahjahan was deprived of some of his privileges. It is surprising, however, that the Emperor Jahangir inflicted the cruelest punishment on Khusrau. Here I have aimed at an evaluation of the incident of Khusrau’s rebellion and the exigencies that influenced the view of the Emperor regarding the nature of crime, and punishment given to Khusrau. It was neither approved by the Islamic Shariat nor by the general norms followed at the Mughal court. Although there were different rules and laws for punishment according to the nature of
crime, in the Mughal court, but they were hardly followed accordingly.

Reference:
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
12. Tuzuk-i Jahangiri, I p. 22; Maasir ul Umara, II, 60.
13. Jahangir is silent about the blinding of Khusrau in Tuzuk; as to Khusrau's punishment there are different theories. According to De Laet, he was blinded at Jahangir's order. William Finch says - 'there were two stories prevalent at that time. One makes us believe that he was blinded on the battle field with glass. The other has it that Jahangir merely caused a hankercchief to be tied over his eyes and that he sealed it with his own seal. Terry mentions that his eyes were sealed up for the space of three years, after that, the seal was taken away.


23. Ibid.


26. Ibid.


29. Iqbalnama, p. 274;

30. Mughal Emperor used to hold his court every day where ordinary cases were decided. Akbar held his court after prayers and administered justice there. Akbar always held his court on the day of Thursday, Akbarnama, III, p.717; Jahangir on Tuesday and Shahjahan and Aurangzeb on Wednesday; William Hawkins who visited India during Jahangir’s reign (1608-13), remarked that the Indian kings sat “daily in justice everyday”. The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roy, p.116; Almost all European travelers discuss about justice in Jahangir’s time, and award of punishment to the guilty, Early Travels in India, p. 115; During his stay in Ahmadabad in 1618, Jahangir appeared in the Jharokha everyday for about three hours to administer justice and award punishment to the guilty. Tuzuk, II. p.2, 4.

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