ALLAMI SA’DULLAH KHAN

Sa’dullah Khan occupies an important place among high ranking nobles of Shahjahan’s reign. He held the office of imperial Diwan for about ten years and also held important military campaigns, although he had neither a large family nor clan to promote his cause. Besides that he was an Indian Muslim (Shaikhzada) and even among the Indian Muslims, his family was not very well known even in his own times.

We have very little information about his family background and his early life. Shaikh Farid Bhakkari a contemporary of Sa’dullah Khan who had also written an account of his career, provides us practically no information about his family background except mentioning that he was born at Jaroob in Punjab¹ and that his family was highly respected. Strangely enough no other Persian chronicler gives any information about his family or early life, except that some of them call him as Lahori² while other as Shaikhzada of Chiniot.³ The absence of any reference in our sources about his family and early life clearly indicate of his humble origin. What is still more surprising is that even his parentage had not been discussed by the contemporaries.

³ Ma’asir-ul umara vol. II, 441; Chiniot is located on the bank of river Chenab.
However, a 19th century work gives rather detailed account of his family and early life without referring to his sources of information. We are told that Sa’dullah Khan’s father Amir Baksh was a Jat zamindar of Chiniot and that his parents (father and mother of Sa’dullah khan) died one after the other while he was still very young. As he had nobody to support him, at the young age of five years, he came alone to Lahore. It was to the credit of young Sa’dullah Khan that even when he had no place to stay and no regular means of livelihood, he devoted himself to studies and proceeded to Delhi after completing his education at Lahore. According to Lahori, Sa’dullah Khan acquired mastery over traditional and rational sciences and also became Hafiz-i Quran. He also became a polished speaker and expert calligrapher. His teachers Yusuf Ghiyas Lahori and Abdus Salam Lahori who were considered as a great scholars of the time. At Delhi, he stayed at the mosque of Muhammad Saleh, the tutor of the sons of Nawab Asaf Khan. Through his sons Asaf Khan came to known about Sa’dullah Khan’s attainments. He enquired about him and finally appointed him as tutor of his sons. He became

6 Yusuf Ghiyas was a gifted teacher and expert in Tafsir He was desciple of Maulana Jamal Tilahi (Lahoi, Vol. II, 342.)
famous as a man of extraordinary talents and learning and as a result several other nobles engaged him to teach their sons.\textsuperscript{8}

According to Shaikh Farid Bhakkari, he became well known in court circle for his academic achievements specially communication skills, drafting and calligraphy.\textsuperscript{9} Chandra Bhan Brahman writes that he was so proficient in Arabic, Persian and Turkish that he could easily compete with the natives of these countries. He further adds that he was also master in art of writing diplomatic letters.\textsuperscript{10}

Sa’dullah Khan entered into Mughal service on 31 Dec. 1647, as rozindar\textsuperscript{11} (literally on daily allowance), through the good office of Musavi Khan,\textsuperscript{12} the Sadr of Shahjahan.

In this connection, Lahori writes that Shahjahan ordered his Sadr to bring to his presence learned and competent persons who could be admitted in service Sa’dullah Khan who by then had become well known for his knowledge and learning was presented by Musavi Khan before

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{8} \textit{Tabqat-i Chisti}, 565.
  \item \textsuperscript{9} \textit{Zakhirat-ul Khawanin}, vol. III, 7;
    \textit{Ma’asir-ul umara}, vol. II, 441.
  \item \textsuperscript{10} Chandra Bhan Brahman, \textit{Chahar chaman}, M. S. Abdul Salam collection No 293/63, Azad Library A.M.U., fol. 23a.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Lahori, Vol. II, 219.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ma’asir-ul Umara}, vol. III, 447-51.
\end{itemize}
the emperor who admitted him in Mughal service.\textsuperscript{13} It had also been suggested that Hakim Alimuddin Khan the governor of Punjab, also belonged to the same place to which Sa’dullah Khan belonged and in whose madarsa Sa’dullah Khan studied also helped him in acquiring imperial service.\textsuperscript{14} In a short time by his own competence, Sa’dullah Khan managed to obtain a mansab of 1000 Zat 200 Sawar. Although he started his career as a petty functionary but very soon he got the office of Arz-i Mukarrar, which was bestowed on only most trusted and loyal servants. He also received the title of Khan. At the same time he was also assigned the office of superintendent of Daulat-Khan-i Khas.\textsuperscript{15} In the following year (1643) at the occasion of Lunar ceremony he was given promotion of 500 Zat 100 Sawar\textsuperscript{16} thus raising him to the rank of 1500 Zat 300 Sawar. Although this office was not very high but the nature of his duty was such that this office could be given only to a very responsible and trustworthy person. In 1643, he was removed from the post of Darogha-i Daulat-i Khana Khas and appointed to the post of Mir saman.\textsuperscript{17} He was also given promotion of 500 Zat 200 Sawar and

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\item\textsuperscript{13} Lahori, vol. II, P. 219.
\item\textsuperscript{14} Zakhirat-ul Khawanin, vol. III, 7.
\item\textsuperscript{16} Lahori, vol. II, P. 336; 
\textit{Ma’asir-ul umar,} vol. II, P. 442.
\item\textsuperscript{17} Lahori, vol. II P. 347; 
\textit{Ma’asir-ul umar,} vol. II, P. 442.
\end{itemize}
robe of honour. This appointment was of great significance because as mentioned earlier Sa’dullah Khan neither belonged to a high family nor had a large clan to promote his cause. Besides that, at the court also he had no particular group at his back. If any thing it was solely his merit and competence which led him to attain this high position. The nature of the office of Mir saman provided him an opportunity to show his worth. On the other hand the Emperor also got an opportunity to closely observe the capacity of Sa’dullah Khan as a high functionary of the state.

In 1644, on the occasion of celebrations in connection with the recovery of Princess Jahan Ara, Sa’dullah Khan was given a robe of honour, horse, a flag and elevated to the rank of 2500 Zat 600 Sawar. A little later he was given an increase of 500 Zat raising him to the rank of 3000 Zat and 600 Sawar shortly after wards he was again promoted to the rank of 3500 Zat and 800 Sawar. Shahjahan was so much impressed with his abilities that he was elevated to the more important and challenging office of Diwan-i Khalisa on 27 July 1645; he was also given promotion in his rank which now stood at 4000 Zat 1000 Sawar. Abdul Hamid Lahori writes that Sa’dullah Khan was specially asked to

20. Ibid, 422.
draft royal orders and in recognition of this service he was allowed to put his own name below the name of Prince Dara Shikoh with these words ‘drafted in my knowledge’ (Tarqim Marfat-i Khud). As a special mark of the favour he was given a jewelled Qalamdan.\(^{22}\) Sa’dullah Khan impressed the Emperor so much with his work as Diwan-i Khalesa that within very short time (46 days) he was appointed as Wazir-i Kul on (12 sept 1645) with an increase of 1000 Zat, 500 Sawar\(^{23}\) thus raising his rank to 5000 Zat and 1500 Sawar\(^{24}\). Subsequently he was promoted to the rank of 6000 Zat 2000 Sawar\(^{25}\).

For about eleven years Sa’dullah Khan worked as Diwan-i Kul. Chandra Bhan Brahman, who had worked for several years in a subordinate capacity in the Diwani under Sa’dullah Khan writes that in comprehensiveness of knowledge he could be compared only with the unrivalled and irreplaceable Abu Fazl. He further adds that Sa’dullah Khan was of the view that Diwan should be careful and punctual in the performance of his duties and deal with courtesy with all section of the society.\(^{26}\)

Sa’dullah Khan’s duties were not confined to revenue

\(^{24}\) Lahori, vol. II, P.471.
\(^{25}\) Ibid, P.479.
\(^{26}\) Chandra Bhan Brahman, f. 24 (a).
department. He had become so close to the Emperor that his services were utilized for so many other important imperial duties. In the matter of appointments Emperor not only consulted him but actual appointments were made on his judgement. Once Sa’id Khan presented a person before the Emperor and spoke very high of him and requested for some appointment. Although Sa’id Khan was a high ranking noble and held the office of the Subedar but Shahjahan referred this matter to Sa’dullah Khan to test the credentials and abilities of the candidate. Sa’dullah Khan had became so much influential in the matters of appointment that even royal Princes used to approach him to get their favourite nobles appointed to the post of their choice. We have a number of references which show that Prince Aurangzeb utilized his services in this connection. Sa’dullah Khan held the office of Diwan from 1645 till death 1656 and it is significant to note that he never had to share his authority with any other officer. All officers in the ministry were his subordinates. The most important contribution of Sa’dullah Khan as Diwan was relating to the problem of extortions of Karoris. Before his assumption of the office of Diwan it was a common practice that Karoris used to extort ten rupees on every collection of one

27. Adab-i Alamgiri. 474-75.
hundred rupees from the peasantry. Sa'dul'ah Khan considered it as heavy burden on the peasants and reduced it to five rupees. Sa'dullah Khan also made an effort to increase the income of the state. He ordered construction of canals to boost the agricultural production and encouraged officers to bring more land under cultivation. Lahori writes that in the beginning of Shahjahan’s reign the total income of the Empire was 17.5 crore rupees of which fifty Lacs rupees were collected from the Khalisa. With his effort and better financial management this amount increased to twenty two crore and the income of Khalisa enhanced upto three crores.\textsuperscript{29}

As like other leading nobles of the Empire Sa’adullah Khan also to performed military duties. Sa’adullah Khan took an active part in the Balkh and Qandhar expeditions during his term of office. Before his departure he was raised to the 6000 Zat, 4000 Sawar.\textsuperscript{30} He was sent to Balkh for the first time to disuade Prince Murad from coming to court but inspite of Sa’dullah Khan’s best efforts, Prince Murad refused to listen anything in this regard and decided to return. Sa’dullah Khan was given charge of the country and entrusted with its entire management. He appointed Bahadur Khan and Asalat Khan as joint commander of Balkh, and Qulij Khan as governor of Badkshan. In order to win the


\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 547.
confidence of the local people, Sa’dullah Khan ordered that they should be compensated for any loss to their fields or orchards suffered at the hands of the Mughal army. The imperial officers were paid three month’s salaries in advance. Sa’dullah Khan also asked to make revenue settlement of the conquered area. He finished his assignment in twenty two days and returned to the court on 6 sept. 1646. 31 Shortly afterwards, on the occasion of the celebration of Lunar ceremony his mansab was enhanced to the 6000 Zat and 6000 Sawar. 32 In the following year he was bestowed a robe of honour and again promoted to the rank of 7000 Zat 7000 Sawar; he was also presented an Arabian horse with a golden saddle. In 1648, he again received a robe of honor and 100033 of his troopers were made do aspa  sih aspa. This rank was very high for any noble specially for an Indian Muslim.

As briefly referred above failure of the Mughals in Balkh gave severe blow to its military prestige in Transoxiana. Shah Abbas of Persia taking advantage of the exhaustion of Mughal troops attempted to recover Qandhar. He sent a large army and put to seige the fort of Qandhar. Bust, and Zamindawar were captured only Qandhar defied.

Shahjahan having been informed of these developments dispatched Prince Aurangzeb and Sa’dullah Khan at the head of a large army comprising 50,000 troops. The army reached Kabul on March 25, 1649 but in the meantime Qandhar had fallen to Persian. Inspite of mainifold difficulties, Sa’dullah Khan rapidly marched on to Ghaznin and put to siege the fort of Qandhar immediately after reaching there. Aurangzeb also reached shortly. But the campaign failed. The second campaign led by them also proved unsuccessful. The causes of the failure of the Qandhar campaign are well known to be discussed but the failure was not because of the incompetence of the commanders because both Aurangzeb and Sa’dullah Khan made their best effort to conquer the fort. On both occasions Sa’dullah Khan admirably demonstrated his capacity and skill in the management of affairs at that time of war specially in the organization of siege, running of mines, and other necessary arrangements. Although Sa’dullah Khan’s two campaigns in Qandhar under Prince Aurangzeb failed miserably but it is important note that his position at the court remained intact.

He continued to enjoy the confidence of the Emperor. Not only that if Khafi Khan is to believed he became so powerful that on one occasion he could even deprive Prince Dara Shikoh of his more

34. For more details of the Qandhar campaign see Amal-i Saleh, I, 469-72.
productive parganas. He was also accused by Dara Shikoh of creating difficulties regarding a request that he made for a cash grant of rupees ten Lacs which he apparently needed for tiding over financial exigency.\textsuperscript{35}

Ruqqat-i Alamgiri refers to continuing mistrust and mutual bickering between Sa’adullah Khan and Dara Shikoh. It also indicates that Shahjahan expressed his disapproval for Dara Shikoh’s conducts\textsuperscript{36} Although Ruqqat is so openly hostile to Dara Shikoh that we have to be very careful in accepting its version but in any case indicates the high position enjoyed by Sa’dullah Khan. Shahnwaz Khan makes the point much more clear when he writes that inspite of the gentle temperament and honesty of the Wazir, he was opposed by Dara Shikoh\textsuperscript{37} and several other important nobles. But their complaint to the Emperor had no adverse effect on the position of the Diwan and probably on account of that it got currency among people that Sa’dullah Khan was himself

\textsuperscript{35} Muntakhab-ul Lubeb, Part . II, 738; Ruqqat-i alamgiri edited by Mohd. Abdul Rahman Nizam, P. 16; ‘Once Dara told the Emperor that Sa’dullah Khan had assigned him a desolate Jagir, the income from which did not approximate to his mansab while he himself took the fertile territory. When Sa’dullah Khan came to know about this report, he called Dara’s agent and he himself took the parganas earlier assigned to the Prince and gave to Dara his own which the Prince had alleged to have been the furnishing ones. But within a year or two these very productive parganas were ruined and the revenues declined.

\textsuperscript{36} Ruqqat-i Alamgir, P.16.

\textsuperscript{37} Ma’asir-ul Umara, vol. II, P.449.
planning to ascend the throne after Shahjahan’s death and it is in the context of these suspicion in Dara Shikoh’s mind about Sa’dullah Khan that Manucci goes on to suggest the latter was poisioned by Dara Shikoh.38

The above discussion on the career of Sa’dullah Khan clearly indicate that he was not only a high ranking noble holding the coveted office of Diwan-i Kul but also became extremly powerful. Even Princes were jealous of his position at the court. From our study of contemporary and near contemporary sources we have not been able to identify any powerful group in the nobility at his back, nor he had a large and powerful clan or family to support his cause. He had only two sons but none of them held very high office or awarded mansab in his life time. It appears his source of strength was his competence and complete loyalty to the throne. On the basis of these evidences, Qanongo is of the opinion that there were two main parties at the court one headed by Dara Shikoh and other by Sa’adullah Khan and between these two ‘the Emperor sewing like pendulum’.39 As stated earlier the evidence is doctured and being drawn sentiments of self intrest in

very careful in drawing conclusion on its basis. Besides that it is just not possible to think of a party lead by a noble against a royal Prince and that to higher to the throne. Moreover, we have no evidence to support this contention. The only inference that could be drawn is this that Sa’dullah Khan indeed enjoyed a unique position at the court.

Sa’dullah Khan’s last military campaign was against Rana Raj Singh of Mewar. Shahjahan was informed that Raj Singh started repairing the fort of Chittor in violation the treaty signed by Rana Amar Singh during Jahangir’s reign. Shahjahan was highly incensed at the activity of Raj Singh and dispatched Sa’dullah Khan to demolish the ramparts of the fort and punish the Rana. The campaign was highly successful, the fort walls were demolished and Raj Singh was forced to sent his crown Prince to the court to be forgiveness and promised never to repeat the action in future.\(^{40}\)

After serving faithfully for about 15 years Sa’dullah Khan expired on 7\(^{th}\) April 1656.\(^{41}\) At the time of death, his rank was 7000 Zat, 7000 Sawar, 5000 do aspa- Seh aspa.

According to Ma’asir-ul umara, we may summarise his career in following words. In dispensing of cases with private individuals, he

\(^{41}\) Ibid.
strove towards uprightness and honesty. In collecting government dues, he did not act tyrannically, or nor did he allow fear or favouritism to influence his actions towards the peasants or the officials. Mughal India prospered during the period of his Wizarat. Though he had rival like Dara Shikoh, but complaints against him were of no avail. From the beginning of his service he was always respected. In recognition of his profound scholarship, he was given the title of “Allami Fahami Jumdatul Mulk” Sa’adullah Khan richly deserved it.\(^{42}\)

Sa’dullah Khan was survived by two sons and a daughter but unfortunately We get information only about his eldest son named Lutfullah who was eleven years old at the time of his father’s death. He held the rank of 700 Zat and 100 Sawar at end of Shahjahan reign. After ascending the throne, Aurangzeb graciously treated him on account of his close connection with his father. He played important role in various capacity and held the rank of 3000 Zat 2500 Sawar.\(^{43}\)

\(^{42}\) Ma’asir-ul Umara, vol. II, 447.
\(^{43}\) For more details account of Lutfullah Khan See, Ma’asir-ulumara, vol. 171-77.