Chapter 3
Princess Razia and Crown Prince Khurram

One of the earliest Indian princes to be deliberately groomed to rule was Princes Razia of the Sultanate of Delhi. Her grooming and her ascending the throne of the Sultanate of Delhi were glaringly contradictory to the general practice of the times. Yet her grooming was such that she was a successful and even admirable ruler during her brief reign.¹

Razia is the daughter of Sultan Iltutmish by his first wife, who was the daughter of Qutbuddin Aibak, the founder of the Slave Dynasty. Razia is bom to rule and Sultan Iltutmish wants her to succeed him as the ruler of Delhi. However, his favourite wife, Shah Turkan, who is a bewitching beauty, wants one of her two worthless sons to succeed Sultan Iltutmish, who, however, despises her two boys as lazy playboys. Shah Turkan tries in vain to persuade Sultan Iltutmish to change his opinion of her sons (Dasgupta, Razia Sultan 6-10).

Sultan Iltutmish is convinced that his heir should primarily be willing and able to fight. He observes that his daughter Razia, more than any of his other children, possesses the qualities of a good soldier, being fearless, tough and intelligent. So he trains her to lead the Sultanate's army one day. Razia is trained to fight on horseback and on
foot, to manage her shield and heavy armour and at the same time be quick in her movements, so as to be able to ride away, if necessary. She is also taught how to direct her soldiers during a battle from the back of an elephant. She is trained to use various weapons, such as the spear, the sword and bow and arrows. Razia is also taught how to plan an attack on the enemy, studying the foe's weaknesses and the area of the battlefield. Sultan Iltutmish also teaches Razia that, in certain situations, diplomacy, and not war, should be resorted to. By the time Razia ascends the throne, she is prepared in every way to lead the most powerful institution in the Sultanate, namely, the army (Dasgupta, Razia Sultan [46J-48).

Razia is a princess with a difference. She does not dress like a girl or veil herself, but wears trousers and a coat, ties a turban round her head and carries a sword at her hip. She participates regularly in martial games and constantly works on improving her skills as a warrior. She is good at sports and often goes hunting and riding. Bold and athletic, she is a skilful rider, both on horse and elephant. In short, Razia grows up more like a prince than a princess. She learns not merely to read and write, but also to argue and debate, so that she can hold her own among the nobles and counsellors in court. She also receives religious instruction and is familiar with the Koran. Thus Sultan Iltutmish trains Razia to become a ruler and a warrior (Dasgupta, Razia Sultan [17]-18).
However, there is one important drawback in Sultan Iltutmish's plan. Razia is, despite all her talents and qualities, a woman. When Sultan Iltutmish dies in April 1236, and his decision that Razia will be his heir is made known to the Amirs, the powerful leaders and royal counsellors, most of them are not willing to take orders from, a woman. Shah Turkan senses this and decides to exploit it for her own benefit. She has no intention of giving up her power and position upon her husband's death. She has some powerful Amirs at court as her allies. She sets out to enlist their support for her sons, particularly Ruknuddin (Dasgupta, *Razia Sultan* 11; 18-19).

Razia, sensing the growing opposition to her becoming queen, diplomatically proposes that her step-brother Ruknuddin be declared Sultan. Shah Turkan and the Amirs are surprised. On 30 April 1236, Ruknuddin is crowned Sultan of Delhi. However, Razia is determined to strike back. She is confident that everyone will soon, see how weak Ruknuddin's character is (Dasgupta, *Razia Sultan* 19-20).

Within, six months, the people begin to feel insecure because of the behaviour of Sultan Ruknuddin. His merrymaking and irresponsible behaviour empty the treasury soon. His mother, Shah Turkan, wields unlimited power and begins settling old scores ruthlessly. The mother and the son fear that the young Prince Qutbuddin, Sultan Iltutmish's son by
another wife, can be a dangerous rival when he grows up and so order his murder. They also try to silence Razia, who begins to fear for her very life. So she decides to go directly to the people by using a technique devised by her father to enable aggrieved citizens to draw the Sultan’s attention and obtain justice—appearing in red clothes (Dasgupta, *Razia Sultan* 26-27).

With the administration having broken down, and the Amirs defying the Sultan, Ruknuddin has to rush around to control several rebellions. While Sultan Ruknuddin is thus away from Delhi, in November 1236, Razia, cleverly selecting a birthday, appears before the huge crowd going for prayers in the mosque in the red clothes of a victim. Bluntly telling the people that Ruknuddin has killed her brother and wants to kill her too and that her step-mother is evil and wants to see her die, Razia appeals to the people for help out of respect for her dead father. The people are moved. They capture Shah Turkan and imprison her. When Ruknuddin rushes back to Delhi, the Amirs, who have switched their loyalty to Razia, capture him and bring him before her. Razia orders that her step-mother and step-rother be tried according to the law. Both are found guilty and are killed (Dasgupta, *Razia Sultan* 27-29),

Sultan Razia is a kind ruler. She visits far-flung villages in the company of Court officials and personally acquaints herself with the way
her people live, particularly their privations. She devises many plans for
her people-repairing roads, setting up a postal system, building forts to
guard the roads against thieves and dacoits. Such measures, she
envisages, will not only ensure good governance, but also prove useful to
merchants, farmers and craftsmen and enhance the business potential of
villagers. She invites scholars from all over to study and teach at Nasiri
College in Delhi, which was founded by her father, and make it a
prestigious centre of learning. She also encourages poets and painters.
She sets up schools and libraries (Dasgupta, *Razia Sultan* [39]–41).

Dasgupta highlights the uniqueness of Razia thus:

Razia Sultan did not become queen because she was the
wife of a dead king. Nor did she become quttn because she
was the mother of a young prince, on whose behalf she had
to rule until he was old enough to be king himself. Instead
she took the throne in her own right like a king would have
done, and so she called herself Razia Sultan and not Sultana.
She was her father's choice as heir and she was the people’s
choice as their ruler. In a way, she was a democratically
elected queen and in this respect she was far ahead of her
times. (*Razia Sultan* 42)

As her projects for the welfare of her people begin to change the
atmosphere in the Sultanate, Razia, with admirable political acumen, makes her boldest decision of removing the tax on non-Muslims, as Dasgupta narrates:

The Sultan was very well aware of the fact that she and her noblemen—the Amirs—were foreigners in Delhi. Besides they were hugely outnumbered by the local population who were Hindus. She knew that if the Hindu kings stopped quairelhng amongst themselves and united, it would not take them long to get rid of the outsiders. Razia was a clever politician and understood that as a foreign ruler she could not survive long without the support of the Hindu population. If she was to keep her kingdom together, she needed their involvement and loyalty. She realized that she must somehow prove to the Hindus, that in her scheme of things they were her people as much as the Muslims were. And she thought the best way of doing so would be to treat Hindus and Muslims as equal. (Razia Sultan 42-43).

The Amirs are shocked at Razia's proposal. To them the special tax on Hindus is not only an easy way of collecting money for the Sultanate but also a symbol of the power of the Muslim State and the Amirs. They point out that, in return for the tax, the Hindus are exempted from
fighting for the Sultan. To their surprise and horror, Razia asks why the Hindus should not fight for her (Dasgupta, *Razia Sultan* 43). Razia wins the argument, as Dasgupta narrates:

Razia explained to the nobles that she wanted the Hindus to identify themselves with the Sultanate and accept her as their ruler. She wished that Hindus and Muslims would participate in each other's lives and live harmoniously. This was only possible if her Hindu subjects were treated fairly, and Razia was convinced that the first step towards achieving that end was, to abolish the tax on Hindus. (*Razia Sultan* 43)

Despite the opposition of the Amirs, Razia abolishes the tax on the Hindus. Almost immediately the Hindus in the fortress town of Ranthambore rebel Razia sends a force to recapture the fort, but orders it to return to Delhi after recapturing the fort. Razia still holds that, if she lets the Rajputs handle their affairs by themselves and treats them fairly, with neither force nor arrogance, they will remain within the Sultanate and also respect and support her. The Amirs are worried that, very soon, with the help of the people, she will hold all the power in her hand and regard it unnecessary to consult the Amirs or even inform them of her plans. The Amirs perceive that power is gradually slipping away from
Within a year of Razia's ascent to the throne, a small Muslim sect decides to challenge the supremacy of the main sect, namely the Sunnis. A thousand armed men attack worshippers gathered for Friday prayers in the lama Masjid. Many people are killed, but Razia quickly brings the situation under control. Defiant Hindu kings sporadically rebel and, in some cases, Razia orders her soldiers to abandon some fortresses. The Amirs are confused. Several Amirs join together in a rebellion, march to Delhi, and lay siege to the city. Razia forms an alliance with loyal Amirs and crashes the rebellion, killing several of the rebel Amirs (Dasgupta, Razia Sultan 49-50).

In 1240, when Razia has been ruling for three years, she is still without rest because of the constant trouble given by the Amirs, the most recent of these being a rebellion by Malik Izzuddin Ayaz, the Governor of Lahore. Since she cannot afford to lose Lahore, she marches into the Punjab, chases Ayaz into a corner and forces him to surrender. But, instead of killing or imprisoning him, she sets him free because he has been taught a lesson. Almost immediately upon her return to Delhi with her tired army, Razia learns that Amir Altunia, the Governor of Bhatinda, has revolted and declared his independence from the Sultanate (Dasgupta, Razia Sultan 57-58).
Razia is stunned by the news. She recollects the situation at the time of her father's death: most of the senior Amirs and even some of the junior ones, despite Sultan Iltutmish's last wish, were opposed to Razia succeeding him; a few of the Amirs, however, supported her, because they did not care whether the ruler was a man or a woman; Altunia was one of these—a newcomer among the Amirs, a young Turkish nobleman, rather hotheaded and jealous by nature, but intelligent and ambitious, and expected to rise to great power one day; and, Altunia actually argued in her favour, hoping to persuade older Amirs to accept her as leader (Dasgupta, Razia Sultan 58-59).

Razia reviews the past few years to detect what could have gone wrong: upon ascending the throne, she began rewarding the Amirs who had helped her by appointing them ministers in her Court or governors of provinces; Altunia was loyal and reliable and she trusted Mm totally, valuing his friendship and advice; she even thought of marrying him, but brushed aside the idea, since she did not wish to divert her attention from the Sultanate; and, for his loyal support during the siege of Delhi, Razia appointed him Governor of Bhatinda, thinking that such a far away province should be entrusted only to an absolutely reliable Amir (Dasgupta, Razia Sultan 59-61).

Razia suspects that someone must have exploited the streak of
jealousy in Altunia's nature to turn Mm against her: after Altunia had left for Bhatinda, she turned to other people for advice; one of them was Jamal-ud-din Yakut, an Ethiopian slave in her Court, who caught her attention because of his calm and dependable nature and whom she appointed to the important post of ‘Amir-i-Akhur’, or head of the royal stables; many of the other Amirs were infuriated because the post was usually occupied by an Amir of Turkish blood; Yakut not only looked after her horses, but also advised her on other matters of state, while riding alongside her or fighting beside her; and, Yakut was constantly in Razia's company, much more than any other Amir (Dasgupta, *Razia Sultan* 61-62).

Now, Amirs like Balban and Aetigin have seized the opportunity provided by Razia's careless behaviour and Altuma’s jealous nature to carry out their plan to get rid of her. They have incited Altunia's jealousy by reporting to him her scandalous behaviour with Yakut and they have promised to share power with Mm after Razia is toppled. Altunia has fallen into their trap. Working all this out cleverly, Razia decides to face Altunia's rebellion and the larger conspiracy. She sends for Yakut and tells him of her decision. Yakut has his own misgivings about the proposed campaign, but his loyalty is so great that he begins preparations for the war (Dasgupta, *Razia Sultan* 62-63).
Razia's army sets out in April 1240. It meets Altunia's army near Bhatinda in Punjab. Altunia cleverly isolates Yakut. When Yakut dies in battle, his soldiers surrender to Altunia. Razia herself is captured and taken to Bhatinda fort. Altunia sends word of his victory to Delhi. The Amirs are overjoyed and immediately appoint Razia's brother, Muiz-ud-din Bahram Shah, as her successor, since he is fit to be a puppet of the Amirs, the most powerful of whom is now Aelligin, who becomes the Sultan's deputy. The Amirs just forget Altunia, Meanwhile, the indomitable Razia starts thinking of escaping, gathering her army and taking revenge on her enemies. Aelligin’s increased demands for power and recognition irk the other Amirs as well as the Sultan. One day he is violently stabbed to death by assassins. Now Altunia perceives that he has been used and fooled by Aelligin and Balban, He is determined to take revenge on the Amirs who cheated him. Since Altunia and Razia have a common goal now, they agree to unite. They even fall in love again and decide to get married (Dasgupta, Razia Sultan 63 70).

After their marriage, Altunia and Razia turn their attention to reconquering Delhi. The Sultan and his advisers decide that, since Razia is still respected in Delhi, she should never be allowed to reach the city, but should be met outside the city. In October 1240, Razia's army and the
Sultan's meet at a place named Kaithal. The Sultan's army is larger and better equipped. Altunia dies fighting bravely. What happened to Razia after Altunia's death is a mystery because there are two versions of it. According to one, she was struck by an arrow and died a hero on the battlefield. According to the other, she fled from the battlefield into the countryside and, while she was sleeping in exhaustion, a peasant, coveting her jewels, killed her and buried her in the fields. All that can be ascertained is that she died on 13 October 1240 (Dasgupta, Razia Sultan 70-72).

In the eyes of Sultan Iltutumish of Delhi, only his daughter Razia is worthy of succeeding him on the throne of the Sultanate. So he arranges for her to be brought up as a prince, well-versed in war and statecraft. After his death, Razia, drawing upon her upbringing, succeeds, after a well-timed wait, to ascend the throne of the Sultanate. She rules competently and wisely for four years. But the male-chauvinist atmosphere prevailing then and her own youthful impetuosity cost her the throne and her life.

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well-timed wait, to ascend the throne of the Sultanate. She rules competently and wisely for four years. But the male-chauvinist atmosphere prevailing then and her own youthful impetuosity militate against her and she is doomed to fatal failure.

Murari’s *Taj* proves the efficacy of prudent upbringing in childhood through the stories of Crown Prince Khurram, his elder brother Khusrav and Shah Jahan’s (Khurram’s) eldest son Dara Shukoh. Being a prince in the Mughal household was always dangerous because, according to the Timurid law, the succession was determined by the reigning monarch in an autocratic and absolute manner and the Mughal princes had only the proverbial choice of *Taktya Takhta* (Throne.or Coffin). Emperor Akbar, sorely disappointed with his eldest son Jahangir, sowed the seeds of succession in the mind of his grandson Khusrav to such an extent that, when, on his deathbed, he passed the reign on to Jahangir, Khusrav was sorely disappointed and he attempted an uprising against Ms own father. But he was betrayed. Jahangir could not kill Mm because of the Timurid prohibition against spilling one’s own blood. So Jahangir had Khusrav blinded and chained for all his life to a soldier. So Khusrav’s younger brother Prince Khurram became Crown Prince. In the evening of his life, Shah Jahan is a helpless witness to the inhuman torture meted out to his darling firstborn Dara by his youngest son
Aurangzeb merely because Shah Jahan and Mumtaz (Aijumand) had doted on Dara and ignored Aurangzeb when they were children.

Prince Khurram is reprimanded by his military tutor General Mahabat Khan for dreaming during his lesson in swordsmanship.

Mahabat Khan points out that he could have killed the prince three times. He counsels that a prince cannot dream on the battlefield, because, in war, the king is the heart and, if he is killed, defeat is inevitable. He asks Khurram to remember his grandfather Akbar's advice that a monarch should ever be intent on conquest, as, otherwise, his neighbours will rise in arms against him. Mahabat Khan has been Khurram’s personal tutor, teaching him the princely arts of swordplay, horsemanship, wrestling, and the tactics of the battlefield since an early age. Now Mahabat Khan advises Khurram also to forget Arjumand. When Khurram asserts that he cannot erase her picture from his mind, Mahabat Khan sarcastically tells him to become a sanyasi and wander the land in sackcloth and ashes with her image about his neck. He seriously counsels Khurram: “Love is not for princes. You are not a soldier or a villager. You are Shah Jahan. You will marry whom you must. Not for love, for politics.” When Khurram points out that his great grandfather Humayun married for love, Mahabat Khan points out that it brought great disaster on his head. Khurram thinks that Humayun's disaster was caused by his brothers and not his beloved
Hamida. When Khurram mentions Jahangir's obsession with Mehrunissa, Mahabat Khan warns Mm about the waiting women present, who might carry tales, because the wrong inflection on Mehrunissa could cost them their lives (Murari, *Taj* [51]-53).

Prince Khurram complains that he has been unable to obtain an audience with Emperor Jahangir. Mahabat Khan says that the Emperor hopes- that he will regain his senses. He warns that the Padishah will see him only then. Khurram says that the Emperor has granted him an audience for the next day and that he is going to make a demand on his father. Mahabat Khan cautions him that none but the Emperor can demand or command. He advises Khurram to speak gently to his father. He thrusts a Kashmiri girl at Khurram and asks him to douse the fire of his lust. But Khurram declines, saying that what burns in him is love. Mahabat Khan repeats Ms advice to speak carefully to Jahangir, remembering that he is Crown Prince Khurram (Murari, *Taj* 54).

Khurram enters the diwan-i-khas and approaches the Emperor with trepidation. After disposing of State affairs and dismissing his ministers, Jahangir leads Khurram to his chamber. The prince is formal and decorous and Jahangir chides him out of such an attitude and encourages him to speak fearlessly. Khurram broaches the subject of his marriage to Aijumand (Murari, *Taj* 56-60). Emperor Jahangir's reply is a long piece...
of counsel to the Crown Prince:

‘Akbar .... often lectured me on the duties of a prince. It is our destiny to rule. God chose us alone for that purpose. We are not dacoits or brigands who have captured the empire. We are the descendants of Ghengis Khan and Timur-i-leng, and the empire we have carved from Hindustan sprang from our quality as rulers. A prince must consider only what will benefit his kingdom. If he thinks of himself first, and then his kingdom, it will be lost. You should read the Arthasastra of Kautilya. That Hindu wrote wisely on the duties of a prince. Everything I do, I consider first how it benefits the empire, or how it affects the empire. When you mount the throne, you will learn to think in this way. Now, on the question of this girl, Arjumand, I consider it not as the father of a beloved son, but from the seat of the emperor looking at his crown prince. Our lives, my son, are not our own. They are the kingdom’s. How will this marriage to Aqumand strengthen the empire? Consider it thus.’ (Murari, Taj 61)

Prince Khurram knows that he has lost and desperately says that the marriage will make him happy, and Emperor Jahangir replies:

‘Ah, badmash, you have not listened to me. Make you
happy? I told you, our lives are not our own. A peasant can say, “I will do this” and do it. Who does it affect? Only himself, perhaps his immediate family. But if Shah Jahan says, “I will do this because it makes me happy,” it affects the whole kingdom. What does Aijunand bring with her? Wealth? Power? A kingdom? A political alliance? Will marrying her make a friend of an enemy, as Akbar always advised? Will it extend the empire?’ (Murari, *Taj* 61)

Emperor Jahangir concedes that Prince Khurram may, after his marriage for the kingdom, take Aijumand for his second wife if he still feels the same love for her. Khurram asserts that he wants Aijumand as his first and only wife. At this Jahangir tells his son to do as he commands and advises him to expend his lust on other women and stop thinking of Aijumand. Seeing the anger mounting in his father’s face, Prince Shah Jahan withdraws from the royal presence. As he reaches the threshold, Emperor Jahangir says that he has already chosen his wife for Mm (Murari, *Taj* 62).

The marital alliance decided upon by Emperor Jahangir for his Crown Prince Khurram is effected. The bride is Gulbadan, the niece of the Shahinsha of Persia. In conformity with his advice to his son and with the guiding wisdom of Akbar, Jahangir has arranged the marriage for
political reasons—to establish peace and friendship between the constant rivals, namely, the Emperor of Hindustan and the Shahinsha of Persia (Murari, *Taj* 104).

Prince Khurram is one of the sons of Emperor Jahangir. His elder brother Khusrav forfeited his claim to the throne when he foolishly revolted against his own father and tried to capture the throne. Since then Prince Khurram has been, treated as the *de facto* Crown Prince. He is also trained systematically in warfare and in commanding the Mughal army. Differences arise between him and his father over his insistence on marrying the commoner Aijumand, while his father contemplates a politically useful alliance with the Shah of Persia. When Aqumand’s aunt, the widowed Mehrunnisa, becomes Empress Nur Jahan and the virtual ruler of Hindustan, she places as many impediments as possible between Khurram and his father and creates as many misunderstandings as possible between the father and the son so as to secure the succession for her good-for-nothing son-in-law Shahriyar. However, Khurram’s upbringing gives him an advantage and, following it carefully, he manages to beat back all fraternal competition and ascends the Mughal throne, sparing Nur Jahan’s life only at the intercession of his wife Arjumand.
Note

1 Dasgupta’s novel, Razia: The People’s Queen, is based on Jamila Brijbushan’s biography Sultan Razia: Her Life and Times.