CHAPTER - II

LIFE OF SHER SHAH

Sher Khan who afterwards became the king of Delhi under the title of Sher Shah, was one of the most extraordinary men whose name appears in the history of India.

EARLY LIFE

His real name was Farid the son of Hasan and grandson of Ibrahim, an Afghan of the tribe of Sur, who claimed descent from the princes of Ghor. His grandfather Ibrahim Khan first entered the imperial service when Sultan Bahlol Lodi was the Emperor of Delhi. He served under some Amirs of distinction and remained for a time in Hissar Firuza where according to Tarikh-i-Khan Jahan Lodi (MS p.151) a son was born to Hasan Khan who was named Farid Khan. The exact date of his birth is not given by any historian. Abbas Sarwani (Elliot iv. p.308) says that he was born during the life time of Sultan Bahlol, who died in 1488.2

1 The Surs represent themselves as descendants of Muhammad Sur, one of the Prince of the house of Ghor who left his native country, and married a daughter of the Afghan chiefs of Roh. (Elliot IV p.308 Foot-note 1) The Nisab-nama-e-Afghan, f.81, makes Hasan Khan, the tribe (taifa) of Mati or family or clan (qabila) of Sur.

2The old view of Dr. Qanungo derived from the Tarikh-i-Khan Jahan Lodi (MS p.151) that Farid was born at Hissar Firoza perhaps in 1486 A.D. was pointed out to be wrong by Prof. Parmatma Saran in his paper on "The Date and Place of Sher
Soon after the birth of his eldest son, it seems, Mian Hassan Khan Sarwani, a high noble of Bahlol's court, who bore the title of Khan-i-A'zam Umar Khan was made Governor of Lahore by the Sultan and given jagirs in Sirhind. Hasan Khan Sur, in his turn, received from his master some villages in the pargana of Shahabad.3

The story is told of Farid which indicates his exceptional courage and determination even at a very early age. As a very young child he said to his father, Hasan Khan, "Take me before Umar Khan and say for me - Farid Khan wishes to serve you; order him on any duty of which he is capable." At first his father refused the request on the score of his tender years, recommending him to wait for some time. The boy was not discouraged by his father's refusal but went to his mother, an Afghan lady of considerable force of character, asking her to use her influence with his father. This she

Shah's Birth - published in J.B.O.R.S., 1934, pp. 108-22. In his new edition of "Sher Shah and His Times" (p.10) Dr. Qanungo himself asserts, in agreement with Dr. Ishwari Prasad (in "Life and Times of Humayun", p.96 that Farid was born probably at Narnaul. According to Dr. Parmatma Saran, Farid was born in 1472 and he relies upon two works, viz., Sir Saiyyad Ahmad's Asar-us-Sanadid and Jam-i-Jam compiled in the time of Bahadur Shah. Both are later works and cannot be relied upon). But Dr. Qanungo maintains the hypothetical date of 1486 as the year of Farid's birth in the new edition of his Sher Shah and His Times p.24. Dr. Iswari Prasad concurs that probably he was born in 1486 (see footnotes on p.96 of Life and Time of Humayun).

3The Makhzan says, a district of Shahabad called Bhowli was settled upon Hasan. Dorn, History of the Afghans, p.81 (English translation of Makhzan).
This she did, with the result that Hasan Khan to please Farid and his mother, took the child to 'Umar Khan. The governor, flattered and amused at the little boy’s request gave him a hamlet of the village of Mahawali, and promised to employ him when he was old enough. Both father and son were delighted, and when Farid got home he said to his mother. "My father would not take me save at your request. and now Masnad-i-Ali has given me a village in Pargana Shahabad." (Abbas Sarwani in Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi Elliot iv. p.309).

To Sultan Bahlol Lodi succeeded Sikandar Lodi as Emperor. Under Nasir Khan Lohani one of Sikandar Lodi’s most powerful nobles, Hasan Khan remained in employment for some time and by his faithful service and intelligence, distinguished himself and was admitted into his master’s confidence. His reputation finally became such that when Jamal Khan was appointed governor of Jaunpur, Hasan was taken into his service, in which he spent rest of his life; received from him in Jagir the valuable parganas of Sahsaram and Khawaspur Tanda, for the maintenance of 500 horsemen.4

Hasan Khan had eight sons, of whom only two, Farid Khan and Nizam Khan, were the legitimate sons of an Afghan mother.

4Akbarnama f. 42, Tabkat-i-Akbari, f.169; Tarikh-i-Badaoni,f.145; Kholasat-ul-Towarikh f.271; W.Erskine in History of India under the first two Sovereign of Timur - Babur and Humayun, iv. p.112, Sher Shah by Dr. Qanungo p.5.
The other six by different slave girls or concubines, subsequently elevated to the position of wives, three of them, Sulaiman, Ahmad and Madar being by one mother. Hasan neglected his Afghan wife and his fondness for Sulaiman's mother, who had acquired a great ascendancy over him, led him to show more favour to her sons than to his other children. Hasan's indifference to Farid forced the latter into a life of adventure and struggle, which cast his mind and character in heroic mould. Farid, who even when a young boy, could stand it no longer, left his father's house, went to Jaunpur then a centre of culture and learning and placed himself under the protection of his father's patron, Jamal Khan. Hasan on learning this, wrote to Jamal Khan to send Farid back, that he might be instructed in learning and trained up in accomplishments suited to his station; but young Farid objected that Jaunpur had better schools than Sasaram and applied himself ardently to the pursuit of knowledge. By indefatigable industry and steady application he is said to have attracted the attention of his teachers and quickly gained an uncommon knowledge of the Arabic and Persian languages. He also studied thoroughly the Kafia (a

5 Abbas Sarwani writes (Elliot iv. p.310) that other six sons were Ali and Yusuf of another mother; Khurram and Shadi Khan of a third; Sulaiman and Ahmad of a fourth. Makhzan-i-Afghana make Khurram to read as Madar and as own brother to Sulaiman and Ahmed.

6 Abbas (Elliot iv. p.310) goes on to say that Hasan was so attached to the mother of Sulaiman that she gained such influence over Hasan that she entirely ruled him.
work on Arabic grammar). He showed himself to be earnest by committing to memory all Sheikh Saadi's Golistan and Bostan; he is reported to have learnt by heart Sikander-Nama; He studied the religious and civil code of Muslim law as contained in the Holy Quran and the commentaries upon it. With such accomplishments, he was soon considered a great scholar among the Afghans, who, though distinguished in arms, have always been noted for dullness in letters and arts. Farid courted the society of the Ulema, frequented the monasteries of Derveshes and secured the favours of the Sheikhs and men of saintly reputation which he retained throughout his life and which proved of considerable advantage to him in his plans of ambition.

A few years later, Hasan Khan visited Jaunpur. Through the good offices of family friends and relations, and especially Jamal Khan, his patron, Hasan and his son became reconciled and Hasan appointed Farid manager of his Sasaram estate, while he himself settled at Jaunpur. Farid consented to accept the responsibility on the express understanding that


8 Abbas writes (Elliot iv. p.311) that all kinsmen of Hasan who were in Jaunpur were of the opinion that in all the tribe of Sur"there was none who possessed learning, talent, wisdom and prudence like him".


10 Abbas Sarwani, Elliot iv. p.312.
he was to have the absolute direction of all so as to be able to govern the ryots with impartiality, by gentleness and justice, and to relieve them from the ignorant oppression which he saw perpetrated by his soldiers and kinsmen.\textsuperscript{11} He is reported to have said, "That the stability of every administration depended on justice and that it would be his greatest care not to violate it, whether by oppressing the weak or by permitting the strong to infringe the laws with impunity." This promise which sounded like a pompous platitudde, Farid kept alike as manager of his father's jagir, as King of Bengal and as Emperor at Delhi.\textsuperscript{12}

**AS MANAGER OF HIS FATHER'S JAGIR**

Farid took over the management of his father's jagirs and soon gained the confidence of the inhabitants by the kindness with which he treated them and his invariable regard to justice, from which neither the calls of interest nor the claims of relationship could divert him.\textsuperscript{13} Not long before the extraordinary administrative capacity, amounting to positive genius of young Farid made its mark upon the Parganas. Of late, the rule of his father had been slack and careless and he soon found much to amend. The government

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid p.312., W.Erskine iv. p.115.

\textsuperscript{12} Sher Shah, the Great Afghan Leader, by Charles Kincaid, in Great Men of India by different authors p.105.

\textsuperscript{13} Abbas Sarwani - Elliot iv. p.317.
dues were estimated in proportion to each year's crop, and the measurement of the crop was performed by a body of crop-measurers, who extorted heavy sums, and the state was robbed at every turn. The revenues collected from the peasantry went into the pockets of the collectors, and not into the treasury. This was not all, however; there was a certain number of thoroughly refractory persons, who, taking courage from the slackness of the administration had utterly declined to pay their taxes, and had resisted collection by force. The major portion of these offenders were small zamindars, but sometimes also whole villages had banded themselves together to evade their obligations. Further, it was no uncommon thing for the rebellious to make a comfortable living by robbing their more law-abiding neighbours. Farid started by issuing from Sasaram a farman bidding all the Muqqadams, Patwaris and soldiery assemble. He impressed upon the soldiers the necessity of promoting contentment among the people which could be done by showing kindness and encouraging cultivation. Further he asked them to give up extorting and threatened to punish severely disobedience and repaciousness. He then addressed them briefly, explaining the policy which he proposed to adopt, and the powers he possessed of enforcing it. The principal features of his plan were: first, the encouragement of the peasantry; secondly, the exact determination of state rights and their strict enforcement; thirdly, the maintenance of order. Then he turned towards the peasantry and explained his
policy in regard to the settlement of revenue. He gave the headmen their choice, as to whether the payment should be in cash or kind. Having determined this matter he gave formal leases of their obligation. He further fixed the fees of the corn measurers and of the tax collectors, effectually preventing extortion by announcing that the accounts were to be audited in his own presence, and by threatening the heaviest penalties for petty oppressions. In the actual

14. The text of Abbas runs thus:

'I have given you today the option. Make your choice. Some cultivators accepted the jarib and others ghalla or payment in kind. Farid obtained Qabuliysats from the tenants (ryots) and fixed the Jaribana (charges of measurement), Muhassalana (charges of collection and provisions for Muhassals). No extra charge was to be made. If you will charge in excess from the ryot, the amount taken will not be deducted at the time of settling your accounts. You must know that the accounts will be adjusted in my presence and that only legitimate expenses will be recovered from the ryot. You will pay the proper dues (Zar Wajibi and Sababi) - the revenue for Kharif during Kharif and the revenue for Rabi during Rabi because the arrears of revenue lead to the desolation of parganas and bitterness between the amils and tenants. The duty of the officer (hakim) is to be lenient at the time of jarib and to take into consideration the actual produce but at the time of collection he must realize the dues with great rigour."

Jarib here means fixing of rent by measuring the areas under crop. Obviously the choice of the peasants was between measurement and sharing of produce. Mr. Moreland calls this the mode of assessment and says that some wished to pay by measurement, and others by sharing and Farid allowed them to do so. This was Farid's method of assessing the revenue. In his Jagir both systems of measurement and division of crops seems to have been prevalent.

The passage in the Makhzan-i-Afghana runs as follows:-

'The choice today rests entirely in your hands. You may, if you like, have the Jama (assessment) fixed after the Jarib (measurement) of the cultivated lands. Some accepted the Jarib, others chose the Khiraj and Muhassalana, i.e. the charge on account of management and collection were also fixed at this time. This being done, he told the Muqaddams
collection of the revenue, he laid down and enforced the cardinal principles of easy assessment rigidly i.e. showing leniency to the cultivators at the time of measurement but utmost strictness at the time of collection. He declined to permit arrears to accumulate as they had done in the past much to the detriment both of the treasury and the cultivators; but announced that the government dues for the spring harvest would be collected in the spring, and for the autumn, in the autumn. Finally, declaring that it was his fixed intention to watch over the prosperity of the cultivators he invited them to bring complaints directly to himself for consideration and remedy. The system of forced labour and many other vexatious imposts, to which the cultivators had hitherto been subjected were abolished. Soon after his arrival, he showed bold and resolute decision of his character in dealing with recalcitrant and refractory headmen of some of the villages who had demonstrated opposition to him. In a bid to restore order throughout his parganas, according to him a regular body of troops was necessary. He, therefore, mustered all the soldiers who were

and Sharikdars that at the end of each harvest he would call the big and small cultivators and scrutinise the assessment and the expenses of collection. If a piece more is exacted, than what is fixed today, he would deal severely with the Muqaddam.’


Makhzan-i-Afghana, I.O.MS.

Moreland, Agrarian Systems of Moslems in India, p. 69.
left in the parganas and supplemented their numbers by such Afghans and men of his own tribe as were without Jagirs. He promised them a free hand with all the plunder they might collect from the rebels, together with ample rewards of land for distinguished conduct. He borrowed horses for his men from the villages everyone of which could provide two or three. By these means in short time, he had raised and equipped a body of some 200 cavalry (Abbas Sarwani - Elliot iv. p. 314)

The first objects he selected for attack were the villages which had declined to pay their dues. Before long, he had taken all the principal places, and had made a clean sweep of the women, children, cattle and movables. The men had for the most part taken to the jungle. To his soldiers he handed over the cattle and plunder; but he kept the women and children in honourable confinement. With these hostages in his hands, the work of negotiation was easy. The refractory villagers were perforce compelled to give in their submission, and provide pledges for their future good conduct lest their wives and children should be sold to defray the debt they owed to the state. There were some villages, however, situated in the remoter places, which were so rash as to take no warning by the fate of others. Farid determined to extirpate these. Accordingly, he set to work to collect a force adequate to the task in hand. Leaving half his soldiers to collect the revenue after the
new plan, and to perform other real duties, he took the remainder with him to stiffen the army he was raising from the land-holders. He ordered that one half of the able-bodied men of each village should come to him, bringing what arms and horses they had. He then set out upon his first military enterprise.

His plan of action on this occasion reveals all those qualities of cautious design and careful execution which were to be responsible for his subsequent triumphs on many a battle-field. Advancing against each rebel village in turn, he erected a mud fort on the outskirts of the jungle surrounding it. He then sent out bodies of light horse to scour the neighbourhood, and to isolate the village completely, giving them orders to kill all the men they met, to seize the women and children, to destroy the crops, to carry the cattle, and to prevent all attempt at cultivation. Meanwhile, his footmen cleared a path through the jungle, and when it had been pushed far enough, he erected another fort, closer to the village. In this way working methodically and quickly, he approached nearer and nearer until finally he attacked and took the place. He wisely declined to listen to any offers of submission from the now terrified rebels, saying to his men: "This is ever the way, with these fellows; they fight and oppose their ruler, and if they find him weak, they persist in their rebelliousness; but if they see that he is strong, they come to him.
deceitfully and humble themselves and agree to pay a sum of money, and so they persuade their ruler to leave them alone; but as soon as they find an opportunity, they return to their evil ways*. Accordingly, he put all the men to death gave the women and children to his soldiers to sell or keep as slaves as they preferred, and brought other people to inhabit the village. By quelling opposition by acts of resolute determination inspired some of his rude neighbours with such alarm that they never after troubled him and regularly paid annual tribute.

The freedom from internal and external oppression in his villages soon drew to them an influx of cultivators from the neighbouring districts that he was enabled to bring into cultivation nearly the whole of the waste lands within their limits. The produce of the Jagir was soon amazingly increased; the villages flourished; the inhabitants pursued in peace and he was extremely beloved. In a very short time, both Parganas became prosperous and soldiery and peasantry were alike contended. Hasan Khan who some time after paid a visit to his Jagirs, was delighted with the order, peace, populousness and general prosperity which he saw everywhere.

15. Farid's attempts to punish the recalcitrant Zamindars are described at length both in the Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi of 'Abbas (Elliot iv. p.314) and the Makhzan, T.S., A.U. MS., p. 27.

Unfortunately Farid's merits could not protect him from Zenana intrigue. Sulaiman's mother, who was favourite of Hasan, used all her charms to secure the Sasaram Jagir for her son. Hasan Khan was very reluctant to turn out Farid; but the young manager, out of frustration and to avoid further unpleasantness, voluntarily resigned his office and with his full brother, Nizam, went to Agra where he obtained service with Daulat Khan Lodi, who held the command of 12000 horse and was in great favour with Sultan Ibrahim.

Farid, by his talent and assiduity, gained the esteem and confidence of his patron. By his liberality and generous qualities, Farid won the heart of Daulat Khan Lodi. A short time afterwards, Farid's father having died, through Daulat Khan's influence, Farid obtained the Sasaram Jagir by procuring farmans from the Sultan. Farid returned to Sasaram with a strong retinue and took possession of the jagirs, which he again governed with his former moderation and justice.

18. Abbas Sarwani - Elliot iv. p.318
Sulaiman, unable to oppose his brother thus supported by the royal farmans, went to Muhammad Khan Sur, a relation of the family who then held the government of Junda and Buxer in charge of fifteen hundred horse. Muhammad Khan Sur had formerly been on bad terms with the late Hasan. Thinking that by supporting one brother against the other, he could secure a predominant influence in their family affairs, he made Sulaiman very welcome. He advised Sulaiman to be patient for a while, telling him that as long as Sultan Ibrahim held his position, there was little to be done for the moment. By this time the invasion of Babur had begun and a decisive battle was expected any time.

In 1526 Babur invaded India with a small but veteran army and an admirable train of Turkish artillery. He defeated and killed the Emperor Ibrahim Lodi and made himself master of Delhi empire. In the disorders and wars that followed the overthrow of the Afghan Kingdom of Delhi, Farid remained attached to the interests of his tribe, perceiving danger from Muhammad Khan Sur, protector of his step brother Sulaiman, who was too powerful a man to be opposed with impunity. Farid sought a stronger protector for himself, and joined Bahar Khan Lohani, son of Darya Khan Lohani, who was supported by the Afghans and occupied Bihar and declared himself as king of the Eastern provinces of Bihar and Jaunpur under the title of Sultan Muhammad. Farid's
bravery, knowledge of affairs and his assiduity gained Sultan Muhammad's favour so much so that he had access to him in public and private and became one of his most intimate friends. One day Farid went out hunting with Sultan Muhammad and a tiger (Sher) charged at the latter who was in grave danger. Farid, who was a skilful and dashing swordsman, rushed at the tiger and killed it with a blow of his sabre. For this act of loyal daring Sultan Muhammad conferred on the young adventurer the title of Sher Khan, which he ever afterwards used.\textsuperscript{22} He rapidly rose from one office of trust to another until he was at last appointed his deputy (Vakil) and Tutor, Ataliq,\textsuperscript{23} of Jalal Khan, the Sultan's son and heir, an office which implied the highest degree of rank and confidence.\textsuperscript{24}

But perverse destiny again went against Sher Khan. Inspite of his obligation to Sher Khan, Sultan Muhammad allowed himself to be so prejudiced against him by tale bearers that he ordered him to surrender his Jagir to his brother


\textsuperscript{22} Abbas Sarwani - Elliot iv. p.325; Tarikh-i-Nizami f. 209; Ferishta Vol. ii. p.103.

\textsuperscript{23} W. Erskine (p.120) has erroneously mentioned that Sher Khan was appointed governor whereas he was appointed tutor (Ataliq) of Sultan Muhammad's minor son, Jalal Khan. Abbas says (Elliot iv. p.325) that he was appointed deputy to Jalal Khan.

\textsuperscript{24} Abbas Sarwani - Elliot iv. p.325., W. Erskine iv. p.120.
Sulaiman, mainly at the instigation of Muhammad Khan Sur, whose protege was Sulaiman and sent a large body of troops to enforce the order. Sher Khan first resisted but afterwards, perceiving discretion is better than valour, fled to Sultan Junaid Birlas, who was then governor of the province of Karra-Manikpur on behalf of Babur Junaid Birlas took Sher Khan under his protection. Obtaining troops from his new patron, he defeated Muhammad Khan, and not only recovered his own Jagirs, but seized several other districts, which he professed to hold from the new Emperor, who confirmed him in his new holdings and gave him a military command in Bihar. His scattered family and clansmen now returned. He recruited his forces, took again into his service many inhabitants of the country who had fled to the hills and speedily became very formidable. With the foresight and sound judgement which formed so remarkable a part of his character, he gave evidence of his political sagacity when he also won over Muhammad Khan Sur, restored his Districts to him and was responsible for bringing order into his affairs. This act of generosity ever


26. Sultan Junaid Birlas was an Amir of an illustrious family and is said to have married a sister of Babur's - Kholast-ul-Towarikh f.273., Erskine iv. p.122.


As soon as the state of affairs of Sasaram permitted, Sher Khan leaving his brother Nizam incharge of his Jagirs, again visited his patron Sultan Junaid Birlas at Karra and thence accompanied him to Agra where he was presented to the Emperor Babur. He remained for some time in Babur’s Camp where he had the best opportunity of observing the strengths and weaknesses of the Mughals. He studied the military methods of the Mughals, which he admired, and their method of conducting business which he condemned as corrupt and inefficient. The weaknesses of Mughals did not escape his eagle-eye where others found them quite sound. He served through the Chanderi campaign.

While in the Mughal Camp, Sher Khan was indiscreet enough to say to a group of friends that it would not be difficult to drive the foreigners out of India. The friends asked him his reasons. He replied that the Emperor had great talents but applied little to business and left everything to his ministers who, being selfish and corrupt, did not attend to the interest of the state. If the Afghans, who were


unfortunately divided, constantly at enmity at each other, and, consequently powerless, united together, could drive out the Mughals. He added that, if fortune favoured him, he regarded himself as equal to the task. Some time later, Babur remarked to Mir Khalifa, his minister and elder brother of Sultan Junaid Birlas, in Sher Khan's hearing:

"This Afghan is disconcerned by trifles; he may become a great man yet"

31. Abbas Sarwani heard from his Uncle Shaikh Muhammad that Sher Khan was present at the Siege of Chanderi. It was there that he saw with his penetrating eyes the defects of the military organisation of the Mughals. In describing the siege of Chanderi, Babur makes no mention of Sher Khan. But soon afterwards in recording the events of February, 1529 he writes that when he was in the east, he heard the news that Mahmud Khan Lodi had collected 10,000 Afghans, that he had detached Bayazid and Biban towards Gorakhpore and that Sher Khan Sur, whom he had favoured the year before with the gift of several parganas and had left in charge of that country, had joined the Afghans. The Memoirs do not make it clear what favours had been shown to Sher Khan, but it is certain that he had put himself in touch with Babur.

Again in recording the events of March, 1529, when Babur was somewhere near Ghazipur in the east, he says: "On Thursday (21st) Mahmud Khan Nuhani waited on me. On the same day dutiful letters came from Bahar Khan Bihari's son Jalal Khan, from Sher Khan Sur, from 'Alaul Khan Sur and from other Afghan Amirs."

Sher Khan suspected that his rash words had been repeated to the Emperor and that night he fled from the imperial camp to his estate.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{33}. Abbas writes that one day Sher Khan dined with the Emperor. A solid dish was placed before him and, being an Afghan rustic, he did not know how to eat it. So he cut it into pieces with his dagger to the amusement and surprise of the guests present. On seeing this Babur observed to Khalifah: 'Keep an eye on Sher Khan; he is a clever man, and the marks of royalty are visible on his forehead'. Abul Fazl, who is hostile to Sher Khan, puts these words into the mouth of Babur: 'Sultan Birlas, the eyes of this Afghan indicate turbulence and strife-mongering; he ought to be confined! The author of the Makhzan also supports Abbas. The dish is called ash mahicha in the text. Elliot, iv. p.331. T.S., A.U. M.S., p.59.

This incident is differently related by Hassan 'Ali Khan, the author of the Daulat-i-Sher Shahi who was present with Sher Khan in the imperial camp. He says that, when the dinner was over and the drinking bowl began to go round, Sher Khan lost consciousness and leaning towards me said, 'If it pleases God, I will expel the Timurids from Hindustan and re-establish the power of the Afghans'. This was communicated to Babur by Nasir Quli and his brother who were asked to keep an eye on Sher Khan and to cast him into prison next morning. Luckily Hassan Ali came to know of this and informed Sher Khan of what was going to happen.

Both took swift horses and fled from the camp. Later he sent an apology to Junaid Birlas and wrote to him that his flight was due to the fear of the other nobles from whom he apprehended danger.

Ahmad Yadgar calls the dish that was served kas-i-mahicha. As there was no spoon, Sher Shah took out his knife and began to cut this delicacy with it. Babur saw this and quietly said to Junaid: 'This Afghan is a strange fellow: apprehend mischief from him' Tarih-i-Shahi, p.180.

W. Erskine writes in Book iv. (p-124) that "he was one day invited to an entertainment at the Emperor's where some solid dish (Mahcheh) was placed before him, and only a spoon with which to eat it. Having in vain asked for a knife, he at length drew his hanger (dagger), and, cutting up the treat into small pieces, proceeded to complete his meal with his spoon, perfectly indifferent to the smiles and remarks of those who were diverted with his Afghan rusticity. Babur, when the incident was pointed out to him, turning to Mir
To excuse this step he wrote to his patron Sultan Junaid Birlas that he must not regard his precipitate retreat owing to disaffection. Having learned that his old enemy Muhammad Khan Sur had urged Sultan Muhammad Khan Lohani to send an army to occupy his Jagirs while he was absent in Mughal Camp, he had ventured to depart at once and begged Sultan Junaid to assure his Majesty that he would continue to be attached to his service. Sultan Junaid saw plainly that these were mere professions and felt much offended.  

Sher Khan seeing no prospect of succeeding at the Emperor's court, sought to be reconciled to Sultan Mohammad Lohani, the self-appointed king of Bihar. This he achieved easily and soon after accompanied by his brother Nizam, went to the court at Patna where he was welcomed by the king and restored to the office of Ataliq or tutor, to his young son Jalal Khan.  

Khalifa, his prime minister (and elder brother of Sultan Junaid Birlas, Patron of Sher Khan) quietly remarked, "this Afghan is a man of sense and spirit;" and, being informed of his conduct towards Muhammad Khan, he did not hesitate to predict his rise to future greatness.


It was not long after his return to the court of Sultan Mohammad Lohani that his patron died soon afterwards, but Sher Khan so won the affections of his widow, Bibi Dudu, mother of the minor heir, Jalal Khan, that she bestowed on him and his supporters all the positions in the Bihar government. Although Jalal Khan was proclaimed king under the title of Sultan Jalal-uddin, Bibi Dudu ruled the kingdom in conjunction with Sher Khan, who became the prime minister. On the death of Bibi Dudu, the administration fell wholly into the hands of Sher Khan who strenuously exerted himself to maintain the prosperity and reputation of the kingdom. He became virtual ruler of the kingdom an office which he filled with conspicuous success. Among the most brilliant of his achievements was the delivery of the country from the aggressive designs cherished by the king of Bengal, Nusrat Shah. That monarch had long desired to add Bihar to his already extensive dominions, and now that Sultan Mohammad was dead, and his successor a child, the opportunity for carrying out his scheme seemed to have arrived. Sher Khan on his part, had not been idle, but had contrived to cultivate the friendship of a powerful Bengali nobleman, Makhdum Alam, governor of Hajipur. In consequence, when Nusrat Shah despatched a large army under Qutab Khan, governor of Munger, to invade Bihar, Makhdum Alam refused

to join in the enterprise and eventually had to pay with his life. It is said that when Nusrat Shah, indignant at the failure of Makhdum Alam to support the Bihar expedition, sent a force against him, Sher Khan had to stand idly because of Lohani hostility, while his friend was killed. Sher Khan, when he heard of the approach of the Bengal army, realised that the situation was serious. "With the army of the Mughals on one side of us, and the army of Bengal on the other", he is reported to have said to his men, "we have no resource save in our own bravery." His men supported him enthusiastically and after making all preparations for a sturdy resistance, he marched out to encounter the enemy, whose forces were far superior to his own. At the outset of the action, fortune favoured the Bihar troops, for an arrow struck and slew Qutb Khan, the leader of the opposing army. After obstinate fighting, the Bengali troops were utterly defeated, and immense booty fell into the hands of Sher Khan. This booty he kept for himself and for his own men, not distributing it even among the Lohanis, the tribe of Sultan Muhammad and Jalal Khan. In the process, he gained a great reputation as an Afghan Champion but also invited the wrath of Lohanis. The success and increased power of Sher Khan, unfortunately, roused the jealousy of Lohanis, in general, and Jalal Khan, in particular. They tried to get rid of the dictator. The attempt however failed owing to

Sher Khan’s unusual circumspection. Jalal Khan implored the help of the king of Bengal, Muhammad Shah Purbia, who was eager to check the rise of Sher Khan. A Bengal army invaded Bihar but the military skill, strategem and bravery of Sher Khan triumphed over superior numbers of the allied troops of the Bengal king and Lohanis at Surajgarh. The invading army was destroyed, its general, Ibrahim Khan, son of Qutab Khan, killed and minor Jalal Khan forced to flee an exile to Bengal.38

This victory was the turning point in the career of Sher Khan. Great as it was as military achievement, it was greater in its far-reaching political result. But for this victory, Sher Khan would never have emerged from his obscurity into the race for the Empire with the hereditary crowned heads like Bahadur Shah and Humayun. He thus became master of Bihar, to which he shortly added the stronghold of Chunar and its dependant lands.39 The celebrated fort of Chunar lies on the bank of the Ganges above Varanasi. It had been held under the late Sultan Ibrahim Lodi, by Taj Khan

38. Abbas Sarwani - (Elliot iv. pp.342-343) says "The whole of treasure, elephants, and train of artillery (top-khana) fell into the hands of Sher Khan, who was thus supplied with munitions of war, and became master of the kingdom of Bihar, and of much other territory besides."

39. Abbas Sarwani says that Sher Shah employed himself in the improvement of his provinces and in a short time, they surpassed their previous condition because he personally superintended every business and he did not show any favour to any oppressor, even though they may have been his relations or dependants (Elliot iv. p.343)
Sarangkhani who continued to hold it in Babur's name. Taj Khan was much under the influence of his wife Lad Mallika who was childless yet a woman of "great sagacity and wisdom" and beauty and accomplishments and who entirely possessed his affections. This inevitably excited the jealousy and hatred of his other wives whose sons resolved to put her to death. One of them, the eldest, assaulted her one night with a sword so clumsily that he inflicted only a slight wound. Taj Khan heard her cries and rushed at his son with drawn sword, only to fall slain in her defence.

As all Taj Khan's sons, except the murderer, were too young to be able to conduct the government and Lad Mallika, who had the affection of the garrison was appointed to manage the estate. Sher Khan learning this, offered the widow marriage. She accepted the offer, so the celebrated Chunar fortress, its wide lands and immense treasure, passed into the hands of Sher Khan.

In December, 1530, Babur died and his son Humayun, succeeded him as Mughal Emperor. For the first nine years of his reign

40. Taj Khan was the son of Jalal Khan Sarangkhani, one of Sultan Ibrahim Lodis great Amirs.
42. Ibid iv. p.346 - Akbarnama, Tabkat-i-Akbari followed by Ferishta, and Kholaset-ul-Towrikh have mentioned about it. A statement of the treasures found in Chunar is given in the Makhzan, f.87.
Humayun was preoccupied with the rebellions of his brothers and the conquest of Gujarat. In 1539 he resolved to check the rising power of Sher Khan. The latter had sent contingents on two occasions to the Imperial Camps but each time their commander, Sher Khan's sons, had deserted at critical moments with results disastrous to the Mughals. At the same time, Sher Khan had in person invaded Bengal and shut up the king of Bengal, Mahmud Shah Purbia, in Gaur, his capital. Soon a battle ensued in which Mahmud Shah Purbia was defeated and severely wounded. He fled and left the wealthy Kingdom of Bengal to Sher Khan. These fresh acquisitions considerably enhanced Sher Khan's power and prestige and many of the distinguished Afghan nobles from Gujarat and other places joined their rising leader in the east.43

While Sher Khan was still occupied in the siege of Gaur, Humayun marched on Bengal. On his way lay the fortress of Chunar which Sher Khan had strongly garrisoned. While the Indian officers of Humayun urged the Emperor to press on to the relief of Gaur, his Mughal officers insisted on taking Chunar before proceeding. Unfortunately, the Emperor

43. Abbas Sarwani-Elliot iv. p. 356 narrates that when the Emperor Humayun came back from Gujarat, the Khan-i-Khanan Yusuf-Khail.(who brought the Emperor Babur from Kabul to Hindustan) warned the Emperor not to neglect Sher Khan who was rebelliously inclined and well-versed in matters pertaining to government and, moreover, all the Afghans were collected round him.
followed the advice of his Mughal officers and laid siege to Chunar. 44

The fortress held out beyond all expectations and the time Chunar had fallen to Imperial forces Gaur had also surrendered to Sher Khan. As Humayun marched towards Bengal, he met near Patna the unhappy Mahmud Shah Purbia, who, still suffering from his wounds, implored the Emperor's assistance in the recovery of his kingdom.

Sher Khan’s forces were neither sufficient nor properly disciplined to meet the imperial army in the field. He bided time in which to store the captured treasures of the King of Bengal. He had hoped to deposit them in the fortress of Rohtas, a strong place in the south west of Bengal. Rohtas did not belong to Sher Khan. He captured the fortress of Rohtas by questionable means. 45 and had sent his family and

44. According to Abbas Sarwani, the Emperor enquired of Khan-i-Khanan Yusuf-Khail for his opinion, he (having previously heard that the Mughal nobles had agreed it was advisable first to take Chunar) said "It is a counsel of the young to take Chunar first, the counsel of the aged is that there is much treasure in Gaur, it is advisable to take Gaur first." The Emperor replied, "I am young and prefer the counsel of the young. I will not leave the fort of Chunar in my rear."

45. The hill fort of Rohtas which was reckoned impregnable and never submitted to the King of Delhi. It would not only be a place of security for his family and treasure, but a most important military post in the warfare he anticipated. With caution and secrecy and, perhaps premeditated treachery, he proposed to the Raja of Rohtas, Hari Kishan, to be allowed, in this pressing exigency, to send his herem and family, with his treasure and a few attendants, into the
wealth there. Completely baffled in Bihar, Humayun turned towards Bengal and entered Gaur in July, 1538. But Sher Khan cleverly avoiding any open contest with him in Bengal, went to occupy Mughal territories in Bihar, Jaunpur and plunder the tracts as far west as Qanauj.

Humayun, who was then whiling away his time in festivities and idle pursuits at Gaur, was disconcerted on hearing of Sher Khan’s activities in the west and the revolt of his brother, Hindal Mirza, whom he had left in northern Bihar.

This was first refused. Sher Khan employed an able agent who was able to prevail upon Churaman, a brahmin Naib of the Raja, by giving him a large bribe. Churaman strongly urged the Raja to show kindness to his neighbour and persuaded him to comply with Sher Khan’s request. The Raja, whatever were his motives, whether friendship or avarice, finally agreed. The attendants supplied themselves with arms, seized the palace and took possession of the gates, and admitted Sher Khan and his troops. The Raja effected his escape by a private passage. Thus, says Ferishta, “Fell one of the strong fortresses in the world into the hands of Sher Khan, together with much treasure, that had been accumulated for ages”.

Abbas Sarwani - (Elliot iv. p. 361) specifically refutes the generally accepted charge that Sher Khan put Afghans into 1200 dolis, and sent them into the fort as women, but also does not explain as to how Sher Khan gained admittance in the fort.

According to Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi Churaman was given six maunds of gold by Sher Khan.

This is another instance of Sher Khan’s treachery and ingratitude. He broke his plighted word and disregarded his obligations towards the Raja. The doli story discarded by Abbas is confirmed by other Afghan historians. They all describe, at length, the startagem which Sher Khan employed to eject the guards and obtain mastery of the fortress. Ferishta supports the Afghan writers. Abbas says he made enquiries about this from leading Afghan Amirs, but they contradicted the story. (Text pp.117-118). (Elliot iv. pp.361-362).
It was no longer possible for the Emperor to remain where he was, yet a march northwards was full of difficulty. The monsoon was at its height. The Gangetic Delta was one sheet of water and brooks dry in summer had become unfordable torrents. Sickness raged in the imperial army and the soldiers deserted in thousands. While Humayun's forces had shrunk the Afghan's army had grown and he now became as bold as he was cautious. Humayun had sent an *avant guard* to clear the road to Agra under Khan-i-Khana Lodi, a veteran officer trained under Babur, who camped at Mungher. In a surprise night attack Sher Khan's ablest general, Khawas Khan, took Lodi as prisoner and killed his entire contingent. Humayun was thunder-struck when the news reached him. Leaving a garrison under Jahangir Kuli Beg at Gaur, Humayun marched northwards. He reached Buxer safely but at Chaunsa he was opposed by Sher Khan and his Afghan followers and suffered a heavy defeat in June, 1539. Most of the Mughal soldiers were drowned or captured, and the life of their unlucky ruler was saved by a water-carrier, who carried him on his water-skin across the Ganges, into which he had recklessly jumped.\(^{46}\)

\(^{46}\) *His Empress, Bega Begum, with other ladies of the harem fell into the hands of Sher Khan. He treated them with utmost courtesy and attention and sent them at the first opportunity to a place of safety (W. Erskine p.174).*