CHAPTER - III

SHER SHAH AS KING OF BENGAL AND EMPEROR

SHER KHAN ASSUMES ROYAL TITLE OF SHER SHAH

The victory over the sovereign of Delhi widened the limit of Sher Khan's ambition and made him the de-facto ruler of the territories extending from Qanauj in the West to the hills of the Jharkhand and the Bay of Bengal in the south. In order to legalise what he had gained by the strength of arms and strategy, he now assumed the royal title of Sher Shah and ordered the Khutba to be read and coins to be struck in his name. He had the royal umbrella of the King of Bengal opened over his head.

1. Sher Shah proclaimed himself king of Bengal, Bihar and Jaunpur. According to Abbas Sarwani, Sher Shah also took the additional title of "Shah Alam" (Elliot iv. p.377). The Wakiat-i-Mushtaki gives the same title, but from his coins it would appear that it was "Sultan-ul-Adil" (Thomas's Chronicle of the Pathan Kings, p.395).

2. Dr. Qanungo's statement that 'Abbas is silent as to when and where Sher Shah was crowned is incorrect. Abbas is supported by Ahmad Yadgar and Abdulla who assert that it was after Chaunsa that Sher Shah crowned himself with the consent of the Afghans and adopted the insignia of royalty. According to MS Makhzan, the coronation took place in Bengal which is corroborated by Ferishta (Persian text p.226). Tarikh-i-Daudi says "In 946 A.H., Sher Khan after the victory at Chaunsa, with the consent of the Afghans, sat on the throne, spread the royal umbrella over him, read the Khutba and issued coins in his name. He assumed the title Sher Shah Alam." Campos also writes that Sher Shah was
Next year Humayun made another attempt to recover fortune. He could not secure the cooperation of his brothers inspite of his best attempts. On the 17th May, 1540, the Mughals and the Afghans met again opposite Qanauj. The army of Humayun, hopelessly demoralised, half-hearted, badly officered, was severely defeated by the Afghans at the battle of the Ganges or Bilgram, commonly known as the battle of Qanauj, and Humayun just managed to escape. Thus the work of Babur was undone, and sovereignty of Hindustan once again passed to crowned after Chaunsa. But numismatic evidence shows that Sher Khan assumed the title of Sher Shah and struck coins earlier than the battle of Chaunsa. There are coins bearing the date A.H. 945, Nos. 1040 A and 1040 B, in H.N. Wright's collection issued from the Shergarh mint in A.H. 945 and in the superscription we find the title Sher Shah. Again we find the words "Sher Shah Al-Sultan" on coins Nos. 1257 and 1270A in Wright's collection issued in the same year (945). Edward Thomas thinks that Sher Shah assumed the title of King of Bihar when Humayun was isolated in Bengal and Hindal Mirza was in revolt at Agra. There is evidence in the chronicles, too, of the fact that Sher Khan assumed the title of Shah before the battle of Chaunsa. Abbas's account of the coronation after Chaunsa is very detailed and is a declaration of his new dignity after the clear defeat of the Mughal Emperor who was the acknowledged lord of Hindustan. It would appear that the first was a preliminary ceremony gone through to proclaim his mastery of Bengal and Bihar. The second was a real consecration of his newly acquired dignity. The fêtes and festivals held for days together and farmans of victory issued soon after the battle furnish evidence of its special significance.

Tarikh-i-Shahi, Biblioth, Ind., p.203.
Qanungo, Sher Shah, p.206.
Campos, History of the Portugeuse in Bengal, p.41.
Islamic Culture X pp. 127-30.
Thomas, Chronicles of Pathan Kings, p.393.
the Afghans. From this time onwards for the next fifteen years, Humayun had to lead the life of an adventurer.

Flight of Humayun left Sher Shah in possession of the Mughal empire, but before he could exercise complete control, he had to consolidate his gains. His success made him the legitimate representative of the Afghans who had, prior to the invasion of Babur, held power and sovereignty in Hindustan and also held all the great offices of the Kingdom were rendered in a state of disarray and their power was broken on account of the war fought by the Mughals in the wake of Babur’s invasion, could still be speedily repaired if handled by a skillful hand as because their power and influence in the country of their adoption were much deep-rooted and better established. "All these, delighted with the rising prospects of Sher Shah, now flocked to his standard, and hailed him as the restorer of their glory, of their power, and of the Afghan ascendancy." ³

**SHER SHAH AS EMPEROR**

SHER SHAH had to consolidate his empire and his task was made easier by the sons of Babur who failed to combine even at such a critical moment. Though Humayun went to Lahore and did his best to win his brothers over but their selfishness

³ W. Erskine iv. p. 211.
triumphed over common interests. In the process, Sher Shah was able to extend his authority over the Punjab also. The Afghan ruler marched with his usual promptitude and vigour, to subdue the warlike hill tribes of Gakhkhar country, situated between the upper courses of the Indus and Jhelum. The Gakhkhar were a numerous tribe and ruled the greater part of the rough hilly country lying between the rivers Jhelum and the Indus. This country is rugged, mountainous, and intersected by rugged ravines which make it easily defensible. He ravaged the country but could not thoroughly subdue the Gakhkhar.\(^4\) He had to hurry back to Bengal in

\(^4\) During this campaign, Sher Shah made up his mind of building a fort in Gakhkhar country in which he might leave a garrison on the Kabul road. He selected a site and built a very strong fort and named it Rohtas after the name of his other favourite stronghold in Bihar. The Tarikh-i-Khan Jahan speaks of it (MS.p.176) as being built on the boundary of Hindustan and Kabul which is erroneous.

According to the Afghan accounts, the difficulties attending the erection of Rohtas were not small. They say that Sher Shah, before beginning to build, invited the Gakhkhar Chiefs to come and acknowledge him. They sent him in answer a peshkesh of some quivers full of arrows, and two maces, with a message, that, being soldiers, they had nothing else to give. Sher Shah, enraged at the insult, replied that they might rest assured, that, God willing, he would drive such a nail into their breasts as should not be removed till the day of judgement. He then selected one Todar Khatri (who was later to play a greater role during the reign of Akbar as Todar Mal) to build the fort supplying him plentifully with money, and returned to Agra.

The Gakhkhar chiefs, in alarm, engaged by oaths to each other, not to assist in the work; and issued an injunction prohibiting all their dependants from serving at it as labourers, under pain of banishment. For sometime Todar was unable to procure a single stonemason, and the work was at a standstill. This state of things he reported to Sher Shah, who answered. "I selected you from among many, to execute this work, thinking you a man of sense and experience. You have been supplied with money. Go on, at any expense, to
March, 1541 where his governor had impudently rebelled against his authority. He humbled and dismissed the rebel and completely changed the military character of the provincial administration and substituted a completely new form of administration original in principle and efficient in working.

Scarcely any revenue from Bengal ever seems to have found its way to the treasury in Delhi except perhaps some elephants, jewels or gifts in the form of occasional tributes which suited the pleasures of the Governor or was extorted by the dread of the imperial army or the strength of the Sultan.

The Governors usually kept large armies and with resources of the vast territories assigned to them exercised enormous powers. In internal administration of the provinces, they were the sole arbiters of the fate of their multitudinous subjects. They exercised executive, judicial and military

fulfil my object, and draw on my treasury for the amount, whatever it may be". Todar, it is added, on receiving this order, on the first day offered such workmen as would engage, an ashrafi for every stone; and every one who brought a stone received a yellow ashrafi. The Gakhkhars, hearing this, disregarding the prohibition, came down in such numbers that, in a very short time, the rate was reduced by competition to one rupee each stone; and by and by to ten takkas; till at last it came to one behluli. In this manner, it is added, by dint of expense, was the fort completed. When a report of what was doing was made to Sher Shah he entirely approved of what had been done, and praised the conduct of Todar most highly.
functions as despots subject only to the control of central government, which functioned from a distant seat of government with meagre means of communications, and varied according to the strength and weakness of the latter.

Sher Shah perceived that the answer did not lay in replacing the Governor but supplanting the administrative system. Instead of placing the province under one military Governor he created several small governorships of almost equal status, who were directly appointed by him and were independent of one another and responsible to the Emperor alone. In order to preserve the administrative unity of the whole province, Sher Shah appointed Qazi Fazihat, a man of learning and piety, at the head to oversee the administration and to preserve unanimity among the governors and to report to him direct on their conduct. Qazi Fazihat was not to interfere with the work of his subordinates but to ensure that the commands of the Emperor were carried out by them. The provincial army and finance, the main incentives for rebellion, were taken out of the hands of the head of the province. "By this single stroke of policy he struck at the very root of the evil of chronic rebellion".\(^5\)

These reforms completely changed the military character of the administration of Bengal and the administrative

\(^5\) Qanungo, Sher Shah, p.243.
machinery went on working efficiently and smoothly till the end of Sher Shah's reign.

Sher Shah next turned his attention against the Rajputs of the west, who had not yet recovered fully from the blow received at Kanuah. Having subjugated Malwa in A.D. 1542, he determined to undertake the reduction of Raisin and Chanderi which were held by a Rajput family. He marched against Puran Mal of Raisin's intolerant cruelty. In January, 1543, Sher Shah's son, Jalal Khan, marched against Puran Mal. After Humayun's flight Sher Shah joined his son; but the Rajput prince defended himself with obstinate courage. At last Puran Mal offered to evacuate the fort, if he and his troops and their families were allowed to leave unmolested. The Afghan Emperor agreed, withdrew his troops to a distance of two marches and swore solemn oaths that he would in no way molest the Rajput retirement.

6. Ahmad Yadgar gives an account of the campaign against Chanderi. The Raja sent his nephew (brother's son) at the head of his troops to fight against the Afghans, but another nephew of his went over to the enemy and suggested a device by which the fort could be captured. Ready to take advantage of the traitor's services, Sher Shah promised to make him ruler of the country if the plan succeeded. At the head of 5000 horsemen his general Walidad Khan's brother advanced towards Chanderi; Walidad himself was to march with a force of 4000. A surprise attack was made upon the Rajputs and in a hotly contested action, according to Ahmad Yadgar, many Afghans were slain. At last Rajputs were overpowered and the fort came into Afghan hands. Among the booty seized was a beautiful daughter of the Raja who was presented to Sher Shah. The traitor, who had disgraced himself by inviting a foreign invasion, was placed upon the throne of Chanderi as reward for his treason. Tarikh-i-Shahi, pp. 210-212.
It is probable that Sher Shah meant honourably to keep terms of peace; but he had not counted on the savage temper of his followers. Directly the Afghan soldiery saw the Rajputs marching through the open plain they disregarded completely their leader's commands. At the same time the Muslim Ulema pressed on Sher Shah the wickedness of keeping a treaty with the unbelievers and pronounced a decision for the death of Puran Mal.

Sher Shah had to watch helplessly while a division of his Afghan troops set in pursuit of Puran Mal. The Afghans fell furiously on the people of the fort as soon as the latter had come outside the walls. To save their wives and children from disgrace, the Rajputs took their lives, and themselves died to a man, fighting bravely against their formidable foe. The Raisin incident has been condemned by several writers as a great blot on the character of Sher Shah.


8. Ahmad Yadgar gives a detailed account of the campaign. Having obtained the fatwa, Sher Shah marched towards Raisin. After going two or three stages, he got fever on account of fatigue and though a physician Mahanand by name advised rest, he pushed on. The desire for revenge completely possessed his mind. When he reached Raisin, Puran Mal's brother waited upon him and presented to him 7000 and 3 elephants. He was asked to advise his brother to release the Muslim women whom he had admitted in his harem. The brother's protest that the reports that had reached him were untrue was unheeded and Sher Shah ordered the siege of the fort; Puran Mal offered 40 lakhs and agreed to wait upon him provided a solemn promise was made that his life would be
Sindh and Multan were annexed to the Afghan Empire by the Governor of Punjab. 9

spared. This was done and he decided to leave the fort with his family notwithstanding the advice of his kinsmen to the contrary. As Rajputs they begged him not to put faith in Sher Shah’s words and urged him to fight to the last for the honour of his house. But their counsels were unheeded and Puran Mal came out of the fort and landed at the place allotted to him in the midst of the royal camp. Though outwardly friendly, Sher Shah secretly hinted to Haibat Khan that the infidel should be exterminated with his wives and children.

Tarikh-i-Shahi, pp. 215-17.

Abdul-Fazl (Akbarnama, i.399) calls it "a dishonest treaty" and many others are inclined to agree with him, looking upon the affair as a whole.

Elphinstone has stigmatised this act of Sher Shah with severity. He says, "No motive can be discovered for this act of treachery and cruelty. There was no example to make or injury to revenge and the days of religious fury were long since gone by, yet there is no action so atrocious in the history of any Mohamadan prince in India except Tamerlane" (History of India, p.456).

Dr. K. Qanungo, says (Sher Shah, pp.294-296) "What Sher Shah sincerely wished to avert was forced upon him by a sudden out-burst of feeling in his camp. The Afghan troops had breathed for several months the anti Rajput atmosphere in the society of their co-religionists in Malwa, who had undoubtedly suffered wrongs at the hands of the Rajputs. The minds of the Afghans were inflamed by exaggerated tales of oppression and they were hailed as the avenging host of the Lord."

Dr. Qanungo further maintains (Ibid. p.299) "Even if Sher Shah’s act were one of bare-faced treachery, the historians, in all fairness and justice, can only say that he was not above the morals of his age."

That Sher Shah broke his word is apparent.

* The annexation was completed by November, 1543 - Ibid p.315.

9. The annexation was completed by November, 1543 - Ibid p.315.
There remained only one more formidable enemy of Sher Shah to be subdued. He was Maldev, the Rajput ruler of Marwar, a consummate general and energetic ruler, whose territories extended over about ten thousand square miles. From Central India Sher Shah, instigated by some disaffected Rajput Chiefs whose territories had been conquered by Maldev, marched against the Rajput Chief in A.D. 1544.10

Maldev, on his part, was not unprepared and it was no light task to conquer the Rathor cavalry in their own plains. The military skill of the Raja Maldev checked Sher Shah's advance at Mairta, some seventy miles north-east of Jodhpur.11 The two armies entrenched, but Sher Shah had far greater difficulty in obtaining supplies than the Rathors. Soon the Afghans were in a desperate plight. Sher Shah extricated his men by a ruse. He forged letters in the name of the Raja's nobles said to have been written to him by the Rajput generals promising him help and caused them to be

10. Abbas says (Elliot iv. p.404) "I have heared from the mouth of the respectably descended Shaikh Muhammad, and the Khan Azam and of Muzaffar Khan, that in this campaign Sher Shah had so great an army with him that the best calculators, inspite of all reflection and thought and calculation, were at a loss to number and reckon them, and we often ascended the tops of eminences that the length and breadth of the army might appear to us; but so exceeding was its magnitude, that its whole length and breadth were never visible together".

"Sher Shah marched against Maldev at the head of the largest and most magnificent army that he ever commanded" -- Dr. Qanungo Sher Shah p.321.

11. Ibid p. 323.
dropped near the tent of Maldev's vakil. The latter sent them to his Raja. Completely hoodwinked, Maldev retreated from the field and took refuge in the fortress of Sivan on the borders of Gujarat. It was in vain that the nobles swore to their loyalty by the most solemn oaths; the Raja fled, panic striken.

Inspite of this, some of his chiefs, like Jetha and Kama, with their followers, vindicated their honour by attacking, unsupported the entire Afghan army, and fought with desperate valour, but only, to meet a warrior's death. Sher Shah won a victory, though at a great cost, with the loss of several thousand Afghans on the battlefield and coming near to losing his empire. The Rajputs lost an opportunity of revival and the path was thus left open for undisputed Afghan supremacy over Northern India.

After this success, Sher Shah reduced to submission the whole region from Ajmer to Abu. Having accepted the submission of the Rajput Chiefs, he returned to Central India. There he invested Kalinjar (November 1544). Sher Shah p.327.

13. Abbas Sarwani (Elliot iv. p.406) says that when Sher Shah learnt the valour and gallanty of Rajput chiefs, he said, "I had nearly given the Kingdom of Delhi for a millet (bajra) seed" - an allusion to the barrenness of Marwar.
14. The cause of Sher Shah's sudden attack upon Kalinjar is not given by Abbas who simply says "The Rajah of Kalinjar,
Shah first offered the Raja easy terms which the Rajputs, mindful of the Afghan treachery of Raisin, contemptuously spurned. The Emperor then sat down before the fortress. "Never were the super-human energy and grim determination of Sher Shah displayed more splendidly than in the reduction of Kalinjar," says Dr. Qanungo in Sher Shah (p.338).

To quote the words of Tarikh-i-Daudi (MS. p.239) - "Sher Shah encircled Kalinjar and began to construct mines and lofty tower for mounting a battery and covered approaches. The latter reached the fort and the tower was built so high that the land within the fort could be overlooked from its top. For the space of seven months the soldiers and camp followers laboured day and night."15

On the 2nd May, 1545, a general assault was ordered. The first attempts were repulsed. Sher Shah ordered a second attack led by grenadiers carrying hand bombs. One hand bomb

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Karat singh, did not come out to meet him. So he ordered the fort to be invested" (MS. Abbas p. 237. Elliot iv. 407)

Ahmad Yadgar (MS. p.313) says that the reason for his advancing against Kalinjar was, that Bir Singh Deo Bundela, who had been summoned to Court, had fled, and taken refuge with Raja Kirat Singh of Kalinjar who refused to give him up. Sher Shah determined to reduce Kirat Singh to obedience and, on reaching Kalinjar, invested the fortress.

15. Quoted by Dr. Qanungo in "Sher Shah" p.338.
struck the wall, rebounded, and exploded close to a powder magazine which blew up close to where Sher Shah and some of his generals were standing directing the assault. Several generals and soldiers were hurt but Sher Shah was mortally injured. Despite his sufferings, he still directed the assault. When the fortress was finally taken, he uttered his last words, "Praise be to God: This was my very desire", and breathed his last.\textsuperscript{16}

"Thus passed away in the mid-career of victory and beneficient activity the great soldier and statesman, with whom there appeared for the persecuted Hindus the dawn of that era of toleration, justice and equality of political rights, which broadened into dazzling noon on the accession of Akbar."\textsuperscript{17}

Sher Shah was a brave warrior and a successful conqueror. His "Military character" was marked by a rare combination of caution and enterprise; his political conduct was just and

\textsuperscript{16} Makhzan-i-Afghana MS. p.53. Qanungo’s Sher Shah, p.341.
\textsuperscript{17} Qanungo, Sher Shah, p.341.
humane; and his religious attitude was generally free from medieval bigotry.\textsuperscript{18} He was indeed a striking personality in the history of Medieval India.

\textsuperscript{18} Though a pious Muslim, Sher Shah was not a fierce bigot. His treatment of Hindus in general was tolerant and just. "His attitude towards Hinduism," observes Dr. Qanungo, "Was not of contemptuous suffernece but respectful deference it received due recognition in the State". (Sher Shah p. 417)