CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

Character and Estimate of Muhammad Shah.

Muhammad Shah possessed neither the qualities of a soldier nor those of a statesman, though he was cunning enough to indulge in plots against his Wazir and other nobles when they challenged his authority. The best part of his youth he had passed in prison, and, untrained in the arts of civil administration or the conduct of military operations, he was all of a sudden raised to the throne and utterly prove unfit to solve the problems that faced the government. Though kind hearted and well-meaning, he was ill-educated, inexperienced and shrank from matters of state. Indolent and pleasure loving, he gave himself up to the enjoyments of dance, music and sports. The cares of government or problems were never allowed to disturb his repose. The elegant arts of music and dance were used to revive his languid spirits, a confused multitude of women, clowns and bufoons were gathered to gratify his low appetites. He affected the dress and manners of females,

1. Mirat-ul-Haqaiq. f. 165(b).
   Sahifa-i-Iqbal. f. 31(a).
   Shah Namah-i-Deccan, p. 138.
preferred hunting in the nearby orchards and meadows to fighting in the open against his enemies. Though the amours and exploits of Jahandar Shah were not repeated, rules of Court etiquette and public virtue were violated by his excessive love for Kokiji, his affection for Basant, a beardless boy, and Nur Bai, the famous dancing girl of the capital, whom the master of the Mughul crown loved, and who later on, was abducted by Munawvar Khan, brother of Roshnud-Daulah. Gay and genial, patient and forbearing, he was prone to forgive faults of his subordinates who showed ingratitude in return for their master's generosity.

From the outset of his reign, he had little opportunity to follow an independent course of action. He was surrounded by selfish courtiers and officials and caught in a network of intrigue and counter-intrigue. The problems were so complex, that a mediocrity like him, could not solve them. He singularly lacked in martial ordour, ability for organisation or resourcefulness. He had no skill or strength to keep his nobles in check, make them work for the state and prevent them from exploiting both the people and the government. He gradually withdrew himself from all cares of government, and placed himself in the hands of his ministers.

Under the tutelage of the Saiyid brothers, he had no

1. Akhbarat - date 21st, 24th, 25th of April, 1743.
   Akhbarat dated 6th May, 1743.
   Shah Namahi Deccan p. 97., Hadisa-i-Nadir Shah f. 3(b).
   Murqqa-i-Delhi. p. 73.
freedom to move in the company of nobles, and issue commands according to his will. He was seen in the Diwan-i-Khan once a week, but only to approve the decisions already taken by the Chief Minister and the Paymaster. After the battle of Hasanpur, he is reported to have held his Darbar regularly and conducted the business of the state seriously. After the morning prayers he would first go to the Jharoka window where he witnessed elephant fights, reviewed troops and heard petitions. From there he went to Diwan-i-Khas where he interviewed the officials, the governors and chiefs were introduced who offered presents and received robes of honour and other gifts. New appointments, promotions and transfers were made and reports from provinces were submitted and orders issued by the Emperor. His next engagement was the visit to Diwan-i-Adalat. Here Muhammad Shah received minor officers, granted gifts, and issued orders to them, dispensed justice and heard petitions of the Faujdars, revenue collectors and mansabdars. On Friday he did not attend to public business but went in the company of learned theologians or in almsgiving. The evenings were sometimes spent in hunting, visiting gardens, and shrines or witnessing elephant fights.

Muhammad Ali Khan, author of Tarikh-i- Muzaffari, informs us of the Bell of Justice in the Burj Mussamin, whose chain lay on the ground below the fortwall, following the practice of

3. Ibid.
4. Akhbarat-i-Darbar Maulah Vol.II.
Jehangir, but in the absence of any record about its working, and considering the growing laxity in the administration, it can be inferred that it was not used very often.

Muhammad Amin Khan, the arch-conspirator and the skilful demagogue, had kept the Emperor under salutary restraint, himself directing the public affairs and not tolerating any negligence of work in the departments. But when Kokiji and her clique tightened their comprehensive grip on the royal authority, the government fell in gross corruption and incompetence. Nizamul Mulk tried, to purge corruption, but his efforts failed because of the office-hunting and power-seeking persons and he was dubbed as traitor. His resignation marked the beginning of a widespread confusion and laxity in the government manned by upstarts. Muhammad Shah "paid no attention to the administration of the kingdom, which lacked all supreme authority, and through his indolence, unrelieved by an exertion he fell and came to an end."

Throughout his reign Muhammad Shah confined himself to the fort and never went out to lead military campaigns except the two expeditions, against Nadir Shah and Ali Muhammad Khan Rohilla which only exposed his utter incompetence. In the later years of the reign, major part of his time was engrossed in music and dances at night. Another diversion was to witness the weakly-held market on the sandy bank of the Jumna below the walls of the palace, where he purchased birds and

1. Tauhar-i-Samsam. (Elliot Vol. VIII) p. 73.
animals, and visited the orchards laid out by his orders to which he had given the name of Aishmahal. "We wonder," writes Sarkar, "Whether such spectacles would be considered a worthy diversion by anyone outside a nursery unless he were a country clown, and whether the lord of a hundred and fifty million souls at the ripe age of 41 had no more serious use of his time and no more refined tastes." The resultant state of affairs is revealed in this passage of Tarkh-i-Ahmad Shah. "Muhammad Shah, from the commencement of his reign, displayed the greatest carelessness in his government, spending all his time in sports and play. This neglect on the part of the sovereign was speedily taken advantage of by all the Amirs and nobles, who usurped possession of Subas and Parganas, and appropriated to themselves the revenues of those provinces which in former days were paid in the royal treasury, and amounted to several Karors of rupees."

The last decade of Muhammad Shah's reign had witnessed the horror and tragedy of two terrible foreign invasions, occupation of Malwa and Gujrat by the Marathas, imposition of Chauth on the eastern provinces, complete severance of Haiderabad from the centre, establishment of Rohilla power in the Gangetic Doab, and the loss of Trans-Indus region which became a happy hunting ground for invaders and local turbulent elements. It was in this fateful period that public exchequer was exhausted, government machinery weakened, army demoralized, and the crown lost much of its former prestige and dignity. The cities as

well as the villages were subjected to plunder and rapine. Muhammad Shah who lived up through these years, was wearing out in health day by day as province after province of the empire was slipping away from his feeble grip. Cooped up within the walls of his palace, despair and depodency seized him, his health was impaired by excessive drink and opium, and in the end he became a complete invalid. Weak in constitution, he later had an attack of paralysis which accompanied by serious dysentery made him bedridden. The court physicians, Nawab Alvi Khan Bahadur, Nawab Ali Naqi Khan Bahadur and Muhammad Akbar Khan endeavoured their utmost to cure him but their measures proved of no avail. One day he was carried in a litter to Masjid Sangi gate, which was inside the court, and there sat in a state with all his nobles and attendants. All of a sudden he fainted, and was taken away to his apartments. The next morning on the 27th Rabi-us-Sani, in the 31st year of his reign, 15th April, 1748, the Emperor breathed his last. He was then 49 years old.

Mirza Ahmed, his only surviving son was still on his way from Sirhind to Delhi. The news was not disclosed and the corpse of the deceased sovereign was put in a lang wooden case of European style covered with a sheet, the attendants

2. Tarikh-i-Ahmad Shah. p.111.
3. Ibid.
had procured from the Darogha of Kitchen, on the pretext of using it as a dinner cloth, and buried it in the garden. At Panipat, the Prince received the letter, calling him to the capital to assume royalty, but Safdar Jung crowned him there and then. On reaching Delhi on May 2, he encamped at the Shalamar gardens and here coronation ceremony took place. The corpse of Muhammad Shah was buried in the Shrine of Nizamuddin near the grave of his mother.

Muhammad Shah left behind him one son, viz, Prince Ahmed, now Mujahiduddin Ahmed Shah Bahadur Ghazi, who was born to Adham Bai, dancing girl and one daughter known as Hazrat Begum born to Saheba Mehal, and later married to Ahmad Shah Abdali. Saheba Mehal was the cousin of Malika Zamani, the Emperor's first wife and the daughter of Farrukh-Siyar.

Thus passed away "the last of the rulers of Babur's line, as after him the kingship had nothing but the name left to it." To hold Muhammad Shah entirely responsible for the decline would be an exaggerated statement. The problems he had to face were complex and the situation in which he had to work was grave.

In the monarchical system, nobility formed a great source of power and strength, it was its backbone. The ultimate responsibility/conduct the administration and fight wars

1. I. Tarikh-i-Ahmad Shah pp.111-112.
   T.M.
   Delhi Chronicle. p.87.
was theirs. But they had become corrupt and clique ridden. Their mutual jealousies rent them asunder, dividing them into factions, each engaged in pushing the fortune of its members by creating hurdles in the way of their rival groups. They kept on formenting distrust and suspicion against each other by means of dexterious intrigues. Thus the court had turned into a chess-board where the game of party politics was played by different sections of the ruling class in a most vicious way. The nobles and chiefs finding, that career was not open to merit, that their posts were not secure, that the sovereign was no longer a source of inspiration and guidance, gave themselves up either to pleasure or to sedition. They would try their utmost to stay at Delhi, where they could maintain their position. Under an atmosphere fraught with fear and suspicion, no chief would leave the court for distant campaigns, where he was sure to court disaster and dig his own grave by providing golden chance to his rival for discrediting him in the eyes of the Emperor. In the reign of Muhammad Shah Mughul Court was divided into Turani and Hindustani parties. Nizamul Mulk and Qamruddin were at the head of the former, while Khan-i-Dauran and Raja Jai Sing were the leaders of the latter. After the invasion of Nadir Shah, both these groups suffered a severe setback, and their place was taken by the Irani leaders including Amir Khan and Safdar Jung. They had laid bare their daily widening rift before the public on several occasions. The shoe-seller's riot started on communal basis ended in hand to hand combat between the Mughuls and the Indians in the mosque of Delhi. One day in the presence of the Emperor, Muzaffar Khan and Saadat Khan grappled with each
the Emperor, Muzaffar Khan and Saadat Khan grappled with each other on a very minor issue. Saadat Khan after striking blows, cast him under his feet. The Emperor laughed and the Indian noble remained tight-lipped. Warid says that the ignominious degradation suffered at the hands of rioters by the nobles in the mosque, where their turbans had been taken off by them, was a just reply to their vanity and highhandedness.

Another potent source of weakness was the absence of any law of succession in the Mughul system. "Its uncertainty had encouraged every prince to aspire to the crown, to ingratiate himself with his father, to form cliques, to undermine the influence of his brothers, if not to attempt their lives, to stoop to the lowest depths of baseness and cruelty. They sought to unsettle the settled fact, they intrigued, they warred." Every war of succession caused unspeakable disaster and havoc sappling the imperial strength. Within little more than a decade after Aurangzeb's death seven fierce battles for imperial succession were fought in which princes, nobles, and large number of soldiers perished, treasures were wasted and the whole administrative machinery was upset.

The imperial treasury, as a natural corollary to these chaotic conditions, rapidly grew impoverished. The range of Khalsa lands was narrowed down, subjecting the Emperor to abject poverty and financial distress. The nobles too lost hold over their jagirs, and resorted to unfair means to get money for their expenses.

The soldiery, completely demoralised, became impatient of central control and broke in mutiny, and gratified their
avarice by plundering villages and towns because their salaries were not regularly paid. The zeal with which the generals had fought in former days had faded away. Selfishness instead of devotion to a cause governed their conduct, and personal and sectarian differences kept them every divided. The Mughul generalship failed to adapt their strategy and technique of warfare to the exigencies of new situations. Their armies were unwieldy, their camp like a moving city, with bazars, tents for women and servants, a large number of hangerson and camp-followers making nobility impossible. The Mughuls could not break old traditions, and consequently were buried under their weight. They again and again suffered defeats at the hands of the Marathas in the guerrilla warfare, but, for reasons of prestige, they neither reduced unnecessary paraphernalia, nor trained their soldiers in guerrilla tactics. They further failed to take notice of the growing importance of the sea-power.

One of the crucial problems confronting all the Muslim rulers had been the way how to deal with the chiefs of small principalities and the governors of the provinces. The problem centred round the conflict between the centrifugal and centripetal forces. From the very beginning we find two tendencies, one tending to the creation of one central government and the other to the establishment of smaller political entities. On the one hand there was a persistent desire on the part of great Emperors to achieve the ideal of all India sovereignty and on the other was the potent urge on the part of petty local chiefs, for regional independence and territorial expansion. The
most important factor in giving impetus to the desire for regional independence was the Bhakti movement which flourished during the 15th and 16th centuries, and under special conditions the movement assumed anti-Islamic form and became a powerful force for political separation in some areas such as Maharashtra and the Punjab. As there was no enlightened middleclass, the leadership of these movements remained in the hands of the local feudal chiefs, who patronised them to gratify their own territorial ambitions. These movements were neither religious nor national but tribal and regional. Not only martial races of the Hindus like Jats and Sikhs were at war with the imperial government but the Afghans and the Rohillas strove to set up their own independent kingdoms. These forces had existed in this country, all along but when the sceptre was in strong hands, they lay underground and burst forth with fierce violence, when imbecile kings controlled the destiny of the people. The provincial governors who had been kept exceptionally for a long time in their charges, grew bold, broke off with the central government and assumed independence. The first who embarked on this ambitious scheme and almost succeeded in its execution was Nizamul Mulk, the governor of Oudh, Saadat Khan, imitated his example, while the governors of Eastern provinces had for long enjoyed local freedom unquestioned by the crown. The advantages flowed from local independence were peace, and prosperity, and people made progress in arts and industry under the rule of an able, just and benevolent governors.

During this period the relations between the Hindus and Muslims were extremely cordial and the two communities had
evolved a common culture out of the social orders. Notwithstanding certain differences in religious beliefs and rituals, their social customs and manners resembled each other so much that Hindus and Muslims seemed to have formed one nation. "It rests upon no unwarranted assumption, but upon well ascertained facts, that Hinduism and Muhammadism have acted and reacted upon each other, influencing social institutions, colouring religious thoughts with their mutual, typical and religious lines, these being conspicuous illustrations of the union of the two streams of Hinduism and Islam which since Muslim conquest, have flowed side by side in India." Resemblance in social ceremonies and peculiarities of wedded life, unity of language and similarity of dress, could apparently be noticed in Delhi. Both Hindus and Muslims took part enthusiastically in each other's festivals, fairs and social festivities. Hindus visited the shrines of Muslim saints while Muslims went to Hindu jogis and astrologers for favour and guidance. The later Mughul showed remarkable tolerance towards Hindus by abolishing Jaziya, appointing Rajput chieftains as provincial governors, giving key posts in civil administration and conferring high ranks on them. Raja Chabella Ram Nagar, Deya Bahadur, Raja Ajit Singh, Raja Jai Singh and Raja Abhai Singh were the leading nobles of the empire. There was a locality in Delhi called Jai Singh Pura where Rajputs lived mixed with the Muslims in social gatherings and took part in local affairs. There was another locality called Vakilpura.

1. Some Bihar Contemporaries by Dr. S. Sinha, p. 186.
3. Ashob, p. 144.
where Hindu vakils lived and passed peaceful life. The whole secretariat of the central government was filled with Hindu secretaries and clerks who were held in high confidence for their honesty and efficiency. It was unimaginable that a Muslim minister could govern the revenue department without having a Hindu officer as his Diwan or secretary. Raja Sabha Chand, Diwan of Zulfiqar Khan, Raja Ratan Chand secretary to the Saiyid Brothers, Raja Bhagwant Rai, Rai Bhog Chand, Rai Tond Rai, secretaries to Muhammad Amin Khan, and Anand Ram Mukhlis, Diwan to Qamaruddin Khan, are the few names in the long list of Hindu civil officers who had achieved high status in society by virtue of their ability and integrity. Thus Hindus and Muslims in the capital were on the same level. The same economic and social standards guided their habits and hobbies, and same political exigencies governed their weal and woe.

The virtual collapse of political power, insecurity of civil life and economic discontentment made men and women bitter and pessimistic. In order to seek escape from the hardships of life, they resorted to the pursuit of pleasure. True religion was pushed into the background, the cult of the saints and superstitious beliefs gained hold over the educated as well as the masses, 'Standards of morality decayed; ugly vices raised their head. The virus of moral laxity infected in varying degree the entire society.' The pent up desires of courtiers and citizens, restrained under the Puritan Alamgir found full expression in those days.