Chapter- 7

CONSPIRACIES AND ALLEGATIONS

It should be fully understood that Delhi was not prepared to become the central place for such a large scale outbreak. Undoubtedly, the Mughal Emperor enjoyed great respect of the citizens not only in Delhi but throughout the country. Unfortunately, during the past 150 years his authority had progressively declined and the nobility and other functionaries of the so-called Mughal Empire had degenerated to the extent that was beyond repair. Most of them were not prepared to take any risk at the cost of their own comfortable life. Had the rebellion taken place simultaneously at each place according to a plan, the situation might have been different. Moreover, no war could be prolonged for an indefinite period and the English were in a better position to take advantage of this situation. It had been noticed in the previous chapter how the English tried to create disunity among the people of Delhi on communal lines. Further, it was not difficult for the English to create doubts against the integrity of the King. There are numerous examples that the English were continuously trying to tarnish the image of Bahadur Shah. The city population consisted of different types of people. The trading community, the industrialists and other professionals could not keep their work in abeyance for long. The moment the English surrounded the city of Delhi and blocked its exit and entry, this class became extremely restless. The spies and mischief mongers took full advantage
of this situation and soon they succeeded in creating an atmosphere of despondency and feeling of hopelessness among the people. Those who were fighting gallantly, despite their meagre resources, also succumbed to the conspirators' game-plan and the King was hard pressed to conclude peace with the English.

Bahadur Shah who had succeeded to the Mughal throne in September 1837 after the death of Akbar Shah II, was fairly in an advanced age i.e. 63 years. He was born in 1774. According to the Mughal traditions he received military training including the art of handling modern weapons. He was also a good rider and poet. He loved the people and felt sad, seeing their plight. Like a noble soul, he wished to remove the miseries of the people of the entire world, but his own position was so uncertain under the English tutelage that he could do nothing in this regard. The English were continuously trying to reduce his prerogatives. The assurances given to his father Akbar Shah for the increase of the tribute which the English preferred to describe as pension was not fulfilled on different pretexts.

In the Red Fort crisis of succession arose in 1839 when prince Dara Bakht, the nominated successor to Bahadur Shah, passed away. It should be remembered that the ominous era of Lord Dalhausie had already began to cast its dark shadow on the Indian subcontinent. His interferences in the affairs of the Mughal house as well as other ruling princes is too well known to be described. Lord Dalhousie

1. Zaheer, p.38, f.n. The author says that the King was born in 1773.
was determined to destroy the Mughal sovereignty. After the death of Prince Dara Bakht it was Fakhruddin Fatahul Mulk in the line of succession and was known to be a great supporter of English. Bahadur Shah was keen to raise Jawan Bakht, born of his favourite queen Zeenat Mahal, as his successor. Mirza Fakhruddin Fatahul Mulk is also alleged of possessing a weak character but to the English, his succession suited. Hence on the terms dictated by the English Fatahul Mulk was recognised as successor. On 10th July, 1856 Fatahul Mulk also died. On 11th July, Sir Thomas Metcalfe appeared before Bahadur Shah. The latter pleaded for the succession of Jawan Bakht. And to strengthen his argument the King gave him a statement signed by other claimants of succession supporting the name of Mirza Jawan Bakht as heir apparent. On 13th July, the eldest son of Bahadur Shah, Mirza Quresh, sent a petition to the English agent alleging that the Badshah forced the Princes to sign the statement threatening that their refusal would lead to discontinue of their allowances. It was also alleged in the petition that Bahadur Shah promised them to increase their allowance and salary if they signed the statement. The petition also alleged that the petitioner had not agreed to the proposal as he had come to know that Begum Zeenat Mahal was keenly interested to raise Jawan Bakth as the heir apparent. He also claimed that being the eldest son with all capability and qualifications, he should be declared heir apparent. This petition is not free from doubts. We have no evidence to suggest that it was done at the behest of the

English. However, the petition of Mirza Quresh provided a golden opportunity to the English to interfere in the Imperial affairs. It was now the turn of Lord Canning who recognised the right of Mirza Quresh as heir apparent and declared the termination of Sovereignty of the Mughals after the death of Bahadur Shah¹.

The Red Fort had become a centre of intrigues. Begum Zeenat Mahal, who was married to Bahadur Shah in his old age, was his favourite. Begum Zeenat Mahal was keenly interested in the succession problem and wished that her son, Jawan Bakht, should succeed Bahadur Shah. She anticipated that after the death of Bahadur Shah, if her son did not succeed as sovereign her condition would be worse. The tradition of the Mughal house was before her. She very well knew that Bahadur Shah would not live for long hence she was making every effort and even took resort to conspiracy and manipulation to raise Jawan Bakht as heir apparent. After the death of Mirza Fatahul Mulk, she had become very optimistic. However, her hopes ended in smoke when the Governor General recognised Mirza Quresh as heir apparent. Therefore, in the Imperial household, Begum Zeenat Mahal appears to be the greatest enemy of the English.

On the outbreak of the rebellion and occupation of Delhi by the rebel forces, Begum Zeenat Mahal might have thought that her aspirations to raise Jawan Bakht as the heir apparent would now be fulfilled. But Mirza Ilahi Bakhsh, Hakim Ahsanullah Khan and others appear to have assured her that the English would be successful

¹ Kaye, vol-II, p.32.
and regain power. Keeping the entire situation in mind, it should not be a matter of surprise that in this conspiracy she joined hands with them. Mirza Ilahi Bakhsh was probably most enemical to Begum Zeenat Mahal as he seems to have believed that the sudden death of Mirza Fakhruddin (Fatahul Mulk) was the result of a palace conspiracy in which the Begum had a leading role. To him it was the most opportune time to take revenge from the King and the Begum by joining hands with the English and betraying the King and the queen. Since Begum Zeenat Mahal was prepared to do every thing for raising Jawan Bakht, it was not difficult for Ilahi Bakhsh to entrap her. He prevailed upon her and the King who believed in his integrity. This is manifest from the fact that Ilahi Bakhsh succeeded in preventing Bahadur Shah from joining hands with Bakht Khan and going outside Delhi in September, 1857. He wanted to handover the King to the English alive.

On 16th May, the rebels produced a letter before Bahadur Shah which was alleged to have been written by Hakim Ahsanullah Khan and Mahboob Ali Khan and was addressed to the English with the message, "come immediately to this palace and raise Mirza Jawan Bakht as heir apparent. We will arrange the arrest of all the Sepoys and horsemen present in the Fort."¹ The Hakim stoutly refused to accept the credibility of the letter, declaring it to be a fabrication but the rebels continued to regard Begum Zeenat Mahal a suspect. Jivan Lal testifies that wherever the rebels discovered the hands of

Hakim Ahsanullah Khan in conspiracies they also believed Begum Zeenat Mahal's complicity\(^1\). On the 8th August, 1857 Begum Zeenat Mahal conveyed to Bahadur Shah rebels' suspicion that she was an English ally\(^2\). Maulana Fazle Haq Khairabadi endorses this allegation\(^3\).

The problem of the succession in the history of Mughals has been very complicated from the very beginning. It assumed very serious proportions after the death of Akbar threatening a civil war. It went on increasing with the demise of every Mughal King and often proved to be extremely bloody. This problem continued during the English East India company's rule. It arose once again on the death of Mirza Fakhruddin Fathul Mulk.

The princes were assigned various responsibilities in the rebel army by the rebels expecting that their orders would be carried without dispute. But the princes could not prove to be competent enough to carry on their assigned responsibilities to effectively manage the administration and control the army. They even failed to win the support of the people. To raise funds and its proper distribution was also beyond their capacity. Their greed for money and plunder of mahajans of Delhi has already been discussed elsewhere. They had become unpopular among the people. The King warned them several times without any impact on them. Ehsanul Haq had filed a petition to the King on 4th July, 1857 to the effect that:

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2. Ibid. p. 190.
"Mirza Abu Bakr visits the house of Princess Farkhunda Zamani located at the crossing of Bahram Khan with evil intentions. He behaves under the influence of intoxication which is expected by drunken man."¹ The character of Mirza Abu Bakr has been described in this petition in detail which shows him as a cruel person. Bahadur Shah knew this problem as his orders of 5th July, 1857 were clear that the Princes should be treated like the common men and dealt with without considering their positions². The cowardice of the Princes may be judged from the fact that they were 6-7 thousand strong in the Tomb of Humayun and they surrendered to the English forces tamely without any resistance.

Bakht Khan and Mirza Mughal:- An account of Bakht Khan and his fight against the English has been given earlier. It has also been mentioned that the date of Bakht Khan's arrival in Delhi has been given variously by historians. According to a report reproduced in the trial of Bahadur Shah, the King is reported to have written to Mirza Mughal on 29th June, 1857 that Bakht Khan was likely to arrive from Barielly on 30th June. Orders were thus issued to the Darogha of Pul to make arrangements for quick crossing of Jamuna through the boat as the river was in spate. Bahadur Shah also gave orders to Mirza Mughal that it should be ensured that no officer and soldiers endeavoured to interrupt their crossing³.

Bahadur Shah sent Ahmed Ali Khan, his father-in-law, to receive

¹. Garret, p.17.
². Metcalfe, p. 139.
³. Press List of Mutiny Papers, 69, no.34.
Bakht Khan. Bakht khan was brought to Delhi on 1st July by Samsamuddaulah. Bakht Khan requested the King that he should be entrusted the responsibility for making all arrangements in Delhi. The King was greatly pleased. He gave him a sword, shield and four thousand rupees in cash for distributing sweets to his soldiers granting him the title of Sipah Salar. He was given all authority directing all officers to follow his instructions. At this stage, Bakht Khan adopting a strict attitude had said to the King that he would cut the noses and ears of the Princes, if they were caught plundering. The King responded, "You have full authority, do whatever you consider proper". It appears that in order to justify the prosecution of Bahadur Shah, the English were planting false evidence to punish the King. In the trial case of Bahadur Shah it was stated that on 1st July, 1857 Princes Mirza Mughal and Mirza Abdullah requested the Emperor to grant permission to bring the Breilly armour in the night to Delhi to avoid English artillery attack. They also sought permission for stationing them outside the Ajmeri Gate but the King asked them to station them outside the Turkman Gate. Here it may be pointed out that Bakht Khan had already appeared before the King and had been given Rs.4000/- for sweets. The whole attitude of Bahadur Shah towards Bakht Khan from the very beginning was such that the request of Mirza Mughal and Mirza Abdullah as referred to above makes no sense. The activities of Bakht khan were greatly annoying to the princes. The honour conferred upon Bakht Khan on account

1. Delhi Urdu Akhbar, 12th July, 1857; Metcalfe, p.134.
of his ability and competence appears to have caused jealousy to other nobles as well, specially Mirza Mughal was not happy because till then he enjoyed an undisputed authority in the State affairs. Seeing that his position had become vulnerable, he said to the King on 2nd July that he had received a complaint from the city people that they have received an order from the Kotwal directing them to be prepared to serve under the direction of the Bareilly Sepoys with their arms. Perhaps this refers to Bakht Khan's general instructions to the city traders to keep arms with them to fight against the undesirable elements plundering them. Bakht Khan's order appears to have seriously endangered the position of the Sepoys loyal to Mirza Mughal who were supposed to be involved in plundering activities. Naturally, this caused jealousy of Mirza Mughal and he thought it fit to poison the ears of Bahadur Shah. Not only that, Bakht Khan's disciplined routine in keeping the administration was also quite irksome to many who were used to a lazy and easy life. This is explained by the contemptuous report published by Zakaullah who reported that Bakht khan was also enjoying the ways of the English Commander-in-chief. Some times he examined the Magazine and instructed the officers posted there to maintain it according to the rules by storing all the essential commodities in it, and some times he directed the respectable and rich people in Delhi to appear before him which annoyed them.

On 3rd July Bahadur Shah instructed to Bakht khan to arrange

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1. Garret, pp.16-17.
salary for the army and provide compensation to those whose properties were lost, to control the judiciary, the police and revenue department\(^1\). He was further instructed not to have any concern with the princes. This greatly annoyed those who were directly affected by those measures. This order might have made the Princes more enemical towards Bakht Khan. It also appears that Bakht Khan might have made inquiries about the plundered wealth which angered Mirza Mughal and he provoked Bahadur Shah and Bakht Khan had to explain his position\(^2\). However, the King was supporting Bakht Khan's endeavour and ordered him to carry on inquiries\(^3\).

The attitude of Bahadur Shah in not considering the accusations levelled by Mirza Mughal against Bakht Khan made Mirza Muhal desperate. Having no alternative, Mirza Mughal began to manoeuvre support of other nobles against Bakht Khan. Mirza Mughal always attempted to exploit the situation if it could serve his objective. It is said that on 12th July the Mirza wrote to the King, "According to your orders, your instructions have been conveyed to the Sardars of the army. Yesterday General Bahadur Bakht Khan also visited the slave. Your wishes were conveyed to him and transmitted to all the authorities of the army according to my ability to accept it. I am sending their petitions to you."\(^4\) It may be inferred from the character of Mirza Mughal that the petitions were signed by the Neemuch faction of the Sepoys loyal to Mirza Mughal. It is abundantly

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2. Garret, p. 89.
4. Ibid. p.87.
clear from the group factionalism that Mirza Mughal was using his supporters as if the majority of the army was reluctant to accept the position of Bakht Khan.

Bahadur Shah's attitude towards Bakht Khan remained neutral. He allowed him to work independently even after so much bickering and conspiratorial attitude of Mirza Mughal. A desperate Mirza Mughal now began to interfere in the military arrangements made by Bakht Khan and began to tarnish the image of Bakht Khan as an incompetent person. To create a wedge between Bahadur Shah and Bakht Khan, a forged letter from Bahadur Shah was sent to Bakht Khan criticising the style of functioning of the latter. Bakht Khan protested to the Emperor but the latter denied having written such a letter to him. It is sad to note that while the English were tightening their grip over the rebel forces, and had infact surrounded Delhi, Mirza Mughal and his party was engaged in such petty and condemnable activities. On 20th August anti-Bakht Khan group even alleged that he was in league with the English. The witness was produced before Bahadur Shah, and on cross examination he could not give any satisfactory evidence. In the end, he could only say that he came to visit Mirza Mughal. Again on 23rd August, an attempt was made to prevent Bakht Khan's entry to the Court. On 17th July, Mirza Mughal had levelled a serious allegation against Bakht Khan that the latter was deliberately avoiding battle with the English where as prior to his arrival the war against the English was being fought satisfactorily. He urged upon the Emperor

1. Metcalfe, p. 201.
2. Ibid. p. 204.
to dismiss Bakht Khan as Commander-in-Chief of the forces so that he could launch a massive attack on the enemy. Bahadur Shah kept quite over this proposition. Meanwhile, another petition was sent to the King pointing out that Bakht Khan was an officer in artillery branch and he knows only one work that is how to manage artillery. He is not competent in the battle field nor he deserves the position to hold the office of Governor. The petitioners also alleged that Bakht Khan was ill mannered, and did not pay any offerings to the Emperor. The petitioners thus urged upon Bahadur Shah to raise Mirza Mughal as Commander-in-chief of the entire forces, a position which he held earlier. They maintained that the entire army also wished that a Commander-in-Chief should be appointed. Bahadur Shah sent this petition to Bakht Khan for suitable reply. Since the time did not allow squabbles, Bakht Khan acted with caution and suggested that the army should be divided into three parts. First part should consist of Delhi and Meerut regiments, the second part should consist of the forces which came with him and the third part consist of the remaining forces. Bahadur Shah showed Bakht Khan's reply to Mirza Mughal.

A close scrutiny of the petitions of Mirza Mughal and the Sepoys reveal that Mirza Mughal was the main instigator behind these petitions. Bakht Khan also understood that a division of army was the only solution in the circumstances. That is why he kept his own forces

1. Garret, p.89.
with him and suggested the division of others. However, it is interesting to note that when the rumour of division of the army gained momentum, many soldiers from other military contingents began to join Bakht Khan’s army. A panic stricken Mirza Mughal directed the Kotwal of the city to make a public announcement that all the soldiers who had left their contingents should return to their respective contingents failing which they would be severely dealt with.

Apart from the princes, there were some other persons who were known for their loyalty to the English. They were naturally unhappy with the appearance of Bakht Khan in Delhi. One of them was Hakim Ahsanullah Khan. From the very beginning, the rebels doubted the integrity of Ahsanullah Khan. He believed that the English would be finally victorious, that is why he managed to send a letter in the name of Bahadur Shah to the Lt. Governor of Agra. The rebels also suspected Ahsanullah Khan and his associates. On 15th May, 1857 the rebels made allegations against Hakim Ahsanullah Khan and Mahboob Ali Khan, a confidential servant of Bahadur Shah, for conspiring with the English. Mehboob Ali Khan assured on oath that he was not involved in any conspiracy. On 16th May, the rebels produced a letter of Hakim Ahsanullah Khan and Mahboob Ali Khan addressed to the English. Ahsanullah Khan and Mahboob Ali Khan denied having written any such letters. On 26th May the rebels came to know that the gun placed at Salimgarh fort had been made ineffective by filling stone chips. The rebels suspected the hands of Ahsanullah

1 Metcalfe, p. 152.
2 Press List of Mutiny Papers, III d, No.41.
3 Metcalfe, p. 83.
4 Zaheer, p. 144.
5 Metcalfe, pp. 84-85; press List of Mutiny Papers, No. 39, p. 5a.
Khan and Mahboob Ali in this regard. The rebels decided to kill both of them. Bahadur Shah, however, persuaded them to act with restrain. Further, the rebels discovered that the ammunition and gunpowder was concealed in the grain store. The rebels believed that it was the work of Begum Zeenat Mahal, Mahboob Ali Khan and Ahsanullah Khan. Jivan Lal tells us that the rebels had become so desperate over the activities of Ahsanullah Khan that they attempted to murder him on 4th August. On 7th August the gunpowder factory of the rebels in the Kothi of Begum Samroo caught fire and was destroyed. The rebels believed that it was the handy work of Ahsanullah Khan. The rebels were so annoyed with Hakim Ahsanullah Khan that at last on 7th August he was captured from the Red Fort. Bahadur Shah pleaded not to harm his life and on 8th August he gave orders to his sons to see that Hakim's life was saved. On 9th August apprehending that the life of Ahsanullah Khan was in danger, Bahadur Shah made a personal appeal to the Sepoys that as a physician the Hakim was an indispensable necessity for him. He thus pleaded to save Hakim's life in view of his failing health. There was another person Mirza Ilahi Baksh who was a relative of Bahadur Shah and a well wisher of the English. Bahadur Shah held him in great confidence. Ilahi Baksh always counselled for a peace with the English. On 24th July he had warned that if the King did not open

1. Metcalfe, p.103.
2. Ibid. p. 107.
4. Sadiq-ul-Akhar, 10th August, 1857; Metcalfe, pp.185-86.
negotiations for peace with the English, he would be put to great loss. The rebels also suspected Jivan Lal for his espionage activities and secret deal with the English. Jivan Lal writes in his roznamcha. "I learned afterwards that, when I was arrested, Lalla Sham Lal wrote to Mirza Ilahi Baksh that now was the time to render me assistance, as I was a servant of the English and he a well wisher." Mirza Ilahi Baksh was mourning the death of his infant son. He hurriedly laid him to rest and rushed to save Jivan Lal. It was Mirza Ilahi Baksh who played a crucial role in not allowing Bahadur Shah to go out of Delhi despite persuasion by Bakht Khan.

Besides the Fort, there were a large number of well wishers of the English in the City. There are many names who posed themselves as the supporters of the rebels' cause but they were actively helping the English. Prominent among them were Jivan Lal, Moinuddin Hassan Khan, Chunni Lal and others. They had their own network of espionage and they provided regular information to Hudson who headed the department of the Espionage of the English. They were so clever that it was difficult to catch them in their nefarious activities. The Delhi Urdu Akhbar lamentingly writes that it was a peculiar game of God that some time it is hard to believe that most of the Hindus and Muslims are loyal to the English in this age and work against their own faith and religion. It is said that secretly they wish the
success of the English and supply them information regularly. By heart they are sincerely with them.

Ironically, the shamlessness of some of the greedy persons had reached to the extent that they were providing regularly essential commodities from Delhi to the English. A report cited by Jivan Lal indicated that on 14th June 13 bakers (Nanbaies) of Kabuli Gate were killed for supplying bread to the English. On 6th July three spies were executed in the camp of Bakht Khan and two men were caught carrying wine to the English camp. People were being imprisoned regularly for espionage activity but unfortunately the espionage net-work established by the English could not be broken.

As already noticed earlier, the army of the rebels was badly divided. It was torn into many factions. It lacked a central leadership. Jealousy and false pride played a leading role in not accepting the over all leadership of a veteran and seasoned warrior like Bakht Khan by other groups and factions. Moreover, except the army that was being commanded by Bakht Khan, the Neemuch, Meerut and Delhi army of the rebels lacked resources and discipline. Since they were not being paid either by the princes or by their commanders, the only avenue for their subsistence was plunder. The Princes were a worthless lot, their ambition was to hold offices and pose themselves as military rank holders without contributing in any way to support

1. Delhi Urdu Akhbar, 19th July, 1857.
2. Metcalfe, p.121.
the rebels' cause. Their role in plundering the people with the help of the impoverished Sepoys has already been cited. In view of such a state of affairs prevailing in Delhi during the progress of the rebellion of 1857, it was bound to lead to a dismal result to the spontaneous revolution that had begun from Meerut on 10th May and engulfed Delhi on 11th May.