The Family of Mohammad Khan Niyazi

The family of Mohammad Khan Niyazi was one of the most important Afghan family of nobles who served under Akbar, Jahangir and Shahjahan. Mohammad Khan Niyazi joined Mughal service during the reign of Akbar and in the beginning of his career, he was deputed to serve under Shahbaz Khan Kambo. During the course of the battle on Brahmaputra he earned a name for his bravery and courage. Shahnawaz Khan writes that Shahbaz Khan in view of companionship and service used to give him a lac of rupees, (a very high amount in those days) every year from his own resources.

Thereafter Muhammad Khan Niyazi was transferred to Thatta to serve under Abdur Rahim Khan Khanan who was preparing to conquer

1. Niazis were an Afghan tribe who lived around Bannu and Khogionis strip of land lying between Kabul and Langhavid. They were mostly agriculturist and later embarked upon commercial activities until Nineteenth century A.D. (Ibbeston, vol. III, 168).
2. Shahbaz Khan Kambu belonged to a mystic family. He was sixth descent from Haji Jamal who was disciple of Bahauddin Zakaria. He started his career at the court of Akbar. Initially he was appointed Kotawal. In 16th regnal year he was appointed MirBakshi. For details see Ma’asir-ul umara vol. II, 590-601.
the kingdom of Jani Beg. Muhammad Khan alongwith Shah Beg Khan and others was dispatched to conquer Aghan and watch the movement of Jani Beg. But in the meantime Khan-i Khanan was informed that Jani Beg had come out of the fort and hastened towards Sahwan to capture the boats that had been sent by the imperialist. After reaching there Muhammad Khan Niyazi impressed upon the other commanders to attack the enemy immediately rather than waiting for reinforcement. Ultimately the commanders agreed and the battle was fought which continued for several days. Muhammad Khan Niyazi who commanded the vanguard played a very important role in the imperial victory. Abdur Rahim Khan Khanan had full confidence in his leadership. However, we have no other information about him or any other of his family member during Akbar’s reign. But in the Ain Abul Fazl mentions him among the mansabdars of 500, a rank which during Akbar’s time was not a low rank specially in the context of Afghans. It is well known that in his early years Akbar adopted a harsh and vindictive policy towards the Afghans for two reasons. First, Akbar remained hostile towards them because his father Humayun was expelled by SherShah and secondly continued to make attempts to regain their lost position. Only at the end

of his reign he conferred small ranks on some Afghans, but they were not given any important appointments and played no significant role in the political events of that period. As a matter of fact Muhammad Khan was in the personal service of a Mughal noble and the rank that he got was a favour given to Abdur Rahim Khan Khanan.

The accession of Jahangir (1605) was a turning point in the Mughal Afghan relationship. From the beginning of his reign as mentioned by Niamatullah we notice a complete change in his attitude towards Afghans.\(^7\)

Soon after his accession Jahangir promoted Ruknuddin Afghan who had served him during his Princehood to the rank of 3500. Another Afghan noble Ibrahim Khan was given the title of Dilawar Khan and promoted him to the rank of 3000.\(^8\) Although in the rebellion of Khusrau certain Afghan nobles had a role, Jahangir continued to appoint Afghans to important posts. The most significant appointment and promotion was that of Khan-i Jahan Lodi. However, it is important to note that even in this favourable atmosphere Muhammad Khan Niyazi was neither given any important office nor a rank in the entire period of Jahangir's reigns. This could have been because of his very close association with

\(^7\) Tarikh-i Khan-iJahani, 183; for the details of the Niamatullah's comments see chapter 'The family of Dilawar Khan Kakar.

\(^8\) See chapter 'The family of Dilawar Khan Kakar.
Abdur Rahim Khan Khana who was an Akbar Shahi noble and Jahangir was hostile towards him. As mentioned earlier he held a Jagir in the Deccan and served under Abdur Rahim Khan Khanan and Khan-i Jahan Lodi with distinction. He died in 1628 at Ashti in Berar which remained in his Jagir. He had two sons Ahmad Khan Niyazi and Muzaffar Kha Niyazi. We have hardly any information about Muzaffar Khan. Shahnawaz Khan writes that Muzaffar Khan died without attaining any distinction. The other son Ahmad Khan Niyazi was well known in the time of Jahangir for his bravery and bounty. He was admitted into Mughal service by Jahangir through his father Muhammad Khan Niyazi but we have no reference of his activities during Jahangir’s reign. Shahnawaz Khan, however mentions that Ahmad Khan Niyazi expelled Rahim Khan Deccani an officer of the Nizam Shahis from Elichpur which he had conquered inspite of having a very small army at his command. As a result of this great achievement Ahmad Khan Niyazi became famous all over Deccan.

After the accession of Shahjahan, Ahmad Khan was given favours and was promoted to the rank of 1500 Zat 1500 Sawar and despatched

11. Ibid, 186.
to Daulatabad along with Khan-i Zaman to bring treasure and supplies which had arrived at the pass of Roshankhera from Burhanpur. When the two commanders reached Zafarnagar, Ahmad Khan Niyazi fell ill, but Khan-i Zaman proceeded towards the pass of Roshankhera leaving Ahmad Khan with Pahar Singh Bundela at Zafarnagar. Yaqut Khan Abyssinian who was marching at the head of a large army against Khan-i Zaman made a surprise attack on Ahmad Khan Niyazi and Pahar Singh Bundela who were in the open plain with only few retainers. But they stood firm and repulsed Yaqut Khan with heavy casualties. Thereafter Ahmad Khan Niyazi again distinguished himself in the conquest of Amarkot. The author of Zakhirat-ul Khawanin writes that Mhabat Khan used to say that the credit of this victory goes to Ahmad Khan Niyazi only.

In 1634, Ahmad Khan Niyazi along with Mahabat Khan was despatched for the conquest of Parenda, the over all commad being in the hands of Prince Shuja. Ahmad Khan Niyazi a gave good account of his military skill and showed rare valour during the campaign. The Emperor rewarded him with an increase of 1000 Zat 500 Sawar to his previous rank of 2500 Zat 2000 Sawar.

Although several important military commanders have been deputed in the Deccan and huge amount of money and war material had been given to them not much progress could be made in the affairs of the Deccan. Therefore in 1636, Shahjahan came to Daulatabad and decided to personally supervise the campaign in the Deccan. He decided to launch three pronged attack on the Deccanis under the command of Khan-i Dauran, Khan-i Zaman and Shaista Khan. Ahmad Khan Niyazi was attached to the division commanded by Shaista Khan who was ordered to conquer Junair, Sangannir and Nasik, the area controlled by Shahji. Ahmad Khan bravely fought the enemy and succeeded in capturing the forts of Sangannir and Nasik. In appreciation of his service he was given a drum and shortly afterwards appointed faujdar of Gulshanabad.\(^{19}\) It may be pointed out that his father also held the Jagir of Ashti which is probably now named as Gulshanabad.

We have no information about his activities in any of the contemporary or near contemporary sources after his appointment of Gulshanabad till 1650 A.D when he was promoted to the rank of 3000 Zat 3000 Sawar and made commander of the Ahmadnagar fort\(^{20}\) because he was born and brought up in the Deccan and was very well acquainted

\(^{19}\) Lahori I part II,139-50, *Ma’asir-ul umara*, vol. I, 187  
with the topography of the area. Shortly afterwards in 1651 A.D he died while serving in the Deccan.

Mubarak Khan Niyazi, son of Muzaffar Khan was another important member of the Niazi family at the Mughal court. He was admitted in the Mughal service during the reign of Jahangir but he neither held a high rank nor an office or important military command. The first important appointment of Mubarak Khan was against Khan-i Jahan Lodi, who had rebelled and fled towards Deccan. He was despatched under the command of Azam Khan to suppress the rebels and also to take action against Nizam Shah II who had given shelter to Khan-i Jahan Lodi. Nizamshah had also treacherously occupied Balaghat. Mubarak Khan at this time was promoted to the rank of 1000 Zat 700 Sawar and subsequently despatched to Telingana to serve under Rao Ratan. During the campaign for the conquest of Kandhar Mubarak Khan performed deeds of valour in the laying of mines beneath the fortification and after that when the mines were fired and outer earth work and one half of the bastion were destroyed, Mubarak Khan along with the storming parties fought from mid-day till sunset inspite of valiant defence offered by the garrison. After the conquest of the fort he was

21. Lahori I Part. I, 291;  
rewarded with an increase of 500 Zat and 300 Sawar raising him to the rank of 1500 Zat 1000 Sawar. 22

The Mughal prestige in the Deccan was restored after the suppression of the rebellion of Khan-i Jahan Lodi, recovery of Balaghat and specially after the conquest of Daulatabad. However, complete subjugation of Ahmadnagar had not taken place. There were still some patches of land in the hands of enemy. In the western district especially Junair, Poona, Chakan and Konkan were beyond the pale of Mughal authority, where the seed of future Maratha power were sown. In the south Udgir and Ausa were still under NizamShahi officers, and the centre of trouble was Parenda now under the Adil Shahis. After the collapse of the Parenda campaign under Mahabat Khan, Shahji resumed his activities for the revival of Nizam Shahi Kingdom and with the cooperation of other Deccani powers started ravaging Mughal territories.

Alarmed with the fast detoriating situation in the Deccan Shahjahan proceed towards Daulatabad on sept 21, 1635 to put pressure on the Deccanis. As mentioned earlier soonafter his arrival, Shahjahan divided his army in to three sections. One of the section under Khan-i Zaman was despatched to Ahmadabad with a view to besiege Chamargunda and Ashti and to reduce Konkan. Mubarak Khan was also ordered to join the campaign. The campaign was highly successful;

Shahji was compelled to sue for peace on term and condition of Khan-i Zaman however we have not been informed of the activities of Mubarak Khan Niyazi in these campaigns but when he returned to court he was promoted to the rank of 1500 Zat 1500 Sawar.²³

After securing the submission of Adilshah, Shahjahan departed from Daulatabad, leaving Aurangzeb as viceroy of the Deccan. The Prince found that Shahji was still quite powerful and the two formidable forts of Udgiri and Ausa were in the hands of enemy. Mubarak Khan Niyazi who had ably served in the campaign against Shahji was deputed under Khan-i Dauran to capture these forts. The fort of Udgir was put to seige and Mubarak Khan laid mines and exploded one of them. Although the breach did not prove to be practicable but it thoroughly demoralised the besiege and they agreed to surrender. The same procedure was adopted at Ausa. Bhograj then commander of the fort was dismayed and handed over the fort to imperialist. Khan-i Dauran highly impressed with the tactics adopted by Mubarak Khan during the seige sent a recommendation for his promotion to the court. The emperor granted him a Naqqara, flag, and promotion of 500/500 in his

rank which now stood at 2000 Zat 2000 Sawa. 24

Mubarak Khan continued to serve in the Suba of Berar and developed Ashti which his grand father Mohammad Khan Niyazi had made home and his uncle also built many buildings and laid gardens. During the period of the governorship of Islam Khan Mashadi hot words passed in the Diwan nin connection with some affairs. Mubarak Khan because of anger and self respect left for court without informing the governor. On his arrival, he was graciously rewarded but he was transferred and attached to the auxiliary force of Kabul. Shortly afterwards in 27th regnal year he was appointed to thanedari of Bangash. 25 But he could not properly manage, and as the area was hot bed of sedition he was removed from the office in 29th regnal year but remained attached to the Kabul suba. After the accession of Aurangzeb he was reappointed to the thanedari of Bangash. 26 No further details of his life are available to us; even the date of his death is not mentioned in any of contemporary text.

26. Ibid.