Chapter 7

Conclusion
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CONCLUSION

The Saiyids claimed descent from a family of Mesopotamia. One of their ancestors came to India and settled in India in Sarhind long before the Mughals appeared in India. They became thoroughly Indianised, marrying here, founding settlements, and gaining importance from the time of Akbar onwards. There is some difference about their name, ‘Barha’ Saiyids. One view is that the family settled as Barha between Meerut and Saharanpur in the upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab. The other view is that they were the masters of a group of 12 villages in that area. Some say as there are Bara Imams, therefore they are described as sadat-e-Barah. Though brave fighters and excellent commanders, they became notorious for their ambition and unreliability. Aurangzeb had a very poor opinion about them. But it was during his reign that Abdullah Khan held administrative and military post fighting against the Marathas and becoming powerful. Abdullah Khan joined Jahandar Shah, then Governor of Multan, while Husain ali was appointed faujdar of Ranthambor. At the battle of Jajau (1707), the Saiyids fought well on the side of Bahadurshah but they were not satisfied with the rewards given. Husain Ali became (1708) deputy of Azim-ush shan governor of Bihar and three years after Abdullah Khan was appointed deputy of Azim-us-
Shan, governor of Allahabad (1711). So both of them were indebted to Azim-ush-Shan. But they did not support him when Bahadur Shah died. However, when Farrukh Siyar, the second son of Azim-ush Shan and his father’s deputy in Bengal, who had been recalled to Court, got the news of Bahadur Shah’s death, he proclaimed his father as king. But this was not liked by Husain Ali. When Azim-ush Shan was defeated and killed, Husain Ali wanted to drawback. But Farruk Siyar’s mother appealed to him in espousing the cause of the family. Ultimately Husain agreed to join Farrukh Siyar, partly because of his dislike of Jahandar Shah and jealously of the position of Zulfiqar Khan and partly in expectation of future gain. But this did not mean that the relation between Farrukh Siyar and Husain Ali was quite cordial. As a matter of fact there was mutual ill-will and suspicion between Farrukh Siyar and the Saiyid Brothers right from the day one, as has been mentioned in the previous chapters. Husain Ali was afraid of the cunning and deceitful nature of Farrukh Siyar. Pressed for money, Farrukh Siyar wanted to levy contributions on all rich merchants including Europeans and to plunder the town of Patna. Farrukh Siyar offered Husain Ali ¼ share if he did not oppose the agreement. But Husain Ali disagreed. Differences of opinion arose on the other points also. Outwardly these were sorted out. But it is difficult to say how far these differences were personal or on matters of policy. At the suggestion
of Husain Ali Farukh Siyar then in Bihar abolished the jizyah in 1713. Abdullah Khan (at Allahabad) tried to resolve the ill-will between Husain Ali and Farrukh Siyar. Between the two brothers, Abdullah Khan, the elder was tactful and a better manager of events than Husain Ali, the younger. This can be borne out by the fact that, inspite of the break off with Farrukh Siyar, Abdullah Khan was in favour of keeping Farrukh Siyar on the throne and maintaining the khutbah and saikhah in his name. However, events moved very fast and Abdullah Khan was forced to do what he never wanted i.e. to finish Farrukh Siyar.

Abdullah Khan afterwards regretted the deposition of Farrukh Siyar and blamed his brother for his haste. In destroying Farrukh Siyar, the Saiyids had thus destroyed their most effective shield against the old nobles. Irvine had opined that the deposition of Farrukh Siyar was, perhaps, unavoidable but the way of doing what had become almost a necessity was unduly harsh and taking of the captive’s life was an extremity entirely uncalled for.¹

The deposition for which Husain Ali seems to bear the primary responsibility created apprehensions in the minds of many nobles about the ultimate intentions of the Saiyids, and alienated their own supporters who were not prepared for such extreme measures. Even men who owed

¹ Irvine, I, 395.
their fortunes to the Saiyids used to pray secretly for their downfall, culminating into desertion of commandants of some important forts to the side of Nizam-ul Mulk, when he reached Deccan. To the dismay of the Saiyids these commandants had owed their positions to the Saiyids. All contemporary writers, including those favourable to the Saiyids are agreed in condemning the deposition as an act of infancy and disgrace. Considering the weakness of their actual position, it was a political blunder, for it enabled their rivals, the ‘chin’ group to appear as the champions of the Timurid monarchy and to utilize the public revulsion against the Saiyids for their own ends.

The revolt of the Nizam proved to be the immediate and direct cause of the downfall of the Saiyids. But there were some deep-seated causes of their failure. An important factor in their downfall was the opposition of the old nobles who regarded the Saiyids as upstarts and disliked their pro-Hindu policy. The leading part was taken by the small powerful Turani Group consisting of capable and ambitious leaders like Nizam and Mohammad Amin Khan, who did not want to be overshadowed. They interpreted the Saiyid policy of reconciling the Hindus and satisfying the Hindu sentiment by abolishing jaziya, as anti-Islam and anti-monarchial. At the same time they appealed to the narrow interests of the small section of the foreign nobles i.e., Mughalia, who
were excluded from power. Hence they posed as champions of Islam of monarchy and the interests of the Mughal nobles. However, on behalf of the Saiyids it may be said that this interpretation of their policy was incorrect. The Saiyids did not want to monopolise power. They associated various sections in the court, Hindus as well as groups of old nobles with the government. But the anti-Saiyid struggle was characterized as a struggle between Mughals and Hindsutanis.

In the meantime, the administration was paralysed by the party conflict. Law and order broke down with the risings of zamindars and discontented elements. Rules of business were not followed. Their dependence on their subordinates like Ratanchand showed their administrative incompetence, made them unpopular and increased the tendency to harmful revenue farming, bribery and oppression by the subordinate. Naturally, the Saiyids were blamed for this maladministration. Their efforts to maintain law and order failed because they could not command the confidence of the people. On the other hand, it is not denied even by those writers who are strongly opposed to the Saiyids that they strove hard to maintain law and order, and that their military reputation and capabilities prevented a final breakdown of the administration. Rustam Ali says ‘As is well known, this Emperor (Muhammad Shah) so long as Amirul Umara Husain Ali Khan lived,
strictly observed, by virtue of the efficient management of that great Saiyid, all the ancient laws and established rules of his ancestors. The achievement of all undertakings, the arrangement of all political affairs, and the execution of all wars were carried on in an excellent manner by the wisdom of that high nobleman. Iqbalnama mentions that unemployment was rare in the time of the Saiyids and any soldier or person who reached their audience, generally secured a job worth Rs. 50 per month at the lowest.

As far as Farrukh Siyar was concerned, the Saiyid brothers were more sinned against than sinning. The constant intrigues of the Emperor turned them to the point of desperation and their safety seemed to lie in the end of the emperor. It is interesting to note that Farrukh Siyar had been the first to make secret overtures for aid to these powerful chief whom the Saiyids later succeeded in turning against him. When the emperor dispatched Husain Ali Khan against Ajit Singh, he had also sent a dispatch to Ajit Singh to fight against and kill Husain Ali Khan. Again he had tried unsuccessfully to induce the Marathas to help Daud Khan Panni in his campaign against Husain Ali who was governor of the Deccan. In the case of Ajit Singh, the emperor vanity tried to the last to win him over. Unfortunately for him, the image which Farrukh Siyar

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2. Tarikh-i Hindi, Elliot & Dowson, viii, 42, 43.
3. Iqbalnamah, p. 128.
projected on the popular mind was that of a fickle and ungrateful person who could be trusted only at one’s own peril. It is, however, to be added that in view of Farrukh Siyar’s disposition, the course adopted by Husain Ali was dictated by the motives of self-defence. His reaction to the situation, beset with danger to his own security and position of his group can hardly be ascribed to any liberal purpose or enlightened policy, “they (the Saiyids) tried their best to put down the Marathas; and Husain Ali, during his first two years in the Deccan, made strenuous efforts to prevent Maratha inroads in Baglan and Khandesh. But when ultimately they found that they stood in great danger to their life and position from their master, they were compelled to reverse their policy and seek Maratha friendship”. ⁴ The financial difficulties of the emperor further accentuated his weakness. He could not bear the expenditure of his Wala-shahi troops while the wazir, Qutub-ul Mulk Abdullah Khan maintained a strong army of 20,000 horse, well equipped and regularly paid, that formed the core of Saiyids power. Thus, in the end the Saiyids were able to seize control of the fort and the palace without encountering armed resistance.

The Saiyid brothers, although they had done nothing to destroy or supplant the institution of the monarchy and had been at pains to preserve the integrity and power of the empire, had nevertheless pushed the

⁴ G.S. Sardesai, New History of the Marathas, II, 37.
monarch into oblivion. Under their political hegemony, Farrukh Siyar’s successors would continue to wear the crown, but would be stripped completely of the sovereign powers. The Saiyids succeeded in their objectivity of reducing the sovereign himself to a nullity but were unable to destroy the ties of loyalty that bound all sections of the people to the house of Timur. The nobles and the people had been used to the exercise of authority by the sovereign and no deep-rooted tradition of allegiance bound them to a government in which all authority proceeded from a family group. It was the monarch alone who could evoke the affection and loyalty of the people. He alone could maintain the balance of power among various sections of the upper classes by the judicious distribution of royal patronage.

The significance of the struggle which ended with the overthrow of the Saiyids brothers has been reduced by some contemporary historians to a mere clash between two vigorous, daring and ambitious personalities, namely Nizam-ul Mulk and Husain ali Khan. Interpreted in this way the conflict would appear to possess no deeper significance that what could be attached to an accidental and passing occurrence. But in reality the struggle was momentous in its consequences and the forces which produced it were complex and lay deep in the political tensions created by the interplay of power politics.
Nizam-ul Mulk and Husain Ali Khan represented two opposing factions, strong furiously against one another for the control of the state. The issue was nothing less than the absolute control of the throne by their own faction. The basis of division between the Mughals and Saiyid factions although it had no religious understones, was ethnic in the sense that the support of the former came chiefly from families who were either of more recent foreign origin or which had preserved their ethnic identity, while the latter was made up almost entirely of family groups of Indian origin or those long settled in the country. Such for example, is the position taken up by Khafi Khan and Muhammad Baksh Ashub who assert that the final showdown between the factions was precipitated by the Saiyid brother’s policy that none except the Saiyids of Barha should hold supreme power at the centre. Their hatred for the Turani Mughals was such that they deliberately planned to destroy the prestige and ruin the fortunes of all the Turani and Irani families. Both Khafi Khan and Qasim Aurangabadi held the view that at this stage of the proceedings, the main motivations behind the struggle of the Mughals against the Saiyid brothers were the preservation of the dignity and prestige of the Mughal nobles and restoration of the freedom of action of the sovereign. Through the story told by Khafi Khan and Qasim Aurangabadi there runs the assumption that sectional interests combined with a desire to free
Muhammad Shah from the domination of the Saiyids, drew the Irani and Turani nobles closer Muhammad Amin Khan's appeal for Mughal solidarity was responded by Saadat Khan and Haider Quli Khan although both were Iranis. These Irani nobles never flinched from the deliberate stand they had taken and the energy and devotion they displayed at the battle of Hasanpur amply proved that their support for Muhammad Amin Khan and the cause he championed was whole-hearted and sincere. It must be remembered that considerations underlying group formation and rivalry applied only to the core of the group and its leadership. In actual action like the coup d'etat of 1719 by the Saiyids or the palace revolution of 1720 carried out by the Mughals, the forces that came into play on either side were not homogenous. In each case the elements which supported the rival groups were very diverse like the Afghans, Rajputs, Marathas and Indian Muslims, each of whom represented a separate ethnic tradition and followed its own leader, but were found operating on either side. From family groups the Saiyids and Mughals had transformed themselves into two rival heterogenous coalition loosely strong together, whose leaders strove for the attainment of their aims through court intrigue, political manoeuvring and if it came to that through was of succession. The coalition formed by the Saiyids included a larger proportion of the Afghans, Rajputs and the Marathas, while the Mughals,
Shaikhs and Deccani Saiyids predominated in the rival coalition of Nizam-ul Mulk; the proportion of the Afghans and the Marathas was very much smaller in his army. No Rajput zamindar or mansabdar of not seems to have joined the Mughal leader though it is likely that he enlisted some Rajput soldiers during his stay in Malwa. Similarly, in the battle of Hasanpur the Afghans Rajputs and other Indians fought by the side of the Mughals for Muhammad Shah. However, except for Nusrat Yar Khan, who was hostile to Abdullah Khan, no other Saiyid of Barha fought on the side of Muhammad Shah or served in the army of Nizam-ul Mulk, nor were the Mughals employed by the Saiyid brothers in any of their battles.

Muhammad Shah’s victory over Abdullah Khan had freed him from the tutelage of the Saiyid brothers who had completely dominated the administration, the crown and the court. The centre of gravity now shifted from a group formed by the two top ranking ministers to the monarch himself who became once again the pivot of all administrative, military and fiscal authority. He could once again exercise the right to frame policy and choose his own servants and officials. The restoration of monarchial authority brought stability in political life and relief to the masses from the confusion and tension of civil strife. It engendered the hope that the state machinery which had suffered most by the civil commotion, would now begin to function smoothly. It was believed that
prices would come down, revenues would flow into the royal treasury and arrears paid to the servants, and all thus would usher in an era of peace and plenty yet this kind of atmosphere bred complacency rather than a sense of serious urgency needed to meet the enormous problems of the day.

It would not be out of place at this juncture to have a brief look at the policies being pursued by Mohammad Amin Khan and Nizam-ul Mulk during their respective terms of Wizarat. The Mughal group had a sentimental attachment to the monarch as a person whom the Saiyids had reduced to a mere figurehead. The Mughals favoured the dominance of the Khanazad and hereditary nobles. Whereas the Saiyids supported the cause of new elements in the nobility. The Saiyid party had made concessions, in its own interest to the Marathas, Jats and Raja Ajit Singh against whom the Mughal leaders advocated a forward and vigorous policy. The Mughal wazirs, stood for strong and clean administration which they tried to achieve by setting an example of firmness and uprightness. Muhammad Amin Khan infused a spirit of duty and discipline among the officials. Nizamul Mulk made proposals for the eradication of such patent abuses as bribery, reckless alienation of khalisa lands and ijarah. It was when real power lay with the Mughals that
Muhammad Shah abolished the jaziya which was a measure in keeping with the temper of an age marked by moderation and enlightenment.

To cut the story short, it must be admitted that the Saiyids brothers were the victims of the circumstances and spirit of the age. To a large extent they failed because of the party conflicts in that corrupt and confused atmosphere of the Court. Concentrating power in themselves they tried to save the empire from disintegration. But here also they failed because no lasting solution could be made of the various problems, viz. the old nobility. Problem of the Hindus, problem of the Deccan. In every sphere new problems were created and much of this was due to the bitter party strife prevailing in the court. They tried to develop a composite ruling aristocracy of religion or race. But the old 'Alamgiri nobles' did not want to share power while the Maratha sardars were interested in their own domination in the Deccan. Husain Ali's deputy in the Deccan, Alam Ali rejected Baji Rao's plan of carrying on a harassing warfare against the Nizam. The Rajputs were more interested than the Marathas in maintaining the Mughal empire but neither Ajit Singh nor Jai Singh offered military help needed by the Saiyids. The latter could not secure the support of the nobles and they could not win the backing of the monarchy because of a traditional suspicion between the monarch and all powerful Wazir.
Last but not the least, in that age of monarchical decadence and decline of peerage the only strong agency which could maintain the unity of the empire was the wazir. The wazir also failed to give the necessary direction in the state. In certain respects the Saiyid tried to follow a secular and national approach as pointed out by Satish Chandra, but this was not supported by other powerful sections of the nobles or by the emperor.