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# **SALTANAT**

**The Saga of a Desperate Warrior**

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*The names of non-historical and non-political persons are fictitious. Any coincidence is incidental. The names of mountains, rivers and places are true, except those of the Saltanat family and the Saltanat state.*

## **FIRST EDITION**

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY

uncle Hakim Syyed Pir Rashiduddaula,  
without his fatherly affection and  
generosity I wouldn't have been  
what I am;

mother Zubeda Khanum who never lived to  
see her son crowned with success;

wife Farakh Jumshad, a portrait of tragedy  
who suffers in silence the highhandedness  
of her kindred;

daughter Ghazia Porzana Nasiruddaula  
Jumshad; and

son Andres Aquil Anwer Nasiruddaula Jumshad.





SALTANATPUR WAS TUCKED IN THE MIDST OF WOODS forested with deodar and rhodendrons clothed the slopes up to the limit of perpetual snow high up in the lap of Himalayas. It could be approached only by a scarcely motorable road, the Saltanat Road, snaking perilously through treacherous unending curves. Many a careless driver had gone forever over the embankment down in the bosom of the rattling Saltanat River.

Perennially snow-clad peaks stood around Saltanatpur like unwavering sentinels, allowing admittance through a narrow pass, the Saltanat Pass, by the Saltanat River. The Saltanat Road, in itself most of the year intransitably buried under the snow and slush, became negotiable only for a couple of months during the summer. Here again, rains and floods, coupled with awash bridges, caused prolonged obstructions. Actually, it mattered little. After all, only once in a blue moon did some vehicle embark upon the long hazardous journey to Saltanatpur, carrying a crown officer, medical supplies, post, merchandise, or when the motorcade of Nawab Saltanat Khan made for New Delhi to fulfill an appointment with the viceroy.

Saltanatpur was not a town in the real sense of the word, rather a complex of huts, with the characteristic bilaterally sloped roofs, ending in downwardly directed eaves, studded in a vast landscape at different levels, reclaimed from mountain ledges, or capping hilltops.

The centre of the town, if so it could be called, "boasted the rectangular Saltanat Square," flanked by a post office, a modest haberdasher's shop, a general merchant's store plus bank, a stationery facility, and a dispensary for outdoor patients. There was an adjoining 21-bed hospital, mostly unoccupied, except for a couple of serious cases. A qualified resident physician, three female Christian nurses and two paramedics all lived on the premises. A surgeon from Kerangi paid regular monthly visits.

An occasional British official, who happened to arrive, used to be accommodated in a rest house. It was the exclusive lodge for the visiting officials, located just where Saltanat Road emerged from the Saltanat Pass and continued towards the Saltanat Square. The building in itself was guarded by a watchman, with two servants on duty in nearby quarters.

The Saltanat Mahall constituted the only imposing building perched on a clearing, overlooking Saltanatpur like a watchful parental eye. The luxurious growth of variegated species of enormous trees formed a canopy as if suspended over a throne. Forty-one tiers of stony steps, each tier twelve yards long, had to be traversed before landing upon the mahall lawn. From this point on, a stone-paved stretch, exactly six yards wide, led to the main entrance of the colonnaded veranda. This veranda and the regularly-spaced columns encircled the entire ground floor two steps or so higher than the surrounding lawn. Sporadic growth of varied flowering plants presented a pleasant feast for the eye.

A dozen or so typically uniformed servants in spotless white dress and white turbans, lined with red bands, the free length of each turban flowing from its knot, with red waste bands, roamed about, doing odd jobs, apparently oblivious to the surroundings. Occasionally, one of them would enter a room, only to reappear after some time.

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The servants, as a rule, had to be married and were provided with separate settlements, not so clumped, at a respectable distance from the mahall, lower down the main lawn towards the east side. They had no other recourse except to follow the same steps, to and from the mahall, as mentioned before.

The female servants, young and elderly alike, all of them belonging to the families of the male servants, attended only to domestic duties strictly inside the mahall. They were all dressed up in white cotton *saris* or *sarees*, bordered with broad red ribbons. The footwear was limited only to the black leather sandals.

A body of male and female servants or, better said, the "attendants" as the Nawab referred to their status, rotated their duties so as to be available at any time of the night, and were assigned nocturnal quarters within the precincts of the mahall. They dared not be seen or heard unnecessarily unless called upon.

Contrary to the princely residences of contemporary nawabs, rajas and maharajas, beset with cacophonous sounds, in the glamorous days of colonial British India, an uncanny silence reigned supreme. However, far in the back, beyond a hillock, the not so frequent brayings of horses, in a stable, did manage interruptions.

A disquieting silence permeated the atmosphere, as if foreboding some calamity lingering in the offing. Notwithstanding, nobody among the current population of Saltanatpur was given to any comments about the unnatural uneasiness characteristic of the Saltanat Mahall. However, some of the older folk certainly gossiped about the mysterious past of the enigmatic lineage of the present Nawab. Gossip or otherwise, nobody bothered to verify. Since the inhabitants at large enjoyed a tranquil and prosperous life, it was irrelevant at best. At the same time, the Nawab commanded a special trustworthy, unfaltering corps, a sort of grapevine system that gathered information willingly proffered or benignly extracted about the grievances of the

residents. And, the Nawab made a point of looking into it that his subjects basked under the sun of divine panacea for morbid, material or moral origin.

Another grandiose structure, with a grandeur of its own, was a mosque, about a mile from the Saltanat Square, accessible by hilly tracks from four cardinal points. Several decades ago a hilltop was levelled off for the purpose. It was lavish white marble construction, with four minarets glowing against the snow-draped peaks. A bearded imam was permanently housed in the vicinity thereof. Its spacious front included a small pond fed by a natural spring the water of which served for the ablution of prayers.

Rather far from the mosque, down on a slope; an ample cemetery served for the burial of the Muslim dead. None of the graves had epitaph except that of a section reserved for the Nawab's ancestors. The commoners had no other option but to memorize the last resting place of their departed ones.

A moderate Hindu temple occupied a lesser hilltop amidst a conglomeration of mostly Hindu settlements.

A Christian Church mounted another hilltop, a stone's throw away from the rest house. Surprisingly, but not out of tune with the prevailing custom of colonialists, every effort has been made to make it a mammoth edifice for a handful of Christians living in the neighbourhood.

An Anglo-Indian family with the surname of Smyth, headed by Jack Smyth, 53, Mrs. Smyth, 49, Buxom Smyth, 21, the glamorous young daughter, affectionately as Buxy, and son, Sunder Smyth, 19, managed what may be called a hotel - a three-hut complex, with a total capacity for eight; profitable, if at all, only during the summer time, for hardy adventurers.

The present Nawab made extra efforts to build a reasonably adequate school, close to the church, up to the eighth class, but the enrollment had been poor. After all, in this sleepy domain, self-sufficient, amenities provided from the coffers of the Nawab, career-seeking seemed outlandish. At the same time, the Nawab

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and his forefathers enjoyed education at select schools of New Delhi, pursuing further studies at Eton and Harrow and ending up in Oxford or Cambridge, in England.

The very outlay of the town, its ups and downs, hardly passable tracks, long distances, permitted no other means of transport except mules and horses. The wheeled transportation exclusively belonged to the Nawab family and the Saltanat Guards. Considering the terrain, all of the vehicles could only venture up to a flattened hilltop, just across the rest house, by the side of the Saltanat River. To guard against the harsh and snowy conditions, about three-quarters of this parking lot housed garages with slanting roofs. A Ford V8, two Ford-As, one vintage 1922 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost limousine (a Cream 1907 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost was bought by a British businessman Charles Howard, Palm Beach, Florida, for 2.8 million US dollars, May 1990. It was once owned by the Rockefeller family), one recently bought Austin and a Morris - the royal fleet, were carefully looked after. Two army trucks, four heavy duty jeeps and a neglected motorbike formed part of the Saltanat Guards' equipment. The royal drivers, four of them, lived at the parking lot.

The nearest sea level town, Kerangi, was a sprawling provincial capital of about 100,000 people, 81 miles from the heart of Saltanatpur, where the Saltanat Road merged into the perimetral highway of Kerangi.

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SALTANATPUR RESEMBLED AN UTOPIAN PIECE OF HAVEN transported to the earth under the benevolent care and control of Nawab Saltanat Khan. During many nights, the Nawab himself, dressed like a commoner covered with a ragged shawl, would make a round of this God's little acre, eavesdropping, scrutinizing, keenly watching out for any unusual activity, which might be remedied accordingly.

Crimes as such were never heard of. Throes of misery in any form, want of anything mundane, were painstakingly and manoeuverably coped with. Sometimes, a family in dire need of money, would run into a bundle of crisp banknotes skilfully placed around their house.

The population of 1,200 or so consisted mostly of vassals who, as an article of faithful allegiance, rushed day or night at the beck of their lord, Nawab Saltanat Khan. And, it had to be so. There wasn't a single household that had not been indebted to the generosity of the Nawab. In return, even the most personal affairs, such as marriages, couldn't be effected without his benediction. Naturally, as was customary in the feudal system,

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some enjoyed more privileges than others, by no means, discriminatory; only the magnitude varied, depending upon individual needs.

Saltanatpur prided in a mixed society, Muslims, Hindus and Christians, all lived harmoniously. They were equal before the eyes of the Nawab. He was the sole master of this state, Saltanat state, with the capital Saltanatpur, who in turn was answerable only to the ruling viceroy in New Delhi. It should be borne in mind that the Nawabs, Rajas and Maharajas had their own ruling codes, to be administered according to their whims, without interference from New Delhi. The British official would come only to pay the courteous calls and to discuss matters of the transcendental political nature with the Nawab.

The Muslims constituted a sweeping majority, followed by the Hindu and Christian minorities, but the non-existence of the Sikhs was rather baffling. The story has it that there lived about half a dozen Sikh families in Saltanatpur over the turn of the century when the old Nawab Saltanat Khan was in power. In accordance with the tradition of the ruling Nawabs of taking nocturnal tours of Saltanatpur in disguise in order to have first hand knowledge of their subjects, the old Nawab on a particular night felt indisposed. He delegated this job to one of his predilect aides. That night the Sikh locality was on the schedule. When this aide tiptoed past a Sikh house, he was pounced upon by two Sikh toughies and mercilessly beheaded. This incident startled not only Saltanatpur but also the entire Saltanat state. The next morning all of the male Sikh settlers were brought before the Nawab. His reddened, piercingly furious eyes were hard to withstand. The moment he fixed his gaze at the uncontrollably trembling Sikhs, the culprit literally hit the ground. Instead of handing out the capital punishment, he was benevolently pardoned. Perhaps, the Nawab took pity on him due to the wretched state of his appearance.

A paradisiacal piece of land Saltanatpur was, its peace-loving inhabitants, not known to violence, more than ever began to hold the Nawab in higher esteem. This gracious act of forgiveness, exemplary in the real sense of the word, became a legend. However, the Sikhs began to be shunned, looked down upon, as

a sort of alien, undesirable elements. Through such a benign neglect anyone would break under the circumstances. Ironically, the real motive behind this cold-blooded murder remained undetermined. Then one day, when the British emissary happened to be on a routine visit to Saltanatpur, the Sikhs implored him to be taken out of there. He consented to their request but only after having a word with the Nawab. And, this nobleman, you know what he did? He compensated them graciously for the possessions that were to be left behind.

The law-enforcing body, if there was any law to be enforced, consisted of the Saltanat Guards. An elite contingent, 33-strong, of the Nawab's own kin, captained by Ajmer Khan, with other rank and file, were all stationed in a befitting hamlet near the Saltanat Mahall. Their presence could hardly be felt, seldom visible and their duty was mostly ceremonial. When a new emissary or a higher official arrived, resplendent in white, instead of typical British-styled army khakis, they would form a guard of honour. However, six of the Saltanat Guards were a regular fixture to escort the Nawab on his trips to New Delhi.

Nawab Saltanat Khan was a compassionately magnanimous towering giant, in his late sixties, of robust constitution, whose kindness shone equally upon his vast fiefdom like a beacon of hope. In contradistinction to the order of the day, when mustache and beard were commonly held in high esteem, he made a habit of shaving routinely. Since he came of a warrior stock, he stuck to this doctrine in accordance with Alexander the Great, fearing their beards might serve as handles to the enemy, who ordered his soldiers clean shaven.

He contravened another traditional customs of wearing a turban, instead opting for a Nehru cap, in conformity with the hues of daily change of dress. In not so rare public audience, he invariably appeared in a white silken *sherwani* with matching *tung pajamas*, wearing *khusa*, as a footwear, and a white Nehru cap. A gold chain of the pocket watch dangled from the right chest pocket, hooked higher up at the other end to a button of the *sherwani*. The left hand chest pocket harboured a partly protruding SK-monogrammed handkerchief of light blue silk. A



dark baton, capped with gold, borne by his right hand, intermittently served more of a support than of a authority. Rumour had it that he suffered a fall while playing a polo match in Chitral, with the resultant back injury that occasionally flared up, but nobody knew for sure.

As a natural outcome of the climatic conditions prevailing in the high Himalayan altitudes he wore a reddish complexion. This trait was attributed to the earlier settlers who claimed a direct ancestral derivation from the indigenous bifid origins of Chitral and Gilgit.

Chitral, a princely state comprising the most northerly portions of the Malakand agency in the tribal area of what is now a part of Pakistan, is bounded north and west by Afghanistan, and the Wakhan Valley dividing it by 12 miles from the former Soviet Union. To the east is flanked by Gilgit agency, to the south and southwest by Dir state and Kalam in the Swat Kohistan. The ruling family claimed descent from Baba Ayub, said to be a grandson of the Mogul emperor Babur; Baba Ayub settled in Chitral early in the 17th century. A British garrison had been maintained there until the state acceded to Pakistan following the partition of the subcontinent in 1947.

Gilgit lies in the northwest of Kashmir containing the famous Gilgit Hill Station. It comprises a number of states and principalities extending toward Chitral, Afghanistan, the former Soviet Union and Sinkiang, China. The whole area, which has been administered by Pakistan since 1947, was previously under the jurisdiction of the Maharaja of Kashmir, except the states in the political agency which were administered by a British officer who was responsible directly to the government of India. One of the states of Gilgit, known as Hunza, is said to be populated by people usually living more than hundred years.

The name Saltanatpur was a mystery in itself. The word Saltanat in Arabic means "Kingdom," and pour or pura implies a "Town" or a "Village". Saltanat is also a first name occasionally given to a female child among the upper classes by hereditarily noble Muslim families of the Indian subcontinent. But how it came

to be the name of a princely state, high up in the almost inaccessible reaches. And, why nobody seemed to know about its origin? Why every ruling lady has been known by the name Saltanat? And, why every ruling Nawab has been addressed as Nawab Saltanat Khan? All of these enigmatic questions restlessly needed to be answered.

In the archives of Imperial India, Saltanatpur appeared just as a speck on the map of Northern India under the name of Sultanpur. In Arabic, *Sultan* refers to the ruler of a Muslim country. Formerly, the Sultan used to be the title of the sovereign of Turkey. Since the inception of the present century the name has been corrected to Saltanatpur. Thus, no help came from geography either.

The fact of the matter is that a bearded fanatic Muslim and ferocious warlord once ruled an extensive territory, including what is the present day Saltanatpur. His seat of power was a fort, Saltanat fort. It was labyrinthic network of interconnecting tunnels, natural and artificial. The remains of this fort can still be seen near the Saltanat peak, where the main tributary of the Saltanat River emerges from the snow-clad mountains and thunderously falls deep in a ravine. Within his jurisdiction and far beyond, he was known as the Sultan, but his actual name Arbab Khan topped the list of the most wanted rebels in the official colonial records of Old Delhi.

Someone of the forefathers of Arbab Khan joined the Army of the last of the great Mogul emperors, Aurangzeb, of India. Soon he gained the reputation of being an indefatigable warrior, an adept swordsman and unwaveringly loyal. Although the successors of Aurangzeb were wretched puppets controlled by favourites and Court factions, the ancestors of Arbab Khan steered clear through, dedicated entirely to military matters. Since their fighting proficiency was indelibly impressed upon, notwithstanding the declining decades of Mogul Empire, some members of Arbab Khan's lineage would always be in the service of the Mogul Army.

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In the late 1840s, the eventide of the Mogul Empire, the foundations of which were laid by Babur in April 1526, Arbab Khan appeared on the scene as one of the genuinely trustworthy faithfuls still in the Court of Bahadar Shah at Delhi.

It was the time of the titular Mogul Emperor of India, Bahadur Shah II. During the Indian mutiny (Mutiny in the eyes of British colonialists, but patriotic insurrection in the eyes of nationalists) in 1857, he succeeded in preventing Hindu-Muslim conflict within Delhi. In June 1857 he offered to open the city gates if granted honourable terms. In September of 1858, after the city's fall, he was tried and unjustly condemned. He was treated as a rare show before being exiled to Rangoon, Burma (now Myanmar), where he died November 7, 1862. Thus, the last glimmer of once the grandiose Mogul glow was silenced forever.

When the news of Bahadur Shah's passing away broke out, a sudden wave of melancholy gripped Delhi. It was especially unbearable for Arbab Khan. He became so grief-stricken and listless that he took refuge in a renowned saint's mausoleum to seek inner strength. Although he regained outward composure the fire of avenging the last Mogul "Emperor" Bahadur Shah's death in forced exile, away from his fatherland, became an inextinguishable obsession with him.

To fight the colonial monster, an insane's dream, was beyond his reach. Still it was worth making an attempt. The odds were rather too heavy: sword against bullets, a lonely faithful, proud of his long line of forerunners who laid their lives cheerfully for their Mogul Emperors, intent upon crossing the path of a lion. After every evening prayer in a mosque, he carried on the routine of visiting that saint's tomb nearby. It was also frequented by other devotees. Drowned in oblivion, he pondered ways to satisfy his vanity, even at the cost of his life. To murder a couple or so of British masters, inviting inevitable harsh punishment, simply an isolated crime, a transitory commotion, soon to be forgotten, did not deserve much consideration. Moreover, it would be a foolhardy venture, sure to be foiled. The masters were heavily guarded, the mutinous upheaval scarcely over. Arson might involve innocent people and their properties. Alternatives of

hitting a memorable blow reached the end of the line. At the same time Arbab Khan's patience was ebbing fast. How eagerly he wanted to make a dent while the iron was hot.

The British Raj was reeling in the aftermath of the nationalist rebellion in the Indian subcontinent. Concomitantly, with the redoubling of security grips in general, Britons overnight found themselves esconced in comfortable fortifications. After all there was no dearth of toadies to take care of odd jobs for them.



THE BRITISH ADMINISTRATION CHARACTERISTICALLY isolated the military corps from that on civilian duty. Depending upon the population of a town, the armed forces relatively equipped with men and material used to be confined to the cantonments (cants for short) in the suburbs, off-limit to the urban inhabitants. However, some personnel on semi-military duties, did live in towns, commuting routinely on working days to their jobs in cants.

Then, one night during his brooding spells at the mausoleum, Arbab Khan chanced an elderly, goateed dignified fellow in meditation in a far corner of the mausoleum. He immediately recognized him as the poet Hafiz Amin, a regular participant in the poetry-recital nightly sessions of Bahadur Shah (an accomplished poet whose *nom de plume* was Zafar). Arbab Khan gingerly neared him. After an emotional reminiscence of good old days in the last Mogul's Court, Arbab Khan tearfully poured out his heart to him.

Hafiz Amin was a distinguished scholar, in his early seventies, a reputed poet and religious person, proficient in Arabic, Farsi

and Urdu, with a fair command of the Turkish language. He himself was heart-broken, profoundly saddened by the way Bahadur Shah had been unreasonably charged with participation in the mutiny, and especially as to the manner in which he was humiliatingly exiled from his fatherland. His family and other royalties, deprived of their already limited privileges, had been left at the mercy of streets. There were many sorrowful tales of untold hardships and disgrace to which they were subjected by the colonialists. These events had inflicted irreparable damage to the literary circles of Delhi, since Bahadur Shah carried the torch of keeping Muslim poetry and culture alive. He was deemed as a beacon of etiquette long established in the Muslim upper crust of society.

How Hafiz Amin himself earnestly wanted to score some hit, even in a minor way, to the colonial masters. At the same time, he lamented that his advanced years formed an unsurmountable barrier in the pursuit of physical activity of that magnitude. Hafiz Amin and Arbab Khan probed the pros and cons of embarking upon some idea for a long time. Nothing concrete seemed to emerge. Understandably, the British were foreigners, aliens, who had encroached upon their land, blowing out the last flicker of what once had been a great Mogul dynasty. But, the very thought of some traitor native Indians serving extra-territorial masters, at the cost of the subjugation of their fatherland, hurt them most. These stooges were completely sold, body and soul, a shame on patriotism

Eventually, the vengeance, perhaps with dire consequences, if apprehended, centered upon the kidnap of the wife of an Anglo-Indian\* functionary who played a major role in metting out the relentless sentence of banishing Bahadur Shah to Burma. This Muslim lady came of a highly aristocratic, prestigious family of Delhi, venerated among all other things for sophisticated ethics and mannerisms. Also, the family enjoyed an extraordinary dole for allegiance to the raj. Rumour had it that a coveted British

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\* One would think that Anglo-Indians were Christians as a matter of course. How a Muslim lady be a wife to a Christian? Islam permits a man marrying a non-Muslim but not vice versa.

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title would be conferred soon upon the family. The Anglo-Indian functionary, mentioned above, named Gibson, 30, was the scion of an Englishman who had married the daughter of a Hindu Raja while she was studying at the Queen's College, London. His father and grand parents had a long history of occupying distinguished posts in the British Government back in England. He himself joined the British Foreign Service and had been posted in Delhi for the last five years.\*

Once the decision had been made, the next step lay in making the strategy work, and work successfully, even though transitorily.

The wife of Gibson was in her early twenties, invariably clad in *Burkah* while in public, accompanied by an ever present maid dressed likewise. Every Thursday evening, the day when Muslims usually pay homage at graves, mausoleums and tombs, she used to visit the tomb of a saint buried near the red-stoned Badshahi Mosque. Since the maltreatment of the *Burkah*-clad ladies was never heard of and there has never been a kidnap case of this nature before, the plan seemed not that difficult. All that was required amounted to a couple of good horses and a sword just in case. Firearms were hardly available to Indian civilians. Swords and daggers used to be the common weapons of the day. And, Arbab Khan was not new to swordsmanship.

It happened to be Monday, two more days to go, and during this period the equipment had to be procured, if the scheme were to materialize. The unnecessary delay of waiting for other Thursdays was discarded. In consideration of the old age of Hafiz Amin with regard to the unforeseen hardships, Arbab Khan prevailed upon him not to join the adventure. If the kidnapping succeeded, Arbab Khan along with the lady had to flee Delhi. This might boil down to galloping, walking, or hiding till reaching the safety of NWFP (North West Frontier Province), about 600 miles away.

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\* Paradoxically, isolated cases of marriages did involve not only Muslim but also Hindu girls and Englishmen. Recently, when in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, the author came across a rare case of a Muslim girl who married a Hindu.

NWFP is the tract of the country in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent, lying between the Indus and Afghanistan, North of Balochistan. From 1901 to 1955 it was administered as the North West Frontier Province, part of British India, then of Pakistan. In later years, the province and its attached tribal and state agencies, were divided between the Peshawar and Dera Ismail Khan Divisions of the new Province of West Pakistan.

The origin of the predominating inhabitants of NWFP of modern times, the Pathans, is obscure. The frontier became a traditional introduction to warfare of generations of British officers. The great majority of the population are Pathans by race and Muslims by religion. The most common language is Pushtu. By their own traditions, the Pathans originated in Afghanistan and are descended from a common ancestor. Disputes over property, women and personal injury often result in blood feuds between families and whole clans; these may be inherited unless settled by the intervention of clan chiefs or the tribal council. They are farmers, herdsman and warriors and have a reputation for fanaticism when aroused by their religious leaders. The British could never really subdue them. Even in the present day Pakistan, which has jurisdiction over them, control over tribal areas has frequently been thwarted by the refusal of tribesmen to obey their chiefs.

Hafiz Amin provided Arbab Khan with some names and addresses of trusted countrymen, he had known during his long stay at the Mogul Court in Delhi. They would never betray him on his long hazardous escape to NWFP. Naturally, Arbab Khan would be obliged to take shelter to avoid detection, particularly in the company of a woman forced to be with him, and follow not so trodden paths. The Imperial sources would for sure be alerted, or perhaps the very onset might be fatal.

The top question revolved around the acquisition of a horse of a sound breed, pedigreed. It should be capable of withstanding the rigours of the gruesome journey and carrying about double the normal weight in the absence of another horse for the lady. A sword which had weathered so many storms, still sharp on edge,



the only mundane possession of Arbab Khan had been concealed in a hedge, way out from the northern gate of the walled city of Delhi. He knew the spot where he buried his sword, in one rainy night, a week or so after the banishment of Bahadur Shah. But how could he retrieve it? Hafiz Amin knew a wise man named Jalal-ud-Din, once of immense wealth and famous for profound knowledge of Islam. Like many other luminaries now had fallen on hard times. He used to impart religious instructions to the princelings at the Mogul Court. This scholarly man hardly subsisted on Bahadur Shah's remunerations. Bahadur Shah himself barely could make both ends meet with the deficient pension allotted to him by the East India Company. Now that mainstay removed, Jalal-ud-Din would be squattering around the spot where Arbab Khan had laid his sword. Wrapped in long ragged garbs, he used to recite the Holy Quran, no more than a beggar to earn his living. The passers-by would throw him a coin or so on a piece of cloth stretched out in front of him.

Tuesday morning, Hafiz Amin contacted Jalal-ud-Din and unfolded the plan. He beseeched him in the name of Allah to uncover that sword, hiding under his flowing garb, and discreetly leave it unnoticed in one of the rose gardens at the back of the mausoleum. He was more than happy to comply with the request, and the same evening accomplished the mission. Nobody would look at him with suspicion, a beggar, an everyday fixture, a dispensable segment of society. Here one sees scholarship and wisdom reduced to nothingness. Once a noble personage of the Mogul Court had been sadly rendered to a despicable undesirable element, at the mercy of leftovers and handouts. History throws light upon parallel situations, though differing in magnitude, namely, Hernán Cortés, Juan Pierluigi, Mozart, Gustavo Adolfo Becquer and Fernando de Lesspes.

Jalal-ud-Din did another gracious act. He used to carry, tied to one of his things, a unique piece of dagger, with a gem-studded handle, a personal gift from Bahadur Shah. Even under extremely trying conditions, he dared not sell these gems, the momento of the last Mogul Emperor. He had saved this weapon to kill himself, if living became unbearable. At the same time, he was well aware that suicide wouldn't have been such an

acceptable method among devout Muslims. With utmost devotional restraint, the dagger was also tactfully interred with the sword.

Hafiz Amin had heard of a dare-devil, self-confident and brutally notorious British official, Captain Lawrence, who lived in the suburban cant of Delhi. The captain wouldn't fail in his routine solitary, dusktime horse-rides. His route tracked by the side of a lonely mosque, rather not far from the cant. It was in contravention of the strict orders given to British officials not to be alone at anytime. And, his timing almost coincided with that of the lady's visit to the tomb. The assassination of Captain Lawrence might provide an opportunity to get hold of the much needed horse.

Since Hafiz Amin was a superb archer as well, he improvised bow and arrow, and climbed up the staircase of one of the minarets of the mosque. He watched patiently through one of the holes customary to let air in. The moment the British official, Captain Lawrence, galloped past, he adjusted the bow, and aimed the sharply pointed arrow at the rider's throat, letting it fly. The arrow piercing his throat, Captain Lawrence staggered down from the horse to the ground. Arbab Khan, already hiding in a nearby cornfield rushed upon the scene, and grabbed the reins of the horse. He wasted no time in occupying the saddle and instantly rushed for the tomb. Luck sided with him. There in a throng he spotted the lady and steered his way through the bewildered crowd. In the ensuing stampede, indifferent to the cries for help, he violently dragged her up between his arms on to the saddle. He dashed through the mêlée for the rose garden at the mausoleum. There he unearthed the sword and the dagger and disappeared into the darkness.

The story goes that Captain Lawrence agonized for some time before breathing his last.

Back at the mosque, Hafiz Amin thought for a moment to commit suicide by jumping to his death from the minaret. But, such a method has been unacceptable among the devout Muslims and, in Islam, there is no forgiveness for an act like this.

To escape, at his age, didn't stand much chance. Moreover, it alluded to a coward's way. It was not the way of a righteous man who firmly believed in the justification of the cause. After all, in his own humble way, he did succeed in giving vent to his burning desire. A cog in the colonial wheel had been put out of action. Whereas he might have failed to raise a storm, some ripple indeed had been brought about. Since it was the time for the evening prayer, he climbed down the staircase, and performed the ritual right inside the mosque. In order to strengthen his nerves, he immersed himself in meditation.

As the captain failed to return to the base on schedule, a lesser British officer and some of the soldiers were ordered to look for him. Upon coming across his dead body, a quick search of the vicinity was carried out. They didn't have to go far to trace the perpetrator. One of the soldiers chanced Hafiz Amin in a deep trance. Although the armed forces were forbidden to enter the premises of holy places, the British officer, in a glaring violation of the code, relentlessly pulled Hafiz Amin out of the mosque.

There was no need for gruelling interrogations. Hafiz Amin himself confessed having killed Captain Lawrence, and that he was very proud of it. At that he was cruelly beaten up, but nothing more could be extracted from him. The next morning, after a summary trial, he was hanged in a public place inside the walled city of Delhi.

## IV

THE FLYING LENGTH OF ARBAB KHAN'S TURBAN WAS slipped across the face of the lady in his arms to muffle her screams, then secured with several coils around his own neck, the horse galloped at devilish speed, carefully guided through unknown terrain.

Strong winds blew and torrential rains took hold, God-sent blessings to wash away the trail. As a matter of fact this Thursday the clouds had been already hovering in the sky since morning. At the same time, Arbab Khan had taken a respectable lead for the *posse comitatus* to catch up with.

The incessant downpour, howling winds, thunder and lightening, coupled with the fear of pursuit, are all meaningless for a man with purpose. He was on a lofty mission and convinced of its righteousness. Above all, he was predetermined to make a gift of life unrepentingly to the protection of death, if need be. For him, death was tantamount to martyrdom, the highest honour in Muslim faith.

To avoid detection and possible capture, Arbab Khan had to rely on his instinct to follow the safe tracks, away from frequented paths and roads. This led to the futility of names and addresses given to him by the late Hafiz Amin, because he couldn't afford the luxury of refuge in familiar directions en route.

Well before midnight, the storm subsided. The moon hesitatingly peeped through the shrouds of sombrous drifting clouds. The prevailing circumstances drew an analogy between this celestial body and an orthodox bride on her nuptial night, who revealed the glimpses of her glowing countenance from behind flimsy veil. The stars too managed to twinkle rather haltingly.

He made out rather vaguely the wavering light of a candle, or the like, deep inside a grove, and pulled on the reins of the horse, gallops relegated to trots, and trots to casual gaits. The sword readied, the dagger steadied, he unfastened the tailend of the turban from his neck, slipping it from across the face of the lady.

Arbab Khan timidly broke the ice, offering his humble apologies for the inconvenience and bone-cracking perilous ride. She made no efforts to hide her blushes. Instead of responding with retort, the lady philosophically reciprocated: "Life is a portrait, an integrated expression of sorrow and joy to be lived in conformity with the impending circumstances, brought about or brought upon. Adaptability is what counts in this struggle for existence. Misfits are doomed in any case but the fits come to the same end in the long run. The builder of a boat slaves painstakingly to lay out a perfect design, making sure it should tide over the storm, and usually it does so. On the contrary, boats to sink in fair weather. Additionally, boats do go under just by the shore. Water is known to extinguish fire, but what about the houses that do burn in rain. We pretend to hold keys to our destinies, forgetting that Somebody up there holds a master key. He can anytime lock shut the doors of our good fortunes and open new doors for unfortunate. If one door is closed, He opens another door for us. The main switch of our fates lies unquestionably in His hands. How foolish are those carried away with the idea that they can turn on or off the switches of our lives.

As a Muslim, I believe and am content with the fact that we come, or are brought into this life with everything predestined for us by God, Allah-au-Akbar (God is Great)."

This subtlety of practical wisdom eluded Arbab Khan's circumscribed comprehension. He was a warrior, a skilled swordsman, barely a literated person, arrogantly proud of a long history of antecedental devotion to the Muslim Mogul masters, a personification of the expression: "It's no to reason why, but to do and die."

In order to make thorough observations, Arbab Khan directed the horse around the grove, first in wide then gradually narrow circles. While still at more than a stone's throw away, a sense of suspicion overcame him. There appeared a thatched roof, mounted on three logwood walls, a sort of makeshift contraption, of recent past. What looked like a burning candle, was in fact the last sigh of firewood from a temporary hearth that supported a time-worn kettle. An old straw mat, rotten blankets, weather-beaten rags, exhausted foot-wear, some warped utensils, smoked clay pots, varied rope lengths, and insignificant sundries contributed to the entire household. The most intriguing element was the complete absence of any human being. It couldn't be a transitory hideout of soldiers of fortune, or for that matter, of bandits. Far from it. The complete lack of any sign of arms and respectable personal effects indicated to the contrary.

The best bet would have been to leave the lady and the horse camouflaged in the surrounding thicket and explore the situation at closer proximity. The horse could be tied but what about the lady; she might decamp, disappearing in the wilderness under the cloak of practically impenetrable darkness, foiling his mission, which hitherto had been uneventful. Why not tie her? The very thought of it ran a chill down his spine. He came of humble beginnings, dared not go to that extreme of highhandedness. Professionally, he was soldier, disciplined only to obey, not to give orders. While the lady was of a respectable Muslim family, unaccustomed to mental, physical or financial travails, already subjected to a strenuous crisis.

Another subject hanging over his mind, to be tackled eventually, involved a change of dress for the lady, and masculine outfit too. Her feminine garments must be substituted by manly fatigues. And, her waist long jet-black hair somehow should be rendered undetectable, perhaps indiscreetly moped over her head, topped by a turban or an head cover.

He stopped the horse, dismounted, gingerly helping the lady to alight. The reins fastened to a tree trunk, it took him a lot of effort to summon up courage, before he addressed her in slightly more than a whisper: "There is no going back; a long fateful horse-ride ahead, or perhaps on feet, fraught with unforeseen eventualities, till we reach the safe haven of the tribal area in NWFP. Your enforced companionship, clad in female clothings must be exchanged for men's wear, or else it would be a voluntary invitation for more trouble, abduction, elopement, slavery and the like. Somehow an additional horse has to be found. We must take rest in this clearing to reinvigorate ourselves for the oncoming task. But the atmosphere of this hut is rather ominous, and I must go alone to scrutinize. The horse has already been taken care of. Something deep down inside me keeps telling that you won't desert. At the same time, my immediate past behaviour makes me think that you may escape. I again beg your pardon madam for what you have been through. I reassert in the name of God, I don't mean any harm to you. Please let me have your confidence."

Her lake blue eyes welled up with tears, she responded: "The moment a Muslim girl leaves, or is compelled to leave, without the consent of her parents, she is never ever welcome back home again. She leaves such an aspersion on the fair name of her family that cannot be effaced. Many parents had taken their own lives, couldn't stand that kind of ignominy. As for me, I am already dead for them. My predicament resembles a high flying kite, abruptly loosened from the life-sustaining string, at the mercy of gusts, to be lost in void. Why not die with you? There is always a silver lining to a dark cloud. May be a glimmer of hope awaits at the end of the tunnel."

Sudden twinkles beset Arbab Khan's eyes. Reassured of the lady's alliance, he rechecked her safety and of the horse and made for his target alone. Alternating upright postures with stoopings, sometimes at all fours, he groped his way through the underbrush to the nearness of the hut. There were no human beings around, it might be a stopover at the most, recently abandoned by men in haste, or poor men's occasional shelter. He had hardly contemplated spending the rest of the night at this spot when he heard loudly repeated shrieks of the lady. As indicated by the other human whispers, some sort of scuffle was in progress.

He dared not rush back to the scene bustlingly, the attackers might disperse in the darkness of the night. This time around, he deviated from the path already chosen. He waded through a ruggedly-banked seasonal stream, recently fed with rain, and curved around the back side of the hut, past the site where the lady had been struggling.\* He took an abrupt flying jump, brandishing the sword and beheaded one of the attackers with a single swaying. The other was literally cut into two, and the third took to his heels. He was chased and dragged back. Instinctively, Arbab Khan stopped short of killing him, since his wear would stand in good stead. The bloodied clothes, if these could be called so, deserved to be discarded.

As it turned out, they were roving professional mendicants, living on the margin of the law. They were paupers surviving on petty larceny, cowardly humble in living out of harm's way. For the last couple of weeks the hut had served their hiding place, to be on the move again at being aware of the slightest suspicion. All that they meant was to strip the lady of her precious jewelry and clothes. The jewelry could be sold if the opportunity arose. And, some of the clothes could come handy for their own personal use, *tatter-de-malion* as they were. Taken for a lonely, unarmed, helpless lady, they had stood to the occasion. They

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\* The scene is reminiscent of Indian movies, unrealistic disequilibrium between the hero and the villains. It doesn't go down well with anyone. But the description of such heroic feats had authenticated basis among the mighty warriors of those days.



scrambled around her, tugging at her attire and ornaments like desperately hungry wolves, until she had been practically disrobed.

Arbab Khan ordered the surviving beggar, all tremors, lying at his feet, to bow before the lady and seek forgiveness. He submissively complied. As a fanatically religious man, a disciple of orthodoxy, Arbab Khan could scarcely afford to leave the dead bodies without interment. He and the beggar dug a common grave with whatever came to their hands, and the dead were turned in. In accordance with the customary religious teachings, he offered *Fateha* (particular prayer) at the grave.

Now, the surviving beggar was dispossessed of some of his tatters, and with the remaining of the lady's partly torn dress, Arbab Khan contrived reasonable clothing to disguise her real self. A hoodwork of robes neatly covered her head. The beggar was tied to a tree in full view of Arbab Khan, to be set free the next morning - his liberty apparently won't pose any risk to divulge information. He unsaddled the horse, patting him affectionately, and gathered some grass as horse fodder. The lady stretched herself on the worn out mat inside the hut. He collected some rags for himself, lying on top of these between the open side of the hut and the hearth.

After passing a not so restful night, he woke up well before dawn and saddled the horse. The lady took a while to get up. This time around the lady seated herself behind him, and on they rode towards the NWFP. He took special care to avoid the suburbs lest they be noticed. Always on the fringes, peripheral detours, even at the expense of extra miles, had to be negotiated.

Hunger and thirst steadily but inexorably began to gain ground. But the most impelling necessity demanded another horse. For the same horse, carrying two riders, the long arduous journey in front, would be inordinately cumbersome. It would add to the curtailment of speed and convenience. Some measures must be taken to meet the exigency of this difficult period. In the late afternoon, the same day, pangs of hunger became unbearable. He could carry on perhaps longer but the lady's

plight was rather distressing, although she stubbornly feigned otherwise.

Down a forest slope a typical Indian rural hamlet came into sight. It couldn't be categorized as a village, since a village is smaller than a town, but it is larger than a hamlet. Only small, variedly spaced mud houses, at uneven levels materialized. A closer look revealed the presence of a single spire piercing through the treetops, a tell-tale sign of a mandir. It clearly indicated that the population was Hindu at least predominantly, if not in its entirety. Under normal circumstances, the lady and the rider, being staunch Muslims, would have to think twice before asking for help from Hindus. Now, it wasn't a question of asking but, rather, of exacting that was required needfully. The only way out of their present predicament led to this hamlet. Prudence demanded they wait for the onset of the darkness. Consequently, they got off the horse by the side of a huge rock. The lady with overt manifestations of debility reclined by the rock on the grassy soil, the reins of the horse held by one of her hands. Arbab Khan crawled a few meters towards the hedge overlooking the hamlet. Hunger could wait unattended for a time but thirst needs an immediate solution.

Customarily, the mandirs harbour a sacred pool within the precincts. Only if they managed unnoticed access to the pool, would their problem be solved. While Arbab Khan busied himself in the assessment of the surroundings, a few meters on the left, under a banyan tree, partly obscured by shrubs, he chanced a *sadhu*. Seemingly, the *sadhu* with shoulder-length hair, in saffron-coloured loincloth, had entered the realm of profound meditation, standing only on one leg. Some of the *sadhus*, with transcendental achievements, can become so immersed in trance as to be indifferent to extrinsic interference. Time ticked by but the *sadhu* didn't budge, and Arbab Khan's patience was ebbing fast. The larger than life shadows, cast by the evening sun disappearing over the horizon, merged into the lap of enveloping darkness. Deciding upon going it alone, Arbab Khan returned to see the lady in deep sleep. Surreptitiously progressing distantly from the banyan tree, watching the *sadhu* through the corners of his eyes, hidden he reached the mandir's outer steps. No sooner

did he make it through the entrance, than he was taken aback to see the same *sadhu* smiling right in front of him. The *sadhu*\* provided Arbab Khan with an abundant supply of food to last a week or so, filling two earthenware pitchers with water. Since it weighed too much for a single person, the *sadhu* himself carried one of the pitchers and a part of the foodstuff. Then both of them walked back. The lady was still sound asleep, and Arbab Khan gently touched her to awaken. The *sadhu* advised them to spend the night there, without asking any questions as to why they were there, where they came from, and where they were going to. And, he himself insisted to be on guard lest some unusual event should take place.

Before the advent of the dawn, Arbab Khan got up, and the *sadhu* was gone. He readied the horse, loaded the supplies, and tied the two pitchers with a rag swinging across over the back of the horse. The weight of another rider would add to the already burdened horse. Consequently, Arbab Khan holding the reins, and the lady in front of him, they continued their onward journey by foot.

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\* Nothing out of this world. Stories are rife in the Indian subcontinent about the corporeal transmigrations and levitational experiences of *sadhus*. They have breached the barriers of the unfathomable human mind, and dominated the domain of self-enlightenment - mind over body, sublime excellence, height of will in power.

V

THIS WAS NO LEISURELY ITINERARY. FAR FROM IT, RATHER the odyssey of a man on the run, with a prize on his head, a criminal before the law, who had abducted the wife of a British officer. The lady in his company being of a prestigious Muslim family, well-known in the social circles of Delhi. The horse somewhat overburdened with the provisions, and the progress by foot, all contributed to the slowing down of the escape flight. Diurnal hidings and nocturnal travellings, long deviations from urban limits, greatly lengthened the already lengthy journey. A constant fear of what might be lurking around and what measures the government adopted to effect his capture, and how widespread the news became, haunted him constantly. How dearly he wished to get out of this ordeal, especially as the thought of the lady's latent state of anguish failed to desert him. The availability of another horse became all the more too apparent. From now on special efforts had to be made as to this end.

After crossing a part of the Registan or Thar (Thal) desert, they entered the Bahawalpur state, on the left bank of the Sutlej, Panjnad and Indus rivers. Their food supplies were just about

exhausted when they landed upon the fertile plains of the Punjab, the grainery of the Indian subcontinent. The horseload lessened, edibles became more abundant, now, the lady at least could make use of the saddle to relieve her aching legs and sore feet.

One sizzling day of summer, while resting in a forest, by the bank of the Ravi, Arbab Khan heard the unmistakable sound of horses' hooves and undecipherable murmurs. Involuntary reflexes actuated him to feel the grasp of the dagger and sword. After all, he had played with such weapons throughout his life; the swordsmanship inherently flourished with him. Abruptly, the sound of hooves ceased, but the mutterings continued for a considerable time, eventually to be subdued altogether. If luck favoured, perhaps he could get hold of a badly needed horse. Entirely circumstantial, a chance was not to be judged with trivialism.

As time slipped past, he heard clearly audible conversation between two men, boasting about the murder of a family the night before and how, one Sarwant Singh, the head of the slaughtered family who had informed the police about their whereabouts, they impaled right in front of his wife and children and, how, they then mutilated them before putting a torch to their village house.

Arbab Khan crawled up along a slanting tree trunk to pry for details. There he noticed a bunch of five Sikhs, in the characteristic dark garbs of bandits, in red turbans, and heavily armed with swords. Perhaps, they belonged to the feared gang of Mangal Singh - an outlaw, wanted dead or alive, inclemently ruthless dacoit. He was the most wanted criminal, notorious for countless murders, arsons, rapes, kidnappings and dare-devil robberies. The police had announced a tempting reward for his arrest. He was cunningly deceitful, contrivingly elusive, an escape artist, humiliating the stringiest police dragonets.

Mangal Singh's brigandage wreathed havoc around several districts. Isolated villages in particular have been plundered in broad daylight, would be brides sequestered right in marriage ceremonies, and entire villages set aflame.

Two of the bandits, carrying old earthenware pans and pots, busy bragging, zigzagged towards the river bank. It was a high, almost vertical muddy declivity, literally to be jumped down to reach the sandy margin of the water level. When they disappeared over the brink, Arbab Khan taking long steps, carefully hastened towards them. Peeping over the edge, he saw them engrossed in washing the pottery. An appraisal of the situation brought him to the conclusion that he could in one sweep indeed push them forward rigorously into the deep water. Accordingly, the dagger held transversely across the mouth, he took a well poised flying jump, carrying them with a lightning strike, firmly squeezing their necks in the acute angles, formed by his upper and forearms, down in the river. Completely taken unaware and the asphyxial pressure of his grasp rendered them stunned. He repeatedly submerged them to death, letting their lifeless bodies float away with the current.

The job meticulously accomplished, he hurried back to the spot where the lady and the horse had been left behind a pile of collapsed trees. The lady had fallen asleep. He jolted her to awakening, and explained as to what had taken place. Three bandits and five horses, two redundants, but only one was more than sufficient for him.

He crawled back the same dropping tree trunk. The three bandits could be heard loudly cursing the other two, gone forever, who took such a phenomenal long time. One of them decided to follow up and departed. Still along the tree trunk, Arbab Khan watched his movements and then he came down. He advised the lady to be beside herself as nothing would happen to him and to have faith in God.

He trailed the bandit from a distance. The moment he approached the brink of the river, Arbab Khan also adept at knife-throwing, let the dagger hit the side of his throat. With a loud shriek and a sudden thud, the bandit fell forward down by the waterline. The two remaining bandits, swords drawn, came dashing towards the scene. These stood no chance before Arbab Khan, a veteran fighter, a skilled soldier. He himself pounced upon them, hacking them to pieces. Upon hearing the sabre-

rattlings, the lady came running breathlessly, only to see him standing triumphantly. Before leaving, he made a point of retrieving that memorable dagger from the throat of the dead bandit.

The evening sun was about to settle down. The lady on the horse, and Arbab Khan on foot found it rough to tread the way through the bush and closely set trees to the site where the dead bandits had fastened the horses. The sturdiest of the horses untied, he readied and occupied its saddle to continue their onward track.

Their stay in the suburbs of Lahore somewhat saddened Arbab Khan and brought back the memories of the glorious days of the Mogul Empire. The Mogul Emperor Jehangir and his wife Noor Jahan were buried at Shahdara by the right bank of the Ravi River and there lay the tomb of Anarkali in Lahore. The panoramic Shalamar Garden, one of the architectural wonders of the Mogul dynasty, presented an unforgettable sight in the outskirts of Lahore.

The most critical part of their journey hovered around the crossing points of rivers. Boats used to be the only means of ferrying across, at nights unattended by security guards. The boatmen would gladly take them across, horses and all that, in exchange for some piece of the lady's ornaments, no questions asked. Her identity escaped suspicion due to the masculine wear, coupled with the night time crossings.

Since fleeing Delhi, they had already crossed the Sutlej, Ravi and Chenab Rivers. Now, they had entered into a terrain where the low mountain ranges of the Himalays merge into the plains of the Punjab. a day's journey took them to the surroundings of the Jehlum River. As usual Arbab Khan sneaked forth, leaving the lady and the horses behind. He was flabbergasted to see the colonial guards, out of ordinary duty at night. They were asking the passengers whether they had encountered a man who has been travelling in the company of a kidnapped woman. Without wasting much time, Arbab Khan rushed back. They changed their

course immediately, heading up north, where the river still snaked through the mountains.

Normally, the highlanders, at the narrowest width of a river, put some parallel logs to bridge it over. The resultant arrangement\* is usually strong enough to withstand the weights of humans and animals alike. As they were unfamiliar with the region, it took them three nights to come across the right makeshift bridge to cross over.

In retrospect, after fleeing Delhi on that eventful night, Arbab Khan realized that the northern part of the country side presented relatively safer escape routes. Down from north, the nightly Himalayas gradually grades into the hilly ranges that eventually embrace the southern plains. The mountainous, terraced tracks, are more difficult to traverse, abounding in recesses and nooks. Moreover, these ranges are not that frequented. Granted that the progress would be tedious and exertive, Arbab Khan made up his mind to be as far north as possible to forestall the enemy's designs en route to the tribal area.

All of a sudden they ended up in a *cul-de-sac*. An insurmountable series of mountains in front, and on the right hand side, frustrated their progress. A deep gorge on the left, with a deafeningly roaring stream flowing through it, put another sort of obstacle. The horses were pulled to a stop. In the advancing shadows of the evening, they chanced a small open fire on the shoulder of a monticle. It was about halfway obliquely down between the stream and where they were standing. He dismounted, passed the reins of the horse over to the lady, descended a few steps down for a cursory view.

The only visible human figures around were an ugly young man in shabby dress; a middle-aged woman with long cloth

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\* On frequent trips to Kashmir, before the partition of India, in 1947, the author has seen many such bridges over the rivers Jehlum and Chenab, which on emergence to lowlands are no less wide than good size lakes.



wrapped around her; and a young girl respectably clothed, her hands tied with a rope, sitting upright with the support of a rock, at a distance from the others. He might have squeezed his way through huge pervading stones, easily unnoticed, but opted for return to consult with the lady, and wait for the deepening tenebrosity. He helped the lady down from the saddle, and remarked amazingly: "A young man, a young girl, an old woman, without any means of transportation, decided to choose such an isolated almost inaccessible site."

"On many occasions, while back in Delhi, a seasoned traveller told strange stories about the customs of tribesmen. In certain cases, blessed was a tribesman who was lucky to have more daughters than sons. A daughter was a profitable commodity. She could be sold to a higher bidder, not in an open slave market, but in clandestine dealings," the lady replied.

"May be, but how come the girl had her hands bound, when the chances of escape were not that bright?"

"I remember another tale of young gullible girls falling an easy prey to the enticing offers of veteran slave-traders; thereby ending up in brothels of far off towns, or sold to resourcefuls for lucrative compensations."

"In that case, normal routes of communication should have been quick and easy; why this tortuous hazard?"

"Abduction," she rejoined with a cryptic smile, "to evade pursuers."

This time, the lady insisted to accompany him to the scene. The horses secured to a tree-trunk, they hopped down to the lower levels. Any sound of the footsteps thereof mingled with uproar of the stream falling over a succession of varied cataracts and with sibilance of the wind just built up. For a moment they took a pause behind the mountainside of the ledge. Arbab Khan, never giving a second thought as to how to tackle the situation, made up his mind to act first, not to think of consequences. By any standard, with or without arms, the tribesman stood no

chance of standing up to him, a hardened soldier, having weathered so many storms. However, as a matter of convenience, the lady must linger behind.

The tribesman lowered his back to pick up wooden sticks to feed the fire. Just at this moment, with a swift leap from behind, Arbab Khan grasped his neck with both hands, as if in a vise. Then, he loosened one of his hands to twist one arm of the tribesman behind his back. The old woman being taken aback was shocked to prostration.

The lady companion of Arbab Khan emerged from behind and let free the arms of the young girl, with motherly consolations and pledges of safety. Now, the tribesman humbled before him, he gave another turn to his already twisted arm and he began to beg for mercy. Arbab Khan enjoined him to divulge the whole truth, or else be maimed for life. With a sudden kick from behind he let him loose, but he stumbled to hit the ground. Arbab Khan came upon him furiously with the threatening dagger. That was enough, the tribesman broke down with emotions, the facts began to pour out from his mouth, with the resultant visualization of the actual picture.

**VI**

THE OLD LADY, A NOTORIOUSLY PROFESSIONAL SEDUCER, with time-taught polished manners, used to be a supplier of girls. She had been a cohort of lesser princes, had already made a small fortune in her own right as a dazzling beauty in her youth, selling her curvaceous body if the price was right. Through the years, her payroll included a variety of tough cutthroats to recruit fresh girls by persuasion, money, or force. The services of these unfortunates when no more profitable, were discontinued, and they became discarded to hang onto life in cheap whore houses. Recently, as a natural outcome of the advancing age, her physical activities became drastically curtailed. Her elegant comportment deteriorated into clumsily shabby demeanour, unworthy of admiration. As a result, she fell from favours of high-ups in the society, and her fortunes began to dwindle. The protection she enjoyed before failed to come forth. As if that were not enough, her sins began to catch up with her, a sense of guilt haunted her, at times leading to hysterical fits. Since she was a Muslim and, as she gathered from religious persons, to spoil the lives of innocent, force them to sleep with strangers, is an unpardonable sin. On top of that the aggrieved parties, whose girls she led astray, made her life miserable. She was forced to move from village to village,

town to town, no hiding place. Only the tribesman, who took advantages of her disadvantages and infirmities, taking a lion's share of whatever she used to have, clung to her in the twilight of the life, like a parasitic leech. After all, the old hag could still spread her apparently benign tentacles to trap a victim or two, with sweeteners now and then, in the locality far away from her base, if it did exist. And, the death of the host is the death of the parasite; he had to be with her to make his living.

This old woman and Jaggu, the name of the tribesman in question, happened to spend a few days near a borderline village of the tribal area of NWFP, hoping to strike some promising deals with the money laid by for rainy days. Some offers did come forth, but the transactions fell through due to inadequate price, and the old woman had reached the rock bottom of her savings. Cold nights of the hills, the creeping winter, coupled with the old age, weeks of disappointment - no prospective girl victims, life became no more than a burden for this ailing old woman.

In a late chilly night, she could not take it anymore, decided to return to plain countryside, but before that she wanted to make a last try. She threw a few gold coins from her last worldly possessions, tucked in stealthily in an inside pocket of her long dirty cloak, to Jaggu just about begging to do the job, quicker the better. Jaggu made an attentive observation where she put her trembling hand in the pocket to fetch these coins. Brazenfacedly, he shot back at her that if she wouldn't let him have all of the coins, and he meant all, including the last gold ring which she had concealed a couple of days before under her garb, nothing could be expected of him. If need be, he wouldn't hesitate to make use of force.

The wretched woman, by a strange twist of fate, suddenly found herself at the horns of dilemma. With tearful eyes, she reluctantly handed him over up to the last penny, solicitously asking: "Now that you have all that I had, I expect at least a last favour from you. I want you to find a girl so from whose sale I may have some comfortable days back again to see me through in life." Jaggu had a change of heart, developed a soft corner for her, but keeping all of her belongings with him.

In a settlement of thirteen widely separated village houses, at different levels, further up north, there lived a middle class family, owning the biggest herd, five or so, which was quite a good size for that area. There were several grown up children in the family, including a teen-age girl, who used to take their turns on tending the cattle in the field. As she strayed past in the neighbourhood, Jaggu already had an eye upon her. If she were to be sold willingly by her parents, the buyer must pay the matchingly right price-beyond the reach of the old woman. Kidnap, the only alternative, and he had been paid in advance by the old woman. This woman and Jaggu couldn't afford to pay even for the common transportation of the day, horses or mules. They had to rely on their feet. He could make it. But the old woman, surely was unable to walk or run that fast.

In those high lands of disorderly tiered levels, of precipices and ledges, studded with stones and rocks of unimaginable contours and sizes, interspersed with shrubs and trees, no definite access paths existed. Only the horse or mule tracks had to be resorted to, and these too at the whims of a traveller. The herds had to be guided around ups and downs to browse over a vast area. The pebbly approach, path farther downhill in the south, eventually leading to the plains, should by no means be followed. A safe escape route remained to be the topmost priority.

For a few days, Jaggu was given to wanderings all around, probing deep into the region. The escalating system of the lofty Himalayan mountains in the north presented an impassable hurdle. Towards the west, there hung the specter of tribesmen replete with unforeseen eventualities. And, in the south the apprehension of getting caught, since it was the most frequented area. The eastern venture suggested the only possibility, although it rested in untrodden courses. A huge mountain, enveloped in thick forests, had to be ascended, before following the slope downhill that ended sharply on an edge. The latter marked the west bank of the stream deep down, and its east bank could be reached by walking over an almost rotten wooden trunk. The very

state of this trunk stood witness to years of its neglect. Who knows how long ago somebody has had to negotiate this route?

If Jaggu, the old woman and the girl to be abducted landed upon the east bank of this stream he would simply dislodge the spanning trunk, to be pushed down in the current below. The resultant yawning gap would form a natural obstacle to the chasers, if they happened to be in this direction.

The ascent required more than a full day's labour and the descent, on the opposite side to the west bank of the stream, about half that much. First, the old woman had to be helped to the western bank and enough of the food material carried through. He himself would stay behind to execute the mission.

Jaggu himself retraced the journey and explained the well calculated plot to the old woman. Whereas she was beside herself with joy, her frail physical condition made her shudder at the very thought of threatening stress and strain. Anyway, they were intent upon carrying out their hideous design.

The food and minimum necessities were carefully arranged. The old woman was safely escorted to the predetermined spot on the other side of the hill. He himself returned and lay behind in wait for the right opportunity to sequester the young girl.

One late evening, when the girl was returning home after tending the herd, a thunderous storm broke out, torrential rains came pouring down. The girl took refuge under an inclined boulder. As Jaggu had kept vigilantly following her whereabouts, he rushed upon her, gagging her tightly. Even if he had not taken this step, her cries for help would have never been heard due to the pounding rains and shrieking winds. Since he was a rustically sturdy young man, of robust frame, he dragged the girl along, quickly making it uphill.

After taking a respectable lead, he took the gag off the girl's mouth, lest she should suffocate to death. Then he tied her hands behind her back. The young girl obediently followed the instructions of the savage beast as Jaggu was, that is, to hurry up

over the cliff then down to the slope of the bank where the wretched woman was nervously awaiting.

They all crossed the trunk over the ravine, Jaggu making sure to displace it down to the stream, where it fell with a thud. Instead of continuing along the brink, where the stones and woods hampered their progress, they descended down to the level of the water. It took them three days to come upon this ledge, where they found this deserted hut.

When Jaggu had finished his side of the story, Arbab Khan asked the lady to bring the same rope with which the hands of the abducted girl were tied and fastened Jaggu's hands behind his back. Arbab Khan asked the young girl to arouse the mean old woman, who lay motionless like a bundle. It was too late, she had breathed her last. The lady, the young girl and Arbab Khan dug a reasonable grave and buried her.

For a time a deadly silence reigned supreme. Nobody uttered a word. However, Arbab Khan noticed that whenever the young girl's eyes crossed that of Jaggu's ferocious looks, she felt dreadfully intimidated, unnerved to the point of withdrawing into herself. A company like this couldn't stand up to the unknown toils and dangers ahead. The trying position of the young girl, brimming with youthfulness, feeling oddly uncomfortable in an unsettling companionship, was too problematic to live with. Out of sheer pity, he dearly wished her happiness, feeling genuinely sorry for the budding beauty, who would not be welcome back home again, even if he did manage to restore her to the parents. Excommunication was the name of the game for such an act, intentional or unintentional and a disgrace, blemishing the fair name of the family to shameful worthlessness, to be looked down upon. For a moment he actually made up his mind to do away with Jaggu, but the lady advised him to the contrary; he might be helpful in certain respects. The fright of the young girl had to be gotten rid of, once and for all. Otherwise, the promising youth would wither pitilessly without blossoming into a flower.

"Henceforth, you are only accountable to me. Under no circumstances you should communicate with the lady or the

young girl. Your awe-inspiring look and disarming stare must change. This is the only and the last warning. Any contravention, you will have to pay with your life and in the name of Allah I won't flinch," Arbab Khan ordered Jaggu.

In return, he only nodded affirmatively, whereas Arbab Khan had expected a spoken pledge of submission. To exact conformity he gave a hard poke into the ribs of Jaggu with the hilt of his dagger.

It had been a long time since Arbab Khan and the lady enjoyed a hot meal, and Jaggu had prudently accumulated enough supply of food stuff to last for a week or so. The fire was still smouldering. The lady and the girl took charge of getting on with the cooking, while Arbab Khan gathered some more firewood. As an occasional drizzle began to develop into rain, all three of them made for the hut to take cover. Once in a while the lady would go out to check on the cooking. Jaggu who dared not move without a command from Arbab Khan was still outside by a boulder. He ordered him to get in, and Jaggu obeyed sheepishly. Shortly afterwards, the lady brought the steaming pot, poising it on three small stones. Poor Jaggu had his hands tied behind his back, unable to feed himself in this state. Arbab Khan stood in the door and asked the lady to untie his hands and retie them in front leaving a reasonable length of the intervening rope between the hands to allow him some mobility. Just about midnight they finished with their meal. The clouds parted and a clear star-sprinkled night sky hovered above loftily.

No hurry, no worry of getting captured, in such a seclusion, out of the way, hardly accessible, they deserved a treat of leisurely repose. The comfort of the ladies rested uppermost in Arbab Khan's mind. The lady and the girl stayed inside the hut, he and Jaggu walked out. Just in case, he might attempt to escape, two additional good size lengths of rope were found. With the one end of a length, he tied Jaggu's legs, and the other end knotted to the reins of the horse. One end of the other length Arbab Khan tied to his own right leg, while the other end engaged Jaggu's already bound hands. Thus Jaggu occupied an intermediate position, barely comfortable, between the horse and Arbab Khan.



Any movement of the rope, out of the ordinary, would startle the horse, and a likewise motion sure to alert Arbab Khan. If he had wanted he would have bound Jaggu mercilessly, hand and feet, but the humanitarian instinct urged him to allow him at least a small degree of the ease for the rest of the night.

About mid-morning, Arbab Khan got up. He untied the rope from his own right leg, and disentangled the other end of the other rope from the reins of the horse.

## VII

JAGGU STILL SOUND ASLEEP, ARBAB KHAN HEADED FOR the hut. And, was dejected to see the lady reclining by the wall, florid-eyed, her face awash with tears, sobbing dispiritedly, while the young girl asleep sideways. He choked his emotions, words failed him to make any expression, stood at the entrance, ashen-faced. The lady herself broke the ice with the remarks: "It's not that I have any hard feelings towards you. On the contrary, your gentlemanly treatment of me has occupied a soft corner in my heart. I could be violated, sold, ended up in sex markets, mutilated or murdered, helplessly at your whims and mercy. Knowing fully well there is no return, yet the memory of my family haunted me throughout the night. I miss my mother real bad, as she was the only person who sided with me against my marriage to the end. Days and nights she cried her heart out, but my father couldn't be prevailed upon. I vividly feel the warmth of her tears when she kissed me on the wedding day. At the same time, this is the least of my woes, just one of those things."

"Then madam, what's that bothers you so distressingly?"

"I am completely broken, cannot take it anymore, have reached the end of the line. See the blisters on my feet, my back is sore, that saddle for so many days has cracked my bones, my last reserves of energy have been drained. I have to eat to live, but I am not accustomed to this kind of food and for such a long time. Have pity on me, relieve my soul." With that the lady burst into a flood of tears, sobbing louder and louder. The young girl sprang on her feet, too nervous to utter a word. Jaggu still having his hands bound and his legs tied to the horse did wake up, but he could only watch from a distance.

"My lady, I swear to you, you have my word of honour, our roaming days will be over very soon. I am going to find an haven for you. Trust me, you indeed have trusted me all along. Give me courage, my lady, wipe your tears. Please, don't let my conscience reprimand me. Trust me, I beg you to. Your toils are going to end," Arbab Khan responded.

The young girl, also in tears, helped wipe the lady's tears with a corner of her own dress.

In accordance with one of the fundamental principles of Islam, Arbab Khan all along the journey, once in a while, found time to offer *nimaz*. Today, while going through the afternoon *nimaz*, he devoted more than the usual time to meditation, seeking divine guidance to come across a suitable place.

The original plan of reaching the sanctuary of the NWFP, though within only a few days' distance, was rejected. Notwithstanding the staggering heights, he instinctively chose to scale the still northern mountains. Hopefully, some valley should be lying beyond. Depending upon the rocks, stones, and vegetation, if the upward trek became too laborious, impeding progress, the horses might have to be disincorporated, but onwards they must proceed. Out of curiosity he put a question to Jaggu: "Have you a good knowledge of the countryside, or have heard about some valley on the other side of this mountain?"

"My family left this area when I as a small boy, and my father used to say that at about a week's walking distance over the

challenging northern mountains indeed existed a valley, with a small town by the side of a river."

Arbab Khan's guess turned out to be intelligent. He loaded all of the essential material on one of the horses, leading it by the reins, and Jaggu handcuffed in front of him. The lady and the young girl alternately sharing the saddle of the other horse behind, the caravan left in a single file.

True to the presentiment, the trail was certainly defiant and the high altitude naturally chilly, though not intolerably. More often than not, the horses had to be pulled in front and pushed from behind, and the stoppages became frequent to catch up with breath. Jaggu would be freed during the day to serve as a sort of lookout, to be handcuffed at night again.

Three ranges of mountains were crossed, repeating the same drudgery of ascents and descents, no sign of a valley with a town and a river flowing through. The extra-sensory precept goaded Arbab Khan to believe that he shouldn't depend upon the observations of Jaggu. Because he was intent upon looking only towards the right hand side, despite repeated orders from him to keep in view other directions as well.

Two weeks lapsed since they departed from the ledge. There had to be a wadi or a valley inhabited by somebody. Arbab Khan noticed a change in the landscape. The trees down the slopes greener and taller, and for the first time the flocks of birds, characteristic of lowlands, came into sight.

One late evening, the party came to a halt at the edge of a gorge, with a roaring river. Since the sky was threatening, the entourage huddled under protruding stones. Sometime during the night a storm broke out, rain and wind went on for hours. In order to permit the freedom of movements, Arbab Khan untied the hands of Jaggu. Moreover, even if he were to desert, there was no hiding place for him to go.

The morning sun flushed the wilderness far and wide and Arbab Khan decided to have a look around himself. Up in front

and right, there stood apparently endless peaks, menacingly high, a formidable barrier to attempt scaling. The moment he faced slightly backwards towards the left, he couldn't believe his eyes upon seeing a few scattered huts down in a valley and a river flowing through. Logically, it wouldn't be the same town, which Jaggu had hinted about. Perhaps, that town lay far down to the southwest, the direction towards which the river was flowing. He broke this heartening news to the others, the lady in particular was delighted. From now on they would establish this mountain shelf as their base of action. They would develop it into a permanent, somewhat comfortable home.

They cut some logs, gathered suitable rocks, stones, and all kinds of other useful material to start constructing. Eventually, a two-room highland hut, with a hovel, if needed to be slept in, took its definite shape. Although they had plenty of food supply, it has been pretty well exhausted by now. As the hut was located at a difficult spot, far removed from the settlement down in the valley, their activities couldn't be noticed by the settlers. Moreover, the intervening vast stretch of the slope was densely forested; this provided a natural blanket to the visibility.

Their little home put in order and domestic duties assigned, one evening after meals, Arbab Khan spoke abruptly: "It's out of an ordinary company, our little family, if it may be considered so, but strangely enough, despite being together for a considerable time, we still don't know each others names yet. It's high time to deepen familiarity. To begin with, my name is Arbab Khan, I am warrior by profession, with a long history of faithful service to the Mogul Empire. My only purpose in life is to inflict a blow, a staggering blow to colonialists, even through it may cost me my life. The indecent and inhumanitarian treatment of Bahadur Shah, unfairly incriminated in the mutiny, is a burning passion with me, eagerly awaiting to be avenged."

The lady replied: "You never asked my name, and I have never volunteered it to you. My name is Saltanat. My father, to gain privileges from the British masters, forced me in getting married to an Englishman, Major Gibson, even though my mother vehemently protested."

"How did the major happen to know you, madam, at the first instance?" interrupted Arbab Khan.

"In a lavish party thrown by the viceroy, in Delhi, to celebrate the quelling of mutiny, attended by favoured nobility, nawabs, rajas, etc., the major somewhat high on drinks, mixing with the guests, got introduced to my father through a common friend. Without my knowledge, while I was engaged in conversation with a family from Agra, he cherished a liking for me, a passionate desire I suppose. The next morning my father was summoned to his office. To my surprise my marriage was settled in matter of week."

Hardly had Arbab Khan diverted his attention to the young girl than she began to whimper. And, that was that. He couldn't stand her tearful eyes. He might have continued with Jaggu, but decided to give it up. However, he made it clear to him that if he wanted to leave, he was at liberty to do so.

"Something in me keeps on insisting to stick with you, and I swear by God I will never give you a chance to complain, and my behaviour towards the ladies will never be unbecoming," responded Jaggu.

"I take you for your word. Anything amiss, rest assured, you won't be spared. Take it for granted, there is no escape from my clutches. The destiny of all of us is bound together. A clenched fist is strength, an open one is useless," remarked Arbab Khan.

The next move required the assessment of the huts down in the valley. The inhabitants and their customs had to be taken into account. It was worth knowing whether these people, so isolated from the current civilization, had ever heard of the new foreign masters, who had replaced the Mogul rule. Men and arms were badly needed. The food supply must be restored. This job was to be tackled by Jaggu and Arbab Khan himself.

The huts in the valley were widely scattered, located at different levels, and mostly obscured by trees. Thus, for Arbab

Khan and Jaggu, it wouldn't be difficult to move around without being detected by the residents. First, nocturnal, then the daylight incursions were carried out. Their wanderings remained unsuspecting and they began to spend more and more time in the village. The only significant structure was an imposing mosque on top of a hill, and it could be approached through disproportionate stony steps. This led them to the conclusion that the population must be entirely or predominantly Muslim.

For weeks none of the villagers left their village nor did anyone come from the outside. Seemingly, a settlement of contented inhabitants, indifferent to alien traffic or influence, who were happy with their isolation. Stray herds, scanty poultry, abundance of grown vegetables, natural fruit trees, and patchy fields formed the mainstay to subsist. Perhaps, in the summer months, when the snow relents, a trader or two may trickle in. This presented an ideal ground to breed the germs of hatred against the British rulers. The crucial point revolved around winning over the hearts of these people, and that too through friendly persuasion. Failing that, Arbab Khan wouldn't shirk to employ force for their enlistment. These simple villagers, far removed from civilization, left to their own, God knows for how long, were no match for his power.

One Friday, the day of week when Muslims usually congregate to indulge in the afternoon *nimaz* in a mosque, Arbab Khan and Jaggu observed the male folks of the village descending from their huts towards the mosque. This afforded a golden opportunity to make his point home, therefore, they joined the crowd. The prayers finished, and the worshippers were surprised to see the two strangers among them. Arbab Khan took the liberty of introducing himself. He commenced with a vehemently provocative speech, sprinkled with versions from the Holy Quran, about the atrocities of colonialists, and how the last Mogul emperor was forced into a humiliating exile.

The strategy worked. The impact was tremendous, results more than expected. He was several times interrupted with the slogans of Allah-u-Akbar (God is Great). The audience unanimously pledged to stand by him to add fuel to the fire, the

Imam himself quoted some scriptures from the Holy Quran, calling for Jihad (Holy War).

Just after the discourse, as a token of friendship, the Imam exchanged his turban with that of Arbab Khan. He was also honoured as the distinguished guest of the village. Jaggu always lingering in the shadows of Arbab Khan, received a treatment worthy of *aide-de-camp*. Simply out of curiosity, Arbab Khan asked the Imam about the name of the village. "As far as I know and have gathered from others, this place has never had any name," answered the Imam.

It didn't take Arbab Khan long to gain the confidence of the public at large. He and Jaggu began to enjoy the freedom of moving around at will, and they increased the frequency of their visits to the village. They were also offered the privilege of sharing the residence of the Imam whenever they wanted to. However, this gesture of good will was politely turned down. Because, Arbab Khan couldn't afford the luxury of leading the life of an ordinary man among the easygoing settlers. The goal he had set for him, demanded solitary meditations, at times inspirational actuations. There was another reason to decline the hospitality of living at the village. And, it rested in the fact to avoid the natural curiosity of villagers about the two female companions of him. Undue questions may be asked as to their actual status. He dared not provide a topic for cheap gossip. This could only be achieved in the secluded environment of his home up in the mountain. The fear of being counted as a stranger, now gotten rid of, he used to spend more and more time at the square - a rectangular space on a flattened hilltop. As a matter of fact this square was a routine gathering place of the people, who whiled away their time talking about some matter of mutual interest, like weather, crops, cattle, marriages, etc.



ONE DAY ARBAB KHAN, AS A MATTER OF ROUTINE, HEADED for the square. He was disappointed to see the crest-fallen faces of some familiar fellows with whom he used to exchange views about his future strategies. An elderly figure, named Asif Jah, was actually in tears, repeating the same words over and over again: "He did it again. How long is it going to continue? We are losing our grown-ups one after other." Nobody among the crowd came forth with an answer, apparently all of them were lost in void. Arbab Khan was completely nonplussed when Asif Jah said: "No" to a question. A long silence persisted, and it made Arbab Khan rather irritable. Eventually, Arbab Khan asked a fellow: "What was this all about?" The fellow simply looked at him in amazement. This time around Arbab Khan lost his patience and thundered at the crowd: "Come of it, tell me all about this. You have made me feel as one of you. I must partake of your joys and sorrows, triumphs and tragedies," and in a fit of rage violently decked a fellow. At this Asif Jah began with the story: "Towards the down flow of the river, on the other side of the hillocks, there lives a monster. He leaves us in peace during the winter, but during the summer all hell breaks loose. Upon the approach of the springtime, our misfortunes begin to take shape. About eventide

that barbarous beast descends and wreaks havoc upon the village. Children, young and old all run for the safety of their homes. He only grabs the sturdy young boys, one or two a week, and disappears. Many a family has lost their only sons, never to be seen again. Since we marry in here at an early age, many pretty girls have been widowed. If he fails to find his victim in the open, then he forces his way into the huts. We have been so much awe-stricken as to be helpless before him. You see he has almost depleted our stock of the young. Last evening, he took the first victim of the year."

"How long has it been going on and how does the beast look like?" interrupted Arbab Khan.

"For about two years. He is bear-like in appearance, colour, tail, fur, snout, ears, eyes and all that goes with it. But walks or runs only on two hind legs just like human-beings. His height could be just about yours. His well-built physique and upright posture make us believe that he is a bear-man - the vicious creature that roams the northern Himalayan heights. The strange thing is that he makes no vocal sound," replied Asif Jah.

When Asif Jah was busy narrating the story, a hush gripped the audience. Arbab Khan gave a serious thought to it for some time, then he took leave of the crowd and returned to his mountain home.

When Arbab Khan reached home, it was already late in the evening. He huddled with Saltanat and the young girl and poured out the description of the bear-man. The lady pondered over the story for a long time, then suddenly burst out into laughter, and remarked: "The ambiguity of entire drama has dawned upon me. There are several flaws in the story to give it a true colour, some fabricated account of bear-man has crept into it. The bear-man, as is rumoured, inhabits the northern peaks of the Himalayas, and this beast emerges from the low hills of the south. Moreover, it is only during the season, when the snows thaw, the bear embarks upon his adventures. On the contrary, the northern bear-man is a creature of perpetual snows; shouldn't be comfortable in fair weather. The very upright posture, and humanoid gait further

strengthen my doubts. The wild animals, as a rule, shun the humankind, and this southerly bear-man going that far so as to force its way into human abodes makes it rather illogical to fit into a normal pattern. His voice is never heard of and he sets a definite weekly routine of attacks, unlikely of savage animals. Last but not least is the reality that he practices a unique discrimination, that is, only to abduct young persons, and his timing almost never changes. It is usually about evenings that he sets out for his preys. And, the wild beasts usually attack at nights. He has chosen that time, because he himself is afraid of late nights lest he should fall on hard times. I am convinced that somebody, with a crooked bent of mind to accomplish certain evil designs of his own, has resorted to this practical terror. These innocently credulous people who accept all that comes in their way have presented easy targets."

"But, my lady, that fur, tail, ears and the like are not human at all," Arbab Khan asked apologetically.

"Oh, that is the trick which has made the clock tick. Somebody with a robust frame, disguises himself under the cloak custom-tailored to simulate a bear-skin and all that comes with it," explained Saltanat.

Arbab Khan marvelled at Saltanat's acumen to integrate the odds and ends of the tale into a convincing mosaic. It left no shadow of doubt in his mind that the bear-man was fallacious. The entire episode was the making of a man, not that of a bear-man. He decided on getting to grips with this faked monster. Perhaps, it was only the tip of an iceberg. He was given to all sorts of speculations. In the end, he came to the conclusion that it was no less than an act of exploitation, the abductees obliged to a forced labour. The so-called bear-man must be captured alive.

The following morning, Arbab Khan ordered Jaggu to accompany him. He also told Saltanat that the job might involve a few days' stay in the village. They barely walked a few yards towards the slope en route to the village when Saltanat hollered: "Another point to corroborate my belief lies in the fact that nobody ever did any harm to the bear-man and for that matter nobody

escaped from his clutches. A behaviour that belies the animal characteristics. The abductees have been so awe-stricken that they simply give in. May be, in the beginning when the first kidnappings took place some scuffles did ensue. Afterwards, a debilitating panic took a firm hold of the people, the victims simply falling an easy prey. Upon the sight of a cat, a pigeon does nothing but only closes his eyes - a ready morsel to be engulfed without struggle."

When they reached the village, Arbab Khan discussed his view about the real nature of the bear-man with Asif Jah and the Imam. At first, his arguments were ridiculed, but in the end they agreed with him rather reluctantly. It was considered prudential to keep a secret of the purpose of Arbab Khan's visit. Because, he never spent a single night at the village before, it might arouse curiosity if he had to stay longer.

There was no definite day when the bear-man used to strike, but it had to be at least once a week. He and Jaggu were accommodated in the hut of the Imam. Arbab Khan was intent upon to get hold of the bear-man alive. In a fighting bout this beast was no match for Arbab Khan. If he couldn't be subdued easily, he might come to grief or get killed. In the latter case, this would mar the whole idea of getting the truth out. The available information pointed to the fact that the beast always made his way through a pass by the river before entering the village. This made going somewhat easy for Arbab Khan. If he could lay a trap right inside the pass, or just near its southern end, which continued with a stony trek, the beast might be trapped unharmed. The northern outlet of the pass was discarded as it diverged immediately into various tracks.

In order to accomplish the plan, Arbab Khan thought of two possibilities: first, to dig a hole in the ground and cover it with a false top; secondly, a rope could be tied across the pass, or near its southern end, about half a yard or so high from the ground, so that on approach the beast might trip over unaware. The first of the two possibilities was ruled out. It required a lot of work and time to make a headway in the rocky ground, thus arousing unnecessary curiosity. The second manoeuvre was the right

choice. For this job, a fairly long and strong rope was needed, which was provided by Asif Jah.

Arbab Khan rechecked with the Imam and Asif Jah about the possible day of a week when the beast used to strike. No definite day was the answer. It was late Monday afternoon and the assault of the beast could take place the same evening. There was not much time to make a general survey of the invasion route of the beast. Anyway, Arbab Khan kept his fingers crossed, and awaited impatiently in the hut of the Imam.

The incursions of the beast normally materialized just about evening, but well before the evening prayer. Arbab Khan, Jaggu, the Imam and Asif Jah kept on their guards for a considerable time but nothing happened. Eventually, Arbab Khan, after consultation with the Imam and Asif Jah, decided about the futility of expecting the beast's attack. Thus, he and Jaggu walked towards the pass to have a thorough view of the locality of their future operation. Although it was dark, yet the moonlit night made the going easy. The choice of the southern end of the pass was given up. The ideal locale, finally chosen for the trap, was the precincts of the pass in itself. Just about the middle of its stretch, the pass had a minimum width of about three meters. At this level and in its vicinity, the walls presented dispersed nooks and crevices of irregular size, interspersed with fairly large stones. This sector had an added advantage of running a tortuous course to obstruct visibility.

Arbab Khan asked Jaggu for the rope and it proved to be long enough to cover the transverse extent of the passage. The ends of the rope had to be held by Jaggu and Arbab Khan himself in such a way that the rope should be about half a meter high from the ground and firmly extended. Now, the question hovered around the timing of setting up the trap. It would have been foolish of them to lie in wait till the next morning. When the situation had been precisely ascertained, they decided to return to the hut of the Imam only to come back again in the small hours of the following morning. This time around a sufficient supply of food and water had to be taken care of, for the exact day of the beast was not known. They reached the Imam's hut, and he was

fully informed of their plan. Being an old man, Asif Jah had already left.

The next morning, when Arbab Khan and Jaggu retraced their way back to the pass only a stray cock crowed. Nobody would have noticed them. It took them about two hours to return to the selected spot inside the pass. Since it wouldn't be evening before the hoped for appearance of the beast, they practiced the stratagem a few times. The rope must be suspended across tightly. The moment, the beast would stumble over, then Arbab Khan should dart forth with another length of the rope to attempt binding his legs. Jaggu would be a handyman around, just in case. Arbab Khan repeatedly warned Jaggu to avoid hurting the beast seriously, because only when alive he could be obliged to divulge the secrets of his adventures.

They whiled away their time sauntering along the pass. After midday, they occupied their respective hideouts, and poised the rope in its determined position. Arbab Khan had an inkling that the beast might notice the rope blocking his path, as it would still be the daylight in the pass, although not that bright. Perhaps, the rope, hitherto on the surface, should be adjusted just at the spur of the moment when the beast approached. He gave a thought to it and changed the original plan: The beast should be trapped when he returned with the prospective victim. It sounded logical. At this time there would be a pitch dark inside the pass. It should exclude any possibility of the detection of the rope.

He exposed his renewed strategy to Jaggu, and pulled back the rope from across the surface of the pass. He also considered it wise to stay at their respective positions already taken up by Jaggu and himself.

## IX

THE LATE AFTERNOON SEEMED TO MERGE LINGERINGLY into the early evening, then the big surprise. There came a man holding a disguise on his shoulders, and walked resolutely towards the northern end of the pass. True to the foretelling of Saltanat, it couldn't be but a faked bear-man terror. Arbab Khan became all the more curious. He wanted to see when the man actually cloaked himself with the disguise. Arbab Khan tiptoed at a respectable distance behind him, taking the advantage of the twists and turns of the pass for concealment. As a matter of fact it mattered little, as the man has been going on the rampage unchecked for quite some time. Routinely, he took it in a stride, without paying any attention to the surroundings.

There was a huge boulder on the side just before the northern end of the pass. He reclined by the boulder and jumped causally into his meticulously tailored bear-man's disguise. The man seemed to be an adept craftsman in having such a custom-made outfit. This man just transformed into a phony bear-man continued his onward march rather hesitatingly; perhaps, undecided as to the tracks to follow. He chanced an isolated hut

perched on not so high a hillock towards the left hand side, and straightaway made for it.

Arbab Khan retreated to the rendezvous where Jaggu was already stationed. They adjusted the rope to its appropriate level, and awaited anxiously to queer the bear-man's plans. At the last moment, it flashed across the mind of Arbab Khan that they would have to tackle not only the bear man but his accompanying victim as well. In a reasonable audible command, he conveyed it to Jaggu to focus his attention only on capturing the abductee, the rest was to be left to him.

The atmosphere, inside the pass, became charged with an almost impenetrable darkness. After quite a while, Arbab Khan had a feeling that the bear-man might have entered the pass, because he could vaguely make out the thumpings of feet and some muffled sounds. Then, there was a long period of silence. Perhaps, the bear-man busied himself in taking the disguise off in the same alcove and was occupied in securing his prey. Suddenly, there could be heard threatening sounds: "Stop crying, nobody, remember nobody is going to come to your help. If you follow my orders, no harm will come your way. See this knife, any attempt at fleeing, I will cut your feet. Swallow this stuff quick, it will calm you down. Anyone who ever tried to escape my clutches never lived to tell the tale. My wrath is merciless. I do mean what I say. Down the track, about half a mile from the southern end of the pass, there is an abyss by the mountain side. On three different occasions, three boys were fool enough not to heed my warning. You know what I did. I didn't kill them, even though they begged me to. I mutilated them not that bad to die straightaway, and threw them right on to that abyss. Their heart-rending pleas for help continued for a long time. Poor fellows, they asked for it."

When they happened to be some distance away from the rope, Arbab Khan heard that the man had switched over to a conciliatory tone which ran: "I am going to get you fixed up at a lucrative job. In a short time you are going to be a rich man. The route which we are going to follow snakes through the most uninhabited area. May be, we come across some travellers, or have to spend a night at a certain place. If somebody asks you,



your relation with me is that of a son or a nephew. In any case, in order to overcome your anxiety, I will keep on giving you that stuff now and then to gulp it down."

Due to the pervading darkness, Arbab Khan failed to discern whether the victim was gagged and his hands were bound together. He could only figure the ill-defined contours of two persons, like mobile shadows, which differed only in height and width. The bulkier of the two could be none other than the bear-man himself.

They tripped almost simultaneously over the rope. Arbab Khan groped for the bear-man with a lightning agility. Jaggu issued forth violently and with an adroit manoeuvre got hold of the boy, who was already panic-stricken. This poor fellow never offered any resistance. On the contrary, Arbab Khan had to go through a rough scuffle to subdue the bear-man. At last he did manage to fasten the hands of the bear-man behind his back. With the hands immobilized in an awkward position, it would have been foolhardy for the bear-man to take a futile risk of getting away. In any case, with the hands tied, one loses one's balance and cannot make much progress when trying to run. Nonetheless, he attempted to escape a couple of times, only to be foiled either by hitting the sides of the pass, or his legs gave way and he fell flat on to the ground. All the time, Arbab Khan had been right at his heels.

Arbab Khan gave the "once had-been bear-man" a prod with his elbow, and warned sternly not to fool around with the idea of escape. It was well before midnight, Arbab Khan considered it advisable to fall back on their way to the hut of the Imam. Once there, he would get along with the interrogations. He consoled the boy with the remarks: "You don't have to worry anymore about the captivity. Soon I am going to restore you to your parents, and that tyrannical beast of a man would be taken to task. Have faith, just come along with me." Then, he ordered Jaggu to let the boy loose, and himself guided the "bear-man" along.

The entire village was steeped in a deadly silence, oblivious of the fact that a detestable monster had been subjugated for ever.

The Imam was completely nonplussed when they entered the hut. Arbab Khan pushed the man onto the floor, then threw the bundle of the bear-man disguise near the feet of the Imam.

"What is this?" exclaimed the Imam.

"This is your bear-man," answered Arbab Khan.

"It doesn't make any sense to me."

"The man prostrated on the floor used to terrorize the village under that bear-man disguise."

The Imam was shocked to discover that the bear-man of whom they were so afraid of was nothing more than an ordinary man. And, he was so crafty as to take a heavy toll of the village's youth for such a long time. Although the first impressions are often misleading, the unsolved early kidnappings seemed to have an indelible mark about the existence of a real bear-man. The highlanders, almost isolated from the world at large, were credulous people who accepted all sorts of novelties for real.

"What is he doing in here, isn't that boy Attif living on that mound beyond that thicket?" enquired the Imam. With that the boy burst into a flood of tears, and sobbed: "Yes, I am the same boy. This God-fearing man rescued me from the clutches of the satan."

Arbab Khan narrated the sequence of events that led to the capture of the bear-man. When he finished with the story, the Imam asked about the future course to be adopted.

"The boy should be escorted immediately to his grief-stricken parents," answered Arbab Khan.

The Imam sat there brooding on whether it was worth agreeing with this suggestion there and then. After a long silence he advised: "No, I am thinking along different lines. It must be tomorrow. After the morning prayers, the village herald would be charged to make it public that all of the able-bodied persons must gather at the square for an important announcement. In the meantime, we should know about the actual motives of this evil man. The fate of so many of our kidnapped youngs must be brought to light."

Arbab Khan consented to the proposal of the Imam, and directed Jaggu to untie the hands of the man. Arbab Khan himself stood in the door with a hand on the hilt of the sword, just in case the man dared escape. Jaggu was again ordered to retie the man upright arms and all that to one of the supporting pillars of the roof. The Imam, Jaggu and the boy sat in a semi-circle facing the bound man. While still standing in the door, Arbab Khan thundered at him to come out with a detailed description of behind the scene designs. The man couldn't resist the command, stammered almost instantly.

"My name is Nomi, brief for Noman-ur-Rehman. When I was a small boy, our caravan was attacked by the bandits at a caravanserai en route from Sindh to Iran. This happened to be the time of yearly pilgrimage to the holy Muslim places in Iran and Iraq. The brigands let loose an indiscriminate massacre of the pilgrims and plundered the caravan of its possessions. It's hard to guess as to how many of us survived. I was bedazzled by the violent assaults and ruthless carnage. In the ensuing melee I was nearly frightened out of my life and started to scream uncontrollably. I ran aimlessly and got lost in the vast stretch of the shrubs. Hunger and thirst began to tell upon me and I drifted into a twilight of unconsciousness. The next thing I remember to open my eyes in the tent of some nomads, who picked me up during their migration. I grew up among these people who roamed mostly along the borderline areas of Sindh and Balochistan. My restlessness never took leave of me. I had always wanted to look for new horizons. Once I tried to escape and was beaten up brutally. However, my mind was made up to flee these denizens of the wild. A freak sandstorm afforded a golden opportunity and I managed to make good my escape. In the long run, my wanderings landed me near Peshawar. Somewhere along the line, I fell among the dope-addicts and began to frequent opium dens. In one of those haunts of the opium-smokers, I came across some shady characters discussing the slackening of their business. They were the field operators at the services of poppy-growers, who employed forced-labour for the opium manufacturing. These operators got reasonable compensations for the new recruits, or better said the slaves. These unfortunate labourers used to be the young boys, who were led into the trap

either by the lures of promising opportunities, or through the generous offerings of the opium. Once into the clutches of these merciless masters, they toiled day and night, never to come out alive again. In order to quench their thirst, they were forced to drink water, mixed with the poppy-buds and flowers, from the mangers. This further heightened their dependence on the insidious narcotic. As for myself, I never got hooked on the drug, but the temptation of making an easy money by providing slaves to the poppy-masters filled me with an excitement. I presented my services to those field operators mentioned before. Then, one day, under the cloak of darkness, I was guided several miles away from Peshawar to one of the poppy-fields. The owner immediately enrolled me for the job. Thus began my adventures, and I hit upon the novel idea of a bear-man disguise. As this village is almost inaccessible and far away from the frequented places, it presented a befitting field of action."

X

WHEN NOMI FINISHED HIS TALE OF HORROR, ATTIF shuddered at the very thought of his future, if he were not rescued. Arbab Khan and the Imam cried their hearts out over the fate of those weltering under the yoke of the atrocious drug-lords. They asked all sorts of questions to Nomi, and the answers were disgustingly barbarous. They wondered aloud at the elaborate plans of Nomi, and the interestingly inclement schemes of the poppy-growers. None of them cared about sleep.

"What are we going to do with Nomi and Attif?" Arbab Khan asked the Imam.

"It's just about the time for the morning prayer. I would make a startling announcement after the *nimaz* in the mosque, and would seek the opinion of the prayers. You and Jaggu come along with me to the mosque. Let's leave that scum of humanity behind, but Attif must be left in another room," answered the Imam.

Arbab Khan made a meticulous check on the coils and knots of the rope encompassing Nomi. Attif was ushered in another

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 room of the hut. The Imam, Arbab Khan and Jaggu left for the mosque.

The prayer finished, the devotees were about to take off, then the Imam stood up and remarked: "Please stay around, I have to break a surprising news about a strange development. Last night Arbab Khan and Jaggu not only caught the bear-man alive but also recovered the kidnapped boy, Attif, safe and sound. What do you suggest?"

A hush fell over the audience. They looked in amazement at the Imam. For a while nobody uttered a word. Then Asif Jah advised: "We should make it known to the villagers to assemble at the square about midday. Everyone of us must look into it that the villagers are indeed informed. Let the drummer to his duty as well. Arbab Khan and Jaggu would take the bear-man and Attif to the square. Arbab Khan, myself and the other wise men would decide as to the fate of the bear-man." With that the crowd still confused dispersed. The Imam, Asif Jah, Arbab Khan and Jaggu headed for the Imam's hut.

The rope was uncoiled from around Nomi, leaving his hands bound together in front of him. Arbab Khan tied one end of a length of rope to the bound hands of Nomi, and the other end was held by Attif. In a sort of a single file led by Attif with the bear-man behind, followed by Jaggu who carried the bear-man disguise, and Arbab Khan at the side of Attif, they all marched to the square.

It was tumultuous reception, mixed with anxiety and enthusiasm. Attif's parents hastened towards them. The crowd had been expecting the bear-man. When no such thing materialized, it cast a gloom over the entire mob. At the beck of Arbab Khan, Jaggu threw the disguise at the feet of Nomi. A sudden hush gripped the audience. Then, the gathering watched Arbab Khan rather curiously as he ascended an elevation, where the Imam, Asif Jah and a few other elderly folk of the village were already sitting. Arbab Khan opened up with the traditional *Aus-Salam-u-Alaikum* of the Muslim faith. He explained, by giving details, the mysterious saga of the bear-man. The whispers of the

crowd augmented to murmurs and the murmurs to the unison shouts of curses. The Imam pleaded for silence. It took some time before the uproar subsided. The Imam, Asif Jah, Arbab Khan and those wise men also on the same elevation deliberated for quite a while. The Imam turned to the "once had been bear-man" in a stern voice: "Your guilt has been proved to the hilt, and the penalty for such a heinous crime is no less than death. Do you confess your guilt?" He nodded affirmatively, but begged for mercy. It was foolish of him at the first place to expect leniency.

Arbab Khan was consulted as to the method of the capital punishment to be inflicted. After a pause, he recommended that this wicked man should be thrown into the same pit, way down the southern end of the pass, where he himself had pushed many of his victims. The jury agreed, and the verdict was read aloud to the people who applauded wholeheartedly. Since Attif was happily reunited with his parents, Arbab Khan pulled the end of the rope now dangling from the hands of the condemned man, and set out on his way to the pit. Jaggu, the Imam, Asif Jah and the jury followed suit. A great many of the crowd also descended down the path. When they were about to reach the pit, the criminal had to be pulled by Arbab Khan and pushed by Jaggu. With the roar of *Allah-u-Akbar*, the most detestable demon was bumped into his living grave. There, they hung around for a while only to hear his loud cries that rent the air. Thus a mighty was put down from his seat.

On their way back, the Imam put forth the idea that from now on Arbab Khan must be their leader. This got a unanimous support from the other wise men of the jury and the accompanying villagers. Arbab Khan thanked them for taking him into confidence and he accepted the leadership.

Arbab Khan and Jaggu returned to their abode up in the heights. Saltanat was sitting there on a log, immersed in thoughts whether something unpleasant had befallen them. Arbab Khan told her that her interpretation of the so-called bear-man proved to be true to the letter. And, that abjectable man was meted out the punishment that he deserved.

For the coming Friday prayer Arbab Khan and Jaggu returned to the mosque down in the village. After the prayer, Arbab Khan gave another talk: "Now, that the scourge of the village has been eliminated, we should divert our energies to the project I have voluntarily undertaken. I need help of men and material. All of the able-bodied persons should come forth to accomplish the noble cause. You must start pouring whatever weapons, in whatever shape and size, at the square. Let's get organized. And, God be with us, *Allah-u-Akbar*."

Swords, spears, lances, daggers, knives, slings, bow and arrow, or whatever worth fighting with, began to be gathered day after day at the square.

As far as possible, some uniformity in dress was emphasized. Arbab Khan himself painstakingly handled the task of teaching swordsmanship, dagger-throw, and other allied skills. Jaggu, well versed at cutting throats and stabbings, left no stone unturned to impart his skill.

Finally, a rag tag crack force of 72-strong, took its shape. Arbab Khan was affectionately given the title of Sultan, which replaced his real name altogether in the long run. He became an undisputed chief in command and Jaggu his handyman around.

During one of those training sessions, an old wise man named Akbar, though himself handicapped due to advanced years, who used to be a spectator and frequently consulted to for advice, remarked: "Now, we have a Sultan, his dwelling must be befitting for his name, not only sprawling, but militarily secure as well."

"The Sultan and his company should be accommodated in a house especially to be built for them," suggested someone in the gathering.

"No, we must span that river gorge up there, where the Sultan is already living, and build a fortress on the opposite of it. In critical times, the span, as of logs, could be easily demolished to



block access," advised an old man. This was wholeheartedly concurred with.

All of the able-bodied persons, men and women alike, helped in bridging that gap over the river. An headway thus established, they continued excavating, carving, shoveling, digging, covering, supporting, stone-layings and the like, for a year or so, till a modest fortress materialized. As witnessed from a distance, it appeared to perch perilously on a shoulder.

The southern end of the bridge, leading to the original common living of the Sultan was now modified and reserved to house a unit of twelve men-at-arms. They were the toughest, and regarded as the most trustworthy of all - the Sultan's elite personal guard. Additional hovels were constructed for their horses. The original two horses remained the exclusive right of the Sultan and Jaggu.

Twenty-one additional horses were also made available, thereby forming a crash invading force of thirty-three horsemen, whereas thirty-nine footsoldiers were dedicated exclusively to defense duties in the village.

The winter had been extraordinarily harsh, and they were forced to wait till spring to test their first raiding capabilities far down towards the flow of the river, into the neighbouring territory, on the other side of the low mountain range in the south.

The onset of thaw injected a new life into the countryside. Lush green vegetation sprouted, pine and other highland trees proudly bore the luxurious growth of branches, the fruit trees standing bathed in magnificence. The river thunderously leaped down from catarat after catarat. Some solitary trees erected like sentinels on guard above the overhanging cliff of the snugged in fortress, still in the process of being enlarged. The colourful birds chirpped around, fluttering purposelessly in flocks, disappearing among boughs, only to reappear restlessly. Rabbits and monkeys engaged in playful antics; the monkeys especially took to swinging among trees.

A relatively low hilltop had been particularly levelled off to make room for the morning drills of the rank and file. The Sultan, accompanied by Jaggu, never failed in taking a good look at the muster. The horsemen formed a single file on one side, whereas the foot-soldiers along the opposite end across. The Sultan's personal guard of twelve-strong riders, assigned to a raised level along one of the longitudinal sides of the ground. Before the ceremony, a distinguished Imam among the foot-soldiers, would occupy a raised spot, about halfway along the other longitudinal side, and recite some of the scriptures from the Holy Quran loudly. Jaggu would herald the arrival of the Sultan and his elite guard.

"In the name of Allah, the Almighty God, we will return victorious from our expeditions. No harm is ever to be inflicted to children, women, elderly, invalids, or diseased. Their homes to be left untouched. Prisoners to be taken and brought back alive. Newly-weds to be spared. Booty to be equally shared on return, including myself. No deliberate arson to enemy houses. Only limited number of cattle and livestock to be seized. Depending upon the situation, a strict adherence to *nimaz* should be borne in mind; the enemy to be kept engaged by some, while the others would rotate their turns after having finished the prayer. Bear in mind, this is our Saltanat code, infraction to be dealt with dire consequences," Arbab Khan would deliver every day at the ceremony.

This was the marvelously moral and ethical code, reminiscent of the days of the Islamic wars. Whether it would actually work out in the days of the Sultan had to be seen.

The motto "Saltanat" of the Sultan was prominently in gold on the green standard, and it remained the ensign of the state. The significance of this motto was to be camouflaged. Whether it related to the name of the lady or the principality, was no more than a conjecture. Jaggu served as the standard-bearer of expeditions.

The wise old man Akbar emphasized the pressing necessity of integrating a special detachment of archers. This had to be postponed till men and material would be sufficiently available.

One morning, the cavalry of thirty-three, with the Sultan in the lead and Jaggu a length or so behind, marched in a single column southwards over the hills. Saltanat and the young girl, from the bridge of the fortress, prayfully bade them farewell.

Over the shoulder of the first hill, a natural stony but passable track lined the edge of the gorge through which the river rushed deep below. They descended to the edge and followed the track, which for the most part ran about halfway between the river bed and the flanking mountain tops on the left hand side. The Sultan took a note of it to improve the track at some future time for easy transit. The evening shadows loomed large, but still there was no sign of any settlement or the sight of the terrain where the mountains merged into the plains and the river widened its course.

Jaggu made a quick survey of the area to check on its suitability as a stopover for the night. He came back with the remark: "Sultan, at about half a mile along the east there is rather a steep wall of mountains; not very far from it, a natural water course, presently dry, cuts our way down to the river bank where there is ample space that could easily accommodate the horses and the men." This sounded reasonable enough. The Sultan guided his cavalry through this rather treacherous ravine down to the water level. Before settling down, the Sultan ordered for the early night *nimaz*. One of the cavalymen, relatively more knowledgeable than the others, was selected to serve in the capacity of the Imam, and it was reckoned that future religious duties of this kind should also be assigned to him.

One would get a little worried about all that highly religious fervour while the leader had a woman who was living in his household and who was not his wife or relative. He could swear by anything, but no one was going to believe that she was just under his protection. Knowing the East, people were bound to say she was his mistress. And what about the young girl? But those simple credulous highlanders dared not stand up to him and ask questions to the man whom they held in high esteem and fear at the same time. Or, perhaps he himself some day would reveal the identity of the ladies in his company.

## XI

THE HORSES WERE UNSADDLED, TIED IN BATCHES WITH their reins held-together. Food provisions unloaded, a nightfire kindled, victual finished, then the Sultan appointed vigilants with alternating turn of duty. He and Jaggu volunteered for the last turn.

The morning prayers offered, horses readied, following the same ravine uphill, they reached the track on the onward southward journey. At noon a gradual change was noticed, mountains degrading into lowlands. The stormy sound of the river subdued. The crows and kites dashed across the horizon. The shrubs took over woodlands, and a billowing smoke hazily hung up further down. Beyond a mound the vultures hovered lowly in the sky, a sure indication of some carcass. All of these signs indicated the proximity of a human settlement.

The Sultan eased up his horse over a flat-topped cliff, being convinced of the presence of a good-sized village. To avoid detection, the course was changed to carry on by the bank of the river down below. Well within the sight of the village, the Sultan ordered the single column to be broken into a sem-circle and

spoke in a commanding tone: "Do not forget the Saltanat code; its disregard is unpardonable. From this point on gallops, no laxity, encircle the village, *Allah-u-Akbar*."

This band of crusaders in the name of jihad, recklessly galloped through sand, mud and dust, splashing water around, leaving a cloud of dust and laid siege. A last minute check was carried out and the village was stormed. All hell broke loose. The villagers running in frenzy, seeking shelter, deafening wailful screams and shrieks filled the atmosphere; shops hastily boarded up, doors locked shut, even the dogs were given to mournful barkings. The Sultan, Jaggu, and six of his bodyguards dared into the centre of the village. Jaggu began beating the goatskin drum - a traditional act to call attention. The drumming still in progress, stray shots of rifle-firing were heard from an outpost, well beyond the encircling force. At the spur of the moment, the Sultan and his six bodyguards rushed to the scene, fearlessly overwhelming seven policemen of the colonial service, cowardly hiding inside a brick house. All seven were disarmed and taken prisoners. A cache of arms and ammunition fell at their hands. At last, they were in the possession of modern arms - only the privilege of colonial service up to now.

The Sultan and the company returned, Jaggu was still busy with the drum. The Sultan ordered a pause and shouted: "Come forth, we mean no bloodshed, safety of old, sick, women, newly-weds, and children granted. I am the Sultan. The British have usurped our fatherland, cruelly murdered the innocent people in the aftermath of the patriotic uprising, going to the abjectable extent of banishing the last Mogul Emperor Bahadur Shah to a foreign land, Burma. The princelings left to a penniless state. I want the brave men to join my crusaders on their own free will, if not, I won't desist from using force. We need money, material, livestock, horses and wise men, not necessarily to fight but to give advice. Don't be afraid, come in the open, bring whatever you can spare. I am determined to deliver a stunning blow to the colonialists, the *kaffirs*, who have forced the Muslim soldiers to use the cartridges containing the fat of pigs. Mind you, there is no escape, you are completely surrounded by my horsemen. Any opposition will be met with an exemplary punishment."

Slowly but steadily, the villagers streamed forth, piling heaps upon heaps of dispensables, gold, coins, utensils, clothes, cloth, swords (some rusted), spades, hammers, sickles, bows and arrows, earthenwares, blankets, etc., some livestock and twenty-nine horses were also offered. Eighty young men volunteered their services.

The very nature of jihad, as the name implies, excluded the fighting services of Hindus and Sikhs, both categorized as *kaffirs* in Islam, though their passive assistance was not declined.

The very first incursive adventure culminated in no bloodshed, arson or cruelties that are usually the natural outcome of such expeditions. It was the first taste of a triumph in the true sense of the word. The Saltanat force prided itself in discipline. The prize, both in men and material, was staggeringly more than expected. It was a stunningly miraculous feat. Fortune beamed over the Sultan, and he emerged with flying colours.

The colonial soldiers who were taken into custody, were graciously forgiven with the warning not to be seen at the side of the enemy again. Without wasting anymore time, it was decided to withdraw. Jaggu beat the drum again, heralding the departure.

The Sultan on the horseback, took his usual position in the forefront and Jaggu trailing somewhat behind him. Some of the horses that had been loaded with booty and the others mounted by the new recruits, livestock, etc., were intercalated between Jaggu and cavalry. Eventually, they embarked upon the homeward journey.

Back in the stronghold, Saltanat and the young girl greeted them with broad smiles from the bridge in front of the fortress.

As a rule, the booty had to be partaken equally by the victors, including the Sultan, but a discrepancy crept in. As a token of affection and a tribute to the supreme leadership of the Sultan, it was resoundingly consented to surrender a lion's share to the Sultan. At first, he declined this preferential treatment, but at the incitement of Saltanat he accepted. Thus, the Saltanat code

became incorporated with its first amendment. Also, the Imam, Asif Jah, Akbar and the other dignitaries decided upon the transition of the status from the sultan to Sultan.

At last, a new detachment of archers was integrated into the fighting units. The bulk of the archers was to be deployed on the strategically important southward low mountain pinnacles. The latter had to be defended at all costs. Because, the only accessible approach along the river and for that matter to Saltanatpur traversed the lap of these mountains.

The modification of the fortress continued ever more vigorously. A formidable entry mural, intricate innards, spacious living quarters and complicated exits all required more time and labour. Several new huts sprang up and the once sleepy village, Saltanatpur, came out of lethargic lotus-eaters way of life. A small work force undertook to start work on the project of improving the approach trek along the river.

Before the advent of the winter, three more raids were carried out, deep south and farther into the east from the target of the first invasion. The western territories bordering on or inside NWFP were intentionally ignored. This was a shrewd step not to provoke the volatile and savage Pathans, whose imprudential schemes might invite unwelcome disaster, and a permanent front of conflict.

This time around, blood was shed, houses set on fire, more of the colonial police killed, more prisoners taken, but the gains multiplied several folds. The modus operandi unaltered since the first invasion, and every expedition led by Sultan himself.

Another detachment of riflemen was added. Whereas the cavalry almost quadrupled, the strength of foot-soldiers hardly increased, and Sultan's guards remained the same in number. This was a rather judicious tact, not to lend his trust too far. However, archers, work force and labour at the fortress steadily increased.

Finally, the fortress was constructed in its definite form in accordance with the original layout. The time had come that the domain, which Sultan ruled, though with no definite boundaries, should have its identification. One morning, after the muster, Jaggu drummed that Sultan was going to make an important statement.

"This territory is named as the Saltanat state, and its capital, Saltanatpur, in the honour of the madam Saltanat, and in the same way our glorious army in general as Saltanat force, Saltanat guards, Saltanat river, Saltanat peak harbouring the Saltanat fortress, the Saltanat pass, the Saltanat square, the Saltanat road our first route of invasion by the side of the Saltanat river and Saltanatabad - the village down south where the mountains end and the Saltanat river joins the plains, are denominated respectively," proclaimed Sultan.

For the coming spring a daring foray still deep south was planned and, this happened to be the same sprawling town, Kerangi, which Jaggu's father had mentioned several years before when Jaggu was a small boy. This was a risky step. Since Kerangi lay far in plains, the familiar security of hilly stretches could no longer be relied upon. Perhaps, significant police and military forces had to be coped with. Akbar suggested sending two unsuspecting spies, who could cage the situation while wintering there, and would return with the desired information the next year when the weather relents. This idea pleased Sultan. Without waiting for the winter, two emissaries were charged with the mission, and given a reasonable sum of gold pieces to live on.

Now, the frightening tales of horror, extortionate demands, systematic plunder, and exaggerated subjugation tendentiously aired of Sultan and his "marauding" hordes spread like wildfire in far reaches of Northern India.

Saltanat's guise long exposed to reveal her female identity since the fortress's foundation was laid, gradually led to the exchange of her drabby masculine attire for the ladylike wear, becoming of a Sultan's companion. Ironically, her relations with him never attracted sufficient attention to be talk of the state,



## SALTANAT

overshadowed by application to other newly acquired interests. In order to be at peace with his conscience, Sultan, one day at muster, let it be known the full truth of Saltanat and declared her as his protégé and companion in jihad. The young girl's true story was also revealed.

Saltanatpur was no more a humble settlement of scattered huts, rather a fair-sized town, boasting several new semi-concrete houses, setting up trading posts and commercial links with newly acquired villages and towns. Sultan's coffers began to bulge. Saltanat fortress enjoyed the services of attendants, privileged to be at Sultan's beck and call, without monetary considerations - a gesture of benign obligation to the master.

The archers, cavalry, riflemen and foot soldiers redoubled their fatigues to hone their fighting skills. After all, superbly disciplined Saltanat force was a pressing necessity, as the forthcoming expeditions might be fraught with unforeseen perils.

The colonial forces might have been in a state of all time alert. Perhaps, manoeuvres were already afoot to blunt the onslaughts of Sultan's men. But the Saltanat force used to come down with a lightning strike, was unpredictable, and readily disappeared across the horizon. To hit at the stronghold of Sultan, that is, Saltanatpur, presented another sort of obstacle. It was surrounded on three sides by almost insurmountable perpetually snow-draped summits, high up in a semicircle. The only possibility of access pointed to the uphill course of the Saltanat river. Here again, the smooth going was imperiled by the archers and riflemen, manning the tactical heights, caverns, recesses, chasms, curves, etc. On top of that, if the situation demanded, the foot-soldiers would form a human shield, blocking the entrance of the acclivity, emerging from the trek higher up by the Saltanat river to Saltanatpur. The Saltanat pass in itself could be easily obstructed.

Just about springtime, the two emissaries on the espionage mission returned with detailed information about the British security measures, police, military quarters, city gates, official

buildings, public places, offices and material in general at Kerangi.

One dark night, with the sky-renting shouts of *Allah-u-Akbar*, the Saltanat force, as customary with Sultan in the lead and emphasis on the Saltanat code, stormed the town of Kerangi. Angered by the ferocity of the resistance, Sultan ordered to put torch to official buildings, break open the locks of prisons, cut down enemy forces indiscriminately, plunder with discretion, take maximum of prisoners and gather abundant supplies. Within hours the town streets became littered with dead and wounded. The fire went out of control, dense cloud adamantly enveloping, animals running berserk, and moans of inhabitants as if foretelling the coming of doomsday filled the sky. The losses were heavier, many folds on the enemy side, and it presented the very first time that the Saltanat force had to face an organized, well-disciplined hostile resistance. Too much of booty was grabbed, of which a considerable quantity had to be regretfully left uncollected. In compliance with the hit and run policy, the Saltanat force proceeded homeward triumphantly.

Sultan had never intended to annex the territories beyond Saltanatabad, the point where the low hills and the Saltanat river merged into plains. He only wanted to hound the occupying forces of Britons, and to strike where and when least expected.

For several years Sultan had been an unchallenged invader, deciding to participate himself only in more distant and formidable adventures, especially where the enemy was rumoured to be superior.

## XII

YEARS PASSED, A TRADER OF RENOWNED HONESTY AND truthfulness, widely informed due to his extensive travels and resourceful contacts, brought the news that a certain Major-General Gibson committed suicide while stationed at Simla. Saltanat correctly concluded that he must be the same Major Gibson, her husband, escalated through the years to the rank of a Major-General. Whether it touched her heart, she never betrayed any emotions. That needed a very tough, practically a cruel woman of which the image so far was not as such.

In retrospection, the abduction of Saltanat, several years back in Delhi, led to one of the biggest manhunts in the contemporary colonial history of India. It wasn't an ordinary case of abduction. She belonged to a family with distinguished learning and manners, and Major Gibson wasn't simply another British official. He was rather a key figure who played a decisive role in forcing Bahadur Shah into exile. At the time of this incident, he was on a special mission to Nepal and the courier service belatedly informed him of this development. Upon his return to Delhi, a high level meeting was specially called at the viceregal lodge. Although Major Gibson was satisfied with the pursuit

measures adopted the night of abduction and the follow up afterwards, yet he requested to take charge of the operation himself. After hours of deliberation, the request was granted with extraordinary powers. No leads were neglected, every piece of information thoroughly checked and rechecked. An alluring reward was offered for the capture of the kidnapper.

Somewhere along the line, Major Gibson took to heavy drinking to drown his sorrows and humiliation. After all having his wife snatched away was an ignominious insult, not only on a personal level but also for the British masters at large: someone going to that extreme, so bold and on top of that getting away with it. Even in the exclusive parties and clubs he would get inebriated, shouting obscenities, picking up fights, being always provocatively insolent, indiscreetly violent, and hard to be calmed down. With the passing of time, his frustrations aggravated, hope changed to despair, as he was getting nowhere nearer to Saltanat, or her captor. He was reaching the end of his professional career, to live with this degradation, couldn't be tolerated anymore.

One summer, an official farewell party was thrown in Simla for a retiring general, who was going back to the mother country. Major-General Gibson was also invited. In a state of inebriation, he shot the general to death and two other officials, ending up in killing himself too. What triggered this slaughter, under other circumstances would have been only a meaningless factor. The general, simply out of good humour, had innocently remarked: "Hope you reach the end of the trail, and find your old flame." Major-General Gibson's death proved to be sadly ill-timed as the identity of the kidnapper and his whereabouts came to light shortly afterwards.

The very first night on the run, when Sultan (then Arbab Khan) killed two of the beggars at a stopover and released the third the next morning, the missing links began to take shape.

In order not to arouse the unnecessary public interest in the private affairs of others, a clandestine state of emergency was declared throughout British India and an elaborate manhunt was

organized. Mobile checkpoints were erected, CID (Criminal Intelligence Department) was specially instructed, key appointments reshuffled, many a doubtful career officer in the civil service transferred, night raids became more frequent, street arrests increased, shady characters gaoled, judicial lock-up interrogations intensified, public places (mosques, mandirs, gurdewaras, mausoleums, markets, hospitals, railway stations, bus stops and the like) infiltrated by plain-clothes agents; river-crossing sites in particular became strictly guarded.

In Panipat, a town 53 miles north of Delhi, one of the police roundups netted the third beggar, whose life Sultan (then Arab Khan) had mercifully spared a couple of years before. A mere shout from an interrogating official sufficed to break him down, and he belched the required information: "Yes, Sir, a very strongman armed with a sword killed two of my companions."

"What else, speak out quick, quick, or else?" thundered the official.

"A lady with lots of gold ornaments, expensive clothes, a horse."

"Where were they going to?"

"In the name of Allah, no idea Sir, but well before dawn he untied me, I saw them disappearing towards the northwest."

"Do you remember anything else?"

"To hide the identity, Sir, he improvised a sort of manly wear for her, and she concealed her long dark hair under the headcover."

At last northerly or northwesterly escape route of the fugitives was unquestionably established, and the lady disguised to avoid detection - an ingenious ploy. The kidnapper had turned out to be an extraordinarily a powerful man.

Whereas Major Gibson commanded the entire operation, including the military chase, he had entrusted the criminal intelligence - the civilian section of the file - to Captain Bray, an ex-employee of Scotland Yard in London. He was well-versed in Bengali, Punjabi and Urdu, with a fractional knowledge of Pushtu (Pashtu), known to have solved many complicated cases - an expert in civilian intelligence.

Captain Bray would wear many of the local costumes, from laity through aristocratic, disguise himself as a bearded old man, or an elderly lady, never shrinking from mixing even with hostile crowd. A veteran mimicker, who would go to any length to exact the desired facts.

An inkling stressed upon Captain Bray to work on the northwesterly route. Because, the strictly northern direction ended up in almost intransitable snow-clad Himalayan peaks, not easily accessible to seek shelter for long. Furthermore, earlier experience had taught him to follow tracks of offenders on out of the way course, least frequented by travellers and ordinary citizens and to concentrate his interrogations on adjoining populations.

He moved his headquarters from Delhi to Lahore and serenely poured over the backlog of the files of unsolved case histories at CID's main office., All of the files, current or dead, were ordered to be rechecked, in particular the ambiguous reports to be scrutinized, no clue was to be considered insignificant. The securing of accuracy was greatly emphasized.

One of the headclerks, named Kartar Singh, at the CID office of Lahore, brought the attention of Captain Bray to a file that had been gathering dust for years, classified as dead. It referred to the discovery of three human skeletons by the east bank of the Ravi river in a suburban forest of Lahore. Swords, daggers, three steel bracelets, tufts of long hair scattered around, tattered turban lengths - unmistakable indications that the dead bodies belonged to Sikhs. Another date on the file marked that four stray horses had been seen running wild by some people, an authentic information; the area was combed, with the resultant recovery of

some odd pots and pens and scattered horse gear. On the final page of the file the observation included: "Unsolved murder of three possibly four Sikhs; aim vengeance or robbery, perhaps Sikh dacoits overtaken by chasers or police, and killed; identity unknown." Another file, dated a year earlier, related to the findings of two dead bodies of Sikhs by fishermen. The dead bodies were floating down the Ravi river, several miles from Lahore; the case was concluded to be drowning, identity unknown.

Captain Bray happened to be one of those meticulous detectives, realistic visionaries, in the Indian Civil Service, who won't disregard any details, no matter how trivial, unless definite conclusions were arrived at and implications leading to far flung incidents reconstructed. For weeks, he poured over these files. Apparently, two isolated incidents, five dead bodies, all Sikhs, four horses, that sounded intriguing. There must be a link in this chain of events. The five Sikhs might be the members of the same gang or family. How about the fifth horse? The abductor might have overpowered them, drowning the two, killing the three others, and fleeing with one of the horses (the fifth horse), since the abductor did need an additional means of transport. One against five, seemed strange. But the beggar had depicted the abductor to be of sturdy, robust constitution, having finished two of the beggar's companions almost instantly.

The scattered evidential bits began to fit somewhat perfectly in the mosaic. The vaguely hypothetical picture now appeared to present a comprehensive view of past events. Only, if the presence of the fifth horse could be proved!

While still at Lahore, working on the case, the news came that the roaming Sikh bandits, seven of them, fell into a police trap as they were going to attack a village near Kasur (now a district near Lahore, Pakistan) and they were all detained in judicial lock-up. Captain Bray hastened to Kasur with the hope that some useful piece of information might turn up to corroborate the fact that there had been five Sikhs together, perhaps bandits, and five horses - the axis about which the story revolved.

A Police Inspector, Karim Bukhush, in his late fifties, who rose through the ranks from S.H.O. (Senior House Officer), Captain Bray seated next to him. All of them were young dacoits, ordinary delinquents, not of the times of the notorious outlaws Mangal Singh and Gabbar Singh. In spite of harsh grilling, nothing that interested Captain Bray came out of it.

The same evening Captain Bray discussed the intricacies of his case with Inspector Karim Bukhush. This seasoned police officer knew details of many reports, even of distant past, by memory. He made a casual remark about a closed file which dealt with the burning down of a village in the vicinity of Kasur several years before by five members of Mangal Singh's gang who made off on their horses in the darkness of the night.

"Get me that file," asked Captain Bray.

"I am sorry, Sir, since the culprits could never be caught and brought to justice, the file has been closed and sent to the central offices of C.I.D. in Delhi."

The Captain was delighted. At last his guess proved to be right. Without waiting for the morning, the same night he returned to Lahore. The next morning the file was requested from Delhi.

In about six weeks the file arrived by the courier service. Indeed, it turned out that many years before, five bandits of Mangal Singh's gang had burned down that village and they were the same gang killed by the kidnapper. Undoubtedly the fifth horse had been taken away by him.

The boatmen at the 'Ravi and Chenab rivers' crossing points confirmed the transit of two travellers fitting the description of the kidnapper and the kidnapped lady in the guise of a man. Notwithstanding the manly dress of the lady, the beggar had advanced sufficient details about her physique and that of her kidnapper to make an accurate identification. No verification of the crossing of the Jehlum river existed. This was an apparent dead end to the Captain's efforts. He had all sorts of hypotheses,



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conjectural possibilities, mere imagination but nothing to be genuinely canalized to achieve the goal.

The abductor and the abductee mysteriously at large for so long, defying such an efficiently geared civil and military machine, baffled Captain Bray for weeks. In one of the usual cogitative moods, he struck an idea about the man, whose daring raids, every day more extensive, more brutally destructive, ever untenable, endangered the security of northwestern India up to a certain point, beyond the demarcation of the Jehlum river. May be, Sultan in fact is the same abductor, and his lady no other woman than the abducted wife of Major General Gibson. Anyway, he gambled his future plan of action on this course and decided to press along towards the NWFP, farther from the western bank of the Jehlum river.

In every town, en route, he indulged himself in going through the C.I.D. records, taking notes, moving round in guise, talking to officials of different departments. He was particularly keen on questioning travellers, intent upon coming across somebody who happened to come from Sultan's operating base, or had a good look at Sultan.

Special orders were issued from the central government, back in Delhi, to concentrate the civil and military intelligence services at Abbottabad as a prelude to the major offensive in the making. The military command decided to reinforce Abbottabad and defend it at all costs, making it impenetrable to the hordes of Sultan, whose incursions had spearheaded inroads in many of the neighbouring villages and towns.

Although entirely unpredictable the next strike of Sultan, yet the rumour had it an assault was imminent on Abbottabad. Captain Bray moved in with his staff, setting up headquarters in army tents, wasting no time in enrolling new candidates to carry out espionage duties along with old professional hands. The infantry and cavalry armed with swords and rifles, supplies of ammunition, provisions, supporting equipment, tents, mules to carry heavy pieces of artillery and general purpose transportation, and the like continuously streamed in. Abbottabad was to be the

back up station, a sort of jumping point to steal initiative from Sultan.

Sultan delegated special powers to Daler-Khan, the Saltanat guards' most courageous and resolute fighter, in his early thirties. Apart from his admirable warfare talents, he distinguished himself through his elegant manner and unfaltering obedience to Sultan. Even in the height of an engagement, he would not turn his eyes from Sultan, ensuring his safety and trying to keep him out of harm's way.

The old folks of Saltanatpur remembered fairly well that Daler Khan's parents had origins in Gilgit and Chitral, esteemed for distinguished mannerism. They belonged to an upper class wealthy family, were forced to migrate to the village, then known by the name of Sultanpur, as a result of factional feuds. In fact, before the days of Sultan, the family enjoyed more privileges and riches than the other villagers.

The wise old man, Akbar, of Saltanatpur vividly described how the father of Daler Khan used to train him, when he was still in his teens, to become an accomplished horseman. One day, when Daler Khan trying a high jump, the saddle and all slipped right off and the horse went over. His father sternly admonished: "Always, check the underbelt across the belly of the horse, after it has been harnessed. Never resort to a whip, simply employ the tactile persuasion with your arms or legs, and the horse would learn to respond accordingly through the persistent communicative kindness of the master. A pull on reins might help. After any oppressive exercise, give your horse a special treat, like a fistful of raw sugar or any other sweets. Don't let anyone else befriend your horse. And, mind you, horses and dogs do understand human language. Talk to them politely and assertively."

Sultan had been taking a note of the fact that, for a long time, whenever the Saltanat guards returned home from expeditions, Saltanat impatiently rushed forth from the bridge to make sure that Daler Khan was back, safe and sound. This development and

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casually tendentious manifestations could only be an expression of impressive affection for Daler Khan.

Once when Sultan summoned the Saltanat guards inside the Saltanat fortress, for instance, they were all standing customarily with their hands folded in front of them, along one side, single file. Daler Khan happened to be the last to come and so had to take place at the tail end. This was unusual. Being the favourite guard and endowed with special powers, he had to be right in the front along the right hand side of Sultan. Saltanat, seated to the left hand side of Sultan, felt uneasy due to this uncommon court procedure. Sultan wised up, and made a gesture to Daler Khan to come forward and take his regular position at the head of the line.

It wasn't the breach of conduct that disturbed Saltanat, rather the somewhat degrading position of Daler Khan at the tail end of the line. Daler Khan, sophisticated as he was in style and gallant in battle, a stalwart supporter of Sultan, had simply thought it discourteous to hurry up to the front as he lagged behind in arrival when the Court was already in session.

## XIII

THE DEATH OF MAJOR-GENERAL GIBSON MATTERED LITTLE to sultan, but he couldn't afford to see the youth and beauty of Saltanat wither before his eyes. At the same time how he could reconcile himself with the idea of seeking Saltanat's opinion about marrying Daler Khan. After all, he was still reeling under the guilt of having Saltanat deprived of her family. On top of that, he had subjected her to almost unbearable hardships during all those months of fleeing before providing her with the maximum of comforts at his disposal. At the same time, he could easily arrange this marriage without the consent of Saltanat and Daler Khan.\*

Weeks passed without any progress ensuing from this indecision, when the informants broke the news about a huge military build-up on the east bank of a river some fifty miles

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\* Among Hindus and Muslims of India, marriages are usually arranged arbitrarily by elders even among educated families. With many a believer the image of arranged marriage, in Islam, does not go well. It is practical in some societies, but it really has nothing to do with Islam. It is rather a function of society.

southeast of Saltanatpur. This amounted to an unequivocal move on the part of colonialists to come to a head-on collision with Sultan. Sultan trembled with rage, his face reddened with anger, recoiled like a hungry lion: "Is there any bridge over that river Daler Khan?"

"Yes, my Sultan, only one, four logs wide."

"Burn that bridge, reduce it to ashes. You take charge of the mission. gather the minimum of help, start tonight, and quick."

Saltanat long accustomed to massive thundering attacks, face to face encounters, manly involvement of power and dexterity, shuddered at the new technique. It wasn't Sultan's way.

"Madam, sabotage, no more loss of unnecessary blood. Hit and run. This is going to be the future policy," explained Sultan.

The same night, Daler Khan enlisted two of his Saltanat guards, two horseback archers and Jaggu, an additional horse with appropriate equipment, and left.

The west bank of the river lay within the territorial gains of Sultan, but the ride was depressingly gloomy, bedimmed with recurrent rains and whipped by howling winds, most of the time through perilous descents and zigzag stony-stepped alleys. It was pitch dark. Daler Khan raised his right arm for the following horsemen to stop in the shadow of a huge boulder, near the forest line. They dismounted, tied the horses to fallen tree trunks and huddled for consultation. Jaggu proceeded stealthily to have a scrutinizing view of the situation. In the meantime, they busied themselves to organize paraphernalia, dried woods, fire drills, axes, hatchets and considerable lengths of ropes. The ropes were a precaution. In case the fire should fail due to rain or wind, then the logs of the bridge could be dislodged by pulling with the aid of the ropes.

Jaggu returned from the mission rather crestfallen, expressing: "A lone lackadaisical rifleman on guard, trudging up and down near the bridge, far removed from the main camp.

Awesome concentration of tents, thousands of torches as if the entire plateau aflame, row after row of horses lined the far side of the field, piles and piles of bayoneted rifles, systematically positioned slantingly upwards. The river deep down in the gorge doesn't seem to embrace the plains till perhaps several miles further southwest. I could vaguely make out several armed guards at other points, but distant from the river bank. This soldier near the bridge forms an easy target for my dagger-throw. He will have no chance to yell for help. But, such a formidable armed force scares me. Our Saltanat force, I am afraid, seems to be no match for these *kaffirs*."

He had hardly finished the last sentence when Daler Khan almost strangled him, with the reprimands: "Never ever underestimate our Sultan's Mujaheddins (Holy Warriors). don't you dare ever think of it. In the name of Allah, we will annihilate them, Allah-u-Akbar."

The party cautiously creeping on their bellies, crawling or half bent, took cover by the side of the flagstones forming a wall that supported the logs on the west bank. The ropes were entwined around the logs, rags and firesticks generously scattered over the west end of the bridge.

The logs could be pulled down in the gorge manually or by tugging the ropes. However, this was brushed aside, as Sultan and explicitly ordered them to burn down the bridge. Jaggu and one of the archers began the fire drills and set the bridge afire. The moment the enemy rifleman took notice of it, Jaggu silenced him with a fatal throw of the dagger at his throat. They quickly retreated to their hiding place and remounted their horses.

The fire made a slow start, soon to be flared up by winds and the entire bridge was engulfed in flames.

The enemy trumpet-calls sounded the danger signals. When scores of cavalymen arrived upon the scene, the undermined flaming logs crumpled down the gorge.

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The party lingered for a while to watch enemy's reaction. As far as they could see, the eastern bank of the river was lined with the colonial forces.

Daler Khan's triumphal return so pleased Sultan that as a token of meritorious reward he ordered the construction of a luxurious palace for him. Accordingly, the shoulder of a mountain, on the other side of Saltanatpur, opposite the Saltanat fortress, was levelled off, taking more than a year to shape up the building in its finished form. Eventually, Daler Khan was ceremoniously awarded this palace.

Deep in his heart, Sultan had made up his mind to unite Saltanat and Daler Khan in a marital bondage, and the palace of Daler Khan served as pretext to have his will imposed. One sunny morning, while standing over the bridge, in front of the Saltanat fortress, Sultan hesitatingly suggested to Saltanat, pointing towards the palace: "This Saltanat fortress is not worth your status, Madam, lacks many of the facilities. Moreover, in a fortress battles are fought, no place to lead a domestic life. I would like you to move over to the palace."

"But Daler Khan is already living there, and it was built exclusively for him. I don't think it's justified to usurp his right. Anyway, he deserves this palace too, a befitting present to a distinguished soldier and a faithful aide."

"Perhaps, I failed to make myself more explicit. It's not a question of throwing Daler Khan out of the palace, rather I sincerely wish you, Madam, to live with him through publically religious rites."

With a modest shyness and semi-occlusive, smile she lowered her head - an obvious indication of concurrence that couldn't be construed otherwise. After many a moon there appeared to be a silver lining to a dark cloud, and a tear stole down her cheek. It was a sight to behold and a moment to cherish.

Daler Khan was summoned to the presence of Sultan and apprised of the proposed wedlock. Without demurring, he succumbed to the wishes of Sultan. after all, he was the sovereign of them all.

In the wake of the Muslim faith, an Imam was sent for and the *Nikah* ceremony performed. From the standpoint of religion, they became husband and wife, free to live together, but as a custom a dowry was required and that must be taken care of before Saltanat could leave the Saltanat fortress. This meant that Daler Khan couldn't take Saltanat into his palace until a day would be declared for his arrival, with the ceremonial procession (accompanied by relatives, friends and men-at-arms) to take Saltanat away along with the dowry.

The civilians and the Saltanat force alike, of their own free will, gave liberal gifts of jewelry, ornaments, gold coins, precious stones, clothes, cooking utensils, livestock and the like as their tribute to the wedding of their ruling lady. Sultan himself dispensed with almost all of his personal treasury. Altogether eleven casks of valuables, clothes, shawls and rugs with a good-sized herd of animals were lined up for the dowry.

The wedding date was fixed one Thursday. The hostilities were declared ceased and festivities announced for one week, accompanied by firewood dances, eating and traditional folk songs. No alcoholic drinks were permitted as these were already proscribed in line with the Muslim faith.

While the ceremony was afoot, one of the Sultan's maids heard cries of help from the young girl's room. Sultan was informed, and came running like a wounded tiger and was stunned to see Jaggu violently tearing apart the girl's dress. He held him by the neck and with a mighty jolt threw him to the wall. The girl rushed for the bridge and killed herself by jumping over down in the river (a Muslim girl usually cannot stand her chastity violated, and suicide is a general resort). Since it happened to be past midnight, and Sultan wanted to give Jaggu an unprecedented punishment, he was bound arms and legs to await sunrise, so that justice could be carried out publically.



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In the morning the Imam was called. The Saltanat guards and the public at large were invited to the bridge. The Imam announced Jaggu's crime. He admitted his guilt and was filled with remorse for his failure to live up to the moral standard enforced by Sultan. In consultation with Sultan, the Imam pronounced death as a penalty for such a crime.

Daler Khan was ordered to untie Jaggu, so that he could stand upright. A sack full of stones was tied to his waist. Then, Daler Khan pushed Jaggu over the bridge to his doom down in the roaring Saltanat river.

On the wedding day, Daler Khan mounted his horse, followed by hundreds of well-wishers and arrived on the grounds of the Saltanat guards near the southern end of the bridge. Saltanat, resplendent in a wedding dress, at the side of Sultan, followed by retinue carrying the dowry, emerged from the Saltanat fortress upon the northern end of the bridge and continued to the southern end where Daler Khan was awaiting. Sultan, with emotional tears of joy, gave the hand of Saltanat to Daler Khan, and the bridal procession along with Daler Khan's companions made their way to the palace of Daler Khan; the palace as renamed as Saltanat Mahall.

Sultan never intended to hold on to the territories under his influence. Rather he was more interested in delivering devastating blows to new villages and towns, content to get away with booty. The policy of taking prisoners and livestock was given up. His foremost principle, right from the beginning, rested upon fomenting turmoil, a sort of constant commotion to appease his vengeful vanity. On the other hand, his domain, Saltanat state, with the main town of Saltanatpur, had well defined limits. It was surrounded by the snow-capped mountains on the three sides, with only one outlet, merging into plains, by the Saltanat river towards the south, through hilly terrain.

In so far as the riches were concerned, Sultan had accumulated more than enough, later handed over to Saltanat and Daler Khan. All that wealth could not be easily exhausted for the generations to come. Sultan's subjects had gotten rid of the

constraints of poverty, reveling in prosperity - no extortions, no revenues to be paid, no high-handed oppressive governing body.

The pacificatory departure of Saltanat to the Saltanat Mahall to live with her husband greatly alleviated burdensome restlessness hanging on Sultan's mind, since the days she was abducted from Delhi. However, the tragically untimely death of the young girl left an indelible impression, which added to his occasional melancholy spells coupled with long hours of prayers and meditation. He gradually slackened the reins of his power, used to sit alone brooding whether this worldly life was worth living. He became more and more convinced that there would be a better life after we die.

After a long inoperative break, Sultan ordered a raid on a town about thirty miles southwest from the bridge that was burnt down sometimes ago, authorizing Daler Khan to lead the expedition. As usual considerable booty fell at their hands, but Daler Khan broke a piece of alarming news. Not only that bridge had been reconstructed, but also several other bridges, many logs wider, spanned the river at strategic points as well. This was a clear indication that enemy meant business, an all out offensive to meet on a collision course.

This time around, Sultan hit upon a novel idea. He ordered a large number of buffalos and cows with well developed horns, to be gathered down the lowlands, towards the western bank of the river. Most of the horns were wrapped in rags soaked in fat, and tied with firesticks. The animals thus prepared were split into seventeen groups, corresponding to the number of the bridges, and hidden near the forest line, well away from the west bank of the river. These were followed by cavalry, archers and riflemen, while Sultan and Saltanat guards took a position opposite the eighteenth bridge. After midnight the horns were set ablaze. The startled animals rushed towards the bridges over to the enemy camp. The colonial forces shooting left and right, the animals running wild, trampling, crushing, hitting, overthrowing the tents, starting isolated fires, while Sultan with his well organized onslaught played havoc with the enemy lines. The battle field became strewn with the dead, mutilated and wounded. No

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prisoners were taken. Only a few lucky managed to escape the carnage, retreating towards Abbottabad.

Arms, ammunition, and cannons captured from the enemy compensated for the dire need Sultan always felt of these. Instead of hit and run, Sultan stayed there till the morning, in order to have a better view of the massacre. The cries of the wounded, the agony of the dying, disfigured bodies of the dead, and the blood-stained soil changed Sultan's outlook of life for ever. He was never the same again.

Day after day, Sultan sank deeper and deeper into despair. There had been many a factor which contributed to his depression: The humiliating banishment of Bahadur Shah; the killing of Captain Lawrence while out on a horse-ride in the suburbs of Delhi which laid the stepping stone to the unfolding of the saga; on the same day of this assassination, Saltanat was abducted years back in Delhi, and the fate of Hafiz Amin provided the initial food for serious thinking; the slaying of the two beggars at the first stopover and the murder of the five Sikhs, near Lahore, added to the chain of events; the recent suicide of the young girl and the pushing of the once faithful Jaggu over to his death lingered sadly on his mind. The haunting specter of the bearman must have badly unnerved the simple villagers. Hundreds of invasive encroachments with the resultant outrage, plunder, prisoners, arson, and now this ruthless devastation, all set a stage to give a second thought to his purpose of life.

As of revenge, it was more than vindicated. Will more pillage and blood-letting bring Bahadur Shah back to Delhi from his forced exile in Rangoon, or the British masters be expelled from India? Saltanat now happily settled down and cannot be restored back to her first dead husband, or to her own family. He became revoltingly disgusted with mundane luxuries, opting for an ascetic hermetical life. He was more and more absorbed in prayerful meditations, seldom emerging from his hermitage in the Saltanat fortress, deeply committed to self-righteousness; though to a lesser extent, it was in line with Asoka.

Almost all of the servants, attendants, personal guards, treasure chests, and other valuables were transferred to the Saltanat Mahall and Daler Khan was commissioned with the ultimate authority. The Saltanat guards, the paladins of Sultan, a paragon of combatants, faithfulness and self-reliance already under the command of Daler Khan, occupied new dwellings near the Saltanat Mahall.

Notwithstanding the persistent power and influence of Sultan in the neighbouring territories, no more campaigns and outrages were to be undertaken. At the same time, the Saltanat state, including its capital, Saltanatpur, had definite demarcations of the frontier to be jealously defended at all costs. The only approach to Saltanatpur, and for that matter to the Saltanat state, was a stony path, the Saltanat road. It was interrupted zigzaggingly by descents and ascents, running high above the level of the Saltanat River. The entire track, beginning at Saltanatabad, where the Saltanat River merged into plains, coursed its way along the eastern bank of the river gorge, over or by the shoulders of mountains. Daler Khan looked to it that the Saltanat road should be heavily defended by archers, riflemen, and cannons strategically positioned. Other similar precautions involved the protection of the bottom of the gorge where the Saltanat river flowed.

## XIV

THE SURVIVORS OF THE LAST HUMILIATING DEFEAT OF THE colonial forces told horror stories of the Saltanat force, right under the guidance of Sultan, to Captain Bray at Abbottabad. Contrary to early belief, the strength of Sultan must not be taken lightly, and preparations got underway for a full assault on Saltanatpur with elaborate details. It could be only invaded from the south along the Saltanat river, or higher up through the Saltanat Road, if a decisive victory was to be scored.

The veteran strategists planned to deploy expert infantry and cavalry units in limited strength for the exploratory attacks, but Captain Bray suggested gathering tactical information first through the infiltration of spies behind enemy lines. In this case, no enemy lines as such existed, no real battlefield. There was only a restricted rough terrain, perilously snaking uphill and heavily guarded by the Saltanat force. There was also the roaring Saltanat River, punctuated by awesome cataracts, not that easy to allow any progress through unnoticed. It teemed with Sultan's soldiers, occupying almost all of the available nooks and crevices along its banks. Anyway, Captain Bray's idea was given a positive

thought naturally as he was the top intelligence cop, with many citations for distinguished services.

A detachment of seasoned informers, who had weathered many storms, was specially instructed to get through to Saltanatpur. Somehow, it must be accomplished, under the guise of travelers, traders, beggars or religious folk, along with necessary equipment and if need be, to kill or get killed. Had it been one of those earlier raids of Sultan, they could have possibly mingled with the crowd, thereby managing access to Saltanatpur. Now that question didn't arise. Sultan had taken a new turn in his life. Withdrawn into the seclusion of his fortress in pursuit of eternal peace, self-enlightment and spiritual aggrandizement and given to self-abnegation. He would for months on end fail to emerge from his spiritual and wordless communication with God. An absolute oblivion to corporeal or extra-corporeal interests rendered him immune to worldly affairs. In any case the fate of Saltanat state rested entirely in the hands of Daler Khan. If circumstances demanded, he was at liberty to surrender to the forces of the British Raj, or sit upon the ruins of Saltanat state, it was dependent on his discretion.

The informers of Captain Bray, six in all, after following different routes, regrouped in a wood near Saltanatabad. They discussed different alternatives of gaining access to Saltanatpur, as it happened to be the heart and soul of Saltanat state, the centre of Sultan's activities, but nothing feasible could be decided. The very nature of the terrain imposed a formidable barrier. It couldn't be trespassed without the fear of getting caught. At last, it was concluded to feign desertion - deserters from the British forces - morally impelled no longer to betray their country, bent upon seeking asylum in Saltanatpur under the protection of Sultan. The weapons they carried were thrown away.

Shortly after dawn, the informers made their way to one of the outposts on an elevation near the gorge of the Saltanat river, in the vicinity of Saltanatabad. No sooner did they make any overtures than they were pounced upon by several riflemen of the Saltanat force. In spite of being thoroughly checked, they were

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still ordered to be disrobed. After detailed grilling, the man in charge of the outpost agreed to their aspirations and their safe conduct shouted to another outpost uphill. A sequence of similar signals heralded their arrival all the way to Saltanatpur.

Daler Khan postponed seeing them for a couple of days. In the meantime they were housed in the travelers lodge near the mosque. Whether devout Muslims or not, they shrewdly never let an opportunity slip to offer *Nimaz* five times a day in the mosque, along with other regular worshippers. Finally, they were led to the presence of Daler Khan who listened intently to their tales of colonialists' atrocities, and how sincerely they repented having served the enemies of their country. With apparent satisfaction, he respected their desire and an indefinite refuge was granted.

It was the first time that these secret service agents became aware of the fact that Sultan had relinquished his authority to Daler Khan. How dearly they wanted this information to be relayed back to Abbottabad where the intelligence service knew nothing about this development.

After having gained the confidence of the public at large, they roamed about at their own free will for months, except in the neighbourhood of the Saltanat fortress which could only be visited either by Saltanat or Daler Khan. Having memorized as much information as possible about the accessibility to Saltanatpur, geographical details, strength of the Saltanat force, way of life of the inhabitants, prosperity and the like, they started preparations for return. It was easier said than done, since all of the possibilities of fleeing converged towards the south along the Saltanat river.

The dreary autumn beckoned an unusually inclement winter, covering the country with thick blankets of snow. Violently smashing winds whipped the alleys and slopes charged with shrapnel-like snowflakes. The deafening roar of the Saltanat river choked to death. It would be suicidally foolish to attempt an escape at this time of the year. If not killed by Sultan's men, they were sure to perish in climatic fury. Consequently, it had to be delayed till the weather relaxed severity, or the advent of spring.

One day, after the early night *Nimaz*, the Imam lingered behind in the mosque, awaiting an abatement in the snowstorm due to his old age. No relief seemed to be in sight. Anyway, he mustered up all his courage to brook the storm, stepping down the long way from the mosque to the street en route to his home, which was not far from the mosque. As he passed by the travellers lodge, where the deserters still stayed, in order to catch up his breath, he took shelters under the overhangings of roof inclinations. He was bamboozled to hear them discuss about the much talked enormous wealth of Sultan. Whether it had been hidden in the Saltanat fortress or mahall, because Captain Bray specially emphasized its whereabouts. Silently, but quickly, the Imam hastened to his home. This curiosity of the deserters, amounting to treachery, bothered him all night. Since the citizens of the Saltanat state adored their Sultan, their benefactor, the conversation of the deserters had to be brought to the ears of Daler Khan.

The next morning, after the early dawn prayers, the Imam visited the Saltanat mahall to see Daler Khan rather urgently. The protocol restrictions not binding on him, he was ushered in immediately.

Daler Khan and Saltanat engrossed in checking the routine monthly benefits to be distributed among the needy citizens, asked the Imam for the trouble he had taken in such a harsh weather to come over. The Imam unfolded what he had heard at the travellers' lodge. Daler Khan, phenomenally an inexcitable person, lost his temper. He ordered the Saltanat guards to capture those traitors and bring them to the Saltanat bridge, spanning the gorge to the entrance of the Saltanat fortress, from where the young girl had committed suicide, and Jaggu was pushed to his death.

At first, these traitors refused all of the charges of espionage, then had to confess, since the Imam won't lie and the truthfulness of his words used to be taken for granted. Daler Khan asked the Imam for the verdict.

"Death for treason, my lord," was the announcement.



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"One by one they were pushed over the Saltanat bridge to their death hundreds of feet down below in the Saltanat river, now frozen like a rock. This time around, the established *modus operandi* of tying weighty stones around the waists of the culprits was set aside, since the freezing weather and the stone hard frozen waters of the Saltanat river would do the job instead.

By the passage of time, back in Abbottabad, Captain Bray's patience ebbed. It was too long a time and the agents' safety must be in jeopardy. Moreover, the compelling orders poured in from Delhi to push ahead, and a lull on the part of Sultan baffled the military high command. Rumour had it that Sultan might be dead, or a rebellion within deprived him of powers. Within sight of the borders of the Saltanat state, a formidable army was amassed by the east bank of the Saltanat river. The idea of a full scale campaign was discarded due to its impracticability. Instead two columns of cavalry, archers and riflemen, followed by files of infantry were lined up: one to negotiate the river bank below, and the other to proceed along the edge of the gorge over the Saltanat road.

The first attempt resulted in utter failure. It was ferociously repulsed. Out of a bulk of ignominiously decimated colonial forces, only scores struggled back to the base camp. The Saltanat force advantageously perched on strategically elevated positions rendered the enemy forces an easy prey. Heavy losses were also inflicted on the Saltanat force, the first taste of a powerful encounter.

Another campaign, doubly reinforced, with a change in the formation: Infantry spearheading the attack, managed to occupy about half of the Saltanat road on way to Saltanatpur. Hundreds of Sultan's men were killed or maimed.

It was too much for Daler Khan, too many lives lost. He became convinced of the superiority of the British army, both in manpower and armaments, and the futility of continuing the hostilities was crystal clear. Saltanat state, however, had been irrigated to bloom with blood of so many of its valiant soldiers,

and couldn't be yielded easily to the enemy. There had to be a last stand, come what may.

The northern half of the Saltanat road, still under the control of Saltanat force, presented a monumental challenge to the British army: first, it snaked ascendingly through a system of patternlessly high mountains, and was interposed by a series of bridges which could be demolished with relative ease; secondly, not only the Saltanat road but also the accompanying stretch of the Saltanat river below swarmed with the heavily armed Sultan's men. Daler Khan chalked out a two fold manoeuvre. As the defense of the rest of Saltanat road was of paramount importance, he removed a great many of his men from along the river banks down below in the gorge to reinforce the units stationed higher up along the Saltanat road. In order not to have the river banks at the mercy of the enemy, the river was ordered to be dammed up at different points along its course. This resulted in the flooding of the area to such an extent that the safety of the gorge was ensured markedly. There were left no footholds or hiding places for the invaders.

Now that the field of action was restricted only to the Saltanat road, the Saltanat pass deserved a special attention. It happened to be the gateway to Saltanatpur and the Saltanat road passed through it. A contingent of the foot-soldiers was ordered to man one of the brinks of the pass, and numerous massive stones arranged along its entire length. If the enemy succeeded in venturing through, the stones would be rained down indiscriminately. The archers and the riflemen, positioned along the opposite brink, would shower down their arsenal. The bridges along the Saltanat road, still under the control of Saltanat force, had been pulled down.

It was no longer the question of a preemptive strike, rather the security of the state in itself was at stake. Nothing that mattered had to be set aside. The time had come for the state to count on its sons.

An unexpected spell of inaction seemed to have overtaken the enemy lines. Perhaps, the colonial force had lost its

momentum. This intrigued Daler Khan. In good old days he would have looked forward to the advice of Sultan, or failing that the wise old man Akbar might have come forth with a word of wisdom. Unfortunately, during the last winter, in one of those shivering cold nights, he breathed his last.

As the time passed by, Saltanat had gradually taken the liberty of participating in state's affairs, though not to the extent of crossing her husband's way. One late evening, after checking on the defensive preparations at the Saltanat pass, Daler Khan returned to the mahall. He was not in his usual self. His pensive looks reflected an internal inquietude that had taken hold of him.

"What's behind your troubled expression?" enquired Saltanat.

"When our defenses began to crumble, the kafirs could push us back all the way up to the Saltanat pass, or enter Saltanatpur as well. Contrarily, the odds being in their favour, they opted for a unilateral cessation of hostilities. How come they failed to reap the benefits of their advantageous superiority? Our defeat became a rout, but they put a sudden halt to their advancing columns. For months there has been no renewal of activity on the part of the enemy. May be, you can figure it out," answered Daler Khan.

"Perhaps, the kafirs got bogged down in the difficult uphill terrain, or it is a well calculated strategy: to await reinforcements from Abbottabad and maintain the life line of Saltanatpur strangled to block provisions for Sultan's domain. This might provoke a revolt within Sultan's own subjects, as a lack of basic necessities of life would begin to take effect. Gone are the days when Saltanatpur was a small village, self-sufficient in every thing, but now it has been growing rapidly and, as you know, since long we have been depending on major supplies from outside," suggested Saltanat.

Whatever the reason, it did provide the much needed time to Daler Khan who laboured idfatigably to supervise the fortifications of Saltanatpur. On the dark side, Saltanat's apprehension about sealing off the supply route, that is, the

Saltanat road, proved to be correct. Ten months had lapsed since the kafirs occupied about half of the Saltanat road. A slow but steady dwindling of food provisions and merchandise began to creep insidiously upon Saltanatpur.

The colonial military command realized that a face to face combat had already taken a heavy toll of its invading army's combatants. The continuation of this practice would be a foolhardy feat. The resultant mounting casualties might no longer be concealed from the public at large. This could sparkle a flame of general unrest. Moreover, the Saltanat force enjoyed the privilege of a 'relatively higher' terrain, which was fortified reasonably well against the enemy's prospective thrust. Any move as to this effect would expose the soldiers to a merciless barrage of gunfire and the onslaught of archers by the Saltanat force.

Daler Khan, a man of action, a dedicated soldier, could no longer stand the specter of no war no peace. After consultation with Saltanat and other veteran advisers, he arrived at the conclusion to dislodge the foe from its entrenched positions.

One evening, the Saltanat force descended upon the enemy with a ruthless fury. It only served as a fodder for the mighty cannons that the enemy had been gathering throughout that lull in the fighting. The Saltanat force was badly mauled and suffered unusually heavy losses. Bloodied as they were, the soldiers were forced to fall back over the hills towards the Saltanat pass. The enemy gained an upper hand and the balance of power swang in the favour of the kafirs. They maintained a relentless pressure, though the progress slowed down due to the demolished bridges and the snipers' shots. However, such a consistent pressure, methodically executed, failed to demoralize the Saltanat force.

Daler Khan channelized all of his resources for a final showdown at the Saltanat pass. The strength of the archers and the riflemen, along one of the brinks of the pass, was redoubled. The massive stones, bordering the opposite brink, were poised precariously so as to be slipped down almost simultaneously in the pass. A generous supply of additional stones was held at hands. Hundreds of the foot-soldiers steadied to manipulate these

stones. As an extra defensive obstacle, the northern entrance of the Saltanat pass was lined with whatever cannons they happened to capture from these kafirs on earlier occasions. These would be fired only when the enemy struggled to be within an easy reach as a target.

Due to the flooding manoeuvre, the approach from the river banks, down in the gorge, had been secured against the enemy encroachment. Moreover, the river bed was under the surveillance of the watchful eyes of the alert guards.

One afternoon, after the Friday's prayer, Daler Khan, in the company of his Saltanat guards, was busy taking a look at the precautionary measures being adopted to defend the Saltanat pass. Suddenly, he remembered, in line with the established tradition whenever a fateful event would be in the offing, to deliver a speech to the Saltanat force. Although he lacked the rhetoric of Sultan, yet could manage to say: "Men-at-arms, we must repel these kafirs all the way back down the Saltanat road, or be doomed for ever. They are intoxicated with the victory, bent upon trespassing the threshold of Saltanatpur. Let this pass be their graveyard. The Saltanat code has to be regretfully ignored. None of these kafirs should come out alive from this pass. Wait intently but noiselessly, no unnecessary movement. When the enemy column is halfway through the pass, the archers, the riflemen and the stone-throwers must carry on their duty unflinchingly. I myself would signal the right moment to act, Allah-u-akbar."

## XV

IN ABOUT A DAY'S TIME THE KAFIRS REACHED THE southern end of the Saltanat pass where they made a tactical stop. The forerunners were dispatched to report on the situation inside the pass. They returned with the exhilarating news that it had been completely deserted well up to a considerable distance. However, some movement could be observed high up on top of the mountains bordering the pass. This was discarded as a trivial matter. In the eyes of the kafirs the enemy had been battered devastatingly, licking its wounds and unable to strike back. Regardless of the fatal danger that lurked in the heights above the pass, the enemy continued its onwards march. The lookouts, assigned to the camouflaged posts in the surroundings of the pass, took a note of the enemy movement. Then, this information was passed on systematically to Daler Khan.

The British column penetrated deep into the pass without any visible trace of resistance. At about halfway point through the pass, all hell broke loose: hundreds of massive stones thundered down on the kafirs; the bullets and the arrows rained down in volleys; those, who in panic, dared run towards the northern end of the pass, were scorched to death by the cannon fire. There

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was no other alternative but to retreat southward along the Saltanat road. The Saltanat force, among the sky-renting shouts of Allah-u-Akbar, chased the badly wounded enemy on the run and inflicted severe blows. Not many survived, only a score or so returned to the base with a tale of horror.

The Saltanat force turned the tables on the colonialists. The vulnerable spot, that is, the Saltanat pass paved the way for a rebirth of Saltanat state. The Saltanat force became reinvigorated. How times had changed. Only a few days before Daler Khan was just about to give in, but a second thought made him turn the clock back.

The Saltanat force was re-organized. Men worked round the clock to rebuild the damaged bridges. However, the river was left dammed up as a safeguard against possible future incursions. The entire tract of the Saltanat road, down south up to Saltanatabad, once again changed hands. It came under the control of the Saltanat force. Daler Khan and Saltanat moved their headquarters temporarily to Saltanatabad which transformed into an impenetrable military citadel. The enemy had savoured such a stunning defeat that it would take months before another attack might be launched.

The news of the disgraceful debacle reached Delhi where the viceroy Lord Appleton-Croft was in power. He was a visionary who believed in a peaceful co-existence instead of running the risk of facing a stubbornly hostile enemy. He was not accustomed to delude himself with false hopes rather to see things in their right perspective. An emergency meeting of the Viceregal Advisory Council was called. The main points of the agenda included : the suffering of heavy losses by the crown forces; the situation of the Saltanat state in a hazardous terrain far removed from the major routes of communication; and an intractable enemy, a sort of legend in its own rights. Moreover, one of the principal protagonists, Major General Gibson, in the much heralded case of abduction, was already dead. After several days of deliberations, it was concluded that there was no sense in renewing the acts of warfare. At the face of its, the problem defied belligerent solution. Colonel Harrison was given a mandate to

negotiate a permanent truce and was empowered to establish friendly relations with the Saltanat state.

As no direct contracts existed between the opposing forces, to effect a deal posed another sort of problem. Concomitantly, with the triumphal balance tipped in the favour of the Saltanat state, Daler Khan left no stone unturned to ensure the safety of his domain. An all time alert was declared. An elated Daler Khan transformed into a sworn enemy of the foreign rulers of India.

The British raj had to find some means to express its desires of friendly ties with the Saltanat state. In the absence of direct communications, some trustworthy intermediaries had to be resorted to.

Colonel Harrison established his base at Kerangi. Some of the Muslim religious leaders were consulted. To invoke the name of Islam was to touch upon the sensitive nerve of Daler Khan. This strategy was bound to work. A famous leader Maulana Basharat Ahmed, well known in the countryside, offered his services. As a matter of fact, a couple of times Daler Khan had received him in audience at the Saltanat mahall. Knowing the integrity of Daler Khan's character, Maulana Basharat Ahmed sought and received guarantees from Colonel Harrison that if an agreement were reached, it won't be breached.

One late morning, Maulana Basharat Ahmed on a horseback and unescorted headed for Saltanatabad. Unfortunately, Daler Khan had left Saltanatabad to make a check on the defenses of the Saltanat road up to the Saltanat Pass. His return was expected after three days' time. This gave Maulana a God-sent opportunity to have talks with Saltanat. She became convinced of the good intentions of the crown. In reality, she had already been giving a serious thought to the futility of this indiscriminate bloodshed. The carnage of the British army, inside the Saltanat pass, made her heart revolt against the warring stance.

Upon his return, Daler Khan received Maulana in the presence of Saltanat and other close aides. The British point of view focussed on the pledge of a non-aggression pact, with no



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strings attached. It also stipulated that an emissary from Delhi would occasionally visit Saltanatpur. The Saltanat state would be enjoying all sorts of benefits at the expense of the crown.

At first, Daler Khan stuck to his guns that no peace could be possible with the colonialists who had landed upon the soil of India only to steal our wealth and subjugate our people. Eventually, at the goading of Saltanat he was prevailed upon to consider favourably the brighter aspects of the crown offer. He made it clear that Colonel Harrison himself and his negotiating team, including Maulana, would have to ink the agreement at Saltanatpur, the capital of Saltanat state.

After successful parleys, in line with the predetermined guidelines, Maulana Basharat Ahmed returned to Kerangi. He was proud to inform Colonel Harrison about the success of the mission. The story was sprinkled with braggings that how difficult it was to reconcile Daler Khan with the conditions of the agreement proposed by Delhi.

The coming spring Colonel Harrison, his aides and Maulana Basharat Ahmed rode to Saltanatabad. They were escorted by some of the Saltanat guards to Saltanatpur where they settled down at travellers' lodge. After a few days, they were brought to the presence of Daler Khan at the Saltanat mahall, and he himself headed the peace mission of the Saltanat state. It was explicitly emphasized that Sultan's person was not negotiable. In any case, this mattered little, since Sultan had mysteriously disappeared although Daler Khan was utterly ignorant of this happening. An old faithful servant in attendance, about a week before had seen Sultan disappear in a freak blizzard towards the north, never to be seen again.

The British Indian service had learned with experience not only to make friends with the inflexible enemies, but also to shower favours on them. The Saltanat state was officially recognized, and Daler Khan was conferred with the title of a Nawab, accompanied by the handsome annual pension to defray luxurious maintenance expenses. Additionally, a generous amount of subsidy would be annually sanctioned by Delhi for the

welfare of the state. It should be mentioned here that Daler Khan accepted the title of a Nawab rather reluctantly. Because, the contemporary nawabs used to be the persons who had been bestowed with such titles for their services rendered to the crown, even at the cost of their homeland.

To comply with the wishes of Saltanat, as she wanted to have her name and that of her present family perpetuated, it was stipulated in the treaty that every ruling Nawab must be given the title of Nawab Saltanat Khan, and every ruling lady as Saltanat, irrespective of the real names.

Whether the identity of Saltanat, now the wife of Nawab Saltanat Khan, ex-wife of the late Major General Gibson, was divulged or not is to known.

It was a tempestuous night, streaked with intermittent lightning, and punctuated with thunderbolts. Right through the evening an incessant rain reigned supreme. As if this celestial wrath were not enough, a nearby dam on the Saltanat river of this feudal town, Saltanatpur, gave way, effluent running past the boulders near the Saltanat mahall.

Tears, the impotent exponents of anguish, rolled down the rosy cheeks of Saltanat, now in her late forties, as she haltingly eased up from the chair where she had been through the stormy night, adding the closing lines to her daughter, Anjuman, in England. She had gone through many a sleepless night before, thinking about a male heir to the state. It was postulated in the viceregal treaty in the 1880s, in consonance with the policy of British India, that the heirship must be passed on to the eldest son, or else the crown prerogative had to be invoked.

Anjuman, about twenty-year-old, a smashing beauty with disarming looks and tantalizing smile, was the only child of Saltanat and Nawab Saltanat Khan. She obtained a degree in social Sciences from the Oxford University, England. It's worth mentioning that the Oxford and Cambridge Universities used to be under obligation to receive a certain number of students from India regardless of achievement potential. Anjuman, however,

gained admission on her own meritorious record. This was a deed of academic excellence seldom heard of the scions of privileged families under British raj. Her extra curricular activities included a commendable list of distinctions in martial arts, swimming, horse-riding, running, cycling, high-jumps, and the like. All of these pursuits had been instrumental in the development of her proportionately vigorous physique.

Anjuman was greatly impressed by the governmental responsibility for people in need that first took form in Great Britain with the enactment of the Elizabeth poor law ("old poor law") in 1601. The British Social Insurance System prepared by Sir William Beveridge in 1942 was another aspect of the welfare state that profoundly influenced her thoughts about the betterment of Society. This report identified "want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness" as was "five" giants in the path of social progress. It stated that social insurance should be considered as an attack on want and that a comprehensive social security service should be achieved by the co-operation of government along with efforts of private individuals which would combat these "five giants."

While still in England, Anjuman acquainted herself with practical experience in three generally accepted methods in social works: casework, social group work and the community organization. She intended to employ these methods herself to help some community of a metropolitan slum area once back in India. Equipped with such lofty ideals, ambitiously determined to make a start, at least, she returned to India in 1945. Presumably she was waiting for the war to finish because, otherwise, it would have been very dangerous to travel all the way. Her arrival coincided with the time when the winds of freedom had just gathered momentum to shake the colonial yoke off.

Saltanat and two of the Saltanat guards were at hand for the reception, when Anjuman stepped down the gangplank from a luxury P & O liner at the wharf of the Bombay harbour. Before returning to Saltanatpur, she insisted and had her desire prevailed upon for touring the slums of Bombay, Calcutta, Old Delhi and Lahore. The railway systems being one of the most efficient in the world, they undertook their travel by trains.

Her heart bled at the sight of filth and wretched poverty. The undernourished children hardly more than skeletal ghosts hung around listlessly. Criminals were rampant with impunity, rape and thefts in broad daylight, and open gutters swarmed with fecal material breeding the germs of cyclic infectious diseases. Not least of what horrified her was the inhuman means of exiguous livelihood; the most derogatory of which involved the rickshaw contraption - man driving man physically, or mechanically by working the pedals of a cycle.

Anjuman was given to long hours of serious thinking as to why there is so much poverty and suffering in the world. She remembered seven reasons given by Mohandas Gandhi: politics without principles, wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity and worship without sacrifice.

Not that the colonial power showed indifference to the problem of slums, but slums being slums, even in advanced societies, posed a challenge that was hard to be tackled.

Finally, they all got back to Saltanatpur. A big party was thrown to welcome Anjuman back home, dancing, singing and eating continued throughout the night.

Nawab Saltanat Khan, fully aware of Saltanat's distress of not having a son, contemplated drafting a plea to the Viceroy, requesting Anjuman as the heir-apparent. Unfortunately, no way could be found to bring Anjuman around. She had determined, once and for all, to devote her entire life to improving the living conditions in the slums of Lahore. Yielding to the wishes of their only child, Saltanat and Nawab Saltanat Khan bade farewell to Anjuman one day with a tearful reluctance.

The rural uplift programmes for the betterment of villagers had already been underway throughout British India, with commensurate results, but practically nothing was done about the urban slums, the rundown neighbourhoods. Basically an agricultural country, the governmental and non-governmental organizations diverted their resources for the amelioration of

farmers. Depending upon the size of the village, first aid posts, rural health care centres, schools, police posts, animal husbandry units, agricultural advisers and the postal services were adequately provided.

Anjuman had a predilection for social services in the urban slums, so she chose an extensive area of dilapidated brick houses, mud houses, shanties and huts, known as Shaitan Chauki (Arabic *Shaitan* Satan; Urdu *Chauki* outpost). Thus she rented a ramshackle dwelling, soon acquiring the ownership with generous compensation.

Shaitan Chauki occupied a somewhat triangular space along the peripheral segment, where the Grand Trunk Road, (G.T. Road as it is still known these days) tangentially joined the Circular Road around Lahore. The permanent rickety dwellings of Shaitan Chauki graded into hastily built shacks or cabins and improvised shelters that disappeared overnight, only to reappear in hundreds after a few days at different sites in the fringes. Long, winding, unpaved streets harboured open drains, snaking right through the center, and most of these resembled typical Indian bazaars, teeming with the customers and owners alike. Spontaneous open air markets, dotted with kiosks and makeshift stalls, sprouted in empty lots. The peddlers and hawkers, vending a variety of merchandise, could be seen almost everywhere. Some of them hollered so regularly with clock-like punctuality, while making rounds, that one might predict nearly accurately the right time of the day.

It also boasted a overwhelmingly Muslim population, which accounted for the presence of two reasonably separated mosques, and one big *Jamiya masjid* where as a custom, the worshippers gathered to offer Friday afternoon's prayers. The Hindus, in accordance with the current traditions, were all concentrated in the center of Shaitan Chauki, having only one mandir for the devotees.

Pickpockets , petty thieves and shoplifters frequently ran through crowds, at times trailed by yelling chasers. Beggars, of all ages and forms were a common sight.

There were only two police posts, moderately manned, each with a judicial lock-up. The policemen, on patrol day and night, did their best to look after the property and hold the crime in check. However, ghettos like this, inhabited by citizens who couldn't live anywhere else because of social prejudices and handed down inheritance, provided safe havens for professional criminals and training grounds for future delinquents.

A fairly-equipped hospital existed in the suburb of Shaitan Chauki, but the patients steadfastly refused to seek help, instead resorting to herb doctors and quacks, or simply throwing themselves at the mercy of prayers, frequently unanswered, and the sick willingly falling prey to their doom. Even some educated people, in present day India and Pakistan vacillate to avail themselves of hospital consultations, since a vague conception persists that one visits or is taken to a hospital, only to die.

Another social evil to the detriment of Muslims (not only in Shaitan Chauki, but also countrywise) rested in the money-leading practices of Hindus, to the extent of usury and common usufructuary. Many a moderately wealthy Muslim family was reduced to pauperism, with ultimate living at the margin of the law to make both ends meet.

Atrocious crimes, like murder and broadday break-ins, were few and far between, seldom heard of, desisted due to the merciless justice of the British system.

## XVI

THE PLACE, IN SHAITAN CHAUKI, WHERE ANJUMAN TOOK UP her abode lay in the peripheral sector, about halfway between it and the hospital that was a mile away. It constituted the living sheds of the tonga drivers and their families, unwallled side extensions to park their tongas and tie the horses.

Although the electric power lighted the entire Shaitan Chauki, the system was somewhat primitive. The naked electric bulbs dangled glaringly from old wires, covered with dust and flies; some of the wires being so old as to betray their colour. At the same time the water system had not been laid out. The manual water pumps and typical Indian wells served the purpose.

One primary and one high school more than sufficed for the basic education. But, this referred only to the male children, since the co-education system of instructions had not been widely implemented as yet. Even if it gained general acceptance, the Muslims would shy away from sending their girls to study side by side with boys. To do away with this social barrier, the government established a primary through high school for Hindu, Sikhs and Muslim girls . Some of the students walked, cycled or

made use of the tongas to attend a nearby college just outside the walled city. The Punjab University campus was about two miles away.

No racial disturbances, or sectarian tensions took any outward manifestation. However, for the wise old people of Shaitan Chauki, a storm was in the making which only needed a catalytic agent to burst open and destroy the harmonious co-existence of the diverse racial entities. Every day, the banner headlines in newspapers published inflammatory news about the racial clashes in different parts of the subcontinent.

Meanwhile, politics in India were in a maelstrom and U.P (United Provinces, one of the provinces of India) was the centre of the Muslim League movement, frequently visited by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, where he always stayed at Kaiser-bagh with the Raja Sahib of Mahmoodabad. Once Mr. Jinnah remarked that in the final analysis, all our human aspirations are subject to the animal in us. In 1937 the elections for the Provincial Assemblies had taken place, on the basis of separate electorates, with occasional seats with a view to the joint electorates. The Raja Sahib Mahmoodabad flaunted the idea that if and when Pakistan did come into existence, it would be undoubtedly an Islamic State. But Mr. Jinnah replied: "Do you realize that there are over 70 sects and differences of opinion regarding the Islamic faith? On the contrary," added Mr. Jinnah: "We shall not be an Islamic state but a liberal, democratic Muslim state."

It was no more the question of throwing the British masters out, an independent India but its partition into predominantly Hindu provinces - India, and majority Muslim provinces, Pakistan.

Once in a while the imams, after prayers in the mosques of Shaitan Chauki, would inject incendiary phrases in religious discourse. The same course used to be adopted in the mandir and gurdewara, though to a lesser extent, lest the Muslims should be enraged, since it happened to be a majority Muslim area of the province of Punjab. If the partition materialized, which indeed it did, Shaitan Chauki for sure would form an integral part of



Pakistan. The Hindus and Sikhs would be left with no alternative but to leave.

The underworld had divided Shaitan Chauki into several jurisdictions, each bossed by a gangster, and jealously guarded by hoodlums under his command. Their main business involved prostitution, forced beggarden - employing the services of young homeless or abducted children from distant areas, protection to pickpockets and thieves, bullying for loan sharks (exclusively the Hindus), blackmailing for the shabby deeds of otherwise respectable citizens, traffic in hashish (also known as bang or bhang, Skt. *bhanga* hemp) and opium, grapevining for the police, sale of the shop-lifted and stolen merchandise. All this used to be carried out in a very humble way, not to arouse the police attention and the public at large.

Anjuman was shocked to hear so many tragic tales of once prosperous families fallen on hard times due to debt problems. The alluring interest rates offered by the underworld tempted the borrowers into a quagmire of financial throes. The interest had to be paid several times over than the actual loan. This landed many a family at the threshold of bankruptcy.

Extortion, as such, apparently didn't flourish. The law-enforcement authority dared not be confronted. Some of the gangsters themselves had to pay the hush up money to their rivals and underlings in order not to inform the police about their shady dealings. The violent means, like murder, that might receive wide publicity, had to be avoided at all costs, which was an unwritten law even among the sworn enemies to be strictly respected and enforced.

Since power particularly permanent power inevitably corrupts in the long run, the government authorities higher up would make frequent transfers of their staff in Shaitan Chauki, especially those in the police force. At the same time, a network of secret service kept a precautionary tab on the trouble-makers. Many of the ruffians had to report to the police station at least once a week.

The municipality's workmen, attached to its sanitary section, would every morning, except Sunday, discharge the duty of garbage collection, unblocking the gutters to permit a smooth flow, spraying kerosene mixed with some antiseptic almost everywhere, with special attention to the stagnant water, and putting the stray dogs to sleep and carrying these away.

The water puddles containing decaying matter are the favourite site for the breeding of the malaria vector, a mosquito of the genus *Anopheles*. During the rainy season the stagnant bodies of water abound, an excellent opportunity for the mosquitoes to breed with prolificacy. The abundance of these vectors spreads malaria to epidemic levels, resulting in the otherwise preventable death of thousands. The phenomenon is repeated annually. Before the onset of the monsoon season when the rains fall in torrents, the health workers used to supply the quinine tablets, free of charge, as a prophylactic against malaria. Ironically, owing to their very bitter taste, these tablets were often thrown away once the health workers had gone. Anjuman hit upon the idea of swallowing down these tablets herself in the presence of others. This strategy worked and a great many of her neighbours followed suit. The children were brought around with kindly persuasion. These efforts bore almost immediate fruits, and the use of quinine became a matter of routine. Smallpox vaccination was frequently carried out on a mass scale, sometimes rather forcibly.

Lady health visitors, intending to help prospective mothers, were usually shunned or politely turned away, for the dread of being taken to hospital. More often than not, the care and delivery had to be handled by the illetrate old veteran ladies, proudly pretentious of their profession. No wonder, the maternity deaths and infant mortality leaped ever so high.

The rainy season resulted in calamitous hardships for Shaitan Chauki. Its location in a low - lying area coupled with the lack of a definite drainage system, made the water currents, charged with refuse, flow down from the walled city, over the Circular road and down into the streets and houses of Shaitan Chauki. At times, the residents had to wade through water, knee deep, to perform their

daily chores. The porous and leaky roofs gave the impression that it was raining more indoors than outdoors.

The blackouts continued for days and the rats, flushed out from their holes, hung onto any solid object, dead or alive, a common occurrence in water. But, the children enjoyed the time of their life, spending hours in floods, paying no heed to the call of their parents to get inside.

The low caste, or untouchable (back in the 1920s, Mohandas Gandhi coined the term *Harijans*, or children of God for untouchables) had a colony to their own, not far from the hospital towards the Grand Trunk Road. For the Hindus it had been an article of faith to keep them ex-communicated, not even to enter the vicinity of their settlement, but the Muslims didn't give a hoot to that conceptual outlook. The Hindus harboured a belief (and still believe to some extent in certain parts of India) that a strange gas diffused out of the bodies of untouchables, not only obnoxious, but also unholy to cast evil spells on other castes. Through the centuries they have been considered an out-cast, a sort of sore on Hinduism that must be extirpated. In modern times, a new name has been given to them, a collective denomination, the *scheduled caste*. They have been drastically oppressed, given to untold misery and sufferings, left to bare subsistence, only employed for the menial jobs, condemned to withstand cruelties in silence, with no protection from any quarter.

The Press Trust of India, February 24, 1988, reported that the Indian authorities have suspended fourteen policemen for allegedly raping twenty-five women and looting a small village, Padaria, in the eastern state of Bihar. The victims and the village belonged to the "untouchable" caste. The Bihar Chief Minister Bhagwat Jha Azad said that the government would take the "sternest action" against those found guilty, and a compensation of US\$ 75 would be made to each of the victims' families.

The Christians were even more liberals than the Muslims towards untouchables. As a matter of fact a British missionary, Mr. Skinner, paid regular visits to their colony near Shaitan Chauki, preaching the cause of Christianity and helping them to

help themselves to improve their social conditions. As a result, nearly all of them converted to Christianity. A lonely man's humane treatment opened new avenues for them. Father Skinner used to eat with them, share their sorrows and joys, encourage them to seek help from authorities, without any fear, if the situation demanded and, above all, contributed to the elimination of their identity crisis.

A sort of school had been established for the untouchables to impart education to the children and adults. Consequently, a good number of them got into the payroll of the nearby hospital working in the capacity of male and female nurses, kitchen staff, janitors, clerks and even compounders.

This was another reason that the Hindus of Shaitan Chauki resisted the services of the hospital, for the dread of coming in contact with, or even in the shadow of the untouchables, and thus be profaned.

This presents a glimpse of the community, where Anjuman, a dazzling beauty, of noble and aristocratic antecedents, with all imaginable luxuries and wealth, educated in England, of highly sophisticated demeanour, a portrait of grace and inherited benevolence, determined to live and introduce some social reforms in her own way

Any thought of physical assault or rough handling was foreign to her nature, as she happened to be well groomed in the offensive and defensive skills. Moreover, she had convinced herself to face whatever consequences without grumble and regret. After all, it was her own sweet will and decision to embark upon this noble mission.

In order to analyze the details of the pervading situation and to get familiarized with the topography of Shaitan Chauki, Anjuman subjected herself to a vigorous schedule of long and leisurely perambulations. She made a point of visiting the hospital almost every evening, befriending the staff and patients. The M.O (Medical Officer) Dr. Cornelius, born in Poona of British parents, in charge of the hospital, was particularly moved by the display of

her supremely moral qualities, in making no secret of his admiration for her devotion to the penurious and the neglected.

Dr. Cornelius was forty-three years old, and unmarried. He occupied a spacious bungalow officially allotted inside the hospital compound, on the right hand side immediately next to the entrance. Two of his assistants and lesser staff also enjoyed the rent free official accommodations, according to their status, along the left hand side, at some distance from the way leading to the hospital building in itself.

Whereas malaria had been held back due to the administration of the routine quinine tablets, typhoid and cholera outbreaks occasionally reached epidemic proportions, taking with them a heavy toll. The bereaved Muslims buried their dead in a cemetery about a mile southward from the hospital. The Hindus burned their corpses on wooden pyres, about two miles to the east from the hospital, near a phenomenally old, sacred banyan tree. The ashes later to be dispersed over the mountains like that of Indira Gandhi's over the Himalayas, or stored in receptacles to be disposed into the rivers or sea.

The Hindu merchants, *banians* (from the use of the ground under a banyan tree as a market place) were looked down upon in India, especially among Muslims. Money-lenders by profession, fabulously rich in real estate, farm land, gold, jewelry and hard cash, they were unnaturally polite and submissive. They themselves used to be very niggardly and penny-pinchers, leading unpertentious life and living in ordinary humble houses. The inhabitants of Shaitan Chauki with rarer exceptions, had some links with the Hindu banians in some way or another; by having borrowed money, paying rent, selling their products, or simply by being on their payroll for protection. Most of the property of banians came through confiscation by court orders, as the real owners failed to pay back the debt or backlog of the accumulated interests. In the later years the government of British India decreed against the appropriation of farm lands which, however, might well be mortgaged.

It didn't take long for Anjuman to become a well-known figure in Shaitan Chauki. She went along helpfully guiding the aged and disabled through the streets, pleading the cases of innocent with the police even putting up bails for those who couldn't afford. Her ever present disarming smile and generosity with money for the destitutes raised her popularity to new heights. The children eagerly awaited her arrival, because she always had some sympathetic words for them, some motherly tips, affectionate counsel, providing occasional clothings, and above all peanuts and sweets.

Gradually, she progressed to the extent of being welcome in their homes, listening to their woes, and trying to solve their problems on the spot, if she could: the domestic tensions related to inter or intra-family bickerings, trivial altercations, family wrangles like wife and in-laws' disconcordance, disobedient son or daughter, unduly demanding mother, unemployment, marital disharmony, mounting debts, disease, monetary limitations, coupled with despicably inveterate dowry system, and lack of education in general.

The evil of the dowry tradition, at times, has resulted in hideous tragedies. The unfortunate parents of unfortunate girls, failing to come up with an adequate dowry, settled by the bridegroom's parents, has ruined several untimely and innocent lives. This practice is carried to its extreme among some of the Hindu families.

Anjuman tried to tackle this problematic issue of dowry from various standpoints. How much is an average dowry and what determines the amount? This was a pivotal question. She contacted families from all walks of life, but no standardized measures could be taken. It always ended up in disappointing embitterment. Many a time she wondered as to why can't it be waived or reduced to nominal or minimum amount. Come what may, dowry has to stay. It must be mentioned here that in certain Islamic school of thoughts dowry is the other way, that is, the man pays towards the bride.

In 1988, a Hindu family of Jaipur (a town of Cuttack district, Orissa, India, on the right bank of the Baitarani river) suffered ghastly consequences. The father, an insurance agent had six daughters: the three elder ones were university educated and of marriageable age. The poor man needed a fortune to provide for their dowry so that they could get married. This hopeless situation created an immense strain within the family. One day, the parents, along with their three young daughters, went out visiting. Upon their return they were horrified to see the dead bodies of the elder daughters hanging by the ceiling fans. The dead girls had left a note that stated the eldest sister hanged herself so that the next one along the line might get married, and this one did the same thing for the sake of the third sister who then took a similar decision. They all sacrificed their lives, so that the burden of their dowry might well be used for the marriage of the three younger sisters at some future date.

Sometimes, only a part of the agreed dowry is given, and the marriage does take place, with the promise that the rest would be paid later on. In this case, either the bride is forced to stay with her parents, or the bridegroom takes her to his home, where she faces harsh punishments, both physical and moral, at the hands of the in-laws, till the pending settlement is resolved.

No overnight solution could be possible. There was no panacea in sight to do away with a host of complexities that faced Shaitan Chauki. In any case, Anjuman's acceptance in the society, a person to be reckoned with, to be resorted to in the case of problems, was an undeniably admirable achievement. Her top priority rested in the friendly persuasion of bringing inhabitants around to get rid off the dread of hospital services, free of charge, to combat myriad of diseases that were rife in the community. She hit upon the idea of giving talks to small gatherings, in the layman's language, in different sectors of Shaitan Chauki, about the benefits of the governmental medical aid, advantages of the outdoor patients' facility of the hospital, serious cases to be admitted, perhaps to be operated upon. The lady health visitors weren't to be looked with suspicion. They were to be trusted and informed about the infirmities. Their guidance would serve a specially useful purpose to feminine questions. In addition, she

made a point of having a qualified nurse at her side, with the permission of Dr. Cornelius from the hospital, in future discourses, who would prick Anjuman's skin with the needle of a syringe, so that the injections shouldn't be feared.

The strategy worked. The response was slow but assuredly coming forth. The attendance at the window of outdoor patients at the hospital increased manifold. Several cases of appendicitis were successfully operated upon. Many children with acute dehydration, rehydrated. They would have been long dead under normal circumstances.

Anjuman prevailed upon Dr. Cornelius to open an all time dispensary right in the center of Shaitan Chauki, the stronghold of Hindus. Free Aspirin tablets for the common cold and fevers and Enterovioform for digestive disorders were handed out to every family.



## **XVII**

A RELATIVELY WEALTHY HINDU FAMILY'S SON, RAJINDER Kumar, one of the few lucky ones having been brought up in Shaitan Chauki, obtaining early schooling herein, went all the way to the university and was awarded the degree of M.A., in economics. He had been fixed up as a headclerk in the revenue department at Multan. He returned to Shaitan Chauki to spend a holiday with his parents and suddenly was taken ill, with excruciating pain in the abdomen. He was carried to the hospital on a cot supported by four men. Doctor Cornelius diagnosed a bad case of gall bladder stone, and recommended an immediate surgery.

As usual in Shaitan Chauki when something unusual happened, Anjuman was alerted and she came rushing to the hospital to find his parents crying. Since Rajinder Kumar happened to be the only son, the very thought of operation unnerved his parents. After some consolation from Anjuman, they agreed and he came through the operation successfully.

A fair-skinned untouchable nurse, now converted to Christianity, named Sarita, took care of Rajinder Kumar in the

post-operation convalescence. Somewhere along the line, as a result of frequent togetherness, Kumar developed a soft corner for her. Sarita also reciprocated,, knowing fully well that their romance would never flourish, falling apart in the face of inexorable hindrance of caste discrimination. Parental agreement was an indispensable factor. She was nourishing a hope that apparently led to nowhere.

Everyday, the parents of Kumar would come to see him. They were particularly anxious that the untouchable staff shouldn't attend upon him. Doctor Cornelius was fully aware of this short-sightedness. He would simply advise Sarita not to make appearance when they happened to be around.

In spite of the odious social obstacles, Kumar and Sarita deeply fell in love, even vowing to get married together or not at all.

As far Sarita, Father Skinner had infused a new light in her parents in particular and in the residents of the untouchables' colony at large. His preachings, teachings, and the words of wisdom changed their concept towards humanity altogether. Admittedly, they were poor in worldly possessions but fabulously rich in moral and understanding. Father Skinner's sermon: "All are equal under the sun. We are born in the image of God, our Lord, who loves us all, irrespective of caste, colour and creed. No religion teaches hatred, discrimination, arrogance, oppression. All religions lead to God, only the approach differs. To be born poor is no crime, as we cannot choose our parents, but to remain poor is. Hard work; love for each other, and faith in Him are weapons mightier than sword, and remember forgiveness is divine. Don't hurt or kill a wicked person, rather kill the wickedness in him, with affection, advice and forbearance," repeatedly echoed not only in their ears, but also in ears of other residents of the colony. On the contrary, Kumar's parents, the orthodox Hindus, enslaved by superstitions, staunch followers of fanatically institutionalized taboos, miserably handicapped for the lack of education, were not that easy to relent.

Kumar left for Multan to join his duty, having spent another ten days in hospital, and a week with his parents in Shaitan Chauki. He regularly wrote love letters to Sarita, emphatic as ever to take her for his bride, or never get married. Sarita carried the same torch, a fatal step further, to kill herself by jumping in front of a railway train, if it came to the worst. Disappointment in love, throughout the Indian subcontinent, has led quite a few girls to take such extreme decisions as jumping in deep well, getting crushed by railway engines, drowning in rivers, poisoning themselves, or simply hanging to death. Paradoxically, marriages that had not had the benediction of the parents were not recognized as such in those days, to a lesser extent now, even among educated families.

After a year or so, Kumar's parents asked Anjuman to write a letter to him (themselves being illiterate) about marriage as they had selected a girl for him, from a neighbouring town, and the girl's parents had given their word. Anjuman had suggested to have the opinion of Kumar whether he agreed to it. "No need. He is our own son and has to obey us. After all it has been going like this for ages. He owes his life to us. We have brought him up, educated him. All that belongs to him is ours. Who is he to decide anything against our wishes?" was the reply.

Considering the seriousness of the matter, Kumar took a casual leave. Just in order not to dishearten Sarita, who might take any impulsive step, he kept her in dark, but he didn't let her know about his unplanned arrival.

It was the height of the monsoon season when he arrived at Shaitan Chauki. As his father happened to be a henpecked husband, all sorts of decisions, usually without his consent, were irrevocably taken by Kumar's mother. She was a dominating old lady, bigot to the extreme and the hollering sort. Her domineering behaviour spilled over to the neighbours as well and she was unyieldingly indifferent to reasons.

Kumar poured his heart out to his father, who hesitatingly succumbed to the wishes of his son. However, the stubborn mother had to be mellowed, if Kumar wanted his way.

Emboldened by his father's overt support, he found the opportunity to express his desire before his mother. She flared up like a wounded tiger, given to the outrageous tantrum, uttering obscenities, throwing objects left and right, moving aimlessly around and in that enraged spate tipped over a threshold, hitting her head against the wall. She fell unconscious, and in a heavy downpour was carried on a cot to the hospital.

Fully aware of the caste system, blood of several persons was tested, but there was no matching group. Anjuman was hastily sent for. Her own blood proved negative as well, although she being a Muslim there might have been some hesitation in accepting her blood anyway. It was question of saving a life hanging by a thread. Doctor Cornelius consulted Kumar if he could try the blood of Sarita. He consented. What a surprise, Sarita's blood, and untouchable, matched perfectly. Two blood transfusions were carried out before the old lay regained consciousness in the presence of Dr. Cornelius, a male assistant, Sarita, Kumar and his father, and Anjuman.

Anjuman took heart to tell the old woman as to how Sarita's blood saved her life, snatching her back from the clutches of death. It was thought advisable that the old lady should be left alone for sometime to reflect on the situation after an initial shock. They all walked out of the room without any further conversation. After a long while they returned. With tears in her eyes, the old lady in hardly audible whisper asked for Sarita to be near her bed, and said: "I always thought, as we have been told through the generations that the untouchables' blood is different from that of other human beings. How ignorant I have been. You have saved my life. Your blood is mixed with my blood. You are now my blood relation. I accept you as my daughter-in-law. Please forgive me."

Anjuman's insistence on the evils of dowry convinced Kumar's parents to shatter the tradition of this social scourge, and welcome Sarita with what her parents might easily afford. After sometime, this love was crowned with marital bondage and the reception was held at Dr. Cornelius's bungalow.

Doctor Cornelius was not only medical man, but also a thinker, having written quite a few thought-provoking articles. Someone of the gathering-requested him to give a leisurely talk after the reception, and he obliged: "Besides circumstantial limitations, laziness leads to unemployment and unemployment to poverty. To live honourably and usefully, laziness has to be overcome. Lack of application, irrespective of the haves and have-nots, conduces to habitual idleness, eventually with grave consequences, expressed in serious diseases, at times terminal. The Creator has engineered the human body to work like a machine, and work it must, or else it would rust and become oxidized like an unused motor. To eat, sleep and make love is not what is only expected of man, rather to do something constructive, be productive, naturally with material gains. Dogs, donkeys and other animals also live, but no creativity, no originality of thought and execution. Sometimes Lady Luck fails to smile, something beyond our reach, and in certain cases the opportunities are hard to come by. The most important factor in a society is a continuous struggle to create opportunities."

Exactly, the openings of the opportunities was what called Anjuman's attention, and she began to give a serious thought to it. The sight of naked children, in tatters or partly clad, hurt her most. Why not get hold of a couple of sewing machines? After all, there was no scarcity of unemployed women who should be willing to make use of these machines.

Resourceful and rich as she was, Anjuman could beg, borrow, or buy scores of sewing machines. The problem was the lack of space. She explained the project to her neighbouring tonga-drivers. She dared not impose her will upon them, eject or buy them out to acquire some of their empty lots that served for their tongas and horses. These tonga-drivers are a class to themselves. They are accustomed to the needs and deeds of the passengers from all walks of life, outwardly tough, almost always illiterate, indifferently rude at the first sight, but are very resilient, emotional, hungry for affection, and are usually ready to lay down their lives for kind words. The tough and rough customers shout at them for their services at the cost of mostly insignificant fares.

They are always ready to serve the callers, who are frequently niggardly, rarely generous and liberal with tips.

For a week or so, no offer came through to sell or rent a space. One cold, wet and windy night, Rehana the wife of Sikander, a next door tonga-driver neighbour, developed birth pains. Anjuman heard her cries, hurried to their home, and helped with the delivery. For Sikander this was an act of neighbourly courtesy, to which he became morally indebted, that needed to be repaid somehow. When Anjuman was about to leave, Sikander stammered: "Madam, if I could be of any help, day or night, please count on me." That was it. The ice was broken. Anjuman asked him whether he could spare his lot for money or rent as she wanted to construct and annexe to install some sewing machines that would help provide jobs.

"Yes, madam. It will be my humble present to you. It is all yours, no compensation. I have been more than compensated".

"Where would you park your tonga and horse?"

"My brother, next door, has ample space that will serve for mine and his tonga as well."

A spacious hall was constructed, equipped with twenty rustic wooden tables and stools. Anjuman bought six manual sewing machines to begin with from the main shopping centre Anarkali of Lahore. Sikander did the job of delivering these machines in his tonga.

Most of the tonga-drivers are out on the street during daytime while their female folk stay home. Anjuman started to take her case to this neighbourhood first. Rehana was the first woman who expressed her willingness to work with Anjuman, but only in the forenoons. Soon after, five more ladies became convinced. This afforded a good opportunity to supplement their household income while remaining near their own homes. Unfortunately, none of them knew an A B C of cutting, threading, sewing or handling the machines; and Anjuman was no better either. Occasional families in the heart of Shaitan Chauki, especially in

the Hindu locality, had their own sewing machines, not for selling clothes to others. However, three men and two women, in different neighbourhoods sewed for sale, charging exorbitant price.

One day, Anjuman had a talk with Father Skinner about helping her find someone who could be paid for teaching basic tailoring to her employees and explained what she intended to do for Shaitan Chauki. Father Skinner appreciated Anjuman's efforts, advising cheerfully: "There is a middle-aged lady, named Helen, an untouchable, a long time convert to Christianity, well versed in this profession. As a matter of fact this is her only source of income, let me have a word with her.

For many years Father Skinner had a habit of cycling to the colony of the untouchables twice a week, that is, Thursday and Sunday, spending long hours, listening to their grievances, helping find solution to their problems, sharing their joys and sorrows, baptizing once in a while, and offering the evening mass. It was precisely Sunday when Anjuman spoke to Father Skinner, which meant no answer could be expected till the coming Thursday.

In the meantime, with the unfaltering help of Sikander in providing the means of transport, Anjuman bought several rolls of long cloth of variegated texture, colour, and patterns, scissors, chinks, meter tapes, and other accessories. As it would take about three weeks before an electric meter could be officially sanctioned, She ran a cable from her own house upto the shed to arrange for the power supply.

Father Skinner himself in the company of Helen, came to see Anjuman. She felt sorry that they had taken the trouble to come over. "Don't be sorry, my child," responded Father Skinner "I am delighted to join your struggle in my own humble way. This is Helen, ready to share your burden, please settle the terms with her, and may Lord bless you all."

Helen was already running her own business, reasonably profitable, a full time dedication. Her enthusiasm to participate in

the project demanded a sacrifice of her own time. This might well be recompensated by pecuniary returns. On the contrary, Father Skinner's persistently moralizing guidance: "Service of humanity is service of God," stood in her way, obligingly refraining from the acceptance of material reciprocity.

"Anjuman, I should be more than happy to instruct, but I can afford only one whole day and it has to be every Tuesday. Please be understanding, don't ask me to be on your payroll. Perhaps, Lord has willed that way. Someone, after all, is carrying the banner to alleviate the sufferings of Shaitan Chauki," Helen remarked with motherly air.

Within a year, the business flourished. Two more constructions were added, eighteen more machines bought, a manager, a storekeeper, a cashier, a bookkeeper and sales persons employed. To all intents and purposes, it was no less than a medium-sized factory. Three shifts, six hours each, had been organized. The majority of the tonga-drivers had their families, in one way or other, attached to the factory.

As a rule, the profits were restricted to a minimum, and the novel idea of employees participation in the ownership produced lucrative results. The needs of Shaitan Chauki were more than met with. The outside merchants lined up for orders.

A nursery for the employees infants and toddlers was devised with a permanent caretaker. This was an intelligent move as the main force of the sewing workers consisted of women, so that they didn't have to worry about leaving their children alone at home.

The P.W.D (Public Works Department) tried for a long time to lay the underground drainage system, but the owners wouldn't cede their property, even with the promises of reasonable compensation. Long accustomed to their ancestral lands, they traditionally stuck to these without any consideration of ensuing hygienic benefits. One day, Anjuman announced her intention to give an important talk. In the same evening a huge crowd gathered near the factory. She explained to them in a way they



could understand about the suicidal effects of unhygienic conditions and as to how the infectious diseases were communicated. The centuries of myth, a natural outcome of ignorance, that diseases are God's wrath, ordained by Him to punish us for our bad deeds, was shattered once and for all in Shaitan Chauki. She received a thundering applause. The audience agreed to surrender their pieces of property that the P.W.D had been insisting upon for several years. And, she assured them that she would look personally into it so that they should be compensated adequately. She drafted a petition to the provincial governor with the thumb impressions of the owners declaring their willingness to yield the required lands up in order to make way for the P.W.D plans. Shortly, thereafter, the preliminary work got underway.

## XVIII

DOCTOR CORNELIUS, BESIDES BEING A COMPETENT surgeon, was a man of letters; a literary figure, intrigued by the mysteries of the Indian culture, with a proclivity towards Islam, having published several papers about the indigenous literature. His aversion to Hinduism stemmed from various factors. For example, the doctrine of polytheism, the basic concept of Hinduism failed to fit into his ideological standards. Polytheism, practiced as such, involves the worship of various images or idols that can be removed and taken away anywhere from their actual sanctuary in the mandirs. As a matter of fact, the Hindus have set aside a special corner in their homes, where they pray and chant *mantara* in accordance with the *puja*. It's argued that no matter what the image or *moorti* is, it represents one of the several expressions of the same god. On the contrary, the revealed religions like Christianity and Islam, explicitly emphasize that God is not an embodiment, a tactile configuration, to be molded into a preferred shape by man and physically carried away with him to his place of choice.

The principle of reincarnation was no less befuddling for Doctor Cornelians. If they believe, as Hinduism dictates, that after

death their spirits take other animated personification right here in this world, then how come the world population keeps on increasing astronomically. Some species become extinct and others proliferate. A justification is offered by the fact that in this boundless universe there are unlimited planets and celestial systems. The departed spirits from the planet Earth reincarnate in other universal systems and vice versa.

It wasn't that Dr. Cornelius was given to prejudice against Hindus, but the harder he tried the more he became frustrated to seek satisfactory answers to many others of the Hindu dogmatic beliefs. And, look at this another strange aspect of the Hinduism. In ancient times, rarely these days as well, the widows of the Rajputs used to become *sati* by burning themselves to death at the *Chitah* (aflame pyre) of their dead husbands. This act of immolation was regarded as a devotion to their husbands; moreover, after her husband's demise, a widow didn't like to be left at the mercy of others, and pitied upon and to protect her chastity resorted to that extreme.

Some historians have criticised that Islam spread through the might of sword, with subsequent ruthless carnage. Perhaps so, but it's equally true of the other religions. Charlemagne "Charles the Great, " 742 or 743-814, during three decades waged eighteen campaigns against the fierce Saxons - the last great pagan German nation, and in 804 they were finally Christianized at the point of the sword. Pope Urban II, in 1095, exhorted Christians throughout Europe to come to the aid of Byzantine Emperor who is threatened by the advancing Turks and to free holy Jerusalem from the "legions of Antichrist" - the Muslims, thus beginning the first crusade.

Doctor Cornelius used to hold social gathering at his bungalow Sunday afternoons over a leisurely tea about spontaneous topics, participated by the prominent cultural figures of Lahore representing different racial groups. A number of fresh graduates from Punjab University also took part. When Anjuman arrived at Shaitan Chauki, she had anxiously looked forward to be at Dr. Cornelius's meetings, and was usually the first person to enter the front lawn of his bungalow. In the summertime these

meetings took place under the shade of trees, and in the winter, by the side of the bungalow, in the open air, under the warmth of the sun.

Once a young biologist put forth the subject of "The Origin of Life." A bearded Muslim, a religious old man delivered a lengthy harangue that he would not be sure as to how the other life came into being, but one thing was certain that God created Adam first, the very first prophet, and Eve was born out of his ribs undoubtedly an integral part of faith among the Muslims.

Another fellow, a prominent principal of a local college, expressed the theory of the "Spontaneous Generation, "that is, without parents, of small living matter from Aristotle's four elements, earth, water, air, and fire, and talked about Lucretius, who saw numerous animals emerging from the earth "engendered by the rains and the heat of the sun."

The theory of the "Cosmic Panspermia" was elaborated by a Hindu scholar who suggested that the earth was seeded by the transportation of germs of lunar origin, which had been ejected by volcanoes. Cosmic germs from other planetary systems were expelled by the pressure of the stellar - radiation and reached the Earth on interstellar cosmic dust. The germs could also be carried by meteorites; the so-called "carbonaceous meteorites" were of special interest. Also, when the two worlds met each other at a velocity of 30km/sec, the impact had been so violent that an innumerable quantity of fragments was hurled into space. These fragments must have brought germs onto the planets on which they landed.

A physicist, Doctor Kelvin raised some objections to this theory. The volcanic exhalation could only be sterile. With the collision at such velocities, it was clear that the transformation of the kinetic energy into radiation led at very high temperatures, to a complete volatilization, with the formation of gas and cosmic smoke, no germs could survive.

A professor, Dr. Majid, teaching evolution, talked about the book of A.I. Oparin, a Russian biochemist, entitled "The origin of

Life," published in 1936. The primitive atmosphere didn't contain oxygen, nitrogen or carbon dioxide, but only hydrocarbon, ammonia and water vapour. During the period of incandescence, that is, "global glow," these hydrocarbons reacted with water and ammonia and formed tertiary and quaternary compounds. In this way, a reaction converted acetylene into acetaldehyde, which was capable of combining ammonia at 300C in the presence of iron oxide. Primitive organic matter would thus have consisted of alcohols, aldehydes, acids, reacting in an aqueous environment, would have given rise to increasingly complex macromolecules in the course of cooling.

A retired chemist Dr. Nasar, objected vehemently. None of these reactions leads to the liberation of oxygen, that is the source of energy to continue living. Furthermore, none gives rise to disymmetric molecules that are characteristic of living matter. Primitive carbon was not in the form of hydrocarbon, but of carbon dioxide. The atmosphere of terrestrial planets, such as Venus and Mars, do not contain oxygen and give no evidence of hydrocarbons but plenty of carbon dioxide. If the living organism was thus formed as suggested by Oparin, how does the organism continue to live? Having arisen in an oceanic broth of organic molecules, it's only recourse is to live upon itself. There is only one way of doing that in the absence of oxygen, It's called fermentation: the process by which organisms derive energy by breaking organic molecules and rearranging their parts. The most familiar example of such a process is the fermentation of sugar by yeast, which yields alcohol as one of the products. Animal cells also ferment sugar, not to alcohol, but to lactic acid.

The discussion was going to drag along endlessly, when Anjuman interjected: "We are long accustomed to believe in only those events that have been brought about by us, if not so then these must be the works of supernature. Most of the cultures we know incorporate mythical accounts of hyperphysical creation of life. The Christian tenet or doctrinal system provides such a basis in the opening chapters of *Genesis*. There we are told that beginning on the third day of the Creation, God brought forth living creatures - first plants, then fishes and birds, then land animals and finally man."

Doctor Cornelius brought the discussion to an end with the remarks: "We seem to have three answers. One the life has been created supernaturally, the other that it arises continually from the nonliving. The first explanation lies outside science, the second has been shown to be untenable. The third is spontaneous generation. One of the least probable is to have had such a body as the earth. Yet though this probability is remote the universe is so large that it is conservatively estimated that at least 100,000 like the earth exist in our galaxy alone, and there are thousands of other galaxies. We are not alone in this universe. Life has come many times, in many places - places sealed off from us by impenetrable distances, probably never to be crossed with a signal. As human beings we can attempt to understand it, and even somewhat to control and guide its local manifestations. On this planet that is our home, we have even reason to wish it well. Yet should we fail, all is not lost. Our kind will try again somewhere."

Whereas the scholarly unions used to be a routine at Doctor Cornelius' bungalow, occasional lectures were also delivered by celebrities at other places as well.

Once Anjuman persuaded Allama Inayat Ullah Khan Al-Mashriqi to give a lecture in a prestigious hall. He was a versatile genius, a scientist-Philosopher, profoundly concerned with the purpose of man's creation, an organizer of immense capacity, a reformer of deep human motivation. He was both humble and haughty, a stiff-necked intellectual and a commoner in Khaki, a fine horseman and an untiring walker, a great idealist and a prolific writer, while at the same time being extremely practical. His multiple vision perplexed many and the people of the Indian subcontinent reacted to his advent in different ways.

A few dubbed him insane, not an uncommon appellation for a genius; some were scared of the immensity of his ideas, terming those impracticable and visionary. Many thought he was born ahead of time, and in a people unable to rise to the heights he had visualized. The really longing, however, thronged around him.

Allama Al-Mashriqi was outmanoeuvred in politics by his adversaries - the Indian National Congress the Muslim League and the British statecraft. But whatever he forecast during the 1940s and later after the establishment of the sovereign states of India and Pakistan has come true. For example, an unnatural two-winged West and East Pakistan, separated by thousands of miles of the hostile India territory, fell apart. East Pakistan gained a new statehood, December 16, 1971, exactly as Allama Al-Mashriqi had anticipated. He openly opposed Mohammad Ali Jinnah to become the very first Governor General of Pakistan upon its inception, and urged in vain in favour of Lord Mountbaten - the first Governor General of independent India, to assume the charge of both of these positions simultaneously. Had this been achieved, the burning question of Kashmir, the bone of contention between India and Pakistan, would have been the responsibility of the only one Governor General, that is, Lord Mountbaten, of both India and Pakistan.

Allama Al-Mashriqi was different from Carl Marx, who based his philosophy on Hegel's dialectical materialism and conceived of a classless society through class struggle, which later turned out to be class hatred. He was also different from Lenin, who threw to the winds much of what Marx propounded and brought about the revolution by dint of his unbending will power and ceaseless manoeuvring. Whereas both of these luminaries stood for the dictatorship and banishment of Religion, Al-Mashriqi advocated the rule of the Knower of Nature for enforcing equalities and unity of mankind, and its evolution to higher forms of existence to capture the entire universe.

He was at variance with the Western thinkers of the past centuries, whose emotional upsurges were mainly concerned with national upheavals. He completely rejected Aristotle and the Greek philosophy, as the most baneful influence on mankind. He attacked the Western materialists and the Eastern spiritualists alike.

He entered the University of Cambridge in 1907 and, a year later, topped the entire university in the preliminary test in mathematics; he was only 18 then. He did his M.A in mathematics

at the age of 19, securing the first position and topping all of the previous records. During his five years stay at Cambridge, he did four triposes, attained first class in all, created new records at the University. His main subjects were mathematics, physics, mechanical engineering and oriental languages (Arabic and Persian). At Cambridge, he was awarded the title of Wrangler, and declared Bachelor Scholar and Foundation Scholar.

He founded the Khaksar movement, the main purpose of which was the service of people. In principle it was at loggerheads with the elections in British India, since these were only nominal, selecting stooges and privileged servants to the British. The movement was badly crushed, and he was frequently jailed, without any charges to substantiate.

The speech which was requested by Anjuman, was about the "Unity of the Divine Message." Religion is the greatest mystery of all that is believed and practiced in the world. What is this worship? Why this bowing? Why are there dogmatic beliefs, and conventional rituals, and Brahman's blots, and idol worshipper's statutes, Muslim's sacrifices, and Hindu's offerings? What is the Christian son of God? Garlands of beads, rites of *haj*, pilgrimages, prayers, alms, offerings, presents, donations, long beards, conformational faces, amulets, baptism, dancers, baths, etc. what are these all about?

All these religious practices are such mysteries of tradition and custom that people do not consider it necessary to explore the significance. And, yet everybody performs them with an extreme sense of devotion and duty. Nobody questions whether they are right or wrong, proper or improper. The ignorant and the learned, the unintelligent and the wise, all participate in their unknowable exercise, and feel that abiding by them, as far as possible is a vital purpose of life. In the major part of his struggle and action, religion alone is that all-pervading and quiet catalyst, whose amazing influence is visible almost on every individual. And, Religion too is that undebatable, unarguable and unceasing heritage of man, everybody considers his lawful right to keep in unquestionable custody.



It is astonishing that in spite of the general learning towards Religion, it has not been possible, ever since man's creation, to authenticate which Faith is true, which is strictly in accord with the will of the creator, what actually religion is, and what its real object is; what the criterion of a faith being true is.

It has not been so far possible to find an irrefutable and unanimous argument about the being of God himself and His real place.

**XIX**

THERE IS NOW NOT A SINGLE FOLLOWER OF ARISTOTLE'S false "religion" that the earth is stationary; all untrue theories of olden times have been gradually given up. But what is TRUTH? Using Relativity, there is no way we can demonstrate that it is the Earth that moves. Even the 19th century idea of centrifugal force breaks down. However, the difference between the Hindu and the Buddhist, the Zoroastrian and the Christian remains as ever.

A deadly silence permeated the hall, except the voice of the learned scholar Allama Al Mashriqi. Abruptly an explosion shook the hall, the audience panicked chaotically trampling shrieked their way out. Some burly young men guided the speaker, Anjuman, and the other dignitaries safely out.

Police vans converged upon the scene. A careful investigation afterwards revealed that a time bomb had been planted under the seat of Al-Mashriqi in the front row, to go off after he would have finished the speech. Fortunately, the bomb detonated before time, it was by no means an expert job. The device was not that sophisticated, a big bang, but no casualties, half a dozen people suffered the slight injuries.

## SALTANAT

Simultaneously, other incendiary appliances exploded in other areas of Lahore. It couldn't be regarded as a racial act of violence since the gathering at Al-Mashriqi's address included a mixed assemblage of varied religious groups. However, this particular incident as the police investigation showed, was only aimed at killing Al-Mashriqi.

Saltanat, back in Saltanatpur, heard about these explosions at Lahore, and similar disturbances almost throughout India, and rushed to Shaitan Chauki to advise Anjuman to leave for the protection of Saltanatpur. After all, the motherly feelings impelled her to look after the security of her only child, and the only daughter for that matter. She frustratingly failed to induce Anjuman to accompany her back home.

Nawab Saltanat Khan, fairly well-linked with the higher governmental circles, was convinced about the oncoming racial bloodbath, which inevitably lurked around the corner. Major Brooks, the new emissary from the Viceroy, at Saltanatpur, had offered him, Saltanat, and Anjuman, an honourable exile in England. However, the Nawab, in consultation with Saltanat, stubbornly turned down the generous move as he wanted to be with his people come what may.

Saltanat returned to Saltanatpur, leaving two of her trusted aides with Anjuman, just in case their services might be called upon. They belonged to the elite Saltanat guard, ready to lay down their lives before any harm could come Anjuman's way.

The Hindus were genuinely scared, and some of them had already planned to leave for Amritsar, or other nearby towns, sure to become part of India if and when the partition of the Indian subcontinent materialized. A limited number of them had indeed left or sent their children and women beyond the future borders of what would be Pakistan and India.

Anjuman and her bodyguards frequently visited the Hindu stronghold in the centre of Shaitan Chauki, giving them assurances to look after them in time of trouble. If, at any given

time, they had no choice but to leave, then they would be safely conducted across the border.

One night, Anjuman decided to sleep for a week or so in the house of a Hindu family, as a gesture of good will, to show that she really was one of them despite her Muslim heritage. They gave her a room at the ground level.

On her very first night, Anjuman dreamed that a pretty young teenage girl, with paezebs, dressed in brand new clothes, appeared from one of the corners of the room, only to disappear in the other corner across the floor. Anjuman ignored the dream. After all, dreams are only dreams, seldom representing reality. The following night it happened again. One night, she actually felt a tactile sensation that the same girl with the tinkling sounds of her paezebs reappeared from the same corner, begging Anjuman to unearth her remains from that corner and bury these in a graveyard in accordance with the Muslim rites. Again, Anjuman brushed it aside. The succeeding night the same vision recurred. However, the girl tearfully told her story: "I belonged to a poor Muslim family in the neighbouring village. My parents arranged my marriage to a moneyed old man who actually bought me from my parents for a handsome amount. The specter of wasting the rest of my life haunted me to the extreme. When I was being taken by the bridegroom to his village, a band of dacoits attacked the marriage procession en route to our destination. My husband and three of his companions, on offering resistance, were killed. I was kidnapped and sold to the brothel that ran business in this house. Several years ago this street was lined with whorehouses guarded by the mercilessly cruel pimps, so that none of the girls could make an escape. The matron of the brothel took a fair amount of money from a customer to spend the night with me, right in this very room. I cried, shouted, and begged, but this client continued disrobing me. He was loaded with booze and handled me brutally. In my struggle to avoid his clutches, he held my necklace and tightened it around my neck. Suddenly, I was strangled to death. The same night they interred me in that corner. This house changed many hands. My appearance in the dreams of people sleeping in this room made it a deserted, ghost spot. Nobody has slept in this room for several years. And, now

you have come. Perhaps, nobody told you about this haunted place. If you kindly remove my remains and bury them in a Muslim cemetery, with Muslim rituals, my soul will rest in peace. I won't bother anyone again."

That was really not a dream something to be followed through. With this in mind, Anjuman searched the backlog of the missing persons at the main police station in Lahore. To her surprise, a dog-eared, time-worn, dusty register had an entry many years before about the same disappeared girl

Anjuman explained the entire episode to the owners of the house. Undoubtedly, they had no knowledge about the antecedents of the murdered girl. At the same time, they did confirm that the room was haunted and that the previous owners never cared to inform them, perhaps for fear that the sale of the house might fall through.

The news of this occurrence spread like wildfire. That corner was dug up in the presence of several citizens. Right there lay the skeleton, with the paezebs and other ornaments still intact. The dress was unrecognizable. With typical Muslim traditions the skeleton of the girl was interred in the cemetery. Just for the heck of it, Anjuman spent a couple of more nights in the same room. No such dreams ever took place.

This incident added fuel to the fire and the sectarian hatred flared up. Although the brothel used to be run by a Muslim lady, yet the Muslims of Shaitan Chauki out of sheer ignorance and in the view of racial upheavals rife countrywide, were convinced that this was an act of Hindus, and that a Hindu client had murdered the girl.

An Englishman, named Allan Hume, who had consistently advocated the introduction of a more representative form of government founded the first Indian National Congress, which met at Bombay in 1885. It was hoped that it would develop into a sort of Indian parliament for the discussion of grievances. The first congress was attended by 72 delegates, chiefly lawyers, schoolmasters and newspaper editors. Of these, only two were

Muslim. The second congress in 1886 was composed of 440 delegates. This time, due to the influence of Sir Sayyid Ahmed, the number of the attending Muslims increased to 33. In reply to Lord Dufferin's description of the congress as a microscopic minority, 1,248 delegates attended the meeting in 1888.

The last decade of the 19th century witnessed a change in the character of Indian nationalism. By 1907 a moderate Indian National Congress led by Surendranath Banerjee and Krishna Gokhale had given way to a virtually anti-British party under a Maratha Brahmani journalist named Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and a Bengali Arabindo Ghose, who had taken a first class in the Classical tripos at Cambridge.

The anarchist movement was first organized by the Brahmans of Poona and owed much to inflammatory articles that appeared in Tilak's paper, the *Kesari*, advocating the assassination of British officials. Centres of conspiracy were also formed in London, Paris, and San Francisco, California.

In 1914 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), feeling that he was no longer needed by the Indian community in South Africa, returned to India. He was already convinced that India was ripe for home rule, or *Swaraj* (self-rule) as it was usually called at that time. As soon as he allowed himself a year's probation, enjoined by his mentor, the Indian statesman G.K. Gokhale, Gandhi threw himself actively into the work of the Indian National Congress party.

The death of Tilak in August, 1920 left Gandhi the undisputed leader of the Congress party. Between 1918 and 1922 Gandhi had done his utmost to produce an accord between the Hindu and the Muslim communities. In the furtherance of this purpose, he enthusiastically supported the Muslim agitation for preserving the Turkish *Khilafat*, as the symbol of the unity of Islam.

The demand by influential sections of British and the United States of America's opinion that the Turks should be expelled from Constantinople and the failure of the Khilafat deputation to obtain satisfaction from David Lloyd George produced great

discontent among Indian Muslims and prompted the agitators, the brothers Mohammad and Shaukat Ali, to proclaim that it was the duty of all true Muslims to leave India for countries where Islam was respected. In obedience to this call, many thousands of Muslims sold their goods and joined *hijrat* (emigration) movement from India to Afghanistan. It was concluded that in the month of August, 1920 more than 18,000 people the *muhajirin*, as they were called, moved in the direction of Afghanistan. The limited resources of Afghanistan compelled the Afghan government to forbid the entry of *muhajirin* into the country, with the result that the road from Peshawar through Khyber pass was strewn with the graves of old men, women and children, who had succumbed to the hardships of the journey. The failure of this movement was a severe setback to the Khilafat campaign.

In the meantime, Gandhi had been imprisoned. During his stay behind the bars, relations between the two communities, Hindus and Muslims, deteriorated, and there were communal riots in a number of towns. In September, 1924 he undertook a three weeks' fast at Delhi, hoping thereby to induce Hindus and Muslims to come to a better understanding. For a time, the fast seemed to have achieved its objective but before long the conflict broke out again.

Gandhi was again held in detention in the spring of 1943. In February, 1944 Mrs. Gandhi died in detention, and Gandhi was released a few months later after a severe illness.

After his release Gandhi's first effort was to come to an understanding with Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League who was demanding in the name of the 90,000,000 Muslims of India the establishment of an independent state to be called Pakistan. But, the Gandhi-Jinnah talks proved to be unfruitful.

When the Congress leaders were released from detention after the conclusion of WWII, Congress and the Muslim League continued to drift apart. In the summer of 1946, terrible killings between Hindus and Muslims broke out in Calcutta and quickly

spread to East Bengal, then to Bihar and other areas, especially the province of Punjab.

Gandhi spent months during the winter of 1946-1947, at the age of 77 trampling barefoot from village to village in Bengal, and later visiting the affected areas of Bihar and Punjab, reminding people that the God whom they worshipped under various names was the same God, that their real interests were identical. He urged the minority community to overcome fear and the majority to win back the minority by rebuilding their ruined homes. He and his helpers had a large degree of success, but a section of the political leaders of both the Hindu and Muslim communities opposed them.

In the spring of 1947, Congress leaders agreed to the partition of India, though Gandhi himself disapproved. The date for independence and for the division of the Indian subcontinent was fixed for August 15, 1947.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, for many years, undeviatingly spoke in favour of Hindu-Muslim unity in the cause of Indian nationalism, and the consequent necessity of constitutional safeguards to give a sense of security to the minority. As a president of the Muslim League in 1916, he sponsored a joint Congress-League scheme of constitutional reforms. Part of this the Lucknow pact, provided for separate Muslim electorate and weighed representation for Muslim minorities on a basis which was largely adopted in later reforms. He strongly disapproved, however, of M.K Gandhi's nonco-operation drive (1919-1921) and broke with Congress on this issue. His argument was that nonco-operation could only lead to antagonizing the British, especially when there was hope of a favourable response to Indian nationalists' demands.

After attending the London round-table conference (1930-1932) Jinnah withdrew temporarily from politics but in 1934 resumed his leadership of the Muslim League. He considered the provincial part of the 1935 constitutional reforms worth a trial, and still hoped to secure Muslim interests by an entente with Congress. But, the latter's attitude after the provincial election of 1937 permanently alienated him. Reorganizing the Muslim League



as an effective opposition party, he greatly increased its influence and became known as *Quaid-e-Azam* (the great leader).

Hindu-Muslim relations meanwhile deteriorated; in 1938-1939 an interparty conference on further constitutional reforms rejected Jinnah's view. However, the all-India Muslim Conference endorsed his "fourteen points" programme which, besides formulating other safeguards, aimed at strengthening the position of the Muslim provinces.

In 1940, Jinnah adopted the policy of establishing a separate Muslim state "Pakistan," by partitioning India. Once committed to this he rejected British proposals regarding the transfer of power in India and advances made by Gandhi (1944).

When, in 1947, Congress consented to a modified basis of partition, Jinnah became Pakistan's first Governor General. Besides, organizing the new state he had immediately to deal with the crisis in Punjab and consequent mass emigrations and the Kashmir dispute. He was taken ill at the hill-station ziarat, in Baluchistan, rushed back to Karachi where he died September 11, 1948.

XX

IN THOSE TURBULENT DAYS OF 1947, GANDHI WAS NOT alone fighting for the harmonious relations between Hindus and Muslims. Another voice advocating pacification continued sounding the same note. It was the voice of H.S Suhrawardy, chief minister of Bengal until its partition, and active member of Muslim League, and one of Gandhi's most outspoken critics a few months before. Two days before the partition date, that is, August 15, 1947, Gandhi having reached Bengal, entered into a pact with Suhrawardy, who was deeply distrusted by the Hindus of Bengal. But, the determination of the two men to act together for the peace of Calcutta and Bengal had an almost miraculous effect. Instead of bringing fresh massacres to Calcutta as was widely anticipated August 15 was a day of general rejoicings and fraternization all over the city, throughout eastern India in Delhi and elsewhere.

A few disappointed Hindus tried to break the peace a fortnight later. Gandhi immediately began to fast, and within five days all parties in Calcutta promised to work together for peace. Suhrawardy himself, at times openly armed mixed with hostile

crowds, threatening to shoot irrespective of Hindus and Muslims if mischief-mongers attempted to disturb the peace.

The nonviolence doctrine of Gandhi, his fasts, Suhrawardy's harsh warnings to employ force, and pleas of racial tolerance from other wise quarters disappointingly came to a doom. Bengal, Central Provinces, United Provinces, East Punjab (India), West Punjab (Pakistan), Sindh and elsewhere, all got embroiled in incessantly barbarous riots. Sectarian media, in particular, gave wind to the fire. Unspeakable horrors were committed on both sides of the new frontier, and millions of people were fleeing terror to the safety they hoped to find beyond the borders. Delhi, Amritsar and Lahore were especially swept into the flames of hatred and terrorism.

Master Tara Singh, a leader of the Sikh Akali Dal party played a moderating role in the beginning, but soon the atrocities of Sikhs perpetrated against the Muslim minority in East Punjab suppressed all limits of earlier slaughter. Amritsar, a stronghold of Sikhs, with Hindu and Muslim minorities, erupted into a dreadful murder of Muslims. The Hindus joined forces with the Sikhs, giving full vent to their wrath at the expense of the already terrorized Muslims. Killing, crippling, burning, abduction, rape, plunder, and the forced conversion of the Muslims constituted the name of the game.

Shaitan Chauki was astonishingly spared the galloping flames of racial animosity. Anjuman, an influentially moderate force, respected all others, slow and high, rich or poor, mobsters and law-abiding citizens, irrespective of caste, colour and creed and received respect in return. She had by now assumed the stature of a person to be reckoned with in time of peace and trouble. Her moral integrity and selfless devotion to the cause of downtrodden and neglected were valued at a saintly level. The tranquil co-existence was owed entirely to the tirelessly indiscriminate endeavours of Anjuman. She headed a multi-racial committee of the level-headed representatives, The result of her own initiative, which worked closely in conjunction with tough street vigilants. The duty of these rested in watching and reporting out observations to the committee.

For the time being, an apparent calm had been painstakingly maintained in Shaitan Chauki. It seemed to be an island of hope in a sea of helplessness, an oasis among the might dunes of partisan prejudice. However, the superficiality of this peace was only skin deep, evidenced by the hidden tensions that led the Hindus and Sikhs to avoid frequenting Muslim neighbourhoods, hardly venturing out from their own localities. If tempers were to flare and riots to break out, the Hindus would be more vulnerable. Concentrated as they were in the centre of Shaitan Chauki, they would become an easy target for malicious arsons-a common practice of the majority, in this case the Muslims.

After the Friday noon's prayers the imam of the Jamiya Masjid interjected provocatively exaggerated tales of cruelties committed by the Hindus and Sikhs across the border: "Entire Muslim villages have been gutted down, mosques desecrated, some even profanely demolished, trains carrying Muslim refugees en route to Pakistan derailed, plundered and the passengers murdered, mutilated, and the women kidnapped. Copies of the Holy Quraan besmirched and torn to pieces."

The whole mosque echoed with the slogan of Allah-u-Akbar, tit for tat kill those infidels, burn them to death. Someone among the audience hinted to the murder of that girl who was forced to prostitution. The stage was set, ingredients handy. Only a spark was needed for the onset of the holocaust. The agglutinating hold of Anjuman had to be enfeebled, her belief in the sincerity of the Hindus and Sikhs to live in harmony with Muslims must be tergiversated if the opportunists were to incite resentment. Rumour had it that some of the Muslim extremists were already looking for a cause to brand Hindus and Sikhs as aggressors.

To bring Anjuman to grief in public places was out of question. A lady of such a dignified eminence, a portrait of love and affection, adored and held in awe at the same time, a woman who brought to this slum unexpected benefits order out of disorder, jobs, better living conditions dared not be belittled, much less physically harmed, at least in broad daylight.

A band of Muslims fanatic hoodlums, professional scavengers, freeloaders, became particularly enraged by the speech of the imam, bent on looking for an excuse to ignite the flame of disaster. A way had to be found to disturb the precariously maintained peace. Bashira, the most dissolute and crafty of them hit upon the idea of setting aflame the sewing factory of Anjuman, and somehow to put the blame on Hindu and Sikh activities. This could only be done at night and stealthily too. Since Sunday used to be a free day, the Sunday night was thought to be best for his evil design.

One dark Sunday night, Anjuman's personal Saltanat guards, along with other vigilants, happened to be on duty of taking rounds of Shaitan Chauki. She herself was invited by Father Skinner and Dr. Cornelius to discuss the possibility of impending racial disturbances. The political climate of India and Pakistan had dangerously deteriorated, getting worst by the day. The slaughter of the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh minorities and the destruction of their properties increased ever more. The caravans of the refugees on foot, by buses, tongs, carts or trains poured into the respective borders day and night. The Harijans and Christians had been brushed aside by the sliding avalanche of the ethnical clashes. It was agreed upon to request an additional police force from Superintendent of Police from Lahore. Father Skinner took the responsibility of seeing the police official personally the next morning and decided to spend the night at the colony of the Harijans. Doctor Cornelius walked to the hospital and Anjuman left for Shaitan Chauki.

Upon nearing the entrance of her home, Anjuman sensed the unusual goings on the main gate of the factory. She turned around to have a better look when three masked men violently jumped at her. Adept at martial arts, self-confident, of the powerful built for a woman, with the one stroke of the right hand, she felled the one attacker, who came upon her from the front. Simultaneously, with a stunning back kick of her leg, she prostrated the fellow behind her back. The third about to take off, was nearly killed by a blow of the edge of her hand to his throat, and lay unconscious.

The neighbouring tonga-drivers startled from their sleeps as a result of uncommon bustling activity came rushing with the *lahthis* (wooden staffs) ready to set upon beating the thugs. Anjuman calmed them down and told them to take off the masks of these ruffians. The tonga-drivers knew them well, as they were the notorious street bums, ready to do anything for money, or when the price was right. They had been jailed many times for larceny, not the sort to settle an account in a fair fight. They were sneaky buggers, Dared not to face the eyes of Anjuman, they belched the whole story, with special reference to Bashira, who was the man behind the scene.

First thing the next morning, she reported the night's incidence to the Senior House Officer at the police station of Shaitan Chauki. Bashira and several of his cronies, along with the other doubtful characters were rounded up and held in preventive detention.

This occurrence shook the community. Perhaps, the Muslim trouble-makers would infiltrate into Shaitan Chauki. Now, the Hindu and Sikh minorities became genuinely worried about their safety. The peaceful co-existence could not longer be held intact. It was the high time to arrange for their exodus. May be, some of them would opt for staying in Shaitan Chauki as long as Anjuman was around. She had several rounds of talks with the spokesmen of these minorities. All of them had made up their mind to leave. Some were visibly moved at the very thought of abandoning their ancestral homes, but they saw no other alternative either. The big problem lay in disposing of their assets. And, how about the hard cash and journey! They would be foolish to carry this along on a hazardous journey ahead. The waylayings, looters, bandits and, particularly, those opportunists who are always on a look out, might have to be faced.

In times like this, one is at the mercy of the buyer. Some lucrative properties were sold out at nominal rates. Many of them begged Anjuman to be entrusted with their valuables, but she declined to agree. To discharge this responsibility honourably amounted to an immense moral binding, not an easy commital. Who knew what her tomorrow would bring. In any case, some of

them buried part of their wealth in safe corners, inside their homes, wishfully thinking to return one day, when conditions would normalize. Others, on a spoken word, left their fortunes in the custody of reputed Muslim neighbours. (The author is personally acquainted with many such cases, in Pakistan, when the yesterday's beggars became rich, and of course the "respectable" citizens overnight.)

Anjuman talked with the same Senior House Officer at the police station, who advised that in various towns and villages the government had already set up the refugee camps for the emigrants and immigrants, that were guarded by armed soldiers and the same might be done for the minorities of Shaitan Chauki. This was a rational approach because their confinement to their respective strongholds was fraught with danger. The dwindling supplies of food, interrupted public services, worsening hygienic conditions, and the specter of unexpected raids, all presented a perilous situation demanding superhuman efforts to tackle effectively.

A spacious refugee camp, with accompanying facilities and improvised shelters, in between the hospital and the colony of the Harijans was organized, enclosed by several rows of barbed wire. An army detachment took its position. In the darkness of the night, the Hindus and Sikh families, along with their possessions, whatever they could comfortably manage, were led to the camp escorted by the soldiers.

The exigency of the pervading circumstances claimed an early transit arrangement. In spite of the hectic efforts of the authorities, and Anjuman's persuasive influence, it was not going to be before three days when the buses for the refugees would be made available. In accordance with the regulations to ensure a safe journey, the exact date and time of such departures, and the route to be followed, were kept a guarded secret. Only a couple or so hours before the schedule, the camp-in-charge would make the departure announcement, without giving any details of the direction to be followed and it was all accomplished at night.

Notwithstanding the elaborate precautionary specifications, more often than not, the relevant information would leak, through carelessness, or in connivance with the camp authorities or the higher-ups. In this way, the mass scale slaughters and horrible cruelties had often taken place, killing the guards and the guarded alike. A bridge, en route, would be felled, roads mined, grenades hurled or the drivers with full knowledge of the ambush in advance would intentionally stop the buses, or trains, at particular stops.

Shortly before midnight, nine buses were lined up, each with a soldier armed with a machine gun on top. Anjuman and her Saltanat guards occupied the rear bus, with the elderly folk, newly married couples, gravely sick and the children, as she was intent upon seeing them off safely across the border.

The caravan, had hardly taken off, when premeditatedly or by sheer coincidence, the rioters put up a torch to the Hindu and Sikh localities of Shaitan Chauki, resulting in more destruction to Muslim life and property, since the wind below in this direction. Within minutes, fanned by the howling winds, almost the entire Shaitan Chauki was aflame.

The nearest crossing point, known as the Wagah border, less than twenty five miles from Lahore, was the destination. No sooner did the caravan leave the outskirts of Lahore than it came to a halt. The saboteurs had demolished a bridge. All hell broke loose, bursts of machine gun fires left and right, volleys of shots from 303 rifles, hails of grenades, hits with incendiary contraptions. With heart-renting cries the refugees rushed out from the burning buses, some got trapped inside, only to be slaughtered by the ambushers.

Anjuman leaned over a weeping Hindu girl, her mother and father were mortally hit. The Saltanat guards, while helping Anjuman out of the bus, got badly wounded. By the time the reinforcements arrived, only a handful had survived. The field was littered with the dead and wounded. Agonizing sighs filled the air, shock-stricken roamed aimlessly, puddles of blood and scorched bodies dominated the scene.



## *SALTANAT*

The wounded Saltanat guards were hospitalized in Lahore. Anjuman and the little girls, about six, named Poonam, boarded a train for Rawalpindi, then hired a taxi to Saltanatpur.

Nawab Saltanat Khan and Begum Saltanat did not have to worry anymore about a male heir to their state. The Pakistan Government, years later, abolished all the autonomous states and merged them all in the federal territory.

In post-independent India, Hindus got their homeland India, Muslims a new state, Pakistan. Unfortunately, Sikhs, although covertly promised political favours, as a reward for siding with Hindus, yet were side-stepped after the partition of the subcontinent. East Punjab, with Sikhs predominating, became one of the provinces of India, with no autonomous privileges whatsoever.

Somewhere along the line, as a result of political frustrations, having failed to have a homeland of their own, Sikhs became rancorously vengeful, the result is a routine bloodbath in East Punjab. In recent past, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination at the very hands of her own Sikh bodyguards is an unparalleled instance of a stubbornly unpardonable nature of Sikhs. Her fault, perhaps administratively and politically justified, was to order Indian troops into the (holy of holy) Sikh Golden Temple at Amritsar. Here we find Sikh fanaticism in its very extreme.

## EPILOGUE

WHEREAS THE BRITISH RULERS TRIUMPHED POLITICALLY TO keep the Indian subcontinent under their colonial yoke, they failed miserably, or felt powerless to do full justice to the current social system. Notwithstanding the religious freedom, somewhere along the line, the two principal ethnic entities, predominantly the Hindus, followed by the Muslims, missed the boat of equal opportunities, or differential privileges curtailed. Even in the provinces like Punjab, NWFP, Sindh and Balochistan, with a Muslim majority, the Hindus almost invariably got fixed up in commanding positions. In the A.G. Office (Accountant General's Office), for example, at Lahore, Punjab, teeming with thousands of employees, the boss of a section used to be a Hindu, the Muslims reeling under the subservient clerical posts. Paradoxically, a want of competent Muslim personnel seemed to be an unlikely factor. At the same time, it in no way reflected upon the impartiality of the British rulers, an unquestionable quality admired by the patriotic nationalists and servile flatterers of the raj.

Then what happened to be amiss?

K.L. Ghabba, a scholarly Hindu personality, converted to Islam, once in a laudable self-criticism remarked that a carping analysis of the centuries old discrete Hindu and Muslim cultures flourished in the Indian subcontinent, would reveal, among other respects, two fundamental realities: first, the policy of pretentious non-violence, adroitly ostentatious, but in fact dangerously orientated to achieve subtly premeditated results; secondly an intrinsically compliant disposition, humble to the extent of unflappable composure, even in the face of harshly exacting situations. These dual combinations of the very Hindu nature have always been instrumental in the supremacy of a Hindu, when a Muslim contestant of the equal capabilities, or better appears upon the scene. The non-violent epochal crusades of saintly Mohandas Gandhi, in the late 1940s, to gain the independence of India from the British crown, stand unsurpassed in the annals of the modern history of the world. But, here again, Gandhi was an exception, in exceptional times, when the cradle of democracy, drained by the exorbitant demands of the WWII, both materially and morally, could no longer afford to keep the empire intact. These views may not stand much chance of being widely agreed upon and in any case are probably unnecessarily embittering. Coming from a Muslim, these will be seen as an "incitement to racial hatred" and a provocation but, here, we are faced with the observations of a Hindu statesman. There emerges a cultural difference between Hindu and Muslim outlooks.

In the present day India, about a 100 million Muslims, at the mercy of 868 million Hindus, not infrequently are slaughtered in periodic racial riots. One only has to read the newspapers correctly to corroborate the non-violence doctrine of the Hinduism going down the drain. The killing of animals, and for that matter consuming meat, is a sinful act, but the massacre of human beings is inordinately acceptable by a notable stratum of the Hindu society. This is a glaring aspect of Hindu hypocrisy.

In general, the Muslims, on the other hand, basically extroverted and boisterous, of flutterable temper, sensitive to instigation, tending to act on impulse without forethought, characterized by undue exercise of force, failed to make inroads in the colonial administration. These qualities eventually make one

break under pressure. The placidly visionary British masters had to run an empire, where every cog in the complicated bureaucratic machinery deserved to be custom made. You can mold a moss without unnecessary pressure, but not a metal.

"The Hindus are parsimonious, exclusive, bigoted; the Mohammedans are thoughtless, extravagant, bold, and luxurious, from the prince to the peasant; or indeed to the very beggar the portraiture is equally applicable; yet let us not therewithal refuse them their proper need of praise. The Hindu possesses many redeeming qualities - extreme forbearance, submissive consideration, and a high degree of attachment to his kindred, his relations, his paternal property, and his benefactor. The Mohammedans are brave to a fault, studiously concerned for their faith and its extension, chivalrous and hospitable. These are the necessary results of their political and religious institutions combined. Alas! What a balance is set off against them in the united evils of demoralizing superstition and naturally depraved heart. In such qualities they are alike; the grossest immorality, the most lax ideas of the sacred obligations of truth, and an utter unconcern for the happiness or eternal interest of the fairest and valuable portion of the human race" (Hugel, 1845).

Perhaps, we are overlooking the Divide-and Rule doctrine. Most of the massacre might well result from the division inspired by the Colonialists. After all, Muslims and Hindus have been living side by side for centuries without a major problem and that was indeed what Gandhi was agonizing about.

In the British schematic designs, a Hindu would perfectly fit into the intricate mosaic of the vast administration, if not by suggestion then by trivial coercion, without inducing palpable ruffles. A Muslim replacement, on the contrary, might well substitute, if need be, but the coercion had to be excessive, and the ruffles palpable enough to overflow and arouse the public attention. No master, under any circumstances, would be foolish enough to waste the much needed energy and time, when the same goal can be achieved with the least possible efforts.

Man, by nature, though gregarious, is refractory, inheriting that rebellious spirit from the day when God forbade Adam to eat wheat (apple according to Christianity). You know what Adam did? He indeed ate wheat, even at the cost of falling into disgrace. Too much civility, and the immoderate submissiveness are perilous in the long run. Man must possess that sparkle of resistance which should kindle once in a while or else be relegated to a slave incarnate, a puppet.

Another element, an imprudentially vainglorious, misconstrued fundamentalist faith progressed imperceptibly, but harmfully among the orthodox Muslim families. It wasn't a modern belief, rather the centuries old dictates to desist from educating females, and that implied the instructions at public institutions, schools, colleges, universities, etc. Whereas the contemporary knowledge was shunned to the limit of abhorrence, the guidelines laid down in the Holy Quran and the teachings of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) could by no means be dispensed with. The idea behind this resided in avoidance of exposure to the strangers. The staunchly faithful fanatics expected and still do in varying degrees that their female folk, on stepping out from the threshold, must mobilize immaculately enveloped in the specially designed long-cloth, known as *burkah*, a sort of animated movable tent.

One might think that this is a lot of unfair hammering aimed only at the Muslim inclinations. Females were not allowed education in England and France until practically this century. In China, Japan, Russia (the former Soviet Union) and Zulu's females had had far less opportunities than under Islam and Islamic Societies.

Since the inception of the British Raj up to its waning days, this conceptual adherence of the Muslims steadily but surely resulted in the disparate levels of education between the Hindu and Muslim women. The ensuing gulf became so widened that the Hindu women reached far ahead in education, and the hapless Muslim counterparts lingeringly weltered in the quicksand of parochial bigotry. A shining example is furnished by Mrs. Vijaya Laxami Pundit, sister of Nehru, who became the first woman

president of the UN General Assembly (1953-1954) after the partition of India. Another recent Hindu colossal, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, represented the other of the same breed. However, Ms. Benazir Bhutto, the Prime Minister of Pakistan since 1988 (later dismissed in about twenty months by a special presidential decree), occupies a unique position as a woman ruling a Muslim country at any time in history. Unfortunately, some religious leaders have raised quite a hue and cry about the permissibility of a Muslim female sovereign in Islam. At the same time, she was dramatically elected for a period of five years after eleven years of a ruthless military dictatorship.

Some wise Muslim statesmen tried to unshatter the manacles of confining the Muslim women indoors, thus depriving them of the worldly affairs and impeding their education. One of these was Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898, born at Delhi, died at Aligarh) - Muslim educator, jurist, and author, who founded the Anglo-Mohammedan oriental College, later the Aligarh Muslim University at Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh state, India, in the late 19th century. He devoted himself to the establishment of a Muslim school at Aligarh in 1875, which he nurtured after retirement (1876) into a college. The All-India Muhammadan Educational Conference, which he founded in 1886, became a major forum for Indian Muslims until 1906. In 1888 he was made a Knight Commander of the State of India.

Every nation has an inherent right to run its own destiny, and colonialism, beyond doubt is repulsively wicked. Whatever its origin or dimensions, the arguments abound to condemn the atrocities accrued. At the same time, the British domination of the Indian subcontinent happened to be no less than a "bliss."

Anyone, who had an opportunity to visit the Indian subcontinent, before and after the partition in 1947, would be a testimony to the disgraceful deterioration of the streamlined administration, in every walk of life, especially the devastating neglect of the immense railway system and roads, in the post-independent India and Pakistan. The glorious legacy of the British Indian reforms torn asunder.

A sojourn into the records of global colonialism would divulge at once that the British were by far the better masters by any standard. Even after the dismemberment of the British empire, with the blossom of emergent new nations (once the colonial states), the crown introduced the Colonial Development Corporation. It's a British Public Corporation established under the Overseas Resources Development acts, 1948-1988, for the purpose of assisting British territories in the development of their economies. At the end of 1957 there were 76 projects in hand in 23 territories, covering agriculture, forestry, hotels, minerals, property and housing, electric power, transport and communications. The total capital approved for these projects was £80,468,000 (an inflation-adjusted equivalent would be interesting).

Latin America, comprising the entire continent of South America, Central America and Mexico (also Middle America or Mesoamerica), and the islands of Caribbean, better known as "Hispanic America" (Since it specially indicates the region's Spanish and Portuguese heritage) might well serve as the victim of the Iberian colonial ravages. (The Iberians were the ancient people, inhabiting parts of the Spanish peninsula. The name was applied by the Greek navigators to peoples, who inhabited the eastern coast of Spain; originally, those who dwelt by the river Iberus - mod. Ebro. The river's name itself may represent the Basque phrase *ibay-erri*, "The country of the river.").

From a different standpoint "Gold, glory and gospel," the major motivations of Iberians, might seem a misleading oversimplification. Iberians, during their 325 years of domination, left an indelible impression upon the culture and life of the land they occupied. Spain preserved an Indian nobility, and many Spaniards took Indian wives. Spaniards and Portuguese staked out land for agriculture, founded cities, opened trading posts, and prospected for mines. They established the church of their own faith, and converted millions to Christianity.

The Iberian wars of conquest and plunder in the incredible adventure of new world domination annihilated Aztec, Maya, Chibcha and Inca Indian groups that had reached a high level of

culture. The cultural impression, which dominates the modern-day Latin America is only an heritage of Spanish conquistadores, an appendix of Spanish society. The pre-Columbian societies have been ruthlessly exterminated.

The bafflingly archaic administrative and judicial systems, begging to be extricated from the bondage of centuries old shackles, inexorably put a gag on the cries for development in Latin America - no less than a slanderous inheritance of Iberian colonialism. Even in the best of circumstances, it pales into insignificance, when compared to, the legacy left by the British masters in India.

The preservation of nobility and intermarriage have been a natural by-product of foreign territorial domination. It was carried to the extreme by the Iberian colonialism to the extent that long established familial entities, known for their purity of blood, literally disappeared. Whether the practice involved passion or pressure is another question. Granted, the intermarriages did exist, with the subsequent emergence of an Anglo-Indian community, but it never established a class in the real sense of the word. The British couldn't or didn't really want to penetrate the social or religious barriers of the Indian society. The fanatical adherence to the long established religious preachings, Hinduism and Islam alike, had woven an almost impassable shroud for Christianity to make a significant breakthrough.

In a society typical of the Indian subcontinent, where marriages, even among the elite social class, with rare exceptions, had to be with the blessings of the parents, there was practically no scope for the aliens to gain a foothold. Exceptions did occur, usually ending up in ex-communications.

Some rajas, maharajas and nawabs were the hereditary titles of long established families well before the colonial occupation of the Indian subcontinent but the British raj, among others, bestowed the additional titles of nawab upon Muslim faithfuls of the crown and an equivalent title of raja or rajah was reserved for the Hindu loyals; a somewhat higher title was known as maharaja, meaning great raja. Urdu *Nawab* (Arabic *Naib* meaning Deputy),



also nawwab or nabab, used to be a viceroy or Deputy Governor under the former Mogul Empire in India. Later, an honorary title conferred upon Muslims of distinction during the legacy of British empire in India. Somewhat equivalent title for the wife of a Nawab, or a reigning Muslim queen, or princess would be begum or begam - a high-ranking Muslim lady, often a widow, Turkish *begam*. A Hindu title for a chief, or prince, derived from the same root as the Latin *rex*, is *raja*. Other forms are *rao*, *rana* and *rawal*. While chiefs of higher ranks are styled *maharaja*, *maharana* and *maharao*, *rani* or *rane* applies to the wife of a *raja*, a reigning queen, or princess, and in the same way the title *maharani* is employed. Both titles, *nawab* and *raja*, carried enormous landed property and were hereditary, only to be inherited by male descendants. The title *Nizam* (Urdu *Nizam-al-Mulk* Governor of the realm) was restricted only to the ruler of the predominantly Muslim state, Hyderabad, India, from the beginning of the 18th century to 1950. In modern India, after the partition in 1947, these titles were abolished.

The Nawabs, Rajas, or Maharajas were the mainstay of the British empire in India, never giving a second thought to the dictates of the contemporary British Viceroy, who ruled India by the authority of his sovereign back in London, basking in the glow of an empire upon which the sun never set. Whereas the Nawabs and Rajas were the gems of the British crown, their status if any, among the Indian nationalists, deserved no more respect than that of stooges and quislings. At the same time, some of these titulars took active part in the struggle for the partition of India.

Religiously speaking, Muslims and Hindus trod, and still tread entirely opposite paths, but the nawabs and rajas stood together as the distinguished French writer Voltaire said: "When it comes down to money, all are of the same religion."

It was a sagaciously cunning political move to substantiate the insidious creepers of colonialism by the East India Company in 1619 when English trading posts had been established at Surat, Agra, Ahmadabad and Broach. Surat became the company's headquarters, with a President and Council who controlled the other factories. These concessions were obtained from the Mogul

Emperor Jahangir by Sir Thomas Roe, who arrived in India as the first English Ambassador to the Court of the Mogul Emperor at Agra in September 1615.

There could be no better manoeuvre to tighten the colonial grip on masses at large than to shower favours on selected few, nawabs, rajas, or maharajas, who in turn saw to it that their *master's voice* was carried through to be heeded affirmatively by their respective subjects; it could be through friendly persuasion, worldly amenities, or simply due to a word from a lion's mouth. Any voice of dissent was ruthlessly silenced, no questions asked. Apart from that, another strategy was almost invariably resorted to. It resided in the fact that the coveted Civil Service jobs were only open to those who came from the families known for unwavering allegiance to the colonial rulers.

Once the colonial foundations had been securely laid, a system of Indian Civil Service (ICS) examination was implemented. Here again, only the scions of elite upper class families gained admittance. The top class of the successful candidates was offered lucrative posts in Indian Foreign Service, always with the antecedents of loyalty. Lower on the scale became commissioners, ruling over divisions (a division constituted several districts), Deputy Commissioners (DCs), each heading a district, and so forth serving in central and provincial positions. However, a Governor, the Chief Authority of a province, had to be a "pedigreed" feudal lord, with an unblemished record of ancestral servitude. Some exceptions did emerge upon the scene, such as when a fellow from a humble family background participated in an ICS Examination and came through with flying colours through sheer brilliance. (Paradoxically, some families of wealth and reputable class, like that of Nehru's, venerated among others by the man in the street, survived through decades of British rule, but neither could be bought nor subjugated. Material gains, a factor to be weighed in any society, lacked that magnetism and glitter, a worthless bait for such a nobility; they were already rolling in turns of money. The most alluring titles stood belittled, as they deserved and commanded respect, ruling over the hearts of the people.)

Whatever the evils of colonialism are, the British type was no less than a boon for the Indian subcontinent in certain respects. When the author was going through the lower classes of the High School, an English teacher Miss Millen of the Scottish Mission, on every school day, upon entering the classroom, would unfailingly write on a blackboard: "Don't ever steal, respect the elderly, honesty is the best policy, never tell a lie." With such an inculcation, one had to be adamantly base to forgo such golden principles. A boy brought up with such ideals, perhaps fails moneywise in the actual life, but enjoys the wealth of moral integrity.

The normal means of local and suburban transportation before the twilight of the British Empire in India, used to be buggies, a light four-wheeled carriage drawn by a horse or horses (a luxurious version can be seen in New York City's Central Park) or tongas, a two-wheeled version, driven only by one horse. The buggies used to be the rich people's transportation, while tonga was and still is, to a lesser extent, a poor or layman's transport and means of livelihood. The colonial traffic authorities laid down strict rules and regulations governing the use of a tonga. These prominently imprinted on a framed table: one on the outer surface of one of the lateral sides, and the other right in front of the front seat of the passengers on a wooden plank. The rules included fare charges between destinations, regular, hourly or daily basis, and where the complaints were to be lodged, etc. The Tonga driver and only one passenger occupied the front seat, while the other two passengers seated in the back seat; both of these seats resembled somewhat a reasonable sofa. Both of the sofas were separated by a transverse low partition. Thus only three passengers were allowed. Any additional passenger constituted an infraction, punishable by a fine or a jail term, or both, depending upon the previous record of the driver.

A special department, known as *be-rehmi* office (Persian *be* without, Arabic *rehmi* mercy), about analogous to RSPCA (Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelties to Animals, in UK) had been instituted countrywise to look after the well being of horses employed by tonga drivers. Every Saturday morning, rain or shine, around 8 am, a uniformed British official, from this

department, would materialize at four different intersections of the small town, Gujrat (not to be confused with the town and state of the same name in the present day India), where the author witnessed most of his teens slipping irretrievably into the mist of the past. Every driver, as a matter of routine, would stop his tonga, and the official would make a thorough check not only of the horse's groins, legs, back, hoofs, teeth, etc., but also of the accompanied harness. The general fitness of the horse would be of particular interest. The horseshoes used to be especially checked. Any deviation from the standard norms resulted in a punishable offence for the driver. If a horse were to be found underfed, it would be taken to a veterinary hospital, cared for until it was back to normal health. In fact, this represented a severe penalty, since the driver could hardly afford to miss his daily livelihood - the only source of income, fares from driving his tonga. A couple of kilometers away, in the outskirts of the town, there was a special ditch, a sort of mass burial ground for the horses, where once in a while irreversibly diseased horses were put to sleep through bullets into their heads and buried, right under the supervision of an English official.

The author had heard several stories about the British system of Justice in India, known for its speediness and fairness, but only once witnessed the actual judicial proceedings. Kutchery or judicial courts comprised a complex of several, one-story buildings, bungalow type, scattered in a spacious compound, dotted with huge trees, so foliate that the sun rays hardly made it through. It was the summertime, sizzingly hot, and the court was being held under one of those trees. The judge, an Englishman, sitting in a chair, flanked by other chairs, the occupants of which were native Indian personalities, and a wooden table placed in front of him with only a couple of thin files. A handcuffed fellow, accompanied by two policemen, armed only with duty sticks, was brought before the judge. The judge ordered the handcuffs to be removed, got up from the chair, and asked the culprit in a very polite way in Urdu to have a seat in one of the empty chairs. The fellow trembled all over, drenched in perspiration. It was rather uncanny, how a criminal could on earth expect such a treatment, and for that matter, from a judge. The fellow lingered on, his head somewhat turned down, a token of awe and respect. The judge

patted him on the shoulder, and himself guided the fellow to a chair.

The Judge's first question was as to why he did steal (the proceedings were all in Urdu, sprinkled with Punjabi). The answer was that he stole to buy some remedy from a herb-doctor for his sick wife. The second question referred to the amount stolen. It was one rupee (the rupee was and still is a national monetary unit in India and Pakistan). The fellow was sentenced to work the lawn of the Judge for four days, and a bailiff was ordered to have his wife admitted to a hospital (hospitals were free of charge). As I found out later, the witnesses were only needed if the fellow had denied the charges.

During the days of British India, even now to a lesser extent, the public in general hesitated to ask for medical attention at the hospitals, preferring quacks and private practitioners, usually the herb doctors. Tradition or ignorance has it that one only resorts to a hospital when all hopes are gone, and death is inevitable.

Under the British raj, although the rulers never let an opportunity slide away when it boiled down to buy political henchmen with generous rewards, administrative irregularities, corruption and nepotism were strictly prohibited. The violators expected harsh punishment, even for a trivial infringement. The officialdom in educational system was especially known for honesty.

Cheating or lies amounted to serious offense, especially in examinations, to the extent of ruining one's educational career for good. Punctuality and respect for time, the two elements constituted the very hub of the educated class. Late coming, early coming, and for that matter undue delays in the system practically did not exist. The trains, the only medium of inter-city mass transit in such a vast land as India, needed to be on time for the oncoming connections, or else the mammoth, complicated network would falter.

Hospitals, police posts, schools, colleges, universities, public buildings, offices, institutions, highways, paved and unpaved,

parks, post offices, railway lines, irrigation canals, etc., were carried through to the remotest corner of this land mass, and meticulously maintained.

General public dealing offices, universities, post offices, and the like boasted special complaint offices, where complaints, no matter how serious even against the highest authority, without any fear of retaliations, would be lodged by the public. Every complaint, irrespective of its magnitude, was genuinely checked and the offender brought to book.

The fact of the matter is that every public servant, no matter what his status, couldn't afford to have any complaint filed against him. If proved guilty, depending upon the gravity of the irregularity, it could lead to ouster, or failing that there persisted a red spot on his career sheet, hurdling his further promotion, an obstacle not that easy to overcome.

Several years ago, the author happened to visit Banaras. Also known as Varanasi, Banaras was the capital of the ancient janapad or kingdom of Kashi, in Uttar Pradesh province of present day India, located on the west bank of the Ganges River. The crescent-shaped bank is entirely lined with stone and has several broad flights of ghats or steps; an array of shrines, temples and palaces of Hindu nobles and princes rise tier over tier from the water's edge. Many Hindus, who have their children established, leave their homes for the Hindu holy places like Banaras, where they pray to seek inner happiness, never to return home physically. They live on bare necessities of life, utterly bereft of worldly possessions until they die. Once in a while their descendants visit them but only for short while. On that visit I heard an incredulous account of a Sadhu sea-bound to Australia on a P&O liner during WWII. These were the days of the climax of Japanese conquests, ship after ship of the Allied Forces torpedoed to destruction. The liner, with the Sadhu on board, just about in mid Pacific, got a Japanese hit. Fortunately, no serious damage resulted, but the ship slowly began to take water, with a consequential list on the starboard side. Although the possibility of immediate sinking had been ruled out, the eventual disaster loomed large.

For a couple of days, the Captain had been flashing SOS signals without response. As usual with luxury liners, the main deck carries a blackboard, on which the overnight news are inscribed the next morning. On board a Greek liner, somewhere around the stricken ship, several passengers witnessed for successive mornings a Sadhu writing on its blackboard about the plight of the P&O liner, its location, distance and the day of attack. The Captain taking it only for a prank, neglected the news.

One morning, while on the bridge, the Captain saw the vision of a Sadhu, suspended in the haze, with audible entreaties to rescue. Again, he turned a deaf ear. The same evening, when heading for his cabin, the same Sadhu seemed to approach him, this time right in front of him in the hall, with the same request. At that point, he decided he had had enough. Turning the course of the ship, and in a week or so he didn't believe his eyes when he actually observed the P&O liner limping perilously.

All of the passengers were saved, the sadhu being the last person having agreed to be taken on board the Greek liner.

Another story related to a Sadhu, the son of a rich Rajput family (one of the powerful and warlike Hindu castes), who as a young man, dedicated long hours meditating about the sufferings of the have-nots, and the futility of wars that only lead to indiscriminate bloodshed. His forefathers laid their lives for Jhansi ki Rani. Jhansi, presently a city southwest of Kanpur, is the centre of the Indian Midland system of the Central Railway. In 1883 the raja of Jhansi died childless, and his territories lapsed to the British. The widow of the raja considered herself aggrieved, because she was not allowed to adopt a child as an heir and because the slaughter of cattle (considered sacred by Hindus) permitted in the Jhansi territory, and when the mutiny broke out in 1857, she put herself at the head of the rebels, and died bravely in battle.

Over the years he developed a melancholy pensive personality, renouncing even the basic necessities of elaborate foods that to his point of view signified just a luxury. He subsisted on water, occasional vegetables, fruits and pieces of chapati

(typical Indian bread, a sort of pancake). His heart bled at the sight of beggars, lamented the plight of the abandoned and diseased, revolted at wars and oppressors. Helplessness, want, hunger, poverty, and the sectarian adherences all became an obsession with him. The answers to all of these questions ended up in frustrations.

At one of the family gatherings, in which he rarely participated, he requested his father to have his share set aside, so that he could make a distribution of it to those who deserved. As expected, he was rebuked to silence.

From that day on, he took an irrevocable decision to set on a laborious trail to Badrinath. Badrinath is a village and celebrated pilgrimage place in the Uttar Pradesh province of India, northwest of Hardawar. It lies on the Vishnuganga river in rugged mountainous country near Kamet, east of the Badrinath peak, 23,420 ft. The temple, on the shoulder of the latter at 10,294 ft., contains a shrine of Badrinatha, another name Vishnu - a major Hindu deity, a member of the Trinity also including Brahma and Siva, also Shiva, and having many incarnations of which the most powerful is as Krishan - in the Epic mythology the Preserver god. The place has been famous for over 2,000 years. The long and tiresome route to Badrinath enhances the merits of pilgrimage. Here at Badrinath he wanted to enter into the discipleship of a famed guru.

His hermetic life became legendary. Then one dismal day he took off never to return.

With the passage of time his family fell on hard times, fortunes dwindled, living became burdensome, mass suicidal intentions were often discussed.

While praying in a mandir, his grandmother in a fit of desperation took to pounding her forehead at the footstone of the deity, with ensuing unconsciousness. The fellow *pujarees* (worshippers) carried her outside, easing her down under a tree.



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This old lady, scarcely on the threshold of consciousness, perceived the presence of her grandson, hundreds of miles away in Badrinath. A palpable reality, explicitly asserting to remove a slab from the floor in the backyard of the house and recover a treasure hidden by hurriedly fleeing earlier occupants about a century before.

When the site was unearthed, true to the instructions, there lay a precious collection of gold ornaments, diamonds and gold coins.

It had so happened that the earlier rulers of the state, where Banaras is situated, stood in revolt against a Mogul emperor in power, and were ruthlessly crushed. With the hope to return some day, the treasure was shrewdly buried.

## GLOSSARY

### ALEXANDER THE GREAT (356-323)

KING OF MACEDONIA AND THE GREATEST GENERAL IN ancient times. By the age of 32 he had founded an empire stretching from the Adriatic Sea to India. He was born in Pella, Macedonia in 356 BC, the son of King Philip-II of Macedonia. His mother was Olympias, an Epirote princess. Alexander was magnetic, intensely willful, mystical in thought, while practical in action. as a pupil of Aristotle he learned the use of scientific investigation, became interested in doctoring the sick, and deeply attached to Greek tradition - having been told that Heracles and Achilles were his ancestors.

At 16, serving as regent during his father's absence in Byzantium, and put in command of the select Companion cavalry at 18. A year later he was in exile, after Philip cast off his mother, Olympias.

Badly exhausted by insomnia, wounds, and sickness, Alexander was critically injured in ferocious fighting against the Brahmanic peoples at the junction of the rivers in Panjab. After

venturing into the Indian Ocean, he made the famous journey over the Gedrosia Desert back to Babylon, while the fleet under Nearchus followed by sea. He died at Babylon, not so much from fever as from exhausted vitality. He was not yet 33 years old. No other man has been claimed - in legends - by so many nations. Egyptian fable makes him a god. Arabo-Persian tradition represents *Iskander* as a hero-saint. Israelite lore joins him to the house of David as precursor of the Messiah. Even Ethiopian hagiology preserves his memory as a saint. Christian tales of medieval and Renaissance periods relate how *Alexander le Grant* searched for paradise.

History looks with wonder at the fact of Alexander the Great not only finding his way into India, but also having the penetration to fix on the point from which to depart, whence he could reach it most easily (excerpts from Hugel, 1845).

Just in like manner have other historical writers marvelled, how Vasco de Gama from Mozambique on the east coast of Africa, ever found his way to Calicut, on the coast of Malabar, India. There is nothing more surprising in such expectations than in the means by which a humble journeyman finds his way from Vienna to Paris; for in the days of Alexander the Great, the produce of India were carried into Parsia and Greece, and the merchant chose not the best and easiest, but the only route. So Vasco de Gama found a pilot, who brought him from Mozambique to the commercial city of Calicut, which was well known there, although the Western world knew nothing about it. We are to wonder at the genius which urged onward those great men, of whom Vasco de Gama was one of the noblest, to enterprise such as this, but not at the consequences which naturally followed them. Many writers have enlarged on these expressions of surprise, finding a vast deal to marvel at in the fact that subsequent conquerors, Sabaktagin, Mahmud Ghiznavi, Timur, Baber, Nadir Shah, and Ahmed Shah, all followed Alexander's route to India. The reason cannot be made simpler than we find it. It is the only road that an army could have taken.

From Central Asia, Sogdiana (Bokhara), and Zariaspa or Bactria (Balkh), Alexander advanced by Bamian to the foot of the

northern side of the Hindu Kush, Paropamisus of the ancients, and called by the Macedonians Caucasus. Crossing the Kalu pass, which is 13,400 ft. and the Gajigak, which is 12,400 ft. above the level of the sea, mounting then to the Una Pass, 11,000 ft., to the east of the Koh-i-Baba, which towers 18,000 ft., he was then in the region of the sources of the Indus. This is stated expressedly by Aristobulus (in Strabo): "After the setting of the Pleiades, Alexander left the country of the Paropamisadae, and passed the winter partly in the mountains, partly among the Aspian and the Musican. The army saw snow continually, and rain for the first time in Taxila." In other words, Alexander began his march from Balkh in the beginning of winter, and crossed the Hindu Kush during that season. But from Burnes' Travels, we find that the passage is closed during the six months of winter, and we shall therefore be more safe in following Arrian, who tells us, that Alexander spent the most severe part of the winter in Zariaspa, quitting Bactria in the beginning of spring to proceed to the conquest of India.

He had already, on his march towards Bactria, journeyed over this same route in opposite direction, and founded a city called Alexandria, not far from the base of Paropamisus; the site of the city is now uncertain. Arrian says, without hesitation, that it lay on the south side of the present Kabul, had he not written further "that Alexander moved forwards from Alexandria to the city of Nicea and the Kophenes. Kabul being built on both sides of the Kophenes or Kabul River." To transfer Alexandria as Diodorus does to the north side of the Paropamisus towards Media, and near the present Bamian, is in direct opposition to Arrian, who expressed himself thus, when writing of Alexander's expedition against Bactria, and his passage of the Indian Caucasus in northerly direction: "About this time Alexander moved towards the Indian Caucasus, where he built a city, calling it Alexandria. After he had sacrificed to the gods, he went over the Caucasian mountains, etc." Further on when relating the expedition from Bactria to India, he writes: "After he had crossed the Caucasus in ten days' march, he arrived at the city of Alexandria, which he had founded on his first expedition against the Bactrians and the Paropamistae." It does seem, therefore, more probable and agreeable to the truth, to conclude, that Nicea was only at a short

distance from Alexandria (Kabul), and was situated on the Logue, the main branch of the Kabul river, coming from Ghizni. If we call, as Strabo does, the one source of the Kabul river Kophes (the Kophenes of Arrain) and the other Choaspes, transporting Alexandria to the Choaspes or Kabul (which is not named by Arrain) and Nicea to the Kophenes, the difficulty will vanish

Alexander marched from the Kophenes eastward, having been told that most fruitful and best populated countries were to be sought in the mountains and towards the north; the south and the plain being, on the contrary, parched with heat and infested with wild beasts (Strabo). Arrain does not say anywhere that when Alexander moved along the left bank of the Kophenes, he had crossed the stream; but we find in Strabo, although he confounds the Choaspes in this passage with Kophenes; and it is clear that he must on his way to the Indus, have crossed the Gurband, the Kama and the Lander. We find in Arrain the passage of the three rivers mentioned, the Kophenes, the Euaspa, and the Guroeus.

We cannot, at present, ascertain the position of those cities, which are mentioned by the above cited authors, by Megasthenes, a Greek, who lived at the court of the Indian King Sandracottus, and by all the Grecian and Roman geographers and historians after them, as having been founded in Alexander's time in the region of the Indus. With rare exceptions, rivers have kept on in one course unmoved; while cities have crumbled near them without any successor rising up over their ashes. The Grecians did also alter their names in such a manner, that scarcely one is recognized in their original language, and one chief cause of this may be, that the most trustworthy accounts of Alexander's exploits were not composed, as Arrain informs us, until after his death.

The conquest of the city of Nyssa, on the right bank of the Indus, gives us the first instance of an Indian name. It belongs to a mountain in the vicinity of the city called Meros, and although Arrain assures us that this is a Greek word, we can hardly fail to see that the Greek Meru has been clipped and made from it.

Alexander moved onwards towards the city of Peucellia, where he crossed the Indus into the plain of Shush, and probably in the vicinity of Benares (Atok), above where Kabul river joins the Indus. Thence he advanced to Taxila, a city seated in the fruitful plain, between the Indus and the Hydaspes (Jehlum river), perhaps the modern Rawal Pindi. On the left bank of the Hydaspes, or Jehlum was Porus and his army; Alexander forced his passage and built a city on each shore of the river, naming the one Niki, or Victory, the other Bucephalia, in the honour of his horse Bucephalus (Ox-head), who died after the battle. Sir A. Burnes thought he had founded this double city in the modern Jalalpur (poor). We have no means of ascertaining where Alexander passed the Acesines, or Chenab; for the rock in the bed of the river is no more to be found. The crossing of Hydrates, or Ravi, is only mentioned generally, but it may have been in the country of Lahor (Lahore), since, as we presently shall see, Alexander's progress was in a south-easterly direction. As he pursued his march, it might have happened that if the enemy were stationed near, or some great city presented itself, he was sometimes compelled to change his route. Now, according to the Greeks, of all the cities in the Punjab, Sangla was the largest and most formidable. It lay three days' march from the Hydrates, or Ravi, the distance of Chak, or Amritsir, from Lahore. After storming the city, he proceeded to Hyphasis (Setlej). That the Hyphasis must be the Setlej and not the Beas, is clear from Diodorus who says: "From the Hyphasis to the Ganges (or rather Jamna) extends a desert of eleven days' march, behind which the King Xandranes stationed himself with an immense force. This is true of the Setlej, or the Ghara rather; but the country on both sides of the Beas is the most fruitful district throughout the Panjab. Arrain speaks of the meeting of the Hyphasis with the Chenab. Alexander was compelled to retire after some sharp combats on the left bank of the Setlej, his troops being overpowered with the fatigues consequent upon their march through the Panjab, which took place (a fact scarcely credible) during the rainy season. Before he crossed the Hyphasis, or Setlej (Beas is Viaspa), however, which he probably did not far from Hari, he raised a monument to the divinity he served most constantly - his own vanity. Ordering his tent to be enlarged to the double of its original size, and a ditch, 50 ft. broad and 40 ft. deep,

to be made around it, he had weapons, much larger than any man could carry, manufactured for his purpose, with harness for horses far beyond the common weight, and commanded that they should be left behind to astonish and alarm his enemies; and, finally building up 12 altars 50 yards high and the same width at base, in the form of pyramids, he sacrificed on them to the gods, and forthwith crossed the Hyphasis. Plutarch says that in his times the Hindus were accustomed to come from the other side of the Ganges, to sacrifice to the gods on these altars, after the manner of the Greeks.

He remained there for some time, repairing the injuries which his towns had suffered from the rains, and occupied with the construction of a fleet destined to convey him down the Hydaspes (Jehlum). To this project Alexander was moved by an expectation that the Hydaspes was one of the branches of the Nile, in which belief he was confirmed by seeing the lotus, or nelumbium in the Jehlum and the crocodile, or alligator which is very frequently met with in that river. This made him hope to reach the Mediterranean Sea by means of his ships. Nor should such an idea be considered by us as unworthy of the intellect of Alexander, but rather as a proof of the ignorance of his time in point of geographical knowledge. The opinions of modern days regarding the source of the Nile were not less extraordinary, and especially one theory among many, which made the Nile and the Niger have their rise from the same lake.

As soon as his fleet, which was composed of 80 vessels of 30 rowers each, and nearly 2,000 other ships, was ready, he divided his army into three parts, of which one was to march along the right, the second along the left shore of the river, while the third and the smallest division embarked with him. While attacking the city near the junction of the Acesines (Chinab) and Hydrates (Ravi), Alexander received the dangerous wound in the breast, which was probably the remote cause of his subsequent death; but no sooner had he recovered from its first effects than he resumed the march, and near the spot where the streams of the Panjab all unite, he founded a large city and harbour, which he also called Alexandria.

Jairazbhoy, R.A. (1994, Alexander visits Pakistan. Dally Dawn, Tuesday Review August 25, page 2) states that Alexander lay gravely wounded in his tent as his surgeon examined the wound. The arrow had gone clean through his breast-plate into his lung. There was no option but to remove it. Secunder (Alexander) was raving but the surgeon just about got him to understand that if he did not operate, he would die. Secunder nodded and the surgeon set about his task. No cries came from the delirious king.

There was no medicine in those days to numb the pain, but mercifully he just passed out. It seemed like hours before the arrow was withdrawn, and the wound redressed.

Outside the tent, Secunder's generals carried on the vigil through the night. They spoke in low tones. "What if he were to die?" asked one. "It's unthinkable," said another. "We are thousands of miles from Macedonia. Who would lead us back?" Another spoke angrily: "We had warned him not to be so reckless. But you have seen what he did."

"The men with the scaling ladders were hesitating, so he grabbed one, rushed with it to the city wall, set it up, and started climbing. This is when I rushed alongside with the large shield," said his bodyguard. "We kept on climbing with the arrows raining down on us. On the top of the wall, the king fought fiercely. He then did a crazy thing. He jumped into the fort and slew many, but before I could reach him, an arrow struck him down."

Ptolemy was saying: "As soon as we heard what had happened, we just threw caution to the wind and stormed into the castle." Another said: "The battering rams flattened the gate, and we streamed in, and rescued the king next."

The next few days the surgeon and Roxanne scarcely left Secunder's side. Slowly he recovered his strength. His first words were: "Did we take the fort?" Ptolemy replied: "Yes, Multan has fallen, though the natives fought bravely."

"How is the morale of our men?"



"I regret to say not-good at all they have been fearful you might die, and there would be chaos. Some are even talking of mutiny."

"Then I have to face them tomorrow." The surgeon protested and Roxanne looked alarmed but Secunder had made up his mind.

As the mist rose from the Ravi, the soldiers on the further bank saw the king's state sail down the river with an escort of boats. As it neared, Secunder suddenly raised his head and waved. At first there was a stunned silence. Then rose cry upon cry, "The king lives, long live the king."

The boats anchored, and with a renewed strength Alexander addressed his soldiers: "Men, it seems I am not fated to die just yet. Why then are you talking of wanting to go home? Have we not conquered half the known world? To turn back now would be to lose all we have gained."

But the handwriting was on the wall. Secunder could not change what was to be. Soon he would build a fleet and send his troops back from near Karachi, while he marched across the Balochistan desert with the rest when many maddened by fatigue, hunger and thirst, fell like flies.

After venturing into the Indian Ocean, he made the famous journey over the Gedrosia Desert back to Babylon, while the fleet under Nearchus followed by Sea. He died at Babylon, not so much from fever as from exhausted vitality. He was not yet 33 years old.

As a further detailed account of Alexander's expedition would have no connection with the design of the present work, I shall merely add a few observations on that portion of its already described.

The whole expedition took place between the spring of the year 327 BC and the winter of the year 326 BC, or 18 months from

the first passage of the Indus until the final departure from that river at Patalene.

I am convinced, from a careful perusal and examination both of all that Arrain and Strabo have written on that and all that also related by Ptolemy, Aristobulus, and the mendacious Onesieritus, either that in Alexander's time, neither the Brahmin nor Buddhist faith was known in the Punjab, or that Alexander and his captains never crossed the Indus, unless we can believe that when their accounts were set down in writing, they had already forgotten all that had been seen and experienced there. (The above paragraphs and those in continuation have been excerpted from Hugel, 1845).

Thus Strabo divides the Indians into seven classes, that is, the Brahmins, the peasants, the shepherds and huntsmen, the handicraftsmen, the warriors, the police and the courtiers. According to Arrain, the system of castes had no existence, and the Brahmins ate with Alexander at night, and drank wine.

The following passage from Strabo shows plainly enough to what faith the natives of the Punjab belonged at that time. "Aristobulus relates some singular customs of the natives of Taxila. Among these is the custom of casting the bodies of the dead to vultures." Here we have at once a clear proof at the nature of the faith professed in the Punjab; the worship of the elements, the religion of the Medes, still existing according to the regulations of Zertusht, or Zoroaster, among the Parsees, or fire-worshippers, which declares the elements are too pure to take up or to destroy a dead body.

Arrain says nothing of the Indian funeral rites; for in his account of the burning of Kalanus, which nobody would suppose to mean a Brahmin, we cannot understand that he means to describe the burning of the dead as a common practice or custom in the Panjab.

Diodorus, speaking of free nation of Indian on the left bank of the Indus, the Oritoni, says: "In regard to their habits, they are all like the Indians, but they have one very strange custom; the

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relations of a dead person carry his corpse naked out of his dwelling, with spear in their hands, set it down in a wood, take away his ornaments, and then abandon it to the wild beasts." This passage would show that all the Indians had not the custom in common; but as Alexander, during his progress through Asia, must have met with it many times, and precisely among the people inhabiting the provinces west of the Panjab, it would have been a strange thing, had the narratives of Alexander's companions said nothing about a custom existing among the Hindus which so much resembled the Greek funeral rites. In another place (Strabo), Aristobulus, says that he has heard how, among some Indian nations it is customary for the women to be burned with the bodies of their deceased husbands; another evidence that this usage, peculiar to the Brahmins, did not exist in the Panjab.

There are writers who believed that Alexander reached the Ganges. This story rests upon a letter, which one of the warriors, Kraterus, wrote to his mother Aristoparta, where he tells her that he has seen the Ganges, describing its enormous breadth and depth, and the huge cetaceous animals which live in its waters. It is unnecessary to prove that the whole is a fable, and the better supposition. Before he could have reached the Ganges, Alexander must have crossed the Jamna, which has never been asserted.

In order to give some idea of the absurdities invented by the Greeks and Macedonians about the Punjab, Hugel collected the statistical accounts of Arrain, Strabo, and Diodorus:

Where the Chenab and Indus unite, there dwelt the Abastane, Xanthae, Sodrae, Ossadae, and Massanae. South of these were the Sogdi, Arachoti (Osii), Drangi, and Subracaes, and the last alone opposing Alexander with some 60,000 men. Where the Ghara and Chenab unite in the Baree Doab, were the Ambrae and Sugambrae, with 80,000 men on foot and 60,000 horse. Further north on the Hydraotes, or Ravi, were the Oxydracae, Malli, and Brachmani. In this country dwelt also the Agalassi, who marched against their forces with 40,000 men on foot and 3,000 horse. Towards the north, again, were the Sibae, Sobii, Hiacensi, and

Silae. The Adrastae, Kathai, Glausae, or Galusanidae, inhabited the north-eastern countries of the Panjab, the Jhalander Doab. To east of these, between the Setlej and Jamna was the King Xandrances with 30,000 horse and 200,000 foot soldiers, 2,000 war chariots drawn by four horses (no Indian custom); and 3,000 elephants.

Finally, Porus reigned over the great Indian nation, to which no one author has ever given a particular appellation, and who inhabited 300 cities in the Jinhath Doab, between the Jehlum and the Acesines. The nearest neighbour of Porus on the north was Abisares, King of the Bergindii, whose power was but little inferior to his. King Taxila reigned over the northern part of the Doab-i-Sindhi-Sagur, which Strabo describes to be as large as Egypt. On the north shore of the Indus reigned the Indian Kings Erix, Afrikes, Kofacus and Assagetes. In Strabo occurs the name of the country Baxdobene, Gandaritis (Kandahar?); and about the Kophenes and its tributaries dwell the Acinacae, Bazirae, Nicae, Hypasii, Thyraei and Arsaei. Strabo reckons 5,000 cities between the Hyphasis and Hydaspes, in the Barea, the Rekhna and the Jinhath Doabs!

## AMRITSIR

IN 1800S AMRITSAR (AMRITSAR) WAS A CITY LARGER THAN Lahore. The wealth of the whole Panjab seemed collected in it, and the great merchants had made it their abode. Under the Mohammedans it was an unimportant place called Chak. It became the holy city of the Sikhs. When their fourth Guru, Ram Das, dug a large tank, or tulao, herein the year 1581, which he called Amrita Saras, or the spring of immortality. It was also a place of pilgrimage for all the Hindus and called Ramdaspur and Amritsar.

Places of pilgrimage were so numerous in India, that they were only noticed by the government for the sake of the tax levied on each pilgrim; and here the assembled crowd being of the lowest classes, they had nothing from which any tax could be levied. It was not until the Mohammedans clearly saw the importance of the Amritsir in the religion of the Sikhs, that they

fancied themselves able, by destroying the town, to aim a fatal blow at the faith. The opinion was an absurd one; for persecutions are the very means by which the force of any faith is established; let the mind once embrace the belief for an eternal reward for actions done, and whether in truth or in error, no earthly event can tear it away from the soul.

Ahmed Shah Abdali wanted to chastise the unquiet spirits who called him so often over the Atok, and thought it possible to eradicate the evil by destroying the holy city, where the first open assembly of the Sikhs took place, after the expulsion of his viceroy Khaja Obied, in 1762. The assembly or ceremony, called Sarhat Kalsa, was held with great rejoicings. After every Sikh had bathed in the holy purifying water, they met to hold the Gurmatta, or council, for the organization of the Sikh confederacy. These proceedings being carried on with proper forms, the Aluwala Sirdar carried the beetle-axe of the people, called Kalal, the chief of the Nishanwala Misal carried the banner of the faith, or Nishan. These officers, like those of the holy Roman empire, have now ceased to exist. Ranjit Singh did not want them; he had no idea of the policy of keeping the most formidable chieftains near his throne by the concession of such privileges; he is on his own throne, and cares nothing for what happens after him.

The first general assembly had hardly broken up, before Ahmed Shah appeared to take a bloody revenge on them. The Sikhs fled in all directions; and after encountering and slaughtering a great part of their number at Kos Rahira, he returned towards Amritsir. The temple of Harmander (Hari Mander, the temple of Hari or Vishnu) was blown up with gunpowder, the broad stones round the Holy tank were torn up and flung into the water, which was soaked up with masonry and rubbish; and not content with the profanation, they brought cows to the place, slaughtered them on the heaps of ruins, sprinkled the stones with their blood, and flung their entrails about.

Ahmed Shah had not reached the Atok before a second Gurmatta was held in Amritsir, where the profanation of this sacred spot animated all the spectators to deeds which brought about, perhaps sooner than might otherwise have happened, the

downfall of Mohammedan power in the north of India. At the same time the Sikhs began to cleanse their dishonoured tank, and (a rare example for Hindus) it was restored to greater splendour than ever.

Amritsir was the most bustling of all the cities of the Punjab; in every street the most beautiful productions of India were exhibited for sale; and it seemed, though the elephants moved on briskly, as though there was no end to the streets.

The chief entrance to the temple, which was very unpretending, was surrounded by houses.

The *tulao* or pool is about 150 paces square, and has a large body of water, which to all appearance is supplied by a natural artesian well. There is no sign of the spring to be seen. It is surrounded by a pavement about 20 or 25 paces in breadth. Round this square are some of the most considerable houses of the city, and some buildings belong to the temple, the whole being enclosed by gates, although one can look very conveniently from the windows of the houses into this enclosed space, and some of the doors even open into it.

There are several stone steps by which the bathers descend into the water, which is so clear as a mirror, a rare occurrence in such places in India.

In the midst of the Tulao stands the temple of Hari Mander, built on an island, and reached by a bridge on the west side. The holiest spot for bathing is on the east side, as they step out of this temple; but before the pilgrim is allowed to bathe there, he must have performed his ablutions in another part of the pool. Opposite to this reverend place stand some small buildings, in which Gurus and Fakirs are seated; another which is unattended is shown as the place where Guru Ram Das, the excavator of this bath of immortality, passed his whole life.

Several fanciful-looking structures stand before the western entrance, a lugubrious sound of music proceeds thence, and a Guru clad in silk appeared seated under the canopy belonging to

a throne in the first storey, surrounded by a sort of court or levee. Every bather, on returning from his or her ablutions, brings a present for these Gurus, chiefly of fruit or flowers but there are some very large pots containing 200 pounds of Ghee or clarified butter, and rice standing before their houses, offerings made in the morning. The Guru presents usually three leaves of Pan, Piper betel, to chew, but without the Areca nut: this is a general custom in India. The three storied house near the Guru and before the bridge, is the place of consecration. Hugel (this topic of Amritsir based on excerpts from Hugel, 1845) inquired whether this ceremony took place often, and with true Indian accuracy, he received for answer: "a thousand times every day." Hugel said that he should like much to see it, and would wait until a neophyte came, but on being told that perhaps on that very day none might come, he understood at once that the thousands were by no means to be taken literally.

All Indian temples have something in them which appeals forcibly to the imagination, and the Hari Mander is particularly mysterious and romantic in its character. It is surrounded by a golden roof, very beautifully and skilfully contrived, and is inlaid with marble, a large door of gold opening into the temple which is surrounded with little vestibules, the ceiling being supported by richly ornamented pillars. Before the entrance to the bridge are two large banners of red; on one is written, "Wha! Guruji-ke faith!" in white letters; and on the other, the name of Ram Das. These banners are from 30-40 cells long, and are stretched on masts and confined with iron chains. Having crossed the bank, Hugel entered the temple; in the center sat the first Guru of the Sikh faith on a masnad, or throne of cushions, the wall of the building being ornamented with a handsome carpet worked in gold, while before him lay another of Kashmiri shawl stuff. A large circle of devotees and followers had formed around him, leaving an open space which is never encroached upon, it being customary that the Guru should be viewed from a certain distance with due reverence. The stillness was quite unbroken, and Hugel had time to gaze on the venerable features of the aged man, as his Chaori-buridar moved the fan, made of the Tibet Cow's tail, before him. At first, there was something striking in the whole scene, but it

became wearisome as the silence continued unbroken, the Guru keeping his eyes intently fastened on the Granth, or Holy Book.

The presents brought by the pilgrims for the Guru were given to the master of ceremonies.

Amritsir is the capital of the district of the same name, in the Punjab (India), 31 miles east of Lahore. The Holy Sikh temple is also known as the Golden Temple, and is the chief Sikh shrine, in which is kept the sacred book of the Sikh religion and law, the Granth Sahib. Voluntary contributions of pilgrims and devotees support the shrine to which about 600 priests are attached.

## ANARKALI

ANARKALI (LITERALLY FLOWER BUD OF POMEGRANATE) WAS the title given to Nadira Begum, or Sharfun Nisaa, one of the favourites in the harem of Akbar. One day, as the emperor was seated in an apartment lined with looking glasses, with the youthful Prince Saleem attending him, who later was to become Emperor Jehangir, he saw from her reflection in the mirror that she had returned the prince's smile.

Suspecting her of criminal intrigue with his son, Akbar ordered her to be buried alive. Accordingly, she was placed in an upright position at the appointed place and in full view of countless horror-struck people, built around with bricks. It is said that Prince Saleem felt intense remorse at her death but felt dread, and more possibly fear of losing the crown, and did not allow himself the freedom to mourn.

On assuming authority, however, Saleem had an imposing structure raised over her sepulchre. The sarcophagus was made of a block of pure marble of exquisite beauty and painstaking workmanship. Past historians describe it as one of the finest pieces of carvings in the world. On top were inscribed the 99 attributes of God and on the side was engraved a Persian couplet by Jehangir, the royal paramour!

"Ah! could I behold the face of my beloved once more,



I would give thanks unto my God until the day of resurrection."

On the northern side of the sarcophagus, below the attributes of God, was the inscription: "Majnoon Saleem Akbar," or the profoundly enamoured Saleem, son of Akbar. The inscription is dated 1008 AH (1599 AD), the year of Anarkali's death (Nyla. D. 1994. The Colours and Scents of Anarkali. *Daily Dawn*, Friday Magazine, September 16, page 3).

However, this historical sum up by Syed Mohammad Latif (1892) does not satisfy the queries as to whether her body lies buried within the Civil Secretariat, Lahore, was she really bricked and not saved secretly at the eleventh hour. But the fact remains that the tomb has the same spirit as that behind Taj Mahall - the spirit of love dauntless, and free from consciousness of social hierarchy.

The octagonal mausoleum dates back to 1615 AD though Anarkali's death refers to 1559 AD. In good old times the river Ravi ran near the extensive gardens. There was an attractive house of a Sikh General M. Allard adjacent to the building.

When the Sikhs took over Punjab after the final disintegration of Muslim empire in India, they used many buildings, surrounding the mausoleum, as their residences. Anarkali tomb was one of them as it was used by Khorak Singh, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's son, as his residence. Later it was given over to General M. Ventura, Indian officer of the Sikh Government who used it as his private residence. After remaining vacant for four years, 1886-1890, the Punjab Government took it over for storing its old records.

The place was doomed to remain in a mess till 1923. It was Professor Garrette, Head of the History Department, Govt. College, Lahore, who worked laboriously to professionally order all the documents stored till then, with the permission of Sir Edward Mclagen, then the Governor of Punjab. Recently, the government of Mian Nawaz Sharif has put further order to the tomb.

The main shopping centre of Lahore, the Anarkali bazaar, has been named after Anarkali.

## BAHADUR SHAH II

BORN OCTOBER 24, 1775, REIGNED 1837-1858, A PENSIONER of the East India Company. He had dignity without power, maintaining from his modest pension the palace and princelings. He was a poet, writing pathetic poems under the pseudonym Zafar, still unsurpassed in pathos and tender sufferings even among the present day poets of India and Pakistan.

Farida Asrar (1994, Fall from Grace. Dawn Friday Magazine, March 11, page 3) by chance in an antique shop, Dubai, came across some pages giving a detailed account of the last days of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, and the atrocities perpetrated on him by The British. While she had read history of the subcontinent and the Mughal kings this was the first time tears rolled from her eyes. The account was written by a Britisher and was printed a century ago in London.

Bahadur Shah II was endowed with other titles besides the usual Your Majesty. These include: the shadow of God, Refuge of Islam, Propagator of Islam, Exalted King of Kings, Sultan and son of Sultan, etc. He was an able calligrapher and copied verses from the Holy Quran. His life was devoted to literature. He was an accomplished poet, and his *nom de plume* was Zafar. Mirza Ghalib was his *ustad*.

After the 1857 "mutiny", Bahadur Shah was taken prisoner. The amount of property that fell into the hands of Britishers was of enormous value. In October 1858 it reached 280,000 Sterling, or 28 lakh rupees. The famous crystal block and marble platform which adorned Diwan Khas in his palace was forwarded to Calcutta to be sent to England. The crown and the jewels of the king also found their way to the Indian metropolis. His crown studded with the finest jewels was bought by Queen Victoria for £500 at an auction.

Mr. Layard, a member of Parliament for Aylesbury, in the course of his travels, came to India where he was permitted an interview with the royal prisoner. On May 11, 1858 at James Hall, London, he communicated some details of the interview to a large and influential audience which included several members of the House of Commons. He said: "Many persons regret that the King of Delhi had not fallen in just punishment for his offence. I saw the King of Delhi. I will not give any opinion as to whether the manner in which we are treating him is worthy of a great nation. I saw the broken down old man - not in a room but in a miserable hole of his palace, lying on a bedstead with nothing to cover him but a miserable tattered coverlet. He rose with difficulty from his couch, showed me his arms, which were eaten into by disease and by flies - partly from want of water. He said in a lamentable voice that he had not enough to eat. Is that they way, in which as Christians, we ought to treat a king? I saw his women too, all huddled up in a corner with their children and I was told, all that was allowed for their support was 16 shillings a day! Is that not punishment enough for one that has occupied a throne?"

The following is an extract from a letter of Mrs. Hodson, wife of the British officer who had taken the King prisoner. "I went with Mr. Saunders (the civil commissioner) and his wife to see the unfortunate and wretched man. A small low door opened into a room, half of which was partitioned off with a grass matting, behind which there was a woman cooking. In the other half was a native bedstead. On this was lying and smoking a *hookah* an old man with a long white beard. No other article of furniture was in the room and I am almost ashamed to say that a feeling of pity mingled with my disgust at seeing a man recently lord of an imperial city almost unparalleled for riches and magnificence, confined in a low, close, dirty room which the lowest slave in his household would have scarcely occupied in the very palace where he had reigned supreme. Mrs. Saunders and me then went into a smaller, darker, dirtier room than the first, in which were some eight to ten women crowding around a common charpoy. The Begum, Zeenat Mahal, asked me - a great honour I afterwards found but which I did not appreciate - to sit down on her bed, but I declined, as it looked so dirty."

Bahadur Shah was tried by the British and was convicted for treason and rebellion, Bahadur Shah pleaded, "Not guilty." Throughout the proceedings he appeared unconcerned and indifferent and took little notice what was happening. At times he was dozing! "Several times he declared himself perfectly innocent and varied the wearisomeness of his constrained attendance by amusing himself with a scarf which he would twist and untwist round his head like a playful child." As expected he was convicted. The emperor and his household were exiled to Rangoon. No proper arrangements were made for them and they stayed in small dirty tents for a few months. Later on, a wooden house with four rooms, two bedrooms and a kitchen was constructed for him. Seventeen people from the Mughal royal family staying in four small rooms! Each person was paid Rs. 430 per month, that is, Rs. 11 per day and they had to meet all their expenses.

Can anyone with a clear conscience treat an 85-year-old in the way the British treated Bahadur Shah Zafar? The British took everything away from him - his country, his palaces, his property, his jewels. They only spared his life, which was filled with sorrow as a result of their shabby treatment and humiliation of him. He died two and a half years into exile. The officiating civil surgeon of Delhi wrote on June 25, 1858 that, "I have seldom seen so old a man in England with equal mental and bodily energy... He usually vomits after every meal." After taking everything away from him, he was only allowed food that too which made him vomit. Is that the way a mighty nation should treat an old man? Was it that justice was only for Britishers and not for the people of the subcontinent? Stuart Welch rightly points out that "justice - of which Bahadur Shah received so little - was no longer his to bestow." In this article of Farida there is a tragic picture of "Once a King: on his deathbed in Burma."

## CHRISTIANS

BISHOP ALEXANDER JAHN MULLICK (URDU DAILY PAKISTAN, December 21, 1991, Political Edition, page 1), in an interview, made some comments about Christians, in Pakistan, that are reproduced in continuation:

Since the inception of Pakistan, whatever government came to power never did full justice to the Christian minority, and the population thereof has been deliberately underestimated, because due to the Muslim names of many a Pakistani Christians, these have been considered as the Muslims. As a matter of fact, this choice of Muslim names is intentional. The underlying reason alludes to the reality that a religion is not incumbent upon western names. Undoubtedly, in olden days, some of the Hindus (particularly of lower caste) were converted to Christianity. But when the British colonialists set their feet on the Indian subcontinent, the East India Company did not permit Christian priests into India. The main purpose of British colonialists was to indulge in extravagance and debauchery (of course plunder) in India, and if the British priests came along they won't let them lead a life of luxury.

The very first English priest entered India clandestinely. The name of this very priest was William Carey and enlisted in the service of East India Company as a cobbler. He deserted later on, took up living in woods and devoted his time to preaching. Also, he established the Srampur University in 1825.

Years passed before the British Parliament would pass a bill that allowed the priests to visit India.

In the time of Quaid-i-Azam nobody ever talked of an Islamic state. Furthermore, Quaid-i-Azam is on record when he addressed the first National Assembly, August 11, 1947, thusly: "We are laying the foundation of such a state where a Muslim won't be a Muslim and Hindu won't be a Hindu. We are the equal citizens of the same state. The government has nothing to do with religious affairs."

During the golden days of British empire, in the very church where Bishop Alexander was sitting, except the British Christians, no other Christian (presumably Indian) could dare venture in. And, those who embraced Christianity, whatever reasons might be, the English colonialists employed them as drivers, cook, etc., but never did let them have education.

General Ziaul Haq introduced the separate electorate for the minorities, which has resulted in upsetting some of the Christian circles. Notwithstanding, they side with the same government that favours such elections?

We are all out for the same system of elections, for all the Pakistanis, because we do not consider ourselves any different from Muslims as a one nation. We are the cogs of the same machinery, therefore, our ballot boxes must not be separate.

J. Salik (Urdu Daily Pakistan, December 21, 1991, Political Edition, page 1) - A Christian MNA, stated that General Ziaul Haq establishment the Majlise Shoora and, then, in 1985 blundered in setting a wrong tradition of allotting development funds to the members of the National Assembly. The outcome is that the role of assembly members has changed. In none of the Parliaments worldwide, the construction of street and the like fall under the authority of Assembly members.

It is said that we are first Muslims and afterwards Pakistani. This conviction negates the lofty philosophy of Quaid-i-Azam, who asserted that Pakistan is not the country for those who practice one particular religion, rather it would be a home to all those living in Pakistan. Had Quaid-i-Azam so desired, he would have easily named the country as the Islamic Democratic Pakistan. He desisted from doing so. Salik's claim is based on the fact that the proceedings of the first National Assembly did not commence with a recitation from the Holy Quran. Nobody would have stood in Quaid-i-Azam's way, if he would have decided otherwise. The speaker of the National Assembly, in 1991, made a check on the veracity of Salik's statement. Indeed, the first National Assembly of Pakistan did not start business with a Tilawate Quran Pak. This was a visionary's shrewd and premeditated move, as in that Assembly there was a Hindu Minister (Mandal) and Christian representatives as well. In 1991, there were about 35 representatives of Christians in Pakistani Assemblies.

## **FIRE DRILLS**

ALTHOUGH THE MATCHED TIPPED WITH SULPHUR AND phosphorus came into use after 1830, the usual method to ignite fires consisted of fire drills: in a simple frictional method the blunt end of a stick is rubbed back and forth along another piece of wood lying on the ground. The stick makes for itself a groove and ultimately a spark is developed. In Tahiti, Charles Darwin saw a native produce fire thus in a few seconds, but he himself succeeded after long efforts. In another version, a mobile stick is rotated as rapidly as possible, sometimes holding it vertically between the palms of the hands in a stationary piece of wood that lies on the ground, and a spark is obtained.

## **GANDHI, INDIRA (PRIYADARSHINI)**

BORN NOVEMBER 1917, ALLAHABAD, INDIA, WHO SERVED Prime Minister of India for three consecutive terms (1966-77) and won a fourth term in 1980. Her father was Jawaharlal Nehru, a nationalist leader who was first Prime Minister of Independent India. She attended Visva - Bharati University, West Bengal and Oxford University, and in 1942 she married Feroze Gandhi (died 1960), a fellow member of National Congress Party.

In 1977, Gandhi's popularity steadily declined as she appeared to come more and more under the influence of her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi. Sanjay Gandhi's death in airplane crash in June 1980 caused some speculation over the cause of national politics, but at the end of 1980 public opinion polls and local election results showed that Indira Gandhi's popular support remained solid.

On October 31, 1984, Mrs. Gandhi was shot and killed in New Delhi by two Sikh members of her special security force. The assassination was apparently in retaliation for the army's June 1984 raid on Golden Temple at Amritsar, the holiest Sikh shrine and headquarters of extremists agitating for greater autonomy for the Punjab. Her son, Rajiv Gandhi, became Prime Minister of India on October 31, 1984 after the assassination of his mother.

He was born in Bombay on August 20, 1944. Later, on he was also assassinated while still in high office.

Khushwant Singh (Daily Dawn, February 4, 1994, page 7) makes a critical review: "Who murdered Indira?" Of course, Beant Singh and Satwant Singh, her security guards! They threw down their weapons after they had perpetrated their vile deed and surrendered. A few minutes later an attempt was made to eliminate both of them: Beant Singh was killed, Satwant Singh survived, made a full confession and went to the gallows.

Were there other conspirators in the crime? Two men, Balbir Singh and Kehr Singh were named. The evidence of their involvement in the crime was shaky. However, while the Supreme Court let off Balbir, it confirmed death sentence on Kehr Singh who was hanged along with Satwant.

Were there still others, higher up the social scale involved in the plot to assassinate Mrs. Indira Gandhi? A number of them including Simranjit Singh Mann and Atinder Pal Singh were arraigned. None of them knew the actual killers. Their trial was still going on in Bihar where a day before he handed over prime ministership, Rajiv Gandhi, made a unilateral decision to drop the case against them. No body knows whether Rajiv did so because he found nothing substantial in the charges against these men, or wanted to make political capital by showing magnanimity.

Undoubtedly, the man who knew most about the diabolical plot in all the ramifications was S. Anandaraman, head of the special investigation team. He has recorded whatever he knew in *Assassination of Prime Minister: as it happened* (Vision). But he saw the evidence from a police officer's point of view and not that of an objective observer. One would have thought that after Satwant Singh (the assassin who survived) had made a full and honest confession there was little left to do but to put him up for trial and conviction.

Although he named some people whom he met in the home of his co-assassin Beant, accompanied them to gurdwaras in Amritsar and Delhi where he accepted baptism, there was not



enough to establish a well-planned conspiracy to commit the crime. Encouragement undoubtedly there was but no detailed planning or incitement. That is why Balbir Singh exonerated. And many jurists including Chandrachud, retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, felt that Kehr Singh should also have been given the benefit of doubt.

The attempt to kill both Beant and Satwant after they had surrendered needed more careful looking into than was done. Anandraman accepting the version given by the guards who opened fire on the two unarmed men is not convincing. They maintained that the assassins tried to grab weapons out of their hands. The only corroborative evidence was the trajectory of the bullets which hit the two men and the walls. Common sense would indicate that having failed to prevent the assassination they turned their ire on the assassins.

Anandraman has not brought the discipline he imbibed in police service into his writing. Some facts are reported over and over again and he goes forward and backward in his narrative. It would appear that he dictated most of his book to the steno. Books are not produced by dictation but by painstaking writing, correcting and rewriting. Nevertheless the topic and the material amassed is such as to make the compilation a must for every library.

### **GANDHI, MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND**

*(Excerpts from Askari, M.H. 1992. Dawn, February 5, page 13, Reassessing Gandhi's Role)*

MAHATAMA GANDHI, THE APOSTLE OF NON-VIOLENCE, WAS murdered by a fanatical Hindu, Nathuram Godse, January 30, 1948. Godse belonged to the Hindu Mahasabha, the rank and file of which has now virtually merged with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and is the second largest party in the Indian Parliament.

It is common knowledge that Nathuram Godse's resolve to assassinate the Mahatama was hardened because of the concessions which Jawaharlal Nehru's government was at that time obliged to grant to Muslims (and Pakistan). Three weeks

earlier (January 13, 1948) Gandhiji began what was to be his last fast which, as he declared, was to appeal "to the conscience of all - to the Hindus and Muslims in India and the Muslims of Pakistan."

Fears were expressed that he might die. But he declared. "...Death for me would be a gracious deliverance rather than that I should be a helpless witness to the destruction of India, Hindustan, Islam and Sikhism." At his customary prayer meeting on the fast he told the congregation: "If the Hindus and Sikhs insist on turning out the Muslims of Delhi, they will betray India and their religions and it hurts me."

Five days after Gandhi began his fast, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President of the Congress presented him with a pléde signed by representatives of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, as well as some Jews, undertaking that "We shall protect the life, property and faith of Muslims" and that the incidents which had taken place in Delhi in the preceding months would not happen again. The pledge also *inter alia* stated that Muslims would be able to hold in peace the annual *Urs* of Hazrat Khawaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiar-kaki, whose *Mazar* is located in the suburbs of Delhi.

The Government of India also undertook to transfer to Pakistan Rs. 550 million (\$180 million approx. at that time) as its share of India's undivided assets. Among others representatives of Hindu Mahasabha and RSS signed the pledge and, according to Gandhiji's biographer, Louis Fischer, the Pakistan High Commissioner also present when the pledge was read out to Gandhiji, also "addressed a few friendly words to the Mahatama." The latter then announced that he was ready to break his fast.

All this incensed Nathuram Godse and his companions who planned Gandhiji's murder. They were particularly infuriated as the mosques of Delhi had to be vacated by Hindus who had occupied them. Godse said at his trial: "I sat brooding on the atrocities perpetrated on Hindustan and its dark deadly future if left to face Islam outside and Gandhi inside; I decided all of a sudden to take the extreme step against Gandhi."

Pakistanis, by and large, particularly the present generation, find it hard to accept that Gandhiji was willing to sacrifice his life to save Muslims or to ensure amity between Pakistan and India. They recall his unqualified support to the Nehru's government's annexation of Kashmir and his continued support to Sardar Patel whom even Abul Kalam Azad recognized as being cold-bloodedly indifferent to the plight of the Muslims at the time of partition.

Azad is on record as having said that in the midst of the communal frenzy "What was most noticeable was that Sardar Patel (who was Home Minister) had turned against Gandhiji and was indifferent when Gandhiji fasted on the issue of the security of Muslims." At a public meeting held in Delhi after Gandhiji's murder, the veteran Congress leader Jayaprakash Narayan demanded that Patel should explain why no special measures had been taken when there was an open propaganda inciting people to murder Gandhiji and a bomb had been thrown at him at his prayer meeting a few days before the actual assassination.

In Pakistan, the general view is that Gandhiji was virtually a reincarnation of Chanakya, the Hindu philosopher, who propagated machiavelli-like attitude towards the society and state-craft and that he did not always mean what he said.

In India too, there have lately been some candid attempts to reassess Gandhiji's role in the freedom movement, particularly in the last phase when the British government was negotiating with the Indian leaders for the transfer of power. Barrister S.K. Majumdar, in his study of the comparative roles of Quaid-i-Azam and Gandhiji, published 1966, points out that even after his overall disillusionment with the Congress's attitude, the Quaid throughout 1937 and 1938 "tried his level best to come into personal contact with Gandhiji for the purpose of settling Congress-League disputes, but Gandhiji and Congress did not think it worthwhile to cultivate Jinnah's good-will."

Likewise, H.M. Seervai, a former Advocate-General of Maharashtra state, in his book *Partition of India: Legend and Reality*, quotes Gandhiji as having admitted to ex-Governor Richard Casey that "Jinnah had told him that he (Gandhi) had

ruined politics in India by dragging a lot of unwholesome elements in Indian life and giving them political prominence, that it was a crime to mix up politics and religion the way that he (Gandhi) had done."

Seervai also says, in a public statement shortly after the 1937 provincial elections, Quaid said: "Nobody will welcome an honourable settlement between the Hindus and Muslims more than I and nobody will be more ready to help it." The Quaid followed up with a public appeal to Gandhiji to tackle the question but the latter's response was somewhat depressing: "I wish I could do something... My faith in unity is bright as ever; only I see no daylight but impenetrable darkness and in such distress I cry out to God for light..."

Seervai maintains that long before Pandit Nehru made his speech of 10th July 1946, Gandhi had destroyed both short-term and long-term provisions of the Cabinet Mission Plan: Gandhiji declared his opposition to the grouping formula before the Plan was announced on May 16, 1946. He also maintained (in an article in Harijan, May 17, 1945) that the proposed Constituent Assembly was to be a sovereign body "free to frame a constitution of independence for India... (and) the Provinces were to reject the very idea of grouping." (Pandit Nehru took up the same position in his statement of 10th July).

Seervai is firmly of the opinion that "If anyone is to be blamed for the failure of the (Cabinet Mission) Plan it was Gandhi and not Jawaharlal." He quotes the historian Penderel Moon as having said that on June 19, 1946 that the Congress Working Committee had reportedly decided to "accept at any rate the proposal of an interim government (but) hopes were dashed by the last-minute intervention of Gandhi who insisted that a nationalist (Congress) Muslim must be appointed."

To quote Seervai: "It is not correct to place the responsibility for the Muslim League's withdrawal of its acceptance of the Plan on Jawaharlal's speech alone. The Working Committee had it in its power to undo the effect but it did not, and Gandhi had it in his power to undo the effect but he did not..."

Excerpts from "Zeno" (Daily Dawn Friday Magazine, March 6, 1992, March 13, 1992; Cultural Notes, page 4 and 4) present an interesting critical review of B.R. Nanda's book *Gandhi, Panislamism, Imperialism, and Nationalism*, under the Captain "Mahatama Gandhi and the Muslims," a two-part article: Indian nationalists, especially the Muslims among them, have always discussed the important role played by Mahatama Gandhi in the affairs of the Khilafat movement. What has not been realized, by them or by others, is how important a role was played by the Khilafat agitation in the political development of Gandhiji.

In fact it can be stated with a great deal of accuracy that it was the Khilafat phase of the Congress struggle which afforded Gandhi the possibility not only to rise to his predominant position of authority of the Indian national organization, but also to put him on the imposing pedestal of Mahatama.

It is asserted that the Indian Muslims had always been an aloof, even hostile, factor to the Indian nationalist idea and movement. During the Khilafat politics between 1919 and 1928, only for a brief period, thanks to Gandhiji's efforts, they came out of their self-imposed isolation and became a part of the Indian nationalist mainstream. But this association proved to be a brief one and when the Khilafat as a political form, came to be abolished by the Turks themselves, the Muslims of India were not only deeply frustrated but went back into their shell, and followed, once again, with increased intensity, the isolationist and separatist role that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had chalked out for them.

Mr. Nanda analyses the inherent nature of the Indian Muslim psyche, and the reasons for its aloofness and "foreignness." Quite correctly he concludes from his study of history of the problem that, "Hinduism and Islam are religions and the social system that they engendered, failed to develop links of intimate interactions, at best they reached a state of tolerance and coexistence." He attributes this long subsisting hiatus between the two groups to the "foreign" nature of Islam and the various groups of Muslim migrants and conquerors who came into India. They refused to be absorbed into Hindu society "unlike the earlier invaders such as Huns and Scythians." To this "Zeno" adds that Mr. Nanda fails

to mention the Aryans, but then perhaps like the Arya Samajists and most modern Hindu Intellectuals, he believes that the Aryans were indigenous to India and thus had a natural right to be the sons of the soil.

However, he fails to realize the essential difference between the Muslim Central Asian invaders of India and the pre-Muslim invaders of India - also from the same region. While the Huns the Scythians, the Aryans, and the other pre-Muslim invaders had a more primitive culture - social, political and intellectual - the Muslim Central Asians brought with them a highly developed feudal civilization, evolved over a number of centuries, with its centre in Baghdad - and further back in Damascus, Mecca and Medina. It was not the more highly developed Muslims who would get absorbed into the Hindu social matrix, but rather the other way round. And, this is proved by the vast and deep changes which were introduced by them into Indian society - linguistic, educational, administrative, political, social, cultural, even religious.

When WWI started with Turkey opposing the allies in league with Germany, the Indian Muslims came to a parting of the ways and broke their alliance with the British. It was about this time that the Muslims League and the Congress came to an agreement and Hindu-Muslims unity was established on a secure political basis. The Lucknow pact engineered by the joint efforts of Jinnah, Tilak and other Congress leaders, sealed the political unity of India.

Ali brothers were at this time carrying on an intensive Panislamist movement, which enthused the whole of the Muslim community. Annie Besant started her Home Rule Movement about the same time. Both the Ali Brothers and Annie Besant were arrested between 1915 and 1917 and widespread struggles were launched for their release and for the causes of Home Rule and Khilafat.

Gandhi, who had returned from South Africa in 1914, remained on the periphery of politics in all this period. Not until 1919 did he find an opening to acquire a position which should give him the opportunity of trying in India his experiment of non-violent non-cooperation, with which he had achieved great success in South Africa for many years.

Gandhi found this opportunity in 1919 when practically all the important Indian leaders were in London for discussing the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, Tilak, Jinnah, Besant, Surendranath Banerjee, Srinivas Sastri, were all absent from India. The promulgation of the Rowlatt Act in 1918 had created a lot of unrest and agitation. Gandhi was approached by Bombay nationalist leaders to start a non-cooperation movement against the Rowlatt Act. He agreed to do so, and gave a call for a political strike in March 1919.

The strike began on April 6. By April 9, the whole country was set ablaze. On April 13, the holocaust of Jallianwala Bagh took place. The whole of the Punjab was under martial law. Unheard of atrocities were committed and the British army crushed the rebellious movement. Gandhiji suspended the noncooperation movement on April 18. The Non-Violence technique of Satyagrah, the unrelenting control of Gandhi over the initiative of masses, the withdrawal of the movement at the slightest tendency to get out of hand, were all features of the struggle closely related to the political opportunism of the bourgeoisie.

But the tremendous agitation and unrest brought Gandhiji to the forefront of national politics. He not only became an all India leader of the Hindus but also emerged as a leader of the Muslims who championed the cause of the Khilafat.

In the Calcutta Congress session, September 1920, Gandhi proposed a resolution for non-cooperation both for the cause of anti-Rowlatt Act movement and the Khilafat. With the assistance of Shaukat Ali, he had his resolution passed in the face of leaders like Lajpat Rai, who was presiding the session. The process was repeated after a few months at Nagpur Congress. Here again Lajpat Rai opposed Gandhi's resolution for launching a non-

cooperation movement. The aim of the movement was the winning of Swaraj within one year. Nagpur decided the tussle between the old Congress leadership and the new one led by Gandhi

The poet Rabindranath Tagore opposed the movement. Bhupendranath Basu called it "a plan of madness." Aurobindo Gosh said "it made no sense." And, Jinnah declared in a letter to Gandhiji "it means complete disintegration and chaos."

In the middle of all this confusion and chaos, let loose by the largely unorganized non-violence' movement, there were incidence of severe violence. The spontaneous Mopla rebellion of the Muslim peasants of the West Coast against the government and the landlords (mainly Hindus) turned into a large scale bloodshed. And, just when Gandhiji was preparing to personally lead a peasant movement in Bardoli district of Surat, he heard of the killing of number of policemen by the mob in Chewri Choura in UP. He suspended the entire nonviolent non-cooperation movement in February 1922, and stopped all political activity.

As for Khilafat, it continued to drag along for another two years until 1924 the Grand National Assembly of Turkey abolished the very concept of the mediaeval political form which had become a mere shadow of its original substance. This dealt a grievous blow to the Indian Muslims and the Khilafat politicians.

Jinnah in one place has described Gandhi's political methodology as "spiritualization of politics." He meant by this the change of political struggle from the largely secular to the preponderantly religious mode. Gandhi himself in his own analysis of his politics had identified politics and religion. Once this is done in a situation where more than one religious community is involved only inter-communal conflict can ensue.

As we know, Jinnah started as an uncompromising secularist in politics. He continued to maintain his opposition to separate electorates until 1927, when he persuaded all the Muslim political parties to agree to accept joint electorates provided there were certain safeguards ensured for the Muslim community. He never



believed in making religion a substitute or alternative for politics. Even in the case of Pakistan's proposed constitution he opted for a national state with no religious distinctions among its citizens. Again and again he expressed his opposition to a religious or a theocratic state.

The real trouble about Indian national politics has always been the deep desire in the majority of the Hindu community to create a Hindu state on the basis of the Hindu religious, cultural and historical tradition. When, however, the India National Congress began its career as a political institution, it conceived itself as a secular Indian body.

Nevertheless, under the influence of what is called Hindu Renaissance (which began in Bengal at the beginning of the 19th century) Indian national leadership changed the Congress into an instrument for "Hindu Nationalism" as Bepin Chandra Pal so forcefully proclaimed. By the turn of the century, this transformation was complete under the influence of such leaders Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai. While Bengal nationalists, at the beginning of the 20th century, specially after the 1905 partition of Bengal, turned Indian nationalism more and more into Hindu religious formulations, the Arya Samaj movement in the Punjab and the UP popularized the politics of ant-Muslim psychosis. This attained its ultimate conclusion in Shuddhi and Sanghtan movement and large scale communal riotings.

Gandhiji attained supremacy and eliminated the old generation of secularist or semi-secularist politicians. But the manner in which Gandhiji perverted the Indian political movement through his "spiritualism" has not been taken into account.

Communal isolation and separatism was snot, and is not, a Muslim monopoly. Throughout the course of India's struggle for freedom, both Muslims and Hindus were in general trying to plough their separate lonely furrows. In this they were helped and assisted by the British rulers, who learnt at a very early stage to create dissensions in the Indian population - especially dissensions on the basis of religion. This divide and rule policy

was used very successfully in the case of Hindus vs Muslims community divisions, alternately leaning on one side or another. To blame the entire communal separation on the Muslim psyche or Sir Syed's teachings is not only unfair but untrue. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad learnt at the very end, when he saw Patel, Nehru and, above all, Gandhi accepting the partition of India on religious lines, but those whom he had followed on the secular path were in reality still not rid of their communal political prejudices. This has been revealed with telling effect in the unexpurgated edition of Maulana Azad's *India Wins Freedom*

Akbar Allahabadi's *Gandhi Nama* - a collection of 198 qata'at - recently published under the title *Gandhi lisanulas ki nazar main*, is reviewed under the title "Rediscovering Gandhi" (Hussain .I. 1994 Daily Dawn Friday Magazine. September 30, page 2). The excerpts from Hussain's article are in continuation: the whole inspiration of Akbar Allahabadi comes from the political events of that particular period beginning with the Rowlatt Act 1919 and culminating in the Khilafat movement in 1921. Gandhi, frankly speaking, is an integral part of our political history. No Hindu leader ever commanded so much respect and adoration as he at one stage of our struggle had commanded among the Muslims. The reaction against him too was of the same proportion. The Ali brothers' early adoration and later disenchantment symbolizes the Indian Muslim's attitude, as a whole, towards the man.

Gandhiji had headed the Khilafat movement. With the rare exception of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who differed with the whole concept of the movement, the whole Muslim leadership had faith in him. It was his decision of the suspension of the movement at a crucial stage which created doubts about his intentions among a large section of the Muslims. However, the Ali brothers took their time to be disillusioned with him. Historically speaking, the first rift in their relations occurred when Gandhiji and Maulana Shaukat Ali differed in their determination of the causes of Hindu Muslim riots in Kohat. That happened in the later months of 1924.

## **HARIJAN**

MAHATAMA GANDHI GAVE THE NAME HARIJAN(GOD'S children) to the untouchable millions of Hindu society. This empty euphemism did not change anything. The high caste Hindus continued to avoid the touch, the smell and even the sight of the lower castes, especially the Sudras. The Aschutes remained the outsiders of the Hindu society.

Dalit (the oppressed, the crushed) was the name given by Dr. Ambedkar to his fellow untouchables. This also did not stick, though for a time the great untouchable leader thought in terms of founding Dalistan, like Jinnah's Pakistan - a separate state of the untouchable people. It was a very large minority in Indian society, about the same size as the Muslims, but unlike the Muslims they could not claim any consolidated landmass in which they had a majority population. So the idea of Dalistan was still born.

Later, after independence Dr. Ambedkar wrote the draft of the constitution of Free India, in which untouchability was declared a crime. But that did not change anything. The untouchables remained untouchables. Totally frustrated about the future of his people within the Hindu society, the great law-giver converted to Buddhism as a means of attaining a certain measure of social dignity and acceptability. Large numbers of untouchables in Maharashtra, where he belonged, followed in his footsteps and became converted to Buddhism.

This was not a solution to the problems of the degraded and outcaste position of untouchables. In the seventies arose a violent movement of untouchable youth to organize them and arm themselves for self-protection, in the face of increasing attacks by gangs of high caste hoodlums. This was called the Dalit Panthers movement. Both the literary and Dalit political movements were inspired by the rise of the revolutionary movements of the black people in the United States. The Dalit wave of poetry and prose in Marathi is another manifestation of this mood of revolutionary insurgency among untouchable intellectuals. In many ways, the

problems of both community were similar; so was the expression of their revolutionary self-consciousness.

In recent times the untouchables are still subjected to atrocities at the hands of high caste Hindus. In December 1991, in the province of Bihar, ten Harijans were killed and one wounded by high caste Hindu. The Indian welfare minister Sita Ram, in Indian Parliament, remarked that during 1990 there were about 17,000 cases of murders and violence of Harijans. He further indicated that such incidents are on the increase during recent years. On August 9, 1991 twenty Harijans were hacked to death in a village in southern India by high caste Hindus and their bodies were thrown into a nearby canal. The incident occurred at Sundur village near Guntur town in Andhra Pradesh state. It is said that a group of Harijans were attacked by deadly weapons while trying to flee across marshes. A police picket in the village remained passive to gruesome murders. Some of the Harijans took shelter in the salvation army church.

It so happened that a Harijan boy watching a movie stretched himself and his leg accidentally touched a high caste boy sitting in the next seat. Soon there was an altercation between them. The Hindus took this as an affront on their authority. They summoned the father of the Harijan boy and held him hostage until they caught hold of the boy and beat him. After this, other minor incidents between the two groups snowballed and finally led to arson and mayhem.

Mahmood, M.A. (Daily Dawn Friday Magazine, September 23, 1994, page 3), in an interesting article "It is Written in the Stars", refers to the Bhandoo community. A low caste, Hindu Community, the Bhandoo's are fatalistic in their approach to life. They believe that destiny has marked out the tortuous path for them, and hemmed in by hostile neighbours, they are not taking any steps to change their fortunes. However, some of the younger ones want to prove their elders wrong.

Mahmood was always suspicious of stories narrated by grandparents, and of history books, where it was mentioned that the higher class Hindus use to pour simmering lead into the ears

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of the lower-class Hindu Sudras if they ever tried to listen to their talks. These stories also related that if Sudras caught a glimpse of the festivals or happy occasions of Brahmans, they would make them blind by sliding hot iron bars into their eyes.

To know all this he did not have to visit a remote village in India. Only four kilometers from downtown Karachi, right in the shadow of a posh locality, namely Defence Housing Authority, and along the Korangi road where rich industrialists commute all the time, to and from their industries, there lives a poor community of Hindu lower caste known as the Bhandoo. This community is living in a small area, walled in by houses belonging to other communities living in the Masoom Shah Colony, Mehmoodabad.

The Bhandoos are the lower caste Sudra Hindus. The Bhandoos of Masoom Shah Colony, about 2500 in number, still experience the exploitation they used to suffer at the hands of upper class Hindus.

They have been living here for the last three decades and were helped to settle in here by a local social activist, Mir Zikria. Now, the whole 2500 member community lives in about 120 houses along a single two-metre long lane.

These outcasts have never been able to pursue an education. Their children are simply not allowed to sit in school.

Even in 1994, when a large number of people and organizations talk about "human rights", the Bhandoos do not believe any one can help them. The upper social classes have always been either exploitative or indifferent towards them. The leaders appear only during election time to beg for votes, by promising each and every necessity of life. These political leaders return only at the time of next elections.

### **JINNAH, MOHAMMAD ALI (1876-1948)**

THE FOUNDING FATHER OF PAKISTAN, A STATESMAN, BORN in Karachi, 1876, the son of a merchant. He studied law at

Lincoln's Inn, London (1892-1896) and built up a good practice as a barrister in Bombay, India. In politics he followed the moderate leaders of Indian National Congress Party, Dadabhai Noroji and Gopal Krishna Gokhle. He joined the Indian Muslim League in 1913, when it extended its platform to include Indian self-government. He brought about the Lucknow Pact between Hindus and Muslims in 1916, and created the Nationalist Party in 1924 by bringing together 23 independent members of the newly elected Central Assembly and then attracted such giants as Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das to integrate their Swaraj Party with his group.

He tried his best to bring about rapprochement between Muslim League and All India Congress. In 1918 some differences developed between Mr. Jinnah and Mahatma Gandhi, then he became a leader of Muslim League. In 1940, he decided to start a regular movement for a separate homeland of Muslims, thereby creating a tension between Hindus and Muslims.

There was no equal to him in the art of winning the confidence of others in his own proposals - not even Gandhi who could never get the Hindus united to oppose the division of India and creation of Pakistan as much as Jinnah succeeded in uniting the Muslims in favour of achieving Pakistan.

When in 1913 he agreed to join Muslim League he expressly made it a condition that his "loyalty to the Muslim League and the Muslim interest would in no way and at no time imply even the shadow of disloyalty to the larger national cause to which his life was dedicated."

He was a great Parliamentarian and constitutionalist.

## LAHORE

LAHORE IS THE HUB OF CULTURE AND PROVINCIAL CAPITAL of the Punjab. It is said to have been founded at the end of the 1st or beginning of the 2nd century AD by Loh, the son of Rama Chandra, the legendary hero of Ramayana. It is located on the left bank of the Ravi somewhat opposite to Shahdara. Historically,

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Lahore is recorded to have been a dependency of the great ruler Lalitaditya in 8th century AD. In 1021-1023 AD, this city was occupied by Mahmud Ghaznavi. But Lahore, as we know it today, reached the peak of its glory during the reign of Mogul rulers, especially during the time of Akbar the Great, who made it his capital. The Moguls endowed the city with some of its finest pieces of architecture. But like other civilizations, Lahore too, suffered decline.

The city was stripped of most of its architectural beauty and elegance during the political chaos and anarchy that followed in the wake of the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 AD.

The British, during their reign (1849-1947) compensated Lahore by harmoniously combining Mogul, Gothic and Victorian style of architecture and built some important buildings like the High Court, Government College, the Central Museum, National College of Arts, Montgomery Hall, Tollinton Markets, the Punjab University (Old Campus) and the Provincial Assembly.

The reigns of Mogul Emperors Humayun, Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb form the golden period in the annals and architecture of Lahore, but from the accession of Bahadur Shah I till the establishment of the rule of Ranjit Singh in 1799, its history is of successive invasions and conquests.

The Sikhs ruled over Lahore from 1768 to 1894 when, at the end of the second Sikh War and, with the rest of the Panjab, it came under British dominance.

In retrospection, it was the 15th invasion of Lahore (as stated by Mirza, 1994, Daily Dawn 3rd September, Sect. 2, page 3) since the advent of the Muslims in the Indian sub-continent. The first was by Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi who was out to destroy all Indian rulers including the Muslim potentates of Multan and Sindh. Ghaznavi did not distinguish between Muslims and Hindus.

Sultan Mahmud and other invaders from the west had to first face the Muslim rulers of the sub-continent - the Ghauris, the Moguls, the Qizalbashes (Nadir) and the Pathans (Ahmad Shah

Abdali) all came and most of the time destabilized Muslim rule in northern India. Only two attacks came from the east. The first was by the British in the 19th century and the second was by the Indian (against Pakistan) in September, 1965. There was another attack from southern India by the Marhattas, but they were forced to retreat almost immediately. The attacks on Lahore from within the Panjab were launched by the Sikhs, particularly the one after Ahmad Shah Abdali's invasion who had come to help his Governor Kabuli Mal from whom the Sikh rebels demanded that all Muslims butchers of the city be handed over to them.

The last attack on Lahore was launched by the Indians on September 6, 1965, who were earlier ambushed in the Raan of Kutch by the Pakistan army and later on harassed in Occupied Kashmir by Pakistani armed guerillas sent under a proposal openly opposed by then Commander-in-Chief, General Muhammad Musa. He later declared it a misconceived adventure for which the Pakistan Army was neither prepared nor well-equipped. General Musa and many others were of the opinion that the late General Akhtar Hussain and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto were the architects of the scheme to send infiltrators to Occupied Kashmir, particularly to the Kashmiri-speaking areas. General Ayub Khan readily agreed to the proposal in which he saw not only rehabilitation of his political image dented by the presidential contest against Mohtarama Fatima Jinnah, but also fulfillment of his vision of becoming President for life.

Whether Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was a party to the so-called conspiracy of hawks or not, he was one of those who over projected the issue and ultimately emerged as the political hero of 1965 war in the Panjab and the Frontier. It was the fallout of the 1965 war which not only seriously damaged Ayub Khan and his system but also jolted the tenuous relationship with East Pakistan, which until 1965 was sure that in case of a war with India, West Pakistan would provide it with a protective umbrella.

During the 15th attack on Lahore, it was defended by Bengalis, who had come here with the British in 1849, and Hindustani forces who had defeated the Sikh Army because of the treachery of Rani Jindan, her brother and her paramour Mir



Lal Singh and his brother Misr Teja Singh. It was Rani Jindan who invited the British stationed at Ludhiana to attack and occupy the territory.

The 15th attack on Lahore had altogether a different connotation. It was not fought on the banks of the Ravi as had happened in the past but in the plains east of the city.

The Buildings of Ranjit Singh and his mausoleum in Lahore are common and meretricious in style, paling into insignificance before Mogul architecture. Moreover, he was responsible for much of despoiling of the earlier Mogul Buildings, having stripped the Muslim tombs of their ornaments and sent them to Amritsar.

The Shalimar Gardens, which were laid out in 1641 by Shah Jahan, six miles east of the city of Lahore, are some of the most magnificent in the world. Originally planned in seven parts, there are now only three terraces, rising one above the other, and 427 fountains, in an area of 39 acres. A magnificent counterpart of seven terraces still stands as an intact memory of the Mogul grandeur in Srinagar, Kashmir, by the Dal Lake.

Shahdara, which contains the tomb of emperor Jahangir, lies across the Ravi, about five miles north of the city. It consists of a splendid marble cenotaph surrounded by a garden. The principal material is red sandstone. But there is a profusion of marble ornaments arranged in elegant mosaics representing flowers, and inscriptions in Arabic and Persian.

The *barradarri*, another jewel of the Mogul architecture, in a sadly deplorable neglect, originally at the right bank of the River Ravi, is now perched on an islet, as a current of the river has made its headway between the bank and the site.

The ruinous deterioration of Nur Jehan's tomb, in the vicinity of Jahangir's tomb, would bring to tears anyone well-versed with the Mogul history, and the pathetic verses from the poetry of Bahadur Shah Zafar, engraved on the tombstones, would make you cry.

Jahangir, known for the legendary justice, ruled the Mogul empire and Nur Jehan ruled Jahangir. An empress of such power and splendour, lying in what looks like a commoner's grave, is hardly meritorious of great ones.

Jahangir's majestic mausoleum stands on the right bank of the River Ravi, about 8 kms north-west of Lahore. Originally, the garden surrounding the mausoleum belonged to his wife, Queen Nur Jehan and was known as *Dil Kusha Garden*. In the central vaulted tomb chamber is the marble gravestone elaborately inlaid with *pietra-dura* floral decoration and the 99 attributes of God.

Whatever survived of Ranjit Singh's plunders, fell to the hands of grave-robbers.

Perhaps, the Saudi logic of treating their deads deserves appreciation. Strictly in accordance with the Wahabi faith, a Muslim sect, whenever a Saudi King passes away, his body is lowered in an ordinary grave, of no better significance than a common person's last abode.

The sole aim of Ranjit Singh was the preservation and extension of his own unlimited power. Ranjit Singh's policy was to overthrow everything which existed before his time; to raise all the people of the Panjab to the same level, and to assign to every Sikh his separate position and estate. Everything had to proceed from him. Whereas plunder and possession mania were a burning passion with him, his son Sardar Sher Singh once built a beautiful pavilion (*Baradari*) 153 years ago in Baghbanpura (now Gujjarpura). Raja Sher Singh ruled Lahore for three years, 1841-1843, defeating his sister-in-law, Mai Chand Kaur, the widow of Kharak Singh, the eldest son of Ranjit Singh who succeeded his father and died in 1840.

Sher Singh built the pavilion and a vast garden around it in 1841 and used it as a hunting ground. The pavilion also served as a recreation resort for the ruler. Sher Singh was assassinated on September 15 1843 by Ajit Singh, a commander of the Scindianwalas, in the pavilion. His *samadh* was also built in the

pavilion with his Prime Minister's (Dhyan Singh) who was also slain there.

The edifice, with its magnificent high arches, stood for decades. Later, however, it started to give into the vagaries of the weather and neglect by the Department of Archaeology. Though a protected monument, the pavilion is now in shambles.

After the desecration of the Babri mosque, the people set the structure on fire. As a result, its woodwork was either reduced to ashes or was extremely badly charred. (In Dawn, September 18, 1994, Sect. 2, page 2, Tariq Mahmood depicted a picture of the pavilion under the caption "Suffering from Vandalism and Neglect).

*THE END*