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THE TRANSITION IN BENGAL, 1756–1775

A STUDY OF SAIYID MUHAMMAD REZA KHAN
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MUHAMMAD REZA KHAN
THE TRANSITION IN BENGAL, 1756-1775

A STUDY OF
SAIYID MUHAMMAD REZA KHAN

ABDUL MAJED KHAN

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Reproduced by courtesy of the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs  v
PREFACE

This study is not the first to be made of Reza Khan in recent years. As early as 1925 Imtiaz Muhammad Khan wrote two articles for the *Calcutta Review*, published by the University of Calcutta.¹ These sketched the whole career of the Khan, but concentrated particularly upon his trial, in the author's view the 'dominant feature of his life'.² His study necessarily suffered from the limitations of space within which it was published, and contains some errors, but above all it suffered from not being broadly set against the political background of the period. The trial, however minutely described, cannot be understood except as part of a political campaign. Imtiaz Muhammad Khan's articles were soon followed by two other articles on Reza Khan and the Chitpur family, of which he was the founder, by Ameer Ali Midhut Jang, most probably of the Khan's family. These were published in Calcutta's Muslim Institute journal, the *Muslim Review*.³ Though less ably presented, Midhut Jang's articles have their merits too. Besides giving a genealogical table, beginning with Reza Khan and brought down to 1927, the author brought to light a portrait of the Khan, a photographic copy of an eighteenth-century original painting.

Dr N. Majumdar in her *Justice and Police in Bengal, 1765–1793 — a study of the nizamat in decline*, published in 1960, also dealt with Reza Khan in a broader fashion. However, her interest was primarily in judicial and police administration, and particularly in the changes which took place after 1772. Her work does explain Reza Khan's role in the development of the judicial administration, but mainly in the post-trial period, when the Khan had been restored to the office of Naib Nazim. Her main emphasis thus falls on the period after 1775, the year at which this study ends. Another thesis, written earlier but published as a book in 1961, *The Judicial Administration of the East India Company in Bengal, 1765–1782* by Dr B. B. Misra also has an extensive notice of Reza

Preface

Khan, but Dr Misra’s emphasis has been more on the evolution of the new judicial institutions than on Reza Khan.

Apart from these studies there are no other modern works which have Reza Khan as their main subject. Of course no general work on the period fails to make some mention of the Khan, but the whole weight of interest in the period after Plassey has been upon the military and political activities of the Company, upon the careers of such figures as Clive, Verelst, Hastings, Francis, Shore and Cornwallis and even of Charles Grant or Jonathan Duncan, or more recently upon the European sources of their ideas. But to neglect the Indian side of the story in this way, to fail to examine the activities, personages and ideas of Mughal Bengal, though natural, is distorting. Monographs, it is true, have been written on Mir Qasim and Mir Jafar of the post-Plassey period and there has also been a more recent study of the conflict between Siraj-ud-daulah and the East India Company. Most of them, though excellent studies in themselves, fail to take any adequate notice of the great transition through which Bengal was then passing. The conflict of the age intensified in the career of Reza Khan, a Mughal representing an old system and yet serving the English who were soon to introduce a new one, one result of which was his personal tragedy. As Shore remarked in 1782, ‘he has often... been blamed, where his hands were tied up’.

English contemporaries of Reza Khan had little doubt of the Khan’s importance and stature. In England Dow thought it worth while to include a violent propagandist attack upon the Khan in his popular History of Hindostan. James Grant in his Analysis of the Finances of Bengal cast him as ‘the great defaulter’, the wholesale plunderer. Colonel Caillaud thought it necessary to pass on to Hastings the warning he had received ‘from a man who

1 There is, however, an article on ‘Some Records re Reza Khan’s trial’ by Nani Gopal Choudhury in the Proceedings of the Indian Historical Records Commission, 1946.
2 Quoted by N. Majumdar, Justice and Police in Bengal, 1765–1793, p. 196.
3 See below, chapter 11.
4 Grant based his comment on the basis of twenty volumes Persian accounts ‘procured through the influence of a light and private purse’ which in the end failed him ‘to provide an adequate basis on which practical proposals could be based’. Grant, however, did not know the Khan personally but from what he had learnt from report, ‘in Hindostan, a Mussulman could not be found characterized by greater reputed virtues of honour, sagacity and moderation locally understood’ (Firminger, Fifth Report, II, xix–xx, 167–8).

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Preface

sees far into things with much judgement and penetration’—‘To Beware of Mahomed Reza Cawn!’ Warren Hastings’s Council, while the Khan was still a prisoner under trial, on the other hand could write ‘Although Mahomed [Reza Khan] can no longer benefit by our good opinion of him, yet we cannot omit to express our thorough conviction that he ever served the Company with a fidelity, integrity and ability which they can hardly expect to experience in any future officer of government whom they may choose from the same class of people’.\(^1\) If Reza Khan loomed so large in the eyes of Englishmen of his day, it would seem that a revaluation of the man and his career would not be out of place. By reworking a limited but most important period in Reza Khan’s career, in considerable detail, it is hoped that the balance may in part be redressed.\(^2\)

The sources used for this study have been relevant official documents, supplemented by contemporary private papers and private accounts, mostly in English and some in Persian. While basic facts have been sought from official records preserved in the India Office Library and in the British Museum, and in one case also from the records in the National Archives of India, private records and accounts have been helpful in understanding them. In life Reza Khan and Warren Hastings clashed, but Warren Hastings’s papers on the career of Reza Khan in the British Museum have been most illuminating. Indeed no study of eighteenth century Bengal is possible without Hastings’s papers. When Hastings was absent from Bengal, Richard Barwell was there, and Barwell’s letters which are already published in *Bengal Past and Present* offer an insight into men and events of the period which cannot perhaps be obtained anywhere else. Philip Francis arrived in Bengal about the time when this study of Reza Khan closes and yet Francis’s own papers and collections, now in the India Office Library, fill up some of the most vital gaps. The Committee of Secrecy’s letter of 28 August 1771 ordering the arrest of the Khan

\(^1\) For Caillaud’s letter to Hastings, 27 March 1772, see Add. MSS. 19133 f. 89, and for Calcutta Council’s letter to Court, 10 November 1773, see M. E. Monckton-Jones, *Warren Hastings in Bengal, 1772–1774*, p. 199.

\(^2\) Reza Khan was acquitted and reinstated as Naib Nazim, but the fact that he had been tried at all permanently damaged his reputation. Its recovery was made difficult by Grant’s *Analysis* and almost impossible by Hindu nationalist writings in Bengali in the late nineteenth century, seeking to glorify Nandkumar as a martyr. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya’s *Ananda Math* (see Bibliography, p. 361) also seemed to depict him almost as a villain.
Preface

could only be found in Francis’s collection. For Reza Khan’s conception of Alivardian Bengal again we are indebted primarily to him.1 Where these three have failed, three Persian histories have been most helpful. Of these three Persian histories, two, the Seīr and the Muzaffarnamah are available in English translation,2 though a major part of the latter has yet to be translated from its Persian text;3 the third, the Tarih-i-Muzaffari, is available in the Persian original in the British Museum.4 The authors of these Persian histories, Saiyid Ghulam Husain Khan Tabatabai, Karam Ali and Muhammad Ali were no impartial observers; while Ghulam Husain was a critic of the Khan, the other two were admirers—they both named their works after Muzaffar Jang, that is Reza Khan. The same lack of impartiality can, of course, be traced in all contemporary accounts of men and events. Caution had therefore to be exercised while using all private accounts, whether in English or in Persian. While an attempt has been made to leave out no relevant official records, no claim is made to have exhausted all sources of information.5 The object has been to present a connected account of the Khan’s career in the hope that it will make some contribution to our knowledge of the man and provide a fresh review of the circumstances in which he lived and worked.

The book grew out of a Ph.D. thesis submitted to London University in 1966. I was introduced to historical research by Professor A. B. M. Habibullah of Dacca University when he was my teacher in Calcutta University. He later suggested the subject of this study, and Professor C. H. Philips recommended me for direct Ph.D. registration. The work took a long time to complete. That I could complete it, is largely due to the encouragement of these two gentleman, and to the ungrudging personal and professional help that I received from Mr J. B. Harrison, Reader in South Asian History at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London. My wife Roquaya could not have done more to relieve me of all my obligations and duties except to my work.

1 Some papers are available also in the private collection of Lord North, Francis’s patron, at the P.R.O. in London.
2 For part of the Muzaffarnamah see Bengal Nawabs by Sir J. N. Sar kar.
3 Only the I.O. copy of the manuscript has been used for this study.
4 The British Museum Persian Manuscript No. OR 466.
5 By ‘Official records’ only the English East India Company records are meant. No notice has been taken of the records of other European nations which also had their trade connections with Bengal. For detail, the Select Bibliography may be seen.
Preface

Yet I owe much to the kindness and assistance of many others, though I could not possibly name them all. Dr P. Hardy bore the brunt of my early trials and tribulations. Professor A. L. Basham (now of A.N.U.), Professor Riaz ul Islam (now of Karachi University) and Dr B. N. Pandey spent hours of their valuable time with me. Colleagues at Dacca University and some of my former pupils, particularly Dr M. R. Tarafdar, Dr A. B. M. Husain and Mr Matiur Rahman helped me in various ways. In this context I wish to remember Dr A. F. Salahuddin Ahmad and Dr Mukhlesur Rahman of Rajshahi University and Sj. Santosh Basu of Viswabharati University, with gratitude. I am particularly indebted to two successive Vice-Chancellors of Dacca University, Dr Mahmud Husain (who is now in Karachi) and Dr Muhammad Osman Ghani. Another former Vice-Chancellor, the late Dr W. A. Jenkins, helped me with a travel grant to consult old and rare books in Calcutta. At different stages I received financial support from the Government of East Pakistan and the British Council.

National Archives of India, the Asiatic Society of Pakistan and the Dacca Consulate of the Federal Republic of Germany made records available to me. I am equally obliged to the Librarians and staff of the India Office Library, the SOAS Library, British Museum and Calcutta National Library and of the Libraries of the Universities of Dacca and London.

I would also like to thank Dr T. G. P. Spear and Professor C. R. Boxer who suggested publication of this work; the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press and their staff; and Cambridge University Centre for South Asian Studies which honoured me by including this book in its series of Cambridge South Asian Studies.

In making this book ready for publication I have received help in many ways from my present colleagues in Victoria University of Wellington: Professor F. L. W. Wood, Professor J. C. Beaglehole, Professor P. Munz, Dr T. H. Beaglehole and Miss D. F. Crozier are only some of them. Miss G. Grellier, secretary in the Department of History, has also been of much help to me.

A.M.K.

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### COMPANY SERVANTS

A LIST OF SOME COMPANY SERVANTS WITH THEIR MUGHAL TITLES BY WHICH THEY WERE GENERALLY KNOWN TO THE INDIANS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Meaning of the Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Admiral Watson</td>
<td>Dilir Jang</td>
<td>The Courageous in Battle¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(of H.M. Navy)</td>
<td>Saif Jang</td>
<td>The Sword in War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sabit (or Sabut) Jang</td>
<td>The Firm in War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amir-ul-Mamalik</td>
<td>The Grandee of the Empire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muin-ud-daulah</td>
<td>The Eminent in the State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zubdat ul Mulk</td>
<td>The Select of the Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Major Killpatrick</td>
<td>Dilawar (or Dilir) Jang</td>
<td>Courageous in War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Colonel Forde</td>
<td>Shitab Jang</td>
<td>The Brisk in War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Colonel Coote</td>
<td>Saif Jang</td>
<td>The Sword in War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nasir Jang</td>
<td>The Succourer in War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 General Carnac</td>
<td>Maham-ud-daulah</td>
<td>The Affairs of the State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Basalat Jang</td>
<td>The Valorous in War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Major Adams</td>
<td>Muzaffar ul Mulk</td>
<td>The Triumphant of the Empire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saif-ud-daulah</td>
<td>The Sword of the State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ghalib Jang</td>
<td>The Subduer in War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Major Fletcher</td>
<td>Musta'id Jang</td>
<td>Ready in War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Captain Knox</td>
<td>Dilawar Jang</td>
<td>The Courageous in War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 H. Vansittart</td>
<td>Munir ul Mulk</td>
<td>The Illuminer of the Empire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ali Jah</td>
<td>High in Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shams-ud-daulah</td>
<td>The Sun of the State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nasir ul Mulk</td>
<td>The Succourer of the Empire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 J. Spencer</td>
<td>Munawwir ul Mulk</td>
<td>The Illuminator of the Empire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maham-ud-daulah</td>
<td>The Affairs of the State</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Admiral Watson was not a Company servant but he came to fight a war in Bengal that was declared by (rather on behalf of) the Company in 1756.
Company Servants

12 H. Verelst
   Babar Jang
   Fakhr-ud-da’ulah
   Saif Jang
   Intizam-ud-da’ulah

13 F. Sykes
   Izzat-ud-da’ulah
   The Dignity of the State

14 R. Becher
   Mushir ul Mulk
   The Counsellor of the Empire
   Murad-ud-da’ulah
   The Desire of the State
   Ikhtiar Jang
   Jasarat Jang
   Intrepidity in War
   Sarfaraz-ud-da’ulah
   The Exalted of the State

15 S. Middleton
   Iftikhar-ud-da’ulah
   The Distinguished of the State

16 W. McGwire
   Babar Jang
   The Lion in War
   H. Jang

17 R. Marriot
   Hoshyar Jang
   Wary in War
   Jaladat Jang
   Daring in War
   Umdat ul Mulk
   The Support of the Kingdom

1 The list is taken mainly from CPC, i, 467–8. For other names see Seir, ii, 225; CPC, iii, 372; W. Hastings Papers, Add. MSS. 29596, ii, 215–16; H.M.S., 193, 65: PP Fourth Report, 1773, p. 542 (Motiram’s letter to John Johnstone).
### ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Add. MSS.</td>
<td>Additional Manuscripts, British Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>App.</td>
<td>Appendix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal Army</td>
<td><em>History of the Rise and Progress of Bengal Army.</em> By Captain A. Broome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal Nawabs</td>
<td><em>Bengal Nawabs</em> by Sir J. N. Sarkar (containing translated extracts from three eighteenth-century Persian works on Bengal’s history, works of Azad al Husaini, Karam Ali and Yusuf Ali and published from Calcutta in 1952)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPG</td>
<td>Bengal Public Consultations (Reference by date)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPP</td>
<td><em>Bengal Past and Present.</em> Calcutta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRP</td>
<td>Board of Revenue Proceedings or Bengal Revenue Proceedings (distinguished by I.O. records range and vol nos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSC</td>
<td>Bengal Secret and Military Consultations (Reference by date)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDR</td>
<td><em>Chittagong District Records</em> (a Bengal Government publication)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerations</td>
<td><em>Considerations on Indian Affairs.</em> By W. Bolts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court’s letter</td>
<td>Despatches to Bengal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPC</td>
<td><em>Calendar of Persian Correspondence</em> (usually followed by vol. no. and entry no.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dacca Cons.</td>
<td>Dacca Factory Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUHB</td>
<td><em>History of Bengal</em>, published by Dacca University, vol. II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Famine Papers</td>
<td><em>Extracts from Records in the India Office relating to Famines in India, 1769–1788</em>, compiled by George Campbell, to which is appended Remarks by W. W. Hunter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Report</td>
<td><em>The Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Affairs of the East India Company, 28 July 1812</em> as edited by W. K. Firminger and published in 3 volumes in 1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forrest, Clive</td>
<td><em>Life of Lord Clive.</em> By G. W. Forrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis MSS</td>
<td>Private papers and collections of Sir Philip Francis in the I.O. Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWIHC</td>
<td><em>Fort William–India House Correspondence</em>, a publication of the National Archives of India</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abbreviations

Grant, Analysis  Historical and Comparative Account of the Finances of Bengal, By James Grant, 1786. (Available in Fifth Report, vol. 11)

H.M.S.  Home Miscellaneous Series, India Office

India Tract 378  India Office tract no. 378, containing Luke Sraffton’s Observation on Vansittart’s Narrative and J. Z. Holwell’s Address to Luke Sraffton in reply to his Observation on Vansittart’s Narrative

I.O.  India Office Library.

I.O.R.  India Office Records

JASB  The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta

JFORS  The Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Patna

Khulasat  Khulasat ut Tawarikh, by Kalyan Singh. (Translated in JFORS, vols. v, vi)

LCB  Letter Copy-Book of the Resident at the Durbar at Murshidabad (2 vols. in one. Published, Calcutta, 1919)

Letter to Court  Letters received by the Directors from Bengal


Mir Jafar or Mir Jafar Khan  The Career of Mir Jafar Khan, 1757–1765 A.D. By Atul Chandra Roy

MN  Muzaffarnamah by Karam Ali (unless referred to Bengal Nawabs, the reference is to I.O. copy of the MSS.)

MP or Murshidabad Proceedings  The Proceedings of the Controlling Council of Revenue, Murshidabad (Reference by date)

Orme MSS.  Robert Orme’s collections (O.V. and India volumes) at the India Office Library

PCC  The Proceedings of the Committee of Circuit

PP  Parliamentary Papers of the India Office Records, Parliamentary Branch Nos. 6 and 7

reccd.  Recorded date of receipt of a letter


Secret Cons.  Consultations of the Fort William Council in their secret session (commencing in 1768 and different from BSC)

Seir  Seir Mutagherin by S. Ghulam Hussain Khan. (The references are to the English version)

TM  Tariikh-i-Muzaffari. By Saiyid Muhammad Ali

Transactions in Bengal  A Narrative of the Transactions in Bengal during the Soobhdaries of Azeem us Shan Jaffer Khan, Shuja Khan Sirafz Khan and Alyvirdy Khan by F. Gladwin, being an English translation of Salimullah Munshi’s Tawarikh-i-Bangala

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Abbreviations

TP

Trial Papers. Proceedings of the Fort William
Council especially held for the trial of Reza
Khan during 1772–1774. Typed copies procured
from India are indicated as Miscellaneous
Proceedings Vol. 39A and 39B in India Office
Library. These are referred to as TP I, TP II

View

A View of the Rise, Progress and Present State of
the English Government in Bengal. By H. Verelst