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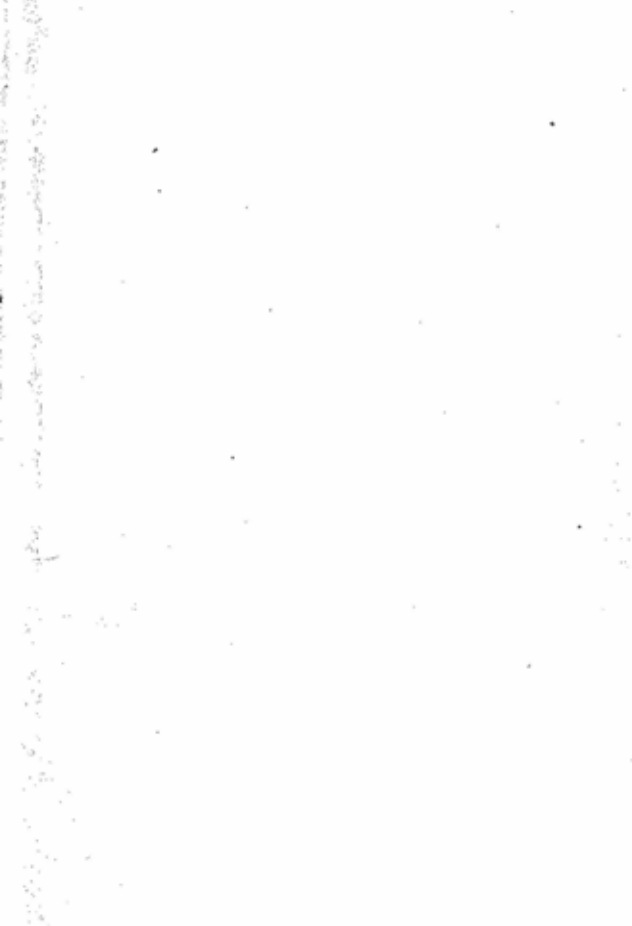
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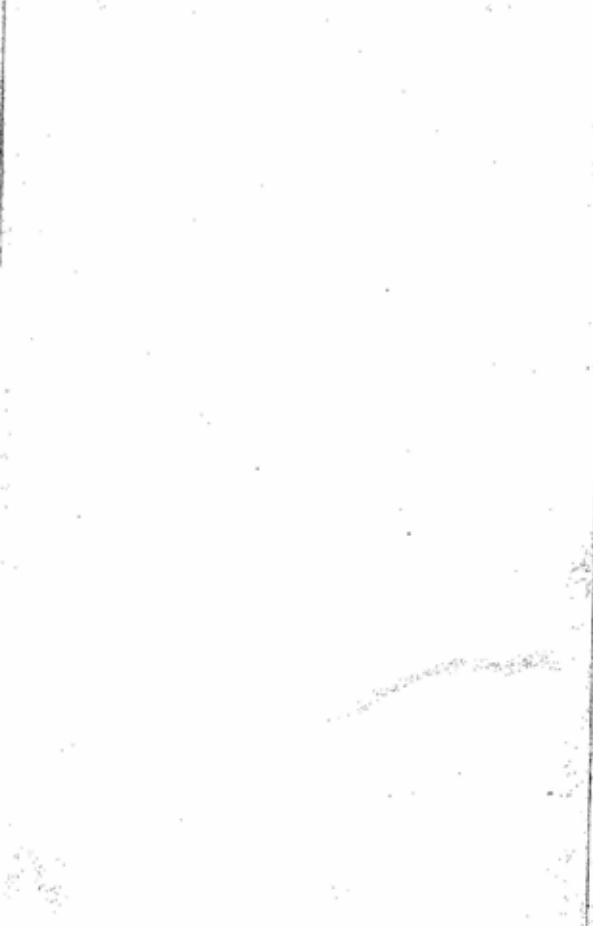
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आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

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Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, 1-89-i

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

General Editors

K. M. MUNSHI

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130

HEROES WHO MADE HISTORY

By

V. B. KULKARNI

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HEROES WHO MADE HISTORY

43785

By

V. B. KULKARNI



1965

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of Books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulses of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 2.50.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages : Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit :

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art

of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita* by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere". After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing

a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

1, QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD,
NEW DELHI,
3rd October, 1951.

K. M. MUNSHI



PREFACE

A number of sketches included in this book were published in a leading Bombay daily more than a decade ago. They were later brought out in book form by Messrs. Hind Kitabs Ltd., Bombay.

I am grateful to the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for issuing the second edition. I have not felt called upon to make any changes in the original text.

With our country menaced by its militarised neighbours, it will be profitable for our young men to draw their inspiration from the heroes figuring in this book.

I am grateful to Shri A. D. Prabhu for his help in the preparation of this book.

V. B. KULKARNI

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1. SANGRAM SINGH

When writing the military annals of Rajasthan, one is often tempted to put aside the prosaic pen of a chronicler and give rein to flights of fancy, for so inspiring are the deeds of her sons and daughters that they make a more appropriate theme for poetic eulogy. The record of Rajput chivalry is indeed an epic, and I cannot conceive of any other Indian community which has washed the feet of the motherland with so much noble blood and tears as the Rajputs have done. Proud of their heritage and passionately devoted to their homeland, they have fought for their beloved Rajasthan with a tenacity and heroism which has few parallels in our history. For centuries without intermission their homes were invaded by imperial armies, but, though they were often forced to swallow the bitter drench of defeat, their indomitable courage was never destroyed. Indeed, Rajasthan has built her glory on the bones of her heroic children.

To this saga of Rajput resistance to foreign invasion Mewar has made the most outstanding contribution. Her proud rulers, the Sisodia Maharanas, disdained to ascribe any limit to the antiquity of their House or to trace their ancestry to mere mortals. They held their patrimony as a divine gift and guarded its integrity with religious zeal. A succession of brave and benevolent rulers adorned the throne of Chitor, leaving behind them a legacy of righteous pride and patriotism. Submission to Delhi was, in the eyes of the Maharanas of Mewar, an act of treachery and an unpardonable affront to the memory of their illustrious forbear, Bappa Raval. Because of her pre-eminence among the Rajput principalities, Mewar became the especial target

of the invader, and the travails of her rulers and people were in consequence tremendous.

Even so, the thought of surrender never sullied the councils of the valiant Sisodias. Hamir retrieved the honour of his House by expelling the intruders from his kingdom. Later, he was followed by another prince of incomparable courage, Kumbha, who became celebrated in history as a great warrior and statesman. He was, to quote an authority, "one of the greatest of the princes of Chitor, a soldier, a poet, a man of letters, and a builder to whom Mewar owes some of her finest monuments." Such was the personal record of the ancestors of Sangram Singh, the grandson of Kumbha and the subject of our present study.

Sangram Singh, popularly known as Rana Sanga, was a chip of the old block and inherited all the great and noble qualities of his ablest ancestors. The bards of Rajasthan have described him as the *kalas* or pinnacle of Rajput chivalry. He reigned from 1509 to 1528 and during these nineteen eventful years his enemies never ventured to violate the integrity of his realm. So great was his renown in war and so upright his behaviour towards his brother princes that they spontaneously acknowledged his supremacy. Sanga was indeed cast for a bigger role and, as Tod, the eminent historian of Rajasthan, aptly remarks, the Rana would probably have crowned himself emperor of India if luck had been favourable to him.

Sanga had to contend with his two brothers for the throne of Mewar. Prithvi Raj was brave but impetuous, while Jaimal, the other brother, exhibited no eminent qualities. Sanga was anxious not to precipitate a war of succession which would have benefited none but the enemies of Mewar. He accordingly went into exile on his own preference, but not before losing an eye in an encounter with

his rash and ambitious brother, Prithvi Raj. Jaimal kept the throne for some time, but his misadventure with a damsel put an end to his life. Prithvi Raj, who, like Sanga, had gone into exile, was recalled, but his regime was also short-lived. He was poisoned by his brother-in-law whom Prithvi Raj had reprimanded for ill-treating his sister.

The way thus became clear for Sanga to return to Mewar and don the robes of sovereignty, which he did on the death of his father in 1508. Soon after his accession, he threw himself with characteristic zeal into the task of improving the administration of his State which had suffered from neglect following dynastic distractions. He gave particular attention to the reorganisation of his armed forces which he replenished and brought to a high pitch of efficiency and preparedness. Minor chieftains, not well disposed towards him, were shown the error of their ways either by subjugation or through persuasion. Having thus put his own house in order, he made careful preparations for a long and bitter struggle with the Muslim powers that menaced Rajasthan.

Sanga, a man of intense patriotism, was filled with grief at the political state of India. The country was being overrun by adventurers and usurpers. The South was more fortunate, for Vijayanagara gave it both peace and security. No such benevolent power existed in the North to confer the blessings of settled conditions on its people and peasantry. The strength of the men who sat on the throne of Delhi had been crippled by their excesses. Ibrahim Lodi found himself utterly incapable of commanding the obedience of his governors. The more ambitious ones among them were planning to transform their satrapies into sovereignties and to establish their ascendancy in rivalry to Delhi. The king was too feeble to check such disintegrating forces. Sanga watched these developments with deep concern, for the victims of a country in distraction are not so much its rulers as the helpless people. But he also rejoiced at the growing embarrassment

of the Muslim power, whose final overthrow was the goal of all his elaborate warlike preparations.

He fought eighteen pitched battles against the kings of Delhi and Malwa and gained decisive victories in most of them. He waged a successful war against Mahmud II of Malwa whom he took prisoner near Gagraun in 1517. Sanga, like all great Hindu conquerors, bore no hatred against the followers of Islam; he was opposed to the religious intolerance and political conquest which their rulers attempted in the name of their faith. Commenting on Sanga's victory over Mahmud, a British writer says: "From Sultan Mahmud Khilji, the king of Malwa—whom he defeated in battle, took prisoner, and honourably entertained in a spirit worthy of the best days of chivalry—he had wrested the wide and valuable provinces of Bhilsa, Sarangpur, Chanderi and Rantbor."

Sanga's renown as an invincible warrior spread far and wide and put heart into those who were fighting against the invaders. In Rajasthan his name attained legendary fame. Thousands of soldiers flocked to his standard. Writing about the Rana's armed strength and popularity, Tod says: "Eighty thousand horse, seven Rajas of the highest rank, nine Raos, and one hundred and four chieftains bearing the titles of Rawal and Rawat, with five hundred war elephants followed him into the field. The Princes of Marwar and Amber did him homage, and the Raos of Gwalior, Ajmer, Sikri, Raisen, Kalpi, Chanderi, Bundi, Gagraun, Rampura, and Abu served him as tributaries or held of him in chief."

Is it any wonder then that a prince who commanded such immense resources and armed forces cherished the ambition of planting the banner of Hindu resurgence on the fort of India's capital? Sanga was, however, cautious. Being a realist, he carefully weighed the consequences of such a bold enterprise. True, Muslim strength in the country had

been crippled by intestine quarrels, but the cry of "religion in danger" could still weld the 'faithful' into a formidable force. Sanga perceived that his own strength would not be equal to the task of extinguishing the fires of fanaticism once they were started. It was, he thought, necessary that Muslim dominance should receive still more shattering blows before it could be finally destroyed.

His thoughts were now turned towards Kabul where Babar had entrenched himself firmly. The conqueror from Central Asia was known to be casting his covetous eyes on India. He had heard of the country's fabulous wealth as well as its weakness. It suited Sanga's book if Barbar came to India and overturned the Lodi dynasty. A scion of Timur, the new invader might not fancy Hindustan as a congenial place for permanent residence. Like his forbear, he might return to his homeland after gathering as much booty as he could. If, however, Babar elected to stay on, what would happen to Sanga's dreams? The Rana was not much perturbed by this thought. Having resolved to dispute Muslim hegemony on the field of battle, it hardly mattered to him which enemy he was fated to fight.

India's attractions in fact proved overpowering to the new invader. After defeating the Lodis in the Battle of Panipat in April 1526, Babar decided to found his dynasty in India. Sanga was soon to realise that he had to contend with a foe the like of whom India had seldom seen since its invasion by the adherents of Islam.

In some important respects Sanga and Babar shared the same qualities. Both were brave, generous and wise and both were trained in the hard school of adversity. If Sanga's career was a "tissue of successes and reverses", so also was the life of the Turco-Mongolian. The courage of both was tempered with a discretion that was not indifferent to results.

Though they belonged to widely different races, each recognised his rival's greatness, for

*"There is neither East nor West,
Border nor Breed nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face,
Tho' they come from the ends of the earth."*

Babar realised that his acquisition would not be secure unless he defeated his formidable rival. Similarly, the Rana was convinced that his dream of gaining the imperial sceptre could not be fulfilled unless the new invader was sent back to the shores of the Oxus and Jaxartes. So, both sides prepared themselves for a life-and-death struggle. The Tartars were not keen on drawing their swords against the renowned fighters from Rajasthan. Their first encounter with the Rana's army failed to inspire them with confidence in victory. The rashness of their advance guards had proved disastrous. The news of their annihilation paralysed the courage and energies of Babar's soldiers. Far from advancing to destroy the enemy, they dug deep trenches for security.

Babar alone was not daunted by these early reverses, though the fast-ebbing morale of his army distressed him. It was necessary to rouse their courage by exhortation and personal example. He reminded his followers of the terrible hardships they had endured to conquer Hindustan. This was the supreme hour of their trial and if on this battlefield they showed their native courage and valour, the prize would be theirs for ever. He then made a dramatic declaration of his resolution to abandon drinking, his "besetting sin", so that he might merit superior aid from Allah to win the war against the mighty Maharana. The wine-pots were shattered to pieces, and with them went the pusillanimity of his followers. In his *Memoirs*, Babar writes: "Having withdrawn myself from such temptation, I vowed never more to drink wine." Inspired by their leader's example, the Tartars fought with their customary skill and tenacity, and the great

Battle of Khanua (March 16, 1527) was decided in their favour.

Severely wounded and exhausted, the Rana retired from the stricken field, vowing never to return to Chitor except as victor. "Had his life been spared to his country," says Tod, "he might have redeemed the pledge, but the year of his defeat was the last of his existence." Thus ended the life of a man whose glory remained untarnished even in defeat. Babar, a valiant foe, entertained the highest respect for Sanga, who, he declared, "attained his present high eminence by his own valour and his sword."

Tod gives a graphic description of the Rana's personal appearance. Sanga was of medium stature, but of great muscular strength. He was fair in complexion, with unusually large eyes. In the incessant wars he waged, his body had suffered incredible mutilations. He had lost an eye, an arm and a leg, and sword and lance had inflicted eighty wounds on his body. So, as Tod puts it, at the time of his death, Rana Sanga exhibited "but the fragments of a warrior".

Historians have rightly acclaimed Sanga as the man who carried Mewar to the summit of prosperity. It is, of course, true that she fell from her exalted position after his death, but the fount of Mewar's chivalry never dried up. To Rana Pratap and several other scions of the illustrious House of the Sisodias belongs the credit of keeping the lamp of Rajasthan's independence burning. They are as much entitled to our homage as the great Maharana Sangram Singh.

2. BABAR

The story of Babar's life reads like a romance. This Prince-errant from the inconspicuous principality of Far-ghana in Central Asia was a man of destiny. A fugitive from his homeland, which he loved till the end of his life with the fervour of a patriotic exile, he crossed into India and founded one of the grandest empires known to history. Babar's greatness is, however, not limited to his military exploits. Throughout history conquerors have dazzled the world by their military performances, but this scion of the Timurids was in many ways unique. He was not only an able and fearless soldier, but an accomplished man of letters, an ardent admirer of the charms of nature, a loyal friend and a considerate foe. Seldom has a man of the sword been endowed with so many attributes of greatness.

Babar's association with India was brief, and it is probable that he would not have descended upon the plains of this country had not an inscrutable Providence led him by the hand to his great destiny. He had spent the best part of his manhood in the cockpit of Central Asian conflicts and fled to Kabul after heroic but unsuccessful attempts to revive the glory of Timur in his own country. Derived from Chenghis Khan and Timur, he believed that the vast realms once conquered by these mighty men belonged to him. He was then too young to realise that to covet the crown of Samarkand was to invite the antagonism of a host of rival rulers.

The Central Asia of Babar's time was precisely in the same deplorable plight as India in the eighteenth century. The whole region had been broken up and a number of warring princes held precarious sway over the fragments of what was once a compact empire. Fierce conflicts over

succession to vacant thrones descended upon the land like a blight. Brother fought brother to extend the area of his dominion. The law of succession was reduced to mockery. The volatile loyalty of selfish nobles worsened the prevailing political instability. Umar Shaikh Mirza was the ruler of a small State in that medley of principalities.

He was a gay monarch to whom the company of pigeons and the attractions of the wine cup were far more congenial than the business of government. He had, however, certain noble qualities, for he was said to be "generous, affable, eloquent, daring and bold", but these traits, perhaps not unnatural in the father of a man whose name was to resound in many parts of Asia, were almost neutralised by his hasty temper. Tact was not his strong point, and he died at the height of his manhood, following an accidental fall down a precipice. He left an insecure legacy to his son who was only eleven years old. The kingdom of the boy-prince was assailed by his ambitious uncles who had bitten off large slices of territory even during the lifetime of Umar Shaikh.

Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad, for that was the real name of Babar, was born on February 14, 1483. Fortunately for him his uncles withdrew from his kingdom as suddenly as they had invaded it. The peace and security that came to Farghana was, however, shortlived, and Babar was not destined to enjoy the "soft delights of cultured ease and magnificent idleness." The state of the country and his own irrepressible love of adventure found him always in the vortex of struggle and conflict. Like the celebrated German statesman of more recent times, Babar was by temperament one whom life consumed but rest killed! It was, however, his great good fortune that he came under the guardianship of his grandmother, Aisan Daulat, a woman of unusual intelligence and robust common sense. The unsettled condition of his country denied Babar the advantages of long and

sustained education, but his mental abilities lost nothing by this denial. Aisan Daulat was a cultured lady and succeeded in giving strenuous exercises to her ward's faculties.

It is impossible to reckon the debt Babar owed to his grandmother. She shielded him from the innumerable plots and intrigues that his kinsmen hatched to strip him of his possessions. Her influence over the young prince was probably as decisive as that which Jijabai exerted over her great son Shivaji. She kindled the ambitions of Babar and roused his martial spirit by feeding him with tales of the glory that attended the Houses of Chenghis Khan, her own ancestor, and Timur. By watching over his upbringing, she made him acceptable to and indeed adored by the people of Farghana. But great as was her influence over him, she never overstepped the bounds of prudence. It was easy for this discerning woman to see that Babar was not a boy who could be led by the nose. He was stubborn and independent both in his behaviour and actions. The wise lady heartily encouraged him to develop his versatile talents in a way that conduced to their uninhibited growth.

The seed of ambition which Aisan Daulat planted in the tender heart of Babar did not go to waste. It grew to become a giant tree, spreading its branches to the far corners of Asia. Babar's first essay in adventure was in 1497, that is, when he was only fourteen years old. He marched with an army to conquer Samarkand, once the prized possession of Timur. In November of the same year, the proud city lay at his feet. He entered it and received declarations of loyalty from all sections of the populace. It was an extraordinary achievement for a mere stripling, but it needed the wisdom of a Solomon and the strength of a Hercules to retain Samarkand! Friend and foe alike were astonished at Babar's audacity. Jealousy increased the number of his enemies and, after a reign of one hundred days, he found himself reduced to the plight of a vagrant, for his brother

Jahangir had seized Farghana during his absence in Samarkand !

The drift in Babar's fortunes was much too sudden even for a stoic to bear with equanimity. "I became a prey to melancholy and vexation," he wrote; "I was now reduced to a sore distressed state, and wept much." His bitterness was acute, because that was his first encounter with misfortune. But later when reverses and calamities became more frequent, he ceased to worry about them. Instead of resigning himself to what other men would have regarded as an inexorable fate, he resolutely fought against adversity and finally overcome it. "When", writes Stanley Lane-Poole, "almost all abandoned him, and none believed in his star, Babar never lost faith. His serene constancy of purpose, his noble fortitude, are the only invariable element in the vicissitudes of his early life, the one unfailing antidote to the poison of intrigue." Babar won Samarkand once again only to lose it for ever, but he never allowed the insidious feeling of defeat to overwhelm him.

It is neither relevant to my present purpose nor is it necessary for an appreciation of Babar's greatness to go into the details of his unflagging but abortive efforts to regain his homeland and to establish his ascendancy in Samarkand. He found the faithlessness of his own relatives, the Mirzas, much more disastrous to his cause than the military strength of his enemy Shaibani Khan, the Uzbek chief of Transoxiana. The Mirzas lived true to the Turkish proverb, namely, that "kingship knows no kinship"! In June 1503 Babar fought his last action against Shaibani and, being soundly beaten, retreated to the hills for asylum. He now realised that it was useless to fritter away his energies by attempting to reconquer his patrimony. His friends had become faithless and his enemies numerous and powerful.

His first impulse was to proceed to China, but Kabul, where an energetic noble had unseated Babar's kinsman from

his throne, beckoned to him. The homeless wanderer, who was now twenty years old, had learnt the great lesson of bearing his suffering with fortitude. A deeply religious man, he discovered that success and failure were playthings in the hands of God Almighty. The immortal injunctions in the Holy Book sustained his drooping spirit. Does not the Koran say:

*"Oh, Allah ! kingship is Thine alone;
Thine to give when Thou pleasest;
Thine to take away at Thy pleasure"?*

Babar consoled himself with the belief that his duty was to pursue what he conceived to be the right path and leave the fruit of his actions in the hands of God. This faith in the paramountcy of destiny taught him the value of humility. He was as quick to ascribe his successes to God's favour as to attribute his failures to his own infirmities. That is the reason why we do not find the slightest trace of vanity in Babar.

Accompanied by a small retinue of faithful followers, who looked "more wretched than the most ragged pack of gypsies", he wandered in the hills, suffering terrible pangs of hunger and physical privations. But Babar had mounted the "stirrups of resolution" and neither nature's fury nor man's infidelity could deflect him from his goal. In October, 1504 he attacked Kabul with such force as he could muster and became the lord of one of the key countries in Central Asia. Afghanistan is a small, poor and rugged country, but it gave its conqueror a precious foothold and opened up for him new avenues of conquest. And yet so passionate was his attachment to his homeland that the following year he undertook an expedition in support of Sultan Hussain of Herat against Shaibani Uzbek.

There was little prudence in this venture. Babar gambled with his fortune by leaving the scene of his recent conquest before consolidating his power. His military expedition

on behalf of his relatives was foredoomed to failure. Sultan Hussain died soon after his solicitation for help. Babar's cousins, who had warmly welcomed him to their homes, were mere cultured idlers. They smothered him with hospitality, but avoided all talk of war against Shaibani Uzbek. Realising, rather belatedly, the futility of an undertaking about which nobody was serious, Babar decided to return to Kabul. It was not a day too soon that he realised his perilous position. He at once set out for Kabul by the straightest course and plunged into the "granite terrors" of Hindu Kush. As he and his troops were climbing the mountain, a savage snowstorm fell upon them, obliterating their route. What Babar and his men suffered on this occasion beggars all description. It was only a miracle and the stubborn resolution of Babar that saved them from the mad fury of the elements.

When at last, the troops stumbled upon a cave, Babar refused to enter it for sleep and warmth, if his men were to go without them. "Had I done that," he says, "I should have proved myself heartless towards my comrades in arms. I preferred to suffer what they suffered, for it is said, 'To die with one's friends is as good as a wedding feast'." Is it any wonder then that his leadership inspired his followers to extraordinary exertions even in the darkest hour of defeat and despair? Babar reached Kabul just in time. Both the capital and the country were seething with disaffection, but such was his reputation for invincibility that the Pathans soon returned to the path of obedience on hearing of his return.

It is not clear when exactly Babar conceived the project of marching on Delhi. It is probable that the idea of emulating Timur's example germinated in his mind while he was wandering in the wilderness of Central Asia. Conquest was in fact forced on him when he discovered that Kabul could neither contain his ambitions nor defray his mounting

expenses. He had heard about the fabulous wealth of Hindustan, and the four expeditions he had previously undertaken on the outskirts of the great Indian plains had confirmed these reports. In 1525-26 the situation was most favourable for a full-scale invasion. Ibrahim Shah Lodi, the reigning monarch in Delhi, was confronted with formidable revolts by his Afghan kinsmen and nobles all over the country. Maharana Sangram Singh of Mewar was making a bold bid to overthrow Muslim rule in North India. Daulat Khan, the Governor of the Punjab, invited Babar to invade the country.

The temptation was irresistible and, with a disciplined army of 25,000 men, Babar invaded India and gave battle to Ibrahim's immense but ill-organised hordes of 1,00,000 men. The famous battle of Panipat was fought on April 20, 1526 and ended in complete victory for Babar. Ibrahim Lodi was slain and Afghan supremacy in India was destroyed. Babar fought two more major actions in the following year, culminating in the firm establishment of his rule in Delhi. It was a great performance comparable to that of any celebrated conqueror. Babar richly deserved his laurels. His consummate skill as a general and strategist, his courage and fortitude, and his determination to achieve success and fame by surmounting all obstacles, could not fail him against an enemy who, despite his fabulous resources, had not the wisdom to use them to his best advantage.

Considered from any point of view, Babar was a remarkable man. He lived in an age and belonged to a race both of which revelled in cruelty and bloodshed, but he never brought dishonour to his valiant sword. He was wronged by many, but few suffered unjustly at his hands. His broad humanity was probably derived from his cultured mind. His *Memoirs*, one of the finest autobiographies in Asia, reveal the extent of his knowledge. His observant eye missed nothing, and the detailed and correct record of what he saw in India confirms his capacity for acute observation. He was

a lover of nature and his autobiography contains memorable passages devoted to rapturous descriptions of its fascination.

Babar possessed the strength of a giant and few could equal him in single combat. There were no rivers which he saw and did not swim across. He could carry two sturdy men under his arms and run with them round the battlements of a fortress, leaping the embrasures. He loved the pleasures of life and indulged in them to his heart's content, but he never neglected his duties. His attitude to the delights which a bountiful world provides for man's delectation may be summed up in the following verse:

*"A book of verses underneath the bough
A jug of wine, a loaf of bread—and thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness!
Oh, wilderness were paradise enou!"*

Babar confirmed his faith in the adage "God made the garden—and the city, Cain" by laying out beautiful parks wherever he went. Indeed, his greatest contribution to India's adornment was the introduction of the art of garden planning and construction. We do not know what other things he might have achieved if he had not died at the age of forty-seven (December 26, 1530).

Strictly speaking, it would not be correct to call Babar an Indian. Many years were not vouchsafed to him after his arrival in this country. And his love for his own home in Central Asia and his desire to return to it did not abate even after his splendid conquests in Afghanistan and India. Nevertheless, Babar is entitled to a distinguished place among the makers of Indian history. He gave India a great dynasty which governed for over two centuries.

Of Babar we might well say with the poet:

*"Death makes no conquest of this Conqueror,
for now he lives in Fame."*

3. KRISHNADEVA RAYA

Let us leave North India for a while and turn our attention to the happenings in the south. In the year 1336 A.D., says Robert Sewell, there occurred in India an event which almost instantaneously changed the political condition of the entire south. This epoch-making event was the foundation of the great Vijayanagara Empire, with its capital on the banks of the river Tungabhadra at Hampi, in the present district of Bellary in Mysore State. The empire was established to repel the tide of Muslim invasion from the north and to protect the culture and the immemorial pieties of the people.

Muslim penetration south of the Vindhyas was not a mere campaign of conquest, designed to bring the whole country under one benevolent rule; it was in fact a calculated attempt to impose an alien way of life on the local population. Allauddin Khilji, Malik Kafur, his general, and later Muhammad Tughlak descended upon the south like an avalanche and razed to the ground some of the most ancient and illustrious Hindu dynasties like the Yadavas, the Kakatiyas and the Hoysalas. South India lay prostrate and bleeding under the impact of the invader.

It was, therefore, necessary to halt and push back what Sewell aptly describes as the "rapidly advancing terror from the north". This task devolved on two brothers, Hukka and Bukka, who, fortified with the blessings of the great Vidyanarya, their spiritual preceptor, organised the forces of resistance, and as their culminating achievement established one of the most splendid empires in India. The support which the new empire received from the Hindus in the south was as spontaneous as it was steadfast. Indeed, so rapid was its expansion and so dazzling its prosperity that visitors to the

court of Vijayanagara were astonished at its wealth and strength.

Abdur Razaak, the Persian envoy, was one of the many foreigners accredited to the court of the Vijayanagara kings. Razaak visited the capital in April 1443 and stayed in the city till the end of the year. He has left behind glowing accounts of the splendour of Vijayanagara: "The city of Bidjanagar is such that the pupil of the eye has never seen a place like it, and the ear of intelligence has never been informed that there existed anything to equal it in the world." One would probably have dismissed this rapturous description as the familiar "Oriental" hyperbole, if it had not been corroborated by the eye-witness accounts of unemotional Western observers. The chronicles of the Portuguese traders of Goa, more particularly the detailed and authentic narrative of Domingo Paes which in fact provides a solid foundation for the history of this almost "forgotten empire", bear eloquent testimony to the unsurpassed grandeur of Vijayanagara.

The empire reached the zenith of its glory during the reign of Krishnadeva Raya. This great king, who adopted wisdom and valour as the twin guardian angels of his realm, ascended the throne in 1509. He was probably a little over twenty years old when his coronation took place. He soon discovered that, though his dominion was large, populous and wealthy, it lacked cohesion, especially in those areas committed to the government of his subordinate chiefs. A grand demonstration of his armed might, not only to bridle the ambitions of the governors of the empire, but also to inspire wholesome respect for him in the Muslim Powers that skirted his realm, became necessary soon after his accession. Taking a compact army with him, he toured his kingdom, compelling his rebellious vassals to submission. He then proceeded to the frontiers of the Muslim kingdoms, where he planted garrisons of his empire.

Krishnadeva Raya was, however, vouchsafed little respite from his warlike activities. His enemies, who had reason to dread his waxing strength, persevered in hatching plots for the overthrow of his empire. He had an old score to settle with the Gajapati king of Orissa, who had bitten off a valuable slice of Vijayanagara territory in the days of Krishnadeva's predecessors. Moreover, this monarch of the eastern State, made no secret of his alliance with the Muslim Powers in the Deccan. In 1513 Krishnadeva set out on an expedition against him and captured Udayagiri, "an exceedingly strong hill fortress", then under the king of Orissa. The campaign was a long-drawn out one and it was not till the middle of 1515 that Pratapa Rudra was forced to sue for terms. Many of his important fortresses, including Kondavidu, were captured and brought within the orbit of the expanding Vijayanagara empire.

Perhaps, Krishnadeva's most noteworthy achievement in the domain of conquest was the annexation of Raichur. This fortified town and Mudkal, both situated in the Doab, so called because the territory is watered by the rivers Krishna and Tungabhadra, were a perpetual bone of contention between the Rayas of Vijayanagara and their adversaries. Like Alsace and Lorraine, they changed hands as the strength of the rival claimants waxed or waned. Krishnadeva decided that the fate of the Doab should be finally settled. He accordingly collected a large army to carry on the war for years, if necessary, till his object was gained. It is rather strange that Indian chroniclers, who have minutely recorded either in prose or in poetry almost every episode of the king's reign, have not accorded to the Battle of Raichur as much significance as European or Muslim historians have given.

Both in its importance and scale, the battle was as momentous as the more widely noted actions on the plains of Panipat in the north. Fernao Nuniz, another Portuguese

contemporary, with intimate knowledge of the empire's affairs, gives a full and vivid account of the Battle of Raichur. According to him, the Vijayanagara army which marched against the Doab was about one million strong, the number of the combatants alone being 736,000. There were 550 war elephants to lead the assault. The troops advanced in eleven great divisions, which were further strengthened before Raichur. The Raya's army pitched its camp on the eastern side of the citadel, invested the place and began a regular siege. Meanwhile, the Adil Shah of Bijapur arrived with an army of 140,000 horse and, crossing the Krishna, entrenched himself within nine miles of Raichur. Emboldened by the apparent inaction of the Vijayanagara army, the Bijapur forces launched a vigorous attack, spreading panic in the ranks of the enemy.

The daring charge of the Bijapur cavalry, ably supported by their artillery, caused incredible havoc in the Raya's army. His men began to flee in all directions, but, undismayed by these early reverses, the valiant king urged his troops not to run away like cowards. Mounting his horse, he gathered around him such divisions as were still intact and then delivered the counter-attack with such sustained fury and determination that it was now the turn of the enemy to beat a hasty and disorderly retreat. The resulting carnage was terrible. The terrorstricken Bijapur troops plunged headlong into the river to save themselves from the sword of the victor, but very few escaped. With his army destroyed and his camp in the hands of the Vijayanagara king, the Shah returned to his capital, burdened with grief over his terrible misfortune. Never again during his enemy's lifetime did he venture to attack the dominions of Vijayanagara. Thus ended the great Battle of Raichur (May 19, 1520) which, besides bringing security to the realm of the king, established his fame as one of the ablest generals of his time.

Though implacable in war, Krishnadeva Raya was generous in victory. He refused to listen to the advice of his counsellors to pursue the fleeing Shah and annihilate the crippled power of Bijapur. The course suggested was neither unwise nor impracticable, but the king's compassion for the fallen enemy triumphed. A man of great self-discipline, Krishnadeva enforced this quality both in his civil and military administration. He loved pleasure and splendour, for he had a real zest for life; but he drew a clear line between enjoyment and indulgence. The magnificence of his capital and his court dazzled the eyes of many a foreign visitor, but none could perceive in them any traces of effeminacy or degeneration. He set an example to his soldiers and followers in physical fitness. An accomplished horseman and a skilled and formidable wrestler, the king strenuously exercised his limbs, beginning these salutary exertions long before sunrise. The graphic account by Paes of Krishnadeva's daily "constitutional" would make the youth of today blush with shame at their avoidable physical feebleness.

Posterity is indebted to the same chronicler for his vivid description of the personality of this great prince. Krishnadeva, he says, was of medium height, of fair complexion and good figure. He was "the most feared and perfect king that could possibly be, cheerful of disposition and very merry; he is one that seeks to honour foreigners, and receives them kindly, asking about all their affairs whatever their condition may be. He is a great ruler and a man of much justice....." Krishnadeva was, without doubt, a remarkable man, for he was a great soldier, a seasoned statesman and an accomplished scholar. He was besides a master-builder. He adorned his capital with innumerable stately mansions and shrines and dug tanks throughout his vast dominion. Such was his enthusiasm for conferring the blessings of his rule on his subjects that his governors were also infected by his ardour and undertook extensive projects of

public utility. Centuries after the fall of the empire, the British who occupied its territory found it wholly unnecessary to dig new tanks. They had only to renovate those that had fallen into disrepair in order to ensure agricultural prosperity in that region.

The Raya's reign was truly an Augustan Age in the history of South India. Like King Bhoja of old, he gathered around him a galaxy of scholars and poets who, thanks to the patronage of their sovereign, wrote works of enduring excellence. And over this empire of letters he himself presided with distinction. He was a master of three languages—Kannada, Sanskrit and Telugu—and wrote with great proficiency in two. The eulogy of his literary and other accomplishments is best recorded when it is recalled that both Karnataka and Andhra claim him as their own sovereign. But these wrangles by rival linguistic groups to monopolise him are foolish. In an age darkened by decay and degeneration, he strove to awaken in his people an awareness of the greatness of their heritage. For this purpose he attracted to his court the best talent in the country and harnessed it to the exalted purpose of national revival. How could the stature of such a man be circumscribed by partisan claims made about his origin and accomplishments?

Krishnadeva was a tolerant king and his Muslim subjects enjoyed perfect immunity from persecution. They were assigned spacious streets in the capital of the empire, which, whether as civilians or soldiers, they served with exemplary devotion. I make particular reference to this fact, although Krishnadeva was not the originator of the policy of tolerance towards his Muslim subjects. Indeed, that policy was as old as the empire itself. Since Krishnadeva was most feared by the Muslim sovereigns of the Deccan, his total freedom from bigotry adds lustre to his great qualities.

Krishnadeva was not only a patron of art and learning; he was also a great architect and builder. None of his

predecessors or successors contributed so much as he did to beautify the city of Vijayanagara. He built a *gopura* or tower to the Virupaksha temple, the shrine of the presiding deity, and repaired another. After his successful military campaign in 1513, he built the great Krishnaswami temple. In the same year he commenced the construction of another big shrine for Hazara Ramaswami. In the vicinity of his capital he ordered the building of a township which he named after his mother Nagala Devi. Perhaps, chief among his elaborate and expensive building operations was the temple of Vithalswami, which represents the "extreme limit in florid magnificence to which the style advanced".

Glowing accounts of the magnificence of the city of Vijayanagara exist in abundance. I give here a few extracts from the excellent report of Paes. Surveying the capital from a vantage ground, he writes: "What I saw from thence seemed to me as large as Rome, and very beautiful to the sight: there are many groves of trees within it, in the gardens of the houses, and many conduits of water which flow into the midst of it, and in places there are lakes; and the king has close to his palace a palm-grove and other rich bearing fruit trees". This is what the Portuguese observer saw in a street: "In this street live many merchants and there you will find all sorts of rubies and diamonds and emeralds and seed pearls, and cloths and every other sort of thing there is on earth and that you may wish to buy." The people were lovers of flowers, for Abdur Razaak tells us that they were sold everywhere in the city. "These people," he writes, "could not live without roses, and they look upon them quite as necessary as food." This gorgeous city of parks and palaces and of immense wealth housed a population of half a million industrious and prosperous citizens.

It is seldom that even great men receive universal acclaim, but Krishnadeva Raya is an exception. Foreigners

and Indians have vied with one another in honouring the name of this greatest of Vijayanagara monarchs. Paes, of whose tribute to the Raya we should not tire because it is sincere and reliable, says that the king was gallant and "perfect in all things". The dark pages of the sanguinary story of the mediaeval kingdoms of the Deccan, says Vincent Smith, are relieved by few names of men who claim respect on their personal merits. The figure of Krishnadeva Raya "stands out pre-eminent".

I give below an estimate of the king by Krishna Sastri, whom Smith quotes with approval, because it judiciously sums up the claim of the Raya to be recognised as one of the most outstanding personalities in Indian history: "Krishna Raya's kindness to the fallen enemy, his acts of mercy and charity towards the residents of captured cities, his great military prowess which endeared him alike to his feudatory chiefs and to his subjects, the royal reception and kindness that he invariably bestowed upon foreign embassies, his imposing personal appearance, his genial look and polite conversation which distinguished a pure and dignified life, his love for literature and for religion, and his solicitude for the welfare of his people, and, above all, the almost fabulous wealth that he conferred as endowments on temples and Brahmins, mark him out as the greatest of the South Indian monarchs, who sheds a lustre on the pages of history."

It was Vijayanagara's great misfortune that the king died long before he attained old age. He passed away in 1530 at the age of forty-three, assuming that the year of his birth, 1487, is correct. The men that succeeded him were less gifted than he was and the great empire, which for nearly three centuries had stood sentinel over the cultural wealth of the land, perished in less than four decades after the death of Krishnadeva Raya the Great.

4. SHER SHAH

The annalists of the Moghul emperors were not always scrupulously fair to the enemies of their imperial masters. Though scholarly and industrious, they do not seem to have realised that the real function of a historian is to approach his task without predilections. It was wholly unnecessary for them to disparage or repudiate the greatness of others in order to uphold the eminence of the emperors. Abul Fazl's erudition has commanded universal esteem, but his treatise on Akbar is remembered more as a masterly eulogy than as an impartial chronicle. His contempt for Sher Shah, the man who drove his master's father into exile, is ill-concealed and indefensible. It would probably have redounded to his own reputation for impartiality and heightened Akbar's greatness if he had presented the Afghan king's achievements in their proper perspective. It may be that the panegyrists of the Timurids were not free to write according to the dictates of their own conscience, but no suppression or distortion of facts can deny Sher Shah the celebrity which he has earned by his great abilities.

According to Abul Fazl, Ibrahim Khan, the grandfather of Sher Shah, was an Afghan horse-dealer of the Sur tribe. Whether Ibrahim ever sold horses is uncertain, but it is a fact that he came to India during the reign of Sultan Bahlol Lodi (1451-1488) to seek his fortune in this country. He was followed by his son, Hasan Khan to whom was born Farid, the future emperor of India. The exact year of Farid's birth is not known, but he was probably born in 1486. Farid was an unwanted child of the family. His father was endowed with many amiable qualities, but in the declining years of his life, he submitted, perhaps unwillingly, to the dictation of his last wife, a young and beautiful woman with

an evil temper. Her husband was too weak-minded to be able to shield Farid and his brother Nizam effectively from her senseless persecution. They were Hasan's children through his first wife, an Afghan lady, whom he had discarded in favour of the wily wench from India.

Farid was a sensitive boy and found life under his father's roof insufferable. One day, when he was fifteen years old, he fled to Jaunpur, vowing never to return to his paternal home to be plagued by his heartless step-mother. Hasan, who held a military fief at Sasaram, wrote to his master, Jalal Khan, praying that his truant son be sent back. Farid, however, succeeded in prevailing upon that nobleman to permit his residence at Jaunpur which, he argued, was a better place than Sasaram for prosecuting his studies. It is not known how long the young Afghan stayed there to acquire education, but he must have spent many years in an assiduous application to his studies. By the time he ended his scholastic career, he had gained a vast amount of useful knowledge in theology, in statecraft and in civil and military administration.

Farid deeply impressed all those who came near him by his scholarship and by his irreproachable and manly bearing. Hasan at last realised that by listening to the siren-voice of his crafty wife, he had driven out a son of Farid's sterling character and towering abilities. In order to make amends for his past injustice, the old man offered to put his son in charge of his paraganas, Hajipur and Khavaspur Tanda. Farid was too shrewd to be taken in by this new-fangled manifestation of affection by his capricious father who could not be trusted to remain constant for long, particularly when exposed to renewed attacks on his weakness by his domineering wife. He, therefore, insisted that Hasan should give a solemn undertaking not to interfere with his administration of the jagirs. He had

learnt many useful things from his books and was anxious to experiment with them in his father's estates.

He delivered a learned lecture to the rough old soldier on the duties of a ruler. He said : " Justice alone is the mainstay of government and a source of prosperity to the governed, for injustice undermines authority and brings all-round ruin. " He declared his implacable hostility to the oppressors of the humble ryots who, he rightly asserted, were the backbone of an agricultural country like India. All this was strange talk to Hasan, who had, however, the prudence to realise that, at least in civil matters, his son knew more than himself. He accordingly gave a free hand to Farid in putting the affairs of his paraganas in order. The jagirdar on deputation, holding such enlightened views, was only twenty-five years old when he embarked upon his new tasks.

What he saw in the jagirs deeply distressed him. The exactions of the rent-collector and the insolent soldier had driven the peasantry to the extremities of want and hunger. With hard labour they tilled and fructified their lands and raised rich crops only to be plundered by their exploiters. Farid knew that agriculture, the foundation of the country's wealth, could not flourish under such conditions of unbridled oppression. Soon after his arrival he called a joint conference of the extortioners and their victims. Addressing himself first to the former, he declared that he would not allow them to pursue their old course of oppression and violence and that he would not hesitate to mete out harsh punishment to those who were guilty of practising injustice against the ryots. " I shall, " he declared, " inflict heavier punishments upon my guilty relatives and soldiers so that others may take a warning from it. " He then proceeded to assure the terrorised and famished farmers that their travails were now at an end and that they might pursue their avocations

without the haunting fear of being stripped of the fruits of their industry.

Farid was as good as his word. He introduced a simple but enduring land revenue system which at once ended the rapacity of the robber barons. Lands were surveyed under a uniform system of mensuration. The holding of each peasant was systematically measured and one-fourth of the anticipated produce was assessed as the revenue to be paid to the jagirdar. Though the reformer was stern in his collections, he never made any demands which the impoverished peasantry could not pay. If in a given season the state of the crop was bad, remissions were freely granted. It was, however, not easy to enforce these beneficent reforms which spelt ruin for powerful vested interests. Farid was not the man to be cowed down by the bandits. He collected a small army, consisting partly of the suppressed peasants, and made lightning attacks on the strongholds of those who had long battered on the industry of the tillers of the soil. The retribution that overcame them was often terrible, and Farid Khan was not afraid of resorting to calculated frightfulness to suppress the enemies of the masses.

Thus Sasaram became an excellent training-ground for this man of genius. There he acquired a deep and first-hand insight into the economic condition of the country and the incredible weakness of the administration. There, too, he was initiated into the strategy of war, though on a small scale, and gained valuable experience in the reorganisation of the armed forces. His name will always be associated with India's land revenue system. Three such different powers as the Moghuls, the Marathas and the British copied it with only such variations as the need of the times and the changing circumstances warranted. Sasaram was indeed the place where he laid the foundation of his greatness. Neither the vacillations of his senile father nor the vendetta of his step-mother could injure him any longer.

The jagirs, though temporarily taken away from him came back to Farid after his father's death, but now Sasaram could not contain his expanding ambitions and growing abilities, which clamoured for a wider field for their full exercise.

Farid was a careful student of public affairs. The defeat and death of Ibrahim Lodi at the hands of Babar in the Battle of Panipat had caused a profound change in the political landscape of India. With all the wealth of the country and the tremendous military strength of his Afghan compatriots, Lodi could not repel the invader. Farid realised that the mere possession of wealth and strength was of no avail if they could not be used well and wisely. The Afghans were a brave and warlike people, but they were proud, turbulent and vindictive, being always prone to pick up a quarrel and pursue it to the bitter end. Their tribal and family ties prevailed over national interests. The position of the Afghan kings in India had never been strong, for, deluded by a false sense of equality, their lieutenants behaved as if they were sovereigns in their own right. That is the reason why the struggle for the crown of Delhi was frequent and bloody.

Farid decided that, should he ever gain power, he would put an end to a system which permitted the governors of provinces to claim the status of *primus inter pares* in relation to the Central Government. A vast country like India needed a strong central authority, not only to curb the centrifugal forces, but also to make foreign invasions impossible. Throughout his chequered career, Farid never lost sight of this basic requirement of India. The opportunity of putting his political theories into practice came to him when he accepted service under Bihar Khan, who after the Battle of Panipat, assumed the title of Sultan Muhammad and governed Bihar as an independent sovereign. During a hunting expedition with his

master, Farid showed great personal courage by killing a tiger and for this act of bravery he was awarded the title of 'Sher'. He thus came to be known as Sher Khan.

In the troubled times in which he lived Sher Khan was too wise to commit his fortunes to the care of any one master. Though he swore allegiance to the king of Bihar, he carefully cultivated the favour of Sultan Junaid Birlas, Babar's governor of Kara and Mankipur. In fact, he temporarily entered the service of Babar, perhaps with a view to "ascertaining how he could be expelled from India". He accompanied the new emperor on an expedition to Chanderi. It was during this period that he became convinced that Babar's success against Ibrahim Lodi was due, not so much to his so-called invincibility, as to the weakness of his enemies. He decided to profit by this lesson and returned to the service of the king of Bihar.

By a conspicuous display of tact and ability, Sher Khan soon established his own ascendancy over the government of Bihar. The new prince, Jalal Khan, became jealous of his power and foolishly implicated himself in an attempt to assassinate his chief minister. He committed the worse folly of going over to the king of Bengal, the very man who had long been casting covetous eyes on his kingdom. It was a good riddance for Sher Khan who now began to administer the State independently, but he wisely resisted the temptation of assuming the insignia of royalty. A powerful army was sent against him by the ruler of Bengal, but it was decisively beaten in the Battle of Surajgarh (1534). Sher Khan thus became the *de facto* sovereign of Bihar, with the adjoining province virtually at his feet.

With such a glittering prize in his possession, it was impossible for Sher Khan to be on friendly terms with Humayun. His first impulse was not to imperil his assiduously raised handiwork through rash adventure. His

earlier encounter with the emperor had not been encouraging, but a clash was inevitable, though he earnestly endeavoured to avoid it. He addressed himself humbly to Humayun, asking for friendship on honourable terms. The emperor would have lost nothing by placating his most formidable adversary, but he had surrendered his better judgment to the evil counsels of incompetent men. Though brave and generous to a fault, Humayun lacked the vigour and statesmanship of his father. The defects noted in his early life persisted even in the years of his maturity. He was indolent, careless, unreliable and addicted to soft and enervating pleasures. Lulled into false security by his sycophants, he made the fatal mistake of underestimating Sher Khan's strength.

Even so, he would not have shared the terrible fate of an exile if his two battles against the Afghan had been fought with a little more vigour and efficiency. Sher Khan, a master in the strategy of elusive warfare, completely neutralised the deadly power of Moghul artillery. On June 26, 1539, Humayun was defeated in the Battle of Chausa and fled to Agra. He sustained another crushing defeat at Kanauj on May 17 of the following year. The emperor now became a fugitive and was chased out of India. Sher Khan, the son of a petty assignee, thus became the undisputed master of a sub-continent. It was a fully deserved elevation, achieved by a superb exercise of political wisdom and military talent. He now crowned himself emperor of India and struck coin in his name.

Sher Shah was undoubtedly a great military commander, and only his resourcefulness could vanquish armies often more numerous and better equipped than his own. He could not, however, claim that he always fought with clean hands. His stratagem in defeating Maldeo, the valiant Rathor chief of Marwar, detracts from his fame as a warrior. Nor could he wholly succeed in suppressing the

primeval savagery which sometimes gained ascendancy over his noble and generous impulses. The ferocity with which he murdered Puran Mal of Raisen and his family, in cynical disregard of his own plighted word, cannot be forgiven. There were some more instances in which Sher Shah combined trickery with a heartless insensibility to human suffering, but these episodes, while they certainly constitute a blot on his character, should not blind us to the fact that he was probably one of the most humane and gifted rulers of India. This great and benevolent king died on May 22, 1545, from injuries accidentally sustained during the siege of Kalinjar.

Sher Shah, says a distinguished writer, was "the greatest of the Muslim rulers of India." The admirers of Akbar may dispute this eulogy, but if we remember the abiding contribution which Sher Shah made to the country's civil administration, the high tribute paid to his greatness is certainly not exaggerated. There was indeed no department, civil or military, which he did not reform. His successors may have improved upon some of them, but the credit for originating them should go to Sher Shah alone. He was probably the greatest friend of the peasantry, and by establishing intimate personal contacts with them, he not only saved them from their centuries-old distress, but in the process attained unrivalled insight into the needs of the government. He waged a relentless war against lawlessness throughout his dominion and gave peace and security to the weak and the helpless. Even hostile historians have been constrained to admit that in his reign "an old woman with a basket of gold could safely sleep in the open plain at night without a guard."

Sher Shah was a great builder and road-maker. He laid out four trunk roads. On either side of these great arteries, he planted fruit trees and erected 1,700 caravan-serais,

with boarding and lodging arrangements for travellers of all communities. By establishing a strong and integrated government, he gave stability and peace to the country. His far-reaching land reforms and his sound currency system gave an impetus to trade and commerce. His postal arrangements shortened distances and promoted freer and more frequent intercourse between people living in different parts of the country. It was a memorable age in an India long distracted by internal violence and frequent threats of aggression from without.

It was the country's grave misfortune, says a historian, that this great king could not, as he himself once exclaimed when observing his grey hair in a mirror, ascend the throne until the time of the evening prayer. If he had lived longer and if his successors had carried on his great traditions, Humayun might never have returned to India and regained his crown, but these are useless speculations. Both by personal example and by his amazing successes, Sher Shah proved to the world that, however humble one's origin may be, one can attain undying fame by one's own exertions.

5. AKBAR

In the last chapter we tried to assess the greatness of Sher Shah. Perhaps, he would have qualified himself for an equal place with Akbar if only good fortune had smiled on him in the full tide of his manhood. Even so, during the few years of his sovereignty he accomplished much, so much indeed that many of the reforms which were later introduced by Akbar derived their inspiration from his sagacious policy. But this high tribute to Sher Shah cannot detract from the glory that deservedly belongs to Akbar's rule, for few rulers in his position could have employed their opportunities with such wisdom and statemanship as was done by this greatest of the Moghul emperors. Only a man of Akbar's stature could establish his dynasty on secure foundations and give India the blessings of an enlightened rule, rarely enjoyed by her before.

And yet Akbar, with whose name the entire civilized world was to become familiar, grew up amidst surroundings which held out no promise of his future greatness. As we saw elsewhere, the failings of Humayun, his father, were many. He lacked the outstanding virtues of Babar, whose valour and enterprise had won for him a mighty empire. Humayun's defeat at Kanauj on May 17, 1540, climaxed his misfortunes. The discrowned emperor was hunted from place to place by Sher Shah's forces till he found asylum in the desert of Sind. His following was small and dispirited, and there was no powerful prince to espouse his seemingly lost cause. But the royal fugitive had one great virtue. Neither hardship nor adversity could deflect him from his resolve to regain the throne of Babar.

It is a revealing commentary on Humayun's character that, although he was a homeless wanderer, he could not conquer his love of pleasure and gaiety. Unmindful of his misfortune, he encumbered himself with one more matrimonial tie. His new bride, Hamida Bano Begam, was a mere child, being only fourteen years old. One year after the wedding, the girl attained motherhood and, on November 23, 1542, she presented her lord with a son and heir, who was destined to become the greatest Moghul. This happy event took place in the little-known town of Umarkot in Sind. Humayun was naturally happy over the coming of the child, who was given the name of Akbar.

The fugitive emperor was without means to reward his followers on that joyous occasion. He, however, contented himself by distributing musk to his principal adherents. With great composure, he declared to his men : " This is all the present I can afford to make you on the birth of my son, whose fame will, I trust, be one day expanded all over the world, as the perfume of the musk now fills this apartment." Thus the great monarch drew his first breath in the bosom of poverty. Little did his father dream then that his formal words on that memorable occasion were pregnant with prophetic import.

Humayun's stay in Sind was in other respects uneventful. His ambition to return to Delhi in triumph remained as forlorn as ever before. At last he decided to implore assistance from the king of Persia and accordingly set out on his arduous journey. It was impossible to take the infant prince with him. Akbar was, therefore, confided to the care of his younger brother Askari Mirza who took him to Kandahar. The child was later transferred to the guardianship of Kamran, another brother of Humayun, then in possession of Afghanistan. The Shah of Persia obliged the ex-emperor of India by giving

him a small army. Humayun eventually succeeded in conquering Afghanistan with the aid of the Persian troops. It was only then that the boy-prince came under the loving care of his parents.

Akbar grew up as a wild and untutored boy. He was the despair of his teachers, who signally failed to interest him in book-learning. Indeed, they could not even teach him to read and write. Akbar carried this failing to his grave. Perhaps, idleness and a fierce love of freedom from all forms of discipline fostered in him a distaste for formal studies. He, however, developed an enormous and an unusual liking for animals. He revelled in their company and took delight in taming the most turbulent ones. He was absolutely fearless and was blessed with a strong physique. He loved adventure and deliberately courted risks to his life and limbs. This strange insensibility to personal danger persisted throughout his life and it accounted in some measure for his great victories over his enemies. These were certainly admirable qualities, but they hardly fitted him for the eminent position which Providence had reserved for him.

Meanwhile, Humayun had perfected his plans for the invasion of India. With the aid of a small but efficient army he recovered the Punjab in 1554, and towards the end of the same year, he re-entered Delhi in triumph, fifteen years after he had fled from the country. The situation was most favourable for the re-conquest of India, which, after the death of Sher Shah in 1545, had once again lapsed into a state of anarchy. Sher Shah's son, Islam Shah, was brave but rash. The incurable tendency among the Afghan chieftains to repudiate Delhi's overlordship reasserted itself, and the disruption of the central authority was almost complete after the death of Islam Shah in 1554. Nevertheless, there were still two formidable adversaries, whose defeat was imperative in

order to plant Moghal rule in India on firm foundations. Humayun did not live to complete that task, for he died in January 1556 after an accidental fall.

The legacy bequeathed to Akbar by his father was by no means an easy one. He was called on to don the Imperial mantle when he was only a little over thirteen years old. His immaturity was not his only disadvantage. Sher Shah's nephew, Sikandar Sur, the principal rival claimant to the crown, was still powerful in the Punjab, while around Delhi a great Hindu general, Hemu, had collected a large army to expel the Moghul intruders from the country. Hemu had already inflicted severe reverses on the Moghul forces and was now waiting to attack the main army of the invaders. He made his final stand at Panipat, that famous plain near India's capital where the fate of the country had been decided more than once. Like his grandfather, Akbar was now confronted with a difficult situation. His troops were not anxious to meet the formidable enemy and clamoured to be taken back to Afghanistan. Had he yielded to their importunities, Akbar's ambition to mount the throne of Delhi would have dissolved into a dream. He took counsel with his able guardian, Bairam Khan, who indignantly spurned all suggestions for withdrawal. So, the great Battle of Panipat was fought on November 5, 1556, ending in complete victory for the Moghuls. Thus did the imperial diadem of India once more come into the hands of the Timurids who lost it finally one and a half centuries later, thanks to the incalculable folly of Akbar's great-grandson Aurangzeb.

This great windfall made no appreciable change in the wild disposition of Akbar. Bairam Khan, the protector, spared no pains to interest his royal ward in education. An eminent Persian tutor, described by the Muslim historian, Badaoni, as "a paragon of greatness", was

engaged to curb Akbar's truancy and to initiate him into the mysteries of learned lore, but all attempts at spoon-feeding were anathema to the young pupil. Riding, shooting and the taming of wild elephants were for Akbar far more exciting than the suffocating atmosphere of the class-room. Nevertheless, his intellectual growth was neither halted nor hampered by reason of his inattention to the "customary apparatus of learning". He was blessed with an extraordinary memory and an observant mind. Commenting on Akbar's intellectual training, Vincent Smith says : "He constantly employed other persons to read for him, and being gifted with an exceptionally powerful memory, was able to retain the knowledge gained by hearing, so that he was as well served by the ear as ordinary people are by the eye." According to another writer, Akbar, "by a peculiar acquisitiveness and a talent for selection, by no means common, had made his own all that can be seen and read in books." Thus the emperor's so-called illiteracy was no reproach to his brilliant and cultured mind.

The ferment in Akbar's mind was noticed by few. His elders deluded themselves by still believing that he was devoid of all ambition to govern. Among those who mistook his seeming indifference to kingly office was Bairam Khan, who gradually developed dictatorial tendencies in the exercise of his delegated authority. Complaints against his high-handed behaviour were frequently reported to Akbar. The emperor at last decided to remove this dangerous man from power. In a carefully worded message, he addressed Bairam Khan in these terms : "As I was fully assured of your honesty and fidelity, I left all important affairs of State in your charge, and thought only of my own pleasures. I have now determined to take the reins of government into my own hands and it is desirable that you should now make the

pilgrimage to Mecca, upon which you have been so long intent." It was a polite but firm order of dismissal which Bairam Khan could not ignore. All would have been well with him, had he accepted the imperial command with good grace. In that event, he would probably have ended the evening of his life in holy Mecca. But there is a fatal fascination in power to which the guardian succumbed. He raised a revolt, but it was promptly suppressed. He was captured and brought before the emperor, who magnanimously pardoned him. The disillusioned Khan now turned his face towards Mecca, but he was assassinated by an Afghan in Gujarat. After putting aside the ambitious Regent, Akbar had little difficulty in gaining complete control over his government.

Akbar was twenty years old when, in the words of Abul-Fazl, his panegyrist, he emerged from 'behind the veil'. For some time past, he had been meditating deeply on the problems of India and had arrived at certain important conclusions. His reflections on the political instability of the country revealed to him that no serious attempts had been made in the past to bridge the gulf between the ruler and the ruled. The non-Muslims, constituting the bulk of the population, were being unfairly treated and not infrequently persecuted. Religion, far from being a unifying force, had become an instrument of oppression. Akbar, therefore, decided that the throne of his empire should be in the hearts of his people no matter to what faith they belonged. Freedom of worship and freedom of thought, so long fettered under the previous regimes, became the cardinal principles of his policy.

The first step he took towards founding his rule on the affections of his people was in 1563, when he ordered the abolition of the pilgrim tax. He did not reckon the loss to the State exchequer. In doing an act of justice he

refused to consider the cost. It was, in his opinion, utterly wrong and thoroughly reprehensible to tax people assembled to worship the Creator, even if their forms of worship were not his own. Early in the following year Akbar took another decisive step towards binding the Hindu community to his Raj with bonds of affection and esteem. He abolished the Jaziya or poll-tax on non-Muslims. This hateful and oppressive impost was another fruitful source of revenue to the State, but Akbar saw with the vision of a seasoned statesman, that by sacrificing it he could win the good-will of the great Hindu community. He rightly considered that such good-will was worth more than all the wealth of the world.

Akbar's attitude to religion was based on enlightened and broad-minded toleration. In fact, his catholicity was sometimes carried to the point of eccentricity. In his zeal to free himself and his people from the trammels of dogma and ritual, he sought to impose a new religion of his own creation. His "Divine Faith" turned out to be an adroit attempt on his part to play Providence to his people. We need not waste many words in describing Akbar's unsuccessful attempts to establish a synthetic faith. More important than his abortive theological experiments was his total freedom from bigotry. Akbar was born and brought up as a Muslim, but Islam, as practised and propounded by the Moulvis, failed to attract him. He invited learned men of all creeds to Fatehpur-Sikri and Agra to engage in discussions on the relative merits of their respective religions and philosophy. He often presided over these debates and made distinguished contribution to them. What is more, he sincerely strove to apply to his own life some of the tenets of other religions if they appealed to his rational mind. As Malleon rightly remarks; Akbar "prostrated himself before the God of all, discarding the priesthood of all".

Akbar gave the death-blow to the absurd belief that Muslims alone were entitled to power and imperial patronage. He rejected the assertion that India belonged to none but his coreligionists. He realised that it would be impossible to establish a real community of interests between the Hindus and Muslims unless both were treated on an equal footing. The Hindus could not acquire a sense of dignity so long as they were excluded from positions of trust and responsibility. "The most original of his ideas", says Vincent Smith, "consisted in his recognition and practical acknowledgment of the principles that Hindus as well as Muhammadans should be considered eligible for the highest offices in the State, civil or military, and that the adherents of every creed should have complete liberty to worship God after their own fashions." It was because Akbar regarded the Hindus as a vital element in the Indian body politic that outstanding men like Raja Bhagwan Das of Amber, his nephew and adopted son Raja Man Singh, Raja Todar Mal, Birbal and a number of others came forward to support the Moghul empire.

Akbar added vast territories to his realm by conquest. Almost the whole of North India, including Gujarat in the west and Bengal and Orissa in the east comprised his kingdom. He extended the principles of his government to all the conquered areas. He abolished the old system of permitting semi-sovereignty to the provincial governors. They were to regard themselves as officers of the State and not as independent chiefs. Though long distances encouraged revolt, Akbar insured against this danger by posting his most trusted lieutenants, both Hindu and Muslim, to the key provinces. Moreover, his amazing capacity for swift movement and his reputation for invincibility exercised a salutary influence on governors inclined to rebellion. Both by personal example

and by strict injunctions, he safeguarded against any serious miscarriage of justice. Fanatical judges were removed from office and only those of proved probity were appointed to administer justice.

Akbar's land reforms bore the imprint of Todar Mal's genius. Save during the brief reign of Sher Shah, land revenue collections were most arbitrary. Lands were neither measured nor classified in order to fix their assessment for a definite period. This total lack of system was a fruitful cause for friction between the tax-gatherers and the ryots who were exposed to great hardships by heavy and unregulated exactions. By introducing the principle of ten years' settlement, Todar Mal eliminated the uncertainties of assessment and saved the tillers of the soil from the oppressions of tax-collectors. His revenue system was ryotwari and, in consequence, the actual cultivators were made responsible for the annual payment of the fixed revenue.

India under Akbar was not a welfare State. The conception that the sovereignty of a State belonged to its people was not known to Akbar or his times. Even if such a principle had been familiar, the emperor would not have accepted its implications, for he was an autocrat. Even so, Akbar's reign is remembered, not for what it failed to accomplish, but for what it did. Endowed with a cultured and constructive mind, Akbar encouraged art and literature. Talented men always received honour and patronage from him. His court was adorned by gifted artists, musicians and men of letters. The famous musician Tansen was the emperor's great favourite. Abul-Fazl and Badaoni did much to make the literary treasures of India and of other lands accessible to a wider reading public. The latter's history, though abounding in prejudiced observations, is valuable as portraying the state of his times. Akbar himself collected a library of choice

manuscripts of extraordinary pecuniary value. Even so, in the domain of letters the man who made the emperor's reign memorable was far away from the pomp and glitter of the imperial court. That was the great Tulsidas, whose exquisite composition of the *Ramayana* is still sung in millions of homes in North India. Akbar was not fortunate enough to meet this great master. Another literary luminary of his reign was Sur Das, "the blind bard of Agra". Akbar's rule of nearly half a century was an era of great creative activity. Much of the credit for it should naturally go to the emperor whose patronage and tolerance made such pursuits possible.

Perhaps, the most unsavoury feature of Akbar's rule was his policy of aggression. In the sketches that follow I have commented on his career of conquest. It is not correct to say, as some writers have endeavoured to point out, that Akbar's conquests were prompted by the sole desire to extend the blessing of his enlightened rule to all parts of the country. This opinion is based on two assumptions, namely, that Akbar's intentions were free from ambition and that those whom he defeated or attempted to defeat were not benevolent rulers. There is no historical support for either of these assumptions. In trying to defend the emperor's forward policy, Malleon has played the part of an eulogist. He writes : "Akbar did not conquer in Rajputana to rule in Rajputana. He conquered that all the Rajput princes, each in his own dominions, might enjoy that peace and prosperity which his predominance, never felt aggressively, secured for the whole empire." This, if I may quote Vincent Smith's strong words, is "untrue nonsense", for "the ruling passion of Akbar was ambition." The same learned author declares : "There is no evidence that his administration in fact caused more happiness than that produced by most of the governments which he overthrew so ruthlessly."

Akbar's military operations against Mewar, against Rani Durgavati's Gondwana, and against the dominions of Chand Bibi were unabashed acts of aggression which cannot be explained away by any amount of casuistry. Their patriotism was their offence.

Akbar was not, therefore, a paragon of virtue. Many indeed were his acts of omission and commission, but he was a Titan who towered above his contemporaries both in strength and wisdom. He was ahead of his times and only his penetrating insight into the country's *malaise* enabled him to adopt bold measures. So, in appraising the achievements of a man of Akbar's stature, it is unnecessary to smother him with adulation. Facts, even if some of them are unpalatable, have faithfully sustained his claim to immortality. Let me conclude my estimate of this greatest of the Moghul emperors with the words of Robert Bryan. "The wonder of his age, he does not diminish in stature with the passage of time. Part mystic, part man of action, gentle and cruel tolerant and self-willed, ascetic and voluptuary, he astonishes us today by the complexity, but still more by the intense force of his character. The hope expressed by his father, that his fame would spread through all the world, has been fulfilled. The child born in poverty and flight in the desert of Sind became Akbar the Great Moghul, one of the great men of the world."

6. PRATAP SINGH

In his *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Tod writes : "Pratap succeeded to the titles and renown of an illustrious house, but without a capital, without resources, his kindred and clans dispirited by reverses : yet possessed of the noble spirit of his race, he meditated the recovery of Chitor, the vindication of the honour of his house, and the restoration of its power." This, in a nutshell, was the plight of Mewar which, as we saw, had attained the pinnacle of glory at the time of Maharana Sangram Singh's death.

Udai Singh who succeeded to his father's title in 1537, was wholly unequal to the task of sustaining the responsibilities which Sanga had increased by his conquests and which became even more onerous since his contemporary on the throne of Delhi brooked no rival. Akbar was a determined conqueror. To bring the whole of India under his undivided sway became his governing passion. Many a proud prince of Rajasthan kissed the dust before this all-powerful monarch. Rather than risk his anger they preferred to make the most complete surrender possible to his imperious will.

Udai Singh was the one prince in Rajasthan who refused to stand as a suppliant before the foot-stool of the emperor. His refusal to submit to the status of a vassal was in the best tradition of his house, but he lacked the energy and foresight of his father to sustain his defiance of Delhi by the strength of arm. Slothful and pleasure-loving, he hardly realised that Akbar would spend sleepless nights planning for Mewar's destruction. To him the existence of two royal houses in India was a personal affront. So, the Moghul armies marched on

Chitor to compel the submission of its ruler or to reduce it to ashes.

It is strange that Udai Singh did not remain in Chitor, "the citadel of Rajput heroism", when the Moghuls besieged it. Its defence devolved upon Rao Jaimal Rathor of Merta, while the Maharana retreated to the safety of mountain fastnesses. After a gallant struggle, the capital of Mewar fell into the hands of the aggressors on February 24, 1568. The victorious Akbar perpetrated upon the fallen city acts of atrocity which have cast a slur upon his name. Let me quote the *Cambridge History of India* : "The massacre of Chitor, which has made the place unclean and accursed to its old royal house, has left an indelible blot on Akbar's name. No such horrors were perpetrated by the brutal Allauddin. . ."

The crushing defeat of Chitor hastened the death of Udai Singh, who had retired to his new city of Udaipur, built some years before the disaster. He died on March 3, 1572, at Gogunda, about nineteen miles north-west of the new capital. This unfortunate and short-sighted prince bequeathed a sea of troubles to his successor. Overlooking the right of his eldest son and heir-apparent, Pratap, to occupy what was now the tottering throne of Mewar, he exercised his royal and paternal prerogative in favour of his younger son, Jagmal. This unjust and totally uncalled for interdiction of Pratap's accession was resented by many prominent chiefs in Rajasthan, who hastened to right the wrong by proclaiming the heir-apparent as the Maharana of Mewar. Pratap, like his illustrious grandfather Sanga, was willing to renounce his birthright for reasons of fraternal and patriotic forbearance, but since Rajasthan desired his lead, he accepted the honour as a matter of duty.

Thus came Rana Pratap to the helm of Mewar's affairs at a time when the fortunes of his family were at

the lowest ebb. The patrimony inherited by him from his father was a broken shell. Ruined Chitor and the surrounding country were in the hands of the invaders, who had mobilised the great resources of the empire to destroy even the fragmented principality of the Sisodias. Rajasthan abounded in traitors, renegades and opportunists. The glorious Rajput traditions of heroic resistance to aggression were ignored and there was an unedifying scramble even among the tallest in Rajasthan for the emperor's favour and patronage. In a land accustomed to pay homage to mighty Rajput warriors, the benevolence and toleration of the Moghul were praised to assuage the torments of conscience. In a word, Rajasthan was in a state of moral decay.

Two alternatives faced Rana Pratap soon after his accession, namely, to carry on the war of independence against immense odds, or to join the gay crowds on a pilgrimage to Delhi. It is to the imperishable glory of the grandson of Sanga that he chose the course of suffering and sacrifice. He gave signal proofs of his manhood by offering to cross swords with the Great Moghul instead of consenting to take the bit in his mouth and submit to be bridled by the emperor. No proud heart could forget the wrongs inflicted by Delhi on the House of Mewar. Its capital had been pillaged and its people put to the sword; the fertile regions of the realm were under occupation by the imperial armies, and the Rana and his family had been driven into the wilderness.

Even apart from the vital consideration of retrieving the honour of his family, what could Pratap expect from the emperor? What indeed was the import of imperial patronage? Those who have dismissed Pratap's indomitable resistance to Akbar's sway as the exploit of a misguided rebel have failed to realise that a prince who accepted Delhi's suzerainty signed the death-warrant of

his own independence and that of his principality. If, under British rule, the system of holding the Indian States in subjection to a paramountcy which operated independently of the will of princes and people alike, was adjudged unjust, it is for consideration whether Akbar's policy of reducing ancient kingdoms to a state of vassalage deserved approbation. I do not suggest for a moment that a multitude of competing sovereignties should have been allowed to flourish in India, but Akbar's conception of political unity was open to serious objection.

Let us examine what it meant to accept his overlordship. First, it involved for Rajput princes in particular a social degradation which it was impossible for any proud ruler to contemplate with equanimity. Secondly, it struck down from the hands of the feudatories all weapons of resistance to the emperor's arbitrariness. Thirdly, they were reduced to the status of mere estate-holders, with no powers to ordain succession to their *gadis*, except with their suzerain's consent. Fourthly, to guarantee their good behaviour, they or their heirs-apparent were to remain at the imperial court and render servile service to the person of the emperor. Fifthly, they were to maintain armies for the consolidation of the empire and render military service whenever ordered to do so. Lastly, they were to cater to the emperor's caprices. It redounded to their material advantage if they acclaimed Akbar as the great founder of the 'Divine Faith', which, according to one writer, became the emperor's 'stock-in-trade.'

I wonder whether in our own time the yoke of British paramountcy over the States was more galling to the princes than the one imposed by Akbar on his vassals. And yet some historians have shown a singular lack of charity when dealing with Rana Pratap, who rightly refused to submit to the humiliating overtures of Akbar. Could it

be that this heroic figure repelled them because rebellion of any kind was anathema to them? History is, however, not interested in their foibles. Rana Pratap disdained to bend his head, although Akbar used every device to secure his submission. The emperor sent his distinguished and trusted Rajput lieutenant, Raja Man Singh, to admonish Pratap about the futility of resistance. The Rana received his guest with all the honour due to a person of his eminence and arranged a feast for him. He, however, excused himself from attending the dinner offering a thinly-veiled plea for his non-participation. It became evident to Akbar's emissary that the Rana was disinclined to eat with a man who had sold his services to the Moghuls.

Man Singh returned to the capital smarting under this indignity and reported the failure of his mission to the emperor. Akbar made further efforts to bring Pratap into his political orbit. Raja Bhagwan Das, another Rajput pillar of Akbar's empire, and later the celebrated Raja Todar Mal, visited Gogunda, the place where the Rana lived, and sought in vain to wean the Sisodia from what they thought his misguided and useless stubbornness. Pratap welcomed these distinguished men with the utmost deference but sent them back empty-handed. Surely, it was too much to ask from him to barter away his birth-right for the gauds of Moghul patronage. So, the two enemies came dangerously close to settling their dispute by the arbitrament of the sword.

We should not overlook Akbar's astuteness in his diplomatic moves; he engaged the Rana's fellow-Rajputs as the instruments of his policy to hasten Mewar's discomfiture. Whether that policy was a wise one or not, he pursued it even when hostilities broke out. Raja Man Singh was entrusted with the command of the Moghul armies to enforce Pratap's submission. That Akbar's

move was an adroit one and that it was motivated by the doctrine of *divide et impera* is a point of view which has received influential support. "Akbar", says a historian, "should not have imposed such a task upon a Rajput", and adds that by calling on Man Singh to conquer Mewar, the emperor "too severely tested a faithful servant". But then the doctrine of "divide and rule" is as old as imperialism itself.

Man Singh set about the task of reducing Mewar with a thoroughness born out of a deep sense of loyalty to his master. Meanwhile, Rana Pratap was making careful preparations to give battle to the Moghul armies. But neither his resources nor the time at his disposal were sufficient to enable him to face Moghul aggression. It was only four years since he had come into power and his kingdom had greatly shrunk during the regime of his father. He did not, however, stop to calculate the means which were opposed to him; on the contrary, the magnitude of the peril confirmed his fortitude and urged him "to make his mother's milk resplendent". Kumbhalgarh, his hill-capital, became the centre of the Rana's warlike preparations. Those Rajput chiefs who had withstood the temptations of Moghul favour hastened to Pratap's assistance. Even so, the Maharana's means were but a drop in the ocean.

The memorable battle of Haldighat was fought on June 21, 1576. Mounting his famous steed, Chetak, the Indian Bucephalus, Pratap jumped into the thick of the battle, performing prodigies of valour, which have been written in letters of gold in the military annals of Rajasthan. Inspired by the example of their leader, The Rajputs fought recklessly, though outnumbered by the enemy. Tod describes the battle thus: "At this pass (Haldighat) Pratap was posted with the flower of Mewar, and glorious was the struggle for its maintenance. Clan

after clan followed with desperate intrepidity, emulating the daring of their prince, who led the crimson banner into the hottest part of the field." But this magnificent display of valour was unavailing, for the strength of the Moghuls was overwhelming. Out of 22,000 Rajputs assembled on that day for the defence of Haldighat, only 8,000 left the field alive. Rightly does Tod say that the Battle of Haldighat will not be forgotten while a Sisodia occupies Mewar, or a bard survives to relate the tale.

Wounded, but not dispirited, Rana Pratap rode off from the field. The Moghuls, who were thirsting for his blood, gave him hot chase. Chetak could no longer carry its master, for the noble animal was also wounded. The rider of the 'blue horse' dismounted to face his pursuing enemies, but was agreeably surprised to find his renegade brother, Sakat Singh, approaching him. The two brothers met and warmly embraced each other. After destroying the Moghul raiders, they parted, Sakat returning to the imperial camp and his gallant brother retreating to the hills. The grief of the defeated Rana was no less poignant when his faithful mount dropped dead with wounds and fatigue. Chetak, like other famous horses, has found a place in the roll of honour.

The Moghuls had little reason to become flushed with victory, for their casualties at Haldighat were as heavy as those of the Rana. Events were soon to prove that, though Pratap's defeat at the pass was serious, it neither interfered with his preparations for another trial of strength with his enemies nor weakened his resolve to keep the banner of independence flying. Akbar, at any rate, was not pleased with the performance of his men. Man Singh became the inevitable scapegoat and all his great record, both as a soldier and a servant, was forgotten. He was forced to live for some time under the cloud of imperial displeasure.

It is not necessary to recount all the details of the Rana's matchless resistance to the invaders. The talent of every able Moghul general was tried and the fabulous wealth of the empire was liberally drawn upon in an attempt to capture a mere strip of land that defied the powerful enemy. There, in the inhospitable Aravalli hills, the indomitable Rana, his brave Rajputs and his equally brave and faithful Bhils, kept the fragile lamp of independence from going out. It was a bitter and long-drawn-out struggle; all the safe retreats were taken by the enemy; Gogunda, Kumbhalgarh and many other forts fell into their hands. Only the inaccessible hill ranges were safe from the assaults of the Moghuls. Akbar himself conducted the campaign, but with no success.

The Moghul victories were in fact Pyrrhic. The Rana's sudden sallies from his hiding-place spread dismay in every garrison. His guerilla warfare, of the kind that was later to become the *bete noire* of the imperial armies fighting the Marathas in the Deccan, gave them little respite or feeling of security. Even the bravest of the Moghul generals were convinced of the futility of a campaign, the results of which proved ephemeral. While they obeyed the commands of the emperor to prosecute the war to the bitter end, they missed no opportunity to return to the capital or their posts, where they could live undisturbed by the haunting fear of the Rana's sudden irruptions. But if the war in Mewar was unpopular with the Moghuls, it was hardly a picnic for Pratap, his family, or his followers. The life they led was one of great hardship and of perpetual danger. They could not eat or sleep in peace, for enemy hordes were always on the look-out for them.

But the Rana's determination to carry on the war of independence never weakened, nor did the martial ardour of his devoted followers flag. In many ways Pratap

set an example to his people. He cheerfully accepted a life of penury; his food was simple and his garments were coarse. He discarded the soft bed and made the battlefield his home. Gold and jewels were spurned as so much tinsel. The warrior-king became a practical philosopher and by personal example he taught his followers the sublime philosophy of suffering for the right cause. Seldom has history recorded such a soul-warming saga of heroic resistance to unprovoked aggression. Pratap's sacrifices were not made in vain, for his fame will echo down the corridor of time.

The flesh is weaker than the spirit. Even an iron constitution must break down under the strain of incessant toil, anxiety and exposure to danger. Maharana Pratap's body was strong but it was not imperishable. It waned and withered as his distractions mounted and, after a short illness, he passed away on January 19, 1597, when he was only fifty-seven years old. The sun of Mewar's glory set with the passing of this great prince. Principal Sri Ram Sharma pays an eloquent tribute to Maharana Pratap Singh. He writes : " A great general, a brave warrior, a successful organiser, a prince among men, a generous foe, Pratap's name is sure to be honoured wherever these virtues are respected. "

7. CHAND BIBI

*" In the gardens of the blest, where the happy
howris dwell,
In the palaces of men, where earth's fairest ones
are seen,
There is none who can compare in beauty
or in grace
With the noble Chand Sulatana, Bijapur's
beloved Queen. "*

In the long and chequered history of India her daughters have often played a notable part. Considered against the country's social background, their rise to fame is remarkable. As in many other countries, so in India, the right of women to take their place in public affairs was not readily recognised. There was a mistaken belief that women were incapable of performing great deeds. It is true that no deliberate attempts were made to put them down, but denial of opportunities to them to grow to their full stature was regarded neither as a social injustice nor as a national loss. It was thought that women must be fondled and protected like jewels in a velvet case. With that, it would seem, the obligation of man to the "weaker sex" ended.

The absurd belief that the place of women was in the kitchen or in the zenana—a belief held with the vigour of an obsession till recent times—accounts in some measure for the history of nations being less romantic. Even so, in all countries and climes many women have from time to time risen to eminence, compelling wide recognition of their greatness. We have in India a glorious tradition of heroines who have illuminated the pages of our history. That tradition is as

ancient as the country itself. Many a chapter in our immortal epics celebrates the renown achieved by women on the battlefield, in statecraft and in the domain of letters. Even in less remote periods, we have had a galaxy of fair damsels sallying forth, sword in hand, and shedding their blood in vindication of the honour of their motherland. Chand Bibi was one such heroine who preferred death to a life of gilded thralldom.

Chand Bibi was born and lived at a time when the Deccan was torn by grave political disorders. While such a situation certainly conduced to drawing out the warlike qualities in her, it was detrimental to the exercise of her constructive talents. The great Bahamani kingdom, founded in the fourteenth century, had been dismantled. Though not resting on the affections of the people, it had at least saved the fair and rich province from the ravages of competing States. Its dissolution, however, heralded a long period of decay and degeneration. Neither common religion, nor community of interests sought to be strengthened by matrimonial alliances, could persuade the succession States to realise the value of unity. Each kingdom, dominated by incompetent and capricious rulers, aspired to establish its own ascendancy in the Deccan. Deceit and intrigue were not deemed ignoble devices for attaining this end. Only on one fateful occasion did they unite, in order to destroy the splendid Vijayanagara empire. Having accomplished this negative and destructive purpose, they fell back on their old course of self-aggrandizement at the cost of their neighbours.

It was in such an atmosphere of all-round decay and demoralisation that Chand Bibi was born and brought up. The exact date of her birth has not been recorded, but it is believed that she was born in 1544. Nor are there any detailed or authentic accounts relating to her

childhood. A girl brought up in an overcrowded and closely-guarded harem could not be an appropriate subject for the historian. But her mother, Khunza Humayun, was probably an able woman. According to Ferishta, she was derived from the ruling house of Azarbaijan in Persia. Her father, Mian Jco, who came to India, married her to Sultan Husain Nizam Shah of Ahmednagar. It is doubtful whether Husain and his foreign wife enjoyed a happy married life, for the king was excessively addicted to ignoble pursuits which hastened his death (June 6, 1565).

Husain was succeeded by his son, Murtaza Nizam Shah I, " a dissipated and self-indulgent young man " who, for the first six years of his reign, left the administration of the state to his mother's management. Divergent opinions have been expressed about the competence of this lady who held charge of a kingdom menaced by ambitious and self-seeking monarchs, but the author of her daughter's biography, Sayyid Ahmad-ullah Qadri claims that her reign was a landmark in Ahmednagar's history. He writes : " Her reforms, her administrative methods, and her love for her subjects served as a model to other kings. The way in which she ruled over her kingdom indicates the power of her intellect, tact and sagacity. "

From this description of her mother's abilities, it is reasonable to suppose that Chand Bibi was brought up with great care. Meanwhile, the dispute between Bijapur and Ahmednagar over Sholapur and Kalyan threatened to involve the two kingdoms in a bloody conflict. The men at the helm in both States, however, desired that the quarrel be settled without resort to arms. Such an exhibition of statemanship was foreign to the traditions of the Muslims States of the Deccan and the real motive behind these pacific gestures was to promote

unity among them in order to launch a grand offensive against the Vijayanagara empire. The growing power of Rama Raya, the reigning monarch of Vijayanagara, roused the fears of his Muslim rivals, more especially of Sultan Ali Adil Shah of Bijapur, who vowed to destroy the great Hindu kingdom by concerting a grand alliance with his fellow-Muslim rulers of the Deccan. Ali Adil Shah accepted the hand of Chand Bibi, both to gather strength for wreaking vengeance upon Rama Raya and to extend his jurisdiction to Sholapur and Kalyan which were given to him as a dowry.

A sagacious and high-minded woman like Chand Bibi must have brought much happiness to a prince whose restless energy drove him into constant warfare against his neighbours, but their domestic felicity, which lasted about eighteen years, was suddenly cut short by the assassination of Ali Adil Shah on April 9, 1580. Chand Bibi bore no children to him, and in the year before his violent death, Ali Adil Shah had chosen his brother's son, Ibrahim, to assume the royal canopy after him. Ibrahim Adil Shah II was only nine years old when he succeeded to the Bijapur *gadi* and so he came under the guardianship of Chand Bibi. Both Bijapur and her neighbours would probably have enjoyed a long spell of peace and prosperity if the regent had been allowed to govern the state in her own wise and efficient manner, but the self-seeking and all-powerful nobles gave her no rest.

Chand Bibi's benevolent rule during the brief period of her regency is still the subject of eulogy in Bijapur which, despite the passage of centuries, cherishes her memory with affection and gratitude. The rapacious Sardars, however, prevented her from leaving enduring monuments of her enlightened regime. The chief culprit among them was Kamil Khan Deccani, who abused his

privileged position by packing the administration with his own henchmen and by gaining control over the State exchequer. In order to checkmate the overgrown power of this nobleman she appointed other Sardars as her advisers, but such changes could not cure the deep-rooted malady of the government. Chand Bibi, who governed from behind the *purdah*, did not realise that the corruption and graft which she so valiantly strove to put down, were the infirmities of the age in which she lived. Since almost every minister she chose was dominated by selfishness, a mere change of counsellors could not be an effective remedy any more than scraping can be a cure for measles! She became heartily sick of the machinations in Bijapur and finally resolved to retire to Ahmednagar, her brother's kingdom. Thus the State lost one of its most sagacious and enlightened rulers. Her ward, Ibrahim, however, cherished deep and permanent gratitude to her for the untiring energy with which she had brought him up.

Chand Bibi's return to Ahmednagar, which she visited for the first time after her marriage, gave her no peace. Her brother Murtaza was a lunatic and his insane behaviour ended in his murder by his own son Husain on June 14, 1588. A prince who could commit the terrible crime of parricide could hardly be a paragon of virtue, and Husain was in fact a "dissolute and blood-thirsty youth". His deeds of violence and dark threats, writes a historian, "so alarmed his nobles that they deposed, imprisoned, and finally murdered him, and on April 1, 1589, raised to the throne his cousin Ismail, the younger son of Burhan-ud-Din, who had fled from the wrath of his brother Murtaza and was now in the service of the emperor Akbar".

Chand Bibi was powerless to compose these internal quarrels. A woman of great discernment, she

feared that Akbar would not be slow to take advantage of Ahmednagar's distractions in order to extend his dominion to the Deccan. Her fears were soon confirmed. Responding to solicitations for help by an unscrupulous Ahmednagar nobleman, the Moghul armies, commanded by the emperor's favourite son Murad, besieged the capital. By a supreme effort, the valiant queen stilled all internal dissensions and inspired the garrison with her own patriotic fervour for the defence of the honour and independence of their homeland. The Moghuls caused wide breaches in the defences, but they dared not enter the fort. Under the personal superintendence of Chand Bibi, the garrison maintained a continuous and devastating cannonade at the Moghul camp. When the ammunition was exhausted, copper, silver and even jewels were used as shot. The breaches made by the enemy were repaired overnight.

The heroism displayed by Chand Bibi in this life-and-death struggle won the admiration of friend and foe alike. "Both camps", according to one authority, "were filled with admiration for the heroic leader of the defence, whose title by common consent was raised from Lady Chand to Queen Chand." The same source gives an inspiring account of her role. It says: "Chand Bibi, clad in armour and with a veil thrown over her face and a drawn sword in her hand, dashed forward to defend the breach." Such reckless courage was, however, of no avail, for the garrison was suffering from famine. With great difficulty the noble queen was induced to save the capital by surrendering a province to the Moghuls.

Chand Bibi was now convinced that the fate of the Deccan States was sealed. If they could not unite even in the face of common danger, they did not, she must have thought, deserve to live. Treacherous men, who had fomented disunity and contributed to the defeat

and discomfiture of the governments they had pledged themselves to serve loyally, maliciously cast doubts on her patriotism. During the second invasion of Ahmednagar by the Moghul army, she was treacherously murdered by a band of ruffians who defended their foul crime by denouncing her as a traitress ! Thus in 1599 the noble queen of Ahmednagar perished at the hands of assassins. Her biographer, however, holds that she killed herself by jumping into a well which she had caused to be filled with acid. Whatever the circumstances of her death might be, she passed away at the age of fifty-five.

Chand Bibi has attained legendary fame. In a crisis of grave danger, she showed the highest fortitude and self-reliance. In times of peace, she bent her great energies to the task of improving the administration and promoting better relations among the warring States of the Deccan. She was a woman of great political insight and wisdom. There are many interesting portraits of her personality. She is depicted as a beautiful woman, with shining eyes, a thin aquiline nose and refined features. Chand Bibi deserved to be the Queen of the Deccan, but her pusillanimous kinsmen and selfish nobles defeated her heroic attempts to build up a powerful political fortress against Moghul encroachments. They chose to be submerged under the tide of imperial conquest.

8. RANI DURGAVATI

During the reign of Akbar two women won fame by their heroic resistance to the Great Moghul's career of conquest. The name of Chand Bibi has become a household word in many parts of India, but Rani Durgavati, though more outstanding than her southern contemporary, has not achieved the same legendary renown. It is, of course, nobody's fault that we know so little about Gondwana. The region over which the Rani ruled and in which she made history was shut off for a long time from the main currents of Indian life. The opportunities for chronicling the history of the four Gond kingdoms which flourished some six hundred years ago were therefore, few. Indeed, Gondwana, comprising a large part of the province now known as Madhya Pradesh, has ceased to be a 'geographical entity'. We search in vain for its name on the modern map of India, but it was here that Gond sovereigns rose to great summits of achievement, conferring on their people the blessings of peace and prosperity.

Protected by the towering walls of the Satpura ranges and by thick forests, the simple denizens of the hills pursued their peaceful lives, undisturbed by the storms that frequently swept the rest of the country. It would, however, be wrong to assume that their region was condemned to complete isolation or that they were wholly immune to cultural and social influences from the north. Their country was known to the Aryans, whose crusading zeal for the dissemination of the Vedic civilization knew no barriers. But the Aryans did not go to Gondwana either to conquer or to colonise, but to pass on the torch of enlightenment to its people. Moreover, its magni-

sicent mountains, rivers and forests held a special attraction for sages and recluses who spent their lives in prayer and meditation in its serene retreats.

The presence of such holy men in their neighbourhood and the process of Aryan cultural penetration, which went on unimpeded for centuries, enabled the inhabitants of Gondwana to widen their mental horizon and to assimilate as much as they could the fertile civilization of the northerners. A significant feature of their intercourse with the north was that their country ceased to be a wholly unknown land. Though there was no appreciable change in their traditional mode of life, the fact that their isolation was somewhat broken led to some important political results. Gradually, adventurous scions of Rajput families penetrated their homelands and eventually brought the whole region under their supremacy. The Gonds were at first acquiescent to the new dispensation, but in the fullness of time they developed a passionate desire to become masters of their own destiny. They wanted Gondwana to be governed by themselves.

There is an inevitable arbitrariness in summarising the events of centuries in a few words, but it is sufficient for my present purpose to point out that about six hundred years ago four independent Gond kingdoms came into existence almost simultaneously, after power had been wrested from the Rajput rulers. The northern kingdom had its capital at Garha, three miles from Jabulpore; the chief cities of the two central States were Deogarh and Kherla, in the Chhindwara and Betul districts, respectively; and the southern principality had its seat of government, first at Sirpur, and then at Chanda. All these four kingdoms thrived for nearly four hundred years. I am concerned here only with the Garha State where Rani Durgavati reigned.

Garha was the premier principality in Gondwana. Its rulers were wise, brave and benevolent. The circumstances in which their Gond forbear founded his dynasty¹ are somewhat obscured by inadequate historical material. But the broad facts are not in doubt. Jadurai was the hero who put an end to the semi-Rajput rule in that State. He was of humble origin and his home was "in the region of the river Godavari". As a young man, he left his parental roof in order to seek his fortune with the Kalachuri Raja of Garha. Being ambitious, clever and adventurous, he not only learnt the secrets of statecraft but also studied the weakness of his master's government. After some time he resigned his post and departed from the kingdom to mature plans for the overthrow of its Rajput ruler. His first step in that direction was to win a bride of royal blood in order to overcome the disadvantage of his lowly birth. He married the daughter of Nagdev, the Gond chieftain of Mandla, and thus achieved a substantial accession to his social standing. Thenceforward the local inhabitants began to look upon him as their leader. Assisted by another ambitious man, Surbhi Pathak, Jadurai succeeded in overturning the Rajput monarchy in Garha and crowned himself as its king.

About his immediate successors we do not know much; they do not seem to have accomplished anything outstanding to deserve the perpetuation of their names. We are, however, on firm ground when we come to the reign of Sangram Shah, who ascended the *gadi* about 1480. It is from this period that we are vouchsafed fairly adequate and reliable evidence of the character of Gond rule. Sangram was a man of large ambitions and high courage. He greatly extended his dominion, which at the time of his accession was confined to the country around Jubbulpore and Mandla. At his death the original four

districts, which formed the kingdom of Garha, had increased to fifty-four, comprising large portions of the Narmada Valley and the modern districts of Saugor and Damoh, as well as much of former Bhopal State.

Sangram was not a mere conqueror. He was also a reformer and a master-builder. He built the famous fortress of Chauragarh, in the Narsinghpur district, which became the treasure-city of the kingdom. He dug tanks and lakes to promote agriculture and in many ways added to the beauty of his capital. He was a man of deep piety and built one of the finest temples dedicated to God Bhairawa. Sangram has received a well-deserved tribute from the Reverend Eyre Chatterton, Bishop of Nagpur, who, in *The Story of Gondwana*, writes : " Sangram Shah was undoubtedly the most distinguished prince of the northern kingdom." He was succeeded by his son, Dalpat Shah, a young man of great daring and splendid appearance. Sangram, whose paternal heart swelled with righteous pride at the manly bearing and generous disposition of his son, decided that Dalpat should wed a princess worthy of his admirable qualities.

His choice fell on Durgavati, a princess of great beauty and of greater character. She was the daughter of the Rajput chief of Mahoba, which had been one of the great powers of India five hundred years earlier. Proud of his lineage, her father refused to enter into matrimonial alliance with the Gond ruler, to whom prejudice had assigned an inferior social status. Durgavati was, however, free from the foolish pride that she was a princess of the famous Chandel dynasty. Social barriers were, in her eyes, absurd and she believed that a man's eligibility to honour and recognition should be judged not by the accident of his birth, but by the nobility of his character and manly courage. She found in Dalpat a hero after her own heart and secretly vowed to become

his bride. She abhorred the prospect of linking her fate to a spineless 'high-born' youth.

She accordingly encouraged Dalpat's suit and secretly counselled her lover to persist in his efforts to win her father's consent to the match. Dalpat joyously took the hint and marched into Mahoba, determined to take the princess away to his kingdom with the assent of his prospective father-in-law, if possible, and without it, if necessary. The proud but indigent Rajput at last realised that discretion was the better part of stubbornness and that there was really nothing discreditable about the alliance if only he could lower his pride. To the great joy of Gondwana, the two lovers were happily united. Unfortunately, however, they were not fated to enjoy this bliss for many years. Within four short years after their wedding, Dalpat, "still young in years, though great in valour, was gathered to his fathers", leaving their three-year-old son, Bir Narayan, in charge of his grief-stricken widow.

It was an overwhelming tragedy, but Durgavati, a woman of great discernment, did not waste much time in useless grief. The charge bequeathed to her by her beloved husband was an onerous one. There was none, save herself, to rear her infant son and prepare him for his great inheritance, nor could she disown the cares and burdens of government imposed on her as the regent of the realm. She was young and inexperienced in statecraft, but she had a natural aptitude for leadership. She brought astonishing zeal and wisdom to bear upon her responsibilities. She endeared herself to the people of her adopted country by identifying herself with them and by willingly sharing their joys and sorrows. She wisely maintained and improved upon the traditions of her father-in-law's government. She assiduously ascertained the wants and wishes of her subjects and redressed

their grievances promptly. With unsleeping vigilance, she personally supervised the safety and intergity of her realm and guarded it from external aggressions. Durgavati's rule for fifteen years became memorable for its enlightenment. It added to the strength of the kingdom and the prosperity of its people.

Let me reproduce here Vincent Smith's quotation from Abul-Fazl's remarks on Gondwana under Durgavati. The Rani proved herself worthy of her noble ancestry, and governed her adopted country with courage and capacity, "doing great things by dint of her far-seeing abilities. She had great contests with Baz Bahadur and the Mianas, and was always victorious. She had 20,000 good cavalry with her in her battles, and one thousand famous elephants. The treasures of the Rajas of that country fell into her hands. She was a good shot with gun and arrow, and continually went a-hunting and shot animals of the chase with her gun. It was her custom that when she heard that a tiger had made his appearance, she did not drink water till she had shot him."

Such was the great queen of Gondwana, who desired to be left in peace so that she might continue to serve her people with zeal and devotion. But Akbar ordained otherwise. When he decided to invade this small state with his powerful legion, he did not pause to consider that a woman would be ranged against him and that she had offered him no provocation whatsoever to justify his aggression. The stage was set in 1564 for the enactment of one of the most tragic dramas in the history of India. In that year the emperor ordered Asaf Khan I, governor of Kara and the Eastern Provinces, to invade Garha and reduce its valiant Rani to submission. We do not know how penetrating was Akbar's insight into Indian history, but his counsellor Abul-Fazl could have told him that

"from the earliest establishment of the Mohammedan power in India no monarch has been able to reduce the fortress of this country (Gondwana) or annex its territory ". Evidently, the emperor was determined to win new laurels by conquering a State which had never before submitted to Delhi.

The Rani was not unnerved by the Moghul invasion. Mounting a war elephant, she marched at the head of her troops to repel the invading hordes. The battle was, however, an unequal one. The brave Gond soldiers were no match for the trained armies of Asaf Khan. The queen made a gallant stand, but many of her men fled in panic and disorder. With her depleted forces she fought another action, but with the same result. The heroic Rani was wounded, and she now decided to retreat so that she might wage the war of independence from her fortresses. But she was not destined to fulfil this gallant resolve. The river on the line of her flight was in spate, and escape was impossible. Preferring death to dishonour, she stabbed herself to the heart, so that " her end was as noble and devoted as her life had been useful ". Says the Bishop of Nagpur : " So perished this noble woman, whose name should always be cherished as amongst the noblest of India's daughters."

The rest of the story may be briefly told. Flushed with victory, Asaf Khan marched with his troops to Chauragarh and laid siege to it. The fortress was defended by Rani Durgavati's son, Bir Narayan, who after fighting for two months, fell on the battlefield, dying in the heroic manner of his mother, " When the fort was taken," quotes Vincent Smith, " there fell into the hands of Asaf Khan and his men an incalculable amount of gold and silver. There were coined and uncoined gold, decorated utensils, jewels, pearls, figures, pictures, jewelled and decorated idols, figures of animals made whol y

of gold and other rarities." Besides this enormous wealth, the booty included one thousand elephants. Incidentally, the emperor received no share from this plunder, except two hundred elephants.

How are we to account for Akbar's behaviour in this tragic episode? The answer is provided by himself, for it is one of his "Happy Sayings" that "a monarch should be ever intent on conquest, otherwise his neighbours rise in arms against him." The second part of this saying is, of course, an apologia for the first, for it is ridiculous to believe that the princess of a small hill-country like Gondwana could have challenged the Great Moghul. The plain fact is that, despite his greatness, Akbar was an active exponent of imperialism. His attack on a princess like Durgavati was, in the words of Vincent Smith, "mere aggression, wholly unprovoked and devoid of all justification other than the lust for conquest and plunder"; The author heartily endorses Mrs. Beveridge's remarks that Akbar was "a strong and stout annexationist before whose sun the modest star of Dalhousie pales". Any attempt to explain away this fact is useless. Let me conclude this estimate of Rani Durgavati's heroic life with the following :

" The Kingdom of the Gonds is gone,
But noble memories remain,
And with a loving awe we scan
The battle page, which ends thy reign. "

9. SHIVAJI

Three hundred years ago there lived in the Deccan a man whose genius caused a profound change in the course of Indian history. It is, however, unfortunate that historians have been unable to find common ground in their appraisal of his greatness. While on the one hand, Shivaji has been acclaimed by his admirers as an inspired messenger of God, on the other, his critics have been chary of according him any such unique place in our history. But his claims to greatness are so well established that neither adulation nor disparagement can affect them.

Shivaji was born on April 6, 1627, in the fort of Shivneri, near Poona. His father, Shahaji, was a distinguished soldier in the service of the Muslim kings of the Deccan. His frequent military expeditions kept him on the move, and his wife, Jijabai, and his infant son, Shivaji, were accordingly sent to his jagir at Poona where they took up their permanent residence. There, far away from the debilitating influence of court life, Shivaji lived and grew up under the vigilant care of his mother and his Brahmin guardian Dadaji Kondadev.

It is impossible to exaggerate the influence exercised by Jijabai on young Shivaji. A passionate lover of freedom, she decided that her son should not sink into anonymity by accepting service under Muslim rulers. With great discernment, she saw in him the makings of a hero and spared neither care nor diligence in preparing him for his exalted mission.

She found in Dadaji Kondadev a wise and sympathetic counsellor. He was honest, able and industrious and evinced deep interest in his ward. It was, of course,

impossible for this astute Brahmin to guide his ward deliberately along the path of revolt against the prevailing order, but he gave Shivaji an education that proved to be of inestimable value in his future campaigns against the Moghuls and the Deccan Muslim States.

A shrewd observer of men and things, Shivaji began, even as a lad, to take keen interest in the affairs of his country. He undertook extensive tours of his father's jagir. What he saw there filled him with dismay and indignation. The people were ill-fed, ill-clothed and thoroughly wretched. While in distant capitals their rulers abandoned themselves to indolence and sauntered away, their lives in secluded palaces, these humble hill-men of Maharashtra were being hunted down like vermin. "To grow a crop," says Kincaid, "was merely to invite a troop of hostile cavalry to cut it, and probably kill its owner." By his wise and benevolent administration, Dadaji succeeded in banishing this scourge from Shivaji's jagir, but who could bring deliverance to the millions of Marathas who lived outside his jurisdiction?

Those historians who have learnedly argued that in his acquisition of a kingdom Shivaji's own exertions were not equal to his good fortune, forget that it was his genius which discovered the explosive situation in Maharashtra and, what is more, used it with admirable skill and courage for the realisation of his mission. There were other Maratha captains, more experienced and powerful than Shivaji, but they never realised that the deliverance of the masses lay only in the overthrow of a system which made their exploitation possible. Even if they had realised this basic fact of the situation, they had neither the patriotism nor the courage to strive for Swaraj.

Shivaji's right to a distinguished place in history is assured because he moulded heroes out of clay. The

human material with which he sought to build his empire of tolerance and righteousness was not first class. The Mavlis, says Grant Duff, were "clownish and stupid in appearance", but they had some sterling virtues, for "they were active and intelligent in anything to which they were accustomed, and remarkably faithful in situations of trust". It is not in the gift of an ordinary leader to transmute dross into gold, and yet hostile historians have been most unsparing in flinging opprobrious epithets at this great alchemist.

A distinguished writer makes frequent references to Shivaji as the "treacherous Maratha". Later, I will endeavour to examine the tenability of this accusation, but it is pertinent to ask whether perfidy and stratagem alone, even assuming that Shivaji practised them, could have won a kingdom for him. Much is made of the manner in which he captured the hill-forts, his novel mode of warfare, and his methods of replenishing his treasury. Apart from the fact that in the circumstances in which he was fighting, it was absurd to expect Swaraj to descend upon him like manna, Shivaji had preforce to fashion his offensive weapons to match the character and calibre of his opponents. Even assuming that he had sufficient means at his disposal to launch an open offensive against them right from the beginning of his career, such a course would have been suicidal when his enemies were by no means scrupulous about ends and means in their attempts to destroy him and his handiwork.

The Muslim kings of the Deccan and the Moghul emperor had solemnly vowed to exterminate the architect of Maratha resurgence. They had mobilised all their tremendous resources for this purpose. Would it ever have been possible for a leader with negligible means to confront such a formidable array of armed might and yet hope to fulfil his exalted mission? The

methods by which Shivaji marched towards his goal were dictated by the realities of the situation which faced him. Let those who take a narrow view of the means employed by him for the attainment of his object ponder over the revolutionary significance of the rise of the Marathas under their great leader.

What, for example would have happened to the religious and cultural heritage of the people if the invading armies of Aurangzeb had not been held by the Marathas and eventually routed ? The title of Alamgir, with which the last Great Moghul dignified himself, was not a mere appendage. The social and religious order which he envisaged in the territories under his sway was in consonance with his notorious bigotry. In the affairs of men it is futile to speculate on the play of the contingent and the unforeseen, but it stands to reason that, after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the Moghul empire would not have been destroyed if there had been no Shivaji and his brave Marathas.

And to Shivaji and Shivaji alone goes the unique credit of testing the truth of Sir Thomas Roe's celebrated observation on the inherent weakness of the Great Moghul. Roe, who was England's ambassador in Jahan-gir's court, wrote : " His (the Great Moghul's) greatness substantially is not in itself, but in the weakness of his neighbours, whom like an overgrown pike he feeds on as fry. Pride, pleasure, and riches are their best description. Honesty and truth, discipline, civility, they have none or very little." The proud conquerors of Delhi found their grave in the Deccan because at long last they discovered in their ' neighbours ', the Marathas, opponents who were more than a match for them.

The Marathas were indeed the first to demoralise and defeat and, finally, to destroy the imperial armies. They proved by their victories that after all the Great

Moghul had feet of clay. Their successes put heart into the Rajputs and the Sikhs. Their shining example stimulated a feeling of fraternity among the suppressed and fostered in them a sense of oneness—a significant prelude to national consciousness. Viewed against this background, the quarrel over ends and means, as if Shivaji's opponents were exemplars of virtue, is singularly petty and absurd. Today, when a wave of revivalism is sweeping the country, it is only proper that we should remember with gratitude the name of that great man who, three hundred years ago, fought for and preserved our precious heritage so that the generations that succeeded him might rejoice in its greatness.

Shivaji was a prince among men. He possessed a highly cultured mind and a refined character. Grant Duff says that the king of Maharashtra was unlettered. It is impossible to accept this statement without evidence, but since literacy alone is not education, it is unnecessary to join issue with the historian on this account. It is, however, on record that Shivaji was humane and generous. Narrow-minded bigotry or wanton cruelty never tainted his character. He was deeply pious, but his devotion to his own faith did not teach him to hate other religions. It is perhaps invidious for people of the atomic age to sit in judgment on the doings of men who lived in other centuries, but Shivaji's tolerance and his high sense of rectitude in an age when fanaticism and persecution were rampant are truly amazing.

We have the remarkable testimony of no less a person than Khafi Khan, the Muslim historian, who overlooked no opportunity to revile Shivaji, that the character of the Maratha leader was unsullied by dark deeds in the name of religion. He says that "Shivaji made it a rule that, wherever his followers were, they should do no harm to mosques, the Book of God, or any one's

women". The liberal traditions of tolerance established by the renaissance in Maharashtra had taught Shivaji that all creeds had the same objective, though the paths leading to the goal were different. He had learnt from his great spiritual teachers that the noblest of virtues is reason and that it is by reason alone "we cross safely the sea of life".

Numerous instances of Shivaji's chivalrous behaviour towards women have been cited by historians. One such example may be given here to illustrate the nobility of his character. One of his generals made a lightning attack on Kalyan and captured its Governor's family. Among the captives brought before Shivaji was his daughter-in-law, a young woman of striking grace and beauty. The Maratha king rose and, bowing to the young lady, exclaimed : "So fair is she that were it in my power, I wish to be born as her son !"

Shivaji was a true leader of men. Enumerating his virtues, Ranade says that the Maratha leader's self-discipline was as great as his power of control and his military daring. "This characteristic of his nature," writes the distinguished author, "stands out in marked contrast with the looseness and ferocity of those times." Shivaji was not the man who would expose his followers to the perils of war while he himself sought the security of his forts. In all actions where personal example and daring could settle the issue, he was always in the forefront. And because he was reckless of his own safety, he could inspire among his followers unexampled devotion to his person. It was, says an admiring chronicler, a sight for the gods to see Shivaji going into action with his drawn sword and scattering his enemies like chaff ! Like all great generals, he was adored by his troops, who would follow him anywhere. There were practically no deser-

tions from his army. Till his death in 1680 most of his major campaigns were conducted and led by him.

Seldom in history do we find examples of successful generals combining the qualities of great administrators. Shivaji was an exception. He had seen Dadaji Kondadev's far-reaching land reforms in his father's fief bear excellent results. Later, he introduced those reforms in the whole of his dominion. They were two-fold. First, the assessment of land tax was to be made on the state of the crop, so that in famine years the peasants had nothing to pay to the State. Liberal assistance in the shape of cattle, grain, seed and money was given to the farmers to encourage agriculture. Secondly, all tax-farming, the evils of which are obvious, was peremptorily stopped and taxes were collected only under the strict supervision of the Central Government.

Shivaji had the inestimable gift of attracting the best talent in the country. Brahmin, Prabhu and Maratha flocked to him and were taken into his service according to their merits. He divided his kingdom into a number of provinces, with the hill-forts as the nucleus. By distributing key-positions among different members of the community, he insured the realm against revolt or insubordination. Muslims were freely recruited to his armed forces, more particularly to his navy.

Shivaji was not a constitutional ruler. Democracy, as we know it, was unknown in his days. But he was not an irresponsible despot. He gathered around him a body of eight ministers, known as *Ashta Pradhans*, to whose advice on public affairs he deferred. He could, of course, overrule his Cabinet, but the fact that he realised the need for wise men to guide him in his kingly duties is a tribute to his sagacity. In the art of Government, as in other matters, he was far ahead of his times. He was among the few who realised the evils inherent in the here-

ditary system and abolished it in the government of his country. Under his rule, merit was the only criterion for personal advancement.

It should be pertinent to make a brief reference here to what Shivaji's critics have called his 'unprincipled transactions'. No impeachment of his character can be endorsed by impartial persons unless the actions and behaviour of his enemies are judged by the same exacting standards. Grant Duff has waxed indignant while discussing Shivaji's dealings with Afzal Khan, Chandra Rao More of Javli and the Raja of Mudhol. Historical data on all these episodes are by no means conclusive, and the last two being less important, need not be considered here.

No incident in Shivaji's career has provoked such wide and acrimonious controversy as the Afzal Khan episode. Certain facts relating to this episode are not in doubt. Afzal Khan, a general in the service of Bijapur, had boasted before his sovereign in open court that he would capture Shivaji and fling him at the feet of his master, alive or dead. To make good his boast, he marched to Shivaji's stronghold with a large army. On his way he desecrated some of the famous shrines of Maharashtra and sprinkled their altars with the blood of cows. In anticipation of success, he amused himself during his march to Wai by preparing a cage for Shivaji's confinement. In these circumstances, he could, as Rawlinson rightly remarks, expect little mercy at the hands of any Maratha.

It became evident to Shivaji that the Swaraj he had laboured to found was now threatened by a grave crisis. After much deliberation, he decided to meet the Khan alone in a specially prepared place at the foot of Pratapgad. The Bijapur general readily acquiesced in this plan. There, at the meeting, both Afzal Khan and his attend-

ant met their death. "The Angel of Doom," says Khafi Khan, "led him by the collar to his fate." Grant Duff, who has drawn his source material from this historian of dubious integrity, writes that "the treacherous Maratha struck the *wagnuck* (tiger-claws) into the bowels of Afzool Khan" and thus killed him.

Grant Duff's strongly-expressed view on the Afzal episode cannot be accepted as conclusive since it is not supported by unimpeachable evidence. It is an indisputable fact that during his encounter with Shivaji, Afzal Khan had left his army behind and that he was attended by a single servant. Neither the Khan nor his lieutenant, the famous swordman Syed Banda, emerged alive from the conference. Since there was none from the Bijapur side to give an eye-witness account of what transpired at the meeting, any attempt to establish the innocence of Afzal Khan cannot be very convincing. G. S. Sardesai, the veteran historian of the Marathas, who has carefully studied the Afzal episode, writes "As Shivaji walked in, the Khan rose and embraced him, tightly gripping him with his left arm and stabbing him with a dagger. Shivaji, with perfect presence of mind thrust his short sword and the tiger-claws into the Khan's huge body, ripping open the bowels and bringing him instantly down to the ground. The whole affair was finished in a moment."

Unless there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary, it is impossible to disbelieve this version. Khafi Khan had certainly no such evidence in his possession to justify his charge against Shivaji. The king of Maharashtra was a man of great veracity and could be trusted to have given to his spiritual leader, Ramdas Swami, an unvarnished account of what had occurred at the conference. Shivaji told the Swami: "When at our interview Abdulla (i. e. Afzal Khan) caught me under

his arm, I was not in my senses and but for the Swami's blessing, I could not have escaped from his grip." Afzal Khan, it must be noted, was a man of tremendous physical strength, and Shivaji would not have made an attempt on his life except in self-defence.

Shivaji holds a pre-eminent position among India's great men, for he was

"The pillar of a people's hope,
The centre of a world's desire."

Mountstuart Elphinstone writes : "The son of a powerful chief, Shivaji had began life as a daring and artful captain of banditti, had ripened into a skilful general and an able statesman and left a character which has never since been equalled or approached by any of his countrymen....It required a genius like his to avail himself as he did of the mistakes of Aurangzeb by kindling a zeal for religion and through that, a national spirit among the Marathas. It was by these feelings that his government was upheld after it passed into feeble hands and was kept together, in spite of numerous internal disorders until it had established its supremacy over the greater part of India."

Shivaji has often been compared to Napoleon, Garibaldi and other makers of modern European history. These comparisons are merely fanciful, for the circumstances in which the Indian hero laboured and succeeded have few parallels. By his great achievements, he gave courage and hope to millions of his countrymen who for centuries had helplessly resigned themselves to tyranny and oppression. He also taught them that only by right conduct and right action could they succeed in ridding the country of injustice and persecution. He was, in short, an exemplar of all that is noble, just and

honourable. Let me conclude this tribute to India's great soldier-statesman by quoting the exhortation of Ramdas Swami :

“ Remember Shivaji ! His form, his noble aims, forget not also his valiant deeds on earth. ”

10. TANAJI MALUSARE

Among the many outstanding qualities of Shivaji, his capacity for making a correct estimate of men was noteworthy. Seldom did he make mistakes in the choice of his lieutenants. The flower of Maratha manhood flocked to his standard, although he had nothing but toil and tears to offer to his followers. And yet they preferred service under him to the seductions of Muslim court life. To them he was a man of destiny and they chose to do or die with him.

Thus, a unique comradeship in difficulty and danger was felt between Shivaji and his followers—such a comradeship as, to adapt a well-known observation, engages the strenuous and loyal exertions of a ship's crew under the categorical imperative of the captain. Although Shivaji was a stern disciplinarian, his men adored him all the more for his exacting demands upon them. They were always willing to hurl themselves down a precipice and to face the cannon's mouth at his bidding.

The task of galvanizing a subject people into a vigorous and self-respecting nation and of building an empire without any resources cannot be accomplished by any one individual, however gifted and eminent he may be. Shivaji was, without doubt, a remarkable man, but even he could not have accomplished much if he had not been supported by able lieutenants.

These men made history in their own way. Take, for example, Baji Prabhu. He had opposed Shivaji when the latter liquidated Chandra Rao More, but he soon overcame his mortification over his master's discomfiture and joined Shivaji. The bond of friendship forged between the two never snapped. In fact, on one critical

occasion, when Shivaji was in danger of being captured by the Bijapur troops, Prabhu saved the situation by immolating himself on the altar of duty. With his badly mauled army, he made a determined stand at the Rangana Ghat so that his illustrious master might retreat to the safety of a stronghold from the pursuing enemy. He lost his life in this engagement, but his was the death of a hero. Rightly has his heroic stand at the Ghat been compared to the battle of Thermopylae. Such was the devotion of Maharashtra to her chief.

It was, however, given to Tanaji Malusare alone to achieve legendary fame. This man from the "emerald" Konkan was among Shivaji's earliest companions. Leaving his hospitable home of stately palm trees and smiling paddy fields, he joined Shivaji's band of dare-devils in capturing forts and in performing feats of arms against hostile armies. He was not a military genius, nor had he the prowess of Netaji Palkar, whose name struck terror into the hearts of the Moghuls. But Tanaji was lion-hearted. He was his master's inseparable companion and confidant. To borrow a homely phrase, he was Shivaji's shadow. His personal courage, his integrity and his resourcefulness in the face of danger were in themselves the best recommendation for his close companionship with Shivaji whose career was an uninterrupted record of great daring and of hair-breadth escapes.

In many of Shivaji's surprise encounters with his adversaries, Tanaji was by his side. He accompanied his master, when Shivaji made a night attack on Shaista Khan, the uncle of Aurangzeb, resulting in that Moghul nobleman's precipitate flight from Poona. Faithful Tanaji awaited his master at Mathura and returned with him to Maharashtra after his celebrated escape from the Moghul capital, where Aurangzeb had treacherously ordered his house internment in utter disregard of the

canons of hospitality. In all situations where nerve, initiative and bold action were necessary to turn the tables on Shivaji's adversaries, Tanaji was invariably his companion.

Tanaji's name has become memorable in the annals of Maharashtra, not simply because he was Shivaji's faithful friend, but because he died in circumstances which were both tragic and grand. The stirring *Ballad of Sinhagad*, commemorating his last glorious act on behalf of his king and country, continues to be sung in millions of Maratha homes. Tanaji's exploit in capturing the fort of Sinhagad, the favourite stronghold of the Queen Mother, has been recorded in history in terms sufficiently thrilling, and his achievement assumes the character of an epic when translated into verse and song.

Sinhagad or Kondhana, as it was originally called, is situated on the eastern side of the great Sahyadri range, about twelve miles from Poona. It communicates with the Purandhar hill on the east and west by very high, narrow ridges, while on the north and south it presents a huge rugged mountain with a very steep ascent of nearly half a mile. From the slopes rises a great wall of black rock more than forty feet high, crowned by the fortifications of Sinhagad. The fortifications consist of a strong stone wall flanked with towers and enclose a nearly triangular space about two miles round. The exterior presents on all sides a stupendous barrier so that, except by the gates, access to the fort is almost impossible.

It was this fort of singular strength that Tanaji was commissioned to capture. It had been surrendered to the Moghuls and was now under the command of a very able Rajput soldier, Udai Bhan, who guarded it with a picked body of troops. The loss of Sinhagad, the pride of Maharashtra, had made Shivaji's spirited mother disconsolate. She feared that the tender plant of Swaraj

reared by her son would not grow in safety unless the fort was wrested from the Moghuls. One morning, so says the ballad, while Jijabai was combing her hair at Pratapgad, she suddenly saw through the window of her palace the Lion's fort, "gleaming in the February air". The poignant thought that the fort did not belong to her son made her unhappy.

"Ride to Rajgad", she ordered her servant, "and bring my son to me. Tell him, his mother will neither eat nor drink till he hastens to her presence." Over hill and dale the messenger sped and did not stop till he reached Rajgad and delivered the message. Shivaji responded to the summons, though puzzled by its peremptoriness. When he came Jijabai artfully lured him to a game of chess, which he lost. She demanded the restoration of Sinhagad to Maharashtra as a reward for her victory. Shivaji was amazed and disheartened at this request. In vain did he plead with his mother that the fort was being manned by one of the ablest generals in India.

"To win it (he explained) went forth many, but
There came back never any;
Oft planted was the mango seed, but nowhere
grows the tree."

But the Queen Mother was adamant.

Shivaji, who worshipped his mother, could not ignore her behest. The adventure of capturing the fort, he knew, was hazardous in the extreme. He thought deeply over his dilemma and finally resolved to put his favourite Tanaji on the mission. He alone, among his brave barons, could fulfil the heart's desire of the Queen Mother. Had he not in the past performed prodigies of valour? Perhaps, with the blessings of Goddess Bhavani and Jijabai, this devoted servant of Swaraj might achieve even the impossible.

A peremptory order was accordingly sent to Umrathe in Konkan, where Tanaji lived, asking him to hasten to Rajgad with his armed retainers. Tanaji was engaged in preparing for his son's wedding to the "fairest damsel in the Konkan". But he decided to go, brushing aside the dark-eyed bridegroom's entreaties to postpone his departure till the celebration of the auspicious event. Tanaji and his men rode post-haste to Rajgad and presented themselves before the great chief. Shivaji cordially welcomed his friend and took him to his mother by whom the summons had been sent.

Tanaji learnt about his mission from Jijabai, who said :

“Of all the Bhosle's barons men shall deem thee
as the first.

Nay, I shall be thy mother and Shivaji thy
brother,

If thou wrest the Lion's fortress from the rule
of the accurst.”

Out went the hero in quest of his prey, accompanied by one thousand seasoned Mavlis. They secretly assembled at the foot of the fort for the escalade. It was a clear, moonless night, “the ninth of the dark fortnight of the month of Magh”, cold and still. Choosing the sheer south-west gorge, as the part least likely to be guarded, Tanaji tied a cord to the waist of Shivaji's famous Ghorpad, Yeshwanti, and bade it run up the cliff. The faithful lizard was reluctant to go, as if it scented the impending disaster. Tanaji grew furious. “You lazy beast,” he cried, “don't play prophet to me. If you refuse to scale the fortress, I will make a dish of you for my *chappatis*.”

The frightened creature fled to the top and there fixing its talons firmly in the heath, hepled the Mavlis to clamber up the cliff. Hardly three hundred men had

entered the fort, when something caused a commotion which drew the attention of the sentries to the quarter where the Marathas were ascending. The sentries were killed, but not before the garrison had been roused. The situation was desperate. Seven hundred of Tanaji's soldiers were still below, while in the fort there were one thousand veteran fighters, consisting of Arabs, Afghans, Rajputs and Pathans—his enemies. Tanaji gave the order to charge. Though overwhelmed by numbers, the Marathas fought with desperate valour and in the *melee* that ensued their leader fell.

The version in the ballad on Tanaji's death is different and, as may be expected, more inspiring. Chandravally, the cruel manslaying elephant of Delhi, says this story in song, charged at Tanaji, who jumped onto its back and chopped off its trunk with his sword, reducing it to a "lump of bleeding clay". Then came Udai Bhan's twelve brave sons who fell upon him. The valiant Maratha killed them all with the terrific blows of his ruthless sword.

Now, when everything seemed lost, Udai Bhan rushed to the battlefield, leaving his wine cups and the embraces of his "winsome ladies", determined to kill or be killed by Malusare. The result of the encounter between the two great swordsmen is described thus :

"As the lightning-flash descends where the
Indrayani wends,

When the thunder-clouds are gathered around
Visapur in Jesht,

On Malusare fell the blow, beating sword and
sword-arm low,

And Tanaji the Lion fell cloven to the waist."

The death of their leader unnerved the Marathas, who began to retreat, but before all was lost Suryaji, Tanaji's brother, appeared on the scene with his reserves.

Addressing the fleeing Marathas, he asked who amongst them "would leave their father's remains to be tossed into a pit" by impious hands. The fugitives soon rallied behind their new leader and, shouting the war cry 'Har, Har, Mahadev', fell upon the enemy with renewed energy. Their attack was irresistible. The garrison was routed and several hundreds, to save themselves from the fury of the invaders, ventured over the rock and were dashed to pieces in the attempt. Udai Bhan, the mighty Rajput warrior, was also slain in the battle.

It was a great victory for the Marathas, but there was no elation in their camp. What was victory worth when their beloved leader was killed? The capture of the fort was notified to Shivaji by firing a thatched house. The King came to congratulate his comrade, but as he rode through the Kalyan Gate, what did he behold? Seated on a cot was the corpse of his faithful Tanaji. His grief was tremendous.

"Twelve days the king wept o'er him for the great love that he bore him."

Shivaji refused to be felicitated on his acquisition of the historic fort. With a laconism that has become famous in Maratha history, he exclaimed: "I have got the fort but I have lost the lion."

Thus ended the career of a man whose single-minded devotion to duty, whose unswerving loyalty to his friend and master, and whose undaunted courage will always stand out as a conspicuous example for his countrymen to emulate. Sinhagad is now in ruins, but the glorious episode of Tanaji's victory in death will remain imperishable. It is in the vicinity of this legendary mountain-fortress that the Khadakvasla National Defence Academy is located. Let the cadets who go there to learn the art of defending the nation draw their inspiration from the great captain of the Konkan.

11. RAJ SINGH

During the reign of Aurangzeb the House of Babar saw the culmination of its glory as well as the beginning of its downfall. The emperor was probably more fortunate than his predecessors in his feudatories. Rajasthan's leading princes were men of more than ordinary ability and were firmly attached to the imperial throne. Even the Maharanas of Mewar, who alone among the Rajput princes had stubbornly resisted Moghul aggression, were in a conciliatory mood. Under such favourable conditions Aurangzeb could, if he had wished, have inaugurated a new era in India. It is true that in the Deccan Shivaji was waging a bitter struggle against Muslim sovereignty, but his war of liberation was mostly directed against his neighbours. It is probable that he would not have spurned offers of friendship from the emperor if they had been made on honourable terms. Nor would the Sikhs have abandoned Baba Nanak's pacifism and banded themselves into a militant fraternity if Delhi's religious policy had been tolerant. If only he had willed it, Aurangzeb could have inscribed his name on the pages of history as one of the ablest rulers of India, even eclipsing the glory of Akbar.

And such an achievement, which would probably have given a longer lease of life to the Moghul Empire, was not beyond Aurangzeb's ability. His personal life was remarkably free from those blemishes which inhere in the descendants of a House accustomed to a plentitude of arbitrary authority. He was courageous, competent and God-fearing. Even as a young man he had given signal proofs of his resourcefulness and courage as a soldier, and his acquaintance with the mechanism of

government was profound. His knowledge of Islamic lore was unrivalled. He cleansed the Moghul court of all vulgar pomp and by personal example, infused into it, a purity and simplicity that did credit to his abstemious disposition.

Yet, the same man became the destroyer of his own empire. If he was endowed with towering virtues, he was also burdened with weaknesses which totally neutralised them. He was treacherous, suspicious, bigoted and ambitious. In a despot, swaying the destiny of millions of people, these weaknesses are worse than crime. By treachery and stratagem he waded through fratricidal blood to the throne of his father. But in a State where wars of succession were both unavoidable and bloody, Aurangzeb's seizure of power could probably have been pardoned, but his intolerable aversion for 'non-believers' which, throughout his long life, haunted him like a malevolent spirit, hastened his destruction.

The consequences of his two-fold policy of attempting to establish in India the kingdom of God, as he conceived it, and of waging interminable wars in pursuit of this elusive and disastrous ideal were indeed frightful. Millions of Hindus, who clung to their faith, perished by the sword of this gladiatorial prophet, and those that survived vowed implacable hostility to a man who had deliberately made their great religion and its symbols especial targets of his contempt and destruction. The baneful effects of this persecution have been eloquently described by Orme, who says : " Labour left the field and industry the loom, until the decrease of the revenues induced Aurangzeb to substitute a capitation tax as the balance of account between the two religions. "

The imposition of the hated *jaziya* on the Hindus marked the beginning of Aurangzeb's downfall. A wave of indignation swept the length and breadth of India

when the news of the emperor's foolish edict flashed across the country. Resistance to the impost was spontaneous and widespread. In Rajasthan, the Maharanas of Mewar, acknowledged leaders of the persecuted community, took up the challenge. Raj Singh, the reigning Rana, decided to terminate the alliance which Pratap's successors had made with the Moghuls. It had been an honourable friendship based on mutual esteem and forbearance. The treaty had not been vitiated by any social or political stigma to the Maharanas and had borne excellent results. Mewar had enjoyed a long spell of peace and prosperity of which she had been in desperate need after Akbar's total war against Rana Pratap. Raj Singh did not spoil for a fight and invite death, destruction and hunger for his brave and loyal subjects. But he would have been guilty of a crime worse than that of pusillanimity if he had elected to pursue peace at any price. Aurangzeb's policy threatened to destroy everything that the Hindus held sacred and noble. Like an oasis in the wilderness of slavery, Mewar alone had stood out, valiantly struggling against the hordes of destruction. Was the ruler of this proud State to sit back at a time when the need to challenge Aurangzeb's unbridled aggression was paramount?

Raj Singh was the true scion of Sanga and Pratap. Acclaimed as the defender of the faith, he could not turn a deaf ear to the piteous cries of the Hindu community. Moreover, considerations of gallantry and self-preservation impelled him to prepare for a bitter war with the Moghuls. The queen-mother of the infant Rathor prince of Marwar had solicited his armed assistance to defeat the emperor's designs against her State. Aurangzeb was determined to seize the person of Prince Ajit and immure him in the imperial palace to be brought up as a Muslim. Thousands of Rathor blades had been

drawn to frustrate this wicked scheme. It was a God-given opportunity for the two foremost clans of Rajasthan, the Sisodias and the Rathors, to unite in comradeship to resist a danger that threatened to engulf both.

The alliance between these two historic Rajput houses roused Aurangzeb to a paroxysm of rage. He saw in their friendship a danger to his deeply-laid plan to raze Rajasthan to the ground and to build on her ruins a theocratic polity. He accordingly mobilised the resources of his empire with the avowed object of annihilating the new Rajput combination and marched immense armies into Mewar. Moreover, the Maharana's dignified but stern warning against his imprudent policy of persecuting the Hindus was rankling in Aurangzeb's bosom. Among the epistolary documents, the Rana's letter of protest to the emperor has justly become famous in history. In a language at once noble and restrained, Raj Singh called the attention of the emperor to the immense harm that his fanaticism had wrought on his empire.

He wrote : " During Your Majesty's reign, many have been alienated from the empire, and further loss of territory must necessarily follow, since devastation and rapine now universally prevail without restraint. Your subjects are trampled underfoot, and every province of your empire is impoverished, depopulation spreads, and difficulties accumulate...." Condemning the emperor's bigotry, the letter reads : " If Your Majesty places any faith in those books by distinction called divine, you will there be instructed that God is the God of all mankind, not the God of Mahomedans alone. The Pagan and the Mussalman are equally in His presence. . . To vilify the religion or customs of other men is to set at naught the pleasure of the Almighty. . .

" In fine, the tribute you demand from the Hindus is

repugnant to justice; it is equally foreign from good policy, as it must impoverish the country; moreover, it is an innovation and an infringement of the laws of Hindustan... But if zeal for your own religion hath induced you to determine upon this measure the demand ought, by the rules of equity, to have been made first upon Ram Singh, who is esteemed the principal amongst Hindus. Then let your well-wisher be called upon, whom you will have less difficulty to encounter, but to torment ants and flies is unworthy of an heroic or generous mind. It is wonderful that the ministers of your government should have neglected to instruct Your Majesty in the rules of rectitude and honour."

Tod, from whose *Annals* I have taken these extracts, bestows the highest praise on the letter, which, he says, was written "in a style of such uncompromising dignity, such lofty yet temperate resolve, so much of soul-stirring rebuke mingled with a boundless and tolerating benevolence, such elevated ideas of the Divinity with such pure philanthropy, that it may challenge competition with any epistolary production of any age, clime or condition." Sir Jadunath Sarkar, the distinguished historian of the Moghuls, holds that the letter to Aurangzeb was probably written not by the Maharana of Mewar but by Shivaji. The letter, it is claimed, was actually drafted by Nila Prabhu on behalf of the Maratha King; but the doubtful authenticity of its authorship does not detract from its value or reverse the fact that Raj Singh took the lead in North India in drawing the sword against Aurangzeb's persecution. It is also undeniable that the emperor had the temerity to demand the tax from the Maharana himself, who rightly challenged his right to make such a claim.

The war against Mewar, begun in December 1679, followed the familiar pattern. Moghul superiority in

numbers and equipment prevailed against the Rana's forces which, after offering stubborn resistance to the imperial army, retired to the hills to wage guerilla warfare. The invaders promptly occupied the deserted plains and Udaipur, the capital, which had also been evacuated. After winning what he regarded as a decisive victory against Raj Singh, Aurangzeb returned to Ajmer on March 22, 1680, leaving behind a strong force under the command of his favourite son, Prince Akbar. Meanwhile, the Maharana was not idle; by holding the Aravalli range in force, he insured the isolation of Moghul positions in Mewar and Marwar.

Having accomplished this important task, he made sudden descents upon isolated Moghul outposts, cut off supplies and stragglers, and created a feeling of nervousness, almost amounting to panic, among the officers and men of the imperial army. He marched into the Bednor district, threatening Prince Akbar's communications with the emperor's headquarters at Ajmer, while another Rajput contingent under his son Bhim Singh ranged the country, "striking swift blows at weak points and cutting off grain supplies coming from Malwa." In one major action, Prince Akbar, supreme commander of the Moghul army in Mewar, was decisively defeated. Professor Sarkar writes: "From Prince Akbar's letters we learn how effectually the Rajputs succeeded in creating a terror of their prowess. The command of Moghul outposts went abegging, captain after captain declining the dangerous honour and 'offering excuses'; the Moghul troops refused to enter any pass, 'being overcome by vain fancies'; detachments sat down only a short distance from the base and refused to advance further."

The unhappy Prince could not carry out the emperor's orders to destroy Mewar, for neither threat nor

cajolery could induce his captains to venture beyond the low country. "Our army", lamented the Prince, "is motionless through fear." The counter-attacks by Raj Singh's forces contributed in great measure to Marwar's stubborn resistance to the emperor, who had declared his intention to annex it to his empire. Aurangzeb had yet to realise that he was contending with a remarkable Rathor in the person of Durgadas. Great as were the Maharana's victories against the invaders, he did not win them by dishonourable means. Tod is evidently annoyed with Raj Singh at his excessive display of generosity towards an enemy who scarcely exercised that virtue in dealing with a fallen foe. The historian writes : "But for repeated instances of an ill-judged humanity, the throne of the Moghuls might have been completely overturned."

The war against the ancient kingdoms of Mewar and Marwar was a signal for a general revolt in the whole of Rajasthan. With rare insight, Prince Akbar discerned that by alienating the Rajputs, his father was digging the grave of the empire. He had many opportunities to size up the nobility and greatness of the Rajputs and became a sincere admirer of their gallant and loyal disposition. His contacts with Maharana Raj Singh, both on the battlefield and elsewhere, and with Durgadas confirmed him in his belief that only through an honourable alliance with the warrior race of Rajasthan could the emperors reign in peace in Delhi. Raj Singh encouraged him in his noble resolve to strive for a new era, deriving its strength from tolerance and good-will among the diverse elements of India's population. Unfortunately for this great cause, Maharana Raj Singh died on October 22, 1680 at a time when his counsel and guidance were most needed. It is futile to speculate on the 'ifs' of history, but it is undeniable that the Maharana's

death deprived the new movement of its outstanding support.

Among the illustrious enemies of Aurangzeb, the name of Raj Singh stands second only to that of Shivaji, But in the exhibition of fortitude in suffering, of inflexible determination to fight injustice and tyranny, of generosity towards an enemy that did not deserve it, of reverence for his own faith and tolerance towards other religions, and of pride in the greatness of his motherland, he was indeed the equal of the hero of Maharashtra. By turning the tables on the Moghuls, he proved himself a skilful general, and his all-out support to the queen of Marwar and her infant son established his reputation as a gallant soldier. "As an accomplished prince and benevolent man," writes Tod, "his dignified letter of remonstrance to Aurangzeb on the promulgation of the edict, places him high in the scale of moral as well as intellectual excellence."

12. DURGADAS RATHOD

It is not given to many to achieve fame who is an exacting mistress. But she is partial to none and showers her favours on all those blessed ones who, by their great and glorious deeds, defy anonymity and oblivion. A man born in the bosom of poverty and initially ignored and even despised by his fellowmen may find himself lifted to the sublime heights of immortality. Good and great deeds are not lost in the debris of time, for history keeps an unsleeping vigil on the careers of their authors, clearing a place for them in the hearts and memories of men. Examples of humble folk attaining celebrity are many, for fame is not the exclusive privilege of kings or commanders of armies. Heroism, humility, self-abnegation and devotion to duty are virtues which deserve our respect, in whomsoever they are found. They are the real stuff of a noble life.

More than two centuries have passed since Durgadas left the worldly stage and yet his countrymen remember him with pride, affection and gratitude. He was not a king, nor was he a conqueror, but while many a proud monarch has been pushed into the dark and unexplored realm of obscurity, the name of Durgadas still rings in our ears. The country in which he lived and for which he died was not destitute of heroes. Rajasthan is indeed a pearl of great price in the treasure-house of Indian chivalry, but even in that land the name of Durgadas stands high. It is still the devout prayer of every Rajput mother to be blessed with a son like him :

*" Eh mata put esa jin
jesa Durgadas. "*

How did this son of a mere minister of Marwar establish his claim to be enthroned in the hearts of his people? Are the deeds attributed to him so outstanding as to entitle him to immortality? These are legitimate questions to which an answer must be found in the life and career of Durgadas. He was one of the many sons of Askaran, Dewan of Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur, and was born in 1638 in the village of 'lesser Salwe'. Durgadas was a mettlesome youth and was brought up in the service of the Maharaja, whose honour he considered it his special duty to protect. Even as a young man, he had recourse to the sword to vindicate the good name of his master when some royal grooms trespassed into the fields of the peasants and fed the State camels on the standing crop.

Maharana Jaswant Singh was one of the Rajput pillars of the Moghul empire. As a true servant of the State, he had declined to collude with Aurangzeb in the latter's plot to usurp the throne. Aurangzeb was vindictive and never forgave the Maharaja for what he regarded as the Rajput's perfidy. Jaswant Singh was a gentleman and he did not deviate from his devotion to his master, despite the emperor's subtle and calculated affronts to him. He was transferred from one command post to another and was seldom permitted to remain in his State. The shrewd emperor foresaw that in the north Marwar and Mewar would be his most formidable antagonists in his grand offensive against the Hindus. Under the wise and energetic rule of Jaswant Singh, Jodhpur had grown in power and prestige and thousands of Hindus, who dreaded the emperor's unbridled bigotry, looked up to him and his State for protection.

Durgadas watched these developments with deep concern. He was a constant companion of his master

during the Maharana's military expeditions to distant places on behalf of the empire. He probably foresaw that the mantle of leadership would fall on his humble shoulders after Jaswant Singh's death, when the very existence of Marwar would be threatened by the ambitious emperor. Things happened exactly as he had anticipated. On December 10, 1678, the ruler of Marwar died at Jamrud when commanding the Moghul posts in the Khyber pass. Nothing could have gladdened the heart of Aurangzeb more than this news which reached him in the fourth week of the month. Neither decency nor fairplay deterred him from embarking forthwith on plans to overrun Marwar with a view to its annexation.

It is true that the Maharaja had left no son to succeed him, but if the emperor wished to preserve the integrity of the State, there was the grandson of Jaswant Singh's elder brother to inherit the Jodhpur *gadi*. But Aurangzeb decided not to pursue any such just or wise course, and the moment the throne fell vacant, he filled the State with Muslims officers. On January 9, 1679, he went to Ajmer to be near the scene of his unprovoked aggression. By a display of overwhelming force, he succeeded, but only momentarily as will be seen later, in crushing a principality bereft of leaders and resources. Flushed with a seemingly easy victory, he deliberately insulted the proud Rajputs by pulling down the emblems of their religion. He did not then realise that Nemesis was soon to overtake him and his empire.

While the Moghuls were spreading rapine in Rajasthan a star of grave import to Aurangzeb appeared on the horizon in Lahore. The two surviving wives of the late Maharaja gave birth to two male infants. Although one of the infants died, another by the name of Ajit lived to haunt Aurangzeb's dreams. The emperor peremptorily ordered the family to come down to the capital.

The Ranis and the infant heir to the throne of Marwar reached Delhi at the end of June 1679, and the emperor showed his hand by surrounding their house with a body of imperial troops. Earlier, on February 26, the Rathor ministers had waited on Aurangzeb and "pleaded in vain for a recognition of the succession of Ajit to his father's heritage". The emperor had other plans, namely, either to bring up the infant in his harem and hand over the *gadi* to him when he came of age, or to recognise his succession to his father's principality forthwith on condition he was converted to Islam.

It was a terrible choice offered to the Rathors who were quick to realise that to surrender Prince Ajit to the guardianship of the bigot was either to push the child into the jaws of death or to connive at his apostasy. Their devotion to the memory of the dead Maharaja, their sense of loyalty to his infant son and their manhood revolted against this insulting proposal. They, therefore, decided to die to a man in an attempt to frustrate Aurangzeb's plan. "But", says Sir Jadunath Sarkar, "even Rajput devotion and Rajput heroism would have availed little without the guiding genius of Durgadas, the flower of Rathor chivalry." This heroic son of Marwar took counsel with his comrades in planning the deliverance of the child from the clutches of the Moghul.

Mere ruse, however cleverly it might have been conceived, could not have succeeded in extricating Ajit from the net spread for him. It was necessary to accomplish this delicate and dangerous task by shedding Rajput blood. "Let us", declared the faithful followers of the royal family, "swim in the ocean of fight." Durgadas took the lead. In a firm and determined voice he told the brave Rathors: "The teeth of the Moghuls are whetted, but by the lightning emitted by our swords, Delhi shall witness our deeds,

and the flame of our anger shall consume the troops of the emperor."

Durgadas' plan of action was to make a surprise attack on the imperial guards surrounding the house and, in the ensuing confusion, carry away the child and his mother, the latter clad like a male trooper. To his great relief, the plan succeeded, for the imperialists were none too anxious to provoke the 'death-loving' Rajputs. The grim Reaper, however, gathered a rich harvest from both sides and most of the brave Rathors, who disputed every inch of ground with the Moghuls, perished. It was a memorable exploit, comparable with some of the most daring escapes which have become famous in history. The prince and his mother owed their life and honour to the loyalty and valour of Durgadas and his brave comrades. He was to repeat this performance later when escorting Aurangzeb's fugitive son Akbar to the hospitable country of the Marathas in the Deccan.

The emperor was astonished at the audacity of Durgadas, but, instead of making amends to his valiant foe, he swore to destroy him and his protegee. He strained the resources of his empire in a vain attempt to ferret out the prince who was concealed on the heights of Abu like 'a flame confined in a vessel'. It was a signal proof of Aurangzeb's acknowledgment of defeat that he adopted an infant of a cowherd and brought him up in his harem, proclaiming to the world that this child of humble parents, not the ward of Durgadas, was the real heir to the throne of Marwar. Such subterfuges, however, deceived none but himself.

It is unnecessary to follow the tortuous course of the sanguinary war which Aurangzeb waged against the small States of Jodhpur and Udaipur. His most celebrated generals led the imperial armies and thousands

of lives and immense wealth were recklessly squandered away merely to gratify the overweening vanity of the emperor and his insatiable thirst for vengeance. With indomitable courage Maharana Raj Singh of Mewar and Durgadas defeated his designs to wipe out their States. The result of this costly and useless war was that the imperial army became demoralised, exposing itself to the obloquy of defeat and disgrace.

Prince Akbar, the emperor's favourite son, was deeply concerned over his father's suicidal policy. He saw that by incurring the enmity of the Rajputs, whose country had been reduced to charred ruins, Aurangzeb was applying the axe to the very roots of the Moghul empire. He decided to overthrow his father's tyranny and received every encouragement from Maharana Raj Singh and Durgadas in pursuit of this object. The Prince's general, Tahawwur Khan, actively co-operated with him in raising the standard of revolt. But Akbar was no match for his wily old father, for, besides being immature—he was only twenty-three years old then—he lacked energy and determination to prosecute such a daring plan.

Aurangzeb, distinguished for his subtlety, succeeded in disrupting the coalition and by the time his trick was discovered by Akbar and his Rajput allies, the opportunity to strike had been irretrievably lost. The unhappy prince and some members of his family became fugitives and he would have lost his head had he been captured by his infuriated father. From this terrible fate he was saved by Durgadas who undertook to protect him. Sambhaji gallantly agreed to give asylum to Akbar, although he knew the consequences of his generosity. By a series of bold and cleverly-concealed marches Durgadas succeeded in escorting Akbar to the court of the Maratha prince.

It is a tribute to Akbar's faith in his friend that he entrusted his own life and his daughter's honour to the keeping of Durgadas. The noble Rajput played the part of father to the luckless grand-daughter of Aurangzeb and looked after her education with meticulous care. A learned Muslim divine undertook the religious instruction of the girl, who astonished her grandparent by her thorough acquaintance with Islamic lore when she was restored to the imperial court. It is indeed impossible not to draw a comparison between Durgadas and Aurangzeb. While the latter was a narrow-minded bigot, the former distinguished himself by his humane and generous treatment of the young princess. Rightly does Tod say that the "virtue of the grand-daughter of Aurangzeb was in far better keeping than in the trebly walled harem of Agra". Later, Durgadas sent the girl to the emperor and used the occasion worthily for winning liberal terms for his master, Ajit, who was restored to the *gadi* of Jodhpur.

Aurangzeb was not insensible to the great qualities of Durgadas. Like Apolyon in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, he tried in vain to tempt the Rajput from the path of rectitude. He sent eight thousand gold mohurs to Durgadas as an inducement to him not to abide by Prince Akbar's waning fortunes; the money was accepted but handed over to the needy prince to the last mohur! Not merely gold, but the splendid offer of power in the shape of a command over five thousand Moghul troops was temptingly dangled before him. Durgadas had only to name his price and the emperor would have readily paid it. It was within the reach of the Rajput warrior to shuffle off his 'vassal condition' and attain a position inferior to that of none in Rajasthan, but he spurned power and wealth as filth if they were to be gained by mortgaging his country to slavery.

Many anecdotes are extant about Durgadas. The emperor, according to one of them, desired the pictures of his most formidable foes, Shivaji and Durgadas, to be drawn for him. The painter depicted the King of Maharashtra as seated on his couch, while the Rajput was shown seated on horseback, toasting barley-cakes with the point of his lance on a fire of maize-stalks. Aurangzeb exclaimed : " Perhaps, I can get even with my Deccan enemy, but this man on horseback will be my bane ! " It may be that this story is without any foundation, but Durgadas lived to defeat the emperor's ambitions in Marwar. The thirty years' war which he organised against the imperial troops hastened the dissolution of the Moghul dominion in India. It is a tribute to his inspiring leadership that during this relentless struggle " hardly a chieftain of Marwar died on his pallet ".

Durgadas was indeed the salt of the earth. He was not merely a soldier and an organiser. He was also a man of principles. When Ajit, who owed everything to Durgadas, ill-requited his benefactor, the generous Rajput readily forgave him. Not even revenge turned him aside from the dictates of true honour. The foul assassination of his brother, says Tod, made no alteration in his humanity whenever the chance of war placed his foe in his power. Thus writes the author of the *Annals of Rajasthan* : " What a splendid example is the heroic Durgadas of all that constitutes the glory of the Rajput ! Valour, loyalty, integrity, combined with prudence in all the difficulties which surrounded him, are qualities which entitle him to the admiration which his memory continues to enjoy. " Who can challenge the right of this man to reap the fruits of immortality ?

13. GURU GOBIND SINGH

The story of the birth of Sikhism and its development into a dynamic force is of absorbing interest to the student of history. The numerical strength of the Sikhs in India's teeming population is negligible, but so commanding is their position in our national life that it is impossible to minimise their importance. Their contribution to our heritage is impressive, but nowhere is it so pre-eminent as in the domain of our defence. The Sikhs are the sword-arm of India, but their faith as propounded by Baba Nanak (1469-1538) was fundamentally pacific. Guru Nanak belonged to that illustrious line of saints and seers who preached personal rectitude as a solvent of the ills of mankind. He did not desire to found a new church or State.

Basically, Nanak was a reformer. The insight which he gained into the frailties of man, both from acute observation and from personal experience, confirmed him in his belief that the distance that separated his fellowmen from their Maker could not be shortened except by exemplariness in thought and action. He was convinced that men groped in spiritual darkness primarily because they allowed themselves to be lost in the labyrinth of ritual and dogma. While the Hindu tenaciously clung to the dead conventions of caste, although they had nearly destroyed his social and credal solidarity, the Muslim was slow to realise the error into which he had fallen by assuming that his was the only true faith.

Nanak strove to reform society by attempting a synthesis of both these great religions. He pleaded with the Hindu to overcome the trammels of caste and abandon

his belief in a multitude of gods. There was, he declared, only One Invisible God whose worship alone would hasten man's self-realisation. He reminded the Muslim that humility and gentleness, and not arrogance and violence, were the real path to deliverance. His teachings which were later transformed into an inspired message, laid great stress on excellence of conduct "beyond the requirements of any formal code of law". The 'Sikh' was a learner and, as an aspirant to salvation, he could reach the goal only through tolerance and a proper understanding of his fellow-creatures.

Nanak's message thus enshrined the cardinal principles of fraternity and equality, and since those principles were upheld by all great religions, he refrained from giving them the stamp of dogma. But after him the Gurus, upon whose shoulders his apostolic mantle fell, discovered that only by giving a credal and institutional basis to his teachings could they be propagated among the people with greater effect. Guru Arjun (1581-1606), fifth in the line of the ten Sikh Gurus, was probably the first who clearly realised this need. The Jats predominated among the recruits to the new religion. Unfettered by the inhibitions of caste, they were strongly drawn towards the teachings of Nanak, who boldly upheld the right of the humble and the lowly to a proper place in society.

The Jats were of sturdy frame and of stolid mien. Guru Arjun rightly realised that they could be converted into a pillar of Sikhism by infusing into them the fervour of religious consecration. He enlarged and brought together the Adi (or 'original') Granth Sahib and made it the Holy Book of the new faith. By making Amritsar, then an obscure hamlet, his headquarters, he gave the adherents of Sikhism a place of pilgrimage. His martyrdom, caused by his conflict with the emperor of

Delhi, knit the Sikhs together into a solid brotherhood. The gradual transformation of the mild Founder's adherents into a powerful fraternity was a necessity of the times. And this change became manifest in the days of Teg Bahadur (1664-1675), the ninth Guru.

The advent of Aurangzeb to power heralded an era of religious strife and political turmoil all over the country. The watchful emperor could not view with equanimity the growing strength of the Sikhs in the Punjab. The rapid popularity of the protestant faith caused him both alarm and anger. It was not difficult for him to provoke a *casus belli* in furtherance of his design to supplant the new faith and its chief prelate. Teg Bahadur was captured and cruelly done to death in Delhi under the orders of Aurangzeb. Gobind, the son of the martyred Guru, was only fifteen years old when this barbarity was perpetrated upon his father. But he was sufficiently grown up to understand that his tenure of office as the head of the Sikhs would be shadowed by the relentless intolerance of the emperor.

Guru Gobind (1675-1708) spent his youthful days at Anandpur under the shadow of the Himalayas. He was a brave and intelligent young man who became acutely aware of his mission. Before going to Delhi to meet his terrible doom, his father had girded upon him the sword of his ancestors, exhorting the spirited youth not to forget the crimes of his persecutor. There, in his seclusion, Gobind brooded over the last injunction of his father, over the fallen condition of his country, and over the feebleness of the Hindus. Reports had reached him that in the far south a redoubtable chief had raised the standard of revolt against the Great Moghul, inflicting defeat and disgrace on the imperial armies by his successful defiance. He reflected whether he could not

emulate Shivaji's exploits and establish the faith of his forbears on solid foundations.

For some twenty years he did not emerge from his seclusion. During that long period he occupied himself in hunting tiger and wild boar in the hills, in drilling and disciplining himself and his followers, and in mastering his inheritance of religion and its sacred texts. By 1695 he was finally prepared for action outside the confines of his hill-retreat. Assisted by his gifted and sagacious wife Jita, he set about organising the Sikhs into a powerful force. For this great and noble task he was supremely qualified, for, in the words of Cunningham, the eminent historian of the Sikhs, study and reflection had enlarged his mind and experience of the world had matured his judgment. Under the two-fold impulse of "avenging his own and his country's wrongs, he resolved upon awakening his followers to a new life and upon giving precision and aim to the broad and general institutions of Nanak".

It is difficult to sustain the charge that Guru Gobind Singh was the high priest of militarism. He did not spoil for a fight, but he was certainly not prepared to be coerced into submission. He had the prudence to realise that his own inclinations towards peace were irrelevant, since the government of the day was capable of unprovoked aggression. Baba Nanak's pacifism was hardly calculated to meet this menace. His doctrine of fraternity was too abstract to fire the imagination of his followers. The Hindu and Christian belief that meekness can conquer violence was doubtless sound, but how could the stalwart Jats comprehend the excellence of this principle? Moreover, before a rampant menace mere reliance on the efficacy of ultimate values was scarcely wise. The time was not propitious for an unimpeded indoctrination of the masses with the gentle teachings of the Founder.

These thoughts probably weighed with the energetic apostle when he organised his famous Khalsa. The Khalsa, derived from the root word *Khalis*, meaning 'pure' or 'free', was an institution which imposed an iron-bound discipline upon its adherents. The basic principle of the baptismal rite introduced by the Guru was to demolish all social gradations in the Order and to foster unflinching faith in the chief pontiff of Sikhism. The ceremony, dramatically inaugurated at a fair where the faithful had foregathered, gave a distinctive stamp to the Sikhs. They were given tangible symbols of their uniqueness and were enjoined to assume the suffix of Singh or 'Lion' to their names. Long hair, a comb, a steel bracelet, a pair of shorts and a dagger, which they were required to carry on their person, became the insignia of the elect. The Guru himself underwent this ritual.

Thenceforward the Sikhs ceased to be a hole-and-corner community. The personal example of the pontiff, the democratic character of his institution, the advantages which membership of a rapidly expanding faith conferred upon its followers, and the deep urge among the people to participate in the crusade on behalf of righteousness had a profound effect on the course of events in the Punjab. The virile and hopeful Order received recruits by the thousand. Even so, Guru Gobind acted warily, for to subvert the empire of the Moghuls was not an easy undertaking. He knew that "something more than a mere skirmish loomed for him". Even apart from the fact that his resources were uncertain and poor, his sovereignty was spiritual and not territorial.

In the war against the Moghuls his valour and the fighting qualities of his followers triumphed, but his successes against the imperial armies, though they did credit to him as a fearless and resourceful fighter, were

temporary and elusive. He was driven from pillar to post by the enemy and most of his sons fell in battle. Like Rana Pratap, he suffered incredible privations and eventually took refuge in the wastes of Bhatinda, one hundred miles below Amritsar. The Moghuls prudently refrained from crossing into this desert region, which gave undisturbed repose to Guru Gobind for two years from 1705 to 1707. There in the vicinity of the Sutlej river, he penned his famous *Zafar Namah*, or 'Victorious Epistle', in reply to the emperor's summons to appear before him.

Zafar Namah was a defiant letter, which reproached the emperor for his intolerance and misdemeanours and dwelt upon the merits of Sikhism and the Khalsa. He warned the aged and dying emperor that the Khalsa would one day settle accounts with the Moghuls. Meanwhile, the Guru, whose martial ardour had not blunted his literary tastes, engaged himself in composing additional material for the Holy Book. He also wrote his autobiography, *Vichitra Natak*, or 'Wonder Tale', in which he delineated the importance of his mission. The Guru was a profound scholar and commanded the assistance of learned men in his theological labours. In the *Japji* of his creation he declares :

"O thou who art deathless,
Who hast amply armed us,
To whom we go dying,
Do thou in arms protect us !"

It would be foolish to assert that Guru Gobind Singh despised the sword, but he did not stretch his hand to it except as a desperate recourse. This is illustrated in his epistle to Aurangzeb, for he says :

"When all other means have proven ineffective
It is right then to take up the sword."

Nor did Guru Gobind attempt to establish a new church at variance with the teachings of Nanak. Like the latter, he was a believer in One God and was himself "pre-eminently a disciple of 'timeless truth'". He told the Hindus and Muslims that mandir and mosque were the same and called on them to master the secret of *Sat-Nam* which he named Akal. He wrote: "He (Akal) is the one true, wise and pure Guru, hath no contour, countenance, colour, caste or lineage." It is absurd to accuse a man of his spiritual eminence of intolerance or aggression.

Guru Gobind was an humble seeker after truth. Though he felt that his mission was divinely inspired, he never claimed for his writings the merits of a direct transcription of the words of God. Again and again he dwelt upon the impermanence of power and wealth, for his own spiritual experiences and the twenty-five years of uninterrupted ordeals which he suffered had convinced him that, while all was unreal, only *Sat-Nam* was real. He acquired military strength, not to found an aggressive theology, but as a means for doing good to the humble and the downtrodden.

Bhatinda ceased to be Guru Gobind's abode after the death of Aurangzeb. He cultivated the friendship of the emperor's successor, Bahadur Shah, who wisely realised the need for conciliating the Sikhs. By accompanying his royal friend to the south, he disarmed any lingering suspicion that he and his followers were implacably ranged against Islam. He reached Nanded on the Godavari, 150 miles north-west of Hyderabad, where in the following year, he was stabbed to death by an Afghan. The dying Guru called his trusted followers to his side and exhorted them not to be disheartened by his death. He said: "I shall ever be among five Sikhs. Wherever there are five Sikhs of mine assembled, they

shall be priests of all priests." Guru Gobind was the last of the ten Sikh Gurus.

Guru Gobind Singh was only fifteen years of age when he was inducted into office, but such were his commanding abilities that his leadership was willingly accepted by his people. Though fated to meet a premature and tragic end, he had the satisfaction of fulfilling the prophecy about him that "he would convert jackals into tigers and sparrows into hawks." In intelligence, capacity, and fixed purpose, he was, to quote Sir Lepel Griffin, "infinitely the superior of all his predecessors". The Sikhs owe the vital spirit which pulsates them today to the sagacious and heroic endeavours of their great Guru. He laid the foundation of the new Sikh State, over which Ranjit Singh was to preside with such distinction, by rousing the dormant energies of a defeated people and by inspiring in them an irrepressible urge for social and political liberation.

14. CHIKKADEVA RAJA WODEYAR

We saw in an earlier chapter that the Vijayanagara empire attained great heights of glory under Krishna Deva Raya. Its fall after the Battle of Rakshasa-Tangadi, better known as the Battle of Talikote, in 1565, was a great calamity. An empire that had for over two centuries played a notable part in revitalising the political and cultural life of South India was ruthlessly put out of existence, leaving only poignant memories of the splendour that once belonged to it. Destruction of its material wealth was only a small part of the national loss, but the spoliation of its cultural treasures and the reappearance of conditions of political instability were most unfortunate. Vijayanagara had been the bulwark of everything that was stable and progressive and, with its downfall, south India again became a prey to anarchy and oppression.

It is not easy for people accustomed to the blessings of the rule of law to realise the terrible consequences that flow from its absence. The weak and the helpless suffer most in a country whose political landmarks are obliterated. Adventurers who seize power are not always responsive to popular welfare. In such a country man loses courage and self-respect and becomes the plaything of a capricious fortune. This was the plight of Karnataka after the tragedy of Talikote. Men of learning, who had adorned the courts of the kings of Vijayanagara no longer found any royal patrons to encourage their talents. The services of master-builders, who had reared shrines and places of enduring architectural value, were needed by none. The forces of disintegration became

too powerful to make the pursuit of such beneficent activities possible.

The work of the vandal in the proud capital of Vijayanagara was thorough. One has only to visit the magnificent ruins of Hampi to realise that the fall of the Vijayanagara empire was truly a national disaster. Efforts were made to rescue it from total collapse, but the men who undertook the task lacked imagination and strength. King Sadasiva took refuge in Penukonda, from where he strove to repair the battered fortunes of his dynasty. Concerted action might probably have crowned his labours with success, but the nobles of the empire were too engrossed with their own selfish ends to pay any heed to the appeals of their distressed sovereign. In that hour of adversity Karnataka needed leadership of an order that combined military strength with far-sighted statesmanship. And such leadership was provided by the ruling house of Mysore.

Chronologists and historians are not quite sure how the ancestor of the Mysore dynasty established himself in that State. Epigraphical records and tradition tell different stories about the origin of the dynasty. Both, however, agree that the rulers of the State originally came from Dwaraka, the birthplace of Lord Krishna, in Gujarat, and that they were Kshatriyas of Yadava descent. Having arrived in Karnataka and made it their permanent home, the royal immigrants adopted two significant courses which at once gave them the prestige and influence that is wielded by the sons of the soil. They proclaimed their veneration for the flourishing Jangama faith, the 'religion' of the worshippers of 'linga', a symbol of Lord Siva. They also assumed the honorific of Wodeyar, which in Kannada means 'lord' or 'master'.

Having thus established themselves in the affections of the Kannada people, these scions of the Yadava race

from Gujarat began to win a principality for themselves with southern Mysore as the foundation of their future State. The rule of the Wodeyars begins with Yadu Raja, who reigned from 1399 to 1423. It was impossible for them to extend their sway so long as Vijayanagara flourished, nor was such extension, even if it were possible, necessary. The fall of the empire, however, gave them their chance, which they wisely interpreted as an obligation devolving upon them to rescue Karnataka from a state of prostration. With the removal of the strong hand of the emperors, several adventurous Naiks had carved out independent or semi-autonomous principalities in Mysore. The viceroy of the defunct empire, who had made Srirangapattana his capital, was too feeble to hold the disintegrating forces in check.

It is small wonder, therefore, that the Wodeyars began to cherish the ambition of stepping into the shoes of the great Rayas of Vijayanagara. Their object was two-fold, namely, to repudiate the pretensions of the viceroy of Srirangpattana and to reduce the various petty and turbulent Naiks to submission. Chamaraja, the Bald, took the first step in this direction by withholding tribute from the chief of Srirangpattana. Later, Raja Wodeyar (1578-1617) launched a bold scheme of conquest, culminating in the consolidation of the areas comprising the present southern territories of Mysore. It is, however, when we come to the reign of Chikkadeva Raja Wodeyar (1672-1704), the subject of our study, that we see clear evidence of the rulers of Mysore forming definite notions of their obligations to Karnataka.

Chikkadeva was cast in the heroic mould. A lover of discipline and method, he was distressed to find that the once prosperous and happy land of the Kannada people had fallen on evil days, not because the people were demoralised, but because the rapacious Naiks who

roamed the country denied them the blessings of a strong government. According to inscriptional evidence, he was guided by the firm belief that he and his dynasty were the sole competent receivers on behalf of the Vijayanagara empire. And yet this energetic prince had nearly lost the chance of ascending the *gadi* of Mysore. Kanthirava Narasa Raja died without a male issue and was succeeded by Doddadeva Raja, though he belonged to the junior branch. Doddadeva reigned from 1659 to 1672, during which period his unfortunate rival, together with his father, was kept in confinement at Hangala. His chance, however, came after Doddadeva's death. Chikkadeva was not a young man when he came to the *gadi*; he was about forty-five years old. Even so, he played such a distinguished part in the history of his time that he is rightly acclaimed as one of the greatest rulers of Mysore.

One of the outstanding qualities of Chikkadeva was his political astuteness. In the north of his dominion he was confronted by two formidable military powers. Aurangzeb, the emperor of Dehli, had come down with a powerful army to subjugate the rising power of the Marathas and to annihilate the Muslim kingdom of Bijapur. The clash between the vast armies of the belligerents was fierce and long-drawn-out. Chikkadeva was faced with the delicate task of steering his infant kingdom clear of these powerful States, locked in mortal combat. So long as Shivaji was alive, Maratha resistance to the Moghul emperor was stubborn and successful, but after his death his successor was captured and killed. Sambhaji's brother, Rajaram, was constrained to flee to Jinji to save himself and his family from the invaders.

Chikkadeva watched these developments with grave concern. The policy of sitting on the fence, however beneficial to his interests momentarily, could not bring

him immunity. The fortunes of the Marathas seemed to be at a low ebb. The ruler of Mysore wondered whether he could not make his position secure by declaring his loyalty to the throne of Delhi. It was not that he preferred the Moghuls to the Marathas; in fact, every consideration, save that of survival, warranted that he should espouse the cause of the latter. After all, the Marathas were his neighbours and were bound to him by ties of religion and culture. Both were anxious to liberate the Deccan and South India from Muslim hegemony. Moreover, Shivaji was believed to have drawn his inspiration from the great kings of Vijayanagara and was credited with the aspiration of building a new empire on its model. Though Chikkadeva felt that it was a task which appropriately devolved upon him and his dynasty, he could not be insensible to the fundamental soundness of such an undertaking.

Nevertheless, he finally resolved to make offers of friendship to Aurangzeb. This decision was hastened by the attack of a Maratha force on Srirangpattana while on its way to relieve Jinji, where Rajaram was making desperate attempts to beat off the besieging Moghul army. Chikkadeva hastily recalled his troops which had laid siege to Trichinopoly (1696) and, with their aid, succeeded in saving Srirangpattana. Perhaps, this incident decided his course of action. Three years later (1699) he sent an embassy to Aurangzeb, then in camp at Ahmednagar, soliciting the emperor's approval of his sovereignty over the territory he then held. The embassy returned to the State in the following year after successfully accomplishing its mission. Chikkadeva is believed to have received a signet from the emperor, bearing the title Jagadeva Raja.

Inscriptions and literary works describe Chikkadeva as a valiant king. He led his armies in person and was

very considerate towards his fallen enemies. He subjugated the Naiks of Madura and extended his jurisdiction in all directions, but he was careful not to come into collision with the Moghuls. He does not seem to have rendered any military assistance to the invaders from the north, for he was too cautious and prudent to commit the fortunes of his State to the capricious events of his time. An inscription, praising his military prowess, describes him as having vanquished the Muslims, the Marathas, the Telugu Vokkaligas, the Tamils, the Coorgis and the mountain people in the west. There is no exaggeration in this appreciative account, for it is a historical fact that during his long reign he extended his sway far beyond the confines of the former State of Mysore.

Perhaps, Chikkadeva somewhat overrated his military prowess when he dignified himself with the title of *Apratima Vira* (unrivalled hero), but the assumption of such high-sounding titles by rulers, both Hindu and Muslim, was a widely prevalent practice in those days. We have noted that Chikkadeva was inspired by the ambition of becoming heir to the emperors of Vijayanagara. This is supported by an inscription dated 1675 which describes him as seated on the throne of the Karnataka dominion. He embellished his name by annexing to it the titles of the Vijayanagara kings. "Such an ascription", says the *Mysore Gazetteer*, "would be meaningless except on the basis that the sovereign to whom they are given was held to be the successor of the last representative of the Vijayanagara dynasty to which they belonged."

Chikkadeva Raja Wodeyar's domestic reforms are of great interest. To him belongs the credit of having established for the first time a regular postal system in his kingdom. The intention was two-fold; first, by the circulation of letters and epistles, the barrier to communication

was overcome. Secondly, by this means the ruler could, through private and confidential reports from his agents, keep his fingers on the pulse of his people. Chikkadeva was careful about public finance. He never wasted his resources on fruitless projects. It was his 'fixed' practice to deposit two thousand pagodas daily in his treasury before breaking his fast. He reorganised his revenue system according to that of the Moghuls so that unauthorised exactions from the peasants were minimised.

Chikkadeva ardently believed in the solace of religion. Though he continued to respect the Jangama faith, he devoutly followed the Vaishnava *dharma*. He was a tolerant king, and Hindu and Jain shrines in Mysore State received princely benefactions from him. At Sravana Belgola, the famous Jain pilgrim centre, he dug a pond for the convenience of pilgrims. A patron of learning, the Raja was himself an accomplished writer. His works "breathe the spirit of a true devotee". In the history of Kannada literature his reign is remembered as a landmark, for it was during this period that Lakshminsa wrote his immortal *Jaimini Bharata*. It is a popular epic in poetry and is read in millions of Karnataka homes, both as a religious work and as a piece of literature of unsurpassed excellence in that language.

As a man Chikkadeva was gentle and generous. Though he fought many wars, he never tarnished his name by wanton cruelty. He was a brilliant conversationalist and an humble seeker after truth. His was a long and eventful reign and he was seventy-six years old when he died in 1704. A stern disciplinarian and a severely practical man, he gave to his people the blessings of an enlightened and stable government. He will be remembered as the greatest architect of Mysore State.

Unfortunately, his successors did not inherit either his warlike abilities or his sagacity. Weak and incapable, they paved the way for the rise of Haidar Ali, who, together with his brilliant son Tipu, flashed across the South Indian firmament, contributing a new chapter to the history of Mysore. We are, therefore, entitled to describe Chikkadeva Raja as the last great ruler of the Wodeyar dynasty before the advent of the British.

15. BAJI RAO PESHWA

After the death of Shivaji, Moghul aggression developed into an all-out war against the Marathas. Sambhaji, the eldest son of Shivaji, was captured and cruelly put to death by Aurangzeb. Sambhaji's younger brother, Rajaram, fled to Jinji in the south to escape the fury of the invading armies. But the great edifice of Swaraj raised by Shivaji survived the Moghul onslaught. Captains of extraordinary courage and resourcefulness, like Santaji Ghorpade and Dhanaji Jadhav, successfully halted the imperial armies and finally cleared them out of the Deccan. The history of the Marathas entered a new phase after this event.

Chhatrapati Shahu, son of Sambhaji, who had been captured along with his father and brought up in the imperial court, was released on the eve of Aurangzeb's death in 1707. A good-natured and pleasure-loving prince, Shahu found personal exertion, either in the government of his country or in the conduct of wars, repugnant to his inclinations. He made a virtual delegation of his authority to the Peshwa, who became the *de facto* ruler of the State. Baji Rao I, the son of Balaji Vishwanath, Shahu's first Peshwa, assumed the premiership at the age of twenty. The Prime Minister's office was not a cushion of indulgence but a stern seat of duty.

The problems that faced Maharashtra were manifold. It is true that the Moghuls had been thrown back, but the political and economic consequences of waging a long-drawn-out war against the imperialists were far-reaching. Some of the great institutions created by Shivaji had been gravely weakened. His administration had drawn its strength from a closely-integrated system of government and none

of his lieutenants, however great, could arrogate to himself a position of independence.

The sound principle of unitarianism, best suited to the nascent Maratha State, had to be greatly modified under the stress of the war with the Moghuls. Individual chieftains having courage and resources to conduct campaigns against the enemy on their own account were permitted to do so. When peace was restored, it was found that vast vested interests both in Maharashtra and outside had been created by ambitious Maratha leaders who were loth to surrender their gains at the behest of a central authority too weak to enforce its will. The dangerous hereditary principle, which Shivaji had stamped out, reasserted itself in all walks of Maratha life. An energetic king could have prevented his authority from being whittled down, but Shahu was not made of such stern stuff.

The task of infusing fresh blood and vigour into the anaemic body of Maharashtra thus devolved on the First Minister of the State. Baji Rao, though a beardless youth, realised that centralism in Maharashtra had become a lost cause. Any attempt to strengthen Shahu's tenuous authority would, he feared, only lead to internecine conflicts, which it would have been suicidal for the Maratha cause to provoke. He, therefore, decided to strengthen the State by striking boldly for Maratha expansion. Both the decision and the manner in which he carried it out have elicited the admiration of historians.

Baji Rao, known in his boyhood as Visaji, was born on August 18, 1700. Like all great men, he was fortunate in his parents. Balaji Vishwanath Bhat was a remarkable man who, from an humble origin, rose to become the Prime Minister of Shahu, with whom he had maintained contact even when the latter was a royal prisoner

in the Moghul court. The king had had many opportunities of testing the integrity and abilities of his Brahmin servant. Balaji Vishwanath worked for his master with a single-minded devotion and brought many a wavering Maratha chief back to the path of loyalty and devotion to their sovereign. He purified the civil administration and made it more efficient. He raised armies to compel refractory vassals to submission. It was beyond his power to strengthen the central authority by suppressing the separatist ambitions of all the chiefs, but he succeeded in consolidating the Maratha confederacy with the king as the rallying-point. For these signal services he was honoured with the title of *Senakarte*, or 'Maker of Armies', and in November 1713 he was raised to the coveted status of Peshwa, which office he held with distinction till his death in April 1720.

Baji Rao's mother, Radhabai, who came from the Barve family, was also a person of extraordinary accomplishments. She was both pious and imperious and "ruled her household with a rod of iron". A woman of outstanding talents, she inspired her children with her own dynamism. In social matters she was far in advance of her time and took a tolerant view when the rigid regulations of caste were infringed. She gave Maharashtra two outstanding sons, Baji Rao and Chimnaji Appa. The latter was a tower of strength to his elder brother and his abilities as a general would have received greater notice if his personality had not been overshadowed by the commanding genius of Baji Rao.

Baji Rao was his father's favourite and even as a lad he accompanied Balaji Vishwanath on his military and political missions on behalf of Shahu. Thus, early in life he came to know a good deal about the state of the country and the calibre of the men who presided over its destiny. It was perhaps during such journeys to

North India that Baji Rao made up his mind to carry Maratha arms far beyond the confines of the Deccan.

Baji Rao's accession to the Peshwaship was not without difficulty. The king's counsellors cautioned him against the impolicy of entrusting the government of the State to the care of a twenty-year-old youth. Maharashtra, it was urged, was being menaced by its foes from without and by disruptionists from within. The Pratinidhi, who headed the opposition party, argued that Baji Rao's elevation to the exalted office of Peshwa would not be in the best interests of Maharashtra. The young man was impetuous and inexperienced. He lacked a sense of realism because he failed to comprehend the State's internal weakness. The Maratha country, declared the Pratinidhi, was so vulnerable that she could "scarcely quell a common insurrection," should one break out. The State should first acquire strength, so seriously impaired by its life-and-death struggle with the Moghuls, before embarking on ambitious foreign conquests.

Baji Rao had little difficulty in knocking the bottom out of this argument. He pointed out to Shahu that, with little or no resources, his grandfather, Shivaji, had been able to wrest a large territory from the Muslim States even in the heyday of their glory. The Marathas were now much stronger than ever before, while the fortunes of their opponents were at the lowest ebb. This, declaimed the young Peshwa, was the hour to strike at the enemy and rid the country of oppression and misrule. "Strike", he exclaimed in lofty peroration, "strike at the trunk, and the branches will fall of themselves. Listen but to my counsel, and I will plant the Maratha banner on the walls of Attock."

The eloquence of the handsome Peshwa was irresistible. His address, adroitly contrived to rouse Shahu's memory of the great martial heritage of his House, instantly

warmed the king's heart. With blazing eyes, he exclaimed: "By heaven, you shall plant in on the throne of Almighty!" The remarkable Peshwa knew no defeat in diplomacy or warfare. He had, as Grant Duff rightly remarks, both the head to plan and the hand to execute. And to these was added the gift of a commanding personality. His complexion was fair and his features were strikingly handsome. So widespread was his reputation as a handsome man that stories about his personality circulated far and wide.

The ladies in the harem of Nizam-ul-Mulk, according to one story, pined to have a look at the winsome Prime Minister of the Maratha Government. They begged their lord to vouchsafe them a glimpse of his guest, when Baji Rao next visited him. The fame of the Peshwa's personal magnetism travelled even to Delhi. Desiring to satisfy his curiosity, the emperor commissioned his court painter to draw the Peshwa's portrait for him. The painter did a good job of his work and took the painting to his royal master. It was the picture of a trooper on horseback. His reins lay loose on his horse's neck and his lance rested on his shoulder. As he rode, he rubbed with both hands ears of corn which he ate. The wondering emperor exclaimed: "Why, the man is a fiend!"

It is small wonder that Baji Rao was feared by his enemies. He was not cruel, but he was invincible. His adversaries knew that they were dealing with a military genius and, in the words of Sir Jadunath Sarkar, a heaven-born cavalry leader. Baji Rao perfected the art of guerilla warfare and practised it with consummate skill. Enemy armies in superior numbers did not daunt this dashing general. On the plains of Hindustan, his cavalry marched with the velocity of lightning. It roamed here, there and everywhere and, when it suited its purpose, it disappeared with equal celerity. Baji Rao engaged

hostile armies in open warfare only after manoeuvring them into a strategically untenable position. The veteran Nizam-ul-Mulk was no novice in the hard game of war, but his disastrous defeat in the two major battles of Palkhed and Bhopal, the first fought in 1730 and the second in 1738 with all the resources of the Moghul Empire, established the military genius of Baji Rao beyond all doubt.

It is not my purpose here to describe the numerous wars waged by the Peshwa in Gujarat, Malwa and Bundelkhand and against the Siddis of Janjira and the Portuguese. It is sufficient to say that everywhere his arms were victorious and that the successes of the Marathas carried their jurisdiction far beyond the limits of Maharashtra. By his exploits Baji Rao proved to his nation and his king that he was not an idle braggart. Under his guidance, the Marathas acquired considerable national prestige, a great deal of political stability, and a formidable military organisation. What is equally important, his forward policy threw up a band of new generals like Ranoji Sindhia, Malhar Rao Holkar and Udaji Pawar, who succeeded in founding their own dynasties in Central India—dynasties which survived the tide of British conquest until they were submerged under Sardar Patel's energetic policy of unification and integration.

The eulogy of Baji Rao is best recorded in the words of Sir Alfred Lyall, who writes : " Under their great Peshwa Baji Rao, they were now attaining the zenith of their predominance; they had conquered great territories; they were pushing forward into north India, they were supreme in the central regions..... " The eminent author has no doubt in his mind that " if at the time of the dissolution of the Moghul Empire, India had been left to herself, if the Europeans had not just then appeared in the field, the whole of Southern and Central India would

have fallen under the Maratha dominion," This judiciously sums up the political and military achievements of Baji Rao.

It would, however, be wrong to regard Baji Rao merely as a conqueror. He had an affectionate disposition and loved the pleasures of life. It required more than ordinary courage for this man of the orthodox caste to ignore the prevailing prejudices against meat and drink. He indulged in both without much regard for the susceptibilities of his relatives or for popular approbrium. His defiance was complete when he lavished his love on Mastani, a Muslim girl, supposed to have been presented to him by Raja Chhatrasal of Bundelkhand. Mastani, whom Kincaid describes as the Indian Salome, was a woman of great character and striking beauty. She accompanied her lord on his wars. She was the staff of his life. Their son, Shamsheer Bahadur, remained loyal to the Maratha cause and fought valiantly in the Battle of Panipat.

Baji Rao Peshwa flashed across the Indian firmament like a luminous star. He was the incarnation of Maratha energy. Death came to him, while he was encamped on the banks of the Narmada. Sir Richard Temple writes : " He (Baji Rao) died as he had lived in camp under canvas among his men, and he is remembered to this day among the Marathas as the fighting Peshwa or the incarnation of Hindu energy."

Baji Rao had his blemishes. He was ' inordinately ambitious ' and overbearing in his attitude towards others. Dr. V. G. Dighe, in his monograph on the Peshwa, writes : " Imperious by temperament and habit, he brooked no rival to his authority; those of his feudatories who refused to submit to his superior power were either destroyed or went over to the enemy and their energies were lost to the nation." This is a very legitimate accusation, for

Baji Rao did not have Shivaji's largeness of heart or his tact in conciliating his rivals and thus augmenting his own strength. He was feared but not loved.

Though this failing was serious, the Peshwa possessed many striking qualities. He was loyal to his king. He was kind and generous to his friends and followers. His word was as good as a bond even to his enemies. He was fearless, and his personal example in war inspired his followers. There was no limit to his resourcefulness in times of difficulty and danger. A man with a dignified bearing, he had most of the qualities of a gentleman. Perhaps, he could have accomplished more had he lived longer. Even so, his place in history is assured as the greatest builder of the Maratha empire.

16. CHHATRASAL

Raja Chhatrasal of Bundelkhand was foremost among the princes of Northern India to emulate the example of the Marathas in challenging Moghul dominion. As was observed elsewhere, Akbar's power and popularity rested on his wise and benevolent rule. Perhaps, his most outstanding achievement was his successful attempt in promoting good-will among the diverse elements of the Indian population. The downfall of his empire became inevitable when his successors made a flagrant departure from the principles of government which he had laid down and practised. An addict to enervating pleasures, his son, Jahangir, made a virtual abdication of his kingly office in favour of his beautiful and domineering wife, Nur Jahan. It became evident to foreign observers that the maggots of disintegration had begun to flourish in the body politic of Moghul India.

Under Jahangir's rule the military strength of the country was impaired. But that was not all. The unpardonable impatience which he had shown to crown himself emperor even when his father was alive and his open revolt to gain his object created a dangerous precedent for his successors. Fratricidal strife became a normal feature of Moghul rule whenever the imperial throne fell vacant. This was the terrible legacy which Jahangir left to his sons and his people. What was worse, he took the first step towards reversing his father's policy of religious tolerance. Akbar's principles of secularism were reduced to a dead letter.

Jahangir's son, Shah Jahan, who had been nurtured in the orthodox traditions of his faith, grew up with a closed mind. Vain and self-willed, he regarded the existence

of creeds other than his own as a challenge to his ancestral religion. Commanding unlimited power and patronage, he abused both by encouraging and compelling proselytisation. He interdicted the construction of new temples and pulled down a good number of them. Dr. Banarsi Prasad Saxena, his biographer, writes that "systematic efforts were made at the instance of the emperor to convert the Hindus both by persuasion and by force. The former included tempting offers of service and rewards." Shah Jahan's zeal for encouraging apostasy extended to the "non-conformist" sect of his own religion. One of the incentives to his invasion of Golconda was to convert its ruling dynasty to Sunnism.

Shah Jahan is certainly entitled to a distinguished place in the country's history. The immortal Taj, conceived as if in a dream and executed like a jewel of unsurpassed beauty, is a permanent monument to his rule. But neither this unique architectural creation nor the resplendent peacock throne, which augmented the magnificence of his court, can conceal the fact that he was largely responsible for provoking the antagonism of a considerable section of his subjects. To his religious intolerance he joined political short-sightedness. He estranged the brave Bundelas from his throne by persecuting Bir Singh of Orcha, a trusted friend and confidant of his father. The Raja of Orcha, who died soon after Shah Jahan's accession, was succeeded by his son, Jujhar Singh, a brave fighter for the freedom of his homeland. The emperor precipitated a fierce conflict in Bundelkhand by casting covetous eyes on its principalities.

Thus, in the year 1629 there broke out in that part of the country a war of independence from which neither Shah Jahan nor his gladiatorial son, Aurangzeb, could emerge successful. The course of events, however, followed the familiar pattern. The Bundela Rajputs fought

with courage and determination, but they could not repulse the Moghul invasion. In the final battle, the Raja was driven out of the battlefield and soon after perished at the hands of assassins. The victors dug up his treasures and carried away ten million rupees to augment the imperial exchequer. A terrible fate overtook his surviving sons who were forcibly converted to Islam. This was an affront which Bundelkhand did not forgive.

The famous Champat Rai of Mahoba now stepped into the breach. He was a friend and associate of Bir Singh with whom he had collaborated in an attempt to overthrow Moghul supremacy in his homeland. After the death of the Orcha chief, he gave his wholehearted support to Jujhar Singh in challenging Shah Jahan's career of conquest. When that prince perished, Champat Rai took his son, Prithviraj, under his own protection and thus saved him from the holocaust that overwhelmed his family. By virtue of his distinguished abilities, Champat Rai soon obtained the sole direction of affairs in Bundelkhand. He changed the whole complexion of the campaign against the invaders by welding all the insurgents in his province into a solid army of opposition which he led in person. His cause was just and noble and thousands of Rajputs flocked to his standard.

Armies after armies were sent by Shah Jahan to subdue the 'rebel', but they signally failed to stem the rising tide of the revolt. Commenting on Champat Rai's mode of warfare against the Moghuls, Edwin T. Atkinson writes : " When the principal portion of the Muhammadan troops had retired, he issued forth from his hiding places, and rapidly assembling a number of adherents, began to make reprisals by driving in the outposts, cutting off supplies, and continually harassing small garrisons by night attacks, until, emboldened by his success,

he met the imperial generals in the open field, and totally routed them. . . .” He could not, however, hold out indefinitely, particularly when the very men on whose behalf he had raised the standard of revolt came forward to sell the honour of their country. Pahad Singh was one such renegade who was utterly devoid of all scruples in advancing his own interests.

Champat Rai wisely decided to call off the fight against the Moghuls until he succeeded in composing the squabbles among his fellow-Bundelas. He temporarily enlisted himself in the service of Dara but the arch-intriguer, Pahad Singh, gave him no peace. At his instigation the credulous prince dismissed Champat Rai from his service — an act of injustice for which he suffered later. Champat Rai took his “full revenge on Dara by showing to Aurangzeb a little known ford to cross the Chambal and by fighting on his side at Samugadh”. His brave Bundelas greatly distinguished themselves in that battle, and in return for this service, Aurangzeb gave him a command of 12,000 men and a jagir free from revenue “extending from Orcha to Mol Kanar”, and thence to the Jumna. But Champat Rai’s association with the Alamgir was unnatural and shortlived, for the two men, so different in outlook and temper, could not work together in harmony.

Champat Rai suffered immensely by crossing swords with the Moghuls. He lost his eldest son in battle, but he was soon blessed with another offspring whose name was to resound in the whole of India. Chhatrasal was a child of his parents’ prayers and was destined to lead his people to victory and freedom. He was born on May 26, 1650, and was in his fourteenth year when his lion-hearted father was foully murdered during his flight. A child of adversity, young Chhatrasal vowed implacable hostility to his father’s enemies. But he and his brothers

were, in the expressive words of the chronicler, "like enchanted snakes who possessed the will without the power to injure." That power Chhatrasal decided to acquire. He is believed to have taken service under the celebrated Mirza Raja Jai Singh of Amber, who had been commissioned by Aurangzeb to destroy the infant State of Shivaji in the Deccan.

Jai Singh was in many ways a remarkable man. He was the prop as well as the pride of the empire and had steeled his heart against all sentiments in his devotion to a master whose policies represented the negation of everything that the Hindus held sacred. The Raja was a valiant soldier and an experienced diplomat. He was an accomplished linguist and now, at the age of sixty, he had acquired the 'sobriety and circumspection' of a statesman. Such a man could have no illusions about the magnitude of his undertaking. His testing time had come, for had not the redoubtable Maratha humbled and defeated such stalwarts as Shaista Khan and Jaswant Singh? Despite his big battalions, the Raja of Amber was not sure of the results of his tournament with Shivaji. Again and again, he wrote to Aurangzeb: "The task I have undertaken allows me not a moment of ease and peace." Raja Jai Singh descended upon Maharashtra in 1665 and in the month of March established his base near Poona.

We do not know when and where Chhatrasal joined his chief, but he must have been very young at the time. There is, however, reason to believe that the Moghul wars in the Deccan served as an eye-opener to the youthful warrior from Bundelkhand. He realised from his own observation that Shivaji was waging a war, the implications of which were of country-wide significance. The hero of Maharashtra, to whom belonged the unique credit of destroying the myth of Moghul

invincibility, was not a self-seeker. He was fighting for a cause that was at once noble and just. He was fighting for the liberation of the Hindus from the two-fold incubus of political tyranny and religious persecution. Shivaji was truly a national hero, for how else could one account for the admiration with which his great struggle was being watched in such distant provinces as the Punjab and Rajasthan ?

Chhatrasal resolved to follow in the footsteps of this great liberator. By 1671 he became the "elected principal leader and chief of the Bundelas" and set about conquering the forts in the hills near Panna. He valiantly resisted Aurangzeb's aggression and iconoclastic zeal and meted out swift and terrible punishment to those Hindu Rajas who sought to play false to their country and people. The bigoted emperor regarded Raja Chhatrasal as his inveterate enemy and sent well-tried armies under able captains to subdue him. Like the famous hero of Maharashtra, Chhatrasal routed the enemy hordes in guerilla warfare or in pitched battles, adapting his strategy to the exigencies of the military situation and his own resources.

The career of Chhatrasal was one of uninterrupted warfare against the Moghuls. For over thirty years he fought them with relentless pertinacity and nearly succeeded in restoring Bundelkhand's sovereignty to his people. He could probably have reached his goal earlier with Maratha assistance if affairs in the Deccan had prospered better. Nevertheless, his achievements were enormous. Aurangzeb, to his great sorrow, discovered before his death that the fire of intolerance, kindled by his predecessors and stoked by him, had assumed the proportions of a conflagration, threatening to reduce Babar's empire to ashes.

There was a temporary respite for Chhatrasal on the accession of Bahadur Shah, who invited him to court and "confirmed all the acquisitions he had made, yielding a revenue of nearly a million sterling per annum." But the Moghul war-lords gave him no peace. He was brought face to face with a Subedar of exceptional abilities. When the hands of Baji Rao, the conqueror of Malwa, were full with his campaigns against the Nizam, Muhammad Khan Bangas, the man who became famous as the founder of the house of Farrukhabad, attacked Chhatrasal and inflicted a severe defeat on him. In June 1728, Jaitpur was invested and within six months the garrison was reduced to the extremities of hunger. Unable to hold the fort any longer, Chhatrasal sallied forth and fought his way out. He was severely wounded and it seemed as though the great edifice of Swaraj assiduously built up by him would collapse.

His only hope now centred on the Marathas. In his celebrated appeal to the Peshwa he wrote : "Know you, Baji Rao, that I am in the same sad plight in which Gajendra, the celestial elephant, was when caught by the crocodile. My valiant race is threatened with extinction. Come and save my honour." The Peshwa was prompt in responding to the appeal of his brave ally. In a series of decisive actions, he defeated the Subedar, whom he "allowed to return safe to his headquarters upon his giving a written undertaking that he would never again return to Bundelkhand or embarrass Chhatrasal in any way". Out of profound gratitude, the old Bundela settled on his benefactor a jagir yielding a handsome revenue. He also committed his sons to Baji Rao's care. Perhaps, his most memorable gift to the Peshwa was Mastani, a Muslim girl of great beauty and character. Though her association with Baji Rao caused

convulsions in orthodox Poona, the two remained devoted to each other till the end of their lives.

Raja Chhatrasal passed away on December 14, 1731, full of years and glory. A great fighter, he never swerved from his goal either in defeat or in victory. Adversity, far from dispiriting him, served only to strengthen his resolve to struggle with great firmness and fortitude for the liberation of his homeland. His crusade on behalf of tolerance and righteousness inspired thousands of his countrymen to follow his noble example. Bundelkhand has ceased to be on the map of India, but who can forget the name of its incomparable leader, Raja Chhatrasal ?

17. PESHWA MADHAV RAO

In the chequered history of India the third battle of Panipat, fought between the Marathas and the Afghans in January 1761, is a mystifying event. Neither of the belligerents, even after their armies had been arrayed on the battlefield, desired a bloody conflict. Each had wholesome respect for the prowess of the other, but an inexorable fate pushed the Marathas into the vortex. They lacked neither courage nor skill nor resources in outclassing their adversary, Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Afghan king, and yet they were defeated with great slaughter. Their misfortune was the result of personal rivalries among their chieftains and of an amazing slovenliness in providing for the needs of their troops.

The blow that fell on the Maratha arms was a terrible one. Thousands of soldiers perished in a conflict that would have brought imperishable glory to the Marathas if only the battle had been fought with a little more foresight and tenacity. In victory Afghan savagery was unparalleled, but it was not unexpected. The flower of Maharashtra's manhood was wiped out on the bloody battlefield. Kashiraj, an eye-witness of the disaster, declared : " One may say that it was verily Doomsday for the Maratha people. "

An intercepted letter disclosed to the Peshwa the magnitude of the disaster. " Two pearls ", its fatal contents read, " have been dissolved, twenty-seven gold mohurs have been lost, and of the silver and copper, the total cannot be cast up. " Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao, who was rushing to the north with reinforcements, abandoned the march when he learnt that all had been lost. An overwhelming tragedy befell his own family. His eldest

son, Vishwas Rao, his cousin Sadashiv Rao Bhau, commander of the Maratha army, Tukoji Rao Sindhia, Jankoji Rao Sindhia and many other prominent generals had been slain.

The news proved fatal to the Peshwa, and in June of the same year the Chief Minister died of inconsolable grief. Fortunately, there was no problem of succession to the Peshwaship to make the cup of Maharashtra's sorrow overflow. Madhav Rao, Balaji Baji Rao's second son, was spared the terrible fate that overtook his brother. He was only seventeen years old, but the *gadi* could not be left vacant. He was accordingly taken by his uncle Raghunath Rao to Satara, where he received his investiture from the king. The young Peshwa was little known to his people, for he would not have attained that exalted office, if his elder brother had not perished at Panipat.

Youth, inexperience and obscurity were not the only handicaps with which Madhav Rao was saddled. None of these disadvantages would have mattered much if the domestic and foreign affairs of Maharashtra had not been a source of great anxiety. Raghunath Rao, his uncle, was a man of undoubted military abilities and, under his energetic generalship, Maratha arms and influence had traversed as far as Lahore. But his weaknesses, which were many, overshadowed this great but solitary virtue. He was proud, tactless, and ambitious. Ambition is not a blemish if it is governed by high purpose, but Raghunath Rao's was of a grasping and selfish variety. He regarded his nephew's minority and his own guardianship as an opportunity for self-aggrandisement.

In all countries and at all times there are men in whose eyes self-advancement even by dubious methods is more important than anything else. It would not be too harsh a judgment on Raghunath Rao to describe him

as the very embodiment of sordid selfishness. Egged on by his ambitious wife, he missed no opportunity to supplant the influence of Madhav Rao with the sole object of usurping the Peshwaship. If he failed, his failure was not due to any laxity in his perseverance, but to the noble character and superior talents of his young nephew.

While the councils of Poona were thus riven with factions and jealousy, the enemies of the Marathas were making plans to overthrow their hegemony. The temptation was too great for them to resist. They believed that the Maratha sword-arm had been amputated at Panipat. The Nizam was among those who ardently cherished this illusion. Conspicuous among his contemporaries in practising the art of intrigue and opportunism, he gathered around him dissident Maratha generals in the hope of extinguishing the Maratha menace to his own acquisitions. His defeat at Udgir was still rankling in his bosom.

In conjunction with Janoji Bhosle, a disaffected Maratha chief, the Nizam marched on Poona and pillaged the country around the Maratha capital. But such wanton acts of terrorism failed to bring him victory. Collecting a large army, Raghunath Rao, invaded Nizam Ali's dominions by way of retaliation. In the meantime he had succeeded in winning over Janoji Bhosle, whose desertion of his country and people was governed by the sole object of personal profit. On August 10, 1763, an important battle was fought between the Marathas and the Nizam's army at Rakshasbhuvan in which the Nizam was decisively beaten. Never again did he venture to invade the Peshwa's dominions.

The young Peshwa, who received his baptism of fire in this action, played a gallant part throughout the operations. In the words of Grant Duff, he particularly

distinguished himself both by personal energy and by the judicious support which he sent to different points of attack. Raghunath Rao was astonished at the military talent displayed by his nephew. He wrote : " He (Madhav Rao) surprises me. He had never before seen a fight. I have confidence in his future management of responsibility. "

The terms of the treaty with the Nizam were not to the liking of the Peshwa. They were too liberal to an enemy that did not deserve such generosity. We do not know whether Madhav Rao could fathom his uncle's motive in this transaction. It was a calculated generosity on the part of Raghunath Rao, who did not desire the total destruction of the Nizam's power. The uncle was practising the infamous doctrine of counterpoise against the government of his own nephew and people. But Madhav Rao, an upright man, endorsed the treaty on the lofty ground that a word once given could not be honourably withdrawn. The same adherence to high principles governed every one of his actions. He knew that Janoji's contribution was merely a make-believe, but the Peshwa did not lose the opportunity of addressing him on the virtue of loyalty to one's own people and country. Such candour in a young man was the more remarkable, " when we consider the control under which Madhav Rao was still held but over which his judgment and ability were gradually obtaining ascendancy. "

The perennial intrigues of Raghunath Rao against his nephew and his government were more dangerous to the Maratha State than the aggression of its enemies. Even so, Madhav Rao refused to be stampeded into hasty action against his uncle. It was clear to him that Raghunath Rao was able, experienced and powerful. Conciliation rather than chastisement was the only insurance against open rupture. He declined to listen even to

his most trusted advisers. On one occasion he said : " Raghunath Rao's heart is clear, but he is ill-advised." Wise words these, coming as they did from a young man whom none would have accused of rashness if he had ranged himself openly against his guardian. So great was his confidence in managing intractable men that, when Raghunath Rao marched against him at the head of a powerful army he boldly walked into his uncle's camp, attended by only two hundred guards. At the meeting the discomfiture of the invincible general was complete. After listening to Madhav Rao, he exclaimed : " Everything is yours. I do not want anything." But the change of heart was only temporary, though the parley between uncle and nephew saved Maharashtra from a civil war.

The defeat of the Nizam was a turning point in the Peshwa's career. It marked the end of his uncle's unwanted tutelage. Thenceforward Madhav Rao assumed the supreme leadership of the Maratha country both in its domestic and foreign affairs. He now turned his attention to the new menace from the south. Haider Ali, a man of considerable military talent, had successfully dislodged the Hindu dynasty from the Mysore *gadi*. He was now casting greedy eyes on Maratha territory in Karnatak. His ambition was three-fold, namely, consolidation of his own position, which he owed to usurpation, annihilation of the English Company, which was now dreaming of unrivalled supremacy in India, and, lastly, liquidation of Maratha interests in the south.

Haidar was a born leader, but he would probably have left an enduring monument to his greatness if he had succeeded in composing his quarrels with the Marathas. He did not have the sagacity to realise that it was impossible to counter the growing power of the British in India by his own unaided strength. In army organisation, in strategy and in equipment, the British had made a

great advance in the modes of warfare while the Indian powers still clung to traditional methods. It would have been in Haidar's own interest to make common cause with the Marathas instead of creating two formidable enemies against himself. And it was all the more unfortunate for the new ruler of Mysore that he was not quick to realise that the Peshwa, whose implacable enmity he had incurred, was endowed with military abilities even more outstanding than his own.

The war with Haidar was waged by the Marathas with relentless tenacity and in every major engagement he was worsted, with disastrous consequences to his military power. The Peshwa himself headed the invasions as often as his health permitted. The military genius that he showed on those occasions impressed his officers so much that they came to respect and regard him as an unrivalled warrior. They were right, for, even the redoubtable Haidar dreaded the Marathas more than he was afraid of the British. The young Peshwa, always modest about his own extraordinary accomplishments, was surprised at the Mysore ruler's reluctance to cross swords with him.

He wrote to Haidar asking why he was so much afraid of the Marathas. The writer had heard much about him in Poona, where many of his heroic actions were related. He had come to the south to test whether those stories were true or mere fables. He, therefore, asked Haidar to leave his entrenchments and come to his camp. If he did not have the courage to do so, he, the Peshwa, would himself "visit his camp and batteries the following day and tell him of the delight with which he left Poona to come and engage with him." Haidar, however, preferred the safety of his hiding place to the Peshwa's overtures. It did not occur to him that the

only party to profit by his tussle with Poona were the British.

The exploits of the Marathas in the north were equally impressive. They rescued the emperor from the bondage of the East India Company and took him back to his capital from where he had been exiled to Allahabad. But, considered from the point of view of results, these were empty gains. Long before power, virtue and self-respect had fled from the descendents of Babar. Even so, Maratha prestige and influence in the north could have been stabilised if the management of their affairs in Delhi had been left in the capable hands of Mahadji Sindhia. This was not done, because the Maratha captains had forgotten the advantages of unity. The great Peshwa was too sick and too far away to regulate his government's affairs in Delhi.

This, in brief, was the state of affairs in India during Madhav Rao's regime. He held the office of Peshwa only for the brief period of eleven years till he died of consumption on November 18, 1772. Nevertheless, this remarkable man strove ceaselessly for the welfare of his people. He succeeded in rescuing the Maratha State from the dreadful consequences of Panipat, and retrieved the honour of his people as a fighting race. He was gentle and generous. A high sense of rectitude governed his public and private life. He was highly religious-minded and always listened to the wise counsel of competent advisers like Ram Shastri.

He led a simple and frugal life and loved the poor and the oppressed. The tumult of foreign wars and internal dissensions which distracted his government gave him little opportunity to introduce many reforms in his civil administration, but he succeeded in ridding it of some of its gross abuses. Forced labour and unjust

exactions from the peasantry were firmly suppressed. Corrupt officials were brought to book. The judicial administration of the State was entrusted to Ram Shastri, a learned and incorruptible man, upon whom Grant Duff bestows the highest praise. He forestalled the Congress Government of today by introducing Prohibition. The people were happy and food was plentiful.

Madhav Rao gave personal attention to the government of his realm. His capacity for mastering details was remarkable. Historians have unanimously acclaimed him as a great administrator. The army was well looked after and was always kept in a high state of efficiency. Advocates of the absurd two-nation theory will probably be interested to know that the Maratha army consisted of Arabs, Abyssinians, Siddis and Sikhs, all of whom served their Hindu master loyally. Madhav Rao was among the first to realise that the so-called invincibility of the troops trained and led by Europeans in India lay in the effectiveness of their artillery. He, therefore, established factories in his own State for the manufacture of guns and cannon balls and initiated negotiations with France for assistance to strengthen his artillery arm. He gave generous help to artisans.

The cares and worries of office and the rigours of camp life undermined the health of the Peshwa who was only twenty-eight years old when he died. Grant Duff makes a correct appraisal of the Peshwa's career. He writes : " Although the military talents of Madhav Rao were very considerable, his character as a sovereign is entitled to far higher praise, and to much greater respect, than that of any of his predecessors. He is deservedly celebrated for his firm support of the weak against the oppressive, of the poor against the rich; and, as far as the constitution of society admitted, for his equity to all." The historian concludes that the plains

of Panipat were not more fatal to the Maratha empire than the early end of this excellent prince.

Perhaps, the chaos that overtook the Poona government after Madhav Rao's death would never have occurred if he had lived longer. Even during his brief reign, he could have done more if his uncle had abandoned the suicidal course of intrigue and self-interest. "Had Madhav Rao lived to his sixtieth year," says Professor A. C. Banerjee, "Shah Alam would have remained a protege of the Poona Durbar, Haidar Ali and Tipu would not have been able to reign unmolested, and there would have been no treaty of Bassein." There can be no end to such soul-warming speculation. One thing is, however certain, namely, that Madhav Rao has earned for himself a high place among the great men of India.

18. SURAJ MAL JAT

Till the eighteenth century the contribution of the Jats to the political history of India was negligible. Though hardy and warlike, they cherished no ambition to compete for supremacy in the country. Geography and their social organisation were a deterrent to their rise to power. The region where the Jat population preponderates was dangerously near the seat of the central authority. The imperial highways ran through their territory, necessitating a careful watch over their activities. Moreover, the location of Mathura, the famous pilgrim centre, in their region exposed them to the iconoclastic zeal of the rulers of Delhi.

Caught between the upperstone of Muslim domination and the netherstone of Rajput ascendancy over their economic life, the Jats lay dormant for centuries, eking out a miserable living from a grudging soil. Their social system hardly conduced to their integration into a single community. Untrammelled by the rigid regulations of caste, they grew to become highly individualistic and were not easily amenable to discipline. They accepted no leaders and willingly rendered obedience to none. But lack of social solidarity had not destroyed their sterling qualities. Experts in handling the ploughshare, they were no less dexterous in wielding the sword. They were brave, virile and deeply attached to the soil they tilled and fructified by their persevering industry.

The basic elements conducive to Jat resurgence were thus present in a race that only awaited leaders of ability and vision to guide it to its destiny. It is, however, doubtful whether the Jats could ever have played a notable part in history, even under inspiring leadership, if

the suicidal policies of the great Moghul had not assisted their emergence from obscurity. Aurangzeb's intolerance was calculated to rouse even the most prostrate people to fury, and his defeat in Rajasthan and the Deccan nerved almost every freedom-loving community in the country to embark boldly upon rebellion.

Aurangzeb left the capital in 1679 to prosecute his disastrous wars against the Rajputs and the Marathas. He denuded north India of its resources in men and money in a vain attempt to annihilate his enemies. "In unvarying succession," says Sir Jadunath Sarkar, "Northern India continued to be annually drained of its public money and youthful recruits in order to fill the ever-growing void caused by the Deccan wars." The fear that a swift and terrible vengeance would overtake the insurgents in the north disappeared as the emperor's return to the capital became increasingly remote. Second-rate generals and soldiers, with no stomach for serious fighting filled the armies left behind to guard the provinces during the emperor's campaigns in the south. The situation was thus most favourable for Chauraman Jat (1695-1721) to raise the standard of revolt under the very shadow of the forts of Agra and Delhi. His predecessors such as Gokla, Rajaram and Ram Chehra had shown to their people that, though rebellion was a dangerous affair, militarily it was not fraught with disastrous results. During their daring assaults on imperial outposts and convoys, they had defeated some of the most celebrated Moghul generals.

Nevertheless, the Jats had hardly emerged from the predatory stage in their military operations. Daring had certainly brought them laurels, but their victories were shortlived. It was the organising genius of Chauraman which welded them into a disciplined army of brave and dogged fighters. He gave an institutional basis to

their slowly germinating political aspirations and created a State out of their fragmented society, with Bharatpur as the capital. The history of Jat resurgence may be said to begin with this competent and far-seeing chieftain, but his conquests did not survive him.

He was succeeded by Badan Singh, who combined astuteness with military abilities. He cultivated the friendship of Sawai Jai Singh of Jaipur, who had reconquered for the Moghuls the acquisitions of Chauraman. So deferential was Badan Singh's behaviour towards the Maharaja of Jaipur that the latter rewarded his protegee with the title of Braja-Raj, or 'Lord of the holy land of Mathura', and the insignia of chieftainship. The Jat chief was not insincere in his attachment to his benefactor, but he did not abate his efforts to strengthen his realm. He made a judicious use of his wealth by investing it in the construction of new forts and, according to the testimony of a contemporary observer, the walls of Kumbher were lined with guns with no interval between them.

Badan Singh, who died on June 7, 1756, was followed by Suraj Mal, described as the Ulysses of the Jat race. Badan Singh had a brood of children by his many wives, but, with the willing consent of the community, he transferred the reins of government to this young man though he was not his son. Associated with the ruling house of Bharatpur through his mother, Suraj Mal became the most competent and trustworthy lieutenant of Badan Singh, both in his military campaigns and in his civil administration. The chief leaned more and more heavily on Suraj Mal as he advanced in age and became almost blind. It is a tribute to Badan Singh's sagacity that he chose an 'outstanding genius' to succeed him, overlooking the claims of his own sons.

Under Suraj Mal the Jats became a formidable power in the north. Trained in the hard school of experience, he carefully abstained from embarking upon hazardous or futile projects. Tested in many a hard-fought battle, his army attained renown for its discipline and intrepidity, but he used this great instrument with the utmost prudence. "The fame", says Sir Jadunath Sarkar, "of Suraj Mal's capacity for leadership and the tough fighting qualities of his troops spread rapidly, and there came repeated solicitations for his sword from the highest in the land." The Jat chief lent military support to his allies, but he did so with an eye to his own advantage. Even the supreme commander of the Moghul forces was defeated and 'reduced to utter impotence' by rashly trying conclusions with Suraj Mal. But the Jat chief was not a *condottiere*; he was in fact a far-seeing statesman, determined to consolidate his race and attain for it the dignity of a State.

Only a man of exceptional abilities could succeed in this attempt. The rapid disintegration of the Moghul empire, though it certainly gave him a great opportunity to liberate the Jat homeland from foreign intruders, was not entirely to his advantage. The weakening of the central authority put a premium on chaos and on the growth of adventurers in alarming numbers. Not content with the ejection of the invaders, the Marathas overflowed their boundaries, carrying their victorious arms as far as the Punjab. Their incursions in the north became bolder and more frequent. Though they were animated by the resolve to deliver the country from Moghul hegemony, their action was not always in accord with their ideals. They were not quite successful in infecting the Hindu element in the north with their own enthusiasm.

The vicissitudes of Delhi offered an irresistible temptation to the Amir of Afghanistan to wrest the imperial

diadem from the feeble hands of the emperor. In the Rohillas and their leader, the notorious Najib Khan, Ahmad Shah Abdali found useful allies and accomplices in his plan of conquest. Being in close proximity to Delhi, the land of the Jats was constantly exposed to the irruptions of the Afghan invader and his ruthless troops. The sack of Mathura in February 1757 and the wholesale slaughter of the civil population was a terrible experience to Suraj Mal and his people. Taking refuge in his forts, the Jat chief wisely refrained from giving battle to the formidable invader, though his heart bled for the unfortunate victims of Afghan savagery. Having come to power only a year before, he considered it imprudent to challenge Abadali single-handed.

Suraj Mal was endowed with a political vision which was not obscured by sentiment. He certainly did not appreciate Muslim excesses, but he saw grave danger to India's integrity in supplanting the central authority. Like Rana Sanga and Mahadji Sindhia, who came later, he realised that the time was not yet ripe for the complete overthrow of Muslim rule in Delhi. Though their strength had been dissipated by Aurangzeb's suicidal wars and by the follies of his successors, the rallying power of the followers of Islam was still considerable. Suraj Mal's 'pan-Hinduistic ideal' did not blind him to the basic realities of the situation. His political views, expressed on many occasions, deserve the highest praise. He realised that the growing strength of the Marathas entitled them to assume *de facto* sovereignty in India. He, however, considered it prudent that the semblance of royalty should continue to rest in the House of Babar. The Wazir of the realm should also be a Muslim in the person of Nawab Shuja-ud-Daulah, who was free from communal predilections.

In a word, Suraj Mal envisaged a polity in India that would leave the trappings of sovereignty in the hands of the Moghuls, while the substance of power, with all its immense advantages, would be held by the Marathas and their allies. These views were in perfect accord with those of some of the most sagacious leaders in the country. Professor Kalika R. Qanungo is quite right when he says that, "had the Maratha government acted upon them, their *de facto* sovereignty in Hindustan would have remained long unshaken". It is sad to reflect that the Poona Government failed to pursue the wise course indicated by the Jat chief. Malhar Rao Holkar's partiality for the unscrupulous Najib Khan was fatal to Suraj Mal's well-considered scheme of Hindu solidarity.

History cannot forgive the Marathas for their failure to enlist the gifted Jat ruler's active co-operation in their expansionist plans. Far from winning his friendship, they provoked his deep suspicions by investing the fort of Kumbher in 1754. Despite his immense armies, the Maratha general, Raghunath Rao, failed to capture the fort and the siege was withdrawn after his receiving promise of an indemnity of Rs. 30 lakhs from Suraj Mal. Neither their discomfiture before the walls of Kumbher, nor the knowledge that Suraj Mal's brilliant talents and vast warlike resources were of inestimable value to the nation, served as an eye-opener to the Marathas.

It is reasonable to suppose that the disaster that befell the Maratha armies in the Battle of Panipat (1761) could have been averted if only they had listened to the wise counsel of Suraj Mal. The Jat chief, an experienced man with acute discernment, did not approve of the indiscretions of Sadashiv Rao Bhau, commander of the Maratha army. Bhau Saheb's reprisals in Delhi and his rashness inflamed both Hindu and Muslim sentiment in North

India. He failed to realise that in the impending trial of strength with the Afghan ruler, it was both politic and necessary to secure the friendship or at least the neutrality of the Muslim powers in the country. Suraj Mal pleaded in vain with this proud man that his impetuosity would spell the ruin of the Maratha cause in the north.

Himself a man of considerable military talents, Suraj Mal knew both the strength and the weakness of Abdali's army. The king of Afghanistan was at a great disadvantage, having to give battle to his enemy far away from his homeland. Apart from the fact that it was a major problem for him to maintain his long lines of communication intact, he could not remain in India for an indefinite period and risk a revolt in his turbulent country. Unaccustomed to pitched battles and to the modes of warfare in the north, the Marathas could ensure their success by harassing the enemy by their inimitable guerilla tactics. "It is advisable", declared the veteran Jat soldier in his exhortation to Bhau Saheb, "to carry on an irregular warfare with light cavalry against the Shah, and not encounter him in pitched battles after the manner of kings and emperors. When the rainy season arrives, both sides will be unable to move from their places, and at last the Shah, who will be in a disadvantageous position, will of himself become distressed and return to his own country. The Afghans, thus disheartened, would submit to your power". But Bhau Saheb brushed aside this wise counsel.

Finding that his advice was unceremoniously rejected, Suraj Mal decided not to implicate himself in what he regarded as a mad venture. Even his eminently sensible suggestion that the Marathas should leave their women and superfluous baggage at Bharatpur was turned down. Suraj Mal, who could have fed the armies of his allies with a perennial supply of food and warlike materials if his plan had been executed, withdrew, to the im-

mense loss of Maratha prestige and their cause. On receiving reports of the miscarriage of these confabulations, Abdali, a shrewd man, sought to placate the Jat chief. Suraj Mal was a patriot and chose to remain neutral rather than raise his hand against his own countrymen, however misguided they might have been.

Animosity was foreign to the nature of the noble Jat, who gave food and shelter to thousands of Maratha soldiers escaping into his territory from the bloody battlefield. "The Peshwa's heart", says Mr. Sardesai, "was greatly consoled by Suraj Mal's conduct." By his 'marvellous sagacity' and 'diplomatic shrewdness' Suraj Mal saved his own state from the terrible holocaust of Panipat. After Abdali's retreat to his homeland, the Jat chief became, to quote Professor Sarkar, "the strongest potentate in India with absolutely unimpaired forces and an overflowing treasury, while every other chief had been more or less ruined." He gave signal proof of his strength by capturing the historic fort of Agra in June 1761, and carried away fifty lakhs of rupees as the prize of his triumph. Suraj Mal reached the height of his glory at the time of his death which came on December 25, 1763, while he was waging a successful war against the Rohilla chief, Najib Khan.

Suraj Mal was only fifty-five years old when he died, leaving his great work unfinished. His State was, however, the "richest and strongest in Hindustan". His army was powerful, while his resources were abundant. By frugal methods of public expenditure, he added six crores of rupees to the State's hoarded wealth. He was a benefactor of his people and encouraged them to pursue the arts of peace with the same enthusiasm as distinguished their military exploits. Suraj Mal abhorred ostentation and preferred to be known as a mere zemindar. He has been described as of middle stature and of a

robust frame, black in complexion, and fat. His eyes were unusually sparkling, and all his appearance "indicated more fire than one could notice in his conduct, which was very sweet and supple."

Let me further quote Father Wendel, who writes with authority on the subject. He says: "In one word, being prudent, politic, valiant and noble above his birth he was able to make himself admired and at the same time feared by the outside powers. He had found the Jats rich already but mere zemindars and unknown except for their plundering; but he left them powerful and highly reputed throughout Hindustan." It is a serious weakness of one-man rule that there are no known methods by which the standards of wise and efficient government, laid down by one ruler, can be maintained by his successors. It was not, therefore, Suraj Mal's fault that the men who succeeded him did not share his greatness.

19. MAHADJI SINDHIA

A sturdy soldier was fleeing for precious life from the stricken field of Panipat. His charger was a noble animal and, sensing danger to its master's life, it ran fast and furiously. But before they could shake off the pursuing Afghan, both the rider and his mount fell into a ditch. The pursuer overtook them and, stripping his victim of his jewels, rode off on the steed after smashing the knee of the unfortunate man.

With his horse stolen and his leg broken, the soldier lay helpless in the ditch. Fortunately for him, a Muslim water-carrier stumbled upon him and, taking pity on the wounded man, conveyed him to a place of safety on his bullock. He did not know that by this timely act of kindness, he was making his fortune. He had helped a man of destiny.

The fugitive was none other than Mahadji Sindhia, who soon became famous as the power behind the imperial throne of Delhi. Mahadji was the youngest son of Ranoji, the illustrious founder of the Sindhia dynasty in Malwa. He had four brothers, but all of them had died before Panipat or were killed in that action, so that he was the last of his race to inherit Ranoji's fiefs. Orthodoxy raised objections to his succession on the ground that he was an illegitimate son of his father, but Mahadji was not the man to be cheated out of his patrimony in deference to absurd social prejudices.

Mahadji was over thirty years old when he made his narrow escape from the inferno of Panipat. He became maimed for life after his encounter with the savage Afghan. His physical disability did not, however, oppress his mind so much as the spectacle of India's dissolution.

The lessons of the Panipat tragedy were burnt deep into his heart. He was convinced that, unless the central government of the country was strengthened and made powerful, neither internal instability nor the recurring threats of foreign invasion could be successfully eliminated.

He was a bluff soldier, but he brought the vision of a statesman to bear upon his study of the Indian situation. It was obvious to this clear-headed man that, although the Marathas had been severely mauled at Panipat, they were still the only potent power in the country to bring peace and order to it. The Great Moghul was still there, but he was only a phantom and a plaything in the hands of intriguing ministers and ambitious usurpers. Muslim hegemony in India had been irretrievably destroyed after Aurangzeb's death.

But Mahadji was not a visionary. He knew that the name of the emperor evoked in millions of breasts sentiments which it was both impolitic and dangerous to ignore. He, therefore, drew up a master plan for Maratha dominion, with the puppet emperor as the central figure. The Peshwa, who enjoyed a plenitude of effective power, was to be the viceroy of the country, while he himself should assume the role of protector of the realm. It was a bold scheme conceived by an ambitious man, but Mahadji's ambitions were patriotic.

He built up an immense military force to put his plan into operation. He, however, realised that the success of his undertaking depended entirely upon the Peshwa's support. After all, the Sindhias were strangers to North India and their roots still lay in the Deccan. In fact, it was impossible to implement the scheme without the Peshwa's blessings, for he and he alone could neutralise opposition to it by other Maratha chiefs. The Holkar, for example, was not likely to enthuse over the scheme

unless it received the Poona Government's wholehearted support.

The failure of the Marathas to achieve mastery over India should in some measure be attributed to Poona's inability to strengthen the hands of its ablest feudatory. The untimely death of Peshwa Madhav Rao, who alone could have composed the Sindhia-Holkar tussle and lent his powerful support to Mahadji's plan, was thus a national tragedy. Tukoji Holkar was an able general but he was not a statesman. He was more anxious to frustrate Mahadji's work in Delhi than to ponder over the disastrous consequences of his misguided behaviour.

The Marathas had gained possession of the emperor's person and had taken him to Delhi from Allahabad, where, as a pensioner of the English Company, he had virtually been its prisoner. There was thus a golden opportunity for the Marathas to establish their influence in the capital on secure foundations and extend it all over the country through the medium of the nominal monarch. But to Tukoji the ascendancy of Mahadji in the councils of Delhi was a bitter pill which he was unwilling to swallow. This proud man made no bones about attaching himself to Najib-ud-daula, the Rohilla chief, at whose connivance Abdali had invaded India and fought against the Marathas.

Najib was, however, nearing his grave and in his desperate anxiety to secure for his successor peaceful enjoyment of his possessions, he sought reconciliation with his Maratha adversaries. Tukoji readily responded to his petition, but Mahadji firmly refused. "I require revenge," he declared, "for so much desolation and so many deaths, for the blood of my brothers and my nephews and my own perpetual mutilation; nor am I satisfied because my friend chooses to make this Mussalman noble his brother." He, however, added by way of an aside ;

"Nevertheless, I am the Peshwa's servant; and if he sanctions such an alliance my part is to obey."

This brief quotation reveals the character of Mahadji. He was not vindictive, but he did not easily forget a wrong. Najib was not a generous foe to deserve indulgence; he was one of those men who would plan sins even in penitence. Cowards, intriguers and treacherous men could never expect kindness from Mahadji, who, however, gave his all in gratitude to a friend or a benefactor. He always treated the humble Mussalman water-carrier, Rana Khan who had rescued him from the pit, like his own brother and gave him the command of his armies. The absolute confidence reposed by him in his brilliant general, de Boigne, though he was a foreigner, was a striking characteristic of this remarkable man.

Despite intrigues, Mahadji succeeded in establishing himself in Delhi. All would have been well for the emperor if he had shown consistency in his behaviour towards his benefactor. Surrounded by usurpers and hare-brained sycophants, he made the fatal mistake of yielding to "the cause of the Crescent". He came under the influence of Ghulam Kadir, who became Premier-noble, an office of undefined character.

Ghulam Kadir, once a distinguished nobleman, soon degenerated into a crazy ruffian. His demands upon the emperor for money to accommodate his clamorous followers became persistent. The indigent monarch's possessions consisted of nothing more than his faded mantle. But his persecutor believed with the intensity of an obsession that the old man was obstinately concealing a secret hoard from him. He plagued the emperor with gross insults and in a fit of mad fury blinded him. He ransacked the palace and dug up its glittering floor in a futile search for the mythical hidden treasure. Shah Alam told his tormentor: "If you suppose that I have

concealed any treasure it must be in my own body. Rip me up and see." He was generous and forgiving even in the extremity of his suffering, for he exclaimed: "God protect you; I am content with my fate."

Why did not Mahadji come to the rescue of the poor old man? It is probable that he did not anticipate that the events of the summer of 1788 would take such a ghastly turn. It is equally probable that he took a somewhat sardonic delight in seeing the emperor humbled by the very men who professed themselves to be his deliverers. Succour was, however, brought to Delhi and Shah Alam's persecutor was pursued, caught, blinded, mutilated and then hanged on a roadside tree. This terrible punishment was meted out to Ghulam Kadir by Sindhia's indignant soldiers before he was taken to their master. We have the testimony of the emperor himself that under Mahadji's protection he enjoyed security and comfort.

Shah Alam was a man of letters. In a Persian psalm, composed after he had been blinded by Ghulam Kadir, he wrote:

"Now that this young Afghan has destroyed the
dignity of my State,

I see none but Thee, O Most High! to have
pity on me;

Yet peradventure Timur Shah, my kinsman,
may come to my aid,

And Mahadji Sindhia—who is as a son to me—
will avenge my cause."

Incidentally, Timur Shah, son of the famous Durani of Panipat, had married Shah Alam's daughter.

Mahadji's hopes of building a strong empire, with the emperor as the pivot, were now destroyed. A blind imbecile could hardly be an appropriate instrument for the realisation of his grand plan. After Peshwa Madhav Rao's death the Poona Government, far from render-

ing him help, became a source of anxiety to him. On a few occasions he received military assistance from it, but his relations with Nana Phadnis, the astute Brahmin statesman, were, if correct, not very cordial. Meanwhile, Shah Alam dragged on his unhappy life, though Mahadji did everything to mitigate his sufferings. For two generations more he continued to live on the bounty of one benefactor after another till his exile to Burma by the British Government in India.

Mahadji was among those Indians who were the first to discover the need for a complete reorganisation of the Indian armies to suit the changed times. Indian methods had become obsolete, more especially in the wars against the disciplined troops of the foreign powers in the country. The great importance which the English and the French in India attached to peace-time training was realised by few Indian powers. More than at Panipat, Mahadji learnt an invaluable military lesson from the English. Though the Marathas emerged victorious in the Battle of Talegaon, Sindhia was not slow to discover that bad leadership on the part of the English accounted for their temporary defeat. His appreciation of the strength of the rising foreign power was soon confirmed when the apparently impregnable fort of Gwalior fell to Popham without the loss of a single soldier.

Mahadji began to raise his own armies on the European model. In this he was ably assisted by General de Boigne, "one of the most upright and able soldiers then in India." He had learned the art of warfare in good schools on the European continent. The new force he organised for his master gradually attained the strength of three brigades. It was a formidable armour, particularly when used against the armies of Indian powers. Some historians have expressed doubts whether such departures from the traditional Indian methods of warfare

were beneficial to Indian States in stemming the tide of foreign conquest.

Sir Alfred Lyall, for example, writes : " The regular troops and the cannon hampered those rapid daring marches and manoeuvres of light-armed cavalry—their dashing charges and dexterous retreats—which had for a hundred years won for the Marathas their victories over the unwieldy Moghul armies, and had on various occasions perplexed and discomfited the English commanders." A well-appointed army of regular infantry and field batteries necessarily entailed a heavy financial burden. It is a point for consideration whether the resources of the Indian States were adequate to maintain such an expensive military apparatus and to renovate it frequently. Moreover, one of the essential conditions for the maintenance of such armies in a high state of efficiency was an assured supply of competent commanders.

It is not known whether these considerations had ever occurred to Mahadji, but he seems to have realised the unwisdom of regarding his armies as invincible. The fact that he entertained a discreet awe for the English Company's troops, and diligently avoided a clash with them, helps one to the conclusion that the pride of possessing a new armour did not obscure his sense of realism. De Boigne, in whose judgment he had implicit faith, was perfectly clear in his own mind about the limitations of his corps. Before he laid down his office, he advised his successor " never to quarrel with the British, and rather disband his army than hazard it in a conflict with them." The sagacity of de Boigne and the Sindhia was not shared by the latter's successor, whose impetuous use of his armies led him to great disaster.

Mahadji has been described by a high authority as " a statesman and soldier of almost unsurpassed ability."

An English biographer, H. G. Keene, writes : " He changed the habits of men, gave a new direction to their thoughts, and prepared a social revolution. He did so because his aims were clear and reasonable, definitely conceived and resolutely pursued, without ignoring the continuity of human interests." Though he profoundly influenced the "habits of men", he himself remained unchanged. He preferred to be known as a simple village Patil, an humble office from which his father had risen to eminence. This extraordinary man made himself "a sovereign by calling himself a servant".

He was a shrewd judge of men. It is the weakness of common people to accept glitter and pomp as 'quintessences of reality'. He would not grudge them this meretricious satisfaction, though he himself despised such gauds with all his heart. Mahadji was cool, collected and courageous even in the darkest hour of defeat. His mind worked with the power of a dynamo when he was assailed by baffling difficulties. His loyalty to his comrades was proverbial and his gratitude admitted "neither stint nor oblivion." Sir Jadunath Sarkar, who calls him "the greatest and most successful Maratha general", sums up his career in these words :

"Mahadji Sindhia, a heroic personality, dominates the north-Indian history of his time like a Colossus. His resources were defective, his instruments and allies often played him false; many an anxious crisis he had to face. Even sympathetic Residents like James Anderson and William Palmer predicted his sure downfall. And yet in the end he triumphed over all. We see the intense religious feeling, modern nationalists may call it superstition, which formed the essence of his being. We see the deep family affection, the habitual meekness of spirit, the respect for venerable persons, which this strong and busy man

of action displayed even at the height of the earthly glory."

Mr. G. S. Sardesai quotes the following passage from the Poona Residency Correspondence :

"We see here month by month the difficulties that Mahadji had to struggle with, his diverse remedies, his inflexible determination which the English observers on the spot mistook for fatuous obstinacy, and his resounding success in the end. We also realize his suppleness, his moderation, his unwavering steadfastness to the English alliance, his royal gift of judging character and choosing his fittest instruments and the power of adhering to a clear cut policy in the midst of obscurity and distractions."

"The fame of his political sagacity," says Keene, "and the terror of his General's military skill and resolution were now acknowledged from the boundary of the Punjab to the frontier of Rohilkhand, from the Jumna to the Narbada."

Even so, he failed to realise his great dream of uniting the country under Maratha rule. But the fault was not his. It was impossible for any human agency to stem the moral disintegration that had overtaken its people. Mahadji died in his camp at Wanavdi near Poona (February 12, 1794) at the age of sixty-seven. With him disappeared all chances of establishing Maratha Raj in India.

20. MALHAR RAO HOLKAR

The forward policy inaugurated by Peshwa Baji Rao was beneficial to the Marathas in many ways. It saved them from sinking into illiberal parochialism and stultifying themselves by internecine bickerings. It inspired them to strive for the great goal that the illustrious founder of their State had set before them. And it enabled them to exercise in full measure their hitherto unexplored abilities. The talents of these gifted and enterprising people would have been lost to the nation if the Poona Government had adopted the short-sighted policy of isolation. It is true that later developments in Maharashtra betrayed the weakness of the confederacy, but the principle of expansion was in itself unexceptionable. The Maratha political organisation became amorphous and feeble only when Poona fell upon evil days and when its subordinate principalities began to pull apart like Plato's team to horses.

Malhar Rao Holkar was fortunate because he rose to prominence when the Marathas were still at the height of their glory. The dark and sinister shadow of disintegration that spread over Maharashtra some decades after his death was neither known nor anticipated during his long and brilliant career. Balaji Vishwanath, the man who founded the Peshwa dynasty, bestrode the Deccan like a colossus. He was a sagacious statesman, whose governing passion was to elevate the Marathas to the highest pinnacle of power and glory. In this stupendous task he enlisted the co-operation of all talented men, irrespective of their social status. Malhar Rao Holkar was among those fortunate Marathas who went

through a useful course of apprenticeship under this great Peshwa.

Malharji was born on March 16, 1693, in the village of Hol, near Jejuri on the banks of the river Nira in Poona district. He did not belong to a rich or aristocratic family. His father, Khanduji Virkar, was an humble official under the village Patil, and his mother hailed from Talode, a village in Khandesh. He belonged to the shepherd class. When he was about three years old, Malharji lost his father, and his rapacious relatives drove out his mother from their ancestral home. The widow was, however, a courageous woman and, gathering her little son in her arms, went away to Khandesh to live under the hospitable roof of her brother, Bhojraj Bargal.

There, in the village of Talode, Malharji grew up, pursuing his ancestral occupation. He did not then dream that a kindly destiny was shaping his future. Coming events, however, began to cast their shadow. One day Malharji had fallen fast asleep under a tree, after leaving his flock to graze, as usual. A cobra gently glided towards him and, spreading its hood, protected the comely face of the young shepherd from the scorching rays of the sun. His mother, who came with her son's midday meal, was paralysed with fear when she saw the strange spectacle.

She ran back to the village to apprise her brother of the terrible danger that threatened her son's life. The two came running to the tree and found the reptile still in the same posture. It, however, crawled away on seeing them. Malharji was awakened, but no harm had been done to him by the serpent. What the brother and sister had seen was something strange and inexplicable. They approached the learned Brahmin of the village to unravel the riddle for them. The wise man explained that the stars in their courses had ordained that one day

Malharji should become a great man. The story is probably apocryphal, but not so was the prophesy about his future greatness.

Bhojraj decided that his nephew should be commissioned with a job more exalted than that of a shepherd. He used his good offices with his master, Sardar Kadam Bande, to take Malharji into his service as a trooper. There the young shepherd soon outstripped his compeers in horsemanship, in the use of lance and sword, and in performing deeds of daring. In short, he took to the profession of arms like duck to water and won the appreciation of the Sardar. It was during this crucial period of his life that an event occurred which became a turning-point in his career.

Balaji Vishwanath had set out to Delhi on an important mission at the invitation of the emperor. He was accompanied by a large Maratha force which encamped in Khandesh *en route* to the capital. Malharji ardently desired to join the expedition. He importuned his uncle to get him permission to accompany the Maratha troops. By judicious solicitation, Bhojraj succeeded in persuading the commander to accept Malharji's offer. This was in 1717 when Malharji was twenty-four years old. It was a happy coincidence that Baji Rao, the future Peshwa, was in his father's retinue. The two young men came together frequently. The acquaintance then formed ripened into a warm friendship, which the two bore towards each other till the premature death of Baji Rao.

During the journey to Delhi and back Malhar Rao gave ample proofs of his distinguished qualities as a soldier. But he also revealed that he was hot-tempered—a weakness that sometimes led him into difficult situations. One day Malhar Rao ordered his troops to cut standing crops in a field to feed his horses. Young Baji

Rao protested against such wanton acts of destruction, involving ruin to the peasants. Malhar Rao resented his admonition and, not realising what he was doing, flung a clod of earth at his illustrious companion. Baji Rao, however, forgave the rashness of the young man—a gesture which the Holkar cherished with gratitude till the end of his life.

Malhar Rao returned to his uncle's home laden with riches and fame. Gratified by his nephew's rising career, the old man bestowed on him his daughter, Gautamabai, in marriage. It was a happy choice, for it gave much domestic felicity to Malhar Rao. He was by temperament rash, while his wife was a woman of great mental serenity. She was pious and played no small part in mending her husband's angularities. He acquired from her the great but rare gift of moderation. She certainly encouraged his ambitions, but she also endeavoured to keep them within bounds. She was altogether a woman of exceptional abilities—quiet but firm, religious but mindful of her worldly obligations.

Malhar Rao's military talents blossomed out under the inspiring leadership of Baji Rao, who assumed the office of Peshwa after the death of his father, Balaji Vishwanath, on April 2, 1720. Baji Rao was not merely a "heaven-born cavalry leader". He was a consummate political and military strategist. He was convinced that the end of the great house of Babar was drawing near and it was his ambition to make the Marathas "competent receivers" of the vanishing empire. He decided to hasten its demise and made careful plans to accomplish his great project.

He knew that it would not be possible to deliver hammer-blows at Delhi from Poona. It was, therefore, necessary to plant Maratha authority close to the capital. Malwa was rich and strategically important. By

wresting it from the feeble hands of the Moghuls, he could use it as a jumping-off ground for striking at the heart of the empire. Malwa thus became an obvious choice for Maratha conquest. Moreover, the new acquisition could be transformed into a buffer state to ward off aggressions against Maharashtra.

The success of this system of political and military fortifications, which in some ways anticipated the East India Company's famous "ring fence" policy in Bengal, depended a great deal upon the degree of co-operation that the Peshwa could obtain from his lieutenants in the northern province. It is a tribute to his own greatness and to the steadfast loyalty of Holkar and Sindhia that he received their wholehearted collaboration in this great enterprise. Malhar Rao was more fortunate than others because he had the rare privilege of serving Maharashtra under four outstanding Peshwas in succession. Throughout his long and eventful career, soldiering became his major preoccupation. He took part in most of the important campaigns which the Marathas fought against their enemies. His military services were frequently sought by the Poona Government. Whether it was to reduce a refractory vassal to submission or to teach the Nizam a lesson, or to re-establish Maratha hegemony in the south or to augment the Peshwa's armies for the conquest of the north, it became necessary to enlist Malhar Rao's active co-operation.

Having thus fought in different and far-flung areas and engaged enemies of different calibre, the Holkar acquired a tremendous insight into contemporary modes of warfare in the country—an experience the sagacious Peshwas were not slow to utilize to Maharashtra's best advantage. Malhar Rao did not invent any new military tactics, but he perfected the guerilla warfare which, more than any other strategy, had won an empire for the

Marathas under the inspiring leadership of Shivaji. It is small wonder, therefore, that Malhar Rao's fame as a dashing general, and as one of the ablest exponents of the strategy of lightning attacks and abrupt retirement spread far and wide.

The Holkar took a prominent part in Baji Rao's campaigns in Malwa and so signal were his services to the Peshwa that he was granted a generous share in the revenues of that rich province. He was, in addition, invested with the distinction of carrying *Jaripatka*, an insignia of high office. Baji Rao, who had made careful preparations for the conquest of the north, set out on his famous expedition to Delhi in 1736. It was only natural that on this historic occasion he should be accompanied by his trusted generals, Malhar Rao Holkar and Ranoji Sindhia. The Moghuls became panicky, but decided to give battle to the invaders from the Deccan. They collected a large army and marched against the Marathas under the command of Sadat Khan, the Nawab Wazier of Oudh.

In March 1737 the Holkar's contingent, ordered to engage the imperial armies, was worsted. Malhar Rao had great difficulty in getting across the Jumna and re-joining the Peshwa who was then at Gwalior. Sadat Khan was an energetic soldier but he was vainglorious. He foolishly believed that the Holkar's temporary discomfiture amounted to the annihilation of the entire Maratha army! He wrote a flamboyant letter to the emperor, telling his credulous majesty that the Marathas would soon be driven back to their rugged retreats in the Deccan. The emperor, whose vision of the world did not go beyond the four walls of his palace, accepted fiction as fact and celebrated the mythical victory with great eclat! Baji Rao was naturally incensed at the light-heartedness of the emperor and his bragging Wazier. "I

will prove to the emperor, " he exclaimed, " that he has not heard the truth, by showing him Maratha horse at the gates of Delhi. "

He was as good as his word. By rapid marches, unsuspected by the enemy, he appeared before the capital and sent word to the terror-stricken emperor that he was at his gates. Baji Rao was too generous a foe to despoil the imperial city. To reassure its citizens, he moved his camp to some distance from Delhi. While the terms of the peace treaty were still under negotiation, a large Moghul army marched against the Maratha camp. In the battle that ensued the victory of the Marathas was complete. The victorious army was led by the Peshwa in person and by Malhar Rao Holkar and Ranoji Sindhia. A more decisive trial of strength, however, took place later. Smarting under the humiliation of defeat, the emperor made earnest appeals to the Nizam to uphold the honour of his House by wreaking vengeance upon the Marathas. In a moment of weakness, the Nizam agreed to attempt the impossible.

He proceeded to Delhi and, collecting a large army, marched towards Bhopal. The Peshwa, who had gone south to consult his sovereign on certain domestic affairs, set out to meet the hostile army. He crossed the Narmada early in December 1737 and, keeping his communications under strict control, watched for an opportunity to push the Moghuls " by his guerilla tactics into an untenable position. " It was, as Mr. Sardesai says, " the momentous struggle of his life. " Despite his vast military experience, the Nizam walked into the Peshwa's trap by shutting himself up in the fortified town of Bhopal. The town was besieged by the Marathas with the utmost rigour and, in less than a week's time, the trapped enemy was faced with acute hunger. In the famous battle of Tal Bhopal, Malhar Rao Holkar and

Yeshwant Rao Pawar greatly distinguished themselves and their services were warmly commended by the Peshwa. Besides ceding extensive territory, the Nizam paid a fine of Rs. 50 lakhs to the Marathas.

It is unnecessary to dwell at further length on Malhar Rao Holkar's military exploits. He served the Peshwa with distinction and was overcome with profound grief when Baji Rao died prematurely in April 1740. He readily swore allegiance to the new Peshwa, Balaji Baji Rao, with whom his relations remained cordial. When the ascendancy of the Marathas was established in Delhi, the emperor tried to win over the Holkar by offering him territory. "I am the Peshwa's servant," replied the noble Maratha, "without his consent I cannot accept any reward." Even so his integrity was questioned. His expedition to the Punjab in 1757 under Raghunath Rao was a great military success, but financially it proved a Pyrrhic victory. Sadashiv Rao Bhau, cousin of the Peshwa, roundly accused the Holkar of having kept for himself large sums of money without accounting for them. Whatever the facts may have been, Malhar Rao paid off sixty lakhs of rupees, but the estrangement between the two men seems to have endured.

Another charge brought against him is about his behaviour in the Battle of Panipat. The fact that he was not on intimate terms with Sadashiv Rao, who commanded the Maratha army, has lent plausibility to the accusation that Malhar Rao did not enthusiastically support his leader. The probability is that the Holkar, who had been trained in the school of guerilla warfare, did not appreciate Bahu Saheb's departure from it on such a momentous occasion and against such a powerful enemy as Abdali. Expert opinion is bound to differ on the soundness of the Holkar's view. But we might accept Mr. Sardesai's judicious appraisal of his attitude during those

fateful days. "Malhar Rao," says the historian, "had lost the spirit of his youth, and the infirmities of age were having their effect on him."

But history cannot overlook Malhar Rao's partiality for Najib Khan, the Rohilla adventurer, at whose instigation Abdali decided to fight the Marathas at Panipat. Najib, according to the estimate of a co-religionist of his, was 'a vulgar upstart'. It was this man whom Malhar Rao shielded even after the disaster of Panipat and thus invited the suspicion of his countrymen about the purity of his motives. But mistakes are made even by great men, for infallibility is a goal achieved only by a blessed few.

Malhar Rao did not live long after Panipat. His last days were clouded by defeat, distress and anxiety. The easy victory which Major Fletcher scored over him in 1765, one year before his death, pronounced the doom of the guerilla warfare of which he had so long been an ardent champion. No other reverse had shaken this veteran soldier more than his defeat at the hands of the English. The problem of succession was yet another cause for his deep distress. His only son, Khanderao, had been killed in 1754 by a stray shot in the Battle of Kumbher. His grandson, Malerao, was still a minor. He, however, succeeded in securing Poona's assent to his grandson's accession to the Indore *gadi*. The end of the aged warrior was now drawing near. The ailment began with pain in the ear. Further complications besieged a body worn out by the hardships of camp life. Malhar Rao passed away at Alampur on May 20, 1766.

Malhar Rao was undoubtedly a brave and skilful general, but he belonged to the old school and was rather tardy in recognising that the science of war, like every other science, is not static. He was, however, fortunate in his wife, the sagacious and high-minded Gautatmabai,

who exercised a great restraining influence upon him. He was devoted to religion and was an ardent disciple of Brahmendra Swami, who, by his stirring exhortations to the Marathas, kept alive the great and glorious traditions of Ramdas Swami. Though of humble origin, Malhar Rao succeeded in winning a principality for himself and his descendants. Like the Sindhia, he was instrumental in permanently planting Maratha influence in the heart of India. For this achievement his name will live.

21. HAIDAR ALI

An English soldier who fought Haidar Ali wrote thus : " Many have compared the military genius and character of Haider Ali to those of the renowned Frederick the Second, King of Prussia; and indeed, when we consider the distinguished abilities of that prince amongst his contemporaries in this country, and the intrepid manner by which he established himself upon the throne of Mysore, and extended his dominions, one cannot but allow the simile to be exceedingly just." This is not a small tribute, coming as it does from an adversary whose nation was forced to wage bitter and bloody wars with Haidar and his son.

Haidar was an extraordinary man and it would have been surprising if, with his vast and versatile talents, he had lived and died in obscurity. The situation in Mysore was most favourable for his rapid ascent to power. The ruling house of the State had lost its original vigour and strength. Chikka Krishna Raja Wodeyar II (1734-1766) was an amiable prince, but he was utterly devoid of kingly qualities. Coming under the domination of two avaricious brothers, Devaraja and Nanjaraja, he had retired into the recesses of his palace, nursing his hatred for the tyrants with impotent rage.

The younger brother in particular, was a thoroughly undesirable person. Some talent and virtues have been attributed to him but they were not much in evidence in his administration. The humiliations that he heaped on the devoted head of the prince bordered on barbarism. He was, moreover, destitute of all political wisdom. His passion to annex Trichinopoly was as foolish as it was overpowering. Lured by the meretricious promises of

Muhammad Ali, the notorious ally of the English in the South, Nanjaraja ruined the finances of Mysore and undermined the morale of his army by his repeated failures to meet its demands.

A State which exhibited such appalling weakness in its domestic affairs and which was constantly assailed by the Marathas and the Nizam could not possibly retain its independence unless its destiny was confided to the care of a wise and strong ruler. It was not Haidar Ali's fault that he supplied this need by establishing himself on the throne of Mysore. Technically, he was, of course, guilty of usurpation, but he was not the first offender. Nor can it be forgotten that in a country not governed by constitutional principles, the only stable factor is the personality and character of its ruler. If ability is the criterion for wielding authority, as indeed it should be, neither the Wodeyar rulers of Haidar's time nor the two domineering brothers deserved to be invested with power. And is it not a revealing commentary on the sorry state of affairs then obtaining in Mysore that an obscure and unlettered man should have succeeded in seizing its government ?

Haidar Ali Khan did not claim any lofty lineage. His great-grandfather was an immigrant from the Punjab, and the family was noted for its piety. Haidar's father Fatte Muhammad was however, made of sterner stuff and the placid life of prayerful inaction did not suit his restless temperament. He accordingly chose the profession of arms, in which he attained some distinction. He died in an action in 1729 when Haidar, born in 1722 at Budikote, was still a boy. Robbed and persecuted by relatives, the family migrated to Bangalore in search of better fortune. Whether it was due to his own repugnance or to the poverty of his mother, Haidar failed to acquire education in the fashion of his family tradition.

But this omission was not a great disadvantage to a man destined to learn his lessons from the abiding school of life.

War and its instruments exercised a strange fascination on young Haidar's mind. He acquired great skill as a rider, and his reputation as an unerring marksman drew the attention of the men in authority. He also became an accomplished swordsman. Above all, he gave unmistakable proofs of courage and resourcefulness in serious situations. This remarkable capacity of remaining cool and unperturbed even in the face of grave danger at once distinguished him from the common soldier. Equipped with these superb qualities, he joined the State army as a trooper. It was, however, impossible for a man like him to remain long in that humble position. Having acquired personal wealth during one of the expeditions of the Mysore forces in the South, he soon began to recruit men under his own banner.

It is not easy to determine when exactly Haidar conceived the bold plan of seizing the sovereignty of Mysore, but his latent ambitions must have received a great stimulus after his appointment as the Fouzdar of Dindigul, a place which had been annexed to the State in 1745. He had under his command an army consisting of 5,000 regular infantry, 2,500 horse, 2000 peons and six guns. With the aid of European deserters, he drilled and disciplined his troops and judiciously augmented their strength by diverting the revenues of his Fouzdari for this purpose. It was, of course, a small force, but it was probably the most effective corps in the Mysore Army. From the outset, Haidar spared neither labour nor money to ensure the efficiency of his fighting instrument.

Perhaps, Haidar would never have attained the pinnacle of power if he had merely collected a medley of mercenaries around him. He had seen with his own eyes

in the South how small contingents trained and led by Europeans could rout immense armed hordes. He did not underestimate the fighting qualities of Indian soldiers, for he had witnessed the formidable striking power of the Marathas, but he was convinced that the 'armies' which the English and French fought in the South did not deserve that appellation. Consisting largely of professional soldiers, drawn from all parts of India, they lacked both discipline and coherence. The number of such men in the country was, according to one good contemporary authority, two million ! They roved the whole of India, freely selling their services and deserting their masters with alacrity at the prospect of long marches or hard fighting. Haidar decided not to burden himself with such a crowd of mutinous soldiery who were of no better calibre than the *condottiere* of Italy in the sixteenth century.

Whatever apprehensions the ruling clique might have felt about Haidar's growing strength, the impasse which faced the domestic and foreign affairs of Mysore compelled it to seek his aid. With an ill-organised army, clamouring for the disbursement of its salaries which had fallen into arrears for many months, and being totally incapable of repelling the invasions of the Marathas and the Nizam, the dictator helplessly looked up to his former protege to extricate him from the difficult situation in which he by his own folly had involved himself and the State. It suited Haidar's plans to oblige his benefactor by himself assuming responsibility for cleansing the Augean stables in the administration. Without naming his price, he exacted it by dislodging all his rivals. By 1761 he had attained complete mastery over the affairs of Mysore. It is a measure of his political astuteness that his elevation provoked no serious convulsions in the State.

It was not a small achievement for the son of a common soldier of fortune to win sovereignty over a State of

Mysore's importance, to extend his sway over the Malabar coast, to neutralise the Nizam's aggression and to bite off big slices of Maratha territory in the South. It looked as though his military brilliance would bring the whole of South India under his dominion. Perhaps, he could have attained this grand object, if he had not come into collision with two formidable powers in the course of his conquests. It is astonishing that this man of great natural genius, who had raised himself entirely by superior daring and sound military instincts, failed to realise that he could not fulfil his mission by making enemies of everyone. There was in fact not a single State in the South that looked upon his rise with favour or sympathy.

Perhaps, Haidar's greatest political blunder was his antagonism with the Marathas. It ought to have been evident to a man of his vision that by incurring their enmity, he was reducing his own project of expelling the English from the South to a chimera. Peshwa Madhav Rao was a chivalrous foe and he would probably have saved Haidar from the humiliation of defeat and its disastrous consequences to his military strength, if he had shown a reasonable spirit of accommodation. The English, more astute than the Mysore ruler, acted with greater prudence in their dealings with the Marathas. "It was", writes Sir Alfred Lyall, "very fortunate for the English that they did not come into collision with such antagonists until their own strength had matured; since there can be no doubt that throughout the later stages of the tournament for the prize of ascendancy between England and the native powers, our most dangerous challengers were the Marathas." Surely, Haidar could not presume that he was more formidable than the English.

Another mistake which he committed was in fighting the English single-handed. It is true that the first Mysore War somewhat tilted the scales in his favour, but his temporary gains were largely due to the imbecility of the Madras Government. He realised, rather belatedly, that his foreign enemies drew their real strength and prosperity from the sea. Haidar's naval power, if at all it deserved that name, was hopelessly inadequate to deal with the greatest maritime nation in the world. His reliance upon French help was little more than a desperate expedient, for France's preparation to establish her dominion in India lacked the thoroughness of her rival's. Neither Dupleix nor Lally, nor any other French genius, could deflect the course of history in India.

Haidar's defeat in the Battle of Porto Novo (July 1, 1781) compelled him to change his opinion of the English. He is stated to have confided his feelings to his great Minister, Purnaiya, in these terms: "I have committed a great error. I have purchased a draught of *sendi* (spirits) at the price of a lakh of pagodas; I shall pay dearly for my arrogance; between me and the English there were perhaps mutual grounds of dissatisfaction, but not sufficient cause for war, and I might have made them my friends in spite of Muhammad Ali, the most treacherous of men. The defeat of many Baillies and Braithwaites will not destroy them. I can ruin their resources by land, but I cannot dry up the sea; and I must be the first to weary of a war in which I can gain nothing by fighting."

Greater men have made worse miscalculations than Haidar and we should, therefore, guard ourselves against underestimating his achievements. M. M. D. L. T., who has written an appreciative book on Haidar and his son Tipu Sultan, gives a graphic description of the personality of the former. "The countenance of Hyder," he says,

"though not handsome, is open, and calculated to inspire confidence. He has not acquired the habit of disguising his aspect, which is either gay or overspread with chagrin, according to the occasions that present themselves. He possesses a facility of conversing on any subject and has none of that stateliness and taciturnity which almost all the other princes of the East affect to preserve." Haidar, according to the same authority, administered justice with impartiality and gave great encouragement to agriculture and commerce. He was indulgent to his subjects, but strict in the discipline of his army, severe in punishing the offenders and cruel to his enemies. Foolish pride did not taint his character.

Haidar Ali Khan was remarkably free from all religious prejudices. "It was", writes Wilks, "his avowed and public opinion that all religions proceed from God, and are all equal in the sight of God; and it is certain that the mediatory power represented by Rangaswami, the great idol in the temple of Seringapatam, had as much, if not more, of his respect than all the Imams, with Mohammed at their head." This great and excellent prince had little respite to pursue the arts of peace. War, it has been well said, first brought him to notice, and engaged in war he died. Though unlettered—he could not even sign his name—he showed a remarkable grasp over the details of his administration. He spoke Hindustani, Kannada, Marathi, Telugu and Tamil fluently. Haidar, who owed his eminence to his own exertions, passed away on December 7, 1782. He was succeeded by Tipu, whose solitary resemblance to his father was his physical courage and military skill. Haidar, in the words of Wilks, "uniformly, earnestly, and broadly" predicted that his son would "lose the empire which he himself had gained". The prediction did not go wrong.

22. BAPU GOKHALE

The fall of the Marathas, like the fall of any virile nation, constitutes a melancholy chapter in the history of India. In all ages and climes there is a striking similarity in the eclipse of empires. Foolish and incompetent rulers and internal disunity, accompanied by the moral disintegration of the people, have played a great part in hastening the ruin of powerful nations. To take a well-known example, the Romans, who carried the torch of civilisation to the four corners of Europe and who gave the world the inestimable gift of the rule of law, were themselves overrun by barbarians when virtue and wisdom departed from their councils. The last phase of the Moghul history teaches us the same lesson.

The assumption of Peshwaship by Baji Rao II was a national disaster. Apart from his handsome personality, he was totally destitute of the great and noble qualities of his distinguished grandfather whose honoured name he bore. The foundation of Swaraj, which Shivaji had laid by his heroism and statesmanship, was consolidated and broad-based by the four Peshwas who adorned the Indian firmament like luminous stars. Sir Richard Temple, not accustomed to lavish superlative eulogy, writes about them in terms amounting to rapture. He says : "None of the many lines of Hindu sovereigns in India has ever shown a series of rulers equal to the Peshwas."

Balaji Vishwanath, a sane and sagacious statesman, Baji Rao I, the incomparable general, Balaji Baji Rao, the intrepid ruler who carried Maratha arms to the far corners of India, and Madhav Rao I, the precocious Peshwa who retrieved the disaster of Panipat, were all

giants whose abilities and achievements compare most favourably with those of the finest men in any other country. Maharashtra would probably have saved herself from the ignominy of defeat and dissolution had their successors shown even a modicum of their virtues. It is perhaps correct to say that the doom of the Maratha empire was sealed with the untimely death of Madhav Rao on November 18, 1772.

Neither by birth nor for reasons of ability was Baji Rao II entitled to the exalted office of Peshwa; but the amazing calamities that overtook the successors of Madhav Rao put him in that position. The great Nana Phadnis strove in vain to exclude this man from all positions of trust and responsibility. Perhaps he would have succeeded had he acted with energy. The humiliations that the young man and his depraved associates inflicted on the worn-out statesman hastened his premature death, which occurred on March 13, 1799. It was not difficult for observers to see that the glory of Maharashtra departed with the Nana. Colonel Palmer, the British Resident at Poona, wrote to the Governor-General: "With Nana has departed all the wisdom and moderation of the Maratha Government." To quote Sir Richard Temple again: "Maratha administration lost all vestiges of honesty and efficiency by the death of the great Minister."

The character of Nana Phadnis was certainly not above reproach. He was ambitious and fond of power and his behaviour during the last phase of his life, when he was stripped of all authority and insulted, was indefensible. Nevertheless, he was a passionate lover of national independence and was one of the few Maratha statesmen who viewed with alarm the rising strength of the English. Throughout his life he laboured to consolidate Maharashtra in order to defend Swaraj from the peril

of foreign conquest. Perhaps, everything that was wicked and absurd in the character of Baji Rao II could have been condoned and even forgotten if only he had allowed himself to be guided by Nana and his trusted companions after the Minister's death.

But Baji Rao did nothing of the kind. He was a man of straw, cowardly, vulgar, rapacious and dissolute. It is indeed impossible not to marvel at the calculated malevolence of fate which put this unworthy person in a pivotal position, especially at a time when the great Maratha nation could have been saved only by a ruler of exceptional abilities. Baji Rao did not have to wade through fratricidal blood to ascend the Peshwa's *gadli*, but his elevation was abhorred by all the saner elements in the State. Attempts to replace him precipitated a civil war, which destroyed the unity of Maharashtra.

It did not take the Peshwa many years to antagonise his people. His association with upstarts and perverts, his ruthless exactions and the utter depravity of his private life filled them with dismay and resentment. Daulatrao Sindhia, a hare-brained and immature youth, and his crazy father-in-law, Sarzerao, became the Peshwa's intimate friends. The number of evil men by whom he surrounded himself was legion, but particular mention should be made of Trimbakji Dingle, the patil of an obscure village, whose absurd pranks against the British hastened the downfall of his master. In the black record of Baji Rao it is difficult to single out any particular episode; so fatally consistent were his misbehaviour and recklessness that one is dumb-founded at his folly. Here was signal confirmation of Burke's famous dictum that "a great empire and little minds go ill together."

No self-respecting man, not to speak of the head of a State which cherished the ambition of becoming heir

to the Moghul empire, could accept the hospitality of a power which was planning the destruction of his own dominion. During the civil war, despite the entreaties and solemn assurances of Yeshwantrao Holkar, the Peshwa ran away from his capital and signed the notorious Treaty of Bassein (December 31, 1802), bartering away the independence of a State that had been created and built up with the assiduous labour and sacrifice of countless men and women. When the news of the compact reached Poona, the Holkar rightly exclaimed: "Baji Rao has destroyed the Maratha State. Now the British will deal the same blow to it that they did to Tipu Sultan."

The restoration of the fugitive Peshwa to his office was utilised by the British as an occasion to demonstrate their military strength in order to overawe the Maratha people and their chiefs. Colonel Wellesley, who later became famous as the conqueror of Napoleon, marched to Poona from the South and sent intimation of his arrival to Colonel Close, who left Bassein for the Maratha capital as Baji Rao's escort. The impressions gathered by the future Duke of Wellington about the Peshwa during his stay in Poona are of melancholy interest. He wrote: "He (Baji Rao) has no public feeling and his private disposition is terrible. He is without subjects except when a British force is actually at his back, and he has no desires except money for sensual pleasures and that what he called 'rebels' should be caught by his protectors and handed over to his vengeance." The knowledge that there was not a single responsible person in Maharashtra to support the Peshwa did not deter the British from dealing with him as the head of the Maratha State. But then empires are not won by following the path of rectitude.

The Peshwa, though smarting under the humiliation which he himself had invited by accepting British paramountcy, was not averse to indulging in carnal pleasures. Here is a contemporary report of Baji Rao's life after he became a vassal of the British. "The Shrimant", says a reporter, "is now quiet and happy with his routine of baths and prayers, eating, drinking and making merry, having no bother of any outside concern. During the four monsoon months he has on hand religious rites for which eminent priests have been requisitioned. Sumptuous dinners with profuse decorations for plates and sweet music are arranged daily." Considerations of decency forbid further quotations from this report, which also refers to the Peshwa's profligacy.

Are we to wonder then that this man, who could descend to any depth of degradation, was the cause of Maratha downfall? Ranged against this imbecile were men of outstanding ability and discernment. It is indeed a remarkable coincidence that at a time when the Maratha State had reached the twilight of its existence, the East India Company claimed in its ranks soldiers and administrators of undoubted talents. While from distant Calcutta Lord Wellesley wove a magnificent web of diplomacy against the indigenous powers, his brilliant brother pushed forward the frontiers of English dominion in India by a series of decisive victories over them. Both were ably supported by a band of Residents who, being animated by the highest sense of patriotism, overlooked no opportunity to create disorder and confusion in Indian courts and eventually assist in their overthrow. We have only to recall the names of British Residents in Poona from the year of Baji Rao's accession till his deposition in 1818 to realise that the dice had been heavily loaded against the Peshwa.

Nevertheless, Baji Rao could have salvaged his State from total ruin and remained a feudatory of the British if there had been any stability in his character. He was proud of his position but he did not know how to protect it by honourable means. He practised duplicity and dissimulation against the very men who were inured to such strategy, in the hope that by such devices he could release himself from British thralldom. He was living in a fool's paradise, for Mountstuart Elphinstone, the Resident at Poona, guarded the interests of his nation with the unsleeping eyes of Argus. He had in his pay some of the trusted servants of the Peshwa and his secret service was superb.

There was one man, Bapu Gokhale, who felt the humiliation of Maharashtra under British suzerainty more deeply than his master. The Treaty of Bassein was a bitter drench which it was impossible for him to swallow. He yearned for the renewal of Maratha glory and was willing to sacrifice everything for its attainment. And yet he was not an enemy of the British. He had accompanied Wellesley in the latter's expedition to suppress the rebellion of Dhondia Wagh. He knew the military methods of the British and admired their sense of discipline. He was on excellent terms with Captain Ford who commanded the subsidiary force stationed at Kirkee. The British on their part esteemed him for his courage, his uprightness and his soldierly qualities.

Even so, he preferred patriotism to personal advancement. He had no illusions about the abominable character of his master. In fact, he nursed a bitter resentment against Baji Rao's affront to his family honour. But to this valiant soldier the call of patriotism was irresistible. The British were probably honourable men, upright and able, but what could they offer to Indians except slavery? Was not misgovernment under Swaraj

more palatable than even good government under alien aegis ? The evils of misrule could be removed by contriving a dynastic revolution, but what remedy was there against a firmly entrenched foreign dominion ? Such thoughts decided Gokhale's course of action.

There were not many in Maharashtra who shared his noble views. Many able men, perhaps abler than Gokhale, allowed their minds to be clouded by the appalling behaviour of the Peshwa. They loathed his very name and would not have spared a single tear if he were to be hounded out of his State. They were right in their contempt for the man, but they failed to realise that upon the Peshwa alone depended the future of the State. So, when Baji Rao decided to attack the Residency there were few who supported him. All his advisers, save Bapu Gokhale, endeavoured to dissuade him from such a course. Gokhale himself had probably no doubt in his mind about the rashness of the undertaking. But his proud and sensitive heart could not endure the stalemate in the Maratha-British relations. He desired to do or die, for he was convinced that one day a collision with the British was inevitable. He knew his master well; the timid and vacillating Baji Rao would not allow him a free hand in organising an army of liberation. The capricious Peshwa was now in a mood to fight. Why not grasp the opportunity ?

The attack on the Residency was launched and, being ill-defended, it fell into Maratha hands. The Peshwa was now at war with the British and victory on the field of battle alone could save him. Both sides prepared for a decisive battle. On November 5, 1817, the two armies went into action. While the issue was still undecided, the cowardly Peshwa lost heart and peremptorily ordered Bapu Gokhale to retire to his camp at Ganeshkhind. His pusillanimity and his foolish inter-

ference with Gokhale's conduct of the campaign were responsible for the defeat of the Marathas in the Battle of Kirkee. Perhaps, the situation could have been retrieved, for Gokhale had now received powerful reinforcements from many Maratha chiefs, if the Peshwa had not beaten a precipitate retreat to Purandhar. Nothing was probably more fatal to his cause than his desertion of the capital which fell into the hands of the victorious British.

Thenceforward the head of the Marathas became a fugitive, hunted from pillar to post by his enemies. "While Gokhale and his men were trying to make a determined stand," writes an eye-witness, "the Shrimant ran away at night, his troops lost courage and his State and the capital with all the treasure easily fell into British hands." The role of the unfortunate Gokhale was suddenly reversed. The war of independence, which he had planned to wage against the British, ended in a dream. It now became his urgent and only preoccupation to save his fleeing master from falling a captive into the hands of his determined enemies. He performed this task with unexampled perseverance and loyalty, although he realised the futility of his undertaking.

The Peshwa beat a retreat with amazing celerity. Each day he covered vast distances by rapid marches. The faithful Gokhale followed him, intercepting and harassing the British forces. His son died of exhaustion, but the brave and loyal general did not give up the thankless task. At last he was forced to give battle to General Smith at Asta, where he was killed (February 19, 1818). Henry T. Prinsep, whose book was published in 1820, describes the battle thus: "A gale, led by Gokla, was charged by the troop of dragoons in the most gallant manner, on which occasion that distinguished chief was himself slain. He died bravely, having wounded several of our men with

his own hand before he fell, and amongst the rest Lieutenant Warrand, of the 22nd Dragoons, the first who attacked him."

The author pays a handsome tribute to Gokhale, the last Maratha general who died like a hero in defence of his country. "Bapu Gokhale was reputed a good soldier; he was one of the soldiers who accompanied the Duke of Wellington throughout his campaigns in the Dukhun, during the Mahratta war, and was then well esteemed for his services and general character, insomuch as to be particularly recommended to the favour of the Peshwa's government on the close of that war, besides deriving other substantial advantages from the general's good opinion. He had subsequently been yet more deeply indebted to the British government, which more than once interfered to secure his possessions from his master's rapacity, at a time when the latter was stimulated by private pique, as well as by avarice, to aim at his ruin."

Prinsep, however, wrongs the subject of his eulogy by adding: "These benefits were of course forgotten, as soon as ambition and the desire of restoring the Mahratta empire to its ancient splendour became the ruling passions of his soul." What the British author regards as a blemish in Gokhale's character, namely, the desire of restoring the Maratha empire to its ancient glory, is in the eyes of the brave general's countrymen a noble virtue, which entitles him to an honoured place in the Indian history. It would be irrelevant to follow the fortunes of the Peshwa after the flame of Maratha independence flickered with the death of Bapu Gokhale. It is sufficient to say that very soon after the disaster of Asta, Nemesis overtook the man who played traitor to his country and people.

In retrospect, we might reflect that, after the Treaty of Bassein, the course of Indian history would have taken no different turn even if the Peshwa had remained loyal to British paramountcy. In any case, Sardar Patel would have made a short meal of the Poona State if it had survived as one among the five hundred odd subordinate principalities. What is more important is the need to ponder over the lesson that Baji Rao's blunders have to teach us and to the generations that will succeed us. It is difficult to win independence, but it is even more difficult to retain and consolidate it. A renegade in position could encompass the ruin of a strong empire. Mr. Sardesai, whose masterly study of Maratha history comprehends an illuminating analysis of the causes of Maratha downfall, makes an earnest appeal to the nation to "brace ourselves for the new tasks that are awaiting the free India of today". This is the lesson Baji Rao's perfidy and Bapu Gokhale's sacrifice should teach us.

23. RANJIT SINGH

Guru Gobind Singh gave the Sikhs a powerful weapon with which to establish their ascendancy in the Punjab. The martial heritage bequeathed by him survived even after the discontinuance of the institution of guru-ship. The political situation in the Land of the Five Rivers was ideal for imposing Sikh supremacy over that province. The frequent invasions of India by Ahmad Shah Abdali boded no good to the government of Delhi. Presided over by a succession of weak kings, the Moghul empire was reduced to pieces. The Punjab, a pivotal province of the empire, was wrested by the Afghan king from the feeble hands of the emperors. For the Sikhs, intent on destroying Delhi's sovereignty, this was a welcome development. The seat of the invader's government lay in distant Afghanistan and his visits to India, however frequent, could not be a greater deterrent to Sikh expansion than a strongly entrenched power in Delhi.

The indignities and reverses which the Sikhs suffered at the hands of Abdali were by no means negligible, but their capacity for recovery remained unaffected. Aware of the superiority that the invaders enjoyed, both in numerical strength and military equipment, they wisely refrained from engaging the Afghan armies in pitched battles. They, however, gave unmistakable proofs of their waxing power by harassing the Shah's troops and causing destruction to his baggage and lines of communication. In the formative stage of their growth the Sikhs could not accomplish more to stop the recurring invasions of India.

For over seventy years, which intervened between the death of Guru Gobind Singh (1708) and the birth of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780), the Punjab was denied the blessings of firm rule. Apart from the ineptitude of Moghul and Afghan authority, the tenets of Sikhism and the temper of its adherents did not conduce to the establishment of a unitary government in that province. The Jats, comprising the biggest element in the Sikh community, were slow to appreciate the advantage of stable conditions. Their conception of loyalty and obedience to organised authority did not go beyond their immediate environment. Moreover, the principles of the Khalsa, namely, liberty and equality, as understood by the rugged Jat peasants, were not calculated to broaden the mental horizon of the brotherhood. It was felt that submission to the agents of a distant and unknown authority amounted to the negation of the very doctrine which drew them in such large numbers into the fold of Sikhism.

It became increasingly clear that, in order to rescue the community from its parochial outlook, the advent of a strong man was necessary. Nevertheless, the *misl*s or confederacies, into which the Sikh barons had organised themselves, served a useful purpose. In the then condition of the province the very fluidity of the organisation was to the advantage of the Sikhs. Daring and resourceful leaders captured small territories and governed them as best they could. They constantly strove to enlarge their acquisition and their success or failure depended on their own exertions. This process of expansion, in which about a dozen *misl*s participated, hastened the establishment of Sikh hegemony over a large portion of the Punjab. "The Sikh territory", says Dr. Hari Ram Gupta, "spread as far north-west as the Indus, and in the east up to the Jumna; while their predatory

excursions reached Multan and Derajat in the south-west and to Garhwal and Rohilkhand towards the south-east." The most obvious advantage of the confederacy was that, while it assured a reasonable measure of co-operation among the various *misl*s, especially in times of difficulty and danger, the defeat of any one of them by a hostile power did not materially affect the strength of the Sikhs as a whole.

As a temporary device, the *misl*s were certainly unexceptionable, but they were no substitute for an integrated authority. The confederacy had no constitutional basis and it was almost impossible to preserve it from dismemberment in times of peace, when the urge for co-operation among the self-regarding Sardars was none too strong. It required a man of Ranjit Singh's political acumen to realise the ruinous consequences of exposing the province to the hazards of divided sovereignty. The Maharaja's grandfather, Chharat Singh, founded the Sukerchakia *misl* which attained a commanding position during the lifetime of his father, Mahan Singh. Both the father and the grandfather were energetic men, but their prowess had failed to unite the Sikhs under a common government.

It took many years for Ranjit Singh to dissolve the outmoded confederacy and to raise a stable government on its foundation. He was still a beardless youth when he inherited the estate of his father, who died in 1791. The young Maharaja came under the tutelage of his mother and his would-be mother-in-law, the latter an ambitious woman of the Kanhaiya *misl*. When he attained manhood, he surveyed the political scene with the eye of an expert. Liquidation of the confederacy became his primary concern. He was a genius and his capacity for leadership was unlimited. The Maharaja's intellectual brilliance astonished and overawed his friends

and enemies alike. He was a phenomenon and comported himself in the manner of a Messiah. Men obeyed him by instinct, for resistance to his imperious will was both useless and suicidal.

The personality of this remarkable man was indeed baffling. It is impossible to assess his greatness by relating his private morals to his public conduct. His standards were peculiarly his own, and there was no common ground between him and others cast in a less heroic mould. Ranjit Singh had weaknesses, but he also possessed "in an extraordinary degree the qualities without which the highest success cannot be attained." He was not a Spartan and yielded to pleasures more than his stomach for them could digest, but he lived in an age when the habit of personal indulgence was widespread. When dwelling upon his blemishes, we should perhaps do well to remember that the vices of civilisation are no less reprehensible than the infirmities of less enlightened times. It is, however, undeniable that, notwithstanding his foibles, Ranjit Singh was one of the most outstanding Indians of the nineteenth century.

It required more than mere military capacity to evolve order out of chaos in the Punjab and to establish a centralised government over its proud and turbulent people. Only a man of Ranjit Singh's abilities and resourcefulness could overcome the obstinacy of the Sikh Sardars and convert them into enthusiastic and trustworthy supporters of his grand project to unite the Punjab under one undivided authority. Some of the *misl*s were more powerful than the Maharaja himself and an unwary step by him would have precipitated grave disorders in the province. In encompassing their dissolution he used all the weapons the armoury of a talented and resolute man furnishes. He neutralised the opposition of some through matrimonial ties, won over quite a few by a

superb display of personal charm, and subdued the rest at the point of the sword. By capturing Lahore, the capital of the province, on July 7, 1799, he laid the foundation of his kingdom, giving at the same time signal proofs of his superior talents and strength.

The Maharaja's occupation of Lahore was a landmark in the history of the Sikhs. Thenceforward he became the sole actor on the political stage of the Punjab. The East India Company, which in the meantime had grown into the most formidable power in the rest of the country, saw in the Lion of the Punjab a man of destiny. With the passage of time its esteem for the Maharaja increased. It would, of course, be far-fetched to claim that the Calcutta Government dreaded the Sikh power, but the Governor-General certainly did not despise it. British desire for friendship with Lahore was probably prompted by considerations of self-interest. By the time Ranjit Singh attained the pinnacle of power, the Company had established its paramountcy over almost the whole of India save the Punjab. A strong government at Lahore gave immunity to the British Raj from foreign aggression and time to consolidate its new conquests. It did not want to throw away this advantage by planning aggression against the Sikh ruler.

The Maharaja's political sagacity warned him against the dire consequences of coming into collision with the British. Had not Teg Bahadur prophesied that India would eventually come under the sway of the strange islanders? A keen student of political affairs, Ranjit Singh had observed how all the powerful States in India had been supplanted by the foreign Power. But he was not a coward and was proud of his own independent sovereignty. He was willing to accept British friendship on honourable terms. And since both parties evinced sincere esteem towards each other, the treaty

of 1809 became possible. Ranjit Singh did not consider it derogatory to his prestige to renounce his claims over the Cis-Sutlej States. The advantages of friendship with the British outweighed such narrow considerations. "His political sagacity", says Sir Lepel Griffin, "was great, and was shown in nothing more convincingly than in his determined friendship with the English, when he had once realised that they were safe friends and very dangerous enemies." For thirty years that alliance held, to the benefit of both States. The Maharaja's intercourse with the British was constant and his personal friendship with their highest representative in India increased his respect for them.

The Maharaja's wars of conquest in the north and north-west of India bore conclusive testimony to the versatility of his genius. He sealed off the invasion routes by subjugating the unruly tribes in the north-west and by planting Sikh garrisons in that restless region. Never before had the redoubtable Afghan confronted a more formidable adversary than the Sikh. The myth of his invincibility was at last exploded. It would be wearisome to recount the Maharaja's numerous campaigns which ended in the conquest of Kashmir and the fierce tribesmen of the frontier. His wars were protracted and bloody. Sometimes they were not even successful, but his iron will overcame every difficulty. His supremacy was acknowledged far beyond the confines of the Punjab and was not seriously challenged during his lifetime. Political stability reappeared in the distracted Land of the Five Rivers under his energetic rule.

Ranjit Singh was convinced that he could sit securely on his throne only by maintaining a strong army. The organisation of the Sikh armed forces was found to be defective. The Sikhs had learnt to fight only as cavalymen and, as a result, their infantry had been woe-

fully neglected and was even despised. With infinite patience, the Maharaja studied the various modes of training, tactics and organisation then in vogue. He rightly believed that the British methods were the best and accordingly overhauled his military establishment, giving pride of place to the infantry. He had to break down the prejudices of his people against these innovations which were accomplished with the assistance of competent European leaders. Of the foreign officers who entered his service, Generals Ventura and Allard were the most important, but neither they nor any other Europeans in his employ could claim the credit for creating the Sikh army. It was the Maharaja's genius alone which made it a formidable fighting instrument.

Ranjit Singh was well served by his commanders, foreign as well as Indian. They considered it a privilege and an honour to be led by a man of his outstanding abilities and discernment. It would be invidious to single out names, but who among the students of history has not heard of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, "the Murat of the Khalsa", and the most dashing of the Maharaja's generals? They were all animated by the determination to do or die for their master, who was the *beau ideal* of a soldier, "strong, spare, active, courageous, and enduring." He had an unerring capacity for choosing his men well and wisely and it is a tribute both to his generosity and far-sightedness that none of the subordinates whom he chose either deserted him or fell below his expectations. Their attachment to his person was unique.

Wars are not missions of mercy, and Ranjit Singh was not afraid of waging them to the bitter end. But he was not cruel or bloodthirsty. His compassion for the fallen and the suffering knew no bounds. He invariably treated his vanquished enemy with the utmost kindness and generosity, even if his victories had been costly and

bloody. It is to the abiding glory of the Maharaja that, despite the stubborn hostility of his people, he ceaselessly strove to promote cordial relations between the Sikhs and the Muslims. He gave concrete shape to his tolerance by allowing Muslim officers to hold key positions in his government. His belief in the excellence of Sikhism was not diminished by his broad-mindedness. He venerated the Sikh priests and their shrines and overwhelmed them with his bounties. But he was not a partisan.

The Maharaja's liberalism cannot be sufficiently praised. In the Government of his kingdom he gave first place to talent and integrity. Brahmins and Muslims served him loyally and with distinction in all branches of the administration. The Fakir brothers were his trusted friends and counsellors. Fakir Aziz-ud-Din was his foreign minister and, by his courtly and cultured deportment, he cemented the friendship between the Maharaja and the British Government. Asked by an English officer in which eye Ranjit Singh was blind, the Fakir Saheb gave a classic reply. He said: "The splendour of his face is such that I have never been able to look close enough to discover." The reply was a polite protest, for this loyal servant of the Sikh State could not endure the subtle suggestion that his master was disfigured. It is a fact that the Maharaja's features were pock-marked and that his eyes were weak, but they did not affect the fascinaion of his personality.

There are many contemporary descriptions of Ranjit Singh. Though every one of them alludes to the inroads that ailments had made into his constitution, they unanimously affirm that his appearance was striking and memorable. He was, according to present-day standards, "unlettered", but his observant eye missed nothing. His intellectual curiosity was astonishing and it was impossible for impostors to gain his confidence. He was cour-

teous and polite both in conversation and behaviour. "His manners," writes Sir Lepel Griffin, "to strangers were particularly pleasing and courteous, and many accounts are extant by travellers who visited Lahore during the latter years of his reign which attest the fascination he exercised over those in immediate relation to him."

He had a great passion for collecting rare and costly articles. He succeeded in persuading Shah Shuja, the fugitive Amir of Afghanistan, to part with the famous Kohinur diamond as a reward for the asylum which the Sikh State gave him. The considerable trouble which the Maharaja took to own the famous mare Laili, belonging to the Afghan governor of Peshawar, testifies to his love for rare things. But his personal habits were simple. He never wore expensive robes, nor did he carry jewels on his person except on ceremonial occasions.

Ranjit Singh was a phenomenon. No person endowed with lesser abilities could have tamed the turbulent people of the Punjab and established a strong and centralised government. Sikh supremacy in that province would probably have endured if the Maharaja's successors had been granted his vision and statesmanship. They were not, and so the dissolution of the Sikh power in the Punjab in 1849 marked the completion of India's occupation by the British. From then onwards the country's history took a new turn. Eight years later a tidal wave of popular revolt swept over it.

24. RANI LAKSHMIBAI

The uprising of 1857 was the first serious challenge to British rule in India. It shook the foreign Raj to its very foundations. Conflicting opinions have been expressed on the origin of the rebellion, but it is undeniable that the provocation offered by the British Government by its annexationist policy played no small part in precipitating the conflict.

Since the establishment of British ascendancy in India, no Prince, big or small, felt himself secure on his *gadi*. Despite solemn assurances by the Paramount Power, they were filled with grave apprehensions about their future. Their feeling of uneasiness was aggravated by Lord Dalhousie's expansionist policy. Dalhousie was one of those British pro-counsuls who believed in the "divinely inspired" mission of his nation in India. Sir Charles Napier, his Commander-in-Chief, envisaged in Asia a polity which, besides obliterating all the then existing States in India, would have engulfed the sovereignty of her neighbours. Dalhousie did not share Napier's day-dreams, but he considered it his duty to carry out faithfully the injunctions of the home authorities, namely, "to persevere in the one clear and direct course of abandoning no just and honourable accession of territory or revenue."

The policy of annexation was in itself unexceptionable. Even apart from considerations of self-interest on the part of the British, it was not to the lasting good of India herself that her political map should be disfigured by a multitude of semi-autonomous and backward principalities. Enlightened opinion would have heartily endorsed Dalhousie's policy if its execution had not been

capricious. None could doubt or challenge the right of the Paramount Power to regulate successions to vacant *gadis* in the States or to mete out the extreme punishment of annexation to those which became guilty of gross misrule. Even the doctrine of lapse would have been upheld if the whole field of the States' relationship with the Paramount Power had been defined on the basis of well-understood principles.

The fact of the matter is that the wishes or caprices of the Governor-General for the time being played an important and often a decisive part in regulating the relations of the suzerain power with its feudatories. To take one specific example, Dalhousie stripped the Nawab Wazier of Oudh of his kingdom under the plea that the continued existence of that State would have cast a slur on the fair name of the British. The Governor-General would probably have enhanced his reputation for consistency, and would certainly have been hailed as a liberator by the suppressed people of the States, if he had wielded the weapon of annexation impartially against all principalities guilty of misgovernment. Hyderabad, according to his own admission, was nearly as notorious for misrule as Oudh, but he chose to transmit an evil legacy by allowing that State to survive.

The result was that his forward policy, which was a curious combination of aggressiveness and misplaced generosity, succeeded in provoking the bitter antagonism of princes and people alike. Among the enemies he thus made against the British Raj, the Rani of Jhansi was probably the most implacable. That a man of his intellectual eminence should have erred so grievously in his dealings with this energetic lady is most surprising. Jhansi was a feudatory State under the Peshwas and came under British suzerainty after the dissolution of the Poona Government in 1818. In a treaty concluded in

the previous year, the British Government had guaranteed the right of succession to its rulers.

Gangadhar Rao *alias* Baba Saheb Newalkar, the Raja of Jhansi, died in 1854 without a male issue. Ignoring the solemn undertaking of 1817, Dalhousie ordered the State's annexation. Rani Lakshmibai, the widow of Gangadhar Rao, vainly protested against the British Government's wanton violation of its plighted word. To add "meanness to injury," as Malleson rightly remarks, the Governor-General granted her a mere pittance of £ 6,000 a year, which was further encumbered with the debts of her late husband. Lakshmibai was a young and spirited woman who regarded the whole transaction as a calculated affront to her husband's illustrious family and as a gross injustice to herself.

It is true that personal grievance spurred her to raise the standard of revolt, but selfishness played the least part in her subsequent behaviour. She was nurtured in the great and glorious traditions of the Marathas and abhorred foreign rule in India with all the intensity of her soul. Her burning zeal to redeem the country from alien conquerors transmuted selfishness into a splendid idealism. Lakshmibai was cast in the mould of heroes. It is neither fair nor historically correct to analyse her role during the so-called 'Mutiny' in a spirit of cold-blooded detachment. Selfishness is not always a blemish, for what is nationalism if it is not enlightened self-interest? Lesser persons would have resigned themselves to the new order as the dispensation of a cruel Providence, but Lakshmibai discarded a life of ease and security in favour of one of hazard, involving sacrifice and death.

Three years of British Raj in her beloved Jhansi had convinced her that no nation could be happy or prosperous under foreign rule, even

if the fetters were made of gold. There was no community of interests between the alien rulers and their subjects. The whole system was in her eyes unnatural and degrading to her people. She decided to overthrow it and patiently bided her time. The uprising in the north was, therefore, a godsend to her. She flung herself into the vortex with all the ardour of a youthful patriot. How could this proud woman, so passionately devoted to her despoiled Jhansi, remain idle when the British Raj was being rocked to its very foundations elsewhere in the country?

The Rani was as astute as she was brave. Considering her young age, the former quality in her was all the more remarkable. When the news of the revolt in the north reached her, she did not behave like a stampeding pony. The 12th Native Infantry, under Captain Dunlop was guarding the fort of Jhansi and the civil administration was in the hands of Captain Alexander Skene. With consummate skill she succeeded in winning the loyalty of the Indian troops. Her manoeuvre was carefully concealed and none among the British officers and men stationed in Jhansi knew anything about her moves until the fort and town had been actually captured on her behalf.

June 9, 1857, was a memorable day for the people and the Rani of Jhansi. The standard of Swaraj, which had been hauled down three years before, proudly fluttered again on the ramparts of the historic fortress. The event was one of thanksgiving and rejoicing. The people of Jhansi adored their Rani. She had all the noble qualities that entitled her to their affection and esteem. She was pious, gentle, generous, wise and brave. She was, in short, an extraordinary woman.

The Rani shrewdly realised that her victory was only temporary and that her security lay in consolidating

her gains. The following quotation from Malleon bears eloquent testimony to the sagacity of this remarkable lady. He writes : " She proved herself a most capable ruler. She opened a mint, fortified the strong places, cast cannon, raised fresh troops. Into every act of her government she threw all the energy of a strong and resolute character. Possessing considerable personal attractions, being young, vigorous, and not afraid to show herself to the multitude, she gained a great influence over the hearts of her people. It was this influence, this force of character, added to a splendid and inspiring courage, that enabled her some months later to offer to the English troops, under Sir Hugh Rose, a resistance which made to a less able commander, might even have been successful. " A great tribute this by a historian from whom such unqualified encomiums could not be easily elicited.

The valiant Rani was, however, battling with an inexorable fate. The cause of the so-called 'rebels' was indeed a hopeless one. In the rest of the country the revolt had not been carefully planned nor was it carried out with the foresight and determination so essential in an undertaking of such a momentous character. In march 1858 the British Army, commanded by Sir Hugh Rose, invested the fort of Jhansi, which was garrisoned by 11,000 men. The heroism with which men, women and children defended the fort constitutes a landmark in the history of Indian chivalry. With indefatigable energy, the Rani supervised everything and cheered up the defenders infusing into them her own indomitable courage and determination.

Though reduced to desperate straits, the garrison held on doggedly, and its hopes rose high when Tatia Tope, another remarkable 'insurgent', marched with a large army to its relief. Tatia was, however, decisively

defeated by the British commander. The siege was carried on with renewed vigour and it now became evident to the distressed Rani that her beloved fort would once again fall into the hands of the enemy. Her very life was now in danger and, though she preferred to die with her brave comrades, she was pressed by her people to leave the fort and wage the war of independence from outside.

On the night of April 4, 1858, Lakshmibai, donning the robes of a trooper, boldly sallied out of the fortress. Accompanied by a select band of retainers she rode to Kalpi, where she was joined by the redoubtable Tatia Tope, Rao Saheb Peshwa and their adherents. Sir Hugh Rose would have given anything to secure the person of the Rani but the discovery of her escape was made too late for successful pursuit. The revolutionaries decided at Kalpi to give battle to the enemy. In the action fought at Kunchgaon, the Rani distinguished herself by her superb valour, but the odds were heavily against the revolutionaries.

The defeat was a blow to the liberation movement, but the intrepid Rani raised the hopes of the insurgent leaders by mooted new plans of adventure. She urged them to make a bold bid to capture the renowned fort of Gwalior which was being garrisoned by troops in sympathy with the revolutionaries. The Maharaja and his Prime Minister refused to countenance a course of action that involved an open conflict with the powerful British Raj. But their opposition to the popular upsurge was unavailing.

The capture of Gwalior by the insurgents filled the British with dismay. With their customary sagacity, they realised the far-reaching consequences of Sindhia's discomfiture. Their two-fold policy of reconquest and pacification was now imperilled. The Maratha ambition to

unfurl the Peshwa's flag in Maharashtra ceased to be a fantastic dream. Gwalior at once became a rallying-point for the revolutionaries in the country to make a last desperate bid to wrest power from the hands of the foreigners.

So, the British lost no time in collecting a large army with which they marched swiftly towards Gwalior. The fate of India, no less than that of the liberation movement, now depended on the outcome of the battle which was fought on the hilly ground between Kotah-ki-Sarai and Gwalior. The Rani of Jhansi decided not to return from the battlefield except as victor. "I am ready", she declared, "with all my heart and soul to do my duty." Her preparation for the final trial with fate is described by Mr. Savarkar. He writes: "She donned her usual military uniform, rode a noble steed, took out her gem-studded sword from the sheath, and ordered the army under her to march on."

Historians have fully recorded the skill, the heroism and the tenacity with which she fought on that fateful day. Says a British writer: "Immediately the beautiful Rani went over the field and made a firm stand against the array of Sir Hugh Rose. She led her troops to repeated and fierce attacks and, though her ranks were pierced through and were gradually becoming thinner and thinner, the Rani was seen in the foremost rank, rallying her scattered troops and performing prodigies of valour. But all was of no avail. The camel corps, pushed up by Sir Hugh Rose in person, broke her last line. Still the dauntless and heroic Rani held her own."

The battle was lost, but Lakshmibai was still in the thick of it. Her horse, a noble creature, sensing danger to its mistress' life carried her away from the stricken field in spite of her efforts. It fled like a winged bird, but before the beast and its fair rider could reach a place

of safety, it stumbled while fording a stream. The Rani was overtaken by a Hussar who, ignorant of her sex, cut her down. Thus on June 18, 1858, perished Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi, the great heroine of India, whose memory is kept alive in history, song and ballad, so that generations of her countrymen may draw inspiration as much from her exploits as from her suffering and sacrifice.

25. TATIA TOPE

The so-called 'Mutiny' brought to the fore many men who would otherwise have sunk into oblivion. The causes of the rebellion, the seriousness of which was never in doubt, are an issue in controversy, but no sweeping indictment of the participants as disgruntled or self-seeking adventurers can carry conviction to impartial minds. It is contrary to historical experience that mass upheavals take place in support of the grievances of individuals. It was not the Sepoys only who were drawn into the conflict, nor was the rebellion confined to a dissatisfied nobility. There were in fact thousands of others who zealously threw themselves into the fray, although they had suffered no personal wrong at the hands of the foreigners. Even if critics are chary of recognising any evidence of patriotism in their sacrifices, the readiness with which these common people risked their all deserves our admiration.

Among the revolutionaries who offered the most stubborn resistance to foreign rule in India, the name of Tatia Tope stands pre-eminent. It is not surprising that the achievements of this man, who for nearly two years haunted the dreams of the British and the sensational tales of whose exploits thrilled Europe, are little known in our own country. It was perhaps too much to expect as alien regime to perpetuate the memory of patriots like him. Tatia Tope made the supreme gift of his life in the sacrificial fire of the Revolt of 1857 and in doing so he was prompted by no personal considerations. He was neither a sepoy in the Army nor was he a dispossessed prince. And yet, while all or nearly all the revolutionaries had either been suppressed or won over, he

carried on his war against the British with a pertinacity that elicited the highest praise from his adversaries.

Raghunath Rao, for that was the real name of this revolutionary, was probably born in 1814. He was a Deshasth Brahmin from the Deccan and was brought up in the court of the deposed Peshwa Baji Rao II in Brahmavarta. Pandurang, Rao Tope, his father, was the head of the ex-Peshwa's charity department. The boy grew up amidst surroundings that exercised a profound influence on his future career. The last Baji Rao, whose Himalayan follies accounted for the final defeat and disappearance of the Maratha empire, was a worthless man. He had none of the great qualities which distinguished his ancestors, but as the last representative of that illustrious line, his personality was invested with great political importance. However ignoble his own part in the history of the Marathas, memories of their achievements were revived in all their vividness during his lifetime. It was perhaps impossible to prevent a sensitive boy like Tatia Tope from falling into historical reverie. Moreover, he was brought up with the children of the ex-Peshwa's household, some of whom were destined to play a notable part in the Revolution. Baji Rao's adopted son, Nana Saheb, his brothers and nephew became Tatia's boon companions from his boyhood. They were his mates both in the class-room and on the playground. There was, besides the charming 'Chabeli' the future Rani of Jhansi, whose childish pranks enlivened the company of the mettlesome youngsters. The death of Baji Rao in 1851, though lamented by few, led to some startling developments. On the specious ground that the ex-Peshwa had amassed a vast personal fortune, the British Government refused to continue the pension to his adopted son, Nana Saheb. The dispute that arose between Nana Saheb

and the Government inevitably assumed a political character.

It was a matter of no great consequence to Nana Saheb whether the pension of eight lakhs of rupees paid to his deceased adoptive father continued to be paid to him or not. He was not a poor man, nor did he covet wealth, but he was provoked beyond measure by the calculating nature of a Power which, besides making and unmaking princes, had the temerity to disown its own solemnly-given promises. It is not relevant to my present purpose to discuss here the rights and wrongs of Nana Saheb's dispute with the Government, but there is reason to believe that all his subsequent actions were guided by the single-minded determination to regain the lost glory of his forbears. Being of a shrewd disposition, he patiently bided his time and, when in 1857 the insurrection broke out, he boldly stepped forward to assume command over the revolutionary forces.

Tatia Tope, it must be noted, had no manner of personal concern with Nana Saheb's quarrels with the British and, had he been a faint-hearted person, he would have deserted his friend and master at the first indication of hostilities to save himself and his family. He, however, chose to cast his lot with the dead Peshwa's son because he was convinced that the ideals for which he was fighting were just. He heartily shared the belief of many of his contemporaries that foreign rule was an unmitigated curse because it undermined the personality of the people subjected to it and destroyed their initiative to mould their own destinies. Realising that the issues at stake were fundamental, he threw himself into the vortex with enthusiasm and determination.

Tatia Tope had received no regular training in the profession of arms, but in his encounters with the Government forces he gave signal proofs of his military

abilities. A born soldier like him needed no formal initiation into the science of war. He was indeed marked out for the leadership of the revolutionary forces. Tatia commanded one of the biggest armies he was ever privileged to lead when he marched to Jhansi to relieve Rani Lakshmibai's garrison, besieged by Sir Hugh Rose. It was his misfortune, as indeed it was the misfortune of all other insurgent generals, to lead his men to defeat. His failure to win any decisive victories over his opponents could not, as has been justly recognised by contemporary military observers, be attributed to any defect in the conduct of his campaigns. The quality of the material at his command was unfortunately poor. Nevertheless, he emerged victorious even from his defeats !

Times without number the British routed his armies, chased them out of the battlefield, and pursued them with relentless pertinacity, but they could neither catch nor destroy him. He was always in the forefront of every battle, but neither shot nor sword could kill him. It was as though he bore a charmed life. After his withdrawal from Jhansi, he was joined by Rani Lakshmibai, who had made a daring escape from her fort on the night of April 4, 1858. The revolutionaries re-formed their troops near Kalpi, where they were joined by Rao Saheb Peshwa and other adherents, and gave battle to the British at a place called Kunchgaon. They were again defeated, but the ubiquitous Tatia and the intrepid Rani raised the hopes of the dispirited leaders by proposing new plans of attack. But all their schemes were doomed to failure, and in the next battle fought on a difficult terrain near Gwalior the valiant Lakshmi perished after fighting with reckless courage.

Tatia was now convinced that it was impossible to dislodge the British from India and that their superior strategy was bound to prevail over the ill-organised

forces of the insurgents. But this grim conclusion did not dishearten him, nor did it weaken his resolve to fight his opponents to the bitter end. He was a soldier who had taken up arms to regain the freedom of his country and his duty was to do or die. Repeated failures had taught him that to face the disciplined armies of the British in pitched battles was to court certain defeat. He accordingly decided to revive the ancient methods of Maratha warfare which specialised in surprise attacks and sudden retreats. By this means he hoped to tire the enemy out.

Thus the stage was set for one of the most astonishing and memorable dramas which was watched with bated breath not only by millions of people in our own country but by spectators in far off lands. "For nearly nine months," says Malleon, "from his defeat at Jaora Alipur by Sir Robert Napier, to his capture by an officer serving under that general, Tatia Tope had baffled all the efforts of the British. During that period he had more than once made the tour of Rajputana and Malwa, two countries possessing jointly an area of one hundred and sixty-one thousand seven hundred square miles, had crossed the Narbada, and had threatened the more vulnerable parts of Western India." His marches, says this prolific historian of the Indian revolution, were wonderful; he had a good eye for selecting a position, and he had a marvellous faculty for localities.

Another British writer gives Tatia his due—a eulogy that deserves to be inscribed in letters of gold. He writes: "Then commenced that marvellous series of retreats which, continued for ten months, seemed to mock at defeat, and made Tatia's name more familiar to Europe than that of most of our Anglo-Indian generals." What was the calibre of the men who followed his lead? They were an ill-assorted collection of half-disciplined soldiers who

shared his hardships mainly because they were drawn to him by his renown. And yet with these feeble instruments Tatia took some dozen cities, obtained fresh stores, collected new cannon, at the same time evading the enemy who streamed down upon him in all directions. Tatia, says the same author, was of a class to which Haidar Ali belonged and, "had he carried out the plan attributed to him and penetrated through Nagpur to Madras, he might have been as formidable as his prototype. As it was, the Narbada proved to him what the Channel was to Napoleon."

Let me quote yet another writer since the passage at once reveals the resourcefulness and pertinacity of our hero. Commenting on Tatia's movements in Central India, he says : "He has sacked stations, plundered treasuries, emptied arsenals; collected armies, lost them; fought battles, lost them; taken guns from the native princes, lost them; taken more, lost them; then, his motions were like forked lightning; and for weeks, he has marched thirty and forty miles a day..... He has marched between our columns, behind them and before them. Ariel was not more subtle, aided by the best stage mechanism. Up mountains, over rivers, through ravines and valleys, and amid swamps, on he goes, backwards and forwards, and sideways and zig-zag ways..."

But even an evasive Proteus must tire of a life of incessant toil when the very meaning and purpose of it have been irretrievably destroyed. The body of Tatia was fagged out, but his will to resist never flagged. Queen Victoria's famous proclamation of November 1858 gave a solemn assurance to the insurgents that the Government would grant "unconditional pardon, amnesty, and oblivion of all offences against ourselves; our Crown, and dignity, on their return to their homes and peaceful pursuits". Tatia was entitled to amnesty because he did not

belong to that category of 'offenders' to whom clemency was refused, namely, those who had "directly taken part in the murder of British subjects." But this valiant man refused to surrender. He was in fact not prepared to concede the legality of the Government that administered the country.

Fate was, however, unkind to him. A fellow-countryman, succumbing to the bait of pardon and reward, betrayed this noble son of India. Let us draw the curtain of oblivion on the name of the miscreant whom Mr. Savarkar rightly calls the "basest man". He treacherously contrived the arrest of Tatia while he was fast asleep in the jungle. At midnight on April 7, 1859, five months after Queen Victoria's proclamation, the hero of many battles fell into the hands of his enemies. Eleven days later he was tried by a court-martial and sentenced to death. Tatia did not beg for mercy, nor did he lose heart in the face of death. At his trial he declared in ringing words : "Except in just battle, in warfare, neither I nor Nana have ever killed in cold blood or hanged any European man, woman or child." Tatia's mission was unfulfilled, perhaps because the country was not ripe for national independence. But as the man who immolated himself on the altar of Mother India, he is entitled to our gratitude and admiration.

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