

Diplomatic Approach of Nizam Shahi Rulers Towards the Early Mughals

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The year 1526 witnessed the extinction of the two powerful kingdoms, the Bahmani in the Deccan and the Lodi in North India. Babur's victory at Panipat had far-reaching consequences in the Deccan also. Earlier, throughout the fifteenth century as well as the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the relations between the Deccani kingdoms and the northern states were always at a very low key. But with the establishment of the Mughal Empire this isolation seems to have ended. The Deccani rulers, namely Ismail Adil Shah of Bijapur, Burhann Nizam Shah I of Ahmadnagar and Quli Qutb Shah of Golkonda sent congratulatory letters to Babur on his victory. On hearing the news of the dispatch of these messages, the last Bahmani ruler, Shah Kalimullah, who was only a pawn in the hands of his *wazir*, Amir Ali Barid, also sent one of his confidant with a letter to Babur complaining against the 'old servants of his Kingdom (i.e. Adil Shah, Nizam Shah and Qutb Shah)'. He also requested Babur to secure his release from virtual captivity in the hands of Amir Ali Barid. In return for this help Shah Kalimullah promised to cede to the Mughals the domains (*mumlikat*) of Berar and Daulatabad,¹ which he incidentally no longer controlled as an effective ruler. When this news leaked out, apparently, in sheer fright of his *wazir*, Ali Barid, Kalimullah fled to Bijapur. Disappointed over not being welcomed there, he finally took refuge at Ahmadnagar.²

Owing to his preoccupations in the North, Babur seems to have paid no heed to the communications from the Deccani rulers. Moreover, as it comes out from Babur's brief notice of the Bahmanis in his memoirs, he was aware that 'no independent authority is left to them'.³ So far as Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golkonda rulers were concerned, he apparently, did not recognise them as sovereign rulers and refers to them only as the 'great *begs*' of the Bahmani Kingdom.⁴ This should explain why Babur decided to ignore their congratulatory letters.

Perhaps it was the tendency of the Deccani rulers to placate the powerful rulers invading North India. On an earlier occasion also, in similar circumstances, when Taimur had captured Delhi in 1398-99, the Bahmani ruler, *Sultan* Firoz Shah, had sent him *peshkash* and acknowledged his overlordship.⁵ According to Ferishta, Taimur was pleased by the gesture and had issued a '*farman*' conferring on the Bahmani *Sultan*, Malwa and Gujarat with permission to use all the insignia of royalty.⁶ By conferring the territories of Malwa and Gujarat on Firoz Shah Bahmani, Taimur was behaving in a manner as if these territories were parts of his empire. At the time of Babur's invasion the same ritual of sending congratulatory letters was repeated. As a matter of fact, after the Battle of Khanwah (1527) Babur appeared inclined towards advancing into northern Malwa controlled by the Rajput chieftains, who had co-operated with Rana Sanga. This can be conjectured from his occupation of Chanderi in 1528, which placed him in a commanding position on the northern confines of Malwa.⁷ Babur's advance into Malwa in 1528 could also be interpreted as revealing his long term plans to extend influence towards the Deccan. Thus, one could justifiably conjecture that Babur might have played, for sometime, with the idea of moving southwards in response to the letters received from the Deccani rulers. But his preoccupations in the North obviously would not have allowed him to make any such move.

Subsequently, Humayun's invasion of Gujarat (1535-36) brought the Mughals into a direct contact with Khandesh as well as Ahmadnagar. When Humayun started his operations against Bahadur Shah, the latter hotly chased by the Mughals, fled from Mandisor to Mandu and then to Champaner and Ahmedabad. Eventually, he was forced to take refuge at Diu on the Kathiawar coast. Thus, the whole of Gujarat came under the Mughal control.⁸ While Humayun was still in Gujarat, he received submissive letters from Burhan Nizam Shah I of Ahmadnagar, Alauddin Imad Shah of Berar and 'other Deccani rulers (*digar hukkam-i dakan*)'.⁹ According to Ferishta, during this time, Humayun sent a certain Asaf Khan to Ahmadnagar to demand *peshkash* (*talib-i peshkash shud*) from Burhan Nizam Shah.¹⁰ It may be conjectured that Asaf Khan was sent to reciprocate the embassy of Rasti Khan sent earlier by Burhan Nizam Shah to persuade Humayun to invade Gujarat.¹¹ The dispatch of Asaf Khan to Ahmadnagar is also corroborated by a subsequent letter of Burhan Nizam Shah I, which he sent after Humayun's invasion of Khandesh. In this letter, which, according to Ferishta, was drafted by Shah Tahir

Junaidi, acknowledging the receipt of imperial *farman* (*farman-i humayun misal*) sent through Asaf Khan, he states that, '... Letters have been received from Muhammad Khan Faruqi, the ruler (*kabir mutasaddi-i iyalat*) of Burhanpur and Asir', seeking protection for his small kingdom from Mughal invasion. Burhan Nizam Shah requested Humayun to pardon Muhammad Khan Faruqi's 'errors' and pleaded that the Mughals should not occupy Khandesh.¹²

After Humayun's withdrawal from Khandesh (1536) and his subsequent discomfiture at the hands of Sher Shah (1540), the correspondence between him and the Nizam Shahis was discontinued. But these contacts are reported to have been revived around September-October, 1550, which shall be noticed in some detail after having surveyed the Nizam Shahi-Sur relations during 1537-50.

After the Mughals were displaced from North India, Burhan Nizam Shah I established diplomatic relations with the Sur Empire in order to secure their help in his struggle against his neighbours. Although hardly any information is furnished by the chronicles regarding Burhan Nizam Shah's contacts with the Sur rulers, but an anonymous *Insha* collection contains letters (*maktubat*) written by Burhan Nizam Shah I to Sher Shah and after him to Islam Shah as well.¹³ Later, with the decline of Sur fortunes, Burhan Nizam Shah again opened correspondence with Humayun. In one of the letters, sent sometime in 1550 (by this time Humayun had established himself at Kabul after defeating Kamran), he recalls his earlier relations with the Mughals and apologises for not keeping in touch. He further writes that "...the present communication is aimed at renewal of allegiance (*tajdid-i marasim-i ita'at*)", and expresses gratitude and pleasure on receiving Humayun's *farman* brought by the companions of the late Rasti Khan. In this letter Burhan Nizam Shah also conveys that 'he expects that Humayun will launch a campaign to liberate territories still held by rebels (possibly a reference to Surs) and assures all assistance in the campaign'. 'Having broken-off relations with the enemies of the imperial power (i.e. the Surs)', the letter goes on to say, 'this writer is now awaiting the launching of the campaign, success of which is assured'.¹⁴

The contents of this letter indicate that, for some reason, the relations between the Nizam Shah and the Surs had become strained during this time (1550), which was partly responsible for Burhan Nizam Shah's re-establishing relations with the Mughals. This correspondence was resumed at a time when Islam Shah was reigning

and was still a powerful ruler. Already by this time Islam Shah had succeeded in crushing the disaffected nobles, including Isa Khan Niazi, Khawas Khan and Shuja'at Khan Sur, the *hakim* of Malwa,¹⁵ and appeared to be in a position to intervene in the Deccan. One might conjecture that it was, possibly, in the hope of persuading Humayun to create a diversion for Islam Shah in the North-West, that Burhan Nizam Shah thought it politic to approach Humayun with this kind of letter. This is borne out by the contents of the letters that are reproduced in the anonymous *insha* collection. In this context Iqtidar Alam Khan rightly suggests that, 'during the period 1537-53, Burhan Nizam Shah I appears to be trying to cultivate alternately the Mughals and their Sur rivals depending on who seems to be gaining an upper hand at any particular point of time'.¹⁶

Another letter (*ariza*) of Nizam Shah addressed to Humayun goes to highlight his keenness to establish close relations with the Mughals after 1550. The statement in this letter that '(the writer) was overjoyed to receive the confirmation of the news of His Majesty's (i.e. Humayun's) setting out for the conquest of Delhi (*betaskhir-i dar-ul mulk Dehli*),¹⁷ suggests that it was written sometime after November, 1554, when Humayun had left Kabul for re-establishing his rule in North India. It is noteworthy that by this time Burhan Nizam Shah had already died (December, 1553).¹⁸ This letter was possibly sent on behalf of Husain Nizam Shah, the successor of Burhan Nizam Shah. There is yet another letter (*ariza*) from the Nizam Shahi ruler to Humayun, which also seems to have been written on behalf of Husain Nizam Shah. The contents of this letter indicate that it was written sometime after Humayun had already conquered Delhi.¹⁹

It may, thus, be noticed that during the period 1537-55, the rulers of Ahmadnagar Kingdom, Burhan Nizam Shah I and later Husain Nizam Shah, were cautiously keeping an eye on the developments taking place in North India leading to the establishment of a powerful state in Gangetic plains capable of expanding towards the Deccan. Thus, Ahmadnagar rulers were always anxious to remain on the right side of the powers that seemed gaining authority in the North. The shift of Ahmadnagar's allegiance from Mughals to Surs and then *vice versa* during 1535-55 is borne out by their correspondence with the Sur as well as the Mughal rulers during this period.²⁰

Under Akbar, no information regarding his relations with Ahmadnagar is found in the sources till one comes to the account of Akbar's march to Malwa for suppressing Abdullah Khan Uzbek in

1564. One of the Nizam Shahi officers, Muqarrrib Khan, came by way of Berar and waited upon Akbar in Malwa. He was received in the Mughal service and was assigned *sarkar* Handia as *jagir*, which was taken from Khandesh only a shortwhile earlier.²¹

Thus, during the period 1535-55, the attitude of Burhan Nizam Shah I was of a shifting nature. He shifted his allegiance according to the demands of the situation. He maintained correspondence with either Humayun or the Sur rulers depending on the general impression as to which one of them seemed to be gaining an upper hand in establishing his authority over North India. He was particularly apprehensive of the *Sultan* of Gujarat. His main concern during this period was to keep away the Gujarati *Sultan* from intervening in Ahmadnagar. To a lesser extent the Nizam Shahi ruler also regarded the Khalji kingdom of Malwa as his potential rival in the affairs of Khandesh. He, therefore, was keen that Humayun, Sher Shah and, still later, Islam Shah, in short, everyone of these rulers controlling North India at different points of time during 1535-55, should keep up military pressure on Gujarat as well as Malwa to restrain them from interfering in Ahmadnagar or from competing with it in cultivating the friendship with Khandesh.

REFERENCE

1. Ferishta, *Tarikh-i Ferishta*, Munshi Nawal Kishore Press, Lucknow, 1864, vol. I, p. 376.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Zahiruddin Babur's *Baburnama*, translated from the original Turkish text by A.S. Beveridge, (reprint), London, 1969, p. 631.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Tarikh-i Ferishta*, vol. I, p. 312.
6. *Ibid.*
7. See *Baburnama*, (tr.), p. 598. Babur also planned to annex Raisen, Bhilsa and Sarangpur but was prevented from doing so by the news of renewed Afghan rebellion in Awadh.
8. Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, ed. by Agha Ahmad Ali and Maulvi Abdur Rahim, Bibliotheca Indica, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1897-1921, vol. I, pp.132-33. For details of Humayun's war with Bahadur Shah, see Ishwari Prasad's *Life and Times of Humayun*, Calcutta, 1955, pp. 68-77.
9. *Tarikh-i Ferishta*, vol. I, p. 215; See also Khafi Khan, *Muntakhab-ul Lubab*, ed. by Kabiruddin Ahmad, Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1869, vol. I, p. 79.
10. *Tarikh-i Ferishta*, vol. II, p.285.
11. *Ibid.*, p.116; pp. 9-10.

12. *Tarikh-i Firishta*, vol. II, p.285. For the letter of Burhan Nizam Shah I to Humayun, see Anonymous, *Insha-i Tahir Husaini*, British Museum MS, HARL-499, ff.179-99. From the contents of the letter it appears that at this time, Humayun was in Khandesh and the letter was despatched in August-September, 1536.
13. Iqtidar Alam Khan in his article 'Ahmadnagar and the Sur Empire, 1537-53; A Study of Contemporary Documents', *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, Burdwan, 1983, pp. 176-88, has used an anonymous *insha* collection preserved in Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Paris, which contains Burhan Nizam Shah's correspondence with the contemporary rulers and other related documents. See MS Bibliotheque Nationale, Persian Supplement, 1352.
14. For full text of the letter, see *Anonymous Insha Collection*, Persian supplement, 1352, ff. 19b-21b (margin). Same letter is also included in *Insha-i Tahir Husaini*, ff. 9 b-13b. Riazul Islam has given a summarised translation, but he wrongly gives the date of dispatch of above letter as AH. 937/AD. 1530. See Riazul Islam, *Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations*, Tehran and Karachi, 1979, vol. II, p. 120.
15. For details of suppression of the disaffected nobles by Islam Shah, see Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Some Aspects of Afghan Despotism in India*, Aligarh, 1969, pp. 73-74.
16. See Iqtidar Alam Khan's article 'Ahmadnagar and the Sur Empire, 1537-53; A Study of Contemporary Documents', *Op.cit.*, pp. 176-88.
17. For full text of the letter, see *Anonymous Insha Collection*, Persian Supplement, 1352, f. 18b (written on margin).
18. Saiyid Ali Tabataba, *Burhan-i Ma'asir*, Hyderabad edition, printed at Delhi, 1936, p. 356.
19. *Anonymous Insha Collection*, *Op.cit.*, f. 36b (written on margin).
20. For the detailed analysis of Nizam Shah's correspondence with the Surs and the Mughals, see Iqtidar Alam Khan's article 'Ahmadnagar and the Sur Empire', *Op.cit.*, pp. 176-88.
21. *Akbarnama*, vol. II, p. 30.