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War of succession during mujhako period, CC 410, unit 3

Problems of Succession

There was no clear tradition of succession among the Timurids, which can be seen in an irregular succession of this dynasty. The years of Shah Jahan's reign were clouded by a bitter war of succession among his sons.

The right of the nomination of a prince by the ruler had been accepted by some of the Muslim political thinkers. But it could not be asserted in India during the Sultanate period.

Hindu traditions were not very clear in the matter of succession either. According to Tulsidas, a contemporary of Akbar, a ruler had the right of giving the tika to any one of his sons. However, there were many cases among the Rajputs where such a nomination had not been accepted by the other brothers.

Sanga had to wage a bitter struggle with his brothers before he could assert his claim to the gaddi (throne).

Mughals' Succession

The growing trend towards a struggle for the throne among brothers was a major concern to Shah Jahan during the latter part of his reign. Four of his sons, Dara, Shuja, Aurangzeb, and Murad, had been carefully trained for government and in the art of warfare.

Among all four, each of them had proved to a deserving and energetic commander. Though, Shuja and Murad had made a mark for bravery, but were inactive and ease-loving.

Dara was known for his liberal views in matters of religion and was a patron of learning. He was friendly, and had won over the confidence of his father who leaned on him increasingly for advice in matters of governance. But Dara was unsuccessful, as he had a little actual experience of warfare. Further, it was also proved in some of the events that he was a poor judge of human character.

Aurangzeb, On the other hand, had proved to be a skillful organizer, an intelligent commandant, and a shrewd negotiator. By paying personal attention to individual nobles (both Hindu and Muslim), he had won over many of them to his side.

By the end of 1657, Shah Jahan was fallen ill at Delhi and for some time, his life was despaired of, but gradually, he recovered his strength under the loving care of Dara. Meanwhile, it was rumored that Shah Jahan had already died, and Dara was concealing the reality to serve his own purposes. After some time, Shah Jahan slowly made his way to Agra.

In the meantime, prince, Shuja in Bengal, Murad in Gujarat, and Aurangzeb in the Deccan, had either been persuaded that the rumor was true, or pretended to believe them, and prepared for the inevitable war of succession.

Anxious to avert a conflict among his sons, which might spell ruin to the empire, and anticipating his speedy end, Shah Jahan decided to nominate Dara as his successor.

Shah Jahan raised Dara's mansab from 40,000 zat to the unprecedented rank of 60,000. Dara was given a chair next to the throne and all the nobles were instructed to obey Dara as their future sovereign.

Aurangzeb did not like Shah Jahan's decision and he took serious action to become emperor. He defeated everyone and successfully became emperor.

There were many reasons for Aurangzeb's success; significant of them were divided counsel and underestimation of his opponents by Dara.

On hearing of the military preparations of his sons and their decision to attack the capital, Shah Jahan had sent an army to the east under the command of Dara's son, Sulaiman Shikoh, which was supported by Mirza Raja Jai Singh (to deal with Shuja who had crowned himself).

Second military group was sent to Malwa under Raja Jaswant Singh, the ruler of Jodhpur. On his arrival in Malwa, Jaswant found that he was faced with the combined forces of Aurangzeb and Murad.

Shah Jahan had instructed Jaswant Singh to bar the move of the princes to the capital and to persuade them to go back, and in any case to avoid entering into a military conflict with them.

Jaswant Singh could have retreated, but as deeming retreat was a matter of dishonor, he decided to stand and fight, though the likelihoods were definitely against him. This was a great mistake on his part.

On April 15, 1658, the victory of Aurangzeb at Dharmat encouraged his supporters and raised his prestige, while it discouraged Dara and his supporters.

Dara was over-confident about his strength. He had assigned some of the best troops for the eastern campaign. Led by Sulaiman Shikoh (his son), the army moved to the east and gave a good account of itself.

In February 1658, Sulaiman Shikoh defeated Shuja near Banaras and decided to pursue him into Bihar. On the other hand, after the defeat of Dharmat, an urgent message was sent to Sulaiman to return back to Agra soon.

After patching up a hurried treaty on 7 May 1658, Sulaiman Shikoh marched to Agra from his camp near Monghyr in eastern Bihar. But could not return to Agra on time for the conflict with Aurangzeb.

After Dharmat, Dara made desperate efforts to seek allies. He sent repeated letters to Jaswant Singh who had retired to Jodhpur. The Rana of Udaipur was also approached. Jaswant Singh moved out slowly to Pushkar near Ajmer. After raising an army with the money provided by Dara, he waited there for the Rana to join him.

Rana had already been won over by Aurangzeb with a promise of a rank of 7,000 and the return of the parganas seized by Shah Jahan and Dara from him in 1654. Thus, Dara failed to win over even the important Rajput rajas to his side.

On 29 May, 1658, the battle of Samugarh was basically a battle of good generalship, the two sides being almost equally matched in numbers (about 50,000 to 60,000 on each side).

Aurangzeb's troops were battle hardened and well led and defeated Dara. Aurangzeb forced Shah Jahan to surrender by seizing the source of water supply to the fort.

Shah Jahan was strictly supervised and confined to the female apartments in the fort though he was not ill-treated. He lived for eight long years, lovingly nursed by his favorite daughter, Jahanara, who willingly chose to live within the fort.

Jahanara re-emerged into public life only after Shah Jahan's death and was given great honor and given the position of the first lady of the realm. Aurangzeb also raised her annual pension from twelve lakh rupees to seventeen lakhs.

According to the terms of Aurangzeb's agreement with Murad, the kingdom was to be partitioned between the two of them. But Aurangzeb had no intention of sharing the empire. Hence, he treacherously imprisoned Murad and sent him to the Gwalior jail where he was killed after two years.

After losing the battle at Samugarh, Dara had fled to Lahore and was planning to retain control of its surrounding areas. But Aurangzeb soon arrived in the neighborhood with a strong army. Dara left Lahore without a fight and fled to Sindh.

Dara moved from Sindh to Gujarat and then Ajmer on an invitation from Jaswant Singh, the ruler of Marwar.

In March 1659, the battle of Deorai near Ajmer was the last major battle Dara fought against

Aurangzeb. Dara could well have escaped into Iran, but he wanted to try his luck again in Afghanistan.

On the way, nearby the Bolan Pass, a treacherous Afghan chief made him a prisoner and handed him over to his dreaded enemy.

Two years after Dara's execution, his son, Sulaiman Shikoh, had taken shelter in Garhwal. But the ruler of Garhwal, handed him over to Aurangzeb on an imminent threat of invasion.

After taking command of the Mughal Empire, Aurangzeb tried to mitigate, to some extent, the effects of the harsh Mughal custom of war to death between brothers.

In 1673, at the instance of Jahanara Begum, Sikihir Shikoh, son of Dara, was released from the prison in 1673, given a mansab, and married a daughter of Aurangzeb. Izzat Bakhsh (son of Murad) was also released, given a mansab, and he married another daughter of Aurangzeb.

In 1669, Dara's daughter, Jani Begum, who had been looked after by Jahanara as her own daughter, was married to Aurangzeb's third son, Muhammad Azam.

Thus it was clear that since there was no proper law of succession, so there was a war of succession during the time period of every Mughal ruler, among the sons, or nobles for the succession which ultimately became the chief cause of the decline of Mughal Empire.