

Malik Aḥmad: Life and Times (Part-III)

FAZAL SHER AND ABDUR RAHMAN

Abstract

So far we had the advantage of having with us the Memoirs – the touchstone for checking Khwāju's statements, Bābur died on Monday the 5th of Jumādi al-Awwal 937 H/ Dec. 26, 1530. But even long before that, since 1520 in fact, when he passed through Bājaur on way to India and brought some refractory Bājaur tribes to order, his focus of attention had shifted to the conquest of India; consequently, he tells us nothing about the frontier tribes. Therefore we have necessarily to depend upon Khwāju and Akhūnd Darwezā for the rest of the story regarding Malik Aḥmad's achievements.

Keywords: Malik Aḥmad, Khwāju, Babur's Death

Arrival of Gagiānis in the Doābah

According to Khwāju the Gagiānis in Kābul found it difficult to live in Kābul owing to the harsh treatment meted out to them by Bābur. On the same page (175) he also remarks that Malik Hamza b. Ya'qūb, Mughal Khel, the Ganiāni chief, was very close to Bābur. Malik Hamza, we are further told, sent a delegation comprising eminent Gagiāni chiefs to Malik Aḥmad to explain to him how were they living in extreme anxiety and distress in Kābul and that they were looking, to him as Malik al-Malūk (Chief of Chiefs) to show kindness and favour in that hour of need. Aḥmad warmly welcomed them saying "It is very good that even you have been sent to me by God. Now be composed, and satisfied, I give you the whole of Doābah". Aḥmad's statement had a hidden reference to the animosity shown by the Gagiānis when the Yūsufzais were at Kābul. Hearing this good news the Gagiānis went back and soon after moved through the Karappa Pass to the Doabah, except the Mūsazais who had played the leading role, in collusion with Mirzā Ullugh Beg, in expelling the Yūsufzais from Kābul and now feared reprisal. The Gagiānis distributed the land among them and within a short span of two years, Khwāju says, they grew rich and prosperous.

One day, our historian goes on to state, Malik Hamza's tent, having colourful carpet flooring and a cushioned couch covered with velvet sheet at one end, was fixed on a prominent place. There he took his seat to receive the guests, attired in a gorgeous dress. One by one the guests went in to shake hands with him while he kept seated and in no case rose from his seat as required by Pakhtūn tradition. When Malik Aḥmad came to know about it he felt that his companions have been slighted. He turned back without shaking hands. As he went out of the tent he shouted loudly. "These ill-natured Gagiānis who did us wrong even when we were in Kābul, I thought, might have repented of their wrongful actions therefore they came to me, and I gave them the most fertile land like the Doābah, but their instinctive malice still exists. Well, if I am a man, I shall get the haughtiness out of their heads and avenge the wrongs they did us in Kābul" (p.177). The Gagiānis heard these words but kept quiet. Aḥmad took his companion with him and everybody went home. The Yūsufzais in general did not like the treatment meted out to their maliks. Consequently, the old days of enmity got a fresh boost.

Malik Hamza thought of a novel plan to escape the wrath of Aḥmad. He at once went to Kābul and joined the service of Bābur and persuaded him to come to Peshāwar to conquer more lands. Bābur came, we are told, and became the personal guest of Hamza. The purpose behind this move was that on seeing Bābur as the personal guest of Hamza, Aḥmad would be obliged to make up matters with him. Khwāju then goes on to tell the story how Bābur fell upon the 'Umr Khel Dilazaks and destroyed their villages. It is worth noting here that not even an hint exists in the Bābur Nāma to uphold the truth of this story. It is no doubt fictitious and has no foundation in history.

In any case the 'Umr Khels believed that the wrong done to them was on the instigation of the Gagiānis. A delegation of the 'Umr Khel therefore went to Swāt to inform Malik Aḥmad who had already learnt about the death of Sarabdāl. He told the 'Umr Khels that he knew what had happened and that he himself was the real target of the Gagiānis who wanted to demonstrate their power. In a few days, he remarked. "I am going to Buner, you also come there and there we shall make a decision after due consultations. Now, you go back and get busy with the task of rehabilitation".

After a few days Malik Aḥmad and Shaikh Mali etc. went to the Samah where they met

Malik Mahmud b. Yahyā ‘Alā ad-Dīnzai and condoled the death of the late Sarabdāl and also scolded the Yūsufzais for helping Hamza Gagiāni – their inveterate enemy of old. He then went to Buner where the ‘Umr Khels had also arrived. After consultation he announced the decision. Addressing the ‘Umr Khel he said! “Your enemy is my enemy. I give up the Khakhay nang (honour, revenge). Go and avenge yourselves”. The ‘Umr Khel came back and collected a huge force. Crossing the Landi river at Surgh Warae they reached Peshāwar where other Dilazāks also joined them.

When the Dilazāk lashkar was on the way to Doābah, Malik Hamza dispatched letters to Mir Fateh Khān b. Mūsā, Baizai Solizai and Dādi (actually Allāh Dād) b. Popal b. Fakhr ad-Dīn Yusufzai for help in the name of Khakhay. Both were then living in lower Samah and both responded positively without consulting Malik Aḥmad. When they reached Doābah with their lashkars the Gagiāni women showered praises on them singing song and asked Mir Fateh what for they are thanking us. “It is price of our blood”, Fateh Khān answered. Malik Hamza said to Fateh Khān “You were the chief of Yūsufzais so far, but now you have become the chief of the whole khakay. Congratulation, we also consider you our chief.”

When Fateh Khān was passing though Hashtnagar a certain newly married Youngman Sargīn Sadozai, who was going back home with the marriage procession sent the bride home and joined Fateh Khān’s lashkar. Meanwhile Malik Aḥmad came to know about it. He at one dispatched Mir Aḥmad ‘Umr Khail Sadozai to stop Mir Fateh Khān and Dādi and tell them not to join forces in support of Hamza. But Mir Aḥmad, keeping the Khakhay nang in view also joined the Ganiānis. Muḥammad zai at that time were in Kāmāh (Nangarhār). They also sent a contingent in support of Hamza. Thus the Gagiānis also collected a great lashkar in which horsemen had the upper hand the Gagiānis alone had one thousand horse riders, all wearing armour, from head to feet.

The Dilazāk lashkar with full preparation departed from Peshāwar and reached Gul Belah where they crossed the “river of Peshawar” and went straight to Nimah Warae both the lashkars clashed. The Dilazāk archers who were great experts in this art, wounded a great number of the Gagiānis. When Fateh Khān, Dādi, Sargin and Hamza saw this they also jumped into the foray and hand to hand fighting began with swords and

spears. The Gagiānis showed great bravery but were cut to pieces in the Dilazak onslaught. The Makka Khel who three hundred horsemen fell in the battle and suffered the most. After this battle they grew very weak and dwindled into insignificance as a tribe. The Dilazāks did not molest women and children and carrying their dead and wounded stayed at the bank of the river of Hashtnagar for the night. The next day they dispersed and went home. They Gagiānis suffered a great loss and all their leaders, including the Yūsufzai supporters lay dead on the battle field.

The Battle of Kātlang

The battle of Nīmah Warae in which the Gagiānis were completely crushed and their Yūsufzai supporters such as Mir Fateh Khan, Dādi, Sargin and Mir Aḥmad lost their lives produced adverse efforts on the Yūsufzai in general and came to be looked upon as a deadly blow to the Khakhay nang which needed to be avenged. Malik Aḥmad who had earlier said “I give the Khakhay nang”, now came under pressure from the relatives of all those who died on the battle field. If Malik Aḥmad does not do anything, it as argued, they would themselves take steps to kill the Dilazāk chiefs, which would create an even bigger challenge for the Yūsufzais. Malik Aḥmad tried to calm down and told them that he himself cannot forget the deaths of his dear ones and that he was looking for an excuse to take revenge.

The excuse did not take long to come by. According Khwāju (p.199) says that some Yūsufzai women were washing their clothes in the Bagiāri stream and had spreads their clothes on bushes to dry them up, when a party of Dilazāk youngmen on their to Kalah Panri passed nearby. A naughty Dilazāk young man picked up the paroni (a sheet of cloth used by ladies to cover their heads and other parts of the body) of a women and did not return inspite of her abusive protest. This news spread among the Yūsufzais like wild fire and everyone demanded to avenge this insult. Akhūnd Darweza however does not mention it and it appears to be a merely lame excuse.

The land grasping Yūsufzais had already occupied part of Swāt and now wanted more territory in the Samah from the Dilazāks who not only refused but also contumaciously resisted encroachments upon their lands. Thus accusing the Dilazāks of undue severity in

the battle against the Gagiānis, which, Malik Aḥmad and other chiefs thought had made them arrogant and contumacious, they decided to go to war with them in the name of Khakhay nang. Forgetful of the generosity which the Dilazāks showed to them when they were penniless and begged for a piece of land, Aḥmad and his advisers determined to bring the whole of the Khakhay together, and also their allied tribes into the field against their erstwhile benefactors. To bring together the Khakhay, and in some cases even the non-Khakhay tribes, Akhund Darweza (p.95), says Malik Aḥmad thought that expediency demanded that Shakhi tribes should be approached and if there was enmity between them it should be brought to an end by showing humility. Thus Mohmandzai (actually Muḥammad zai) seeing his humility sympathized with him and decided to accompany him on the condition that Hashnagar would be allotted to them. Similarly the Gagiānis came with him on the condition that the Doābah would be given to them. The Yūsufzais, he further remarks, have stood by their word till today. Only the Tarklanris did not accept Aḥmad's plea and were give no land after the Khakhay victory in the battle of Kātlang.

Khawāju puts it differently. Having heard about the pronany affair mentioned above in which a Dilazak Youngman took away the sheet of cloth worn by ladies to cover their head; Malik Aḥmad got enraged and said: "If I do not avenge this dishonour of the whole Khakhay, I shall not consider myself the son of Sultān Shāh". After this he held a jirgah of all the notable chiefs and got busy with the job of collecting a lashkar to clash with the Dilazāks.

A section of the Gagiānis – the Mūsā Zais – who had in the past cooperated with Mirzā Ulugh Beg, in inflicting injuries upon the Yūsufzai, preferred to stay in Kābul fearing reprisal, while othr Gagianis moved to the Doabah. Now Aḥmad needed more and more troops and Mūsāzais had to be reconciled some how. Some of the Utmān Khels were also in Kābul, while the Tarklanris occupied Lamghān and Muḥammad zais who had no territory of their own were in Nangarhār living there (p.200) as vassals of the Gagiānis.

For this purpose a delegation under Shaikh Mali was dispatched to Kabul with instructions to take the help of some Gagiāni chiefs of the Doābah. The delegation reached Kābul and convinced the Mūsāzais of the sincerity of Malik Aḥmad's promise to

forget about the past. Mūsāzais were glad to know this and sent their lashkar with Shaikh Mali who also collected the Muḥammad zai contingent on the way back. But the Tarklanris refused to provide any help. When the lashkar on the way back reached Bagiāri, about 9 to 10 miles from Kātlang to the east, Shaikh Mali went ahead to inform Malik Aḥmad of the arrival of a great army which may join the other force tomorrow.

With Shaikh Mali's departure for Kābul Malik Aḥmad got busy with collecting lashkars from Swāt, Bājaur, Sammah, Hashnagar – all Yūsufzais – but he also received contingents from Utman Kehl, Mashwāni, Gadūn, Kakhār, Rāhwānri, Ranri, Kāsi, Swāti, Shalmāni and Barech sections of the population. All these were collected and posted in villages around Kātlang (p.202).

Meanwhile the Dilazāks, when they came to that Malik Aḥmad is collecting a lashkar, they sent messengers to Peshawar, Hazārah, Mangrāo, (Manakrāo), Akori, Tarbela, and across the Indus, Pehūr, Sher Darah, Panjtār, upto the bank of the river landā and gathered a large number of people. With a view to attacking Malik Aḥmad's force before the lashkar brought by Shaikh Mali joins it, the Dilazāks made an early start towards Kātlang. Malik Aḥmad and Shaikh Mali also moved their men slowly. Both Khwāju (p.204) and Akhund Darweza (p.95) say that the Utmān Khel had brought dried skins of cows and buffaloes to be used as Shields. These, according to Akhund Darweza, were studded with what in Afghāni language is called "Kurwah" (nest). The lashkars clashed with each other at the place called Gadar, which is also the name of a near by seasonal stream.

By the time the vanguard of the Dilazāks reached the stream, the main body of their lashkar was proceeding slowly, two hundred horsemen of the Yūsufzais, under Salām Khān b. Ma'dūd b. Popal, said and Jokal, sons Dilkhak b. Popal Malizai, suddenly attacked the Dilazāk vanguard and pushed it behind. Meanwhile the Yūsufzai force crossed the stream and engaged the Dilazāks. At this very moment the Gagiānis also reached the battle field and attacked the Dilazāks from the south. The vanguard thus overpowered retreated. When the main body saw the vanguard retreating, it was so scared that it fled without even engaging the enemy. The victors pursued the vanquished, many were slaughtered and their houses plundered. In spite of Aḥmad's call not take any

prisoners, some Yūsufzais did not release women and girls and wedded them later on. One of these was ‘Ali Khān who married a Dilazāk girl who gave birth to his foursons – Mūsā, ‘Isā, Hindāl and Kāmṛān. On the pattern of ‘Ali Khān, Khwāju remarks (p.206), many others also did the same.

Khān Kaju b. Malik Qarah in his early youth also took part in this battle. He went to Munārah, crossing point of the Indus, in pursuit of the fleeing Dilazāks. There he came face to face with a Dilazāk chief named Bhai Khān who was waiting for his turn to cross. Seeing Khān Kaju, who had earlier sought his daughter in marriage but in vain, he implored him to keep back his men that the females might be sent across, otherwise they would all throw themselves into it and perish rather than be made captives. His appeal to the youth was not without effect; and taking pity on the Dilazāk chief, he cried out to his clansmen: “Give over Kinsmen! Let them alone! Do not harm them, for, after all, they are Afghāns like ourselves”. The chief was thus enabled to get across safely with his family. It was not long after this that the Dilazāk damsel became the wife of Khān Kaju (Khwāju 1977: 206-07).

We have so far followed the sequence of events as recorded by Khwāju. Akhund Darweza (p.95) puts it slightly differently. We have seen above that having settled affairs with Muḥammad zais and Gagiānis, Malik Aḥmad returned from Kābul and then, taking their families with them, his lashkar marched to Gadar Rūd (or stream). The next day the Dilazāk lashkar set out from Langarkot for fighting. I have heard, Akhund Darweza says, that the Utmān Khel put in the greatest effort in this fight. They had brought fifty dried cow skins studded with Kurwah (nest). It was carried by one person but behind it several warriors could take Shulter. This made the rain of arrows coming from the Dilazāk side ineffective. As a result the Yūsufzai lashkar went on proceeding steadily and engaged the enemy in hand to hand fight. The first person from the Yūsufzai force to jump into the Gadar Rūd was Bashārīn, son of ‘Ali Ismailzai who killed the son of Zangi, the Dilazāk. After this the Yūsufzai prevailed upon the Dilazāks on every side and defeated them. The Yūsufzais drove the Dilazāks to the village Jalabi in their pursuit. The Dilazāks fled to Hazārah and spoiled that country. After this Malik Aḥmad and Shaikh Mali took and decided to move with their families to the Shah Kot Pass for the purpose of invading that country.

The actual date of the battle of Kātlang is not recorded. Sir Olaf Caroe (1958: 179) argues in favour of AD 1525. “On internal evidence”, Caroe says, It probably fell some time between Babur’s second into this region (1519), when he too was at Kātlang, and his final conquest of Delhi (1526). If we are to accept these chronicles at their face value, it can hardly be believed that Bābur, who had previously enjoyed many contacts with all these tribes, would not have recorded the disastrous Dilazāk defeat at Kātlang, if that defeat had taken place before he reached that same place in 1519. on this ground, I think, the battle must be dated after 1519, say 1525”.

After this terrible defeat, when the Dilazāks vacated the entire territory to the west of the Indus, the Yūsufzais gathered in a meeting at Kātlang for the distribution of land. Malik Aḥmad and Shaikh Mali played the leading role. Hashtangar was allotted to the Muḥammad zais on their own demand. The Gagiānis asked for more lands in addition to the Doābah to accommodate the new-comers-the Musaziais. Malik Aḥmad quite generously gave them almost one half Bājaur-from Dānish kol to ‘Anbar and Lāshorah and from Nāwagai to Chāmang – the entire territory previously held by the Khalīls. The rest of the land was distributed by Shaikh Mali among the Yūsufzais and their allies. Shaikh Mali did the job honestly and the best of his ability. The main principle underlying the distribution was not equal Shares for everyone but on the need of every family. Then there were good and bad lands. Shaikh Mali therefore introduced the idea of mutually exchange lands after a fixed period of time so that everyone may share the benefit or loss on equal basis. Shaikh Mali’s distribution proved lasting and stood the test of time.

Working out the boundaries of each and every Share was an uphill task but Mali did it to the satisfaction of everyone. Akhūnd Darwezā (P. 106) appreciates Shaikh Mali’s distribution of land saying that, at the time of his death, he clearly stated, in the presence of all who happened to be there, that whatever he did for the people was done to please God and earn merit, not for any personal benefit or to show vanities of the world on the pattern of the rich. “If I am truthful in what I have said, he remarked” I am hopeful that God, the almighty, will keep the distribution I have made in place for seven generation (i.e. forever), if, however, I have told lie, may God quickly undo it” Similarly, Sir Olaf Caroe (1958: 181-83) pays a rich tribute to Shaikh Mali’s honesty of purpose and hard

work in marking out the boundaries of the divisions wisely separated by seraes (land allotted to holy persons) to put a lasting stop, to tendencies regarding boundary disputes. Munshi Gopāl Dās (1874: 410-13) gives a detailed account of Mali's distribution and says that he was the leventh descendant of Saraban, one of the sons of Qais who is considered by Pakhtūns as the progenitor of the Pakhtūn people.

The mode of apportionment very nicely described by Belew is thus quoted in the Gazetteer of Peshawar (1989: 148): "The land to be divided is first marked off into impact blocks called vand, each of which is subdivided into the required number of allotments. After the measurement and primary division of a vand. Its distribution is regulated by lot, or, as it is termed, casting the pucha or hissah. It is thus managed. The representative of each of the Khels to Share in the distribution selects a private mark (a piece of wood, or a rag, a grain of maize or peket of Sheep's dung or a stone, or any substance near at land) which, in the presence of all, he hand over to the 'greybeard' appointed to cast the lot, declaring it to be his token. The 'greybeard' having collected all the tokens and seen them severally recognized gathers them together in the skirt of this frock and then walks round the vand, followed by the assembly, and as he passed them throws on each of the plots marked off the first token that comes into his hand. The several plots then become the possession of the Khels severally represented by the token thrown out on them. Each plot is then successively divided and allotted in a similar manner to the divisions of the Khels and their several respective families."

The exact date of this distribution is not known. But we know for certain that it took place after the Battle of Kātlang (I say in AD 1530). A few years after this distribution Khāju says (p. 212) Shaikh Mali fell ill and died and was buried at Ghorbandi in a level piece of ground near the road connecting Swāt with Damghār. If 'a few years' means four to five years, the Shaikh may have died in 1535. Whatever the date of his death, his survey and apportionment of land became proverbial and was so popular with the masses that even lone after this whenever there was dispute about boundaries, the disputants, in support of their own claims, asked each other; "Have you gto it written from Shaikh Mali" (Khwāju: 213).

After one year of the death of Shaikh Mali, Malik Ahmad Also died and was buried at an

uneven place near the road connecting Alah Dad Dheri with Thanrah. If our assumption that the Battle of Kātlang was fought in 1525, and that the land distribution took place in about 1530, and that Shaikh Mali died in 1535, Malik Aḥmad must have died in 1536 or 1547.

Learning a bitter lesson from past when the Khakhays were driven from place to place, and the Yūsufzai—Mandanrs expelled from Kābul valley, Malik Aḥmad wanted to have a piece of land for his tribe where it could plant its feet firmly. To obtain land at whatever cost was his primary objective and he pursued it aggressively. He got his sister married to Sultan Awes (Khwāju: 134), in order perhaps to obtain information about Swāt at which the Yūsufzais had an eye since their expulsion from the Kābul valley; he made an alliance with the Khalīls to root out the ‘Umr Khel Dilazaks from Bājaur and then managed to get the help of the Dilazāks against the Khalīls and dispossessed them of Bājaur. When he found that he was not strong enough to face the Dilazāk Chief Muḥammad Khān in the Peshawar valley, he bowed down. But then got busy with expelling the governor of Sultān Awes and marching upon Swāt itself. Having occupied Bājaur, Swāt and Hashtnagar, his lust for more land was not satisfied. He then made a grand alliance against his erstwhile benefactors – the Dilazāks of the Peshawar valley north of the Kābul river – and pushed them out. Even the more powerful, Zahir ad-Din Bābur could extract nothing from him except one girl give to him in marriage. This in short is the story of Malik Aḥmad’s magnificent achievements.

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