

## Shah Jahan 's Military Campaigns in Central Asia.

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**Abstract:-** To the north of the country, (Present day Afghanistan), lay the province of Balkh and Badakhsha surrounded by the river Oxus and the *Hindukush* Mountain. In the middle ages, they were neither civilized nor prosperous and had been ruthlessly ravaged by Mongols, *Uzbegs*, and *Turkomans*, who had all inflicted untold misery on the native population.<sup>1</sup> Recovery of ancestral Timurid dominions by Mughal rulers of India in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries was a constant dream. They regarded Trans-Oxiana as belonging to them by right of legal inheritance, and they always cast longing eyes on the arid regions of the north. To recover Samarqand and Bokhara Babur went to the length of even sacrificing his religious conscience. Humayun's activities could not extend further than *Badakhsha*. Akbar was confronted by the mighty 'Abdullah Khan *Uzbek*, and could hardly move his feet beyond the borders of the *suba* of Kabul. And when after the Deccan wars he had an opportunity, his attention was engrossed with the rebellion of his sons. Jahangir inherited the ambition of his father, but lacked practical genius. During his reign, therefore, friendly relations were maintained with the rulers of Trans-Oxiana.<sup>2</sup>

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Like his predecessors ShahJahan felt a desire to conquer the lands of Trans-Oxiana, where his ancestors had once exercised their sway. He looked back to the glories of Timur and his heart longed to achieve renown in these distant lands. His reign opened with an unfortunate incident which for the first time openly disturbed the amicable relations existing between the two countries ever since the treaty of friendship between Abdullah and Akbar. Nazar Mohammad, a restless and ambitious brother of the peaceful and generous Imam Quli, to satiate his lust for conquest invaded the north<sup>3</sup>.

Southern central Asia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was dominated by the Khanate of Bukhara, ruled by the Janid Dynesty (also known as the Ashtrakhanids, as they originated from Ashtrakhan). From 1611 to 1642, the khanate was ruled by the Imam Quli Khan, whose reign was generally a stable one. His younger brother, Nazar Mohammad ruled the provinces of Balkh and Badakhsha.<sup>4</sup>

In 1622, Imam Quli Khan sent an offer of alliance to Mughal Emperor Jahangir, proposing a joint offensive against the Safavids in Khurasan. However, The Mughal Emperor at the time was embroiled in campaigns in the Deccan, and was not particularly interested in diverting forces away from that front. That same year, Shah Abbas of Persia launched an invasion of Mughal Afghanistan, and succeeded in capturing Qandahar. The failure of the Mughals to retake Qandahar from the Persians was the interpreted by the Uzbeks as an indication of the Mughal weakness, and they soon forgot about their alliance proposal, choosing instead to attack the Mughals and profit as the Persians had, The Uzbeks attacked in 1625 and again in 1626, but were repulsed on both occasions. On 19 May 1628, Nazar Mohammad launched a large scale invasion of Mughal territory with intention of capturing Kabul<sup>5</sup>.

ShahJahn desired to achieve renown in these distant lands. Samarqand was one of the capitals of the Timurids, and the Indian Mughals at times cherished the dreams of gaining possession of the city which Babur had thrice won and lost. With such thoughts in his mind ShahJahan attempted the conquest of Balkh and Badakhsha, dependencies of the kingdom of Bokhara, without adequate means of defending themselves against a powerful invader. ShahJahan's motive was purely lust of conquest; Abdul Hamid Lahori describes The Emperor's motive in these words:

Ever since the beginning of his reign, The Emperor's heart had been set up the conquest of Balkh and Badakhsha, which were hereditary territories of his house, and were the keys to the acquisition of Samarqand, the home and capital of his great ancestor Timur Sahib Qiran Sani.>>6

Since the very beginning of his accession , The Emperor decided to conquer these territories and due to the reason that Nazar Mohammad Khan came with the intention of conquering Kabul and returned unsuccessful, desired to conquer the territories of Balkh and Badkhasha, which were ancestral territories and had earlier been conquered by Hazrat Sahib-i-Qaran as a ruler of Samarqand.<sup>7</sup> PadshaZada Wala Guhar Murad Bakhsh with 50,000 horses, 10,000 foot, including musketeers, Rocketeers and Cannoners to chastise the mischief Mongerers. The force was divided in to eight divisions. Each of the *Qol* and *Harawal* had 12,000 horse and 2000 foot. Each of the left and right wings 6000 horse and 2000 foot and each of the flanking parties on the right and left side 6000 horse and 1000 foot, in *Altamish* ( vanguard) 2000 horse. And the army of the *Qol* had personality of PadshahZadah Wala Gauhar Murad Bakhsh and 4000 nobles and *Mansabdarans*, who were in

addition.<sup>8</sup> Ali Mardan Khan who knew the country well also went with the Prince. They entered the city of Balkh on July 2, 1646 without encountering any opposition. Nazar Mohammad had fled to Persia but finding it difficult to obtain support there, came back. He left his vast wealth amounting to 70 *lakhs* to be plundered by the Mughal soldiery. In the general scramble that followed the flight of Nazar, the Mughals were able to seize only 12 *lakhs* of rupees, 2500 horses and 300 camels. Murad who lacked a determined will, pined for the pleasures of the plains and begged the Emperor's permission to leave the place.<sup>9</sup> ShahJahn sent instruction that if Nazar Mohammad behaved, Balkh was to be restored to him and he should be helped to regain control over Samarqand and Bukhara. Nazar Mohammad, who had returned was alarmed at the continued stay of the Mughals on the pretext of helping him. Murad Bakhsh wanted to withdraw from Balkh and several *Amirs* and *Mansabdars* agreed with this decision. Mughal soldiers had, by this time, begun to oppress and plunder the local people. The prince left for India against his father's wishes and Sadullah Khan, the Prime Minister, was sent to assume command in Balkh.<sup>10</sup>

It proved easy to conquer Central Asian territory but far more difficult to retain and govern the Uzbeks. The Mughal outposts were attacked and their communications disrupted. The severity of the winter added woes of soldiers, a few of whom were killed in every raid by a more mobile enemy. There was no unity in the Mughal command. It was wiser to withdraw but the lure of his ancestral lands was too strong for the Emperor.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile the Emperor made preparations for a vigorous campaign. Aurangzeb was called to lead the command. ShahJahan appointed Prince Aurangzeb to lead the Campaign. On 24 Safar 31 Julus/ 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1647 A.D.<sup>12</sup> ShahJahan asked Mirza Raja Jai Singh to join Prince Aurangzeb but since he arrived late prince Aurangzeb left for Balkh. He was therefore, directed to wait at Jamrud and join the Prince when he reached Balkh.<sup>13</sup> Raja Jai Singh met ShahJahan in Kabul at the head of 2000 of his contingents and was promoted by another 1000 of his troopers being made *do aspa seh aspa*. He was given an advance of Rs.20,000 and sent to join Aurangzeb in Balkh.<sup>14</sup> The expedition was liberally financed, and the Emperor himself proceeded to Kabul to direct operations in person.<sup>15</sup> Prince Aurangzeb asked Mirza Raja to join the royal train on the river Attock and directed him to order Ibrahim Beg, *Daroga* of Attock, not to permit the Rajputs to cross Attock without the royal pass and to punish those who defied the orders.<sup>16</sup>

Aurangzeb, with the rank of 15,000 *zat*, 10,000 *sawar* ( 8,000 *do* and *sih aspa*), was now placed command of Mughal troops in Central Asia. He left Kabul on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1647 A.D, with a large force. By then the situation had become irretrievable with bickering among Mughal commanders, the hostility of the local population, resentment at the presence of Hindus and the unhappiness of Indian troops with service in a hostile environment.<sup>17</sup> Aurangzeb suffered from serious handicap. His position was not as strong as that of the enemy. The Uzbeks numbered about 100,000 while the Mughal force consisted only of 25,000 men. The generals who held districts as signed to them by Sadullah Khan were kept, but they did not leave their posts promptly when their services were required elsewhere. The Uzbeks mode of fighting also added to the difficulties of the Mughals. The nomad savages never risked an open engagement, and they were powerless against their "Cossack-tactics". But Aurangzeb was not the man to flinch from his resolve. In the first battle of Uzbeks fled from the field when the Mughals and Rajputs opened fire on them. They attacked the imperialists again but sustain a severe defeat. Aurangzeb entered Balkh in triumph and placed it under the command of the Rajput chief Madhu Singh Hada.<sup>18</sup>

Aurangzeb advanced to Aqeba with the Uzbeks hovering around his force and inflicting casualties and losses. On hearing of a large force of the enemy advancing on Balkh, he marched back. Abdul Aziz was easily repulsed by Mughal musketeers. Accepting the superior strength of his opponents Abdul Aziz decided to make peace, in any case his own army of nomads was melting away after each setback. The grim tenacity of Prince Aurangzeb struck terror into the heart of Nazar Mohammad who opened negotiations. Nazar Mohammad arrived with a small body of Persian troops provided by Shah Abbas II and made several unsuccessful attacks on Mughal outposts. His attempt to capture Maimanah fort was also unsuccessful. He decided to negotiate. ShahJahan was willing to return Balkh to him provided he submitted but he was averse to doing so. As winter was fast approaching, Indian Soldiers were reluctant to face the winter of Bukhara and the fear of their communication being cut off by snowing of the Hindu Kush passes.<sup>19</sup> Aurangzeb handed over Balkh to Nazar Mohammad's grandson and commenced to withdraw on 3<sup>th</sup> October 1647. Grain worth five *lakhs* was abandoned in the forts of Balkh and large quantities of other stores and provisions were left behind. It was now late in the season and the troops suffered much hardship and privation during their march back. The column was constantly harassed by the *hazaras* who were every bit as heartless as the Uzbeks. They plundered some baggage between Ghor and Khwaja Zaid. An attempt to loot the treasure was, however, foiled. Through sleet and snow the withdrawal continued. Aurangzeb showed his mettle by calmly dismounting to offer his prayers with the enemy on his heels and within sight. The rear guard was provided by Rajputs who suffered untold misery. Men and beasts fell headlong down ravines and died without food.

Over the Hindukush snow began to fall. Raja Jai Singh crossed during a snow storm. The treasure was stranded on top of the pass, ferrying it through deep snow and in bitter cold took seven days. Bahadur Khan who was

following the treasure had to beat off an attack on the rear guard by the *Hazaras*. He had difficulty in getting across the Hindukush and many men and animals were lost. The prince's baggage reached Kabul a fortnight after he did.<sup>20</sup> It is mentioned that 500 soldiers were lost in battle but ten times that number, including camp followers, lost their lives due to cold and snow in the mountains. The state suffered a loss of four crores and this was without the payment of any compensation either to the survivors of the expedition for their arduous toil and suffering or to the families of those who perished. The Mughal nostalgia for their homeland was finally extinguished. The expedition had proved a total disaster. Its consequences, however, turned out to be far reaching and still more catastrophic.<sup>21</sup> The battle was over but it was difficult to settle the terms of a lasting peace. ShahJahan was inclined to give the country back to Nazar Mohammad but he insisted on the condition that he should first make his submission. Three months were wasted in negotiations but the ex-king of Balkh could not make up his mind to accept the terms offered to him. Still in a state of doubt and uncertainty he sent his grandsons to wait on the prince wanted to leave the place quickly, he made over the fort and city of Balkh to Nazar Mohammad's grandsons and made preparations for his home-ward journey.<sup>22</sup>

Thus ended ShahJahan's fatuous war in Balkh, a war in which the Indian treasury spent four crores of rupees in two years and realized from the conquered country a revenue of Rs. 22 ½ lakhs only. Not an inch of territory was annexed, nor dynasty changed, and no enemy replaced by an ally on the throne of Balkh. The grain store in Balkh, fort, worth 5 lakhs, and the provisions in other forts as well, were all abandoned to the *Bukharians*, besides Rs. 50,000 in cash presented to Nazar Mohammad's grandsons and Rs.22,500 to envoys. Five hundred soldiers fell in battle and ten times that number (including camp followers) terrible price that aggressive imperialism makes India pay for wars across the north-western frontier.<sup>23</sup>

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