

Adharchandra Mookerjee Lectures for 1942

MAHARAJA RAJBALLABH

A Critical Study based on
Contemporary Records

BY

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DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY OF
MY MATERNAL GRANDFATHER
PRASANNA KUMAR SEN
GREAT-GREAT-GRANDSON
OF
MAHARAJA RAJBALLABH

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PREFACE

In 1942 I was invited by the University of Calcutta to deliver a course of two lectures under the Adharchandra Mookerjee (Endowment) Lectureship. These lectures are now published exactly in the form in which I delivered them in January, 1943, with the addition of the footnotes. The importance of the subject and the reason why I selected it have been explained at the commencement of Lecture I, and I shall consider my labours amply rewarded if these lectures promote a critical study of the history of the period. The short but tragic reigns of Sirajuddaula and his two successors constitute the most eventful period in the modern history of Bengal and, to use the words of Hallam, it is one 'which no Indian ever regards without interest and few without prejudice.' Time has come when we should study the history of this period in the light of contemporary records, without prejudice or passion of any kind. I have approached the study of Rajballabh in this spirit; but I am not a specialist in this branch of study, and these lectures touch only a fringe of the subject. I have, however, shown that there is scope for fresh study, and I hope a more competent scholar should take up the task of writing a critical and comprehensive history of Bengal from 1756 to 1763. I have keenly felt the want of such a book while preparing these lectures.

I take this opportunity to thank most sincerely the Syndicate of the University of Calcutta for having invited me to deliver these lectures. I must also express my deep obligations to Dr. S. N. Sen, M.A.,

Ph.D., B.Litt., Director of Archives, Government of India, for the facilities he gave me for consulting the original documents kept in the Imperial Records Department. Thanks to the new arrangement and system introduced by him and the personal interest he took, I could consult all the records relating to Rajballabh during my short stay in Delhi. I may incidentally mention that in course of my inspection of the records I found that they contain a great deal of interesting information about the social and economic condition of Bengal, and it is a matter of regret that no student has yet studied them from this point of view by taking advantage of the great facilities now offered by the Imperial Records Department.

In conclusion I must thank the Calcutta University Press for the great care with which the printing of this book has been executed.

4, Bepin Pal Road,
Kalighat, Calcutta. }
May 1, 1946.

R. C. MAJUMDAR.

valuable information concerning Bengal by his friend and hero Robert Clive.

(2) *Muzaffarnāmah*—This is a detailed history of Bengal from the time of Alivardi to the year 1772 A.D. Karam Ali, who composed it in 1772 A.D., claims to have belonged to the family of the Nawabs of Murshidabad, and served as the Fouzdar of Ghoraghat under Nawab Alivardi with whom he was on intimate terms.

(3) *Riyāz-us-Salātin*, composed between 1786 and 1788 A.D., by Ghulam Husain Salim.

(4) *Khulāsat-ut-Tawārikh*, by Kalyan Singh, Deputy Governor of Bihar till 1783 A.D. His father Shitab Ray was also the Deputy Governor of Bihar from 1765 to 1773 A.D. The work was completed in 1812 A.D.

(5) *Stewart*—History of Bengal, published in 1813 A.D.

These are the materials with the aid of which I have attempted to sketch the life and history of Maharaja Rajballabh, leaving out of consideration the later writings, both of English and Indian authors, as it is risky to accept their views or statement of facts without corroboration by the above contemporary sources.

The local and family traditions about Rajballabh have not been altogether ignored, specially in delineating those aspects of his life for which there is no other record. But except where reliable documentary evidence can be brought forward to support or substantiate them they cannot be definitely accepted as historical facts.

2. EARLY LIFE

No authentic account is available regarding the early life of Rajballabh, and we are almost entirely de-

pendent upon the tradition preserved in his family and among the people of the locality. These will be found in his biography by Gupta and need not be referred to in detail. We may note only a few important particulars the authenticity of which may be accepted without reasonable doubt.

Rajballabh was born in a village called Beel-Dāoniā which he later decorated with fine palaces and temples, and renamed Rājnagar. It is shown in Rennel's map, and was destroyed by the Padma river about 1867 A.D. Rajballabh's father Krishnajiban Majumdar was a man of some means, though it is difficult to ascertain his exact status in life. There are good grounds to believe that he held the office of Khasnavis at Malkhanagar (now in Dacca district) in 1680 A.D.⁴ and amassed at least a moderate fortune before his death.^{4a} Although 'Sena' was the family title, Krishnajiban is usually referred to as Majumdar, the title conferred by the Nawab on one of his ancestors.

The date of Rajballabh's birth is not known with certainty, but the family tradition fixes it at A.D. 1707.⁵ Of his education we know almost nothing, though according to some tradition he acquired great proficiency in Persian.⁶

4 For evidence, and different opinions on this subject, cf. Gupta.

4a Rajballabh's father was a *zamindar*. This is proved by the evidence of the *Serishtadar* Mrityunjai Mukhuti, when examined before Mr. Thompson in the proceedings about Rajnagar on 20th September, 1791. The *Serishtadar's* words are: "I have served in the *zamindari* from the age of fifteen or sixteen years, and am now sixty-two. My father served before me, in the time of Rajballabh's father, and we were both employed as the head *Serishtadars* of the whole *zamindari*." (Beveridge—Bakarganj, p. 97, f.n. 7.)

5 Gupta, p. 63.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 68-73. Gupta concluded, from Rajballabh's letters in Long's Records, that he knew English. But these may be

MAHARAJA RAJBALLABH

LECTURE I

I. INTRODUCTION

Maharaja Rajballabh is one of those leading political figures in Bengal who have earned an undying fame or notoriety by the part they played in the memorable events which led to the transference of political authority from the Muslim rulers to the British. As is the case with most of them, the current view about Rajballabh is based on popular beliefs and prejudices rather than on authentic or reliable historical facts. Fortunately, contemporary records are now available to us, and it is high time to study afresh the history of the period in order to form sober judgment on the leading actors of the great drama. Apart from this general motive, certain personal considerations have impelled me to undertake the study of Rajballabh. I am a descendant of the Maharaja and am urged by a very natural instinct to discover and reveal the true facts of his life and career. This is my excuse for venturing into a field of study in which I have no claim to be a specialist.

The subject is not an untrodden ground; for Rajballabh has had a fair number of both friendly biographers and malign critics. There are no less than four Bengali Lives of the Maharaja,¹ the best of them, also the latest, being composed by Late Rasik Lal Gupta and originally published in 1311 B.S. (1904 A.D.). As an extreme example of the malign critics may be mentioned Kailas Chandra Sinha, whose writings² betray

1 Gupta, Preface.

2 Specimens have been quoted in 'Gupta.'

such obvious traces of deliberate malice and inveterate prejudice as would justify us in ignoring him altogether in a sober historical discussion. A moderate example of unfriendly criticism is furnished by the writings of the historian Akshaya Kumar Maitreya³ which fairly represent the current, though absolutely unfounded, view generally held at the present time. I propose to ignore altogether the traditions and beliefs which form the background of these two rival opinions and draw a true picture of Maharaja Rajballabh as far as it is possible to do so with the help of the reliable historical evidence available to us.

The sources of information regarding Rajballabh may be divided into two classes. The contemporary records, specially the Minutes of the Calcutta Council, the official correspondence of the Governor of Calcutta with the Nawabs and the English officers, and letters and memorandums of the English, French and Dutch officials of the time form the first category, and are highly valuable and useful materials. To the next category belong the historical works composed by persons who lived in the latter part of the eighteenth century and had access to reliable information concerning Bengal. The most important of these is the *Siyar-ul-mutaqherin*, whose author, Syed Ghulam Hussain, was a skilful chronicler and had personal knowledge of the historical events of the entire period of Rajballabh's public career. Among other contemporary works may be mentioned the following :—

(1) *Orme*—A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan. Orme, who was a member of the Madras Council in 1756-57, published his great historical work in 1763, and was supplied

3 In his Bengali work *Sirajuddaula*,

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(2) *Muzaffarnāmah*—This is a detailed history of Bengal from the time of Alivardi to the year 1772 A.D. Karam Ali, who composed it in 1772 A.D., claims to have belonged to the family of the Nawabs of Murshidabad, and served as the Fouzdar of Ghoraghat under Nawab Alivardi with whom he was on intimate terms.

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Rajballabh entered public service as a clerk (or accountant according to Stewart) in the Department of Admiralty (*Nawara*) in Dacca some time about the year 1734 A.D. He was soon promoted to the post of Peshkar (Head Clerk) in the same department and, later, became its Superintendent.⁷ This rapid promotion in course of about five years (1734-39) has given rise to many legends and stories,⁸ the truth of which cannot be tested by any positive evidence. Shortly after the last promotion of Rajballabh, his patron Nawab Sarfaraz Khan lost his life and throne.

and most probably are, English translations of Persian letters.

7 Stewart says that "the Superintendence of the boat department (of Dacca) was entrusted to Murad Ali Khan, who had in his employment an accountant named Rajballabh" (p. 462). This refers to the year 1734, when Sarfaraz Khan was appointed Deputy Nazim of Dacca by his father Shujauddin Khan. Later, Murad Ali Khan was married to a daughter of Sarfaraz Khan and appointed Deputy Governor of Jahangirnagar (i.e., Deputy of the absentee Deputy Nazim Sarfaraz Khan). According to Riyaz "Murad Ali Khan now (being appointed Deputy Governor of Jahangirnagar) promoted Rajballabh, a clerk attached to the Admiralty, to the office of Peshkar thereof." According to Stewart this took place in 1737-38 (p. 464). According to the same authority Rajballabh was appointed Superintendent of the boat establishment (i.e., Nawara or Admiralty) by Sarfaraz Khan and thereby accumulated much wealth (p. 530). This promotion, therefore, evidently took place in A.D. 1739 or the beginning of A.D. 1740, as Sarfaraz Khan was defeated and killed in April, 1740.

Mr. Raymond, the translator of Seir, says that large vessels and galleys, some of them as big as the biggest galley in Europe, were built and fitted at Dacca and sent to Delhi. This was the main work of the Boat Establishment at Dacca, the expenditure of which was assigned upon eighty villages about Dacca, rated at Rs. 40,000, but which in process of time yielded above 3 lakhs (Seir I, 345, f.n. 2). The post of Superintendent of this Department was, therefore, both responsible and lucrative.

8 These have been collected in Gupta, pp. 74-86.

3. REIGN OF ALIVARDI KHAN

In 1740, Alivardi, Governor of Patna, revolted against his master, Nawab Sarfaraz Khan, and marched towards Murshidabad. Sarfaraz was defeated and killed at Ghiria on April 10, 1740, and a few days later Alivardi ascended the throne at Murshidabad. He had no son and his daughters were married to the three sons of his brother. Nawazish Muhammad, his eldest nephew and husband of his eldest daughter Ghasiti Begam, was appointed Dewan of the Nizamat and also Deputy Governor of Dacca (which included, within its jurisdiction, Chittagong, Tippera and Sylhet), with Husain Quli Khan as his Deputy. But as both of them lived at Murshidabad, the actual administration was entrusted to Ray Gokulchand, the Dewan of Husain Quli.⁹ The

⁹ Seir I, 357.

In order to understand properly the significance of the posts called Deputy Nazim, Deputy Governor, *Diwan* of the Nizamat, etc., cf. Riyaz, p. 303, f.n. 2.

Bengal was divided into four administrative Divisions, viz.: (1) Bengal proper comprising Western, Central and a portion of Northern Bengal; (2) Jahangirnagar or Dacca Division, comprising Eastern and Southern Bengal and a small portion of Northern Bengal, and including Sylhet and Chittagong; (3) Behar; (4) Orissa.

The Nawab of Bengal, theoretically the Nazim (Governor) of the whole province, directly administered only the first Division, and appointed a Naib-Nazim (Deputy Governor) for each of the rest. Sometimes the latter only nominally held the office and stayed at Murshidabad, while the actual administration was carried on by his Deputy, also referred to as Deputy Governor. The indiscriminate use of the term to denote the *de jure* as well as the *de facto* Governor of the Division, often causes confusion and misunderstanding which is further increased when a Deputy Governor of the second type was also an absentee and left the actual administration to his own Deputy.

Each Administrative Division, referred to above, had a *Dewan*, who may be regarded as the Prime Minister of the Deputy Governor and not unoften the actual ruler. Sometimes the

complaint of this Dewan led to the dismissal of Husain Quli about 1743 A.D., but the latter found means to ingratiate himself into the favour of Ghasiti Begam, a woman of dissolute character, and was re-instated in his office. He proceeded to Dacca, dismissed Gokulchand, and appointed Rajballabh to his post.^{9a} But he soon returned to Murshidabad so that he might continue to exercise his influence over Ghasiti, leaving his nephew Husainuddin Khan at Dacca as his Deputy.¹⁰ How long Rajballabh personally discharged his responsible duties of Dewanship at Dacca, it is difficult to say. For he was called to Murshidabad to advise and assist his master Nawazish Muhammad who was playing a big game in politics. As the eldest nephew and son-in-law he naturally regarded himself as the legitimate successor of Alivardi, but the latter made no secret of his partiality for Sirajuddaula, the son of his youngest daughter, and formally nominated him as his successor. Nawazish accordingly began to amass money and troops for the inevitable war of succession, and in this secret conspiracy his chief counsellors and assistants were Husain Quli Khan and Rajballabh.

Accordingly Rajballabh lived mostly in Murshidabad, and first his eldest son Ramdas, and after the

Dewan stayed with the Deputy Nazim at Murshidabad and his Deputy carried on the actual administration.

The *Dewan* of the Nawab was called the *Dewan* of the Nizamat.

9a Rajballabh presumably continued up to this time in the post of Superintendent of the Department of Admiralty. According to *Siyar-ul-mutaqherin* (Vol. I, p. 345), Alivardi, on his accession to the throne, bestowed upon Sirajuddaula the office of Admiral of Jahangirnagar (Dacca). Whether this is the same post as that held by Rajballabh, is difficult to say. But the appointment was purely nominal and the actual management of the Department must have been in the hands of Rajballabh.

10 Seir, Vol. I, pp. 422-23.

latter's death, his second son Krishnadas acted as his Deputy at Dacca. Thus Husain Quli Khan and Rajballabh, the Deputy Governor of Dacca and his Dewan, both stayed at Murshidabad, and their work was actually carried on in Dacca by the nephew of the former, and the son of the latter.¹¹

The chief strength and support of Nawazish lay in his great popularity. The author of *Siyar-ul-mutaqherin* has given a long catalogue of his charity, liberality and other virtues which endeared him to all classes of people at Murshidabad.¹² This might have stood him in good stead in the forthcoming contest for the throne,^{12a} but he was not destined to put it to test, and an accidental misfortune changed the whole course of intrigue and perhaps the political history of Bengal. Nawazish Muhammad had no son and adopted Akramuddaula, the younger brother of Sirajuddaula, and the death of this boy in 1753 so overwhelmed him with sorrow that he practically retired from public affairs and soon his health almost completely broke down. Full advantage of this was taken by his enemy. In 1754 both Husain Quli and his nephew Husainuddin, his Deputy at Dacca, were murdered at the instance of Sirajuddaula.¹³ An open rupture was prevented by the tact and influence of the old Nawab who, in order to conciliate Nawazish, appointed the posthumous child of Akramuddaula, named Mabarakuddaula, Governor of

¹¹ Krishnadas, the second son of Rajballabh, is referred to as the 'Nabob' of Dacca in Public Consultations, July 14, 1755. (Long, No. 155, p. 59.)

¹² Seir, Vol. II, pp. 128 ff.

^{12a} The Dacca Council was of opinion that in spite of nomination by Alivardi as his successor, Sirajuddaula had little chance against Nawazish (Hill, Vol. II, p. 67).

¹³ Seir, Vol. II, pp. 119-25; Orme, Vol. II, p. 48.

Dacca, with Rajballabh as his Deputy¹⁴; but Nawazish did not recover from his illness and died in January, 1756.¹⁵

The death of Nawazish left Rajballabh as the chief adviser of his widow Ghasiti Begam, who did not give up the contest for the throne, and now actively intrigued for the succession of Akramuddaula. She had transferred her favours, after the death of Husain Quli Khan, to Nazar Ali who organised her army, and Matijhil, the fortified palace constructed by Nawazish outside the city of Murshidabad,¹⁶ became the stronghold of the party.

Drake, the Governor of Calcutta, thus describes the power and position of Ghasiti Begam.^{16a} "She had," he says, "amassed immense riches, one of the most powerful engines of war in these eastern parts, and being determined at all adventures to support her ward she drew together a large body of men under the command of Meir Nazzer Alli her reputed gallant, and fortified herself in the large gardens of Moota Ghill within two miles of Muxadavad the capital of the Nabob

14 Rajballabh's appointment must have taken place before the end of the year 1754 A.D. In the Minutes of the Calcutta Council, dated 13th January, 1755, we find the following entry:

"Arrival of Rajballabh's *Dewan* on 23rd December, 1754 from Muxadabad with a *Perwana* appointing him to act as immediate Deputy to Morada Daula, the new *Subah* of Dacca."

Mr. Gupta places the appointment before 14th March, 1754 (Gupta, p. 233, f.n. 1), but the letter published in Long's Records, on which he relies, is dated March 1, 1755, and not March 14, 1754 (Long, No. 137). The date 1754, printed at the top-corner, misled Mr. Gupta, but the Minutes of the Council, dated January 13 and February 12, 20 and 24, leave no doubt that Long's No. 137 is dated March 1, 1755.

15 December, 1755, according to Hill (Vol. I, p. xlv, 67). But according to Seir "he died the 13th of the Second Reby in the year 1169" which falls in January, 1756.

16 Seir, Vol. II, pp. 156, 185-86; Orme, Vol. II, p. 49.

16a Hill, Vol. I, p. 119.

of Bengal; she had with her for her duan and privy councillor one Rajabullub, who had been Nabob of Dacca, and esteemed the subtlest politician in the whole province and one whom Souragud Dowlet was determined to draw over to his party if possible or to have him assassinated the first opportunity."

4. THE PLOT FOR THE THRONE

A series of fortuitous circumstances thus placed Rajballabh at the head of a party resolved to seize the throne, after the death of Alivardi, for Ghasiti's grandson and protégé Mabarakuddaula, a child of three. It would be unjust to regard this as an act of treason or of disloyalty. For, according to the canon of conduct universally followed in those days, the loyalty of a servant was due to his immediate master, and Rajballabh was justified in regarding it to be his duty to serve faithfully the cause of his master and patron Nawazish Muhammad. As to treason, we must remember that intrigues for the throne were the order of the day, and Alivardi himself became the Nawab of Bengal by a successful intrigue against his master and king. Alivardi had been ruling in Bengal for less than sixteen years, and could hardly claim the kind of loyalty which an old established royal family might reasonably expect from the subjects. Besides, the child, whose cause was adopted by Rajballabh, belonged to the royal family, and Ghasiti being the eldest daughter of the Nawab, her grandchild's claim to the throne could hardly be regarded as less legitimate than that of Sirajuddaula. It is true that Alivardi had nominated Siraj as his successor. But such nominations had little value either in law or in convention. Murshid

Quli had himself nominated his grandson Sarfaraz to be his successor, but the latter's father had successfully contested the throne.¹⁷ Thus, apart from the general unsettled condition of the country as a whole, recent events in the history of Bengal furnished ample justification for the course of conduct that Rajballabh's sense of duty and gratitude for his master obliged him to follow. Indeed, his attachment to the cause of Ghasiti Begam was tacitly taken for granted, and he would have undoubtedly earned an unenviable notoriety if he had deserted the widow of his late patron at this supreme crisis in her affairs.

Sirajuddaula, as observed by Drake, naturally regarded Rajballabh as his chief enemy and exercised the great influence which he possessed with the dying Nawab to bring pressure upon this trusted chief of the rival party that contested his succession to the throne. According to Holwell, Sirajuddaula sought 'by imprisonment' and other despotic and severe methods to force from Rajballabh a confession and discovery of the riches of Nawazish Muhammad, but the minister, faithful to his deceased master, could not be brought to any confession injurious to the interest of his surviving family; and after a few days' sufferings obtained his liberty by the intercession of Ghasiti Begam with her parents.¹⁸

This is, however, denied by Watts, the Chief of the English factory at Cossimbazar. Regarding the imprisonment of Rajballabh during the life-time of Alivardi, he observes: "Where Mr. Holwell picked up this piece of intelligence I am at a loss to know,

17 Riyaz, p. 284.

18 Hill, Vol. II, p. 3; cf. also Vol. III, p. 353. According to Seir (Vol. II, p. 188) Sirajuddaula sent "guards to Dacca to seize Krishnadas, son of Rajballabh."

for neither I, nor I believe any of the gentlemen of Cossimbazar ever heard of his being imprisoned till after the old Nabob's death; on the contrary Rajballabh was daily employed in giving an account of Nawazish Muhammad's riches to the old Nabob and never received any check till about a few days before he died, when on the information of Sirajuddaula of Nawazish Muhammad's Begam or wife's raising forces for us, he was sent for and spoke to severely; on which he retired to his mistress at Matijhil where she was raising forces as much to preserve the life of her gallant Mir Nazir Ally, as her riches which she expected will be seized on her father's death. . .''¹⁹ At the time when Watts wrote this letter he had, as we shall have presently occasion to see, special reasons of a personal nature to give a garbled version of the entire episode of Rajballabh and his party at this critical juncture. It is, therefore, difficult to accept his version as the whole truth. In fact, the imprisonment of Rajballabh by Sirajuddaula, as stated by Holwell, is also referred to in a French letter of M. Demontorcin, dated Chandernagore, August 1, 1756²⁰ and by Mr. Cooke, Secretary to the Governor and Council at Calcutta.²¹ According to Riyāz-us-Salātin also Sirajuddaula arrested Rajballabh and kept him under surveillance.²² On the whole the conclusion is irresistible that the rivalry between Sirajuddaula and Ghasiti Begam came to a head some time before the death of Nawab Alivardi, and unable to touch the person of Ghasiti during the life-time of her father, Siraj sought to disarm the opposition by removing her chief adviser Rajballabh. Evi-

19 Hill, Vol. III, p. 331.

20 Hill, Vol. I, p. 175.

21 Hill, Vol. III, p. 291.

22 Riyaz, p. 365.

dently Ghasiti Begam still possessed enough influence over her father to prevent Siraj from pushing matters to the extreme and obtain the release of Rajballabh. Watts' statement that Rajballabh was daily employed in giving an 'account of Nawazish Muhammad's riches to the old Nabob' supports the statement in Riyāz that he was called upon to render accounts, presumably of the Nizamat Dewani of which Nawazish was in charge, in order to find out his dues to the Government, and this might have been as much due to official routine as to a desire to compass his ruin, as happened in many other cases. According to Riyāz, although Rajballabh tried hard to pay up some cash and to compromise the demands, Sirajuddaula did not consent and kept him under surveillance.²³

In any case the conduct of Sirajuddaula, whatever might have been the degree of its severity, left no doubt in the mind of Rajballabh that things had drifted almost to an open war with the heir-presumptive to the throne who commanded all the resources of the State which the affection of a dotard grandfather and physical incompetence of an old dying Nawab placed in his hands. Rajballabh did not rely solely on the military force which swore allegiance to Ghasiti Begam, but sought to strengthen his party by diplomatic alliance. There were two sources from which he could expect any aid, the English Company in Calcutta and Shaukat Jang of Purnea, and there are good grounds to believe that he carried on secret negotiations with both. From the very nature of the case, it is difficult to secure positive proof about the nature and course of these secret plots, but we may discuss here some evidences, both direct and indirect, which throw light on these transactions.

²³ Riyaz, p. 365.

The most direct evidence is furnished by the Memoir²⁴ written by Monsieur Jean Law, Chief of the French factory at Cossimbazar at this time. He definitely states that "during the last illness of Aliverdikhān there were two considerable parties which pretended to the *subahdari*, and which, though divided, appeared likely to unite in order to overthrow that of Sirajuddaula." The one was the party of Ghasiti Begam, the other was that of Shaukat Jang, Nawab of Purnea. Law then continues: "It was in the effervescence of these troubles that the English gave Sirajuddaula reason for complaint against them. Always led away by the idea that he would not have sufficient influence to get himself recognised as Subahdar, they carried on a correspondence with the Begam whom I have just mentioned and withdrew to Calcutta the treasures which she wished to put in a place of safety and also those of Rajballabh her chief Diwan. It is even said they had an understanding with the Nawab of Purneah."

Law's narrative regarding the relation between the English and Ghasiti Begam is fully corroborated by an account in a British Museum Manuscript,^{24a} a letter from P. Renault to Dupleix, dated Chandernagore, August 26, 1756,²⁵ and Tooke's narrative.^{25a} M. Law's further statement that Sirajuddaula strongly suspected an alliance between Ghasiti Begam and the English is fully endorsed by the very circumstantial narrative of Mr. Forth contained in a letter²⁶ to Mr. Drake, dated December 16, 1756, which runs as fol-

24 Hill, Vol. III, p. 160.

24a *Ibid.*, p. 219.

25 Hill, Vol. I, p. 206.

25a *Ibid.*, p. 284.

26 Hill, Vol. II, p. 65.

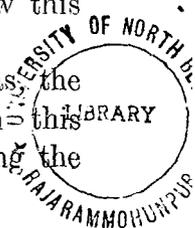
lows: "About fifteen days before the old Nabob (Alivardi) died, his son (Siraj) came in with a face full of resentment and anger and addressed the old man thus, 'Father, I am well informed the English are going to assist the Begam.' The old Nawab asked me if it was true. I told him that it was a malicious report. . . . He turned round to his son and told him he did not believe a word of what had been told him. Sirajuddaula answered that he could prove it." Forth himself admits in the same letter that there was a report that the English would assist the Begam, and he explained the origin of this report as due to a simple misunderstanding.

The English writers, with one or two exceptions, never refer to any alliance or even any understanding between the English and Ghasiti Begam. But while they admit certain important facts, such as the protection afforded to the riches and family of Rajballabh in Calcutta, they differ widely, and sometimes even flatly contradict one another, regarding almost every phase of this incident, as well as of the general political situation in Murshidabad about the time of Alivardi's death. These differences and contradictions throw a veil of mystery upon the whole affair and lead almost irresistibly to the conclusion that there was a deliberate attempt, on their part, to conceal and distort the true state of affairs concerning Ghasiti Begam and Rajballabh. As this deliberate suppression of truth constitutes, in my opinion, a strong indirect evidence in support of the alleged secret alliance between the English and Rajballabh, it is necessary to review this point at some length.

We may begin with the episode of Krishnadas, the son of Rajballabh. Mr. Holwell's statement on this subject may be summed up as follows: "Finding the

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death of the old Subah (Alivardi) was near at hand, and recollecting his own family and greatest part of his wealth were exposed to danger at Dacca, his (Rajballabh's) first care was to draw them to a place of security.' In order to effect this he wrote to Mr. Watts that his family were going from Dacca to Puri, halting at Calcutta on his way and requested him to see that they might find there a proper reception. Mr. Watts accordingly wrote to the President and to Mr. Manningham. On the evening of 13th March, Krishnadas, the eldest son of Rajballabh, and his family arrived in Calcutta, and as the President was absent Mr. Manningham issued orders to receive them. The reason which weighed with Mr. Watts in recommending Rajballabh's family to the protection of the Governor was contained in his letter, which was however lost during the siege of Calcutta. Mr. Holwell reproduces from memory a substance of this letter, which says "that in compliance with Rajballabh's intimation and request, he wrote and recommended his family being received with all possible respect and regard, not only on account of his influence with the *Chuta* (Ghasiti) Begam, but as his power at Dacca might be of the utmost consequence to our Honourable Masters' affairs there." ²⁷

Mr. Watts admits having written to both the Governor and Mr. Manningham about Rajballabh, but gives an altogether different version of his letter which he also quotes from memory. He whittles down 'the recommendation for protection' mentioned by Holwell to a 'mere request to permit Krishnadas to stay for a month in Calcutta as his wife was taken ill and expected confinement.' The ground for his recommendation

was that 'Rajballabh had been useful to us and might be more so.' He even maintains that he did not know till about the time of Alivardi's death that 'ever Rajballabh's son or wealth were admitted into Calcutta.' "If I had been acquainted with that," continues he, "I should have been immediately alarmed, and the moment I suspected any ill consequences might attend the Governor's keeping Rajballabh's son or wealth in Calcutta I did desire the Governor to turn them out of the place."²⁸ Watts' version of his letter thus substantially differs from Holwell's. Drake, the Governor, however corroborates the latter. According to him, Watts made a request to admit Rajballabh's family into Calcutta for the space of two months and "strenuously recommended that we would not refuse that request as Rajballabh was likely to hold great posts in the Government, and might from such favour shown his family be instrumental of giving an uninterrupted currency to our business at Dacca and its dependencies."²⁹ Drake's statement is fully supported by Orme.^{29a}

There is, however, another phase of this interesting incident. Holwell, in agreement with the statement of Watts quoted above, tells us that 'about the time the death of Alivardi was deemed inevitable Watts wrote to the Governor advising that Krishnadas and his family should no longer be given protection in Calcutta, as it was very uncertain what a turn things would take after the decease of the Nabob.' Holwell says that he and Manningham agreed with this view and he pressed the Governor more than once to dismiss Rajballabh's family. "Why the President delayed their dismis-

²⁸ Hill, Vol. III, p. 332.

²⁹ Hill, Vol. II, pp. 136, 143.

^{29a} Orme, Vol. II, p. 50.

sion," says Holwell, "I am at a loss to account for."³⁰ President Drake, who, according to both Watts and Holwell, was thus alone responsible for continuing the protection afforded to Krishnadas, shifts the responsibility upon Watts' shoulder. He refers to several letters from Watts "implying that Rajballabh would be taken into favour again, and advising rather showing civility to his family than any ways to distress them, giving his opinion that we should be cautious and not let them leave Calcutta." "One letter," Drake admits, "did imply to give them warning to depart"; but he asserts that "that was soon contradicted, and I call on Mr. Watts to declare whether I did not frequently express I was apprehensive that family's residence here would bring the Company's affairs into trouble." Finally Drake positively asserts that the sole motive of originally granting protection to Krishnadas and continuing it later was to "hold in good correspondence and harmony people who then had great influence at the *Durbar*, thereby to promote the interest of the Company, and to act according to the recommendations of Watts who has always been supposed a competent judge here to hold the great men in favour at the *Durbar*." Referring to Holwell's remark that he and Manningham pressed for the dismissal of Krishnadas as soon as Watts suggested this course, Drake observes: "Even had any letter private or general from Cossimbazar hinted so much as even an apprehension that the protecting Krishnadas would be likely to draw on the Nabob's anger, I dare aver either of those two gentlemen would have communicated the same in public council."³¹

³⁰ Hill, Vol. II, pp. 4-5.

³¹ Hill, Vol. II, pp. 138-39.

The reason for the divergence of views in respect of the protection given to Rajballabh's family and the attempt of each of the leading members to shift the responsibility on the other is not far to seek. After the loss of the English settlement in Calcutta in 1756 many leading officials maintained that the protection given to Rajballabh's family was the greatest, nay the sole, cause of the resentment of Sirajuddaula that led to that great calamity. Holwell, in his narrative addressed to the Court of Directors, concludes this episode with the following words: "The foregoing is, Honourable Sirs, a faithful narrative of the protection given to Krishnadas, the son and family of Rajballabh, which has been industriously and maliciously by some, and erroneously by others, circulated as the principal cause of the loss of your settlement in Bengal."³² There is no doubt that Holwell, Drake, Manningham and Watts were the only leading members associated with the policy of protection to Rajballabh's family. Not only was the matter never placed before the Council, but as we shall presently see, Governor Drake, in consultation with Holwell, took upon himself the entire responsibility for ignominiously treating the agent whom Sirajuddaula, immediately after his accession, sent to Calcutta to demand the family and wealth of Rajballabh. It is natural, therefore, that after the great calamity had befallen the English, and the policy and action of these persons were generally held responsible for it, each of them would try to clear his own conduct by withholding as much as possible the true facts of the case. It

³² Hill, Vol. II, p. 7. Sirajuddaula himself mentions this as one of the "three substantial motives for extirpating the English" (Hill, Vol. I, p. 4); *cf. Ibid.*, pp. 7, 10, 67, 95, 196, 207, 243; Vol. III, p. 223, 288, where similar views are expressed.

is otherwise difficult to explain the hopeless discrepancies noted above, and also how Drake could seriously maintain that there was no reason to apprehend any difficulty from the side of the Nawab on account of the residence of Rajballabh's family in Calcutta until about the 15th of April when the Nawab sent a *Perwāna* immediately demanding their surrender. The contemporary documents leave no doubt that the rivalry for the throne between Sirajuddaula and Ghasiti Begam, aided by Rajballabh, was a matter of common knowledge, and no person with the least understanding of the Murshidabad Court politics, far less Drake and Watts, could be possibly ignorant of the reaction, in the mind of Sirajuddaula, of affording protection to the family and wealth of Rajballabh in Calcutta.

The same desire to evade responsibility is also apparent in some other statements of Watts. In order evidently to disprove the assertion of Drake and Holwell that he recommended the protection of Rajballabh's family on account of the latter's influence with Ghasiti Begam and the likelihood of his holding great posts in the Government, he goes to the length of denying that Ghasiti Begam had ever even any remote chance of success in the struggle for the throne. This is not only contradicted by the general report from independent sources, to be quoted later, but also by the anxiety shown by Sirajuddaula himself, as stated by Mr. Forth. Consequently, we are justified in attributing it to Watts' desperate but futile attempt to absolve himself of his responsibility in the matter of affording protection to Rajballabh's family.

It will appear from the above detailed discussion that history affords but few instances where such widely different accounts are given by leading actors of an important political transaction, in less than a year after

it had taken place, in order to evade their own responsibility. It is permissible to conclude, therefore, that there was possibly some mystery behind it, something secret which none was prepared to admit or disclose. Some light is thrown on this by the letter of the Court of Directors, dated 23rd March, 1759. "We are informed," so runs the letter, "from good authority that two of our servants of considerable rank actually received from Krishnadas upwards of fifty thousand Rupees for our protecting his person against Sirajudaula." ³³ The Court of Directors held that this iniquitous transaction was the source of the calamities suffered by the English and, therefore, requested the Council to hold a sifting enquiry in order to find out the guilty. Mr. Holwell also admits that a report was spread at Fulta, soon after the fall of Calcutta, that three gentlemen in the service had received from Krishnadas 50,000 rupees each. Although the Court of Directors did not name any person, Holwell was undoubtedly one of the suspects. Holwell was also probably right when he ascribed to this suspicion a degradation in rank, not only of himself, but also of seven members of the Board. ³⁴

The inquiry demanded by the Court of Directors was held, but with what results we do not know. It is presumably in connection with this inquiry that Rajballabh wrote a letter to the effect, that he never knew or heard of any money being given to any gentlemen at that time in Council but that a box of jewels and pearls was deposited in the care of Luckicondore (Lakshmi Chandra?) when the troubles began, and it was lost at

33 Hill, Vol. III, p. 368.

34 Hill, Vol. III, pp. 370-71.

the capture in a sloop on which it was laden.³⁵ Rajballabh's denial, of course, proves nothing, but the reference to the lost jewel box is significant. Besides, we shall have occasion to see that Rajballabh once did offer heavy bribes to high English officials to serve his own ends. In any case the circumstances noted above taken as a whole certainly lend colour to the definite statement made by Pierre Renault that "the English had sold their protection at a high price."³⁶ That this protection was given not only in respect of Krishnadas, as affirmed by Holwell, Watts and Drake, but also included the wealth of Ghasiti Begam, as affirmed by Law and Renault,³⁷ is supported by the letters of the Dacca Council,³⁸ M. Le. Conte,^{38a} and others.^{38b}

Indeed it is difficult to explain the attitude of the English in any other way. It is puerile to argue that they could be unaware of the great risk they ran in giving protection to the family of Rajballabh, as he was definitely known to be the head of one of the two rival parties in a contest for the throne, that was imminent and by no means could be long postponed in view of the illness of the old Nawab who had attained the age of 82. What was then the consideration for which the English undertook the great risk? The grounds suggested by Watts are that 'Rajballabh had been useful to us, and might be more so.' As regards the first we have no knowledge in what respect Rajballabh had been useful to the English. But it is on record that as early

³⁵ Minutes of the Council, 29th December, 1759 (*I.R.O.*)

³⁶ Hill, Vol. I, p. 207.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

^{38a} *Ibid.*, p. 20.

^{38b} *Ibid.*, pp. 174, 243; Vol. III, p. 218.

as 1749, when Rajballabh was the Dewan of Dacca, the English Council there reported that "not only was *Mutchulla* (agreement) taken from the tradesmen and *Podars* not to have any transactions with them but also from the *Modys* (grocers) not to supply them with necessaries and provisions . . . that all the *Chowkees* from Dacca to Backergunge are full of people to prevent any supplies being sent them."³⁹ Then, again, in December, 1754, *i.e.*, a little more than one year before these transactions, Rajballabh "demanded ten thousand rupees from the English Chief of Dacca Factory as present on his appointment to act as immediate Deputy to Mabarakuddaula, the new Subah of Dacca." The English after a great deal of bargaining agreed to make him a present of Rs. 3,000.⁴⁰ A month later Rajballabh again asked for *nazr* (visit) from the English Chief at Dacca, and on his refusal confined his Dewan and also stopped some of the Company's boats at Bakarganj. On 12th February the Calcutta Council sent orders to Dacca not to pay the *nazr* and sent Lt. John Hardinge to clear the boats near Bakarganj. This open hostility was only prevented by the payment of Rs. 4,300 by the Dacca authority in lieu of *nazr*.⁴¹ These instances, to which others may be added,⁴² certainly do not support Watts' contention that Rajballabh had been useful to the English. Indeed, Mr. Becher very rightly observed that even accepting Holwell's version that Watts' commendation about Rajballabh was based on the

39 Long, No. 42.

40 Minutes of the Council, 13th January, 1755 (*I.R.O.*), Revenue Consultations of the Dacca Factory, dated 30th December, 1754 (Beveridge-Bakarganj, p. 438).

41 Minutes of the Council, 12th February, 1755; 20th February, 1755; and 24th February, 1755 (*I.R.O.*); Long, Nos. 145, 146, 137.

42 For further acts of oppression, *cf.* Long, Nos. 152, 155.

ground that his power at Dacca might be of the utmost consequence to the Company's affairs, the reason should not have been regarded as sufficient, for while Rajballabh's family had the management of Government in Dacca they were very oppressive to the Company and their servants.⁴³

The second ground urged by Watts, *viz.*, that Rajballabh might be more useful, presumably in future, involves him in self-contradiction.^{43a} For he states categorically that no one believed that Ghasiti Begam had any chance of success in her contest for the throne; and as Rajballabh was an avowed partisan of the Begam it is difficult to conceive how he could be more useful to the English in future, or as Drake and Holwell put it, was likely to hold any great post in the Government.

Indeed, it is hardly conceivable that the English would have taken the great risk of offering protection to the wealth and family of Rajballabh and also the wealth of Ghasiti, unless some of the leading officials were won over by Rajballabh by payment of money, or unless they were firmly convinced that Ghasiti Begam had a fair chance of success. The presence of both the inducements is not, of course, ruled out.

The facts noted above, particularly the conduct of the English officials in respect of the protection granted to Krishnadas, the strange inconsistencies and contradictions involved in the explanation of this action, the conviction openly expressed by Sirajuddaula that the English were assisting the Begam, the general report current among the English and the French, and accepted by the Court of Directors on good authority, that some highly placed English officials had accepted bribes

⁴³ Hill, Vol. II, p. 158.

^{43a} This was pointed out by Mr. Holwell in his letter to the Court of Directors, dated August 10, 1757 (Hill. Vol. III, p. 354).

from Krishnadas, and above all the absence of any other rational and satisfactory explanation of the policy pursued by the English—all serve to support very strongly the narrative of Jean Law quoted above, and although no final conclusion is warranted by the facts so far known, there is a strong presumption in favour of the view that Rajballabh managed to enlist the support of the English in favour of Ghasiti Begam in the forthcoming struggle for succession to the throne. The one ostensible achievement of this secret alliance was that the wealth and family of Rajballabh, and possibly also the wealth of Ghasiti Begam, were safe in Calcutta beyond the immediate reach of Sirajuddaula. What other help was promised by or expected from the English we have no means to determine, for a false step on the part of Ghasiti Begam lost the battle almost before it was begun in earnest, and there was no opportunity of putting the English alliance to test. There is no definite evidence that Shaukat Jang, the Nawab of Purnea, joined this alliance, as hinted by M. Law. The alliance between Ghasiti and Shaukat Jang is, however, definitely mentioned in an account of the Revolution in a manuscript in the British Museum.^{43b} Moreover, we gather from the English records that the English authorities, while they were taking refuge at Fulta, after the fall of Calcutta, decided on September 15, 1756, to send a letter in Persian to Shaukat Jang with presents, hoping he might defeat Sirajuddaula.⁴⁴ This supports M. Law's statement that Shaukat Jang showed Siraj some letters he received from the English,^{44a} and definitely refutes the view of Hill that there is no evi-

^{43b} Hill, Vol. III, p. 217.

⁴⁴ Long, No. 199.

^{44a} Hill, Vol. III, p. 164.

dence of there having been any correspondence between the British and Shaukat Jang.^{44b}

Whatever may be said of Rajballabh's secret alliance with Shaukat Jang, there can be hardly any reasonable doubt of some sort of understanding between the English and Rajballabh. Although it did not bear much fruit, the significance of the step must not be overlooked. Rajballabh introduced a new element in Bengal politics, which was destined to revolutionise the whole course of Indian history at no distant date. To him belongs the credit—or discredit as some may choose to call it—of realising for the first time the importance of the English as a powerful factor in Bengal politics which might be put to very great use, with the aid of a liberal purse, by the rival factions in Murshidabad Court in their internecine quarrel or even struggle for the throne. The enunciation of this new principle may be likened to, and was in a sense the reverse of, what was so brilliantly pursued by M. Dupleix with conspicuous success in the Deccan. Although Rajballabh had no opportunity of carrying his new policy to its logical conclusion, he paved the way for the later successes of Mir Jafar and Mir Kasim. No political faction in Murshidabad before Rajballabh ever entered into an intrigue with the English; none after him could think of achieving any real success without it.

5. RAJBALLABH AND SIRAJUDDAULA

The death of Nawab Alivardi on April 10,⁴⁵ 1756, precipitated the political crisis which had been im-

^{44b} Hill, Vol. I, p. li.

⁴⁵ This date is given in a letter from the French Council, dated Chandernagore, April 26, 1756 (Hill, Vol. I, p. 1). Drake gives the date as April 9, in a letter, dated July 19, 1756 (*Ibid.*, p. 118). There are other authorities for both April 9 and 10 (Hill, Vol. I, 248).

pending for a long time. Sirajuddaula proclaimed himself Nawab even "before the body of his grandfather had been interred,"⁴⁶ as the Dutch Council put it. The time had come when Rajballabh, as the head of Ghasiti Begam's party, had actually to commence the struggle for which preparations had been going on for years past. As to the strength of this party, and the chance of its success, we may form some idea from contemporary views held on the subject. For reasons already stated above, we cannot put any reliance on the statements of English officials for, as the protection afforded to Rajballabh's family was obviously connected with the position of Ghasiti Begam and her chance of success against Sirajuddaula, their views are coloured by their attitude towards this incident. In order to refute the allegation (of Drake and Holwell) that he recommended protection to Rajballabh's family on account of the latter's influence with Ghasiti, Watts, as we have seen above, vehemently asserts that nobody in Murshidabad or Cossimbazar ever thought that Ghasiti had any chance of success. In his anxiety to exculpate himself Watts even goes further, and casting all sense of decency to the winds, observes that nobody imagined that "a loose abandoned old woman would be able to stand in competition with Sirajuddaula."⁴⁷ On the other hand Drake, who was mainly responsible for protecting Krishnadas, regarded Ghasiti as a powerful enemy and wrote on July 19, 1756: "It was also much doubted whether Sirajuddaula could overcome (Ghasiti) Begam's forces and those of her adherents who had promised her their assistance . . . and people were much divided in their sentiments whether the Nabob would be able to

⁴⁶ Hill, Vol. I, p. 304.

⁴⁷ Hill, Vol. III, p. 333.

establish himself as he had made himself generally odious throughout the province." ⁴⁸ Orme also writes : "Many now began to think and to say that she (Ghasiti) would prevail in her opposition against Sirajuddaula."^{48a}

Holwell goes even further. In order to justify the protection of Krishnadas even after Sirajuddaula, on ascending the throne, had sent an envoy demanding his person, he writes : " For we no sooner received advice of the death of Alivardi than we had notice also of the stand made against Sirajuddaula's accession by the young (Ghasiti) *Begam* and her party, of which Rajballabh was the Chief Minister and favourite of his mistress, so that it became at that juncture a dangerous step to the Company's interest to turn his family out of the settlement, the more specially as for some days advices from all quarters were in favour of the *Begam's* party." ⁴⁹ Other officials like Cooke,^{49a} Becher ⁵⁰ and Sykes ⁵¹ who attributed the loss of Calcutta to the protection of Rajballabh's family, minimised the strength of Ghasiti Begam and her chance of success in order to prove that there was no reasonable ground for this imprudent act of the Calcutta authorities. The statement of the French writers is, however, very definite,

48 Hill, Vol. I, p. 123; Drake's view about the power and general position of Ghasiti, contained in the same letter, has been noted above (p. 9); cf. also Hill, Vol. II, p. 143.

48a Orme, Vol. II, p. 50.

49 Hill, Vol. II, p. 5. This is further amplified in his letter to the Court of Directors, dated August 10, 1757, in which he says : " Not only the letters which came daily to Omychand, but to many of the other merchants and residents at Calcutta that kept a correspondence with the *Durbar* and city, intimated the probability of her (Ghasiti's) success." (Hill, Vol. III, p. 349).

49a Hill, Vol. III, p. 290.

50 Hill, Vol. II, p. 158.

51 Hill, Vol. I, p. 163.

and coming from disinterested persons, may be regarded as a more trustworthy evidence. After referring to a conspiracy of the chiefs to prevent the succession of Sirajuddaula on account of his haughty and violent character and unheard of cruelty, Renault, President of the French in Bengal, continues: " His aunt, Ghasiti Begam, who had at her disposition a party in the State with a considerable body of troops, having put herself at their head, it seemed that nothing could resist this faction. The English under this impression, thinking the ruin of Sirajuddaula, by whom they were not loved, inevitable, entered into a conspiracy with the Begam . . . " ⁵² The same view is expressed by M. Jean Law ⁵³ and is also endorsed by the account in the British Museum Manuscript referred to above. ⁵⁴

On the whole we are bound to hold that Ghásiti Begam was no mean enemy and to all outward appearances she had a reasonable chance of success. Immediately after her father's death, she took up her position in the strongly fortified palace of Matijhil outside the city. She had collected there an well-equipped army whose strength is put by Orme at 10,000 and by Tooke at 20,000, ⁵⁵ led by Nazir Ali, who had taken the place of Husain Quli Khan as her personal favourite. The great popularity of her late husband, in contrast to the general dislike for Sirajuddaula, was a great element in her favour. To this must be added the great talents of

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

⁵³ Hill, Vol. III, p. 164.

⁵⁴ Hill, Vol. III, p. 217.

⁵⁵ Orme, Vol. II, p. 50; Hill, Vol. I, p. 249. The British Museum MS puts the number as seven or eight thousand and describes the strength and strategic position of Matijhil (Hill, Vol. III, p. 217).

Rajballabh, specially his diplomatic skill in winning the support of the English and possibly also of Shaukat Jang, the chief of Purnea. The only serious defect lay in her own personal character. Her licentiousness was notorious and her relation with the chief of her army proved to be a cause of weakness rather than of strength.

The best evidence of the strength of Ghasiti Begam is perhaps afforded by the conduct of Sirajuddaula himself. His very first act on ascending the throne was directed against her. All authorities agree that he achieved complete success, though it is difficult to get an accurate idea of the incidents in this struggle. The most circumstantial account of this important episode is given in a British Museum manuscript of unknown authorship from which we may quote the following :⁵⁶ “ Aliverdikhan died in the beginning of April and Sirajuddaula was proclaimed Nawab. The next day he surrounded the castle of Moti Jhil so that nothing could enter ; he set fire to the fourrages and brought up artillery. In two days the troops in the castle, despairing of the succours which were promised them on the part of the Nawab of Purnea, who, moreover, was not yet on the march, though ten days’ journey away, almost all deserted in the night. The Great Begam, widow of Aliverdikhan, entered the castle to persuade her daughter to surrender, and assured her Sirajuddaula wanted neither her life nor her wealth. She agreed to everything provided her lover, Mir Nazir Ali, should have his life and be permitted to leave Bengal. The Nawab agreed and gave him an escort to conduct him to the frontier. The rumour ran that he retired to

Delhi, residence of the Mogul, where he tried to form a party.”

How far this account is accurate, it is difficult to say. At best, it is not in conflict with the somewhat cryptic account given by Jean Law which runs as follows: “The Begam, who, betrayed, it is said, by the persons from whom she expected assistance, preferred to give up everything and even her most faithful servants rather than risk the event of a conflict, which indeed might have been favourable to her, the small number of troops she had being picked men.”⁵⁷

It is somewhat strange that the narrative of the leading English officials contain very few particulars of this important episode. But the little information they supply corroborates the above account. Thus Drake’s narrative makes only the following brief reference:—
 “Affairs remained long in suspense, . . . however at length with specious promises the Begam was prevailed upon to disband her troops and return to her allegiance.”⁵⁸ Holwell’s inordinately long narrative contains only two passing references to the effect that Rajballabh and Ghasiti Begam withdrew to Moti Jhil and for some days advices from all quarters were in favour of the Begam’s party.⁵⁹ According to Sykes the Begam opposed Sirajuddaula for a few days, but her forces being discontented were in a very short time brought over to Sirajuddaula by his threats and the solicitations of others when Rajballabh and all his family that were in the city were brought into disgrace.⁶⁰ Tooke gives a few more details in the following extract^{60a}:—“She

57 Hill, Vol. III, p. 164.

58 Hill, Vol. I, p. 123.

59 Hill, Vol. II, pp. 4-5.

60 Hill, Vol. I, pp. 162-63.

60a *Ibid.*, p. 249.

was possessed of immense riches, got 20,000 of the military over to her party, with which she entrenched herself at Moota Geel, near Muxadavad, at the Chutah Nabob's palace; and took care to be well supplied with all sorts of arms and ammunition; but in want of provisions, the Nabob having secured all the avenues leading to her camp, whereupon, many of her military, upon her refusing them to attack the Nabob's forces, deserted her; and her husband's friends interposing between her and Seir Raja Dowlet, she suffered herself to be imposed on, and compromised matters; which was no sooner done, but Seir Raja Dowlet took her forces in pay, and having her then entirely at his discretion, plundered her of all her riches, to put it out of her power to make head against him hereafter."

The author of *Siyar-ul-Mutaqherin* also refers to the treacherous desertion of Ghasiti's troops, and the secret intrigues of her beloved Commander Nazir Ali with Sirajuddaula, as the main cause of her defeat.⁶¹ The contemporary English historian Orme, after referring to the great strength of Ghasiti Begam, merely says that "the widow of Alivardi interposed between her daughter and Sirajuddaula and at length prevailed on her to acknowledge him."⁶² According to *Riyaz-us-Salatin*, "the Begum of Alivardi, and Jagatseth, as an emissary of Sirajuddaula, went to Ghasiti Begum and gave her assurances, and so the latter refrained from hostility."⁶³

A perusal of the different accounts leaves no doubt that Ghasiti Begam's party was sufficiently strong and powerful to hold Moti Jhil against the Nawab's forces

61 Seir, Vol. II, p. 186.

62 Orme, Vol. II, p. 55.

63 Riyaz, p. 363.

for a few days, and their defeat or surrender was due partly to treason and partly to the interference of the old Begam of Alivardi. It is probable, too, that Ghasiti Begam's lack of character, intelligence and foresight was chiefly instrumental in bringing about her speedy downfall. The foolishness of his mistress in placing implicit trust on her adversary's words and putting the safety of her life, wealth, and lover before everything else ruined the scheme of Rajballabh before the results of his diplomacy could be brought to bear upon the momentous issue. Ghasiti Begam paid dearly for her folly, for Siraj seized her treasures and made her virtually a prisoner in his own palace.⁶⁴

It may be easily surmised that Rajballabh had no share in the policy of abject surrender pursued by his mistress.⁶⁵ For the personal safety of Rajballabh, unlike that of her lover Nazir Ali, was not stipulated by Ghasiti, and this devoted and faithful servant of herself and her husband was now surrendered to the wrath and vengeance of Sirajuddaula.

Sirajuddaula regarded Rajballabh as his inveterate enemy and had subjected him to harsh treatment even during the life-time of Alivardi as noted before. After the surrender of Ghasiti Begam, Rajballabh must have felt the full fury of the Nawab. He was removed from his office of the Dewan of Dacca.⁶⁶ Watts says he was imprisoned, and Sykes adds that he and his family in Murshidabad were put in disgrace. No further details

64 Seir, Vol. II, p. 186.

65 A biography of Rajballabh, in manuscript, now in possession of one of his descendants, says that "Ghasiti submitted to Sirajuddaula against the will of Rajballabh." Nothing is known, however, about the historical value of this biography (Gupta, p. 271).

66 Orme, Vol. II, p. 357. This is also indirectly supported in Seir, Vol. II, p. 253.

of the indignities inflicted upon Rajballabh are known, but the Nawab also took prompt steps to seize the wealth and family of Rajballabh that had found shelter in Calcutta. Even while he was engaged in the siege of Moti Jhil, he sent Naran Sing, brother of Rajaram, the *Fouzdar* of Hughli, to Calcutta, demanding the surrender of Rajballabh's family and wealth. Incredible as it may seem, the English Governor, without even consulting his Council, not only refused the request, but even drove away the messenger with ignominy.^{66a} In spite of the somewhat long and laboured defence of his conduct,^{66b} the true reason seems to be, as Holwell had the candour to admit, that they had definitely espoused the cause of Rajballabh and did not yet despair of the success of his party.⁶⁷

It may seem incredible that there was no immediate reaction on the part of the young and haughty Nawab to such a grave provocation. But fortunately the explanation is supplied by Watts. Dreading the consequences of their folly, now that the Nawab had triumphed over Ghasiti Begam and Rajballabh, Watts influenced all the great men of the Durbar in order that the complaint of the envoy might not reach the Nawab's ears,⁶⁸ and it may be safely presumed that this could not be effected without heavy bribes. A part of the ill-gotten money—the price of protection to Krishnadās—was evidently spent in a vain effort to avert its consequences.

Watts temporarily succeeded in his endeavour because the Nawab was busy with his expedition against

66a Hill, Vol. I, pp. 95, 100; Vol. III, pp. 338-39.

66b Hill, Vol. I, pp. 120-22; Vol. II, pp. 136-37, 145; Vol. III, pp. 349-50.

67 Hill, Vol. II, pp. 6-7, 137, 159. Drake indirectly admits this (cf. Hill, Vol. I, pp. 122-23).

68 Hill, Vol. III, p. 332.

Shaukat Jung of Purnea, his other rival, who was believed to be in league with Ghasiti Begam. Shortly after settling the affairs of Ghasiti Begam he personally led this expedition and had advanced as far as Rajmahal when he suddenly turned back and marched against the English. The cause of this unexpected change of plan is not definitely known. It is said in *Siyar-ul-Mutaqherin* that Sirajuddaula learnt at Rajmahal that "Krishnadas, son of Rajballabh, had given the slip to the guards that had been sent to Dacca to seize him and had made his escape to Calcutta where he was protected by Mr. Drake, the Chief man of the town. On hearing this Sirajuddaula gave up his design against Shaukat Jang and returned to Murshidabad whence, after angry correspondence with Drake, he marched with an army against Calcutta."⁶⁹ This statement affords an example of the author's ignorance of the accurate details of the history of the period. For we have indisputable documentary evidence, as noted above, that long before the Nawab marched against Shaukat Jang he not only knew about Krishnadas's stay in Calcutta but had even sent an envoy to demand his person.

According to Drake, his letter to the Nawab replying to his charge that the English had raised new fortifications in Calcutta reached the latter at Rajmahal and on receipt of this the Nawab flew into a great rage and immediately ordered his army to march back and invest Cossimbazar.⁷⁰ He, however, does not mention the fact, noted by Watts, that possibly the humiliated envoy of the Nawab, who was then with him, communicated to his master the ill-treatment he had received at the hands of the English.⁷¹ There is no doubt that it was

69 Seir, Vol. II, p. 188.

70 Hill, Vol. I, p. 125.

71 Hill, Vol. III, p. 332.

not merely the question of fortification but also that of Krishnadas that decided the Nawab to return.^{71a} Some even hold the latter to be the real cause, and the former merely a pretence.^{71b} The error of the author of *Siyar-ul-Mutaqherin*, referred to above, can thus be easily explained. What the Nawab heard at Rajmahal for the first time was not that Krishnadas had fled to Calcutta, but that the English had refused to surrender him and insulted the envoy sent by him for that purpose. It probably convinced him, what he had long suspected, that the English had secretly conspired with Ghasiti Begam, and from this point of view he was certainly right in regarding a settlement with the English as of far greater urgency and importance than that with Shaukat Jang. Viewed in this light we get a rational and satisfactory explanation of the unexpected return of the Nawab from Rajmahal and his subsequent conduct ending in his march to Calcutta. This also fully supports the view, almost unanimously held at the time, that the affair concerning Krishnadas was the main, if not the sole, cause of the hostility of the Nawab towards the English and all the miseries that the English suffered from it.

It is probable that before marching towards Calcutta, Sirajuddaulah had pardoned Rajballabh and come to some sort of accommodation with him. This may be inferred from the fact that while the English authorities imprisoned Krishnadas shortly before the siege of Calcutta, the Nawab not only treated him kindly but also publicly honoured him after that city fell into his

71a This was the general view at the time. Cf. Hill, Vol. I, pp. 62, 95; Vol. III, pp. 219, 317, 339, 351.

71b Hill, Vol. I, p. 67.

hands.⁷² Indeed the change in the attitude of the two parties to the family of Rajballabh was so radical, that some have even gone to the length of representing the whole episode of Krishnadas as one arranged in collusion between Sirajuddaula and Rajballabh. It has been seriously suggested that Rajballabh, in order to placate Sirajuddaula and keep his wealth from his grasp, proposed to him "to trick the English into sheltering his son and then to seize upon their property as punishment for the offence." This ingenious, but highly improbable, theory does not merit serious consideration even though it is endorsed by such a high authority as Hill.⁷³ Apart from the impossibility of such a design being conceived during the life-time of Alivardi, who was against a rupture with the English, the subsequent history of Rajballabh and his open adherence to the cause of Ghasiti give the lie direct to it.

As a matter of fact, the abject surrender of Ghasiti Begam removed the chief difficulty in the way of a settlement between Sirajuddaula and Rajballabh. The latter had now no other way left but to submit to the Nawab and to appease his wrath, and a handsome payment and profession of submission could easily secure pardon from him as he had no longer any reason to fear Rajballabh. A reconciliation between the two was neither unnatural nor difficult of accomplishment and need not be explained by recourse to a hypothesis which, apart from its inherent improbability, implies a long-drawn deceit and trickery of such an extraordinary nature that it could not be regarded as anything short of a miracle if ever it did take place.

72 Hill, Vol. I, pp. 142, 160, 258, 280, 285; Vol. III, pp. 288, 301-2, 371.

73 Hill, Vol. I, pp. xliv, 279-80.

The restoration of Rajballabh to liberty and, possibly also, to Nawab's favour, closes the first and in a sense the most important political episode in his life. The next is associated with the great plot against Sirajuddaula which cost him his life and throne and ended with the accession of Mir Jafar to the throne of Murshidabad. It is a memorable episode which no educated Indian has ever regarded without interest and few without prejudice. It behoves us therefore to deal with it in a perfectly detached and dispassionate spirit, unaffected alike by the blind prejudices and preconceived notions of the nineteenth century and the patriotic effervescence and parochial sentiment of the twentieth. If we do so we shall have to admit, quite against the current view, that Rajballabh was not concerned in any way in this great conspiracy.

Fortunately for Rajballabh's reputation the contemporary records give us a comprehensive account of the conspiracy, as it developed day by day, from the very inception to its successful completion. Indeed it may be said that history affords few instances where the true details of such a secret conspiracy can be recovered from contemporary records whose authenticity cannot be questioned in any way. We possess letters giving details of periodical transactions of the conspirators, their change of plans, their agreements, differences and quarrels, and we have the proceedings of the Secret Committee which finally approved of the plan. In none of these contemporary documents or in subsequent letters or memoirs by the English or the French does the name of Rajballabh figure in any way. The persons whose names figure prominently in these contemporary documents are Omychand, Jagat Seth, Yar Latif, Mir Jafar and Rai Durlabh, while persons of less importance are also occasionally referred to as willing

to join. But nowhere do we find any reference to Rajballabh.⁷⁴ The author of *Siyar-ul-Mutaqherin* also specifically names only Mir Jafar, Rai Durlabh and Jagat Seth as the conspirators. Although he adds that Ghasiti Begam "leagued herself secretly with Mir Jafar" and helped him with her money and personal influence, he does not name Rajballabh, and there is nothing to show that Rajballabh was still her associate or adviser.⁷⁵ There are of course references in some of these documents to 'other persons' who helped or joined the conspiracy. But it is difficult to believe that such an important personage as Rajballabh would be referred to in that vague manner if he had really been a member of the conspiracy. It may be added that neither Orme nor the author of *Riyaz-us-Salatin* includes Rajballabh among the conspirators.

While there is thus not a shred of evidence to implicate Rajballabh in the conspiracy with the English, it is worthy of note that Holwell bitterly denounces him for his activities against the English during the regime of Mir Jafar.⁷⁶

The English, it may be noted, conspired only with those persons round the Nawab, who might be of some use to them by virtue of the position they held in the Durbar. We have no evidence that Rajballabh held

74 A. K. Maitra sought to connect Rajballabh with the conspiracy on the basis of a letter written by Omychand and referred to in the Proceedings of the Council, dated August 22, 1756. In this letter Omychand advised Major Kilpatrick to write complimentary letters to Manik Chand, Jagat Seth, Khoja Wajid and Raja Dewlap and undertook to deliver them to the aforesaid gentlemen. (Long, No. 196.) Mr. Maitra took Raja Dewlap to refer to Rajballabh, but it really stands for Rai Durlabh. (*Sirajuddaula* by A. K. Maitra—8th Ed., p. 234.)

75 Seir, Vol. II, pp. 227-28.

76 This will be discussed in the next section.

at this time any office of trust or responsibility which would have enabled him to render any material aid to the English or the other conspirators.

How or when the name of Rajballabh came to be connected with the great conspiracy against Sirajuddaula, it is difficult to say. So far as I have been able to ascertain, it is mentioned for the first time in a biography of Maharaja Krishnachandra, entitled *Mahārājā-Krishnachandra Rāyasya Charitram* composed by Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyay, a Pandit of the Fort William College, and published in 1805. This book contains a long account of the plot against Sirajuddaula which may be summed up as follows :—

“ Sirajuddaula, the grandson of Alivardi, was of vicious disposition, and his cruelties took various forms such as sinking the boats in the river to see the sufferings of drowning men, forcibly seizing beautiful women, ripping open the belly of pregnant women in order to see where the embryo lies, etc., etc. His disposition was not changed in the least even when he became the Nawab. So the leading men began to consider ways and means of getting rid of him. Accordingly Maharaj Mahendra, Raja Ramnarain, Raja Rajballabh, Raja Krishnadas and Mir Jafar met at the residence of Jagat Seth, and discussed the matter. Raja Ramnarain proposed to send an agent to Delhi in order to have another Nawab appointed in place of Siraj. Rajballabh was opposed to this as he thought that the interests of the Hindus would not be served by substituting one Muslim Nawab for another. It was generally agreed that an attempt should be made to remove the Muslim Nawab. Jagat Seth then advised them to consult Raja Krishnachandra of Nadia and so a messenger was sent to him. In the resumed meeting, Krishnachandra suggested that the

English merchants of Calcutta should be invited to assume the sovereignty of Bengal. The assembled members were all ignorant of the English and their activities and so Krishnachandra gave them a long catalogue of their virtues. The assembled leaders accepted the proposal of Krishnachandra on condition that they should be continued in the posts which were being held by them. So Krishnachandra, at their request, went to Calcutta and saw the Chief of the English factory as their representative. The latter agreed to the proposal and promised to write to the authorities in England. He assured Krishnachandra that as soon as he received the permission of the home authorities he would fight with the Nawab and conquer the country. Krishnachandra communicated the result of his interview to the other conspirators. Shortly after this differences arose between the Nawab and the English as the former increased the duty on English trade. About the same time Raja Rajballabh incurred the displeasures of the Nawab (for reasons not stated) and fled with his son Krishnadas and other members of his family to Calcutta. The Chief of the English factory there gave him an asylum. The Nawab wrote to the English to surrender the Raja and his son, but the English refused to do so on the ground that it is against laws of all nations and scriptures of all religions to surrender any one who has taken refuge. In course of the prolonged correspondence, which is quoted in full, the English Chief even quoted the legend of Daṇḍī in support of his argument. Sirajuddaula then invaded Calcutta. Rajballabh and Krishnadas left by boats and concealed themselves in some parts of Vanga. Calcutta fell, but was recaptured by the English a year later. About this time the English Chief of Calcutta received the permission of the authorities at home to accept the pro-

posal of Krishnachandra. The latter, being informed of this, sent his minister to Murshidabad. He met Raja Mahendra, Raja Ramnarain, Jagat Seth and Mir Jafar and reminded them of their old proposals and subsequent negotiations. They all agreed that the English should be invited. Mir Jafar said that the Nawab's army was under his control and he would not seriously fight the English if the latter agreed to make him Nawab after the victory was won. Krishnachandra communicated it to the Chief of the English factory at Calcutta, and the latter readily accepted the terms. The English thereupon marched with an army against the Nawab who sent Mir Jafar with 50,000 men against them. The two armies met at Plassey, but Mir Jafar did not make any serious efforts and his soldiers died in hundreds. This being reported to the Nawab, who was still at Murshidabad, he sent Mohandas with 25,000 soldiers. Mohandas made a violent attack, and having failed to recall him by a pretended order of the Nawab, Mir Jafar had him shot by one of his own men. Thereupon the battle was over and the English won a complete victory. As soon as the news reached Siraj-uddaula he got into a boat and fled, but was captured, and Miran himself cut off his head."

Such is the curious story recorded by a Bengali Pandit less than half a century after the battle of Plassey. It is needless to point out that he had little or no knowledge of the actual events and his fanciful story was mainly inspired by the desire to represent Krishnachandra as the main instrument in effecting the great revolution in Bengal. About the time when he wrote the English were the rulers of Bengal and naturally there was a wide-spread desire on the part of all leading families to enhance their power and prestige with the English by representing their ancestors

as chief actors in the memorable transactions which established the English authority in this province. Seven years before the publication of the biography of Krishnachandra by Rajiblochan Pandit, a descendant of Maharaja Rajballabh mentioned in a petition to the English Governor-General that the Maharaja was killed by Nawab Mir Kasim on account of his friendliness towards the English. Similarly the Nadiya Raj family evidently tried to propagate the story, mentioned above, about the leading part taken by Krishnachandra, though the latter's name is not even mentioned by any contemporary authority in connection with the memorable political transactions which virtually made the English the *de facto* rulers of Bengal. It is thus impossible to place any reliance on the story recorded in *Mahārājā Krishnachandra Rāyasya Charitram* and implicate Rajballabh in the great plot against Sirajuddaula. It, however, proves that this tradition had an early origin, and it was presumably on the authority of this text that Rajballabh's participation in the plot was assumed by the author of *Kshitīśa-Vamśāvalī*, another Bengali work on the same subject, composed in 1875 A.D., and later writers like Nabinchandra Sen, Akshaykumar Maitreya and others evidently relied on these sources or others derived from them. It is important to note, however, that Stewart, whose history was published in 1813, *i.e.*, five years after Rajiblochan's work, does not mention Rajballabh in connection with the plot. Evidently the popular tradition recorded by Rajiblochan had not gained currency until long afterwards. This is further proved by the historical work called *Rājāvalī* composed by Mrityunjay Vidyalankar, another Pandit of the Fort William College, and published in 1808. This work is also full of myths and legends, and describes the atrocities of Siraj-

uddaula in almost the same words as are used in *Mahārājā Krishnachandra Rāyasya Charitram*. In addition, it attributes the flight of Rajballabh to Calcutta to the attempt on the part of Nawab Sirajuddaula to pollute his caste. But in describing the conspiracy against the Nawab it makes no reference to either Krishnachandra or Rajballabh. The two Bengali works demonstrate what little reliance can be placed on popular tales about Sirajuddaula and his times even though they were current less than half a century after his death.

A consideration of all the relevant facts and documents would convince any one that there is absolutely no reasonable ground to regard Rajballabh as a member of the great conspiracy against Nawab Sirajuddaula, although popular legends associating him with it can be traced as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century A.D.

6. - RAJBALLABH AND MIR JAFAR

The author of *Siyar-ul-Mutaqherin*, after describing the cruelty and excesses of Miran, the worthless son of Mir Jafar, adds that "as he imagined that with the title of Shahamat Jang, which he had now assumed, he had likewise inherited all the other qualifications of the late Nawazish Muhammad Khan, who had always borne the title, he modelled his household accordingly, took in his service all the officers and servants that had belonged to that much regretted nobleman and therefore appointed Rajballabh as his Prime Minister (*Dewan*)."⁷⁷ Whether this was the sole ground for the appointment, we do not definitely know, but there is

⁷⁷ Seir, Vol. II, p. 253; Orme, Vol. II, p. 357.

no doubt that Rajballabh soon obtained a great ascendancy over Miran. He was also appointed Deputy Governor of Dacca ⁷⁸ and once more occupied an important place in the affairs of state. An indirect testimony to his power and influence is furnished by a letter from Warren Hastings, dated 17th August, 1759, in which he says that no progress has been made in respect of *sanad* for "Luckypore lands owing to the absence of the *Chutah* Nabob (Miran) and Rajballabh, and that the land in dispute with the zemindar of Banchenagar will cause great difficulties on account of Rajballabh being himself interested in his favour." ⁷⁹

The relation between Rajballabh and Nawab Mir Jafar is more difficult to determine. Holwell made a few important observations on this point in a report ⁸⁰ which he presented to the Select Committee on the current political situation, shortly after he had handed over charge as Acting Governor to Vansittart. After referring to the unfitness of Mir Jafar to rule, he proceeds:—"A party was soon raised at the Durbar headed by the Subah's son Miran and Raja Rajballabh, who were daily planning schemes to shake off their dependence on the English, and continually urging to the Subah that until this was effected, his government was nominal only. The Subah . . . fell too soon into these schemes.

"The first step taken to accomplish this scheme of independence was, to assassinate and cut off, under one pretence or another, every minister and officer at the Durbar, who they knew were attached to the Eng-

⁷⁸ Seir, Vol. II, p. 271; Orme, Vol. II, p. 357.

⁷⁹ Minutes of the Council, August, 23, 1759 (*I.R.O.*).

⁸⁰ Tracts, pp. 12-13; Narrative, Vol. I, pp. 48-50.

lish. (Several instances of assassination, attempted murder and proscription of high dignitaries are cited.)

“ The next project of the Durbar appeared to be a secret negotiation with the Dutch, for transporting troops from Batavia into these provinces, that with their united force a stop might be put to the power of the English. This scheme was conducted by Raja Rajballabh, on the part of the Subah, about October or November, 1758.”

It is difficult to accept these accusations against Rajballabh and Mir Jafar as true in view of the notorious antecedents of Holwell, particularly if we remember that he had already planned to remove Mir Jafar, and therefore naturally brought all sorts of charges against him in order to convince his masters and colleagues that he did not deserve either the favours of the English or the throne of Murshidabad. As to Rajballabh, Holwell's personal animosity led him to exceed even all bounds of decency, as will appear from the following letter⁸¹ written by him, as acting Governor, to Hastings on 16th July, 1760. Referring to the death of Miran by a stroke of lightning he writes :— “ Had Providence thought proper to have appointed, by the same flash, Raja Rajballabh to attend him to the other world, the country would have had a double benefit. . . . He has been at the bottom, the great cause of the long dissensions between Miran and his father.” Holwell concludes the letter by saying that although his office as Acting Governor would come to an end in a few days he would employ it in procuring the dismissal of that ‘ viper Rajballabh from the councils of the Nabob.’

81. Tracts, p. 87.

It is not difficult to account for this angry outburst. Holwell was smarting under the recent order of the Court of Directors by which he was degraded from the position of Acting Governor to the seventh member of the Council in point of rank and dignity⁸² and he rightly ascribed this humiliation to the allegation of taking bribes for supporting the cause of Rajballabh's son Krishnadas. The allurements of heavy bribes from Mir Kasim⁸³ had probably also no small share in influencing Holwell's judgment against the former's rivals Miran and Rajballabh. In any case the expressions of his sentiment about Rajballabh, quoted above, show the stuff he was made of, and anything coming from him about Rajballabh cannot be relied on in the absence of corroborative evidence. It may be noted in passing that Holwell has unwittingly testified to the eminent position occupied by Rajballabh, for the latter would not have inspired so much dread or hatred if he had not really wielded great power and authority.

The most positive and satisfactory evidence on this point is furnished by the part played by Rajballabh in that military expedition which had such a tragic consequence for his master and himself.⁸⁴ The Shahzada (Emperor Shah Alam) had invaded Behar in 1760, and was defeated by the Nawab's troops, in which Rajballabh took part under Miran. Miran next set out on

82 Tracts, p. 141. Holwell regarded this degradation as due to the unjust suspicion of taking bribes from Krishnadas (Hill, Vol. III, p. 368), and was naturally incensed with Rajballabh, the cause of his misfortune.

83 Tracts, p. 130.

84 I have not given a detailed account of the long-drawn struggle between the Shahzada (later Shah Alam) and the Nawabs of Bengal, as it is not necessary for our present purpose. I have only stressed those phases of it in which Rajballabh played any part. The account given here is based on Riyaz, pp. 378-84.

an expedition against Quadim Hussain Khan, Governor of Purnia. Before any actual engagement took place, the Emperor had besieged Patna. Miran hastened back with an English contingent under Col. Caillaud to assist Ramnarain, the Governor of Behar, who was defending Patna with the help of a small detachment of English soldiers under Knox. Quadim Hussain now tried to join the Emperor, but the latter, on hearing the approach of Miran, withdrew. Miran and Caillaud next pursued Quadim Hussain Khan, who being already defeated by Knox had fled towards Betiah. In course of this pursuit, Miran was killed in his camp by lightning, on the night of 3rd July.^{84a}

“The Nawab’s army consisted, as usual, of a great number of undisciplined people, who were never regularly paid but were kept together by the promises of Miran, who commanded them, that he would be answerable for their arrears.”⁸⁵ Grave consequences were accordingly apprehended from Miran’s death, and this news was therefore kept secret.

A very graphic description of the subsequent events is given in a long letter written by Col. Caillaud on August 7, 1760, to the Select Committee in Calcutta. As this letter has not yet been published, and contains very interesting information about Rajballabh from a highly authentic source, a summary is given below, mostly in the original words of the author.⁸⁶

‘I summoned immediately to my tent “those who were most firmly attached to our interests and to the interest of their late master. To these alone were the

84a For difference of opinion regarding this date, cf. N. L. Chatterji
— *Mir Qasim*, p. 12, f.n. 47.

85 Narrative, p. 33.

86 The letter is recorded in the Minutes of the Select Committee,
August 18, 1760 (I.R.O.).

particulars of his death imparted. Their amazement and terrors were indeed great, but by the superior temper and composure of Rajabullubh, the Nabob's *Dewan* who in the whole course of this affair has displayed uncommon activity and address, assisted by myself, their fears were at length appeased."

'The conference concluded first that the sole power of the army was to be invested in me, and secondly, that I would request the Nawab for the succession of the deceased's son to his father's honour and employment.

'In my first letter to the Nawab "I very warmly recommended to his justice and to his protection Mir Sidoo the late young Nabob's son and also to the inheritance of his father's rank and fortunes and that Rajbullubh, pursuant to this election (decision of the conference), should still continue in his old employment of *Dewan*."

'The principal motive of my conduct since then has been to secure the troops and to prevent their disbanding and revolting to the enemy. To assist me in this design I made choice of Rajballabh, who, besides the great service he had already done to me and which he had performed with cheerfulness and skill, was recommended to me by the whole body of Jemmatdars who are very much attached to his person and interest.

'While I lay at Hadjipore they a second time visited me. . . They also took Rajballabh by the hand and introduced him as the man whom they wished to view in his ancient station in consequence to the succession of his late master's son.

'This is one cause why I engaged to solicit for the first and to support the last. I was also induced to it by thinking that our importance in this government must be augmented while we had a man devoted

to us in the second post of the kingdom who would never hope to aspire to the first, and whose power was solely dependent on our interest. The promoting this plan could never fail during the life time of the Nawab to be of considerable advantage; of how much more utility then after his death when most probably the vacant government would be filled by a minor with Rajballabh retaining his Dewanship on our patronage alone.

‘ The other possible candidate is Mir Kasim Ally “ but there appeared to be some dangers in recommending a person who by possession of the Dewanship would become almost equal to the Nawab himself.” . . .

“ I could not wait for your orders and instructions without running the risk of a general revolt of the troops which I could only avoid by a compliance with the request of the Jemmatdars and the promise of supporting Rajballabh who thus engaged was ready and able to assist me in keeping the forces together. Thus my first engagements were the effect of necessity, but I own that I have not since on reflexion found that I could have done better for the service of the Nawab or our interests.”

‘ I am concerned to find, however, that my opinion in this respect differs from the instructions Mr. Hastings received from the Governor and Council on this occasion.’

The concluding portion of the above extract is explained by the letter written by Holwell to Hastings on 16th July, 1760, a portion of which has been quoted above (p. 46). After abusing Rajballabh and wishing that he had died along with Miran, Holwell concludes : “ Copy of my letter to the old Nabob I enclose you ; my plan, you will observe, is short and easily to be effected, now his son is gone—to wit, to throw himself into the

arms of Mir Kasim Ali Khan and Rai Durlabh and dismiss from his Councils those two vipers Aga Salah of Cuttack and Rajballabh.”⁸⁷

The reaction of these opposing recommendations on the mind of the Nawab is not easy to determine, and affords a clear instance of that weakness and vacillation which ultimately brought about his ruin. It appears that he at first decided to declare Miran's infant son as his heir, with Rajballabh as his *Dewan*,^{87a} but later changed his views in favour of Mir Kasim. In a letter to Holwell, dated July 10, 1760, after referring to the high qualities of Mir Kasim and the recommendation made by Holwell and Hastings on his behalf, he adds:—“ I have no friends dearer to me than himself and family, and should be very glad, if it was in my power to give it him; but the colonel has wrote me a letter, a copy whereof I have enclosed for your perusal, and you will then be able to judge, what motive has induced me to prefer the *Chuta Nabob's* (Miran's) son.”⁸⁸

The Nawab also wrote to Major Carnac not only agreeing to the appointment of Miran's son as his successor, and of Rajballabh as his *Dewan*, but also adding that it was the best that could be done.⁸⁹ This is at variance with the general purport of his letter to Holwell which implies that his acceptance of Miran's son and Rajballabh was based solely on Caillaud's re-

87 Tracts, p. 87.

87a According to Dr. N. L. Chatterji, “ The infant son of Miran, Mir Saidu, was named the heir-apparent with Rajballabh as his *Dewan* ” (*Mir Quasim*, p. 15). But it does not appear that such a formal declaration was made. In any case, Vansittart's statement, quoted later, is definitely against such an assumption.

88 Narrative, Vol. I, pp. 75-76.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

commendations, and almost against his will. This difference is further accentuated in his letter to the Governor, on receipt of Caillaud's recommendations, in which he said that he was surprised that the Colonel would recommend a man so very unfit for every business.⁹⁰

The strange conduct of the Nawab is unaccountable, and drew forth a strong but just protest from Col. Caillaud. In a letter to the Governor, received in Calcutta on August 24, 1760, he writes:—"The Nawab's usage of me in the course of this affair hath piqued me sensibly; nor will I let it go unnoticed. I do not quarrel with the man for being of a different opinion with me, had he ingenuously told me so, for I left all to his choice, and only advised him what I thought best; but he agreed by his letters to all I proposed, allowed that it was the best that could be done, and approved of all my measures; whilst, at the same time, he was acting diametrically opposite, without ever considering me, or the engagements I had entered into upon the strength of his promises."⁹¹

The inner workings in the Nawab's mind are thus explained by Vansittart: "The Nawab seemingly acquiesced in both recommendations, but continued wavering in his choice, in such a manner, as shewed that the increase of the English influence was the event that he most dreaded in the appointment of either. This is the only clue which can lead to the motives of the many opposite resolutions which were taken by the Nawab, upon this affair, in the small space of time in which it was suspended. His inclinations first led him to accept the advice offered him by Col. Caillaud, in

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

favour of his grandson ; but when that advice was urged in a more pressing and peremptory stile, and Rajballabh, by his emissaries and friends at the Durbar, too solicitously laboured to bring about the same design, the Nawab became jealous of his growing power, and suddenly declared his resolution to support Mir Kasim in his pretensions, as will appear by the letter he wrote Mr. Holwell and Col. Caillaud upon this subject. On the other hand, the Nawab, perceiving that Mir Kasim was warmly supported by Mr. Holwell, appears to have formed the wild scheme of shaking off both, by throwing all the chief offices of the government into the hands of a stranger, named Mirza Daud. . . .''⁹²

There is no doubt that Rajballabh put himself in touch with the new Governor⁹³ and probably tried to enlist his sympathy and support. But so did Mir Kasim.⁹⁴ Whether the preference of the Nawab to the one or to the other was solely dictated by his dread of the increase in English influence, or caused by his habitual irresolution and suspicion, we cannot, therefore, definitely say. It is probable, however, that his final choice was influenced by the pressure brought to bear upon him by Holwell and the Select Committee in Calcutta. For no sooner had the Nawab changed his mind about appointing Mir Kasim, than the latter hastened to Cal-

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

⁹³ For summaries of Rajballabh's correspondence with the Governor, *cf.* Calendar, Nos. 291 (August 4, 1760), 330 (August 14), 357 (August 24), 446 (Sept. 16), 454 (Sept. 17).

⁹⁴ For summaries of Mir Kasim's correspondence with the Governor, *cf.* Calendar, Nos. 307 (August 8, 1760), 331 (August 14), 335 (August 16), 336 (August 16), 339 (August 17), 346 (August 19), 382 (August 31), 388 (September 2), 390 (September 3), 395 (September 3), 415-16 (September 7), 419 (September 8), 421 (September 9), 422 (September 10), 425-26 (September 10), 440 (September 15), 443 (September 15).

cutta and concluded the treaty which ultimately placed him on the throne of Murshidabad. The situation is thus described by Vansittart who negotiated the treaty : " He (Mir Kasim) arrived there about the middle of September. As he came down with these fears and suspicions of the Nawab's disinclination to him, for the favour already shewn him by the English, it naturally led him to fall in with any measures which might be proposed by them, as a means of securing the continuation of the same interest in his behalf." ⁹⁵

One singular circumstance in the negotiation of this treaty cannot be overlooked, specially as it throws some light on the means by which Mir Kasim got the better of his rival Rajballabh. Mir Kasim offered a "present" of twenty lakhs of Rupees to the members of the Select Committee. Both Vansittart and Holwell admit that the offer was made by Mir Kasim. But while Vansittart declares unequivocally that the offer was refused,⁹⁶ Holwell, who was charged with the delivery of this refusal, quotes the actual letter written in this connection. It says in effect that " when the Company's debt was paid off, and the arrears paid to his troops, if he (Mir Kasim) then thought there was aught due from him he was at liberty to gratify his friends in what manner he pleased." ⁹⁷ It may justly be suspected that Mir Kasim did already " gratify his friends " for exercising their influence on his behalf with the Nawab in the contest for the Dewanship with Rajballabh.

In spite of the failure of Rajballabh, the very fact that his name was seriously considered for the highest post in the realm next to the Nawab, and even at one

⁹⁵ Narrative, Vol. I, p. 43.

⁹⁶ Narrative, Vol. II, pp. 29-31.

⁹⁷ Tracts, p. 130.

time agreed to by the latter, reflects great credit on his personal abilities, and shows the high position, power, and influence he had already acquired in the state. The same view is supported by the fact that the Governor wrote to Rajballabh on September 7, 1760,⁹⁸ "that he should not be uneasy as a suitable appointment will be given him." But the contest for the Dewanship engendered implacable hatred and enmity towards him in the mind of Mir Kasim, and to a certain extent also in that of the Nawab, and Rajballabh had to pay dearly for it.

On the death of Miran the command of his army devolved on Rajballabh, who had been his *Dewan*, and he led it back to Patna.⁹⁹ But as already referred to in the letter of Col. Caillaud, the troops at Patna were almost on the verge of mutiny. They were clamouring for pay and there was no money to pay them. As early as August 4, Rajballabh wrote to the Governor that "the Sepoys give him excessive troubles for their pay."¹⁰⁰ The mutiny of the troops at Murshidabad,¹⁰¹ on receipt of the news of the death of Miran,

98 Calendar, No. 454.

99 Seir, Vol. II, p. 376. This may appear at variance with the following extract from Caillaud's letter, dated August 7, 1760 which has been quoted above: "The conference concluded that the sole power of the army was to be invested in me, Raja Derisnarain (*i.e.*, Durjaynarain, brother of Ramnarain) was nominally joined with me in the command." No mention is made here of Rajballabh leading the army of Miran. But that he did so follows from Holwell's letter to Hastings, dated July 16, 1760, more than once referred to above. After wishing that Rajballabh had died along with Miran he writes: "Miran's troops, returning under his command, I think will prove bad politics" (Tracts, p. 87). The subsequent events also prove that Rajballabh was in charge of Miran's troops.

100 Calendar, No. 290.

101 The details of this mutiny are contained in a letter from Hastings, dated July 18, 1760 (Narrative, Vol. I, p. 71).

must have been a source of constant anxiety to Rajballabh, and that a similar trouble was prevented at Patna for nearly three months, is perhaps not a little due to his skill and personal influence. The Nawab (Mir Jafar) did not help him with money, but tried to get him back to Murshidabad. For this purpose the Nawab wrote several letters to the Governor "complaining of the bad conduct and wicked intentions of Rajballabh and insisting upon his being recalled by some means or other." The Nawab also represented to the Governor through Mir Kasim and the Roy Royan that the business of the most consequence was to get Rajballabh down from Patna.¹⁰² As soon as Mir Kasim became *Dewan* he wrote to the Governor on September 8, 1760, requesting the presence of Rajballabh in Murshidabad for the settlement of some accounts.¹⁰³

Rajballabh had very good reason to fear this powerful combination against him and naturally refused to come to Murshidabad. Unfortunately the disaffection of the army at Patna for want of pay constituted a grave problem and the English authorities agreed to induce Rajballabh to come to Murshidabad on condition that the Nawab and Mir Kasim would guarantee the safety of Rajballabh's person, family and property. The following letter¹⁰⁴ to Amyatt, so far unpublished, reveals this interesting but little known episode :—

"The difficulties which the army at Patna labours under for want of money are not to be obviated but by Rajah Rauje Bullob's coming to Moorshidabad to settle his accounts. This we know he will not consent to

102 Cf. Governor's letter to the Nawab dated October 18, 1760 (Narrative, Vol. I, p. 130.)

103 Calendar, No. 459.

104 Minutes of the Select Committee, Sept. 19, 1760. (J.F.O.)

willingly out of his fears of the little justice which would be done him by the Nabob and Cassim Ally Cawn, but to make him so easy on that head as we possibly can we now enclose letters to him from the President and Col. Caillaud in which he will be informed that securities will be taken by them from the Nabob and Cassim Ally Cawn that no hurt shall be done to himself or family and that no more will be required of him than paying his just balance, if any balance there be, without prejudices to the remainder of his fortune, and after his accounts are once settled he will be at full liberty to go wherever he may think proper. The same assurances are given him in the enclosed letter from Cassim Ally Cawn and will be confirmed by the Nabob in a letter Mr. Sykes will forward to you—You will therefore induce him to set out immediately.'

Neither the Nawab nor Mir Kasim was evidently disposed to bring back Rajballabh with such guarantees. For not only was no guarantee sent by them but the Nawab wrote to the Governor on September 24, expressing a wish that Rajballabh and Col. Cook should remain at Patna owing to the approach of the Shahjada, and again two days later, declaring it as inadvisable for Rajballabh to leave Patna.¹⁰⁵

But no arrangement was made to send money to Rajballabh for the payment of troops. On September 20, the Governor wrote to the Nawab to exert himself to the utmost to supply money to the troops at Patna.¹⁰⁶ But the Nawab was either unwilling or unable to help Rajballabh. The troops consequently got more and more excited and went out of control at the beginning of October. They held Rajballabh personally respons-

¹⁰⁵ Calendar, Nos. 477, 483.

¹⁰⁶ Calendar, No. 468.

ible for their pay and their attitude was so threatening that he ran the risk of being killed by them at any moment.¹⁰⁷ In view of this he was glad to go to Murshidabad as requested by the Governor, even without the guarantees stipulated by the latter from the Nawab and Mir Kasim. He made preparations to set out for Murshidabad on October 2. What followed is thus described by Mr. Amyatt in a letter, dated Patna, October 4, 1760¹⁰⁸ :—

“ The Nabob has not wrote to Rajebullub, and by what Mr. Sykes writes to me, he will not, till he has seen Colonel Caillaud ; but notwithstanding this, Rajebullub is very willing and glad to go to Moorshedabad, and wanted to set out immediately ; the army, hearing this, surrounded his house, abused and used him ill, seized upon his boats, and for these three days past, there has been such a scene of confusion, I cannot express it ; the Seepoys are no ways under their commanders, and do almost what they please ; and this scene is likely to continue, and probably may end in Rajebullub's being cut off, or some disaster upon the city ; nothing but the fear of our army prevents it, for a trifle will stir them up to rashness ; however, they have obliged him to swear he will not go, till money or Cossim Allee Cawn comes ; indeed, they will not let him go, and use him most excessively ill.”

The seriousness of the situation is further indicated in Amyatt's letter to the Governor, dated October 12¹⁰⁹ :—“ The Nabob's seepoys are daily deserting to

107 Narrative, Vol. I, p. 69.

108 *Ibid.*, p. 112. Also letter, dated October 5, 1760 (Original Papers, I.21).

109 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

the prince; the remainder labour under great difficulties, and are very troublesome for their pay."

7. RAJBALLABH AND MIR KASIM

While Rajballabh was passing his days in Patna in extreme anxiety and fear of his life in the hands of mutinous troops, Mir Kasim was secretly negotiating with the Select Committee in Calcutta. A treaty was concluded between the two parties on September 27, 1760, and on October 2; the very day on which the troops mutinied at Patna, Governor Vansittart started for Murshidabad to give effect to the treaty. The result was more gratifying to Mir Kasim than he had a right to expect. For whereas the treaty merely stipulated that Mir Jafar should continue to be the Nawab in name and Mir Kasim would become the *de facto* ruler, the personal negotiations between the Governor and Mir Jafar ended in the latter's abdication and the enthronement of Mir Kasim as Nawab on October 20 (or 21), 1760.¹¹⁰

This change of government temporarily solved the difficulties of Rajballabh. It appears that Mir Kasim sent in November, 1760, five lakhs of rupees with Colonel Caillaud for the payment of his troops at Patna,¹¹¹ but this amount was insufficient to pay the arrears. Even as late as December the troops continued in the same turbulent state, and we learn from two letters, one from Ramnarain, and one from Rajballabh, dated December, 1760,¹¹² that Rajballabh's person was subjected to violence by the mutinous soldiers, as in October last.

110 For a detailed account, cf. Narrative, Vol. I, pp. 45, 158.

111 Narrative, Vol. I, pp. 140, 178.

112 Long, Nos. 502, 511.

Rajballabh evidently wrote to the Governor in Calcutta about the serious situation in regard to the troops. On December 7, 1760, the Governor wrote to him that Col. Coote would soon be at Patna and stop the disturbance caused by the Sepoys.¹¹³ On December 16, he wrote to the Nawab to remit a sufficient sum of money to clear the arrears due to the Sepoys as affairs in Patna were beginning to look serious.¹¹⁴ On December 27, the Nawab intimated to the Governor that he sent three lakhs of rupees,¹¹⁵ and a further sum of three lakhs and thirty thousands was probably sent a few days later.¹¹⁶

It was fortunate that the discontent in the army was removed. For within a short time, the fight with the Emperor Shah Alam was resumed. Major Carnac at the head of the English troops with two large bodies of Nawab's sepoys, one under Ramnarain and the other under Rajballabh, took the field against him. Ghulam Hussain, the author of *Siyar-ul-Mutaqherin*, who was in the English camp at this time, refers to serious dissensions between Ramnarain and Rajballabh. "These two," says he, "who were in camp at the head of large bodies of troops, agreed so little together, that what the one had proposed in his usual visit of the morning, never failed to be objected to by the other, in his evening interview" with the Major. The English, disgusted at these dissensions, and afraid of their consequences upon the Nawab's affairs, sent Ghulam Hussain to the Nawab.¹¹⁷ But evidently their differences were compos-

113 Calendar, No. 673. It appears, however, from letter No. 681, dated December 9 and No. 808, dated January 15, that Col. Coote was sent to Pondicherry instead of to Patna.

114 Calendar, No. 703.

115 *Ibid.*, Nos. 727, 747.

116 *Ibid.*, No. 746. It is not expressly stated that the money was for the Patna troops, but this seems to be the case.

117 Seir, Vol. II, p. 398.

ed and the united forces defeated the Emperor on January 15, 1761, near Gaya-Manpoor. Rajballabh distinguished himself in this battle. The news of the victory reached Calcutta on or shortly before January 22, 1761,¹¹⁸ and on January 30, the Governor wrote to Rajballabh setting forth the high opinion he received of the latter from Major Carnac.^{118a} In a letter, dated February 1, Rajballabh wrote a detailed account of the battle to the Governor.¹¹⁹ In his reply, dated February 4, the Governor informed Rajballabh that he had written in his favour to the Nawab who would reward him as an adherent.¹²⁰

After his defeat the Emperor came to terms with the English, and proceeded towards the English camp. A tent was pitched in a garden close to Gaya for receiving the Emperor. As soon as he had alighted, Major Carnac, accompanied by Ramnarain, Rajballabh and the principal commanders of the two armies, paid their respects to the Emperor and offered their *nazar* and homage.¹²¹

On receiving the news of the defeat of the Emperor and his surrender Nawab Mir Kasim proceeded towards Patna. His hostile feelings against Rajballabh were well-known and these were not lessened even after he had ascended the throne. Almost immediately before his accession, on October 13, Mir Kasim wrote to the Governor that Rajballabh should be sent on some pretext to

118 Calendar, No. 824.

118a *Ibid.*, No. 861.

119 *Ibid.*, No. 872.

120 *Ibid.*, No. 882.

121 Seir, Vol. II, p. 406. There is a family tradition that the Emperor, on this occasion, presented a sword to Rajballabh and gave him the title *Salarjang*. Gupta refers to persons alive at his time, who saw the sword with the name *Ali Gohur* engraved on it. (Gupta, p. 360, f.n. 2.)

Murshidabad.¹²² The Governor, who seems to have been favourably disposed towards Rajballabh, evidently did not agree. His attachment to Rajballabh grew as a result of the late campaign as noted above. He naturally felt anxious about the treatment of Mir Kasim to Rajballabh, and so when the Nawab proceeded towards Patna the Governor personally wrote to Mir Kasim in favour of Rajballabh.¹²³ The Select Committee also wrote to Major Carnac on February 9, 1761, about the protection to be given to Ramnarain, Governor of Patna, and to Rajballabh. They directed the Major to protect Ramnarain against all violence and injustice, though they believed such injunction to be unnecessary, 'as the present Nabob seems to be well inclined towards Ramnarain.' Regarding Rajballabh they expressed themselves as follows¹²⁴ :—

“ As to Rajebullub, he can have no reasonable objection to a fair examination of his accounts by the Nabob, or such person as he shall appoint; that a just statement being made of all the monies he has received, for defraying the charges of the troops under his command, together with a due enquiry of what number of troops have really been kept up, and how much every one has been paid; the balance that is found due may then be discharged, and Rajebullub be employed again or not, as the Nabob thinks proper. This the Nabob declares is all that he asks, and in this (as it is

122 Calendar, No. 531.

123 This appears from Governor's letter to Rajballabh, dated March 1, 1761 (Calendar, No. 980) in which he says that " letters in his favour have been written to the Nawab, and when he has paid his respects to His Excellency everything will be happily settled."

124 Narrative, Vol. I, p. 160.

just and reasonable) you will yield him all the necessary assistance.”

The Nawab arrived at Patna at the beginning of March, 1761. Contrary to the expectations of the Select Committee, there soon ensued a bitter quarrel between the Nawab on the one hand and Ramnarain, backed by Major Carnac, on the other. There is hardly any doubt that Ramnarain was encouraged to take up a positively hostile attitude towards the Nawab by the sympathy and support he expected from the English authorities at Patna.¹²⁵ This circumstance, joined to the personal recommendations of the Governor, probably helped Rajballabh to win the favour, sympathy and support of the Nawab. The chief events during the Nawab's residence at Patna were the long and protracted negotiations with Ramnarain, and the quarrel between the Nawab and the English generals, and as these are mostly irrelevant to the present subject they need not be referred to in detail except in so far as they have a bearing upon Rajballabh.

At the time of Mir Kasim's arrival at Patna both Ramnarain and Rajballabh, with their forces, were stationed in the territory of the enemy Kamgar Khan who had not yet ceased hostility. They were sent for and met the Nawab at Baikunthapur.¹²⁶ In a letter, dated March 12, 1761, the Governor wrote to the Nawab that he was glad to learn of His Excellency's arrival at “ Baikuntpoor where Major Carnac, Ramnarain, Rajballabh and others paid their respects to him. The Governor assured the Nawab that the Major and the two Rajas would serve him faithfully.”¹²⁷

125 Narrative, Vol. I, pp. 182, 191.

126 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

127 Calendar, No. 1009.

While the Governor thus took every opportunity to plead the cause of Rajballabh to the Nawab, he urged Rajballabh also to do his duty to his master. In a letter, dated May 15, to Rajballabh, the Governor expressed the hope that Rajballabh must have by that time explained the papers to the Nawab's officials and added that "his delivering the papers will please the Nabob as well as himself."¹²⁸

It seems that Rajballabh listened to this salutary advice. But the attitude of Raja Ramnarain was very different. Ramnarain had three or four years' accounts of his administration to settle,¹²⁹ but he tried to avoid it by all means with the support of Major Carnac and Col. Coote. The Nawab wrote to Vansittart in April:—"I before heard of the imprudence and evil intentions of Ramnarain but since my arrival at Patna I have seen nothing but his baseness and deceit."¹³⁰ The Nawab's endeavours to compel Ramnarain to render accounts were backed up by the Select Committee and he appointed Rajballabh on the recommendation of Col. Coote to examine his accounts in the presence of the Colonel. For fifteen or sixteen days together Rajballabh and Golam Ali Khan went backwards and forwards to the fort in order to examine the papers, but Ramnarain neither gave them a single paper, nor a writer to attend them.¹³¹ We need not pursue this topic any further, but this appointment of Rajballabh is the first positive indication that he had ingratiated himself into the favour of the Nawab. Another instance

128 Calendar, No. 1159.

129 Vansittart says 'three years' (Narrative, Vol. I, p. 196), but the Nawab says 'four years' (*Ibid.*, p. 204).

130 Narrative, Vol. I, p. 199.

131 Nawab's letter to the Governor, dated June 16, 1761 (Narrative, Vol. I, p. 210).

is afforded by the successful intercession of Rajballabh with the Nawab, at the instance of Col. Coote, to grant a pension of Rs. 1,000 to the brother of Mir Jafar who was starving at Rajmahal with a big family.¹³² This incident, by the way, illustrates the generous nature of Rajballabh who had the least reason to be grateful to the late Nawab. It is probable that Colonel Coote had some share in bringing about the reconciliation between Mir Kasim and Rajballabh. For in a letter, dated Patna,¹³³ June 6, he writes to the Select Committee :— “The Nabob has made up matters with Rajballabh and has appointed him to assist in settling the affairs with Ramnarain who does not seem desirous of parting with his money.” It is equally probable that Mir Kasim took Rajballabh into his favour in order to curb the power and authority of Ramnarain from whom he was now completely alienated. In any case, he had decided to dismiss Ramnarain and appoint Rajballabh in his place, almost at the same time that he engaged the latter to examine the accounts of the former. He communicated his intentions to the Governor and got his full support. In a letter, dated June 15, 1761, the Governor “informs the Nawab that he has received his letter intimating that he has appointed Rajballabh to examine into Ramnarain’s accounts and intends to replace the latter by the former. The Governor approves of his appointing Rajballabh to succeed Ramnarain saying that the former is a fit man for the post.”¹³⁴ Early in August, 1761, Nawab Mir Kasim appointed Rajballabh Naib or Deputy-Governor.^{134a} The following

132 Narrative, Vol. I, p. 248.

133 Minutes of the Select Committee, 13th June. 1761. (*J.R.O.*)

134 Calendar. No. 1216.

134a Rajballabh was probably appointed *Naib* of Patna on August 1. (Chatterji, *Mir Quasim*, p. 80.)

abstracts of five letters ¹³⁵ throw interesting light on this appointment :—

(1) July 5, 1761 from Rajballabh to the Governor.

Thanks the Governor for so strongly recommending him to the Nawab.

(2) July 14, 1761 from the Governor to Rajballabh.

Is glad to learn that the Nawab is favourably disposed to him. Never loses an opportunity of recommending him to His Excellency. Advises him to regard the Nawab's will and pleasure as of the greatest consequence.

(3) August 6, 1761, from the Governor to Rajballabh.

Has received his letter asking that he may be recommended to the Nawab for the *Naibship* of Bihar and for a *sarpech*. In reply, says that he has informed the Nawab of the Addressee's capacity and character and recommended him for Ramnarain's place.

(4) August 19, 1761, from the Governor to the Nawab.

Has received the Nawab's letter . . . that Rajballabh has been appointed to the Naibship of Patna and invested with a *sariepa*.

(5) September 4, 1761, from the Governor to Rajballabh.

Received his letter intimating he has been appointed to the Naibship of Bihar and honoured with a *khelat* consisting of seven pieces of cloth, a *sarpech* and other things of value ; congratulates the Raja on the honours and advises him to discharge the business of the Sarkar in such a manner as may gratify the Nawab.

One interesting episode in regard to the appointment of Rajballabh as the Deputy Governor of Bihar is his offer of bribes to Major Carnac and Mr. Lushington, as would appear from the following letter from the Major to the Select Committee, dated Sassaram, 16th June, 1761 ¹³⁶ :—

“ I received a letter last night of a very extraordinary nature indeed from Râdjebullabh enclosed under cover to Mr. Lushington. The purport of this letter to me was to beg I would assist him with my interest to procure him the Naibut of this province in the room of Ramnarain and his letter to Mr. Lushington was to engage him to intercede with me to that purpose. With the letters were two Promissory notes under his seal, one for fifty thousand rupees to myself, the other for twenty-two thousand Rupees to Mr. Lushington. We have both wrote to him in the terms his insolence deserves and it gives me the utmost concern to find that any men of the country should dare entertain the thought that an Englishman was to be influenced by a bribe.”

The observation in the last sentence can only excite ridicule when we remember that apart from the bribes to high officials in connection with the affair of Krishnadas referred to above, only so late as September last a bribe of twenty lacs was offered by Mir Kasim to the highest English officials including the Governor,— and it was not rejected.

There is, however, something more than meets the eye in this offer of bribe by Rajballabh. It is apparent from the letters quoted above, that Mir Kasim had decided to offer the appointment to Rajballabh, and the latter could reasonably rely on the sympathy and sup-

port of the Governor. Why then did Rajballabh offer the bribe to Major Carnac? The answer is not far to seek. Major Carnac and Colonel Coote were trying their best to protect Ramnarain and keep him to his post even after his deliberate defiance to the authority of the Nawab. The Nawab made repeated complaints to the English authority in Calcutta, and the latter wrote repeatedly to Major Carnac and Col. Coote to assist the Nawab in compelling Ramnarain to render accounts. The two military authorities, who were bitter enemies of Mir Kasim, defied the clear order of the Governor and Select Committee and shielded Ramnarain for several months. The Nawab wrote pathetic letters to the Governor as he could not exercise authority over his own officials on account of the opposition of Major Carnac and Colonel Coote.¹³⁷ The Nawab had also good grounds to believe that it was at Ramnarain's instigation that he had suffered a series of ignominy and insults at the hands of Col. Coote, which reached a climax when the latter invaded his camp one early morning, and, according to the Nawab's version, penetrated into his Zenana where he was asleep.¹³⁸ The Nawab's letters leave no doubt that he was thoroughly distracted in mind over these constant frictions and he was desperate enough to adopt any steps for getting rid of Ramnarain. He offered bribe to Major Carnac for this purpose, and Rajballabh also probably took his cue from the Nawab. Major Carnac even goes further, as will appear from the following extract of his letter.¹³⁹

“The Nabob's designs cannot be very good, when he endeavours to secure the execution of them by the

¹³⁷ Narrative, Vol. I, pp. 191-220, 276-77.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 216-22.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

force of bribes ; I can produce proofs of the offers he made me, provided I would let him act as he pleased with regard to Ramnarain ; and few people will doubt, that the notes which Mr. Lushington and I received from Rajebullub, and which I keep by me, were sent by the Nabob's approbation, if not by his immediate direction."

Whether Major Carnac's explanation is right or not, the offer of bribe by Rajballabh, for securing the high post of Deputy Governor, was neither unusual nor unnatural in the circumstances prevailing at the time.

The period of eleven months (August 1761 to June 1762) during which Rajballabh served as the Deputy Governor of Bihar was one of exceptional difficulty. It was caused by the changes in the Council at Calcutta which gave a majority to the party hostile to Nawab Mir Kasim. The immediate consequence of this was the appointment of Mr. Ellis as Chief of the English factory at Patna, "an event," writes Governor Vansittart, "from which I dreaded bad consequences, foreseeing he would set on foot continual disputes with the Nabob's people."¹⁴⁰ "Mr. Ellis' prejudices against the Nabob's promotion," continues the Governor, "and disaffection to his person had been too publicly expressed, and had been made too much the subject of his common conversation to escape Nabob's notice long before this period ; and in effect had greatly alarmed him for the influence which such a temper might have on his affairs."¹⁴¹

Mr. Ellis arrived at Patna about the middle of November, 1761, just after the Nawab had left the city.^{141a} It was not long before the forebodings of

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 296-97.

^{141a} Original Papers, I, 136.

the Governor and the suspicion of the Nawab were fully confirmed by a series of incidents leading to acrimonious disputes between Mr. Ellis and the Nawab. Any unprejudiced person who goes through the records of the period can only come to one conclusion, *viz.*, that Mr. Ellis seized upon every opportunity to insult the Nawab and openly defy his authority with the deliberate motive of provoking him to acts of hostility against the English.¹⁴² It is unnecessary for our present purpose to deal with the numerous incidents which illustrate the truth of this view, except in so far as they relate to Rajballabh. But before proceeding to narrate them we must emphasise the very delicate situation in which Rajballabh was placed by this sudden turn of events. As a servant of the Nawab it was Rajballabh's duty to look to his interests and carry out his commands, but Rajballabh could not fail to realise that this was sure to alienate from him that sympathy and support of the English to which he was indebted not only for his reconciliation with his old rival and enemy, but also for his recent elevation to the present post, and on which alone he could rely in future against the hostility of his capricious master. This conflict between duty and self-interest constitutes the background against which alone his actions can be viewed in their true perspective.

Rajballabh seems to have decided to do nothing that could give offence to his master. Shortly after Mr. Ellis's arrival at Patna, Rajballabh paid him a visit and

142 Narrative, Vol. I, pp. 302, 315. Hastings entertained the same view (*cf.* his letter to the Governor, dated 13th May, 1762, Original Papers, I, 178). Dr. N. L. Chatterji has tried to minimise the faults of Ellis, but in my opinion, he has taken a prejudiced view against Mir Kasim throughout his work (*Mir Quasim*).

was courteously received. But when Mr. Ellis intimated his desire to see Rajballabh, the latter replied that he could not consent to it without orders from the Court. The Governor complained about this to the Nawab, remarking that Rajballabh's conduct was improper as 'any displeasure between His Excellency's officials and the Company's chiefs could only be attended with trouble to both the Governments.' The Governor asked the Nawab to order Rajballabh to apologise for his behaviour and in future to live in friendship with Mr. Ellis.¹⁴³ The Governor also wrote to Rajballabh in the same strain, observing that His Excellency's affairs and those of the Company were the same and that there was no difference between the people of the Government and those of the Company. He also expressed his belief that the Nawab would not be pleased at Rajballabh's conduct and desired him to behave in a friendly manner towards the English Chiefs and conduct the business in conjunction with them.¹⁴⁴ It is hard to believe that Rajballabh could behave in the way he did without instructions from the Nawab. What step the Nawab took is not known, but in his letter to the Governor dated January 7, 1762, he approved of the latter's having written to Rajballabh to wait on Mr. Ellis and consult his wishes.¹⁴⁵

It was not long before fresh trouble arose. It was reported to Rajballabh that 400 Europeans and Sepoys in the English service arrested Khoja Antoon, a kinsman of Khoja Gurgeen Khan and an employee of the Nawab. Rajballabh asked Ellis to send Antoon

143 Governor's letter, December 19, 1761 (Calendar, No. 1405).

144 Do. (Calendar, No. 1406).

145 Calendar, No. 1415.

to him. Ellis refused and replied that he would put Antoon in irons and send him to Calcutta. Rajballabh again wrote to Ellis but he said : "I will neither release him nor send him to you, but he shall not be ill-treated." After his late rebuff from the Governor, endorsed by the Nawab, Rajballabh could do nothing more, and sent a report of the whole affair to the Nawab.¹⁴⁶ The Nawab thereupon wrote to Mr. Ellis as follows : "If that person (Antoon) had committed any fault, it would have been proper to have informed me of it, since my interests and the Company's are united. It ill becomes you to seize an officer of my government, who was entrusted with affairs of great consequence. . . . Since my servants are subjected to such insults, my writing can be of no use—you are the masters, send for any of my officers, Zamindars, Tahsildars or Fouzedars, where and whomsoever you please. How much my government and authority are weakened by these proceedings I cannot describe."¹⁴⁷ This letter, which shows how strongly the Nawab felt the effects of this insult, was the last that he ever wrote to Mr. Ellis.¹⁴⁸

The utter helplessness of the Nawab, so pathetically expressed in the letter, made the relation of Rajballabh and Ellis still more delicate and difficult. But soon another incident happened, which caused more bitter and prolonged acrimony than ever before, and may be regarded as the cause of Rajballabh's ruin.

On February 4, 1762, two or three companies of Sepoys in the service of the English surrounded the

146 Letter from Rajballabh to the Nawab, recorded in Bengal Public Consultations, February 22, 1762 (*I.R.O.*).

147 - Narrative, Vol. I, pp. 305-6.

148 *Ibid.*, p. 305. For further details and sequel of the episode, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 322-26; Calendar, No. 1503.

fort of Monghyr, and demanded entrance on the ground that several European runaways were concealed there. Sujān Singh, the commandant of the fort, said that there were no Europeans inside the fort, but naturally refused to admit the English soldiers. He even went to the length of taking inside two persons, presumably Indians, and showed them the different parts; but though no Europeans were found, the English were not satisfied and wanted to send two European sergeants. This Sujān Singh would not permit. Hence the British force stationed themselves outside the fort walls, and surrounded it for three months.¹⁴⁹

Rajballabh having received this report from Sujān Singh through the Naib of Ghurghin Khan, sent Ghulam Muhammad Khan to Ellis asking to be informed why his men had acted in this manner and pointing out the effect of this upon the power and prestige of the government. He suggested that Ellis should recall his people, and if, after enquiry, the Europeans were found in the fort he would get them and deliver them up. To this Ellis replied: "Till the sergeants go into the fort, I will not recall the men." Rajballabh thereupon reported the matter to the Nawab, observing, "I apprehend he will shortly send more people."¹⁵⁰ The Nawab as usual complained to the Governor who also received a counter-complaint from Mr. Ellis. Mr. Ellis's version was very different on some material points. He said that several Europeans having run away, he had intelligence that they were concealed in the fort. Thereupon he wrote to Rajballabh, pro-

149 For a full account of this incident *cf.* Narrative, Vol. I, pp. 307-16; Calendar, Nos. 1469, 1472.

150 Rajballabh's letter to the Nawab (Narrative, Vol. I, pp. 310-12).

cured a letter from him to Sujan Singh, the Commandant of the fort, and sent a company of Sepoys. Sujan Singh, however, refused to admit them and threatened to fire if they advanced towards the fort.

In a letter, dated March 11, 1762,¹⁵¹ the Governor communicated to the Nawab the above version of the affair given by Mr. Ellis. This brought forth an angry outburst from the Nawab. To the Governor he wrote: "Who is Rajballabh that Mr. Ellis should write to him?"¹⁵² To Rajballabh he wrote demanding an explanation of the incident which, he said, had amazed him.¹⁵³

The Governor replied, on March 24,¹⁵⁴ that Ellis wrote to Rajballabh because he was the Deputy Governor of Bihar, and the latter in the said capacity wrote a letter to Sujan Singh. As Sujan Singh still refused permission to the sergeants to conduct the search, the presumption was that the runaway Europeans were actually concealed in the fort. The Governor therefore requested the Nawab to direct Sujan Singh to permit the search and to punish him if the Europeans were found there. As the Nawab did not agree to this, he suggested, on April 12, that "the best and clearest way is to send two sergeants and several *tilangas* to enquire for the European deserters."¹⁵⁵ The Nawab refused this request, protesting that no European was harboured inside the fort.¹⁵⁶

Rajballabh wrote to the Nawab, on March 26, 1762, denying *in toto* the allegations of Ellis that the

151 Calendar, No. 1469; cf. also No. 1472.

152 *Ibid.*, No. 1479.

153 Narrative, Vol. I, p. 312.

154 Calendar, No. 1479.

155 *Ibid.*, No. 1482.

156 *Ibid.*, No. 1485.

latter had approached him and procured a letter to Sujan Singh asking him to permit the search. "I know not in truth," said he, "anything of this affair, neither did any person ever demand, or I write such a letter; had any such demand been made, what would have induced me to have given such a letter? Or had there been an absolute necessity for me, I would have first acquainted you with the particulars, and waited your orders upon them. This affair is utterly false and untrue."¹⁵⁷

The sequel to this story may be told in Vansittart's words: "The Nawab was desired to punish Sujan Singh for doing what he would have deserved to lose his head, had he not done. On this weak pretence was the English force continued at Monghyr for three months. Mr. Ellis, supported by the Board (Calcutta Council), insisted on their being admitted to search the fort; and the Nabob, as tenaciously refused it, exclaiming all the time against our breach of faith, and continual and unprovoked acts of hostility against him. At length, yielding to my persuasions, he permitted Lt. Ironside, sent by me, to search the fort. He found no deserters, and was convinced upon the strictest enquiry that none had ever been in it. Thereupon being ordered by the Board to put an end to the dispute, Ellis recalled the Sepoys in consideration of the sergeant (who had indeed attended Lt. Ironside) having been admitted to search the fort."¹⁵⁸

Before the agitation over the search in Monghyr fort had died down, Rajballabh was involved in another quarrel with Ellis. The incident is fully

157 Rajballabh's letter to the Nawab, dated 26th March, 1762
(Narrative, Vol. I, pp. 312-13).

158 Narrative, Vol. I, pp. 313-14.

described in two letters from Rajballabh to the Nawab quoted below.¹⁵⁹

I. "To-day a man, mounted on a horse belonging to Mr. Ellis, Chief of the English factory, was passing by the eastern gate into the Kella. A Coffree, who commanded the seepoys belonging to Goorgheen Cawn, and who had the command of the gate, asked the horseman, whom the horse belonged to? The man refused to tell him the owner's name, and gave him ill language. Upon this provocation, the Coffree took hold of the horse's bridle and stopt him. The horseman drew his dagger upon him, which the Coffree seized and took from him. The horseman went to Mr. Ellis, who sent some seepoys to seize and carry the Coffree before him. On intelligence of this, I called the seepoys of the factory and the Coffree before me, and enquired into the affair in presence of the Hircarra of the factory. It appeared, that the fact was as I have related it. Afterwards speaking kindly to them, and giving them beetle, I dismissed them. They took their leave of me, but did not go to the factory and not being able to sit at the gate, six seepoys stationed themselves in a shop of the Bazar, in the passage which leads to my house, demanding the Coffree, with some gold mohurs, which were plundered. I sent Golaum Mahomed Cawn to the chief, to expostulate with him, for making such trifle a matter of debate; and to desire him to recall the seepoys. He would by no means consent, but replied in anger: 'till the Coffree is brought into my presence, I will never recall the seepoys.' Since in this manner the affairs of the government suffer indignity, and I am not impowered to do any thing without your commands, I request you will

speedily favor me with your orders upon this affair, that I may act accordingly.’’

II. ‘‘ The substance of a quarrel which happened between Mr. Ellis’s people and the Coffree belonging to Goorgheen Cawn; and of the six seepoys being stationed at a shop in the Bazar, in the way to my house, I have before represented in an address to your Excellency, which you will have received.

‘‘ Several times, both yesterday and to-day, a person came from the factory to demand the Coffree. By the means of Meer Abdoola and Golaum Mahomed Cawn, who formerly passed and repassed into the factory on business, I returned a suitable answer. At length the chief declared, that if the Coffree was not sent, it would be treating him with contempt; and if he was sent, for one instant only, he should be immediately dismissed. To-day therefore the Coffree was sent. The chief, enquiring the occasion of the difference, told him, he forgave him his offence, and at the same time dismissed him, and withdrawing the seepoys, called them home. At present there are no seepoys at this place.’’

Referring to the incident of the Monghyr Fort, Vansittart very justly observes that ‘‘ if Mr. Ellis’s real intention, by this open act of hostility, was not to provoke the Nabob to retaliate it, it will be hard to assign any other reason for so extraordinary proceedings,¹⁶⁰

160 Narrative, Vol. I, p. 315. It is difficult to agree with Dr. N. L. Chatterji’s view on this point (*Mir Quasim*, pp. 108-14). His partiality for Ellis has evidently induced him to omit all references to the other high-handed acts of Ellis mentioned above. On the whole I differ entirely from Dr. Chatterji’s conclusions regarding Mir Kasim’s relations with the British, but it is unnecessary to discuss the matter here.

for even assuming that the deserters found refuge in the fort he could hardly expect to recover them, as they must have had ample opportunity to effect their escape.' The other acts of Ellis fully confirm this general conclusion. As Vansittart adds, the consequences of these acts were but too evident in the conviction which it gave the Nawab of Mr. Ellis's unconquerable resolution to create a breach between him and the English, in the contempt it brought upon his government, and in the encouragement it gave to the disaffected persons about his court to conspire against his life, in which they had nearly succeeded.¹⁶¹

There is another aspect of the question which is more relevant to our present purpose. It would appear from the contradictory statements of Ellis and Rajballabh about the latter's writing to Sujan Singh to admit the English sergeants to the fort, that one of them must have told a deliberate lie, or had servants around him who deliberately misrepresented things to their master. Referring to this discrepancy, the Governor wrote to the Nawab on March 11, 1762, that every affair like this seems to have had two different versions, and expressed his misgivings 'that both the Nawab and Mr. Ellis have disaffected people about them, who, for their own advantage, are desirous of creating animosity between the two.' He asked the Nawab to find out the person who 'is the instigator of these disputes and severely punish him.'¹⁶²

Probably the Nawab himself had similar suspicions. In any case he thought in this line and his suspicion fell upon Rajballabh. This is evident from his letter, dated March 26, in reply to the Governor's

161 Narrative, Vol. I, pp. 315-16.

162 Calendar, No. 1469.

letter dated March 24, quoted above (p. 74), as the following extract¹⁶³ will show :

“ Rajbullub as Naib might have written, and given a letter about such an affair, when I was not within two or three days' journey of Patna; but whilst I am at hand, what authority has he to proceed in such an affair without my knowledge? Therefore he strongly denies that he wrote such a letter, as you must have known before this from his letter which I sent you. This circumstance ought to be enquired into; because, if he did write, and give such a letter, and then deny it to me, it is certain that he had a design to disturb the friendship between us; and in that case I will punish him as he deserves, as a warning to other incendiaries.”

It is impossible to find out whether Rajballabh or Ellis told the truth; nor would it be of much use. The fact remains that the suspicions of the Nawab were roused, and these were not dispelled even by the most categorical denial on the part of Rajballabh. Whether the Nawab made an enquiry, as hinted at in his letter, we do not know. But the conduct of Rajballabh, in the next incident about the Coffree commandant, was certainly not such as to allay the suspicion of the Nawab; it was rather calculated to provoke his wrath. For, according to Rajballabh's own admission, after reporting the matter to the Nawab, and without waiting for his orders, he timidly yielded to the admittedly unjust demands of Ellis to surrender the Coffree into his hands. The whole conduct of Ellis, specially his haughty declaration to the Coffree that he forgave him

163 Narrative, Vol. II, pp. 3-4.

his offence, was undoubtedly designed to give public demonstration of his absolute authority over the employees of the Nawab, and the utter helplessness of the latter to protect them. The prolonged correspondence regarding the incident of Monghyr fort clearly showed how much the Nawab felt such humiliation and insult, and Rajballabh, of all persons, could not have been ignorant of this. Viewed in this light the action of Rajballabh can only be characterised, at the best, as a grave error of judgment, and at the worst, as a serious dereliction of duty actuated by a desire to placate the English against the will and interest of his own master.

There is no doubt that the prevailing circumstances of the time, specially the daily increasing triumph of Mr. Ellis over the Nawab, with the support and sanction of the Calcutta Council, would go a great way in excusing the conduct of those employees of the Nawab who might have deliberately adopted the policy of hunting with the hound and running with the hare, in order to safeguard their interest in uncertain future. It would be unreasonable to conclude that Rajballabh's actions were inspired by such a motive, but it would be equally unreasonable to deny that they are liable to such an interpretation.

In what light the Nawab viewed the policy and action of Rajballabh we have no means of knowing. In a letter, dated May 24, 1762, he wrote to the Governor: "You write me, that it is the intention of some designing persons to breed a dissension between me and the Company It is amazing you have not discovered who is the designing person between you and me (meaning, of course, Ellis). I have no design-

ing person about me. If upon enquiry any such be discovered, I will punish him as he deserves." ¹⁶⁴

This was followed shortly by the last known incident involving Ellis and Rajballabh. It was concerned with Sujan Singh, the famous hero of the Monghyr fort affair, and happened about the middle of June, 1762.^{164a} The first complaint came from Ellis in the following letter he wrote to Rajballabh :

“ Sujan Singh, Naib of Gurgeen Cawn in Monghyr, had stopt a fleet of mine and imprisoned the Bhirdas. Today he stopt another fleet also. Was I to punish him you would make a complaint and say I obstructed the business of the Sarkar You should punish him as he deserves otherwise I swear that whoever has or shall behave improperly to me I myself will punish him according to his deserts. You know very well my disposition that what I say that I do.”

To this haughty and insolent letter Rajballabh sent a timid reply, saying that if Sujan Singh had really behaved in such a manner he should certainly be punished. It is highly probable that the Nawab was not satisfied with Rajballabh's conduct. His implacable spirit of hatred and resentment against Ellis, his known sentiment that it was highly improper for Ellis to prefer these complaints to Rajballabh rather than to himself, and above all the tone of submission displayed by Rajballabh in his reply to the haughty and insolent letter of Ellis—all these were calculated to arouse not only the wrath of the Nawab against Rajballabh, but also his suspicion that Rajballabh, in collusion with

¹⁶⁴ Narrative, Vol. II, pp. 6-7.

^{164a} The letter of Ellis to Rajballabh and of the latter to the Nawab are quoted in Bengal Public Consultation, 14th June, 1762 (*J.R.O.*).

Ellis, was trying to create dissensions between the Nawab and the English.

Although there is no positive evidence that the Nawab really regarded Rajballabh as such a designing person, it is difficult to dissociate altogether such a suspicion from his almost immediate act of dismissing Rajballabh, particularly if we remember the cruelty with which he persecuted this whilom favourite, till he was brutally murdered with his son.

The first intimation of Rajballabh's dismissal is contained in a letter written by the Nawab to the Governor on July 8, 1762. The original letter is lost and the official abstract, on which alone we have to rely, runs as follows: "Has appointed Raja Naubat Ray to supersede Raja Rajballabh who is defaulting in 40 lakhs of Rupees."¹⁶⁵ The sudden dismissal on such a ground, without apparently giving him any time to submit accounts, offers a striking contrast to the procedure adopted in case of Ramnarain in similar circumstances. It is unfortunate, that this subject is not touched upon in the detailed narrative of Vansittart, and the available records do not throw any light on the preliminary stages leading to the final act.

It appears, however, from a letter which the Governor wrote to Mir Kasim on July 29, that Rajballabh was dismissed on the ground of keeping in his own hands a considerable amount of the revenues

¹⁶⁵ Calendar, No. 1563. It appears from the following letter that Rajballabh was dismissed and Naubat Roy appointed in his place some time before 25th June, 1762.—Governor in Council to Ellis, dated 8th July, 1762. "We have received your letter of the 23rd and 25th inst. The first advising of the Nabob's refusing your visit; the other of his forbidding Nobut Roy to pay you that compliment upon his appointment to the Neabut of the Bahar Province." (Original Papers, I, 186).

of Jahangirnagar, Dinajpur etc.” After referring to this intimation sent by the Nawab the Governor proceeds: “Some time ago Mr. Hastings in consequence of your orders wrote me concerning Maharaja Rajballabh’s affairs. It is proper to receive what money is due from the districts and as through the said person’s negligence a balance is yet outstanding, your dismissing him and appointing Raja Naubat Ray was very proper. When your Excellency honoured him (Rajballabh) with his post you wrote me a great character of him, therefore regarding that do not debase or dishonour him.”¹⁶⁶

How far the last injunction was obeyed by the Nawab is only too well-known. Rajballabh and his son Krishnadas¹⁶⁷ were both imprisoned in the fort of Monghyr, and we are even told that cruel tortures were inflicted on the former to force him to disclose his wealth.^{167a} Mir Kasim also sent Aka Reza with a force to Rajnagar, the native town of Rajballabh, and not only seized the family treasures but also confiscated to the state his house and property.¹⁶⁸ The cruelty and thoroughness with which not only the house of

166 Calendar, No. 1577, English translation of the “Persian letter issued,” No. 118 (*I.R.O.*).

167 According to *Seir* (Vol. II, p. 492) all the sons of Rajballabh were imprisoned and killed with him. This cannot possibly be true, as one of his sons is referred to in a letter, dated May 2, 1765 (Calendar, No. 2635). According to the family tradition only Krishnadas shared his father’s fate, and this is supported by the fact that at least two sons of Rajballabh survived their father. Major Adams in his letter, dated, December 8, 1763, to the King says that Mir Kasim killed the sons of Rajballabh (Calendar, No. 1973).

167a The tortures are referred to in *Muzaffarnāmah*, a contemporary work (*cf.* Chatterji—*Mir Quasim*, p. 122).

168 *Seir*, Vol. II, p. 431. The fact is also referred to in a petition of a grandson of Rajballabh, dated June, 1798 (Beveridge—Bakarganj, p. 97, f.n. 2), referred to later.

Rajballabh but the entire city of Rajnagar was plundered still lives in the family and local traditions.¹⁶⁹ But even this did not satisfy the Nawab. After keeping Rajballabh and his son prisoners for more than a year, he murdered both of them, along with Ramnarain and a number of other prisoners, by throwing them from the fort-wall of Monghyr into the Ganges with sand-bags fastened to their necks.

The charge brought by the Nawab against Rajballabh was very common in those days, and was more often a pretext for ruining a man with whom the Nawab was displeased, than a reason for such displeasure. It is, therefore, difficult to regard the defalcation of money, alleged by the Nawab, as the sole cause, either of the precipitate dismissal of Rajballabh from the high post he occupied or of the subsequent cruelty and indignities inflicted upon him and his family. The letter from the Governor, quoted above, proves that he did not think that Rajballabh's conduct merited any such thing. The Nawab sent him a reply on August 15, 1762, of which the original is lost, and the official abstract simply says that 'he enlarged on the reasons of his dismissing Rajballabh.' Whether the Governor wrote to him anything further about Rajballabh, even after the cruelties and indignities described above had been inflicted upon him, there is nothing on record to show. This offers a striking contrast to the solicitude with which the English regarded the interests and safety of the Seths who were also prisoners of the Nawab and shared the fate of Rajballabh. It is worthy of note that the English authorities not only formally interceded

169 A detailed account of the plunder, based on local and family traditions, is given in Gupta, pp. 378-382.

with the Nawab for the release of the Seths, but even included this as one of the clauses of the treaty which they proposed to him on the eve of the final rupture.¹⁷⁰ This may be construed as an indirect evidence against the general belief that Rajballabh's secret alliance with the English was the cause of the Nawab's wrath against him. But, as suggested above, the Nawab had probably some suspicions of this kind, and although this cannot be definitely proved, such an assumption offers a more satisfactory explanation of his conduct towards Rajballabh than anything else that we know of. That the Nawab definitely entertained such suspicions against the Seths is clear from his letter to Mr. Amyatt, dated May 5, 1763,¹⁷¹ and the interest shown by the English on their behalf lends some support to them. The only positive evidence justifying the Nawab's suspicions against Rajballabh, if he really had any, is afforded by a passage in a petition made by Pitambar Sen, a grandson of Rajballabh, in June 1798.¹⁷² It is stated therein that Rajballabh "was a well-wisher of the Company, in consequence of which Kassim Ally Khan drowned him and his son Kissen Dass Bahadur in the Ganges, and having deputed Aka Reza, confiscated to the State his house and property."

It is obvious that apart from its vagueness the statement can hardly be taken at its face value. An applicant for help, the sole foundation of whose claim lay in the services rendered by his ancestor to the English, is naturally apt to exaggerate the value of those services, and the risk and troubles suffered for them.

170 Calendar, No. 1778A.

171 *Ibid.*, No. 1765.

172 Beveridge—Bakarganj, p. 97, f.n. 2.

According to *Seir*, the Nawab at this time developed a suspicious nature and several persons fell victims to it. There is probably a great deal of truth in the following diagnosis of this trait in the Nawab's character: "The perpetual treasons and endless duplicities, which he had been seeing throughout so many preceding administrations, had soured his temper; and the perpetual infidelities of the troops, as well as of the commanders and Grandees of Bengal, had rendered him exceedingly suspicious, and ever prone to confiscation of properties, confinement of persons, and effusion of blood."¹⁷³

Mr. Gupta, the biographer of Rajballabh, attributes Mir Kasim's conduct to a spirit of jealousy against a rival candidate for the post held by Miran after the latter's death.¹⁷⁴ In view of the subsequent relation between the two as noted above, it would be unreasonable to accept this view, though the old feelings of animosity might have played some part in embittering the Nawab's mind against Rajballabh and adding to his suspicions. All the factors noted above perhaps contributed in a greater or less degree towards provoking the wrath of the Nawab against Rajballabh.

We have no information of the prison-life of Rajballabh or his attempts, if any, to restore himself to the favour of the Nawab. The next we hear of him is his tragic end on that fatal day in July 1763, when, after two serious reverses in the hands of the English, the Nawab set out from the fort of Monghyr to take his final stand at Udhua-nala. The state of things is thus described in *Seir*¹⁷⁵ :

"But by this time a sanguinary disposition had made its appearance in his character, which had

¹⁷³ *Seir*, Vol. II, p. 432.

¹⁷⁴ Gupta, p. 385.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

received additional strength from Gurchinghan's insinuations, and also from a review of the state of his own affairs. And as his mind had been soured by the alteration which he now observed amongst the Grandees of his Court; and the conjuncture required that he should dispose of his prisoners of State, who were in great numbers; he resolved to put all those unfortunate men to death; especially as he had already a variety of suspicions on their account, and they had filled his mind with tormenting anxieties; they were too numerous to be kept under command, and too dangerous to be dismissed."

The large number of persons occupying high offices and distinctions met their end in a peculiar manner. The author of *Siyar-ul-Mutaqherin* writes: "I have heard it said that Ramnarain had been drowned in the Ganga with a bag of sand fastened to his neck; and probably the others also were dismissed out of this world in the like manner." M. Raymond also corroborates it in respect of Jagat Seth Mahatab Rai.¹⁷⁷ According to the petition of the grandson of Rajballabh, referred to above, and the unanimous tradition still living in the family, both Rajballabh and Krishnadas met their end in the same way.

Three months later, the English prisoners also were all murdered with one exception.¹⁷⁸ Even the blood-stained annals of this period afford no parallel to such cruel and barbarous acts. We can only suppose that the exasperation and a spirit of desperation, caused first by the bitter insults and indignities, and later by the serious military reverses which the Nawab suffered from the English, must have unbalanced his mental faculties

177 Gupta, p. 493, f.n., p. 504.

178 *Ibid.*, p. 505.

when he committed this crowning tragedy of brutally murdering his helpless prisoners.

8. GENERAL REVIEW

The tragic end of Rajballabh invests his life with a dramatic interest, which is fully sustained by the long and eventful career in course of which he rose from the humble post of an office clerk to a position next in importance only to the Nawab Nazim of Bengal. The interest is further heightened when we consider the various rôles he played with such eminent success. Beginning his career as a successful Superintendent of the Nawara or the Admiralty, he became the *de facto* ruler of Eastern Bengal, and was selected as the Chief Adviser by Nawazish Muhammad and Ghasiti Begum in their struggle for the throne of Murshidabad. Though his cause was lost, he rose to prominence again as the right-hand man of Miran, who virtually carried on the government of Bengal in the name of Mir Jafar. If we can trust Holwell, Rajballabh initiated the policy of driving away the English from Bengal with the help of the Dutch. In any case it was he who first realised the importance of an alliance with the foreign trading nations as a decisive factor in Bengal politics. But he excelled both in arts of peace and war. On the death of Miran he became the commander of his army and actually fought against the Emperor of Delhi. His military talents were of no mean order, as they elicited praise from the English Governor, and were at least partly responsible for his elevation to the post of Deputy Governor of Bihar in the régime of his rival and enemy Mir Kasim.

Rajballabh was an able administrator, an astute politician, a shrewd diplomat, and a veteran general.

According to Drake, the English Governor of Calcutta, Rajballabh was "esteemed the subtlest politician in the whole province."¹⁷⁹ Whatever we might think of this, no one who studies the history of the time can deny him the very front rank among the leading men of Bengal in the middle of the eighteenth century.

In our review of Rajballabh we have mainly confined ourselves to his public career. But his personal history and private life are also not altogether devoid of interest. He not only amassed an immense fortune but also created a vast estate, of which the nucleus was formed by the zemindary of Bozrag Umedpur¹⁸⁰ granted to him by Nawab Mir Jafar as a reward for his services. He built fine houses and temples, excavated big tanks, and established *tols* at Rajnagar, and converted an insignificant village into one of the most beautiful towns in East Bengal. Some of his buildings, known as Pancharatna, Navaratna, Satararatna and Ekusratna, from the number of turrets and of spires over each, are still remembered by old men. Though they have all been washed off by the Padma river we can fortunately gain some idea of their grandeur and magnificence from their photographs and descriptions. But Rajballabh's building activities were not confined to Rajnagar. He built many temples and excavated tanks at Burdwan, Srikhanda, Murshidabad and Benares.

Rajballabh was an orthodox Hindu and performed various Vedic sacrifices. For this purpose he invited learned Brahmans from all over India. A stone slab, in a temple built by him at Srikhanda in Burdwan district,

179 Hill, Vol. I, p. 119. The passage, containing this opinion, has been quoted above, on p. 10.

180 For an account of Rajballabh's estate, cf. Beveridge—Bakarganj, pp. 94 ff, 118 ff.

contains a short inscription which states that it was built in Saka 1676 (= 1754 A.D.) by Rajballabh who had performed Agnishtoma, Vājapeya and other sacrifices. A unique manuscript, in the collection of the Dacca University, preserves a drama, called Rājavijaya, which was composed on the occasion and describes the sacrificial ceremonies. The scene is laid at Rajnagar and the main plot centres round the great *Yajña* or sacrifice performed by Rajballabh.

Rajballabh was also a great social reformer. In his days the section of the Vaidya community to which he belonged did not wear the sacred thread. At enormous cost he assembled the Brahman Pandits from different parts of India, and after a great deal of discussion they recorded their opinion in writing admitting the right of the Vaidyas to use the sacred thread,—a right which they still maintain.

But the most important social reform attempted by him was the remarriage of Hindu widows. Though he did not succeed, his efforts bore fruit about a century later. For we have definite evidence that the activity of Rajballabh in this direction was remembered till the days of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar when the custom was legalised and introduced into Hindu society.

In an article on this subject, published in *Bengal Spectator*, July 1842 (Vol. I, No. 5, p. 51), we find the following statement: In 1756 Raja Rajballabh applied to the learned Pandits of Dravida, Telenga, Benares, Mithila, etc., and they unanimously expressed their approval (of the widow remarriage) in the following words:

Gate mṛite pravrajite klīve cha patite patau I
Pañchaso-āpatsu nārīnām patir-anyo vidhīyate II

ABBREVIATIONS

1. Long—*Selections from Unpublished Records of Government for the years 1748 to 1767*, by the Reverend J. Long (Calcutta, 1869).
 2. Hill—*Bengal in 1756-1757* (Indian Record Series), Edited by S. C. Hill (London, 1905).
 3. Calendar—*Calendar of Persian Correspondence* (Calcutta, 1911).
 4. Seir—*Seir Mutaqherin*, by Syed Gholam Hossein Khan (1780 A.D.). Translated by M. Raymond (1789 A.D.). Published by R. Cambray & Co. (Calcutta, 1902).
 5. Riyaz—*The Riyazu-s-Salatin*, by Ghulam Husain Salim (1788 A.D.). Translated by Maulvi Abdus Salam (Bib. Indica, 1902).
 6. Orme—*A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan*, by R. Orme (1803) (Madras, 1861).
 7. Stewart—*The History of Bengal*, by Charles Stewart (1813). Published by Bangabasi Office (Calcutta, 1910).
 8. Narrative—*A Narrative of the Transactions in Bengal (1760-1764)*, by Henry Vansittart (London, 1766).
 9. Tracts—*India Tracts*, by J. Z. Holwell, 3rd Edition (London, 1774).
 10. Gupta—*Maharaj Rajballabh Sen*, by Rasiklal Gupta, B.L. (in Bengali)—2nd Edition.
 11. *I.R.O.*—Imperial Records Office, Delhi. This abbreviation, placed within ordinary brackets, denotes that the original record in question was consulted by me in the Imperial Records Office, Delhi, and is not known to me to have been published before.
 12. Beveridge—*Bakarganj—District of Bakarganj*, by H. Beveridge (London, 1876).
 13. Original Papers—*Original Papers relating to the Disturbances in Bengal from 1759 to 1764* (London, 1765).
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