

onwards marred the policy of the Safawi monarchs towards their conquered races, there is plenty of proof that the Armenians and Georgians were flourishing and numerically large communities in Persia till the Afghan invasion. Within fifty years of it, however, Julfa had been almost entirely abandoned, even by schismatics, whose descendants form the stock of the present colonies in Baghdad and Basra: the Armenian population of the Nakhchiwan and Erivan districts had dispersed even as far as Smyrna, the last Catholics and their missionaries had left Persia. (Sir J. Malcolm's *History*, chapter XXII, p. 374, states:

“The Armenians in Persia are calculated on an estimate made by order of the bishop of Julfa at 12,883 souls—not more than one-sixth of their number before the Afghan “invasion”,”

and his history was produced nearly a century later.)

It will be recalled how Bishop Elias of Isfahan had been assisted at Moscow at the end of 1700—according to the author of his *Vita*—by Shahnawaz Khan, alias Vaqtan or Vactanga, brother of

“Gurji Khan, the Georgian prince who had been making war for five years previously on “Shah Sultan Husain”,”

and was very friendly with Czar Peter. Restlessness in Georgia against Persian rule and relations of the Georgian princes with the Czar were thus already existent when in 1704 Gurji Khan, governor on behalf of the Persian suzerain, aware of the oppressive rule of the eunuchs at Court, revolted and attempted to make himself independent; but abandoned by his principal adherents and after remaining an outlaw near Ganjeh for several months he was obliged to fly from the country. However, a third brother or cousin, Khusru Khan, was at that period Diwan Baigi at Isfahan, and by the latter's powerful mediation it was only a short time before Gurji Khan was reinstated in his governorship of Georgia. This event was followed by the arrival at the Persian capital of an ambassador from the Mogul emperor of Delhi, sent to demand restitution of Kandahar, which for over fifty years had been under Persian suzerainty, and its province, a move which alarmed the Persian Court and determined the dispatch of a strong governor likely to defend Kandahar against aggression from India. The Georgians were considered among the most valiant and reliable fighters in the Shah's dominions, so Gurji Khan was bidden to enrol as many of his compatriots as he could, and in the sequel marched from Kandahar with 14,000 [? sic], while as ‘locum tenens’ his brother, Khusru Khan the Diwan Baigi, remained behind in command in Georgia.

‘Arrived at Kandahar, the Georgian commander victualled the town and its three forts against a siege of three years: and soon becoming suspicious of the loyalty of Mir Wais, a Ghilzai by race, Kalantar of the town, and finding that the Shah and eunuchs at the Court paid no attention to the reports he communicated about the intrigues and riches of Mir Wais and the largesse the latter bestowed on the common folk to grow in influence and gain adherents, Khusru Khan ordered him to quit Kandahar within three days and betake himself to Isfahan.

‘When Mir Wais reached the capital, knowing he was under suspicion, he feigned to be a Muslim of great piety: his temper was pliant and supple, he lived in some splendour and before long he won over to himself a party at the Court. He became welcome as a guest at the houses of the chief officials, and proceeded to intrigue with the two chief factions, praising Gurji Khan to the pro-Georgian party, while representing him as ambitious and tyrannical to the other, to whom he insinuated that the Georgian troops would better be replaced by Persians.

‘Astutely working on the Shah's known esteem for piety and regarded at length as a ‘Mulla’, or highly devout person, he obtained permission to go on pilgrimage to Makkeh