



Sovereignty, Space, and Identity: The Politics of Power in Eighteenth Century Punjab

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Sovereignty, Space, and Identity: The Politics of Power in Eighteenth Century Punjab

A dissertation presented

by

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to

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Abstract

This dissertation inquires how Iranian and Afghan attempts to gain and legitimize political power over Punjab from 1738 to 1772 led to new constructions of sovereignty, reimagined connections to land and space, and re-articulation of self and community as part of that process. Mughals, Iranians, Afghans, Sikhs, and Marathas competed, at time simultaneously, for political power over Punjab—a strategic borderland province—in the eighteenth century. To date, scholars have focused on theories of Mughal decline or decentralization, or Sikh history, religion, and culture; whereas, Iranian and Afghan intermittent power over Punjab has remained largely unexplored. This is perhaps the result of a long history of either marginalizing or writing off legitimate Afghan claims to Punjab, and other parts of Iran and Hindustan. Safavid, Mughal, and Sikh historians and chroniclers—the historiography through which British colonial scholars understood the early modern period—depict Afghans as rebels attempting to overthrow Iranian, Mughal, and emerging Sikh empires. British colonial and postcolonial scholars further described Afghans as foreign to and invaders of Hindustan. I question these associations and argue that the Afghans had a significant interest in governing Punjab; in fact, I show that Afghan interests in the region was not one of rebellion or invasion, but a strategic and inevitable economic and political move. The Afghan leader, Ahmad Shah Abdali-Durrani (d. 1772), turned emperor took advantage of power vacuums with the assassination of the Iranian warlord, Nadir Shah Afshar (d. 1747), and the unstable and inept Mughal government. Ahmad Shah was able to leverage existing economic,

social, cultural, and religious networks that were available to him to extend his territories well beyond Punjab, as indicated in eighteenth century Persian, Punjabi, Urdu, Braj, French and English histories, genealogies, memoirs, poetry, and travel literature. By reading these underused or misused sources in their original languages and by seriously considering Iranians and Afghans, this dissertation further examines and interrogates how eighteenth century women, slaves, eunuchs, and especially Afghans, lurking in the shadows, have been (mis)represented in colonial and postcolonial scholarship.

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Introduction

For every story that sees the light of day, untold others remain in the shadows, censored or suppressed.¹

This dissertation is a social and political history about individuals and groups who “remain in the shadow”—spoken of, but rarely given a voice. Scholars on Punjab in the eighteenth century write about the Afghans, who attempted to govern the region, but do not incorporate Afghan histories, poetry, and genealogies into their studies.²

Eighteenth century Punjab was a politically volatile, yet geographically strategic region. Punjab was the north-west frontier of the Mughal empire, and the eastern frontier for Iranians (under Nadir Shah) and Afghans (under the Durranis) from roughly 1739-1770s. Additionally, Marathas from the south and local Sikhs contested for power over Punjab throughout the eighteenth century. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Sikh rulers managed to keep territories they subdued, and the Sikh empire was founded. Rather than study the politics of power during this tumultuous century through the lens of Mughal decline/decentralization or the foundation and crystallization of the Sikh empire, I examine how Iranians and Afghans attempted to annex and control Punjab. Specifically, I inquire: how was Iranian and Afghan sovereignty

¹ Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Variations on a Theme by Hannah Arendt* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum University Press, 2013), ii.

² The focus for most scholars on Punjab is on Sikh history, culture, and religion. In Sikh history, Afghans were one of the enemies who prevented them from governing themselves. J. S Grewal, “Historical Geography of the Punjab,” *Journal of Punjab Studies* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 1–18; Reeta Grewal, Sheena Pall, and Indu Banga, *Precolonial and Colonial Punjab: Society, Economy, Politics, and Culture : Essays for Indu Banga* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005); Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699-1799* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste, and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004); Rajmohan Gandhi, *Punjab: A History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2013); Hari Ram Gupta, *Later Mughal History of the Panjab (1707-1793)* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1976).

constructed, legitimized, accepted or rejected? In what ways did the Afghans contest and connect space? How did non-elites and non-males privilege and leverage identity for social and political mobility? Further, I examine and interrogate how eighteenth century women, slaves, eunuchs, and especially Afghans, lurking in the shadows, have been (mis)represented in colonial and postcolonial scholarship.

1 – Sources and Methodology

This dissertation is based on multi-lingual sources and varied genres, which includes chronicles, company reports and letters, administrative records, poetry, memoirs, and travel accounts. I have read most of the sources (or relevant passages) in their original languages (Braj, French, Hindi/Urdu, Persian, and Punjabi), but in some cases where the translation is done well, or if the original language manuscript was not available to me, I opted to use the English translation of the text. Most importantly, I have included sources that have generally remained under examined or simply mined for facts.

Reading multiple and varied sources help us move beyond linear and teleological histories on Punjab, specifically, and South Asia generally. There is an important difference between historians noting and commenting on *how* historical actors invoked the past and emulated figures of their past to legitimize their present needs; compared to the method of connecting historical events to construct a seamless, narrative logic to explain certain moments in history, which we call teleology. The teleological approach is very seductive, as it logically connects past incidents and phenomena to our present circumstances (and this is not always the job of the historian, but rather the political scientist or sociologist). The teleological approach attempts to answer pressing questions that concern us, such as: why do Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs kill each other in the name

of religion? Well, because, there is a long history of it... (read sarcasm). A problematic article written by a political scientist, Ajay Verghese, is presently circulating on the internet.³ He responds to the “traditional story expounded by India’s leaders and public intellectuals” who declare that “religious *tolerance* [sic] stands at the core of Indian history.”⁴ These intellectuals, according to Verghese, articulated these views at the very time when European intellectuals constructed religious categories and ideas about communalism. In an attempt to prove that it was not the British who created and fueled communal conflict, the author sifts through “big-data” to show that Hindu/Muslim conflict existed for centuries (well before European imperialism) and dates back to the seventh century. He maps where Hindu/Muslim conflict took place, historically, and argues that not only is the conflict as old as the religion of Islam, but that the very places where conflict takes place have remained constant. Strangely, his map does not include present-day Pakistan, Bangladesh, or Afghanistan—territories that would have been part of Hindustan in his long fourteen-hundred-year analysis. He does not explain how he obtained the data, what the criteria were for defining “Hindu” “Muslim” and “conflict,” and so on. People are led to believe that the current tensions between Hindus and Muslims is inevitable, and even natural, because historical “facts” and mapping clearly indicates it. He urges readers and scholars to study India’s precolonial past to look for more examples of religious conflict in order to provincialize Euro-centric views on communalism.

³ Ajay Verghese, “Did Hindu-Muslim Conflicts in India Really Start with British Rule?,” *Scroll.in*, June 5, 2018, <https://scroll.in/article/880832/did-hindu-muslim-conflicts-in-india-really-start-with-british-rule>. The core of his argument appeared earlier on the Asia Research Institute blog, see <http://theasiadialogue.com/2018/05/29/hindu-muslim-conflict-in-india-a-precolonial-view/>.

⁴ Verghese.

At the other end of the spectrum, we find intellectuals and scholars who write about religious accommodation, confluence of religion, and tolerance. Verghese mentions Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru as Indian intellectuals who define Indian history as one of “assimilation and synthesis.” Scholars, such as Dominique Sila-Khan and Ali Asani look at “syncretic” religious movements to argue that a shared Indic vocabulary brought “Hindus” and “Muslims” together, at least in the precolonial period.⁵ But this trend, too, is teleological. The intentional outcome is to prove that that religion in India was pluralistic and/or tolerant, before the arrival of the British—the exact opposite of Verghese, and others like him, who argue that conflict existed between these religious groups since the seventh century. The point to note is that the method is exactly the same, even if the argument and its supporting evidence is different.

2 – Historical Background of Punjab

The first textual appearance of “Punjab” as a referential name to the region directly northwest of Delhi occurs in the sixteenth century during the Mughal rule of Akbar. Although the mystery of why it is called *panj* (five) *āb* (water, river) has not been resolved, as there were actually seven rivers in this region during the sixteenth century, the consensus seems to be that *āb* is shortened for *doāb*, meaning land or alluvial tracts of land between rivers, of which there were indeed five: Sind Sagar *doāb*, Jetch *doāb*, Rechna *doāb*, Bari *doāb*, and Bist *doāb*.⁶ The rivers, from the west to the east are: Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, Sutlej. The six rivers merge into

⁵ Dominique-Sila Khan, *Crossing the Threshold: Understanding Religious Identities in South Asia* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004); Ali S Asani, *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

⁶ Grewal, “Historical Geography of the Punjab,” 2.

one, called the Indus, and it reaches the Indian Ocean. For the purposes of this project, “Punjab” extends from the west of the Indus River to include Peshawar to beyond the Sutlej, almost to the Jumna River, to include Patiala and Ambala.

From Afghan sources, we find that a regional understanding of “Punjab” does not cohere in Afghan-commissioned accounts. Rather, they prefer to allude to or explicitly speak of cities (Panipat, Sirhind, Qasur) or provinces (Lahore or Multan). If a large area of land was imagined and mentioned, it was “Hindustan.”

By the mid-nineteenth century, historians wrote about “Punjab” as a coherent region. A Khatri named Ganesh Das Vadhera, also called Badhera, is one such historian. In 1849, he wrote a regional history of Punjab, commissioned by a British officer after they had annexed Punjab. Vadhera’s history, called *Chār Bāgh-i Panjāb* is divided into four parts: 1) Ancient History of Punjab, including Alexander’s invasion and retreat and a flood that wiped out life for a few hundred years (104 pages); 2) History of the Sikhs, which describes the lives of the ten Sikh Gurus, the formation of the *khalsa*⁷ and their battles and conquests (49 pages); 3) The Description of the Reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, with full descriptions of the *doābs* (alluvial plains between two rivers) from the west to the east (147 pages); 4) The Remaining Descriptions of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (105 pages). Vadhera’s history has been partially translated into English by JS Grewal and Indu Banga, first in 1975 and recently edited and republished in 2015.⁸

⁷ The formation of the *khalsa* took place in 1699 by the last Guru, Gobind Singh. For more on the Sikh *khalsa* and Sikh the formation of Sikh identity in the eighteenth century see Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks*; J. S Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁸ Ganesh Das Vadhera, *Early Nineteenth Century Punjab: From Ganesh Das’s Char Bagh-I-Panjab*, trans. J. S Grewal and Indu Banga (Amritsar: Dept. of History, Guru Nanak University, 1975); J. S Grewal and Indu Banga, *Early Nineteenth-Century Punjab*. (Basingstoke: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2015).

Geographically and economically, Punjab was a strategic region: the rivers provided water for agricultural production, a naturally occurring salt range, and transportation for long distance trade. Along these vital trade routes, markets, cities, mosques, centers for learning, and travel lodges were established, and re-established as the rivers moved, along the banks of the river system over centuries. Cities in Punjab, in the eighteenth century, were known for exporting wheat, indigo, and silk rugs.⁹

Punjab falls into a large geographic zone or region that has been called “Persianate,”¹⁰ “Perso- Islamic/Perso-Islamicate,” or “Perso-Turkic,” etc. By these terms, what is meant is that there is a shared cultural system that is referential and coherent (language, aesthetics, imagery, structural conventions, tropes, and so on) between people and societies from the Balkans to Bengal. Shahab Ahmed argues that we ought to call this region or zone as the “Balkans-to-Bengal complex,” because privileging Persian language or culture does not do justice to the vast diversity that existed from place to place; it further undermines other dominant languages, such as Arabic, that continued to thrive in this vast zone.¹¹ While I agree with his argument, I do not use “Balkans-to-Bengal.” I prefer “Persianate” or Indo-Persian because it is precisely Persianate conventions, linguistics, aesthetics, metaphors, etc. that I want to privilege in my analysis. Much of recent scholarship on Punjab has either mentioned it in passing—stating it as fact, but not engaging with the implications or significance of such a world—or ignored it altogether. The latter either shy

⁹ Ashiq Muhammad Khan Durrani, *Multan under the Afghans, 1752-1818* (Multan: Bazme Saqafat, 2007), 173.

¹⁰ Marshall G. S Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). Hodgson coined the term “Persianate.” Like “Islamicate,” Hodgson uses the term to mean a cultural tradition that is written in Persian or inspired by Persian (and for Islam, what is inspired by Islam even if the actors who produce the literature or discourse are not Muslim).

¹¹ Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

away from Persianate writing culture because they associate Persian language and culture to Islam. They opt to marginalize Persianate aspects because they do not want to add to the large body of communal histories fraught with religious tensions produced in the latter part of the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century (they prefer to look at shared languages or cultures between different religious traditions, like Punjabi language or culture). Others deal exclusively with Sikh history and religion and thus use Persian sources to mine facts, but ignore the larger social-cultural context and connections in which those very sources were produced. It should be noted that while I am privileging Persian language and culture, I do not ignore or downplay sources or cultural contexts of Braj, Punjabi, or Urdu. In fact, I emulate Sunil Sharma's definition of Persianate to extend beyond Persian language when "the influence of established Persian-language poetic forms or imagery is discernable [in other languages]."¹² A study of eighteenth century Punjab requires the scholar to take seriously multiple languages and their intersections with Persian literature and culture (very much to the point that Shahab Ahmed and Sunil Sharma make in their respective monographs).

Punjab also falls into what Sajjad Nejatie calls the "Indo-Khurasan" region, first introduced by Joseph T. Arlinghaus. Nejatie uses "Indo-Khurasan" as a conceptual term to help understand the territories acquired by Ahmad Shah.¹³ Nejatie justifies his use of "Indo-Khurasan" in order to be truer to his sources and he is rightfully critical of imposing "Afghanistan" to the historical period when such a reference was non-existent (the first mention of "Afghanistan in the sources is in the nineteenth century). Earlier sources, especially those of the eighteenth century, refer to

¹² Sunil Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia Persian Literature in an Indian Court* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 10.

¹³ See Joseph T. Arlinghaus, "The Transformation of Afghan Tribal Society: Tribal Expansion, Mughal Imperialism and the Roshaniyya Insurrection" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1988), 4–10.

“Khurasan” and “Hindustan” as coherent territories. For Nejatie, using “Indo-Khurasan” is not simply a matter of geography, rather, he says:

I would argue that the term Indo-Khurasan is more appropriate for analytical purposes since it evokes the close historical ties of the Abdālī-Durrānī to Khurasan, India, and the lands in between. Indo-Khurasan also accurately reflects the geographic lexicon found in contemporary sources where the terms Khurasan and Hindustan (or its variant, Hind) are prevalent; Indo-Khurasan thus combines two geographic terms frequently used by contemporary authors when referring to the frontier region straddling Iran, India, and Central Asia where the Abdālī-Durrānī were active throughout the early-modern era.¹⁴

While I understand why Arlinghaus and Nejatie like using “Indo-Khurasan,” I have opted to use only the words that appear in my sources. For the region that we understand as South Asia today, my sources use “Hindustan.” Hindustan was a term used very early in scholarly writings. Arab geographers referred to the South Asian lands as *hind wa sind*, the Indus River serving as the natural boundary—which enabled trade or movement of peoples, ideas, goods.¹⁵ During the time when the sources under review were composed, Hindustan generally means Mughal territories. In this period, “Hindus” did not mean people who believe in or practice forms of Hinduism. The land of Hind (the literal definition of Hindustan), therefore, did not necessarily mean that it was the land of *Hindus*. Politically, the boundaries of Hindustan shifted constantly, depending on who governed. At times, Hindustan including cities as far north as Kabul and Qandahar to the west. South India, generally referred to as the Deccan, was not part of Hindustan. “Īrān” is Iran, as it is

¹⁴ Sajjad Nejatie, “The Pearl of Pearls: The Abdālī-Durrānī Confederacy and Its Transformation under Ahmad Shāh, Durr-I Durrān” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2017), 19–20.

¹⁵ For a summary of Arab geographers from the tenth century to the thirteenth, see Manan Ahmed Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia*, 2016, 73–76. Noelle-Karimi also notes how rivers, in this case by the Oxus river, did not limit interactions between populations on either side of the river, see Christine Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst: Herat and the Mapping of Khurasan (15th-19th Centuries)* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2014), 6.

today, but with different boundaries. Generally, Iran is understood to be the land between the Oxus and Euphrates rivers.¹⁶ Safavid territories in Iran were contested and much land was lost in the early eighteenth century, until Nadir Shah won it back from the Ottomans, Russians, and Afghans. The sources also mention “Khurasan,” but this is usually in the sources written in Iran. In the sources composed in Hindustan, they use the term “*wilāyat*,” which presumably refers to Khurasan.¹⁷ In the Iranian sources, on the other hand, *wilāyat* is an administrative term usually attached to a region or a city. For example, in Ahmad Shah’s court chronicle, the author refers to Lahore as *wilāyat-i Lāhūr*.

About Persianate culture, we know from previous studies, that emperors, and even local rulers, shared cultural etiquettes for displaying power and hierarchies. They used Persian as their language of administration, they hired poets and historians to document their victories and good nature, they exchanged gifts with others and hosted envoys and ambassadors according their rank and status.¹⁸ In South Asia, this was true in both north and south India. The Bahmanis in the mid-fourteenth century in the Deccan, for example, established important centers for learning Persian, and incorporated Persian into their administration.¹⁹ Across much of what is today Iran, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, these imperial and local customs were known by those who were privy to this access and it was faithfully followed, as late as the end of the

¹⁶ Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 6.

¹⁷ Mana Kia writes that in the eighteenth century *wilāyat* is generally eastern Iran, which includes Khurasan, see Mana Kia, “Contours of Persianate Community, 1722--1835” (Ph.D., Harvard University, 2011), 76n.

¹⁸ Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Muzaffar Alam, “The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan,” in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 131–98.

¹⁹ See Sherwani, Bahmanis, 287–89.

nineteenth century. Hindu, Sikh, and British rulers practiced these conventions, despite their Islamicate underpinnings or connotations. These practices did change over time and were not static, of course. When power changed hands, it did not disturb or disrupt how one was to behave at the court overnight. In a way, one could say that courtly practices and rituals were institutionalized, and changes to these practices were subtle and slow. It did not matter who was sitting as the governor or the emperor, usually, the protocol would remain the same across space, but differed based on rank. Non-Muslim rulers, like Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and even the British, emulated these court procedures and protocols because that was how one was to conduct the business of governance in South Asia. Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah did not have a permanent structure wherein they held court during the tenure of their respective reigns. Nonetheless, they held court as they moved (in large royal tents) and the procedures were as formal as they would have been if they were in their capitals. While court culture was Persianate and the language of administration was Persian, we must remember that these societies were bi- and multi-lingual. In Punjab, for example, Punjabi, Braj, and Pashto were commonly spoken and written.²⁰ New immigrants would also speak Arabic, Turkish, and Persian.

From the biographies and hagiographies of famous poets of Punjab, we learn that Qasur was the center for learning, where one would go to obtain a sound education in the Islamic sciences, and in the arts of reading and writing. In the eighteenth century, literary production was not centered in Lahore. Two well-known poets of the period from Punjab, Bulleh Shah (d. 1757) and Waris Shah (d. 1798), resided and wrote outside of the main center of Lahore. Bulleh Shah spent most of his time in Qasur, where he died and was buried. His shrine in Qasur continues to

²⁰ Anne Murphy, "Thinking Beyond Aurangzeb and the Mughal State in a Late Eighteenth-Century Punjabi Braj Source," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28, no. 03 (2018): 540.

attract devotees, from various religious backgrounds. Likewise, his poetry is sung around the world by famous *qawwals* (singers, reciters), including Abida Parveen, the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, his nephew Rahat Fateh Ali Khan, Sabri Brothers, to name a few. In local cafes in Punjab, Bulleh Shah's poetry features in "Sufi" nights in Chandigarh, Amritsar, Jalandhar, and Patiala. Bulleh Shah describes the state of Punjab in the eighteenth century in bleak terms:

The portals of Hell are wide open. The Punjab is in calamity.
Men with torn clothes have become rulers. The Mughals have taken cups of
poison.²¹

Most of Bulleh Shah's writings are critical of religious bigotry and fanaticism, and not on political commentary. Nonetheless, we learn a lot about social life through his poetry, and especially through his contemporary Waris Shah.

Waris Shah was from Jandiala, but he too spent time in Qasur, for his early education. He lived in Thatta and moved to Malika Hans, Pak Pattan, where he composed the famous rendition of the romance story Hīr Ranjhā, popularly known as Hīr Wāris Shāh.²² Waris Shah completed the romance in 1180 AH (1766). Waris Shah was a Sufi follower of Baba Farid Ganj-i Shakar (d. 1266), one of the founders of the Chishti Sufi order from Multan. On Punjab, Waris Shah writes:

God has shown to Waris how thieves have turned into revenue collectors and
tenants into rulers.
What Jats of the country become ruling chiefs and Governments came to formed
from house to house.
Waris Shah – the Yogi – was looted by roving bands.
Punjab and India both tremble at the mention of Nadir Shah.²³

²¹ Gurcharan Singh, *Warris Shah* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988), 11.

²² His exact date of birth is unknown. Some have speculated as early as 1722 and as late as 1735. See

²³ Singh, *Warris Shah*, 11.

Through Waris Shah and Bulleh Shah's brief, but informative, comments on Punjab, we may note that literary production did not cease during turbulent times in Punjab. Qasur and Malka Hans, the centers for cultural production, were not as affected by political battles and plundering as Lahore, Sirhind, and Multan. Unlike Delhi, where artists and poets were killed or forced to leave, the cities in Punjab for these professionals were relatively safer.

3 – Identity and Religion

“Identity” and “Religion” are words to describe concepts, and serve as a set of analytics in the post-19th and 20th century world. The use of these terms in this dissertation requires redefinition, lest the terms be seen as anachronistic. Rather than invent new words and give them meaning in the context of the sources and subject matter I study, I have opted to use these words, and define them through the very sources I read. The hope is that this approach will help eighteenth century Punjab be accessible to readers who are more familiar with later time periods or different geographies.

The topics of identity, identity formation, and identity politics have permeated the field of history, from the British colonial period perspectives on South Asia to the present. British colonial scholars categorized their subject by recording and enumerating religious, communal, or sectarian identities, along with other identities such as caste, when producing reports or histories about the colonized. With the analysis of numbers from the census, religious groups soon became potential voting blocks for political parties in the pre-independence struggle for authority. The demand for Muslim representation in a central federal government eventually led to the creation of the Islamic

Republic of Pakistan.²⁴ Histories produced after decolonization and the creation of nation-states, continued to look to religious and communal identities in order to justify their existence, incorporating the colonial idea that religion and language are intimately interlinked. In addition, major South Asian religions were connected to languages: Hindi (increasingly Sanskritized) for Hindus; Urdu (increasingly Arabicized) for Muslims; Punjabi for Sikhs. Simultaneously, religion and language were linked to territory. India for Hindi speaking Hindus; Pakistan for Urdu speaking Muslims; Bangladesh for Bengali speaking Muslims; and Khalistan (never formed, but the demand is still prevalent among some factions of the Sikh community—especially from those in the diaspora) for Punjabi speaking Sikhs.

Given this historical context, scholars on Punjab generally privilege religious, communal, and sectarian readings when they discuss identity and identity politics²⁵ to make sense of how and why people and communities mobilized, came together, and/or rebelled.²⁶ These studies, mostly centered on the Sikhs, shed light on how humans built community and how they articulated their shared sense of belonging, of great value especially when contrasted with the relatively little attention devoted to Sikhs in the broader South Asian historiography. Nonetheless, privileging religion as the primary frame of analysis becomes problematic when the colonial, post-colonial,

²⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999); Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (London: Hurst, 2012).

²⁵ Histories of Punjab usually means history of the Sikhs. For a critical literature review of this scholarly phenomenon see Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire: Panjab in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991). Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*; Grewal, Pall, and Banga, *Precolonial and Colonial Punjab*; Joseph Davey Cunningham and H. L. O Garrett, *A History of the Sikhs, from the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej*. (Delhi: S. Chand, 1966).

²⁶ See Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks*; Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*; Cunningham and Garrett, *A History of the Sikhs, from the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej*.; Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*.

and present-day concerns of communal and sectarian violence are projected onto the past. It is true that Muslims fought against Hindus and Sikhs, and vice versa, but this simplistic narrative does not account for the many instances and situations when religious identity had nothing to do with who was an enemy or an ally. Let us consider Ranjit Singh (d. 1839), the Sikh emperor who eventually defeated the Afghans and controlled Punjab from the late eighteenth century until his death. He commissioned a beautifully illuminated (sadly unfinished) register of his soldiers and officers.²⁷ The register records the names, rank, and pay of his soldiers, revealing many Muslims—at all ranks—in his army. To reduce his Sikh empire as the enemy and eliminator of Muslims, especially those in power, in Punjab is disingenuous. We must consider other identities, likewise rooted in communities and networks, to construct a fuller, albeit more complicated, history of people and communities in early-modern Punjab.

The neat correspondence of religion to language and land undermines how humans make sense of their own identities. If we take the Sikhs as an example, the linking of religion to land and language would mean that all Sikhs are from Punjab and they speak and write Punjabi. Of course, this is simply not true. Sikhs have lived—for the five centuries they have existed—all over South Asia, and even in countries west of Hindustan in what is today Afghanistan and Iran. It is true that a large concentration of Sikhs is based in Punjab and Delhi, but the numbers outside of Punjab is large enough to call into question this categorization. And what of the Hindus, Muslims, and other religious denominations who live in Punjab? Punjab was partitioned by the Radcliff boundaries, and people moved across the border: Sikhs and Hindus from the west moved east, and Muslims in the east moved west. With the formation of the new state of Pakistan, endless, and even bloody, efforts by the central government forced those who lived in the regions that made up the new found

²⁷ Hasan Nizami, “Hisāb-i-Afwāj-i-Mahārāja Ranjīt Singh” (n.d.), OPB 622 / HL 172, Khuda Bakhsh Library.

state to learn and use a new language—Urdu.²⁸ The vast majority of the people residing in what became East and West Pakistan were not Urdu speaking or reading; rather, they were conversant and literate in Bangla, Sindhi, Baluchi, Punjabi, Pashto, and even Kutchi and Gujarati. The association of land, language, and religion is problematic in the colonial and post-colonial periods; and yet, this tripartite view of identities is still projected onto the past.

Recently, academic discourses have begun to challenge the privileging of religious identities and their connection to language and region.²⁹ They accept that early modern and even colonial societies in South Asia were bi-or-multi-lingual, the population moved regularly, and class and caste varied greatly. When confronted with the problem of connecting religion to language, or religion to nationality, some academics have opted to minimize, marginalize, or problematize religion and religious difference in order to study the intersections of people, language, and territory as primary markers of identity. In the case of Punjab, fifteen authors of the edited work *Punjab Reconsidered* ask: “despite political, social, religious—indeed, historical—differences, are there notions of Punjabinity/Punjabiness that constitute Punjab as a region conceptually in history, culture, and practice? The essays in this volume, through careful analyses of aspects of Punjabi social, cultural, political and religious history, taken collectively suggest that there are, indeed. The “idea of Punjab” or “ideas of Punjab” links land to language to people—Punjab to Punjabi to Punjabis—and this connection is called “*panjābīyāt*” or “Punjabiness.”³⁰ This

²⁸ Alyssa Ayres, “Language, the Nation, and Symbolic Capital: The Case of Punjab,” in *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁹ Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks*; Anne Murphy, *The Materiality of the Past: History and Representation in Sikh Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁰ Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir, eds., *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), xxvi.

perspective provides new ways of thinking of Punjabi identity in broader ways, allowing for the blurring of constructed religious binaries imposed on South Asian scholarship from the British colonial imperial project, and later by nationalism. In fact, they argue the “idea of Punjab,” in the imagination of present day Punjabis, as a regional identity connects them (across borders) in a way that is more coherent than religious or national identities. The conceptual use of “Punjabiness” that includes both the region and the language might well be a useful category of analysis for studying identities in the twentieth or twenty-first century. To attempt to apply this conceptually to the past, prior to the nineteenth century, is not as coherent.³¹ From eighteenth century primary source material I have read, no intelligible idea of “Punjabiness” emerges, let alone a regional identity of being “Punjabi” (of or from Punjab). Identities of place were located at a more local level; for example, one could identify as being from the Rachna *doāb* (land between two rivers), or a city such as Lahore or Qasur, or village. A person from Lahore, then, would be called a Lahori and would speak, among other languages, the Punjabi dialect of Majhi. And they would view a person from another city within the province of Punjab as being different from them.

We see, for example, in Waris Shah’s poem *Hir*, introduced above, when *Hir* first meets *Ranjha* she asks him about his background: who are you? where are you from? And when he says he is from the neighboring *doāb*, alluvial plain, just across the river, she refers to him as *pārdeshī*, foreign or from another land/region. Anyone not in one’s *birādarī* (brotherhood, fraternal relation, relationship) was considered *parāyā* (belonging to another, alien, foreign), and equally, anyone who lived in another *doāb*, even if it the next one over, as was the case of *Ranjha* (*Hir*’s beloved), then s/he too was considered *pārdeshī*, (of or belonging to another, of/from another region/city/land). In Waris Shah’s imagination, belonging to a different *birādarī* and a different

³¹ This is attempted in one-third of the chapters in this edited volume. Malhotra and Mir, *Punjab Reconsidered*.

doāb made a person foreign. What this means is that there was no shared sense of belonging to an imagined Punjab, at least not at the time when Waris Shah composed his rendition of the poem. If we accept that stories like *Hir Ranjha* share certain truths of the time in which they were composed, we may surmise that the logic of a shared sense of belonging, or an idea of “Punjabiness” does not apply in the eighteenth century.

In her erudite study, published before the edited volume, of *Hir Ranjha* during British colonization of Punjab, Farina Mir writes:

The themes that surface in *Hir-Ranjha* texts elaborate historical imagination that contributes in important ways to our understanding of colonial Punjab. They mark *zat* as a critical determinant of self and community, not religious community. They represent women in ways that defied the conservative reformist discourse of the day. They point to a relationship between individual, community, and territory that emphasizes the local, with a discernible lack of association with or affect for the nation or even the region. They point to notions of religious identity that could accommodate multiplicity, such that individuals could participate in shared notions of piety without distancing themselves from being Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian.³²

She shows that identities are fluid, and multiple. She argues that *zāt* (tribe, caste) was a “critical determinant” of identity, and not religion. In eighteenth century sources, especially those composed or commissioned by Muslims, under study in this dissertation, *zāt*—as caste—is not a “critical determinate.” As argued by Mir, religion, too, was not the privileged identity marker, but it was leveraged for political expediency, when necessary.

The idea of Punjabiness is more problematic when we consider other individual and group identities, such as Afghan. Afghans lived in cities in Punjab, Qasur and Samana for example, for

³² Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 25.

generations.³³ Rohillas who lived in the mountain ranges in what is today Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan) settled east in the trans-Gangetic plains during the eighteenth century.³⁴ In sources composed in Hindustan, these Afghans are labeled as *wilayātī* (foreign, or from the west). This is not the same marking of foreignness as the word *pārdeshī* connotes. The usage of *wilayāt* for Afghans, in the early modern and British colonial period, became so common that it eventually became synonymous with eastern Iran, namely, Khurasan.³⁵

This dissertation argues that Ahmad Shah and Afghans, generally, were not foreigners (in the sense of not belonging, and not in sense of being strange or unknown) in Hindustan. The idea of what it meant to be foreign, as described by the contemporary poet Waris Shah, was based on ascribed or imagined kinship and location. Because a sense of a national identity did not exist in the eighteenth century, the question of whether one belonged or not was much more narrow. If we took Waris Shah's logic about belonging, even a Hindu Brahmin from Chennai would be seen as foreign in any other part of Hindustan in the eighteenth century. The problem, when it comes to the Afghans, in European imagination, is that they took the idea of being foreign and applied it indiscriminately to these minority groups. This trend was later applied to even the Mughals, as Satish Chandra points out: "Some modern writers have divided the nobility into "foreigners" and

³³ D. H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 35.

³⁴ Jos J Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire: C. 1710-1780* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

³⁵ More examples of the uses of *wilayāt*, including those that refer to Khurasan are provided throughout the dissertation.

“Indians,” identifying the former with the Mughals, and the latter with the Hindustanis and the Rajputs.”³⁶

4 – Afghan Genealogical Affiliation, Place of Origin, and *Becoming Afghan*

Eighteenth century writers used Mughal (Turani, Turkmen), Irani, Afghan, Baloch, Uzbek, Qizilbash, and so on as a self-evident category of belonging and identity. By the fifteenth century, Afghan was a known label for people.³⁷ A person would be associated to the larger community of Afghan, Uzbek, Mughal, who shared the same real, fabricated, or imagined genealogy. The members of these larger communities, did not necessarily have to be related to each other by blood; rather, they could be based on shared occupations, such as serving in the army, or based on political allegiance to ruler.³⁸ Within the larger collective, say the Afghans, there existed genealogical affiliations. In secondary scholarship, scholars have used the word “tribe, clan, or kinship” when they refer to the people who belong to a real, fabricated, or imagined lineage.³⁹ I have opted to introduce “genealogical affiliation” to both underline that a genealogy—even if it was not real—

³⁶ Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics in the Mughal Court, 1707-1740*, 3rd ed. (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1979), xxxii.

³⁷ Nile Green, *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7. Green writes that the earliest reference to Afghan comes from the Sanskrit work *Brhat-Samhita* that mentions a group called the Avagana.

³⁸ Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy*; Jos J. L Gommans, *Mughal Warfare Indian Frontiers and Highroads to Empire, 1500-1700* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003).

³⁹ Nile Green, “Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood in Afghan History,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 2008; Christine Noelle-Karimi, *State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan (1826-1863)*. (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997); Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). For an excellent critique of “tribe” see David Sneath, “Tribe, Ethnos, Nation: Rethinking Evolutionist Social Theory and Representations of Nomadic Inner Asia,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 4 (October 2009): 80–109.

was imagined and invoked by people within and without the group, and to underscore that people *affiliated* with said genealogy, whether they were born into it or not. The founder of the Rohilkhand, explored in detail in the third chapter, was not an Afghan by birth. He was adopted by an Afghan with a verified genealogy. He, despite his status as an adopted son, was recorded in history as the Afghan founder of Rohilkhand. Early modern usage of “Afghan” should not be conflated or confused with contemporary definitions of “Afghans” which generally means citizens of the nation-state of Afghanistan. Contemporary Afghans are not seen as an ethnic group today; Ethnic groups that reside in Afghanistan today include Hazaras, Qizilbash, Pakhtun (Pashtun), Tajik, Uzbek, Baloch, and so on.

The earliest extant histories and genealogies of Afghans by Afghans emerged when they came to political power, and when they opposed rising Mughal power in the fifteenth and sixteenth century in Hindustan. The Lodis and Surs commissioned histories/genealogies as a means of self-articulation and self-identity.⁴⁰ Muhammad Kabir’s *Afsāna-i-Shāhān* and *Tārīkh-i Sher Shah* by Abbas Khan Sarwani are two well-known Afghan histories composed in the late sixteenth century, after the fall of the Surs.⁴¹ In the early seventeenth century, Khan Jahan Lodi (d. 1620) commissioned a history of Afghans, called *Tārīkh-i Khān Jahānī wa Makhzan-i Afghānī* by Ni’mat Allah Harawi (who was not Afghan, according to Green, but from Herat, Iran), and a co-compiler

⁴⁰ For Afghan history and identity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries see Raziuddin Aquil, *Sufism, culture, and politics: Afghans and Islam in medieval North India* (New Delhi; New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007); Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴¹ Aquil, *Sufism, Culture, and Politics*, 16. Sarwani’s history has been edited by S.M. Imamuddin; whereas Kabir’s history remains in manuscript form at the British Library, MS. Add. 24,409.

named Haybat Khan Kakar.⁴² An abridged version of the genealogy/history, in wider circulation, is called the *Makhzān-i Afghānī* (Afghan Treasury).⁴³

According to Dorn's translation of the *Tārīkh-i Khān Jahānī*, the Afghans were part of the tribe of Israel (*banī isrā'īl*), and trace their genealogy back to the Biblical and Qur'anic prophet Yaqub.⁴⁴ From Yaqub, twelve "tribes" emerged, the eldest of which was Yehooda, from whom the Afghans descended.⁴⁵ Due to oppressive rule, some Afghans settled in the mountains of Ghor, especially after the death of the prophet Sulaiman (Solomon, d. ca 931 BCE).⁴⁶ During the lifetime of the prophet Muhammad (d. 632), an Afghan leader, Khaled bin Waleed, accepted Islam and fought for the cause.⁴⁷ The prophet Muhammad bestowed the title "Pathan" to Khaled bin Waleed and to his companion, a man named Qais, whom the prophet renamed as Abd al-Rashid.⁴⁸ The prophet urged them to spread the message of Islam to the inhabitants of Ghor.⁴⁹ Khaled bin Waleed's sons were dispatched to Khorasan and Herat for the same by the third caliph, Uthman ibn Affan (d. 656).⁵⁰ Three centuries later, when Mahmud of Ghazni (d. 1030) expanded his

⁴² Green, *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes*, 16; Ni'mat Allāh and Bernhard Dorn, *History of the Afghans: Translated from the Persian of Neamet Ullah* (London: Printed for the Oriental translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1836), 3. Kakar, according to Christine Noelle-Karimi is a known Afghan surname.

⁴³ Green, *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes*, 16.

⁴⁴ Ni'mat Allāh and Dorn, *History of the Afghans*, 10.

⁴⁵ Ni'mat Allāh and Dorn, 10.

⁴⁶ Ni'mat Allāh and Dorn, 37. Ghor is in what is presently central Afghanistan.

⁴⁷ Ni'mat Allāh and Dorn, 26–36.

⁴⁸ Ni'mat Allāh and Dorn, 38.

⁴⁹ Ni'mat Allāh and Dorn, 38. Kohistan is in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in what is today Pakistan.

⁵⁰ Ni'mat Allāh and Dorn, 37.

territories into Hindustan, a number of Afghan chiefs submitted to him and paid obeisance.⁵¹ These chiefs and their companions fought alongside Mahmud of Ghazni in his campaign in Somnath. After Mahmud of Ghazni's death, the Afghan continued their service to his sons and remained in Hindustan or Ghor as attempts to conquer Hindustan continued.⁵² According to the same account, one of Mahmud of Ghazni's sons, Shihab al-Din (Masud I of Ghazni, d. 1040), ordered the Afghans, the "whole nation" to "take up their abode in Koh Suleiman, Ashnaghur, and the territories of Bajour, from the frontier of Kabul to the Neelab, and from the districts about Candahar to the Multan, at any place he thought fit and convenient..."⁵³ Shihab al-Din offered them rank and power, and in turn, they served in his armies.

In terms of place, then, if we accept this oral history memorialized, invoked, and re-invoked, the Afghans have resided in parts of Hindustan for many centuries (perhaps longer). It is also worth noting that by tracing their genealogy back to the *banī isrā'īl*, Afghans implicitly subvert Mughal legitimacy by claiming that they were monotheistic, long before the advent of Islam, and that they quickly accepted Islam, during the lifetime of the Prophet, as opposed to the Mughal line that trace back to Timur, house of Gūrūkān, who accepted Islam much later, in the fourteenth century. The Mughal founder and emperor, Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur (r. 1494-1530)—who descended from the house of Gūrūkān—notes in his first person narrative account, *Bāburnāma*, that the Afghans resided in the territories between Kabul and the Indus river.⁵⁴ It was

⁵¹ Ni'mat Allāh and Dorn, 39.

⁵² Ni'mat Allāh and Dorn, 39.

⁵³ Ni'mat Allāh and Dorn, 40. These are the mountain ranges in what is today Pakistan.

⁵⁴ Babur, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, trans. W. M Thackston (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 150–6.

during the lifetime of Babur when the Yusufzais moved from Kabul to Peshawar and Swat.⁵⁵ Kolff remarks that Afghans resided in Punjab for over two hundred years before the Afghan Sher Shah Sur (r. 1538-45) ruled over Delhi.⁵⁶

As early as 1959 and in the three editions since, Satish Chandra remarks, “No systematic study has as yet been made of the position of the different ethnic, national (or regional) and religious groups in the nobility of the Mughals at various periods.”⁵⁷ Chandra states that the multi-ethnic make-up of the Mughal nobility was intentional, and the Mughal emperors desired to maintain balance between ethnic groups.⁵⁸ Chandra argues against labelling Mughals as foreign because they were not representatives of a foreign power; rather, they established their kingdom in Hindustan and remained there, married into Hindustani families, and did not maintain relations with their places of origin.⁵⁹ If we accept this, we can extend this logic to the Afghans as well.

Nile Green, in his chapter entitled “Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood” states that a self-conscious consolidation of an “Afghan” identity “denoted mobile Pashtun tribal clans and their subsequently disparate genealogical lineages.” He says that the term Afghan was ascribed to this group of people by outsiders, and later adopted by Afghans themselves. Moreover, he argues, “For it was in the Indian spaces of this diaspora that many features of the Afghans’ sense of their historical identity crystallized.”⁶⁰ For Green, there is an attempt to delineate the differences

⁵⁵ Green, *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes*, 222.

⁵⁶ Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy*, 35.

⁵⁷ Chandra, *Parties and Politics in the Mughal Court, 1707-1740*, xxxii.

⁵⁸ Chandra, xxxi.

⁵⁹ Chandra, xxxiii.

⁶⁰ Green, *Making Space*, 66.

between an Afghan identity and other ethnic identities found in Hindustan at the time, including the Turks and Iranians. In other words, there was an internalized and articulated difference between “us” and “them” and the line of distinction was that of genealogical affiliation, not religion.

Within the ascribed label of Afghan, there existed different genealogical or familial groupings. Prominent among the different factions within Afghans were the Ghilzais, Yusufzais (a faction of whom form the Rohillas), and Sadozais. Anthropologists argue that ethnic identities are constructed, and so one does not need to be born into a specific genealogy to be associated with it.⁶¹ The anthropologists’ view is bolstered by early-modern accounts. Although unsuccessful, Mughal elites attempted to displace or question the importance of an articulated genealogy, in an attempt to empower those who prove their merit through their actions and not their familial background. The Mughal emperor, Jahangir, writes in his memoir, “Some people make remarks about their lineage, but their bravery is convincing proof of their being Saiyids.”⁶² Taking this further, Sher Shah Sur’s court historian records “the crucial ingredients of politics were not the famous lineages of the Afghan nation, but soldiers, treasure, peasants, and the revenue they paid.”⁶³ Noble genealogies did not prove worth for Jahangir and Sher Shah Sur. From these writings, we can assume that it was known that people constructed fake genealogies, and that the elite attempted to emphasize loyalty not through kinship ties or noble birth, but through hard work, courage, and the ability to collect tributes and revenues.

⁶¹ Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2006), 14–15.

⁶² A Saiyid (Syed, Sayyid) is a person who has a direct lineage to the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and his cousin and son-in-law Ali b. Abi Talib. Qtd. in Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy*, 18.

⁶³ Kolff, 38.

Additionally, studies on military history describe how a peasant can *become* Afghan. In *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy*, Dirk Kolff convincingly argues that the large peasantry in the early modern period were not solely tied to agricultural occupations; rather, they often doubled as soldiers enlisted in the military. On defining so-called Afghan and Rajput ethnic groups, Kolff suggests that these groups were not necessarily tied to kinship:

This may seem quite a heretical thing to say, but I suggest that, according to the ways of the North Indian military labour market, in the pre-Mughal period, 'Afghan' as well as 'Rajput' were soldiers' identities rather than ethnic or genealogical denotations. It was merely to register membership of the war-band they had decided to join that, until quite later on, Indian soldiers were known by such names.⁶⁴

To provide evidence for his argument that being Afghan meant that they were part of the military⁶⁵ and not an ethnic group, he examines the ways in which men were included into the fold or community of the Afghans or Rajputs. Kolff describes how a person, who came from a peasant class, would convert to Islam and enlist in the military—probably in service to Sher Shah Sur—and therefore he would be associated as an Afghan. Communal meals, dress, and even disciplinary training in the military provided spaces and opportunities for inclusion and community-building. After initial inclusion, these men who became Afghan would identify with a genealogy, imagined or constructed, that traced back to some known and accepted noble Afghan kin.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Kolff, 57–8.

⁶⁵ Surprisingly, Green, who wrote well after this book was published does not cite nor engage with Kolff's theory.

⁶⁶ Cynthia Talbot's study on the Rajputs disagrees with Kolff's assessment about anyone joining the ranks of becoming Rajput, at least in the particular case of the Prithviraj. One had to be from nobility in order to join the ranks of the army in this case. See Cynthia (university Of Texas Austin) Talbot, *Last Hindu Emperor - Prithviraj Chauhan and the Indian Past, 1200-2000.*, 2017, 141–2. As far as Afghans are concerned, Kolff's thesis holds.

Kolff's study is based on the sixteenth century, but what of the eighteenth century? Stewart Gordon's monograph on the Marathas illustrates similar findings. In Gordon's words:

The eighteenth century was a time of social change, with great possibilities for upward mobility. With the rise of many successor states, entry into one governing elite or another was not difficult. A good soldier could raise a body of men and find service in any of the dozen armies. The barriers seem to have been few, as we find Muslims serving in Maratha and Rajput states, Marathas and Jats serving Muslim armies, Marathas serving in Rajput states, and so on. Successful military service brought the rich reward of landed estates for troop maintenance. The states of the eighteenth century also needed administrative skills. Groups with a tradition of literacy found profitable employment keeping the books and collecting the taxes.⁶⁷

In addition to Gordon's study that builds on Kolff's work, we know from Rohilla histories that a run-away Kabuli captive/soldier, Daud Khan, adopted a Jat boy, who became Muslim, and was trained in Islamic sciences, Perso-Arabic languages, and military arts. This adopted boy was no other than Ali Muhammad Khan (d. 1748), who would go down in history as the founder of Rohilkhand, an Afghan princely state.⁶⁸ The make-up of armies continued to be heterogeneous, in terms of ethnicity, caste, and religion, well into the nineteenth century for non-colonialized regions or princely states. As mentioned earlier, Ranjit Singh, founder of the Sikh empire, had Sikhs and non-Sikhs, including Muslims, on his payroll.

Outside of South Asian studies, more relevant scholarship on ethnicity in the early modern period emerge. For example, Mark Elliott's work on the Manchu in China and his introduction to the concept of "ethnic sovereignty" is especially helpful. Elliott posits ethnicity as a construction (following the anthropologists, and I too take this to be true). He distinguishes between ethnicity

⁶⁷ Stewart Gordon, "The Marathas 1600–1818," Cambridge Core, September 1993, 79–80.

⁶⁸ Rustam Ali Bijnori, *Qissa wa ahwāl-i Rohīlla: tārikh-i 'urūj wa zawāl-i Rohīlla sardār*, ed. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqi (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2005).

and culture by defining ethnicity as “acquired...by virtue of their [the ethnic person’s] adoption of the symbols of the system of persistent identity.”⁶⁹ I have followed his advice about the task of the historian: “Concerning ethnicity, the main task of the historian is not simply to distinguish fact from fantasy (though this is certainly of some importance), but to discover how myth and reality were used in the creation of ethnic identity, to trace the changes in ethnic identity and the uses of ethnicity, and to point out the tensions of boundary maintenance over time.”

Yi-Fu Tuan’s conception of “space” and “place” is helpful when thinking about the connections between space and belonging. Tuan examines how space is experienced by the ways in “which people attach meaning to and organize space and place.”⁷⁰ Through experiential processes, humans connect themselves to the place that has meaning for them. Social space that is imagined creates an attachment that can become an identifier. We find evidence of this in eighteenth century sources. Spatial perception, evidenced throughout the dissertation, played a very important role in winning battles, projecting power, and asserting authority. By considering perceptions of space, and social space, we can begin to peel back the layers of assumptions about the Afghans as being foreign to Hindustan, especially when we read history through their recorded memories.

5 – Were Afghans Foreign Invaders?

⁶⁹ Mark C Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 19.

⁷⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 5.

Colonial and postcolonial scholarship written in English on the Afghans in eighteenth century Punjab, and northern India in general, depict Ahmad Shah as an “invader”⁷¹ and his campaigns as “invasions.” A representative sample include Joseph D. Cunningham, Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Hari Ram Gupta, Ganda Singh, JS Grewal, Purnima Dhavan, and Rajmohan Gandhi.⁷² Moreover, Ahmad Shah’s campaigns in Hindustan have been numbered and classified, ranging from seven to ten invasions, that are then used as a referential. The word “invasion” connotes three ideas: violence, foreignness, and fixed and known boundaries. A few scholars, most notably Raziuddin Aquil, have challenged the pejorative view of Afghans from the early modern period to the present; nonetheless, associations of Afghans as “foreign” to and “invaders” of Iran and Hindustan persists.⁷³

In this dissertation, I question the association of Ahmad Shah Abdali as a foreign invader by reconstructing the events of the middle of the eighteenth century, specifically from 1730s to the 1770s, from Afghan and non-Afghan sources written in Hindustan. In eighteenth century Persian and Hindi/Urdu accounts written in Hindustan, the language of “invasion” is not employed, even by the accounts of the victims of the so-called invasions.⁷⁴ The verb chroniclers or authors use to

⁷¹ Certainly, historians do not use the term “invasion” exclusively for the Afghans. The term is employed to describe Arab Muslims who “invaded” frontiers of Sind and Hind in the eighth century. The Marathas, in the eighteenth century, were also described in colonial accounts as “invaders.”

⁷² Cunningham and Garrett, *A History of the Sikhs, from the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej*.; Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, vol. II, 1754–71 (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons, LD., 1934); Gupta, *Later Mughal History of the Panjab (1707-1793)*; Ganda Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan* (London: Asia Pub. House, 1959); J. S Grewal et al., eds., *Sikh History from Persian Sources: Translations of Major Texts* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001); Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks*; Gandhi, *Punjab*.

⁷³ Aquil, *Sufism, Culture, and Politics*.

⁷⁴ There are a few words in Persian that can be translated into “invasion” in English: *tākht* (spoil, plunder, pray, assault, invasion); *hamla* (making as assault, an attack, charge, assault, aggression, invasion); *lashkar-kashī* (generalship, a levy, mobilization, invasion); *dar sar dar āmadan* (to invade, to make an inroad upon).

describe when Ahmad Shah came to Hindustan is “*āmadan*” (to come, to arrive, to exist, to be found, to become).⁷⁵ They then use verbs meaning plundered, looted, attacked (*tākht u tāz*, *tārāj*, *tāz/tākhtan*, *darāz dastī*, and so on) to describe what happens after Ahmad Shah and his soldiers have arrived. Why, then, do we accept and use the language of “invasion” as a given when speaking of Ahmad Shah’s campaigns in an imagined Hindustan? Some other options could be “attack” or “conquer,” if we wish to include the violence caused by Ahmad Shah’s arrival. The problem with using invasion is that it adds the sense of foreignness and not belonging.

The point of reconsidering whether Afghans were invaders is essentially about the question of whether or not they were foreign, in the sense of not belonging, or not having a right to fight for self-rule (as the Sikhs are generally understood to have, for example). Two scholars who dominate the field of Afghans in Hindustan, Jos J. Gommans and Nile Green (previously mentioned), refer to Afghans in Hindustan as “Indo-Afghan.”⁷⁶ They study Afghans who migrate as traders, soldiers, or Sufi saints. In fact, Green refers to the migrant Afghans in Hindustan as a “diaspora,” meaning they have an imagined homeland, but lived (temporarily, or with an intention to return) in Hindustan.⁷⁷ It is true that Afghan migration to Hindustan increased in the eighteenth century, but it undermines or downplays the fact that Afghans were also settled populations in many regions within Hindustan for centuries, and some of those who migrated, such as the Rohillas moved from the north-west frontier of Hindustan to north-central Hindustan. When the two

⁷⁵ Francis Joseph Steingass et al., *A comprehensive Persian-English dictionary: including the Arabic words and phrases to be met with in Persian literature, being Johnson and Richardson’s Persian, Arabic and English dictionary revised, enlarged, and entirely reconstructed = Fārsī Angrizī lughat* (Springfield, VA: Nataraj Books, 2012), 99.

⁷⁶ Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire*; Green, *Making Space*.

⁷⁷ Green, *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes*; Green, “Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood in Afghan History.”

adjectives, “Indo” and “Afghan” are hyphenated, there is an underlying assumption that the two are inherently distinct. “Indo,” meaning Indian, is inherently different from “Afghan.”⁷⁸ This sort of subtle language further deepens the divide of what we conjure as being Indian and non-Indian. An Indian belongs to the land of India, and a non-Indian is a foreigner.

We must further note European hegemonies at play when using pejorative or exclusionary words to describe Afghan exploits in Hindustan in the production of histories and public knowledge. To illustrate this, consider Europeans in the Americas during the early modern period. In popular imagination, and in history textbooks at the primary and secondary level, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are described as the European “Age of Exploration” and that the Europeans “discovered” the Americas. The popular association between the Europeans and the Americas is not that of “invasion.” At worst, they “conquered” and subsequently “reconquered” in order to fulfill their “manifest destiny.” And yet, they were violent, foreign, and there existed an entire body of water—the Atlantic Ocean—serving as a natural and known boundary.⁷⁹

In Hindustan, when the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English came and settled along the shores and coasts of the Indian subcontinent, from Goa, to Surat, to the Bay of Bengal, with their weapons and soldiers, they have not been labeled invaders. Invader has only been applied to Iranians, Afghans, and Marathas in the eighteenth century. How often is a European foreigner in India, whether an invader or not, deemed suspicious or ascribed a lower status because of his difference? And how often does that lead to producing histories and public knowledge recording

⁷⁸ The same phenomenon (with its many problems) is present in the United States: people of color or of immigrant background labeled as “African-American” or “Asian-American” and so on, while white people are simply “American”.

⁷⁹ In academic scholarship, historians do use the word invasion for European exploits in the Americas. The public rhetoric and discourse, however, often forgets the violent past.

a pejorative view of them? And do those writings, oral history, and memory become so pervasive that they are taken as self-evident truths? This has not happened for European foreigners in India, but has happened to Afghans and one may even argue to Muslims in India.

To further problematize the uncontested characterization of Afghans as invaders, we must also take into account the problem of viewing all Muslims, no matter their ethnicity, as being “foreign” to Hindustan, especially the territory that is now India. This view, although not espoused by all, has been invoked by those in power, leveraging contemporary collective memory of an imagined “golden age” that existed prior to Muslim “foreign rule.” The often cited Muslim rulers: eighth century Muhammad bin Qasim, eleventh century Mahmud of Ghazni, and sixteenth century Babur, founder of the Mughal empire, are some of the cherry-picked “invaders” of “foreign” rule on Indian soil. Popular debates about the legitimacy of the destruction of the Babri masjid, replacing Mughal names of places and streets, and the more recent demotion of the Taj Mahal as an Indian tourist site bring to the fore the assumptions that Muslims, and everything they built or named, are foreign to India, and thus do not belong. While academics and journalists have begun to question this simplistic teleology and selective memory, they have not factored in the Afghans, who are grouped with Arabs or Turks simply because they are deemed Muslim. The Afghans, however, resided in parts of what we consider Hindustan, for centuries—well before they accepted Islam as their confessional faith in the seventh century. Additionally, for centuries, they participated in state-building, economic development, military endeavors, and local, even imperial, governance, whether through cooperation or rebellion, for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

6 – Chapter Outline

This dissertation pushes us to re-examine how Afghans, and Muslims, in general, were depicted in eighteenth century sources and to rethink political and social history through those sources. What it meant to be foreign, alien, strange, or an outsider in the eighteenth century is different from how we understand it today—usually in relation to rights of citizenship. If what it means to be foreign has to do with connection to land, how far back does one need to go to establish the connection? One generation? Two? Hundreds? Or does being foreign have to do with imagined origins, which inevitably trumps any length of residence in a new place? At what point, in the context of the early modern period, does one belong to Hindustan, and therefore have the right to establish new power, ousting others?

This dissertation argues that Afghans were not foreign to Hindustan in the eighteenth century, and they did not “invade” Hindustan. The language of invasion is steeped in orientalist biases, and prohibits a more nuanced, albeit complex history of the period. Historical thinking enables different possibilities. In the first chapter, for example, we discover many reasons why Nadir Shah decided to go to Hindustan by reading differing perspectives, such as Dutch company accounts, personal letters, and poetry. In multiple accounts, Nadir Shah does not “invade” Hindustan; rather he is invited by Mughal viziers to challenge the Mughal emperor. In other accounts, he has diplomatic reasons for crossing the border. Through re-reading and contextualizing the sources, we see that Nadir Shah’s campaign in Hindustan was highly experimental. He tested the waters as he marched to Delhi, and as he was not taken seriously, he continued to succeed.

Nadir Shah’s conquest of Hindustan dramatically altered perceptions of power in eighteenth century South Asia. The perception of Mughal power was weakened. Nadir Shah’s day

long battle at Karnal exposed a weak Mughal military that was unable to fend off a rebel. The public display of Nadir Shah, and his Qizilbash and Afghan troops carrying away mass amounts of treasure and plunder further disrupted the perception that the Mughals were wealthy enough to ensure their preservation. Moreover, Nadir Shah managed to project his might and power by his brutal command to his troops to avenge the death of some of his soldiers in Delhi. The entire city witnessed mass slaughter and plunder. The residents, who survived, were barred from leaving the city gates, and had to endure the stench of decaying bodies and horror of wealth extraction. Nadir Shah re-instated the Mughal emperor and left Hindustan with new territories, a Mughal daughter-in-law, and a new title of throne conferrer.

Nadir Shah's success in Hindustan, and the amount of wealth extracted by him, encouraged one of his successors, Ahmad Shah Abdali/Durrani, to fight for Hindustani territories/wealth. Ahmad Shah's attempts were not as conclusive as Nadir Shah, who only entered Hindustan once. After Nadir Shah secured tributes from Hindustan, he was paid annually and did not have to return. In fact, tributes from Nadir Shah's annexed territories west of the Indus river, seized by Ahmad Shah after Nadir Shah's assassination, enabled Ahmad Shah to retain an army of his own. The second chapter inquires how was Ahmad Shah's sovereignty constructed, legitimized, accepted or rejected. The chapter is based on two primary sources: Ahmad Shah's court chronicle and Mir Taqi Mir's memoir. Each offers a divergent view of Ahmad Shah's campaigns in Hindustan. The court history underplays Ahmad Shah's heritage and focuses on Ahmad Shah a just ruler ordained by God. The memoir, on the other hand, written by a Muslim, offers a different perspective. As a resident of Delhi, Mir Taqi Mir's life is uprooted because of Ahmad Shah's attempts to subdue the Mughals. The juxtaposition of these sources highlights the problem of privileging religion as a category of analysis, and the problem of Afghans as invaders. Mir's account is critical of Ahmad

Shah and his attempts to govern Hindustan. He is equally critical of the Marathas who employ the same tactics as the Afghans. The problem, for Mir, is the power vacuum that creates instability and instigates violence for the sake of power. For Mahmud al-Husaini, Ahmad Shah's court chronicler, it is precisely because there is an inept Mughal government that a man like Ahmad Shah is needed to restore peace.

The third chapter is based on sources written in Hindustan. This chapter, organized by city, traces how Ahmad Shah leveraged ethnic networks to expand his sphere of influence beyond the territories acquired by Nadir Shah. The details of some key battles further reveal that the fight for power was not based on religious ideology or commitment; rather, power vacuums in key cities and regions catalyzed locals (Jats, Marathas, Sikhs, Afghans) to rebel, create alliances, and subdue territories held by Mughal-appointed nobles. Key alliances between Ahmad Shah and the Rohilla Afghans proved to be mutually beneficial. Ahmad Shah rewarded those who supported him with rank and land, most notably Najib al-Daula who was appointed Ahmad Shah's chief deputy in Hindustan, while threats of Ahmad Shah's arrival to Hindustan, and his presence there, helped the Rohillas expand their territories. Ahmad Shah, on the other hand, received tributes from his allies, and the troops he needed to fight key battles in Hindustan.

The fourth chapter is a re-examination of a key memoir, written by an ex-slave, named Miskin. A close reading of the text reveals how ethnicity and gender were leveraged for social and political mobility—more so than religion or class. Miskin was taken as slave by one of Nadir Shah's soldiers. He was eventually brought to Hindustan and given as a gift to the governor of Lahore, Muin al-Mulk. Miskin, a witness to the events of eighteenth century Punjab, served the Afghans and the Mughals. His account illustrates how being associated with the Mughals allowed him to secure his freedom, hire soldiers who worked under him, and eventually gain rank and land.

As a foil to his life, the chapter reconstructs the life of his mistress, Mughlani begum, who was of noble Mughal lineage. Her fate, just as volatile as Miskin's, was not as rewarding as his, at the end. The chapter further calls into question misogynist colonial and postcolonial readings of Mughlani Begum.

This dissertation is replete with stories of individuals, some who have remained in the shadows. Their tantalizing lives, full of violence, scandal, hope, aspiration, and resilience provide a taste of early modern political and social life in Hindustan. The first life, under examination, is Nadir Shah, a man who was known as both a "world conqueror" and the "wrath of God on earth."

Chapter One

“The Wrath of God on Earth” or “World Conqueror”?: Nadir Shah’s Annexation of Hindustani Territories

Nadir Shah Afshar, also known as Nadir Quli Beg and Tahmasp Quli Khan, (hereafter Nadir Shah) was born in 1688—or perhaps 1689—to a then unknown Turkish family in a small fort-village called Dastigard in Khorasan, what is today north east Iran. Born in obscurity, this little boy would end up becoming famous: feared, on the one hand, as the “wrath of God on earth” and, admired, on the other hand, as a “world conqueror.” When he emerged from obscurity as a successful military leader attempting to restore waning Safavid power, and especially when he crowned himself the emperor of Iran in 1736—ousting the very Safavids whom he had pledged to serve, many took notice and were captivated by him. During his lifetime, and for decades after, French, English, and Dutch travelers, surveyors, and trade administrators; and Ottoman, Iranian, and Hindustani historians, chroniclers, poets, travelers, and administrators wrote about his life and his conquests. They would construct varying, and often conflicting, accounts about his humble birth and childhood, some reported that he was a thief and murderer in his early childhood; while others constructed a more sympathetic narrative, depicting him as an orphaned child whose uncle robbed him of his rightful inheritance.¹ As the new ruler, he conquered territories beyond older Safavid domains, including the Mughal territories, which resulted in his annexation of lands west

¹ James Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah, Formerly Called Thomas Kuli Khan, the Present Emperor of Persia* (London: Printed by W. Strahan for the author., 1742), 73.

of the Indus river in 1739. In 1747, he was assassinated by his own Qizilbash (meaning red-turbaned) troops, due to his increased paranoia and cruelty.

In this chapter, I bring together Persian, Braj, and Dutch eighteenth century sources to reveal varying accounts about the political climate of Iran wherein Nadir Shah rose from obscurity, a chronological mapping of Nadir Shah in Hindustan, the various reasons why he came to Hindustan from multiple perspectives, and how he legitimized his power over a vast territory. Nadir Shah's success against the Mughals and the resulting annexation of Hindustani territories laid the groundwork for one of his successors, the Afghan leader Ahmad Shah Abdali, who had served Nadir Shah in his campaigns from 1738, after Nadir Shah released him from imprisonment in Qandahar.

1 – Nadir Shah in Primary and Secondary Scholarship

Curiously, while Nadir Shah garnered much attention during his lifetime, the political and social circumstances of his life, his actions, and their implications have been given very little scholarly attention. The most detailed biography of Nadir Shah was written by Lawrence Lockhart in 1938, wherein he references and cites many of the above mentioned accounts recording Nadir Shah's life. Then, after a gap of sixty-eight years, in 2006, two biographies on Nadir Shah were published: Michael Axworthy's *The Sword of Persia: Nader Shah, from Tribal Warrior to Conquering Tyrant* and Ernst Tucker's *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in post-Safavid Iran*. Axworthy's biography is designed for a popular audience. His intention is to familiarize a non-Iranian audience about Nadir Shah, who, in his view, ought to be numbered amongst other great, but vile, men in history like Timur and Hitler. Axworthy, therefore, tends towards more generalizations and mental speculation than perhaps a more serious academic study would allow.

Tucker, on the other hand, puts forth an argument, namely Nadir Shah managed to legitimize his sovereignty by attempting to establish a Shi'i legal school, the Jafari *madhab*, and by invoking and leveraging his Turkish ethnicity. Turks were known to come from Inner Asia, from the steppes and Caucasus of Russia. In the early modern period, most of the emperors and dynasties in Islamicate empires, including the Mamluks, Timurids, Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals, were Turkmen or Turko-Mongol. While Safavid genealogy is perhaps the only uncertain one, some scholars in the field have agreed that it is most probable that they too were of Turkish ethnicity. The Turks were a minority in the vast regions over which they ruled. And yet, emperors claiming Turkish genealogies managed to govern from as far west as the Maghrib to as far east as Hindustan.

Tucker's study, which incorporates new sources from the Ottoman archive, is oriented more in terms of Iran's relationship with the Ottomans during Nadir Shah's military conquests and subsequent reign. Tucker devotes one chapter to Nadir Shah's campaign in Hindustan, but this is only a mere seven pages, of which most of the discussion is about Nadir Shah's son, Riza Quli Khan based on court-commissioned chronicles written by Mirza Mahdi Astarabadi and Muhammad Kazim Marvi, who were sympathetic to the Safavids, and a travel account by Arutin Effendi.²

Axworthy and Tucker have written articles addressing varying questions about Nadir Shah. Beyond this, there are a handful of translations, some that reveal new facts based on Dutch documents, such as that of Willem Floor,³ and some articles that simply ponder about Nadir Shah

² For a comparative analysis between these two court histories see Christine Noelle-Karimi, "Afghan Politics and the Indo-Persian Literary Realm," in *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes*, ed. Nile Green (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016). Ernest Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006).

³ Willem M Floor, *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah: Dutch East India Company Reports, 1730-1747* (Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers, 2009).

and imagine an India had he remained there.⁴ These recent studies on Nadir Shah are a step forward in understanding his life and how he managed to ascend to the position he acquired and how he legitimized his power. Nonetheless, none of these studies seriously consider the Afghans, in relation to Nadir Shah and his “quest for legitimacy.” Further, they do not consider the implications of Nadir Shah’s annexation of Hindustani territories. This would become the basis for the claim and resulting campaigns in the eastern lands of the Afsharid dynasty, including territories west of the Indus river, for Ahmad Shah Abdali, who was one of a few to succeed Nadir Shah. In other words, one cannot understand how or why Ahmad Shah Abdali rose to power without first examining Nadir Shah’s rise to power in Iran, his annexation of Hindustani territories, and his attempts to legitimize power, especially in relation to the Afghans.

2 – Historical Background of Eighteenth Century Iran: Fall of the Safavids, Rise of the Afghans

The Safavids had lost most of their territories by the early eighteenth century. The Safavid dynasty⁵ was founded by Shah Ismail I (r. 1501-1524), a descendant of Shaikh Safi al-Din Abu al-Fath Ishaq Ardabili (1252-1334). He practiced the Sunni interpretation of Islam, and founded the Sufi order, the Safaviyya, by claiming descent through Ali (the nephew and son-in law of the Prophet Muhammad) and Musa al-Kazim (d. 799), the seventh Imam of the Ithna Ashari’s, son of

⁴ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Un Grand Dérangement: Dreaming an Indo-Persian Empire in South Asia, 1740-1800,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 4, no. 3/4 (2000): 337–78.

⁵ Scholars debate whether we ought to call the Safavids an empire at all. As early as Lockhart’s study, scholars have written that the decline of the empire began with the death of the founder. See Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia*. (Cambridge [England: University Press, 1958). Rudi Matthee argues that Safavid Iran was more than a “gun-powder empire,” as has been the general consensus, see Rudi Matthee, “Was Safavid Iran an Empire?,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 1–2 (2010): 233–65.

Jafar al-Sadiq (d. 765). Due to Shaikh Safi's charisma, supernatural achievements (*karāmāt*), and devout faith, he became the leader of the Sufi order. Initially the Sufi order was non-violent, and Sunni leaning. Shaikh Safi's grandson was the first to embrace the Shi'a interpretation of Islam, and he maintained non-violence. By the middle of the fifteenth century, the Sufi order was Shi'a and began fighting those who did not agree with their religious worldview.⁶ In 1501, Shah Ismail I declared the newly established Safavid state's official religion as Ithna-Ashari Shi'ism.⁷

It was Shah Ismail I's grandfather, Shaikh Haider, who placed scarlet caps on his Sufi followers, who were Shi'i and Turkman. They were called Qizilbash, or "red hat."⁸ Safavid ethnicity has been debated: they were either ethnically Aryan, Kurdish, or Turkish.⁹ Roger Savory argues that due to their clear sense of ideology, they deliberately and systematically obliterated a heritage that contradicted the constructed ideology based on the idea of Persian kingship—God ordained kingship, descent from the Prophet Muhammad and rightful representatives of the twelfth and hidden Imam, and *murshid-i kāmil*, the perfect spiritual leader, of the Sufi Order named Safaviyya.¹⁰ In any case, they proclaimed a Turkish identity and chose to speak Turkish when the empire was first founded.¹¹ And yet, they were great patrons of Persian literature and arts and used Persian as the language of administration.

⁶ Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavī Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia.*, 18.

⁷ Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 27.

⁸ Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavī Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia.*, 19.

⁹ For a summary of the different theories see Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 2.

¹⁰ Savory, 2–3.

¹¹ For a summary of the debate, see Savory, 2.

The Turkmen, especially the Qizilbash, had come from outside of the Iranian domains, and were largely the reason why the Safavids were able to ascend to power. They viewed non-Turks, or the *Tājīk* (i.e. the Persians), as inept in governing and commanding the military.¹² The Qizilbash were “men of the sword;” whilst the Persians, the “men of the pen,” were refined, cultured in poetry and the arts.¹³ Shah Ismail I attempted to bridge the ethnic and cultural gaps between these two Turkmen and Tajik groups by creating new positions of authority that were based on a shared religious system. Shah Ismail did this by incorporating the *‘ulamā* (scholars of Islam) into the political branches of government.¹⁴

The Safavid empire reached its greatest height during Shah Abbas the Great’s (r. 1588-1629) reign. At the time of his accession in 1588, Safavid territories had waned. They lost key regions to the Ottomans and Uzbeks. Shah Abbas the Great introduced new policies and tactics to ensure loyalty. He relied on a newly created *ghulām*, slave, regiment, which consisted of Circassians, Georgians, and Armenian slaves who converted to Islam and were trained in the army or household administration.¹⁵ By raising the ranks of these *ghulāms* as part of his royal bodyguard, Shah Abbas made it clear that he did not trust the Qizilbash, the very Turkmen who helped establish the Safavid dynasty.¹⁶ Additionally, Shah Abbas changed the status of state provinces—overseen by Qizilbash administrators that paid little revenues to the royal treasury—into “crown” domains, directly administered by the emperor. In this way, Qizilbash power was further reduced,

¹² Savory, 32.

¹³ Savory, 32.

¹⁴ Savory, 33.

¹⁵ Savory, 78–9; Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 362.

¹⁶ Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 79.

and all of the revenues of these domains went to the royal treasury, which allowed him to pay for his large standing army.¹⁷ The policy of converting state provinces into crown domains was adopted by subsequent Safavid rulers. At times of war, these lands would be re-established as state provinces and Qizilbash nobles would be appointed as their governors, thus indicating the reliance of the Qizilbash as defenders. As they did not hold long term interest in these provinces, they did not find it prudent to defend these provinces to the best of their abilities. Additionally, Qizilbash soldiers and nobles resented the *ghulāms*, and called them *qarā-oghlū*, “sons of black slaves.”¹⁸ During Shah Abbas’s reign, Circassians, Georgians, and Armenians held many positions of power, approximately one-fifth of high administrative posts.¹⁹

By the time Shah Sultan Husain (r. 1694-1722, d. 1726) ascended the throne, “the signs of decline [*inhitāt*], nay rather of extinction [*inqirād*] of the life of the dynasty became from day to day [more] manifest.”²⁰ In fact, contemporary views of the Safavid empire, from as early as forty years after Shah Abbas the Great’s death, stated that the dynasty had begun to decline.²¹ Shah Sultan Husain was deemed by most contemporary accounts to be an inept statesman, more interested in living a life devoted to prayer, reflection, and unable to stomach conflict. He relegated his responsibilities to the ministers and commanders serving his court. In the words of one

¹⁷ Savory, 80.

¹⁸ Savory, 81.

¹⁹ Savory, 81.

²⁰ Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavī Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia.*, 17.

²¹ Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 226.

contemporary writer, Shah Sultan Husain was “simple-minded, preferring peace, and without any knowledge or part in state affairs.”²²

Taking advantage of the state of decline, in 1709, Mir Wais (d. 1715), Hotak leader of the Ghilzai Afghans, killed the Safavid-appointed Georgian governor Shahnawaz Khan, known also as Gurgin Khan, of Qandahar. Mir Wais had served at the pleasure of this very governor, before he was cast into suspicion and exiled (or sent on an errand) to Isfahan by Gurgin Khan.²³ In Isfahan, Mir Wais claimed that the Georgian governor had only nominally accepted Islam, for the sake of political expediency, and he should not be trusted.²⁴ He further claimed that Peter the Great of Russia was in collusion with the Georgians in an attempt to take control of Iran. Shah Sultan Husain, in turn, believed him and bestowed Mir Wais with a robe of honor, after which he returned to Qandahar and promptly assassinated Gurgin Khan.²⁵ The Safavid capital delayed aiding the Georgians in Qandahar, as many of the nobles resented their power.²⁶ Mir Wais enlisted the help of Baluchis (in some accounts also the Abdali Afghans) and eventually defeated incoming help from the Safavids and Georgians, thus securing Qandahar as his own autonomous region.²⁷

²² Willem M Floor, *The Afghan Occupation of Safavid Persia, 1721-1729* (Paris, France: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 1998), 19–20. Rudi Matthee argues that Safavid decline was due to administrative and military mismanagement beginning in the seventeenth century, see Rudi Matthee, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan* (London: IB Tauris, 2012).

²³ For a discussion on the various accounts about Mir Wais, see Christine Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst: Herat and the Mapping of Khurasan (15th-19th Centuries)* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2014), 84–88.

²⁴ Stephen P Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam: Calendar, Ceremony, and Chronology in the Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman Empires* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁵ Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 245; Christine Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst: Herat and the Mapping of Khurasan (15th-19th Centuries)* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 84–5.

²⁶ Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 243.

²⁷ Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavī Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia.*, 90. For Abdali interactions with the Ghilzai see Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 2014; Ashiq Muhammad Khan Durrani, *Multan under the Afghans, 1752-1818* (Multan: Bazme Saqafat, 2007).

Abadali Afghans witnessed and heard about the success of the Ghilzai Afghans in Qandahar, so they too attempted to free themselves of Safavid sovereignty in Herat. The Abdali Afghans, some of whom trace a lineage to Sadu (Asadullah I, d. 1627), were an asset to the Safavids in the seventeenth century. The Mughal emperor Akbar subdued Qandahar in 1595, and Sadu was appointed the tax collector. In 1622, Sadu sided with the Safavid emperor Shah Abbas I, and Qandahar became part of Safavid territories. For his help in this conquest, Shah Abbas I bestowed upon Sadu the title of *sultān*, ruler, and granted him the citadel at Shahr-i Safa (located some seventy miles northeast of Qandahar, *en route* to Kabul) and its revenues.²⁸ Despite their (wavering) loyalties to the Safavids, the Abdali Afghans had strong connections between Kabul, Multan, and Qandahar.²⁹ In 1638, Qandahar reverted back to the Mughals. Within a decade, in 1649, Shah Abbas II, with the help of the Abdalis, once again took control of Qandahar from the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (d. 1666). After 1649, Qandahar never went back to the Mughals despite continued attempts.³⁰ During the seventeenth century, internal disputes within the Abdali faction resulted in the Abdalis who supported the Mughals to relocate to Multan. The Abdalis who sustained relations with the Safavids remained in Qandahar.³¹ By the eighteenth century, enmity between the pro-Safavid Abdalis and Ghilzais forced the remaining Abdalis to leave Qandahar and reside in Herat in larger numbers, although their connections to Kabul and Multan persisted.³² The Abdali possession of Herat in the early eighteenth century further reduced Safavid power.

²⁸ Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 2003, 79.

²⁹ Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 2014.

³⁰ Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 2003, 76.

³¹ Noelle-Karimi, 80.

³² Noelle-Karimi, 76–9.

In Qandahar, Mir Wais's son, Mahmud Hotak (d. 1725), killed his father's brother, who had initially succeeded Mir Wais. In 1722, Mahmud Hotak occupied Isfahan, the Safavid capital of Iran. The rapid threat of the Afghans displacing the Safavids alarmed even the Ottomans, who viewed the newly emerging Sunni power in Iran as a threat to their own sovereignty.³³ In fact, Mir Wais, having visited Mecca and Medina, had employed religious rhetoric, and obtained a legal opinion from Ottoman legal scholars, to oppose the Safavid emperor, whom he claimed was a "heretic" because of his Shi'i beliefs. After Mir Wais's son, Mahmud, was deposed by his cousin, Shah Ashraf, the real possibility of Afghan autonomous power in Iran further threatened the Ottomans. Tucker explains:

The situation changed after Ashraf took the throne. In October 1725, nineteen prominent Afghan religious leaders sent a letter to Sultan Ahmet III proposing that he recognize Shah Ashraf as Iran's *autonomous* sovereign. Basing its arguments on Islamic property law, it asserted that Ashraf should be acknowledged by the Ottomans as the lawful owner of Iran, since his conquest of it would be seen in legal terms as the acquisition of unowned property (*istila'*). It argued that the Iranian territory that he now occupied had been controlled by Shi'is in the first place anyway, who according to fatwas produced by the Ottomans' own clerics had been designated as heretics and therefore without any legal basis for owning property. The letter also observed that Ashraf's political independence from the Ottoman sultan, as an autonomous "imam," was valid according to the Islamic legal doctrine that "the appointment of two sovereigns is permitted when the two countries are remote from each other. [Other] imams have followed this rule accordingly up to the present, as is well known in Transoxiana, Khurasan, and India." The Afghan clerics' letter maintained that since Isfahan and Istanbul were located in non-contiguous climes, this rule should also apply to the ruler of Iran.³⁴

³³ Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam*.

³⁴ Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran*, 26.

Initially, in 1726, the request was favorably received by Ottoman religious scholars, who had generally viewed Shah Ashraf as a “good Sunni and man of some spiritual vision and courage.”³⁵ The Ottoman court, however, hastened to quell a potential Sunni rival, and through the Shaikh al-Islam, Abdullah Effendi, issued two legal opinions in response to the request. The first legal opinion stated that the geographic stipulations required to legitimize two sovereigns was not met in this case, as there was no large geographical barrier, like the Indian Ocean, so Isfahan would not qualify as needing its own sovereign. The second legal opinion declared Shah Ashraf to be a rebel (*baghi*) because the mere request was an affront to Islam, and as such he was deemed an enemy who could lawfully be targeted by the Ottomans.³⁶

The Ottomans wanted to simultaneously restore Safavid sovereignty, whilst expanding their territories; therefore, they sided with the Safavid prince Tahmasp II (r. 1729-1732). The Ottomans annexed Iranian territories, while Russians, seeing the delicate state of Safavid power as evidenced by Afghan rise to power, likewise began controlling key territories in the Caucasus region, advancing down to the Caspian. The inhabitants of Iran were oppressed by the newly emerging powers, thus spurring them to rally with someone who would fight these oppressors. Mirza Muhammad Astarabadi’s court history³⁷ begins with a declaration that for every age, God sends down someone to fight the evils of the world, and this person is of course no one other than

³⁵ Tucker, 27.

³⁶ Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam*.

³⁷ Mirza Muhammad Astarabadi completed his court-commissioned history of Nadir Shah Afshar’s reign after Nadir Shah’s assassination. He did not date the completion of the history, and he did not write about events that occurred after 1747, the year of Nadir Shah’s death. Astarabadi, however, did add information that had been omitted while Nadir Shah was alive, such as the blinding of Nadir Shah’s son, Riza Quli Khan.

Nadir Shah.³⁸ Thereafter, Astarabadi describes the tumultuous circumstances of Iran that was full of evil oppression and required a savior:

ز جور و ظلم کار اهل ایران بس که درهم شد
برای انتقام افغان مظلومان مجسم شد.³⁹

The people of Iran had reached their limits from force and oppression,
For the chastising of the Afghans, the oppressed became unified [in their intent to rebel].

This verse indicates a shared sense of powerlessness against the Afghans, but this very oppression led those who felt subjugated to unify against them. One can infer, then, that this was precisely why people were willing to let Nadir Shah have free reign, and why he was able to recruit troops. As early as the second page of the history, Astarabadi describes how the Afghans had disrupted peace in the region, paving the way for Nadir Shah to become the savior of oppression.

Malik al-shuara Nizam al-Din Ishrat Sialkoti composed three *masnāvīs*, epic poems, about the state of affairs in the eighteenth century: one about Nadir Shah Afshar, and the other two about Ahmad Shah Abdali/Durrani.⁴⁰ In the epic poem about Nadir Shah, Sialkoti begins with a dedication in the name of the one who bestows kingship of the climes (God) and then proceeds to

³⁸ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, *Jahāngushā-yi Nādirī*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh Anwār (Tih-rān: Anjuman-i Āsār va Mafākhir-i Farhangī, 1998), 1. This beginning is different from conventional history writing, usually the historian will begin with praising God, the prophets, especially Muhammad, and then other religious figures who have authority.

³⁹ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, 2.

⁴⁰ The three epic poems, are preserved together in one manuscript at the British Library under the shelf number Add. 26,285. Folios 1-130 versify Nadir Shah’s military conquests; folios 130-288 describe Ahmad Shah Durrani; and folios 288b-end are about Ahmad Shah Durrani’s campaigns in Hindustan. The last recorded date is 1186 AH/1772 CE (year of Ahmad Shah Durrani’s death). There is a 1941 manuscript of the, *Nādir Nāma-i Manzūm*, copied by Faiz al-Haq, a copyist from Amritsar, at the Khalsa College, Amritsar, KCA 270. As it is a clean and legible manuscript, I have relied on this copy, and consulted the British Library manuscript as needed.

praising the Prophet Muhammad, the four rightly guided caliphs,⁴¹ and Shaikh Abd al-Qadir Jilani.⁴² According to Sialkoti, everything is preordained by God, including the number of days a person has on earth, and who becomes emperor.⁴³ His devotion and inclusion of the Sufi Shaikh Abd al-Qadir Gilani indicates that Sialkoti was likely a *murīd*, follower, initiate, in the Qādirīya *tarīqa*, Sufi path. describe

In describing the state of affairs in Iran prior to Nadir Shah’s conquests, Sialkoti writes that everything was in such a state of confusion that even good persons were corrupt:

اگر فی الحقیقت به بینی بغور / بود یک دگر وارث الاستور
برادر گدا و ملک باهم است / بد و نیک فرزندی یک آدم است⁴⁴

Truly, if you look with discerning eyes,
One or the other is the inheritor of the horse.
Brother, the beggar and the king are one and the same,
The good and bad are sons of one person.

The anxiety of not knowing who was in charge is pervasive in the poem, and follows with descriptions of an Iran in tumult, as if the earth was quaking.⁴⁵ According to Sialkoti, it was in this deplorable state, that God made Nadir Shah emerge from the unknown to bring order to the state

⁴¹ Ishrat Sialkoti, “Nādir nāma-i manzūm” (n.d.), 28–39, KCA 270, Khalsa College, Amritsar, India. The four rightly guided caliphs, *khulāfa-i rāshidīn*, are Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali (nephew and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad).

⁴² Sialkoti, 39–45.

⁴³ Sialkoti, 2.

⁴⁴ Sialkoti, 63.

⁴⁵ Sialkoti, 63.

(*dawla*).⁴⁶ Nadir Shah was the “lion of the age, warrior of God”⁴⁷ who would establish new rule (*ān-i nau*).⁴⁸ Nadir Shah marched from one destination to the next, and when the time was right, God—the conferrer of thrones—established Nadir Shah as the emperor of Iran.⁴⁹

Most of the sources on Nadir Shah begin with decline of the Safavids, which is signaled by Afghans ruling over strategic cities, such as Herat, taken over by Sadozai Afghans, and especially Qandahar, controlled by the Ghilzai Afghans. The ubiquity of setting the scene in this manner—a weak Safavid emperor who could not defeat Afghan rebellions, which resulted in those very Afghans, of different genealogical affiliations, to take control of the cities where they rebelled—requires some scrutiny. There is an underlying implicit assumption that Afghans gaining territory, through rebellion, was like a cancer that had to be removed from the body politic. This is stated clearly and explicitly, and it becomes the *raison d’etre* for Nadir Shah and his legitimacy. Nadir Shah emerged as a military leader who would rid Iran of the nuisance of the Afghans, and he was successful. In addition, he focused his energy to regain territories taken by Ottoman and Russian incursions, thus he not only restored Safavid territory, but managed to expand Iranian domains to an even greater extent. The rhetoric, why it was crucial for someone like Nadir Shah to become powerful, emphasizes the self-evident need to remove the Afghans from power, and in particular the Ghilzai Afghans in Qandahar. Nadir Shah overthrew the Hotak Ghilzai Afghans in Isfahan in 1729, reclaimed Herat as part of Safavid domains in 1732, recovered territories from

⁴⁶ Sialkoti, 64.

⁴⁷ Sialkoti, 64.

⁴⁸ Sialkoti, 64.

⁴⁹ Sialkoti, 66.

the Ottomans in 1733-4. In 1736, he crowned himself as the new emperor and founder of the Afsharid dynasty and finally retook Qandahar in 1738.

3 – Chronology and Events of Nadir Shah’s Conquest in Hindustan

When Nadir Shah was in Qandahar, he built a city and named it Nadirabad. After successfully subduing Ghilzai rule in Qandahar, Nadir Shah and his army left Nadirabad for Ghazna, in the direction of Hindustan on May 21, 1738. Within a few days, they entered the Mughal province of Kabul at Muqur (a known point of entry into Mughal territories) and stayed in Qarabagh for a few days where notables from Kabul came to submit to Nadir, with the exception of the Governor of Ghazna, who fled to Kabul. On June 11, 1738, Nadir Shah and his army reached Ghazna and they moved towards Kabul. During the month of June, they attempted to seize the Kabul fort. By the end of June, they successfully occupied the fort—marking the first strategic victory in Mughal territories. On July 14, 1738, Nadir Shah sent an envoy to the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah. The envoy was killed in Jalalabad, and Nadir Shah took his troops to Charikar, in Kuhistan, and remained there for twenty-two days. On September 5, 1738, Nadir Shah left for Gandamak and advanced to Bahar Sulfa, whilst sending an expedition to Jalalabad to avenge the death of the envoy who had been killed *en route* to Delhi. On November 7, 1738, Nadir Shah’s eldest son Riza Quli Khan joined Nadir Shah from Balkh. During this visit, Riza Quli Khan was appointed the “Viceroy” (*nā`ib al-iyālagī-yi mamālik-i Īrān*) of Iran.⁵⁰ Both sons, Riza Quli Khan and Nasr Allah were told to wear the *jīgha*, ornament, on their turbans, “in the manner of kings.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 2014, 91.

⁵¹ Laurence Lockhart, *Nadir Shah: A Critical Study Based Mainly upon Contemporary Sources*, (London: Luzac, 1938), 126.

On, November 17, 1738 Riza Quli Khan left his father in order to govern Iran during Nadir Shah's absence. The next day, Nadir Shah left for Jalalabad and crossed the Khyber Pass via a longer route to circumvent Nasir Khan, governor of Kabul and Peshawar, who was standing ready with his army to block their passage. Nadir Shah, having crossed north of Nasir Khan, circled back and attacked the army from the rear. Nasir Khan was defeated and captured, and Nadir Shah's army continued to Peshawar three days later. They remained in Peshawar for four weeks while Nadir Shah had a bridge of boats built to cross the Indus river at Attock. On January 6, 1739, Nadir Shah left Peshawar for Attock and they crossed the river via the bridge.

On January 15, 1739, Nadir Shah left for Wazirabad and crossed the Jhelum river. Zakariya Khan, the governor of Lahore and Multan (*sūba*, province, Punjab) attempted to halt Nadir Shah's progress. Some five to six thousand Indian soldiers attempted to block their passage approximately twelve miles from Wazirabad, but they were unsuccessful and retreated to a small fortress.⁵² Nadir Shah and his forces marched on, crossed the River Chenab, and plundered villages and small cities along the way. Zakariya Khan, with his troops, attempted to block Nadir Shah at the banks of the Ravi River, but Nadir Shah managed to cross the river north of where Zakariya Khan was stationed, and upon crossing the river, they again engaged in battle. Soon after, Zakariya Khan submitted to Nadir Shah, as he, like Nasir Khan, was not afforded any reinforcements from the Mughal emperor. It was agreed that in exchange for money, Nadir Shah would spare the walled city of Lahore. On January 23, 1739, Zakariya Khan paid Nadir Shah approximately twenty lakh rupees in gold, animals, and other gifts, and Nadir Shah left the city unharmed.⁵³ Soon after Nadir Shah subdued

⁵² Lockhart, 129. James Fraser calculates the dates differently in his account, he is off from Lockhart by a few weeks. I have opted to use Lockhart's date, as the internal evidence of the sources, namely the commemoration of Eid al-Adha in Delhi, which falls on the tenth of Dhul al-Hijja corresponds to March 21, 1739.

⁵³ Lockhart, 129–31.

Lahore, he minted coins in his name.⁵⁴ Nadir Shah left Lahore for Sirhind on February 6, 1739. At Sirhind, Nadir Shah received news that Muhammad Shah had gathered an army of three hundred thousand men who had reached Karnal. Nadir Shah sent out surveyors and marched close to (approximately twenty-six miles from) Karnal, reaching Shahabad on February 19, 1739. A few days later, they moved to Azimabad, twelve miles north of Karnal. On February 23, 1739, Nadir Shah moved his troops five miles from Karnal, where he learned that Mughal reinforcements had arrived from Awadh, led by Sa'dat Khan. The next day, February 24th, Nadir Shah decided to attack Sa'dat Khan and through military savviness, his army emerged victorious. In an attempt to help Sa'dat Khan, the Mughal emperor sent reinforcements, and they too were quickly defeated by Nadir Shah's troops.

Nadir Shah's victory against the Mughals that day, February 24, 1739, was the turning point for military engagements.⁵⁵ It was now time for the Mughals to submit to Nadir Shah, and that very evening Sa'dat Khan was summoned by Nadir Shah. Sa'dat Khan advised Nadir Shah to call the Mughal vizier Nizam al-Mulk Qamar al-Din into his presence as well.⁵⁶ Upon gathering information from the two, Nadir Shah decided that he would continue to Delhi. On February 26, 1739, Muhammad Shah removed his crown and went to meet Nadir Shah. The meeting was pleasant, full of proper hospitalities and exchange of news and food. On March 5, 1729, Nadir Shah requested Nizam al-Mulk to summon Muhammad Shah again.⁵⁷ Muhammad Shah complied, out of obligation, on March 7, 1739. On March 12, 1739, they left Karnal and proceeded to Delhi,

⁵⁴ Floor, *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah*, 82.

⁵⁵ Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 135–42.

⁵⁶ Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah*, 170.

⁵⁷ Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 142. Lockhart writes that Nadir Shah waited for a few days before summoning him again on purpose.

with Muhammad Shah leading the way. They traveled through Panipat, Sonapat, and Narela, reaching the Shalimar Gardens on March 18, 1739. Nadir Shah had Muhammad Shah enter Delhi to prepare his grand entry into the city, while he remained in Shalimar Gardens. On March 20, 1739, Nadir Shah and his troops entered the city with pomp, welcomed by Muhammad Shah. Nadir Shah resided in a palace built by Shah Jahan.⁵⁸

The events that transpired in Delhi, specifically, are vividly recorded and described in gruesome detail in contemporary accounts.⁵⁹ The unrelenting and almost unforgiving stance taken by Nadir Shah is discernable in the retribution he exacted because of a false rumor that he (Nadir Shah) had been killed or poisoned. When some residents of Delhi heard the rumor, they killed a few Qizilbash soldiers. March 21, 1739, the day Persian new year, fell on the day of the Muslim celebration of Eid al-Adha (the Great Sacrifice), and the sermon *khuṭba* was recited in Nadir Shah's name.⁶⁰ Coins were minted in Nadir Shah's name with the quote: "The King (*sultān*) of the kingdom of the world is the King of Kings, Nadir, Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction (*ṣaḥīb-i qirān*)."⁶¹ That day, a confrontation about the high price of wheat ensued between the residents of Delhi and some of Nadir Shah's soldiers who were given the task to supervise the granary. Soon, the rumor that Nadir Shah had been murdered or poisoned spread throughout the city, emboldening the inhabitants of Delhi to kill Nadir Shah's troops. As night had fallen, Nadir Shah commanded

⁵⁸ Lockhart, 145.

⁵⁹ Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah*, 178–211; Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, *Jahāngushā-yi Nādirī*, 319–337; Muḥammad Kāẓim and Muḥammad Amīn Riyāḥī, *Ālam āra-yi Nādirī* (Tehran: Zuvvār, 1985), 699–752; William Irvine, "Nadir Shah and Muhammad Shah, a Hindi Poem by Tilok Das," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 66, no. 1 (1897): 42–47.

⁶⁰ Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 145.

⁶¹ Qtd. In Lockhart, 145. Translation mine. For a history of the usage of the term *ṣaḥīb qirān*, see Naindeep Singh Chann, "Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction: Origins of the Ṣāḥīb-Qirān," *Iran & the Caucasus* 13, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 93–110, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25597394>.

his troops to defend their quarters and not engage in fighting. As soon as the sun rose the next morning, Nadir Shah, accompanied with his troops, marched to Chandni Chowk to survey the damage from the night before. Nadir Shah ordered that only those who had been involved in killing his soldiers ought to be punished, and that anyone not involved was to be left unharmed. Seeing the soldiers proceed with caution, the inhabitants of Delhi felt encouraged and began attacking his troops with stones, arrows, and bullets. An attempt to kill Nadir Shah went awry and a bullet intended for Nadir Shah struck and killed an officer near him. At this moment, Nadir Shah commanded his troops to exact revenge and kill anyone in sight. From seven in the morning until three in the afternoon, Nadir Shah's troops massacred nobles and paupers, men and women, elders and infants, humans and animals indiscriminately. They pillaged shops, captured women as slaves, and set several places on fire. When Nadir Shah returned to the palace, he ordered the slaughtering to end, and his troops retreated immediately.

According to contemporary accounts, between 120,000-150,000 Delhi residents were killed. Some 10,000 men, and especially women, committed suicide to avoid rape, captivity, bondage, or torture, and 50,000 men and women were made prisoners and later released.⁶² Approximately 400 Qizilbash soldiers were killed, in comparison. The bodies of the deceased sprawled throughout the city and emitted a foul odor until they were all burned, without the performance of religious rituals—even deceased Muslims were burned instead of buried. The gates of the city were shut and guarded by Nadir Shah's men, and while people were allowed to enter Delhi, no one was permitted to leave. Religious mendicants appealing to leave were forced to

⁶² Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah*, 185–7.

remain in the city. The guardsmen cut the mendicants' ears and noses as punishment.⁶³ After the mass slaughter, collection of money followed.

Money, jewelry, animals, and precious gems were collected from the Mughal treasury, Delhi nobles, and governors from surrounding areas. For example, Nadir Shah took forty thousand rupees from *sūba* Lucknow, which was under the governorship of Saadat Ali Khan who had died soon after the Mughals lost to Nadir Shah, in addition to elephants and horses.⁶⁴ After collecting much wealth, Nadir Shah paid his soldiers.⁶⁵ He further proclaimed that the inhabitants of Iran would be exempt from paying taxes for three years.⁶⁶

In order to create a political alliance with the Mughals, Nadir Shah arranged a marriage between his second son Nasr Allah and the grand-daughter of the Mughal emperor Alamgir I, Aurangzeb, (d. 1707). Before leaving Hindustan, Nadir Shah restored Muhammad Shah to the throne as the rightful emperor of Hindustan.⁶⁷ Muhammad Shah, in turn, allegedly insisted that Nadir Shah should take as a gift (*bi-rasm-i pīshkash zabt*) “the land between this side of the Attock river and the Sind river, from the border of Tibet and Kashmir until the river reaches the ocean, all of the space including the forts and ports.”⁶⁸ Astarabadi further notes that Kabul and Ghazni, “like much of the lands east and west of the Attock river” had been counted as part of Khurasan before.⁶⁹ Nadir Shah, satisfied with these arrangements, left the city with pomp, throwing coins to the

⁶³ Fraser, 189.

⁶⁴ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, *Jahāngushā-yi Nādirī*, 333.

⁶⁵ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, 333.

⁶⁶ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, 334.

⁶⁷ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, 334.

⁶⁸ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, 334.

⁶⁹ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, 334.

inhabitants as they witnessed him leave. Nadir Shah went back to Punjab, where he re-appointed Zakariya Khan as the governor of Lahore and Multan, and re-installed Nasir Khan, the governor of Kabul and Peshawar.⁷⁰ Nadir Shah promoted Nasir Khan to the rank of the deputy who would collect the revenues and deposit them to the Afsharid royal treasury. Nadir Shah never re-entered Hindustan, and the revenues due to him were paid in a timely manner.

4 – Why Hindustan: Multiple Perspectives

Why precisely did Nadir Shah go to Hindustan? As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, eighteenth century sources do not agree. Most accounts allege he went to Hindustan to punish the Afghans who rebelled against the Safavids and him, when he ascended the throne. Upon closer examination, this logic is flawed, especially when sources written in Hindustan are considered. In this section, we read through various accounts to see how each author made sense of Nadir Shah's campaign in Hindustan. One should note the hesitation and lack of certainty in Nadir Shah's exploits. His campaign in Hindustan was largely experimental and shocking to those who heard about or witnessed the outcome.

4.1 – Tilok Das

*Then he [Nizam al-Mulk] entered his home and wrote a letter with his own hand:
“You are Shah Nadir, the excellent, you have a formidable army,
This throne of Delhi that remains vacant has been destined for you,
I am your humble servant, you are my lord, come and take possession.”*

A long letter was written by the noble Nizam al-Mulk,

⁷⁰ This practice is not uncommon, for examples from the early modern period, see Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 2014, 118, 286.

*Because of one thing, he became a traitor (namak-harām).⁷¹
The messenger went to Nadir Shah with the letter,
From the noble Nizam al-Mulk, who remained the servant of the Shah.*

*The Shah listened to nothing, enraged, he left Balkh and Bukhara beating the
drums [of war].
Ruin fell upon Kabul and Peshawar; Ghazni and Qandahar submitted,
Nadir Shah led his army in disregard; He bestowed Iran to Nek Khan.
He crossed the river of Sindh, enslaved the Punjab province, and took hundreds
of thousands of cash (rupees) for his sustenance.⁷²*

Tilok Das wrote the above poem in Braj (using the Arabic-Persian script) after Nadir Shah's death (1747) but before the Battle of Panipat, when the Afghans led by Ahmad Shah Durrani defeated the Marathas in 1761, based on internal evidence from the poem. In this poem, Tilok Das describes the sad state of affairs of the Mughal court when Nadir Shah was invited by the Nizam al-Mulk, Asaf Jah I (d. 1748), also known as Vizier Qamar al-Din, to occupy the throne. The Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah (d. 1748), Tilok Das writes, was madly in love with his queen Malikah Zamani and would spend most of his hours drunk and high on opium and her beauty. When Nizam al-Mulk entered into Muhammad Shah's presence, Muhammad Shah laughed at him, saying "Look you, how he [Nizam al-Mulk] comes with a monkey's gait, adorned with a nice, happy-colored green turban."⁷³ As quoted above, "because of this one thing," the public disgrace, Nizam al-Mulk

⁷¹ William Irvine translates this line as "Having by reason of one word become untrue to his salt." Given the context of the rest of the poem, it would make more sense to translate "*ek bāt ke kāran*" as "because of one thing." The one thing that drives Nizam al-Mulk to write to Nadir Shah in the first place is that the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah made fun of him in front of the other nobles by calling him a monkey. For Tilok Das, the Nizam al-Mulk's bruised ego is the reason why he invited Nadir Shah, and thus the reason for the great destruction that followed Nadir Shah's entry to Hindustan. Irvine, "Nadir Shah and Muhammad Shah, a Hindi Poem by Tilok Das," 38, 48.

⁷² Irvine, 27–8; 37–8; 49. Translation mine.

⁷³ Irvine, 37.

wrote a letter to Nadir Shah, inviting him to occupy the “vacant” (*khālī*) throne in Delhi.⁷⁴ The poem describes how Nadir Shah heeded the Nizam’s advice and subjugated the people of Kabul, Peshawar, and Punjab. And when Muhammad Shah was informed of Nadir Shah’s arrival in Hindustan, Tilok Das writes that his only reaction was laughter.⁷⁵ Tilok Das continues, writing that the governor of Lahore, Zakariya Khan (d. 1745), sent his Diwan, Surat Singh, to Nadir Shah with presents and “folded hands”⁷⁶ indicating full submission. Nadir Shah accepted the gifts and inquired about whether the governor of Lahore would oppose him, and the Diwan responded that he (Zakariya Khan) would not dare to fight Nadir Shah, whose army was unparalleled.⁷⁷ Nadir Shah met with Zakariya Khan, and freed all the captives. This did not lead to peace, Tilok Das writes: “Lahore was plundered by Mughal, Pathan, and noble. Having looted much wealth, bankers became beggars.”⁷⁸ The nobles of Lahore lost their wealth, the “Pathans began plundering the entire city of Jalandhar.”⁷⁹ The havoc caused by Zakariya Khan’s submission to Nadir Shah did not cease until the Diwan entreated Nadir Shah to leave the area, and gave him one hundred thousand rupees. Nadir Shah accepted the money and marched to Sirhind and Panipat before confronting the Mughal army at Karnal, approximately 120 kilometers from Delhi.⁸⁰ The poem describes Mughal defeat and Nadir Shah’s entry into Delhi, the subsequent massacre there, and

⁷⁴ A similar narrative is recorded in the *Hālāt-i Nādir Shāh*, composed by poet named Amar. British Library APAC Or. 4008. For a comparison between both accounts see, Abhishek Kaicker, “Unquiet City: Making and Unmaking Politics in Mughal Delhi, 1707-39” (Ph.D., Columbia University, 2014), 579–93.

⁷⁵ Irvine, “Nadir Shah and Muhammad Shah, a Hindi Poem by Tilok Das,” 53.

⁷⁶ Irvine, 38.

⁷⁷ Irvine, 38.

⁷⁸ Irvine, 39.

⁷⁹ Irvine, 40.

⁸⁰ Irvine, 41–2.

finally his departure from Hindustan because a Sufi Shaikh had a premonition that Nadir Shah's stay in Hindustan would lead to his destruction.

William Irvine notes at the beginning of his transliteration and translation of Tilok Das' poem that it "is of no historical value.... The outlines of the story...come out fairly true to fact, but in details there would have been equal redundancy and defect."⁸¹ In the historical memory of the period, from the sources written in Hindustan in the eighteenth century that I have read, there is a general consensus that the Mughal emperor and his advisors were at fault and due to either negligence, betrayal, and/or weakness, Nadir Shah conquered Hindustan. Irvine remarks, "The poet assumes as a matter of common knowledge that Nadir Shah was invited to India by Nizamul-mulk [*sic*]."⁸² European travelers and writers, similarly, implicate Nizam al-Mulk for inviting Nadir Shah to Hindustan.⁸³ Ironically, the alleged invitation by the vizier Nizam al-Mulk is absent in Nadir Shah's court commissioned chronicle, Mirza Mahdi Khan Astarabadi's *Jahāngushā-ī Nādirī*.

Tilok Das, and other Hindustani writers, believe Nadir Shah came to Hindustan because he was invited by the vizier Nizam al-Mulk Qamar al-Din to overthrow the inept Mughal ruler, Muhammad Shah. There is no mention of pursuing rebellious Afghans. In fact, there is no awareness of the state of affairs in Iran. The only logical explanation for Nadir Shah's arrival and subsequent oppression is an invitation from within the Mughal nobility.

⁸¹ Irvine, 25.

⁸² Irvine, 25.

⁸³ Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 124 fn.2.

4.2 – James Fraser

James Fraser wrote contemporary accounts of Nadir Shah in the eighteenth century, the first in French and a second, similar in content, in English. He cites his sources in the preface of the work, and provides details of some two hundred manuscripts he consulted. Through a network of friends and colleagues, Fraser had access to letters between Nadir Shah's commissioner, Sarbuland Khan, and Mirza Mughal, son to Ali Muhammad Khan who was Fraser's friend.⁸⁴ Fraser also relied on oral accounts provided by his confidantes, including a person who resided in Persia for decades and knew the language well: "The Account of Nadir Shah's first Exploits I have been favoured with from a Gentleman now in England, who resided several Years in Persia, speaks that Language, and has been frequently in Company with that Conqueror."⁸⁵ Fraser describes his experience in Cambay and his endeavors to learn Persian and Islamic civil and ritual law. During that time, he worked with a Brahmin who gave him access Sanskrit manuscripts. Fraser shipped those materials to Europe, claiming they were "the first Collection of that Kind ever brought into Europe."⁸⁶

According to Fraser's readings of Persian manuscripts, described above, letters had come from Hindustan, from the Nizam al-Mulk Qamar al-Din and Sa'adat Khan Burhan al-Mulk, the governor of Awadh, that Nadir Shah ought to come to Hindustan.⁸⁷ Fraser's version is similar to that of the poet, Tilok Das, mentioned above, with one difference: Fraser's information implicates

⁸⁴ Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah*, iv–v.

⁸⁵ Fraser, iv.

⁸⁶ Fraser, vi.

⁸⁷ Fraser, 129.

Sa'adat Khan Burhan al-Mulk in addition to Nizam al-Mulk Qamar al-Din. According to Fraser, Nadir Shah wrote back, answering the invitation, indicating his hesitation because of the opposition he anticipated from the governor of Kabul, Nasir Khan, the governor of Punjab, Zakariya Khan, and the Imperial Mughal army.⁸⁸ Nizam al-Mulk and Sa'adat Khan assuaged his concerns: "They soon satisfied him how unnecessary his Fears were, and that, before he cross'd the Attock, he should have a Proof how able they were, and how much inclined to facilitate his Passage."⁸⁹

The invitation by Nizam al-Mulk and Sa'adat Khan indicates the lack of unity at the Mughal center (this is not something new, attempts to overthrow sitting emperors and instate others was an on-going fear and battle) and of more consequence is that Nadir Shah was well aware of the disunity in the Mughal court. This intimate knowledge, of which nobles were for the emperor and which ones were disloyal, and general state of affairs was not known to everyone. For example, Dutch accounts lack direct contact from the Mughal court, and thus, Dutch reporters had to rely on rumor, hearsay, or deduction. Nadir Shah, on the other hand, received letters directly from powerful notables at the Mughal center, and he was invited to campaign in Hindustan to dethrone the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah.

When Nadir Shah and his troops proceeded to Kabul, the city was under the sovereignty of the Mughal empire, but historically contested. According to Fraser's account, a man named Sherzih Khan, who was loyal to the Mughal court, fought against Nadir Shah for six weeks at Kabul, but he and son were defeated and killed by Nadir Shah's troops.⁹⁰ The governor of Kabul

⁸⁸ Fraser, 129–30.

⁸⁹ Fraser, 130.

⁹⁰ Fraser, 132–3.

and Peshawar, Nasir Khan, on the other hand, fled to Peshawar. The accounts Fraser relies upon speak of the make-up of the military, on both sides, and reveal general confusion and anxiety within the Mughal ranks. For example, in the letter by Sarbuland Khan to Mirza Mughal, he writes that there was disharmony between the nobles and the Mughal emperor. Apparently, forty lakh rupees were meant to be given to Nasir Khan to fend off Nadir Shah, but nothing was implemented or executed.

Fraser presents the exchanges between Nadir Shah and the Mughal emperor, in which Nadir Shah displayed love and friendship, and provided the reason for his presence so close to the borders of Hindustan purely out of precaution against impending and imminent Maratha attacks:

Be it clear to the enlightened Mind of your high Majesty, that my coming to Cabul, and possessing myself thereof, was purely out of Zeal for Islam, and Friendship for you. I never could have imagined that the Wretches of Deccan [Marathas] should impose a Tribute on the Dominions of the King of Mussulmen. My Stay on this Side of the Attock is with a View, that when these Infidels move towards Hindostan, I may send an Army of the victorious Kuzzlebash [Qizilbash] to drive them to the Abyss of Hell. History is full of the Friendship that has subsisted between our Kings, and your Majesty's Predecessors. By Ali Mortisa, I swear, that (excepting Friendship, and a Concern for Religion) I neither had, nor have any other Views; if you suspect contrary, you may, I always was, and will be a Friend to your illustrious House.⁹¹

We should note here that Nadir Shah does not invoke the pretext of following and punishing the Afghans in this letter. Rather, he appeals to the preservation of Muslim power in Hindustan. Again, it is clear that Nadir Shah was well aware of what was happening in Hindustan, he knew that Marathas were attempting to overthrow the Mughal government, and that they had managed to acquire vast territories.⁹²

⁹¹ Fraser, 138–9.

⁹² Stewart Gordon, "The Marathas 1600–1818," Cambridge Core, September 1993, 114–31.

From the same journal by Mirza Zaman, translated by Fraser, we learn about the events that transpired when Nadir Shah and Muhammad Shah engaged in battle. Most of what happened is more or less the same as what has been reported by the other accounts; nonetheless, the first face to face encounter between Nadir Shah and Muhammad Shah, which is different from the other sources, requires some commentary. On the 20th of Dhu'l al-Qa'dah (March 1, 1739) Muhammad Shah was summoned by Nadir Shah to enter his royal camp, and he was greeted by Nadir Shah's son, Nasr Allah Mirza, and then permitted, with only two or three eunuchs and some noblemen, including Ghazi al-Din and Azim Allah Khan, the Vizier's son, to enter the royal tent.⁹³ Nadir Shah embraced the Mughal emperor, and had him sit close to him on the same raised royal carpet. After customary salutations and inquiries of health, Nadir Shah reprimanded the Mughal emperor, saying:

It is strange that you should be so unconcerned and regardless of your own Affairs, that notwithstanding I wrote you several Letters, sent an Ambassador, and testified a Friendship for you, your Ministers should not think proper to send me a satisfactory Answer; and by Reason of your Want of Command and Discipline over your own People, one of my Ambassadors, contrary to all Laws, has been killed in your Dominions. Even when I entered your Empire, you seemed under no Concern for your Affairs, nor so much as sent to ask who I was, or what was my Design. When I advanced as far as Lahor [*sic*], none of your People came with a Message or Salutation, nay not with an Answer to my Salutation to you: Afterwards, when your *Omrās*⁹⁴ [*umarā*] were awaked out of their Lethargy and Indolence, they prevented all Means of a Reconciliation; and coming tumultuously with an Intent to stop my farther progress, they brought themselves into one general Snare, without having the Fore-sight to leave any behind, who upon an Emergency could make Head, and retrieve their Affairs. Besides this, you have foolishly cooped yourselves up in your *Mourchas*,⁹⁵ not considering that if your Enemy was stronger, you could not remain within these Barricadoes without either Water or Grain; and

⁹³ Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah*, 162–3.

⁹⁴ Nobles

⁹⁵ Fraser does not define “Mourcha.” *Mūrcha* in Hindi/Urdu means stupor; loss of consciousness; state of insensibility. In Persian it means a little ant, the waving luster of a sword; rust; a small black glass; a poor, weak, contemptible fellow; a battery.

if he was weaker, 'twas both unnecessary and disgraceful to suffer yourselves to be besieged by him; besides, if you thought lightly of him, and imagined him a rash inconsiderate Man, without exposing your own Person and Reputation so much, you ought to have detached a faithful and experienced Officer, who, in a little Time might have found Means to distress and cut him off ; but if you dreaded his Experience and Conduct, you had still the less Reason (after provoking him thus far) to venture your All at one Blow. Even, when you had thus entangled yourself, I sent you Offers of an Accommodation, but you was [*sic*] so puffed up with your own childish Conceits, and foolish Resolutions, that you would not give Ear to any honourable Overtures, or consult own Interest; until, at last, by the Assistance of the Creator of the World, and the Strength of the Arms of the victorious Warriors, you have seen what has happened. Moreover, your Predecessors were your take went to the *Jeziyah*⁹⁶ [*jizya*] from the Infidels, and you in your Reign have given it to them, having, in these twenty Years, suffered the Empire to be overrun by them. But as hitherto the Race of *Temur* [*sic*] have not injured or misbehaved towards the *Seffi* Family, and the People of Persia; I shall not take the Empire from you, only as your Indolence and Pride have obliged me to march so far, and that I have been put to an extraordinary Expence [*sic*], and my Men, on Account of the long Marches, are much fatigued, and in Want of Necessaries; I must go to Dehli [*sic*], and there continue some Days, until the Army is refreshed, and the *Peishcush*,⁹⁷ [*pīshkash*] that Nizam al Muluck [*sic*] has agreed to, is made good to me; after that, I shall leave you to look after your own Affairs.⁹⁸

According to this account, Nadir Shah had all of the power in this situation. He summoned the Mughal emperor, permitted access to the inner royal tent to only a few of his companions, and did not engage in ornate rhetoric when reprimanding how the Mughal emperor had handled his own state of affairs. This account also does not mention how Nadir Shah saw himself to be like Muhammad Shah's brother, since they both were ethnically Turkish.⁹⁹ Rather, the discourse is about how the Mughals have been unable to keep the infidels at bay, and the shortcomings of their military tactics and intelligence gathering. Although Nadir Shah was displeased with Muhammad

⁹⁶ Fraser defines "Jeziyah" as "a Poll-Tax levied on all who were not Mahomedans, especially the Hindu's. Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah*, 166fn.

⁹⁷ Tribute.

⁹⁸ Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah*, 164–6.

⁹⁹ See Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran*.

Shah's mismanagement of affairs and governance, he did not overthrow Muhammad Shah because of historical ties of friendship between the Safavids and Mughals (descendants of the house of Timur). In order to recover the expenses accrued on this mission, Nadir Shah reasoned, his army ought to continue to Delhi, in order to "refresh" and to bide time so that the sum of money promised to him by Muhammad Shah could be collected and deposited to Nadir Shah.

4.3 – Mirza Mahdi Astarabadi

According to Astarabadi (and mentioned by historians after him), Nadir Shah sent an ambassador, named Ali Mardan Khan, to the Mughal court in Delhi, to ensure that when the Afghans fleeing from Qandahar appeared near Hindustan, the governor of Kabul would prevent them from crossing the border.¹⁰⁰ The Mughal governor responded in writing, saying that he organized money and military to be sent to aid the governor of Kabul.¹⁰¹ Later when it was time to remind the Mughal emperor of this promise, Ali Muhammad Khan, son of Aslan Khan, who was the *'Umda-i Umarā* of Iran, was appointed as the ambassador.¹⁰² The Mughal emperor revised and recorded his previous promise, stating that when the Afghans attempt to cross the borders, out of friendship that has existed between Hindustan and Iran,¹⁰³ the Mughal imperial army will stop them and move them towards Qalat, away from Hindustan. As far as the nobles are concerned, they would be treated with kindness and affection.

¹⁰⁰ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, *Jahāngushā-yi Nādirī*, 306.

¹⁰¹ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, 306.

¹⁰² Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, 307.

¹⁰³ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, 307. "نظر بدوستی قدیم که فیما بین هند و ایران تحقق دارد"

Meanwhile, approximately one thousand Ghilzais, who “raised their heads in rebellion,” were four *farsakhī*, four-hour horse ride, from Hindustan, near the environs of Kohistan.¹⁰⁴ They were not stopped, and thus the promise given to Nadir Shah was not fulfilled. Upon hearing this news, Nadir Shah sent Ali Muhammad Turkman, through the custom of ambassadors, to Hindustan, to remind the Mughals to stop the Afghans in their “evil ways,” by way of Sindh on the fifteenth of Muharram 1150. He was commanded not to stay longer than forty days at the Mughal court and to quickly send a message back to Nadir Shah. Ali Muhammad Khan, however, was not permitted to leave the Mughal court, and one complete year had elapsed since his arrival on the first of Muharram 1151 AH (April 4, 1738).¹⁰⁵ After Nadir Shah defeated Qandahar, he issued a royal decree through three envoys, stipulating that his ambassador be released. These envoys, were captured, *en route*, by locals and all, but one, were killed. Thus, Nadir Shah, had no choice but to come to Hindustan in order to speak with the Mughal emperor about his negligence in diplomatic affairs.

From the view of the court chronicle, the reason why Nadir Shah went to Hindustan was purely to pursue fleeing Afghans who had rebelled against the Safavids and against him, as the new emperor of Iran. As the Mughals were negligent and non-compliant, thus disrespectful, Nadir Shah sought a face to face encounter with the Mughal emperor, since diplomacy was not carried out through the envoys he had sent.

¹⁰⁴ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, 307.

¹⁰⁵ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, 307–8.

4.4 – Shaikh Muhammad Ali Lahiji Hazin

The Persian traveler and poet Shaikh Muhammad Ali Lahiji, hereafter Hazin (1692-1766), happened to be in Multan, Lahore, then Sirhind, and finally Delhi during the year Nadir Shah made his way into Hindustan.¹⁰⁶ Hazin had left Iran because Nadir Shah's conquests had made it difficult for him to remain in the country. Although he had the option to travel to Europe, Hazin opted to move to Hindustan in the hopes of finding gainful employment as a poet. About Nadir Shah's intentions, Hazin writes that Nadir Shah, by virtue of being Iranian, would not entertain the idea of residing and governing over Hindustan. Nadir Shah came for the primary purpose of extracting wealth from the country, and secondarily to kill rebels. Hazin states:

The reason wherefore the Kings of Persia would not retain the government of Hindustan in their own hands is manifest to every clear-sighted person. No man, who has a residence and place of abode as such the provinces of Persia afford, which in their nature and essence are the best adjusted and most noble, and to all outward appearance are the most beautiful and perfect habitation in the known world, will ever be able of his own choice to reside in Hindustan. Every person's nature is so formed, that without necessity he will never consent to a long abode in this country; and this feeling is common to the King, the peasant, and the soldier. Indeed this is the situation of every man, who with sound senses has been brought up in other air and water, especially if in the empire of Persia or Turkey; unless it be of him who inconsiderately and ignorantly comes into this country, and finds no possibility of returning; or of him that by reason of obstacles and accidents has had no choice left him of remaining in a different place; and, having passed his former days in thorough hardship and poverty, unexpectedly arrives in this country at wealth and dignity, on which, being weak in his senses and mean in his disposition, he fixes his affections, and gradually acquiring the habits of his station, he at length becomes tranquil and familiarised.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Kia writes that Hazin left because he was allegedly involved in the assassination of Nadir Shah's appointed governor of Lar, see Mana Kia, "Accounting for Difference: A Comparative Look at the Autobiographical Travel Narratives of Hazin Lāhiji and 'Abd Al-Karim Kashmiri," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 2, no. 2 (2009): 1. Subrahmanyam and Alam suggest he left Iran for Hindustan because of financial difficulty, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400-1800* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 233.

¹⁰⁷ Muḥammad 'Alī Ḥazīn and F. C Belfour, *The Life of Sheikh Mohammed Ali Hazin*, (London: Printed for the Oriental translation fund, sold by J. Murray, 1830), 279–80.

Hazin leverages history to prove his point, citing and quoting poems that clearly advise against staying in Hindustan for longer than four seasons. He then discusses how Persian people are far superior to those Turks (i.e. the Mughals) who forgot who they were once they established themselves in the wretched environment of Hindustan.¹⁰⁸ Hazin is especially critical of the Mughals for associating and aligning with the Ghilzai Afghans, with Mir Wais and his son:

...the Emperor of India, during all that disturbance which prevailed in the province of Iran, true to his ungrateful principles, never gave a thought to the precepts of his fealty, but, on the contrary, kept up an intercourse of amity and alliance with Mir Veis [*sic*] the Afghan. With Hosein [*sic*] also, the son of Veis the Afghan, at a later period, when he had become the ruler of Candahar [*sic*], notwithstanding that he had marched an army into Moltan [*sic*], and had left nothing undone to depopulate and ruin that country, still after his return twice was a communication opened by way of embassy.¹⁰⁹

Hazin was in Punjab and Delhi for eight years, from 1734 to 1742. He pointedly describes his very unpleasant experiences in Hindustan, complaining about the extreme heat, the illnesses (he was perpetually sick and bed-ridden for most of the eight years he lived there), the meanness of the people and especially of the Mughal emperors, from Babur to Muhammad Shah. It is possible that Hazin projected his own feelings about Hindustan on to what Nadir Shah's intentions were for coming to Hindustan and whether he would attempt or want to govern the land by dethroning the Mughals. Nonetheless, it is quite clear that pretext about pursuing the Afghans is *the* justification, in Hazin's mind, for Nadir Shah's arrival in Kabul, Peshawar, Lahore, and eventually Delhi. In fact, he states that the first letter sent to the Mughal court about prohibiting the Afghans from fleeing Iran was sent by Shah Tahmasp, the Safavid emperor, and a subsequent request was sent

¹⁰⁸ Muḥammad 'Alī Ḥazīn and Belfour, 282–3.

¹⁰⁹ Muḥammad 'Alī Ḥazīn and Belfour, 283.

when the prince Abbas Mirza ascended the Safavid throne; and finally Nadir Shah dispatched “one of the most distinguished” of his entourage to Hindustan.¹¹⁰ When this ambassador had not returned with a response, Nadir Shah sent Muhammad Khan Turkman (as mentioned by other sources) when Nadir Shah marched towards Qandahar. This ambassador, too, was not permitted to leave, and the Mughals provided no answer to Nadir Shah’s repeated request. Hazin explains that the Mughals were confused about Nadir Shah and the potential outcome of the Qandahar siege:

Sometimes they were unable to agree in their own minds on the question of writing any answer at all; at other times they were confused and perplexed, in case they wrote, what titles and forms of address they should use to Nadir Shah. The truth of the matter was this: thinking the detention of the ambassador Mohammed Khan a stroke of state policy, they waited to see, if perchance Hosein [*sic*] the Afghan with the troops besieged in Candahar [*sic*] gained the victory over Nadir Shah, and destroyed him or put him to flight; on which event there would be no need of writing any answer to his letter.¹¹¹

Once Nadir Shah subdued Qandahar, he turned his attention to Kabul. According to Hazin, Nadir Shah wrote to the governor of Kabul, Nasir Khan, sharing his intention, which had nothing to do with “the dominions of Muhammad Shah; but that as those confines were the source and mine of the Afghans, and a number of the fugitives had arrived there, the object of his coming was the total extirpation of that race....”¹¹² And, in Hazin’s view, Nadir Shah did in fact kill many Afghans: “Wherever the Afghans in those parts assembled in a body, the army of the Kizil Bash [*sic*] marched upon them and cut them to pieces.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Muḥammad ‘Alī Ḥazīn and Belfour, 284.

¹¹¹ Muḥammad ‘Alī Ḥazīn and Belfour, 286.

¹¹² Muḥammad ‘Alī Ḥazīn and Belfour, 287.

¹¹³ Muḥammad ‘Alī Ḥazīn and Belfour, 288.

4.5 – Dutch Accounts

Dutch accounts seem to agree with Hazin that Iran was not flourishing economically. Prior to the rise of Afghan power, the Safavid emperors raised taxes, which resulted in Afghans revolting and taking control of Herat, Qandahar, and even Isfahan.¹¹⁴ Although European and Eurasian trade, in general, continued to flourish, the question of taxation and tolls was debated endlessly and cause for concern.¹¹⁵ Safety and security was not guaranteed, for traders or for residents, as Iranian territories were contested by Afghans, Ottomans, Tatars, Uzbeks, Georgians, Russians, and Baloch. Moreover, natural disasters, such as droughts, famines, and the plague, required people to move.¹¹⁶

The reasons why Nadir Shah went to Mughal Hindustan, from the Dutch perspective, is perhaps the most divergent than those given by the Mughal and Afsharid sources. According to the Dutch, Nadir Shah demanded money from the Mughals that was due to the Safavids for having protected Humayun, the second Mughal emperor, in the sixteenth century. In 1737, Nadir Shah sent an ambassador to the Mughals (according to the Dutch) in an attempt to collect the monies due: “Muhammad Khan Turkman (Mhamed Chan Turkman [*sic*]) allegedly had been sent as ambassador to India with a suite of 500 persons...The purpose of the embassy was to claim the debt that emperor Hodayun [*sic*] owed since 1530....”¹¹⁷ This is completely absent from the Mughal and Afsharid sources. More interesting, it is only the Dutch who report that the Mughals

¹¹⁴ Add tucker, see notes...

¹¹⁵ find reference for this...maybe floor

¹¹⁶ Floor, *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah*, 8.

¹¹⁷ Floor, 71.

had indeed sent money to Nadir Shah, prior to his arrival in Hindustan in 1738-9. The Dutch write, “An envoy from the Moghul emperor (sjah of Hindoestan [*sic*]) had brought a present of 20 lakhs of rupees or one million *tumans* so as to be left alone.”¹¹⁸ Most scholars of South Asia have deduced that one of the primary reasons why Nadir Shah was able to easily conquer and loot the Mughals was because they were ineffectual, unorganized, and unwilling to take the threat of Nadir Shah seriously, until it had been too late. This, if true, reveals that whilst the Mughals may have been lacking in good leadership, they did take Nadir Shah seriously, to some degree. Why else would they send so much money to him? It is also possible that, upon receiving this money, Nadir Shah’s appetite was whetted, seeing how easy it was for him to get such a large sum simply by demanding it through an ambassador.

The idea that Nadir Shah would succeed both in terms of conquests and in gaining legitimacy was questioned by officers in European trade companies. This was especially true when Nadir Shah decided to go to Mughal Hindustan. A letter, exchanged between Dutch administrators, reports: "People believed that Nader's first successes had been due to a ruse in order to draw him deep into Moghul territory and then to cut him off and down to size. Indeed, once he had crossed the river [Attock] the Afghans attacked him in the rear and were defeated with a loss of 20,000 men. Nader was said to be afraid and looking for peace, but the Indians were acting as if they were deaf. People considered it a miracle if Nader would get out unscathed."¹¹⁹ The Dutch accounts indicate that they believed the Mughals to be strong enough to not only fend off Nadir Shah, and defeat him, but even capable of invading Iran in order to restore Safavid power:

¹¹⁸ Floor, 78.

¹¹⁹ Floor, 81.

Muhammad Shah then continues to vilify Nadir, calling him faithless and perfidious, one who has dared to aspire to a throne that is not his, not knowing that it is not every stone that produces a glittering sapphire. “Thou art not yet so far advanced as to be entitled to send Ambassadors, or write Letters to the Type of Heaven, according to the Custom of Kings.” After having informed Nadir that Iran is a gift to the Safavids from the Mughal court; that he, Muhammad Shah, has hundreds of thousands of soldiers at his command, whom he lists, he concludes: “They shall after this march into Persia, release Thamas Mirza from his confinement, and replace him on the royal throne of Persia ... If then, leaving thy presumption, thou considerest thy safety and welfare, and turnest thy self to repentance and amendment before thou art punished according to thy deserts, for which purpose this mighty army is appointed, perhaps the servants of my court may blot out the records of thine offences with the pen of grace; if not, look to thyself, and none else.”¹²⁰

Another letter stated that on March 25, 1739, “the Dutch received information that Nader had been killed with his troops in India.”¹²¹ This was the same rumor that spread when Nadir Shah begun his stay in Delhi. Local residents were emboldened to kill some Qizilbash troops resulting in Nadir Shah’s vengeful response the day after, described above. News of the rumor spread beyond Delhi, as mentioned in the Dutch reports. Nadir Shah’s son, Riza Quli, upon hearing the rumor, killed Shah Tahmasp and his family, the remaining heirs of the Safavid line.¹²² A few weeks later, news reached the Dutch officers that Nadir Shah was actually successful in Lahore two months prior, on January 25, 1729, and that he had subdued the Mughal emperor as well. The moments of uncertainty, spread of false information, and time lag to correct previously sent intelligence reports had immediate and far ranging implications.

¹²⁰ Floor, *New Facts*, 203

¹²¹ Floor, *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah*, 83.

¹²² Floor, 87. Ernst Tucker cites Arutin Efendi’s account wherein the author states that Nadir Shah had ordered his son Riza Quli to kill the Safavid heirs, see Tucker, *Nadir Shah’s Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran*, 64–5.

5 – Legitimizing Power: Emulating the Greats

A tried and tested strategy for legitimizing power was to succeed in military campaigns. Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and Timur are a few notable examples who emerged from obscurity, and yet, became known names throughout history. Nadir Shah was aware of these successful historical men, and evidence suggests that he attempted to emulate them. Like Genghis Khan and Timur, he held an assembly, a *qoroltai*, in 1736 to name him as the new king of Iran. Nadir Shah was especially fond of Timur, one may even say he was obsessed with him. Nadir Shah claimed a genealogical tie to Timur, by promoting his Turkish ethnic roots.¹²³ Nadir Shah named his grandson Shahrukh, the name of Timur's son.¹²⁴ Nadir Shah campaigned in similar cities and areas that Timur conquered three centuries prior, and he was as ruthless and evil as his role model. This is especially clear when we consider the merciless sacking and killing in Delhi. Timur, in December 1398, pillaged and massacred many of Delhi's inhabitants; and in late March 1739, Nadir Shah's troops did the same.¹²⁵ On the more obsessive side, in 1740, Nadir Shah had Timur's tombstone removed from Samarqand and deposited in Mashhad, his capital, where he would eventually be buried himself.¹²⁶ After the tombstone arrived in 1741, and upon reflection of his great deference to Timur, Nadir Shah had the tombstone returned to its rightful place.¹²⁷

To Nadir Shah, Timur was a paradigm of success, and imitating him helped Nadir Shah to legitimize his own power. Timur did not have a noble genealogical birth, one that could be traced

¹²³ Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 20. Lockhart suggests that Nadir Shah had already named his sons before he imagined rising to the ranks that he achieved, therefore, he named his grandson, following the example of Timur.

¹²⁴ Lockhart, 80.

¹²⁵ Lockhart, 150.

¹²⁶ Lockhart, 188.

¹²⁷ Lockhart, 198.

back to Genghis Khan. Instead, he invoked Mongol-Turkic and Islamic ideas of being a self-made man, and success as a sign of divine favor.¹²⁸ Timur self-identified as a livestock-thief, and “underlined his early obscurity, stating that he owed all his success to divine intervention.”¹²⁹ Timur was noted as a ferocious leader with the ability to control his troops with strict discipline. Further, Timur modeled himself and his campaigns on Genghis Khan. Timur was perhaps slightly more modest than Nadir Shah. Unlike Nadir Shah, Timur did not adopt the titles of honor reserved for a legitimate lineage, such as that of “*khān*,” and used the epithet “*amīr*” (commander) with adjectives meaning “great.”¹³⁰ Nadir Shah was not as modest. After conquering Delhi, he refashioned his title to *shāhanshāh*, the king of kings.¹³¹

6 – Legitimizing Power through (Non)Diplomatic Strategies: Fear, Exile, Negotiation, and Accommodation

Nadir Shah employed many diplomatic and some not so diplomatic strategies to ensure his success. His use of fear, is perhaps, the most obvious. Contemporary and secondary sources concur that it was through force that Nadir Shah eventually took the crown at Mughan in 1736. Whilst performing humility and reticence, it was quite clear to all present—all the nobles from throughout Safavid territories, even some nobles from Thatta—that Nadir Shah was after the crown.¹³² When two nobles indicated their hesitancy, Nadir Shah’s spies reported this news back to him. The two

¹²⁸ Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 15.

¹²⁹ Manz, 15.

¹³⁰ Manz, 14.

¹³¹ Tucker, *Nadir Shah’s Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran*, 63.

¹³² Floor, *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah*, 49.

were immediately executed, thus sending a very clear message to the rest of the nobles who were present that anyone who would dare protest the coronation would be met with a similar fate. After this, he was crowned the new emperor of Iran, and the *khutba* (Friday sermon) and *sikka* (coins) were recited and minted in his name.¹³³

The cruelest actions taken by Nadir Shah, mentioned by the Dutch, reveal the depths of his perceived cruelty. One Dutch letter from Isfahan reports, “The 4,000 families whom he had taken with him from Shiraz to be sent to Khorasan were not able to keep up with the army's pace. He then ordered to cut their knee tendons and then left them lying in the road to perish.”¹³⁴ In June 1734, it was recorded that Nadir Shah, when extorting money from rebelling Iranians, “had sons kill their fathers, and if they refused he had them killed.”¹³⁵

That Nadir Shah would succeed in his conquests was never guaranteed, and most wished that he would be killed, especially the Europeans, for whom, under Nadir Shah, trade was strained and factories were shut down because the risk was too high. Nadir Shah confiscated their factories and goods at will. Demands on taxes were erratic and in some instances these irrational and at times unfair demands halted trade altogether.¹³⁶ After Nadir Shah's return from Hindustan, he became increasingly paranoid and cruel. Soon after his return, he had his eldest son blinded. The reasons for the blinding vary. Some say that Nadir Shah was angry with Riza Quli for believing that he (Nadir Shah) had died in Delhi, which resulted in the murder of the remaining male heirs of the Safavid family. Another account relates that Riza Quli was blinded because he attempted to

¹³³ Floor, 53; Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah*, 119.

¹³⁴ Floor, *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah*, 40.

¹³⁵ Floor, 41.

¹³⁶ Floor, *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah*.

assassinate his father after his return from India. And yet, another account justifies the blinding as retribution for the injustice he carried out against the Safavids.¹³⁷ The Dutch described Nadir Shah's eldest son, Riza Quli, as more evil than his father: "He is greedy and bloodthirsty, and is worse than his father, who kills people for trifling things. He sent tax collectors here to extort as much money as possible from the few wealthy people that have remained. Although they oppress the people very much even the governor does not dare say anything." The new heir apparent was the second son, Nasr Allah.

While Nadir Shah managed to take the throne, he did not obtain absolute power. Many attempted to undermine him, or negotiate terms with him. From the Dutch perspective, we have some reports that describe how the Dutch perceived Nadir Shah and how he was described to officers back in the Netherlands. One report quotes Nadir Shah responding to people's observations of himself and their attempts to negotiate with this demands: "How is it that they talk so much about me, for I have not come to leave the country in peace and quiet, but to turn everything upside down, since I am not a human being, but I am God's wrath and punishment."¹³⁸ Whether Nadir Shah uttered these chilling words is not relevant. But, that the Dutch believed this to be true enough to report it to their superiors, is noteworthy. They did not see him as someone with whom they could foresee having a mutually beneficial relationship.

The Dutch also reported on how others, such as the Ottomans and Russians, were treating Iranians after Nadir Shah claimed himself to be the emperor. They mention that pilgrims who had gone for the Muslim ritual of *hajj* (pilgrimage to the Kaba in Mecca), which was overseen by the Ottomans, had been treated unkindly, and that the ambassador sent to Russia had been assaulted:

¹³⁷ Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran*, 66.

¹³⁸ Floor, *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah*, 34.

“Recently, pilgrims had returned from Mecca and were very angry about the treatment received from the Turks. They said that prior to Nader's proclamation to shah they had been treated well; this did not bode well for peace. It was also reported that the Russians wanted to go to war again with Vali Ne'mat. The empress was said to have returned the presents, and the kholofa to have had his ears, nose, and lips cut off.”¹³⁹

Dutch administrators in Iran describe Nadir Shah as a warmonger and an impious man: “He [Nader] then whetted his greedy and murderous lust, for one day, people saw the corpses of executed people lying in front of the royal palace on the meydan¹⁴⁰ [*sic*], while the news was dominated by extortion and violence.”¹⁴¹ Another report says, “His army of 200,000 soldiers, slaves, camp followers and animals was like a cloud of locusts, for *en passant*, it devoured everything.”¹⁴² This was not new to Nadir Shah, this was how warfare was conducted in the early modern period. Noelle-Karimi notes, “As a rule, the depletion of agricultural resources accompanying troop movements spelled famine for the local population. This is reflected by Zāhir al-Dīn Mar‘ashī’s statement that after the passage of Tīmūr’s army through Māzandarān, not a single cock survived to crow, nor a hen to lay eggs.”¹⁴³

Nadir Shah moved or relocated people for various reasons: to punish rebels, maintain order, strengthen or populate a city or region, or as a reward for loyalty. Large-scale exiles or relocation

¹³⁹ Floor, 59.

¹⁴⁰ Open field without buildings, a field of battle. Francis Joseph Steingass et al., *A comprehensive Persian-English dictionary: including the Arabic words and phrases to be met with in Persian literature, being Johnson and Richardson’s Persian, Arabic and English dictionary revised, enlarged, and entirely reconstructed = Fārsī Angrizī lughat* (Springfield, VA: Nataraj Books, 2012), 1360.

¹⁴¹ Floor, *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah*, 61–2.

¹⁴² Floor, 62.

¹⁴³ Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 2014, 61.

were common in the early modern period, even the Safavid emperors relocated large portions of the population. In fact, the power to move people was the prerogative of the emperor.¹⁴⁴ Soon after Nadir Shah put the eight-month old Safavid heir on the throne, and acted on his behalf, Nadir Shah moved six thousand Georgians to Khorasan for opposing him.¹⁴⁵ As a way to punish large groups of people, Nadir Shah would move them from one region to another, usually to Khorasan. In some instances, people would petition Nadir Shah to allow them to move (back) to a city or region. The Abdali Afghans, whom Nadir Shah removed from Herat, for example, requested to be allowed to settle in Qandahar after he conquered the city. Nadir Shah permitted it and gave them land grants for their loyal service.¹⁴⁶

In addition to instilling fear and exiling or moving people, Nadir Shah attempted to ensure obedience, once someone had submitted, by giving them positions of power. Governors of certain cities, for example, were allowed to retain their positions after submitting to Nadir Shah. Because Nasir Khan, governor of Kabul and Peshawar, submitted, even after initially opposing Nadir Shah, he maintained his position, and was further raised to position of collecting the due revenues from the newly annexed provinces. The governor of Lahore and Multan, Zakariya Khan, did not want to see the walled city of Lahore plundered and looted, and therefore he offered cash payment in order to be spared. Upon Nadir Shah's return to Kabul, he bestowed the governorship on Zakariya Khan once again. Both Nasir Khan and Zakariya Khan were given robes of honor and treated kindly by Nadir Shah—after they submitted and paid dues. Neither of them, after Nadir Shah left,

¹⁴⁴ Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 54. John Perry provides evidence of forced migration from as early as 512 BCE. For more on forced migration in Iran, see John R. Perry, "Forced Migration in Iran during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Iranian Studies* 8, no. 4 (1975): 199–215.

¹⁴⁵ Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 91; Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 2003, 207.

¹⁴⁶ Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 120.

attempted to undermine Nadir Shah's victory and they paid the agreed upon revenues to Nadir Shah in a timely manner.

Reinstalling governors was not a new practice instituted by Nadir Shah.¹⁴⁷ It is possible to read the reinstatement of these governors in multiple ways. Perhaps it was because Nadir Shah knew that he could not have real power in those regions, and the two who had governed knew enough about the land and people to administer them effectively. It is also possible that Nadir Shah chose to reinstate them, including the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah, because he knew that since they had witnessed Nadir Shah's decisive victories and sheer wrath unleashed on the inhabitants of the cities and surrounding areas he entered, they would not dare to rebel against him, lest he return more furious than the first time. In either case, or in both cases, Nadir Shah's decision to reinstate them to positions of power worked to his advantage: no one attempted to rebel against him, or to re-acquire the land and revenues annexed by Nadir Shah for the duration of his life.

Another tactic Nadir Shah used was accommodation. Nadir Shah sent "offers of accommodation" to (the very?) Afghans he was allegedly pursuing—the pretext he used to cross the Attock River (the understood boundary between Iran and Hindustan). According to James Fraser, when Nadir Shah was at the outskirts of Peshawar,

The Afghans and Moutaineers very much incommoded him, and kept him in Play for Seven Weeks; in which Time he had a great many Men wounded and killed. Seeing there was no forcing the Passes, without much Bloodshed, and that the Afghans had fortified themselves on the Tops of the Hills; he sent them Offers of Accommdation [*sic*], to which they came into the more readily, as the *Soubahdars* had sent no Assistance; and they had been four or five Years without receiving any of their usual Allowance from Court: Upon Nadir Shah's paying them a certain Sum of Money, they not only let him pass unmolested, but several of them listed in his Army; and other Afghans hearing of this, followed their Example.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 2014, 118, 130, 286.

¹⁴⁸ Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah*, 134–5.

From this account, three things ought to be noted. One, there is inconsistency in the narrative. The sources do not distinguish the genealogical affiliations of the Afghans, whom Nadir Shah pursued. We do not know if Nadir Shah wanted to punish only the Ghilzais, or if he attempted to punish all Afghans, who may or may not have rebelled against him. The second point is that it is possible that the Afghans who initially attempted to “incommode” him were the same who had fled Iran, especially after Qandahar had succumbed to Nadir Shah. In this case, they would not have been due the four or five year’s allowance from the Mughals. Third, we must note that the pretext with which Nadir Shah comes to Hindustan, to punish rebels (whether they be Afghan or not, or Ghilzai Afghan or not), is undermined by the very fact that he hired them to serve within his army. No matter which genealogical affiliation (or even if they were Mughal loyalists) the Afghans had been when attempting to fend off Nadir Shah for seven weeks had in this period fought against Nadir Shah, but then joined his ranks when offered the opportunity. Fraser continues to say that once Peshawar submitted to Nadir Shah, more Afghans, after hearing this, enlisted to serve the victor, Nadir Shah.¹⁴⁹ These points alert us to the many assumptions about Nadir Shah, the Mughals, and the writers who recorded this history made about Afghans. It was self-evident and logical to them that Nadir Shah would want to pursue and punish the Afghans, as they were a nuisance to the Iranians, and also to the Mughals. It seemed reasonable that they could be bought, and hence were not loyal to anyone but their paymasters, and that they aligned with the victor, even if earlier they had no such loyalty and were in fact rebelling. Of course, this is not to say that the Afghans were the only ethnic group who behaved in this way. Rather, this reveals how wars and battles were

¹⁴⁹ Fraser, 136.

won or lost. Timely payment and victories (meaning that there would be spoils to obtain) translated to attracting skilled soldiers, no matter their ethnic or religious background.

Lastly, Nadir Shah's strict discipline amongst his troops was another tactic that helped him to succeed. According to Fraser's account, there happened to be an incident of rape in front of some eighty Qizilbash. Nadir Shah ordered that all of the bystanders be killed (their bellies ripped) because they witnessed this transgression and did not intervene.¹⁵⁰ It would be difficult to ascertain if this was true or not, but it is noteworthy that this incident was reported and circulated. At the very least, it reveals how Nadir Shah disciplined his troops.

The more widely circulated and cited example of Nadir Shah's strict discipline was during the mass slaughter in Delhi. As soon as he commanded his troops to halt their attacks on the residents of Delhi, they completely ceased. This was noted by both contemporary writers and by secondary scholars, mentioned above.

In the end, it was precisely Nadir Shah's numerous victories and annexation of territory that won the loyalty of the nobles, and more importantly, of the soldiers who enlisted in his army during his numerous campaigns. Whether they saw it as a sign from God, or an opportunity to benefit from the spoils of war, Nadir Shah managed to substantiate his legitimacy to an effective extent.

7 – Marriage Alliances: Legitimizing his Progeny

Marriage for political alliances or political expediency was not uncommon in the early modern period, especially for nobles.¹⁵¹ Nadir Shah was strategic in selecting wives for himself

¹⁵⁰ Fraser, 151.

¹⁵¹ For marriage alliances in the Mughal court, see Munis Daniyal Faruqi, *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early*

and managed to marry into a local governor's family in Abivard, where he emerged from anonymity and made his debut on the political scene. In 1730, Nadir Shah married, without consent, Raziyya Begum, the sister of the tenth and last Safavid emperor, Shah Tahmasp II (d. 1740; r. 1729-32), thus connecting himself to the Safavid household.¹⁵² In 1740, after his success in Hindustan, he attempted, but was unsuccessful, to marry the "beautiful" niece of the Russian empress, Anna Ioannovna (d. 1740).¹⁵³ According to Dutch correspondence, "Nader sent a special ambassador Sardar Khan (Sardaar Chan) to Russia with large presents to the value of more than 200,000 *tumans* for the niece, who was quickly married off by the tsarina. Nader informed by his ambassador about this marriage, became very bitter towards the tsarina and Russia, though he did not show it."¹⁵⁴

Nadir Shah was even more strategic with his two sons' marriage alliances. Nadir Shah had both of his sons married into the Safavid house. He had betrothed his eldest son, Riza Quli, to Fatima Sultan Begum, the daughter of Shah Sultan Husain (d. 1726; r. 1694-1722), the ninth Safavid emperor, in 1730. In Delhi, after the massacre, as mentioned above, Nadir Shah contracted the marriage of his second son, Nasr Allah, to the great-granddaughter of Alamgir I (Aurangzeb) in 1739. One year later, he had Nasr Allah marry Shah Tahmasp's daughter in 1740,¹⁵⁵ after Shah Tahmasp had been killed by Nadir Shah's eldest son, Riza Quli.¹⁵⁶ According to Dutch sources,

Mughal World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 166–73. Faruqi mentions various alliances throughout the book, especially chapters 2-4.

¹⁵² Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 42.

¹⁵³ Floor, *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah*, 90.

¹⁵⁴ Floor, 90. Floor cites VOC 2546.

¹⁵⁵ Floor, 90.

¹⁵⁶ Floor, 87.

“Nader on his return was angry about the murder of Shah Tahmasp and his family and deposed his eldest son and appointed his second son Nasrollah [sic] Mirza as *vali ahd*, or crown prince.”¹⁵⁷

This is perhaps also the need for Nasr Allah to marry into the Safavid line, so that his offspring could have both Afsharid and Safavid blood, like Shah Rukh, Riza Quli and Fatima Sultan Begum’s son.

A noble bloodline and a verified genealogy were required for legitimate rule in the early modern period. Quoted in Malcolm’s *History*, and then in almost every study on Nadir Shah since Malcolm’s study is the answer Nadir Shah gave when Mughal court officials asked about his son’s genealogy before Nasr Allah was married to the Mughal princess in Delhi: “Tell them that he is the son of Nader Shah, the son of the sword, the grandson of the sword; and so on, till they have a descent [sic] of seventy instead of seven generations.”¹⁵⁸ If he had indeed said this, it is clear that Nadir Shah possessed the hubris (and perhaps rightly after his victories) to contract marriage alliances, to his choosing. And yet, Nadir Shah ensured that his progeny married into noble blood. We can infer that he attempted to correct the potential charge against him and his successors of low birth, which did not fulfill commonly accepted requirements for governance, by securing bloodlines for his progeny that would be Safavid or Mughal. In other words, Nadir Shah was aware that even though he managed to succeed, noble blood was still an important factor for political legitimacy.

¹⁵⁷ Floor, 87.

¹⁵⁸ John Malcolm, *The History of Persia: From the Most Early Period to the Present Time* (Tehran: Imperial Organization for Social Services, 1976), Vol.2, 46–7.

8 – Religion

Nadir Shah's religious principles are difficult to reconstruct. There is very little consistency in his religious worldviews, and even less with his own behavior and actions. Eighteenth century scholars and writers were just as confused as present day scholars are, when it comes to what religion meant for Nadir Shah. Perhaps the one thing most would agree on is that Nadir Shah used religion, religious rhetoric, and religious principles to further his political aspirations.

As mentioned above, Shah Ashraf, the Ghilzai Afghan and nephew of Mir Wais, who sat on the throne in Isfahan in 1725, attempted to legitimize his sovereignty by insisting that his Sunni affiliation ought to pacify the Ottomans. This attempt was seen as a threat by the Ottomans and he was quickly declared a rebel through an Islamic legal opinion. Perhaps considering this alongside Nadir Shah's use of religion, we may be able to understand his hesitancy to rid Iran of Shi'ism altogether, whilst still curtailing specific Shi'i practices like Ashura (ten days of mourning the martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Husain b. Ali b. Abi Talib, (d. 680), and yet deliberate his attempts to found a recognized Shi'a Islamic legal school, the Jafari *madhhab*.

We know from Dutch reports that before Nadir Shah crowned himself king in 1736, he used religion for political legitimacy, in order to be accepted as a legitimate ruler by his Sunni neighbors, the Ottomans to the west and the Mughals to the east: "no difference would be made between the Turkish and the Persian religion and that every subject was free to follow the [Moslem] [sic] religion of his liking, something that greatly upset the Persians. In this way Nader [sic] wanted to induce the Turks to make peace and acknowledge him as shah."¹⁵⁹ As early as 1734, before taking the crown, he banned the observation of Ashura. And yet, soon after his

¹⁵⁹ Floor, *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah*, 56.

coronation, in the first message sent to the Ottomans, Nadir Shah outlined his desire that the Shi'a have their own legal school, called the Jafari *madhhab* (legal school).¹⁶⁰ Confusing still, is how Nadir Shah publicly punished devout Shi'a Qizilbash soldiers for commemorating Ashura. Even in Delhi, after the mass slaughter, and on the night of his son's wedding, some of his Qizilbash troops participated in Shi'i mourning rituals, by reciting an elegy (*marsiya*) lamenting the injustice carried out against the Prophet's grandson. When Nadir Shah learned of this, he said: "For several years I have given orders forbidding passion-plays (*ta'zias*) and threnodies...these soldiers have disregarded the Qur'an and the Traditions and have not observed the festival of my son's wedding. There is no remedy for this save death."¹⁶¹

In terms of his own religiosity, a Dutch report states that Nadir Shah had not only given into drinking wine and allowing them to do the same, but even advised his soldiers to have illicit relations with prostitutes. The report quotes Nadir Shah stating: "Who is God; I have declared all women to be common property."¹⁶² They also write that he lusted after women and alcohol.¹⁶³ For the Dutch, Nadir Shah was more than simply irreligious, he was *above* God, and above any religious laws. The Persian and Hindustani accounts do not categorically describe him in these terms, although hints are provided that do question his piety. The sincerity of practice, or the role of the king as it pertained to being the "savior of religion" when it came to Nadir Shah remains murky. He invoked religion to justify his political advances, as we noted in his letter to the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah about availing himself as a resource to fend off the "infidel" Maratha

¹⁶⁰ Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran*, 2.

¹⁶¹ Qtd. in Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 151.

¹⁶² Floor, *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah*, 40.

¹⁶³ Floor, 62.

incursions. And, he found certain religious practices to be disturbing enough—namely, the commemoration of the martyrdom of Husain—to execute his own soldiers who partook in the ritual. Ironically, it was his mercurial disposition to religion that inadvertently gave him legitimacy, not in the traditional way sought by previous kings, but in an erratic and incomprehensible way. His ever changing views on religion, and his tendency to severely punish anyone who disobeyed him, did not permit religious scholars or his own historians to be critical of him, let alone, question his authority in these matters while he was alive.

9 – Power of Perception and Perception of Power

One important tactic Nadir Shah used to legitimize his authority was to use the power of perception. He behaved in the way of kings with all the pomp and splendor. Witnesses, the historians and poets of the day, along with reporters who shared current events with people within and without Hindustan, documented these moments when Nadir Shah employed this tactic while he was in Hindustan. This began as soon as he subdued Lahore and continued until he left, each time more splendid than the last, which correlated with his success, each successive victory greater than the last. Lockhart describes an account written by the Delhi poet Ashub of the pomp and circumstance of Nadir Shah's departure from Delhi:

Ashub was one of the throng of spectators in the streets, and obtained an excellent view as the Shah as he passed. Ashub states that Nadir looked young, was strongly built and held himself very erect; his beard and moustache were dyed black. He rode through the streets holding his head high and looking straight before him. When the people acclaimed him, he flung rupees to them with both hands.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 154.

This was also true for projecting larger numbers as a military unit. We learn from an extract of the journal written by Mirza Zaman in Delhi, that Nadir Shah used his captives to deceive spies and watchmen:

6 or 7000 women, who had been taken Captives from the Turks and in Kandahar, who on a March could not be distinguished from the Soldiers, having a Baranni over their own Cloaths [sic], girt round with a Girdle, their Faces veiled with a fine Cloth, a Shaul [sic] folded round their Heads in Form of a Turban, and booted and armed as the Men.¹⁶⁵

Nadir Shah was able to project an even larger army than he actually had, especially as would have been seen at a distance by those who gather intelligence reports, by dressing and arming his female captives. It is unclear how long a ruse like this would fool the enemy, but that he employed different military tactics reveals his resourcefulness.

Conclusion

Early modern forms of political legitimacy, aside from the rhetoric of how one legitimizes power (through a noble lineage and divine grace), included the ability to collect revenues/tax from land and trade, and control of a strong, successful military. What this means is that territory would constantly be contested, as it would lead to new revenues or booty, thereby further legitimizing power.

By using various reasons ranging from the pursuit of fleeing Afghans, friendly support to fight (infidel) Maratha incursions, collect debt owed to Iran, or in response to an invitation to dethrone the Mughal ruler, Nadir Shah managed to subdue Hindustan, thereby increasing his boundaries to include lands west of the Indus, and his status as another great conqueror who

¹⁶⁵ Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah*, 155.

plundered the wealth of Delhi. Nadir Shah's ability to instill fear in his enemies (and perhaps even his subjects and soldiers) prevented the Mughal emperor and governors, Nasir Khan and Zakariya Khan, from rebelling against him after he had left. They diligently paid the annual revenues due to him, in accordance with the treaty of 1739. The political alliance, through marriage, contracted between the Mughals and Nadir Shah further insured loyalty.

Nadir Shah's success in Hindustan resulted in annexing parts of Hindustani territory and annual revenues attached to the land, in addition to the mass amount of wealth extracted from the cities he subdued. After the horrible massacre in Delhi and the marriage ceremony between Nadir Shah's second son Nasr Allah and Alamgir I's grand-daughter, Nadir Shah restored Muhammad Shah to the throne, and obtained land and its revenues. The tributes due to Nadir Shah had been paid regularly under the supervision of the governor of Kabul and Peshawar, Nasir Khan. After Nadir Shah's assassination, it was these very annual tributes that provided Ahmad Shah the initial cash flow he needed to initiate his own campaigns.

The ways in which Nadir Shah legitimized and maintained his power did not work for Ahmad Shah Abdali, who was one of Nadir Shah's successors. In the next chapter, we will see how Ahmad Shah Abdali, an Afghan, constructed sovereignty in a different way, and he, unlike Nadir Shah, had to negotiate power more frequently in Hindustan. And yet, if Nadir Shah had not freed, trained, and employed Ahmad Shah, he would have never founded the Abdali/Durrani confederacy.

In the third chapter, the implications of Nadir Shah's campaign in Hindustan are discussed in Hindustani sources—depending on its content and context. Nadir Shah's feat in Hindustan proved Mughal weakness, and perhaps inspired others to try their luck against the Mughals, as Nadir Shah had done. For example, Rohilla power expanded in the trans-Gangetic plains, the

Marathas from the Deccan were encouraged to expand their territories in northern India, and Sikhs organized to control strategic cities and regions in Punjab.

Chapter Two

Competing Sovereignties: Afghan Claims to and Constructions of Sovereignty and Mir's Counter-Perspective

بحکمش احمد افغان گشت پیدا
سوی بند آمده قصاب گویا
ولی بیشک ہلاکون زمان شد
کہ از ظلمش جهانی در فغان شد¹

*With His command Ahmad Afghan was born,
One could say a butcher came towards Hind.
Indeed, without doubt, he was the Hulagu² of the time,
The world wept because of his oppression.³*

Eighteenth Century South Asian history is replete with examples of competing sovereignties. Criterion to legitimize sovereignty changed over time for the Safavids (ca. 1501–1722) and Mughals (ca. 1526–1857). If we were to identify theoretical qualifications for kingship, for the sake of mapping out comparisons and connections, we could say that the Safavids mandated three requirements for legitimate sovereign rule: ordainment by God; descent from the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632) and rightful representatives of the twelfth and hidden Imam (Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, b. 868); and recognition as the *murshid-i kāmīl* (perfect spiritual leader) of the Safaviyya

¹ Tahmas Khan Miskin, *Tahmās Nāma*, ed. Muhammad Aslam (Lahore: Panjab University, 1986), 44.

² Hulagu (d. 1265) was the grandson of Chengiz Khan (d. 1227), Mongol warrior who swept most of Asia under his dominion.

³ Translation mine. I could have chosen to translate *āmadan* as “invaded” Hind, as many translators have done when reading the Persian sources. It is worth noting that in Rao’s abridged translation of this text, this poem, and these lines, are not included, neither in summary or in translation. This is the only hint to the reader that the author, Miskin, does not approve of Ahmad Shah.

Sufi Order.⁴ For the Mughals, we can apply the above three requirements, with one adjustment: kingship required decent from the house of Timur also known as Tamarlane (d. 1405) instead of a genealogy tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad and Imams.⁵

In practice, however, acceptance and recognition as a sovereign included the ability to collect revenues/tax from land and trade, and the ability to control a strong, successful military. It was in this context that Nadir Quli Beg also known as Tahmasp Quli Khan and popularly referred to as Nadir Shah Afshar (1688-1747) was able to displace the Safavids, Afghans, Ottomans, Uzbeks, and Mughals from power in Isfahan, Herat, Qandahar, Muscat, Lahore, and even Delhi. As described in the previous chapter, Nadir Shah's sovereignty and military success proved that kingship could be attained without the necessary credentials of a noble lineage and attributes of saintliness. Nadir Shah's rise to power did not displace ways of legitimizing power—he did attempt to align his genealogy to Timur by claiming a Turkish ethnicity. Nonetheless, Nadir Shah's career as a sovereign demonstrated that a person from an obscure background could rise to the ranks of a feared military commander and sovereign, very much like Genghis (Chingiz) Khan (d. 1227) and Timur who came before him and who served as models to be emulated.

In this context, how do we make sense of an Afghan's attempt to claim sovereignty? Stewart Gordon's study on the Marathas based on archival material in Pune reveals an alternative narrative of eighteenth century South Asia, and more specifically of the Marathas. The period,

⁴ Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 2–3. An Imam, in the Shi'a interpretation of Islam, is a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and appointed successor to lead the community. The first Imam was the Prophet Muhammad's nephew and son-in-law Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 661), followed by his two sons (born to the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Fatima bint Muhammad, d. 632) Hasan ibn Ali (d. 670) and Husain ibn Ali (d. 680). According to Ithna Ashari Shi'as (Twelver), the twelfth Imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, is in occultation.

⁵ A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam*, 2015.

usually categorized as a period of political decline, albeit marked with artistic decadence, is re-conceptualized as a moment of sophisticated administration. Gordon supports his argument by tracing the connections between cities (and centers of power) and villages (largely seen as “a self-sufficient unit suspended in space and time”).⁶ Gordon further calls into question the uncritical assumption that caste was static and unchanging. That caste did change and was intimately tied to power, required Gordon to re-examine notions of kingship. He looks specifically at Bhopal in the eighteenth century. Afghans founded Bhopal as a princely state that continued to exist well into the nineteenth century. He identifies four “reasons” a ruler is considered legitimate:

- 1) A proven protector of the people, capable of establishing a limited sort of public order and preventing external aggression.
- 2) A ruler having a commanding personal presence, competent at courtly etiquette, personally brave, capable of leading the army, and successful at settling factional disputes.
- 3) The most appropriate ruler by rules of heredity, that is the eldest natural son of a reigning king.
- 4) The holder of a genuine sanad from a strong power.⁷

This may well be true for the Afghans of Bhopal, but as we will see in this chapter, these criteria were not required (with the exception of number two) for the Abdali and the Rohilla Afghans, and certainly not for Nadir Shah. Ahmad Shah Abdali, stylized Durrani (d. 1772) succeeded Nadir Shah after his assassination in 1747. Ahmad Shah could not claim descent from the Prophet Muhammad, or Timur, as he was a Sadozai Abdali Afghan. And yet, he managed to control the eastern portions of Nadir Shah’s territories, and founded the Durrani empire (ca. 1747–1826). In

⁶ Stewart Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation in Eighteenth-Century India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), x.

⁷ Gordon, 79.

this chapter, we trace how Ahmad Shah’s court chronicler, Mahmud al-Husaini al-Munshi bin Ibrahim al-Jami (hereafter al-Husaini), constructed Ahmad Shah as the sovereign, with a focus on legitimizing his attempts to rule in western frontiers of Mughal Hindustan early in his career. We begin with an introduction to Ahmad Shah Abdali—a brief summary of his life and conquests—and the court history, the *Tārīkh-i Aḥmad Shāhī*, and their connections to Nadir Shah Afshar (d. 1747). Next, we examine how Mahmud al-Husaini legitimizes Ahmad Shah’s rise to power; namely, through divine inspiration (*ilhām*), which led to harmony with nature, the ability to carry out justice, and success in military conquests. Ahmad Shah’s sovereignty was contested and negotiated, especially when he attempted to annex the western frontiers of the Mughal empire, but because of his inner abilities and alignment with nature, he emerged victorious. We observe how author contrasts Ahmad Shah’s qualities and success with the Mughals who lack saintly characteristics, and thus faced internal struggles and defeat at the hands of Ahmad Shah.

The last section of this chapter is based on Mir Taqi Mir’s *qiṣṣa-i khūd* (memoir) entitled *Zikr-i Mīr* (*Mir’s Account*). This text serves as an example of how Ahmad Shah’s claims to sovereignty were contested in Hindustan from the perspective of a fellow Muslim, who was a non-Afghan. Non-Afghans (and even some Afghans), especially those who were loyal to the Mughals, Marathas, or Sikhs, were unhappy with Ahmad Shah and his allies. As quoted above, an eighteenth century memoir (analyzed in fourth chapter), also written by a non-Afghan Muslim describes Ahmad Shah as the “butcher of Hindustan.” The critical description of Ahmad Shah’s attempt to govern in Hindustan by Muslims demonstrates how politics of power were not solely based on religion; and thus require us to think about ethnicity as an important factor for accepting claims to sovereignty. While only one source is privileged for each perspective (*Tārīkh-i Aḥmad Shāhī* for

Ahmad Shah and *Zikr-i Mīr* for the anti-Ahmad Shah) they both are incredibly rich and nuanced and thus serve the purpose of understanding competing sovereignties in the early modern period.

1 – Literature Review of *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*

Very little scholarly attention has been given to Ahmad Shah and the Afghans in general in the eighteenth century.⁸ The study of the court chronicle, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, has not been fully analyzed in its own right. It is used as an important primary source for the study of Ahmad Shah, specifically. For example, Ganda Singh cites from the history in his biography of Ahmad Shah, written in 1958. Christine Nölle-Karimi, Jos J Gommans, and Amin Tarzi are the few notable scholars who have incorporated the text into their studies on the Afghans in the early modern period.⁹

Christine Nölle-Karimi's detailed and erudite chapter in *Afghan History Through Afghan Eyes* is a comparison of the two court chronicles of Ahmad Shah: The *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī* written by Mahmud al-Husaini soon after Ahmad Shah's death and Imam al-Din Husaini's, *Tārīkh-i Husain Shāhī* or *Tawārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī* written in the late eighteenth century (at least two decades after Ahmad Shah's death). Amin Tarzi's chapter, in the same edited volume, on the

⁸ Many Afghan texts remain unexplored. Poetry, especially, is lacking. Ahmad Shah's own poetic composition in Pashto and his court-commissioned Persian poetry, composed by Ishrat Sialkoti in the eighteenth century, remains unexamined, to date. I hope to include these compositions as I develop the dissertation into the book.

⁹ Christine Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst: Herat and the Mapping of Khurasan (15th-19th Centuries)* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003); Christine Nölle-Karimi, "Afghan Politics and the Indo-Persian Literary Realm," in *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes*, ed. Nile Green (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016); Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012); Nile Green, *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016); Jos J Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire: C. 1710-1780* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Dirk H. A Kolff, *Naikar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Amin Tarzi, "Tarikh-I Ahmad Shahi: The First History of 'Afghanistan,'" in *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes*, ed. Nile Green, 2016.

Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī provides a basic summary and outline of the history.¹⁰ Other scholars have used the the *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī* as a reference for dates, events, and reconciling information mined from other sources. The Persian text has not yet been translated into English (even a partial translation does not exist).

2 – Brief Biography of Ahmad Shah Abdali/Durrani

The Sadozai Afghan Ahmad Shah Abdali (d. 1772), also known as Ahmad Shah Durrani, and hereafter Ahmad Shah, was born in Multan¹¹ in 1722 in his father's maternal uncle's home. Ahmad Shah's father, Zaman Khan, was murdered in Herat while Ahmad Shah was in utero. Ahmad Shah was brought up in the house of his father's maternal uncle, Jalal Khan, in Multan until he was seven years old. Then, he joined his brother, Zulfiqar Khan, in Herat.¹² Ahmad Shah accompanied his brother in his campaigns in Mashhad, Herat, and Qandahar, where they were captured and held captive until Nadir Shah successfully occupied the fort in 1738.¹³ Ahmad Shah enlisted in Nadir Shah's campaigns, including the one to Hindustan in 1738-9, and served as his

¹⁰ Green, *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes*.

¹¹ The place of birth is contested; however, most agree that he was indeed born in Multan. See Ganda Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan* (London: Asia Pub. House, 1959); Hari Ram Gupta, *Later Mughal History of the Panjab (1707-1793)* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1976); Maḥmūd bin Ibrāhīm al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Aḥmad Shāhī: Tārīkh Tashkīl Awwalīn Hukūmat Afghānistān*, ed. Ghulam Husayn Zargarinezhad (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 2005), 56, fn 87. Al-Husaini does not write that Ahmad Shah was born in Multan, he does not give any place of birth, but the editor, Ghulam Husayn Zargarinezhad, inserted a citation from a manuscript entitled *Tārīkh-i Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī*, stating that Ahmad Shah was born in Multan; his birth coincided with a number of Sadozais moving from Herat to Multan in the early eighteenth century.

¹² Ashiq Muhammad Khan Durrani, *Multan under the Afghans, 1752-1818* (Multan: Bazme Saqafat, 2007), 20.

¹³ Laurence Lockhart, *Nadir Shah; a Critical Study Based Mainly upon Contemporary Sources*, (London: Luzac, 1938); Ernest Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006).

personal attendant. After Nadir Shah's assassination in 1747, the Sadozais assembled to appoint a new leader in Qandahar, and when asked, Ahmad Shah declined, despite his noble birth.¹⁴ A “future-knowing” Sufi saint, Sabir Khan, intervened and placed a green plant as a *jīgha* (an ornament or jewel worn in the folds of a turban, signifying a higher status) on the corner of his turban, appointing him the new leader.¹⁵

Ahmad Shah did not possess a Turco-Mongol lineage to Timur, the house of Gūrkan, claimed by Nadir Shah, the Ottomans, and the Mughals; nor a religiously sanctioned lineage to the Prophet Muhammad, claimed by the Safavids. Thus, while Nadir Shah was a disruption to traditional political legitimacy because he emerged he had an unknown genealogy; Ahmad Shah's ethnic background as a Sadozai Afghan attempting to legitimize power as an emperor and founder of his own dynasty was an equally disruptive break in historical tradition —albeit not the first Afghan attempt (as noted in the previous chapter, Ghilzai Afghans attempted this too).

Nadir Shah's success in Hindustan in 1738-9 resulted in annexing parts of Hindustani territory and annual revenues attached to the land, in addition to the mass amount of wealth extracted from the cities he subdued. Nadir Shah arranged a marriage alliance between his second son, Nasr Allah, and Alamgir I's grand-daughter, after his troops plundered Delhi. Before leaving, Nadir Shah restored Muhammad Shah to the throne, and at this time of his re-coronation, according to Nadir Shah's court chronicle, Muhammad Shah (out of his own volition) bestowed lands west of the Indus to Nadir Shah: “the land between Attock and river Sind, from the border of Tibet and

¹⁴ al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 68. Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 101; Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan*, 28–31.

¹⁵ al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 67.

Kashmir until the river reaches the ocean, all of the space including the forts and ports.”¹⁶ As far as we know, the tributes due to Nadir Shah had been paid regularly under the supervision of the governor of Kabul and Peshawar, Nasir Khan. After Nadir Shah’s assassination, it was these very annual tributes that provided Ahmad Shah the initial cash he needed to initiate his own campaigns.

In terms of his training and experience, Ahmad Shah served as an attendant to Nadir Shah and accompanied him from 1738 (at the age of sixteen)¹⁷ until his assassination in 1747. During this time, Ahmad Shah learned much from his predecessor. In addition to gaining first-hand experience in military training and campaigning, he gained familiarity of the terrain that he would eventually attempt to bring into the fold of his own empire. While campaigning with Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah likely met with members of his extended family in Multan, and may have been informed as to their activities during Nadir Shah’s reign. During this time, Nawab Zahid Khan, a Sadozai Afghan and relative of Ahmad Shah on both his paternal and maternal side, was appointed as the *nā’ib* (deputy) of Multan.¹⁸

Ahmad Shah campaigned in Hindustani territories nine times during the duration of emperorship:

1st Campaign: October 1747 to March 1748. Ahmad Shah conquered Kabul, twice. First, on his way to Hindustan and second upon his retreat; Ahmad Shah overcame Shah Nawaz Khan, governor of Lahore; and conquered Sirhind. Ahmad Shah and the Mughals fought, resulting in the death of Nizam al-Mulk Qamar al-Din. Ahmad Shah and his troops retreated back to Kabul and

¹⁶ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, *Jahāngushā-yi Nādirī*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh Anwār (Tihārān: Anjuman-i Āsār va Mafākhir-i Farhangī, 1998), 334.

¹⁷ According to Ganda Singh. See Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan*, 18.

¹⁸ Durrani, *Multan under the Afghans, 1752-1818*, 30.

control over Hindustani territories reverted back to the Mughals. Qamar al-Din's son, Muin al-Mulk was appointed the new governor of Lahore by the Mughals.

2nd Campaign: November 1748 to December 1748. Ahmad Shah defeated Muin al-Mulk and the treaty between Nadir Shah and Muhammad Shah was transferred to Ahmad Shah. It was ratified by the newly ascended Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah Bahadur.

3rd Campaign: November 1751 to April 1752. Muin al-Mulk did not pay the amounts due to Ahmad Shah, forcing him to return to Punjab. After four months of fighting, Ahmad Shah emerged victorious and drafted a new treaty that included Lahore and Multan as part of his territories. He additionally demanded more money by threatening to annex Kashmir. The new treaty was signed by the Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah Bahadur. Muin al-Mulk was re-instated as the governor of Lahore, and Nawab Ali Khan Khugiyani was appointed the governor of Multan.

4th Campaign: December 1756 to March 1757. Muin al-Mulk's widow, Mughlani Begum, wrote to Ahmad Shah to support her intermittent rule in Lahore. Ahmad Shah re-instated Mughlani Begum, and proceeded to Delhi, where his troops pillaged the city. Imad al-Mulk Ghazi al-Din had Ahmad Shah Bahadur blinded and imprisoned, and placed Alamgir II on the Mughal throne. Alamgir II and Imad al-Mulk Ghazi al-Din did not fight Ahmad Shah, choosing to submit instead. Ahmad Shah and his troops plundered surrounding areas, and Lahore, Multan, Sirhind, and Kashmir were declared Durrani territories. Ahmad Shah forged marriage alliances with Mughal royalty. He married Muhammad Shah's daughter, Hazrat Begum. He had his son Timur Shah married to Alamgir II's daughter, Zahra Begum. Ahmad Shah removed Mughlani Begum from the governorship of Lahore and installed his son, Timur Shah, as the viceroy of Lahore.

5th Campaign: October 1759 to April 1761. Timur Shah and Ahmad Shah's military commander were run off from Lahore by Adina Beg, Marathas, and Sikhs. The Marathas were in

power over strategic cities in Punjab, including Lahore. Najib al-Daula, a Rohilla chief, wrote to Ahmad Shah to help him fight the Marathas and Sikhs. At the battle of Panipat, in 1761, the Afghans decisively defeated the Marathas. Ahmad Shah appointed Najib al-Daula as his viceroy in Hindustan, and put Shah Alam II (with a temporary emperor—Jawan Bakht—until Shah Alam II could return to Delhi) on the Mughal throne. Imad al-Mulk Ghazi al-Din was removed from office for killing Alamgir II and opposing Najib al-Daula.

6th Campaign: February 1762 to December 1762. Ahmad Shah came to fight the Sikhs, and defeated them in Gujranwala. After he left, however, the Sikhs successfully defeated Ahmad Shah's appointed leaders and occupied Lahore in 1764.

7th Campaign: October 1764 to March 1765. Ahmad Shah attempted to retake Lahore and subdue the Sikhs.

8th Campaign: November 1766 to May 1767. Ahmad Shah again attempted to collect revenues from the Punjab and re-establish control over Lahore. Despite a short occupation of Lahore, Ahmad Shah and his troops were unsuccessful.

9th Campaign: December 1768 to early 1769. Ahmad Shah's last attempt to defeat the Sikhs failed.

Four years into his reign, Ahmad Shah's territories expanded in Hindustan and included Lahore and Multan. The treaty was written between Ahmad Shah and Muin al-Mulk, governor of Lahore. It was ratified by the Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah Bahadur. The treaty further stipulated that Muin al-Mulk would continue to act as governor, and while the internal administration of Lahore and Multan were to remain as it had been, the excess revenues were to be sent to Ahmad

Shah. Only questions of the highest importance were to be sent to Ahmad Shah for response.¹⁹ Soon after, Kashmir was further included. The annexation of Kashmir, however, was ratified in 1757, between Ahmad Shah and Alamgir II (r. 1754-59).²⁰ With each successful campaign, Ahmad Shah and his troops recovered much wealth, weapons, and goods.²¹ According to Sir Jadunath Sarkar, the cash value of his campaigns ranged from thirty to one hundred and twenty million rupees.²²

Ahmad Shah's success reached its peak in 1761 with the decisive victory at Panipat against the Marathas. Ahmad Shah's territories included Nishapur to the west, Balkh and Kabul to the north (to the river Oxus), Panipat and Sirhind to the east, and the Indian Ocean to the south. Ahmad Shah began losing control over Lahore in the mid-1760s. While Ahmad Shah was not able to displace the Sikhs from Lahore and other parts of Punjab, he successfully kept the Marathas at bay. After his death, Durrani territories shrunk further, but the capital cities Qandahar and later Kabul, Herat, Peshawar, Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, and Multan remained under Afghan jurisdiction until the mid-nineteenth century. Eventually, the remaining territories were lost between the Barakzai Afghan Dost Muhammad Khan, the British, and the Sikhs.

3 – The Text: *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhi*

¹⁹ Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan*, 121; al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 224.

²⁰ Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 101.

²¹ Noelle-Karimi, 113.

²² Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire.*, vol. II, 1754–71 (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons, LD., 1934), 74–5; Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 113.

The *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*²³ was commissioned by Ahmad Shah after he secured Khurasan in 1754 while in Mashhad.²⁴ The author, al-Husaini, adds a personal anecdote of how he was chosen to undertake this task: Ahmad Shah searched for a *munshī* (author, scribe, prose composer), through a certain Muhammad Taqī Khan, who could write a history in the same manner as Mirza Mahdi Khan Astarabadi, the court chronicler of Nadir Shah.²⁵ Muhammad Taqī Khan suggested our author, al-Husaini, as he had spent time with Astarabadi and was familiar with the way in which he composed history.²⁶

The events recorded by our author prior to 1754 required gathering information from informants and/or from reading or listening to the events preserved by fellow record keepers. Al-Husaini completed the history soon after Ahmad Shah's death in 1772. The history follows the conventions of Persian historiography in the early modern period, especially Nadirid

²³ For a brief discussion of the manuscripts available and details of the extant full manuscript of the history in Saint Petersburg, see Amin Tarzi, "Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi," 81.

²⁴ al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 50–1; Nölle-Karimi, "Afghan Politics and the Indo-Persian Literary Realm," 55; Amin Tarzi, "Tarikh-I Ahmad Shahi," 82.

²⁵ al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 50–1. The *Tārīkh-i Nādir Shāhī* was actually completed after Ahmad Shah's death, and three decades after Nadir Shah's assassination, but parts of it were probably in circulation, and it is also possible that Ahmad Shah was in attendance when selections were read out loud in court settings. Nölle-Karimi, "Afghan Politics and the Indo-Persian Literary Realm," 56.

²⁶ al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 51; Nölle-Karimi, "Afghan Politics and the Indo-Persian Literary Realm," 56. Karimi's translation: "In the Turkish year of the dog, equivalent to the Hijri year of 1167, when the province of Mashhad was conquered by the strikes of the swords of the glorious lion-like fighters (ghazis)... the aforementioned Taqī Khan, who had some previous acquaintance with this poor and humble person, submitted [the following recommendation] to the courtiers of the royal throne, 'The munshi Mahmud al-Husaini, son of Ibrahim of Jam, who, because of strokes of fate, has withdrawn from the world ... , has spent some time with Mirza Mahdi Khan, the author of the Tarikh-i Nadiri. ... He has adopted the latter's subtlety and phraseology, indeed, he describes the subject matter better and more lively. When it comes to argumentation, he shows unique talent.'" It should be noted that the *hijri* year given in Zargarinijhad's edited text is 1766.

historiography.²⁷ The text is interspersed with poetry: sometimes the poetry summarizes the prose that comes before it, and other times it foreshadows the prose that follows. Qur'anic *āyahs* (verses) and lines of poetry from famous Shirazi poets like Saadi and Hafiz ornament the text, but are inserted when contextually relevant. The rhythmic pattern of the writing style suggests that the text was read aloud, and the text comes to life when a battle scene unfolds through these metered rhythms. The author's use of anthropomorphisms further livens the text, and at times he includes some wit and sarcasm as well, which seems to keep the attention of the reader/listener. Scandal, rumor, battle scenes, and enticing story-telling keep the history moving forward, and one can easily understand what values are important to our author, as he does not hold back his criticisms or judgments of historical figures. After 1754, the author includes extracts of complete copies of letters or decrees sent between Ahmad Shah and others, including the Mughals.

4 – Authoring Sovereignty in *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhi*

It would worthwhile, to briefly introduce and discuss the *Jahāngushā-i Nādirī*, also known as the *Tārīkh-i Nādirī*, as a way to illustrate that while al-Husaini was hired to emulate Astarabadi, they constructed sovereignty differently, although some similarities do continue (pointed out below). Mirza Muhammad Astarabadi completed his court-commissioned history of Nadir Shah Afshar's reign after Nadir Shah's assassination. He did not date the completion of the history, and he did not write about the events that occur after 1747, the year of Nadir Shah's death. Astarabadi, however, did add information that had been omitted while Nadir Shah was alive, such as the

²⁷ For a brief discussion of how this text follows Nadirid historiography see Nölle-Karimi, "Afghan Politics and the Indo-Persian Literary Realm," 65.

blinding of Nadir Shah's son. The text was partially translated by the British historian and translator William Jones.

The first two paragraphs of *Jahāngushā-i Nādirī* reveal how Astarabadi positioned and articulated Nadir Shah as a sovereign. I have translated it for the purpose of teasing out points of connections, continuity, and discontinuity between the *Jahāngushā-i Nādirī* and the *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhi*:

The premonitory signs and the moments of knowing God's wisdom is manifest to the learned ones, that in every time and season the conditions of the world are upside down and disturbed, and the cruel wheel of fortune revolves according to the desire of tyrants, and God is the one who organizes the affairs of the world, and changes the conditions of the time, God fortifies the auspicious ones with endless felicitous bounty of His grace, and in the expanse of the earth, He extends His hand, with the kindness of his balm and compassion, he heals the wound of the hearts of the oppressed, and with the honey of justice, he makes sweet the bitter poison of desire.

The proof of these words is the condition of the fortunate one [Nadir Shah], who has the status of powerful fate, the Alexander of pomp to Darius, the gatekeeper, the destroyer of enemies on the battlefield, remover of difficulties in the manner of honor, manifestation of God's power, institutor of the custom of minting coins, raiser of banners of conquest, the one who sits on the world-adorning victorious throne, the one who defeats the enemy with force and bravery, he takes kingdoms with the world conquering sword, the sovereign who, from the dread of his arrow, the surface of the world has shielded its head from the wheel of fear, and from the fear of his sky-splitting spear, the highest heaven has coiled its stomach into itself; through victory by his sharp sword, it is as attributes come together with substance; and from his blood drawing sword, form separates from matter; his wrath on the battlefield, the hearts of the enemies are forms without spirits, the slaughterer becomes the lamb that is slaughtered. The heralds of his brilliant court, from ten days of service, receive the good news of the hope of a hundred years of blessings, and the butlers of his table of feast make people from far and near taste desirable things, with the substance of generosity. [Nadir Shah] is appointer of rank and crown, the destroyer of royal banners, worthy of the kingly crown and throne, the hero of the brilliant Turkoman dynasty, the lion of the world and the lion of the age, the most generous ruler, the crown conferrer of Hind and Turan.²⁸

²⁸ Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, *Jahāngushā-yi Nādirī*, 1–2.

Astarabadi paints a bleak picture of the political moment that required God to intervene and raise someone who would appropriately govern. Moreover, Nadir Shah is to be feared, even the earth and highest heaven attempt to protect themselves from his terror and wrath; whilst, those who serve him, they are generously blessed exponentially. The Turkish lineage is highlighted and the language of “lion” evokes both the status of Ali b. Abi Talib (nephew and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad) as the rightful successor to the Prophet, and to Timur who was similarly described as the “lion” of the world and time.

Al-Husaini’s construction of Ahmad Shah’s sovereignty in the court chronicle privileges divine intervention over Timurid dynastic rule, Shi’i conventions, by way of *naṣṣ*, and Sufi authority and mediation. While not underplaying the contested and negotiated nature of his sovereignty, the author illustrates his legitimacy and authority as primarily one that is ordained and sustained by God. Through direct revelation (*ilhām*), Ahmad Shah succeeded as a just, world-conquering ruler. The manifestations (and the proof that is provided by the author) of God’s will that Ahmad Shah was the chosen emperor was visible in nature, in the harmonious alignment of his intentions and his successes, and the way in which carried out justice. To further illustrate the point, Ahmad Shah’s determined right to rule is contrasted to the Mughals, who are depicted as confused, irresolute, lazy and slaves to their bodily desires. Ahmad Shah is described as the defender of Islam; whereas, the Mughals cannot or do not protect Muslims and their ability to practice their faith. In most court chronicles, including Astarabadi’s *Jahāngushā-i Nādirī*, historians provide evidence of legitimacy through the documentation of the recitation of the Friday sermon and coins minted in the name of the sovereign, a noble genealogy (in this period,

one that traces back to Timur), and saintly intercession.²⁹ These generally accepted and self-evident forms of legitimacy that did in fact occur (the earliest extant coin minted in Ahmad Shah's name is from 1748³⁰) do not prominently feature in al-Husaini's history. As for Ahmad Shah's genealogy, the author provides a terse three lines about Ahmad Shah's father, grandfather, and brother. There is no mention of his ancestry, his birthplace, or anything else that would give dynastic legitimacy to his rule. Sainly intercession is further downplayed.³¹ While an important saint features at his ascension ceremony, described later, he is killed soon after (sacrificed, even, for the sake of political expediency).

Mahmud al-Husaini constructs sovereignty in the chronicle in multiple ways. The most obvious is the language he uses to refer to Ahmad Shah—by a referential, an epithet, or formal title, usually shortened, and never his name. The most common title for the section headings is the Turco-Mongol word, *khāqān*, meaning emperor or king. Although al-Husaini does not describe Ahmad Shah physically, he provides ample evidence of Ahmad Shah's inner qualities. Ahmad Shah was aligned with and inspired by the divine. This internal connection with God, through

²⁹ See Lisa Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity in the Mughal Empire: Memory and Dynastic Politics in Early Modern South and Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012). The custom of reciting the sovereigns for congregational prayer goes back to the fifth century BCE, before the advent of Islam, as does the minting of coins in the name of the emperor. These customs were incorporated in Islamic societies.

³⁰ Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan*, 365. The first coin was minted in his name after the conquest of Qandahar in 1748. It read *حکم شد از قادر بچون باحمد بادشاه سکه زن بر سیم و زر از اوج ماهی تا بماه* "God, the Inscrutable, commanded to Ahmad the King, mint coins on gold and silver from the top of the fish to the moon." According to Ganda Singh, there had been about twenty mints during the tenure of Ahmad Shah's reign.

³¹ Karimi contrasts the two court chronicles of Ahmad Shah in Nölle-Karimi, "Afghan Politics and the Indo-Persian Literary Realm," 66–8. She points out that Imam al-Din Husaini's *Tārīkh-i Husayn Shāhī* gives more weight to saintly connections, as it includes more anecdotes of saintly intercession and premonitions, and genealogy that traces back to Jacob who was a contemporary of the Prophet Muhammad and the son of Sado, Khwaja Khizr. Imam al-Din Husaini's text also provides the birthplace of Ahmad Shah as Multan and traces his families move to Herat. Amin Tarzi cites the *Sirāj al-Tawārīkh* and *Majma al-Tawārīkh-i bad-i Nādirī-ya* as sources that record Ahmad Shah's birthplace as Multan, see Amin Tarzi, "Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi," 85–6.

ilhām, direct revelation of God to an individual, was the source for Ahmad Shah's likeness to the sun (*khurshīd*), which radiates light incessantly.³² Ahmad Shah is called *khurshīd-kulāh*, meaning a sun-like hat. Other words like *nūr*, *anwār*, *lāmi'*, all meaning light, radiating light, brightness, are associated with Ahmad Shah when the author describes his actions, thoughts, or characteristics. The *ilhām* bestowed upon Ahmad Shah from God allowed him to take swift action, and this is especially true when the outcome was positive for him. He did not have to engage in thought processes and consultations. Premonitions were clear in his mind, therefore, he did not worry about his enemy's army that outnumbered his, or their ability to manipulate allies or strategically plan attacks.³³

The author provides a very brief account of Ahmad Shah's heritage: he was a Sadozai, and the Sadozais politically engaged with the Turks, the family of Uthman, and the Mughals.³⁴ According to the author, Ahmad Shah inherited nobility from his father and grandfather and after his ascension, he was guided by the unseen divine (God).³⁵ There is no description of his early years, and no mention of premonitions or astrological readings that he would one day become an emperor.³⁶ After Nadir Shah's assassination, the Sadozais assembled to appoint a new leader, and

³² al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 71.

³³ al-Ḥusainī, 81.

³⁴ Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan*, 55.

³⁵ al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 55.

³⁶ This is in contrast to Kazim Marvi's history of Nadir Shah and Imam al-Husaini's history of Ahmad Shah Abdali completed at the end of the 18th century. See Ernest Tucker, "Explaining Nadir Shah: Kingship and Royal Legitimacy in Muhammad Kazim Marvi's "Tārīkh-I 'ālam-ārā-Yi Nādirī'," *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 1–2 (1993): 104; Nölle-Karimi, "Afghan Politics and the Indo-Persian Literary Realm," 67.

when asked, Ahmad Shah declined, despite his noble birth.³⁷ The Sufi saint, Sabir Khan, intervened and appointed him the new leader by placing a green plant as a *jīgha* (ornament) on the corner of his turban.³⁸ Almonds and other sweets were distributed to those present. They paid homage to the newly appointed leader and in return were given robes of honor and money as a sign of good tidings.³⁹ The selection and coronation of Ahmad Shah as the new emperor took place in Qandahar in July 1747.

Our author does not dwell on recording basic aspects of Ahmad Shah's heritage and how and when he became the emperor and moves rather quickly to the first few months after his coronation. For al-Husaini, ceremonial projections of power are not enough to prove legitimacy or authority. Rather, in order to prove sovereignty, the emperor would succeed in military campaigns, whether on the offensive or defensive, guide his troops with a firm and steady command, and enforce justice. Within a month of his ascension, Ahmad Shah verified these qualities when defeating a conspiracy to assassinate him from within the Durrani faction. That very summer, Nadir Shah's appointed *sūbadār*, governor, of Kabul Nasir Khan was on his way to Nadir Shah's camp in order to pay the revenues that had been agreed upon by Nadir Shah and the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah (d. 1748) after the sacking of Delhi in 1739. When Nasir Khan reached Qandahar, he learned about the assassination and attempted to hide with the help of the *sūbadār* (governor of a province) of Qandahar who was appointed by Nadir Shah, Nur Muhammad Khan

³⁷ al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 68.

³⁸ al-Ḥusainī, 67.

³⁹ al-Ḥusainī, 69.

Alizai. After Ahmad Shah's ascension as the new successor, his troops became aware of Nasir Khan's arrival and forcefully took the tributes intended for Nadir Shah.

Nur Muhammad Khan Alizai, unhappy with the appointment of Ahmad Shah, plotted with two others, who had recently been promoted by the newly ascended emperor, to kill Ahmad Shah. The author describes how thoughtfully and cleverly they planned their attack, and yet, because Ahmad Shah's fate as sovereign was divinely ordained, they were defeated.⁴⁰ In narrating this foiled plot, the religious language that accompanies the description of events is noteworthy. The people who went against years of loyal servitude were "immoral and they destroyed the foundation of their being, they ruined themselves."⁴¹ In a sense, they authored their own fate. After this incident, as sovereign, Ahmad Shah had the right to punish or pardon those who rebelled against him, and he sentenced the first set of Durrani rebels who rebelled against him, including Nur Muhammad Khan Alizai, to death by way of elephant trampling.⁴² The author reassures the reader/listener that Ahmad Shah was just: indeed, one alleged conspirator was saved. The elephant that was meant to kill this unnamed man did not trample him; rather, the elephant used his trunk and flung the man to the Ahmad Shah's feet. When this happened, Ahmad Shah saw the truth in the matter of this man: he was not evil on the inside, and because Ahmad Shah was aligned with God's divine power, Ahmad Shah pardoned him and spared his life.⁴³

⁴⁰ al-Ḥusainī, 72.

⁴¹ al-Ḥusainī, 71.

⁴² al-Ḥusainī, 76.

⁴³ al-Ḥusainī, 77.

After this event, Nasir Khan (governor of Kabul) pretended to side with Ahmad Shah⁴⁴ and was therefore sent ahead of *il-i jālīl durrānī*, “the glorious” Durrani army, to win over the people of Kabul and Peshawar. Politically and economically, it was crucial for Ahmad Shah to ensure that the treaty that had been in place between Nadir Shah and Muhammad Shah in 1739 be extended to him. The treaty stipulated that the lands west of the Indus and its revenues were Nadir Shah’s right.

Upon reaching Kabul, however, Nasir Khan re-pledged his allegiance to the Mughal emperor in Hindustan, promising the territories would return to the Mughal dominion if assistance was sent from the center.⁴⁵ With the approval of the Mughal court, Nasir Khan prepared for war and crossed the Indus river. As a way of outsmarting Ahmad Shah, he destroyed and sunk the boats he used. This cleverness on the part of Nasir Khan was no real obstacle for Ahmad Shah, who was divinely inspired and protected.⁴⁶ When they reached the Indus river, they searched for a way to ford it. Some of the vanguard found a spot where the mighty river had lost its current and had divided itself into five small channels. Ahmad Shah commanded that one of the “swift riders” go and cross it, noting the breadth and depth of the river. The rider was successful and reported this to Ahmad Shah. Ahmad Shah, still worried about the safety of his troops, commanded more of them to cross and further investigate if it would be safe for them to ford the river. They too reported the breadth and depth of the river, and because the two accounts agreed in their assessment, Ahmad Shah rode across the river, and he was followed by the rest of his entourage

⁴⁴ al-Ḥusainī, 87–88.

⁴⁵ al-Ḥusainī, 88.

⁴⁶ al-Ḥusainī, 93. Qur’an (57:21) “That is the grace of Allah; He bestows it upon whomsoever He wills.” ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ

and troops. Upon seeing this, a merchant, unattached to Ahmad Shah, attempted to cross the river with all of his belongings, and he was immediately drowned, along with his goods. When Ahmad Shah learned about this incident, he asked his spies to investigate and they learned that no one (historically or in the present) had ever been able to successfully cross the river without boats.⁴⁷ Soon after crossing the mighty river, Ahmad Shah’s troops engaged in battle with Nasir Khan, who fled and left behind his family and possessions.

Al-Husaini devotes quite a bit of the text—prose and poetry—narrating this anecdote. Ahmad Shah’s mere presence enabled the mighty river to recede into itself. In the narrative, the properties of the river and what resided in large bodies of water are transposed onto the “victorious army” who crossed it. The troops are described as being “wave-like” and the horses are likened to “whales.”⁴⁸ And, just in case, the reader/listener’s memory is not triggered to associate Ahmad Shah’s ease in crossing the mighty river to the Biblical and Quranic story of Moses parting the red seas, the author writes a line of poetry about how the Pharaoh drowned in hot pursuit of Moses that should have, but clearly does not, warn the unfortunate merchant who attempted to ford the river in a similar fashion—and ended up losing his life. We should also note the numerous precautions Ahmad Shah took before crossing the river, as protector, he could not be the cause of loss of life or goods.

5 – Contested and Negotiated Sovereignty in *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*

⁴⁷ al-Ḥusainī, 92–3. Imam al-Din Husayni’s history of Ahmad Shah’s reign does not include an anecdote like this; rather he writes that the Durrani army crossed the river via boats, see Nölle-Karimi, “Afghan Politics and the Indo-Persian Literary Realm,” 71.

⁴⁸ al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 92.

Seeing victory and becoming victorious is a crucial ingredient for sovereignty in this text. The next adversary Ahmad Shah had to defeat in Hindustan was the governor of Lahore, Shah Nawaz Khan, son of Zakariya Khan, grandson of Abd al-Samad Khan. The author does not disguise his contempt for Shah Nawaz Khan. He depicts Shah Nawaz Khan as greedy, who confiscated all of his forefathers' wealth after detaining and imprisoning his elder brother and rightful heir. Further, he set a trap of deceit by bestowing favors on Lahore's notables. Shah Nawaz Khan listened to and resolved petitions, inspiring hope in people for further justice, and he behaved in "the way of kings:" he erected and resided in red-colored tents and built watch towers.⁴⁹ When Shah Nawaz Khan heard about Ahmad Shah's victories, he sent a petition pledging his submission and loyalty to Ahmad Shah, thereby ensuring peace for the time being.⁵⁰ It is clear from the way in which the author describes Shah Nawaz Khan that this so-called submission was simply another trick, made up in an "intoxicated, smoke-dwelling mind."⁵¹

Muhammad Shah, the emperor of Hindustan, on the other hand, upon hearing about the ascension and successful campaigns of Ahmad Shah consulted with his entourage for one month, then resolved to send his son, Ahmad Shah Bahadur, accompanied by elders, including the Mughal vizier, Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah I Qamar al-Din (d. 1748) to Punjab to stop Ahmad Shah's advance.⁵² When Shah Nawaz Khan heard about this, he sent a message to Muhammad Shah, saying that his son's arrival in Punjab was unnecessary. Shah Nawaz Khan wrote that Ahmad Shah

⁴⁹ al-Ḥusainī, 95.

⁵⁰ al-Ḥusainī, 96.

⁵¹ al-Ḥusainī, 97–100.

⁵² al-Ḥusainī, 96.

did not command a large force, and the prince should not exhaust his troops; moreover, he, Shah Nawaz Khan, had been diligent in maintaining the region, and the prince's arrival would ruin his hard work.⁵³ The prince, therefore, was stopped at Sirhind beyond his control and will.⁵⁴

Shah Nawaz Khan fortified the city, externally and internally, then proceeded to the Ravi river, about a one-hour horse-ride from the city, and blocked the passageways, including the river. Ahmad Shah took a group of local residents along with him, and they found a fordable part of the river, which they crossed and then set up camp. Ahmad Shah, according to al-Husaini, preferred diplomacy over the death of a single person, and sent Sabir Khan, the Sufi Shaikh who conferred the crown on Ahmad Shah, to “adorn Shah Nawaz Khan's ears with pearls of wisdom.”⁵⁵ Shah Nawaz Khan, the author writes, was “intoxicated on the wine of pride, [he] was not interested in the expositions of the dervish, and did not listen to his sermons, and instead he accused the auspicious dervish of magic and killed him.”⁵⁶ At that very time, Ahmad Shah with a few of his soldiers, mounted their horses to survey the surrounding land, with the intention of mapping out how the troops would be placed during the time of battle. Shah Nawaz Khan's spies reported to him that Ahmad Shah was alone and wandering the land, accompanied with only a few soldiers. Shah Nawaz Khan saw this as his opportunity to strike. Ahmad Shah caught wind of this, and he saw something different: a premonition that this encounter would end with Shah Nawaz Khan's devastation and his victory. Ahmad Shah raised the banner, thus summoning his troops into

⁵³ al-Ḥusainī, 96–7.

⁵⁴ al-Ḥusainī, 97.

⁵⁵ al-Ḥusainī, 98.

⁵⁶ al-Ḥusainī, 98.

motion, and a great battle ensued. Shah Nawaz Khan, defeated, left with a few close companions and a donkey load of money, and turned towards Delhi. The plunder consisting of goods, weapons, and captives fell to Ahmad Shah and his troops.

After this victory, Ahmad Shah went to Sirhind because he heard that the prince had left the citadel. Ahmad Shah and his troops attacked the lofty citadel and emerged victorious. Al-Husaini describes in poetry how quickly and decisively Ahmad Shah and his troops “tore apart the citadel in one blow” and that “there were so many decapitated heads [on the field] that it seemed like the ground was full of turnips.”⁵⁷ After conquering the fort, Ahmad Shah planted the “banner of dominance...on top of the citadel” and obtained even more weapons, gold and silver, and male and female captives.⁵⁸ From Sirhind, they rushed to meet the Mughal prince Ahmad Shah Bahadur in battle.⁵⁹ Days of fighting followed, one of which was so great a conflagration that Rustam and Isfandiyar’s battle⁶⁰ was a mere spark in comparison; even lions and panthers who witnessed the battle turned yellow (meaning their gallbladders or livers failed from shock).⁶¹ The glorious troops ambushed one of the prince’s allies, Raja Isary Singh, who fled and left behind his cannons and other weapons. The next day, with one “life-taking cannon” the vizier Qamar al-Din’s body was made cold by the heat of the cannon ball.⁶² The confusion caused by his death led to an

⁵⁷ al-Ḥusainī, 102.

⁵⁸ al-Ḥusainī, 103.

⁵⁹ al-Ḥusainī, 101–3.

⁶⁰ This is a reference to the epic *Shahnama*.

⁶¹ al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 104.

⁶² al-Ḥusainī, 108.

unsuccessful attack on the Durrani troops, and they in turn captured much of the prince's artillery from his encampment. That very night, while Ahmad Shah was back at camp, the troops who were packing the goods for transport were attacked by "bat-like" enemies, and darkness surrounded them.⁶³ They returned to Ahmad Shah's camp and pled him to leave Hindustan on account of three reasons: one, an evil eye had befallen them, two, the heat of Hindustan was not suitable for his royal disposition, and three, news arrived from the west that Ali Quli Khan, Nadir Shah's nephew, had raised his head in rebellion against Ahmad Shah.⁶⁴

The Mughal prince, on the other hand, having assessed the loss of Qamar al-Din,⁶⁵ the fleeing of Raja Isary Singh, who was ambushed by Ahmad Shah's troops and defeated,⁶⁶ and finally the news of his father's ill-health⁶⁷ offered a compromise in the name of peace. Through his envoys, Ali Quli Khan Lazgi and Abu Mansur Khan (Safdar Jang), he sent a message stipulating that the treaty that had been in place between Muhammad Shah and Nadir Shah should be reinstated in the name of Ahmad Shah and that they pledge to honor this agreement and not rebel against him in the future.⁶⁸ Although the author does not provide a date for this, it is safe to say that it happened in early spring of 1748, before Muhammad Shah died in April of that year. Ahmad Shah saw this as a victory and returned to Kabul via Multan and the Dera Khans. In Kabul,

⁶³ al-Ḥusainī, 110.

⁶⁴ al-Ḥusainī, 111.

⁶⁵ al-Ḥusainī, 107–8.

⁶⁶ al-Ḥusainī, 106–7.

⁶⁷ al-Ḥusainī, 112.

⁶⁸ al-Ḥusainī, 112. The Mughal sources disagree with this chronicle, they note the outcome of Ahmad Shah's first attempt in 1748 as a Durrani loss and Mughal victory.

he had to retake the city, as the sitting governor deemed Ahmad Shah's exploits and early departure due to heat in Hindustan a loss.⁶⁹

Later that year in 1748, Ahmad Shah learned about the death of the Mughal emperor, and the appointment of Muin al-Mulk, son of the late vizier Qamar al-Din, as the governor of Lahore. His informants further relayed that Muin al-Mulk was planning to rebel against Ahmad Shah. After the summer heat had passed, Ahmad Shah returned to Punjab to confront Muin al-Mulk. Through mediation of a local *'alim*, religious scholar, Maulawi Abd Allah, Muin al-Mulk promised to honor the treaty and not rebel.⁷⁰

The next mention of Hindustan, in this chronicle, is in the fifth regnal year of Ahmad Shah, in 1164 AH/1751 CE. We can infer, then, that the revenues due to him were being paid, except for in the years 1750 and 1751, when Ahmad Shah had to return to Hindustan due to nonpayment. Before going to war against each other, Muin al-Mulk sent the aforementioned mediator, Maulawi Abd Allah, to Ahmad Shah to provide the reason why Muin al-Mulk had not been able to pay the revenues, per the agreement.⁷¹ The "slick-tongued" *'alim* (scholar) reported that unfortunate earthly and heavenly calamities led to low yields, thereby making it difficult for the governor to pay what was due last year and the present year.⁷² By way of reparation, Muin al-Mulk asked that the previous year's dues that were unpaid, be forgiven, since its cause was not his doing. And as

⁶⁹ al-Ḥusainī, 114.

⁷⁰ al-Ḥusainī, 213.

⁷¹ al-Ḥusainī, 213.

⁷² al-Ḥusainī, 213.

to the present year's dues, he would pay one-third immediately, one-third when Ahmad Shah reached Peshawar, and the final third would be waiting for Ahmad Shah in Kabul upon his retreat.⁷³

Ahmad Shah did not appreciate this child-like treatment, that of luring a child with candy outside of the region. He sent two envoys with the *'alim* to Muin al-Mulk with a clear threat. Ahmad Shah reminded Muin al-Mulk that the peoples whose lives were at stake were Muslims and his negligence and non-compliance would be the reason for their endangerment. Ahmad Shah did not wish to shed the pure blood of Muslims; therefore, he entreated Muin al-Mulk to pay what was rightfully due to him. Muin al-Mulk disclosed that he too did not wish to sacrifice the lives of Muslims, but he did not have any other option. On the one hand, his troops demanded their salaries and on the other hand, Ahmad Shah asked him to make gold from nothing. Muin al-Mulk then sought Ahmad Shah's advice as to what should be done in this dire situation.⁷⁴

As these negotiations continued for a while, Ahmad Shah learned that Muin al-Mulk was actually biding his time until reinforcements from the Mughal center arrived. This further upset Ahmad Shah and he attacked Muin al-Mulk's troops. Muin al-Mulk honored Ahmad Shah's two envoys with robes and permitted them to leave his court.⁷⁵ Thereafter, the two groups warred for over four months, which finally ended with Muin al-Mulk's defeat.⁷⁶ The cost of the loss of life and goods was far more than what Muin al-Mulk had anticipated. Nonetheless, his position as the

⁷³ al-Ḥusainī, 213–4.

⁷⁴ al-Ḥusainī, 214.

⁷⁵ al-Ḥusainī, 214.

⁷⁶ al-Ḥusainī, 216–225.

governor was re-instated with a new royal title, *farzand*, adopted son.⁷⁷ Ahmad Shah petitioned the emperor that “Multan should be separated from Hindustan for the sake of the hoof-money...and it should be connected to the guarded domains [Durrani territories]” and if this was not acceptable to him, Ahmad Shah would subdue Kashmir.⁷⁸ Additionally, he demanded one crore rupees for having to come to Hindustan.⁷⁹ The Mughal emperor “considered this extraordinary news and took the opportunity to honor the [Ahmad Shah’s] envoy of bright disposition...and hurriedly wrote the agreement with the happy pen of acceptance.”⁸⁰ Thus, Mughal Emperor Ahmad Shah Bahadur, once again re-instated the treaty between Nadir Shah and Muhammad Shah, but with the addition of Multan.⁸¹ While this campaign in Hindustan ended favorably for Ahmad Shah, and prevented Muin al-Mulk from rebelling again, Muin al-Mulk’s premature death eighteen months later in 1753, and continuous overthrows and installments of Mughal emperors by the vizier Imad al-Mulk Ghazi al-Din (the late vizier Nizam al-Mulk Qamar

⁷⁷ al-Ḥusainī, 223. Although missing from the *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, the conversation that took place between Ahmad Shah and Muin al-Mulk was recorded in other contemporary sources, mentioned in Ganda Singh’s biography of Ahmad Shah. The exchange went as follows:

“Ahmad Shah: Why did you not submit earlier?

Muin-ul-Mulk: Because then I had another master to serve.

Ahmad Shah: Why didn’t that master of yours come to your help from Delhi?

Muin: Because he was confident that Muin-ul-Mulk was strong enough for the war and that there was no necessity for sending an army.

Ahmad: Well, say, what you would have done to me if I had fallen into your hands.

Muin: I would have cut your head off and sent it to my Emperor.

Ahmad Shah: Now that you are in my hands, what should I do to you?

Muin: If you are a merchant, sell me (for a ransom); but if you are a king (a just and merciful king), grant me your grace and pardon.” See Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan*, 117–8, fn 27.

⁷⁸ al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 224.

⁷⁹ al-Ḥusainī, 224.

⁸⁰ al-Ḥusainī, 224.

⁸¹ al-Ḥusainī, 224.

al-Din's grandson and Muin al-Mulk's nephew), and the Maratha threat would force Ahmad Shah to return to Hindustan numerous more times.

6 – Space and Sovereignty in *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*

The connection between sovereignty and space permeates the text. When Ahmad Shah was advised to leave Hindustan in 1748 after some of his troops were raided by “bat-like” enemies, the author relates that he did not wish to leave Hindustan, as it would fall into a bewildered state. And yet, when they arrived in Kabul, the author writes: “the King pulls on the reins, moving as swiftly as the breeze, these reins he turns away from the passing through Hindustan, the terrible country of fiery weather, which is not a place for the high bred of fine disposition to sit in merriment...and its salty earth with its abundance of prickly branches and thorns is not a place where the people of high disposition, of fine sensibilities can be inspired...or have their hearts bloom...”⁸² Kabul, on the other hand is “like paradise because of its abundance of greenery and flowers” and Kabul’s “sweet water inspires more happiness than wine.”⁸³ Al-Husaini portrays the stark difference between Kabul, which he describes as refreshing and rejuvenating, as opposed to Hindustan, which is “salty,” “hot,” and “wild”.⁸⁴ We should note that he only describes Hindustan in pejorative terms when Ahmad Shah was not physically in Hindustan. For example, when Ahmad Shah and his troops return to Hindustan, he describes, quite beautifully, surrounding areas of Lahore where hills had formed because of brick-making. Al-Husaini provides a detailed description of how mounds

⁸² al-Ḥusainī, 114.

⁸³ al-Ḥusainī, 114.

⁸⁴ al-Ḥusainī, 114.

were formed due to the brick-making process and that “the hills become green during the rainy season and from a distance they manifest into mountains of emeralds.”⁸⁵ It was so beautiful that “people who have a desire go at that time [spring] to visit the hillocks...they make their eyes shine with the freshness of the renewed greenery. The fine water that collects on the lower end of those miraculous alleys appears to be full of miracles.” Ahmad Shah resided in Hindustan in the winter and spring,⁸⁶ as those seasons would not interfere with the efficiency of their weapons (wetness and humidity rendered their gunpowder unusable).

In the pleasant climate of Kabul, Ahmad Shah “rode around and saw with his inner and outer eye: the truth-discerning King outwardly spent his time looking at the flowers and flowerbeds of happiness, and with the inner eye, he observed the beauty of divine manifestation and he received a refreshed mind from his observations...a true witness from the veil of the two worlds. As the garden of enjoyment was enhanced in its freshness by the grace of the loving gaze, in the same manner, the matters of religion and government likewise were in every way settled to the best owing to the kind attention of the one in charge of the two worlds.”⁸⁷ Al-Husaini describes a mutually beneficial relationship between Ahmad Shah and the environment. Ahmad Shah’s presence brings flowers to bloom, and this in turn bestows peace and rejuvenates his mind and heart.

⁸⁵ al-Ḥusainī, 217.

⁸⁶ There is one exception to this, in 1760, before the battle of Panipat in 1761, Ahmad Shah and his troops stayed in Hindustan for the entire year.

⁸⁷ al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 115.

In a non-allegorical sense, Ahmad Shah cultivated the spaces he inhabited as well.⁸⁸ In 1752, Ahmad Shah spent three months in the city of Peshawar. His presence harmonized with the arrival of spring: “the sun covered the earth with emerald green plants and it fills the air with the property of making flowers grow from stone.”⁸⁹ The “sun-crowned” king, Ahmad Shah, as the protector of people and religion, ordered that buildings be erected for the inhabitants. This included a place for prayer and meditation with a paradise-like pool for people, rich and poor, to perform ablutions; a caravanserai for traders and travelers, which adjoined the mosque and a great splendid market; a picturesque garden next to the mosque whose beauty could be the “envy of all gardens.”⁹⁰ The market attracted merchants who sold goods from all over the world, availing rare goods in abundance at fair yet profitable prices.⁹¹

As the sovereign, it was Ahmad Shah’s responsibility to provide spaces for prayer and reflection and, equally important, to ensure opportunities for trade in a safe and just way. The author describes how goods that could not be found in many places were sold in abundance in this market, and that buyers would get a fair price because price-gauging was impossible, as hoarding goods was prohibited. The sellers, likewise, would receive their “desired profit.”⁹² Ahmad Shah, as sovereign, was the protector of religion and of Muslims, and of a prospering economy and trade.

⁸⁸ For a discussion on the foundation of the Durrani capital of Qandahar during Ahmad Shah’s reign see Nölle-Karimi, “Afghan Politics and the Indo-Persian Literary Realm,” 57–8.

⁸⁹ al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 231.

⁹⁰ al-Ḥusainī, 231–2.

⁹¹ al-Ḥusainī, 232.

⁹² al-Ḥusainī, 232. منافع دل خواه

Lofty epithets, harmony with nature, and the right to carry out justice are examples of explicit constructions of Ahmad Shah 's sovereignty. To be the sovereign, the person had to be aligned with and inspired by divine grace, and the only person in this text who possessed *ilhām* was Ahmad Shah. That being said, not everyone is as enlightened as our author, and therefore, sovereignty is in fact constantly contested and negotiated. Consistently defeating his adversaries and succeeding in military campaigns proved that God's grace was upon Ahmad Shah. Rebels had to be appropriately punished as well. To the agitators whom Ahmad Shah deemed to be beyond help, he decreed the worst of all punishments: obscurity. Those who fell into obscurity were either killed or relocated, but it would be impossible to verify their fate.⁹³ In Hindustan, because of his innate goodness, Ahmad Shah pardoned some of his adversaries, if they were sincere in their repentance. Muin al-Mulk, for example, was pardoned twice. The second time, the author writes, Muin al-Mulk considered "submitting as an essential ingredient for happiness."⁹⁴ The acceptance and recognition of Ahmad Shah's sovereignty protected anyone who could attempt to rebel, and if they did submit to Ahmad Shah, they would benefit in both the worlds, the physical world in which they inhabited and the hereafter.

7 – Mughal Lack of Sovereignty in *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*

Implicit constructions of sovereignty in this text can be teased out if we consider how the author describes the Mughals, specifically, Shah Nawaz Khan, the Mughal prince, Ahmad Shah Bahadur, his father the emperor Muhammad Shah, and Muin al-Mulk. As previously mentioned,

⁹³ al-Ḥusainī, 83.

⁹⁴ al-Ḥusainī, 223.

Shah Nawaz Khan and Muin al-Mulk were governors of Lahore, and yet, they behaved as if they were emperors. They bestowed favors and robes of honor, they claimed to protect their subjects, they erected tents in the fashion of sovereigns, they were even able to halt the movement of the Mughal prince. In an implicit way, the author undermines Mughal sovereignty with these examples—and later, explicitly undermines their sovereignty, especially when Ahmad Shah Bahadur, son of Muhammad Shah, ascended the throne. The Mughal emperor and his son are depicted as having no real power in this text. They were in constant confusion, they underwent endless consultations, and did not possess the resolve or focus that Ahmad Shah had. Shah Nawaz Khan and Muin al-Mulk, who may have had more power were nonetheless deluded in their ambitions, and deviated from the right path, they too could not be deemed as legitimate sovereigns.

After Muhammad Shah's death, his son, Ahmad Shah Bahadur, named Mirza Ahmad in the text, ascended the throne⁹⁵ on April 29, 1748. According to al-Husaini, the new emperor was young and inexperienced. Moreover, his predilection to following baser desires prevented him from governing. Political affairs, big and small, were in the hands of a eunuch, Jawed Khan, also known as Nawab Bahadur, and Ahmad Shah Bahadur's mother Nawab Qudsiya.⁹⁶ The author inserts the (historically controversial and extensively debated) Quranic verse 4:34 "Men are the protectors/guardians/ providers/maintainers/overseers of women"⁹⁷ to indicate how the viziers and ministers serving the Mughal court could not stomach that a woman, and a eunuch, held the reins of power.

⁹⁵ al-Ḥusainī, 116. The precise date of the death is not given in the text.

⁹⁶ al-Ḥusainī, 235.

⁹⁷ الرَّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ Quran 4:34

This was especially true for Safdar Jang, Burhan al-Mulk's nephew and son-in-law, named Abu al-Mansur Khan, in this text. According to al-Husaini, Safdar Jang was annoyed with the loss of power and requested the emperor to permit him to return to Awadh, where he was the governor. When Ahmad Shah Bahadur allowed him to leave, the eunuch Jawed Khan sent letters to Safdar Jang's enemy, the Afghan Ahmad Khan Bangash, informing him that Safdar Jang had left Shahjahanabad, and that he should be killed *en route* to Awadh.⁹⁸ Safdar Jang, however, intercepted some letters, foiling the eunuch's attempt to assassinate him. Safdar Jang cleverly carried out his revenge, which is dramatically rendered in this account: Safdar Jang invited the eunuch Jawed Khan to dine with him at his residence. Jawed Khan's loyal advisors and well-wishers warned him saying that he should not be led astray by Safdar Jang's sweet words and flattery. Not heeding their sound advice, Jawed Khan accepted the invitation, and "with his own feet he set out to his killing ground."⁹⁹ This, the author writes, was the result of fate. When Jawed Khan arrived in Safdar Jang's residence, he was treated with refined hospitality and it soon dawned on him that like a bird caught in a trap, he had no choice but to patiently await his fate. And so, Jawed Khan sat with a heart full of trepidation, while Safdar Jang performed all the rites and customs of being a generous host with eloquent praise for his guest. The food was served and "the *khwāja sarā* (eunuch) whose luck had turned ate some morsels that had remained from the daily portion from fate...from the same bowl as his host."¹⁰⁰ As Jawed Khan smelled the garlic in the food he stopped eating and recited a couplet: "Oh regret! We have eaten from the colorful cloth of

⁹⁸ al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 236.

⁹⁹ al-Ḥusainī, 237.

¹⁰⁰ al-Ḥusainī, 238.

life for some moments, and then they said: ‘enough!’”¹⁰¹ Safdar Jang and Jawed Khan washed their hands, and it was as if Jawed Khan was washing his hands from life. Safdar Jang suggested that they should meet in private, away from others so that he may reveal some secrets to him. Safdar Jang then took Jawed Khan, like a lamb about to be sacrificed, to the place where he was destined to die:

At this time, Muhammad Ali Khan, the guard, and some others had been sitting in the ambush of revenge and like hunters had fixed their eyes on the approach of the prey. He entered through the door and Muhammad Ali Khan brought out a knife sharper than lightening which he had hidden in his sleeve waiting for the proper opportunity, he drew it out quickly, and skillfully brought it to the side of *khwāja sarā* and from the other side with one stroke Muhammad Ali Khan separated Jawed Khan’s head from his body.¹⁰²

When word of Jawed Khan’s murder reached the ears of the Mughal court, the emperor fell into a deep state of melancholy; his mother, on the other hand, whom the author describes as stronger than her son,¹⁰³ immediately wrote letters to the governor of Punjab, Muin al-Mulk, and his nephew, Feroze Jang III Ghazi al-Din, also known as Imad al-Mulk. She reminded them of their ancestors’ loyal service to the house of Timur and beseeched them to come immediately to Delhi and correct the injustice carried out by an Iranian who had once been a loyal servant, but now had become a disloyal rebel.¹⁰⁴ According to the author, she wrote about Safdar Jang: “the Iranians have closed their eyes from the rights of taking salt: they have turned away from this, they have

¹⁰¹ al-Ḥusainī, 238.

¹⁰² al-Ḥusainī, 238.

¹⁰³ al-Ḥusainī, 239.

¹⁰⁴ al-Ḥusainī, 239.

collected followers, and they have girded their loins with the belt of enmity and disloyalty, and they sit in the place of eating salt while breaking the salt.”¹⁰⁵ Imad al-Mulk took advantage of this opportunity and engaged in fighting against Safdar Jang, who allied with Suraj Mal Jat and the Maratha leader Malhar Rao, for over four months. When there was no end in sight, notables beseeched the emperor to end the bloodshed, which was only resulting in the death of Muslims. He acquiesced and forgave Safdar Jang, and commanded Imad al-Mulk to return to Delhi. Imad al-Mulk was unhappy with this result, as the author says, he did not like peace and was a lover of war.¹⁰⁶ As this was his disposition, Imad al-Mulk plotted to remove the Mughal emperor, Ahmad Shah Bahadur, from power. He ordered one of his assistants, Aqabat Mahmud, to bribe the gatekeepers of the artillery and when the time was right, he freed one of the Mughal princes from prison, placing him on the throne, while his brother Saif al-Din removed Ahmad Shah Bahadur and his mother from the royal harem in a secret, albeit disgraceful manner, and then imprisoned them both.¹⁰⁷ After Alamgir II ascended the throne, Imad al-Mulk immediately paid his obeisance. Alamgir II was not wise enough to rid himself of Imad al-Mulk, and out of “stupidity and fear,”¹⁰⁸ Alamgir II kept Imad al-Mulk in his position as the vizier. Imad al-Mulk inquired what should be done about the dethroned emperor and his mother, and the new emperor said that they should remain in prison and not be killed. Imad al-Mulk was restless with this decision, and took it upon himself to ensure that Ahmad Shah Bahadur would be incapable of returning to the throne. He

¹⁰⁵ al-Ḥusainī, 239. Salt is a symbol for loyalty. It is very much like the saying, “Don’t bite the hand that feeds you.” One is not supposed to be disloyal to the one who provides safety and employment.

¹⁰⁶ al-Ḥusainī, 246–7.

¹⁰⁷ al-Ḥusainī, 257.

¹⁰⁸ al-Ḥusainī, 257.

ordered Aqabat Mahmud, his trusted servant, to blind both Ahmad Shah Bahadur and his mother. Soon after Aqabat Mahmud successfully carried out his orders, Imad al-Mulk killed him, for no apparent reason.¹⁰⁹ This, however, was swift justice, according to our author.¹¹⁰ In a short period of time, Imad al-Mulk assassinated Alamgir II and had the Marathas kill Shah Jahan III, who would have been the next successor.

Al-Husaini devotes many pages on the Mughals and their lack of sovereignty. The emperors have no power. Political and governmental affairs had fallen to eunuchs, women, and greedy viziers. Internal tensions and disputes that led to battles and wars represented confusion and weak leadership. Ahmad Shah, on the other hand, masterfully commanded his domains and his subjects. It would only be fitting, then, that Ahmad Shah be accepted as the sovereign in Hindustani territories as well.

8 – Mir: A Counter-Perspective

The eighteenth century Urdu poet, Mir Muhammad Taqi, *nom du plume*, Mir, wrote a first person narrative account of his life in latter part of the eighteenth century in Persian. He completed his account in either 1772-3 or 1782-3. Mir internally refers to this text as *ahwāl-i khūd*, his life events.

Mir’s father, Mir Muhammad Ali, was a pietistic saint who traveled, often without food or provisions. On one such journey, from Lahore to Delhi, which took him ten to twelve days, he confronted a “fake” saint. Mir’s father was critical of this saint because he was extorting money

¹⁰⁹ al-Ḥusainī, 258.

¹¹⁰ al-Ḥusainī, 258.

from innocent people by making false promises to them. When Mir's father reached Delhi, his reputation as a great saint became known and royal nobles of the Mughal court were attracted to him, including Samsam al-Daula. Mir's father was annoyed with this unwanted attention and resolved to leave Delhi.

On day, along his journey, Mir's father sat to rest and a beautiful young male approached him. The young boy was drawn to Mir's father and sat at his feet. When questioned about himself, the youth responded that he was getting married, to which Mir's father joked that he was about to entrap himself. After Mir's father left from there and returned home, the youth went searching for him. When at last he found him, he asked to be his disciple, which Mir's father accepted. This young man became like an uncle to Mir, and over time this uncle would become well known as a revered saint in his own right. Through this uncle, Mir met another saint, Ihsan Allah, who was poisoned by local robbers. These bandits had witnessed a provincial governor give the saint gold coins after consulting with him. His uncle, too, died. Mir describes it happened on the day of the 'Id festival. His uncle had returned home when a pain in his chest consumed him. The pain tortured him throughout the night and finally at day break, he breathed his last. Thereafter, his father caught a fever, and for a month he struggled with being ill. The fever set into his bones and one day he refused to take any more medicine. He told his eldest son, who was Mir's half-brother, to bring his only possessions, namely three hundred books, in front of him so that they may be divided equally between his three sons. The son reasoned that he was the only student in the family and the other two boys would misuse the books. Mir's father became angry with him gave him a lecture about his selfishness, but then agreed to let him have the books. He instructed Mir to pay back the debt of three hundred rupees that were due to people in the market, and Mir worriedly said that there was nothing of value in the house that could be sold in order to pay the debt. His father reassured

him and told him that payment due to him was on its way, but he would not survive until it arrived. His father took his last breath. Mir was inconsolable when he passed away. His half-brother, who is never named in the account, left the family with his books, leaving Mir to deal with debt that was owed. People came to help him and offered two hundred rupees, but Mir did not accept the money, just as his father would not have. Soon, his father's disciple, Sayyid Mikmal Khan, came to their home and gave a bill of payment worth five hundred rupees to Mir. Mir paid off the debt, and with the remaining funds, he used one hundred for his father's funeral. He buried his father by his spiritual master.

Mir tried to find work near their home, but was not successful. He decided to try his luck in Delhi. After much struggle, he met with Khwaja Muhammad Basit, the nephew of Samsam al-Daula. Khwaja Muhammad Basit presented Mir to his uncle and when asked whose son he was, he responded that he was the son of the dervish Mir Muhammad Ali. Samsam al-Daula realized that Mir's presence in Delhi meant that the latter had died. Samsam al-Daula gave Mir his condolences and said that because his father had served him in the past, he would give the child (Mir) one rupee a day while he stayed in Delhi.

While Mir resided in Delhi, he spent time with Siraj al-Din Ali Khan Arzu (d. 1756), the maternal uncle of his elder half-brother. Mir's half-brother hated Mir so much that he wrote to Arzu telling him to kill Mir, so Mir was forced to be alone, once again. Mir started to become known for his Urdu poetry and he attracted the attention of nobles, including the vizier Qamar al-Din's sister's son, Riayat Khan. Riayat Khan became his patron and Mir accompanied him on campaigns. In 1748, when Ahmad Shah Abdali came to Hindustan to maintain the treaty between Nadir Shah and Muhammad Shah, Mir went to Riayat Khan, Qamar al-Din, and the prince Ahmad Shah Bahadur with the Mughal army to confront Ahmad Shah Abdali and his troops. According

to Mir, this battle resulted in Ahmad Shah's defeat, and writes that Ahmad Shah was no better than a beggar, attempting to gain power. He writes:

Every day there is a new master of the world,
Is power a beggar, going from door to door?

Mir's patron, Riayat Khan was appointed as the head of Raja Bakht Singh's army, but after an altercation between the two, Raja Bakht Singh let him go with full pay.

One evening, at a gathering, Riayat Khan asked Mir to teach a young boy some poetry in *rekhtī* (mixed dialect, Hindustani/Urdu) that the young boy could then sing to Riayat Khan. Mir took this as an affront, but taught the young boy a few lines. Mir left the service of Riayat Khan, as his pride would not allow him to endure any more such insults. Mir was employed by Ahmad Shah Bahadur's chief eunuch, Nawab Bahadur Jawed Khan.

Mir accompanied Safdar Jang when Qaim Khan (son of Muhammad Khan Bangash) was killed by the Rohillas. Safdar Jang and the Mughals were defeated by the Rohilla and Bangash Afghans, and Mir was part of the defeated troops. In Mir's account, he writes that that Safdar Jang defeated the Afghans the second time and he does not mention Safdar Jang inviting and allying with Malhar Rao and Suraj Mal Jat who joined his cause, or that the news of Ahmad Shah Abdali's arrival led to a truce between Safdar Jang and the Rohillas.

When Safdar Jang killed Ahmad Shah Bahadur's chief eunuch Jawed Khan who was Mir's patron, Mir lost his position. He was recruited by Safdar Jang's divan and he accepted the new position. This, however, did not last long, as Safdar Jang's initiation of the civil strife and internal war between the Mughal army (Ahmad Shah Bahadur called upon Imad al-Mulk to assist him) and Safdar Jang who allied with Suraj Mal Jat left Mir unemployed once again. During this internal

strife, Mir stayed with Amir Khan who was a poet, who waged a war against Ali Muhammad Khan Rohilla, resulting in his death. Mir managed to survive even though he lived in Amir Khan's house.

After the truce was concluded between Suraj Mal Jat, Safdar Jang, and Imad al-Mulk, Imad al-Mulk displaced the interim vizier, his uncle Intizam al-Duala. Imad al-Mulk then had Ahmad Shah Bahadur blinded and deposed, while he placed Bahadur Shah's grandson with the royal name, Alamgir II, on the throne. Mir happened to be with Ahmad Shah Bahadur when he was captured and blinded by Imad al-Mulk's man. Mir hid in seclusion and returned home. For Mir, these events were wrong. People with no intellectual ability to govern were put into positions of power, such as Samsam al-Daula who became the Amir al-Umara. Raja Nagar Mal was promoted to the position of Naib Vizier with new titles including Maharaja and Umdat al-Mulk. Raja Nagar Mal had served in the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah's diwan.

In 1756-7, Ahmad Shah Abdali returned to Hindustan and during this time Mir was in Lahore. Mir writes, "there is no tyranny or oppression that the worthies of that city did not suffer." Soon after, Ahmad Shah continued to Delhi. According to Mir, there was no one who was able to oppose Ahmad Shah (since Muin al-Mulk had fallen "from his horse and died.") The Mughals, not acting quickly enough, had no choice but to meet Ahmad Shah (rather than oppose him militarily). Raja Nagar Mal and other nobles of Delhi sought refuge in Suraj Mal Jat's forts, while Ahmad Shah Abdali and his troops occupied Delhi and resided there for one month. Mir writes,

For nearly a month the city [of Delhi] suffered extreme hardship. Then the [Durrani] king returned the imperial authority [saltanat] to Alamgir [II] and, taking the Vazir [Imad al-Mulk] into custody, set out for Akbarabad. His army stretched forth its hand of destruction, and Mathura, which was a prosperous and populous city, eighteen kurohs [36 km] this way, was put to the sword. When the air turned evil with the stench [of dead bodies], the [Durrani] king, fearful of plague, decided not to settle the issue with Suraj Mal at that time; he suddenly broke camp, and after

taking for his wife a daughter of Muhammad Shah, hurried away [without again entering Delhi].¹¹¹

Imad al-Mulk stayed near Akbarabad, while Najib al-Daula was promoted to the rank of Mir Bakhshi and Mukhtar by Ahmad Shah Abdali. Imad al-Mulk joined Maratha chiefs, Ahmad Khan Bangash, and Raja Nagar Mal to oppose Najib al-Daula. Najib al-Daula had closed the gates of Delhi, and Raja Nagar Mal advised his companions that they should not attack the city, as plundering the city would not benefit them in the long run. They managed to come to a truce with Najib al-Daula: he would return to Saharanpur, while Ahmad Khan Bangash was made the Mir Bakhshi, Raja Nagar Mal's eldest son was appointed the superintendent of the artillery, and the Deccan army retreated back to the south.

Mir, on the other hand, had not yet found employment and was facing difficulties. He went to Raja Jugal Kishore in search for employment. This Raja said that he was too poor to replace his own hole-ridden shawl, let alone able to employ someone. Raja Jugal Kishore took Mir to Raja Nagar Mal who hired him. Raja Nagar Mal was pleased with Mir's poetry, saying that "each verse of Mir's is like a pearl of strings. I find his style [*tarz*] most pleasing."¹¹²

In the meantime, the Marathas, according to Mir, thought the country was theirs and engaged themselves in fighting the Afghans, especially Ahmad Shah Abdali and Najib al-Daula. Mir writes, "When they heard that Timur Shah, the son of the Durrani king, and Jahan Khan, the commander of the garrison, had only a small number of soldiers with them, they attacked Lahore,

¹¹¹ C. M Naim, *Zikr-I Mir : The Autobiography of the Eighteenth Century Mughal Poet, Mir Muhammad Taqi 'Mir', 1723-1810* (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 77–8.

¹¹² Naim, 79.

ignoring any thought of what terrible consequences there might be.”¹¹³ Timur Shah, Ahmad Shah’s son, was unable to fight the Marathas, and he fled. The Marathas took control of the region, up to Attock, and a Maratha named Sahiba Sindhia was appointed to govern the region. The Marathas went back to the Deccan. They returned to Punjab in 1758-9 and plundered the region. Datta, the uncle and guardian of Janko, conspired with the Mughal emperor, Alamgir II, and vizier to attack Najib al-Daula. In September 1759, Najib al-Daula fought the Marathas by the banks of the Ganges, but this battle was inconclusive. While the Marathas were fighting Najib al-Daula, Imad al-Mulk’s companions reasoned that if they did not help the Marthas defeat Najib, the Marathas might choose to turn south and attack Delhi instead. After asking the emperor to join them, who refused, the vizier, with his friends, went to aid the Marathas. In late November, 1759, some of Imad al-Mulk’s friends returned to Delhi with supplications to the emperor to forgive their external act of transgression, and to assure him that they only pretended to side with Imad al-Mulk, but were, in reality, loyal to him the emperor. They persuaded the emperor to consult a holy man, who was leaving town soon, and so advised Alamgir II to go see him that very evening. These nobles accompanied the Mughal emperor Alamgir II to the fort where the holy man was allegedly staying, and upon entering, they stabbed him to death. They threw his body below the fortress wall. That evening, they went into the home of Intizam al-Daula, and they strangled him, while he was praying. They took the body out of the house, in secret, and drowned the body in the river. Alamgir II was buried that night by his family members, but in silence and without ceremony.

Imad al-Mulk returned to the fort with his companions the next morning and placed Shah Jahan III on the newly vacated throne. They returned to join the Marathas to fight Najib al-Daula.

¹¹³ Naim, 80.

Everyone learned, a week later, that Ahmad Shah Abdali had crossed the Attock, defeated the Maratha general Sahiba Sindhia in Punjab, and was marching east to join Najib al-Daula. The Marathas left Najib, marched west, halted at Panipat, and then continued to Karnal. Mir writes that when the two armies faced each other, one morning, a small group of Afghans soundly defeated the first flank of Maratha soldiers, some eight thousand. Mir writes that “Mighty tyrants were humbled, and the boastful had their jaws broken. Their [the Maratha’s] bloodthirsty opponents fought fiercely and killed so many in just a brief spell. Now the soldiers on this [the Marathas] side were scared and their hearts trembled.”¹¹⁴ The Marathas scattered, and Ahmad Shah Abdali’s army crossed the river, moving further east.

Najib al-Daula went to meet Ahmad Shah Abdali after he set up camp in the trans-Gangetic plain. The Marathas situated themselves near the river, and gave orders to Imad al-Mulk to return to Delhi to reinforce the city from attack. Rohilla Afghans, with Ahmad Shah Abdali’s troops, fought against the Marathas, and one day, a bullet hit Datta, the uncle and guardian of Janko. The Marathas fled the battlefield, leaving behind Datta’s body. The Afghan troops pursued the Marathas, killing and looting them during the pursuit. They then headed towards Delhi to occupy and plunder it. Mir, who stayed in the city to protect his family, describes:

At dusk it was publicly announced that the Shah [Abdali Durrani] had proclaimed peace for the city, therefore its citizens need not worry. But, after a part of the night had passed, the plunderers stretched forth their hand of tyranny and set fire to the city. They burned and plundered. In the morning—which was like the morning of Doomsday—the armies of the Shah and the Rohilla [Najib al-Daulah] poured in and set about looting and killing. They knocked down doors of the houses and tied up the owners, and some they burned while others they beheaded. A world was destroyed. They did not let up for three days and nights. Nothing was spared in the way of food and clothing. Roofs were dug up; walls were pulled down. Breasts were torn open; hearts were charred. Those evil ones were on every terrace and

¹¹⁴ Naim, 82–3.

height, while the good people of the city had nowhere to hide. Those who had been masters were now in dire straits; and those who had been revered could not even quench their thirst. The recluses were pulled out of their corners. The wealthy were turned into beggars. Those who once set the style in clothes now went naked; and those who owned property were now homeless. Most of the people were in the worst shape, and they then were also disgraced in every public place. Many of them, caught in this mayhem, [even] had their wives and children snatched from them. A terrible host trampled the city and caused death and destruction to all and sundry. [86] The nobility suffered; many of them faced death. The soldiers slashed and wounded, and abused and cursed. They grabbed whatever riches they found, while their words poured salt on their victims' blood. Anyone they encountered they looted so thoroughly that he had nothing left to cover his nakedness. Countless people departed from this unhappy world, and countless were dishonoured. The New City [Shahjahanabad] was turned to rubble. On the third day, a martial law [nasaq] was declared under Anzala Khan, a member of the Imperial Guards [nasaqci bashi]; he robbed the people of even their caps and shirts. Eventually the sergeants at arms [qadghanciyan] forced the plunderers out of the city and set about organising some protection. Meanwhile the savages attacked the Old City and started killing its people. All this carnage continued for seven or eight days. No house was left with a suit of clothes or a day's food. The men lost their caps, and the women their black chadors. The people could not even go begging for food for all the roads were closed. A large number of them died from the cold, their jaws locked together. [The Shah's soldiers] plundered shamelessly and paid no heed to anyone. They took away food grain from the hungry, then sold it at a high price to the poor. The cries of the devastated people of the city reached the seventh heaven, but they went unheard by the Shah, who remained engrossed in his own thoughts, since he regarded himself a dervish. Thousands of wretches, in the midst of that raging fire, scarred their hearts with the mark of exile and ran off into the wilderness and, [87] like lamps at dawn, died in the cold air—while the blackguards tied up innumerable defenceless people with ropes and dragged them off to their own camp. It was a reign of tyrants.¹¹⁵

About his own state, Mir writes: “I, who was already a beggar, became poorer still. I was left destitute and penniless, and my humble abode, which was on the main road, was levelled to the ground. In short, those shameless brutes carried away with them [all that was in] the city, while the notables of the city were disgraced and lost their lives.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Naim, 83–5.

¹¹⁶ Naim, 85.

Ahmad Shah Abdali put Shah Jahan III back into confinement and put the son of Ali Gauhar, regnal title Shah Alam II, on the throne until Shah Alam II returned to Delhi. Ahmad Shah Abdali then left the city to confront the Marathas who had raised more troops and intended to fight once again. The Afghan army had crossed the Jamna river, and Ahmad Shah Abdali met with Najib al-Daula, Shuja al-Daula, Ahmad Khan Bangash, and Hafiz Rahmat Khan.

Sadashiv Rao Bhao went to Suraj Mal Jat's territories and secured an alliance with the vizier and Raja Nagar Mal, then took possession of Delhi. A relative of Ahmad Shah Abdali's vizier, Shah Wali Khan, a man named Yaqub Ali Khan, had been left in charge of the fort. Yaqub Ali Khan initially attempted to stand his ground, and the Marathas attacked the citadel and destroyed many royal houses. Yaqub Ali Khan settled a truce with the Marathas because Ahmad Shah Abdali and his troops could not re-cross the river, due to heavy rains rendering the river impassible.

Amongst this chaos, Mir asked Raja Nagar Mal if he may leave and take his family to safety. The Raja agreed and Mir put his trust in God and they journeyed, covering some eight or nine kurohs a day (approximately sixteen to eighteen kilometers). En route, they met with Raja Jugal Kishore's wife who happened to pass through the same caravanserai as Mir. She insisted that they join her to Barsana, which he describes as a "town [qasba] eight kurohs [16 kms] this side of the forts of Suraj Mal, with a [major] Hindu temple—and with many gifts and favours relieved our pain."¹¹⁷ Mir and his family remained there for ten days, then traveled to Kumher. There, Bahadur Singh, the son of Lala Radha Kishan (treasurer of Safdar Jang), met with Mir and his family and befriended them.

¹¹⁷ Naim, 87.

The Maratha chief fought with the *faujdār* of Sirhind and with Najabat Khan, a Rohilla, and emerged victorious. The Maratha forces, seeing victory, continued to Panipat and set up camp to fight Ahmad Shah Abdali and his troops in open warfare. Ahmad Shah and his Rohilla and Bangash allies crossed the river that finally receded and rushed towards Panipat. A few days before the battle, Ahmad Shah Abdali and his troops ambushed a retinue of Maratha soldiers, led by Gobind Pandit. Gobind Pandit was killed and his goods were plundered while his troops scattered.

Mir, who had been living in Kumher, went to pay obeisance to Raja Nagar Mal who had recently arrived there. Mir inquired if he may take leave, and the Raja, not wanting to put Mir in harm's way, gave him money and assured him that he would be paid a regular salary. Mir writes that the Raja decided to reside in Kumher too, he explains: "When this great man saw that Shahjahanabad was nothing but a wasteland, that people had their houses destroyed twice [first by Afghans and second by Marathas] in one year, that one could not go on for ever living like a gypsy, that here was a place of refuge and that the master of the place was not vainglorious but accommodating—he decided to settle down."¹¹⁸

From news reports and rumors in circulation, Mir describes the events that transpired in Panipat between the Marathas and Afghans. He speculates that had the Marathas fought the way they usually did, the method of "attack and withdraw," they might have won. Because they had settled in one place, they were more vulnerable. The Afghans burned the surrounding areas, thereby cutting off any supply for food from the land that the Marathas could have procured. As the Maratha army weakened due to starvation and smaller attacks, they finally decided to engage in open battle. Mir writes that the Maratha prince and heir-apparent, Visvas Rao was fatally shot

¹¹⁸ Naim, 91.

in the battle and Bhao, who witnessed his death resolved to fight until death, with honor, because he could not return to the Deccan a defeated man. Bhao was killed, and Malhar Rao, “that cunning old wolf, took some two or three thousand men with him and escaped from the massacre.”¹¹⁹ Mir writes that the public display of their defeat was known to all: “As hordes of these bedraggled wretches drifted through the countryside, people could see how the mighty have fallen. The villagers gave each of them a handful of parched grain, and thanked God as they compared their condition with their own.”¹²⁰ Many Marathas, who were spared in battle, died from hunger or the cold. The Afghans obtained much wealth and weapons from the fallen Marathas. Mir says that “The Durrani who had been mere paupers now became wealthy beyond imagination... After this victory, the like of which had not been gained even by ancient kings, the Shah [Abdali Durrani] entered the city with full pomp and glory.”¹²¹

Ahmad Shah Abdali issued royal decrees summoning all the nobles to come into his presence to pay their respects. Mir states that Raja Nagar Mal was summoned, and he too went because he thought “now the Shah has become the Emperor of Hindustan [*badshah-i hindustan*] and is not likely to leave this rich land, and I’ll have to serve him anyway—and so he went.”¹²² Raja Nagar Mal was given the rank of deputy prime minister [*niyabat-i vizarat*] and given his own seal. Raja Nagar Mal was then apprised of Shuja al-Daula’s disrespect towards Ahmad Shah. Although Shuja al-Daula had fought alongside Ahmad Shah, he “put on airs.” The Afghan vizier advised Raja Nagar Mal and Najib al-Daula to warn Shuja al-Daula that Shuja “does not

¹¹⁹ Naim, 92.

¹²⁰ Naim, 92.

¹²¹ Naim, 92.

¹²² Naim, 92.

understand that [he is dealing with] a king whose merest gesture of annoyance can turn the world upside down. One ought to be careful.”¹²³ Raja Nagar Mal and Najib al-Daula told Shuja al-Daula that his “boastful ways greatly displease [the Shah], but he does not say anything out of regard for [Shuja’s] support. But one must not delude oneself and turn haughty.” Mir follows the warning with a couplet: “The kingly and the pious, both are a strange breed / They were never subservient to anyone, nor will they ever be.”¹²⁴ Raja Nagar Mal and Najib al-Daula counseled Shuja al-Daula and brought him to Ahmad Shah’s court. Shuja was submissive and the encounter was harmonious.¹²⁵

Mir accompanied Raja Nagar Mal to Delhi and documented the abandoned state of the city. He grieves the loss of life in verse and prose:

Everyone I asked for was said to be not there anymore;
Everyone I inquired about was said to exist no more.

The once lofty city had fallen to ruin: “Houses had collapsed. Walls had falled down. The hospices were bereft of Sufis. The taverns were empty of revellers. It was a wasteland, from one end to the other.”¹²⁶ He reminisces about the times when he was happy in poetry gatherings among friends and mourns the loss of merry company, swearing that he will never return to the city again.¹²⁷

¹²³ Naim, 92.

¹²⁴ Naim, 92.

¹²⁵ Naim, 93.

¹²⁶ Naim, 93.

¹²⁷ Naim, 94.

In the meantime, Ahmad Shah's army wanted to leave. Mir describes the situation, worth citing in full:

The soldiers of the Shah's army—rich as they were with all the booty—gathered at [the Shah's] door and began to shout: "We are going home. Let the Shah stay on if he so wishes. We have devotedly performed our duties long enough. But we have not had any news of our wives and children." The Shah thought over the matter and realised that he could not stay in a strange land without his army. Reluctantly, he decided to return to Qandahar, his capital...He then...made Javan Bakht the heir-apparent of Shah Alam, and placed the city in Najib-ul-Daulah's custody. Two days later he left. On the way back, he appointed Zain Khan, an Afghan of his clan, the *faujdar* of Sirhind. He then proceeded on to Lahore.

The arrogance of these people [the Afghans] had crossed all limits; and so God, in his justice, decided to humiliate them at the hands of the Sikhs—men of no consequence; silk-makers; cotton-dressers; cloth merchants; market touts; grain dealers; carpenters; highway robbers; peasants; lowly men of no means, name or place; mean, destitute and disreputable people of that area. Some forty or fifty thousand of them came together and challenged the mighty army.... In short, these unworthy wretches [*be nāmūsān-i be-daulat*] humiliated those vainglorious brutes [*be-haqīqatān-i be-muravvat*] to such an extent that the chiefs of that region, on hearing of what had been happening, also stopped showing [the Afghans] any respect.¹²⁸

According to Mir, Ahmad Shah was unable to fight in Hindustan and left for safety. He appointed a Hindu as the governor of Lahore, but he was killed by the Sikhs soon after. The annual revenue of Lahore was two crore rupees. About Sikh rule, Mir remarks, "Since there was no proper heir, these wild commoners divided up the country among themselves and opened the door of favours to their subjects. In other words, since they did not know how to rule properly, they accepted whatever the peasants gave them off-handedly and considered that good enough."¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Naim, 94–5.

¹²⁹ Naim, 95.

Mir was a harsh critic of everyone who attempted to come into power, including the Marathas, Sikhs, Afghans, and even some of his patrons who paid his salary. And yet, there is enough evidence to indicate that kingship and sovereignty were God-given. For example, he writes, “Not for nothing does God give power to someone.”¹³⁰ Mir was a Muslim by birth, and had strong connections to mystic interpretations of Islam. The politics of power, for him, though, had very little to do with fighting for the sake of religion. He evaluated the people who came into power based on their ability to maintain peace, to keep cities inhabited, people employed (especially poets, like himself), and so on. Mir worked for Muslim and non-Muslim patrons, as long as they respected him and followed the protocol of how one should treat their poets. Marathas and Afghans plundered Delhi a number of times during his lifetime, and his descriptions of the aftermath is remarkable. His account and his life shed light on how people managed to survive, mostly by leaving the city and finding refuge in other places and patrons.

Conclusion

Acceptance of the sovereign, as it is constructed in the *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī* determined whether a person would be deemed as an insider or an outsider—and not the person’s ethnicity, profession, practice of a specific religious interpretation, class, regional belonging, or family history. Those within the fold were undifferentiated, and were referred to as the *īl-i jalīl durrānī*, the glorious Durrani tribe, or the “victorious troops”, or the “brave men,”¹³¹ and so on. In an attempt to bring Afghans of different genealogies and other ethnic groups within the fold of his

¹³⁰ Naim, 100.

¹³¹ It is literally men, there is no mention of women on the campaigns; very few women are mentioned at all and if they are it is because they are connected to the house of an emperor.

empire, Ahmad Shah referred to himself and his subjects “*durrānī*” which came from an epithet *durr-i durrānī*, meaning the pearl of pearls. They were one unit, indivisible. Those without the fold were numbered, classified by their ethnicity, religion, or place of origin. The Mughal armies, for example, are numbered and in the description of internal fighting between Safdar Jang and Imad al-Mulk, the makeup of the army also includes ethnic and religious divisions.¹³²

In describing who is included and who is excluded and the implications of inclusion and exclusion, the author sets up multiple dichotomies, and they are literally black and white. The criterion for inclusion and exclusion is not that of religion, ethnicity, kinship, or place of origin. Rather, it is quite simple: those who were favored by God are also the ones who accepted Ahmad Shah as their sovereign and submitted by paying obeisance. As a result, they were protected when they lived and would be protected after they died, and they would not be able to imagine the limitless grace and bounty that would be bestowed on them. Those who did not submit to Ahmad Shah, they were the ignorant ones, led astray by God and themselves. They authored their own ruined fate, in worldly matters, and in the hereafter.

In contrast to Ahmad Shah, who was aligned with and guided by God through *ilhām*, his enemies were inspired by the devil (*waswās*) and led astray by God. Al-Husaini cites the Quranic *āyah*: “Those whom Allah sends astray, none can guide him; and Allah leaves them wandering blindly in their transgressions.”¹³³ In their ignorance and arrogance, they resorted to trickery and deceit, leading others astray by manipulating them through monetary or other favors, as a hunter

¹³² al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*, 235–51.

¹³³ مَنْ يُضَلِّبِ اللَّهُ فَلَا هَادِيَ لَهُ وَيَذَرُهُمْ فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ (7:186) al-Ḥusainī, 73.

sets a trap for birds by throwing seeds.¹³⁴ Despite their machinations against Ahmad Shah, they were eventually defeated and subdued. Ultimately it was not merely a worldly war, it was the cosmic battle between good and evil, light and darkness, God and the devil.

What does this then mean for sovereignty and religion? Religion, as much as it is not the criterion for inclusion and exclusion, was intimately interlinked to ideas of kingship. If one was enlightened enough, or if God had guided him on the straight path, s/he would submit to Ahmad Shah, and then secure safety. Simply being Muslim would not mean that one was protected, nor would it mean that s/he would achieve worldly and spiritual success. For example, al-Husaini describes how Muin al-Mulk's Muslim soldiers were tormented in such a horrible way that, like the day of judgement, mere hours of torture felt like hundreds of years. Despite their confession and practice as Muslims, they were not saved, they were not protected. When Muin al-Mulk eventually submitted to Ahmad Shah, he and the population over whom he governed fell within the protected realm of Ahmad Shah's domains: "because of the limitless, overflowing grace of the Shadow of God, the general population saw the dawn of well-being rise from the east...through the bounty of good fortune, the general populace sat in the place of security (*dār al-amān*)."¹³⁵ Sovereignty was also not tied to a physical space, like a city. As the sovereign moved, so did his shadow of protection. The space he occupied was sovereign space, and due to the power of the unseen, harmony ensued. Lastly, ultimate judgment and justice rested in the hands of the sovereign. Ahmad Shah would punish or pardon as he chose. Noticeably, the author does not include signs that we associate with sovereignty, namely, the recitation of the *khuṭba* and the

¹³⁴ al-Husainī, 73, 95.

¹³⁵ al-Husainī, 223.

minting of coins in the sovereign's name. We know from other sources that this did happen; in fact, the earliest Durrani coin minted in Hindustan was from his first campaign there in 1748. And yet, it is absent in the chronicle. For our author, divine will was manifested through the success or failures of the emperor. If and when the sovereign showed signs that he was not divinely guided, in which case, nature would not harmonize with him and he would fail on the battlefield, then he—like the Mughal emperors Muhammad Shah, Ahmad Shah Bahadur, Alamgir II, Shah Jahan III, and Shah Alam II in this chronicle—would no longer be deemed sovereign.

When we contrast this construction of sovereignty with an eye-witness account of northern Hindustan during the periods when Ahmad Shah campaigned, we see that in reality Ahmad Shah fell short of how he is depicted in his court-commissioned chronicle. Mir Taqi Mir, a Muslim, Sufi, and poet, was very critical of Ahmad Shah—and others who fought for power, including Iranian Muslims, Turk Muslims, Marathas, and Sikhs. Ahmad Shah deserved a fate of losing territories to people less worthy than even the Afghans; namely, the Sikhs. For Mir, God bestows power on men, and there is a reason behind it, even if humans do not comprehend why. Nonetheless, the humans in power are fair targets of criticism, especially if they create havoc and not order.

Chapter Three

Connecting Space: Afghan Networks of Power

In this chapter, we consider how Ahmad Shah Abdali's sphere of influence expanded well beyond the territories acquired by Nadir Shah based on sources composed in Hindustan. Ahmad Shah's sovereignty was both enabled and contested in key cities/areas, such as Multan, Katehr (Rohilkhand), Delhi, and Lahore. The chapter is organized by city—those mentioned in the sources composed in Hindustan under examination here, to highlight Ahmad Shah's spatial reach. A close reading of these sources brings into question whether we can classify Ahmad Shah's attempts to subdue Hindustani territories as foreign invasions.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Muzaffar Alam remind us that what Mughal sovereignty, and the ways the Mughals governed, was never fully systematized.¹ Fiscal, agrarian, and administrative policies were negotiated and altered, even during the most expansive period of Mughal rule, during Aurangzeb's reign. Cities and regions, throughout the Mughal period, could be subdued by opponents, as already described in the first chapter about Qandahar.

Afghan political involvement in Hindustan varied, ranging from being non-participants, to rebels, to allies, and even to rulers. In the eighteenth century, Rohilla and Bangash Afghans acquired vast tracts of land in northern India, along the horse trade routes. In secondary scholarship, the Afghans are noted for their military savviness and for horse-breeding and trading.²

¹ Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State, 1526-1750* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

² See Jos J. L. Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c.1710-1780* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1995); Jos J. L. Gommans, *Mughal Warfare Indian Frontiers and Highroads to Empire, 1500-1700* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003).

It is not coincidental that the Afghans, the Sadozais through Ahmad Shah and others in his clan, or the Rohillas, founded their empires along trade routes, especially for horse-breeding and trade.³

Ahmad Shah leveraged Afghan networks. In Multan, he relied on his family the Durranis (Sadozais), whilst ensuring that he did not give too much power to his family, out of fear that they would replace him. In Delhi and Katehr, also known as Rohilkhand, he allied with Rohilla Afghans and they paid homage and tributes to him willingly and regularly. Close readings of histories and memoirs produced in Multan and Katehr reveal a mutually beneficial relationship between the Afghans residing in these regions and Ahmad Shah Abdali. Specifically, Rohilla leaders' submission to Ahmad Shah gave them access to his army at key moments when they were nearly defeated by the Marathas, Sikhs, Jats, and even Mughal adversaries. In turn, Ahmad Shah procured money from these leaders and his sphere of influence expanded well beyond the agreed upon treaties between Ahmad Shah and the Mughals. The alliance between the Afghan groups kept Maratha expansion at bay, especially after the decisive 1761 Afghan victory at Panipat. Marathas, Sikhs, Mughals, Jats, and Afghans contested for power in Lahore, Multan, Katehr, and Delhi. Alliances between and amongst these groups were made and broken, then re-made and re-broken.

1 – Multan

Multan was a *sūba*, province, one of two that made up Punjab (Lahore being the other). In the eighteenth century it consisted of three or four *sarkārs* (subdivisions of a province, districts): Multan, Dipalpur, Bhakkar, and sometimes Thattah. The province contained eighty-eight *parganas* (districts, smaller units of administration within a *sarkār*). To its east, it bordered Bahawalpur, and to the south, Sindh. Thattah was contested between Multan and Sindh. The

³ See maps in Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c.1710-1780*, 22–3.

Afghans in Multan considered the rulers of Bahawalpur as allies, and often relied on them to mediate with the Mughals. When Sikh incursions moved south, many Afghans from Multan sought refuge in Bahawalpur.⁴ Their relationship were further strengthened when Ali Muhammad Khan (a Mohsinzai Afghan who was appointed as the governor of Multan by Ahmad Shah in 1752) married into the Bahawalpur family.⁵

Shah Hussain Khan (descendant of Malik Saddu, founder of the Saddozai lineage, the family of Ahmad Shah) was the first Saddozai to reside in Multan in 1649. The Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (d. 1666) bestowed Shah Hussain Khan with the rank of 700 (soldiers with horses), a *jāgīr* (“a possession in land granted either in perpetuity or for life, as a reward for services or as a fee”⁶), and the title *wafādār* (trustworthy, true, faithful).⁷ Shah Hussain Khan accompanied and fought alongside Alamgir I (also known as Aurangzeb, d. 1707) and his brother Dara Shikoh (d. 1659) in Qandahar, and later with Alamgir I in the Deccan.⁸ As noted by Christine Noelle-Karimi, “When Aurangzib [*sic*] became emperor (r. 1069-1118/1658-1707), he conferred further *jagirs* [land] in Multan, Siyalkot and Lahore on the Saduzai noble. Shah Hussain Khan's family retained a highly

⁴ Ashiq Muhammad Khan Durrani, *Multan under the Afghans, 1752-1818* (Multan: Bazme Saqafat, 2007), 51.

⁵ Durrani, 51.

⁶ Francis Joseph Steingass et al., *A comprehensive Persian-English dictionary: including the Arabic words and phrases to be met with in Persian literature, being Johnson and Richardson's Persian, Arabic and English dictionary revised, enlarged, and entirely reconstructed = Fārsī Angrizī lughat* (Springfield, VA: Nataraj Books, 2012), 350.

⁷ Durrani, *Multan under the Afghans, 1752-1818*, 14; Christine Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst: Herat and the Mapping of Khurasan (15th-19th Centuries)* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2014), 80. There is very little in the English language on Multan. Durrani's study is a summary of a Persian manuscript, entitled *Tazkirat al-mulūk-i 'ālī-shān* by Ali Muhammad Khan Khudakka Saddozai. It was composed decades after Ahmad Shah's death in 1835. As it was a nineteenth century source, I, sadly, did not scan this manuscript, although it is at the British Library, MS IO 3742. I therefore rely on Durrani's summary and Nejatie's analysis of the same manuscript.

⁸ Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in Its Midst*, 80.

influential position in Multan throughout the Mughal period and eventually served as the governors (*nā'ib nizām*) of the province from 1738 on.”⁹

Ahmad Shah's father's maternal uncle, Sultan Hayat Khan, moved to Multan in 1682 with some five to six thousand relatives due to an unsuccessful confrontation with the Safavids.¹⁰ Zaman Khan, Ahmad Shah's father, and Sultan Hayat Khan's nephew, accompanied Sultan Hayat Khan when he moved to Multan.¹¹ Sultan Hayat Khan, the newly elected leader of the Sadozai Abdali Afghans in Multan, received a stipend of ten thousand per month and five hundred acres of cultivatable land, revenue-free, from Alamgir I (Aurangzeb). Sultan Hayat Khan built a palace, fruit garden, and a mosque. He died in 1729 and was buried in his garden.¹² In Multan, some Sadozai Afghans continued their profession as camel-traders and some managed to enter into administrations as negotiators between the Mughals and Safavids.¹³

Zaman Khan, Ahmad Shah's father, left Multan with Sultan Hayat Khan's son, Abd Allah Khan and went to Safa where he was appointed deputy (*nā'ib*) to Abd Allah Khan. In 1704, Abd Allah Khan returned for a period of four to five years to Multan to see his father Sultan Hayat Khan. In the meantime, Zaman Khan, Ahmad Shah's father, managed the state of affairs in Safa. When Abd Allah Khan returned to Safa, he met with the Ghilzai leader, Mir Wais. Mir Wais colluded with the Abdali leader to fight against the Safavids and help him oust the Georgian governor in Qandahar. After they successfully defeated the Georgians, Mir Wais occupied

⁹ Noelle-Karimi, 81.

¹⁰ Noelle-Karimi, 81; Durrani, *Multan under the Afghans, 1752-1818*, 17.

¹¹ Durrani, *Multan under the Afghans, 1752-1818*, 17.

¹² Durrani, 17.

¹³ Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c.1710-1780*, 35.

Qandahar, but severed his ties with Abd Allah Khan.¹⁴ The Abdalis returned to Safa and fought against both the Ghilzai Afghans and the Safavids. In 1712, the Abdali leader, Sultan Abd Allah Khan subdued Herat and he sat as its autonomous leader.¹⁵

Ahmad Shah's father resided in Herat after his cousin took control over the city. Due to continuing conflict between the Abdalis and Ghilzais, and Abdalis and Safavids, Zaman Khan sent his pregnant wife to Multan to his maternal family's home: "When the disaffection had started in Hirat [*sic*], he had sent his wife Zarghuna 'Alkozai to Multan to his maternal uncle Jalal Khan considering Multan a safe place. Zaman Khan's [Ahmad Shah's father] mother was already staying with her brother Jalal Khan in Multan. Zarghuna gave birth to Ahmad Shah Dur-i-Durrān [*sic*] in Jalal Khan's house in the Kiri Shah Husain Khan in 1722 (1134 AH). The infant was brought up in the house of Jalal Khan where he lived till the age of 7."¹⁶

Ahmad Shah informed Nawab Zahid Khan (governor from 1738-48), his relative in Multan, about his intentions to campaign in Hindustan to secure the territories annexed by Nadir Shah in 1748. Nawab Zahid Khan did not consider it lucrative and sided with Shah Nawaz Khan and the Mughals. An Afghan from Multan, who was not a Saddozai, but from the Mohsinzai family, Ali Muhammad Khan, allied with Ahmad Shah and eventually proved his worth during Ahmad Shah's earlier attempts to defeat the Mughal forces. In 1752, when Ahmad Shah successfully annexed Multan from the Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah, he appointed this Ali

¹⁴ Durrani, *Multan under the Afghans, 1752-1818*, 18.

¹⁵ Durrani, 19.

¹⁶ Durrani, 20. This quote is a translation from the *Tazkirat-ul-Muluk* pp 65, 201-2. According to Durrani, there is a 1752 minted coin in the Lahore Museum.

Muhammad Khan the governor of Multan—not Nawab Zahid Khan, his relative. Ahmad Shah minted coins in his name in Multan that year, in 1752.¹⁷

Ali Muhammad Khan governed from 1752-58 and was considered a “reformer.” According to Durrani, “He [Ali Muhammad Khan] did a lot for the welfare of his people. His rule was sensible and popular. He was a great builder. He rebuilt the rampart of the city. He constructed a very beautiful mosque in 1757 (1171 AH) in the heart of the city, which still exists and is wrongly known as Masjid Wali Muhammad Khan.”¹⁸ In 1758, Marathas occupied Lahore and took over Multan in the same year. They plundered and looted the city, and remained there with an army of six thousand troops. Durrani writes that there was peace until 1758, when the Marathas came. Ali Muhammad Khan was defeated and fled to Khairpur, in Sindh. He remained there for the year that the Marathas stayed in Multan. Finally, Nawab Shakir Khan, the son of the above-mentioned Nawab Zahid Khan (relative of Ahmad Shah), arranged a truce, a payment of thirty thousand rupees to be left alone. The truce between the Afghans and Marathas resulted in peace, but it did not remove Maratha presence from Multan.¹⁹

The Sadozais, including Shakir Khan, and Ali Muhammad Khan wrote letters to Ahmad Shah describing the changed state of affairs. Ahmad Shah decided to return to Hindustan to expel the Marathas from Multan. When news spread that Ahmad Shah began his march in 1759 to the Punjab region, the Marathas abandoned Multan and headed to Lahore and from there proceeded

¹⁷ Durrani, 50; Ganda Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan* (London: Asia Pub. House, 1959).

¹⁸ Durrani, *Multan under the Afghans, 1752-1818*, 51–2.

¹⁹ Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan*, 53.

to Delhi.²⁰ Ali Muhammad Khan returned to Multan and subdued the abandoned Maratha governor, then wrote to Ahmad Shah in Lahore about Multan's restoration into the Durrani empire. Ahmad Shah, pleased with the news, re-instated Ali Muhammad Khan as the governor of Multan.²¹ Due to Marathas plundering the area, Ali Muhammad Khan was unable to pay the annual taxes and revenues to Ahmad Shah. As a result, Ahmad Shah appointed a eunuch, Yaqut Khan, as governor of Multan in 1761. Due to the eunuch's incompetence, Ahmad Shah replaced him with Allah Yar Khan Badozai a few months later. In the meantime, Ali Muhammad Khan collected funds and sent them to Qandahar. Ahmad Shah, seeing Allah Yar Khan Badozai's inability to do the same, re-instated Ali Muhammad Khan once more as the governor in 1761. That year, Ali Muhammad Khan had the walls of the Zakariya shrine built with an inscription that is still legible today. Ahmad Shah agreed to bestow a grant of 1450 rupees annually for the maintenance of the shrine.²² A few years later, residents of Multan wrote to Ahmad Shah complaining that the governor had become too greedy—he even taxed non-taxable lands. In 1762, Ahmad Shah issued a decree (*farmān*) that tax should not be collected from Multan.²³ Ahmad Shah appointed Shuja Khan, Sadozai Nawab Zahid Khan's son (whom Ahmad Shah removed from office for not supporting him in his early campaigns; Shuja Khan was the brother of Shakir Khan, mentioned above) as the governor of Multan and the title of Nawab.²⁴ According to Durrani, when Ali

²⁰ Singh, 55.

²¹ Singh, 55.

²² Durrani, *Multan under the Afghans, 1752-1818*, 58. The full inscription is cited as a footnote by Durrani.

²³ Durrani, 60. According to Durrani's note, a copy of this *farmān* is housed in the library of Syed Muhammad Ramzan Shah Gardezi.

²⁴ Durrani, 60.

Muhammad Khan was informed about Shuja Khan's appointment, he moved to Khaipur (south of Multan and Shirkarpur), and many Afghans accompanied him.

During his short six-month reign, Nawab Shuja Khan founded a new city, Shujaabad, and constructed new forts in Shujaabad and Sikandarabad. He expanded the Shish Mahal in Multan. His daughter, Khan Bibi, developed the town of Khangarh and constructed a fort. More people (especially Afghans) left Multan for Bahawalpur because of Shuja Khan's harsh behavior towards the residents of Multan. Nawab Ali Muhammad and Nawab Shuja Khan fought, and Nawab Shuja Khan was defeated and his troops scattered. Nawab Shuja Khan was caught (serendipitously) and imprisoned in the Multan fort. Ali Muhammad confiscated the lands owned by the Sadozais. The Sadozais wrote letters to Ahmad Shah to intervene and rehabilitate their status.²⁵

In the meantime, Sikhs occupied Lahore. In early 1764, Sikhs defeated Ahmad Shah at the Chenab river and Sikh chiefs wrote to all those who had been appointed by Ahmad Shah to remit revenues due to Ahmad Shah to the Sikhs. Upon hearing the news of the Sikhs moving down south towards Multan, Ali Muhammad Khan publically announced that all residents should enter the walled city with their valuables. Everyone but the Sadozais sought refuge within the walled city. When Sikh troops, led by Hari Singh's son Jhanda Singh, reached Multan, they headed for Kiri Sultan Hayat Khan to seize Sadozai treasure (worth fifty hundred thousand rupees).²⁶ Despite attempting to fight the Sikhs, the Sadozai family and their loyal servants were defeated. Some lost their lives, others were taken captive (and later released—one not for three years—because they were Ahmad Shah's family), and the remaining fled "bare-footed and bare-headed."²⁷ The Kiri

²⁵ Durrani, 60–62.

²⁶ Durrani, 62.

²⁷ Durrani, 63.

was looted and set on fire. The vast treasure, including precious gems, stones, and cash, fell to the Sikhs. The women sought refuge in Kaura Mal's father's home

During the winter of 1764, Ahmad Shah marched to fight the Sikhs. The Baluch leader, Mir Nasir Khan Baluch, allied with him to fight the Sikhs. Together, they defeated the Sikhs who fled to the mountains. In April 1765, Ali Muhammad Khan met with Ahmad Shah in Pakpattan and remitted him revenues from Multan. Ahmad Shah confirmed his appointment as the governor of Multan because he felt that only he (Ali Muhammad Khan) would be able to keep the Sikhs at bay and protect Multan.²⁸

After another campaign against the Sikhs in 1767, Ahmad Shah was received by Ali Muhammad Khan in Pakpattan. Together they travelled to Multan and Ahmad Shah held court in the Multan Fort. Many members of his family lodged complaints against the governor and recounted the lack of intervention on Ali Muhammad Khan's part with the Sikhs looted and burned the Kiri Sultan Hayat Khan in 1764.²⁹ Ahmad Shah, after hearing numerous complaints, asked the governor to explain his behavior. Unhappy with his response, Ahmad Shah sentenced Ali Muhammad Khan, his son Ghulam Mustafa Khan, and his three nephews to death. Ali Muhammad Khan pleaded for forgiveness and offered one crore rupees in exchange for their lives.³⁰ Ahmad Shah, upset with this proposition, recalled a letter of complaint written by his relative that described how the Afghan Sadozai women were dishonored during the Sikh attack and declared that one crore rupees was nothing compared to the disgrace faced by his family members.³¹ Ali

²⁸ Durrani, 65.

²⁹ Durrani, 66.

³⁰ Durrani, 67.

³¹ Durrani, 67.

Muhammad Khan, his son, and nephews were executed and Ahmad Shah re-appointed Nawab Shuja Khan as the governor of Multan.³²

In 1768, Sikhs controlled Multan for forty days. Nawab Shuja Khan wrote to Ahmad Shah and asked that he come immediately to help him defend the city. Ahmad Shah dispatched his military commander Jahan Khan and when news of his arrival spread, the Sikhs abandoned the city and fled. The general remained in Multan for the summer, to ensure peace.

Nawab Shuja Khan was unable to suppress local thievery and banditry. Families who were supposed to pay agriculture revenues to the governor refused to pay, because their livestock and animals were stolen regularly. Nawab Shuja Khan, therefore, was unable to pay the revenues to Ahmad Shah. In 1770, Ahmad Shah removed him from office and appointed another Sadozai, Nawab Haji Muhammad Sharif Khan Bahadur-Khel.³³ Nawab Haji Muhammad governed for nine months, and was removed due to inability to maintain peace and pay revenues.³⁴ After some time, Nawab Haji Muhammad convinced Ahmad Shah of his ability and loyalty, and Ahmad Shah appointed him the governor of Dera Ghazi Khan. Nawab Haji Muhammad governed for two years, still never paying the full amount of revenues due to Ahmad Shah, before he was removed from office. Nawab Haji Muhammad owed Ahmad Shah three hundred thousand rupees, and asked Ahmad Shah to pardon the debt. Ahmad Shah forgave it because they were relatives.³⁵

The next governor Ahmad Shah appointed was a Hindu businessman named Dharm Jas in 1771. Dharm Jas was sent by Nawab Shuja Khan to Qandahar with the mission to convince Ahmad

³² Durrani, 67.

³³ Durrani, 69–70.

³⁴ Durrani, 73.

³⁵ Durrani, 74.

Shah to reinstate Nawab Shuja Khan as the governor of Multan. Ahmad Shah decided to appoint the messenger, Dharm Jas, instead (of his own family). Dharm Jas sent his servant, Mirza Sharif Beg Tughlu, to Multan with the *farmān* that named Dharm Jas as the new governor. Mirza Sharif Beg went to Shujaabad to inform Nawab Shuja Khan about Dharm Jas's treachery, then proceeded to Multan with great pomp and declared himself to be Ahmad Shah's appointed governor. According to Durrani, "He went to Multan with great confidence and entered the city from Pak gate. He announced that he was the new *Şūbedār* [*sic*] and showed the royal Farman but did not allow anybody to read the name of Dharm Jas. The people gathered around him. He took over the city single-handedly with sheer intelligence and proceeded towards the Fort in a procession. While reaching near the Fort, he sat down on a cot and asked the people to lift it and placed the royal Farman on his head announcing he was the new *Şūbedār*."³⁶ Nawab Shuja Khan did not intervene. Dharm Jas made his way to Multan and resided in Diwan Mansa Ram's home in April 1771. One morning, while Dharm Jas was on the roof of the house, one of Mirza Sharif Beg Tughlu's men shot and killed him.³⁷

Ahmad Shah learned about Mirza Sharif Beg Tughlu's revolt and sent Abdul Karim Khan Bamezai, as the new governor, to oust the imposter. Abdul Karim Khan besieged the Multan fort for three months. Mirza Sharif wrote to the Sikhs. He offered them a large sum of money in exchange for troops to fight Abdul Karim Khan. Upon hearing about this, Abdul Karim Khan left Multan and returned to Ahmad Shah's court. Ahmad Shah commanded one of his generals, Sardar Bahram Khan Barakzai to settle the affair in Multan. The Sadozai Afghans joined the general and besieged the walled city of Multan. They successfully overtook the city. Sikh leaders Jhanda Singh

³⁶ Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan*, 75.

³⁷ Durrani, *Multan under the Afghans, 1752-1818*, 76.

and Ganda Singh of the Bhangi *misl* (sovereign collective) responded affirmatively to Mirza Sharif Beg's invitation to come to Multan. Sikh troops made their way to Multan and when the general Sardar Bahram Khan heard about their arrival and Ahmad Shah's illness. The general left Multan for Qandahar to attend Ahmad Shah. Nawab Shuja Khan consulted with the other Sadozai leaders and they collectively agreed that it would best if they retreated to Shujaabad, which was considered safer than Multan.³⁸ The Sikh leaders overtook Multan and attempted to siege the fort wherein Mirza Sharif Beg Tughlu retreated. On the day of 'id al-Fitr, Mirza Sharif Beg Tughlu opened the gates to attend prayers at the *'idgāh* (place where people congregate for 'id prayers). The Sikhs attacked and were victorious. They divided Multan territories amongst themselves and Mirza Sharif Beg Tughlu fled. The Bhangi *misl* governed Multan from 1772, the year Ahmad Shah died, until 1780.

Ahmad Shah leveraged familial and ethnic contacts and networks in order to keep and even expand Nadir Shah's territories in north-west Hindustan. His extended family, helped to an extent, but the in-fighting for power limited their strength. Nonetheless, Ahmad Shah was able to ally with the Rohilla chief, who was at the beginning of founding his own empire north-east of Delhi, west of Awadh. This alliance would again prove fruitful in 1761 when they jointly defeated the Marathas in Panipat.

2 – Katehr/Rohilkhand

Yusufzai Afghans lived in the mountain ranges by Peshawar, called Roh. Jos J Gommans describes: "Their [Yusufzai Afghans] migration [to Hindustan] had been part of a whole complex

³⁸ Durrani, 77.

of resettlements and migratory movements following the advent of Turks and Mongols in the area. As the new Islamic sultanates on the subcontinent opened new prospects of employment and trading opportunities, more and more Afghans, most notably in the capacity of merchants or mercenaries, left their homeland in Roh and tried their luck in the promised land of India.” These Yusufzais were eventually known as Rohillas and through trade, military conquest, and agrarian development founded Rohilkhand in the eighteenth century. As their power expanded, indigenous populations began to become associated with the Rohillas, as Gommans explains, “Through this twofold client relationship of *faqīr/hamsayā* and *ghulām*, the conquering elite of Yusufzais could incorporate both the indigenous and the other populations into their own polity.”³⁹ When Rohilla is used, we must bear in mind that the connotation does not necessarily mean that the person was connected through blood to an Afghan genealogy.

2.1 – Rise and Fall of Rohilkhand According to Rustam Ali Bijnori’s *Qissa wa Ahwāl-i Rohīlla: Tārīkh-i ‘Urūj wa Zawāl-i Rohīlla Sardār*

Rustam Ali Bijnori’s *Qissa wa Ahwāl-i Rohīlla: Tārīkh-i ‘Urūj wa Zawāl-i Rohīlla Sardār* is the first known history written in Hindi/Urdu in the Perso-Arabic script.⁴⁰ It was commissioned in 1776 by an East India Company British officer John Harris Ford, also known as Spat Sahib Bahadur, who had initially hired Bijnori to teach him Hindi/Urdu.⁴¹ Bijnori notes that he simply wrote what he heard and knew.⁴² In the English introduction of the edited Urdu text of the history,

³⁹ Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c.1710-1780*, 106.

⁴⁰ Rustam Ali Bijnori, *Qissa wa ahwāl-i Rohīlla: tārīkh-i ‘urūj wa zawāl-i Rohīlla sardār*, ed. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqi (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2005), 26. Bijnori calls the language “*zubān hindī urdū*.” To my knowledge, this text has not been translated into English.

⁴¹ Bijnori, 26.

⁴² Bijnori, 26.

the editor, Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, speculates that Bijnori “could not use harsh language against Safdar Jang and Shuja ud-Daula for their treachery against the Bangash nawab of Farrukhabad and Hafiz Rahmat Khan Rohilla because Katehr had been annexed to Awadh and witch-hunting had begun.”⁴³ Compared to Charles Hamilton’s history of the Rohillas, to be described in more detail below, this text does not describe Safdar Jang or Shuja al-Dawla in pejorative terms; nonetheless, their actions do corroborate with other sources written by the Mughals, and even Ahmad Shah’s court commissioned *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī*. Bijnori’s history centers on Ali Muhammad Khan, and covers the events of northern India from approximately the 1710s, with Dawud Khan (the Afghan who adopted and trained Ali Muhammad Khan) to the 1770s.

After the standard convention of praising God, and the patron of the work, Bijnori begins the history of Rohillas with a man named Hussain Khan Rohilla, from the *bahrīch qaum*. Hussain Khan Rohilla bought a “Khyberī” boy and named him Dawud Khan. When Dawud Khan was a young man, he secretly fled to Peshawar and worked for the governor of Peshawar, Nasir Jang.⁴⁴ After two years, he acquired two thousand rupees and decided to try his fortunes further east in Hindustan. He spent two months in Delhi, but it was not to his liking. He decided to cross the Ganges river and began working for Raja Madhkar in Bichshahabad. In a short period of time, he managed to increase his retinue to three-four hundred riders and foot soldiers and soon befriended Raja Deep Singh. Raja Deep Singh bestowed Dawud Khan with territories, including Ghati Pahar and Kashipur, which yielded annual revenues close to thirteen hundred thousand rupees. Dawud Khan increased his retinue to two-to-three thousand riders and foot soldiers.⁴⁵

⁴³ Bijnori, Introduction 8.

⁴⁴ It is possible this is the same Nasir who was the governor of Peshawar and Kabul whom Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali subdued.

⁴⁵ Bijnori, *Qissa wa ahwāl-i Rohīlla*, 27.

Dawud Khan resolved to kill a local ruler, named Ghanu Bankoli of Bareilly, who would frequently aid and harbor local thieves, including bandits who had stolen from Dawud Khan's land. Dawud Khan decided he would carry out the task of killing him on the occasion of Holi, when the local rulers and their soldiers were high on drugs. In 1730, Dawud Khan murdered the local Hindu ruler, while countless others were killed and many injured. Thirty-two people were captured, and upon examining them, Dawud Khan's eyes fell upon a young boy of ten or eleven years. He was "very beautiful, with rosy cheeks and a white complexion, he had a sweet voice and said lovely things, he was of the jāt *qaum* and named Prem Singh."⁴⁶ When Dawud Khan saw him, he summoned and conversed with him. Dawud Khan was completely taken by him and adopted him as his son. Dawud Khan had him circumcised, marking him a Muslim, and named him Ali Muhamamd Khan.⁴⁷ Within a few years of his adoption, Ali Muhammad Khan excelled in all the arts, ranging from riding horses, shooting rifles and arrows, Arabic and Persian, and matters of religion. Dawud Khan was happy with his progress, and he gathered all the Pathans (Afghans) and named Ali Muhammad Khan his *walī ahad*, heir and successor in 1732.⁴⁸

Deep Singh, observed how popular Dawud Khan was amongst the Pathans, and thought that within four or five years, Dawud Khan would be able to recruit even more Pathans. Deep Singh, threatened by Dawud Khan's potential to rebel against him, wrote a secret letter to a treasurer named Joshi. Deep Singh ordered Joshi to imprison or kill Dawud Khan if he came within Joshi's territories.⁴⁹ The treasurer, Joshi, wrote that Maharaja Iqbal would undertake this task, and

⁴⁶ Bijnori, 28.

⁴⁷ Bijnori, 28.

⁴⁸ Bijnori, 29.

⁴⁹ Bijnori, 30.

it was carried out. After Dawud Khan was killed, Ali Muhammad Khan, unable to seek revenge immediately as his retinue was much smaller than Joshi's, sought refuge in Muradabad under the protection of the local ruler, Azmat Allah Khan.⁵⁰

After this initial loss, Ali Muhammad Khan, with other Afghans, succeeded in conquering new territories, whilst defending the lands they had acquired. At the height of his conquests, Ali Muhammad Khan governed as far east as Shahjahanpur and Shahabad, bordering Awadh, and as far west as Sirhind and Patiala in the province of Punjab, the Himalayan foothills to the north, and Yamuna river to the south, together the region was called Katehr or Rohilkhand. Ali Muhammad Khan chose Aonla as his center and controlled strategic cities such as Sirhind, Sambhal, Bareilly, and Farrukhabad that were important for trade. This large tract of land connected Delhi and the eastern provinces of Awadh, Bihar, and Bengal. Ali Muhammad Khan managed to have most of the territories he conquered to be legitimized by the Mughal center, through the help of the vizier Nizam al-Mulk Qamar al-Din.

In Bijnori's account, when Ahmad Shah set his intentions on Hindustan (his first attack, *pehla hamla*), Qamar al-Din's son, Muin al-Mulk was the governor of Lahore, and after Ahmad Shah crossed the Attock, Muin al-Mulk engaged him in battle, but as people were dying, Muin al-Mulk gave Ahmad Shah money to stop the fighting.⁵¹ During this time, Ali Muhammad Khan, governor of Sirhind, sent Ahmad Shah his two eldest sons, Abd Allah Khan and Faiz Allah Khan with promises of friendship and gifts.⁵² The two sons stayed with Ahmad Shah, until, according to

⁵⁰ Bijnori, 30–1.

⁵¹ This is factually incorrect, Muin al-Mulk becomes the governor of Lahore after his father passes away in 1748. Shahnawaz Khan was the acting governor of Lahore. Bijnori, 42.

⁵² These events are not described in al-Husaini's court history described in the previous chapter.

Bijnori, Ali Muhammad Khan died after a long illness that was incurable, despite calling upon experts in Greek, Arabic, and Indic medicinal training.⁵³ Ali Muhammad Khan was buried in Aonla in September 1748.

Upon his death, Hafiz Rahmat Khan (a “petty horse-dealer and *mullā*...the foremost ideologist of Rohilladom [*sic*] and sovereignty in India”)⁵⁴, Dunde Khan, Bakhshi Sardar Khan, Fateh Khan Khansaman, Miyan Sayid Ahmad, Mir Masum Sahib, Sitar Khan Banirwal, Purmul Khan, Najib Khan, and other Rohilla chiefs gathered in Aonla for a consultation (*jarga*). They unanimously agreed that Ali Muhammad’s third son, Sa’ad Allah Khan, should be seated in his late father’s place.⁵⁵ This news reached Abd Allah Khan and Faiz Allah Khan who were with Ahmad Shah in Qandahar, and they immediately left.⁵⁶ Miyan Qutb Banirwal, with a retinue of ten to twelve thousand riders and foot soldiers, joined the two brothers, and they decided to oppose Sa’ad Allah Khan because they felt, as the elder sons of Ali Muhammad Khan, they had more rights to their deceased father’s seat than their younger brother.⁵⁷ The Mughal vizier, Abu al-Mansur Khan, Safdar Jang, bestowed a robe of honor on Sa’ad Allah Khan. Hafiz Rahmat Khan

⁵³ Bijnori, *Qissa wa ahwāl-i Rohīlla*, 46.

⁵⁴ Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c.1710-1780*, 121.

⁵⁵ Bijnori, *Qissa wa ahwāl-i Rohīlla*, 47.

⁵⁶ The date when the two boys were released from Ahmad Shah’s custody varies in the accounts. According to Ganda Singh, the two boys were released in 1752 after Ahmad Shah subdued Muin al-Mulk. See Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan*, 118.

⁵⁷ Bijnori, *Qissa wa ahwāl-i Rohīlla*, 47. Bijnori writes that the two brothers were excessively angry, and this heated disposition was due to having recently spending time in the “*wilāyat*.”

"عبد الله خان اور فيض الله خان کا ان دنوں بہت گرم تھا اس واسطے سے تازہ ولایت سے تھے۔"

We can then deduce that in latter part of the eighteenth century in Northern India, *wilāyat* refers to Qandahar at the very least.

and other elders decided to partition the territories amongst the three, to avoid conflict.⁵⁸ The vast stretch of land was, therefore, divided amongst the three brothers. The guardian chiefs, including Hafiz Rahmat Khan and Dunde Khan were given parts of Sa'ad Allah Khan's territories.⁵⁹

Mughal nobles and administrators, including Nawab Intizam al-Daula and Abu al-Mansur Khan Safdar Jang, were unhappy with Afghan expansion in the trans-Gangetic plains. Nawab Intizam al-Duala urged the newly ascended emperor Ahmad Shah Bahadur to send troops to Muradabad to reclaim Mughal territories lost to the Afghans.⁶⁰ Likewise, Safdar Jang had lost territories to the Rohillas and he sent his envoy and troops to collect revenues from his lands. The Afghans, who are referred to as Bangash, Rohilla, or Pathan,⁶¹ were not always united against their seemingly common enemy. In fact, in order to convince one group to aid the other when confronted by Mughals, Marathas, or Sikhs, they appealed to each other in various ways. They would use the rhetoric of a shared community (*qaum*),⁶² or dishonor (*zalil karna*).⁶³ Occasionally they used religious rhetoric. Each confrontation resulted in either a win for the Afghans, or a truce between the two parties.

According to this account, after one major loss against the Rohillas, Safdar Jang became so defeated that he hid in seclusion for one week.⁶⁴ Begum Nur Nisa, daughter of Nawab Sa'adat

⁵⁸ Bijnori, 47.

⁵⁹ Bijnori, 47–8.

⁶⁰ Bijnori, 48.

⁶¹ Bijnori, 65. In some instances, Pathan is interchangeable with Afghan. There seems to be a distinction, at times, between Rohillas and Pathans in the account as well.

⁶² Bijnori, 45.

⁶³ Bijnori, 59.

⁶⁴ Bijnori, 62.

Khan Burhan al-Mulk, consoled him and reassured him that whatever had passed was God's will. Safdar Jang was ashamed about his loss and told her: "Indeed, death would have been better than this life. Now all I desire to do is take poison and die."⁶⁵ The Begum responded, with tears in her eyes, that he ought to be patient and not do anything rash. She told him that she had two crore rupees, in hard cash, which he could use to recruit troops from the Deccan and surrounding areas.⁶⁶ Safdar Jang came out of seclusion and began recruiting troops to defeat the Afghans.⁶⁷ With the Maratha army at his side, Safdar Jang once again fought the Afghans. They hid in mountains and dense forests for a few months.⁶⁸ According to this account, the Afghans sent messages to the Maratha leader Malhar Rao to intervene. The Mughal emperor, Ahmad Shah Bahadur, summoned Safdar Jang to return to Delhi immediately because news had spread that Ahmad Shah Abdali had arrived in Peshawar and was planning to march to Lahore.⁶⁹ Malhar Rao, therefore, mediated peace (*sulh*) between the Afghans and Safdar Jang.⁷⁰

When Safdar Jang returned to Delhi, he learned that Nawab Bahadur, also known as Jawed Khan, the Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah Bahadur's chief eunuch, was an encourager of the Afghans (*sā'ī rohīlon aur pathānon ka hai*).⁷¹ Safdar Jang, through trickery, plotted to have the eunuch murdered. On the occasion of the 'id festival, Safdar Jang invited the eunuch. Two guards

⁶⁵ Bijnori, 62.

⁶⁶ Bijnori, 62.

⁶⁷ Bijnori, 62–3.

⁶⁸ Bijnori, 64.

⁶⁹ Bijnori, 64.

⁷⁰ Bijnori, 64.

⁷¹ Bijnori, 65.

were armed with pistols to carry out the task when they saw the eunuch, the first one saluted him, and the second one jumped on Nawab Bahadur and he pointed the pistol to Nawab Bahadur's heart and fired. The vizier, Safdar Jang, decapitated the dead eunuch and threw the body into the river and buried the head in the place where he was murdered.⁷²

Safdar Jang's brutal murder of the emperor's favorite eunuch invited Imad al-Mulk, Ghazi al-Din, the very person whom Safdar Jang had trained, on to the political scene. An internal Mughal civil strife ensued for months inside and outside of the walled city of Delhi. During this internal fighting, Imad al-Mulk invited the Afghans to ally with him. The Afghans gathered to discuss what should be done, and Hafiz Rahmat Khan reasoned, "this struggle is within the royal house, and it will be prolonged. If we leave our places, it will be hard to re-gain the territories."⁷³ Najib Khan, on the other hand, stated "you are all chiefs of King of the land, I am only a soldier, if you permit, I will go to Delhi." He then left with five to six thousand cavalry and foot soldiers with Rao Jeet Singh and his three thousand soldiers.⁷⁴ Eventually, Imad al-Mulk won and Safdar Jang returned to Awadh. He died shortly thereafter, and his son Shuja al-Daula took his position.⁷⁵ Najib Khan was promoted and given land grants (more will be discussed about him below).⁷⁶

Similar to the events discussed in the previous chapter, this account narrates how Ghazi al-Din instructed Aqabat Khan to blind the Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah Bahadur with hot iron

⁷² Bijnori, 65. This account is a variant of the one discussed in the previous chapter. It is noteworthy that the eunuch's death at the hands of Safdar Jang is preserved in multiple sources.

⁷³ Bijnori, 68.

⁷⁴ Bijnori, 68.

⁷⁵ Bijnori, 69.

⁷⁶ Bijnori, 69.

(*mīl*).⁷⁷ Ghazi al-Din placed Muhammad Aziz al-Din on the throne with the regnal title of Alamgir II, and all the notables, including Ghazi al-Din, went that very day to pay homage to the newly ascended emperor. Alamgir II bestowed titles, gifts, and rank upon those who entered his court to pay their salutations.⁷⁸ Najib Khan also paid homage and he was able to retain his lands in Shahrānpur (given to him by the previous emperor).⁷⁹

Soon, news of Ahmad Shah Abdali's arrival to Hindustan reached the ears of the royal court. Ghazi al-Din inquired of Najib Khan if the Afghans would ally with him to fight off Ahmad Shah. Najib Khan, who had witnessed and was unhappy with how Ghazi al-Din had dethroned the Mughal emperor, warned him that the Afghans will not fight against Ahmad Shah Abdali (*rohīla pathān sab ek qaumīyat ke muqābila-i jung ka shah durrānī se nahīn karenge*).⁸⁰ Ahmad Shah had already reached Sirhind, so Ghazi al-Din, out of fear of defeat, decided that it would be best not to fight with him. Najib Khan, Ghazi al-Din, and the Mughal forces marched to Sirhind to meet with Ahmad Shah with gifts and hospitality. When the meeting took place, Ahmad Shah spoke to Najib al-Daula in Pashto (*zubān afghānī*) and rebuked him for giving him gifts, saying that God had bestowed much on him already (Hindi translation in the text: *tū kīyūn lāyā khudā ne mujh ko bhī bahut dā hai*).⁸¹ The following day, Alamgir II met with Ahmad Shah, the Afghan vizier Shah Wali Khan met with Ghazi al-Din, and the two viziers entered Ahmad Shah's presence. *Shāhanshāh* (the king of kings) Ahmad Shah declared that Ghazi al-Din treacherously removed

⁷⁷ Bijnori, 73. There is no mention that Ahmad Shah Bahadur is taken away and imprisoned, only that he is blinded.

⁷⁸ Bijnori, 73.

⁷⁹ Bijnori, 73.

⁸⁰ Bijnori, 75.

⁸¹ Bijnori, 75.

the God-ordained emperor who is the shadow of God, and the royal servants of the entire country have fallen in dishonor. A person like this should be punished. *Shāh* Alamgir II responded in agreement. Ahmad Shah stipulated that there was no reason for him [Ghazi al-Din] to return to his position in the government and it would be better if Najib al-Daula was promoted to the rank of *Mīr Bakhshī*.⁸² Alamgir II responded: “what you have said has been in my heart too, but there has never been a time, since the time of Timur until now, that a *pathān* was raised to the position of the *mansab vizārat* or *amīr al-umarā*.”⁸³ Ahmad Shah decreed, “from my side, Najib al-Daula will be raised to the rank of the *amīr al-umarā* and he will serve you.”⁸⁴ Alamgir II had no response to this declaration. Najib al-Daula was then given the title *Amīr al-Umarā Bakhshī al-Mumālik Najīb al-Daula Bahādūr Sābit Jang Fadawī*.

Bijnori gives more honor to Ahmad Shah in his description of this encounter, which took place in 1757. Bijnori refers to Ahmad Shah as “Shahanshah,” the “king of kings,” while the Mughal emperor Alamgir the II is simply “Shah,” “king.” Ahmad Shah clearly held all of the power, including the ability to decide whether the Mughal Vizier Ghazi al-Din ought to live or die. After this meeting at Sirhind, Ahmad Shah and his troops entered Delhi and Ahmad Shah (like Nadir Shah) was crowned the emperor of Hindustan. During this stay in Delhi, Ahmad Shah married into the Mughal family.

Najib al-Daula sought the Afghan military commander Shah Wali Khan’s counsel and offered to have the Bangash and Rohilla Afghans and even Shuja al-Daula (heir to Safdar Jang)

⁸² Bijnori, 76.

⁸³ Bijnori, 76.

⁸⁴ Bijnori, 76.

present Ahmad Shah with thirty to forty hundred thousand rupees.⁸⁵ Ghazi al-Din and Najib al-Daula wrote letters to all the local governors stating that Ahmad Shah was now the light of the country and they should pay tribute to him, lest he and his large army burn the entire country.⁸⁶ Some leaders thought it would be better to fight Ahmad Shah, on the hopes that with God's grace they would be able to defeat him. They wrote to the Marathas in the Deccan, asking them to immediately march north to help them fight Ahmad Shah. Time passed, and the heat began to make the Durrani soldiers sick. Alamgir II was reinstated as the emperor of Hindustan; Ahmad Shah appointed a new governor, a fellow Durrani, in Sirhind and Lahore and began marching towards the Attock river.⁸⁷

The account continues with the description of Najib al-Daula in his new position and how his power was often contested. Ghazi al-Din, especially, was unhappy about Najib al-Daula's new authority and attempted to limit his reach. Ghazi al-Din lured the Marathas to the north, and Najib al-Daula began writing letters to Ahmad Shah to request help. The Maratha forces arrived and demanded large sums of money from Najib al-Daula. Najib al-Daula wrote to the Rohilla chiefs, Hafiz Rahmat Khan, Dunde Khan, and others to join him in preserving their territories. They agreed and began marching towards him. The Maratha leader, Rao Janku, threatened Najib al-Daula, and (according to Bijnori) Najib responded in poetry, taunting him:

اگر معاملات راستی راہ ہے
 لیٹو وہ جو اول کے تنخواہ ہے
 میرے پاس شمشیر اور ڈھال ہے
 نہ دینے کو کچھ پاس زر مال ہے
 لیا ملک کو لوٹ میں ڈر بڑا

⁸⁵ Bijnori, 76.

⁸⁶ Bijnori, 77.

⁸⁷ Bijnori, 77.

تجھے کام مردوں سے نابین پڑا
 روہیلے ہیں سب مرد میدان کے
 لوہا چابنے والے کہستان کے
 ابھی تیغ ہم نے نکالی نہیں
 تم اوپر یہ بجلی جھمانی نہیں
 چہکو گے بہت جب کہ گھمسان مچی
 کہو گے کسی طرح سے جان بچی
 خدا ہاتھ ہے فتح جس کو دے
 کہ جو کھیت میدان میں جیت لے
 اگر دل میں تیرے کچھ ارمان ہے
 چلا اُ مردوں کا میدان ہے⁸⁸

If the matter is about the right path,
 Submit, the one who is first has more resources.
 I have a sword and shield,
 I do not have gold or goods to give.
 [You] took the country (*mulk*) through fear and plunder,
 You have not yet dealt with men,
 Rohillas, all of them, are men of the battlefield
 The ones from the mountain (*kohistān*) who chew iron
 We have not yet taken out our swords,
 We have not yet struck this lightning upon you,
 You will chirp like birds when war breaks,
 You will say “in some way my life was saved.”
 The one whom God gives the hand of victory,
 Will win on the battlefield.
 If you have any hope in your heart,
 Come, it is the battlefield of men.

In these lines of poetry, Najib al-Duala glorifies the Rohilla soldiers whom he describes as men of the battlefield (*mard-i maidān*). To this, Rao Janku, not heeding the advice of his companions, commanded that his horse and forces be prepared, and they immediately left for Shakartal to confront Najib al-Daula.

Alamgir II, upset about the situation, wrote to Ahmad Shah and complained that the Marathas were at his threshold because of Ghazi al-Din. Unfortunately, Ghazi al-Din intercepted

⁸⁸ Bijnori, 79.

the emperor's letter. According to Bijnori, Ghazi al-Din entered into the emperor's presence and informed him that two to three hundred thousand Deccan soldiers and nobles surrounded the city. He advised (*'arz kīā*) Alamgir II to leave Shahjahanabad and find refuge in the Firoz Shah Fort. Alamgir II, unaware of Ghazi al-Din's evil intent, thought the advice was sound, and that very night he went to the fort. Ghazi al-Din ordered Mahdi Quli Khan to kill the emperor. Mahdi Quli Khan found an excuse to enter into the emperor's presence when he was alone and with a sword he struck Alamgir II and killed him, leaving the body to rot in the fort.⁸⁹

Najib al-Daula and Shuja al-Daula, who were serving Ahmad Shah, wrote to him saying that they ought to fight together to get rid of the infidels (*kufārūn*). Ahmad Shah returned and he held court with Najib al-Daula and Shuja al-Daula. Coincidentally, Janku Rao and Datta Pandit with the Maratha army had crossed the Ganges river. The Deccan troops fought with the Afghans, swords were struck from all sides, and it seemed as if the Ganges river was "flowing with blood instead of water."⁹⁰ Janku Rao and Datta Pandit were killed in this encounter. Ahmad Shah accepted Hafiz Rahmat Khan and his Rohilla retinue and Ahmad Khan Bangash into his services. Ahmad Shah sent Abd al-Samad Khan Durrani, Najib al-Daula, Miyan Qutb Jang, and Nawab Mumin Khan to Kanjpura because Bahu Raja Biswas Rao, with three hundred thousand soldiers, had entered Shahjahanabad.⁹¹ Bahu Raja Biswas Rao left Shahjahanabad to confront the Afghans in Kanjpura. After intense fighting with swords and rifles, Abd al-Samad Khan Durrani was killed, Mumin Khan and Miyan Qutb Jang were injured, and the Marathas took the dead body and the

⁸⁹ Bijnori, 81. Alamgir II died on November 29, 1759.

⁹⁰ Bijnori, 82.

⁹¹ Bijnori, 82.

two injured ones off the battlefield and presented them to Biswas Rao. Biswas Rao had the two injured ones tied to cannons and fired, killing them.⁹²

When the news of the “martyrdom” of the three reached the “auspicious ears” of the king of kings, he was greatly saddened. Ahmad Shah wrote a letter to Bahu Raja Biswas Rao stating: “If you are a man, pick a battlefield. You and I will have an open battle (*saf-jang*).”⁹³ Biswas Rao responded: “At the time when I (royal we) departed from the Deccan, I had decided that very thing, and I desired that if there was a man worthy of fighting, we would fight an open battle. It is fortunate that you requested this. As soon as I heard, I decided on Panipat, where the world’s greatest battle of Azam Shah and Bahadur Shah took place, and it is quite spacious. Come, if this is agreeable to your royal disposition.”⁹⁴ After sending this word, Bahu Raja Biswas Rao began marching towards Panipat.

Ahmad Shah, with Najib al-Daula, Shuja al-Daula, Hafiz Rahmat Khan, other Rohilla chiefs, and Ahmad Khan Bangash with his confederacy, began marching towards Panipat and set up their camp. Biswas Rao and his troops, knowing that this sort of battle had never been fought by their troops before, swore that they would fight valiantly and not turn their backs. Ahmad Shah, on the other hand, ordered his troops to surround the Maratha camp and burn acres of land on all four sides so that they would have no food supply.⁹⁵ The cost of flour (*atta*) reached four or five rupees a *seer*.⁹⁶ The Deccan soldiers began dying of hunger, but despite this, they were on high

⁹² Bijnori, 82.

⁹³ Bijnori, 83.

⁹⁴ Bijnori, 83.

⁹⁵ Bijnori, 83.

⁹⁶ Bijnori, 83. A *seer* is close to one pound.

alert.⁹⁷ Ten to twenty thousand Deccan soldiers would attack the Afghans and every day, one hundred to two hundred on each side died or were injured.⁹⁸ Every day, from morning to evening, the two sides fought with bullets (*gola-andāzī*) on three sides. One day, the troops were tired from hunger, and pleaded with the chief Biswas Rao that they should have an all-out battle on the field. Preparations began that very evening. The Afghans began organizing their troops and weapons also. The battle began with a cannon fight. Each side aimed their cannons at the chiefs of the other side, and slowly and steadily shot at each other. Ahmad Shah stood on top of a ladder made up of four men and examined the battlefield from that height. Cannon fighting continued and soldiers on horses shot at the enemy with rifles. The “market of the world of death became hot” (*bāzār-i mulk-al-maut ka garm hūā*) when the Marathas shot two cannons at thousands of Afghans led by Dunde Khan.⁹⁹ Ahmad Shah witnessed the Rohilla soldiers with swords dying, and commanded more soldiers to join Dunde Khan. For one *gharī*,¹⁰⁰ soldiers on both sides fought with swords and many more were killed or injured. Ibrahim Khan Gharawi (on the Maratha side) fought with Najib al-Daula while Raja Biswas Rao and Raja Bahu fought the Durranis. The sounds of battle were so fierce that the earth split open and the sky shook.¹⁰¹ Blood flowed from injuries caused by swords and body after body fell to the ground. Every person fought valiantly on the field.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Bijnori, 84.

⁹⁸ Bijnori, 84.

⁹⁹ Bijnori, 84.

¹⁰⁰ A *gharī* is a unit of time, there are thirty in one day.

¹⁰¹ Bijnori, *Qissa wa ahwāl-i Rohīlla*, 85.

¹⁰² Bijnori, 85.

Najib al-Daula, observing from a height, sent a soldier to fight Ibrahim Khan Gharawi. The two fought with swords, and Ibrahim Khan Gharawi was victorious. Najib al-Daula sent more soldiers to fight Ibrahim Khan. Ahmad Shah saw that the Afghans were losing on one side, so he sent Shuja al-Daula and his troops as back-up. Ahmad Shah saw that the Marathas were still winning. He removed his turban and prayed to God saying that God was the king of everything and he (Ahmad Shah) came to Hindustan for the sake of God, and there was nothing more important than that.¹⁰³ Ahmad Shah recited the *fātiha* and presented himself to his chief military commander Jahan Khan. When Shah Wali Khan heard this news, he attacked Raja Biswas Rao and Raja Bahu. Among trembling injured bodies that created rivers of flowing blood, Raja Biswas Rao (who was destined with this fate) was killed. Raja Bahu saw Raja Biswas Rao's dead body, and asked himself with what face will he return to the Deccan? How will he enter the presence of Nana Jiku? Raja Bahu climbed on top of an elephant and marched towards Ahmad Shah. Ibrahim Khan Gharawi joined and the heated battlefield and fought. Raja Bahu was injured numerous times and he fell amongst the corpses who died in battle.¹⁰⁴ The news reached the ears of Ahmad Shah and he bowed in prostration, giving thanks to God. The Afghans were told to plunder the Marathas, and those who fled, were to be pursued.¹⁰⁵ The account describing the battle of Panipat ends with: "after a few months, the king of kings set his intentions on Qandahar. He bid farewell to all the chiefs of Hindustan. He bestowed (in addition to Shahrānpur) Chakla Sikandar, Panipat, Sonipat

¹⁰³ Bijnori, 85.

¹⁰⁴ Bijnori, 85.

¹⁰⁵ Bijnori, 86.

and surrounding areas until the Hansi citadel to Najib al-Daula. He appointed Najib al-Daula as the deputy of Shahjahanabad.”¹⁰⁶

The last few pages of the Rohilla history describe the enmity between Suraj Mal Jat and Najib al-Daula (to be described further below) and the decline of Rohilla power in the trans-Gangetic plains, and especially Delhi.

2.2 – British Account of the Rohillas

Charles Hamilton’s history of the Rohillas, published in 1788, is based on a Persian manuscript and other “original papers.” Hamilton reassures his readers that the sole purpose of his treatise is solely to advance “truth and knowledge.”¹⁰⁷ Hamilton worked for the East India Company, and learned Persian. He was promoted by an officer in the Bengal army to research the surrounding provinces, in order to gain the trust of the people with whom this officer might engage.¹⁰⁸ The officer, through a connection with the Rohilla chief, Faiz Allah Khan, Ali Muhammad Khan’s second son, obtained a Persian manuscript about the history of Rohillas. Because the Rohillas had been defeated by the governor of Awadh, who allied with the British, in 1774, Hamilton felt the time was ripe to educate an English-reading audience about the rise and

¹⁰⁶ Bijjori, 86.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Hamilton, *An Historical Relation of the Origin, Progress, and Final Dissolution of the Government of the Rohilla Afgans, in the Northern Provinces of Hindostan.: Compiled from a Persian Manuscript and Other Original Papers* (London: Printed for J. Debrett, 1788), iv.

¹⁰⁸ In Charles Elliott’s introductory remarks to his translation of Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s memoir, he notes: “It is necessary to add, that Mr. Hamilton’s History of the Rohillas will in some parts be found at variance with this narrative; that gentleman appears to have derived his information from the friends of the Nuwab of Oude, who would not be disposed to speak favourably of Hafiz Rehmud Khan; and as that work was published about the time of Mr. Hasting’s trial, it might have been intended to frame an excuse for his permitting a British army to join in the attack on Hafiz in 1774.” Khān Bahādur Muhammad Mustajāb and Charles Boileau Elliott, *The Life of Hafiz Ool-Moolk, Hafiz Rehmud Khan, Written by His Son, and Entitled Goolistan-I-Rehmud. Abridged and Translated from the Persian by Charles Elliott.* (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1831), iv.

fall of the Rohillas, and to this end, Hamilton spent about ten years translating the Persian text he obtained into English.¹⁰⁹ Hamilton does not name the text, therefore, making it difficult to compare his translations and summaries with the original manuscript. Hamilton does, however, write that the author of the history was Rohilla, “a confidential servant of one of their chiefs, and had himself been personally engaged in many of the events related in it.”¹¹⁰ The papers, on which Hamilton relies, deal with treaties and the circumstances relating to the enmity that eventually arose between Shuja al-Daula (British ally) and the Rohillas.

The narrative in Hamilton’s history varies slightly, albeit in important ways, from the Urdu history written by Bijnori. Most notable is Hamilton’s refusal to accept Ali Muhammad Khan—the founder of the Rohilkhand and Rohilla power in northern India—as the adopted son of Dawud Khan. Hamilton footnotes, “Some accounts have said that Allee Mahummed [*sic*] was not the son of Daood, but by birth a Hindoo, and adopted by him: -this however is not only an incongruity (as a Hindoo is seldom or never known to be adopted by a Mussulman,) but is moreover altogether unsupported.”¹¹¹ For Hamilton, the idea that a Muslim would adopt a Hindu was not within the realm of possibility. Of course, this has been proven false: many “Afghans” were of different religious backgrounds, who would accept Islam and associate with an Afghan genealogy, as described above. The number of Persian and Urdu accounts that report he was not Afghan by birth, and that he was adopted by Dawud Khan is more consistent, within each text and between the texts, than Hamilton’s conjecture.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Hamilton, *An Historical Relation of the Origin, Progress, and Final Dissolution of the Government of the Rohilla Afgans, in the Northern Provinces of Hindostan.*, vii.

¹¹⁰ Hamilton, xvii.

¹¹¹ Hamilton, 36fn.

¹¹² Although it ultimately does not matter whether Ali Muhamamd Khan was Afghan by birth or not, because he ascribed an Afghan identity that was accepted. And yet, we must note that in the imagination of an English British

In his history, Hamilton further assumes that certain territories belonged to Hindus while others to Muslims, and explains that the Rohillas' attempts to acquire territories beyond the Ganges had been an incursion on "Hindu land." About Ali Muhammad Khan conquests and political organization, Hamilton writes:

He rooted out all those from whom he had any apprehensions, and drove them to the other side of the Ganges, without any regard to their prior right in those lands, which had been the seats of their ancestors for many centuries. This was a mode of acting diametrically opposite to what had ever been observed by the Mahommedan settlers of Hindostan; the Rohilla chief, however, did not stop here, but conducted himself towards all the Hindoos of any rank or consequence in Rohilcund (the only name by which Kuttaher was after this distinguished) with a cruel and unjustifiable severity. He deprived such as were Zimeendars of their lands, and the public officers of their employments, and filled the places thus vacated with his creatures; so that in the space of a few months the country was put completely under a Patan government.¹¹³

In this version, Hamilton writes that Ahmad Shah came to Hindustan because the "increasing imbecility of the [Mughal] empire gave him hopes of a success similar to that which had attended the expedition of his late master [Nadir Shah]."¹¹⁴ The sequence of events about Ahmad Shah's arrival in Hindustan differs from the *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhi*. In this narrative, Ahmad Shah proceeded directly to Delhi from Punjab, and engaged in battle with the Mughal troops. In this battle, the vizier Qamar al-Din was killed by a canon and his son Muin al-Mulk

scholar, the idea that a Muslim would adopt an Hindu is incompressible. This rigid view clearly indicates how misinformed the British were about social and religious life of the inhabitants of Hindustan.

¹¹³ Hamilton, *An Historical Relation of the Origin, Progress, and Final Dissolution of the Government of the Rohilla Afgans, in the Northern Provinces of Hindostan.*, 86.

¹¹⁴ Hamilton, 76.

fought valiantly (this part is consistent with all other accounts). Ahmad Shah's troops were defeated, and thus they marched to Sirhind, Ali Muhammad Khan's district. From Sirhind, Ahmad Shah and his troops "proceeded towards the Punjab, carrying with him Fyzoola Khan [*sic*] and Abdoola Khan [*sic*], the two sons of Alee Mahummed [*sic*] whom the Rohilla had left as hostages of his fidelity, on his appointment to Sirhind..."¹¹⁵ Ahmad Shah considered "them [Faiz Allah Khan and Abd Allah Khan] as the most valuable part of his acquisition in this desultory incursion; as, by his power over them, he would be able to secure the neutrality of Alee Mahummed [*sic*] (whose abilities and enterprising disposition he was well acquainted with)-and even to render him subservient to his future views upon Hindostan [*sic*]." ¹¹⁶

According to Hamilton, as the two eldest sons were with Ahmad Shah, Ali Muhammad Khan, who had become ill, drafted his will, in which he stipulated that Hafiz Rahmat Khan, his (adopted) uncle, and Dunde Khan, his (adopted) cousin, would serve as guardians of Rohilla territories and his six surviving sons, until the two elder ones returned, or until the younger ones, especially the third son, Sa'ad Allah Khan, came of age. When news of Ali Muhammad Khan's death reached Ahmad Shah, he permitted the two eldest sons to go back to Aonla, in order to convey solidarity with the Rohillas in northern Hindustan against the vizier Safdar Jang. Ahmad Shah presented them with gifts and "wrote letters to Hafiz Rahmut [*sic*] and the other chiefs, strongly recommending a strict attention to the will of Allee Mahummed [*sic*], and requiring them to receive and acknowledge these young men and their brothers as his proper heirs, and to establish them forthwith in their inheritance."¹¹⁷ Later, however, Hamilton writes that the reason why

¹¹⁵ Hamilton, 80.

¹¹⁶ Hamilton, 80.

¹¹⁷ Hamilton, 114–5.

Ahmad Shah sent the two sons back was because Ahmad Shah learned about conflicts that had transpired between the Bangash Afghans, Rohillas, and Safdar Jang (with his Jat and Maratha allies).

Hamilton states that when the two sons returned, Ali Muhammad Khan's six sons lived together in peace initially, but later, the brothers—each with his own retinue—began quarreling amongst themselves and the guardians decided it would be best to invest them of their inheritances, including the territories. Soon after, the guardians, namely Hafiz Rahmat Khan and Dunde Khan, retook power, leaving the three youngest boys without any material support. Eventually, Murtaza Khan (fifth son) and Allah Yar Khan (sixth son) died.¹¹⁸

Hamilton's account reveals some otherwise unknown events—although unverifiable, these shed light on possible connections between Ahmad Shah, the Mughals, and other ethnic Afghans residing in northern Hindustan. In Hamilton's narrative, Safdar Jang despised the Afghans, especially the Bangash Afghans of Farrukhabad; and the Rohillas, because they had killed Safdar Jang's most trusted servant, and laid claim to his territories. In a fierce battle between these adversaries, the Rohillas emerged victorious and Safdar Jang returned to Delhi, but became more determined to kill them all: "He [Safdar Jang] now resolved, at all events, utterly to extirpate the Afghans, and to risk the existence of his own power, and of the ruinous remains of the empire, to effect his purpose, by calling in the aid of the Hindoo powers, whose alliance was scarcely less destructive than their enmity."¹¹⁹ Safdar Jang, therefore, allied with Suraj Mal Jat and the Maratha leader Malhar Rao, and with a royal decree, allegedly issued by Ahmad Shah Bahadur, the Mughal emperor, declared war on the Rohillas, and demanded that they back pay three years' revenue due

¹¹⁸ Hamilton, 123.

¹¹⁹ Hamilton, 103.

to the Mughal empire.¹²⁰ Ahmad Khan Bangash attempted to ally with the Rohillas by stating that they ought to unite on the basis of Safdar Jang's hatred of all the Afghans. When the Rohilla chiefs did not heed the call to unite with the Bangash, Ahmad Khan sent his mother to Katehr to intervene and persuade them. She was unable to convince the guardians, but managed to garner the support of the Sa'ad Allah Khan, the third son of Ali Muhammad. He and his retinue accompanied Ahmad Khan Bangash's mother to confront Safdar Jang and his allies, thus dividing the Rohillas.

Safdar Jang laid a siege on the Afghans who had fled to the Cummow Hills. Safdar Jang assumed that they would surrender due to a blockade he installed thereby limiting the supply of foodstuffs to which they would have access, but the Afghans managed to rely on food found in the hills, and supplemented their supplies with intermittent raids of the royal army.¹²¹ This continued for months, depleting resources on both sides. Then, news arrived that Ahmad Shah was planning to dethrone the Mughal emperor, Ahmad Shah. The Mughal emperor wrote (with his own hand) to Safdar Jang to return to Delhi immediately, and reprimanded him for associating the Mughal house with the Jats and Marathas.¹²² This forced Safdar Jang to compromise with the Afghans: they were permitted to retain the territories they possessed through conquest and were to pay fifty hundred thousand rupees to the royal treasury and promise to pay five hundred thousand rupees every year as the *pesh-kash* (tribute).¹²³ They agreed, with the intention to deposit nothing into the royal treasury, knowing well that Safdar Jang's ability to enforce the terms of the agreement was

¹²⁰ Hamilton, 104–8.

¹²¹ Hamilton, 111.

¹²² Hamilton, 112.

¹²³ Hamilton, 112.

limited.¹²⁴ The Bangash and Rohilla Afghans, therefore, maintained their territories, while Safdar Jang returned to Delhi, only to learn that Ahmad Shah went to Punjab simply to deal with Muin al-Mulk.¹²⁵

Safdar Jang, on the other hand, became more desperate and killed Ahmad Shah Bahadur's trusted eunuch, Jawed Khan (in this account, he is called "Juneid Khan").¹²⁶ The late vizier Qamar al-Din's grandson, Ghazi al-Din, also known as 'Imad al-Mulk, was then called to overthrow Safdar Jang. Ghazi al-Din accomplished this, and Safdar Jang returned to Awadh, where he died soon after, and his son Shuja al-Dawla became the new governor of Awadh. Ghazi al-Din, thirsty for power, dethroned Ahmad Shah Bahdur and crowned Alamgir II in his place (only to assassinate him later).¹²⁷ Ghazi al-Din allied with Ahmad Khan Bangash; whilst the Rohillas entered into a formal treaty with Shuja al-Dawla.¹²⁸ Another Afghan, Najib al-Dawla, who had been a friend and companion of Ali Muhammad Khan, managed to conquer and maintain a "tract of country stretching westward from the Ganges to the district of Siharenpore, along the foot of the hills, and southward almost to the gates of Delhi..."¹²⁹ Knowing that Najib al-Dawla and the Rohillas were friends, Ghazi al-Din issued a royal decree stipulating that Najib al-Dawla may formally retain the territories he acquired, and even became a supporter of the Rohillas (much like his grandfather before him).

¹²⁴ Hamilton, 113.

¹²⁵ Hamilton, 114.

¹²⁶ Hamilton, 124.

¹²⁷ Hamilton, 125.

¹²⁸ Hamilton, 128.

¹²⁹ Hamilton, 132.

The new emperor, however, afraid of Ghazi al-Din's power, secretly wrote to Ahmad Shah to come to Hindustan in order to protect him from his own servants.¹³⁰ Ahmad Shah accepted this invitation and wrote to the two elder sons of Ali Muhammad Khan about his intentions, as well as to Najib al-Dawla. Najib al-Dawla responded that he had been appointed to office by the vizier Ghazi al-Din, so he would feign an alliance with Ghazi al-Din, "but secretly pledged himself to the King (whose sold desire was to overthrow Ghazee-ad-deen) [*sic*] that he would go over to Ahmed Abdallee [*sic*] on the very first opportunity; and he even gave that prince private intimation of his design."¹³¹ When this came to pass, Ghazi al-Din surrendered to Ahmad Shah, seeing that Ahmad Shah had support from the Rohillas, Najib al-Dawla, and the Mughal emperor, Alamgir II. Ahmad Shah entered Delhi, without any obstacle on September 11, 1757.¹³² For fifty-six days, Ahmad Shah's soldiers were allowed to partake in any pleasure, and a general massacre in Delhi ensued. Ahmad Shah reinstated Ghazi al-din as vizier, and Alamgir II as the emperor, and marched southward to fight against the Jats. As a reward for allying with him, Ahmad Shah bestowed more territories to the Afghans, replacing Jat local rulers. After Ahmad Shah left, Alamgir II, wrote to Ahmad Shah again because Ghazi al-Din mistreated him. Unfortunately, Ghazi al-Din intercepted the letter and had the emperor assassinated.¹³³ Ali Gauhar, Shah Alam II, was to be raised to the throne, but he escaped and wandered looking for safety, and "the empire was for some time without any acknowledged head, and the reign of the house of Timur seemed to be an end."¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Hamilton, 137.

¹³¹ Hamilton, 137.

¹³² Hamilton, 139.

¹³³ Hamilton, 143.

¹³⁴ Hamilton, 144.

The Marathas decided to take advantage of “deranged posture of affairs, and the universal anarchy which seemed to prevail in every department of the Mogul state, to attempt overturning the Mahomedan, and establishing the ancient Hindoo government.”¹³⁵ For the Muslims, according to Hamilton,

The time which had been necessarily occupied in the foregoing preparations, gave the Mahomedans full opportunity for taking the necessary measures to avert the danger which threatened “the faith”; and they, for a time, forgot their mutual animosities, and zealously united in this common cause.¹³⁶

In describing the battle of Panipat, which is presented as a summary, Hamilton refers to each side as either “Mussulman/Mahomedan” or “Hindoo.” Hamilton writes that the Marathas deviated from their normal way of fighting, and found themselves cornered in Panipat. The Afghan army, led by Ahmad Shah, surrounded them, cut off their food supply, and eventually defeated them. Suraj Mal Jat, Hamilton writes, betrayed the Marathas and started secret negotiations with Ahmad Shah.¹³⁷ Suraj Mal Jat left the battlefield and fled towards Agra with thousands of Jat soldiers and cavalry. The next day, the great battle ensued.

Hamilton describes how the Marathas, the night before the great battle, were rallied with enthusiasm “approaching madness.”¹³⁸ He writes, the Hindoos “celebrated...some signal victories gained upon it by their ancestors over the barbarians of the north; and the stake to be now contended for was of the utmost magnitude to both sides, including in it nothing less than the ultimate fate of two rival powers, and the decided superiority or the eventual extirpation of the

¹³⁵ Hamilton, 144.

¹³⁶ Hamilton, 146.

¹³⁷ Hamilton, 147–8.

¹³⁸ Hamilton, 149.

Mussulmans in Hindostan.”¹³⁹ On the day of the battle, the Maratha defeat was inevitable because the Maratha chiefs did not organize their troops in a strategic way. Hamilton notes that the number of “Hindoo” deaths was more than one hundred thousand, and included the two Maratha chiefs.

After the Afghan victory, Ahmad Shah went to Delhi and appointed Jawan Bakht, the eldest son of the heir apparent Ali Gawher, to the Mughal throne, until his father returned to the city from hiding. Ahmad Shah further appointed Najib al-Daula to the office of Amir al-Umra. Ghazi al-Din, afraid that he would be punished for killing Alamgir II, retired to the Deccan. Ahmad Shah, having settled the appointments, returned to Qandahar, “towards his own country.”¹⁴⁰ The remaining portion of the text deals with Najib al-Daula, Shuja al-Daula, and the Jats.

3 – Delhi, Surrounding Areas, and Najib al-Daula

Najib al-Daula (d. 1770) was an important Afghan chief in the eighteenth century. He allied with Ali Muhammad Khan and obtained lands west of Katehr, Rohilkhand, and founded the city Najibabad, in the Bijnor district (in the present province of Uttar Pradesh). Najib al-Daula was the governor of the Shahranpur territories, given to him by the Rohilla chief, Ali Muhammad Khan.

There are two extant histories about Najib al-Daula specifically. The first, MS 24,410, housed at the British Library, is the more comprehensive. It was written by Sayyid Nur al-Din Hassan one year after Najib al-Daula’s death. Sir Jadunath Sarkar partially translated the manuscript and published them in three parts in 1933 and 1934, in the *Islamic Culture* journal. The other extant manuscript is at Khalsa College, KCA 425, called *Ahwal-i Najib al-Daula*. It is shorter and contains information about Najib al-Daula, his son, Zabita Khan, and other Rohilla chiefs,

¹³⁹ Hamilton, 149.

¹⁴⁰ Hamilton, 152.

including Ali Muhammad Khan, Dunde Khan, and Hafiz Rahmat Khan. This manuscript was written by Bihari Munshi Lal, completed in 1787. Sarkar translated the first portion of this manuscript, on Najib al-Daula specifically, in 1936, also in the *Islamic Culture* journal.

Sarkar did not translate the first fourteen folios of the 24,410 manuscript. In these fourteen folios, the author, Sayyid Nur al-Din Hassan begins with a statement that Najib Khan was a Yusufzai and when he came to Aonla, he began working for Ali Muhammad Khan. The account beginning in this fashion is similar to the Urdu history of the Rohillas. There is no praise of God, the prophets, or the patron who has commissioned the work. Even the *basmala* (*bismillāh al-rahmān al-rahīm*, in the name of God, the beneficent the merciful) is missing in this manuscript. Within a few lines the political strife of the period begins to unfold. The pages describe how Safdar Jang allied with the Marathas and waged war against the Afghans. During the skirmish between Safdar Jang and Imad al-Mulk Ghazi al-Din, Najib al-Daula supported Imad al-Mulk Ghazi al-Din and was recognized as a savvy military commander.

Najib al-Daula, however, allied with Ahmad Shah Abdali soon after he was successful fighting for Imad al-Mulk and Alamgir II. In 1755, Najib al-Daula wrote to Ahmad Shah in order to encourage him to come to Hindustan. He wrote: “I am too an Afghan, and you ought to preserve the honour of Afghans. In this country I have gathered round myself 25,000 Afghans. I have prepared the other Afghans of Gangapar (Trans-Ganges) who number 40,000, to enter your service. You come here without any suspicion (anxiety). Imad-ul-mulk [*sic*] has not the strength to oppose you. I am his greatest ally. As I have become obedient to you, there is none other left here (to help him).”¹⁴¹ Najib privileges their common ethnic background as grounds for common

¹⁴¹ Jadunath Sarkar, “An Original Account of Ahmad Shah Durrani’s Campaigns in India and the Battle of Panipat,” *Islamic Culture* 7 (1933): 408.

cause against Imad al-Mulk. At other times, Najib uses the rhetoric of religion to impress upon Ahmad Shah, he calls him, for example, the “Emperor of Muslims” and as such it is his religious duty to fight infidels, including the Marathas who had taken many steps to defeat Najib al-Daula. Alamgir II, on the other hand, wrote to Imad al-Mulk complaining that he was a prisoner in the hands of a “Rohilla” – the very Rohilla he appointed as the Mir Bakhshi and Mukhtar of Hindustan.

According to Bihari Munshi Lal’s account (KCA 425), Najib al-Daula came from “*wilāyat*.”¹⁴² His uncle, Basharat Khan, worked in Aonla under Ali Muhammad Khan and had three to four hundred soldiers working under him. Basharat Khan had given one of his daughters in marriage to Ali Muhammad Khan. This uncle gave Najib al-Daula, when he arrived, ten to twelve soldiers and arranged his marriage to the daughter of Dunde Khan. Najib al-Daula served Ali Muhammad Khan and Dunde Khan, increasing in rank and honor over the years. In this account, in 1753, the newly ousted Safdar Jang wished to ally with Hafiz Rahmat Khan, and Hafiz with his and Dunde Khan’s soldiers went to Safdar Jang.¹⁴³ Najib al-Daula, on the other hand, was approached by a loyal servant of the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah, Raja Devi Datt, to ally with the Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah Bahadur and newly appointed vizier Imad al-Mulk, Ghazi al-Din. Najib al-Daula was persuaded by the potential to rise in rank, and “desiring friendship, marched to Delhi.”¹⁴⁴ Within four days, he was enlisted under the employ of the Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah Bahadur and Imad al-Mulk, and was put in charge of the Nīla Burj territories. At that

¹⁴² Bihari Lal Munshi, “Ahwal-I Najib Al-Daula” (1787), 3, KCA 425; Jadunath Sarkar, “Najib-Ud-Daulah - The Ruhela Chief,” *Islamic Culture* 10 (1936): 648–9. Sarkar describes *wilāyat* as “the country beyond our north-western frontier.”

¹⁴³ Munshi, “Ahwal-I Najib Al-Daula,” 3–4; Sarkar, “Najib-Ud-Daulah - The Ruhela Chief,” 649–50. Bihar Lal Munshi honors the memory of Safdar Jang by calling him “*mahrūm*,” meaning the late.

¹⁴⁴ Munshi, “Ahwal-I Najib Al-Daula,” 4.

time, Najib al-Daula had a retinue army of fifteen to sixteen thousand cavalry and foot soldiers.¹⁴⁵ His rank was increased and his title was further honored, from Najib Khan to Najib al-Daula, and he was victorious in every battle he fought.¹⁴⁶ Najib al-Daula took leave of the Mughal emperor and vizier and went towards Aonla, where S'ad Allah Khan was based, stopping at Gularia to visit his father-in-law, Dunde Khan. Najib then went to S'ad Allah Khan, to advise him to take control of his own territories and soldiers by removing Hafiz Rahmat Khan from power. Najib reminded him that they were brothers, as they both had married the daughters of Dunde Khan, and that S'ad Allah Khan was the son of Ali Muhammad Khan, and therefore the rightful heir. S'ad Allah Khan was persuaded. Hafiz Rahmat Khan, with Ali Muhammad Khan's eldest son, Faiz Allah Khan, marched towards Aonla. The chiefs, worried that internal war would end badly, decided that they should hold a consultation at Bisauli.

S'ad Allah Khan met with his mother-in-law (Dunde Khan's wife) and she advised him against Najib and said that he ought to leave the division of power and territories as it had been, i.e. with Dunde and Hafiz in charge of what they had been allotted. When the meeting amongst the chiefs was held, S'ad Allah Khan advocated for status quo. Najib, then, sent a letter via an envoy, named Sadiq,¹⁴⁷ to the Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah's mother, Udahm Bai, to accompany him in any of his campaigns. Ahmad Shah ordered him to occupy Saharanpur.¹⁴⁸ Najib marched with his troops and took possession of the district, and appointed seasoned men to administer the smaller villages. He went to Jalalabad during the rainy seasons and then returned to Saharanpur

¹⁴⁵ Munshi, 4.

¹⁴⁶ Munshi, 4.

¹⁴⁷ Munshi, 6.

¹⁴⁸ Munshi, 6.

when the monsoons were over. He then went to Delhi to help ‘Imad al-Mulk fight the Maratha incursion, led by Ragunath Rao and Malhar Rao in 1757, a battle that lasted three weeks, resulting in peace (*sulh*) through the mediation of Malhar Rao. Najib then returned to Saharpur.

Datta Patil, the chief of Madhu Rao Sindhia, wrote to Najib requesting that he cede Hardwar and Jawalpur because they were places of Hindu worship (*‘ibādatgāh-i hindūdān*).¹⁴⁹ Najib did not accept this, and slowly disagreements between the Marathas and Najib arose. Najib retreated from the region and occupied Shakartal, a strategic area as it was at the intersection of multiple ravines of the Ganga River. He had ten to twelve thousand soldiers. Najib wrote to S’ad Allah Khan, Dunde Khan, and Hafiz Rahmat Khan for support. They responded in the affirmative, but did not move. Najib wrote to Shuja al-Daula, Safdar Jang’s successor, in Awadh as well, who had established friendly relations with the other Rohillas. In 1759, Najib fought the Marathas on his own. The Marathas entered Rohilla territories and pillaged and plundered the area.¹⁵⁰ They burned Jalalabad, while Hafiz and the other Rohilla chiefs remained on one side. Shuja al-Daula, who had “immense friendship in his heart” for Najib, sent help.¹⁵¹ Shuja al-Daula’s soldiers arrived in Muradabad, preceded by Hafiz Rahmat Khan, with other Afghans. The Marathas re-crossed the Ganga River, leaving Rohilla territories, after plundering places along the river.

Najib al-Daula, in the meantime, sent letters to Ahmad Shah Abdali, the king of *wilāyat*, with the plea for help: he wrote, “the Marathas of the Deccan have laid siege on me, come for the sake of the community (*qaum*).”¹⁵² Ahmad Shah Abdali acquiesced to the request and marched to

¹⁴⁹ Munshi, 6.

¹⁵⁰ Munshi, 7.

¹⁵¹ Munshi, 7.

¹⁵² Munshi, 7.

Kunjpura in order to aid Najib. Najib prepared the Afghans in Kunjpura and the news about Ahmad Shah's arrival spread, even before the letters of his arrival reached the Hindustani chiefs.¹⁵³ Shuja al-Daula decided to retreat back to Awadh. Shuja al-Daula justified his return by stating that Ahmad Shah had come to help Najib al-Daula, and he (Shuja al-Daula) needed to return to his province because there was much work there that required his prompt attention. The Marathas, upon hearing the news of Ahmad Shah's arrival, became terrified. The king of the wilāyat (*bādshāh az wilāyat*) reached the Shahrampur and met with Najib al-Daula. Hafiz Rahmat Khan, Dunde Khan, and other chiefs with Najib al-Daula presented themselves to Ahmad Shah. The battle between Datta Patil and Najib continued. Datta Patil was struck in the battle at the hands of Najib and he "went to the realm of eternity."¹⁵⁴ Murtaza Khan Bahrīch, Najib's companion, an Afghan resident of Samana, beheaded Datta Patil.

Ahmad Shah and his troops swiftly rode forth and arrived to Gobind in one night where some thirty thousand Marathas were stationed.¹⁵⁵ With five thousand men, Ahmad Shah killed these Marathas in the early morning when they were either washing themselves, praying, or sleeping.¹⁵⁶ They threw the heads of the slain Marathas into the river Hindan and they floated "like bubbles in the water."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Munshi, 7–8; Sarkar, "Najib-Ud-Daulah - The Ruhela Chief," 652. Sarkar writes that Najib al-Daula had "instructed the Afghans of Kunjpura to make (and put on) scarlet broad cloth caps (like the Persian Qizzilbash) in order to start the rumour of the coming of the Shah." In the KCA manuscript I have consulted, there is no indication that he told the Afghans to don red turbans, only that he instructed that they be prepared and that the news should be known about Ahmad Shah's arrival.

¹⁵⁴ Munshi, "Ahwal-I Najib Al-Daula," 9.

¹⁵⁵ Sarkar calls this place Govind, see Sarkar, "Najib-Ud-Daulah - The Ruhela Chief," 653.

¹⁵⁶ Munshi, "Ahwal-I Najib Al-Daula," 8.

¹⁵⁷ Munshi, 9.

The Marathas camped in Panipat and set up their trenches and blockades with over one hundred thousand cavalry and foot soldiers. The Durranis and Rohillas obstructed their movement, and burned the surrounding areas, leaving them without a food supply. The Maratha army weakened with regular defeats. Najib al-Daula sent a message to Malhar Rao, encouraging him to leave the Marathas and spare his own life, with a promise that he would not pursue him. Soon after the Marathas were decisively defeated. Fifty thousand men within the Maratha faction died, due to famine or fighting in battle. The rest fled in all directions.¹⁵⁸ On the Rohilla side, many of Dunde Khan's men were also slain. The victors plundered the abandoned Maratha camp and acquired one crore rupees, weapons, and horses (but the horses were too weak, and food for the horses was not available).

Ahmad Shah proceeded to Delhi and resided there for two months, while Shuja al-Daula, Dunde Khan, and Hafiz Rahmat Khan returned to their own territories. Najib al-Daula was promoted to the rank of *Amīr al-Umāra* (chief of chiefs) by Ahmad Shah, the emperor of *wilāyat* and Hindustan (*bādshāh-i wilāyat wa hindūstān*).¹⁵⁹ On account of the heat, Ahmad Shah and his troops left.

Najib al-Daula had returned to Najibabad and was ill. Suraj Mal Jat continued to bear a grudge against Najib, thus forcing him to return to Delhi. Najib did not wish to fight Suraj Mal Jat, as he had a large army and much wealth. Najib sent him a message saying that it was not proper that Suraj Mal should engage in fighting with him (Najib) and asked him what would be required for peace. Suraj Mal Jat did not have an answer for him, other than that he should prepare to fight. Najib wrote to Dunde Khan informing him that Suraj Mal broke his word of friendship with him

¹⁵⁸ Munshi, 9–10.

¹⁵⁹ Munshi, 10.

and wants war. The two armies (with Najib greatly outnumbered) fought in the environs of Ghaziabad for six hours. Suraj Mal was slain by an unknown person around the time of sunset. By the next day, Dunde Khan's troops had crossed the river and were approaching. Meanwhile, confusion arose about where Suraj Mal Jat's head had gone on the battlefield. Najib cut off Suraj Mal Jat's arm in an attempt to convince the others that he had indeed been slain. Suraj Mal Jat's horse was found and used as evidence of his demise. Informants looked for Suraj Mal Jat's men, but none were found, and Najib took possession of his territories.

While Najib was engaged with Suraj Mal, Zain Khan, the faujdar of Sirhind, appointed by Ahmad Shah Abdali, "tasted the drink of martyrdom" (*az dast-i sikhān sharbat-i shahadat chashīd*).¹⁶⁰ He was slain by Sikhs. Najib, after defeating Suraj Mal, crossed the Jamna river that separated Shahrānpur and Sirhind and confronted the Sikhs at Sirhind. Ahmad Shah sent word to the Rohillas that he was close to Lahore, but Najib could not meet him because he was preoccupied with Sikhs attempting to plunder his lands. Najib and his troops needed to force the Sikhs to return to their "*des*" (country, province).¹⁶¹

Jawahir Singh, Suraj Mal Jat's son and Jat ruler of Bharatpur, sought to avenge his father's death. He sent a message to Malhar Rao, who was on friendly terms with Najib al-Daula, to persuade him to join him in fighting against Najib, and if he did so, he would be paid in the amount of thirty lakh rupees. When Najib learned about this, he sent messages to Malhar, encouraging him to decline Jawahir Singh's offer, but Malhar Rao decided to ally with Jawahir Singh and collect the money. Jawahir Singh had an army of over one hundred thousand soldier (of which sixty were

¹⁶⁰ Munshi, 11.

¹⁶¹ Munshi, 12. According to Munshi, by 1787, when this history was written, the Sikhs have their own country or province.

his, thirty were Sikhs, ten to twelve Naga faqirs, and four thousand from Nawab Ghazi al-Din Khan).¹⁶² Najib, who was in Delhi, did not take money from the residents of Delhi to fight his foes because he felt that his victory in this war would prove his worth more than forcing the residents of Delhi into famine or hardship, and sin upon himself. Nevertheless, Najib managed to withstand Jawahir Singh's attempts to kill him, and the two sides settled through the mediation of Malhar Rao. During the fighting, Najib wrote to Ahmad Shah Abdali, in which he disclosed his present circumstances. Ahmad Shah Abdali decided to return to Hindustan, and the Marathas, afraid of him and his troops, marched away. Malhar Rao was owed money from Zabita Khan, Najib al-Daula's son, which he forfeited once the news of Ahmad Shah's arrival reached his ears.

Najib al-Daula had one Sikh ally, Ala Singh Jat of Patiala. According to administrative reports, in 1764, Ala Singh attempted to keep the Sikhs from plundering Najib al-Daula's territories and on behalf of Najib al-Daula offered to pay eighty thousand rupees as a sign of settlement. The Sikh chiefs responded, "You give your sign (*nishān*) for your own payment. We will settle with Najibuddaula ourselves. What have you got to do with his case, that you come in between?"¹⁶³ Unsuccessful at mediation, Sikhs continued to cross the Jamna River to acquire Rohilla territories. Najib was constantly distracted by them and sent people to confront and fight them, in the attempt to make them re-cross the river.¹⁶⁴

Some Maratha chiefs, Tuko Holkar and Madhav Rao wrote to Najib al-Daula that they were moving north and reminded him of Najib's friendship with Malhar Rao. Najib responded

¹⁶² J. S Grewal et al., eds., *Sikh History from Persian Sources: Translations of Major Texts* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001), 200.

¹⁶³ Grewal et al., 199.

¹⁶⁴ Sarkar, "Najib-Ud-Daulah - The Ruhela Chief," 657.

saying that he would join them (to fight the Jats and Sikhs). The Marathas defeated Nawal Singh Jat in 1770.

On one occasion two mule-loads of grain belonging to some merchants in Najib Khan's camp were carried off from the way by Maratha troopers. At this Najib Khan summoned Bhagwant Rao, the son of Jagannath, who was Tuko Holkar's wakil (with him), at midnight and told him, "My alliance with the Marathas is conditional upon their friendly conduct. If you wish to retain this friendship, restore to the merchants of my camp the two ass-loads of grain. Otherwise, in a twinkle of the eye I shall do more than what done to you at Panipat." Tuko Holkar, searching that very night, recovered the two ass-loads of grain from the Pindiaries who lived in his camp as retainers solely for the purpose of plundering, and produced them.¹⁶⁵

That year of 1770, Najib al-Daula was very ill, and he summoned his son, Zabita Khan to take his position as the head of five thousand soldiers and cavalry and fight alongside the Marathas. Najib al-Daula left Agra for Hapur and died there on October 3, 1770.¹⁶⁶

4 – Lahore

Ahmad Shah had control over Lahore for only brief periods, whether through appointed local (Mughal) governors, or his son, Timur Shah (1757-8). There is no evidence of kinship or ethnic relations in Lahore that Ahmad Shah could have leveraged. During Timur Shah's short one year and two month stay in Lahore (1757-58), it was clear to others that he did not have the support he needed to guard the city. Adina Beg Khan, with support of a few key Sikh chiefs and their retainers, defied the Afghan prince and openly rebelled against him. Very soon after, Timur Shah and his father's competent military commander Jahan Khan, abandoned Lahore.

¹⁶⁵ Sarkar, 658.

¹⁶⁶ Sarkar, 658.

According to reports compiled by G.H. Khare published as *Persian Sources of Indian History*, Vol. V, Part I, Poona, a report dated March 2, 1759 describes,

The real situation of *ṣubā* Lahore is this that the sect of the Sikhs of the Gurū [are] the authors of much tumult there, since they do not abstain from pillaging and plundering, so much so that out of fear from that sect the gates of the city wall [of Lahore] are kept closed, and, as a result, grain, etc., cannot reach the city. The country around is also absolutely ruined. For this reason, grain prices are very high: sometimes five seers are to be had for a rupee, sometimes the rate is seven seers. The few inhabitants who remain there are in a condition of starvation.¹⁶⁷

By October 11, 1760 it was reported:

The situation of the area of *ṣubā* Lahore is as follows: In the said city, the sect of Sikhs has established their control, and have proclaimed the authority of Bhāu Ṣāhib [the Maratha commander]. They have organized the *karāhī Gurū Ṣāhib* [distribution of sacred sweetmeat made of flour], and have held a prayer (*ardās*) for Bhāu Ṣāhib, that is, a prayer to the Gurū Ṣāhib for His Excellency's victory and triumph. They raised their hands towards the sky, praying that the tyrant [Ahmad Shāh] Abdālī should soon get the punishment for his misdeeds and shortly meet his death....¹⁶⁸

The collusion between the Sikhs and Marathas is described in other accounts as well. In the histories on Najib al-Daula, Sikh leaders partnered with enemies of the Afghans, such as Jawahir Singh, Jat leader and son of Suraj Mal Jat.

Ahmad Shah attempted, multiple times, to secure Lahore, but each victory was short-lived. In 1763, Ahmad Shah sent his military commander Jahan Khan to Lahore and appointed him the governor. Jahan Khan's most challenging obstacle were the Sikhs. By this time, Sikh chiefs had

¹⁶⁷ Grewal et al., *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, 188.

¹⁶⁸ Grewal et al., 189.

begun meeting and consulting each other.¹⁶⁹ The Sikh chiefs, led by Charat Singh, decided to march to Rawalpindi and when Jahan Khan was to cross the Attock river, they would engage him in battle.¹⁷⁰ Jahan Khan, upon arriving in Peshawar, forcefully took three lakh rupees from the inhabitants. Zain Khan, the *faujdar* of Sirhind appointed by Ahmad Shah, with another Sikh leader, Ala Singh, wrote to Jahan Khan that if he were to proceed towards Lahore, Zain Khan and Ala Singh would join forces and they would help quell the Sikhs.¹⁷¹ “As a result of this, ill-feeling has developed between the Sikhs and Ala Singh.”¹⁷² In January 1764, Ahmad Shah crossed the Attock river to assist Jahan Khan. Jassa Singh and his retinue of Sikh soldiers plundered Sirhind, forcing Zain Khan to march from Ambala to Sirhind. Just outside of the city, Jassa Singh attacked Zain Khan. Zain Khan was defeated. Jassa Singh obtained fourteen to fifteen lakh rupees, and approximately ten thousand of Zain Khan’s men were killed in this attack.¹⁷³ The rest of the Sikh chiefs decided that they would wait until Ahmad Shah and his retinue crossed the Chenab river before attacking him. They retreated to surrounding forts, and lived off of the land. Those who resided in Lahore, on the other hand, had to pay exorbitant prices for grain, as the city was closed out of fear of Sikh attacks: “One force has raised disturbance in the neighbourhood of the *ṣūba* [-capital] Lahore and does not allow grain to enter the city. As a result, grain is selling at eight seers [per rupee] in the city. It is cheap outside the city; but the people of the city are dying [of

¹⁶⁹ Grewal et al., 192.

¹⁷⁰ Grewal et al., 193.

¹⁷¹ Grewal et al., 194.

¹⁷² Grewal et al., 194.

¹⁷³ Grewal et al., 195.

starvation].”¹⁷⁴ The Sikhs, comprised of over one hundred thousand horsemen, had divided themselves into three divisions and waited until Ahmad Shah and his forces, close to forty thousand, crossed the river. Soon after they crossed, a fierce battle ensued, resulting in Ahmad Shah’s defeat. Many people, on both sides, died, some even drowned in the river. During the battle, there was a moment of uncertainty about Ahmad Shah: his horse had drowned and people were unaware if he too had died, or if he managed to survive.¹⁷⁵ To the east, Jassa Singh and his troops extracted revenue from Ambala and plundered surrounding areas. Ahmad Shah’s forces retreated to the Jhelum River and “fled hither and thither in disorder. However much the Shah [Ahmad Shah] took off his turban and exhorted his army commanders to show firmness and stand up to the enemy, no one listened to him, and troop after troop crossed the river Jhelum, and fled pell-mell, like an army without defence or transport.”¹⁷⁶ Another rumor spread that Ahmad Shah “had made a long journey, that is, he was killed.”¹⁷⁷ Rumors, such as these, were effective in hastening the defeated army’s retreat.

The Sikh chiefs, Charat Singh, Hari Singh, Karori Mal, Thoka Singh, Lohara Singh and others celebrated *holī*. They wrote letters to the governors appointed by Ahmad Shah (namely Sar Buland Khan, Ahmad Shah’s uncle, governor of Kashmir, and Ghulam Shah Latti, governor of Multan, demanding that they remit revenues due to Ahmad Shah to them instead. They were further warned that if they did not comply or if they delayed, an army would be sent to fight

¹⁷⁴ Grewal et al., 194.

¹⁷⁵ Grewal et al., 196.

¹⁷⁶ Grewal et al., 196.

¹⁷⁷ Grewal et al., 197.

them.¹⁷⁸ As for Lahore, Hari Singh and Charat Singh's men were sent to occupy the city. Internal fighting between the two groups resulted in deaths on both sides. After peace was mediated, Charat Singh's men occupied the city and Charat Singh entered. He demanded two thousand lakh rupees from the finance minister, Kabuli Mal. Charat Singh "summoned all inhabitants and demanded large sums from them. The *sāhūkārs* and wealthy persons have been beaten with sticks, as the Abdālīs used to do. A great calamity has fallen on the people there, big or small, money being demanded from everyone."¹⁷⁹

Qazi Noor Muhammad versified the battle, entitled *Jangnāma*, between the Afghans and Sikhs in 1764-5, wherein the Sikhs emerged victorious. The poem was written in 1765, immediately after Ahmad Shah's seventh campaign. The poem was selectively summarized into English by Ganda Singh and partially translated by Iqtidar Alam Khan. A beautifully legible copy of the poem is housed at Punjabi University, accession number 332119, containing 225 folios. In the first fifty-eight lines, he praises God, followed by twenty-nine lines praising the Prophet Muhammad, and then one hundred and twelve lines devoted to the praise of Ali b. Abi Talib (the Prophet's nephew and son-in-law). Forty-three lines about Ahmad Shah Abdali appear after the Islamicate convention of praising God, the prophet, and Ali, his spiritual guide.

In this account, the reason why Ahmad Shah, who had a "mind, body, and heart of justice" (*dil-i jān-i ādil*) had to come to fight the Sikhs was because they had overrun Lahore and Multan, and had killed Muslims and destroyed mosques.¹⁸⁰ Religious scholars wrote letters to Ahmad Shah, pleading him to come and uproot the Sikhs, which they considered to be more important than

¹⁷⁸ Grewal et al., 197.

¹⁷⁹ Grewal et al., 197.

¹⁸⁰ Qazi Noor Muhammad, "Jangnāma" (1765), 41, 332119, Punjabi University.

planning for *hajj* and *'umra*.¹⁸¹ They issued *fatwās* (legal opinions) to this effect.¹⁸² Upon receiving these requests, Ahmad Shah, who was considering going on hajj to fulfill the saying that one should undertake this pilgrimage and become a *hajjī*. A group of religious scholars, from Qallat and Qandahar, convened to discuss the matter.¹⁸³ They too wrote petitions to Ahmad Shah to fight the “infidel” Sikhs.¹⁸⁴ Ahmad Shah agreed to engage in suppressing the Sikhs, and headed east with this army.

Ahmad Shah attempted to capture Lahore in 1766-67, but was unsuccessful yet again. His forces entered and occupied the city briefly in December 1766, but they were roundly defeated by the Sikhs. This was the last attempt to control Lahore, the last campaign in Hindustan in 1768-69 did not reach beyond Jhelum River.

Conclusion

Ahmad Shah’s campaigns in Hindustan required support from within. His sphere of influence expanded for the first fifteen years of his reign, well beyond the territories acquired by Nadir Shah. Ahmad Shah aligned with fellow Afghans; and yet, he hesitated to completely trust his relatives in Multan. The accounts written in Hindustan show the fragility of relationships within and without each ethnic group, and especially religious groups.

¹⁸¹ Muhammad, 41.

¹⁸² Muhammad, 42.

¹⁸³ Muhammad, 43.

¹⁸⁴ Muhammad, 44.

Chapter Four

Re/Evaluating Miskin's Tahmās Nāma: Negotiating Identities for Social and Political Mobility

همچو نر نواب رفت و کار با زن افتاد
قدر مردان را چه میدانند این نسوان نهاد
گفته خواجه سرايان هر کجا شد پیش رفت
کی بر آید کام مردان زان فریق نامراد¹

“The *nawāb*² departed and one has to deal with women,
What can women³ know of the worth of men?
The *khwāja sarās*⁴ were having an effective voice in everything,
Men had to get their work done through these wretches.”⁵

In November 1753, the governor of Lahore, Muin al-Mulk, died mysteriously while on a hunting expedition. His child, a mere toddler, was confirmed to succeed him by both the Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah Bahadur (d. 1775, dethroned June 2, 1754) in Delhi, and the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali/Durrani (d. 1772) who in this moment of history had jurisdiction of Lahore (Punjab) —meaning Lahore was part of the Durrani empire and annual revenues were due to him. Real power rested in the hands of Muin al-Mulk's widow, Suraya Begum, also known as Murad Begum, and in historiography as Mughlani Begum (d. 1779) because the new governor, Muhammad Amin Khan (d. 1754), was her son and a toddler. Mughlani Begum's political power

¹ Tahmas Khan Miskin, *Tahmās Nāma*, ed. by Muhammad Aslam (Lahore: Panjab University, 1986), pp. 107–8. The script was written in *shikasta nastaliq*, Indo-Persian, therefore I have opted to use the Urdu alphabet for the *ha* and *ta marbuta*.

² Specifically, Muin al-Mulk, the couplet is about his widow, Mughlani Begum.

³ *Niswān-nihād*, which Rao has translated to “women” is perhaps incorrect. A better translation would be “women-like disposition” or “eunuch.”

⁴ *Khwāja sarā* means eunuch.

⁵ *Tahmās Nāma, the Autobiography of a Slave.*, trans. by Pagdi Setu Madhava Rao (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1967), pp. 22–3.

was short lived, controversial, and invited documentation from her contemporaries and colonial and post-colonial historians. The above quotations are, respectively, from an eighteenth century contemporary source, the *Tahmās Nāma* and from an abridged translation of the same source.

In this chapter, we will re-evaluate the *Tahmās Nāma* in order to consider how identities were ascribed, described, and leveraged in eighteenth century Punjab. We will examine, through the first person narrative account of an ex-slave, what identities promoted social and political mobility, and how identities were rooted in networks and thus leveraged.

1 – The Text

The eighteenth century primary source cited above is *the* source from which the above mentioned scholars draw to describe the state of affairs in Punjab and Mughlani Begum. It was written by an ex-slave Muhkam al-Daula, Itiqad-i Jang, Tahmas Beg Khan Bahadur, hereafter referred to by his *nom du plume*, Miskin (meaning wretched, humble), who completed recording his life story in 1782 and named it *Kitāb-i Qissa-i Tahmās Miskīn* or *Tahmās Nāma* (*Book of Tahmas Miskin's Story*, or the *Tahmas Treatise*). Miskin refers to the text as “*ahwāl-i khūd*” (my affairs), “*qissa*” (history, tale), “*qissa-i khūd*” (my history, tale), “*dāstān*” (history, story), and “*rūdād*” (account).⁶ First person narration is not something unique to the early modern period in North India, and especially in Persian. Babur (d. 1530), the founder of the Mughal Empire, wrote his autobiography in the sixteenth century, and other elites, including women such as Babur's

⁶ Miskin, p. 7.

⁷ Miskin, p. 8.

⁸ Miskin, p. 15.

⁹ Miskin, p. 15.

¹⁰ Miskin, p. 83.

daughter Gulbadan Begum (d. 1603), further contributed to this genre of writing.¹¹ Even non-elites composed their life stories in the sixteenth century, such as the Afghan soldier Dattu Sarvani's memoir attached to a Sufi treatise, *Laṭā'if-i Quddusī*.¹² By the eighteenth century, Hazin, Abdul Karim Kashmiri, and Mir had completed their own life stories, also choosing Persian as the language of documentation. These men were of the scholarly class. If there is anything different about Miskin's first person writing, compared to his fellow contemporaries, it is that he was not an elite proper: Miskin was a slave who managed to become free—although, it is possible that he wished to be included in this class of people, and therefore recorded his life's story. The style of writing is unique, in that, Miskin begins and ends each section with a reference to his present moment of writing and the body of the sections are about his past (this is omitted in the English translations). Miskin interweaves political history with his personal narrative (similar to Mir, Hazin, and Kashmiri); the content includes personal and political volatility and brief descriptions of Afghan, Mughal, Maratha, and Sikh men and women plotting and fighting for power.

The stature of the *Tahmās Nāma* as a first-person eye-witness account of the events in Punjab and Delhi in the eighteenth century led colonial and postcolonial historians to preserve and partially translate it in hopes to advance factual history-writing. To this end, the text was first abridged and translated by the well-read Bengali historian, Sir Jadunath Sarkar (d. 1958), in 1937, and again by a Maharashtrian historian Pagdi Setu Madhava Rao (d. 1994) in 1967. For Sarkar, this text becomes *the* account of Punjab in the eighteenth century—he quotes through translation, almost verbatim, the text to describe the events leading up to the downfall of the Mughals in his

¹¹ See Taymiya R. Zaman, 'Inscribing Empire: Sovereignty and Subjectivity in Mughal Memoirs' (unpublished Ph.D., University of Michigan, 2007).

¹² Simon Digby, 'Dreams and Reminiscences of Dattu Sarvani a Sixteenth Century Indo-Afghan Soldier', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 2.1 (1965), 52–80; Simon Digby, 'Dreams and Reminiscences of Dattu Sarvani a Sixteenth Century Indo-Afghan Soldier', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 2.2 (1965), 178–94.

second volume of *The Fall of the Mughal Empire*. Two decades later, Muhammad Aslam critically edited the work and published it in its original language—Persian—based on two extant manuscripts, one at the British Library and the other at Aligarh Muslim University.¹³ Historians who do not have access to Persian rely on Rao’s English translations. Although Sarkar’s abridged translation is rare and more difficult to consult, his verbatim translated passages from the text is perhaps more widely read because it is included in his analysis of the fall of the empire. The question of how and why the Mughal empire declined inspired decades of scholarly output, and the scholars attempting to answer the question, especially those who could not read Persian, relied heavily Sarkar’s reconstructed histories and translations.

To date, Indrani Chatterjee, is the only scholar who has written and published on the text itself, in consultation with a Persian-reading researcher.¹⁴ In Chatterjee’s article, published in 2000, she examines why the text was neglected as a study in its own right, and she critically analyzes the English translations with a primary focus on Jadunath Sarkar’s work to discuss ideas of slavery and selfhood, arguing that Sarkar’s refusal to call Miskin a slave is suggestive of a lack of willingness to consider anything beyond what could produce a “fact-based” history. Chatterjee argues the *Tahmās Nāma* is a literary work of a certain finesse or *adab* and not merely an account of historical events. Her article is a welcome reminder for all scholars who rely on English translations to be weary of colonial and postcolonial translators whose agendas and biases intentionally or unintentionally map on to the integrity of the text.

Miskin’s first person account of his life and the political events of eighteenth century North India requires a reevaluation in its original language, Persian, if we wish to ask questions beyond

¹³ Purnima Dhavan, Muzaffar Alam, JS Grewal read and cite the critical edition of the Persian text.

¹⁴ Indrani Chatterjee, ‘A Slave’s Quest for Selfhood in Eighteenth-Century Hindustan’, *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 37.1 (2000), 53–86.

how and why the Mughal empire declined, or how and why the Sikhs rose in power in Punjab. The questions I seek to answer are about identity and how identities were negotiated or leveraged for political and social mobility and capital in eighteenth century Punjab.¹⁵

By identity, I mean that which can be self-proclaimed and that which can be ascribed from without. Identities are layered, negotiated, and leveraged. And yet, these are coherent in some fashion. For example, Miskin is a male, a Sufi, a Muslim, a captive, a soldier, a superintendent, a poet, a writer, a grammarian, a Turkish speaker, a Persian writer, of Anatolian origin, a husband, a father, a grandfather, an adopted son, a half-brother, a Turk. Some of these identities are acquired over time, like poet and grammarian, some are imposed on him, like captive. These layered identities are privileged in some moments and downplayed in other. They also link an individual to a collective. A poet, for example, would have associated and socialized with other poets. They would meet in gatherings following certain etiquettes and norms. In Miskin's lifetime, these assemblies were not open to anyone, one had to achieve a level of mastery of the art of poetry, be recognized for it and then invited, and if accepted, maintain relations with other poets. The same is true for Sufi orders, one had to identify a guide and if the guide was willing to initiate them into the order, then the person would have access to the community. Gatherings, based on identities, functioned as both religious and social spaces and only those who were initiated were permitted to enter and occupy the space. Identities mattered when it came to movement. Men had access to public spaces, but if they entered a city in which they did not reside, they were required to have proper paperwork. When Miskin needed to go to Delhi as a free man, he was stopped at Sirhind and he had to leave behind his possessions, go on to Delhi to acquire the required paperwork in

¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. by Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). This chapter relies heavily on field theory, it takes as an assumption that human existence is based on social relations.

order to collect his belongings. He waited a period of months to get these papers. Sometimes movement and access to space, especially private space, required leveraging two or more identities. Miskin was allowed to enter the women's quarters in his master's household because he was a slave and a pre-pubescent youth. Likewise, Miskin had access to his master during prayers in the mornings because he was a slave, a Muslim, and a male.

Miskin's Mughal identity was a fluid category in his life. At the beginning of his narrative, he writes that people asked him from where he came. Based on his looks, they guessed that he might be Armenian, or Kurdish, or Khariji. Without settling the question at the beginning, he narrates that he lived in a village near Bayazid when he was captured. But later, he does claim a Turkish identity. When describing certain moments of his life, he uses the voice of the people he writes about to describe himself. For example, he writes that Mughlani Begum referred to him as "*mughal-i haqīqī*"—a true/pure blood Mughal. He is the epitome of fluid Mughal identity: his identity was not based on birth; rather, it was based on affiliation to others who might have a real or constructed genealogy that marked that lineage, in his case it was being Mughal. Moreover, an entire household could be considered part of the same group, like the Mughal household. It consisted of eunuchs, wives, and concubines who came from different regions and even religious practices. And yet, they would collectively be referred to as Mughal, or Turkish, because they were closely linked to the Mughal, Turkish emperor, whose lineage was a matter of fact and uncontested. Miskin was further affiliated with the Uzbeks, as he was adopted by an Uzbek, before he was given as a gift to the Mughal governor. Throughout his account, Miskin refers to his Uzbek "sister" (*hum-shīrī*) with whom he confided and consulted.

Gender, in this chapter, refers to the way in which a person is identified as male, female, eunuch, or child. Persons in these categories had certain obligations they were required to perform and were permitted or denied access to certain spaces based on their gender. Males, for example,

in this text, were expected to pray in congregation if they were part of the household and Muslim. Females of a certain socio-economic class, like Mughlani Begum, were not permitted to abandon *pardā*—screen or curtain that hid their bodies and faces from the public. Eunuchs could move within and without male and female spaces within the household. Children up to the age of puberty were also free to move around as they wished within the walls or borders of the household. In this text, gender is connected to mobility and obligation of how one should behave. For example, Miskin rebukes a eunuch, who fell in love with a domestic slave woman, for running away with her escaping to Delhi from Lahore.¹⁶ He further blames the head of the household who, it was rumored, accepted both of them in his own household. Eunuchs were not allowed to leave without the permission of their master, and his leaving with a slave woman was a transgression that was punishable.

2 – Problems of Abridgement and Translation

The English translation of the *Tahmās Nāma* that is most widely in circulation, is that of Pagdi Setu Madhava Rao's. He states at the beginning of the abridged translation his intentions and aims for translating the work:

In the translation, I have not followed his distribution of chapters. I have indicated important events at suitable places in the narrative. The work, being rather bulky, did not admit of a detailed translation. I have abridged it without omitting any significant incident or event. Descriptions of events of which Tahmas Khan was not a witness or for which more authentic sources are available have been abridged. But where Tahmas Khan has personally witnessed events, I have faithfully translated his narrative. Tahmas Nama gives a graphic description of conditions in Punjab and Delhi during the invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali [Durrani]. As such it provides a [*sic*] very important source material for the study of Indian history.¹⁷

¹⁶ Miskin, p. 173.

¹⁷ Rao, pp. viii–ix.

It is discernable that Rao is not interested in maintaining the integrity of the text, or the genre. Rather, Rao is keen to translate only what can help further the study of Indian history. He fails to mention that he supplies his own summaries for longer accounts (even those that are about Miskin's life or eye-witness accounts); he largely omits poetry, with the exception of a few couplets, including the translated epitaph at the beginning of this chapter;¹⁸ and he inserts dates into the text that are not present in the original account.

The first two full folios of the manuscript (or first eight pages of the published text), which is exclusively poetry, are missing, and they are not summarized. The poetry at the beginning of the work outlines why Miskin felt compelled to write this narrative, and why he chose to write it in the medium of prose over poetry. He explains that because God has ordained it, he must compose his life story rather than sit in silence,¹⁹ emphasizing self-seclusion, which would have been his preference if he had the choice.²⁰ He writes, “although I want to sit quietly in the corner of seclusion, I changed my opinion because it is impossible to hide God's strength.”²¹ He attributes his success to God, saying that God helped the wretched, i.e. our author Miskin, and raised him to such a level that one could not repay or communicate thanks. He continues the poetry, stating that he wished to describe his life in “verses strung like pearls,” to “turn my experiences into pearls and scatter them as beautiful poetry.”²² But, he cannot compose his life in verse for two reasons: the first is that “there are few people of understanding and many who understand little,” and the

¹⁸ The verses he does translate reveal his misogyny more than help us understand the text. He chooses to translate how women are unfit to rule, and yet manages to leave out a translation of a poem on Ahmad Shah Durrani where Miskin likens him to a butcher who comes to Hindustan to destroy it.

¹⁹ خواستم خامش نشینم

²⁰ Miskin, p. 7. عزلت

²¹ Miskin, p. 7.

²² Miskin, pp. 7–8.

second is because he is not a master in poetry (this, of course, is a trope that many writers employ in this period, to display humility).²³ He, therefore, writes his entire story in prose with a sense of urgency, with poetry interspersed as ornamentation.²⁴ The poetry at the beginning is replete with linguistic (references to pearls, for example) and religious (clearly an Islamicate worldview) conventions, and form the foundation of the text. Before the chronogram at the end of the poetry, Miskin says “He who reads this treatise / will scatter flowers of praise on its leaves. In this manner, it will bring to memory / May God always keep it flourishing.” The last couplet of the poetry includes the chronogram which adds up to 1094 AH, or 1780 CE and it includes “As the pen for the sake of his history has pierced the pearls,

After the poetry, he writes in prose about the creation of Adam and his spouse, Bibi Hawa,²⁵ and how all humans descended from them, through Noah. He positions himself as a believing Muslim, who accepts Quranic narratives about the creation of life and humankind. Miskin writes about how the Prophet Muhammad preached that all believers are brothers, and thus one is not better or worse than the other, and in truth we are all one. With this logic, Miskin hopes that his treatise will help people refrain from making transgressions, and that for himself it be an opportunity to reflect on his life, the moments of being ignorant and lost, and general misery, and because God’s will, his beautiful life was not full of sin.²⁶

As mentioned earlier, Miskin begins and ends each section with a reference to the present moment of writing. At the beginning of some sections, he will mention that it is a new day and

²³ Miskin, p. 8.

²⁴ Miskin, p. 8.

²⁵ Miskin does not write that Bibi Hawa (Eve in the Biblical tradition) was created from Adam’s rib. He writes that God created her in the female form in the same manner as he created Adam, but in the male form.

²⁶ Miskin, p. 10.

like the sun lights the earth, his pen lights the pages on which he writes, or that the pen of the horse is ready to run. At the end of sections, in usually one or two lines, he mentions why he must stop at this point in the narrative: it is time for evening prayers, or the horse of writing has exhausted itself, or that a specific account is complete, so he can stop. Sometimes, he adds commentary about how he feels about the narrative he recorded. For example, in the section where he describes Muin al-Mulk's death and the events that follow his passing, he writes: "Oh Miskin! Stop this unpleasant story here."²⁷ The more common occurrence is, "Oh Miskin! The time for evening prayers has arrived, stop this story in this place."²⁸

In addition to ignoring the value of poetry in Miskin's text and eliding the prose full of religious underpinnings, Rao does not faithfully translate the text: he either mistranslates or provides a terse summary. Two examples demonstrate this, the first is a mistranslation, and the second a summary. These examples indicate what "Indian history" actually means for Rao. He seems to gloss over at best, or completely ignore, at worst, aspects of the text that can help historians who are interested in studying this period beyond political or economic history. The two examples that he mistranslates or summarizes provide information that would be useful for military, social, cultural, and gender history.

First example:

هر گاه بعد از مدتی نواب صاحب در لشکر با می بر آمدند، ترکیب خیمه کلان و ڈیره خوابگاه و قلندری خلوتخانه و اسپک دیوانخانه مع قنات جدا جدا و ڈیره نقارخانه دیگر کندله با که استاده میشدند، بخوبنترین وجه نگاه کرده، ترکیب آنرا قرینه بقرینه بر صفحه دل نقش کرده بعد از آن بخیمه خود می آمد و پارچه سلاحی و کرپاس از بازار طلبیده از دست خود بدستوری که دیده آمده بودم، بهمان شکل دوخته و درست کرده استاده مینمودم. هر گاه به تماشای آن سیر می شد، فرود آورده، یکجا بسته، نگاه میداشتم و همین وتیره بر روز دل را خوش می کردم.²⁹

²⁷ Miskin, pp. 102–3.

²⁸ Miskin, p. 106.

²⁹ Miskin, p. 61.

After a while, the Nawab Sahib would embark on campaigns, and I would carefully look at the arrangements of the large tent, place of sleeping, the smaller tents, the place to relieve yourself, the stables with separating screens, the drum house, and other various tents that were standing. I would look at its organization in minute detail, and imprint it on the heart, in the best way and as intently as possible; after that, I would come into my own tent and would take a piece of rough linen, *karbaz*, requested from the bazar, and by my own hand, by the manner in which I had seen it, I would sew it in the same form and would erect them [the layout of the camp]. Whenever I became satisfied from looking at it, I would take it down, roll it up and keep it. Every day, I pleased myself with this.

Rao's translation:

Later, when Muin ulmulk [*sic*] (his other title was Rustume [*sic*] Hind) marched on campaigns, I had a chance to see life in the camps. Rows after rows of tents set in an orderly manner, the chief tent of the Governor, his private chambers, his bedroom, the tent holding kettle drums all these made a lasting impression on my mind. I purchased clothes from the bazar and put on a uniform similar to the one I had noticed in the camp. I was highly satisfied with myself.³⁰

In this translation, Rao depicts an enamored boy who is simply impressed with the wonders of military life, so much so that he is compelled to mimic the soldiers he sees and has clothes sewn to be in conformity with what he witnesses, and all of this brings him great pleasure.

Second Example:

و رفته رفته خود را مایل بفسق و فجور گردانید. غرض که آخر الامر گردن دل بکمند زلف یک طوایف اله دتی نام گرفتار شد. هر چه پیش خود داشتم در چند روز بمحبت او برباد دادم و آن نازنین دلفریب بر چند نزد من تنها نشسته بادابای خوش و غمزه بای دلکش بدام خود می کشید و ترغیب بامر مباشرت میگردانید لیکن من بسبب شرم که دامنگیر بود، دست اندازی نمیکردم. و چند آنکه آن سمین بدن ما را در کنار کشیده دست خود بگردن من حمایل می ساخت. دامن از دست او بر گرفته برخاسته میرفتم. لیکن آخرش که سرشته دل به اختیار دیگری افتاده بود ما بم مرتکب امور رسوائی گشتیم. ایزد تعالی از فضل و کرم خویش مرا بیامرزد و روز قیامت از دیگر گناه های رستگاری بخشد.³¹

And slowly, slowly we fell into debauchery and deviated from right. In short, in the end, a prostitute named Allah Datti arrested my heart like a knot in hair. In a few days of being in her presence, I was devastated in love, and that delightful heart-

³⁰ Rao, p. 10.

³¹ Miskin, pp. 114–5.

allurer would sit next to me alone, drawing my heart into her trap and instigating baser desires (i.e. sexual intercourse), but out of shame that overcame me, I did not touch her. And after a while, that silver-bodied one, pulled my neck and shoulder close to her with her own hands. I freed myself from her grip and standing up, I left. But, in the end, my heart had fallen in the command of another; and we both became disgraced. May God, most high, forgive me, out of benevolence and kindness, on the Day of Judgment.

The English, on the other hand, misleadingly states the following:

Others fell on evil ways. They indulged in debauchery. I resisted their advice for some time. But it was of no use. I had to yield. I too visited the houses of dancing girls. I fell in love with a girl named Moti. In a few days, I lost all that I possessed.³²

Compared to the Persian, it is not that the other boys had fallen into bad habits with Miskin following suit. He says that slowly, we (*māyān*) fell into evil ways and debauchery. The nuancing that exists in the Persian is very different from the English. He describes in detail how easily he could have slept with one prostitute, but is able to resist—only to commit the sin later with another person. The prostitute with whom he spent a lot of time, but did not engage in intercourse with was named, Allah Datti (not Moti as Rao states), yet the person (we do not know if this person was male or a female) who eventually won over his heart and with whom he had sexual relations remains anonymous. It is possible that his telling of the story falls in line with the trope of sleeping with a young boy, although this is pure speculation. We can also consider why he chooses to reveal one person's name, and not the other person. Perhaps public persons, like prostitutes or elite women like Mughlani Begum can be identified, while others cannot.

Both of these examples, which are misrepresented in the English, are important. The first example establishes the strength of Miskin's memory (especially spatial memory). His memory, according to his narrative, permitted him to reconstruct a three-dimensional organization of the

³² Rao, p. 25.

camp, as a very young child. We can also consider why he chooses to include this anecdote of his life. We can speculate he includes these to indicate (and foreshadow) that he fully comprehends how camps are organized, so in the future when he needs this kind of knowledge he has it. Another reason is perhaps a literary trope to trigger memories of notable historical figures, to remind the reader of other famous people who have done something similar. For example, in many contemporary histories of Ahmad Shah Durrani, a Sufi saint has a premonition that Ahmad Shah will become an emperor and would construct three dimensional sown models of his kingdom, as a symbol of his future fortune.³³

The second example provides a gauge for the author's credibility and a sense of his ethical worldview. He could have chosen to leave out this moment of his life where he deemed himself as having been impious; yet, he narrates this part of his life, and illustrates how he tried to resist, but, in the end, succumbed to his desires. The nuance he gives here is noteworthy, and allows the reader to trust the author about other aspects of his personal and professional life. Miskin is perhaps his own worst critic, as can be gleaned by his self-reflection. His sense of morality is, of course, different from ours. This is precisely why it is helpful to have a more nuanced translation, so that we may discern from the text what it would have meant for Miskin to have engaged in pre-marital intercourse. This example provides more intimate (in the sense of personal actions, but also his relation to God) access to the author, and the feel for the text is not as sterile as the English.

In the attempt to make the text appealing to historians, Rao changes the narrative style by adding dates within the story that are not present in the Persian text. Again, for Rao, the dates are necessary, they are the markers required for historians to cross-reference what Miskin reports, cite him as a credible source, and/or corroborate dates/events inter-textually. Chatterjee argues in her

³³ Ganda Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan* (London: Asia Pub. House, 1959), p. 26.

article that Miskin does not include dates because he sees time in a transcendent way. His religious worldview guides the narrative, which is meant to serve as a parable of “timeless truth.”³⁴ It is true that religion is very important to Miskin, and he does use the lens of religion for most of how he sees and makes sense of the world. Nonetheless, it is hard to argue that time is completely absent in this text, and that the narrative attempts to transcend time. I argue Miskin is very aware of time, but perhaps not in the way a historian would want him, i.e. he does not give precise dates for the events that occur and the ones he participates in throughout the text. He does, however, provide two dates. In the poetry at the very beginning of this narrative, he gives a chronogram at the end of the poetry that adds up to 1194 AH (August 31, 1780).³⁵ He writes at the end that he began this narrative during the first day of Ramadhan and it took him nine months to complete the work.³⁶ Miskin includes another date towards the end of the narrative, the date of completion of this “*kitāb-i qissa-i Tahmās Miskīn*”³⁷: 11th Jumadi al-Awwal, 1196 AH (April 24, 1782), in the 24th *julūs* (regal year) of Mubarak Shah Alam Badshah Ghazi.³⁸ Between the date provided by his chronogram at the beginning of the work and the date he supplies in the prose itself, there is a lapse of one year and eight months. There is clearly a discrepancy here, either he does not actually write the work in nine months as he states at the end of the composition, or he did not compose the chronogram correctly, or he added an already-composed poem into his narrative without fixing the chronogram. Regardless of the discrepancy, dates are present in the text, and he is aware of them, but chooses not to use precise dates throughout his narration.

³⁴ Chatterjee, ‘A Slave’s Quest for Selfhood in Eighteenth-Century Hindustan’, p. 57.

³⁵ Miskin, p. 8.. The last line of the poetry: شده این نسخه موزون خرد گفت

³⁶ Miskin, p. 355.

³⁷ Miskin, p. 355.

³⁸ Miskin, p. 355. This is Mughal emperor Shah Alam II (d. 1806)

Although I agree with Chatterjee that he wishes his work to be a moral guide, especially for his children, I do not agree with her assessment that by not including dates, he attempts to transcend the boundaries of time.³⁹ How does he, then, think of time and how does this relate to his narrative? We get a sense of how he measures the days. When describing the routine of those whom he admires, like Muin al-Mulk, or his own day when he becomes a *khān*, (title and access given by local courts) he marks the times of the day by *pahar*⁴⁰ or by prayer times.⁴¹ As for days, weeks, months, and years, he will have a referential first, and then add the amount of time. For example, he says after Ahmad Shah Durrani left, Timur Shah Durrani⁴² ruled for one year and two months; or three years prior to writing this book, he saw and helped Mughlani Begum in Shahjahanabad (Delhi).⁴³ Throughout the narrative, he mentions his age when a significant event occurs. After all, this is the story of his life—not a history of Punjab or Delhi, as the historians want to read it. He was merely fifteen when he advised and helped Qasim Khan, an important figure throughout the narrative.⁴⁴ When he was twenty, he decided to initiate into a Sufi *tarīqa* (interpretation or path). He was twenty-six when he traveled to Sialkot on behalf of Mughlani Begum. He was nearly fifty when he composed his personal narrative. The center of this narrative is Miskin, not the political ups and downs of the eighteenth century. This is a stylistic choice; Miskin could have easily inserted dates, he was clearly aware of them, but chooses not to. His

³⁹ His *dīwān*, on the other hand, is an example that transcends time. There are no historical references or people in his poetry, it is religious in nature, consisting of supplications to God, praise of God, and thanks, etc. The *dīwān* is unpublished and the only extant manuscript copy of Miskin's poetry is currently at the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Kolkata with the accession number ASB, PSC 921.

⁴⁰ A *pahar* is a unit of three hours; there are 8 units throughout the day.

⁴¹ Miskin, pp. 18, 19, 27.

⁴² Miskin, p. 96.

⁴³ Miskin, p. 354.

⁴⁴ Miskin, p. 110.

perspective, how time relates to him, is weakened by the insertion of dates, even if it helps the historian.

Rao's English translation of the autobiographical narrative misses some very important elements of the narrative, as have been described above. The most noteworthy is the real misunderstanding of the author, who he is, what makes him human, why he wants to share his life story with posterity, and how precisely he wishes to be remembered. There is no doubt that his eye witness accounts shed some very important light on the political volatility and events of the eighteenth century—and one would not want to undermine the value of Rao's translation to that end. Nonetheless, taking the human aspects, including religious underpinnings, of the writing process and the very clear intention of wanting to write about his own life undermine and yet again, oppress, the life of a survivor of slavery. We must reread the original text in order to understand our author and how identities operated in eighteenth century Punjab.

3 – Miskin's Life

According to his story, Miskin was kidnapped by an Uzbek soldier in Nadir Shah's⁴⁵ (d. 1747) army. He describes that he lived in a small village called Arzat, a short distance from the city of Bayazid in Turkey. When Nadir Shah's army entered the village, they plundered, committed violent acts of terror and burned whatever they could. When he, his elder brother, and mother came out of their home to witness the commotion, a soldier on a horse grabbed Miskin from his brother's

⁴⁵ Nadir Shah, an Iranian Turk, became one of the most powerful rulers upon the fall of the Safavid empire. Under the pretext of addressing non-compliance with an alliance agreement, Nadir Shah came to Hindustan via Punjab and his soldiers plundered Delhi. He was crowned the emperor of Hindustan, in 1739, but restored the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah. He obtained territory from Hindustan, all the lands west of the Indus river. See Ernest Tucker, 'Explaining Nadir Shah: Kingship and Royal Legitimacy in Muhammad Kazim Marvi's *Tarikh-i 'Alam-ara-yi Nadiri*', *Iranian Studies*, 26.1-2 (1993), 95–117; Ernest Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006); James Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah, Formerly Called Thomas Kuli Khan, the Present Emperor of Persia* (London: Printed by W. Strahan for the author., 1742); Laurence Lockhart, *Nadir Shah: A Critical Study Based Mainly upon Contemporary Sources*, (London: Luzac, 1938).

arms. His mother and brother attempted to run after the soldier, but another man on horseback struck Miskin's brother and his mother went to his brother's assistance. This was the last time Miskin would see his mother, brother, and village.⁴⁶ Khuranji Beg, an Uzbek chief in charge of a large faction in Nadir Shah's army, took Miskin from his brother and adopted him as his son. Miskin relates that Khuranji Beg cared for him and at the time of Khuranji Beg's wedding, he had Miskin circumcised—marking him a Muslim (it is unclear if Miskin was Muslim by birth, or if he becomes Muslim after being adopted by Khuranji Beg). Two years passed in his care, and when Nadir Shah was assassinated on June 2, 1747 by some Qizilbash soldiers within his army, Khuranji Beg and other Uzbeks were killed by the Qizilbash who were vying for power. Miskin was captured by the Qizilbash, and he managed to escape them, and return to some Uzbeks, one of whom was Khuranji Beg's adopted brother, Hasan Beg.⁴⁷ Hasan Beg decided to go to Baloch with Miskin in tow. The journey was hard and unpleasant. Some of the Uzbek contingent decided to move on to Lahore, but as Hasan Beg had lost many horses and men along the journey he had no choice but to give up Miskin (it is unclear if Miskin was sold or simply given to his new master). Miskin describes his new master as the opposite of Khuranji Beg, this man was unkind, beat him often, and forced Miskin to walk long distances. Eventually, this cruel master gave Miskin and other boys as a gift to the governor of Lahore, Muin al-Mulk.⁴⁸

Under Muin al-Mulk's supervision and insistence, Miskin and other Turkish speaking slave-boys, were taught Arabic, Persian, religious scripture, and martial arts. In his account, Miskin notes the rigor with which he approached his studies: he memorized the Qurān, and became a

⁴⁶ Miskin, p. 27.

⁴⁷ Rao, p. 38.

⁴⁸ Rao, p. 44.

skilled soldier.⁴⁹ Following the death of Muin al-Mulk, his widow, Mughlani Begum inherited Miskin. As her slave, Miskin proved himself as a worthy and loyal soldier and servant, and eventually he was entrusted with more senior responsibilities. Mughlani Begum freed Miskin and his wife (after a very traumatic experience, to be discussed below).⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Miskin continued to work in her service, until she plotted to have him killed.⁵¹ He then left her household and worked for Rohilla Afghans Zabita Khan (d. 1785), his father Najib Khan (d. 1770), Iranian Najaf Khan (d. 1782), and eventually the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II (d. 1806). At the time when he composed his narrative in 1780 or 1782, around the age of fifty, he had eight surviving children: four sons and three daughters from his first wife (five children died) and one son from his second wife (one son died). He writes that he owned plots of land and was able to distribute land, money, and horses to his children, and marry them all. Miskin died a little outside of Delhi in 1802.

4 – Miskin’s Gender and Mughal Identities

As addressed earlier in the Introduction, by using “Afghan,” “Uzbek,” “Qizilbash,” or “Mughal/Turk/Turki/Turkman,” I mean a collective of people who affiliate themselves with a shared real, fabricated, or imagined genealogies. These affiliations were coherent in the 18th century, and were accompanied with certain ways of being, including stereotypes that may or may not have been accurate. Land and language were also loosely associated with the collective group, but as many of these groups of people were constantly moving and campaigning and invoked homelands that may not have been their birth places, one cannot assume that a certain affiliation

⁴⁹ He was taught how to ride horses and elephants for war, see Miskin, p. 70.

⁵⁰ Miskin, p. 194.

⁵¹ Miskin, pp. 247–8.

rendered a shared place or language. Of course within one collective group, there were multiple genealogical affiliations. With these classifications came hierarchies within and without each affiliation, and these were disputed. The Mughals, for example, had long claimed the Afghans were beneath them. Mughal historiography characterizes Afghans as uncivilized, barbaric, nomadic, lacking any sense of governance or state-building.⁵² Afghans, in turn, write maliciously about the Mughals and Qizilbash, who were enemies of the Uzbeks. It should not be a surprise that such a phenomenon existed in the early modern period, but what should be notable is how these groups defined themselves in relation to other groups in this period.

For our author, Miskin, being “Mughal,” meaning that he was a Turk, provided him with employment opportunities under the Mughals, but when the Afghans come into power, his Turkish identity, at times, became a liability. It is precisely in relation to Afghan identities that Miskin articulates what it means for him to be Mughal or Turk. From the text, there is no doubt that there is a shared understanding of these identities, and what they represent. Mughlani Begum and others refer to Miskin and the other slave boys as “*Mughal-i haqīqī*,” true-bred Mughals. The Rohilla Afghans also refer to him as Mughal, and Miskin understands that there is a sense of distrust the Afghans have when it comes to the Turks. For example, when Najib Khan, who at first was hesitant to keep Mughals on his payroll and within his retinue, is finally convinced that Miskin and his companions might make good soldiers. He offered them work as soldiers in his son Zabita Khan’s army.⁵³ While they managed to work for Zabita Khan, it is telling that at a key moment, when Zabita Khan was losing on the battlefield, Zabita Khan refused to trust Miskin and his Mughal

⁵² Raziuddin Aquil, *Sufism, culture, and politics: Afghans and Islam in medieval North India* (New Delhi; New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007).

⁵³ Miskin, p. 271.

companions to protect him and take him to safety.⁵⁴ Miskin writes that Zabita Khan feared them, and therefore parted ways. Following this, Miskin's companions suggested that since they were no longer employed, they should loot the bazar. To this, Miskin rebuked them, saying:

ای یاران، از برای خدا این چنین همین طور فوج مغلیه در جنگ منصور علی خان بسبب تاراج کردن خزینه و اسباب لشکر بسیار بدنام و مطعون هر کدام گشتند. در وقت نواب شجاع الدوله ہم بمین قسم مغلان از غارت گری خزینه که از راه عقابت نا اندیشی در جنگ بکسر دست انداختند تا حال دگران مظلوم زبان زد عالم است. خصوصاً این قوم افغانان که در اصل خلاف جنس مایان اندیشه این کینه و بغض در خوابند داشت و اعتبار مایان در خاطر ایشان مطلق نخواهد ماند.⁵⁵

Oh friends! For the sake of God, the Mughal troops, when Mansur Ali Khan was at war, did this thing, they plundered the treasury and military equipment, and earned a bad reputation. Similarly, out of lack of foresight, the Mughals plundered the treasury of Nawab Shuja al-Daula at the battle of Buxar. Till today, their cruelty, is on the lips of the whole world. Especially the Afghans, who are inherently against us (the Mughals), will nurture this hatred, and they will never trust us again.

Miskin, aware of the reputations Mughals had in the minds of the Afghans, was able to persuade his companions from advancing the biases against them. Their shared religious identity, being Muslim—and both champions of Sunni interpretations, did not provide common ground for trust between the Mughals and Afghans.

From Miskin's narrative, we can piece together social relations, including gendered relations, in 18th century Punjab. It is telling how Miskin describes and interacts with people whom he sees equal or below him, versus those whom he greatly admires and respects. Noting the moments where Miskin is silent further provides social and cultural contexts of the time about gender relations. He rarely speaks about his wives, his marital relationships, or his daughters. He writes about when he marries his wives (the first one being a forced marriage arranged by Mughlani Begum and the second, of his own choosing when he is free, with a Mughal woman

⁵⁴ Miskin, p. 289.

⁵⁵ Miskin, pp. 288–9.

from Kabul), when his wives give birth, when his first wife is robbed, and when he strategically moves his family. Other than this, he does not disclose anything else, including their names (we do learn the names of his sons). It is possible that he did not think it was proper to reveal their names especially if he anticipated that his narrative would be available to the public. Mughlani Begum, on the other hand, is an elite, noble woman, and he spent a lot of time with her. His narrative is the extant source for us to access Mughlani Begum.

5 – Mughlani Begum, as Depicted by Miskin

Mughlani Begum was the granddaughter of Abd al-Samad Khan (d. 1726).⁵⁶ He was a Turani and a follower of the Naqshbandi saint Khwaja ‘Ubaidullah Ahrar (d. 1490).⁵⁷ Abd al-Samad Khan was the governor of Lahore and Multan. Zakariyya Khan (d. 1747), Mughal Begum’s maternal uncle, consolidated power in Punjab. Upon his death, his younger son, Shah Nawaz Khan, ousted his elder brother from power. When Ahmad Shah Durrani arrived in Hindustan to re-instate the treaty stipulating that the lands west of the Indus would be part of his domains (as had been settled between Nadir Shah and Muhammad Shah in 1739) in 1748, he defeated Shah Nawaz Khan. While fighting the Mughal troops, Ahmad Shah Durrani’s troops killed Qamar al-Din, vizier of the Mughal empire, Nizam al-Mulk.⁵⁸ His son, Muin al-Mulk—Mughlani Begum’s husband—was honored for his valiant fighting against the Afghans and was appointed as the new governor of Punjab by the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah (d. 1748) and confirmed by Ahmad Shah

⁵⁶ Miskin, p. 247.

⁵⁷ Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and Punjab, 1707-1748* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. xxx.

⁵⁸ Qamar al-Din was the founder of the Asaf Jah dynasty in the Deccan. He is considered the most influential person in South Asia after the death of Alamgir I in 1707. He was given the title Nizam al-Mulk from the ninth Mughal emperor, Farrukhsiyar

Durrani. Mughlani Begum was from a powerful family who was well connected to the Mughal center and governed over Punjab for decades and she was married into yet another very powerful family.

Mughlani Begum's life, despite her nobility, was perhaps equally or more volatile than Miskin's. The first mention of Mughlani Begum, in Miskin's account, comes on page ninety-six in a section entitled "The Description of the Nawab Sahib's (Muin al-Mulk) Household." According to Miskin, despite the intoxication and power of youth, Muin al-Mulk kept one wife in the royal house, and eight other wives in separate quarters. His wife's name was Murad Begum, but she was called Mughlani Begum. Mughlani Begum had two daughters, one was to be married to Nawab Ghazi al-Din Khan, Wazir of Hindustan, and the second daughter was married into the house of their ancestors in Bukhara, to a man named Mumin Khan, the son of Khwaja Musa (Miskin does not give names for the daughters). Mughlani Begum bore one son in Lahore, and he was named Muhammad Amin Khan.⁵⁹

The next full mention of Mughlani Begum in Miskin's account is about the aftermath of Muin al-Mulk's death in November 1753.⁶⁰ Mughlani Begum immediately requested that payments be disbursed to anyone owed money, who had served her late husband and had not yet been paid. This went on for three days and nights.⁶¹ Muin al-Mulk's deputy, Bhikhari Khan, wanted to transport Muin al-Mulk's body to Delhi for burial. Mughlani Begum was suspicious of this and insisted that he be buried in Lahore. Bhikhari Khan immediately ordered five hundred men to guard his body and prevent Mughlani Begum from accessing it. This surprised Mughlani Begum and since the Mughal army was on Bhikhari Khan's side, she sought a man named Qasim

⁵⁹ Miskin, p. 96.

⁶⁰ Miskin, pp. 102–3. Miskin is convinced that Muin al-Mulk was poisoned, he describes his body as turning blue.

⁶¹ Miskin, p. 103.

Khan to aid her. Upon some deliberation, it was decided that Miskin, with a few other slave boys, would protect Muin al-Mulk's body. This was the first interaction Miskin has with Mughlani Begum. Qasim Khan came with his own entourage, and Mughlani Begum proceeded to Lahore with the corpse and entered the city that was in mourning.⁶² It was not until her son, Muhammad Amin Khan, was conferred in his father's place that Mughlani Begum was able to imprison Bhikhari Khan. She asked a respected nobleman, Khwaja Mirza Khan, who had initially sided with Bhikhari Khan, to present Bhikhari Khan to her and plunder his men. Bhikhari Khan was presented to Mughlani Begum, and the soldiers were robbed of their possessions. They asked her what they had done to deserve such ill treatment and she, out of the goodness of her heart, forgave them, returned their goods, and were permitted to remain in their posts and on the royal payroll.⁶³

During the first few months of Mughlani Begum's *de facto* power, Miskin writes that she often took the path of wisdom (*rāh dānā-ī*).⁶⁴ Bhikhari Khan was still plotting against her, from prison, and began to recruit Afghan troops from Qasur.⁶⁵ Mughlani Begum, in order to ensure loyalty from the Mughal troops, increased their pay. To Khwaja Mirza Khan and Qasim Khan who aided her soon after her husband's passing, Mughlani Begum bestowed them with titles of honor and land: Khwaja Mirza Khan received the title *khānī sarfarāz* and he was allotted the land and revenue of Aminabad; Qasim Khan was honored with the title *khānī ifīkhār* and given the land and revenue of Patti (town in the district of Amritsar).⁶⁶

⁶² Miskin, p. 104.

⁶³ Miskin, pp. 105–6.

⁶⁴ Miskin, p. 105. In the English translation, Rao writes that Mughlani Begum “seduced” men, including Khwaja Mirza Khan. In reality, according to Miskin, she simply bribed them with titles of honor and money.

⁶⁵ Miskin, p. 105.

⁶⁶ Miskin, pp. 105–7.

Miskin writes about Qasim Khan, as he was in his service immediately after Muin al-Mulk's death. Mughlani Begum trusted Qasim Khan, and referred to him as her son, *farzand*.⁶⁷ Qasim Khan came from Badakhshan and sent word to his relatives and associates, inviting them to join his retinue. Some three hundred Badakhshani men arrived to join him.⁶⁸ Qasim Khan told Miskin that he was like his brother, and he should join him and his retinue to Patti. Miskin agreed to this because he was still heartbroken by the death of Muin al-Mulk, and he was not comfortable receiving orders from Mughlani Begum's eunuchs. At this point, Miskin writes the couplet that is at the beginning of this chapter:

همچو نر نواب رفت و کار با زن افتاد
 قدر مردان را چه میدانند این نسوان نهاد
 گفته خواجه سرايان هر کجا شد پیش رفت
 کی بر آید کام مردان زان فریق نامراد.⁶⁹

Thus the male *nawāb* departed and the work fell to the woman (wife),
 What can these feminine ones (eunuchs) know of the worth of men?
 The *khwāja sarās*⁷⁰ spoke forcibly in every matter,
 As such, the work of men had fallen to the miserable ones.

Miskin, and some of the other boys, obtained permission to join Qasim Khan, and he left, marching with Qasim Khan. Qasim Khan encountered Sikh opposition and had to fight them in order to take the land that was granted to him by Mughlani Begum.⁷¹ Miskin describes how in these battles, the men from Badakhshan died, and many of the Mughal soldiers too. Miskin offered Qasim Khan

⁶⁷ Miskin, p. 107.

⁶⁸ Miskin, p. 107.

⁶⁹ Miskin, pp. 107–8.

⁷⁰ *Khwāja sarā* means eunuch.

⁷¹ Miskin, pp. 108–9.

advice, and after a difference of opinion, Miskin left Qasim Khan and returned to Lahore. A few days later, Qasim Khan too returned to the boundary of Lahore and Miskin went to see him. Qasim Khan told him that he subdued (through negotiation) eight thousand Sikhs, and with his now large army, he would take Lahore and then march on to Shahjahanabad to take the throne.⁷² At this time, Miskin writes, he was fifteen years old, and in response to Qasim Khan's promise that he would make Miskin his Paymaster General, he counseled Qasim Khan not speak such words, and that he would be unsuccessful.⁷³ A few days later, the very army he brought with him, demanding to be paid, captured him and took him to Mughlani Begum. She promptly confined him in the palace for treachery.

In May 1754, Mughlani Begum's son died from poisoning in the same manner as his father.⁷⁴ Miskin speculates that it was Bhikhari Khan who poisoned the toddler, through the help of a eunuch named Zamarrud. Mughlani Begum's son-in-law, Momin Khan, was made the governor, but she continued to be in control of political affairs.⁷⁵ Miskin mentions that Momin Khan's wife (Mughlani Begum's daughter) had died and he does not mention any children born by her. Mughlani Begum's three eunuchs, Miyan Khush Fahm, Miyan Arjumand, and Miyan Mahabat, controlled the receiving and answering of petitions, and they forcibly ruled dishonorably. Because of this, day by day, the state of affairs weakened and declined.⁷⁶

Meanwhile, Mughlani Begum was rumored to have had an illicit affair with Ghazi Beg Khan, the provincial paymaster (*bakhshī sarkār*). Miskin writes, "the story of Ghazi Beg Khan,

⁷² Miskin, p. 110.

⁷³ Miskin, p. 110.

⁷⁴ Miskin, p. 111.

⁷⁵ Miskin, pp. 111–2.

⁷⁶ Miskin, p. 112.

bakhshi sarkār, and Begum Sahiba (Mughlani Begum) had become so dishonorable that the secret was made public and the rumor was on everyone's lips."⁷⁷ Miskin does not confirm or deny that this actually took place, and the only confirmation he provides is that the rumor spread. A man named Khwaja Muhammad Said Khan, who was closely associated to Bhikhari Khan (who was still imprisoned in the very castle Mughlani Begum resided), informed him of the rumor. They promptly wrote to Khwaja Mirza Khan (who was given the province of Aminabad by Mughlani Begum) to inform him that the eunuchs were causing havoc in governance, and Mughlani Begum was the source of decline and dishonor (*tannazul wa badnāmī*).⁷⁸

Miskin was upset that political affairs were managed by Mughlani Begum's eunuchs, three who were so busy with their own quarrels that the act of governing was rendered impossible. He and the other boys were neglected, and began to roam the streets. It is in this moment when Miskin himself fell into depravation, and when he says he had sexual relations with someone after having resisted temptations from Allah Datti.⁷⁹ The exploits of the boys became known to everyone in the city, and when Mughlani Begum heard the news, she was upset. As the boys were Mughal (Turkmen) it was unacceptable that their deteriorated state be left uncorrected. Mughlani Begum summoned Qasim Khan and said that since he was not doing anything, he ought to be made the guardian of the boys, and that he should ensure that they not become dishonorable.⁸⁰ She instructed that they only be allowed outside two hours after sunrise, and that they should be back inside two hours before sunset, not permitted to leave again. Qasim Khan, Miskin writes, now had pretext to be in regular contact with Mughlani Begum.

⁷⁷ Miskin, p. 112.

⁷⁸ Miskin, p. 113.

⁷⁹ Miskin, pp. 113–5.

⁸⁰ Miskin, p. 115.

Khwaja Mirza Khan, after receiving the message from Khwaja Muhammad Said Khan, left Aminabad and hastily entered Lahore. When news of this reached Mughlani Begum, she reassured the reporters that he was loyal to her. But, when he attempted to enter the palace, he killed two guards who attempted to stop him, and his troops began plundering the palace. Mughlani Begum left the palace and took up residence in another house. Khwaja Mirza Khan released Bhikhari Khan from prison and he persuaded Khwaja Mirza Khan to allow Momin Khan to continue as governor, while he (Bhikhari Khan) would take up the post of Deputy for the province. They then brought Mughlani Begum back to the palace.⁸¹

Miskin went to Mughlani Begum with his companion, Muhammad Quli, and informed her eunuchs that Khwaja Mirza Khan and Bhikhari Khan were sitting in seclusion, and that he and Muhammad Quli could take their lives with “one blow.”⁸² Mughlani Begum responded, via the eunuch, that they should do no such thing, as Khwaja Mirza Khan was only one man, and after him, every Mughal in the palace will want to become Khwaja Mirza Khan. The next day, some eight to nine thousand men attacked Khwaja Mirza Khan, but they were defeated. Mughlani Begum was removed from the palace and taken to her mother’s home, and was guarded by Miyan Arjumand, the eunuch who had previously served her, but was associated to Khwaja Mirza Khan.⁸³

Khwaja Mirza Khan donned himself in the garb of a ruler, and began to make appointments and took control of political affairs. Miskin names the noblemen who came to pay homage to the new governor, including Bhikhari Khan who came after eight days. Initially, it seemed as if they were friends, but soon their enviousness and jealousy began to manifest and infighting ensued. Khawaja Mirza Khan also had to contend with Sikhs, and he appointed his brother who had

⁸¹ Miskin, p. 116.

⁸² Miskin, p. 117.

⁸³ Miskin, pp. 117–8.

recently come *wilāyat*⁸⁴, Khwaja Qazi to fight the Sikhs.⁸⁵ Qasim Khan accompanied him, and they both emerged victorious against the Sikhs.⁸⁶ A few months passed after this event, with Khwaja Mirza Khan as the governor of Punjab. Miskin and his friends had been robbed of their goods, and faced financial hardships. Upon the advice of Mughlani Begum, they went to Khwaja Mirza Khan, and he promptly replaced their beaten horses with healthy ones, and set an allowance of two rupees a day. As they had been raised in Muin al-Mulk's household, Khwaja Mirza Khan was advised that he and the other boys should be sent to the hills, as they were not to be trusted, they were sons of serpents (*mār bachche*) and they may be tempted to submit to the household of their upbringing. Miskin, and the other boys, were therefore sent to Jammu.⁸⁷

Mughlani Begum was constrained by Khwaja Mirza Khan, so she wrote to the Mughal vizier, Ghazi al-Din Khan, with whom her daughter was betrothed, and to Ahmad Shah Durrani, who was in Qandahar. She sent Khwaja Abd Allah Khan, Mughlani Begum's maternal uncle, to Qandahar. Ahmad Shah Durrani sent Mulla Aman Khan with two thousand horse riders and foot soldiers (men from Kabul, Peshawar, Rohila Afghans, and a few Durrani and Qizilbash) to Lahore in order to assist (*mu'āwanat*) Mughlani Begum.⁸⁸ They crossed the rivers and when they arrived at Chenab, they encountered Khwaja Qazi with a troop of five thousand Mughal soldiers. Internal fighting led the Mughal troops to retreat to Lahore, where they felt they would be able to fight better. Aman Khan and his troops followed and soon they were at the border of Lahore. On that day, Miskin and his friends returned from Jammu to Lahore. The Mughals believed a rumor that

⁸⁴ It is unclear what Miskin means when he uses *wilāyat*.

⁸⁵ Miskin, p. 118.

⁸⁶ Miskin, p. 119.

⁸⁷ Miskin, p. 119.

⁸⁸ Miskin, p. 120.

Khawaja Abd Allah Khan was to become the governor, and Khwaja Mirza Khan as his deputy, and thus Khwaja Mirza Khan went to see the Afghan envoy Mulla Aman Khan. Khwaja Mirza Khan was captured and thrown into prison, while Bhikhari Khan was presented to Mughlani Begum and charged for poisoning her late husband and son, and he was executed.⁸⁹ In April 1755, Mughlani Begum was appointed as the governor (*sūbah dār*) of Lahore and her maternal uncle, Khwaja Abd Allah Khan, was appointed as her deputy (*nāīb*).⁹⁰ Mulla Aman Khan left Lahore towards Qandahar. The Mughal chiefs who had rebelled against Mughlani Begum were imprisoned.⁹¹

According to Miskin, Mughlani Begum's uncle, who was now the deputy, could not tolerate being in the subordinate position of a woman.⁹² He began working on his own and recruited soldiers, with the intent to overthrow her. She, savvy of his desire, began to recruit her own soldiers. Mughlani Begum used the same tactics as before, she increased salaried and gave more honors, titles, and gifts to ensure loyalty. Khwaja Abd Allah Khan saw that his men were enticed by Mughlani Begum and he launched an attack.⁹³ During the confrontation, Miskin and his friends defended Mughlani Begum's attendants valiantly. Mughlani Begum was put under surveillance again and guarded in her mother's home. She advised that Miskin leave her, and when she returned to power, she would have him attend on her once again. Miskin left her and went to his adopted sister's home, his *hum-shūr*, who was also brought from Turkey. She was married to a

⁸⁹ Miskin, p. 121.

⁹⁰ Miskin, p. 121.

⁹¹ Miskin, p. 121.

⁹² Miskin, p. 122.

⁹³ Miskin, p. 122.

man named Adraz Beg, and while Miskin stayed with him, his adopted sister bore a son named Iwaz Bedil Beg.⁹⁴

While Mughlani Begum was in confinement (*nazr bandī-i khūd*) at her mother's house, she wrote another letter to Imad al-Mulk Ghazi al-Din, who had removed Ahmad Shah Bahadur from the Mughal throne and placed Alamgir II in his place, and in turn Ghazi al-Din became the vizier.⁹⁵ Mughlani Begum wrote to him, secretly, as he was betrothed to Mughlani Begum's daughter, and implored him to come to her aid. She informed him that Ahmad Shah Durrani had sent help for her from Qandahar, and now that his (Ghazi al-Din) name was associated with her daughters, it would only be appropriate that he come to assist her.⁹⁶ The vizier responded in the affirmative and made his way to Sirhind. Adina Beg Khan, who was appointed as the faujdar of the do-aba by Mughlani Begum, wrote to Ghazi al-Din asking him to remain in Sirhind and to send a eunuch with two or three thousand troops to assist him in restoring Lahore. Ghazi al-Din sent a eunuch named Nasim Khan with the troops and instructions to follow Adina Beg's orders. The large army went to Lahore and visited Mughlani Begum, then proceeded to visit Khwaja Abd Allah Khan. He received them well and bestowed honors and robes. He knew, however, that he would be ousted from power in a few days, and so decided to flee to Jammu. The next morning, Mughlani Begum entered the palace with the "drum of victory" and the entire city lit up with sounds of triumph and happiness.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Miskin, p. 124.

⁹⁵ Miskin, p. 125. Miskin notes the battle between Imad al-Mulk Ghazi al-Din and Mansur Ali Khan Safdar Jang, which is not in the English translation. He further mentions Muin al-Mulk's brother, a man named Khankhanan, who was also the maternal uncle of Ghazi al-Din. The events he discloses follows closely with the events recorded in the *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāh*, described in the second chapter.

⁹⁶ Miskin, pp. 127–8.

⁹⁷ Miskin, p. 129.

Mughlani Begum prepared for her daughter's wedding with Ghazi al-Din for one month. During the preparations, Miskin attempted to gain an audience with Mughlani Begum, to remind her what she had promised him when she told him to go to his adopted sister's home, and that she had also promised him a diamond, if she were to be re-instated as governor. Eventually, he was given audience with her, and she asked him if her late husband had planned to send him as part of his daughter's dowry with her. Miskin told her that he had chosen four other boys, one had died, and three fled during the civil strife. Mughlani Begum asked her eunuchs which of the boys had fought to protect them and to whom had she promised diamonds. They pointed to Miskin, and she inquired if he preferred diamonds or pearls. Miskin, to everyone's surprise, said that he preferred pearls, because diamonds required fancier clothing and other jewelry.⁹⁸ Miskin writes that his thoughtful response pleased Mughlani Begum, and she decided that he should be married to a slave girl, named Moti, who had served her well (Mughlani Begum told her to go to her parents' house when she was confined during the time Khwaja Mirza Khan had revolted against her, and Moti refused to leave Mughlani Begum's side during this turbulent and uncertain time, and thus Mughlani Begum promised to find her a suitable husband).⁹⁹ Mughlani Begum stated that until she heard Miskin speak, no other suitable boy had pleased her enough to marry her servant, Moti.¹⁰⁰

Miskin continues the narrative about his marriage in the next section. He writes that Mughlani Begum rebuked him for earning a bad reputation throughout the city (*badnāmī wa*

⁹⁸ Miskin, p. 131.

⁹⁹ Miskin, p. 131.

¹⁰⁰ Miskin, p. 131. At this point in the narrative, Miskin writes that it is time for the evening prayers, so he must stop here. This resembles a cliff-hanger, as the reader, I was curious to see how Miskin felt about this marriage proposal, but he stopped and did not disclose it, until the next section!

ruswā), and it would only be proper that he be married.¹⁰¹ Miskin told her that he did not wish to get married in Hindustan. The eunuchs told him that it was not proper that he go against Mughlani Begum's wishes, but he still did not agree. Mughlani Begum retorted saying that she would get this boy married through force (*ba-zūr*), and in fact, she would have four or five more boys married, because they were "blossoming young men" and reached the state of "mature youth."¹⁰² Thus, the marriage of Miskin, Muhammad Quli, Darab Beg, Muqim Beg, Faiz Allah Beg, and Muhammadi Beg, was arranged. Still, Miskin opposed the marriage and went to his adopted sister's home. She counseled him, advising him to accept the marriage. As soon as he returned to his quarters, a man came and took Miskin back to the palace, and Mughlani Begum ordered that all six boys be confined to the palace and not allowed to leave. Mughlani Begum came to them and gifted each one a shawl and money. She commanded that each one should be made ready and that the ritual of henna be performed that night. Henna was applied on the boys' hands and feet, in Mughlani Begum's presence.¹⁰³

The next day, the boys were clothed in costly robes and inserted into the marriage procession in the city. They visited Sufi shrines to pay their respects, and then the religious wedding ceremony was performed. Mughlani Begum had paid for the ceremonies, clothes, and wedding gifts. Miskin calculated the amount to be close to twelve thousand rupees per boy, and he additionally received pearl earrings.¹⁰⁴ In the presence of Mughlani Begum, each couple was given their own separate quarters (*khwābghāh-hāi 'alīhudah*). Mughlani Begum addressed him and said that it was because of him that she was able to fulfill her promise and was able to marry

¹⁰¹ Miskin, p. 132.

¹⁰² Miskin, p. 132.

¹⁰³ Miskin, p. 133.

¹⁰⁴ Miskin, p. 134.

the other boys too, during the wedding of her daughter. Miskin describes the dowry and people who would leave with Mughlani Begum's daughter, and here he provides her name, Umda Begum.¹⁰⁵ Two months after the wedding, Miskin was given a land grant (*mansab*) of one hundred rupees a month.¹⁰⁶

After the wedding, Miskin writes that Ghazi al-Din thought in his heart that Mughlani Begum, who was simply the wife of the late Muin al-Mulk, was governing Lahore like a man, and in the eyes of nobles, this was dishonorable and insulting (*bī nāmūsī wa sabukī*).¹⁰⁷ He sent Syed Jamil al-Din with ten thousand men and ten eunuchs to Lahore, and they occupied the palace. The eunuchs went to Mughlani Begum and apprised her of the situation, then put her on an elephant and she was sent to Sirhind. Syed Jamil al-Din Khan re-appointed Mughlani Begum's son in law, Momin Khan, as the governor of Punjab and himself as the deputy.¹⁰⁸ Miskin asked Syed Jamil al-Din for horses, and he gave him four. Miskin and three of his companions rode out to accompany Mughlani Begum and they reached Sirhind, where Ghazi al-Din was camped, in ten to twelve days.¹⁰⁹ Ghazi al-Din rode out to welcome her and she entered the camp with him, accompanied by the eunuch Naseem Khan. A few days later, they all marched towards Machhiwada.

During the march, it happened that Mughlani Begum, Khankhanan (Muin al-Mulk's brother) and his mother, along with Miskin and his three companions took the wrong route and were separated from the rest of the group. Ghazi al-Din, afraid that Mughlani Begum would run away, sent two camels in search for them. When they were found, Mughlani Begum insisted that

¹⁰⁵ Miskin, p. 134.

¹⁰⁶ Miskin, p. 134.

¹⁰⁷ Miskin, p. 135.

¹⁰⁸ Miskin, p. 135.

¹⁰⁹ Miskin, p. 136.

they ride throughout the night to catch up to Ghazi al-Din, instead of resting the night and proceeding in the morning. When they arrived, Ghazi al-Din asked her why they did not halt, as the roads were unsafe. She responded saying that her four boys were as strong as four thousand men, and thus she did not fear. Ghazi al-Din reported this to his maternal aunt, Khala Begum, who did not like Mughlani Begum, and she suggested that Mughlani Begum “most likely had intimate relations with the boy who wore pearl earrings (i.e. Miskin).”¹¹⁰ The vizier responded that if this was in fact true, he would kill Miskin the very next day. When Mughlani Begum was apprised of the conversation, she told Miskin and his companion Muhammad Quli, to return to Lahore this very day because they were married and their wives were in Lahore.¹¹¹ Miskin obeyed and left for Lahore, and in a few days he was back in his own residence in Lahore.¹¹²

In 1756, Khwaja Abd Allah Khan, Mughlani Begum’s uncle who had ousted her from power and then ran away to Jammu, went to Ahmad Shah Durrani in Qandahar and told him that Ghazi al-Din had occupied Lahore, and then had kidnapped Mughlani Begum, whom Ahmad Shah Durrani had called his daughter (*ke khūd bezubān-i mubāarak dokhtar khwandeh būdand*).¹¹³ This, Abd Allah Khan, said was an insult (*sabukī*) to Afghans.¹¹⁴ If Ahmad Shah Durrani permitted, perhaps he could release Khwaja Mirza Khan, who was still imprisoned, and along with him and a few others, Khwaja Abd Allah Khan could retake Lahore, as it was part of his dominions and the Mughals occupying Lahore was not in service to Ahmad Shah Durrani. Ahmad Shah Durrani

¹¹⁰ Miskin, p. 137.

¹¹¹ Miskin, p. 137.

¹¹² Miskin, p. 138.

¹¹³ Miskin, p. 140.

¹¹⁴ Miskin, p. 140.

agreed, and decreed that Khwaja Mirza Khan and the other chiefs who were captured could be released and with Peshawari Afghans they could re-occupy Lahore.¹¹⁵

Miskin, in the meantime, sent his wife and their goods to Delhi, for safety. While she was in Sirhind, she and her companion were robbed of everything. She continued on to Delhi, and Miskin joined her. He informed Mughlani Begum (who was now in Delhi) of what had happened and Mughlani Begum sent them two trays of food every day.¹¹⁶ His wife stayed with Mughlani Begum, and eventually Mughlani Begum asked Ghazi al-Din to secure housing for Miskin and his family in Delhi and he installed them in a house outside of the Ajmer Gate near a school.¹¹⁷

Ahmad Shah addressed Mughlani Begum saying: “Before, I had referred to you as my daughter (*dukhtar-i khūd*). From today forth, I bestow the title Sultan Mirza Sarfaraz, and will call you my son (*pisr-i khūd*).”¹¹⁸ Ahmad Shah then proceeded to give her his turban with the jigha and the special robe he had donned.¹¹⁹ Ahmad Shah Durrani oversaw that the marriage between the Mughal vizier, Ghazi al-Din and Mughlani Begum’s daughter be prioritized. After the marriage took place, within a few weeks, real power was taken away from Mughlani Begum again. It was under the pretext of the marriage alliance that Ahmad Shah Durrani regained the territories he once controlled in Punjab. Her so-called adopted father, Ahmad Shah Durrani reneged her power and put his real son, Timur Shah, at the helm of government in Lahore, promising her, instead, an

¹¹⁵ Miskin, p. 141.

¹¹⁶ Miskin, p. 146.

¹¹⁷ Miskin, p. 146. As Ghazi al-Din complied with Mughlani Begum’s request, one can assume that she was exonerated from the accusation that she had an illicit affair with Miskin. Ghazi al-Din was not after his blood and provided him housing.

¹¹⁸ Miskin, p. 155.

¹¹⁹ Miskin, p. 155. Miskin documents how Ahmad Shah did the same with Muin al-Mulk earlier, i.e. give him the title of “*farzand-i khūd*” and give him his turban with jigha and robe. See Miskin, p. 93.

annual salary of thirty thousand rupees.¹²⁰ Sadly, her possessions were looted by Timur Shah Durrani's vizier Jahan Khan. In fact, Mughlani Begum was physically assaulted by Jahan Khan for interfering with politics in Punjab (she colluded with Adina Beg Khan).¹²¹ After this assault, when he summoned her, she refused to comply. According to Miskin, she was so terrified that she told him that Jahan Khan could take her daughter, but to let her be, because her life was dearer than her daughter's life.¹²² Miskin managed to safely take them to Delhi, and it was at this moment when she freed him from bondage.¹²³

Miskin chose to continue to serve Mughlani Begum and her household, even after he was a free man. She obtained land and land revenue in Sialkot, and Miskin traveled to the region to manage her affairs, while Mughlani Begum resided in Jammu. Mughlani Begum continued to struggle for a sense of financial security, and after what seemed like a sense of complete hopelessness, she decided to marry a man of her own choosing. In the text, this is the only moment when Miskin passes judgement on Mughlani Begum's private life. He writes that one day he found the Begum alone with a man. She had sent away all of her attendants, and that she had concluded the *nikāh* (marriage contract) with this man.¹²⁴ This event, it must be noted, did not happen when she was intermittently in power from 1753-6. Rather, it happened after a very traumatic experience at the hands of the Afghans, after 1758. Miskin was unhappy with this marriage and reprimanded her, reminding her of her noble birth and genealogy. For Miskin, it was about her status, she came from a very noble lineage, and she and her daughters were married into nobility, and yet, she chose

¹²⁰ Miskin, p. 164.

¹²¹ Miskin, p. 187.

¹²² Miskin, p. 192. "دختر از جان من زیاده تر عزیز نیست"

¹²³ Miskin, p. 194.

¹²⁴ Miskin, p. 247.

to marry a man who had no name or rank. She, upset at his boldness to reprimand her, plotted to kill him, and at this point Miskin ran away from her and entered into the service of Qasim Khan in Sirhind. Miskin writes that three years prior to completing his narrative, he heard that Mughlani Begum was in a destitute state, financially and socially, and he provided funds for Mughlani Begum's granddaughter's wedding.

The volatility of Mughlani Begum's life was just as severe and frequent as that of Miskin's. It is clear then that the lives of men and women operate on different power differentials defined by their gender. While Miskin was able to free himself as a slave, and even within the institutions of slavery, able to rise to the status of a *khān*, Mughlani Begum remained a woman vulnerable to financial insecurity and physical assault. She lost all the guardians she had forged relations with: her husband, her uncle, her adopted father. Even non-guardian males whom she trusted, betrayed her. Qasim Khan, whom she adopted as son, tried to usurp her power and attempted to take over all of Hindustan. Mirza Khan, whom she entrusted with land, charged through the palace in an attempt to take over Lahore. She even attempted to protect Adina Beg Khan from Timur Shah Durrani and his vizier, only to be deceived by him, which led to the severe beating she took at the hands of the Afghan vizier Jahan Khan. There was not a single constant support on whom she could rely. This made her paranoid, even when it came to Miskin. As mentioned earlier, she mistrusted Miskin often, and had him imprisoned multiple times, and once plotted to have him killed. Unlike Miskin, who was able to choose whom he would marry, she was not able to freely marry whomever she wished, without receiving a bad reputation and reprimanding, even from her former slave. She died financially destitute, and went down in history as an "immoral" woman hungry for power and sexual pleasures.

6 – Miskin’s Religious and Socio-Economic Identities

To a very notable extent, religion is largely absent from the English translation. By religion, we mean both invocations to it, i.e. when the author invokes God or the Prophet, examples the author cites when describing the morality of a particular person, which for him is very much tied to religion. More troubling is that part of the author's own identity, that of a religious man, a Sufi even, is completely marginalized, even erased in the English translation. To understand Miskin, and therefore the world he lives in, we must consider his views on religion and how that informs his larger worldview, how it impacts his movements, even in the very act of writing itself. For example, he writes that it is time for evening prayers, and therefore he must end a story there so he can go pray. And yet, we must also take care not to read religion into the text where it is not necessary. Religion is an important identity for our author, but it is not the only identity through which to understand his life and by proxy social and cultural life in Punjab in the eighteenth century.

Throughout his narrative, he describes men whom he finds to be virtuous. For each man whom he admires, he writes that he was religious. This begins with the head of the Uzbeks, Khuranji Beg. Miskin likens Khuranji Beg to his mother and father. Whereas, he cannot remember his own family; he does remember Khuranji Beg, his wife, and his family.¹²⁵ Under Khuranji Beg’s care, he is circumcised, which occurs at the same time that Khuranji Beg marries. The next man he admires greatly is Muin al-Mulk, whom he also describes as a very pious man.¹²⁶ He, like his contemporaries, call Muin al-Mulk “*Rustam-i Hind*”: the great tragic hero from Firdausi’s famous epic poem the *Shāh nāma*. Miskin describes Muin al-Mulk’s daily rituals, including religious

¹²⁵ Miskin, p. 14.

¹²⁶ Miskin, p. 62.

duties that he performed every day, without fail, even when they were campaigning. The fact that Miskin and the other slave boys were Muslim gave them access to the governor. He and the other slave boys had access to Muin al-Mulk because they prayed together regularly, at least two times a day, and if they were absent from prayers, Muin al-Mulk would reprimand them.¹²⁷ Religious life, in this sense, was also social life. But, we must note, that it was the male slaves who had this access. The female slaves were not part of this religious or social life. So being Muslim was not the only requirement for access to the governor, the Muslim would have had to be male as well.

In Miskin's worldview, good deeds led to worldly and other worldly rewards. This is not unique to Miskin; in fact, political theories of kingship in the early modern period were based on the idea that God gives power to pious men, as discussed in chapters one, two, and three. During his life, Miskin strove to be a religious man, and ornaments his narrative with invocations to God. Each time he almost died, he praised God, saying that God decreed that he live longer, and therefore he was saved. This does not mean that he viewed Islam¹²⁸ as the exclusive path to worldly and salvific rewards. In fact, even when he writes about campaigns against Sikhs, or Maratha Hindus, he does not justify it as a religious duty. These campaigns and wars operated, for him, on a political realm, not a cosmic religious war. It is true that Sikhs were targeted, and that a reward amount was given for their heads.¹²⁹ But, they were targeted because they were actively rebelling and attempting to establish their own power. In the same way, some Muslims died because they too rebelled in attempts to establish their own authority (see chapters two and three).

¹²⁷ Miskin, p. 63.

¹²⁸ To use "Islam" as a category of analysis is anachronistic; nonetheless, it must be noted here because too often scholars cite such instances as evidence of religious and communal tensions that, in their views, existed well before British imperialism.

¹²⁹ Miskin, p. 98.

Historians studying slavery, whether they specialize in the ancient Near East, or trans-Atlantic slave trade, have not come to consensus as to its definition. Most scholars do, however, agree that slavery is an institutionalized form of oppression and is constituted by asymmetrical power relations.¹³⁰ Miskin's identity as a slave aligns with this very loose definition of slavery. The scholarly turn to move away from studies of legal or economic slave histories to focus instead on domestic and household slavery—the type of slavery Miskin experienced—is more helpful in understanding how slavery functioned in early-modern Punjab. Miskin's status as a slave was not “social death” as per Orlando Patterson's definition;¹³¹ there existed social hierarchies within the system of slavery that Miskin leveraged throughout his years 18 or 20 years as a slave. Scholars of slavery have argued that social mobility existed within the slave system,¹³² and this is true for Miskin. For example, Miskin manages to rise up to the rank of a “*khān*” when he was still a slave in Mughlani Begum's household. And yet, oppression and asymmetrical power relations existed: he was exploited, unlawfully imprisoned, and almost put to death (multiple times) during his years in slavery.

Indrani Chatterjee argues that one aspect of being a slave is being kinless.¹³³ This is true of our author, Miskin, in the sense that he had been uprooted from his birth parents, but not in the

¹³⁰ *Slaves and Households in the Near East*, ed. by Laura Culbertson and others (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2011), p. 2.

¹³¹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 13. He defines slavery as “the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons.” In Miskin's case, he was not born a slave, and his position as a slave was not permanent, nor can one say that he was consistently dishonored.

¹³² Culbertson and others, p. 9. “Enslaved persons in Near Eastern contexts could engage in social maneuvering and hierarchical ascension even within the confines of slavery and cannot be considered social dead or dispossessed.”

¹³³ Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery, and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 43.

sense that his wife or children are taken from him. She goes on to say, “having no *asabiya* [*sic*]¹³⁴, or group feeling of their own, they were expected to adopt the *asabiya* [*sic*] of their master.”¹³⁵ Having to depend on their master’s family, she argues: “Slaves alone could provide allegiance to the ruler that his natal kin did not owe him. It was because they ‘owed’ their lives to the ruler that they could be employed to guard him from the assaults of the enemies within.”¹³⁶ While Miskin does not remember his birth parents, he does, however, fondly remember his adopted Uzbek family headed by Khuranji Beg and continues to associate with them even after he comes to Hindustan.¹³⁷ Khuranji Beg, his adopted father, played a foundational role in his early childhood, he was a positive role model as he was devout in his religious duties—a characteristic Miskin aspired to throughout his own life. In fact, it is Khuranji Beg, who had him circumcised, according to Islamic ritual.¹³⁸ While it is true that he did not have any blood relatives in Hindustan, he did have an adopted family with whom he continued to associate, namely a sister, *hum-shīr*, (milk-sibling, i.e. children who share the same wet-nurse or breastmilk). Of course one cannot take this in the literal sense, Miskin would have been too old by the time he was adopted by the head of the Uzbeks, but it is the closest way of forging an association, even a genealogical one, that makes sense in this period. It was this sister with whom he consulted before marriage, and whose child he arranged his first born to marry. Miskin consulted with her when the situation at Mughlani Begum's home became unstable. Miskin, therefore, did not solely rely on the ‘*asabīya*’ of Muin al-Mulk, or

¹³⁴ عصبية can mean love of kindred or country. Chatterjee likely means love of kindred in this context, although she does not provide a definition.

¹³⁵ Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery, and Law in Colonial India*, p. 43.

¹³⁶ Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery, and Law in Colonial India*, p. 43.

¹³⁷ Miskin, p. 29. He describes his adopted father as someone who was young and warm. He told our author when he was young that if God gave him another son, he hoped that he would be like Miskin. Miskin describes his time with his adopted family as a time of happiness and generosity.

¹³⁸ Miskin, p. 29.

Mughlani Begum when she became widowed; rather, he had a deep relationship of love and support with Uzbeks, who were external to his slave relationship.

The second part of Indrani Chatterjee proposition is that because they are kinless and lack *'asabiya*, they are, therefore, more dependent on and obedient to their masters. In Miskin's case, it is not that because he was kinless or did not have a community of belonging (and as argued above, he actually did have an *'asabiya*) to whom he could turn that made him more obedient. It is because he was more motivated than the others to seize opportunities to move up. He took risks and actively sought recognition. He offered to do tasks that others had refused, and on many occasions, he writes that others rebuked him because he made them look bad in front of their masters. He took to heart the advice Muin al-Mulk gave him at a very young age, that if he worked hard and focused on his training, he could rise up the ranks and become a powerful man in his own right.¹³⁹ This led him to be preferred over others by Mughlani Begum and others who supervised him, and in this way he had a sustained income and at times, even wielded power. As noted, Miskin rose to the rank of a *khān* while he is still a slave.¹⁴⁰ This occurred after he successfully reconciled an argument with Mughlani Begum and Timur Shah Durrani's vizier Jahan Khan. Mughlani Begum had lost her territories that had been bestowed upon her by Ahmad Shah Durrani to his son Timur Shah. As compensation, Ahmad Shah Durrani promised her thirty thousand rupees a year, but she was too proud to ask for this rightful share. Miskin, therefore concocted a plan to bring the vizier into her presence so that the matter may be resolved. With the help of his adopted father¹⁴¹ (this is another person, who is Afghan and part of Timur Shah Durrani's close advisors with the rank of

¹³⁹ Miskin, p. 21. Muin al-Mulk explains that he needs to become an expert in everything, including drawing and writing, so he could do well when asked to participate in a gathering of wise men and rulers.

¹⁴⁰ Miskin, p. 171. Before he gets this title, he mentions that he had been frequenting the tomb of Muin al-Mulk, and he has a dream that Muin al-Mulk bestows on him a robe of honor.

¹⁴¹ Miskin, p. 170.

dārogha-i dīwānkhāna- superintendent of the treasury), named Yusuf Khan, he was able to persuade Timur Shah Durrani's vizier Jahan Khan to meet with Begum and she was then compensated as had been decided by Ahmad Shah Durrani. The astute vizier realized the attempt at reconciliation was actually Miskin's idea¹⁴² and upon spending more time with him, decided to request Timur Shah to confer the title of *khān* upon him.¹⁴³ As a *khān*, Miskin had access to more intimate spaces within the court (reserved for nobles to the exclusion of commoners), and could even partake in sharing meals with other nobles.

Miskin's occupations varied from slave, soldier, messenger, *dārogha* (superintendent), revenue collector, and advisor. He strategically placed himself in positions of power and upward mobility. This did not always work for him; in fact, he was imprisoned a few times by Mughlani Begum,¹⁴⁴ while he was a slave and while he was free. His peers chided him, on occasion, for showing them up, for promising to undertake tasks that they deemed too risky, such as running a message for Mughlani Begum to Ahmad Shah Durrani during moments of Jat and Sikh uprisings. At times, his hubris caused him to be injured and even captured.

His courage, initiative, and persistence availed him opportunities that others in his position did not get. His military and leadership successes brought both the trust of those whom he served and the envy of his peers. He was able to recruit soldiers, when asked, and he managed to get employment after fleeing Mughlani Begum's household. When he was in the employ of Afghan Zabita Khan, he had two hundred horsemen under his supervision. According to Gommans'

¹⁴² Miskin, p. 169. وزیر جهان خان بسیار خوش شد و خندیده فرمود که معلوم می شود که بیگم را تعلیم این چنین مضامین تو می کنی. "the vizier Jahan Khan was happy and said, laughing, that I know it is you who is training the Begum on this subject."

¹⁴³ Miskin, p. 172.

¹⁴⁴ Miskin, pp. 198, 212, 240.

definitions¹⁴⁵ for military terms, Miskin would have been considered a *beg*, and this is part of his name, because he was “able to mobilise [*sic*] a following consisting of kith and kin (*biradaran-ukhweshan*) and retainers (*naukaran*).”¹⁴⁶

Miskin faced a lot of volatility in his life. As high as he rose in rank and status, he also fell into destitution and even loss of all hope. His life comes close to death on multiple occasions. There was no certainty, no sense of stability. It would be easy to say that this volatility mirrors the political environment of the time. But, we must remember that if the political contestations for power did not exist, Miskin would not have had a source of income. His financial future would have been dire, as he was not trained in anything lucrative other than being a soldier. Each time the Afghans tried to gain territory or fight off the Jats or Marathas, Miskin was gainfully employed.

His identity as a slave/soldier, while at times did raise his status, did not break all of the barriers of upward mobility. When Mughlani Begum was given land revenues for Sialkot, she had no choice but to send Miskin to put those affairs in order. After he managed, through the threat of physical harm to the previous revenue holders, he was removed from his position. It could not have been imagined, or perhaps it was deemed socially unacceptable, that a former slave, and a soldier should hold the position of leadership to supervise revenue collection. This was the office/rank of noble families, and the noble family that had been in this position before Miskin’s arrival very easily swayed Mughlani Begum into reinstating themselves to this position. In this case, Miskin’s Mughal identity and social status were not as strong as the family who had originally supervised revenue collection in Sialkot. Their genealogy was stronger, perhaps verified, even, and therefore they outranked Miskin.

¹⁴⁵ Jos J. L Gommans, *Mughal Warfare Indian Frontiers and Highroads to Empire, 1500-1700* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 43–44. The military hierarchy he outlines is as follows: *yikitlar* (individual trooper), *ichkilar* (household trooper), *beglar* (chiefs), and *beg* (someone able to recruit and maintain troops).

¹⁴⁶ Gommans, pp. 43–44.

7 – Colonial and Postcolonial Problems with Gender: Mughlani Begum, A Case Study

Colonial and post-colonial biases have penetrated English primary and secondary sources, which continue to be utilized unchecked. This section looks to problematize blind acceptance of translations and “objective history writing” of colonial and postcolonial scholars such as Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Hari Ram Gupta, Ganda Singh, and Rajmohan Gandhi (the representative sample to be used in this analysis). In particular, this chapter considers the implicit bias and misreading of gender and how that in turn misrepresents political, social, and cultural life in eighteenth century Punjab. Persian sources do not convey certain pejorative connotations that English translations or histories provide. And yet, the negative association of Mughlani Begum as an impious woman continues to be written as fact in even the most recent scholarship on Punjab.¹⁴⁷

A reconstruction of Mughlani Begum nuances her life circumstances in a way that is elided from colonial and postcolonial scholarship. Across two hundred years, rumors of illicit sexual relations are depicted as factual occurrences and Mughlani Begum’s marriage to someone of a lower social status is deployed as evidence of her unsavory character. The ethical implications of her character translate, for colonial and postcolonial scholars, to either good or bad governance. For them, it is not simply that as a female, she could not govern, but that she was an impious woman, which made her unfit to rule. Colonial historians, especially Sarkar, tended to judge an empire by the morality or immorality of the person in power.¹⁴⁸ The fall of the Mughal empire was caused, according to these kinds of histories, because the men who ascended the throne were immoral, unskilled in the manners and etiquettes of good governance, and lacked vision. This

¹⁴⁷See Rajmohan Gandhi, *Punjab: A History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2013).

¹⁴⁸Jadunath Sarkar, *Mughal Administration*. (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar, 1963); Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*. (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons, LD., 1934), II, 1754-1771; Jadunath Sarkar, *The India of Aurangzib (topography, Statistics, and Roads) Compared with the India of Akbar: With Extracts from the Khulasatu-T-Tawarikh and the Chahar Gulshan* (Calcutta: Bose Brothers, 1901).

historiographical trend has been critiqued and newer scholarly trends look to other factors that contributed to the question of Mughal decline, including the rise of regional powers, economic factors, and internal contestations for power.¹⁴⁹ While there have been correctives for historical men, the same is not true for the women, assuming they are discussed at all. That a woman should govern was contested during Miskin's life, and he, along with other men writing in the same period, concluded that it was not proper and further would lead to bad governance.¹⁵⁰ In fact, the male authors cite the same Qurānic verse 4:34 as divine proof that women are at a status lower than men.¹⁵¹ It may be argued that this worldview—that men are at a status higher than women—is consistent with Miskin's life, according to his narrative and his status as a man benefitting from her inability to govern in public; but to project that worldview onto Mughlani Begum is problematic. She may not have seen gender responsibilities in the same way, and no scholar to date has yet attempted to understand her on her own terms.

Unlike Miskin's life story, we do not have Mughlani Begum's self-authored life story. We do not know if she wrote one, and if she did, if it survived. We must, therefore, reconstruct her life from the sources that are available. Miskin's memoir is perhaps the most comprehensive. Mughlani Begum is mentioned, briefly, in other eighteenth century texts, but only in passing, and usually to describe the passing of her husband, the ascension of her son as governor, and then the loss of her

¹⁴⁹ See Alam; Munis D Faruqui, *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719*. (New York: Cambridge Univ Press, 2012); Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707* (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁵⁰ Miskin, p. 121; Maḥmūd bin Ibrahīm al-Ḥusainī, *Tārīkh-i Aḥmad Shāhī: Tārīkh Tashkīl Awwalīn Hukūmat Afghānistān*, ed. by Ghulam Husayn Zargarinezhad (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 2005), p. 235.

¹⁵¹ الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ

de facto power at the hands of Ahmad Shah Abadli and Ghazi al-Din.¹⁵² Miskin's perspective, which should be read critically, is therefore the most insightful.

Sir Jadunath Sarkar translated Miskin's life story and used it as one of his primary sources for the second volume of *Fall of the Mughal Empire*. The narrative on the chapters on the Punjab in the eighteenth century, in most instances, are his own translation or interpretation from Miskin. From reading his loose translations and interpretation of Mughlani Begum, it is clear that inserts his own biases of gender roles. For example, he introduces the word "seduces" when describing how she managed to win over political support.¹⁵³ A Persian word to this effect is completely missing in the actual Persian text. This comes from Sarkar's own bias about women and how they would be able to rally support for their political aspirations. He further describes her as a "virago," an offensive word meaning a woman who is easily annoyed or angered.¹⁵⁴ Later, he calls her an "unreasonable woman" saying that "her obstinacy only humiliated her and brought down upon her head poverty and scorn in a city which she had once ruled with sovereign power."¹⁵⁵

Sarkar writes, "Soon afterwards, her infant son Md. Amin Khan died (early in May 1754) and she threw caution and shame to the winds in the pursuit of pleasure." Unfortunately, he does not cite from where he gets this information. He goes on to say that the eunuchs could not agree with each other; and yet, it is they who were the ones in power, acting on behalf of the begum, and for this he cites Miskin.

Curiously, Ganda Singh, the postcolonial biographer of Ahmad Shah Durrani, who is also proficient in Persian, favors and continues Sarkar's biases, incorporating them uncritically. He

¹⁵² al-Ḥusainī.

¹⁵³ Sarkar, II, 1754-1771, pp. 52, 57.

¹⁵⁴ Sarkar, II, 1754-1771, p. 60.

¹⁵⁵ Sarkar, II, 1754-1771, p. 66.

cites Sarkar's work, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, and two Persian sources, *Tārīkh-i Ahmad Shāhī* and Miskin's *Tahmās Nāma*, all three of which include descriptions of Mughlani Begum. Singh, despite knowing Persian, follows Sarkar's lead and calls Mughlani Begum "seductive". In a section called "Bhikari Khan Imprisoned by Mughlani Begum," Singh writes:

The authority of the Mughal emperor had, in the meantime, been already flouted by the Begum. Equipped with the appointment order from Intizam-ud-Daulah, the prime minister at Delhi, Raushan-ud-Daulah Bhikari Khan had tried to assert himself in the affairs of the state. But he found his position irksome under the petticoat government of an immodest flirt, whose fancy and urge it became impossible for him to satisfy...The tension continued for some days till Mirza Jan of Bhikari's party was seduced away by the Begum by conferring upon him the title of *Khan* and the *faujdari* of the parganah of Eminabad.¹⁵⁶

In describing Mughlani Begum, he calls her an "immodest flirt" and her tactics to be sexual in nature, "seducing" men with titles of honor. Perhaps a better word would have been "bribed" instead, as this is more accurate. By using a word like "seduce" it reminds the reader that it is not a woman's place to govern. She would have to succumb to unsavory acts to obtain and remain in power; whereas, in reality, she did what most men in that position would have done: win over loyalty by posting people with local power to position of authority within their sovereignty. But, because she is a female, her actions must be described in a way that is not deemed moral.

Furthermore, Ganda Singh uses the same type of language as Sarkar, saying that Mughlani Begum "soon sank into evil life, threw all modesty to the winds and became notorious for her loose morals." In a footnote he says, "It is not necessary to go into the details of Mughlani Begum's clandestine love affairs. The pages of the *Tahmās Nāma* are replete with pointed references to her notorious connections with a number of people."¹⁵⁷ He continues to say "But the Panjab is not the

¹⁵⁶ Singh, pp. 139–40.

¹⁵⁷ Singh, p. 141f.

province which could be ruled by a profligate woman. Her foolish pranks and profligacies turned her best supporters and devoted servants against her.”¹⁵⁸ Upon the death of her son, Singh says, “With the loss of her son were gone even the last traces of caution and shame and she was hopelessly lost in the pursuit of her pleasures.”¹⁵⁹ After all of these general depictions of a woman who has no morals and is sleeping her way to the reins of power, he finally gives some evidence and writes about the rumor of Mughlani Begum and a Bakhshi Ghazi Beg Khan: “It was about the month of December 1754, that Mughlani Begum’s illicit connections with Bakhshi Ghazi Beg Khan became so notorious that it was an open scandal on the lips of all and sundry.”¹⁶⁰

It is very possible that she was an “immoral” woman for that period in history, and some would argue even afterwards, and that reasonable people would deem it improper for such a woman to hold positions of rank, authority, and power. It is possible that colonial and postcolonial male historians have depicted her morality in the correct way. But, it is not because they read the sources closely, or critically. If they got it right, and again there is no real way of knowing this, it is only because their biases led them to be correct. Miskin's narrative simply does not provide an indisputable depiction of Mughlani Begum as an immoral woman. He never confirms that she had illicit relations with anyone, even with the Bakhshi, only that the rumor about them had become well-known. Sarkar, Gupta, and Singh draw the conclusion that Mughlani Begum had sexual relations with Miskin also; and yet, again there is conclusive proof of an illicit relationship from the text itself. If it did indeed occur, it is possible that Miskin omitted this information (and yet, as mentioned before, Miskin does admit his pre-martial sexual transgression with a person soon after Muin al-Mulk’s death, who could not have possibly been Mughlani Begum because he had not yet

¹⁵⁸ Singh, p. 141.

¹⁵⁹ Singh, p. 142. Singh does not provide a citation for this.

¹⁶⁰ Singh, p. 142.

served her). Moreover, it should be noted that he does write that her maternal aunt accused Mughlani Begum of sleeping with Miskin, and reported it to the Mughal vizier, her uncle, Ghazi al-Din, also known as Imad al-Mulk (d. 1782).¹⁶¹ Miskin reports these rumors, he discloses the fact that the rumors are spreading, and sometimes from whom, but he does not verify their veracity. Only through pure speculation can one conclude that she had illicit relations with anyone who was not her husband.

Conclusion

Miskin's account, the *Tahmās Nāma*, has been a crucial source for historians of South Asia in the early modern period. More often than not, colonial historians like Sir Jadunath Sarkar, and later postcolonial historians, like Ganda Singh, verbatim translate portions of the text, inserting assumptions into their accounts in an uncritical and unanalytical manner. This leads to carrying forward of biases, including misogyny, but also opens up avenues for misreading the past, especially through anachronistic categories of religion. By reading the text afresh, we have constructed an alternative way of thinking about identity, identity formation, and identity politics, specifically in 18th century Punjab. Rather than privileging religion, region, language, class, or caste—and yet taking them seriously—this chapter has argued that Turkish identity and male gender permitted more social and political capital and mobility in the early modern period. Additionally, rather than continue to perpetuate a misogynist reading of Mughlani Begum, this chapter has sought to reconstruct her life in a nuanced way, thus exposing what social and political life may have been for elite Mughal women. It must be remembered that the original perspective of Mughlani Begum comes from a man—Miskin. He lived and operated in a world where it was

¹⁶¹ Miskin, p. 137. It is also worth noting that it was another woman, her maternal aunt at that, who accused her of having improper relations.

unconceivable that a woman should be the public face of government; and yet, financially, socially, and personally benefitted from her status. She, on the other hand, was exploited, betrayed, and eventually left destitute. Miskin's good reputation and life's work have made it past his death, honored and remembered in the pages of history; whereas, Mughlani Begum's two hundred year-long legacy has been that she was nothing more than an inept, power-hungry adulterer.

The aim of this chapter is not to depict Mughlani Begum as a pious, upright woman, or concoct a new persona. Rather, to question uncritical assumptions about women in the early modern period that continue, unchecked, into present scholarship. The job of a historian is no longer to judge historical figures or events, as it was once the aim of historians like Sir Jadunath Sarkar. We must question the ways in which primary sources are read, and to intervene where necessary. Mughlani Begum is not the only woman, or person for that matter, who has been mistreated or misrepresented in contemporary scholarship. As this dissertation has largely argued, this has happened intentionally or unintentionally to a whole community of people, the Afghans. They have been described as "barbaric," as "invaders," and as "foreign." Their histories, even the ones written by them, have often been read (or ignored) in the same way that Mughlani Begum is read. There exists, in the mind of the historian, a biased understanding of the person or community and that permeates in the ways s/he translates and reconstructs history. This chapter—and dissertation—is an attempt to disrupt those readings, to bring to fore new ways of understanding and interpreting the past.

Conclusion



Figure 1 Awadh Punch on Afghanistan, 1879, The Public Archive

The poetry, written by Mirza Asadullah Ghalib (d. 1869) in the caption reads: “Yusuf Khan – We have heard about Adam falling from paradise; but, you fell from the mountains without honor.”

The man likened to an ape on floor in disheveled clothes and hair, tied in rope by a British officer, is an Afghan named Yusuf Khan. On the left, General Roberts (Sir Frederick Roberts, Earl Roberts I, d. 1914) holds the Europeanized woman, “Kabul.”

By the mid-nineteenth century, the British East India Company in India became an imperial power, the British Raj. When political satirists depicted the cartoon above of British treatment of Afghans, one Anglo-Afghan war had been fought, and another had just begun. British interest in the Afghans increased as the “Great Game” between Russia and the British intensified during the nineteenth century. For the British, mountain-dwelling Afghans were a group of people that needed to be civilized, and Europeanized, even if through force, as depicted in the above cartoon.

This dissertation inquired how Iranians and Afghans attempted to legitimize their sovereignty during the tumultuous eighteenth century. In a related line of inquiry, the dissertation examined how space was connected through ethnic networks; namely the Afghans under the leadership of Ahmad Shah. Lastly, the dissertation asked how identities were constructed and leveraged for social and political mobility.

Three inter-related findings emerged from a re-examination of sources written in the eighteenth century. First, on identity. For the groups under review in this dissertation, there are three categories of identity that are deployed for communities: Muslim, Afghan (or Mughal, Uzbek, etc.), and a genealogical affiliation (Sadozai, Yusufzai, etc.). While all three categories are important for calls to action or to build a sense of community or solidarity, the middle category, that of being Afghan, was more expedient in the eighteenth century, than the other two categories. Second, women, eunuchs, and slaves held more power and were important historical actors that changed the course of history. Mughlani Begum, Nawab Jawed Khan, and Miskin are a few examples of people who held power, despite many attempts by their contemporaries to strip them of that authority. Mughlani Begum and Nawab Jawed Khan were unsuccessful, at the end, but their attempts to govern reveal that it was indeed possible for women and eunuchs to effect change in society. The third is that Afghans were not foreigners in Hindustan and they did not “invade” it. To call Nadir Shah, who was an Iranian Turk, an invader is also problematic, as the evidence suggests that he entered Hindustan for either diplomatic reasons or was invited by Mughal nobles, and even the vizier. Ahmad Shah was born in Multan, and his family had resided there for generations before, as nobles who invested in the infrastructure of the region. The question of what it means to be foreign has been traced through three themes: connection to land and movement, origin stories, and religion.

With the arrival of the British, how identities were constructed and classified altered the ways in which Afghans were documented in nineteenth and twentieth century histories, literature, reports, and so on. Colonial views of Afghans, the creation of Afghanistan as a nation-state in the nineteenth century, and the implications of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet system drive our perceptions of Afghans and their history. The Afghans of the eighteenth century, however, do not match those perceptions. How perceptions of Afghans were shaped by colonial historians is a question that I hope to pursue as I continue to work on Afghans in South Asia in the early modern and modern periods.

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