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SECRETARY-POETS IN MUGHAL INDIA AND THE ETHOS OF PERSIAN:
THE CASE OF CHANDAR BHĀN BRAHMAN

VOLUME ONE

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For my father,

who would have been proud, I hope...
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This dissertation comprises an analysis of the historical and cultural milieu of Chandar Bhān “Brahman,” a celebrated South Asian litterateur and munshi, or imperial secretary. Chandar Bhān rose from a provincial clerkship in seventeenth-century Punjab all the way to the rank of imperial Chief Secretary (mīr munshi) under the Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān (r. 1628-58 CE), the renowned builder of the Taj Mahal. In addition to performing their quotidian official duties, most Indo-Persian secretaries have, historically, also been deeply enmeshed in the literary and political worlds, and have, over the centuries, been responsible for producing an enormous range of texts in myriad genres, from historical chronicles and treatises on philosophy, religion, and ethics, to lexicographical studies and divāns of poetry. They were masters of the refined art of stylized prose, or inshā’ — a form of writing which they deployed not only in their official capacity, but also in personal letters, travelogues, and occasional writings of all kinds. Thus even as imperial secretaries like Chandar Bhān officially carried out the administrative duties that the Ottoman scholar Cornell Fleischer has called “the basic work of empire,” from the viewpoint of intellectual history there has always been a symbiotic relationship among their literary, epistolary, philosophical, creative and political selves. Historicizing the life and career of a master munshi like Chandar Bhān can thus teach us a great deal about early modern Mughal literary and political culture more broadly, as it was lived and practiced. Moreover, given the continuing prevalence of modern-day assumptions about rigid premodern “tradition” and intolerant religious
orthodoxy, one cannot help but be struck by the degree to which a *brahman* like Chandar Bhān, like most other members of the growing demographic of seventeenth-century Hindu *munshi*s in Mughal India, was able, almost seamlessly, to assimilate and contribute greatly to the composite of Mughal literary culture, mystical philosophy, gentlemanly virtue, (relatively) non-sectarian social tolerance, taste, aesthetics, and etiquette that Muzaffar Alam has recently summed up as "the ethos of Persian." And thus, from the literary and political traditions that he inherited, to those that he cultivated and passed on to later secretarial generations — well into the British colonial era — Chandar Bhān offers us a perfect lens through which to envisage the Hindu *munshi*'s-eye view of life in Mughal South Asia and beyond.
I owe an incalculable debt of gratitude to my dissertation committee, Muzaffar Alam, Sheldon Pollock, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. All of you have not only been more generous with your time, encouragement, and suggestions than anyone could hope to expect, but you have also inspired me with your own dedication and exemplary scholarship.

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INTRODUCTION

Prologue

It is a bit of an academic truism, but projects — especially big projects — tend somehow to find us, rather than the other way around. True to the truism, this dissertation began with a simple curiosity about someone else’s footnote. During the first of what would become many years of studying Mughal history with my inimitable teacher, Muzaffār Alam, while reading a biography of the Mughal prince Dārā Shukoh, something caught my eye. The “Prince of Great Fortune” (shāhzāda-i buland-iqbāl), as Dārā was known, was on his way back to Delhi following a disastrous campaign to try and retrieve Qandahār from the Mughals’ great rivals, the Safavids of Iran. Despite the dismal failure of this mission — or, perhaps, because of it — Dārā appears to have been in no great hurry to return directly to the court of his father, the celebrated Emperor Shāh Jahān. Instead, in the fall of 1653 CE the prince broke journey somewhere on the outskirts of Lahore in order to hold what would later be hailed as a major component of his larger “experiment in Hindu-Muslim unity”\(^1\) — namely, a series of dialogues with a local Punjabi yogī most often referred to simply as Bābā Lāl.

These conversations were recorded, and remain well-known among scholars of Indo-Persian cultural, political, and religious history as one of the high water marks in the encounter between Sufism and Vedantic speculative thought in India. However this, in itself, is not what caught my eye especially, as there is slightly more to the story. The biographer in question, Bikrama Jit Hasrat, has a special section on the prince’s remarkable conversations with the yogī, and towards the end of this analysis he adds the following comment, almost as an aside:

The seven discourses were originally composed in Hindī and were later on translated, according to [the] Delhi edition, under the title Nādir-un-Nikāt ["Exquisite Rarities"; or perhaps "Exotic Aphorisms"] by Dārā Shikūh’s mīr munshī Rai Chander Bhān, who was appointed, later, by Shāh Jahān as the Chief Secretary in the Imperial Dār-ul-Inshā [secretariat]. Himself a great Persian scholar and a poet, he was a guide and friend of the prince in the course of his Sanskrit studies. He acted as an interpreter during the whole course of the dialogues and then translated them into Persian.\(^2\)

Hasrat adds further details about this munshī in a footnote:

Munshī Chander Bhān Brahman of Patiala and a pupil of Mullāh ‘Abdūl Hakīm of Sialkot, was Dārā Shikūh’s Chief Secretary. He is the author of the famous Chahār-Chaman, written in a masterly Persian style and composition dealing with Shāhjahān’s court, its splendours and festivals, followed by a memoirs of author’s own life; Munsha’āt-i-Brahman, a collection of letters to the Emperor and other eminent personages of the time; a Dīwān of lyrical poems entitled Dīwān-i-Brahman. Among his other works are the Kārnāmāh, Tuḥfat-ul-Wuzara, Tuḥfat-ul-Fusha, etc., (for more details of his works vide Ethe, 1574, 2093, 2094; also Bodleian Cat. Nos. 1123, 1385 & 1386; Rieu I, p. 397 sq., II, p. 838, III, p. 1087a. Details about his life are given in the Mir’āt-i-Jahānmumā and the Mir’āt-ul-Khayāl, etc.). He died in A.H. 1068 = (A.D. 1657-8), or according to others, in A.H. 1063 = (A.D. 1662-3).\(^3\)

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\(^2\) Bikrama Jit Hasrat, Dārā Shikūh: Life and Works (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1979), 244-5.

\(^3\) Hasrat, Dārā Shikūh, 244n.
Now, on rereading this passage after so many years, my pedantic first instinct is to correct several of Hasrat’s inaccurate statements. For instance: Chandar Bhañ was from Lahore, not Patiala; actually, he worked for Shāh Jahān first, and only later, and intermittently, for Dārā; and there seems to be a misprint where Hasrat gives an alternate date for Chandar Bhañ’s death as 1063 AH, since surely he meant to write 1073 AH, which corresponds to the date given in Mir ‘āṭ al-Khayāl and numerous other sources, and so too with the corresponding Gregorian calendar date of 1662-3 CE.

But long before I became knowledgeable enough on the matter to engage in such quotidian quibbles, I was simply intrigued by Hasrat’s tableau. What was Dārā doing hanging out with yogīs in rural Punjab, just on the heels of the most humiliating defeat of his entire military career? It certainly says something about the importance that he placed on intellectual pursuits, as well as the pace of life in Mughal India. The return trip from Qandahār would have taken weeks, and perhaps a bit of spiritual advice along the way is just what he needed to clear his mind before returning to the bustle of court life. Dārā is, of course, best remembered for a number of eclectic attempts to synthesize India’s religious traditions, and thus — particularly because of the unceremonious way in which he was eventually dispatched by his younger, more conservative brother Aurangzeb — often stands in South Asian memory and historiography as a kind of tragic, overdetermined martyr of early modern composite culture. As such, his particular brand of religious experimentation drew him into intellectual conversation with all manner of
spiritual thinkers of his era, across the social spectrum, and Bābā Lāl was clearly among these.⁴

But who was this mediator, this munshi Chandar Bhān? It certainly seemed to me like no small detail that the chief secretary and a key advisor to the most powerful prince in India, the heir-apparent to the Mughal throne at the height of its power and influence, was a Hindu (from my own ancestral homeland of Punjab, no less), and a brahman at that. Indeed, the image of Dārā, Bābā Lāl, and Chandar Bhān all sitting together and discussing matters ranging from whether or not the Prophet of Islam had an earthly shadow, to Vedāntic concepts like ātma and paramātma, right alongside worldly governmental topics like the ideals and goals of Indian kingship and political justice, all struck me as an example par excellence of the shared religio-political idiom that defined South Asian composite culture under the Mughals.⁵ It showed, moreover, that however exceptional a figure Dārā might have been, he was by no means an exception. His

⁴ In addition to Hasrat, for general details on Dārā’s life and career see K. R. Qanungo, Dara Shukoh (Calcutta, S.C. Sarkar, 1952). For a recent examination of the politics of his approach to religion, particularly his encounters with the “Indian monotheists” (mowāhidūn-i hind), see Craig Davis, “Dara Shukuh and Aurangzib: Issues of Religion and Politics and their Impact on Indo-Muslim Society” (PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 2002). On the larger historical context of Mughal princely competition, see Munis D. Faruqui, “Princes and Power in the Mughal Empire, 1569-1657” (PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 2002).

⁵ There are several recensions of Chandar Bhān’s Persian version of the dialogues. Besides the excerpts provided in Hasrat’s account, I have consulted a manuscript dated 1140 AH (ca. 1728 CE), and inscribed with the title Gosht-i Bābā Lāl Davāl hamrāh-i Shāhzādah Dārā Shukoh, Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, Jawāhir Museum Collection #70. For a translation and some details on the textual variations in some other manuscripts, see Clement Huart and Louis Massignon, “Les Entretiens de Lahore [entre le prince imperial Dārā Shikāh et l’ascète Hindou Baba La’l Das],” Journal Asiatique 209 (Oct. – Dec. 1926): 285-34; reprinted as “Dara Shikoh’s Interview with Baba La’l Das at Lahore,” in On Becoming an Indian Muslim: French Essays on Aspects of Syncretism, translated and edited by M. Waseem (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 106-30. The Sanskrit scholar Christopher Minkowski recently informed me about a Sanskrit version of the dialogues that appears to have been prepared at the Rajput court at Amber (later known as Jaipur), but I have not yet had an opportunity to consult this important text.
interventions were steeped in a centuries-old tradition of intellectual dialogism that, contrary to much modern stereotyping, continued unabated throughout the period of so-called "Muslim" rule in the subcontinent. That is to say, for such a dialogue even to occur, especially in the matter-of-fact way in which Dārā and Bābā Lāl discussed esoteric topics from numerous religio-political traditions — and further, for Chandar Bhān to translate them into Persian with such facility — required that all parties concerned already be familiar with the relevant concepts and vocabularies. And at an even more basic level, the tableau struck me as a signature example of early modern South Asian multiglossia — a Mughal monarch descended from Chaghatay Turks speaking in "Hindi" (i.e. Punjabi? proto-Hindi-Urdu?) with a provincial yogī who cites "Persian books" as sources, all mediated by an assistant who seems to have a considerable background in Sanskrit but, when requested, ably and expertly translates the entire conversation into Persian. And it wasn't as though this munshi Chandar Bhān was merely competent in Persian; he had, in fact, written numerous works, which Hasrat describes in glowing terms like "famous," "masterly," the product of "a great Persian scholar and poet," and so on.

The next time I saw Professor Alam, I made sure to ask him about Chandar Bhān. With characteristic modesty, he initially said that he couldn't tell me too much, but added — with equally characteristic enthusiasm — that Chandar Bhān was indeed a very

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6 I have examined the problems associated with the well-meaning historiographical exceptionalism that surrounds Akbar and Dārā Shukoh in "The Heart is Me and You: A Mughal Conversation about Familiarity and Difference," presented at the Association for Asian Studies, Annual Meeting, Boston, March 22-25, 2007. For a more general take on the traditions of rational disputatation in South Asia, and their relevance to modern Indian democracy, see Amartya Sen, The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture, and Identity (London; New York: Allen Lane, 2005).
important, and understudied, seventeenth-century Mughal litterateur. He therefore readily agreed when I asked if I could look into the available sources for a term paper. And thus, although I don’t think either of us realized it that day, a dissertation was born.

Chandar Bhān and Mughal Historiography

My initial enthusiasm for the project was tamped almost immediately by frustration, on the one hand with a lack of readily available sources, and on the other by the humbling realization that my language skills in Urdu and Persian were not nearly as good as I thought they needed to be. Those language skills have, I hope, improved considerably in the intervening years; but there wasn’t — and still isn’t — a single book-length biography or monograph on Chandar Bhān, published or otherwise, available in any language. In fact, when I began this project the Persian texts of neither of Chandar Bhān’s two major prose works, Chahār Chaman (“The Four Gardens”) and Munsha’āt-i Brahman (“Brahman’s Collected Letters”), were even available in printed editions.7 There are two PhD theses which I have since been able to consult, one from Delhi University, the other from Aligarh Muslim University.8 But both date from the 1970s,

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7 Interestingly enough, however, both have since been published in India. The entire text of Chahār Chaman was recently edited by Yunus Ja’fri and published as a single special edition of the journal Qand-i Pārsī (“Persian Candy,” an allusion to the famous verse of Hāfiz Shīrāzī: shakkar shakan shavand hamah tātiyān-i hind / z-in qand-i pārsī kih ba-bangāla mī-ravad) (number 22 (New Delhi: 2003)); and Chandar Bhān’s collected letters have been published as Munshi’āt-e-Brahman [sic], edited by Sharif Husain Qasemi and Waqarul Hasan Siddiqi (Rampur: Raza Library, 1426 AH / 2005 AD).

and neither was available to me in Chicago at the time. Hasrat says little more about Chandar Bhān beyond what I have quoted above, and Dārā’s other well-known biographer, K. R. Qanungo, also adds little beyond the details of the meeting with Bābā Lāl, and a few other intermittent notes about the ill-fated Prince’s “trust servant."9 Likewise, Chandar Bhān garners nary a mention in many of the standard Mughal references in English, such as John Richards’s *The Mughal Empire*, or the various articles collected in Alam and Subrahmanynam’s edited volume, *The Mughal State*.10 And quite often, when Chandar Bhān is indeed mentioned, it is merely in passing, as someone whose writings are themselves among the useful “official and non-official histories” of Shāh Jahān’s reign.11

Of course, given his intimate knowledge of Mughal culture and politics, Chandar Bhān is indeed a useful “non-official” source for information, particularly about Shāh Jahān’s reign. He was born in late sixteenth-century Lahore, to a family of Punjabi Brahmans, and thus spent his formative years at the height of Akbar’s reign (1556-1605 CE). His professional career began in the service of one Mīr ‘Abd al-Karīm, who at the time was the Mughal superintendent of buildings (*mīr-i ‘imārati*) for Lahore, but who, incidentally, went on to become one of the primary overseers of the Taj Mahal construction. Chandar

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Bhān later entered the subimperial administration directly, as a secretary to the celebrated wazīr Afzal Khān, who would himself eventually become one of Shāh Jahān’s most influential Prime Ministers (wazīr-i kull). After Afzal Khān’s death, Shāh Jahān brought Chandar Bhān to court, where he continued to serve a series of powerful patrons, including a succession of the wazīrs who followed Afzal Khān, and rose through the administrative ranks all the way up to the position of mīr munshī, i.e. the head of the Mughal chancellery (dār al-inshā’). This career lasted through the end of Shāh Jahān’s reign and into the early years of Aurangzeb’s, when, citing old age, Chandar Bhān begged leave to retire to his home town where he seems to have spent the last few years of his life helping to manage the upkeep on Jahāngīr’s (r. 1605-1628 CE) tomb complex.  

So here we have what appears, on the face of it at least, to be a major writer from the seventeenth century, who worked at the highest levels of the state and the cultural intelligentsia, who is nonetheless for all practical purposes virtually absent from modern Mughal historiography. Bear in mind, too, that Chandar Bhān’s life and writings are not, like those of Ginzburg’s miller Menocchio, buried in obscure judicial records and

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12 The biographical details given here are culled primarily from Chandar Bhān’s own Chahār Chaman and Munsha’āt-i Brahmaṇ. N.b., there seems to be quite a bit of misunderstanding about Chandar Bhān’s retirement. It is often reported, for instance, that he was so distraught over Dārā Shukoh’s death at the hands of Aurangzeb that he refused to serve the latter, and instead retired to Benares where, in the words of Sher Khān Lodī’s Mīr ‘āt al-Khayyāl (1102 A.H / 1690 CE), “he busied himself with his own [i.e. ‘Hindu’] ways and customs, until finally… he became ash in the fire-temple of annihilation.” Lodī, in fact, seems to be the original (and unreliable) source for this story, which appears designed specifically to emphasize Chandar Bhān’s synoptic image as a Hindu par excellence, rather than his credentials as a munshī, litterateur, and administrator. I have written more extensively about this in Chapter Four, but in any case, Lodī is flatly contradicted by Chandar Bhān’s own letters to Aurangzeb, which betray no hint of angst, and more importantly state explicitly that he retired to Lahore. See for instance Munsha’āt-i Brahmaṇ, MS, Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, ‘Abd al-Salām collection #294/64, ff. 8a-10a.
bureaucratic fragments, waiting to be excavated.\textsuperscript{13} He was a major figure, who worked, wrote, and interacted with the cream of Mughal royalty and officialdom, and has left behind an intricate account of that career, a significant collection of personal epistolary correspondence, a \textit{divān} of poetry, and other miscellaneous writings besides (the translation of Dārā’s conversations with Bābā Lāl being just one of several such miscellaneous texts). Despite this fact, and despite the renown that he enjoyed in his own times, the currently available scholarship provides us very little in the way of guidance for understanding where he actually fit within the Mughal intelligentsia, or how we might understand how \textit{he} looked at the world. In that sense he is indeed very much like Menocchio, having been reduced by modern historiographical neglect to being practically “an unnoticed but extraordinary fragment of a reality, half obliterated, which implicitly poses a series of questions for our own culture and for us.”\textsuperscript{14}

Obviously, part of the reason for the modern scholarly neglect of figures like Chandar Bhān has to do simply with the decline of Persian (and Urdu) studies in the subcontinent, particularly in postcolonial India. There are simply not enough people trained in the archival and linguistic skills necessary to maintain, compile, and edit (much less translate) the thousands of Indo-Persian manuscripts that lie hibernating in archives across India and around the world. Most scholarship on this period conducted in Europe and America still depends heavily on colonial-era translations, such as Elliot and


\textsuperscript{14} Ginzburg, \textit{The Cheese and the Worms}, xii.
Dowson’s badly outdated volumes, or on the secondary scholarship of the few remaining scholars who truly have a mastery over the textual canons of pre- and early modern Indo-Persian literary and political culture. So in that sense, the fact that someone like Chandar Bhān is not widely known should not surprise us too much, for it has less to do with a neglect of him in particular than it does with the wasting away of expertise in the field of Indo-Persian knowledge systems generally.

But there is another reason that he has slipped through the historiographical cracks, which does have specifically to do with the way Mughal history has been written for the past century or so. As I quickly learned, and eventually argued in my 2003 dissertation proposal, the lives of many intellectuals like Chandar Bhān have fallen by the wayside in a Mughal historiography that has been dominated by political and military history, coupled with a Marxian framework, and a corollary structural approach, that have tended to privilege the history of social and economic institutions over intellectual and cultural history. Needless to say, there is absolutely no denying the immense contribution of writers like Irfan Habib, M. Athar Ali, Tapan Raychaudhuri, Shireen Moosvi, and many others of the so-called “Aligarh School” (as well as their counterparts in the “Cambridge School”) to our knowledge of the Mughal state and political economy in early modern South Asia. But this very focus on the state, political and economic elites, revenue

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systems, and the abstract structures of power in Mughal India has generally come at the expense of deeper investigations into intellectual life and individual lives, or the multiply overlapping and various thought worlds that, say, a seventeenth-century intellectual — even a relatively elite member of the cognoscenti like Chandar Bhān — might have inhabited. Indeed, the very notion that an individual’s worldview might illuminate our understanding of historical process is flatly contradicted by the Marxian dictum: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary it is their social existence that determines their consciousness.”

It is thus not that twentieth-century scholars did not know or care about the thought worlds of Mughal intellectuals, but rather, simply, that their primary interests tended to lay elsewhere. They were, quite rightly, responding to a colonial historiography that posited Mughal India as a land of uncomplicated authoritarian rule, wherein all history was made by “great men” and all ownership and power resided arbitrarily in the body of the emperors, who were themselves cast as classic Oriental despots. To counter this image, nationalist and postcolonial scholars have had to marshal a mountain of evidence that has shown the exceeding complexity of, and diffusion of power within, the Mughal state, bureaucracy, mansabdārī system, and political economy. One cannot help but admire the amazing intricacy and detail of this body of scholarship, even if one has occasional reason to debate the particulars.

But this emphasis on the state and state institutions has also not come without a price, and clearly Chandar Bhān has not been the only victim of the prevailing scholarly modality. Consider if the same were true of European intellectual history, and the lacuna becomes all the more surprising. Could one seriously imagine a world in which decades passed without the production of any major biographies or analytical studies of the intellectual lives of figures like Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Cervantes, Hobbes, Descartes, John Locke, Voltaire, and the like? Probably not. And yet this is precisely the situation for equally seminal figures in early modern Indo-Persian literary and political culture — Abū al-Fazl, ‘Abd al-Qadīr Bādāyūnī, Abū al-Faiz Faizi, ‘Abd al-Rahīm Khān-i Khānān, Sa’dullah Khān, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti, ‘Abd al-Qādir Bedil, Anand Rām Mukhlis, Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Alī Khān Ārzū, Muhammad Raftī Sauda, to name just a few. Beyond the occasional journal article none of these figures have received significant scholarly treatment in my lifetime, and sadly the litany of indifference could go on and on.

Moreover, somewhat epiphenomenal to the general emphasis on Marxian structural analyses, there has been a further reason for the general lack of interest in intellectual life in pre- and early modern South Asia. Modern positivist methodologies have authorized a kind of casual indifference to actual texts and their authors, as a byproduct of a broader mode of textual valuation whereby any given prose work from, say, the Mughal archive is valued only to the extent that it can “serve” the interests of modern (usually social and economic) historians. Texts themselves — particularly prose texts — can do this in all the obvious ways, by providing names, dates, and so on, hopefully without too much interference from ornate compositional norms. But the authors, and the worldviews that
informed the writing of those texts, have by and large been deemed irrelevant to the project of modern history. Thus the trope of “serving” history pops up repeatedly in the work of modern Mughal historians, and carries with it an implicit assumption that Mughal writers were somehow writing for the modern historian — and if they weren’t, that they should have been. It is a demand that is often presented politely enough or, more often, simply implied, as in the formulation of one recent scholar who includes Chandar Bhān’s Chahār Chaman among a list of sources that “extend valuable help in constructing the biographical details of various leading nobles, and throw light on the political, economic and social conditions of this period.”\(^{18}\) However innocuous the statement may be, it nevertheless seems to suggest that the true raison d’être of a text like Chahār Chaman is somehow external to the text itself. It is a call simply to document, and any questions about the work’s author, his own goals in writing it, the possible reasons for its textual architectonics, the potential contemporary audience, and the socio-cultural conditions of possibility that might have been necessary for a text like this even to have been produced, are all set aside in favor of the extrinsic expectation that the work “extend help” to later generations of historians by providing positive data which “throw light” on the structure of Mughal institutions.

There is, of course, nothing necessarily or inherently wrong with mining textual archives for data. It is also not necessarily the case that something — or in this case, someone — merits renewed scholarly attention simply because he, she, or it has been glossed over by

earlier generations of scholars. But here we are faced with an entire cultural historical archive that, although known, has for generations been known primarily through modes of understanding external to it. It is thus my hope that a greater, and a different kind, of attention to a figure like Chandar Bhān can instead begin to help us illuminate some of this archive, as it were, "from the inside out."\textsuperscript{19}

I will address below some of the specific reasons why I think Chandar Bhān can help us do this, but first, I think the force of the arguments that I've just made will be a bit clearer if we briefly examine the attitude of a notable scholar of Mughal India who was very familiar with the prose archive produced by Chandar Bhān and his ilk. In his classic study \textit{Mughal Administration}, the noted historian Jadunath Sarkar has judged that the wealth of details contained in the epistolography and \textit{belles-lettres} of munshīs like Chandar Bhān render them "of inestimable service to the modern student of Mughal history."\textsuperscript{20} Again, the trope of "service" to the modern is here invoked; but very quickly we see that Sarkar's praise for the archive left behind by Mughal munshīs is, in fact, both faint and damming:

But the main wealth of historical information regarding Aurangzib lies in the contemporary letters, which together with the above ãkhbārs form the very raw materials or the most authentic source for the history of his reign. The preservation of these letters we owe not to any action on the part of the Emperor, nor to the practice of any secretariat archive, but to a private source, namely, the literary vanity of the secretaries (munshīs) who drafted them....The munshīs had not the future historian of the Mughal empire


before their mind’s eye, but the polished society of their own days. Their aim was not to leave historical records for posterity, but to show their own mastery of style and to set models of composition before students of rhetoric and epistolary prose...Such letter-books, however, belonged to a decadent age, when the Court had ceased to make history.\(^2\)

Here Sarkar shifts away from the implicit, casual indifference toward Mughal texts and their authors that saturates the work of so many modern scholars, and into a terrain of explicit, active disdain. He accepts the Mughal letter collections as valuable historical sources, but only on his own restricted terms. And thus, though he is grateful that they have been preserved, he winces at the “vanity” of the secretaries themselves; he laments that the secretaries did not think to compose their texts in a manner more suitable to a modern audience, rather than the “polished society” of their own day; indeed, as far as Sarkar is concerned it is precisely the munshi’s neglect of “posterity” in favor of their own will to “mastery of style” that represents the truest indication of their, and their entire era’s, essential “decadence” — a decadence that is formulated specifically in terms that place them outside the realm of the historical.

Ironically, then, this sense that Mughal texts exist solely to serve the interests of what modern historians deem relevant is what actually yanks the archive from its own intellectual historical context. The archive is treated, in other words, simply as a collection of source “documents,” rather than “works” worthy of being themselves situated and analyzed within the trajectory of early modern South Asian intellectual

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history.\textsuperscript{22} In the name of writing history, then, modern scholars like Sarkar have in fact failed to historicize the very authors and crucial source texts upon which they depend (Chandar Bhān and his oeuvre among them); and the emphasis on texts’ documentary “raw materials,” to the exclusion of their literary, socio-political, and religio-cultural (i.e. work-like) properties, has trumped nearly all consideration of the compositional norms that might have been important to the Mughal writers themselves.

But what were those norms, and where did they come from? Briefly stated, the genre of texts to which Sarkar is referring above falls into an extremely broad category of prose compositions for which the standard Persianate term is \textit{inshā’}. Often in modern scholarship \textit{inshā’} tends to be associated almost exclusively with epistolary writing, particularly “official correspondence” among political elites. As we will see in Chapters One and Two below, however, this focus on epistolography can be somewhat misleading, not only because Mughal epistolography had a much wider and more heterogeneous range of formal and informal registers than scholars have tended to acknowledge, but also because, in addition to letter-writing, numerous other compositional modes could fall under the general rubric of \textit{inshā’}, among them various subgenres like wisdom literature, travel writing, biography and autobiography, certain types of mystical literature, and so on. In some ways, then, the only thing that truly unifies the vast \textit{inshā’} corpus as a category is the fact that it is almost entirely in prose, rather than verse. But one cannot simply translate \textit{inshā’} as “prose,” in part because there is another, more explicit Perso-

\textsuperscript{22} For a discussion of the interrelationship between the “documentary” and “worklike” features of texts see Dominick LaCapra, \textit{Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). I am grateful to Sheldon Pollock for referring me to this text.
Arabic term for basic prose (*nasr*), and more importantly because not all works of prose can be considered works of *inshā’*. Historical chronicles, for instance, would be a perfect example of a prose genre that one wouldn’t normally describe as *inshā’* — though it has been known to happen — but the criteria whereby one might decide whether a given prose text falls under the category of *inshā’* are not always clear or specific.

A concrete generic definition of *inshā’* is, therefore, elusive. But what seems clearly to set the *inshā’* corpus apart from other types of prose is its added connotation of literary artistry. This is, in large part, the reason why the genre is so often described as an archive of “ornate prose,” or *belles-lettres*. Master premodern prose craftsmen (*inshā’*-*pardāziyān*) — such as Abū al-Fazl Bayhaqī, Mahmūd Gāwān, Abū al-Fazl ibn Mubārak and his brother Abū al-Faiz Faizi ibn Mubārak, Sa’dullāh Khān, Munīr Lahorī, Anand Rām Mukhlīs, and Chandar Bhān himself — were thus an elite group, for whom composition was a career, rather than a hobby. True mastery of the form required an erudition and skill cultivated over years, even decades, of training and education. Many of these writers eventually became far more famous for other accomplishments, and thus are not really remembered as masters of refined prose composition. But all cultivated the form throughout their lives and official careers, and have left extensive collections of letters and other specimens of artistic prose.

Not all writers of *inshā’*, however, were elite masters of the form. Because of the association of *inshā’* with epistolary writing, diplomatic correspondence, military victory notices (*fath-nāmas*), and other types of governmental prose, the genre was especially
cultivated among royal and imperial secretaries, commercial classes, poets, literati, most nobles and virtually all segments of society for whom writing letters and official documents was *de rigueur*. And hundreds, if not thousands of clerks, secretaries, bureaucrats and other types of administrators in premodern India all mastered the compositional norms necessary to exchange intelligence and transact business in the Indo-Persian ecumene, ca. 1200-1800. Clerks and secretaries went by a number of different titles, with *kātib*, *dabīr*, and *munshī* being only the most common. In time, the term *kātib* came generally to refer primarily to a “clerk,” or even simply a “copyist” or “scribe”; but the terms *dabīr* and especially *munshī* retained a very wide semantic range throughout the pre- and early modern periods, much as the term “secretary” in English carries with it a broad constellation of meanings and potential degrees of prestige. Even in the early phase of British colonialism in India, virtually all East India Company officials at every level relied on *munshīs* for a range of services beyond the functionally bureaucratic, and saw them as a generic class of cultured “men of the pen.” But the key point is that all of these different varieties of clerk, scribe, secretary, accountant, and so on — whether purely administrative or more socially, intellectually, and commercially prestigious — used *insāf* as their primary means of prose expression, both in epistolography and in numerous other types of occasional writing. And thus the nexus between literariness and “official prose” of various sorts remained integral to the *mentalité* not just of allegedly “vain” imperial secretaries like Chandar Bhān, but of numerous segments of Indo-Persian society, from the uppermost political and intellectual echelons all the way to merchant classes and mid-level bureaucrats.
Sarkar's attitude is, however, useful and revelatory in another way. It highlights the degree to which, at bottom, modern historians' rejection of the munshīs' writings is rationalized by an appeal, albeit not always acknowledged, to disciplinarity. What Sarkar is rejecting, really, is precisely the literariness of the Mughal textual archive. Literariness is treated as a residual, vestigial symptom of courtly premodernity, like a textual — and textural — appendix that has to be surgically excised because it "serves" no function in modernist historical practice. The texts themselves are assumed to bear a certain responsibility to the historian, wherein providing data is the quintessential historical "service." And thus any part of the text(s) that exceeds this documentary function is by definition construed simply as an ostentatious disservice. The literary becomes the domain of "vanity," of "polished society," and so on, all of which needs to be smelted away by the modern historian's data mining process like so much slag.

In fairness, though, it should be admitted that a text like Chandar Bhān's Chahār Chaman is not very helpful for corroborating certain types of empirical data, historical dates, the details of war and peace, and so on. But neither is it pure ornament, however much it may be written in what Sarkar referred to as "the vicious style" of Mughal prose after Abū al-Fazl. For the text presupposes an entire vision of Mughal life, literary culture,

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23 For a discussion of the presence of historical "textures" within texts that do not necessarily announce themselves as histories, see Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Textures of Time: Writing History in South India, 1600-1800 (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

24 This attitude is certainly not unique to Mughal historians, being merely a specific iteration of a much more widespread modernist bias against premodern South Asian texts. For a recent overview, see Rama Mantena, "The Question of History in Precolonial India," History and Theory 46 (October 2007), 396-408.

25 Sarkar, Mughal Administration, 219.
religious culture, and yes, institutions, that all figure in the ecology of Chandar Bhān’s “Four Gardens.” Thus unless we are prepared to dismiss the literary and compositional norms that inform his writing as entirely irrelevant to our understanding of his world, we must go back to the texts and ask: why did he write Chahār Chaman the way that he did; how do we historicize a figure like Chandar Bhān; and where did he fit within the world of munshīs and Indo-Persian secretarial culture generally? What was the actual place of such munshīs in Mughal society and courtly experience, and why was such a polished cultural package expected of them? Indeed, what were the historical conditions of possibility for a brahman like Chandar Bhān even to reach — and, more importantly, to choose — the position that he did?

On this latter question, it should be noted, Sarkar does give us a bit of useful information. But his answer, such as it is, simply prompts more questions:

From the middle of the 17th century onwards, most of the munshīs were Hindus, and their proportion rapidly increased. The Hindus had made a monopoly of the lower ranks of the revenue department (diwānī) from long before the time of Todar Mal (Akbar’s revenue minister), probably from the very dawn of Muslim rule in India. Todar Mal’s [late 16th-century] order to have all their papers written in Persian (instead of one set in Persian and a duplicate set in Hindi, as under Sher Shah), compelled all the Hindu officials of State to master the Persian language, and the effect of this change became manifest in the next century, when the Hindus filled the accounts department (hisāb) of the State, and even rose to be deputies and personal assistants (nāibs and pesh-dasts) to the heads of many departments. Most of the nobles and even princes in the late 17th century engaged Hindu munshīs to write their Persian letters. The docile abstemious hardworking and clever Hindu did the work well and cheaply. A Persia-born or Persia-trained Muslim clerk would have been cleverer and would have written a purer idiom, but he was too costly a luxury in India, and the supply of such men from the Persian home-land was dried up at its source by the political disorders in that country at the close of the
17th century. Indian Muhammadans, as a rule, were unsatisfactory for clerical work.26

Even six years after I first read this passage, I am still not entirely clear what Sarkar means by this cryptic last statement about Indian Muslims being “unsatisfactory for clerical work.” Be that as it may, the trajectory that he describes is relatively accurate. Despite not inconsiderable evidence that Hindus, Jains, and other non-Muslims had been learning Persian and working in various Indo-Islamic courts for centuries, it is certainly true that Akbar and Rājā Todar Mal’s decision to institute Persian officially as the primary language of Mughal imperial administration, and to initiate wide-ranging educational reforms to go along with that plan, played a significant role in expanding the demographic range of Persian literacy in India.27 But this alone does not account for why a growing number of the “docile abstemious hardworking and clever” Hindus chose to learn Persian and managed successfully to secure imperial administrative careers as a result, even under the notorious “bigot” Aurangzeb. Indeed, Chandar Bhān’s own father Dharam Dās mastered Persian well before any of Akbar and Todar Mal’s revised administrative and educational policies took effect. And thus Sarkar’s suggestion that they were all “compelled” en masse seems, on its face, if not completely unconvincing then at the very least in need of further clarification and study.

26 Sarkar, Mughal Administration, 218.

Nor does it address the even more fundamental question of why we would assume that linguistic choices and socio-religious identities should be mapped onto one another in this way at all. Why should it matter whether a seventeenth-century intellectual spoke in one language or another? On the one hand, the idea that a family of brahmans like Chandar Bhān’s would see immersion in Persianate literary and cultural norms as no threat to their dharma flies in the face of virtually every divisive colonial (and nationalist) postulate about how South Asian languages and religious communities are defined. Indeed, one recent scholar, noting the ability of Hindu munshīs to accommodate multiple cultural registers simultaneously, has lauded what he called “the chameleon-like attributes of this secretarial caste.” But the image underlying even this well-meaning assertion presupposes that figures like Chandar Bhān were really one thing, while merely pretending to be another; that they camouflaged their true, essential Hindu identity in favor of some sort of elaborate (Muslim) cultural mask. And yet there is no evidence, from Chandar Bhān’s oeuvre anyway, that he was anything but sincere in his mastery of Sufi precepts, Persian poetry, akhlaqi norms, and various other Indo-Persian religio-cultural idioms. On the other hand, we cannot say that his religious identity was irrelevant, for the emergence of a figure like Chandar Bhān was clearly still novel enough in the early decades of the seventeenth century that, as Chandar Bhān himself tells us, Shāh Jahān used to refer to him affectionately as his “Persian-knowing Hindu” (hindā-yi fārsī-dān). And did Chandar Bhān himself not choose unapologetically to draw attention specifically to his religious identification by choosing “Brahman” as his nom de plume?

Many of these issues will be addressed further in the body of this dissertation below, but one final passage from Sarkar brings many of these threads together, and is thus worth noting here:

The earliest Hindu munshi of note (after Harkarn Itibarkhani, c. 1624), known to me was Chandrabhan (poetical name Brahman), a protégé of Shah Jahan’s wazir Sadullah Khan, who has left works in elegant prose and conventional verse besides some letters of little historical value.29

If we accept Sarkar’s explicit formulations as simply a more intense expression of a wider set of modernist historiographical postulates, then Chandar Bhān, and with him entire classes of Mughal texts and authors, have come under scholarly erasure not due to active suppression or censorship, but rather due to a total indifference to the texts’ “historical value.” They have thus been almost entirely written out of history not, as with subalterns, because they cannot speak to us; but rather because they are said to have nothing to say.

From the very outset, though, I felt certain that someone like Chandar Bhān did indeed have very much to tell us, if only we were willing to look with fresh eyes. And thus, what began as a fairly straightforward attempt simply to find out more information about Chandar Bhān was quickly morphing into a much larger set of questions about these much-maligned munshiś generally, about their preferred prose genre of inshā’, and about the cultural ethos that informed their work and worldview(s).

29 Sarkar, Mughal Administration, 218-9.
Inshā’ and Scholarship

I should be careful, though, not to give the impression that inshā’ has not been studied at all in modern scholarship, for that would be far too great an overstatement. Obviously, as suggested above, the inshā’ corpus has been pored over extensively by historians in search of empirical data of various sorts. It has also received a fair amount of scholarly treatment within the narrower confines of producing document compilations to further that larger project. Within this latter historical subgenre, the most common artifacts are epistolary collections, many of which do indeed contain useful and learned introductions. One of the most substantial recent examples — and surely one of the most impressive — is I. A. Zilli’s recently published collection of the letters of Abū al-Qāsim Namakīn (d. 1609-10 CE). None of the letters, nor the collection’s fascinating epilogue (khātima), are translated; but the English reading audience will nonetheless find Zilli’s introduction extremely informative, and it gives a nice sense of the diverse range of discursive possibility that existed even within the ostensibly restricted parameters of epistolary inshā’. Zilli has also authored one of the few serious intellectual historical analyses of inshā’s early development as a particular style — or rather set of styles — of prose composition. Noteworthy, too, is the exhaustive work of Riyazul Islam on royal correspondence between the Mughals and Safavids, and many will be familiar with


Mansura Haidar’s selected translations from the first of Abū al-Fazl’s three volumes (sīh daftar) of collected correspondence. There are also various Persian letter collections available in printed editions, and many do have introductions and commentary at varying levels of detail. Often, too, manuscript formularies were produced that contained within them multiple works of inshā’ in multiple genres, or anthologized model letters produced by multiple authors. Such collections of inshā’ miscellany were often simply referred to as majmū’a or maktūbāt; and in fact, one such compendium, called simply Mukātabāt-i Mukhtalifa (“Miscellaneous Letters”), contains one of only three surviving letters to Chandar Bāhān that I have been able to locate. Hundreds of similar compendia were produced in Mughal times, as the manuscript catalogues of archives around the world will readily attest; but very few—if any—are available today in printed editions.

on the same archive for his earlier study, Indo-Persian Relations: A Study of the Political and Diplomatic Relations between the Mughal Empire and Iran (Tehran: Iranian Culture Foundation, 1970).


35 Maktūbāt-i Mukhtalifā, Bombay University Library, manuscript collection, #82. N.b., in the published catalogue this manuscript is referred to by the different title of Majmū’-a-e-Khuti‘ā.
As attitudes toward inshā’ shift, however, perhaps more of them will begin to become available.\textsuperscript{36}

There are also a number of other compilations of different types of Mughal documents, diplomatic formularies, epistles, farmāns, and the like, all of which are, dare I say, “of inestimable value” in coming to some inkling of the generic range of Indo-Persian administrative prose. Chief among these is Momin Mohiuddin’s 

Chancellery and Persian Epistolography under the Mughals, which is surely the most exhaustive available taxonomy of the various subgenres of epistolary inshā’, and includes detailed information about secretarial norms and hierarchies in Mughal India, as well as short sketches of the careers of some prominent Mughal munshīs, including Chandar Bhān.\textsuperscript{37} There is, in fact, no dearth of scholarly works which take this formulary approach, albeit with lesser scope than Mohiuddin.\textsuperscript{38} One can also find a great deal of basic information on secretaries as

\textsuperscript{36} There is actually some evidence of such a shift in attitudes, at least in Iran, specifically with reference to the cultural historical value of such miscellaneous collections. See for instance Iraj Afshar, “Maktūb and Majmū’ā: Essential Sources for Safavid Research,” in Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period, edited by Andrew J. Newman (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 51-61. Besides historical events, Afshar notes especially the information contained in such collections on such topics as “Cities and Buildings,” “Social Topics” such as bribery, styles of dress, barbering practices, smoking and drinking alcohol, the culture of coffee houses (qahwa-khānas), etc., “Cultural Subjects,” “Government Organization,” and “Economic Affairs.” See also the various articles in Kondo Nobuaki, ed., Persian Documents: Social History of Iran and Turan in the Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), particularly that of Mansur Sefatgol, “Majmū’ah-hā: Important and Unknown Sources of Historiography of Iran during and in the Late Safavids: The Case of Majmū’ah-i Mirzā Mu’īna,” 73-83.

\textsuperscript{37} Momin Mohiuddin, Chancellery and Persian Epistolography under the Mughals, from Bābur to Shāh Jāhān, 1526-1658: A Study on Inshā’, Dār al-Inshā’, and Munshīs, Based on Original Documents (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1971).

administrative functionaries in a number of general works on the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal state. 39 Further afield, there has also been significant scholarship on these topics with regard to other zones that formed a part of the same transregional ecumenical as the Mughals, particularly in the domains of the Safavids and Ottomans. 40

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39 Besides Sarkar’s Mughal Administration, op. cit., see for instance the relevant sections in: S. B. P. Nigam, Nobility under the Sultans of Delhi, A.D. 1206-1398 (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1968), 144-80; I. H. Qureshi, Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1958) and Administration of the Mughal Empire (New Delhi: D. K. Publishers, 1973); Sri Ram Sharma, Mughal Government and Administration (Bombay: Hind Kitabs Limited, 1951); R. P. Tripathi, Some Aspects of Muslim Administration (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1964); and Ibn Hasan, Central Structure of the Mughal Empire, and Its Practical Working up to the Year 1637 (Reprint) Lahore; Oxford University Press, 1967). This latter work relies heavily on Chandar Bhān’s extensive reflections on wizārat in Chahār Chaman for its account of Shāh Jāhān’s dīwāns (188-209), and is one of the few to translate some important passages.

Of course, I must also mention that besides the excellent recent efforts of I. A. Zilli, Colin Mitchell, and Cornell Fleischer, some of the richest and most groundbreaking recent work on Mughal *inshāʾ* has been that of Muzaffar Alam. His translation (with Seema Alavi) of the first volume of the French adventurer Antoine Polier's *mughlai* Persian letters contains a substantial and informative introduction. And his recent article with Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “The Making of a Munshi,” includes a great deal of information about the historical context of Mughal secretarial culture — including an extended quotation from one of Chandar Bhān’s letters — along with an extended analysis of the exemplary career and travelogue of Nik Rai (b. 1670), a *munshī* whose career peaked about two generations after Chandar Bhān’s.

Given this extensive archive it would be presumptuous indeed if I were to make any wild claims about the originality of some of what follows, particularly with regard to the question of the deep history of *inshāʾ* in Chapter One. I have had a rich selection of different kinds of scholarly materials on which to draw, some directly and some only indirectly. In that sense, I see many parts of this dissertation as but a further contribution to an existing, albeit specialized, body of scholarship. But one thing that I have tried to do is build on the existing picture of the normative aspects of *inshāʾ* and secretarial traditions by offering a case study that highlights their practical implementation and importance in the Indo-Persian world writ large. That is to say, I seek answers to two

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main questions: first, how the secretarial arts were conceived broadly, as relevant not just for secretaries and scribes, but also for kings, princes, nobles, and other elites; and second, how this broad view of the secretarial arts emerged as a vital component of elite education, and thus merged into a complex of ideas about social civility that affected administrative practices, cultural life, and the entire set of knowledge systems that informed the worldview of a key bureaucratic figure like Chandar Bhān, at the highpoint of Mughal rule. It is not enough simply to say that such and such information is available in a given text like, say, Chahār Chaman, and leave it at that. The real question is, what can the way that a master munshi like Chandar Bhān deployed those norms in his career and writings tell us, in turn, about various aspects of Mughal civic and cultural life that have hitherto been ignored, glossed over, only hinted at, or indeed almost completely ignored? As we will see, Chandar Bhān’s normative ideal of the secretary is intimately connected to his ideas not just about technical mastery of the secretarial arts, but also about kingship, wizārat, good governance, the tension between earthly power and the desire for renunciation, literary mastery, and a whole cluster of related normative ideals.

The question of literary culture generally is, in fact, yet another area in which the body of scholarship on inshā’ is somewhat lacking. That is to say, while some of the recent scholarship just referenced deals admirably with the literary norms of prose texts within the inshā’ canon, most of it does not deal in any significant way with the parallel careers of most of the renowned munshīs and dabīrs in other disciplines, particularly poetry. For instance, in the case of Chandar Bhān, I do not know of a single work of history — among all those that rely on his prose oeuvre for empirical data, some of which even
mention his renown as a poet — that has tried to situate his divān either as a part of his identity as an elite munshi, or even simply within the broader framework of the Indo-Persian poetic tradition. A few words about his poetic career, and the available scholarship on it, are therefore in order.

**Chandar Bhān and Indo-Persian Literary Criticism**

There is no doubt that, as an intellectual worthy of study in his own right, Chandar Bhān has fared significantly better in the domain of Indo-Persian literary criticism than he has among historians. For one thing, his poetic divān was the first of his major writings to be edited and published in a modern edition with a substantial introduction. There are also several journal articles that deal primarily with his literary writings, though none in the last several decades. And he also earns a mention in many of the available Indo-Persian poetic anthologies and literary histories.


45 Among the anthologies, perhaps the largest selection of his poetry is provided in Waris Kirmani, Dreams Forgotten: An Anthology of Indo-Persian Poetry (Aligarh: Department of Persian, Aligarh Muslim University, 1984), 273-6. On the other end of the spectrum, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi has included one she'r and one rubā‘i (with English translation) in his recent collection, The Shadow of a Bird in Flight: A Collection of Persian Verses (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1994), 82-3 and 88-9. It should be noted, though, that the first couplet included by Faruqi, despite being the single most famous verse attributed to Chandar Bhān, was in all likelihood not actually his verse (for details, see below, Chapter Four). And interestingly enough, though I have often seen Chandar Bhān mentioned as being among the poets included in Hadi Hasan’s Golden Treasury of Persian Poetry and S. M. Ikram’s Armaghān-i Pāk, the editions that I have of these two well-known anthologies do not contain any verses by our munshi. Perhaps other editions did.
Then again, Chandar Bhān also fails to make it into some of the most renowned Indo-Persian literary histories, whether in English (e.g. those of E. G. Browne and A. J. Arberry), or Urdu (e.g. that of Shibli Nu‘mānī). But in this Chandar Bhān is far from alone. He and his Mughal contemporaries all lived and composed at the height of an allegedly decadent era, one often referred to nowadays simply as the Persian language’s era of sabk-i hindī, or “The Indian Style.” As we will see in Chapter Three, many modern scholars like Browne, Arberry, Nu‘mānī, and Muhammad Taqī Bahār often recoiled from the type of self-conscious literary experimentation that became fashionable during the early modern movement of “speaking the fresh” (tāza-gūţ), a literary epoch that coincided with the shift in the center of Persianate literary patronage to Mughal India, but was not — or at least was not entirely — due to that shift in patronage. An informal scholarly consensus has thus developed that the great poet from Herat, ‘Abd al-Rahman Jāmī (d. 1492), represented the last of the true classical Persian literati — the khātim al-shu‘arā, or “seal of the poets” — and as a result, many scholars have either left the Mughal-Safavid literary canons out of their analyses entirely, or used whatever space


they were willing to spare to deride what they viewed as the artifice and insincerity of the
“fresh” (tāza) early modern poetics. How this artifice and insincerity came specifically to
be associated with India is a complicated story that will be addressed in Chapter Three,
but for present purposes the practical result is that Chandar Bhān, along with many of his
Mughal contemporaries, has often been deliberately swept under the rug of Indo-Persian
literary critical scholarship.

Be that as it may, as noted above, Chandar Bhān does find his way into most of the
anthologies and literary histories that are willing to at least acknowledge the literary
contributions of the Mughal-Safavid eras. He also figures prominently within certain
literary critical subgenres, such as regionally-oriented scholarship about the history
and/or literature of Punjab,47 or books and articles that deal specifically with Hindu
writers of Persian.48 Far and away the most extensive such study is S. M. ‘Abdullah’s
seminal Adabiyyāt-i Fārsī men Hindu’on kā Hissa (“Hindu Contributions to Persian
Literature”). ‘Abdullah has two separate sections on Chandar Bhān, one under the
category of “Inshā’ and munshīs,” and another under the separate heading of “Poets,”
both of which are very informative and include examples of his prose and poetry.

‘Abdullah also reproduces the full Persian text of a very long, didactic letter that Chandar

47 Bakhshish Singh Nijjar, Panjāb under the Great Mughals (1526-1707 A.D.) (Bombay: Thacker & Co.,

48 Sayyid Muhammad Abdullah, Adabiyyāt-i Fārsī men Hindu’on kā Hissa (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi-i Adab,
1967), 70-6 and 79-83. See also M. L. Roy Choudhury, “Hindu Contribution to Persian Literature,”
Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society 29, Part 1 (1943): 120-26; Syed Abdul Wahab Dukhari,
“Persian in India with Special Reference to the Contribution of Hindu Writers and Poets,” Annals of
Oriental Research (Centenary Number) University of Madras 13 (1957): 27-38; Syed Suleyman Nadvi,
“Literary Progress of the Hindus under the Muslim Rule,” Islamic Culture 12, 4 (1938): 424-33, and 13, 4
Bhān wrote to his son Tej Bhān, which is full of advice on the intellectual demands required of a Mughal career official, and has become quite well-known in recent years through Muzaffar Alam’s lucid translation.  

For the most part, though, ‘Abdullah, like nearly all the literary scholars just mentioned, relies a great deal on a separate genre of literary biographical compendia known as tazkiras (literally, “remembrances” or “memorials”). For reasons yet to be completely understood, there was an efflorescence of literary tazkira-writing in India toward the latter half of the seventeenth century, throughout the eighteenth century, and well into the nineteenth century, a corpus which has received almost no modern scholarly attention except as an archive of — yet again — “source” documents for literary anecdotes and biographical sketches of poets. Indeed, apart from a few scattered articles, western scholarship has seen almost no significant analysis of tazkiras as a genre since N. Bland’s preliminary efforts in 1848.  


These texts were primarily anecdotal in nature, a feature which, as I argue in Chapter Four, positioned the entire corpus as parallel to, and even sometimes in agonistic opposition to, chronicles and other texts that were more strictly historical in nature (tārīkh). As commemorative recollections, rather than records of “what happened,” tazkiras thus had a very different standard of what was acceptable for inclusion than historical texts (or even inshā’, for that matter). And as a result, a great deal of what we find in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century tazkiras is, by any reasonable standard of empirical proof, completely unverifiable.

The archive of tazkira entries on Chandar Bhān is a perfect example of this larger set of generic principles. A whole set of anecdotes about Chandar Bhān emerged toward the latter half of the seventeenth century, beginning with tazkiras like Afzal Khān Sarkhūsh’s Kalimāt al-Shuʿarā and Sher Khān Lodī’s Mirʿāt al-Khayāl, that are quite at odds with the record available in his own writings and those of his immediate contemporaries. This

and Faruqi do not really address the explosion in Persian tazkira-writing in India that Urdu intellectuals like Mīr Taqī Mīr, and later Muhammad Husain Āzād, might have been drawing on. There is a brief but otherwise excellent article by J. Stewart-Robinson on the deep history of tazkira-writing and its roots in the hadith traditions, “The Tezkere Genre in Islam,” Journal of Near Eastern Studies 23, 1 (1964): 57-65; but it does not address the later seventeenth- to nineteenth-century developments that would be relevant here. And finally, the recent work of Marcia K. Hermansen likewise sees the writing of Indian tazkiras as a specifically Islamic practice, and focuses on them — primarily Sufi tazkiras — as a collective effort to inscribe (Muslim) “imagined spaces which enabled the sanctification of new soil . . . ennobled and sanctified by those who had passed there.” See her “Religious Literature and the Inscription of Identity: The Sufi Tazkira Tradition in Muslim South Asia,” The Muslim World 87, 3-4 (1997): 315-29; “Imagining Space and Siting Collective Memory in South Asian Muslim Biographical Literature (Tazkirahs),” Studies in Contemporary Islam 4, 2 (Fall 2002): 1-21; Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence, “Indo-Persian Tazkiras as Memorative Communications,” in Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia, edited by David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2002), 149-75. This is all well and good within the context of religious studies, but it does not take us very far in grappling with the genre itself, why so many literary tazkiras began to be written ca. 1690 CE, or how particular anecdotes within the tazkira tradition might evolve from one text to another.
makes the biographical data about him that is available in tazkiras quite unreliable, to say the least. But precisely because of this, any attempt to situate Chandar Bhān within the tazkira archive thus presents us with a larger opportunity, not only to learn more about him and his career, but also about how tazkiras worked generically.

The Life of a Secretary-Poet: The Case(s) of Chandar Bhān Brahman

All three of these domains — the culture of inshā', the canons of Indo-Persian poetry, and the tazkira tradition — are almost always treated as discrete areas of inquiry, when treated at all. But I would like to argue that trying to see the world through Chandar Bhān’s eyes, and the eyes of those who knew him and/or his works, allows us to see that early modern Indo-Persian intellectuals lived in a highly interdisciplinary world, where poetic canons informed even mundane prose, where literary culture was imbued with the idioms of multiple mystical cultures, and where those mystical cultures in turn informed the political vocabulary of power, governance, kingship, wizārat, and even commerce. Much of this gets lost when we simply extract data from a text like Chahār Chaman and dissociate it from the way in which that data is inscribed. Moreover, we also find that, amid all of this intellectual cross-pollination and mastery of various disciplines, one’s place in the historical record, or even the evidence available from one’s own autobiographical writings, did not necessarily guarantee a concomitant stature in the anecdotal, one might even say gossipy, collective memory cultivated in the social world of urbane Mughal intellectual circles and constructed in the tazkira tradition, much less later on, in the national memory.
My goal all along, then, has been not just to try and see the world as Chandar Bhan saw it, to the extent that such vision might be possible; but also to try and highlight some of the ways that he has been seen in various types of historiography. If on the one hand our failure to see through the eyes of someone like Chandar Bhan has created certain blind spots in our broader understanding of Mughal politics and social life, so too has it prevented us from historicizing the attitude toward him in the *tazkiras*, as well as some of our own modernist disciplinary commitments. What follows, therefore, is not so much a biography, or "life and works" of Chandar Bhan, as it is an attempt to use him somewhat like the kaleidoscope that he himself mentions in the first volume of *Chahâr Chaman*: as a singular lens through which, with the right lighting, we can catch glimpses of the multiply overlapping panoply of Mughal knowledge systems that he inhabited.

What do we see, then, when we look through this kaleidoscope? Given the rich archive that Chandar Bhan himself has left us, and the striking variety of ways that he has been studied, remembered — and yes, even ignored — there are any number of potential lenses on which to focus one’s attention, and each could take the research in a radically different direction. An analysis devoted to Chandar Bhan’s interpretation of Sufi norms and practices would be fascinating; or a detailed social mapping of the correspondence — and correspondents — in his collected letters (*Munsha' āt-i Brahman*); or a literary analysis of his poetry, one that perhaps situated his *Dīvān* within the classical tradition but allowed interpretive room to incorporate his many innovative approaches to metaphor, meaning, and theme (*isti'āra, ma 'nī, and mazmūn*) — all of these and many other critical approaches could provide fascinating interpretive opportunities. But since
Chandar Bhān himself divided his magnum opus, *Chahār Chaman*, into four parts, I have chosen to follow his lead and arrange the material that follows into four chapters, each of which represents some aspect of Chandar Bhān’s life, writings, or milieu that I felt was particularly in need of fresh scholarly intervention.

Chapter One attempts to situate Chandar Bhān within a deep history of Indo-Persian secretarial culture, and *inshā*’ as a form of stylized composition. Though many of the norms of composition that Chandar Bhān inherited date all the way back to the years of ‘Abbāsid Caliphal expansion — or even, it could be argued, to earlier Sāsānīd epistolary practices — the actual writing of letters in the real world evolved considerably over the centuries. At times *masnū*, a very polished, refined style full of clever rhetorical flourishes like rhymed prose (*saj*) prevailed; at other times secretaries and other prose writers scaled back their verbal artistry in favor of a more straightforward style. Notions of the ideal role of a secretary in courtly life also evolved, informed considerably by specific norms of *dabirī* and *munshīgirī* that were articulated throughout the canon of Indo-Persian wisdom and advice literature. There was, therefore, an evolving but consistent nexus between secretarial practice, i.e. the habits and skill set required to master compositional norms, and secretarial theory, i.e. the idealization of the elite *munshī*’s role as an embodiment of social and political etiquette (*akhlāq*).

Over the centuries, however, there is much evidence that writers like Chandar Bhān were not beholden to any particular strain of prose writing, and clearly had the leeway to adapt their written personality to suit the relevant audience. We see this in a number of ways,
but to take just one example: modern scholars have regularly decried, for instance, the extended salutatory titles (*alqāb-o-ādāb*) in Mughal letters; but, as we will see from Chandar Bhān’s oeuvre, munshīs could adapt their writing style quite flexibly, drawing on a continuum of stylistic options, and thus such extended introductions were neither required nor even appropriate in every situation. Royal *farmāns* and diplomatic letters would indeed usually contain very lengthy, flowery, panegyric salutations strung together over numerous lines. But in Chandar Bhān’s personal correspondence, and in others’ letters which he reproduces in *Chahār Chaman*, quite often we see very informal, personalized greetings, or even no greeting at all. It may appear to be a trivial point; but we can actually extrapolate a great deal even from this seemingly minor detail. For underlying many of the modernist complaints about *alqāb-o-ādāb* are a whole range of ancillary assumptions that treat members of the Mughal-era “polished society” that Sarkar so derided as unthinking slaves to convention, as incapable of flexibility or change, or indeed, to take the extreme modernist position, as lacking a personal voice and therefore not even fully-realized rational beings. But as soon as we take note that lengthy *alqāb-o-ādāb* were but one among many registers of prose composition even within the world of the elite Mughal munshī, each of which allowed for varying degrees of formalism and personal flourishes, then we are in turn obligated to push even further and rethink all this ancillary received wisdom, too. And there opens up for us a whole new archive with which to think seriously about the relationship between early modern epistolary writing and self-formation, about the personalized nature of social intercourse within “polished society,” and about the dialectic between normative discourse and social habitus in South Asia.
But to even get to that point, we need to know where to start. Chapter One, therefore, serves mainly as a historical introduction to the secretary’s role in literary and political culture. As a survey, it cannot possibly cover every development over the span of roughly a thousand years which it registers as background. But I hope that it will be sufficient to give the reader a sense of the very old norms which people in Chandar Bhān’s day were quite consciously drawing on, how those norms evolved in India under the Delhi Sultanate and Mughals, and then became further recalibrated under the British. As is almost always the case, one key step in our understanding of this history is to examine it through the prism(s) of historiography, too. And besides simply trying to return *inshā’* and Indo-Persian secretarial culture to its rightful place as an object of serious study, away from the dismissive attitude of modern scholars like Sarkar, there is another key observation that I have tried to lay out in Chapter One. This is the fact that *inshā’* constitutes more of a compositional framework than a coherent genre. In modern historiography, *inshā’* has been almost universally defined as a strictly epistolary genre, to the exclusion of all other forms and subgenres of stylized prose. I attempt to critique this strict division, because it is this very emphasis on epistolography that has led most modern scholars to regard *inshā’* and *munshiś* solely through the analytical framework of “official documents,” state papers, and so on. It has also caused us, often, to fundamentally misread the type of relationships that later Mughal and early colonial *munshiś* had with the British. Because we have been so quick to see most colonial *munshiś* simply as clerks, language teachers, and bureaucratic functionaries, we have perhaps failed to recognize the degree to which older secretarial norms of learning and
etiquette on a much wider scale persisted well into the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Moreover, as evidenced by the sample dialogues provided in British textbooks like Francis Gladwin’s *The Persian Moonshee* (1795), it is clear that East India Company officials relied on their *munšīs* for a wide range of skills beyond the merely scribal — from buying horses, to running their households, to planning summer visits to hill stations, and yes, inculcating a set of textual canons of indigenous knowledge systems. In fact, with Gladwin we come full circle. For one of the key texts which he includes in his textbook, as a way of instructing the aspiring company official in the ways of Mughal culture and governance, is a work called “Kowayid us Sultanat Shahjehan, or, Rules Observed at Court during the Reign of Shahjehan,” by none other than our very own *munšī* Chandar Bhān Brahman.\(^5^1\)

Though Gladwin either didn’t know or didn’t acknowledge it, Chandar Bhān’s *Qawā’id al-Saltanat* is basically just an excerpt from *Chahār Chaman*; but in any case, neither text fits easily within an analytical framework that treats *inshā’* purely as an epistolary genre. *Chahār Chaman* does contain some epistolary writing, but it also contains numerous other prose forms, genres, and genres within genres, all set within the larger symbolic imagery of the Mughal imperial garden. It is thus an exemplary work in both senses of the term: on the one hand, as a masterpiece of Mughal prose; and on the other, as a composite text which presents us with a perfect, organic example of *inshā’s* complex

ecology of potential forms, well in excess of the purely epistolary — and was clearly read as such by Chandar Bhān’s contemporaries and later generations of Indo-Persian literati.

To get a better sense of this complex ecology of forms, I narrow the focus in Chapter Two away from the broad survey mode to a more text analytical mode, with a close reading of Chahār Chaman itself. Aside from the short excerpt included by Gladwin, this text has never been translated into English, and indeed, as mentioned above, when I began this project the Persian text was not even available in a printed edition. Chapter Two thus also serves a dual purpose: first, simply introducing this major text from seventeenth-century Mughal India to a non-Persophone audience, essentially for the first time; second, and much more complex, trying to show through a careful reading of the text how all of the norms and abstract concepts regarding Indo-Persian secretarial culture that are surveyed in Chapter One worked in practice, in actual Mughal writing and social life. What did the text actually look like? What does it contain? Somewhere between pure decontextualized data and ornate prose that is presumed to be empty of content, there is a text there — a text by one of the most important stylists of his era, that was authored for a reason, that conveyed a particular understanding of Mughal life to a global Persophone audience, and that was organized according to a format that clearly made sense to the author and his readership.

There is a formal question here, viz. how did a master prose stylist of the era integrate all the multiple modes of inshā’ available to him into a coherent composite text, and what does that tell us about the capacity of inshā’ itself as a category? But there is also the
matter of content: what does he actually write about, and why are those observations relevant to our understanding of Mughal literary and political culture? These two overriding questions of form and content continue to be asked, in various ways, throughout Chapter Two, as we move from Chandar Bhān’s descriptions of courtly festivals and parades, to a very important section on the ideals of practical governance (wizārat), to a minute account of the emperor’s daily routine, to a metageographical tour through the various sūbas of the empire (see Appendix), to his own life story and letters — his epistolary self, as it were — and finally to a series of musings on a seemingly random assortment of literary, mystical, and ethical topics.

Throughout, Chahār Chaman is filled with poetry, a feature of the text excised in Gladwin’s excerpt, and virtually ignored by most modern commentators. But the prevalence of poetic forms, like verse flowers meant to beautify these four prose chamans, speaks to a key aspect of Chandar Bhān’s sense of himself as an intellectual. He was not just a secretary, and not just a prose stylist, but also a practicing poet. This practice of poetry was conceived as an essential part of his duties as a munshi, for we see throughout Chahār Chaman that he, just like the more famous professional poets at court, was regularly called upon to punctuate imperial occasions and festivals with his verse. But rather than see him as dabbling in poetry in order to gain work as an imperial secretary, we would do well to think about it the other way around: he made such a good secretary because he was such a good poet. As explained in Chapter One, having a degree of Persian literacy and being merely competent in various scribal skills, accounting, draftsmanship, etc., was not enough to make one an elite munshi. To truly
reach the upper intellectual echelons, one had to have an intellectual and/or poetic career in one’s own right.

And thus, to have a proper understanding of Chandar Bhān’s own sense of his place in the Mughal intellectual world, one also has to consider his poetic Dīvān, to which I therefore turn in Chapter Three. When we look at his Dīvān — which is comprised mostly of relatively short ghazals (lyrics), and some rubā’īyyāt (quatrains) — we find many of the standard idioms and themes of Indo-Persian lyric poetry “in exactly the same manner,” according to S. M. ‘Abdullah, “in which they exist in the works of Muslim poets.” In other words, it is replete with traditional Indo-Persian literary topoi like the rose, the nightingale, the garden, the burning candle of the soul, and the language of Sufi imagery, particularly regarding the path to mystical union with a cruelly indifferent and unattainable Beloved, whether that Love be mystical and “true” (‘ishq-i haqīqī) or earthly and “symbolic” (‘ishq-i majāzī). Yet all along, Chandar Bhān does not shy away from opportunities for linguistic play regarding his Hindu background, particularly in his closing couplets (maqta’s), wherein the conventional requirement to include one’s takhallus allowed him regularly to exploit the varied symbolic resonance of his pen name “Brahman.” For instance, this oft-cited verse:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{marā ba-rishta-i zunnār ulfatī-yi khās ast} \\
\text{ki yādgār-i man az barhaman hamī-dāram}
\end{align*}
\]

I have an especially intimate bond with my sacred thread 
For it keeps on reminding me that I come from [a line of] brahmans.\(^{52}\)

\(^{52}\) Brahman, Dīvān, 256.5 Note: as is often the case, “Brahman” has to be read here as bar-haman for metrical reasons.
It's a clever play on the role of the brahman's sacred thread. One could read it as either
“I have a special respect for my traditions, and thus the sacred thread is especially
important to me”; or “I have so transcended esoteric religious practices that the only
thing that reminds me of my brahmanical heritage is this thread”; or even (though far less
likely) “I have become so confused by all my religious experimentation, with Sufism and
such, that I need this thread to remind me who I really am.” There is also a clever play
on the word rishta, which literally means “thread,” as in “sacred thread” (rishta-i
zunnar), but can also mean a social connection, especially a familial bond, which
resonates with the first line’s suggestion of a “special bond of endearment” (ulfati-yi
khâs) as well as the second line’s genealogical premise of coming “from a line of
brahmans” (az barhaman). This delightful interplay of potential readings and clusters of
meanings gives the verse a kind of semantic “density” (rabt), and in Chandar Bhân’s
context, is what would make the verse sound “fresh” (tâza) to a contemporary audience.

Indeed, creating an effect of “freshness” (tâzagî) was in many ways the summum bonum
of Mughal poetic practice, an avant-garde spirit to which Chandar Bhân certainly
adhered. He and his fellow “speakers of the fresh” (tâza-gûyân) viewed their poetic
production in terms that were explicitly contrastive with that of the ancients
(mutâqaddimîn), and thus in many ways one could plausibly describe their efforts as
modernistic. Any effort to situate Chandar Bhân’s poetic practice would, therefore, have
to begin by trying to locate him within the poetic fashion of his day, and would ideally try
also to locate the tâza-gû’t movement comparatively, in concert with other early modern
efforts to “make it new,” both in South Asia (e.g. Sanskrit nārya) and in other parts of the world (e.g. European Mannerism).

But here we hit a number of additional historiographical snags. For one thing, very few serious efforts have been made to do this type of comparative analysis for any Mughal poet, much less for Chandar Bhaṅg.53 Part of the reason for this is that, like Mughal inshā’, Mughal poetry too has suffered widespread critical neglect since the latter half of the nineteenth century. When it does get discussed, the early modern period of experimental poetics is almost always characterized by modern scholarship not as the period of tāza-gū’ī, but rather as the period of the “Indian Style” (sabk-i hindī) — a term that would have completely befuddled the cosmopolitan poets of Chandar Bhaṅg’s day, who saw their poetic production as part of a transregional Persophone ecumene that extended at least from Bengal to Baghdad, from Rajasthan to Rum, and from Balkh to Bijapur, if not well beyond in all directions. Within this erstwhile cosmopolitan cultural imaginaire, and despite the fact that premodern literati, scholars, and critics regularly acknowledged the emergence of certain local idiosyncrasies (tasarrufāt) of vocabulary and pronunciation, poetic movements had nevertheless usually been situated temporally, in regular cycles of literary periodicity. Thus the contrast that Chandar Bhaṅg and his contemporaries would have seen between their own “latest” generation (muta’akhirīn) and that of “the ancients” (mutaqaddimīn) constituted what Losensky has rightly

53 The closest would probably be Paul Losensky’s wonderful analysis of tāza-gū’ī as it informs Mughal “answer poems” (javāb-gū’ī) and imitātios (istiqabāl) of the works of Fīhanī Shīrāzī. See his Welcoming Fīhanī: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1998), particularly chapter 5, “‘Death Cannot Tyrannize the Lords of Poetry’: Imitatio and Innovation in Safavid-Mughal Poetry,” 193-249.
described as a “poetic historiography.” This temporal framework, however, has been replaced in modern times by what I describe in Chapter Three as a metageographical framework, one that privileges nationalized space over cosmopolitan time. This nationalized, spatial imagination treats the emergence of Mughal, Safavid, and Ottoman poetic experimentation not as a product of cultural periodicity, but rather as an inevitable symptom of the enervating Indian climate. And hence, the term ‚sabk-i hind‘ is almost always meant to suggest that the experimental tāza poetry of the early modern period was an elaborate, decadent, courtly, effete, and artificial result specifically of the miscegenation between “pure Persian” and the Indian environment. By replacing the early modern poets’ own terminology of tāzagī and tāza-gūtī with sabk-i hind‘, modern scholars have shifted the analytical framework away from one of poetic historiography to one of reified cultural metageography. And in the end, the language used by modernist critics to denounce the aesthetics and polished society of tāza-gū poets winds up bearing a striking resemblance to the critique of inshā’ as too ornate, flowery, indirect, etc.

Thus one can’t truly appreciate the status of Chandar Bhān’s poetry unless one also historicizes the notion of sabk-i hind‘, and tries to grapple with some of the reasons for this modern disaffection with Mughal poetry and culture generally. Chapter Three attempts do this, and gestures toward several other complicating factors that are then taken up in Chapter Four. For instance, it is somewhat ironic that Chandar Bhān himself came to be described by many later Indo-Persian commentators such as Afzal Khān Sarkhūsh (d. 1714 CE) as having written not in the fresh style, but rather in a more stale, simple, and old-fashioned “style of the ancients” (ba-tarz-i qudamā). How and why this
shift in critical appraisal came about will be tracked through a series of archival sources presented in Chapter Four, but for now suffice it to say that the implications are far more profound than they might at first appear. For one thing, there is a fair amount of circumstantial evidence to suggest that the anecdotes presented in the tazkiras represent less of a critical appraisal of his works than an attempt to cultivate a memory of Chandar Bhān that binds him to the memory of Dārā Shukoh, and, to a lesser extent, to the memory of another member of Dārā’s eclectic circle, the Armenian naked wanderer, Hakīm Sarmad (who, on Aurangzeb’s orders, was also eventually executed for heresy and his association with Dārā). Dārā, for his part, is usually infantilized in such portrayals as a dreamy-eyed enfant, seduced into breaches of etiquette and errors of religious innovation (bid‘at) under the sway of the now suddenly “insolent” Chandar Bhān, and the “madman” Sarmad. Thus here the connection between the historiography critiqued in Chapter Three and the tazkira anecdotes adduced in Chapter Four becomes most apparent. Sarkhūsh’s assertion that Chandar Bhān wrote in the stale “style of the ancients” (ba-tarz-i qudamā) rather than the fresh style of his contemporary moderns (muta’akhırīn) seems to carry with it the suggestion that he had to write in this more old-fashioned style not through aesthetic choice, but because he was not talented enough — or, possibly, Muslim enough — to write in the au courant fresh poetics. Thus despite the fact that Chandar Bhān repeatedly locates himself as a poet of tāzagī, the critical judgment of his poetry as belonging to an earlier, less complex era is itself part of a larger constellation of anecdotes designed to create a synoptic image of Chandar Bhān not as a munshī par excellence; not as an author of two of the major works of inshā’ from the previous century; and not as a poet steeped in the poetics and fashion of tāza-gūrī; but
rather as a Mughal Hindu par excellence. He is consistently juxtaposed with Dārā, to both of their memorial detriment; and thus the entire corpus of anecdotes becomes eerily, uncomfortably tinged with quasi-communal undertones. The corpus thus also presents us with a sort of limit case for non-sectarian Mughal composite culture and the ideology of “absolute peace” (sulḥ-i kull), exposing as it does the traces of fracturing community harmony well in advance of any British policies of “divide and rule.” It also brings us right back to some of the historiographical questions with which I began this project, since many of these tazkira anecdotes are regularly passed along in modern scholarship as if they are unproblematic “sources” for information on poets like Chandar Bhān. Attention to the minutiae of his life and career as depicted in the tazkira canon thus opens up yet another space for us to interrogate a much wider range of questions about how we understand the history of Mughal India, writ large.

_A Final Prefatory Note_

The above critique of certain aspects of Mughal historiography notwithstanding, I am of course mindful that the state of scholarship on premodern South Asian intellectual history has improved considerably in the last ten to fifteen years. My own training and way of looking at the archive is deeply indebted to the groundbreaking scholarship of the last couple of decades, and has been enhanced throughout by conversations with many of the academics who have performed that research.

We still have a long ways to go, however, and there are two ways in which I believe this dissertation contributes to this growing body of scholarship. The first, and most
straightforward, is simply that it introduces Chandar Bhan to a non-Persophone audience, many of whom might not have even been aware that he or anyone like him had ever existed. While I am wary of sounding too much like Lucy Lacuna and Phyllias Fillagap, those fictional anthropologists so wryly parodied by Bernard Cohn, I nevertheless feel that simply exposing a wider audience to the life and works of such an intriguing and interstitial figure, renowned in his own day but since relegated to the historical margins, can itself be considered a worthwhile, if modest, intervention.\(^{54}\)

But I have also tried to use the task of thinking about Chandar Bhan’s life and career as an opportunity to meditate on much larger, and in some cases quite complex set of questions about Mughal history and historiography, not just as they relate to Chandar Bhan and his times but also to our own times. Thus there is a methodological component to my argument as well. Each chapter could, in many ways, be taken as a separate essay; but where the analysis suffers in terms of traditional biography and narrative continuity it gains, I believe, in interdisciplinary variety. Indeed, though this project was begun long before the publication of Richard Eaton’s recent volume of historico-biographical sketches from the premodern Deccan, I nevertheless see this work as being consonant with his suggestion that “individuals do embody microcosms of at least some, if not many, aspects of the social macrocosms in which they lived.”\(^{55}\) Chandar Bhan did indeed inhabit multiple macrocosms; far too many, in fact, to be exhausted by just one


dissertation. I have tried, therefore, in the pages that follow to show some of the ways in which these seemingly discrete social and theoretical worlds — whether they be the culture and politics of inshā', Mughal poetry, or South Asian collective memory as embodied in the tazkira tradition — can be connected through the microcosmic thread of one compelling individual.
CHAPTER ONE

The Writing of Empire:
*Inshā’* and *Munshīs* in Indo-Persian Literary and Political Culture

"*Not surprisingly, the routine duties of the munshi are relatively simple and easily mastered*..." ¹

One of the most common titles used to describe Chandar Bhān was, of course, that of munshī. Most South Asians, and even many Western scholars, will be familiar with this term, and likely associate it with English equivalents like “clerk” or “secretary.” Perhaps they will associate the term with a bureaucratic functionary of some sort; or, as a recent article notes, they might think of the depictions in Hindi cinema that paint the archetypal munshī as “the accountant and henchman of the cruel and grasping zamindar [landlord], greaseily rubbing his hands and usually unable to protest the immoral demands of his master.”² But just as the word secretary can have a number of associations, from the quotidian and functionary (e.g. a clerk, or office secretary) to the very powerful and political (e.g. Secretary of State), the term munshī too has had a broad range of associations over time. In premodern times the true munshī was considered an elite and erudite intellectual, an essential player in literary and political culture throughout South, Central, and West Asia. And, as we will see, Chandar Bhān Brahman (ca. 1587-1662


CE) inhabited numerous roles in his capacity as a Mughal munshi, working for various patrons over the course of his career, beginning with Mir `Abd al-Karim, the superintendent of buildings (mīr-i `imārat) in Lahore, and working his way all the way up to being the personal secretary of Emperor Shāh Jahān (r. 1628-1658 CE).

He would have also inherited a deep tradition of thought and writing about secretaries, their place in courtly and commercial life, and the compositional norms that informed their workaday life. Depending slightly on the context, even ordinary Indo-Persian munshīs would have been expected to have mastered the fundamental skill set of the secretarial arts, such as scribal notation, basic accounting, draftsmanship, calligraphy, and the theory and practice of epistolography. But there was also an implicit hierarchy associated with the secretarial arts, and the more critical functions of the bureaucratic state machinery — particularly the high-flown tasks of projecting imperial power through diplomatic correspondence, decrees, edicts, and elaborate military victory notices (fath-nāmas) — would usually be entrusted only to experienced, elite munshīs. Such higher order prose compositions, even in “official” documents, were almost always expected to be refined aesthetic documents as well, verbal adumbrations of power, status, and civility. This intrinsically aesthetic requirement of the secretary’s professional duties meant, in effect, that the scribe in Perso-Islamicate intellectual history, whether referred to as a dabīr, kātib, or munshi, was often required to move seamlessly between the realms of mundane administrative culture and refined literary culture. Indeed, from the early centuries of the `Abbāsid era right up to the early phase of European colonialism, a truly good scribe (the munshi-yi asli, or munshi-yi haqiqi in Mughal parlance) was one who,
like Chandar Bhān, could effectively combine the roles of secretary, boon companion (nādīm), diplomat, and litterateur.

In fact the figure of the elite munshī was so synonymous with mastery of Indo-Persian literary prose composition that one regularly finds that intellectuals who were not even secretaries — Abū al-Fazl and Shāh Jahān’s prime minister Sa’dullāh Khān, for instance — could also be referred to almost honorifically as munshī. This honorific usage continued at least as late as the great Urdu poet Ghālib’s mid-nineteenth-century Delhi, when even though the term munshī retained a “root meaning of writer, or secretary,” as a title it often implied “a person of somewhat higher consequence in the old Mughal administration.”³ The lines, therefore, between bureaucratic functionary and esteemed public intellectual were blurred a long time before Chandar Bhān came onto the scene, and continued to be so long after his lifetime. Munshīs and dabīrs comprised a main contingent of what the thirteenth-century scholar Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī had characterized as the “men of the pen” (ahl-i qalam), along with religious scholars, scientists, and professional litterateurs.⁴ Their particular niche was to carry out what one more recent

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scholar has described as “the most basic work of empire”⁵ — but it is especially revealing that so much of this basic work involved not only perfecting the artisanal skills of calligraphy and draftsmanship, but also mastering the canons of Persian literature, and being able to exhibit that mastery on command, in a public setting, and often on short notice. And since the deep history of inšhā throughout the Persianate world shows clearly that at no time could any serious munšī or dābir have performed his regular duties without also being fluent in literary canons and conventions, one might say that though professional poets never had to be secretaries, the best secretaries, in a sense, always had to be poets as well.

Beyond their official duties, moreover, the secretarial classes in India, especially during Mughal times, produced a staggering corpus of personalized epistolary collections, belles-lettres, travel narratives, accounts of court life, other types of “occasional writings,” and even serious scholarly works on rhetoric, poetics, and what would later come to be known as comparative linguistics. Such work, and its seemingly infinite variety, continued even into the British period—and was, for that matter, also crucial for the “most basic work” of early British officials, whether that work was commercial, practical, diplomatic, or even literary. As we will see below in greater detail, it is no coincidence that two of the earliest works produced by East India Company presses in India were both the direct products of Mughal secretarial culture. But first, some background, as well as historical and literary cultural context, is necessary.

A Note on the Scope of the Terms Inshā’ and Munshī

This chapter is not intended as a detailed history of Indo-Persian secretaries and their prime vehicle for expression, the prose compositional style known as inshā’ī. That task would be far too immense to be accomplished here, as would any sort of encyclopedic attempt to catalogue all the many different varieties of inshā’-writing, the features of different types of official and informal correspondence, or the working environment of Indo-Persian scriptoria, chancery departments, and so on. 6 Existing scholarship on all of these areas of inquiry will certainly factor into and inform the analysis here, but this chapter is intended rather as a conceptual investigation into the kind of normative ideal of an elite secretary that a munshī like Chandar Bhān would have inherited and tried to emulate in his own life. Along the way, we will see that living up to that normative secretarial ideal carried with it a whole host of socio-political expectations, ethical demands, and literary ideals for the aspiring munshī. Because of the elite munshī’s proximity to persons and sites of political and commercial power, the normative secretarial tradition also carried with it a strong sense of the inextricable relationship between the articulation of imperial power and the efficacy of the written word. And during the period under discussion, and even well into the British period, that relationship — particularly when the written words in question constituted a kind of public performative speech act (as in a fath-nāma or a farmān) — was almost always mediated by a munshī.

6 The most extensive currently available taxonomy along these lines is Momin Mohiuddin, Chancellery and Persian Epistolography under the Mughals, from Babur to Shah Jahan, 1526-1658: A Study on Inshā’, Dār al-Inshā’, and Munshīs, Based on Original Documents (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1971). For a bibliography and general sense of the current state of scholarship on these topics, see the Introduction, above.
The word *munshī* in its most basic sense means, simply, "writer." It is derived from the word *inshā*, and thus means "one who creates *inshā"; the other notable derivative relevant for our purposes is *munshā*, which means something like "written, composed" — or perhaps more literally, "created." This latter sense is confirmed by the fact that the word is in turn etymologically related to the much more expansive term *inshā*, which itself is the most common term for stylized prose composition, and has the original basic meaning of "creation" or "construction." This linguistic nexus between the secretary and the art of creative prose composition is articulated in an early treatise on administrative practices from the Sāmānid period, Abū ‘Abd-Allah al-Khwārazmī’s tenth-century *Mafātiḥ al-‘Ulūm*, which offers the following definition: "*al-Inshā* ('bringing into existence') is the preparation by a secretary of a draft, which is then shown to the head of the Dīwān [administration], who may add to it or strike something out, or agree to it as it stands. He then orders a fair copy to be made." 

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9 Quoted in C. E. Bosworth, "Abū ‘AbdAllah al-Khwārazmī on the Technical Terms of the Secretary’s Art: A Contribution to the Administrative History of Medieval Islam," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 12, 2 (April 1969): 113-64. Bosworth adds in his commentary that: "The origin of this term is discussed by Ḥalqashandi, *Subh*, 1, 52: ‘It is a verbal noun (masdar). [One says], he began a thing (ansha’ ash-shai’a) when he started on it or originated it, without having any previous example to go by. It signifies that a secretary invents something new by putting together words and phrases, and brings new meanings into existence when he indites letters, investiture diplomas, etc. Or else [it means] that the letters, investiture diplomas, etc. originate from him.’ (The reference is to Ahmad ibn ‘Ali Ḥalqashandi (ca. 1355-1418), *Subh al-a’shā fi sinā‘at al-inshā‘).*
In the course of time, the term *inshāʾ* came to refer almost exclusively to written
“creation,” and as a result its secondary significations such as “composing, composition,”
and tertiary significations such as “style, elegance of style, especially in letter-writing; the
belles-lettres” (cf. Steingass) came to dominate how the term was and continues to be
understood. As a generic label, especially in its most expansive sense, *inshāʾ* could apply
to just about any imaginative, epistolary, or diplomatic prose composition. Thus works
as diverse as Nizāmī ‘Arūzī’s twelfth-century *Chahār Maqāla*, or Chandar Bhān’s
seventeenth-century *Chahār Chamān*, and many more in between, could all be loosely
classified as texts in the *inshāʾ* tradition, despite being quite different in style and
extremely so in content. In a way, then, really the most accurate translation of *inshāʾ*
would be something like “creative writing.” But in English this term has far too much of
a restricted association with novels and short-story fiction to be even remotely
appropriate. One cannot, however, simply translate *inshāʾ* as “prose,” because, as
mentioned in the introduction, *nasr* would be the more common technical term for prose
*per se*, to distinguish it from “arranged” metrical writing, i.e. poetry (*nazm*). Moreover,
not all prose genres — historical chronicle (*tārikh*), for instance — would necessarily be
considered *inshāʾ*. One solution to the translational difficulty has thus often been to
qualify and label *inshāʾ* as “ornate prose,” *belles-lettres*, or some such; but this emphasis
on *inshāʾ* exclusively as stylized writing strikes me as restrictive in its own way. It posits
some other style of writing that was *not* ornate or stylized, that could easily be
distinguished from *inshāʾ*; but since even many relatively informal or occasional writings
also often fell into the category of *inshāʾ*, it is not especially clear that writers in pre- and
early modern India, Iran, and elsewhere distinguished texts in this way (i.e. ornate vs.
informal), or that they saw inshā’ as some particular way of writing that could be entirely
disambiguated from all other prose styles. Indeed, given the fact that virtually all writing
was to some degree or other “stylized,” it is hard to get an exact analytical fix on what
made a particular composition a work of inshā’ as opposed to plain old nasr.

This abstract reality is captured, for instance, when one examines reading practices and
the way that different types of texts were juxtaposed in manuscripts that circulated in
premodern India. It was quite common for texts on related themes to be bound together
in a single volume, sometimes as anthology, sometimes as textbook, and sometimes
simply as a compendium or miscellany. And when we look at what types of texts might
get collected together in a single manuscript binding, we often get a sense of what
premodern readers thought of as related topics that could be grouped together for
consideration and study. For instance, consider a multi-text manuscript copied in Isfahan
in 1661 CE. A key work contained therein is “The Wonders of Inshā’” (Badā’i’ al-
Inshā’), authored by one Yūsuf ibn Muhammad Yūsufī, a sixteenth-century physician
and, apparently, onetime secretary to the Mughal Emperor Humāyūn (1508-1556 CE).
Simply from its title, and the fact that it was written by an imperial secretary, we can
safely assume that a text like Yūsufī’s Badā’i’ would be relevant resource for anyone,
then or now, interested in secretarial theory and practice — “for all possible
emergencies,” as Ethé colorfully noted. But what about the works that the copyist wrote

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10 MS, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT, Persian MSS +106.

11 For brief details on this text, see Hermann Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office* (Oxford: Horace Hart, 1903), 1139-40 (#2057). I am grateful to Ali Anooshahr for drawing my attention to this text.
out and bound together with it? Two of them, Abū al-Fazl’s *Mukātabāt-i ‘Allāmī* and the *Munsha’āt* of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muhammad Marvārīd (d. 1516-7) both function as model letter collections, and thus also obviously relate to the secretarial domain of epistolography. But Abū al-Fazl’s *Mukātabāt* also contains other types of writing besides epistolography, and thus moves us into other domains of prose composition such as prefaces, mini-essays on literary topics, and certain types of “public” imperial documents like *farmāns, dastūr al-ʿamāls*, and so on. The same binding also contains two works in the *akhlaqī* tradition that clearly tie those epistolary and chancellery norms to a much broader discourse about Indo-Persian political, social, and ethical culture: Nizām al-Mulk Tūsī’s eleventh-century *Nasīḥat Nāma* (a.k.a. *Shīyāsat Nāma, or Siyar al-Mulūk*), and Afzal al-Dīn Kāshānī’s early thirteenth-century *Nasāʾīh va Mawāʾīz* (“Advices and Counsels”). This manuscript thus tells us a couple of important things. First, that there was a transregional Persophone audience that circulated texts back and forth among India, Central Asia, and Iran; and moreover that Safavid readers clearly felt comfortable reading and studying, and probably emulating, the prose styles of Mughal writers like Yūsufī and Abū al-Fazl. But we also learn that the science of epistolography was seen by early modern audiences as but one part of a continuum of textual production that was

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relevant for an understanding of *inshāʿ* and secretarial culture. Letter-writers of all kinds would also have been expected to be familiar with the canons of political and ethical philosophy, and to deploy those associated norms of social etiquette in their compositions. This would have applied to epistolographers at all social levels, whether they were secretaries or not. So the message of this compendium to aspiring *munshīs* all across the Persophone ecumene of ‘Ajam could not have been clearer: to be a good secretary, you must study the style of earlier prose masters, and also master the precepts of political philosophy, ethics, and gentlemanly etiquette.

Chandar Bhān’s works were also standard fare for this type of didactic miscellany in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For instance one textbook known as *Daqāʾiq al-Inshāʿ* ("Subtleties of Prose Composition"), composed in Jaunpur by a Kāyastha named Ranjhūr Dās in 1145 AH / 1732-3 CE, specifically cites Chandar Bhān’s work as authoritative, alongside that of other luminaries of stylized prose such as Yūsufī himself, Amīr Khusravī, Mullā Tughrā, Zuhūrī (whose seminal work *Sīh Nasr*, or "Three Prose Compositions," was widely seen as a benchmark of prose style in the early modern Persophone world), the historian Muhammad Sāliḥ Kambūh, Mullā Jāmī (who was himself lauded by Chandar Bhān as one of the masters worth emulating), and Chandar Bhān’s good friend Munīr Lahorī, among others.13 Ranjhūr Dās’s *Daqāʾiq* goes into minute detail about the sciences of wordsmithery, from philological minutiae regarding certain types of letters and diacritical dots — for instance, the first part, or *daqīqa*, is

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composed of three sections, or fāsls: 1) *Dar bayān-i hadd-i hurūf*; 2) *Dar bayān-i aʿdād-i hurūf-i tahajjī va ikhtisās-i ān dar lughat-i ʿarab va ʿajam va sharh-i aʿrāb va iqṣām-i ān*; 3) *dar bayān-i iqṣām-i pārsī* — to more general norms and practical advice on topics like prose composition (*dar tahrīr-i kalām-i nasr*) and the architecture of verse (*dar taʿbīr-i kalām-i nazm*).

Other miscellaneous anthologies of this period could get even more eclectic. One eighteenth-century compendium that contained a number of Chandar Bhān’s letters — as well as other epistolary specimens from the likes of Mahābat Khān (to Aurangzeb), Abū al-Fazl (e.g. to Sultān Salīm, to Akbar, and to Prince Daniyāl), and Munīr Lahorī — also included: a prose eulogy by one Harbans Munshi in praise of Mathura (*taʿarīf-i mathura*), that city so famously associated with Vaishnava cosmography; an advertisement regarding various attractions in “The Seat of the Caliphate, Shāhjahānābād,” by Hājī Khair-Allāh Dīwān (not unlike the similar notices on various cities written by Chandar Bhān himself — see below, Chapter Two, and Appendix One); and a playful composition imagining an extended correspondence between a lover and his beloved, called *Risāla-i Nāz-o-Niyāz* (“A Pamphlet on Coquetry”).

The first 31 folios of this same binding contain sections of the relatively rare *Tazkira-i Nadrat*, a biographical compendium of poets by ʿAlī Fīrat ʿAtā-ālāh “Nadrat,” who was himself an elite scribe of Muhammad Shāh’s reign.

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14 MS, British Library I.O. Islamic #2678. See also Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1161-2 (#21118).

15 For some further details on Nadrat, see Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 350 (#676), and 920 (#1699). The manuscript of his *Dīvān* that is housed in the British Library runs to 157 folios, in two
Another British Library manuscript which is catalogued as *Munshaʾāt-i Brahman*
contains not only that text, but also a number of other miscellaneous letters in the latter
fourth of the binding. Ethé’s catalog suggests that these latter epistles are “probably by
the same Candarbhān Brahman, styled in a vague way *mutafarriqāt*” — but an
examination of the contents reveals that the letters are actually by a number of different
authors, including Shāh Jahān (to Aurangzeb, fol. 51a), one Munshī Uday Rāj (52a), and
various others (including, of course, Chandar Bhān).\(^{16}\) And of course, however “vague”
it might have been to describe such a collection as *mutafarriqāt* (literally, “miscellany”),
it was standard practice among *munshīs* of all ranks and readers of all types to compile,
copy, and widely circulate such anthologies as collections of model letters and specimens
of exemplary prose.

A final manuscript example shows, once more, that a keen understanding of the
“symbiotic relationship between poetry and prose,” and the ways in which they “cast
irresistible influence on the structure and contents of each other in their historical
development,” greatly informed the compilation of the kind of manuscript anthologies
and miscellania in which Chandar Bhān often found himself included.\(^{17}\) A manuscript


that has been catalogued in the British Library as his Dīvān actually contains a number of other things besides. In fact it begins not with Chandar Bhān’s poetry, but that of Mīr Muhammad Majzūb Tabrīzī (d. 1682), Zuhūrī, Wahśī, and Āzūrī. Chandar Bhān’s Dīvān comes next, followed by the romantic allegory in prose, Husn va Dil, followed again by miscellaneous poetry by various poets, at least one hadith, a eulogy on the twelve shī‘ī Imāms, and finally, perhaps most interestingly a collection that Ethé describes simply as “some Rekhta” poetry, but which, on closer inspection, turns out to all be by the celebrated Wāli Deccani.¹⁸

Despite the categorical mutability suggested by the continuum of textual discourses contained in such circulating manuscripts, modern scholarship has tended to privilege a far more restrictive usage of the term inshā’, in which it is taken to refer specifically — indeed almost exclusively — to epistolary writing and official state papers. I. A. Zilli, one of the few recent scholars to do any serious research on the topic, prefers this more restrictive sense: “The term ‘ilm-i insha [science of inshā’] is also sometimes loosely used for refined prose writing in general. In a strictly technical sense, however, it is applied only to the different forms of letters and documents.”¹⁹ Here Zilli is following the distinction proposed by the Arab historian Jurji Zaidan (1861-1914 CE), in particular to distinguish inshā’ from the writing style of scientific treatises: “Zaidan...observes that inshā’ was mainly concerned with the expression of inner feelings, as against the


exposition of the learned sciences. This, according to him, was the main reason why the
*inshā'* style was more liable to change and development than other branches of
literature.”²⁰

The distinction here between the systematic writing style of scientific treatises and the
more fluid parameters of *inshā*’ is certainly not inappropriate; but it does not necessarily
follow that we must further limit *inshā*’ exclusively to state papers and diplomatic
correspondence. Indeed, while it is no doubt true that state papers, letters, and diplomatic
documents make up a great deal of the *inshā*’ canon, it was also the preferred medium for
stylized prose of all kinds, including what Zaidan rightly calls “the expression of inner
feelings.” And thus mastery of the compositional skills necessary for writing good *inshā*’
was an essential part of the education not just of those who expressed imperial power
through prose — by drafting public communications among elites (diplomatic letters,
*farman*, etc.) — but also anyone who engaged in forms of expressive non-fiction that
were not versified. *Inshā*’ was the medium through which to exhibit one’s creative
prowess and cultural refinement on paper, and it is in this sense that *inshā*’ served also as
an umbrella term for the various genres through which “men of the pen” inscribed the

²⁰ Zilli, “Development of Insha Literature,” 310. See also Jurji Zaidan, *Tārikh-u ādāb al-Lughat al-
‘Arabiyyah*, vol. 3 ([al-Qāhirah] Dār al-Hilāl, 1957). It should be noted, too, that Zaidan’s assertion that
*inshā*’ was the domain of “inner feelings” runs quite strikingly against the grain of most modernist
assessments. *Munshīs* and other letter-writers are nearly always accused of being unthinking slaves to
conventional formal codes, incapable of self-expression, and therefore incapable of expressing precisely the
type of personal feelings that are often deemed necessary to cultivate a fully realized individual modern
self. In other words, Indo-Persian *munshīs* have often served as indices precisely of the incapacity of
Mughal culture for producing the type of “epistolary selves” that helped Europe transition to bourgeois
capitalism, the novel, global hegemony, and all that (cf. Rebecca Earle, ed., *Epistolary Selves: Letters and
norms of etiquette, refinement, and comportment that characterized Indo-Persian literary and socio-political life generally, especially under the Mughals.

_The Deep History of the Indo-Persian Secretarial Arts_

Perhaps this will all be a bit clearer if we set the clock back and examine the evolution of secretarial culture, and concomitantly, try to adduce what types of writing have, over the years, been characterized as _inshā_. Indeed, by the time Chandar Bhan used his literary skills to rise to the highest echelon of seventeenth-century Mughal bureaucracy, the basic norms of Indo-Persian secretarial culture were well-established. Many of these norms originated centuries earlier, with some practices dating back even to pre-Islamic courts of Sasanian Persia, in which the _dabīr-bed_, or "writing-master," was one of the key members of court.21 As chief of the secretariat, he would be responsible for drafting political and administrative papers, and overseeing the general workings of the chancery. The French scholar Clement Huart (following the Arabic historian al-Baladurî, who in turn got his information from Ibn al-Muqaffa, the author of the Arabic version of _Kalīla va Dimna_) describes the Sasanian chancery procedure as follows:

Chosroes II Parviz introduced, in the place of parchment, paper dyed with saffron and scented with attar of roses. Paper must have been brought into Persia by trade, for it was a monopoly of China and was only manufactured in the country where it had been invented; it must have been rare and expensive. Orders given by the king were drafted in his presence by the royal secretary, and another official entered them in his day-book, which was made up every month, sealed with the royal seal, and deposited in the archives. The order itself was passed to the Keeper of the Seals, who sealed it and handed it to the executive agent. The latter re-drafted it in the special style of the bureaucracy, and this version was sent to the secretary, shown to the king, and compared with the day-book. If the two

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versions agreed, the secretary placed the royal seal on the executive agent’s document, in the presence of the king or his most intimate confidant, and the order was then in force.\textsuperscript{22}

In the Säsänian context, then, the chief secretary was already one of the most crucial officials in the everyday state machinery. Elite epistolography during this period had also already acquired a degree of formal conventionality, as suggested by the reference here to “the special style of the bureaucracy,” corroborated by numerous references in Firdausi’s Shāh-nāma,\textsuperscript{23} and the attestation of at least one Pahlavi treatise on the secretarial arts from this period.\textsuperscript{24}

This Säsänian pre-history, if you will, is extremely significant for the later historical trajectory of chancellory practices. Right from the earliest days of Islamicate governance, we see the importance of diplomatic and chancellory secretaries as integral to political culture. This is evidenced most clearly, perhaps, by the retinue of amanuenses who

\textsuperscript{22} Huart, Ancient Persia, 155.

\textsuperscript{23} On the evidence from Firdausi, which is admittedly far too anachronistic to be anything more than suggestive, see Shāh-nāmah, passim; Momin Mohiuddin, in his Chancellery and Persian Epistolography under the Mughals, from Babur to Shah Jahan (1526-1658) (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1971), 2, refers to the evidence thus: “Much detailed information can be gathered from the Shah-nama of Firdausi as regards the rules and conventions of the secretarial art and classes of epistles and edicts. Special paper from China dyed with saffron, and scented with rose-perfume and solution of ambergris and musk were used for the royal missives.” Unfortunately, I have not yet had the opportunity to make a detailed study of such references in Firdausi, but I hope to do so at some point in the future.

\textsuperscript{24} E. G. Browne has referred to this text simply as Forms of Epistles, but unfortunately gives little other information about its contents. See his A Literary History of Persia, vol. 1, introduction by J. T. P. de Brujin (Bethesda, Md.: Iranbooks, 1997), 109. There is also some useful information on pre-Islamic Persian secretarial practices, possibly drawn from the same text to which Browne refers, in Maria Macuch, ed. and trans., Das Sasanidische Rechtsgeschichte "Mātakdān i Hazār Dātitān" (Teil II) (Wiesbaden: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft : Kommissionsverlag, F. Steiner, 1981); I am grateful to Sanjay Subrahmanyam for this reference.
helped the Prophet Muhammad draft his embassy letters to the world's rulers. As Islam and Islamicate political culture continued to spread across the Near East and West, Central, and South Asia, the Sasanian model of governance and statecraft — which was itself not entirely dissimilar from that found in northern India — continued to be very influential, particularly during the expansion of Islamic territories under the 'Abbāsid Caliphate. Not only were Sasanian models of court pageantry and comportment emulated, but also many of the administrative divisions and bureaucratic terminology relating to chancellery departments, a fact reflected in the continuing use of terms such as waṣīr, dabīr, barīd (intelligence collector), and so on, in the Islamicate world long after the titular end of the Sasanian Empire. Intellectuals with cultural memories of Sasanian courtly culture also developed into what Patricia Crone has referred to as “a new elite...in the form of educated laymen,” which not only influenced the emergence of literary resistance to Arab hegemony in movements like the shuʿūbiyya, but also helped to cultivate the erstwhile Persian and Hellenic traditions within the framework of urbane life under the 'Abbāsids. As the caliphate underwent changes due “the growth of cities, the influx of converts, and the expansion of the court,” Crone further notes that “the intellectual pioneers were what one might call professionals: secretaries, administrators, physicians, astrologers, and scientists, in short people who owed their position to the

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mastery of non-sharʿī learning...who cultivated the Persian and Greek traditions, and they were also prominent among those who wrote on government in the tenth and eleventh centuries.”28

The precise social role of the “secretary” in this context, however, remained somewhat ambiguous, and was far from limited to the functional bureaucratic post of the dabīr. Right from our earliest sources, for instance, there is widespread acknowledgement of the desirability, on the part of all noble and cultured people, of mastering the “secretarial arts” (fann-i dabīrī) in general. Such arts included some of the obvious skills, such as composition, draftsmanship, and so on. But they also included much more wide-ranging skills, from accountancy to literary mastery, wit, social etiquette, bonhomie, and of course the ultimate secretarial ideals of loyalty and political discretion. Thus, as one modern scholar puts it: “The political and diplomatic importance of the secretarial art, even in its hey-day, could hardly be over-emphasized. In the early days of the Sassanians, the knowledge of writing (dapirih) was considered to be one of the accomplishments befitting a prince.”29 In other words, the world of the dabīr (and his latter incarnation, the munshī) consisted of an ambiguous space along a broad social and political continuum. On one end of this continuum was the obvious and specific skill set required of the state secretary, and on the other was a much more expansive understanding of the “secretarial arts” as a generalizable set of ideal cultural and behavioral norms — a complex cultural package of etiquette, literariness, and

28 Crone, God’s Rule, 146-7.

philosophical acumen which was not merely "befitting a prince," but expected of all nobles and elites in the courtly milieu.

Thus, for instance, it is telling that we find abundant descriptions of the widespread necessity of acquiring such secretarial arts in the same type of the courtly wisdom literature (ādāb and akhlāq) that we saw above, juxtaposed with normative treatises on inshā' in a seventeenth-century manuscript. Virtually every major advice book (nasīhat-nāma) penned during the early centuries of Islam — e.g. Qābūs-nāma, Siyar al-Mulūk (also known as the Siyāsāt-nāma), and Chahār Maqāla, to name just a few — contains sections on dabīrī and the secretary's art. Such treatises were aimed not simply at dabīrs, munshīs, or kātibs (scribes), but rather at princes and elites more generally — hence the fact that they are commonly referred to in English as part of the "Mirror for Princes" genre. As we will see, then, despite the fact that the practices of epistolography and inshā'-writing grew more and more conventional and refined over the centuries, the mentalité which understood the secretarial arts more broadly, as a crucial component of the literary and intellectual toolkit of any self-respecting noble, persisted. One of the key reasons, therefore, that good secretaries were such a prized possession in royal courts was the fact that true mastery of all secretarial arts was immensely difficult and time-consuming. One did not simply decide to become a secretary, and then learn all the necessary skills, but rather the other way around — one spent years, even decades, mastering a wide-ranging set of skills and norms of comportment. This was no easy task, as evidenced by the fact that Abū al-Fazl Bayhaqī, the celebrated Ghaznavid historian and dabīr, was initially passed over as head of the chancery upon the death of his mentor.
‘Bū Nasr-i Mushkān, on account of the former’s “relative youth and inexperience.” As Bayhaqi’s incredulous modern biographer points out, however, “he was then forty-five years old, twenty-five of them spent in government service”! Such high standards of intellect and experience were maintained in chanceries throughout the ensuing centuries, such that even in Chandar Bhān’s own day most of those who saw the Mughal chancellery (dār al-inshā’) as an avenue to improved social mobility intentionally stopped their training at the level of copyist or draftsman, because acquiring the necessary skill set and intellectual acuity demanded of the elite imperial munshi was simply too difficult.\(^\text{31}\)

Another important factor in the development of secretarial culture and practices was phases of imperial expansion. With the initial expansion of the Islamic caliphate, the dependence on written documents and epistolary departments had also increased

\(^{30}\) Marilyn Robinson Waldman, Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative: A Case Study in Perso-Islamicate Historiography (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980), 40-41. Indeed, Waldman’s comments on secretarial rigor in Bayhaqi’s time are instructive: “The reasons for [Bayhaqi’s] snobishness are tied up in the role and heritage of the dabir. Being a dabir had been a very special way of life since pre-Islamic times...The great empires of Iran, including the caliphal empire, had depended on the Persian bureaucracy, and the Ghaznavid empire was no different. Dabiri was not simply a nine-to-five job in the modern jargon; it was rather a style of thinking and acting, based on years of education and cultivation. Dabirs spent much of their time at the palace, living there or nearby; their apprenticeship in the arts of dabiri was a long one; all their work was done in a special section of the palace; much of their socializing, during and after hours, seems to have been done with other palace officials. To be the holder of the office of dabir accrued a much higher status in society than would be associated with a civil servant or bureaucrat in modern states. The dabir’s success in the bureaucracy depended on his facility in Arabic and Persian style, including his conciseness of expression, the niceties of his turns of phrase, and the accuracy of his technical vocabulary...In short, dabiri was an art, and a very important one in the Ghaznavid empire, in which experience counted more than anything else.”

\(^{31}\) Cf. Muzafrāl Alam, “The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics,” Modern Asian Studies 32, 2 (1998): 326-7: “Most of the students discontinued their studies after completing their secondary education, since that was a sufficient qualification to secure employment on the clerical staff in local daftars. The accountancy department attracted them most because it promised better salaries. The art of a munshi (secretary) was a difficult task, ‘a whole life was required to achieve proficiency in that art’.”
tremendously, as written correspondence between the Caliphal authorities and their representatives in newly Islamized lands required increasingly sophisticated communication networks and documentation services. According to Ibn Khaldun, an official chancellery *divān* under the direction of a chief *kātib* responsible for drafting and maintenance of documents was initially established by the Umayyad Caliph ‘Umar I. This Umayyad *kātib* was said to be so valuable to the state machinery, in fact, that the fourteenth-century writer Ahmad ibn ‘Ali al-Qalqashandi later reflected that “above the office of *Katib* there was nothing to aspire, save the Caliphate.”

Ibn Khaldun also makes some remarkable observations on the rise of official secretaryships as a result of the transition from nomadic desert to sedentary urban political culture, specifically within the context of expanding caliphal authority and the attendant linguistic shifts that this expansion necessitated:

This office [of ministry of official correspondence and writing] was not required by the nature of royal authority. Many dynasties were able to dispense with it completely, as, for example, the dynasties rooted in the desert and which were not affected by the refinements of sedentary culture and high development of the crafts. In the Muslim dynasty, the Arabic language situation and (the custom of) expressing what one wanted to express in good form intensified the need for the office. Thus, writing came to convey, as a rule, the essence of a matter in better stylistic form than was possible in oral expression... When the language became corrupt and a craft (that had to be learned), (the office) was entrusted to those who knew Arabic well. Under the Abbasids, it was a high office. The secretary issued documents freely, and put his own signature to them at the end... The office then lost standing through the fact that officials of other government ranks gained in the ruler’s esteem or because the wazir gained control over (the ruler). The signature of the secretary became ineffective... [Nevertheless] One of the functions of the secretary’s office is *tawqī‘*. It means that the secretary sits in front of the ruler during his public audiences and notes down, in the most concise and stylistically most perfect manner, the decisions he receives from the ruler concerning

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the petitions. These decisions are then issued as they are, or they are
copied in a document which must be in the possession of the petitioner…
The person in charge of this function must be selected from among the
upper classes and be a refined gentleman of great knowledge and with a
good deal of stylistic ability. He will have to concern himself with the
principal branches of scholarship, because such things may come up in the
gatherings and audiences of the ruler. In addition, to be a companion of
kings calls for good manners and the possession of good qualities of
character. And he must know all the secrets of good style, to be able to
write letters and find the words that conform to the meaning intended. 33

Khalidun then follows his own remarks with the complete text of an even more
remarkable document, an epistle (appropriately enough) from the Umayyad secretary
ʿAbd al-Hamid bin Yahya, addressed “to his fellow secretaries”:

And now: May God guard you who practice the craft of
secretaryship, and may He keep you and give you success and
guidance…He gave to you, secretaries, the great opportunity to be men of
education and gentlemen, to have good knowledge and good judgment.
You bring out whatever is good in the caliphate and straighten out its
affairs. Through your advice, God improves the government for the
benefit of human beings and makes their countries civilized. The ruler
cannot dispense with you. You alone make him a competent ruler. Your
position with regard to rulers is that you are the ears through which they
hear, the eyes through which they see, the tongues through which they
speak, and the hands through which they touch. May God give you,
therefore, enjoyment of the excellent craft with which He has
distinguished you…

No craftsman needs more than you to combine all praiseworthy
good traits and all memorable and highly regarded excellent qualities, O
secretaries…The secretary needs on his own account, and his master, who
trusts him with important affairs, expects him, to be mild where mildness
is needed, to be understanding where judgment is needed, to be
enterprising where enterprise is needed, to be hesitant where hesitation is
needed. He must prefer modesty, justice, and fairness. He must keep
secrets. He must be faithful in difficult circumstances. He must know

33 Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History, translated by Franz Rosenthal, abridged and
edited by N. J. Dawood, with a new introduction by Bruce B. Lawrence (Princeton: Princeton University
(beforehand) about the calamities that may come. He must be able to put things in their proper places and misfortunes into their proper categories. He must have studied every branch of learning and must know it well, and if he does not know it well, he must at least have acquired an adequate amount of it. By virtue of his natural intelligence, good education, and outstanding experience, he must know what is going to happen to him before it happens, and he must know the result of his actions before action starts. He must make the proper preparations for everything, and he must set up everything in its proper, customary form.

Therefore, assembled secretaries, vie with each other to acquire the different kinds of education and to gain an understanding of religious matters. Start with knowledge of the Book of God and religious duties. Then, study the Arabic language, as that will give you a cultivated form of speech. Then, learn to write well, as that will be an ornament to your letters. Transmit poetry and acquaint yourselves with the rare expressions and ideas that poems contain. Acquaint yourselves also with both Arab and non-Arab political events, and with the tales of (both groups) and the biographies describing them, as that will be helpful to you in your endeavours. Do not neglect to study accounting for it is the mainstay of the land tax register. Detest prejudices with all your heart, lofty ones as well as low ones, and all idle and contemptible things, for they bring humility [humiliation?] and are the ruin of secretarship. Do not let your craft be a low one... Love each other in God in your craft. Advise your colleagues to practice it in a way befitting your virtuous, fair, and gifted predecessors.

...You should explore the character of him with whom you associate. When his good and bad sides are known, you will be able to help him to do the good things that agree with him, and be able to contrive to keep him from the bad things that he desires. You must be able to do that in the subtlest and best manner. You know, that a person who is in charge of an animal and understands his job, endeavours to know the character of the animal. If it is inclined to gallop, he does not goad it when he is riding it. If it is inclined to kick, he takes precautions with its forelegs. If he fears that it will shy, he takes precautions with its head. If it is restive, he gently subdues its desire to go where it wants to go. If it still continues, he pulls it slightly to the side, then has its halter loosened. This description of how to take care of an animal has good points for those who want to lead human beings and deal with them, serve them, and have intimate contact with them. The secretary, with his excellent education, his noble craft, his subtlety, his frequent dealings with people who confer with him and discuss things with him and learn from him or fear his severity, needs to be kind to his associates, to flatter them, and to supply their wants, even more than the person in charge of an animal which cannot answer, does not know what is right, does not understand what is said to it, and goes only where its master who rides upon it makes it go.
Use as much reflection and thought as possible. God permitting, you will thus escape harshness, annoyance, and rudeness on the part of your associates. They will be in agreement with you, and you will have their friendship and protection, if God wills.

None of you should have too sumptuous an office or go beyond the proper limits in his dress, his mount, his food, his drink, his house, his servants, or in the other things pertaining to his station, for, despite the nobility of the craft by which God has distinguished you, you are servants who are not permitted to fall short in their service. You are caretakers whom one does not permit to be wasteful or spendthrift. Try to preserve your modesty by planned moderation in all things I have mentioned and told you. Beware of the wastefulness of prodigality and the bad results of luxury. They engender poverty and bring about humiliation. People (prodigal and living in luxury) are put to shame, especially if they be secretaries and men of education.

Things repeat themselves. One thing contains the clue to another. Let yourselves be guided in your future undertakings by your previous experience... You should know that there is something that defeats accomplishment, namely, talking about things. The person who does it is prevented from using his knowledge and his ability to think. Therefore, every one of you, while he is in office, should endeavour to talk no more than is sufficient... When any one of you says or thinks that the high quality and efficiency of his work is obviously the result of his own cleverness and knowledge of how to do things, he provokes God. God will let him depend upon himself alone, and then he will find that he is not adequate to the task. This is no secret to those who reflect.

...Farewell, and God's mercy and blessings upon you.\textsuperscript{34}

These two long quotations make several things clear. One, that from very early on the role of state secretary encompassed far more than the deployment of an instrumental skill set. It was a highly visible, ethically demanding position around which coalesced a whole constellation of ideas about virtue, discretion, education, and literary panache. This complex of ideas, mapped specifically onto notions of individual moral and intellectual improvement, would eventually be thematized in the figure of the ideal secretary (m\textsuperscript{u}nsh\textsuperscript{i}-yi haq\textsuperscript{i}q\textsuperscript{i}) — a process that extended the moral horizon of

\textsuperscript{34} Ibn Khald\textsuperscript{u}n, \textit{Mugaddimah}, 203-6.
dabīrī/munshīgīrī beyond the strictly functional domain, and thereby promoted the secretarial ethos as an integral feature of Indo-Persian political culture for centuries to come. Indeed, it was precisely through the earthly channel of the secretary that "God improves the government for the benefit of human beings and makes their countries civilized." Secondly, it is crucial to recognize that the early rise of Islamicate secretarial institutions, however much influenced by earlier Sasanian practices, was tied both to imperial expansion and to an increased urban identity. Both of these factors simultaneously required a shift from the oral nature of diplomacy among the erstwhile desert tribes to a sophisticated set of written epistolary practices and etiquette. Indeed, it is not hard to guess why this department was crucial to the functioning of an increasingly centralized administration, given the difficulty of conveying information back and forth over what had quickly become a geographically large and linguistically diverse caliphate.

As a response to such difficulties, Zilli notes that efforts were even made to introduce Arabic as a "uniform language of administrative records in all localities of the empire." The upshot of this process was that centralized Caliphal administration "increasingly necessitated the services of a large number of professional katibs who took over from the old local officials," and thus "a sort of permanent cadre of professionals was established and great impetus was given to the development of the art of inshā." 35 Interestingly enough (as we will see later in the chapter) an almost exactly parallel situation would play out centuries later in Mughal India, wherein the desire to centralize the imperial

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bureaucracy and streamline communication networks over vast swaths of territory led Akbar to reform the Mughal educational system and curricula, and to establish Persian as the uniform language of official imperial administration for the Indian subcontinent. And Akbar’s move, too, would have a similar effect, creating what turned out to be a whole new class of professional munshīs, among whom Chandar Bhān was only one of the most prominent.

There is a direct connection, then, between the expansion of empire(s) and the development of Indo-Persian secretarial traditions. Again, this correlation did not play out solely on the bureaucratic level of functioning departments and the increasing numbers of professional dabīrs, munshīs, and katibs, but also on the intellectual and literary plane. Here again, the memory of Sāsānian glory and courtly traditions played its part. Under the Umayyads, epistolary diction and style had “remained simple and unaffected by verbosity and artificiality.”36 But, as noted above, with the increasing assimilation of Persians and others into the Muslim political and cultural universe during the ‘Abbāsid period, there was a concomitant reverse influence on the Arabs themselves — what Alam has called “culturally conquering the conquerors.” Beyond the growing influence of non-sharīt elites noted by Crone, the persistence of Sāsānian courtly traditions had a specific effect on secretarial practices and the writing of inshā’ that has been much derided in modern scholarship, namely “the adoption of elaborate and

pretentious [epistolary] titles and etiquette.”37 The broader literary parallel to this trend toward grandiose courtly salutations was that state secretaries began increasingly to emphasize formal beauty, stylistic innovation, and literary ornamentation, even in official orders, political documents, and especially diplomatic correspondence. We see this trend reflected, for instance, in the following remarks by Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Khwārazmī on the necessary literary skills of the higher echelon of secretaries (kuttāb al-inshā’) who compose imperial correspondence. The remarks come at the end of an entire chapter on secretaryship, the bulk of which is devoted to mundane administrative terms of all sorts, for various departments — from records, registers, and financial documents, to the payroll of the army, land assessment, various types of taxation, and even water regulation. The final section, however, makes very clear that those secretaries who produced higher order correspondence had to move beyond quotidian administrative expertise, and into a more rarefied world of literary culture:

In connection with the secretaries who deal with official correspondence, it should be noted that they are concerned with everything that has already been discussed in this chapter. In this particular section, I am only going to mention what is special to them, and is not applicable to other types of secretary, e.g. [the technical terms] relating to the criticism of literary production and to the description of its finer aspects and its faults.38

Al-Khwārazmī follows this up with several pages of terminology specific to literary criticism and rhetoric, metaphoricity, parallelism, assonance, and so on. Literary ability, then, was not merely an ancillary skill; it was integral to the successful implementation of

37 Zilli, “Development of Insha,” 315. N.b., Zilli is here following the argument of the 19th-century Arab historian Jurjī Zaidan.

38 Quoted in Bosworth, “Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Khwārazmī on the Technical Terms of the Secretary’s Art,” 158.
secretarial norms, and thus had to be cultivated by the aspiring secretary as would a professional litterateur. During this time the Persian language, too, became increasingly important as a vehicle of cultural expression, and thus the growing cultural importance of ‘Ajam and Persian literary culture in the Islamic lands generally began to be felt in secretarial practices as well, throughout Central, West, and South Asia.\textsuperscript{39}

This is not to say, of course, that such developments went uncontested. For instance, it is not as if Persian simply replaced Arabic as the language of elite discourse overnight, even in ‘Ajam. Well into the eleventh century we have evidence of varying uses for both Arabic and Persian, and the corollary effect of that tension on the stylistic norms of epistolography. Thus Kaika’us ibn Iskander, the Ziyārid author of the ʿQāhūs-_NAMESPACE_ (ca. 1082 CE) advises his protégé:

> Adorn your own letters with metaphors [istiʿārat], Koranic verses, and traditions of the Prophet, peace be upon him. If a letter is to be in Persian, do not write it entirely in Persian [parsi-yi mullaq manabīs], because that would be disagreeable [nā-khush], particularly in the case of provincial Persian [parsi-yi dari], which is unfamiliar and should never in any circumstances be written.\textsuperscript{40} It is generally known how the formal turns of


\textsuperscript{40} Kai Ka’us seems to be referring here to the Central Asian dialect of Persian which is referred to even today as “Dari,” and which Steingass describes as “one of the three surviving dialects of the seven anciently spoken in Persia, said to prevail chiefly in Balkh, Bukhara, and Badakhshan, and called the language of the court and of Paradise” (the latter due to the notion that it was the language itself that was the dar, or door, to Paradise). Kai Ka’us’s point seems to be not so much that this idiom of the provincial courts is necessarily rustic or inferior, but simply that it is not well understood beyond a limited geographical area, and is therefore unsuitable for imperial epistolography. Another possible, albeit remote, reading is that the phrase is parsi-yi darrīdari, i.e. “glittery” or “pearly” Persian. The meaning would then be more along the lines of “Don’t overadorn your letters with literary devices, because not everyone can follow them.”
expression used in Arabic letters [takalluf-hā-yi nāma-i tāzī] should be employed. In Arabic letters, rhymed prose [saj'] is a sign of talent and is considered agreeable, whereas it is disagreeable in letters written in Persian, and much better omitted. But let whatever expressive language you use be elevated, metaphorical, and concise. The secretary [kātib] should know well the mysteries of the secretarial art [asrār-i kātibī], and internalize well the semiotics of coded expressions [sukhan-hā-yi marmūz rā nek andar yābad].

Such contestations and tensions internal to the early centuries of Islamicate secretarial tradition aside, however, there is no doubt that Persian eventually emerged as the chief expressive language for epistology and official state proclamations in Iran, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. As the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate weakened in the tenth and eleventh centuries CE, smaller successor kingdoms and dynasties with their own imperial pretensions rose up in eastern Iran and Central Asia. Dynasties such as the Tāhirids, Saffārids, Sāmānids, Ziyārids, and of course the Ghaznavids and Seljūqs, all began to contest the central authority of the Caliphate, not only in political and military terms but also in the arena of cultural hegemony (cf. below, the anecdote from Qabūs Nāma about Mahmud’s threats to Caliph Al-qādir bi’l-lah). This latter effort certainly had a well-known (and well-documented) effect on the development of Islamicate literary culture generally, particularly with respect to the patronage of poetry; but its direct effect on prose, administrative, and secretarial traditions has garnered far less attention.

Already in the ninth century CE the Saffārid ruler Yaʿqub bin Lais (r. 867-77) is reported to have favored Persian over Arabic for administrative purposes, in part because he

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himself did not know Arabic; during roughly the same period the court of the Sāmānids (r. 819-1005 CE) produced several of the earliest surviving works of post-Islamic Persian prose; and finally it was the Ghaznavids who first began to use Persian as the primary language of their chancery.\(^{42}\) While it is fair to say that even under the Ghaznavids Arabic continued to have a great deal of currency as a status language, its use became increasingly limited to scientists, truly erudite literati, and secretarial professionals, whereas Persian emerged as the lingua franca of court culture more generally.\(^{43}\)

The tension about what language should emerge as cultural hegemon had a parallel during this period in an increasingly direct contestation of ideas about political authority itself. That is to say, as Islam expanded, it came into contact with local populations which, despite accepting Islam qua religion, retained the memory of older cultural and practices and political institutions, particularly ideas about kingship and dynastic succession. Some of this complex of political theories developed into the institution of \textit{sultanat} itself, as articulated and defended by the likes of Mahmūd of Ghaznī, and can be


\(^{43}\) For instance C. E. Bosworth, in describing the activities of Baihaqi at Mas'ūd Ghaznavī's court, offers a striking example of the varying uses to which Arabic and Persian might be put: "Mas'ud himself is praised by Baihaqi as a fluent stylist in Persian, and sometimes he dictated diplomatic documents, but normally it was the Chief Secretary who composed the documents, employing whichever language was considered most appropriate to the addressee: when letters were written announcing Mas'ud's accession, that to the Caliph was set down in Arabic, whereas that to Qadir Khan Yusuf of Kashgar was in Persian. When diplomatic communications written in Arabic were received, translations into Persian were made, often by the Chief Secretary in person, for the benefit of the courtiers and other interested persons who were not literate in Arabic. This was done when in 423/1031 a letter from Baghdad announcing the accession of the new Caliph al-Qa'im was received, and when Mas'ud accordingly sent back a document pledging his allegiance; Persian versions were read out to the assembled crowd at court, and Baihaqi gives both the Arabic and Persian texts of the Caliph's letter and Mas'ud's \textit{bai'at-nama}.

seen reflected even in the writing of texts like Tūsī's eleventh-century *Siyāsāt-Nāma*, which looked specifically and unapologetically to ancient Persian models of kingship and succession, even when dealing with the question of legitimate succession within the political framework of the Islamic Caliphate. According to Alam, "The caliph, for [Tūsī] and his Saljuq master, was little more than a pension-holder, while the ruler was the absolute Pādshāh. Even in the case if those institutions for which he could have cited precedents from the classical Islamic period, Nizam al-Mulk looked instead to ancient Persia."\(^{44}\) Another Saljuq writer, Muhammad bin Hāmid Ghazāli, argued in his own *Nasīhat al-Mulūk* ("Counsel for Kings") that the sultan enjoyed a legitimate "constituent authority" over the populace, so long as he at least vowed allegiance to and received the recognition of, the Caliph.\(^{45}\) In other words, aside from the right to grant a symbolic investiture, the caliph had little true practical authority over local rulers, even within ostensibly caliphal territories. In a sense, Tūsī's and Ghazāli's concerns about the nature of kingship were simply part of a much more widespread trend in which intellectuals were trying to reconcile the theoretical universality of Islam with the political and cultural realities of local practices. Eventually, new ideas about kingship and governance from Turkish and Mongol traditions, such as the *tūra-i chingīzī*, or "Code of Chingiz Khan" (which would itself be very influential in Mughal political theory as outlined by Abū al-Fażl), and what has come generally to be referred to in scholarly

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\(^{44}\) Muzaffār Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 27.

literature as the military patronage state, or “Turko-Mongol theory of kingship,” also began to have a powerful effect on statecraft.\footnote{Ram Prasad Tripathi, “The Turko-Mongol Theory of Kingship,” in The Mughal State, 1526-1750, edited by Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 115-25.}

It was precisely the intellectual ferment resulting from this complex confluence of Turkish, Mongol, and Persian traditions that helped to spark an efflorescence of prose writings about political theory, statecraft, and ethical conduct generally, i.e. the group of treatises which has come to be referred to as the ādāb and akhlāq traditions. Such treatises were, generally speaking, concerned with both “the constellation of qualities that made up a genteel man and also the kind of literature that expressed and stimulated these qualities.”\footnote{Waldman, Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative, 36.} And thus they sought not only to advise princes and kings on matters of justice (‘adl) and good governance (siyāsat), but also to inculcate an entire set of values and normative ideals to nobles, courtiers, and bureaucrats of all types — including, of course, secretaries. Thus too, a wide variety of different types of literary and philosophical writing could fall into the general category of akhlāqī wisdom: of course it would include the already-mentioned works of writiers like Nizām al-Mulk Tūsī and Ghazālī, as well as other texts like Akhlāq-i Nāsirī, Akhlāq-i Jalālī, and Kīmiyā’ī Saʿādat. But a number of other, more eclectic, works could also fall under the loose rubric of akhlāq, with the Masnawī-i-Maulānā Rūm, Kalīla va Dimna, and Saʿdī’s Gulistān and Būstān being only some of the more well-known examples. Over the next several centuries, such ādāb and akhlāq texts would have a powerful effect on political imagination and notions of social comportment throughout the Islamicate world.
Beyond that general influence on courtly thinking, moreover, this efflorescence was also significant specifically for the development of *inshāʾ* and secretarial norms, in at least two major areas. First, generically, the prose style of the ādāb and akhlāq canons developed parallel — both chronologically and stylistically — to the development of *inshāʾ*-writing under the ʿAbbāsids, Sāmānids, and Ghaznavids, and in many cases there is conspicuous overlap between the writing styles deployed in these various textual corpuses. Ādāb literature, too, had begun to emerge under the ʿAbbāsids, again with noticeable influence of Persian courtly values, and tended to lionize the refined qualities of literate city dwellers (as against those of the desert). Though in many ways the ādāb canon can in some ways be distinguished from the akhlāq canon, particularly in the way that some of its authors interpreted the demands of *shariʿa*, it nevertheless can be said to have helped promulgate what Stephen P. Blake has described as “the sum of knowledge that makes a man courteous and urbane.” Significantly, for our purposes, Blake adds that “Adab culture was the province, for the most part, of the scribes, clerks, and managers who administered the Abbasid state...control of a language and its literature was of paramount importance...to divert and entertain through sheer verbal virtuosity and to impart information about the world.”

Here again, then, we have evidence that limiting the notion of what constitutes *inshāʾ* to epistolary documents is somewhat misleading. For in many cases it was precisely the state secretaries and

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48 See Alam, Languages of Political Islam, 26-80.

intellectuals skilled in the secretarial arts who were also penning treatises on ādāb and akhlāq. Indeed, mastering the secretarial arts required that one have a canny understanding of the rich complex of ethical and social norms which the ādāb and akhlāq texts prescribed, and moreover that one be able to deploy that mastery both textually (in imperial correspondence) and socially (in the secretary’s capacity as a courtier and literary savant).

Abū al-Fazl Bayhaqī’s (ca. 966-1077 CE) example is instructive in this regard. He is most famous to posterity as a key Ghaznavid historian, but in his own time he was actually much more well-known as a dabīr. After decades of apprenticeship, he rose to the elite position of dabīr-i khāss (“chief secretary”) in the Ghaznavid communications office (divān-i risālat), in which capacity he served six different Ghaznavid amīrs. Given his intimate knowledge of the Ghaznavid state machinery, his Tarikh-i Bayhaqī is a tremendous source for details about administrative and political culture during that period. For instance, it is from Bayhaqī that we learn that chancery officials were considered so vital to the state that the Head of the Communications Office (sāhib-i divān-i risālat) was deemed as important as the wazīr himself, and that the entire chancery accompanied the Sultan even on military campaigns, with documents loaded on

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50 According to Waldman, “It is in this role that he is best remembered by his biographer [Ibn Funduq], so much so that Ibn Funduq mentions his career as a dabīr before he mentions his birthplace. In fact, Ibn Funduq’s entire biographical entry focuses on Bayhaqī’s career as a dabīr and writer.” Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative, 39.

pack animals, and housed in a tent pitched as close to the Sultan’s as possible. But beyond such fascinating details, Bayhaqi’s example shows us that genre during this period was an extremely fluid concept. He was deeply influenced not only by the secretarial arts and the writing of *inshā'* under the Ghaznavids, but also by the emerging “unsystematic mixture of the normative and prescriptive” "ādāb" traditions as well. His “history” reflects this, and thus quite self-consciously incorporates many of the didactic strategies of the "ādāb" and *akhlāq* textual traditions, even while it is written in a style of refined prose that has so much in common with the epistolary *inshā'* style of the period that his modern biographer refers to his method as that of the “secretary as historian.”

Indeed, Bayhaqi himself noted that his *Tārīkh* had a didactic purpose, both for kings and for those who served them as courtiers. Among the latter would certainly be anyone who aspired to be a state secretary, and it is in this regard that the efflorescence of "ādāb" and *akhlāq* literature had a further normative effect on secretarial culture, beyond the blurring of stylistic and generic categories. Such “mirrors for princes,” or *nasīhat-nāmas*, nearly always contained extensive sections specifically devoted to the secretarial arts, both in terms of practical advice for the aspiring secretarial official, and in terms of

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52 Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, 91-3; Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative*, 41. Incidentally, centuries later Chandar Bhān too would often accompany the Mughal army on campaigns, most notably as a member of Sa’dullāh Khān’s entourage in the Balkh campaign. See below, Chapter Two for details.


54 Cf. the title of Waldman’s third chapter, “The Method of the Secretary as Historian: An Analysis of the Structure and Contents of *Ta’rīkh-i Bayhaqi.*” *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative*, 51-78.

55 Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative*, 47.
articulating what might be called a secretarial value system through the telling of anecdotes about the glories of great secretaries from the past.

Thus, for instance, Ghazâlî’s Nasîhat al-Mulûk contains a specific section on “Secretaries and Their Comportment,” and Kai Ka’us ibn Iskandar’s Qâbûs-Nâma contains a lengthy section “On the Ethical Norms and Principles of Secretaryship, and the Duties of the Scribe” (dar ādâb va ā’în-i dabîrî va shart-i kâtib).\(^{56}\) Kai Ka’us provides the would-be secretary with a fair amount of practical advice, for instance, as noted above, with respect to the acceptable techniques of letter-writing. Such practical advice, however, is in every case punctuated and reinforced by anecdotal evidence of its normative value. Thus after the exhortation to “make a habit of writing constantly so that you achieve greater mastery of penmanship” (bisyâr nabishtan nîz ‘âdat kunî tâ mîhir-tar bâshi bar nabishtan), there follows a brief anecdote validating the advice: “Because I have heard that” (az ān-chih sheniídam kih) the celebrated scribe Sahib Isma‘îl ‘Abbad used to find that “I always find some mistakes in my draftsmanship on Saturday, because I don’t come to the divan on Fridays, and therefore don’t write anything on that day — that single missed day has a negative effect on my writing” (har rûz-i shambadî man dar kâtibî-yi khud nuqásân hamibînâm az ān-chih rûz-i ādînâh ba-dîvân nayâmâyad bâsham va chîzi nahl nabshtak bâsham; ān yek rûz taqṣîr dar man tâ’sîr kunad).\(^{57}\) In other words, the ideal secretary’s dedication should be such that even skipping Friday, the Muslim holy day, would be an unadvisable break of his routine.

\(^{56}\) Qâbûs-nâma, 207-15. Note too the specific invocation of adâb here.

\(^{57}\) Qâbûs-nâma, 207.
In another section, *Qābūs-Nāma* counsels that one should guard the public knowledge of one’s skill in penmanship carefully, “so that you don’t get a reputation for forgery, and thereby lose the trust of your patron” (*tā ba-muzawwar kardan ma ‘rūf nashavī va ān-gāh ‘itimād-i valī-yi ni ‘mat-i tu az tu bar khīzad*). Here again, Kai Ka’us follows up this pragmatic advice with a story about a talented secretary turned forger, Rabī’ ibn al-Mutahhar al-Qasrī. When his superior, Sahib Isma’il ‘Abbad, found out about it, he said nothing. But one day, while ‘Abbad was taken ill, al-Qasri came to pay his respects and asked what food the master was taking. ‘Abbad replied “*muzawwar*” (which means both “broth” and “forgery”), thus cleverly exposing the cheat, who immediately repented and begged forgiveness.

Yet another fascinating section, far too long to deal with in any detail here, contains two other stories. The first tells of one ‘Abd al-Jabbar Khujani, the *khatīb* of Khujan, a province which was at the time defying the overlordship of the more powerful Amir of Khurasan. The Amir of Khurasan hatched a plot to have this crucial minister and secretary killed, a plot which was in turn foiled by the cleverness of the Amir’s own brilliant secretary, Rafi’ al-Ya’qubi, who sent a coded message to the condemned man within the very epistle containing his death warrant! Another anecdote tells of Mahmud of Ghazni’s dispute with the Caliph Al-Qadir-Billah, over the possession of

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58 *Qābūs-nāma*, 213.

59 *Qābūs-nāma*, 214.
Transoxiana. When the Caliph refused to authorize Mahmud’s possession of the territory, the latter is reported to have angrily threatened to lay waste to Baghdad with some 2000 elephants. Al-Qadir-Billah replied to this threat with a letter containing simply the three letters A-L-M. Confused, Mahmud and his secretaries and other officials puzzled over the message for days, until finally Abu Bakr Quhistani, a young man at court who had not even yet earned the right to sit among the courtiers, deciphered the code and informed the Sultan that it did not signify the three letters Alif-Lam-Mim, but rather the two Arabic particles “A-Lam,” and thus referred to the Qur’anic verse “Did you not see how thy Lord dealt with the elephant keepers?”61 Abu Bakr Quhistani was promptly rewarded, promoted, and invited to sit with the Sultan’s closest associates.

The point here is that of all of these tales of wit, skill, and quick-thinking serve more than an anecdotal purpose in the Qābūs-nāma. They inculcate an entire complex of ideas about what it meant to be a talented official, and the means by which one could advance in official life by cultivating the fann-i dabirī. True, in one sense Abu Bakr Quhistani was promoted to a seat by the Sultan due to one serendipitous occasion on which he had the opportunity to display his cleverness. But the moral of the story is that one never knows when in life such an occasion might present itself, and therefore the mastery of the literary culture and norms of comportment which comprised the ādāb va ātīn-i dabirī were an essential part of the intellectual toolkit of any courtier who hoped to have a future. Quhistani is not a court secretary, and yet it is his understanding of the intricacies

60 Qābūs-nāma, 208-10.

61 For more details on this riddle, see the note in Rueben Levy’s translation, A Mirror for Princes, 204n.
of the secretarial domain of *sukhan-i marmūz* ("coded language") that offers him a path to advancement. Kai Ka'us himself punctuates the moral, stressing that "by means of this single utterance, [Qohistani] attained a lofty rank" — a theme that recurs throughout the *nasīhat-nāma* genre, and indeed, throughout Indo-Islamic literary culture generally.  

This theme, along with the importance of secretaries to statecraft, is certainly in evidence in another major *nasīhat-nama* of this period, the twelfth-century *Majma‘ al-Nawādir*, or "Collection of Rarities" of Nizāmī Arūzi al-Samarqandī (more commonly known simply  

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63 As if to drive home the point it is worth noting that, centuries after the composition of *Qābūs-Nāma*, Chandar Bānū too would find his way into imperial service by means of a single opportune utterance. As he explains in *Chahār Chaman*, he was promoted to Shāh Jahān's imperial *dār al-inshā* (secretariat) when, upon the death of his own patron Afzal Khān, he was presented before the emperor and managed to impress the bādshāh with a single *ruba‘i*. As he explains in *Chahār Chaman*:

One day, His Majesty the Emperor of the Age, the Sovereign of the World (*khīdev-i kathān*), the King of the Sea and the Land (*pādshāh-i bahr-o-barr*), the King of Kings of the Seven Continents, was seated on the world-governing and nation-conquering throne in Lahore, the Abode of the Sultanate. Many pillars and elites of the eternal state — such as the Pillar of State Asaf Khān, and the Khān of Khāns, Commander-in-Chief, and Chief Sadr Mūsā Khān, et al — convened (*bār dāshtant*) in attendance of that blessed and exalted bountiful liberality (*faiz-i mauqīhat*), the eternally adorned assembly (*mehfīl-i khulīd-iyyīn*) of celestial sublimity (*bihišht barīn*) that is the refuge of on the rulers of the Earth. The blessed noble royal command was issued (*nīfāz yafī*) that the associates and attendants of the lately deceased Afzal Khān should present themselves before the auspicious [imperial] gaze. When this supplicant's turn arrived, his penmanship in the broken script — which is not devoid of correctness — entered into that gaze of alchemical effect, and found favor with his difficult-to-please nature. The lines of this *faqīr*'s lowly quatrain reached those auspicious ears and earned a measure of appreciation.

*shāhī ki mut`-i ī do `ālam gardad*  
*har jā ki sari-st bar dar-ash kham gardad*  
*az bas ki ba daur-ash ādim yāft sharaf*  
*khwāhād ki firishta niz ādam gardad*

A king to whom both worlds submit  
Everywhere that there is a head, it bows at his door  
So much is a man ennobled in his era  
That even angels would prefer to become men!
as the *Chahār Maqāla*, or “Four Discourses”). Ṭurūzī, “the prosodist,” is often quoted in any discussion of Islamicate secretarial traditions, because he explicitly lists the secretary as one of the four essential advisors to any king (along with the poet, astrologer, and physician). This is an interesting list for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the diminished emphasis on the *wāzīr*, or any type of military commander. Be that as it may, what does not get mentioned very often in discussions on Ṭurūzī is the context within which he frames the importance, indeed the cosmic necessity, of the secretary and the art of *dābīrī*. He begins *Chahār Maqāla* with a fascinating discourse on the creation of the universe, complete with an entire cosmogony and a disquisition on the genesis of the five elements, followed by the evolution in the animal kingdom from vegetables, to the external sense faculties, the internal senses, the higher orders of beasts, and finally the kingdom of man. He subsequently divides men into three categories: the “wild men” who are closest to animals; the urban (and presumably more sophisticated) “inhabitants of towns and cities, who possess civilization, power, and cooperation”; and finally the third class, “such as are independent of these things.” This latter class is then again subdivided into philosophers and prophets, and here is where Ṭurūzī’s ideas of political theory finally emerge. For however much influence a prophet may have while still here in the world, when he eventually “turns his face towards the other world, he leaves

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64 I have followed here the translation of E. G. Browne, *Revised Translation of the Chahār Maqāla* (“Four Discourses”) of Nizami-i-Ṭurūzī of Samargand, followed by an abridged translation of Mirza Muhammad’s notes to the Persian text (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921). Where necessary for clarification, I have added the original Persian words and phrases in brackets, based on Muhammad Qazvini’s edition with additional notes by Muhammad Mu’in (Tehran: Zawwar Bookshop, 1955-57).
behind him as his representative a Code [dastūr]...And assuredly he requires, to maintain his Law and Practice, a vice-regent...such as one who is called an ‘Imam’.\[65\] However:

...not every one of these [Imams] will have such power that all mankind shall be compelled to acknowledge it. Hence there must be an administrator and compeller, which administrator and compeller is called a ‘Monarch,’ that is to say, a king [malik ‘anī pādshāh] and his vicarious function [nayābar] ‘Sovereignty.’ The king, therefore, is the lieutenant [nā‘īb] of the Imam, the Imam of the Prophet, and the Prophet of God (mighty and glorious is He!). Well has Firdawsi said on this subject:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{chunān dān kīh shāhī va paighambarī} \\
\text{do gohar buvd dar yek angushtarī}
\end{align*}\]

"Then learn that the functions of Prophet and King Are set side by side like two stones in one ring"

The Lord of the sons of men [i.e. the Prophet Muhammad] himself hath said ‘Church and State are twins,’ [dīn va mulk do birādar-i ham-zādand] since in form and essence neither differs from the other, either as regards increase or defect. So, by virtue of this decree, no burden, after the Prophetic Office, is weightier than Sovereignty [pādshāhī], nor any function more laborious than that of governing. Hence a king needs about him, as men on whose counsel, judgement and deliberations depend the loosing and binding of the world, and the well-being and ill-being of the servants of God Almighty, such as are in every respect the most excellent and most perfect of their time.

Now of the servants essential to kings are the Secretary, the Poet, the Astrologer and the Physician...\[66\]

These four advisors are thus essential not merely for the well-being of the king, but by extension for the entire stability and balance of the realm, the world, and the cosmos.

Following this prologue, ‘Arūzī’ s four discourses each treat of one of these four essential servants, and the fact that the secretary is first among them is no coincidence, because, as

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65 Browne, Revised Translation of the Chahār Maqala, 11; Qazvini’s Chahār Maqala, 17.

66 Browne, Revised Translation of the Chahār Maqala, 11-2; Qazvini’s Chahār Maqala, 17-18.
'Arūzī stresses, “the maintenance of the administration…is by the Secretary.”67 Indeed, ‘Arūzi draws this connection right from the opening benediction of Chahār Maqāla, in which he offers “Praise, thanks and gratitude to that King [i.e. God] who…created and adorned the World of Growth and Decay, maintaining it by the commands and prohibitions of the Prophets and Saints, and restraining it by the swords and pens of Kings and Ministers.”68

In other words, as the primary wielders of the “pens of kings and ministers,” elite secretaries helped to undergird ‘Arūzī’s entire vision of balance in the cosmos.

_The Secretarial Arts in India, from the Delhi Sultanate to the Mughal Empire_

I have spent so much time on this deep history of the administrative precursors and conceptual parameters of the Perso-Arabic _fann-i dabūrī_ because it is important to recognize that this long tradition of chancery institutions and normative theory about the secretarial arts and their place in effective statecraft was inherited directly by the Delhi Sultans, and thus subsequently by the Mughals as well. Indeed, the Sēsānian, ‘Abbāsid, and especially Ghaznavid precedents had a profound effect on the development of administrative and secretarial culture in the Indo-Islamic context.

67 Browne, Revised Translation of the Chahār Maqāla, 12; Qazvini’s Chahār Maqāla, 18.
68 Browne, Revised Translation of the Chahār Maqāla, 1; Qazvini’s Chahār Maqāla, 1.
Ideologically speaking, the early Delhi Sultans viewed themselves simultaneously as, on the one hand, inheritors of Sāsānian glory via their Ghaznavid heritage, and, on the other, as creating an Islamic new world, a refuge from the increasing devastations wrought by the thirteenth-century advance of the Mongols across Central and West Asia, culminating in the sack of Baghdad in 1258 CE. ‘Abd al-Malik ‘Isāmī, for instance, reports in his fourteenth-century Futūh al-Salāṭīn (“Victories of the Sultans”) that Yalduz, one of Shams al-Dīn Iltūtmīsh’s rivals for the Delhi throne, specifically invoked the mystique of Ancient Persia when asserting his claim to the Delhi throne: “O renowned commander, you know that I am fitter than you to rule the kingdom of Hindustan...unless you are ignorant of my power [you] must not revolt against us. I am as good as a descendant of the kings of Iran, for I hold the capital as well as the army.” It is no coincidence, moreover, that ‘Isāmī’s masterpiece was also commonly referred to as the Shāh-nāma-i Hind — a self-conscious channeling of Sāsānian (and by extension Ghaznavid) glory if ever there was one. In another passage, ‘Isāmī specifically connects his own text with that of Firdausī, and does so precisely in order to project Iltūtmīsh as the Indo-Islamic embodiment of Sāsānian heroism, who would build a new kind of realm where all would be welcome and find refuge:

In the Shah Namah, the old man of Tus [i.e. Firdausi] has written many things in every story that he was pleased to write. But for the most part he describes these four things: amongst the kings he always praises highly and immensely Faridun and Kaikhusrau; amongst the heroes he applauds Rustam and he describes his horses, weapons and armour. Verily, whatever is liked by God is applauded by the people. Had there been no help from God, Faridun would not have been favoured with

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fortune. If Providential help were not forthcoming, neither Rustam nor his horse nor his armour would have had any effect.

In short, when King Ilutmish who was the light of religion and the world [a pun on his title, Shams al-Din va al-Dunya] made Delhi his capital his troops raided the remotest parts of the country. The city wore a bright look. Verily every new thing is a pleasure. Many a Saiyed of correct descent came over there from Arabia. Many tradesmen from the land of Khurasan, many painters from the country of China, many 'Ulama of the Bukhara stock and many a devotee and men of piety came from different regions. Craftsmen of every kind and every country as well as beauties from every race and city; many assayers, jewelers and pearl-sellers, philosophers and physicians of the Greek school and learned men from every land — all gathered in that blessed city like moths that gather round the candle light. Delhi became the Ka'ba of the seven continents (haft iqlim) and the whole region became the home of Islam.70

Thus, like the 'Abbāsids, Ghaznavids, and many other kingdoms and dynasties of the early Islamic centuries, the Delhi Sultans often looked to Sāsānian models of statecraft and notions of imperial power.71 The rise of official chancellery departments throughout this period, too, was in effect also a byproduct of that obsession with projecting power along the Sāsānian model. For it was not only through force of arms, but also through the power of rhetoric, that kings established their superiority over their rivals. Intelligence-gathering and news-reporting departments modeled on the Sāsānian institution of the barīd were built up alongside the chancellery departments in the Delhi Sultanate. And thus, here again, it was precisely during a moment of territorial expansion that communication networks and ministries of information — all of which depended heavily on the expertise of professional secretaries — became crucial for early Sultanate state formation and the maintenance of imperial stability.

70 'Isami, Futūhā's salātān, 226-7.

During the Sultanate years, the main chancellery was known as the *divān-i inshā‘*, and was among the four key branches of administration which came to be together referred to as the “pillars supporting the vault of the state.”

(72) (The others were: the *divān-i wizārat*, which dealt with general administrative matters; the *divān-i risālat*, which was essentially a liaison between the sovereign’s administration and various religious communities, offering grants and bequests to pious individuals and groups; and finally the *divān-i ‘arz*, which dealt with military matters.) Like so many other such departments before, the Delhi Sultanate’s *divān-i inshā‘* dealt with royal correspondence, and was referred to as the “treasury of secrets” due to the confidential nature of the office.

(74) The *dabīr-i khās* would have supervised various types of secretaries and clerks working in the *divān-i inshā‘*, many of whom had titles based on their duties — such as *shab-navīs* (nighttime secretary), *khāsah-navīs* (personal secretary), and so forth. But as with previous and later

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(73) This Sultanate *divan-i risalat* should not be confused with the Ghaznavid department of the same name, which would be closer to the former’s *divan-i inshā‘*. This fact should give us further reason to suspect that many of these technical terms, as well as the bureaucratic and generic categories which they signify, had shifting meanings over time and according to region. I. H. Qureshi’s attempted explanation for the discrepancy is as follows: “How is it that another department [for dealing with religious matters], already mentioned, came to be known by this name under the sultans of Delhi? Nothing definite is on record; but the following appear to be the most probable reasons. The department of the pious foundations and religious establishments was under the *qazi-i-mumalik* in most of the Muslim states of the period. It is not certain what name it was given by the Ghaznavids; indeed a historian of Sultan Mahmud’s life and exploits does not even mention it in his list of the main government departments. A Muslim government had twofold functions; it exercised control in mundane matters and it also ministered to spiritual needs. The former was the kingly function and was called *sultanah*; the latter was a continuation of the prophetic mission, the *risālat*. When the sultans of Delhi organized a partially self-contained department of religious affairs and pious foundations as distinguished from the department of justice, they could not have fixed on a happier name than *divan-i risalat*. What had hitherto been called by this name was now called the *diwan-i insha‘.* Administration of the Delhi Sultanate, 86-7.

(74) Qureshi, *Administration of the Delhi Sultanate*, 86.
eras, the pinnacle of dabīrī in the Delhi Sultanate was the dabīr-i khās (equivalent to the Mughal mīr munshī), who oversaw the workings of the entire bureau, and was entrusted with the most difficult compositions, such as drafting increasingly elaborate fath-namahs (announcements of military victory) which were read in public, and even circulated among neighboring courts and important cities of the realm, explicitly in order to create an impression of imperial majesty in the minds of the listeners.75

In addition to building on the precedent of earlier administrative divisions and procedures, administrators and intellectuals in the Delhi Sultanate also drew heavily on earlier literary and stylistic trends. In earlier times, as noted above, the ‘Abbāsid inshā’ style began to emphasize elaborate titles and forms of address, in an attempt to emulate ancient Persian grandeur. This epistolary sub-convention eventually evolved into a full-blown literary style, referred to as tarassul, or “deliberate writing” — a high-flown literary style that became so fashionable that it eventually came to dominate Arabic prose, so much so that it was often referred to simply as the “classical” style, contrasted by literary historians with the earlier, less elaborate prose style under the Umayyads. Proper implementation of tarassul involved a number of literary techniques, many of which became standard practice over time, such as the use of rhymed prose (saj’), which is much in evidence, for instance, in the passage from Qābūs-Nama above. Authors of tarassul used a number of such techniques to create letters and other compositions filled with ornate figures of speech, poetic turns of phrase, and florid literary digressions, most of which required equivalent mastery of literary techniques and canons on the part of

75 Qureshi, Administration of the Delhi Sultanate, 87.
their readers. In addition to abundant poetic quotations, exceedingly complex and elaborate conventions of address, tailored to the audience and/or recipient (*alqāb va ādāb*), became quite common.\(^{76}\)

Ironically enough, during this period of *tarassul*’s vogue in Arabic, Persian prose tended to be much more straightforward stylistically. Even as late as Bayhaqi (11\(^{th}\) century), we have a powerful example of a relatively direct, simple prose style in Persian, at least insofar as his *Ťārīkh* is concerned. Bayhaqi is also reported to have composed a separate manual on *inshā*’ composition, the *Zinat al-Kuttāb*, but it is unfortunately lost, so we cannot really say whether his epistolary technique differed markedly from his approach to history.

Even in Bayhaqi’ s day, however, a more self-consciously artistic style of Persian was growing in popularity, known as the *sabk-i masnū*’ or *sabk-i fannī*, i.e. the “artificial style.” Like the mannerist impulses of *tarassul*, the *sabk-i masnū*’ emphasized stylistic and literary extravagance over brute content, and this trend clearly had an effect on secretarial practice and textual production, as Zilli has made clear: “Among numerous books written in Persian during this period at least two were exclusively devoted to *inshā*. The first was *ʿAtābat ul-Kitābah* of Muntajabuddīn Bādī’ ʿAlī bin Ahmad Kātib Juwaini, a *dabīr* under the Saljuq ruler, Sultan Sanjar (1118-57). This book contains various types of documents including official correspondence. The other book dealing with *inshā*

\(^{76}\) Zilli, “Development of *Insha*,” 315-6. For an idea of how the techniques common in *tarassul* were used in other types of Arabic literature during this period, see Stefan Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry: A Structural Analysis of Selected Texts (3rd century AH/9th century AD-5th century AH/11th century AD)* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
compiled during this period is the *At-Tawassul ila’ Tarassul* of Bahāuddin Baghdādī, a *dabīr* under ‘Alāuddin Tekish Khwārazm Shāh (1172-1200).*

All of these stylistic developments had reached a mature phase by the early period of the Delhi Sultanate. Doubtless they would have had an effect on *inshā’* style and secretarial norms in the North Indian context regardless, but one can’t help noting that the Mongol devastation of the rest of the Islamic world in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the resulting mass migrations into Hindustan of intellectuals, artisans, and litterateurs from all across Central Asia, Persia, and Arabia must have helped to carry these trends into India. Indeed, we have already seen how ‘Isāmī bragged about Delhi’s emergence under ʿIlītūmish as a new beacon of Islamic culture, along with the recognition of Hindustan as a refuge for Muslim men of piety and letters. This notion only increased after the sack of Baghdad in the mid-thirteenth century. These waves of migrants fleeing the Mongols to Delhi and environs would have brought with them even more intellectual trends than had already arrived in the previous century with the coming of the Turkish Sultans. And once they arrived, it is not hard to speculate that these latest trends in Islamicate literary culture would develop along new paths once confronted with the South Asian context.

Indeed, this is precisely what happened. Thus, just as Islamic political theory had to be reformulated for the Indian context by Zia al-Dīn Baranī, and Muslim mystical thought was revolutionized by the venerated Chishtī Sufī Nizām al-Dīn Auliā, so too was Persianate literary culture practically reinvented by Amīr Khusrau. Khusrau straddled

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multiple sites of culture and power in Sultanate India, and, though not a state secretary, was certainly well acquainted with the workings of the court, particularly the court of Alā’ al-Dīn Khaljī, and the dargāh of his pīr (spiritual mentor), Nizām al-Dīn. Moreover, in addition to his groundbreaking poetical writings, Khusrau was also a prose savant, as evidenced by the prolix introductions to each of his five dīvāns of Persian poetry. One of these, the Dibāchah-i Dīvān-i Ghurrat al-Kamāl, is a veritable treatise on Persian literary theory, much of it invented anew by the boastful Khusrau, after his own fashion. He was also an intimate friend of another disciple of Nizam al-Din Auliyā, the celebrated master of the ghazal Hasān Sijzī Dehlavī, who was so accomplished a poet that he was known as “the Sa’dī of Hindustan.” And when he compiled Nizam al-Din’s conversations and sermons into one text, the Fawā’d al-Fu’ād (“Morals of the Heart”), Hasan became practically the inventor of yet another Indo-Persian prose tradition, the Sufi table-talk (malfūz).

In short, though he is far more well-known for his poetic (and even musical) contribution to Indo-Persian literary culture, Amīr Khusrau was also a prose stylist of the highest order, who was acquainted with many of the other political and cultural luminaries of his day. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Khusrau was also the author of a treatise on inshā’, the I’jāz-i Khusrawī, one of very few surviving works on inshā’ from the Delhi Sultanate period.78 And, typical of his efforts in other literary endeavors,

78 There is, to my knowledge, only one relatively rare printed version of I’jāz-i Khusrawī available, published in the 1880s by Naval Kishore Press. This edition is now quite rare, but the interested reader can find some important excerpts of the text in Zilli, “Development of Inshā,” and Wahid Mirza, Amīr Khusrau ([Urdu Version] New Delhi: National Amir Khusrau Society; Ghalib Institute, 1986), 248-54. Besides Khusrau’s I’jāz, two of the most well-known surviving works on inshā’ from the period are by the
Khusrau sought in I'jaz-i Khusravi to push the envelope of what was possible with language. He added his own poetic innovations in ṭhām (double-meaning) and khayāl to the already well-developed mannerisms of Arabic and Persian inshā' in order to create “a new strain of sabk-i masnu' in which a unique and artful use of figures of speech and other literary artifices...[would] add zest and flavour to the composition.” He boasted of having invented a new language and style of his own, one that was specifically suited to the Hindustani environment, the sugary sweetness of which was not suited to the “ice-crunchers” of Khurasan and Mawara an-Nahr (Transoxiana). Be that as it may, the important point to make here is that Khusrau’s attempt to consciously blur the lines between poetics and prose was simply a logical extension of developments that were already under way. Writing good inshā' had always required the use of literary devices and poetic techniques — the only difference here was Khusrau’s added poetic innovations, and perhaps the degree of self-consciousness with which he implemented them.

Another major writer from the Sultanate period whose writings on inshā' have survived is the celebrated fifteenth-century Bahmani wazīr, Khwajah 'Imād al-Dīn Mahmūd

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79 It’s worth noting, given Khusrau’s insistence that he had studied Sanskrit, and moreover some of the striking parallels between his vision of ṭhām and some features of Sanskrit slesha, that this “zest and flavour” could indicate an adaptation of Khusrau’s understanding of rasa theory.

80 Wahid Mirza, Amir Khusrau, 249.
Gāwān.\textsuperscript{81} If Khusrau had expanded the possibilities of Indo-Persian \textit{inshā’}, Gāwān set the parameters for centuries to come. Modern Indian scholars (including both Zilli and Riazul Islam) continue to follow the \textit{inshā’} categories formulated by Gāwān to this day, and he therefore stands as a crucial transition figure between the literary braggadocio of Amir Khusrau and the later, encyclopedic vision of Abū al-Fazl. Gāwān was himself a celebrated administrator and military commander, who corresponded with some of the intellectual luminaries of his day, including the celebrated poet ‘Abd al-Rahman Jāmī (d. 1492 CE). Jean Aubin has pointed out the likelihood that Gāwān was assisted in the composition of many of these letters (and other works besides) by his own talented \textit{munshī}, Nīmdīhī; but that only further reinforces the point that \textit{munshīs}, as specialists in a package of skills that were required for virtually all governance, administration, and correspondence, were integral to the intellectual and administrative life even of highly erudite and educated officials who could, in theory, write such letters on their own.\textsuperscript{82} As we will see in Chapter Two, Chandar Bhān would later go out of his way to praise administrators like Afzal Khān and especially Sa’dullāh Khān for drafting their own letters and administrative circulars — praise which suggests that such self-sufficient administrators were actually quite rare.


As a prose stylist, Gāwān is known mainly for two works: a manual on inshā’ known as the Manāzir al-İnshā’, and a collection of his own model letters known as Riyāz al-İnshā’. He divides the broad category of inshā’ into two basic rubrics. The first is khutab, literally a “sermon” or, perhaps more appropriately in this case, an “address.” This is the — usually non-epistolary — mode which most modern scholars refer to as belles-lettres or, in the words of Riazul Islam, “the literary Inshā.” The range of topics in this mode is evident from the Islam’s summary, which takes Gāwān’s classification quite literally:

The khutab were elegant literary pieces — short or long, but generally not too long. Their themes were myriad. Anything in nature could be the theme of a piece of literary Insha’. Flowers, fruits, wine, varieties of food, seasons, games, chase, war, weapons, meetings, visits, love, separation (hijr), religion, philosophy, marital consummation, conception, birth and death, and other events and accidents of human life including such odd and petty patters as the fasd (phlebotomy)—these and many other things could be chosen by the munshī to exercise his fancy and his art upon.⁸⁴

Many of these topics are also covered, incidentally, in an older treatise on inshā’ known as the Dastūr al-Kātib (“Manual for Scribes”), wherein they tend to be treated simply as part of the umbrella set of topics with which a secretary and/or amanuensis should be familiar.⁸⁵ But in Gāwān’s typology these occasional topics are contrasted with what he

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calls rasā’il, or “correspondence,” i.e. the supposedly more official, epistolary and diplomatic variant of the inshā’ tradition. This is the branch of inshā’ that Islam, like numerous other scholars, will consider to be “Inshā proper.” But one thing that is lost when modern scholars hold too fast to Gāwān’s categories is the fact that these categories are more like ideal types along a generic continuum than reified categories. For one thing, even if we accept a typological distinction between “official” and “literary” inshā’, it is crucial to understand that all writing of this sort was part of the entire literary cultural and socio-political matrix described in this chapter, wherein refinement, etiquette, norms of comportment, and so on were part of the engine that drove political culture as well. Thus even literary texts, or more personalized epistology, reflect a mentalité and understanding of appropriate medium for verbal and written transactions. And conversely, no political or diplomatic document could be considered worthwhile unless it projected a mastery over the literary conventions and verbal art of the tradition. Thus, for instance, long meditations on the beauty of springtime (bahāriya) were a very common topic for the so-called purely literary inshā’. But even Islam admits that such purely literary exercises were a crucial part of political culture, in the sense that they also “had a special relevance to the tarassul, for royal letters, and even private letters written in a formal style, [which] generally contained a passage dilating upon the beauty of the season, or the flora and the scenic charms of the place where the writer may be at the time of writing.”86 We see a good example of this conflation of “pure” and “literary” inshā’ in one of Chandar Bhān’s letters to Shāh Jahān, in which a long account of his

86 Islam, Calendar, 3.
diplomatic mission to Udaipur is followed by a seemingly random excursus on the climate and local customs in Mewār.\textsuperscript{87} It seems an obvious point to make, but one has to remember that even within the epistolary (rasā'il) mode there were many differential compositional formulae; and, just as in our own time, different writing styles, different levels of formality, and different types of content were considered appropriate for different occasions and addressees. The type of letter one wrote to the bādshāh would most likely begin with extensive verbal genuflections and alqāb-o-ādāb, whereas a letter to a friend might begin quite simply with something like “ai azīz” (O Friend); a letter to a poet might also begin informally, contain extensive reflections on the nature of expression (sukhan), and invariably contain a ghazal or two for the delectation of the recipient; a letter to a Sufi might contain mystical speculations, whereas a letter to one’s son or brother might contain other, more pragmatic and personal types of content; or for instance condolence letters required a different tone, obviously, than the recommendation letters that Chandar Bhān was so fond of writing to help get jobs for acquaintances. Often, multiple modes bled into one another and co-existed within the same epistle. Thus for instance the type of intense formality and convention which reached its apex in royal epistles and decrees was also not entirely out of bounds even in ordinary epistolary communications among people of far less social standing than the royal families — particularly when the letter in question was about important commercial affairs or other types of official business. At other times, such excessive formality was completely absent, as the “literary” topics like religion, philosophy, love, and friendship prevailed. Indeed, all of these epistolary modes, from the formal to the informal, and from the

\textsuperscript{87} Munsha'āt-i Brahman, 2-8.
official to the personal, contained elements of the type of writing styles that also exist in non-epistolary inshā’.

In other words, without belaboring these definitional points too much, the problem here really is that we have perhaps taken Gāwān’s distinction between rasā’il/tarassul and khutab too much to heart, and have consequently tended to treat the “literary inshā’” as a kind of faux inshā’, and thus insignificant. But the reality is that both modes were considered inshā’ by the emic tradition, and more to the point, were actually considered complementary, and even symbiotic, because the skill sets for both were identical. Rather than distinct forms, then, we should see khutab and tarassul as two adumbrations of the same literary practice, both of which bled into one another constantly.

In point of fact, Gāwān himself concedes that really “the various typologies described here constitute a single branch of knowledge” (az jumla-i ajzā-yi ta’rif yaki ‘ilm ast). 88 This co-existence of multiple modes certainly comes through in his own writings, which are packed with literary and historical references, extremely difficult Persian syntax with Arabic phrases and quotations throughout, all executed with a command of various branches of knowledge that would make even most experts blush. This is certainly one indication of the exceedingly high level of education required of literati — and thus secretaries — in Gāwān’s day; in fact, Gāwān felt so strongly about inshā’ as a kind of

culmination of all branches of knowledge that he refers to it as the *ka'ba-i 'ilm*. In other words, it is only through mastery of language, and the ability to cultivate a civilized persona through expressive language, that one can truly access other types of knowledge. With this type of *inshā* as *logos* argument in mind, he proceeds to list five reasons why, generally speaking, the truly accomplished *munshī* is in fact far superior to the poet. The most telling of these is Gawan’s estimation that “In every clime, there are only one or two true *munshīs* (*munshī-yi haqiqi*), or they’re completely absent,” whereas poets, even good ones, are abundant “in every city and district” (*dar har baldah va nahiyah*). He goes on to list the importance of *munshīs* to kings and statecraft, their ideally intense knowledge of literary tropes, figures, and eloquent language, and various other types of skills that are crucial to the functioning of governance and the social order.

It is this fully developed vision of the “essence of *inshā*” (*māhiyyat-i inshā*) which is inherited by imperial *munshīs* in Mughal India, including, of course, Chandar Bhān Brahman.

*The Mughal Period and Beyond*

In 1582, the Mughal Emperor Akbar sent a “Letter to the Wise Men of Christendom (*Dānāyān-i Farang),” in which he noted that: “The observance of the rights and claims of neighborhood and the bonds of love with the reputed sovereign are confirmed in

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accordance with the requirements of a sincere love and the exigencies of the obligations of a spiritual friendship.” But the tension between the friendly “claims of neighborhood” and the realities of global distance, which necessarily precluded a proper face-to-face meeting, is immediately apparent when Akbar goes on to lament that “owing to certain intervening important events and circumstances, a meeting could not take place and is still being delayed.” “Hence,” he concludes:

…it would be proper for [us] to maintain regular correspondence as the wise men have considered the letter as a good substitute for dialogue and actual meeting. Through a regular exchange of envoys and letters between themselves, the desires and affairs of each may be manifested to the other and close, friendly relations could be maintained.\(^1\)

This theme of epistolary inshā’ as a substitute for direct diplomacy is taken up again in yet another of Akbar’s letters, this time specifically requesting King Philip II of Spain (a.k.a. Philip I of Portugal, d. 1598 CE) to send him copies of the Christian scriptures, along with learned men qualified to explicate them:

Considering these things, we are, with the whole power of our mind, earnestly striving to establish and strengthen the bonds of love, harmony and union among the population, but above all with the exalted tribe of princes, who enjoy the noblest of distinctions in consequence of a greater (share of the) divine favour, and especially with that illustrious representative of dominion, recipient of divine illumination, and propagator of the Christian religion, who needs not to be praised or made known; (and this decision is) on account of our propinquity, the claims whereof are well established among mighty potentates, and acknowledged to be the chief condition for amicable relations. But, as weighty obstacles and great hindrances have delayed personal intercourse, an interchange of messages and correspondence is the best substitute for it. Intelligent and shrewd men having considered it fit to take the place of oral conversation, we entertain hopes that the portals of correspondence will be continually

kept open on both sides, whereby we may inform each other of various affairs and pleasant hopes.\textsuperscript{92}

Here \textit{inshā'} is formulated not merely as a means of written communication, but as the literal embodiment of the Emperor himself, “fit to take the place of oral conversation,” and thereby imbued with all the dignity, refinement, and etiquette associated with the royal personage. And it is thus is not merely a convenient means for transmitting messages across great distance, but in fact acts almost corporeally, moving physically through the “portals of correspondence.”

Both of the above letters were, of course, penned by Akbar’s celebrated courtier and ideologue ‘Allāmī Abū al-Fazl ibn Mubārak (1551-1602 CE), widely considered to be the finest Indo-Persian prose writer of his (or perhaps any other) era. If ever there was a state secretary who answered ‘Abd al-Hamīd bin Yahyā’s challenge (quoted above) to act as “the ears through which [emperors] hear, the eyes through which they see, the tongues through which they speak, and the hands through which they touch,” it was certainly Abū al-Fazl. He was not only responsible for formulating much of Akbar’s vision of governance and political Islam — which he detailed in massive works such as \textit{Akbar-nāma} and \textit{Ā'īn-i Akbarī}, as well as shorter works like his introduction to the Persian translation of \textit{Mahābhārata} — but also for handling nearly all of Akbar’s day-to-day correspondence and the issuance of imperial \textit{farmāns}, circulars, and so on. This latter set

of writings were compiled in the first decade of the seventeenth century by his nephew and son-in-law, 'Abd al-Samad, under the title *Mukātabāt-i 'Allāmī*, and as such constitute the first major *inshā* collection of the Mughal era.93 In all of these writings, Abū al-Fazl also sought to create a veritable new style of prose, one which self-consciously shied away from excessive reliance on Arabic terminology in favor of a more Persianized idiom, which hearkened back to pre-Islamic Pahlavi. As a result, he would in time come to be seen not only as a great courtier, but as the embodiment of the secretarial ethos, the *munshī* par excellence, against whose achievements all future secretaries, including Chandar Bhān, would be measured. This is not a trivial point, for it highlights the semantic capaciousness of the very term *munshī*, and shows how it could often be applied even to accomplished intellectuals whose status placed them far above and beyond the class of mere bureaucrats.

Meanwhile, Abū al-Fazl’s brother Abū al-Faiz “Faizī” (d. 1595 CE) was also one of the most prominent poets and intellectuals of the age.94 It was Faizī who oversaw much of the Persian translation of *Mahābhārata* mentioned above, along with numerous other texts which reflected the spirit of eclecticism at Akbar’s court, including the *Līlāvātī* (a translation of Bhāskarāchārya’s Sanskrit treatise on mathematics and geometry); the

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93 The collection runs to three full volumes (*siḥ daftar*), containing both letters and specimens of numerous other types of *inshā*. For details in English, see the preface and introduction to Haidar, *Mukātabāt-i 'Allāmī*. See also Zuhūrūddīn Ahmad, *Abū Fazl: Ahvāl-o-Āsār* (Lahore: Īdārah-yi tahqīqāt-i Pākistān, Dānishgāh-i Panjāb, 1975).

Masnavī-yi Nal-Daman (a versified retelling of the Mahābhārata story of Nala and Damayanti)⁹⁵; a grandiloquent version of the Dāstān-i Ṭāmir Ḥamza; a commentary on the Qurʾān that was composed entirely without the use of dotted letters; an attempt to produce a set of five javābs, or “answer poems” in imitation of the celebrated Nizāmī Ganjavī’s five-fold khamsa of romantic masnaviś (which he was unable to complete due to his premature death from what might have been tuberculosis); and no less than three dīvāns of Persian poetry that were at the vanguard of the experimental Mughal poetic mood of tāza-gū ṭī, or “speaking the fresh” (about which more in Chapter Three). And, in addition to all this production and more besides, Faizī also penned an important inshā’ collection, the Latā’if-i Fayyāzī (also referred to simply as Inshā’-yi Faizī).⁹⁶

Men like Abū al-Fazl and Faizī thus set an early, and high, standard for intellectual accomplishment in Mughal India, and the refined prose in which it was to be expressed. Moreover, though they certainly benefited from the Emperor’s openness to intellectual experimentation, one could just as easily argue that it was they (and others like them) who, through their scholarship, ideas, and writings, opened up the eclectic intellectual space that would define Mughal literary culture and politics for nearly a century.

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Their achievements should also be seen in historical context, particularly the challenges to early Mughal state formation of the subcontinent’s linguistic and regional diversity. I have mentioned above that there is a strong correlation between phases of imperial expansion and the development of secretarial practices; and the Mughal case is the example *par excellence*. The Mughal bureaucracy, particularly after Akbar, took the importance of the chancellery (*dār al-inshā*) to unprecedented levels of size and specialization. Like an early modern version of the problems faced centuries earlier by the ‘Abbāsids — and, for that matter, later by the British — the Mughals, even as they increased their territorial suzerainty, faced greater and greater logistical challenges in trying to govern an enormous geographical area that was linguistically, culturally, and topographically diverse. Moreover, in an increasingly globalized early modern context, Mughal diplomatic efforts, epistolography, and commercial policy all had of necessity to be addressed to broader, ever more diverse audiences. Of course, the bulk of this wider diplomatic correspondence was with the Mughals’ traditional rivals in the Perso-Phone ecumene, the Safavids and Ottomans. But with the growing presence of European traders, diplomats, and missionaries in the subcontinent, there was also a felt need to speak to the Mughals’ royal counterparts in faraway “Firangistan” as well, as evidenced above by Akbar’s letters to the princes and “wise men of Christendom.”

Generally speaking, as has been well-documented, the Mughals’ response to such challenges was a combination of powerfully centralized rule, augmented by the abstraction of sub-imperial power through the *mansabdārī* system. The cultural aspect of these policies included the well-known patronage of knowledge production about classical Indic traditions, as well as concerted efforts at religious *rapprochement* via marriage alliances with Rajputs, and a theoretical basis for these policies through the motto of *sulh-i kull* ("peace with all," or "absolute peace"), the formalization of a space for religious dialogue through institution of the *‘ibādat-khanah*, and other such efforts.

One of the most crucial innovations during Akbar’s reign, however, was the decision in the 1590s to institute Persian as the official language of Mughal administration, regardless of province. Prior to Akbar’s reign, Persian had of course been the literary *lingua franca* of Hindustan’s Turkish and Afghan Sultanates, and as such Persian literary and courtly culture had spread among various elite demographics throughout much of the subcontinent long before the Mughal period. Muhammad bin Tughlaq (r. 1325-1351 CE) developed a close relationship with a Jain monk named Jinaprabha Suri, who used to address the *sultān* as Mahārājādhirāja Mahammada. Their friendship was a direct result of their many dialogues on theology and various other intellectual matters — conversations which are reported to have often gone late into the night, and as a result of which Jinaprabha earned the jealousy of many fellow courtiers, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. There are indications that these dialogues were conducted in a combination of Sanskrit and some form of spoken Prakrit (presumably some form of Hindavi), but
Jinaprabha seems to have also known enough Persian to recite mystically-inclined verses in Sultan Muhammad’s presence. \(^{98}\)

According to Firishtah’s *Tarikh*, by Sikander Lodi (d. 1517)’s time the use of Persian already had a broad appeal even beyond the Turkish and Afghan nobility, with a number of Hindus learning (and in some cases even writing in) Persian. The notoriously gruff historian of Akbar’s reign, ‘Abd al-Qādir Bādāyūnī (b. 1540 CE), describes a Brahman poet from that era who not only wrote Persian poetry, but was so acculturated that he was competent to give lessons in Persian and Arabic. And many, many other examples of Persian’s increasing influence on South Asian intellectual life could easily be mobilized, from the Kashmiri pundits under Sultan Zain al-‘Ābidīn to yet other Brahmans at Deccan Courts. \(^{99}\) Nevertheless, however much it had spread as a prestige language, prior to Akbar’s reign Persian there is little evidence of Delhi Sultans actively promoting Persian beyond court circles. Indeed, one powerful indication of both Persian’s spread and its limited provincial utility during this period is the fact that imperial *farmāns* under the Lodis seem to have been struck in Persian on one side, and the relevant local language (or at least a *devanāgarī* transcript) on the verso. \(^{100}\)

It was Akbar’s celebrated finance minister Rājā Todar Mal, a Punjabi *khattri*, who seems to have been the first to suggest using Persian as a means of streamlining the

\(^{98}\) Agha Mehdī Hassan, “Jains and Hindus Befriended”; chap. 11 of *Tugluq Dynasty* (311-339)

\(^{99}\) For further details on all these developments, see S. M. Abdullah, *Adabiyat-i Farsi*, 34-48.

\(^{100}\) Mohiuddin, *Chancellery*, 28, 38.
administrative machinery. One of the most dynamic administrators of the age — "a Colbert to Akbar's Louis XIV," as one historian has described him — the institutionalization of Persian as an imperial language was but one part of a whole complex of innovative reforms initiated and overseen by Todar Mal. During the so-called "Afghan interregnum" (1540-1555 CE) which interrupted Humayun's reign, Sher Shah Suri had introduced a number of agrarian reforms, specifically in the area of land-yield assessment. But Sher Shah's system was not flawless, and it was Todar Mal who, in 1580, undertook the "drastic experiment designed to completely restructure the Mughal agrarian system." The entire Mughal mansabdari system, along with all salary assignments (jagirs), was suspended while Todar Mal oversaw a massive and meticulous survey of agrarian lands, which were then assessed in concentric circles of revenue potential (village, pargana, district, province, etc.). The outcome of this five-year project was that, through the implementation of novel bureaucratic record-keeping, the revenue assessments of entire system of agrarian "regulation" (zabt) would no longer be based cruelly on the size of any given parcel of land, but rather on a bureaucratic judgment of the land's fertility cross-referenced with its average yield over a ten year span.

101 Abdullah, Adabiyyat-i Farsi, 29-31; Mobiuddin, Chancellery, 38; Alam, "Pursuit of Persian," 325; Abu'l Fazl, Ain-i Akbari, volume one, translated by H. F. Blochmann (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal), 337.

102 John Keay, India: A History (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2000), 325. Of course, the parallel that Keay draws is not entirely apposite. Whereas Todar Mal was more interested in creating a more streamlined and sophisticated bureaucracy and revenue administration within Mughal domains, Colbert's policies and ideology were aimed outward, focused on often violent French mercantile expansion, for which he saw Asia essentially as a battleground for ongoing "economic warfare" (for details, see for instance Glenn J. Ames, Colbert, Mercantilism, and the French Quest for Asian Trade (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996)). Colbert's aims were thus far different from those of Todar Mal, even if one might try to think of their stature as being somewhat analogous.

The intricate details of this system are available in numerous other sources, and there is therefore no need to go into detail here. But Todar Mal's project is significant for our purposes for several reasons. For one thing, at its most basic level the *zabt* system not only led to increased monetization of the Mughal economy, it also required much more sophisticated practices of written record-keeping, practices that had to be consistent throughout the realm in order to optimize revenue.\(^{104}\) The whole system depended on written documentation of tax demands and payments, coupled with accumulation of data on locally specific crop yields — data that were not only compiled in imperial registers, but also cross-listed with village registers, and collated with the accounting records housed in the offices of provincial revenue collectors. In this context, the urge to decide on a uniform administrative idiom for the entire empire would appear to be an obvious desideratum. And, as Muzaffar Alam has pointed out, Persian was in many ways the only available option for such a goal.\(^{105}\) On the one hand, the many Indic spoken languages were far too polyglot and variable — across regions, and even from district to district — to be suitable for uniform application in the provincial, much less pan-Indian, administrative machinery. On the other hand, Sanskrit, however cosmopolitan its reach, was seen as the divinely sanctioned intellectual preserve of the upper castes — primarily *brahmans*, of course — and therefore unsuitable for use in such quotidian matters.

\(^{104}\) As Richards summarizes: "The state expressed its demand in copper coin (dams) and expected to be paid in coin. The peasants had to enter the market and sell their produce in order to pay the assessed revenue demand. In future years, revenue officers simply referred to *written tables* that set out a standard assessment for each crop per bigah or unit of cultivation for that locality...imperial officers imposed *written demands* for tax payment and obtained *written acceptances* in turn from the village headmen and dominant peasants in each village...."; *Mughal Empire*, 85 (my emphasis).

\(^{105}\) Alam, "Pursuit of Persian," op. cit.
Thus it is precisely in the wake of undertaking these agrarian reforms that the notion of a standardized imperial administrative idiom became a bureaucratic necessity. By encouraging all official Mughal correspondence to be conducted in Persian alone, Todar Mal and Akbar instituted a kind of linguistic analogue to the imperial model of the concept taurind-i Ilahi, which later came to be called din-i ilahi. Local languages were all well and good, and were even, along with Sanskrit, cultural media worthy of lavish patronage. But for imperial business, for political stability, the flow of revenue, and administrative coherence of the Mughal Empire, the goal was for the neutral language of the center to predominate.

Alongside such administrative reforms, the Mughal court also developed over time an increased attention to social hierarchy, a trend reflected abstractly in the numerical rankings of the mansabdari system, and culturally in the increasingly rigid rules of courtly etiquette. These trends, too, are reflected in writing practices of the period, particularly the ever more elaborate system of addresses, titles, and salutations (alqab-o-adab) that became the norm in Mughal epistolary insha' at the official levels. A munshi thus had not only to be an expert in language, but also in all of these intricate socio-political hierarchies. And besides the complex system of titles and salutations for

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different classes of addressees, there was a concomitant, equally complex system of classification of different kinds of letters, depending on the social rank of both the sender and the recipient.

Predictably, mastering these elaborate systems of hierarchy and socio-epistolary etiquette required a great deal of training and practice. It is thus not so surprising that, as courtly ritual and etiquette became increasingly complex, we find a concomitant increase in the number of model inshāʾ compilations and formularies compiled throughout the seventeenth century. Most of these collections, including Chandar Bhān's, seem to have served a pedagogical purpose as "model letters" for others to imitate. As noted above, relatively few such collections have survived from pre-Mughal India, whereas the seventeenth century alone saw the production of upwards of perhaps twenty such major collections, if not more — I have already mentioned those of Abū al-Fazl and Faizī, to which we can add at least two by their nephew Nūr al-Dīn Muhammad, along with collections by Khānāzād Khān, Bāqir Khān, the anonymous author of the Zubdāt al-Inshāʾ. Among the more important collections of this period would certainly be that of Harkaran Dās Kambūh, in part because it might well be the earliest surviving collection of Persian epistolography written by a Hindu, and also for being one of the first Persian texts ever published by the East India Company press at Calcutta. Of course, Chandar Bhān's own Munshaʾ āt was written soon after Harkaran's, and other important inshāʾ collections have been left by his contemporaries Munīr Lahorī, Muhammad Sālīh

107 Mohiuddin, Chancellery and Persian Epistolography, 194-214.
Kambūh, and Sa’dullāh Khān. Also noteworthy are Aurangzeb’s letters, the anonymous collection known as *Nigārnamah-i Munshī*, and numerous other collections.\(^{108}\)

The pedagogical purpose of nearly all of these texts is summed up nicely in Harkaran’s preface to the *Inshā’-yi Harkaran*, which itself often came to be referred to as *Irshād al-Tālibīn* (“Instructions for Students”). After an initial invocation (significantly, to Allah and Muhammad), Harkaran explains that:

...this shattered and soul-scorched servant, the sinful (‘āṣif), pitiable no-account faqīr, feeblest slave of eternal God, Harkaran, son of Mathura Dās Kambūh Mutlānī, was seated one day in the company of some dear friends and intimate associates in the Dār al-Khilāfah, town of Mathura. Some of my friends said: “You have spent so much time as a munshī in the service of that gracious Nawāb of exalted title, who has taken refuge in divine forgiveness (ghurfān-panāḥ) [and] attained paradise (rizwān-dastgāh), a Hātim of the times, a Nūshīrvān of the age, ‘Ītibār Khān, and spent your life in the art of inshā’”. Write something by way of a memorandum, that by reading and imitating it (navishtan, lit. “writing it”) people can derive profit.” So at the request of these dear friends I wrote out some lines [of my] broken and imperfect expressions that could be useful to students of this art in their daily writing exercise.\(^{109}\)

Here, the topic of education raises yet another crucial point, namely that almost all evidence from this period, including Chandar Bhān’s own autobiographical writings,

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suggests that, far from alienating the contemporary Hindu population — as a great deal of later colonial and nationalist rhetoric would have it — Akbar’s decision to mandate Persian was welcomed by many sectors of the populace. Indeed, by the time Chandar Bhān was born (ca. 1574) his father and at least one brother had already enjoyed successful careers in imperial service, as the following passage from *Chahār Chaman* makes clear:

This broken-hearted one of true faith (*durust 'itiqād*), Chandar Bhān Brahman, recognizes that the brokenness of my heart is the true cause of my good character. I am a Brahman born of the country (*mulk*) of Punjab, and have achieved distinction and trustworthiness among the cream of the Brahmans, people of sacred thread. Although they earn their livings engaged in various worldly professions, the greatest attribute of this class is that having maintained the social and intellectual practices as they are prescribed in the ancient authoritative texts regarding this group. They have made the embellishment/decoration of their appearance and heart the caption of the book of their actions.

The birthplace and early training of this supplicant was the Seat of the Empire, Lahore, and the ancestors of this rightly faithful Brahman remained engaged in our ancient ways up until the time of this *faqīr*’s father, Dharam Dās. That master [i.e. my father] was a scribe of considerable skill (*an makhdūm navīsanda-i kārdānī būd*), and for a considerable time managed to earn a reputation among the *mansabdārs* of the imperial government ranks. Later, with an eye toward the fickleness of the unstable times, he resigned from government service and his *mansab*, and retired to a quiet corner. Rai Bhān and Udai Bhān are the true brothers of this *faqīr*. The passion for self-liberation fell into Rai Bhān’s head, and he developed no desire for earthly attachments. But Udai Bhān, on account of his ability and talents, warmed to the potentials of the age, and received training through association with that pillar of great nobles, ‘Āqil Khān. When that Khān, still in the eye of youth and success, rushed off from this impermanent world and transient way-station to the eternal province [i.e. died], within days Udai Bhān lifted the goblet of love from the tavern of truth, and turned to the bliss of eternal intoxication. At present he is a complete stranger to the ways of people attached [to this world]. Meanwhile this faithful Brahman, benefited from essential training while in service to Mullā ‘Abd al-Karīm, a master teacher (*makhdūm-i qa‘idalādān*), devoted scholar on the path (*ālim-i ‘ābid bar jādah*) of asceticism (*faqr*), renunciation (*ghinā*), equanimity
(qiyyām), and resolve (mustaqīm); his discipleship proved to be like a precious and tested pearl for me. (shāgirdī-yi ān makhdūm-i durr-i musman-i mujarrab ast).  

Clearly, then, Chandar Bhan and his family did not see the necessity of learning Persian as any threat to their dharma. And thus, quite contrary to the colonial and nationalist postulate that the Mughals imposed Persian as a brute "language of conquest," one gets the sense from Chandar Bhan that he and virtually his entire family actually took to imperial service and the study of Persian willingly and, we might add, with a great deal of aplomb.

And they were far from the only ones. Beyond the bureaucratic domain, there is the example of the Jain sādhu Siddhicandra (ca. 1587-1666). Though we do not know that he ever wrote in Persian, he did learn it reportedly at the personal request of Akbar, and read works of Persian literature aloud for the illiterate emperor. He later tutored Akbar's sons, and was reportedly a favorite of Nūr Jahān and Jahāngīr, with whom he debates the virtues of celibacy in his Sanskrit autobiography. Siddhi's guru Bhāunucandra probably also learned a fair amount of Persian in his capacity as Abū al-Fazl's source for the discussion of Hindavi culture in the Ālm-i Akbari. Kavīndrācāryā Sarasvatī (ca. 1600-75), the Maharashtrian who is perhaps most celebrated for being the man to convince Shāh Jahān to revoke the pilgrimage tax, was at one time Dārā Shukoh's chief Sanskrit scholar, and spent quite a bit of time in the service of the courtier Dānishmand Khān, noted for his worldliness, as well as for also employing François Bernier as a physician.

110 Brahman, Chahār Chaman, 105-6.
and translator of French works into Persian. Jagannātha Panditarāja, the last of the great Sanskrit literary critics, was the client of both Dārā Shukoh and Āsaf Khān, about whom he wrote the Sanskrit panegyric Asafvilāsa. He is said to have fallen in love with and married a Muslim woman, and written a significant amount of extremely personal poetry about his love for her. This body of work, though in Sanskrit, reflects if not a direct appropriation of, then at least a keen awareness of the Persian literary conventions signifying the unattainable mahbūb.\footnote{For further details on all of these figures, see Sheldon Pollock, “The Death of Sanskrit,” \textit{Comparative Studies in Society and History} 43, 1 (2001): 392-426; “New Intellectuals in Seventeenth-Century India,” \textit{IESHR} 38, 1 (2001): 3-31. For Jagannatha, see also Timothy Cahill’s introduction to “Jagannatha’s Rasagangadha: The Text with a Translation and Critical Study,” Ph. D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995.}

All of these Hindu and Jain intellectuals thus benefited generally from what one scholar has called “an air of assimilation” at the Mughal court,\footnote{Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, “A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part 1: Naming and Placing a Literary Culture,” in \textit{Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia}, edited by Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 805-63.} and there is no doubt that the official implementation of Todar Mal’s Persian policy opened up the possibility of bureaucratic advancement, for scribes and secretaries in particular, to a far more diverse group than had hitherto had access to the administrative machinery. A crucial part of this story is the educational reforms that went along with Akbar’s Persian policy. In addition to reform of the madrasa system, this policy strove for the “introduction of ‘secular’ themes in the syllabuses at middle levels [and] ‘stimulated a wide application to Persian studies’. Hindus — Kayasthas and Khatris in particular — joined madrasas in large
numbers to acquire excellence in Persian language and literature...and thus appropriate the ethos of the language.\textsuperscript{113}

We get further details on the question of education from an interesting passage in \textit{Chahār Chaman} in which Chandar Bhān tells us that “this faqīr first studied \textit{ta'līq} script with one Banarasi Das, the son of Pratap Rai Kayasth,” who appears to have been some sort of provincial treasury officer.\textsuperscript{114} Even here, however, further research might begin to show that the conventional wisdom that it was primarily kayasthas and khattiris who took to Persian might be in need of some revision. For instance just after this passage, Chandar Bhān mentions a number of “shudras” who were also part of the whole network of scribes and revenue officials in Punjab at the time. In a letter to his brother, he informs the latter of the death of one of his old teachers:

\begin{quote}
During the bloom of youth, this faithful supplicant took lessons in the broken script (\textit{khat-i shikastah}) from Jatmal Sūdrah (shūdra), who, having
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{113} Alam, “Pursuit of Persian,” 326. Alam goes on to note that, after basic reading and writing: “...they studied the prescribed curriculum which included ethics (\textit{akhlaq}), arithmetic (\textit{hisāb}), notations particular to arithmetic (\textit{sīyāq}), agriculture (\textit{falāhat}), measurement (\textit{masāhā}), geometry, astronomy, physiognomy, household economy (\textit{tadbīr-i manzil}), the rules of government (\textit{sīyāsat-i mādūn}), medicine, logic, mathematics (\textit{riyāzī}) and physical and metaphysical (\textit{tābī and llāhī}) sciences. At an advanced level works of classical masters were studied in order to acquire proficiency in Persian composition and poetry. Texts prescribed at this stage were \textit{Bustān} and \textit{Gulistān} of Shaikh Sa’di, \textit{Akhlaq-i Nāsirī} of Khwāja Nasir-ud-Dīn Tūsī...” and so on. See Also N. N. Law, \textit{Promotion of Learning in India during Mohammedan Rule} (London: Longman’s, 1916). For a detailed discussion of the kāyastha response to these policies, see Karen Isaksen Leonard, \textit{Social History of and Indian Caste: The Kayasths of Hyderabad} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Chahār Chaman}, ms #3340 (55043/2217), National Museum, New Delhi fol. 97. The Banarasi Das mentioned here is almost certainly not the famous author of \textit{Ardhakathanaka}. Note, too, that this passage and the one that follows it are not in the recent printed edition released as a special issue of \textit{Qand-i Pārsī}, but are there in the manuscript housed in the National Museum, New Delhi. The manuscript is unfortunately missing pages at the end, and thus has no colophon. But it does have a handwritten inscription on the front page describing it as “A book of \textit{insāh} from the library of Mr. Ja’far Beg” (\textit{kītab-i insāh} `az kūtb-khānah-i sarkār ja’far beg), and dating the copy to 1083 A.H.—a date which, if correct, is barely 10 years after Chandar Bhān’s own death, and would make this far and away the earliest known manuscript to have survived.
left the bodily cage has sauntered off (kharâmîdah) to the world of the
spirit, and the only living reminder of that world-traveler is now his
brother, Nisbat Rao, who was known among his contemporaries for
innovation, even/sober/moderate temperament, and the power of his words
(matânât-i kalâm). There was also Gopi Chand Südrah (shûdra), who has
taken to ta'liq and shikastah with great relish. In fact, among the
community (gaum) of shûdras [there are also] Bhagavant Rai and Narayan
Das, and their other brothers, [who] have all become quite famous for
draftsmanship, and this faqîr is an avowed/proud disciple of this
community.\textsuperscript{115}

To modern ears accustomed to hearing about the inflexibility of premodern caste
strictures, Chandar Bhân’s relaxed attitude here is a refreshing corrective.\textsuperscript{116} But more
importantly for our purposes, his remarks clearly indicate that the spread of Persian
literacy during this period went well beyond the imperial bureaucracy, and was by no
means exclusive to specific communities. And one gets no sense, anywhere in his
writings, that he or any of the other Hindus that we come across in his writings were at all
reluctant or resentful of their participation in the Mughals’ Persianate ecumene. Granted,
he had become a Persophone intellectual, whereas a few generations prior he might —
and I emphasize, might — have occupied a more traditional role as a Sanskrit litterateur,
possibly even a pundit. Perhaps families like Chandar Bhân’s eschewing Sanskrit was
even a contributing factor in the centuries’ long brain drain which led, as Sheldon Pollock

\textsuperscript{115} Chahâr Chaman, MS #3340 (55043/2217), National Museum, New Delhi, f. 97a-97b. Narindar Nath
also mentions two more of Chandar Bhân’s early interlocutors, named Devi Das and Arjun Mal Shudra.
University, 1974, 9-10.

\textsuperscript{116} There is some question, however, about what exactly Chandar Bhân meant by the term shudra. If it
simply means “not-Brahmin,” then perhaps he might refer even to otherwise high-caste groups like khattîs
and kâyasthas in this way. In that case, the passage is far less meaningful. But if he does indeed mean that
lower-caste groups like jâts, yâdavs, gujars, and so on were learning Persian extensively, then further
research can try to clarify and corroborate this. (I am very grateful to Sanjay Subrahmanyam for helping
me try to clarify this difficult question.)
has argued, to the “death of Sanskrit.” But be that as it may, there is no indication here that Chandar Bhān or any of his other Hindu contemporaries saw reading and writing in Persian as a threat to their religious identity. Admittedly, the choice of “Brahman” as his pen name (takhallus) might well have indicated an attempt on Chandar Bhān’s part to cling to an aspect of his heritage that he felt was being eroded. But given the comfortable and frank way in which he speaks about being a Hindu and being proud of his continued status as a brahman, throughout his writings, it is not especially clear that this was the case.

At any rate, the important thing is to recognize that Chandar Bhān, though certainly quite accomplished among the munshīs of his age in terms of literary achievements, was far from unique — even relative to other Hindus — in terms of his interest in and talent for Persian literary culture. He was a product of a family that was already immersed in Persophone literary and political culture, even before Todar Mal’s reforms were instituted, and he spent his formative years studying and training among a diffuse network of teachers, tutors, and other literati in Punjab, both Hindu and Muslim.

Through all of this intellectual ferment and dialogue, the notion of what constituted an excellent secretary did not diminish in the least, despite the influx of new demographics. Indeed, it was men like Chandar Bhān and his predecessors like Harkaran and Abū al-Fazl — to whom he was regularly compared — who helped to create a standard of

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stylistic excellence in public documents like imperial farmâns and diplomatic correspondence. The best of their epistolary work found its way into the efflorescence of collections of model letters mentioned above, and throughout the latter half of the seventeenth century, and well into the eighteenth, the participation of Hindus in the Mughal Bureaucracy, and the contribution of Hindus to Indo-Persian literary culture generally, would increase exponentially, fueled by the notable writings of luminaries such as Anand Râm Mukhlis, Siâlkoti Mal Wârista, Tek Chand Bahâr, and a host of others. \(^{118}\)

Chandar Bhân’s own life and career has to be seen in this larger context, and situated within this long historical trajectory. He was, in many ways, a perfect example of what Aziz Ahmad once called “Hindu sensitivity embedded in Muslim tradition.”\(^{119}\) This did not, however, seem to affect his contemporaries’ opinion of his secretarial and literary abilities. He is described in glowing terms by other literati of his time, such as Munîr Lahorî, who once referred to him as “the Sahbân of the age, the most elegant man of the

\(^{118}\) As pointed out by M. Athar Ali: “In the main, the Persian literature continued in its well-established grooves. Indeed, the eighteenth century saw its maximum progress in India...whereas there were only six Hindu writers who wrote one book each in Persian, during the seventeenth century, there were during the eighteenth century no less than thirty-two Hindu writers who wrote as many as forty-nine books.” See his article “The Passing of Empire: The Mughal Case,” Modern Asian Studies 9, 3 (1975): 385-96. In his article “Unprivileged Power: The Strange Case of Persian (and Urdu) in Nineteenth-Century India,” Annual of Urdu Studies 13 (1998): 3-30, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi also emphasizes the vibrancy of eighteenth-century Indo-Persian literary culture, and the participation of Hindus in it, as part of his attempt to understand the nineteenth-century reversal of fortune for Persian in India. For more details on Mukhlis, Wârista, Bahâr, et al, see Muzaffar Alam, “The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics,” Modern Asian Studies 32, 2 (1998): 317-49; S. M. Abdullah, Adabiyat-i Farsi Hindû'ûn men Hisâh (Lahore: Majlis Taraqi-e Adab, 1967) 111-68.

\(^{119}\) Aziz Ahmad, Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment (1964; reprint Delhi: Oxford University Press reprint, 1999), 106.
times, the lord of poets (malik al-shu’arā’), Chandar Bhān.\textsuperscript{120} Besides the obviously high praise of calling Chandar Bhān malik al-shu’arā’, the reference to Sahbān Wā’il — “whose seductive eloquence has passed into a proverb and who, it is said, whilst addressing an assembly for half-a-day, never used the same word twice”\textsuperscript{121} — situates Chandar Bhān not merely as a novelty, but deeply within the inherited canons of the Indo-Islamic literary imaginaire. At least one of Chandar Bhān’s verses was included in the personal literary diary (bayāz) of one of the most celebrated poets of the Mughal-Safavid era, Sā’ib Tabrīzī.\textsuperscript{122} And the historian Muhammad Sālīh Kambūh praised Chandar Bhān highly for his agreeable manner and sociability, as well as his searching mystical temperament, and went on to playfully describe him as “the idol worshipper in the temple of literary expression” (sanam-parast-i bukhāna-i sukhan). Indeed, the biographical sketches at the end of his history of Shāh Jahān’s reign, Chandar Bhān is one of several people whom Sālīh lists twice, both under the class of “masters of expressive prose” (arbāb-i inshā’) and that of poets.\textsuperscript{123}

In other words, Chandar Bhān’s reputation as a man of literary talent was just as solid as his renown as a munshī. In a sense, the two went hand in hand, for being an elite munshī meant inhabiting a certain literary and cultural ethos, one that virtually required that he

\begin{footnotes}
\item[122] This text has not, to my knowledge, ever been published. See the MS #6170, Oriental Manuscript Library and Research Institute (OMLRl), Hyderabad.
\end{footnotes}
also be a man of gentility and civility as articulated in the *akhlaqi* tradition, and of poetic acumen in keeping with his courtly status. The deep history sketched above of the theory and practice of *inshā’, inshā’-pardāzī*, and the literary and political norms associated with them, thus not only continued to be relevant to the mindset of someone like Chandar Bhān, but framed his very view of life. Indeed, we get a tremendous sense of how the erudition and intellectual polymathy required of an ideal *munshi* informed Chandar Bhān’s sense of the world from a now well-known letter to his son Tej Bhān, which is reproduced in most copies of both the *Munsha’āt-i Brahman* and *Chahār Chaman*, and has recently been translated by Muzaffar Alam. In keeping with the themes laid out in this and the next chapter, this text is is often referred to in manuscripts of *Chahār Chaman* — and so too in the printed edition — under the separate heading of a *nasihat-nāma*, written especially for his “son of happy good fortune” (*farzand-i barkhār-dār-i sa’ādat-nishān*).\(^{124}\) The fact that the letter was framed in this way shows clearly that, to a pre- and early modern audience anyway, the distinction between epistolary and other subgenres of *inshā’* was very often effectively moot. Shantanu Phukan has written elegantly of the “ecology of Hindi” in early modern north India, to indicate the multiple registers, dialects, and idioms that informed Hindi literature during this period.\(^{125}\) And perhaps we could also speak of a generic ecology of *inshā’,* wherein multiple formal registers, styles, and subgenres could inhabit the same textual space organically, in an

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\(^{124}\) See for instance *Chahār Chaman*, MS, Azad Library, Aligarh, ‘Abd al-Salām Collection #293/63, f. 72b; Ja’fri’s printed edition, 128.

interdependent way. Indeed, we will see a great deal more evidence in favor of this approach when we examine Chahār Chaman more closely in the next chapter.

We should also note here, however, that the symbiotic, subgeneric interpenetration reflected in this letter is indicative of another important, socio-political aspect of the early modern munshi’s worldview. Chandar Bhān quite consciously locates his advice to Tej Bhān directly in the tradition of royal “mirrors for princes,” as well as related texts like the wasayās written by Delhi Sultans for their heirs in imitation of the older practice of Sāsānian kings, as was done most notably by Ghiyās al-Dīn Balban. In doing so he signals to his son, and to other readers, that there is a very practical application for such normative principles. He also generalizes the royal discourse of akhlāqī norms as a set of applicable practices for a wider demographic of society, and carries forward the tradition of Abū al-Fazl and Akbar, who had insisted that all imperial bureaucrats and provincial officers “should study books on ethics and good morals, such as Akhlāq-i Nāsirī, Manjīāt Muhliāt [sic], Ahyā’u’l-‘Ulūm [sic], Kīmiyā’i Sa’ādat and Masnawī-i-Maulānā Rūm and Kalīla u Dimna,” Chandar Bhān advises his son Tej Bhān as follows:

Initially, it is necessary for one to acquire training in akhlāq [the system of norms]. It is appropriate to listen always to the advice of elders and act accordingly. By studying the Akhlāq-i Nāsirī, Akhlāq-i Jalālī, Gulistān, and Būstān, one should accumulate one’s own capital and gain the virtue of knowledge. When you practice what you have learned, your code of conduct will become firm.

126 On Balban’s wasayā, and other Sāsānian influences in the courts of the Delhi Sultans, see for instance Khalīq Ahmad Nizāmī, Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyāt-i Delli, 1974), 92-103.

In other words, what Chandar Bḥān is attempting to formulate, with ample precedent of course, is a kind of nobility based not on birth, but on the accumulation of education and gentlemanly virtues. This immediate emphasis on the munshi’s “code of conduct” hearkens back, of course, also to Yahyā’s letter in Ibn Khaldūn’s Muqaddimah, quoted above. And Chandar Bḥān continues in this vein for a bit longer:

The main thing is to be able to draft in a coherent manner, but at the same time good calligraphy also possesses its own virtues and earns you a place in the assembly of those of high stature. O dear son! Try to excel in these skills. And together with this, if you manage to learn accountancy (siyāq) and scribal skills (navisandagī), that would be even better. For scribes who know accountancy are very rare. A man who knows how to write good prose as well as accountancy is a bright light even among lights. Besides, a munshi should be discreet and virtuous. I, who am among the munshis of this court that is the symbol of the Caliphate, even though I am subject to the usual human errors, am still as discreet as an unopened bud, though possessing hundreds of tongues.

Again, besides the munshi’s functional skill set of draftsmanship, accounting, and so on, Chandar Bḥān is telling his son that he must also cultivate a gentlemanly skill set of good manners, comportment, discretion, virtue — for these too are crucial components of a successful career. Literary skills matter too, and it is at this point that one historical difference from Ibn Khaldūn’s time comes into sharp relief. In the intervening centuries, a truly formidable canon of literary, historical, and normative works had established themselves, all of which were must-reads for the erudite classes in Chandar Bḥān’s day. He offers Tej Bḥān a bibliography of texts that he should master as an aspiring munshi, and I dare say that the following list would send shivers up the spine of all but the most dedicated of modern-day students of Persian:

Although the science of Persian is a vast one, almost beyond human grasp, to open the gates of language one should read the Gulistān, Būstān, and
the letters of Mullā Jāmī to start with. When one has advanced somewhat, one should read key books on norms and ethics, as well as history books such as the Habīb al-Siyar, Rauzat al-Safā, Rauzat al-Salātīn, Tārīkh-i Guzīda, Tārīkh-i Tabarī, Zafar-nāma, Akbar-nāma, and other similar books that are absolutely necessary. The benefits of these will be to render your language elegant, and also to provide you knowledge of the world and its inhabitants. These will be of use when you are in assemblies of the learned.

Note the trajectory: from classics of moral wisdom literature (Saʿdī’s Gulistān and Būstān), to a masterpiece of epistolography (Jāmī’s letters), and through to a whole series of important histories, culminating in Abū al-Fazl’s own Akbar Nāma. In other words, it is a smorgasbord of interdisciplinary texts, all of which are expressly intended to inculcate a sense of worldliness in the aspiring munshī. Chandar Bhān’s message here is overtly reminiscent of Ibn Khaldun’s assertion that a good secretary “will have to concern himself with the principal branches of scholarship, because such things may come up in the gatherings and audiences of the ruler.” The added cultivation of a transregional awareness will come in especially handy once the aspiring munshī has gained access to — and possibly employment in — the Mughal “assemblies of the learned,” where indeed people from all parts of the world came and went, and one had to be savvy enough to write competent correspondence, diplomatic or otherwise, addressed to the people of the world. Those letters would, of course, often contain poetry as well, so the neophyte imperial secretary would also be required to master the established literary canons. Chandar Bhān continues:

Of the master poets, I am setting down here the names of some whose collections I read in my youth. When you have some leisure, read them; they will give you both pleasure and relief, increase your abilities, and improve your language. They are Hakīm Sanā‘ī, Mullā Rūm, Shams Tabrīz, Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār, Shaykh Saʿdī, Khvājah Häfiz, Shaykh...

May my good and virtuous son understand that when I had finished reading these earlier works, I then desired to turn my attention to later poets and writers and started collecting their poems and masnavīs. I acquired several copies of their works, and when I had finished them, I gave some of them to my disciples. Some of these are as follows: Aḥlī, Hīlālī, Muhtasham, Vahshi, Qāzī Nūr, Nargis, Makhī Ummīdī, Mīrzā Qāsim Gūnā Ābādī, Mullā Zābanī, Partavi, Jābrānī, Hisābī, Sabrī, Zamīrī, Rashkī, Hassānī, Halākī, Nazīrī, Nāvī, Nāzīm Yaghmā, Mīr Haydar, Mīr Mā‘sūm, Nazīr Mashḥadī, Vāli Dāshīt Bayāzī, and many others who had their own collections [dīvān], and masnavīs, and whose names are too numerous to be listed in this brief letter.

This, then, was the daunting standard of etiquette, scribal skills, and scholarly and literary erudition required of the Mughal munshī-yi haqiqī. And it was Chandar Bhān’s ability to master these norms of comportment and these literary canons, and deploy that mastery in his own writings, that made him so highly regarded by his contemporaries. Among literati, historians, and other inshā ‘-pardāziyān of his times he was considered a true

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128 This distinction between “earlier” and “later” literati is a significant one. For details, see below, Chapter Three.

129 Alam has translated from the Persian text available in S. M. ‘Abdullāh, Adabiyyat-i Farsi men Hindī ‘on ka Hissah, 241-3. The translation quoted here comes from his article “The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan,” in Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia, edited by Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 164-5. Excerpts are also quoted in Alam and Subrahmanyam, “The Making of a Munshi,” Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, 24, 2 (2004): 61-72, wherein they rightly describe the letter as setting out “a rather full cultural curriculum, showing that the letter was clearly destined for a larger readership than his son alone.” This is surely the case, and I would only add that their hunch is borne out by the simple fact of the letter’s inclusion in both Munsha’at-i Brahman and Chahār Chaman, both of which were most definitely meant for wider distribution, and in the latter case dedicated to Emperor Shāh Jahān himself.
master of multiple disciplines, and indeed, even Emperor Shāh Jahān used to refer to him affectionately as a “Hindu expert in Persian” (hindū-yi fārsī-dān).

Of course, in one sense this pet name indicates that, despite the ever-growing number of Hindus and other non-Muslims who immersed themselves in Persianate culture under the Mughals, someone of Chandar Bhān’s expertise was still a relative novelty. But this was certainly not the case for long, for within barely a generation or two after his death nearly the entire Mughal secretariat was composed of Hindus — a trend which continued unabated even under the notoriously prejudiced Aurangzeb.130 Some texts of this period, like Rai Chaturman’s Chahār Gulshan (also “The Four Gardens”), directly invoked the influence of works like Chandar Bhān’s Chahār Chaman; but it was also a time of widespread multilinguality and growing scholarly expertise regarding the secretarial arts generally. Regarding the former, one can cite polyglottic instructional tools for language pedagogy like Tajalli’s Allāh-Khudā’ī — a Persian-Hindi-Arabic masnavī, aimed at children’s memorization, in the tradition of earlier such texts like Amīr Khusrau’s Khāliq Bārī. Regarding the latter, there were in this period, for instance, numerous texts on the science of accounting such as Munshī Nandram Kāyastha Srīvāstava’s Siyāq-Nāma and Ānand bin Hemrāj Gwāliyari’s Khulāsāt al-Siyāq (“Essence of Accounting” – 1115 AH / 1703-4 CE), which deals in extraordinarily intricate detail with, among other topics, the

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130 As noted in the introduction, Jadunath Sarkar has noted this shift too: “From the middle of the 17th century onwards most of the munshis were Hindus, and their proportion rapidly increased...Most of the nobles and even princes in the late 17th century engaged Hindu munshis to write their Persian letters.” Jadunath Sarkar, Mughal Administration (Bombay: Orient Longman), 153-4.
norms of transregional currency exchange. And in general, as noted above, many Hindus like Anand Râm Mukhliś, Sialkotí Mal Wārista, Tek Chand Bahār, et al., were among the most distinguished Persian scholars of India’s turbulent eighteenth century. And despite the fact that by that point Persian had begun to be replaced almost completely by Urdu as the north Indian literary lingua franca, and worse still that Indian Persian was being increasingly challenged as unsophisticated (even illegitimate) by a swelling number of Iranian critics, the basic canons and practices of inshā’ and munshīs continued relatively unaffected. Stylistically, the inshā’ of the eighteenth century continued in the same vein as earlier, and model letter collections continued to be produced and circulated as pedagogical tools. For instance Daya Ram, the compiler of the early eighteenth-century inshā’ collection Balmukund-nāma (a text containing letters composed by his teacher Mehta Balmukund, that is nowadays extremely valuable for historical information about the infamous early eighteenth-century Mughal king-makers, the Sayyid brothers), explains his purpose as follows:

This humble wretch, unpossessed of talent, Daya Ram, who picks up corns from the harvest-heaps of the masters of language, and carries leavings from the feast-cloth of the sages, has for a long time received instruction in the service of this person [Balmukund] who is unique in the art of eloquence. In accordance with his wishes, who combines the acquired perfections and skills in the art of composition, and is the model for all

131 Ānand Gwāliyarī is mentioned as the Khulāsat al-Siyāq’s author in Hāfīz Mahmūd Shirānī’s article on Amīr Khusraw’s “Khāliq Bābī,” in Punjāb men Urdu, Hisaab-i Awwal (Islamabad: Muqaddira-yi Qaumi Zuban, 1988), 140-52; Alam and Subrahmanyam have also noted a text by this name in “Making of a Munshi,” but according to their research it was authored by one “Indar Sen, probably a Kayastha.” On the larger historical context of South Asian accounting practices during this period, see fot instance Satish Chandra, “Some Aspects of the Growth of a Money Economy in India during the Seventeenth Century,” Indian Economic and Social History Review 3 (1966): 321-31.

The munshi's, this person has collected together with great effort and after
research the scattered copies (of the epistles) which were written by him to
high nobles on matters of finance and government, and has given to this
bunch of flowers of wisdom the illustrious title of "Balmukund Nama," so
that students of inshā' may profit from this work.\textsuperscript{133}

Again, the trope of inshā' as both a tool of bureaucratic professionalization and a means
of gentlemanly improvement, to be mastered for the sake of career and social
comportment, continues to be emphasized. Chandar Bhān, too, continued to be a part of
this matrix long after his demise, for as Lachmī Narāyan Shāfīq recalls in his Tazkira
Gul-i Ra'nah, Chandar Bhān's own Munshā'at continued to be used as a basic pedagogical
text in Persian-medium schools and madrasas well into the late eighteenth-century.

Inshā' among the Europeans

Indeed, even Europeans in the subcontinent were compelled to study such collections,
and some, such as the French adventurer Antoine Poliere, even produced their own
Persian inshā' collections (with help from their munshi's, of course). Thus it is not so
surprising, for instance, that two of the earliest works produced by East India Company
officials in India were both the direct products of Mughal secretarial culture: The first
was Francis Balfour’s 1781 edition of Harkaran’s letters, published as “The Forms of
Herkern: Corrected from a variety of Manuscripts, Supplied with the Distinguishing
Marks of Construction.” Also from this very early period was Francis Gladwin’s The
Persian Moonshee (1795), a textbook used to prepare neophyte Company officials for
their newly mandated language exams. It went through numerous printings, and a

\textsuperscript{133} Mehta Balmukund, Letters of a King-Maker of the Eighteenth Century (Balmukund Nama), translated by
Satish Chandra (Alishgar: Alishgar Muslim University; Asia Publishing House, 1972), 15-16.
measure of how widely read and studied this text continued to be among Company
officials is the chance evidence that a copy of The Persian Moonshee was found among
the belongings of the British adventurer William Moorcroft when he died in Balkh in
1825.\textsuperscript{134}

Even at this early stage, despite their still relatively limited territorial control over the
subcontinent, the British already had undeniable imperial pretensions in the late
eighteenth century. Balfour dedicated his "Forms of Herkern" to none other than
Governor-General Warren Hastings, and in his preface singled out his typesetter Charles
Wilkins, the celebrated pioneer in Indian language printing and typography, "without
whose assistance the Insha-i Herkern could never have appeared in its present form."\textsuperscript{135}

Note, however, Balfour's explicitly commercial, indeed imperial logic for wanting to
regularize the Company's publishing capacity:

The only printed Persian character that has hitherto been in use...has been
subservient to no public purpose; and it is but ill calculated for becoming
the Channel of authority, or the Medium of business, over an extensive
empire...whereas the types which Mr. Wilkins has invented...are not only

\textsuperscript{134} I am grateful to Manan Ahmad for this information. Among the other books found in Moorcroft's
luggage were: Gladwin's Materia Medica in the Arabic and Persian Languages with English Translations,
Elphinstone's Cabool, Malcolm's History of Persia, Berchtold's Essay for Patriotic Travellers, Hunter's
Hindoostanee Dictionary, an Essay on Vaccination, a Pamphlet on Trade with India and China, Bedingfield
on Diseases, Murray's Chemistry, Saumarez's Physiology, Nautical Alamanack for 1823, Bell on the
Urethra, Fry's Pautographia, Herau on War, Duncan's Edinburgh Dispensatory, Marco Polo's Travels, a
Maladies Chirurgicales, Hamilton's East India Gazetteer, Scarpa on the Eye, Saunders on the Eye,
Fordyce on Fevers, Hutton's Mathematics, Histoire des Desconverses, Cullen's Practise of Physic, Art of
Cookery. For further details on Moorcroft, see the entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
(DNB), and Ahmad's comments online: http://www.chapatimystery.com/archives/university/the_outsider.html.

\textsuperscript{135} For details on Wilkins, see Graham Shaw, Printing in Calcutta to 1800: A Description and Checklist of
Printing in Late 18th-Century Calcutta (London: Bibliographical Society; New York: Oxford University
Press, 1981) 69-71. For more on the evolution of printing practices in India generally, see Ulrike Stark, An
Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India
(Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007).
well calculated for promulgating the Edicts of Government, but for every Transaction in business, where the Persian character is required.

Implicit in this argument, then, is a will not just toward mechanized modernization for its own sake, but also for the implicit purpose of extricating British officials from their dependence on munshi and the handwritten scribal practices which were still the primary means of textual transmission in 1780s India. Balfour’s desire to have full control over the “Channel of Authority” reflects this larger goal. Of course, as we have seen, such governmental dependence on secretaries and munshi was nothing new. What did change was the amount of trust and respect — relative to, say, the Mughals — which the British were willing to give to their secretaries. For instance Major William Davy, who went to India as a cadet sometime ca. 1767, and worked as the secretary and Persian interpreter Sir Robert Barker, Commander-in-Chief of the Bengal army, makes the following remarks in his Institutes Political and Military of Timour (Oxford, 1783):

A Persian interpreter should not only be able to speak fluently in the language, but to read all such letters as he may receive...to answer them with his own hand, if the importance of the subject, of which they treat should render it necessary. Otherwise the secret negotiations and correspondence of government are liable to be made public through the medium of the native Munchees, or writers, whom he will be obliged to employ and trust.136

Note that Davy does not come right out and say that one cannot trust the “native Munchees,” only that one should not put oneself into a position of being “obliged” to do

so. In either case, his attitude directly contravenes the deep traditions of secretaryship laid out above, which make clear that imperial munshi like Chandar Bhān would have regarded their discretion and integrity above nearly all else.

We get a sense of the tension and anxiety about trusting the native munshi in some of the British correspondence from the period. For instance William Bolts, who seems to have known Persian quite well, and whose Considerations on India Affairs was extremely influential — it was used by Adam Smith in Wealth of Nations — picked up on a very subtle discrepancy in the way that Lord Clive was indicating the Mughal title of one of his correspondents, and wrote to Clive to alert him\(^\text{137}\):

\emph{My Lord,}

\emph{On looking over my papers I find the Rajah’s Hindoo Title is as follows,}

\emph{Dosty Diny Zarb Uzzuma Jong}
\emph{Din Mahrata Hindoopputt Jong}

\emph{But on enquiry I find that a letter from your Lordship with that superscription would be too condescending as it would subject your Lordship to give the salaam where you have a right to receive it. And that the proper title as the letter will be wrote in Persian, will be}

\emph{Tahavur Wajadalutt Dastgah Rajah Hindoopputt,}

\emph{Which your Lordship’s munshy will understand as follows,}

\emph{تهور وجلادت دستگاه راجه هندوپت}

\emph{The memorandum of the prices of diamonds is on the other side.}

\emph{I am, My Lord,}

\(^{137}\) Bolts to Clive 12/15/65(?), British Library India Office Records, European Mss g37/37. I am extremely grateful to Spencer Leonard for thinking of me when he came across this letter in the British Library, and taking the time to copy it out and send it to me.
Your Most Obedient Servant,
William Bolts

We see here quite clearly that in an early colonial phase wherein Mughal etiquette and symbolic hierarchies are still in effect, epistolary titles and salutations (alqāb-o-ādāb) are also still very important and meaningful, even for Europeans like Bolts and Clive. Modern historians have tended to deride such salutatory titles as meaningless verbiage, and sometimes have gone so far as to leave them out of their translations and/or published letter collections entirely. But the titles do in fact frame the social context that is embedded in much Indo-Persian epistology, a whole set of relational hierarchies which sensitive readers (unlike Clive, or most of us for that matter) were able to decode instantly. Thus the reference to Clive’s munshī has a double edge to it. On the one hand it suggests that, as a trained professional, he will understand what Bolts is talking about, and be able to easily read the phrase that Bolts writes out in Persian for him. But in the context of the British anxiety about trusting their munshīs, as signaled by Davy above, Bolts’s letter might have had the added force of trying to alert Clive that his munshī was either incompetent or up to some sort of native mischief.

It is clear that Balfour, too, had little regard, and even less trust, for his assistants; his dependence on them notwithstanding. In fact he compiled “Forms of Herkern” precisely in order to try and police the kind of native deficiencies hinted at by Bolts and Davy. Initially, he informs us that he has compiled this translation on account of: “The attainment of the Persian language being...attended with greater difficulty than seems to
be generally imagined.” The blame for this difficulty, however, lay not with any inadequacy on the part of the students, but rather on the inconsistency, lack of reliable punctuation, and general inscrutability of the scribal manuscripts then commonly in use. In a revealing passage, Balfour insists that these textual inadequacies are compounded by the inherent “defects” of the munshīs:

The person employed to remove these intricacies, and to correct these errors of the Manuscript, is a Moonshy; for the most part unacquainted with the Arabick language,138 poorly instructed in the principles of grammar, and not sufficiently qualified for the task he undertakes. On the other hand, the scholar being ignorant of Oriental language, or at least of the terms that are subservient to the rules of grammar, is destitute of every medium of communication; and totally incapable of receiving the instruction of his Moonshy, however well qualified he may be in his profession.

Clearly, Balfour is in a bind. His moonshy is employed to fix the manuscripts, but because he doesn’t even know “Arabick,” and has no idea of how to teach his own grammar, isn’t even qualified for the job he is ostensibly employed to do. The British learner of Persian, on the other hand, is known as “the scholar,” and is presumed to be “well qualified” despite his ignorance of “Oriental language” — yet his innate scholarly abilities are frustrated by the moonshy’s equally innate deficiencies. Balfour’s project, then, is formulated as one of correction: “in short, to supply, in some measure, the defects of Moonshies and Manuscripts.” But it is precisely the Company official’s utter dependence on these stubbornly lackadaisical munshīs that is so unnerving to Balfour,

138 It is not clear why Balfour is concerned here with “Arabick,” since the text in question was in Persian, as would most of the inshā’ canon and other writings on literary and political culture that he would have come across. Perhaps he simply meant to indicate the Arabic script, rather than the language itself — in which case his conflation would seem to be already a harbinger of the type of script = language equation that would become so decisive in later splitting “Hindi” and “Urdu” apart.
like Davy before him. The imperial project depends on his ability to communicate, but he is “destitute” of the means to do so.

In a sense, all this is of course just garden-variety Orientalism. But I draw attention to it because here we have a vivid example of an obvious moment of frustration in the British imperial project, and one psychological dimension of the British superiority complex was clearly borne of epistemological anxiety and resentment — not just for the natives in general, but specifically for the munshi, with whom the early Company officials were forced to work most closely. It is this mistrust and resentment, evident here in its early form even during the heyday of what is now so often referred to as the period of “White Mughals,” that would later metastasize into the full-blown “information panic” detailed so extensively by C. A. Bayly.139

Balfour’s munshi, for their part, must have been thoroughly confused by his attempts, basically, to water down their curricula. After all, being a good munshi, as the evidence adduced above should indicate, was supposed to be hard. And reading such manuscripts, even without diacritical consistency, was probably somewhat pro forma for such munshi because most of them probably had years, even decades of practice, and were probably very familiar with the relevant texts to begin with. Moreover, most eighteenth-century munshi will likely still have had a very expansive sense of their role as litterateurs, encompassing the secretarial arts and the formalities of social etiquette generally,

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whereas Balfour was clearly interested exclusively in administrative expedience to facilitate commercial transactions. Thus for Balfour, and surely other Company officials, the dependence on munshīs’ expertise produced a kind of anxiety of, if not influence, then certainly reliance. The resulting urge to “correct” the munshīs’ defects thus also produced a will to erasure, an effort to escheat their intellectual property back to the Company men who were “discovering” native knowledge and in a modality of forgetting described recently by Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi (following Bourdieu) as “Orientalism’s Genesis Amnesia.”

A decade-and-a-half after Balfour’s Forms of Herkern, Francis Gladwin’s view of the British imperial project was somewhat more grandiloquent. In his preface to The Persian Moonshee, he compares the patronage of his supervisor, the Earl of Mornington, to “the illustrious epoch” ushered in by the Medici in Italy, “through their munificence, erudition, and taste.” In a sense, Gladwin’s and Balfour’s Orientalist visions are simply proto-versions of, respectively, the romantic and the utilitarian/empiricist/positivist modes outlined by Ronald Inden. Their two visions of empire are thus certainly not incompatible — but they do provide powerful evidence of the degree to which the British self-image of their imperial project was contested, even


141 “The great encouragement which Oriental Literature now experiences under the auspices of the Earl of Mornington, by exciting a general spirit of emulation, cannot fail of effecting its rapid advancement; and we may reasonably promise ourselves, that the influence of his lordship’s patronage will form an illustrious epoch in the history of learning in this country, like what the MEDICI accomplished in ITALY through their munificence, erudition, and taste.” Calcutta, 16th August, 1799. (Preface to 1800 edition of Persian Moonshee)

from within. Balfour’s project was purely administrative and commercial, whereas
Gladwin had a much grander vision of the impending “Oriental Renaissance.”

Needless to say, the two modes emphasized by these competing imperial visions had both
been the eminent domain of munshi’s for centuries. Balfour needed the munshi’s for
purely administrative expedience, to teach him the “forms” of letters and epistles, i.e. the
complex cultural package of literary and diplomatic norms necessary to do business in
late Mughal India. Gladwin, on the other hand, seems to have been much more
attenuated to the broader scope and traditions of the secretarial arts inherited by his
assistants. He too depended on them a great deal, but in his case the dependence did not
produce the same kind of resentment found in Balfour and William Davy before him.

One obvious explanation for this could be a simple difference of personality. One might
also speculate, though, that given Gladwin’s emphasis on a romanticized cultural vision
of empire (as opposed to Balfour’s purely commercial one), he was more predisposed to
savor the literary aspect of secretarial practices in India. Further still, the very purpose of
textbooks like The Persian Moonshie was, theoretically anyway, to teach Company
officials Persian so that they wouldn’t have to rely exclusively on munshi’s for their daily
transactions. The “advertisement” preceding the 1801 edition draws this connection

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143 For a recent study of the complex ways in which that imperialist vision was negotiated, see Robert
Travers, Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2007).

144 Cf. Charles Schwab, The Oriental Renaissance: Europe’s Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880,
explicitly, raising once more the issue of trust, albeit this time with reference to the British themselves:

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*Of the importance, and even the absolute necessity, of a knowledge of the ORIENTAL LANGUAGES, to every Gentleman employed, or to be employed, in the service of the Honourable EAST INDIA COMPANY in Asia, a stronger proof need not be offered than will be found in the following Extracts from some late Orders of the GOVERNOR-GENERAL in Council at Bengal:*

"Fort William, Public Department, Dec. 21, 1798.

"The Right Honourable the Governor-General in Council, considering that the due administration of the internal government and affairs of the Company in Bengal, requires that no Civil Servant should be nominated to certain Offices of Trust and Responsibility, until it shall have been ascertained that he is sufficiently acquainted with the Laws and Regulations enacted by the Governor-General in Council, and the SEVERAL LANGUAGES, the knowledge of which is requisite for the due discharge of the respective functions of such offices; His Lordship in Council hereby apprises the Civil Servants of the Company in Bengal, that, from and after the first of January 1801, no Servant will be deemed eligible to any of the aforementioned offices, until he shall have passed an Examination (the nature of which will be hereafter determined) in the Laws and Regulations, and in the LANGUAGES, a knowledge of which is hereby declared to be an indispensable qualification for such respective Offices.

"The Right Honourable the Governor-General in Council has given this previous intimation to the Civil Servants of this Establishment, in order that every Servant, whose views may be directed to the succession to any such Offices of Trust and Responsibility, may have sufficient time to qualify himself for passing the prescribed Examination, whenever he may be called upon for that purpose.

"Published by Order of the Right Honourable the Governor-General in Council.

"G. H. BARLOW,
These British notions of gentlemanliness, honor, trust, and responsibility — "trust, truth, and the moral order," as Steven Shapin has put it — were themselves products of the nexus between early modern English scientism and Enlightenment humanist thought. But in India they took on a dual meaning. For the Company officials themselves, positions of "trust and responsibility" were — theoretically, anyway — available to any Englishman, so long as he fulfilled the necessary requirements and passed the requisite hurdles. One of those hurdles, the newly required language examinations, was however constituted precisely to counteract the other side of the truth and civility equation, namely the fact that the native munshís were increasingly seen to be innately incapable of real civility and truth, no matter how good their language skills.

Not always, of course. Indeed, one must acknowledge that Gladwin does seem to have had a far greater degree of respect for the learning and erudition of his munshís than some of his predecessors (not to mention those that came after him). Indeed, he took the surprisingly bold step of actually thanking many of his assistants by name (something that even William Jones had rarely done) as for instance in his preface to the 1800 edition of The Persian Moonshee:

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147 Cf. Tavakoli's meticulous effort to track them down in "Orientalism's Genesis Amnesia."
The important subjects of Persian Syntax and Arabick Grammar, are here amply discussed by Mowlawee Ameer Hyder, a worthy and respectable character, who with great modesty of deportment, possesses an uncommon share of critical skill, the result of extensive reading, matured by good taste and a sound judgment.

This is obviously a far cry from Balfour’s ill opinion of his generic, munshīs, all of whom remain nameless. Still, for all their contrasts, we should be mindful that Gladwin too had a keen sense of the British civilizing mission, as evidenced by his vision of recreating the world of the Medici, as well as from the contents of *The Persian Moonshee* itself.

The book begins with Ameer Hyder’s basic reference grammar of Persian and Arabic, which was “entirely new modelled, much enlarged, and in other respects, considerably improved” for the 1800 edition, which swelled to two volumes to include the additional material. Apart from this revision of the grammatical portion, however, the rest of the book — in dual Persian text with English translation throughout — remained much the same through most editions. Those remaining contents, interestingly enough, do seem to reflect the eclectic interdisciplinarity of earlier generations of munshī training — perhaps a byproduct of the help that Gladwin had from so many munshīs who had had such educations. Thus the grammar is followed by Saʿdī Shirazi’s *Pand Nāma*, a collection of poetry in *masnavi* format which Gladwin describes as “A Compendium of Ethics,” and which contains sections on topics such as “In Praise of Beneficence,” “In Praise of Liberality,” “In Censure of Parsimony,” “In Praise of Humility,” “Censure of Arrogance,” “Praise of Knowledge,” “Praise of Justice,” and so on. Obviously, this range of subject matter would have been standard *akhlāqī* fare in any secretarial curriculum.
from earlier times, so it is striking to see it continuing as part of the education of
Company officials. The selection from Saʿdī is followed in later editions by a primer on
the very same type of “Superscriptions of Firmans, Letters, Perwanahs, &c.” the
misapplication of which had so consternated William Bolts in the letter cited above. And
all editions next contain a section called “Specimens of Arabick,” which here clearly
means, simply, examples of different types of Perso-Arabic calligraphy. Clearly, these
latter two sections deal specifically with the epistolary aspects of secretarial expertise,
after which Gladwin tacks once more back to the type of moral wisdom literature found
in the akhlāqī tradition, in a section called “Pleasant Stories in an Easy Style.” These
brief stories, each of which presents a particular social or moral problem to be solved by
a king or “Cazy” (qāzī), are thus intended both to give the student reading practice (they
are, indeed, in an “easy prose style”), and to emphasize the norms of judicial and/or royal
justice in Indo-Persian political culture. Next comes a selection of biographical sketches
“of the philosophers,” excerpted from Ghiyath al-Dīn Khwāndamīr (ca. 1475-1535 CE)’s
Khulāsat al-Akhbār; a list that includes a cast of high-minded characters from both the
Qur’ānic and Greco-Hellenic traditions — from Lukmān to Asclepiades, Pythagoras,
Socrates, Plato, and many others. Again, this emphasis on non-sharʿī sources of wisdom
and learning sits squarely in the akhlāqī tradition.

Clearly, then, Gladwin did seem to have some understanding of what sort of texts made
up a traditional curriculum, and was trying at least partly to emulate that template. The
texts themselves were almost certainly suggested by Gladwin’s own munshīs, which in
and of itself should give us some reason at least to complicate any notions we might have
of a monolithic, top-down British colonial authority enforcing its own understanding of India’s textual canons on an unsuspecting native population powerless to stop them. Then again, just as we begin to flirt with colonial apologia, the final sections of *The Persian Moonshee* should give us pause.

If the sections up to this point have hewed fairly closely to a traditional secretarial curriculum, then it makes sense that the next passage would offer an exemplary work by a master *munshi* — who, in this case, turns out to be none other than our very own Chandar Bhān. The text chosen by Gladwin is a digest culled from the second *chaman* of Chandar Bhān’s magnum opus, *Chahār Chaman* ("The Four Gardens"). This digest had already circulated as a separate piece for at least a century under various names (which are discussed below, Chapter Two), and in *The Persian Moonshee* it is called “Kowayid us Sultanet Shahjehan; or Rules Observed during the Reign of Shahjehan.” But Gladwin’s purpose in including this particular piece of Chandar Bhān’s oeuvre is not entirely clear. The text doesn’t really deal with "Rules" of governance, or at least not of the type that we would expect an East India Company official to try and emulate. Rather, the it is a section of *Chahār Chaman* that seems to have been researched during Chandar Bhān’s time as Shāh Jahān’s *wāqiʿa-navīs*, or personal diarist. It follows the emperor’s activities on a typical day, and thus is far more attuned to courtly ritual, fanfare, and routine than the sort of regulations, ideology, and *akhlāqī* political wisdom that one finds even in other sections of *Chahār Chaman*, or in another text translated by Gladwin in his career, Abū al-Fażl’s *Āʿīn-i Akbarī*. We will examine this text much more closely in Chapter Two, and admittedly, there is no doubt that it would have given the average
Company official an exemplary piece of *inshāʾ* to study, as well as an inkling of what to expect in a Mughal *darbār*. But there is something odd in Gladwin’s decision to emphasize the ostentatious rituals of the court — which did, after all, fit well with the classically Orientalist images of opulent Mughal extravagance — over the many passages in the text which address other issues of justice, good governance, bureaucratic efficiency, and the ideals of using *wazārat* for the good of the people, that one would expect might be more germane to a Company audience that was itself trying to learn how to govern India.

Following the Chandar Bhān excerpt is a series of “phrases and dialogues,” meant to guide the Company official in his interactions with the native *munshīs*, other Persophone elites, and various types of servants and menials in different types of situations that the Company official might find himself. A reading of social hierarchy is coded explicitly in the sample phrases (“Modes of Salutation,” etc.), all of which give examples of typical greetings and replies, making sure to alert the reader to the appropriate language used among those of equal status, superiors to inferiors, and inferiors to superiors. Again, this could simply have been a reflection of the information that Gladwin’s *munshīs* were giving him about social hierarchies as they were negotiated, or it could reflect the British anxiety about their own status, and the need to reaffirm it correctly, with the right linguistic codes, lest people take advantage of them. This question of status, particularly the British high opinion of their own status, rings throughout the “Familiar Dialogues” that follow. Exceedingly complex socio-historical artifacts in their own right, the dialogues begin with an imagined conversation called “Of Reading and Writing,”
between an official and a man he is interviewing as a potential munshi. What strikes one immediately is the degree to which this first imaginary dialogue recognizes the type of training that a munshi was still supposed to have in late Mughal India, and in turn inculcates hints of those norms and expectations to the Company student who will master these dialogues for his entrance exams. He is instructed specifically to ask what canons the prospective employee has mastered. Of course, the text is also dripping with the tension between the British sense of authoritative superiority and the munshi’s almost caricatured humility. And in the end, it becomes clear that the Company official should be far less interested in the munshis’ erudition and classical training than he is in whether or not the fellow can simply teach him how to read and write correctly:

OF READING AND WRITING\textsuperscript{148}

Moonshy, to what extent have you studied? What books have you learnt?

I have read those books that it is customary to study in this country.

What science are you acquainted with, and how many languages are you conversant in?

Grammar and Syntax, and I know a little of Philology (\textit{\'ilm-i lughat}). I can speak Persian, Hindostany (\textit{hindī}), and Bengally.

Do you speak these three languages fluently; (lit. eloquently.) (\textit{ba-fasāhat})

To speak eloquently is every [sic] difficult, but I imitate (mimick) eloquent men.

What books have you read in Persian verse or prose?

\textsuperscript{148} The dialogues are presented in \textit{The Persian Moonshee} with the Persian text and English translation on the same page in two columns. I have left the Persian text out, but have indicated it in parentheses where it seems necessary for clarification.

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I have read two or three Dewans, two or three Masnavies, and two or three books of epistolary or miscellaneous compositions (va do-sih inshâ’ khwândah-am). 149

Are you able to teach a person the letters of Abu Fazl or Tugra?

One who constantly teaches such books, has them fresh in his memory; I have taught but little.

Have you however a good acquaintance with the style of these two books?

I have read the words (lit. the text) (matn) but may perhaps, have here and there, some doubts about the meaning.

Can you read the text with propriety, and do you know the various kinds of Izafas used? 150

I do not pretend to great things, but I will read as well as I can.

Do you write Nustâleek, or Shekusteh? 151

I do not write pure Nustâleek, it is mixt with Shekusteh.

Is your hand formed by rule, or is it formed by mere habit? (khatt-i shumâ islâhî ast yâ tab’î)

I learnt for some time, from a fine writer (az khush-navîs islâh giriftah bûdam), and have since practiced with copies.

Have you practiced in large or small, or middling hands?

I have not practiced large hand much, but have for the most part written with a middling pen, and I sometimes also write small.

149 Note that, as I have argued above, for this imagined munshî too inshâ’ is not just epistolary, but also includes “miscellaneous compositions.” The single word inshâ’ in the Persian text is translated in the English to indicate both.

150 Most Persian manuscripts, and even modern printed editions, do not indicate where the izâfâs (conjunctive particles) are intended by the author, despite the fact that they are crucial to the meaning of any given phrase, sentence, or verse. This can be very frustrating for non-native speakers and students, whose vocabularies are limited, and for whom the correct placement of izâfâs is not intuitive. Here our imaginary Company official is clearly trying to make sure that whoever he hires will be able to help him in this regard.

151 Two different styles of calligraphy, the “descending” (nasta’îq) and “broken” (shikasta).
Bring a specimen of your hand writing to-morrow, and I will see whether it be a settled hand or not.

I will write a few lines, and present them to you; tho' not worthy, perhaps, of being presented.

How much per month will you accept of, tell me true?

You sir, are the best judge of my deserts; be pleased to appoint me what may suffice for my support.

Whom did you serve before? And what had you per month?

I was with such and such a gentleman, and I had so much per month.

What work did that gentleman employ you in; and how many hours did you attend?

I used to go at ten o'clock, and he learnt of me till noon.

What did he learn, and how much trouble did he take; and how many lines did he get by heart?

He learnt the Persian language, and used to get by heart a page of (infinitive) verbs, with their inflections.

Did he also begin some book; or did he merely learn to speak the language?

Persian Grammar, and the book called Anwar Soheilee, he also read.

What kind of genius had he; did he clearly comprehend the meaning?

He had a very good disposition for learning; and quickly comprehended the sense.

At last, did he attain to some proficiency in reading; or did he continue in the same state?

During the time that I was with him, he had acquired skill in the Persian style/

Did you quit his service; or did he discharge you?

I was sick, and he entertained another Moonshy.
Well, I engage you; I will give so much per month.

For the present, I agree to this, and hope afterwards to obtain a suitable maintenance.

Come every day, before I go to the Court-house.

Shall I write something and bring it; or is the paradigm of verbs at hand, in the house?

Write and bring the Persian infinitives, with the inflections of each verb.

Be pleased, sir, to give me some paper; in two or three days, I will write and bring them.

I give good paper, do your part also, and write a good hand.

To-day I have brought a section of writing; be pleased to begin.

Even within Gladwin's more appreciative understanding of the classical learning and normative traditions of the secretarial arts, there is a clear sense from this dialogue that questions of trust, verification, and a more basic instrumental skill set were the paramount concerns of Company officials. They needed munshīs teach them the right scripts and vocabularies, and they would do the rest on their own. Indeed, this attitude is quite evident when the question of the imaginary employee's former employer comes up: the Official simply asks the prospective munshī whether the man had learned "some book" (bāz hīc kitāb ham shurū' kard?); which book almost seemed not to matter, for it was not a question of having their munshīs impart content and classical norms, but rather a simple question of practice and functional learning.
The rest of the sample dialogues in *The Persian Moonshee* further reflect this moment of transition from the classical traditions of high learning and cultured civility that were the habitus of pre- and early modern *munshīs* like Chandar Bhān. The “moonshee” now emerges simply as an intermediary between the Company officials and those who serve them — an earlier version of Macaulay’s “interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern.” Thus in the next sample dialogue, “Of Going to the Court House, &c,” the *munshī* becomes the translator of British discipline to refractory peons:

**OF GOING TO THE COURT HOUSE, &c**

Send a peon to bring intelligence from the Court house, whether the Court is sitting or not.

The peon has brought intelligence from the Court house; the people are assembling, but as yet the Court is not sitting.

Send him again to remain there, and when one of the judges comes, to give me notice.

The peon has brought word, that the judges are come, and are sitting in court.

Call the bearers quickly, that they may get ready the Palkee, I will ride.

The servant bearers are gone on some business; if you command me, I will send for some hackney bearers.

On what business are they gone; and who has sent them?

Four persons are gone to bring fire-wood, and four to bring water.

Another time don’t let them go, on any business, without my order; if they do I will beat them (*bār-i dīgar bī-hukm-i man barā-yi hīc kār naravand; agar khwāhīd raft man khwāhīm zad)*...

Leaving aside the fact that fetching firewood and water for the household seem like reasonable enough errands, undeserving of corporal punishment, here the *munshī* comes
across almost as a valet, or a head manservant who runs the Company official’s household for him. The latter need not — indeed cannot — speak to the peons himself, so he must go through the munshi. Thus the image of the munshi in British eyes becomes less and less about any role they might have had, or could continue to have, in formulating and carrying on the canons of Indo-Persian literary and political norms, and increasingly about being all-purpose personal assistants. The remaining sample dialogues continue to give this impression, as Gladwin’s imagined munshis help to organize everything from the properly administrative (“On Administering Justice,” “Of Law Proceedings”) to the recreational (“Of an Excursion,” “Of a Garden”), and even the truly mundane (“Of Purchasing Land,” “Of Building,” “Of Purchasing Horses, &c,” “Orders to a Khansaman,” “Of Sickness, &c”).

Indeed, it is here that we begin to see clearly how the munshi starts to switch over from being an admired repository of learning — integral to literary and political culture at the highest levels, crucial members of the “assemblies of the learned” — to being more like the “fixers” that modern journalists rely on when they travel to unfamiliar countries — “they do more than translate for us, they fix our problems.”

The transition does not happen right away, because elements of the erstwhile traditions are clearly still in place, even in Gladwin’s vision. Manan Ahmed’s recent work has also shown the degree to which the nineteenth-century British continued to use munshis both

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in their older modes of deploying high scholarly learning, and as “fixers” who worked as intermediaries, spies, and proxy diplomats along the northwestern frontiers of expanding British territory in Sindh and Central Asia.153 Moreover, the high standards of learning and cultured civility that had been the norm do continue to hold sway for some decades among an elite few. Some of those who lived up to such standards, such as Raja Shiv Prasad and Munshī Naval Kishore, would go on to become very influential in nineteenth-century Indian literary culture.154 Naval Kishore Press, in fact, was instrumental in keeping the textual traditions of inshāʾ alive through their many litho editions of letter collections (including, incidentally, the only printing of Chandar Bhān’s Munshaʾāt prior to the recent 2004 edition edited by S. H. Qasimi).

Indeed, Naval Kishore Press also texts which show that despite the ebb in the munshīs’ status, the range of possible topics which could be characterized as inshāʾ still had the capacity to grow well into the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries. Inshāʾ even started broadening to include subject matter of a distinctly European provenance, a trend perhaps best exemplified by a somewhat surprising entry referring to a text called Inshāʾ- yi Asrār-i Farīmīsan (“Writings on the Secrets of the Freemasons”) in the 1879 Nawal Kishore Press catalogue (Fihrīst-i Kutub). This book continued to be in print at least as late as 1941, when another Nawal Kishore catalogue explained its contents in the


following cryptic words: “If you need to learn the secrets of the Freemasons, then you can purchase the book Inshā’-yi Aṣrār-i Fīrāmaisān, upon reading which all secrets will become clearly reflected back unto you” (agar fīrāmaisān ke asrār ma’lūm karnā haiN to kitāb Inshā’-yi Aṣrār-i Fīrāmaisān kharīdiye jis ke paRhne par tamām rāz āp ke āpar ā’īnah ho jā’en ge).\[155\\]

Despite these continued possibilities, inshā’ too was on the wane in the face of nineteenth-century efforts to encourage writing styles that were allegedly more modern and necharal. Eventually, too, though the image of the munshī continued to be one of erudition and gentlemanliness among Indo-Persian elites, as indicated by isolated examples like Ghalib’s letters, or the character of Munshī Sāhib in the classic Urdu novel Umrao Jān Ādā, increasingly the term munshī began to signify a man whose existence was entirely bureaucratic and functional, or worse still, was slick and untrustworthy precisely because of his fancy way with words, his ability to manipulate language and meaning to his own advantage. As the bureaucrats and clerks who mediated between the populace and the British masters, their very eloquence and facility with language was precisely what gave them the means to dissemble and cheat those who depended on their services (cf. Skinner on Hobbes, the critique of eloquence, and the growth of “civil science”).

As this latter image — which was already incipient in Balfour and Davy’s attitudes — began to crystallize, it also coalesced with the increasingly common opinion that Persian

\[155\] I am grateful to Ulrike Stark for this reference.
was a language exclusively of the erstwhile Muslim conquerors, and so too, by extension, was the newly defined, Muslim "Urdu." The scholarly bibliography on this latter process of defining Urdu as "Muslim" is extensive, so there is no need to go into detail here. But what interests me here is the way that, as Urdu and Persian came increasingly to be defined exclusively as Muslim languages, the munshi, too, became increasingly defined as being a specifically Muslim role. Never mind the legacy of great Hindu munshi like Chandar Bhān, or even the continuing influence of great nineteenth-century munshi like Raja Shiv Prasad and Munshi Naval Kishore; the sense that a munshi was one who wrote in Persian and Urdu, and therefore must be a Muslim, became increasingly prevalent.

This despite, of course, the fact that even as late as Gladwin’s Persian Moonshee the imaginary interlocutor describes his spoken language as “Hindi” — which Gladwin, significantly, translates as “Hindustānī,” as if already gesturing toward the emergent process of splitting Hindi from Urdu. And thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the great Hindi-Devanagari promoter Bhartendu Harishchandra (1850-1885 CE) could make this conflation of munshi and Muslim explicit. In his now infamous letter to the 1882 Hunter Commission investigating colonial education — in which, among other things, he complained that “Urdu is the language of dancing girls and prostitutes” — he railed against the “guttural” Perso-Arabic letters like ‘ain (א) and ghāf (ג), and complained specifically of the danger of naïve, unsuspecting Hindus being tricked by manipulative munshi at the courthouse, on whom they unfairly had to depend to get their administrative business done. This conflation of munshi and Muslim was completed in Harishchandra’s poetic “Lament for Urdu” (Urdu kā Syāpā), in which “Begum Urdu” has died, and Arabic, Persian, Pashto, and Punjabi stand around wailing:
hai hai urdū hāy hāy
kahān sidhārī hāy hāy
merī pyārī hāy hāy
munshī mullāh hāy hāy

O Urdu, alas, alas
Where have you gone, alas, alas
My beloved, alas, alas
The munshīs and mullāhs say, alas, alas!¹⁵⁶

One might just as easily say, then, that Harishchandra was announcing not just the death of Urdu, but also the closing of the book on the classical traditions that had informed the worldview of munshiyān-i haqīqī like Chandar Bhān.

Neither they, nor the textual tradition of inshā’, have been remembered quite the same way since.

CHAPTER TWO

A Mirror for Munshīs: Chahār Chaman and the Craft of Artistic Prose

The previous chapter offered a broad survey of the role of īnshāʿ and munshīs in Indo-Persian imperial culture over the centuries. In this chapter we will tighten our gaze and focus on a close reading of the first two volumes of Chandar Bhān’s prose magnum opus, Chahār Chaman (“The Four Gardens”), treating it as an exemplary composite work of īnshāʿ. All the tools in the munshī’s kit are present, and thus this text can teach us a lot about Shāh Jahān’s court, Chandar Bhān’s view of his cultural milieu, and most importantly for present purposes, the breadth of īnshāʿ as a form of expression. Apart from the brief section excerpted by Gladwin, Chahār Chaman has not previously been translated, and it has never, to my knowledge, been analyzed carefully with an eye to its contents, multiple compositional styles, or overall vision of imperial life and the role of the secretarial arts therein.

As we’ll see, many of the themes discussed in Chapter One will be invoked throughout Chahār Chaman, sometimes explicitly, and sometimes merely by implication, with a presumption that Chandar Bhān’s audience will know what he’s getting at. Epistolary norms played a definite part in Chandar Bhān’s understanding of what the genre could — and should — encompass. But epistolary writing made up just one subset of a much larger horizon of generic possibility, which also included belles-lettres, ādāb and akhlāq,
military victory propaganda, administrative reportage, autobiography, different types of musings on everything from literature and philosophy to the culture of street performers, coffee houses, and the thriving book market in Lahore. Before jumping into the text, though, a few words about the symbolic and generic peculiarities of a text like Chahār Chaman.

_Eternal Spring in the Four Gardens of Empire:_
_The Symbolic Framework of Chahār Chaman_

One of the first projects organized by Bābur upon his conquest of north India had been to build a _chahār-bāgh_, or a quadrangular parterre garden in the Perso-Islamic style. Notoriously dismissive of India’s good qualities, Bābur tells us in his memoir: “I always thought one of the chief faults of Hindustan was that there was no running water. Everywhere that was habitable it should be possible to construct waterwheels, create running water, and make planned, geometric spaces.” His initial efforts at Agra were, however, thwarted by the uncooperative landscape, which “was so unpleasant and desolate that I crossed back [across the Jumna] in great disgust.” Still, he continues, “there was nothing to do but work with the space we had”; so Bābur went ahead with his plans, eventually succeeding in transforming the landscape somewhat to his liking. “Thus,” he informs us with almost charming smugness, “in unpleasant and inharmonious India, marvelously regular and geometric gardens were introduced.”

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Such gardens were, of course, not simply recreational spaces — either in Bābur’s mind or in the Perso-Islamic worldview generally. Rather, they were meant to be earthly reflections of cosmic spatial harmony and the cool, running waters presumed to exist in paradise.² And indeed, Bābur planned and built such gardens just about everywhere he settled for more than a brief period in his peripatetic career.³ Yet interestingly enough, as the above passage shows, he seems always to have been flexible enough to accommodate his idealized vision of geometrical balance and harmony, along with his drive to transform the landscape to suit that vision, to local circumstances. Thus despite his antipathy toward the natural landscape around Agra, he managed to adapt his chahār-


³ For instance his Bagh-i Wafā (“Garden of Fidelity”) at Kabul. See Babur, *Baburnama*, 156-7.
bāgh plans not only to fit the surrounding terrain, but also to incorporate local flora such as the tamarind tree, which he calls “the date of India.”

Of course, the Mughals would become famous for their many garden projects over the next few centuries. But even more significantly, we see here in Bābur’s early attempts a horticultural hint of the kind of strategies that would come to characterize the Mughals’ approach to empire-building generally: namely, a combination of grand transformative enterprises, tempered by adaptations and accommodative gestures to the local Indic context. The garden thus becomes not only a metaphor for paradise, but also for the empire; and it is fitting, then, that Agra would itself later become home in Shāh Jahān’s reign to perhaps the most famous chahār-bāgh complex in the world, the Tāj Mahal.

Agra would also become home, incidentally, to a far less famous garden, built by Chandar Bhān Brahman himself, and known eponymously simply as the Bāgh-i Chandar Bhān. And perhaps purely by historical coincidence (as if merely to fulfill the promise of the extended metaphor that I am laying out here), it just so happens that Chandar Bhān began his administrative career working for one Mīr ‘Abd al-Karīm, who at the time was superintendent of buildings in Chandar Bhān’s hometown of Lahore, but eventually went on to be one of the key supervisors of the construction of the Tāj.

Bearing all of these traces and echoes in mind, then, it is not at all coincidental that Chandar Bhān decided to name his prose magnum opus Chahār Chaman. For this too, in

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4 Babur, Baburnama, 345.
a sense, is a nod to the power of the *chahār-bāgh* as an imperial and paradisiacal metaphor. Both terms simply mean “four-garden,” but as a technical term in landscape architecture a “chahār-chaman” usually referred either to the central plot of the *chahār-bāgh*, or to one quadrangle which could itself be subdivided into cultivated quadrants criss-crossed by walkways, encircling the central pool. Thus in a very literal sense the book invokes the principles of gardening and the Perso-Islamic tradition of human power over the landscape epitomized by the *chahār-bāgh*. But in a larger sense, Chandar Bhān is also simultaneously asserting the organic beauty of his own language, invoking the transformative power of landscape cultivation implicit in Babur’s and all subsequent Mughal gardens, and thus connecting his linguistic dexterity to the overall imperial project.

Indeed, if the previous chapter has demonstrated anything, it’s that what lies at the heart of so much of the *inshā*’ canon is precisely this type of self-conscious connection between the *munshī*’s verbal prowess and the state’s power. But the power of *inshā*’ could also transform the individual, and thus the metaphor of cultivation takes on a dual meaning. If on the one hand cultivation of the garden stands as a metaphor for the transformative power of the Mughal state — along with its ability to adapt its idealized vision to local exigencies — it also represents the transformative power of language, i.e. the cultivation of the self through well-tended cultural refinement, literary skill, the mastery of *akhlāqī* norms of etiquette, and so on. Like many other poets in the Persophene ecumene, the Chandar Bhān draws consistently in *Chahār Chaman* on a larger set of literary codes which, in the words of one Ottoman scholar, “merged the topoi
of romantic love, the mystical yearning for union with god, and [poets’] longing for the psychological and material benefits of royal favor,” and thereby “created a direct chain of metaphors linking the garden, the rose, the beloved, the sultan, the sun, and God.” All of the imagery in a work like Chahār Chaman, some of it admittedly quite florid, should be seen in this larger context, as offering a vision of the harmonious balance among nature, the cosmos, human society, imperial power, and of course the symbolic power of the author’s own words.

The Question of Genre:
Introductory Notes on Chandar Bhān’s Prose Oeuvre

In the preface to his collected letters, or Munsha’āt-i Brahman, Chandar Bhān has listed his life works as follows:

[After his youth] This feeble ant found employment drafting imperial mandates obeyed by the entire world, and the poems of this infinitesimal speck attained a measure of approbation. In the course of time, I composed a dīwān of ghazals and a masnavī, as well as a few other works, such as Gulūstāna, Chahār Chaman, Tuhfat al-Anwār, Kār-Nāmah, Tuhfat al-Fusahā, Majma‘ al-Fuqarā, and others besides those.6

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6 Munsha’āt-i Brahman, MS, Aligarh Muslim University Azad Library, ‘Abd al-Salaam Coll. #294/64, fol. 2a. N.b., the recently published edition of S. H. Qasemi and Waqrul Hasan Siddiqi, based on a manuscript in the National Museum, New Delhi, has slightly different wording, and lists a work called Tuhfat al-Wuzarā in place of Tuhfat al-Anwār above.
Of the texts listed here, very few have actually survived. Indeed, aside from the Divan-i Brahman (which will be discussed in the next chapter) and the Munsha’at itself, only the first two (of these six) are known to still exist. It is not entirely clear why the rest of these titles failed to merit the time and energy of manuscript copyists, especially when one considers Chandar Bhān’s renown during his own era, not to mention the hundreds of manuscripts of his Munsha’at, Chahār Chaman, Guldasta (a.k.a. Qawā‘id al-Saltanat), and Divan that are scattered in libraries and private collections around the world. Be that as it may, the only one of the other works listed here that seems to have any traceability at all is the Tuḥfat al-Fusahā, which appears to have been a short tazkira (biographical compendium) of Mughal poets.

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7 Ironically, several other miscellaneous works attributed to Chandar Bhan (possibly the kind of thing he meant by the catch-all “and others besides”) have survived. Foremost among these are: his Persian translation of Dara Shukoh’s “Hindi” dialogues with the yogi Baba Lal Dayal; a brief calendar sketch of Delhi kings, from Yuudhishtrira all the way up to Shah Jahan, entitled Tārikh-i Rajah-hā-yi Dehlī; and another translation somewhat dubiously (but consistently) attributed to him, of Shankaracharya’s Atma-Vilasa.

8 The Iranian Scholar Ahmad Gulcin Ma‘ānī, in his Tārikh-i Tazkirah-ha-yi Farsi [“History of Persian Tazkiras”], volume 1 (Tehran: University of Tehran, 1348 AH. [1969 CE]), 631-2, lists a text that he calls Risālah-i Brahman, “written by Chandar Bhān Brahman ‘Akbarābādī’ around the middle of the eleventh century [AH].” If authentic, perhaps this could be a version of Tuḥfat al-Fusahā (or “Gift of the Eloquents,” a typical enough title for a tazkira). Gulcin Ma‘ānī describes it as “a short tazkira of poets from the age of Akbar up to the author’s contemporaries,” and quotes these further details taken from an article in the 1317 [al-Shams] issue of Majallah-i Kābul, by ‘Abdullah Khān Qārī, “Malik al-Shu’arā-yi Afghanistan”:

Risālah-i Chandar Bhān Brahman...is a tazkira of Hindi and Persian poets (shu‘arā-yi hindī va pārsī-gū‘ī)...a short pamphlet (risālah) giving information on poets who had traveled to India and/or had India as their residence, from the age of Akbar up to his own era. In the exposition (tarjumah) he has noted only a single couplet or quatrain from each poet, and at the beginning of the pamphlet some of the poets from Iran and Turan that never came to India are also mentioned. This Risālah is in the personal library of Professor Āzar Lāhorī, and the manuscript that I have consulted has 13 folios...it doesn’t have a date, but it appears such that it was probably copied in the eleventh century Hijrī [i.e. during, or very near to, Chandar Bhān’s own lifetime]. The writer [copyist?] has referred to this work by the name of Risālah, and does not give any other title.

I have been unsuccessful thus far in my attempts to confirm whether or not this manuscript still exists, and if so where it might currently be housed. But even if this single manuscript of the Risālah (possibly Tuḥfat...
In any event, one important inference that we can draw from this list is that Chandar Bhān clearly doesn’t distinguish generically among these various prose works. It would perhaps be too big a stretch to then conclude that all six could have been categorized as *inshā’* — but it should not be ruled out either. We have seen already in chapter one the degree to which nailing down a generic definition of *inshā’* is quite difficult. A closer look at Chandar Bhān’s three main surviving works brings this categorical difficulty into even sharper relief, and to a certain degree destabilizes our very notion of what constituted a prose text during this period.

To reiterate, I noted earlier that Mahmud Gāwān’s fifteenth-century typology of *inshā’* — dividing into two general categories, the “epistolary” (*tarassul*) and the “literary” (*khutab*) — should be viewed as a fluid set of ideal types rather than as fixed categories (see above, Chapter One). Historians have, however, tended to choose the opposite strategy, and treated Gāwān’s ideal types as reified, distinct subgenres of *inshā’*. As a result, nearly the entire corpus so-called “literary” *inshā’* (large portions of Chahār Chaman, for instance) has been relegated to practically orphan status. Neither literary scholars (who focus almost exclusively on poetry), nor historians (who treat only of such texts as provide names, dates, and the other “documentary” building blocks of historical narrative), have examined this fulsome archive with any kind of serious attention to the

*al-Fusahā*) could one day be located, the main point here is still the case — namely, that apart from his *Munsha’āt, Chahār Chaman,* and *Guldasta* (a.k.a. *Qawā’id al-Saltanat*), and despite great popularity in his own day, barely half of the works that Chandar Bhān claims to have written have actually survived to the present day.
balance between their documentary and their expressive, artistic, or “worklike” qualities.\(^9\)

Even those scholars who have acknowledged the fluidity of the various forms, such as Riyazul Islam, often do so only in passing, and proceed in turn to give extremely short shift to any inshā’ production that does not either fit neatly into the category of epistolary collections, or offer much in the way of empirical data.\(^10\)

What, then, to do with Chandar Bhān’s major prose works? Traditionally, they have been treated as separate compositions, and of course in some sense they actually are. The most obvious evidence in favor of this interpretation is that Chandar Bhān himself compiled and circulated them under separate titles. The Munsha ‘āt is a relatively straightforward collection of letters, and thus slips very easily into the category of pure, epistolary inshā’.

But what about Chahār Chaman and Guldasta? Both of these works deal with life at the court. Chahār Chaman contains four volumes, or “gardens,” each of which focuses on a


\(^10\) As Islam himself curtsy puts it, “We are concerned in this work with the second form of Inshā’, the tarassul.” And yet even he admits that: “The two forms are indeed closely connected and none of them can be studied in isolation. Both the forms of Inshā’ have essentially the same purpose—the presentation of ma’nā (meaning, purpose, intention, a subject) in an elegant form and in a manner suited to the subject and the occasion. Many letters were composed essentially as literary pieces, with an epistolary phrase added at the beginning or the end to give it the frame of a letter. Many a theme were [sic] common to both the forms. It may therefore be legitimately remarked that for a munshī to become proficient in the art of tarassul, it was necessary first to train himself in the khutab or the purely literary Inshā’.” *Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations (1500-1750)*, volume 1 (Tehran: Iranian Culture Foundation; Karachi: Institute of Central and West Asian Studies, 1979), 1-2.
different aspect of courtly life. The first two volumes describe various social occasions and festivals, including a detailed account of the emperor’s daily routine. The latter half of chaman two also contains a geopolitical survey of the major provinces and cities of the empire (see Appendix). This chapter will focus on chamans one and two (which comprise the first two-thirds of the text), but I hope in future work to add an analysis of parts three and four as well. They follow up the didactic and akhlāqi sensibility in the earlier sections with a much more personal focus, conveying through directly autobiographical sketches and through Chandar Bhān’s “epistolary self” a great deal of personal information about the author, his family history (including the passage quoted above in Chapter One), his relationship with various patrons, friends, family members and fellow poets, and finally some aphoristic musings on various topics, from mysticism to the art of eloquence. These are all topics of great interest, but given that almost none of this text has been substantively critiqued before, it seemed pressing in the first instance to go, as comprehensively as possible, through the earlier sections that cultivate a particular vision of Mughal political culture and the munshi’s role in it.

Scattered throughout the entire text are numerous letters, some by others, and many by Chandar Bhān himself. But those letters that are by Chandar Bhān himself are mostly grouped together in chaman three, and nearly all of them are also contained in most versions of the Munsha’āt. Guldasta, for its part, turns out upon closer inspection to be nearly a word for word excerpt of certain key passages of the first two chamans, particularly the sections on the emperor’s daily activities. So apart from a panegyric
qasīda that is usually appended at the beginning, it is hard to think of it as a completely separate work.

Upon closer examination, then, we see that in many ways Chahār Chaman, Munsha‘āt-i Brahman, and Guldasta are in fact less like separate texts and more like different registers of the same larger work, partial adumbrations of a composite master inshā' text of which Chahār Chaman is the closest full approximation. And yet, so persistent is the latter-day assumption that inshā' is either “documentary” or historically inconsequential that Chahār Chaman and Guldasta — both of which were clearly considered to be very important works, if the number of manuscripts in early modern circulation is any indication — have often been mischaracterized as works of history, as if by the sheer force of the proposition that “important source” = historical document.

One can add to this generic instability a sense of brute textual instability. Again, the first two, and by far the most famous chamans, each contain various portraits of courtly life under Shāh Jahān. It is, however, quite difficult to say which one actually begins the text. Some manuscripts contain a lengthy preface, and some do not; and sometimes this preface is included later in the text. Worse still, so many manuscripts reverse the order of the first two “gardens” that it is, in fact, almost impossible at this point to say which one Chandar Bhān actually intended to be first — a difficulty that contributes mightily to the larger sense of textual instability here. Rarely do two manuscripts of Chahār Chaman ever fully agree on either the complete contents or, as is most often the case, the order of
the text’s contents. This does not mean, however, that the text is so variable and inconsistent that no relatively authoritative version of Chahār Chaman is possible.

Indeed, one “critical edition” has already been attempted based on the earliest known manuscript, and a critical edition collating the oldest available manuscripts would be another possible desideratum, which could possibly clarify some of this instability. The recent printed edition edited by Yunus Ja’fri, and Muhammad Murtaza Qadiri’s recent Urdu translation are both important steps in this direction. But neither these recent editions, nor even a hypothetical critical edition, would resolve the main issue here, which is inshā’s more fundamental generic instability. Since it is not a narrative genre, the need to delineate contents in an orderly fashion was simply not of paramount concern for the text’s early modern audience. Scribe after scribe, copyist after copyist, scholar after scholar, has basically seen the order of many of the various sections and subsections as practically interchangeable — an approach that could only be possible with respect to a text and genre that does not depend on linear narrative for its expressive power. And Chahār Chaman happens to be an especially powerful test case for this proposition, given its composite nature. It incorporates anecdotes (afsānahs), poetry, royal edicts, imperial

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11 Compare, for instance, the order of Ja’fri’s printed edition with that of British Library MS Or. 1892, and Azad Library MS, ‘Abd al-Salām collection #293/63, Aligarh. Both of these manuscripts begin chaman two with the descriptive catalogue of the subās of Hindustan rather than the account of the emperor’s daily routine. In fact, the geographical account is all that’s in chaman 2 of the Aligarh ms. The Azad library also has a manuscript called Inshā’-i Chahār Chaman (Jawāhir Museum Collection #412), which was copied in 1139 AH, i.e. during Muhammad Shah’s reign, about 60 years after CB’s death. It shows that there was some fluidity about the Munsha’āt too, for despite the title this ms is basically a copy of the Munsha’āt — as one later cataloguer, who penciled in “Munsha’āt-i Brahman” in the front matter, seems to have noticed.


reportage, epistolography, and ruminations on numerous other aspects of courtly and mystical life in Mughal India. In so doing, the text takes all the various components of a munshi’s stock-in-trade, and tries to assemble all these discreet units into a coherent snapshot of the entire inshā’ genre.

_The Intertwining Contents of Chahār Chaman, Guldasta, and Qawā‘id al-Saltanat_

Bearing in mind all the above caveats, for present purposes we will follow the order given in Yunus Ja‘fri’s recent printed edition, in which the first two chamans are introduced by the following headings:

- First Garden, containing all the freshness and succulence of the roses of eternal spring in this eternal empire, and a description of the special features of its assemblies, festivals, conversations, boon, gifts, and victories.

- Second Garden, arranged as a rose-bouquet (guldasta) from the delicate flower-garden (gulshan-i uftāda), containing branch and leaf, and fruit and the blossoming result (bār-āsār) of the daily increasing power of the Empire.

Again, the garden metaphor with which we began this chapter is quite pronounced, and contains multiple significations. On one level, there is the emperor as beneficent cultivator, the various festivals and courtly trappings as flowers in the imperial garden.
There is even a sly double-meaning in the turn of phrase “daily-increasing empire,” which contains the sense not only of the territorial expansion of Mughal power, but also of the upward growth of a properly tended garden, which gets stronger and more beautiful through cultivation.

On yet another level, Chandar Bhān sets himself also as a kind of literary florist, ornamenting the empire with his prose, arranging it as a bouquet (guldasta) which he presents to the reading public. This is significant in part because it reinforces one major argument of this thesis — that munshīs saw themselves (and were seen by others) not as mere bureaucrats, but part of the elite literary establishment — and also because of his word choice. *Guldasta*, as mentioned above, was also the name that Chandar Bhān chose for another of his works, a work that has generally been treated as completely distinct from *Chahār Chaman*. But this text too has a complicated and unstable textual history, and a closer look shows that Chandar Bhān’s own title of “Guldasta” came over time to be morphed into the longer (*Guldasta-i*) Qawā‘id al-Saltanat (*-i Shāh Jahān*). In Aligarh’s Azad library alone there are at least six manuscripts of this text, nearly every one of which refers to it by a different title — and sometimes by different titles within the same copy!\(^{14}\) And this phenomenon could easily be replicated with reference to the manuscripts housed all over India and in England.

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\(^{14}\) For instance: 1) ’Abd al-Salām collection, #289/59, originally copied in Bengal in 1209 AH, seems originally to have originally referred to it as per the colophon, which gives the title *Guldasta-i Qawā‘id al-Saltanat*, with someone later adding “*-i Shāh Jahān*”; 2) ’Abd al-Salām collection, #291/61b, copied during Shah ‘Alam’s reign in 1194 AH, lists it in the front matter as *Guldasta-i Saltanat*, while the colophon simply calls it *Guldasta-i Chandar Bhān Munshi*; 3) Subhān Allah collection #891’5528/20, copied in 1146 [1126?] AH, describes it variously in the front matter as *Guldasta-i Munshi Chandar Bhān* or *Guldasta az Tasnīf-i Chandar Bhān Munshi*, and in the colophon as *Guldasta az Tasnīf-i Chandar Bhān Brahman; 4)
In fact, despite the fact that it was never referred to by Chandar Bhān himself as anything other than *Guldasta*, the work is far better known today by this ex-post-facto name, *Qawā‘id al-Saltanat-i Shāh Jahān*. It is not at all clear why this nominal shift became necessary, though of course it could have begun simply by way of scribal clarification. That is, we might speculate that the very vagueness of the title “Bouquet” would have led many copyists and cataloguers to try to clarify the manuscript’s contents: either by pointing to Chandar Bhān himself as the author (cf. *Guldasta-i Munshī Chandar Bhān*); or to *Chahār Chaman* (from which this work is an extract); or to the work’s basic contents, which have to do with life at the court, political culture, and thus, “governance” (*saltanat*). Given the subject matter — i.e. a description of the rituals, customs, and activities at Shah Jahan’s court, and the emperor’s daily routine — and since, in addition to falling under the category of *inshā‘* the text could also be seen as a contribution to the *ādāb* and *akhlāq* traditions, a title like *Qawā‘id al-Saltanat* (“Norms of Governance”) makes a great deal of sense. Such a title would invoke, moreover, an already established tradition of similarly titled writings on political culture dating back at least to Abū al-Hasan al Māwardī (d. 1058 CE)’s *al-Ahkām al-Sultaṇīya*, and theoretical approaches to what Mīr Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī (d. 1384 CE)’s *Zakhīrat al-Mulūk* referred to as “the principles of the form and substance of power and governance” (*lawāżīm-i qawā‘id-i

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Suleiman Collection #664/42, copied in 1196 AH, refers to the text in the colophon as *Guldasta, mausūm ba-Qawā‘id al-Saltanat*; 5) Suleiman Collection #664/44, which is missing a colophon, also refers to the text by both names; and finally 6) Habib Ganj Collection #56/1 refers to the text in one place as *Qawā‘id al-Saltanat-i Shāh Jahān*, but notes that it has been copied from a fellow scribe’s version of *Chahār Chaman*. 

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sultanat-i suwarî-o-ma'navî). Indeed, over the course of the eighteenth century, the title *Qawâ'id al-Sultanat-i Shâh Jahân* seems to have grown in popularity until finally nearly all trace of the original title, *Guldasta*, had disappeared — a process that culminates with Gladwin's version, "Kowayid us Sultanet Shah Jahan; or Rules Observed at Court during the Reign of Shahjehan."

But of course, in its original context as a digest of *Chahâr Chaman*, the title *Guldasta* also makes perfect sense, extending the text's original, organic metaphor as a "Bouquet" plucked from the "Four Gardens." It emphasizes the organic physicality of the excerpting process, and the image of the litterateur as the cultivator of expressive beauty, pruning a paradisiacal imperial garden.

All of these overlaps, multiple titles, and textual interpenetrations push us far beyond the usual text-analytical anxieties — about manuscript variants, scribal peccadilloes, and so on — and into a more radical situation where it is not entirely clear where one text begins and the other one ends. As the list quoted above indicates, Chandar Bhan himself certainly saw the *Munsha'ât, Chahâr Chaman*, and *Guldasta* as different works, and thus we should try to do so too. But given the complications just outlined, perhaps our very notion of what makes a work of *inshâ’* a "work" needs to be much more flexible. Unlike, say, *târîkh* (historical chronicle) or *masnavi* (romantic epic), *inshâ’* does not require linear narrative; and unlike *tazkira* (biographical compendium) or a number of other

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15 Quoted in Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 43. For details on both of these texts and their cultural context, see the entire chapter, "*Shari'a, Akhlaq, and Governance,*" 26-80.
prose subgenres, *inshā' * is not defined by its contents, which could be almost anything. Indeed, in its most expansive sense just about any work of refined prose could fall into the larger category of *inshā'*, and thus in many ways *inshā' * might more productively be understood as a stylistic register, rather than a distinct genre.\(^{16}\) And this is why nearly every attempt to adhere to strict categorical classifications (such as Gāwān’s ideal types), or to insist on one particular style of *inshā’* (such as the epistolary) as the “true *inshā*’” has in the final result tended to be dismissive or exclusionary rather than clarificatory.

To sum up, then, locating Chandar Bhan’s prose oeuvre generically presents us with some very striking difficulties, many of which raise larger questions about how the very category *inshā’* has been defined in modern scholarship. These difficulties clearly cannot be resolved here, as they will require a great deal of ongoing research. Rather than continue to belabor these generic conundrums, perhaps it is best to move on to the text itself, and see what it contains.

*The Secretary’s Spectating Eye*

As one might infer from the foregoing discussion, one of the great challenges of analyzing *Chahār Chaman* is deciding where to begin. But since the state of present research does not allow us to say definitively what order Chandar Bhān himself arranged

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\(^{16}\) Indeed, even travel narratives (*safar-nāmahs*) could fall under the rubric of *inshā’*. For instance, at least one manuscript of the famous eighteenth-century travelogue of Dargāh Qulī Khān — well-known today as *Murqqa’-i Dehlī* (“Portrait Album of Delhi”), the title given to it by Hakīm Sāyyid Muzaffar Husain for his modern published version — refers to the text simply as *Inshā’-i Dargāh Qulī Khan*. For details see introduction to Dargāh Qulī Khān, *Murqqa’-i Dehlī* (*Fārsī Matn aur Urdu Tarjuma*), edited and translated by Khāliq Anjum (New Delhi: Anjuman-i Taraqqi Urdu, 1993), 45-6.
the text in, I will follow the most practical course, and key the analysis to Yûnus Ja‘fri’s printed edition.\textsuperscript{17}

Chandar Bhân introduces the first \textit{chaman} with the following prelude:

Even though in this age adorned by the felicity and prosperity of his most exalted majesty—the sovereign of the times, the world-conqueror, and treasure-bestowing emperor, who is bounteous as the sea, and the earthly shadow of the divine splendorous presence—a new social occasion takes place every day, and fabulous assemblies and festivals are arranged every month and every year; and from [all] six directions an amber-sweetened zephyr of victory and conquest wafts into nostrils eager for a whiff of its grace; and there is no way to measure or count the trappings of the court and the imperial apparatus of this eternal caliphate; and if from the very beginning of this spring of empire and fortune the pen of narration were to commit to writing the details of the day-increasing [-lengthening?] festivities and freshness and verdancy of the garden of eternal spring in this stalwart empire, even the space of many volumes would not be sufficient. Nevertheless, by way of a token (\textit{yumn}), the particulars of some of the days of happy prosperity which were witnessed by my spectating eye have been set forth here, inscribed by the pen of correctness. (1)

In other words, despite the fact that the social gatherings and festivals which take place at Shâh Jahân’s court are too numerous to recount and are in any case really beyond description, Chandar Bhân will give it a try for the sake of his readers. What follows is a set of anecdotes and reports on various types of activities at the court. But there is an extremely personal quality to the perspective that Chandar Bhân shares with us. Nearly all of the events which he proceeds to elucidate either directly concerned him and his relationship with the \textit{bâdshâh}, or they “were witnessed by his spectating eye” (\textit{ba chashm-i tamâshâ mushâhada uftâda}). It is a detail with some significance, for it immediately points us to yet another potential contrast between the expressive capacity of

\textsuperscript{17}Page numbers given parenthetically in the text will thus refer to Ja‘farî’s edition, unless otherwise noted.
inshā’ versus some other types of writing — in this case, particularly, the contrast between Chandar Bhān’s notion of inshā’ and the norms of historical narrative (tārīkh).

Chahār Chaman is not a “chronicle” of Shah Jahan’s reign, but rather an attempt to use language at its expressive apotheosis to try and mirror the visible majesty of the court. It is an impressionistic and anecdotal exercise, one which places the witness to events, his testimony, and his use of language — rather than the subject matter itself — at the narrative forefront.

Chandar Bhān also, perhaps paradoxically, draws our attention to the limitations of language. Here again, the contrast with tārīkh is instructive. Consider the explanation of the historian’s discipline put forth by Chandar Bhān’s contemporary ‘Ināyat Khān, in the prologue to his own Shāh Jahān Nāma. “Finding the language of [several earlier histories of Shah Jahan’s reign, such as Labhī’s and Qazwīnī’s] difficult and diffuse,” Khān insists that there was a need for a more straightforward text. He therefore felt justified in risking redundancy with his own work, because there was abundant precedent from earlier Mughal reigns for the writing of multiple histories. He continues:

With these examples before him, it occurred to the writer of these pages that as he and his ancestors had long been devoted servants of the imperial dynasty, it would be well for him to write the history of the illustrious reign of His Majesty in a clear and simple style and to summarize the major events recorded in the three volumes of the aforesaid Padshah Nama of Shaikh ‘Abd al-Hamid [Labhī], in plain language and in a condensed form. Such a work, he thought, would not be redundant, but on the contrary would be of considerable use to ordinary readers... The coverage of events from the fourth to the tenth year is based on the Padshah Nama of Muhammad Amina Qazwīnī, which is famous for its lucidity and excellence of style... The main object of the present writer was to condense and simplify the difficult portions. Therefore, whenever the language was already clear, those passages have been transcribed.
without change: since to rewrite them would merely be to obtain what had already been obtained... In order to maintain brevity, transcripts of letters and state documents pertaining to dealings with the kings of Rum, Iraq and Transoxiana, have been largely omitted. Similarly, with respect to the bestowal of mansabs and state offices, stipends and awards, appointments to and dismissal from expeditions, and descriptions of celebrations and festivals, and such like—details of this nature have been greatly curtailed, since it was the writer’s purpose to record only the most important events of the reign. Presently... the remarkable incidents that occurred during the august reign will be recorded by the history-writing pen, year by year.\textsuperscript{18}

Note that it is specifically for the sake of “brevity” that Khān has omitted things like transcripts of letters, descriptions of celebrations and festivals, and so on, because he sees his historical task as the concise reporting of events, in correct order, in relatively clear language, and with a relative degree of unbiased accuracy. As we will see, this is in stark contrast to Chandar Bhan’s approach to inshā’-pardāzi, and highlights the very different generic norms between inshā’ and tārīkh.

Chandar Bhan’s “spectating eye,” in fact, signals an almost entirely different understanding of objectivity from ‘Ināyat Khān’s research-based approach to “the most important events of the reign.” True objectivity is in fact recognized by Chandar Bhan as impossible — a cliché, perhaps, but nonetheless an important part of Chandar Bhan’s conceptual apparatus. For despite the fact that his acknowledgement of the incapacity of language accurately to represent the majesty of the court comes by way of (somewhat obsequious) panegyric, it nevertheless carries with it recognition of a larger conceptual problem — namely, that writers have to make choices about what they choose to include

or exclude, and any representation of the world is, in fact, always just a "token" (yumn) of the author's own perspective.

Chandar Bhan's inshā' is thus, as a creative rather than strictly documentary genre, quite comfortable with acknowledging the problematic nature of the relationship between subject position and textual artifact. And a sense of how Chahār Chaman functions as exemplary of inshā' (rather than history) can be had right from the outset. Most versions begin the first chaman with Chandar Bhan's account of the freak accident and burning of Shah Jahan's eldest daughter Begum Sahib, better known as Princess Jahānārā (jahān-ārā, i.e. "adorner of the world").\(^{19}\) One immediate indication that this is no ordinary documentary account comes from the fact that Chandar Bhān inserts himself and his linguistic prowess already into the account's subheading, announcing right away that this section demonstrates the "lifting of the nightingale of language" (tarāna-pardāzī-yi 'andalīb-i zabān) — that is to say, Chandar Bhān himself. Only then, practically as an afterthought, does he inform us what this section is actually about, namely the "the particulars of the celebrations and thanksgiving following the recovery of that world-famous soul of blessed title, the queen of the world, Begum Sahib (May she forever be shown divine affection and forgiveness)" (2). The entire description of these tragic events is thus foregrounded by an emphasis on Chandar Bhan's own role as the describer of those events, and the songbird-like quality of said description. Of course, one could read this simply as boastful self-promotion, but as I've indicated above, I think it also

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\(^{19}\) For details on Jahānārā, including the burning accident, see Qamar Jahān Begam, Princess Jahān Ārā Begam: Her Life and Works (Karachi: S. M. Hamid 'Ali, 1991).
points to something essentially personal and creative about *inshāʾ*, which contrasts sharply with the norms of chronicle prose (however flowery or ornate the latter might be). The author himself, and his facility with language, are nearly always one of the main characters in the narrative.

Indeed, Chandar Bhān not only foregrounds the story of Jahānārā’s accident and subsequent recovery with the announcement of his own belles-lettres intervention, but also concludes it that way. After extensive details about the Princess’s dire condition, the search for a cure, and the joyful celebration upon her eventual recovery, he concludes with a mention of his own role in the festivities:

Because this faithful Brahman is tied to this court of celestial stature among the order of *munshīs*, and my quatrains are presented before the emperor’s luminous gaze on great festival days — such as the world-dazzling *nau-rūz*, the auspicious [imperial] birthday party, and the solar and lunar weighing ceremonies — on this bounteous occasion too, having recited this *rubāʾ*, I was granted a promotion and robe of honor (*khil’at*):

*dar jashn-i mubārak-i shahinshāh-i jahān  
shāhinshah-i āfāq khidīv-i kaiāhān  
daryā shudah az āb-i gauhar rū-yi zamīn  
har khānah shud az l’al-i badakhshānī kān*

In the auspicious festival of the King of Kings of the World — The King of Kings of the Universe, the Sovereign of the World — The surface of the earth turned into a sea of glistening of pearls And every house becomes a mine of Badakhshani rubies

Let us hope that Allāh most high casts a long and permanent shadow of favor and beneficence on the heads of the world and its people. (5)

Thus even though *Chahār Chaman* can rightly be appraised as an account of Shāh Jahān’s court, we would be missing something if we failed to notice the intensely
personal nature of that account. Consider that, following the opening Jahānārā section, fourteen out of the next fifteen subsections all have to do with some occasion or other when Chandar Bhān personally had an opportunity to present Shāh Jahān with either a ghazal or a rubā‘ī. These various incidents, many of them related in just a few short lines — always followed, of course, by the relevant verse(s) — do not appear to follow any chronological or other order, and in some cases actively subvert chronology. For instance, the very first subsection after the story of the Princess’s accident (1644 CE) actually jumps back in time, long before Jahanara’s burning, to the moment when Chandar Bhān came into Shāh Jahān’s employ. As noted in Chapter One, he had been working in Lahore for the Prime Minister Afzal Khān, upon whose death (1639 CE) Shāh Jahān ordered the Khān’s family and servants to “present themselves before the auspicious imperial gaze” that he could personally reassure them. Chandar Bhān describes it as a “Joy-Increasing Event” (afsānah-i nishāt-afzāy), at which “my penmanship in the broken script — which is not devoid of correctness — entered into that gaze of alchemical effect, and found favor with his difficult-to-please nature,” and “this faqīr’s lowly quatrain reached those auspicious ears and earned a measure of appreciation.” (6)

This moment was absolutely critical for Chandar Bhān’s subsequent career, as it brought him into the direct service of the Emperor, and was thus quite possibly the most significant event in his entire life. And yet the author makes no effort whatsoever to locate the event temporally, introducing it simply with “one day” (rūzī) — a gesture that deliberately subverts chronocentrism, and, incidentally, is also a very common feature of
the narrative subversions of empiricality that are ubiquitous in the anecdotal poetics of
*tazkira*-writing of this period.\(^{20}\)

It seems clear, then, that the larger world of courtly events — Jahānārā’s tribulations, Afzal Khān’s death, etc. — exists in this *chaman* primarily to provide a backdrop for Chandar Bhān’s own moments of personal involvement and success, albeit in no particular order. It would be very easy to dismiss all this as vain self-aggrandizement, but the purpose, however, does not appear to be mere boasting. Indeed, when we consider the degree to which so many works of *inshā’* from this period also served quite explicit pedagogical purposes, Chandar Bhān’s persistent self-attention in these opening pages makes a bit more sense. As noted in Chapter One, many anecdotes from the canon of secretarial norms emphasized the fact that one had to have the skills and savvy to be prepared when opportunities for courtly advancement presented themselves. And here Chandar Bhān offers an extended, personalized illustration of that abstract normative principle. The opening series of anecdotes about his poetic recitations before the *bādshāh* is thus not so much an account of courtly events *per se*, so much as it is an exemplification of the principle that a talented and hardworking imperial servant will have limited opportunities to impress, and he must make the most of them. A zealous adherence to strict chronology would be completely irrelevant to the elucidation of this larger principle, so it makes no difference (either to author or audience) if the narration of the “joy-increasing event” which results in Chandar Bhān working for Shāh Jahān actually occurs *after* that of other events which, chronologically speaking, came later in

\(^{20}\) For more details on the writing of *tazkiras* in this period, see below, Chapter Four.
the munshi’s life. In fact, this move away from chronocentrism is further reinforced by a seemingly deliberate and nearly complete absence in Chahār Chaman of any dates whatsoever.

**Advice on the Art of Imperial Service**

This first section of the first chaman closes with a brief mention of yet another “joyful incident” (afsānah-i bahjat-āgīn). After an imperial hunting expedition in Mukhispur, Chandar Bhān notes that the emperor’s solar and lunar weighing ceremonies were both conducted while the camp was en route from Delhi to Agra. And, as with nearly every section up to this point in the text, he closes the anecdote with one of his own verses, a quatrain playing on the theme of imperial weighing.²¹

Strangely, it is almost as an afterthought that he mentions that “it was in those days that the Pillar of State Ja‘far Khān received promotion to the office of Prime Minister of Hindustan” (15). This is the sort of information that one would expect to be foregrounded in any properly historical account, and yet for Chandar Bhān it is barely worth noting. I emphasize this not by way of criticism, but in order to show that when modern historians have dismissed inshā’ of this period — particularly non-epistolary

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²¹ *imrāz ki rūz-i wazn-i shāhshāh ast
sad gūnah nishāt rā bi dīl-hā rāh ast
az wazn-i shāhshāh-i jahān yāfi sharaf
mīzān kih do palla-ash zī mihr-o-māh ast*

Today, the day of the weighing of the king of kings
Blazes a path for hundreds of joys into mens’ hearts
From weighing the King of Kings of the World
The scale whose two pans are made from the sun and the moon is itself ennobled (14)
inshā’ — as uninteresting (or even worthless) because of its relative inattention to empirical specificity, they have held the genre up to a standard which writers like Chandar Bhān would have found completely irrelevant to their compositional norms. They didn’t eschew positivistic reportage because they didn’t know any better, but rather because their aims were completely different from their chronicler counterparts.

One way to see this more clearly is to recognize that, even though Chahār Chaman can at times seem haphazard and randomly organized, closer analysis reveals it to have a sophisticated, albeit implicit, organizational structure. The four chamans have generally been recognized as self-contained units, but one can find coherent sub-units even within the chamans. In the case of chaman one, it can be further subdivided into three coherent sections, even if the individual anecdotes that comprise those sections don’t necessarily follow any particular program or chronology. All of the material described thus far is part of the first subsection, which deals with the munshi’s role in daily life and, particularly on special occasions, as a literary savant. In the passage cited above, Chandar Bhān makes this professional expectation explicit: his rubā’ is “are presented before the emperor’s luminous gaze on great festival days” precisely because he is “tied to this court of celestial stature among the order of munshīs.”

Obviously he is not the only one presenting such poetry, but as an elite munshī he becomes one of the elite literati of the court, a stature that carries with it certain expectations. And thus the entire first subsection of chaman one also serves a powerful didactic purpose, highlighting the

22 Cān in Brahman-i ‘aqīdat-kash dar silk-i munshiyān-i ʾin dargāh-i ṣmān-jāh munsālik ast va dar rūz-hā-yi jashn-i ʿazīm...rubā’ī az nazr-i anwar miguzārānd dar ʾin jashn-i farkhunda-ʾāyīn nīz rubāʾī khwāndah... (5).
practical application of the normative principle that the true munshi is a very public and accomplished literary figure.

This implicit didacticism — which remains implicit, and has thus gone largely unnoticed in the entire secondary literature on Chandar Bhān’s work — continues throughout the text. Thus at this point in chaman one the mention of Ja‘far Khan’s prime minister-ship (which actually began toward the very end of Shah Jahan’s reign, in 1657 CE) serves Chandar Bhān as a nice transition to the next main subsection: an extended reflection on the norms of imperial service, beginning with the qualities of great wazīrs. He describes the careers and good qualities of various Mughal wazīrs and vakīls, particularly those he deems worthy of emulating. In so doing, he presents his readers with a clear vision of ideal administrative comportment, a vision that could be relevant not just for high-ranking officials, but for all aspiring civil servants. His focus is on ministers of Shāh Jahān’s reign, and thus most of those he holds up as praiseworthy exemplars were his own patrons at one time or another. But just as section one was less about self-promotion than laying out a didactic vision of the munshi’s cultural role in Mughal life, this section too is less about panegyric than about making a politico-philosophical point regarding who is qualified to handle affairs of state. For even great kings require servants and administrators, and the more successful and talented the administrators are (including the munshīs, of course), the more powerful the empire will be.

He begins with a look back to the great ministers of Akbar’s reign, paying special attention to Rāja Todar Mal:
The Knot-Unraveling Accomplishments of Right-Thinking Wazīrs on the Seat of Ministries of Hindūstān

At the beginning of spring in the garden of empire and fortune of His Majesty whose Nest is now in Heaven (‘arsh-āshiyānī, i.e. Akbar), whose station was celestial, whose rank was paradisiacal, imperial business was conducted by Bairam Khān Khān-i Khānān, Mullā Mīr Muhammad Jān, Tardī Beg Khān, Shihāb al-Dīn Khān, Ahmad Khān, and Mun‘im Khān Khān-i Khānān. [But] the fog/dust of arrogance and a sort of rancor became enswirled in the mind of Mullā Mīr Muhammad, to such an extent that one day [Mun‘im?] Khān-i Khānān went to see him, but the sentries blocked the way (tā‘khur kardand) and wouldn’t let him pass.23

Some time after that imbroglio ended, when the lapis lazuli sky (falak-i mīnā-rang) spread another bed [i.e. the situation changed (and the old ministers were replaced)], ‘Abd al-Majīd Āṣif Khān, Ghiyās al-Dīn ‘Ali Āṣif Khān, Fath Khān, Muzaffar Khān, Fath Khān, Rājā Todar Mal, Shah Mansūr, Khwāja Shams al-Dīn [Atkā], Rāy-i Rāyān, Āṣif Khān, Ja‘far Khān, and Wazīr Khān, each in their own turn gained the rank of Prime Minister of Hindustān.24

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23 It is not entirely clear what incident Chandar Bhan is referring to here. Numerous sources, however, do refer to a complicated set of circumstances in 1562, in which Mun‘im Khān was implicated in Adham Khān’s murder of the sitting vakil, Atka Khān — whose promotion to vikālat had alienated many prominent courtiers, including Maham Anaga, her son Adham Khān, and Mun‘im Khān himself. Despite some nobles’ suspicions, which in any event seem to have been spurious, Akbar summoned Mun‘im Khān in order to promote him to a second term as vakil, and grant him the title of Khān-i Khānān. But given the tense atmosphere at court, and thus fearing the summons, Mun‘im Khān decided instead to flee to Kabul. After six days of flight, he and his companions had gone as far as Saharanpur, which was then under the administration of one Mīr Muhammad Munshi, one of whose underlings did in fact mobilize a group of local villagers to help him detain the Khān and his fellow travelers. Another local notable, Sayyid Muhammad Bārha, seeing the larger picture, made the effort to free Mun‘im Khān and brought him back to court — where, to the surprise of most courtiers, Akbar continued to show him favor and nevertheless promoted him, in spite of his behavior. At any rate, it is possible that Chandar Bhan has heard a greatly watered down version of this event, and also conflated this Mīr Muhammad Munshi with Mīr Muhammad Khan, who was himself a one-time governor of both Punjab and Kabul territories, and was indeed noted for his ill-temper. Or, obviously, Chandar Bhan might have known of some other incident for which we no longer have any other textual corroboration. For details on Mun‘im Khān’s flight, arrest, and return to favor, see Beveridge, Akbar Nama, vol. 2, 278-9; on Mīr Muhammad Khan’s irritable disposition, see for instance Akbar Nama, vol. 2, 364-5. For another perspective on this incident, in which there is no mention of Mīr Muhammad Khan, see also Iqtidar Alam Khan, The Political Biography of a Mughal Noble: Mun‘im Khan Khan-i Khānān (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1973), 64-8.

24 It is not clear why Chandar Bhan repeats Fath Khān and Āṣif Khān in this list.
But this new well-embroidered raiment best fit the stature of Raja Todar Mal, to the extent that, having gone to the subahs of Gujarat and Bengal and initiated such exemplary projects [of administrative reform], he was elevated to the title of “Master of the Sword and of the Pen” (sähīb al-saif va al-qalam). With tremendous economy and wisdom (kifāyat va dirāyat), he set so many precedents for the plentifulness of the countryside (ma’mūrī-yi mulk) and the well-being of the people (rifāḥiyat-i ra’īyat) that, even today, his administrative and economic policy are the model/paradigm for contemporary experts.

It is reported that someone once accused Rājā Todar Mal of being negligent with state revenues while in His Majesty ‘Arsh Āshiyānī’s service. The Rājā, with an eye to his own integrity, and trusting in the truthfulness of [Mun’im] Khān-i Khānān — whose heart in those days was full of the dust of enmity toward the Raja — retained the Khān-i Khānān as his advocate. Since the truth was on the Rājā’s side, the Khān-i Khānān disregarding both friendship and enmity, which generally influence the minds of petty and narrow-minded people, and made the true situation known to His Majesty. Thus, compared with the pettiness of his enemies (a’dā), the Rājā’s integrity (rāsīf), virtue/piety (diyānat), trustworthiness (amānat), expertise (kār-dānī), business acumen (mu‘āmala-fahmī), and erudition (dānā ‘ī) became evident.

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25 The printed edition has “tangālā,” but this is obviously a misprint for bangālā.

26 Again, the specifics of this incident are not entirely clear, but Chandar Bānī could be referring to the Rājā’s troubles with Khwāja Shāh Mansūr Shirāzī, who was an associate of Mun’im Khān, and who, according to Abū al-Fazīl, “was an adept at the mysteries of accounts.” In any event, according to the Akbar Nāma Raja Todar Mal eventually had Shah Mansūr imprisoned following Mun’im Khān’s death. For details, see A. N. III, 193; Beveridge, III, 273-4 and 223n2, where Beveridge goes so far as to suggest that Todar Mal had Shah Mansur murdered.

27 Todar Mal’s relationship with Mun’im Khan was, at best, frosty. In part, this was due to a larger context in which a new type of imperial apparatus was beginning to take shape, wherein the erstwhile clan and lineage nobility of the pre-Akbar era was being replaced by a new, more demographically diverse generation. The effect of these changes on men like Mun’im Khān has been summed up nicely by Iqtidar Alam Khan: “Mun’im Khan’s appointment to Jaunpur brought to an end his career as a central minister. He had already been removed from wikalat in the beginning of 1564. Apparently, the experience of the subsequent three years that Mun’im Khan was at the court in one capacity or another proved that he was too old, too rigid, and too sensitive about his position as the elder Chaghtaī noble to be able to adjust himself to the new situation in which new ministers like Muzaffar Khan, Todar Mal, Lashkar Khan, Shahbaz Khan, Rai Pitar Das, and Parmanand were playing a leading role. Almost all of these exceptionally able men were non-Turani upstarts. Their steady rise in the King’s favour was bound to make older nobles like Mun’im Khan extremely jealous of them”; Political Biography of a Mughal Noble: Mun’im Khan Khan-i Khanan (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1973), 95.

28 For a summary of Raja Todar Mal’s relationship with various figures at court, see also Kumudranjan Das, Raja Todar Mal (Calcutta: Saraswat Library, 1979), 226-35.
It is also well-known that Shahbāz Khān, because of his power and high stature in this great caliphate, never paid any mind to the Rājā. Until after some time spent in the districts of Gujarāt and Bangāla, he attended the great court and audience of His most exalted Majesty, embraced the Rājā (dar kinār girīfī), and begged his pardon for his indifference in earlier days. His Majesty, the emperor of the age, asked Shahbāz Khān the reason for this unexpected new friendship (ikhtilāt). The latter submitted that “Out of every land and country that I’ve visited, in my opinion the writing and speech of this Hindu is the model/benchmark (dastūr al-‘'amal). I cannot help but be just, and have thus renounced my earlier prejudice (az ta‘assub guzashtam).”

Indeed, the proof of the Rājā’s true wisdom is that the wisest intellectual of the times, Shaikh Abū al-Fazl, whose attributes and qualities are famous the world over, says of him that whatever [knotty problems] he was able to unravel, no one else could have unraveled. And, just as people revere the great sufi Miyān Shāh Mīr for his truth and gnosis, the Rājā’s achievements in agrarian and administrative science have been recited with full eloquence into the khutba of the age. (15-6) [OR: Even a person like the knower of truth and gnosis Miyan Shah Mir will praise his achievements in his sermons.]

There seems to be a not-so-subtle point here about the Mughals’ emphasis on non-sectarian meritocracy. And thus it is no coincidence that the only minister singled out for extended praise in this passage is Rājā Todar Mal, a khattrī from Chandar Bhān’s home territory of Punjab. Chandar Bhān is not squeamish, however, about also noting some of the ethno-religious fault lines that might have persisted, even at Akbar’s court. He draws our attention directly to the Raja’s notoriously fractious relationships with some of the other nobles of Akbar’s reign, and even though he does not specifically cite communal or sectarian antagonism as one of the reasons for this tension, the language he uses is nevertheless suggestive of such an interpretation. Then again, many other sources describe the Raja as an irritable personality with his own prejudices (cf. Akbar Nama; Badayuni), and thus it could be more a case of others being put off by his prickly
arrogance than anything else. Nevertheless, here Chandar Bhān projects the Rāja as the victim of, if not outright antagonism, then at least chauvinism — and it is not impossible that Chandar Bhān himself might have experienced similar chauvinism as the most prominent “Persian-knowing Hindu” (hindū-yi fārsī-dān) at Shah Jahan’s court, for he was certainly the victim of it not long after his death.29

The story of Shahbāz Khān, in particular, is revealing. It is as if Chandar Bhān is asking his readers to put themselves in the Khān’s place — initially wary and distrustful of “this Hindu’s” ability to read and write (navishtah va guftah-i in hindū) — and ultimately come to the same conclusion: that Chandar Bhān himself, like Todar Mal, despite whatever doubts one might initially have had, was a talented and masterful administrator and Persian wordsmith in his own right. And, just as Todar Mal’s “integrity, virtue/piety, trustworthiness, effectiveness, understanding, and knowledgeableness” eventually won over his critics, so too will Chandar Bhān’s own character, literary talents, and administrative ability prove to be exemplary for his own time.

This implicit self-identification with Todar Mal is also especially noteworthy for being so rarely acknowledged in later sources. Indeed, in most contemporary early modern accounts, later tazkiras, and even modern scholarly works, the figure with whom Chandar Bhān is most often compared is actually the great Abū al-Fazl, to whose prose style he was widely considered to have been a direct heir. Of course, Abu’l Fazl still figures in

29 For details see below, chapter 4, “The Persistence of Gossip.”
the equation here too, as the authority in whose words "the proof (dalīl) of the Raja's true wisdom" resides. But it is the Raja whose memory and legacy Chandar Bhan himself seems to want to claim.

Following this passage about Todar Mal, Chandar Bhan moves on to mention some of the elite administrators of Jahāngīr's reign. Thus unlike the first subsection of chaman one, the second follows a roughly chronological pattern. Continuing the implicit — yet nonetheless pervasive — theme of Mughal non-sectarian ideals, our munshi pays particular tribute in these pages to eclectic figures like 'Abd al-Rahīm Khān-i Khānān, who was himself the son of Akbar's erstwhile regent, Bairam Khān.³⁰

To the end of his life, ['Abd al-Rahīm] performed exemplary service (khidmāt-i numāyān); and the Khān-i Khānān's bravery, bold ingenuity, fortitude, presence of mind, excellence, and all-around perfection, not to mention the pleasure of his company and the circle of scholars and wordsmiths and other intellectuals in the said Khān's atelier, was brighter than the sun.³¹ (17) When he was in the Deccan, in his meetings/ assemblies these other folks used to also convene in his assembly. And he was also lucky yo have people like Iraj Bahadur and Darab as his sons, who were also men of the sword.

³⁰ The printed edition refers to 'Abd al-Rahīm as the father of Bairam Khān (wālid instead of wald), but this is obviously a printing error, as confirmed by British Museum MS, Or. 1892., 49a.

Chandar Bhān also lists various imperial administrators who had been assigned to the Deccan, each of whom seem to have hosted their own local assemblies and salons, many of which were integrated as part of the same intellectual network as that of ʿAbd al-Rahīm.

This section on vakīls and vazīrs of Jahāngīr’s reign concludes with a brief mention of [Mirza Barkhurdar] Khān-i ʿAlam, whose service as Jahangir’s ambassador to Iran is described by Chandar Bhān as “famous throughout the world” (17). “An iota of that [fame],” he continues, “is clearly evidenced (bah wuzūh anjāmūd) by the following excerpt of a letter sent to Khān-i ʿĀlam by Shāh ʿAbbās, the ruler (wālī) of Iran.”

Here Chandar Bhan interjects the entire “copy of an epistle that was written to Khān-i ʿĀlam by Shāh ʿAbbās.” It is the first of many letters included throughout Chahār Chaman, and although Chandar Bhān almost certainly had no part in its composition, its very presence in Chahār Chaman highlights the fact that diplomatic correspondence of this kind was in wide circulation among munshīs and other “men of the pen” during Mughal times. Even though there is no specific pedagogical point to be elucidated through this letter, it nevertheless draws further attention to a theme that has been stressed repeatedly in the preceding pages: that part of being a successful courtier, imperial servant, ambassador, etc. required the mastery of secretarial and epistolary norms, because virtually every aspect of imperial business and matters of state included written communication among elites of varying ranks, correct codes of address, and standards of etiquette. These norms had a mutually intelligible currency throughout the
larger Persophone world, as this letter indicates, and as is further proven by the massive extant corpus of correspondence between the Mughals and Safavids, Ottomans, and even the Portuguese. As if to drive the point home, the letter in question here even makes specific mention of the importance of epistolary conventions as a substitute for face-to-face diplomatic etiquette (a theme that was stressed repeatedly above in Chapter One):

It must be known to the Protector of Fortune, Khān-i Ālam, whose virtues are so praiseworthy (hamīda khiṣāl), that his absence/separation from the Royal Person [Shāh ʿAbbās] has had a tremendous effect. But has this separation from us likewise had an effect on him, or no? Of course it’s true that you had no choice in the decision to leave us. But what can I write regarding your knowledge of style (tarz-dāni), diplomatic norms (ādāb-i safārat), epistolary etiquette (tablīgh-i risālat), and gracious habits (luf-i muʿāwadat)... if anyone wanted to engage in the epistolary arts, and had a high standard to meet in order to be effective, then the world would say that he must emulate the Khān-i Ālam... (17-8)

Obviously, then, Chandar Bhān is not simply making a point here about the Khān-i Ālam’s good qualities as a minister, socialite, and diplomat. The underlying message is unequivocally about his abilities specifically in the art of inshā’, and the degree to which the Khān’s mastery of epistolary and secretarial norms was vital to his successful career.

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The next brief section brings the discussion of wazīrs and wizārat up to Chandar Bhān’s own time, beginning with a list of some of the early administrators of Shah Jahān’s reign. It starts off, however, with a telling apologia:

Even though the Soul of Perfect Qualities of our Emperor, the Conqueror of the Universe and King of the World, is never in need of a counselor (wazīr), administration (tadbīr), or the advice of anything or anyone, [nevertheless] counselors (wukalā), ministers (wuzarā), and men of service stand ready in all matters awaiting His most high and noble rightly-guided commands. And on every task and every subject, whatever emerges manifest from that illumined authoritative mind, and/or crosses his jewel-scattering tongue of miraculous expression (mu’jiz bayān), is accordingly inscribed in the imperial registers. Nevertheless, when it comes to legislation (zabiḥ), management (intizām), and anything connected to matters of economy and state, right-thinking wazīrs have been a necessity in every age of existence. And in the early days when the throne of the World-Governing Sultanate became ornamented and decorated by that Being who supersedes mere existence (wujūd-i fāyiz al-wujūd), the servants of His most exalted Majesty the Emperor, the Divine Shadow, the Caliph of Divine Mercy, were as follows... (18)

Two things are especially noteworthy in this passage. First, the stark tone of apologia. It is as if the mere gesture of listing the reigning emperor’s ministers and administrators would have been a breach of etiquette, an unseemly tarnishing on the image of the bādshāh’s perfection. So Chandar Bhān must preempt and qualify his own remarks on wizārat by first emphasizing the emperor’s perfect qualities, the fact that he doesn’t really need any of these wazīrs and wakīls (or munshīs, for that matter); but nevertheless, out of convenience and as a nod to custom, it was found necessary to employ such state officials.

Also noteworthy, simply as a point of contemporary bureaucratic logistics, is Chandar Bhān’s mention of the imperial registers, and the fact that the emperor’s various orders...
and commands were always noted down therein. Chandar Bhān was himself responsible for such notation during his tenure as the imperial wāqiʿa-naḥīx, or diarist, and this points to an administrative reality that often gets overlooked in more sensational accounts of the opulent “Court of the Great Mughals” variety. That is to say, there was an equally important and very mundane day-to-day praxis of imperial notation, bookkeeping, diaries, registers, and logs, all of which had to be collated and sorted, copied out to relevant officials, sent out via imperial post, and so on. From the emperor’s most minor musings to the circulation of official imperial memoranda, across vast swaths of territory, there was a huge matrix of written documentation that had to be organized and accounted for by the chancery apparatus and its career officials like Chandar Bhān. Thus even here, in a relatively offhanded aside about the imperial registers (dafātir) Chandar Bhān is able to draw attention to the theme of the munshi’s role in performing “the most basic work of empire.”

Following all these prefatory remarks, Chandar Bhān carries on with his discussion of the ideals of wizārat, briefly noting the first couple of wazīrs of Shāh Jahān’s reign — Irādat Khān (whose title later became Aʿzam Khān), and Āsa ḳhān. These men were in charge of imperial business until, Chandar Bhan tells us, “on account of his ability, talent, and pre-eminent service, the turn of wizārat came to that Scholar of the Age, whose comprehension was of utmost standard, Afzal Khān” (18-9).

From here the narrative approach shifts slightly, from that of a survey into an extended treatment of several very well-known individual administrators from Shāh Jahān’s reign
— most of whom were, at some point or another, Chandar Bhān’s own patrons. He begins with the aforementioned Afzal Khān, in whose employment Chandar Bhān’s career in imperial service can be said to have really begun, and after whose death Chandar Bhān became attached to the central court, where he served under various other patrons like Islām Khān, Sa‘dullah Khan, Mu‘azzam Khan, and Ja‘far Khan, all of whom are sketched in the ensuing pages of this first chaman.

Noteworthy by his absence here, however, is Prince Dārā Shukoh, who in the later cultural memory and historiography would become the patron with whom Chandar Bhān was most often associated. Of course, because of Dārā’s fame as a patron of intellectuals and projects that explored Hindu culture, it would indeed seem natural enough to assume that someone like Chandar Bhān would fit right into his circle. Interestingly enough, though, when one looks carefully at the evidence, including this key passage of Chahār Chaman, it becomes clear that we actually have only slight evidence of the real extent of their relationship, much of it circumstantial, and almost none of it from Chandar Bhān himself. The lack of any mention of Dārā here, amidst all of Chandar Bhān’s other key patrons, thus prompts one to wonder: either their relationship was not so extensive as many have tended to assume; or they did in fact work together closely (for which there is admittedly some evidence), but Chandar Bhān is downplaying the association in order not to offend the new emperor, Aurangzeb.

Whatever the reasons, one theme that continues prominently in this section on Chandar Bhān’s patrons is the emphasis on the ideals and norms of imperial service. These pages
echo yet another tradition of ākhlāqī texts dealing specifically with ministerial theory and
practice, such as Qāzī Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Hasan al-Husainī’s Akhlāq-i Humāyūnī, which was
also known as Dastūr al-Wizārat. Chandar Bhān’s explicit tone toward most of his
patron-wazīrs is one of praise, but the implicit message throughout is didactic: these are
the greatest administrators of the age, and one can achieve success through emulating
them. He begins with Afzal Khān, and details the Khān’s rise from a provincial finance
ministership (dīwānī), to a master of equipment (mīr-i sāmān) under Jahāngīr, all the way
up to the rank of Prime Minister (wazīr-i kull) at Shāh Jahān’s court. He tells us of Afzal
Khān’s “Aristotle-like” knowledge, virtue, and kind-hearted nature, and then once more
turns to epistolary artifacts as a way of punctuating a section of the narrative. He copies
out two short letters by the Khān, both of which are intended to demonstrate the latter’s
mastery of literary style and social etiquette, and as a discursive lens through which to
best adduce his good character and administrative talents. The first of these letters also
draws our attention to the importance of mysticism and the Sufi idiom as a significant
feature not just of the world of religious divines, but also of educated parlance generally
during this period. Facility with this mystical idiom, with the literary cultural modes of
expressing it, and with the metaphysical doctrines which formed its subject matter, would
in turn also be a natural part of the elite munshī’s repertoire. Thus, Chandar Bhan’s
explanation for how the first letter which he quotes came to be written in the first place:

One day that scholar who was like Plato in character, Afzal Khān, was
sitting on the wazīr’s seat of authority [busy doing his work]. This lowest
of servants had been nourished and trained by that most pure scholar of
the age and the empire, and had acquired prosperity in the copiously
generous service of that pillar of nobles of the world, and have since

33 Alam, Languages of Political Islam, 51-4,
gained renown (ishtihār dāshīt) as a disciple of that wise master. This faqīr, then, on my own initiative made a selection from some book and submitted it to him for his review. [It concerned the notion] that death is a more unbearable moment than the separation/detachment/alienation of the soul/spirit, since the former involves cutting off from / running away from creation, whereas the latter promises arrival at the Creator. On hearing this, a different type of ecstatic mood overcame that master/knower of such states, and he was so moved (rigqat namūda) that he almost involuntarily jumped up from his official chair and went off to be in private. When he emerged from that trance, he wrote this letter with a joyous pen to Āqā Rashīd, who was among the close friends and associates of that Khān of such high wisdom. (20)

The “excellent, learned, perceptive” letter in question is relatively brief, and concerns the wazīr’s desire for greater spiritual awareness and detachment from worldly status — “the pursuit of which is only a cipher (nishāna) for conduct attractive to God, and which Allāh on high keeps at a remove from the heart” (20).

The theological details are not so important, as the implication seems clear: a truly effective minister, in Chandar Bhan’s estimation, is one who combines a heightened spiritual wisdom with his political, economic, and administrative talents. The ideal agent of imperial power is thus posited, paradoxically, as one who strives actively to renounce any actual desire for worldly power. Such spiritual awareness should lead to decision-making and policy which are divorced from any personal desire for worldly status or financial gain on the wazīr’s part — a sort of nishkāma-karma, if you will.

This type of seamless convergence of the mystical, literary, and political idioms current at the time continues in the next brief section, labeled simply “An Anecdote.” Chandar Bhān reports that one day Muʿizz al-Mulk, the mutassādī, the presiding officer at the port
of Sūrat had sent Afzal Khān what seems to have been some sort of kaleidoscope (‘ainak) as a gift. The Khan responds in a second letter:

_Copy of a letter that the learned, Aristotle-like Afzal Khān had written to Muʿizz al-Mulk_

One can only hope that Allāh on high will grant our ilk deliverance from the prison of this imaginary/illusory existence (hasī-yi mauḥūm) and from the contemplation of this ephemeral multiplicity. The viewing glass that you sent — which shows one thing as a multiplicity — has arrived. [But] this inmate of the prison of multiplicity is looking, rather, for a viewing glass that will turn such panoply into a unity. If you come across anyone who has such a glass, give me some indication (nishān dihand), so that I can enlighten my eye by locating him, and I can take that glass in my hand, and see through it, and thus deliver myself from the prison of multiplicity. (20)

This passage, too, clearly frames the broader Mughal ideals of kingship and administrative authority in a way that ties them specifically to other-worldly ideals of spiritual detachment, and the Sufi concept of the “Unity of Being” (wahdat al-wujūd).

Cast in the voice of one of the most powerful ministers in Mughal India, the invocation of such metaphysical ideals takes on an added significance. It helps to build a model of government service that emphasized the larger good rather than personal gain, and (perhaps most significantly) an understanding of political Islam that was informed by idioms of tolerance and non-sectarian consensus-building rather than divisive factionalism — or, in Afzal Khān’s terminology, a policy that would “turn this panoply

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34 Normally, ‘ainak would simply mean “(eye) glass” or “spectacles,” but the context of Afzal Khan’s letter makes it clear that he’s talking about some type of kaleidoscopic device—two more common terms for which would have been ‘ainak-i hazīr-bīn (“glass of a thousand looks”) or ‘ainak-i hazār-numū (“glass of a thousand shows”). In any case, this little anecdote also offers us a trace of yet another larger process lingering in the background of Chahār Chaman, and Chandar Bhan’s oeuvre generally; namely, the global flow of exotic trinkets and objects in an early modern world increasingly interconnected by oceanic trade. Indeed, it is no coincidence that this exotic gift comes to Afzal Khan from the port city of Surat, which was then the hub of the Mughal trading system.
into a unity.” Far too often, even in recent postcolonial historiography, such ideals tend to be associated primarily with Akbar’s court, or else with Dārā Shukoh’s aborted efforts, as if the reigns of all other Mughal emperors represented either unremarkable stasis (cf. Jahāngīr) or some sort of widespread “return” or backslide to orthodoxy (cf. Shāh Jahān, and of course Aurangzeb). But this and other evidence from Chandar Bhān’s oeuvre demonstrates clearly that such norms pervaded the Mughal nobility at all levels, and never really went out of style, at least through the middle of the seventeenth century.

And, as if to dispel any doubt about the larger significance of these two seemingly apocryphal anecdotes, Chandar Bhān follows them up with one of the most striking passages in all of Chahār Chaman. Introduced simply as “an account of some of the learned wazīr Afzal Khān’s expressions of knowledge and wisdom,” this passage offers a series of aphorisms which map out Chandar Bhān’s understanding of his patron’s precepts on good government. Thus far in Chahār Chaman, Chandar Bhān has painted an almost impressionistic picture of the ideal secretary and/or minister — an effective

35 See for instance John Richards, The Mughal Empire, 121-3; Asher and Talbot, India before Europe, 153-8.

36 Or even, for that matter, well into Aurangzeb’s reign and into the eighteenth century. One striking indication of this would be Chandar Bhān’s extant letters to Aurangzeb, which evince a cordial tone very much at odds with the predominant image of Aurangzeb as a one-dimensional, Hindu-bashing zealot. Further, as the recent scholarship of Katherine Butler Brown has shown, even some of the most conventional assumptions about Aurangzeb’s policies — such as, for instance, the oft-invoked ban on music — are in need of much revision. See for instance her articles “Did Aurangzeb Ban Music? Questions for the Historiography of his reign,” Modern Asian Studies 41, 1 (2007): 77-120; and “If Music be the Food of Love: Masculinity and Eroticism in the Mughal Mehfil,” in Love in South Asia: A Cultural History, edited by Francesca Orsini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Another indication that Aurangzeb’s reign was not nearly as restrictive as has been generally supposed was the vibrant interplay between Persian and Braj literary cultures during his reign. See for instance Allison Busch, “Poetry in motion: Brajbhasha-Persianate literary transactions in Mughal India,” unpublished paper presented at “Moving Literatures: Literary Transformation in Islamicate South Asia,” March 17-19, 2006, Raleigh, NC.
policy maker, an accomplished litterateur, an expert in epistolography, mystically inclined and detached from worldly concerns — but now he lays out some of these principles explicitly, in greater detail:

An account of some of the learned wazīr
Afzal Khān’s expressions of knowledge and wisdom

1. Subsequently, the late and forgiven/deceased Khān used to say that wazīrs are of two kinds:

- The first is one who correctly comprehends/understands whatever the Emperor says, and acts accordingly;

- The second is one who, whatever he says and understands, the Emperor works to enact it.

[Unfortunately] wazīrs of the current era, like us, do not [even] have the [former] ability/capacity/status such that, having first comprehended the bādshāh’s commands correctly, we could then proceed according to the blessed will and temperament — let alone that we could be considered in the second category (hālat-i dīgar).

2. The late Afzal Khān also used to say that actually, in consulting (kangāyish) with kings, one should never utter a word unless asked. And if ever asked, one should never deviate from the truth [simply to appease the ruler], for one should fear God more than one fears the bādshāh.

3. Furthermore, that which one advises [the king] in private should under no circumstances be revealed in public (dar kasrat) [as your own wisdom, for he’ll be insulted]. For kings have a proud (ghayūr) nature, so God forbid he [i.e. the king] should deny it [your private advice] once he gets in front of other people. And if he doesn’t accept [your counsel] in private, as a well-meaning (daulat-khwāh) advisor/person can always revisit the matter with him later.

4. Also, royal knowledge (‘ilm-i khilāfat) is one thing, and governmental knowledge (‘ilm-i wizārat) is quite another. Thus one should never, ever dispute/argue with kings on account of [your own] knowledge of governance (dar ‘ilm-i wizārat), for the reality will be that which inspires the hearts of this group (i.e. kings). However, if any particular point

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37 N.b., the numbering and bullets in this passage are not in the original text. I have added them for greater ease of reference.
occurs to you as a result of your having been endowed with the science of wizārat in consideration of the welfare of the government, you should never present it arrogantly (khud-dārī), but should rather give precedence to the virtue of the Emperor’s understanding/position (maslahat) over that of your own.

5. Also, if an important matter arises, but one is so afraid of the king’s grandeur and majesty that he can’t actually summon the will/courage to bring it to the king’s attention, [he must still find a way to] make discreet enquiries (istifsār namūdan) in relevant places — in such a way that it will not annoy/disturb the king — in order to ascertain the best advice and guidance, until eventually [the appropriate action] becomes clear to us in our own minds. At that time, if any advice finds its way into your heart that benefits the empire, then one ought to apprise the king of it. If [the king] concurs, then such a person will have been vindicated, having giving preference to necessities of state [and worked for the latter’s] betterment and benefit. [I.e., because the wazir is both a murshid (of the king) and also a seeker of guidance, he should keep looking for an appropriate occasion when the the discussion will not perturb the king, and ask him if it is appropriate to let him know what he had in mind. At that time, if the king agrees, fine — if not, then at least he has fulfilled his basic responsibility]

6. At the time of consultation nothing should be left out: all the vicissitudes and negative possibilities, strong or weak, of a matter you are considering; and the ascertainment of the most appropriate steps that should be taken (maqām-i maslahat), having swept every corner with the broom of intellect (i.e. looked into the matter from every perspective with an uncluttered mind).

7. Another of the late Khān’s precepts was that [even a] truth-knowing and far-seeing emperor requires four pillars, i.e. four knowledgeable/wise people, to ensure the strength and foundation of the empire. That way, in whichever direction he might look, and from whomever he might enquire, there will be someone to offer unvarnished/unequivocal truth in whatever matter requires clear advice. And the bādshāh, having taken to heart the words of each one and weighed it with the scales of his right/true/intellect, can ratify the advice/measure that is most coherent (muttafaq) in word and meaning, and proceed to enact it.

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38 Clearly, an allusion to the “four pillars of state” outlined in Nizāmi ‘Arūzī’s Chahār Maqāla (discussed above, Chapter One), in which the first and foremost of these four key advisors is none other than the imperial secretary.
8. More than anything, a bādshāh of great glory requires an abundant treasury. If he does not have wealth, he cannot mobilize an army. And if he does not have an army, the country cannot become regulated (zabt nagardad). And if the country is not properly regulated, the revenue does not flow in. The treasury becomes full only when the country is properly cultivated, and the country becomes cultivated only when the administrator (sāhib-i mu‘āmalā) attends to matters thoughtfully and personally.

9. Also, because of wealth (māl), you can organize an army. But the real management and conquest of the hearts of the army is not possible without a general who is a good manager/administrator (zābit), well-mannered (khush-sulūk), contented/satisfied (ser-chashm, lit. "whose eyes are full/satiated"), open-minded (wasī‘-mashrab, lit. "who is religiously wide," not a narrow bigot), courageous (sāhib-i hausala), tolerant (mutahammil), sincere (durust ikhlās), battle-tested (āzmūdah-kār), and pleasant demeanor (shīgufīa-peshānī). Such a person should have full confidence in his freedom to be absolutely independent (mukhtār-i mulaq) in matters of promotion, demotion, bonuses, supervision, and hiring and firing. And among his contingent (tābīnān) he must have so many men that other elites and pillars of the empire will consider him one to reckon with (take him into account).

10. And finally, a king requires an aide who, in both private and public (khalā‘ va malā‘), is willing to speak freely, and does so irrespective of whether it might please or anger (‘itāb va khitāb) the king. Such a person must be both truthful and discrete, such that whatever he says and hears will not be divulged elsewhere. Although such men are rare and difficult to find, but they are definitely available if a king acquainted with truth so desires. (21-3)

No doubt one could dilate over this passage and its many intriguing formulations for quite some time. But for present purposes let us simply note that most, if not all of the characteristics and attitudes that Afzal Khān adduces here for the ideal wazīr could just as easily be applied to elite munshīs and other imperial servants as well — obedience, honesty, piety, discretion, forthrightness, and the like. Both in content and in its pedagogic tone, this passage clearly hearkens back to the nasīhat-nāma and dastūr al-wuzzarā traditions, with its ethos inspired by the ādāb and akhlāq traditions and their
transmission of courtly wisdom and advice, described above in Chapter One. One might say, then, that this passage is an especially explicit example of the way in which this first of Chandar Bhān’s four chamans functions not so much as a “mirror for princes,” but as a “mirror for munshīs” and other administrators.

This mode continues for some time, as Chandar Bhān moves from Afzal Khān (d. 1639 CE) to sketches of other key patrons, beginning with Islām Khān who had been governor of Bengal up to that point. Chandar Bhān notes that Dayānat Rāy Khān-i Khānī “Rāy-i Rāyān”, who had served as executive of crown lands during Afzal Khān’s wizārat, served as the interim prime minister during the gap between Afzal Khān’s death and Islām Khān’s assumption of duties. This brief discussion of Dayānat Rāy’s short tenure as acting wazīr provides some interesting details of agricultural administration, before giving way to an extended praise of Islām Khān’s martial and literary talents — on account of which he too received the title “master of the sword and the pen” (sāhib al-saīf va al-qalam). Indeed, besides his many military successes, Islām Khān was a noted calligrapher and prose stylist, and Chandar Bhān does not miss the opportunity to praise the Khān’s mastery of the secretarial arts, particularly the fact that he could draft in “vibrant shikasta script” (khat-i shikasta rangīn), composed excellent triplet verses (musallasān), and was “at the head of the class of calligraphers and munshīs of the age” (24). Obviously, this last bit of praise is not without significance, for it shows yet again the semantic range of the term munshī in the pre- and early modern period. One didn’t have to be a clerk or a dabīr in the strict sense of the term to be considered a munshī, since longstanding convention had made the term into a generic form of praise for any
elite literati, particularly those who either doubled as administrators or dabbled in inshā'-pardāzi. The term is thus used here in the same sense in which it has been applied to other Mughal intellectual luminaries such as Abū al-Fazl, Saʿdullāh Khān, and a host of others.

İslām Khān’s tenure as prime minister did not last long, as Chandar Bhān makes clear in the sketch of his military career, which came to an abrupt end with his demise during the Deccan campaign. Here again, though he never states it explicitly, it is clear that Chandar Bhān feels no compulsion to provide extensive details of such campaigns — as any historical chronicle would perforce be obligated to do — since his purposes are completely different. The positive historical details, in a sense, don’t really matter so long as he provides us with an elegantly written portrait of İslām Khān’s worth as an administrator who is also worthy of emulation by Chandar Bhān’s audience. Hence the greater emphasis on the Khān’s literary, administrative, and secretarial abilities, rather than his military prowess.

Following İslām Khān’s death, the post of wazīr was transferred to one of the great scholar-administrators of the Mughal era, Saʿdullāh Khan. Saʿdullāh Khan was not only a renowned and reliable military commander, but also an author of many of Shah Jahān’s important farmāns, as well as a highly respected epistolary collection of his own.39 And thus, in his career we have yet another powerful example of the nexus between political-

administrative ability and the literary arts, inshā', poetry, and the mystical idiom.⁴⁰

Sa'dullāh Khān comes in for nearly as extensive a treatment as Afzal Khān, and Chandar Bhān casts him in much the same glowing light, once again reiterating features of the Khān’s personality that would be of interest to other aspiring Mughal administrators. For instance, Chandar Bhān notes the degree to which Sa'dullāh Khān worked his way up through the administrative ranks not on account of family connections, but rather due to his intellect and talent. He details the Khān’s exemplary rise as just that: a paradigmatic case of how to succeed in the Mughal meritocracy. And again, it almost goes without saying at this point that it was Sa'dullāh Khān’s “world-renowned Aristotle-like intellect,” which Chandar Bhān claims was on a par with none other than Abū al-Fazl, not to mention his successful military campaigns in Balkh and Qandahār, that won the munshi's admiration. Predictably, Chandar Bhān makes sure to showcase both his own relationship with Sa'dullāh Khān and the Khān’s enviable mastery of the secretarial arts that Chandar Bhān held so dear:

On behalf of His Royal Highness, he [Sa'dullah Khan] wrote high status letters to the rulers of Turān and Īrān, doing them justice with eloquence and verbal artistry. In preparing draft-edicts (musawwadāt) he put all his energy into composing the imperial mandates obeyed by the entire world, and in addition to complete fluency in Arabic and Persian, he also knew Turkish. Indeed, his conversational ability was superior even to the litterateurs of Arabia and 'Ajam. In drafting replies to the revenue and property officers he had no need of accountants and petty clerks; in fact, there was hardly any matter in which he needed anyone's assistance.

As a result of an imperial command this lowest of servants became the interlocutor and assistant of that Khān, who was the summit of virtues (fazā’il martabat). Many times while conversing with the Khān, who had an appreciation for talent, we used to pass the time as if of one mind, right

⁴⁰ For a powerful example of the mystical element in Sa'dullāh Khān's writings, see especially the final letter (#46) in the printed edition of his Maktābāt, ibid., 89-97.
from dusk all the way to the crack of dawn, for he himself [like me] used
to stay up late and wake up early.

Along with his daily duties, he also had a penchant for spiritual matters,
and thus even in the center of worldly affairs he used to breathe an air of
detachment. (26)

Yet again, the qualities that Chandar Bhan finds worthy of emphasis are Sa’dullāh
Khān’s linguistic skills, mastery of epistolary norms, and his Sufi leanings. The
importance of such qualities will continue to be reiterated in the pages that follow, not
only in Chandar Bhān’s own words, but also in the moving farmān which Shāh Jahān
circulated upon Sa’dullāh Khān’s death, the complete text of which is included in this
section of Chahār Chaman. The farmān makes clear that, despite Sa’dullāh Khān’s
brilliant career as an administrator and military commander, Shāh Jahān valued him more
for his intellect and kind nature than anything else. It is worth noting, too, that this death-
announcement could in fact have been drafted by Chandar Bhān himself (though there’s
no direct evidence of that). But regardless, it shows once more the way in which Chandar
Bhān used epistolary examples (in which one could loosely include farmāns) to punctuate
his exposition of the crucial role of the secretarial arts in Mughal life, a form of “show,
don’t tell.”

Following this farmān, Chandar Bhān continues on the theme of wizārat and
administrative ideals, but introduces yet another stylistic variation, switching to a report
of a dialogue — possibly hypothetical, but not necessarily — between himself and the
late Sa’dullāh Khān. Interestingly enough, the dialogue is entirely in a question-and-
answer format not unlike Dārā’s conversations with the yogi Bābā Lāl; but whether or not
Chandar Bhan had those dialogues in mind when he composed this one, there had been a long tradition of this question-and-answer format in Indo-Persian philosophical tradition from which he could have drawn.\footnote{Indeed, as early as the eleventh century CE, al-Biruni had converted Patanjali’s \textit{Yoga Sutras} into similar question-and-answer format for his translation of the latter. His claim that he chose this format “as a device for facilitating the reader’s comprehension” suggests that even then this format had already been in wide use. Further, his remarks on the difficulty of translating Patanjali are themselves quite intriguing: “Their books are composed according to metres, and the texts are provided with commentaries in such a way that a complete and accurate translation is difficult, because the commentators are concerned with grammar and etymology and other (matters) which are of use only to a (person) who is versed in their literary languages [i.e. Sanskrit, or Hindi-yi kitabi] as distinct from the vernacular. For this reason I was obliged to amalgamate in (my) translation the text with that over-lengthy commentary to arrange the [discourse] in a way which resembles (a dialogue consisting of) questions and answers.” Shlomo Pines and Tuvia Gelblum, “Al-Biruni’s Arabic Version of Patanjali’s \textit{Yoga Sutras}: A Translation of His First Chapter and a Comparison with Related Sanskrit Texts,” \textit{Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies}, Vol. 29, No. 2 (1966): 302-25. For further details and context see also Bruce B. Lawrence, “The Use of Hindu Religious Texts in al-Biruni’s \textit{India} with Special Reference to Patanjali’s \textit{Yoga-Sutras},” in \textit{The Scholar and the Saint: Studies in Commemoration of Abu’l Rayhan al-Biruni and Jalal al-Din al-Rumi}, edited by Peter J. Chelkowski (New York: Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies; New York University Press, 1975); Carl Ernst, “Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Persian and Arabic Translations from Sanskrit,” \textit{Iranian Studies} 36 (2003): 173-95. Ernst, for his part, argues (on circumstantial evidence) that this translation (and al-Biruni’s oeuvre generally) faded from prominence in the centuries following his death. But even if this is the case, even Ernst is forced to acknowledge that al-Biruni was one of Abû al-Fazl’s primary sources during compilation of the \textit{`Ain-i Akbari} — so clearly al-Biruni’s dialogic version of the \textit{Yogasutras} continued to be known in intellectual circles, and could have formed one benchmark for the Mughal approach to Indian religions generally. It is thus not at all far-fetched to suggest that the format itself continued to be a standard rhetorical device which could be deployed even for non-religious didactic purposes, as Chandar Bhan has done here.} Here Chandar Bhan deploys the format for didactic purposes, and just as with Afzal Khan’s aphoristic dicta quoted above, he is clearly trying to connect Sa’dullah Khan’s advice on these matters to longstanding traditions of political writing, \textit{nasihat-namahe}, \textit{adab} and \textit{akhlaq}:

\begin{quote}
Recollection of the administrative instruction given by the pillar of state, the prop of the fortunate sultanate, [in the form of an account of the questions posed by this lowest of disciples while in the service of the respected exemplar, the great minister, the perfect master Sa’dullah Khan, and the answer to each question heard from the tongue of sweet expression of that wisest man of the age and the empire
\end{quote}

FIRST QUESTION: Should one’s own interests take precedence over the will of the public, or should one give preference to the public interest over one’s own?
ANSWER: To the best of one’s ability, the will of the public should have precedence over one’s own. And if one cannot muster the wherewithal to fulfill this precept, then immediately after one’s own interest/desire every effort should be made to respond to the public will (irādah-i khalq).\footnote{One might object to the use of the term “public” here, but I would submit that the only thing that seems clear about the concept of the public sphere is that there is absolutely no scholarly consensus, even in the west, about what exactly we’re talking about when we talk about the public sphere, much less multiple possible public spheres. Even in the classic Habermasian formulation, it does not entirely make sense to talk about the public sphere, because it’s clear even from his title that the emergence of the public sphere as a condition of modernity is not an event or a place, but a process — a gradual “structural transformation” that traces its roots all the way back to Greco-Roman antiquity; returns to flower in the renaissance; reaches a tipping point with the emergence of print capitalism beginning as early as the seventeenth century; and does not achieve its idealized zenith until well into the nineteenth century, at which point it begins falling victim to commodification, mass culturation, postmodern decline, and all that. If we keep this gradual and processual framework in the foreground, then a whole new space for comparative analyses opens up. Rather than speak of the public sphere we can begin to imagine multiple stages in its emergence, multiple precursors, and multiple localities in which the concept might find modified application. Unfortunately, however, given the close connection between the notion of the public sphere and the larger exclusivist narrative of Western modernity, the importation of analytical rubrics like “the public” and “the public sphere” to former colonies like South Asia becomes instantly folded into a whole other complex of highly fraught conceptual apparatuses, and becomes simply a subset of the larger question of South Asia’s potential for a non-European modernity. Worse still, if one were to protest too much that there might indeed have been a Mughal social space akin to an incipient public sphere that fits the early rubric of Habermas’s model, then we also run a very grave risk of reaffirming the normative teleology of the very same Eurocentrism that we had set out to provincialize, and valorizing the notion that the European model of publicity is the only ideal end point of political development to which all societies must conform in order to be considered civilized.}

And yet perhaps we need not be so vexed by such problematics. Indeed, given the limited state of our knowledge about Mughal public culture, we ought not be vexed about them, pending further investigation. As Sheldon Pollock has noted recently (The Language of the Gods in the World of Men (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006): “European modernity and South Asian premodernity are obviously uneven and not absolute categories; the former displays premodern features, the latter modern ones, and this is borne out no matter what definitions we invoke.” Moreover, as Habermas himself wrote in Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 29: “Even before the control over the public sphere by public authority was contested and finally wrested away by the critical reasoning of private persons on political issues, there evolved under its cover a public sphere in apolitical form — the literary precursor of the public sphere operative in the political domain.”

Nearly the entire first section of Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere sets the stage for an understanding of such “literary precursors” to the public sphere, beginning with an even more basic lexical analysis of terminology. Habermas draws a number of distinctions between classical notions of publicus and privatus, medieval notions of “common” and elite or “particular”, and so on, in a kind of prehistory of the terminology he wants to use to distinguish the modern public and private spheres. But there has not, to my knowledge, been any study of similar types of terminology that were in frequent use in Indo-Persian texts from the Sultanate and Mughal periods. For instance, we know that one of the most prized qualities of Indo-Persian textual production was that it be “enjoyable to the elite, understandable by the common” (khās-pasand va ām-fahm). This distinction between khās and ām translates almost literally to Habermas’s terms sunderlich (‘particular’) and gemeindlich (‘common’), and has been a continuing feature of the Indo-Persian authorial imagination of the reading public for centuries. Another term that merits excavation and analysis is the term that I have translated here as public, namely khalq. For random instance, consider this famously defiant couplet of Amir Khusrau, in which the khalq seems posited quite explicitly as a “public” of some sort, whose opinion can be accessed, and provokes a defiant response:
khalq mī-qâyad kih Khusrau but-parastī mī-kunad
āre āre mī-kunam bā khalq mā rā kār nīst

The public (khalq) says that Khusrau worships idols;
Yes, yes, I do it, so what? I have no business with the public

In one sense this verse captures a very conventional Sufistic heterodoxy, in which the beloved is conceived of as an idol, whose beauty is so transcendent that it offers a vision of union with God. But what interests me here is Khusrau's defiance specifically of the khalq, or public, and by extension that public's opinion of him. If one presses on it a bit, it becomes clear that a vision of normative social space pervades Indo-Persian poetry and the Sufi idiom generally as a foil — against which the poet or the mystic seeks to reject social norms, the exoteric strictures of the shaykh and zāhid, to become so enrapt with the beloved that his hat is askew (kaj-kulah), and he destroys his social self so thoroughly that he must leave civilization entirely and go out to the desert like Majnun. It is precisely this antinomian feature of the classical Sufi and poetic tradition that has led scholars like Harbans Mukhia to describe the ghazal's "celebration of failure" as a form of social dissent (see his "Celebration of Failure as Dissent in Urdu Ghazal," Modern Asian Studies 33, 4 (Oct. 1999): 861-81).

Of course, on such thin evidence we should not go so far as to consider Khusrau's fourteenth century as a kind of proto-modern social world with a public sphere. What I would say, rather, is that more extensive study of the conceptual apparatus of terms like khalq is needed before we can even have a serious conversation about whether that type of second-order analysis is even possible or worthwhile. Such an examination would also need to factor in the context of political wisdom literature, texts on virtue, ethics, politics, norms of public behavior, comportment, and etiquette. This latter corpus draws on the very same Greco-Roman tradition that Habermas credits with first formulating terms like publicus, and yet to date there is has been no systematic study which places the Indo-Persian adab and akhlaq canon in such a deep historical context. Other than a few articles by Muzaffar Alam and a handful of others, the scholar who wants to map out the conceptual landscape of akhlaqi norms, and seeks further to locate the evolution of usage of terms like khalq, would essentially have to start from scratch.

But consider Chandar Bhan's use of the term khalq here, at the high point of the Mughal era, at a historical moment that is almost contemporaneous with the beginnings of the European public sphere. The key term here is, obviously irādah-i khalq, which can fairly be translated as something like "public interest," or "will of the people." As part of his next question, Chandar Bhan asks how a government official develops "consideration for the public" (mulāzimah-i khalq), and provides them with a life free from fear. Sa'dullah Khan replies, quite realistically, that although it is impossible to completely eliminate danger from the society, "one should strive to the extent possible for the maximum contentment of the khalq, and be even-handed and sincere [toward people] whether they are in your presence or not." And again, a few questions later, Chandar Bhan asks how and to what extent a king (or his representative), as leader of elite and common (khās-o-ʾām), can best safeguard the interests of both the general public and his intimate circle. Khan's reply is revealing: "He must cast off any expectation of his own physical and emotional desires."

Obviously, one could object that this conversation was a fragment of Chandar Bhan's imagination, and in any case merely reflects a top-down, normative idealization of good governance that had nothing to do with actual administrative practice. Plus, demonstrating that kings and nobles had a sense of the public good is a long way from proving the other side of the equation, namely that there was a civic space available in which that public could meet and formulate a coherent position vis-à-vis the state. It should be noted, however, that there were indeed Mughal parallels to Habermas's literary salons and coffee shops, particularly in the public bāzārs and in the poetic assemblies which, by this point in Mughal history, were increasingly patronized by wealthy portfolio capitalists and other non-courtly nodes of economic and political power (on the latter see for instance Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Of Imārat and Tişārat: Asian Merchants and State Power in the Western Indian Ocean, 1400-1750," Comparative Studies in Society and History 37, 4 (Oct. 1995): 750-80). Some of the possibilities for such comparison have been explored in Farhat Hasan, "Forms of Civility and Publicness in pre-British India," in Civil Society, Public Sphere, and
NEXT QUESTION: What manner of consideration for the people (mulāhizah-i khalq) should arise in the heart [of rulers and wazīrs] [such that] the people can pass their lives free from fear?

ANSWER: Although this ideal is not entirely possible, and completely eliminating [their] fears/threats is not entirely feasible, nevertheless one should strive to the extent possible for the public good (khair-i khalq), and not discriminate among the people (bā ahl-i rūzgār yak-sān va yak-rangi), whether they are in your presence or not.

NEXT QUESTION: Did the great men (buzurgān) of earlier times accept a bond of service to the rulers of states, or not? If they did accept it, how did the craving for [such worldly] ties overpower (ghālib āmadah) their desire for renunciation, enough for them to decide to associate with kings?

ANSWER: Although their will to renunciation is greater[^43] than all worldly desires, nevertheless, if they transform the choice to associate with kings into the work of God’s servants it becomes another type of craving entirely. The great men of the past chose to associate with kings solely for this purpose.[^44]

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[^43]: Ja‘fari’s printed edition has ghā‘ib (invisible, absent, etc.), but this is clearly a misprint for ghālib, cf. Chandar Bhan’s question.

[^44]: N. b., this question of how to resolve the tension between the mystical ideal of renunciation and the reality of courtly life and worldly affairs is also a running concern of Dārā’s dialogues with Bābā Lāl, as well as many of his letters to his brothers.
NEXT QUESTION: After accepting such a worldly connection, in what way and to what extent should a leader of both the elite and the common (sāhib-i khāss-o-ām) lead his life in order to care for both the public and the circle of elites (ri‘āyat-i khalq va makhlūq-i khāss...bāyad namūd), in order that there will be contentment for all three (i.e., himself, his inner circle, and the public)?

ANSWER: He must cast aside his own emotional and physical desires (aghrāz-i nafsānī va jismānī), and have an eye toward the safeguarding of truth (haqq) in every matter, so that the satisfaction/contentment of all is achieved.

NEXT QUESTION: In worldly matters should one be deliberate (āhistah), calm (āramādah), and free of rancor and malevolence (bī-shor-o-sharr)? Or should one rather be impatient, brash (bī-bāk) and brazen (bī-āzarm)?

ANSWER: As far as one is able, the former qualities should take precedence over the latter. But of course, one can only do so much (margar bah qadar zarūr).

NEXT QUESTION: Should one work and not talk [i.e. boast] about it, or rather should one make known whatever one has achieved?

ANSWER: Doing and not saying is far superior to talking and not doing.

NEXT QUESTION: What is the meaning of integrity (diyānat)?

ANSWER: Not usurping another’s wealth (tasarruf dar māl-i dīgarī nakardin); speaking the truth; being kind to well-wishers (daulat-khwāhān). Even if you are not concerned about your own self (i.e. seeking wealth, promotion, etc. for your own personal benefit) you should wish ill of the bad-wishers. Even if you act in your own interest, do so with discreet trustworthiness and sincerity.

NEXT QUESTION: What should be the guiding principle(s) (ā ṭān) regarding purveyors of unnecessary jealousy and ill-will (arbāb-i hasad-o-‘inād)?

ANSWER: That one should not oneself be jealous or wicked toward anyone.

FINAL QUESTION: To what extent must one rely on alert/attentive ears, and to what extent should one keep one’s eyes open to the world? [For instance.] If a group of people are united in agreement and speaking with
one voice on a certain matter, must one quickly accept their consensus, or should one maintain a skeptical stance and perform further inquiry? Should such an inquiry be conducted using one’s own senses, or can it be entrusted to another? How can we be sure that the other person is entirely (trust) worthy? Does one simply have to allow for the possibility of natural human error tainting another’s information, or not? For that matter, how far should one go in trusting one’s own information (wārasīd)? And if someone else finds out about one’s own inadequacies and failings, what approach should one adopt toward them?

ANSWER: To the extent possible, the investigation and scrutiny of affairs should be performed by one’s own self. When you cannot do you’re your own self because you have too many engagements, then entrust it to a man of rectitude and uprightness (muqawwim va mutadaiyin) — who has already tested for his standards and integrity (kīh az botah-i inmīhān az diyānat-i u durust ‘iyār bar âmada:b bāshad) — who can be allowed to intervene in the matter. And always, after that, you should keep track of how he is conducting the matter, and if some error occurs (i.e. if he turns out to be unreliable), and informs/tells you about it, then you should listen [to that person’s concerns] with attentive ears, and endeavor to make amends.\(^{45}\) (28-30)

Clearly, just as with the earlier extended passage attributed to Afzal Khān, Chandar Bhān’s point here is not simply to pay tribute to Sa’dullāh Khān, but to do so in a way that serves a didactic purpose. As with so much of Chahār Chaman, especially this first “garden,” the emphasis here is on the means by which one cultivates a morally sound administrative habitus. Nearly every anecdote to this point in the text speaks to a set of habits and attitudes that, it is important to recognize, can be applied across the hierarchical spectrum, from the most ordinary clerk all the way up to the wazīr-i kull himself. In this question and answer exchange, of course, the answers to nearly every query seem predictably honorable. But their inclusion here nonetheless demonstrates a

\(^{45}\) Or, possibly, having listened attentively to the accusations, he should try to make up for it. In other words, one could read this as advice not to admit anything until you know what you’re actually accused of. That, however, sounds a bit sneaky and Machiavellian, given the tone of the dialogue to this point.
pressing desire to project the Mughal state as one in which the good of the state and the populace is placed above self-interest, at all levels of government. This is a key element of Chahār Chaman that has been generally overlooked, and gets particularly ignored when the text is described simply as “an account of Shah Jahan’s court” or some such. This is in part due to the general modern distaste, outlined in the introduction, for flowery prose of the sort crafted by Mughal stylists like Chandar Bhān — but it’s strange that even those who have gone looking for treatises on governance and administration have tended to ignore these passages completely. Indeed, this is precisely why Francis Gladwin’s decision (cf. Chapter One above) to ignore the substantive advice and precepts outlined here by Afzal Khān and Sa’dullāh Khān, and instead choose to translate a number of more frilly and superficial passages from chaman two as his featured example of Mughal governance, is so mysterious. Likewise, his failure to include a single epistle in a textbook called The Persian Moonshee seems quite strange — particularly when, as we have seen repeatedly, Chandar Bhān makes such pointed use of letters to punctuate sections and provide such consistent evidence of the notion that great writing, spirituality, and great moral-administrative character go hand in hand.

Indeed, he does so again here, following up the dialogue on administrative ideals with a brief — and rather cryptic — letter from Sa’dullāh Khān to an anonymous (Sufi) “friend.”

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46 It is entirely possible that the “friend” in question is Chandar Bhan himself, and modesty has prevented him from acknowledging it. But without some other corroboration, this is just an idle speculation, and we have no way of knowing one way or the other. The letter does not appear in Zaydī’s printed edition of Sa’dullāh Khān’s Maktūbāt. The latter collection does, however, include several similarly short notes,
Copy of a letter that the great scholar of the age, the wise man of Aristotelian character, Sa'dullah Khan, had written to one of his contemporary friends:

Shauq (the desire to meet you) is a world unto itself (raging inside me), and bayan is another world (full of words, tongues, pages). To make the first acquainted with the second world implies bringing something that's in one's heart to the outside. The claim is that I have handed it over to the tongue of the pen. But to actually do this (i.e., describe my desire publicly), even for very good writers, would be inadequate (appear ugly, in fact) in the eyes of those who truly understand (reality of love). Therefore it is better that describing the musk-scented and beautiful quill should be restrained from going forward in the field of writing, so I will get to the point. Your noble great/noble letter mixed with love inspired pleasure in my heart. It offered me a connection (i.e., insight) to your well-being. Happiness thus becomes the currency in a market made of good cheer (masarrat rā rawāj va bahjat rā rūz-i bāzārī shud).

Ai waqt-i tū khush kih waqt-i mā khush kardī

O, may you pass your time happily,
Who have made our time happy

I hope that you will always continue to send news of your noble conditions well-being (mutawaqqi 'ān-kih paiwasta az kaifiyat-i auzā 'ī sharīf masrūr sākhta bāshand).

What do we make of such a letter, and what is it doing here in Chahār Chaman? Clearly, it does not serve to elucidate any particular point about imperial governance. But it does illustrate something about Sa'dullah Khan's character — his belief in the power of social connectivity afforded by letter-writing; his upbeat outlook; his stalwart friendship, and so on — that Chandar Bhan considered integral to his image of the ideal wazīr's outlook on life. One might, along with Jadunath Sarkar, find such things to be "of little historical..."

several of which are likewise addressed simply to "a friend" (bah 'ażī), and two of which (hs 7 and 31), though different in other content, actually include the very same misra' quoted here.

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value.” But one could equally argue that letters like this raise numerous issues about how even well-known figures from Mughal India are often (mis)remembered. A sipah-sālar like Sa’dullāh Khān will almost always be portrayed in modern historiography one-dimensionally, as a great noble or a great military commander, as if the sum of his existence could be captured by a tally of battles won and forts sacked.47 But we see here that there was a complex, highly erudite, and even somewhat eccentric man behind the general who reduced Chittor and led exhausting campaigns in Balkh and Qandahār. He had a sophisticated and philosophical approach to life, friendship, and the limits of the expressive power of language, all of which made him a public intellectual in every sense of the term.

The underlying assumption in much modern historiography — following Jakob Burckhardt’s formulation of Renaissance Europe as a place of “self-fashioning” — is often that premodern norms of etiquette and comportment, particularly in the non-West, were so rigid as to preclude any type of individual character development or self-formation.48 Of course, absent a great deal of further research it would be overreaching a bit to try and suggest that epistolary artifacts like the ones adduced here are therefore indicative of a larger pattern of self-formation parallel to what was then emerging in early

47 Again, see for instance Richards, The Mughal Empire, 132-4 and 144.

modern Europe, as charted by scholars like Roger Chartier, Cécile Dauphin, and others.\textsuperscript{49}

But as a preliminary observation what we see in much of the Mughal-era \textit{inshā’} canon is that, behind all the fancy rhetoric and occasionally excessive formalism of epistolary conventions, there were undoubtedly distinctive personalities at work in the composition of such letters. In fact, the very brevity and informality of this and some of the other letters included in \textit{Chahār Chaman} and Chandar Bhān’s other writings is itself noteworthy. For one thing, the fact that people were sending such short notes back and forth indicates that there was considerable confidence in the Mughal postal system. But more importantly, when we look carefully at many letter collections, or at a work like \textit{Chahār Chaman}, we see that lots of letters, like this one, are not only short but also unburdened by the excessive prefatory titles and salutations (\textit{alqāb-o-ādāb}) that are usually associated with Mughal epistolary conventions. Such extensive titles were of course a major feature of much official imperial correspondence,\textsuperscript{50} but it seems clear that even at the acme of high Mughal \textit{inshā’} style letters among friends and family could take

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{50} Thus compare the opening of a letter drafted by Sa’dullah Khan in 1654 CE on Shah Jahan’s behalf, during a dispute with the Rana of Udaipur: “The cream of the devoted well-wishers, the epitome of faithful adherents, the product of the loyal dynasty, purest of the family of seekers after royal pleasure, essence of the obedient ones, best amongst his equals and peers, faithful to Islam, Rana Raj Singh should expect the royal favours, and should know that our son dear to us as life, the most noble and the most successful, the favoured one of the Creator, comfort of the eye of the empire and dignity, the crescent of glory and honour, pearl of the crown of the great empire, true son and successor of the exalted caliphate, the receptacle of the divine lights, the horizon of the favours of the shadow of God, glory of the fame and nobility and the dynasty, lamp of the sublime ruling dynasty, valuable gem, magnificent, of high lineage, of exalted position, seeker after bliss, prince of high dignity Muhammad Dara Shihok interceded on your behalf to get your faults pardoned. His intercession received the royal acceptance...” Quoted as translated in Sh. Abdur Rashid, “Two Farmans of Shah Jahan to the Rana of Udaipore,” \textit{Indian Historical Records Commission: Proceedings, Volume XXVIII, Part II, Twenty-Eighth Session, Jaipur 1951} (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1951), 74-7. It is not clear whether or not the original manuscript of these \textit{farmāns}, which Rashid located in the erstwhile Anjuman-e Taraqqi-e Urdu, Aligarh, is still extant.
\end{footnotesize}
a much more informal structure and tone. It is no minor point, because there has been a persistent assumption among some scholars that such long-winded *alqāb-o-ādāb* were only abandoned much later, as what has been portrayed as a key step in the cultivation of modern subjectivity. Most place this moment of transition somewhere in the nineteenth century, as part of the larger picture of colonial influence, and thus for instance Ghalib has been held up by some as the first truly modern letter-writer, in no small part precisely because, in the words of his earliest biographer Altāf Husain Hālī, he “eschewed the old and worn out style of *alqāb-o-ādāb*, as well as numerous other conventions which epistolographers (*mutarassīlīn*) used to consider among the indispensable features of letter-writing (*lawāzīm-i nāma-nigārī*), but in reality were just a purposeless waste of time (*fuzūl va dūr az kār*).”51 If nothing else, then, the letters included in *Chahār Chaman* indicate that there was a far earlier precedent for such personalized and relatively informal correspondence among seventeenth-century writers like Chandar Bhān, Afzal Khān, and Sa‘dullāh Khān.

One of the major lacunae, then, in Mughal historiography — and premodern history generally — has been that we have failed to see the human side of so many important figures’ lives. There are many reasons for this, including in some cases the reality imposed by our sources, or occasional lack thereof. And obviously we don’t want to go too far in looking for the fool’s gold of a Mughal parallel to “Renaissance self-fashioning,” or some other benchmark precursor to enlightenment liberalism and

modernism. But we could and should do more simply to try and see these figures as human agents with real human feelings. Here in *Chahār Chaman* we have already seen a vivid example of Shāh Jahān’s all-too-human grief, and his responsibility as the consoler-in-chief, after the death of Afzal Khān, and his efforts to make the late Khān’s family and associates feel at ease. Chandar Bhān revisits this theme when noting the Emperor’s grief over the passing of Saʿdullāh Khān (27-8). Once again, special attention is paid to the bādshāh’s personal efforts to reach out to the late wazīr’s family and associates, helping to assuage their grief and anxiety through symbolic acts that confirm their importance to the imperial project, and assurances that they’ll be cared for. Thus we saw above that Shāh Jahān sent out a long farmān marking the occasion of the late Khān’s death in florid prose, possibly composed by Chandar Bhān himself, though we cannot know for sure. But he also makes a point of personally reassuring Saʿdullāh Khān’s circle through a series of gifts and promotions. ‘Ināyat Khān reports in his *Shāh Jahān Nāma* that the emperor “expressed his deep regrets and showered favors on ‘Allami [Saʿdullah Khān]’s children and all his connections. Amongst that number, his eldest son Lutf Allah — who was then in the eleventh year of his age — was gratified by the bestowal of a mansab of 1000; and his servant Shaikh ‘Abd al-Nabi was also elevated to the above grade.”


In other words, the emperor not only had to deal with “the dust of anguish (ghubār-i malāl) that settled on the mirror of his heart” (31) at the loss of a trusted friend and advisor, but also felt obligated — personally, morally, and practically — to go out of his way to help console the family and friends of the deceased. Such moments of personal emotion and contact rarely make it into our standard Mughal historiography, with all its emphasis on institutions, pomp, and grandeur. But when we scratch the surface of the chronicles, texts like Chahār Chaman, and the countless other works of inshā’ that lie unpublished and unstudied in archives around the world, perhaps a different, more personable picture might possibly emerge.

In any event, besides dealing with his grief Shāh Jahan did also have to decide on an administrative successor to his extremely accomplished late wazīr. And here begins another very revealing section of Chahār Chaman, which closes out the discussion of administration and wizārat. Just as he had done after Afzal Khān’s death, Shāh Jahan began by appointing an interim chief minister, this time selecting a longtime officer from the daftar-i khālsa-i sharīfā (office of state lands) named Raghunath Rāy, who had been a close associate of Sa’dullah Khan, and who was duly promoted to the title of Rāy-i Rāyān. Chandar Bhān describes Raghunath Rāy’s new position as “minister of

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54 The finer distinctions of Mughal administrative offices are beyond the scope of this dissertation, and in any case have been dealt with very ably by numerous scholars. For a brief overview, see for instance S. M. Ikrām, Muslim Civilization in India, edited by Ainslie T. Embree (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 209-22. His concise explanation of the office of dīvān-i ḍawāni is worth noting here: “The dīwan, who can perhaps be called the finance minister, had under him two principal officers, called dīwan-i-tan and dīwan-i-khalsā, who were in charge of salaries and state lands respectively. It is interesting that all the assistants of the dīwan-i-khalsā under Shah Jahan’s reign were Hindus, and five out of the seven under the dīwan-i-tan belonged to the same community. Raja Raghunath Rai, who had been dīwan-i-khalsā for some years, became sole dīwan in the thirty-first year of Shah Jahan’s reign, and maintained this position until his death, during the reign of Aurangzeb” (211). For further details on Raghunath’s life and career, see also the entry
financial affairs” (mutasaddi-yi mu’āmalat-i dīvānī), and does not fail to note that he himself also received a promotion around this time: “This lowest of servants, who had by that time spent some ten years in the service of the refulgent imperial presence working with various wazīrs of the greatest nobility...was promoted to the title of ‘Rāy’, and assigned to the job of drafting mandatory imperial decrees (musawada-navīsī-yi manāshīr-i qazā-tā‘īsī)” (31).

But it is noteworthy that the actual job and title of wazīr-i kull never went to Raghunath Rāy, even if, as Chandar Bhān seems to suggest, he essentially performed that function during the period of administrative disarray after Sa‘dullāh Khān’s death. In Chandar Bhān’s words, he worked as the “acting wazīr” (wizārat-intimā) until the position was officially filled by Mīr Muhammad Sa‘īd Ardastānī, better known simply as Mīr Jumla. Mīr Jumla was an Iranian émigré who had come to India as a petty clerk for a diamond merchant, and had risen to enormous wealth and power while serving the Qutb Shāhī kingdom in Golconda. After a falling out with the Qutb al-Mulk, however, Mīr Jumla sought the intercession of Prince Aurangzeb, with whose backing he defected to the Mughals, was granted the title “Mu‘azzam Khān,” and given a notable mansab rank of 6000 zāt / 6000 sawār.55

55 The Shah Jahan Nama adds that he was also “favored with the gift of a jeweled escritoire; two fine horses with gold and gilt saddles respectively; a splendid elephant with silver housings, accompanied by a female one; and five lakhs of rupees as gratuity” (Inayat Khān, Shah Jahan Nama, 530). For further details on Mīr Jumla’s adventurous life and career, see also Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, The Life of Mir Jumla, the General of Aurangzeb, 1st ed. (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, 1951); Shāh Navāz Khān, Ma’āthir-ul-Umarā, translated by H. Beveridge, edited by Baini Prashad, vol. 2 (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1979), 188-205. N.b.,
At first, Chandar Bhān has great praise for Mīr Jumla, particularly for his military capabilities:

The said Khān, who had achieved the maximum skill when it came to courtly etiquette and the arts of war, had very shrewd instincts and a keen understanding (dīl-i dānā va fāhm-i rasā) in battle, combat, siege warfare, and conquest, as well as in matters of imperial administration, advice, and counsel; he thus found a place in His Majesty’s pure heart in just a matter of days. (32)

According to ‘Ināyat Khān, Mīr Jumla’s elevation to prime minister occurred in July 1656 CE; in less than a year, however, he was sent back south to accompany Aurangzeb in the Deccan campaigns. Chandar Bhān notes this departure, and the fact that Muhammad Amīn Khān — Mīr Jumla’s son, who had only just returned to court — was thus assigned to take over the duties of wazīr-i kull during his father’s absence. Administrative authority was thus split for a time “between the seal of Mu’azzam Khān and the signature of Muhammad Amīn Khān” (32).

There is no need to get lost in the details, but there is an important point to be made here about Chandar Bhān’s attitude. He seems to be stressing the fact that, at least initially, Mīr Jumla was for all intents and purposes a prime minister in name only; most of his practical authority had been transferred to his son, and all the while, Chandar Bhān tells

the printed text of Chahār Chaman initially lists Mīr Jumla’s promotion as being to the title of “A‘zam Khān” — this is almost certainly a misprint, which should read “Mu’azzam.” For the larger historical context of Mīr Jumla’s career, and of Iranian migration to and travel within India generally during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see for instance Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Iranians Abroad: Intra-Asian Elite Migration and Early Modern State Formation,” The Journal of Asian Studies 51, no. 2 (May 1992): 340-363.

56 ’Inayat Khan, The Shah Jahan Nama of ’Inayat Khan, 530-3.
us, “[Raghunath] Rāy-i Rāyān kept supervising his own department” (*dar kār-i khud istīqlāl dāsht*) (32). In other words, it is not clear whether Chandar Bhān wants simply to project admiration for the capabilities of his fellow Hindu administrator, or rather to inject a subtext of resentment that the top job never went to Raghunath Rāy. Whichever is actually the case, there is no doubt at all that he spends several pages repeatedly describing the high position and administrative accomplishments of Raghunath Rāy-i Rāyān, yet always within the context of other men’s terms as prime minister.

Thus he explains that “because the great [Mu’azzam] Khān’s sojourn in the Deccan grew to an extended delay,” the accounting work of the state *dīvānī* became “clogged with delays” (*dar uqda-i taʾwiq uftād*) (32), leading Shāh Jahān to assign nearly all of his administrative duties — running the finance ministry, keeping revenue accounts, drafting orders, and so on — to Raghunath Rāy-i Rāyān in any case. When we recall Chandar Bhān’s earlier praise for a *wazīr* like Saʿdullah Khān, namely that he was a capable administrator who ran his own departments, kept track of accounts, and drafted his own *jāvābs* to provincial administrators, it seems almost certain that now he is drawing our attention to Mir Jumla’s pro forma early term specifically as a cautionary tale. He has already shown us the ideal, and now he is telling his readers how quickly things can go wrong when the wrong man is appointed to run affairs of state.

Thus even while never explicitly criticizing Mu’azzam Khān, he draws a sharp contrast between him and other great *wazīrs* of his era. Indeed, he emphasizes the contrast by
adding that he himself was recruited to help salvage the day-to-day operations of the

dīvānī under Rāy-i Rāyān’s supervision:

This lowest of servants, who has been working as an associate of wazīrs of
the highest dignity ever since the prime ministership of the late Afzal
Khān, and likewise been a sincere attendant in the direct service of His
Most Exalted Majesty (va hamīn dar khidmat-i huzūr-i ashraf-a’lā dar
khalā-o-malā qiymām dāshta), and after the passing of the late Sa’ddullāh
Khān was appointed to draft the imperial edicts obeyed by the entire
world, was sent to assist the Rāy-i Rāyān in the supreme administrative
office (daftar-khāna-i a’lā), in order to train Muhammad Amīn Khān in
such matters (az in ma’nī muttala‘ sāzād). (32-3)

Clearly the reference here to Chandar Bhān’s training under the great wazīrs of old like
Afzal Khān and Sa’ddullāh Khān is intended to contrast sharply with Muhammad Amīn
Khān’s relative inexperience. Indeed, his description of this inchoate state of
administrative authority continues:

Around the same time Muhammad Amīn Khān was selected as the
bakhshe [paymaster], while Rāy-i Rāyān remained busy with the work of
the dīvānī. After that, it was ordered that Wazīr Khān, who is quite
knowledgeable in writing legal orders and keeping accounts, sat in the
administrative seat as a trustee (ba-tariq-i amīn), and on the margins of
imperial orders and accounts his signature was affixed after that of the
Rāy-i Rāyān. But on the documents of the dīvānī and other orders the
Rāy-i Rāyān’s seal remained in effect. (32-3)

Without ever coming out and complaining explicitly about it, Chandar Bhān seems to be
painting a picture here in which Raghunath Rāy-i Rāyān — and Chandar Bhān himself,
to a lesser extent — did much of the administrative grunt work during this period while
others were invested with more prestigious titles and actual authority, despite their
inattention and in some cases outright incompetence.\textsuperscript{57} Again, we could read all this simply as Chandar Bhān’s effort to draw attention to the talents of an admired colleague. But when we recall his earlier remarks on Rājā Todar Mal’s difficulty in proving himself at court despite his obvious administrative achievements, it is hard not to wonder whether or not Chandar Bhān feels that Raghunath Rāy was passed over specifically because he was a Hindu — or, more likely, because he was not a Rajput.\textsuperscript{58}

And he would, in fact, be almost passed over again soon after this. Mu‘azzam Khān’s Deccan campaign continued to be bogged down, and thus finally the administrative apparatus was officially handed over to the charge of “that greatest of khanṣ of the highest echelon, the cream of amīrs of high stature, the khan of impeccable nobility, Ja‘far Khān.” Chandar Bhan has nothing but praise for Ja‘far Khān, whose various talents he describes as being “even brighter than the sun.” And thus his description of Ja‘far Khān’s promotion to the post of wizārat-i kull-i hindūstān, “while the Rāy-i Rāyān

\textsuperscript{57} According to Shāh Navāz Khān, “Mīr Jumla’s son Mīr Muhammad Amin, who was at the Court (Haidarābād), suffered from the dual intoxication of youth and prosperity, and being puffed up by the brilliant victories of his father behaved presumptuously and exceeded all bounds. For example, he came drunk one day to the Darbār, and went to sleep on the royal MASNAD, and added to his offence by vomiting there (istiifrāgh namūda). As a result the signs of annoyance became apparent.” Beveridge, Ma‘āhir-ul-Umarā, vol. 2, 188-9.

\textsuperscript{58} Cf. M. Athar Ali’s remarks, which also draw a parallel between the careers of Todar Mal and Raghunath Rāy: “A very small portion of the Mughal nobility was recruited from those who had no claims to high birth but were pure administrators or accountants. Such were the members of the accountant castes, Khatris, Kayasthas, etc. Usually they received low ranks when appointed officers or clerks in the financial departments. But a few of them rose to higher ranks. Under Akbar there had been Raja Todar Mal. Raja Raghunath, the divān in the early years of Aurangzeb, rose to the high rank of 3000/700 after a purely financial career. In our lists of Aurangzeb’s nobles, this class is included among ‘other Hindus’, i.e. Hindus other than Rajputs and Marathas.” M. Athar Ali, The Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb, Rev. ed (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 14. One wonders, after reading a passage like this, what to make of the notion that the British are the ones who invented the notion of martial races — perhaps we give them too much notoriety, even when rightly criticizing their discursive excesses.
carried on in his same assignment (ba-hamān nasaq ba-hāl mānd),"59 does not seem intended as a rebuke of the former. But in context there does seem to be an underlying strain of dismay, despite the fact that finally, in the end, "when that khān of great stature [Ja'far Khān] was ordered to become governor of Mālwa, the Rāy-i Rāyān was appointed to the wizārat-i kull" (33).

Chandar Bhān’s feelings aside, however, the thing that is perhaps most striking to the Mughal historian is that this latter promotion of Raghuṇāth Rāy-i Rāyān and Ja’far Khān to a sort of dual Prime Ministership was instituted well into Shāh Jahān’s period of failing health, two months after two of his sons (Shāh Shujā’ in Bengal, and Murād Bakhsh in Gujarat) were apparently confident enough in their belief that their father was already dead that they each tried to crown themselves emperor. Meanwhile, Dārā Shukoh was busy trying to shore up his own support in Delhi and Agra, and Aurangzeb was in the process of marshalling his resources to return from the Deccan and challenge for the throne. In other words, the war of succession was already practically afoot during the period Chandar Bhān is describing, and yet he makes no mention whatsoever of all the intrigue, plotting, and counter-plotting that was surely going on in his midst. The narrative is almost completely, willfully oblivious to these historical events, a fact that

59 It should be noted that ‘Inayat Khan’s account characterizes their roles as being on slightly more equal footing: “...it was also ordered at this time [ca. December 1657] that the duties of Prime Minister should be jointly assumed by Rai Rayan and Ja’far Khan, with the former being responsible for financial affairs and the latter for administration.” Shah Jahan Nama, 546. This construes well with M. Athar Ali’s assessment: “...while nominally there was no difference between the civil and military duties of a mansabdar, yet in fact civil (revenue) and military duties were often assigned to different persons according to their experience or training. Thus, for example, nobles like Jai Singh, Daud Khan Qureshi, Dilīr Khan, Bahadur Khan Zafar Jang Kokaltash, Amir Khan, and Dālpat Bundela, were always assigned military duties and no financial and revenue duty was ever required of them. Such instances may, of course, be multiplied. Likewise, some nobles were always assigned financial and executive duties, such as Raja Raghuṇāth, ‘Inayatullah Khan, Fazīl Khan, Bahramand Khan, etc.” Ibid., 145.
once more raises the genre question with which we began this chapter. However much
_Chaḥār Chaman_ might be an "account of Shah Jahan’s court," a work of history it most
certainly is not.

In fact, the only trace that comes even close to acknowledging that this decisive struggle
for the throne has even taken place is itself couched in a description of Raghunath Rāy-i
Rāyān’s final elevation to the title of “Rāja.” Chandar Bhān himself does not go into the
details, but we do know, for instance from ‘Ināyat Khān’s account, that Raghunath seems
to have remained neutral during the war, and thus was able to present himself at
Aurangzeb’s coronation _darbār_ without fear of any reprisal.⁶⁰ And thus Chandar Bhān
closes out his lengthy discussion of the ideals and exemplars of administrative efficacy
with a note of high praise for his diligent and patient colleague:

_A note on the bestowal of the excellent title (khitāb-i mustatāb) of Rāja on that pillar of the state, the axis of governmental affairs (madār al-mahāmāt), Ray-i Rayān_

Since the essence of the pearl of ability and capacity in the market of the
test of the time never goes to waste, and since the state of the capability
of people of skill and wisdom inevitably comes into full view, (va kaifiyat-i
nashā’at-i hāl arbāb-i hunar va ahl-i dānish bi-ikhtiyār ba-manassa-i
zuhūr mī-āyād), therefore in these recent bountiful days that pillar of the
elites of Hindūstān, the head of the office of gentlemen of the world,
[Raghunath] Rāy-i Rāyān — the genuineness of whose business acumen
and literary abilities serves as a textbook (_dastūr al-‘amal_) for managing
the affairs of the world that is so famous that it requires no description —
gained approval from the alchemical gaze of the _pādshāh_ ‘Ālamgīr
[Aurangzeb], the Conqueror of the Universe. He was duly promoted and
elevated to the supreme title of “Rāja” Raghunāth, was ennobled by an
increase in _mansab_ ranking, and appointed manager of the affairs of the

⁶⁰ Cf. ‘Inayat Khan, _Shah Jahan Nama_ , 553. “Two days after the surrender of the Akbarabad fort, on the
19th of Ramazan 1068 (20 June 1658), Prince Aurangzeb held a great _darbār_ in his camp, which was
attended by all the high nobles and officers of the state. Among those who offered their homage were Rai
Rayan and Ja’far Khan, who had jointly shared the responsibilities of Prime Minister.”
entire divānī without any limitation or partner (bī-sahm va sharīk).
Numerous other ministers, despite ostensibly being skilled enough in the
art of wizārat that they needed no help, had always approached the said
Rāja for corrections and a discerning eye, whether with regard to
concluding or deciding some business or assessing and confirming the
account ledgers. But whatever work the Rāja did, he did it himself, with
no need of anyone else’s help. Along with great skill in the art of
penmanship, he also had a true talent for prose style and usage (inshā’-o-
imlā’), and is famous for his excellent manners, politeness, and civility
(husn-i sulūk va murūwat va mudārā). (33-4)

Again, the message seems clear: kindness, civility, spiritual balance, diligence, hard
work, and self-reliance (‘whatever work he did, he did it himself’) will all pay dividends,
and are highly prized values in the Mughal administrative system as Chandar Bhān sees
it. Raghunath Rāy’s rise was clearly not meteoric, and neither, for that matter, was
Chandar Bhān’s; but our munshī nevertheless makes a point of closing this section with a
happy outcome, to send a clear didactic message to his readers that talent and hard work
will in the end be rewarded, no matter what obstacles present difficulties or, for that
matter, who happens to be the emperor.61

61 Incidentally, the memory of Raghunath Ray’s career and talents remains an inspiration among kayasthas
even today, as in the following passage from Madhurt Jaffrey’s memoir Climbing the Mango Trees: A
as a child in the biography of Rai Jeevan Lal Bahadur, her “grandfather’s grandfather,” Jaffrey writes that:

...the family’s real story began in the seventeenth century, when our ancestor Raja
Raghunath Bahadur left his hometown, Narnaal, north of Jaipur, and came to the
glittering Delhi court of the Moghul emperor of India, Shah Jahan...Raghunath Bahadur
would not have been allowed just to walk into the court of the “Grand Moghul,” one of
the world’s richest and most powerful emperors...My ancestor’s way into the Moghul
court was eased by the sponsorship and patronage of the finance minister, Asadullah
Khan, who soon appointed him his deputy. As Shah Jahan aged and the bloody wars of
succession between his sons began, Raghunath Bahadur was shrewd enough to align
himself with the eventual victor, Aurangzeb. For his sagacity, Aurangzeb, when
emperor, amply rewarded my ancestor with titles, money, an army of twenty-five
hundred horsemen, and, on Asadullah Khan’s death, the post of finance minister.
A Brief Non-History of Mughal Conquests

Chandar Bhān never tells us exactly when Rāy-i Rāyān was promoted to the title of “Rāja,” though of course we know from his mention of pādshāh Aurangzeb ‘Ālamgīr that it must have occurred after the war of succession, and in any case other sources such as the Muntakhab al-Lubāb record that Raghunāth’s new title and promotion were bestowed on the occasion of Aurangzeb’s second coronation (1069 AH / 1659 CE). Any number of factors could have played a part in Chandar Bhān’s reticence to delve into much historical detail about this period so quickly on the heels of the war of succession.

Chandar Bhān was, after all, a known associate of Aurangzeb’s older brother and greatest rival for the throne, Dārā Shukoh — so one can understand why he would tread lightly or, as in this case, gloss over the details entirely. Perhaps it was simply a question of etiquette. In any case, it is hard not to marvel at Chandar Bhān’s almost blithe refusal to reference the basic contours of what would surely have been the biggest military and political upheaval of his entire lifetime, particularly when that upheaval played a direct role in the events he is actually narrating. But perhaps we should not be so quick to read so much into this sudden blindness of his speculating eye. It could just as easily be read as being part of Chahār Chaman’s broader pattern of being somewhat willfully nonchalant about historical context and empirical specificity. We saw right away that the first

Of course, it was Sa’dullāh Khān, not “Asadullah,” who patronized Raghunath’s career, and as Chandar Bhān’s account above makes clear his path to finance minister continued to be complicated even after the late Khān’s death. I am very grateful to Sanjay Subrahmanyan for referring me to Jaffrey’s text.

section of chaman one actively resisted historicity by ignoring, even subverting the chronology of events altogether. We have also seen that even though his account of various influential Mughal wazīrs proceeds in basically chronological order, Chandar Bhan has felt no obligation whatsoever to give temporal signposts of any kind, or to locate any of his observations within the context of the political events of his day. Thus even though he was undoubtedly perfectly well aware of those dates and events, and thus can be said to have a clearly informed historical sensibility, as an author of a work of inshā’ he felt absolutely no generic requirement to be, as it were, historicist. And thus it is actually not so surprising after all when we see that his attention is much more focused on locating his colleague Rāja Raghunāth within a certain normative ideal of administrative comportment and success — which is, after all, the true subject of the middle section of chaman one — than on belaboring the particulars of the political imbroglio happening in his midst, the details of which would have been known to his audience, and available in various tārikhs and other accounts anyway.

Immediately after this, however, we enter the section of chaman one that comes closest in the entire text to being what one might call “historical.” After closing out his observations on the ideals and practice of wizārat, Chandar Bhān enters into what he calls “An Account of Some of the Military Victories of the Present Age” (zikr-i ba’zi az futūhāt dar ‘ahd-i qarīn). He begins with a cursory sketch of some of the well-known early victories of Shāh Jahān’s reign, starting with the taking of Daulatbād fort, which, he informs us, “is legendary among the sturdy and fortified citadels of the world, the battlements and heights of which approach the celestial Wheel of Atlas” (34). Chandar
Bhān offers a brief praise of Shāh Jahān’s executive talents, then gives some very cursory details: that Mahābat Khān was appointed to lead the imperial forces, and that it was Fath Khan, the son of the famed Abyssinian commander Malik ‘Ambar (1549-1626 CE), who surrendered the fort and “retied the knot of allegiance to the threshold of royal dominion” (34). But again, as before, he does not give any dates for these events (which occurred in Shah Jahan’s sixth regnal year, 1632-1633 CE). Nor does he go into any further details about what was, in fact, a long drawn-out siege of nearly four months, a campaign which involved shifting allegiances and complex strategic machinations among numerous other Deccani factions, from the ‘Ādil Shāhīs and Qutb-Shāhīs to the upstart forces of Shāhūjī Bhonsle, before Mahābat Khān could finally engineer Fath Khān’s submission.64

Thus even though it might appear that we are entering the terrain of conventional historical source material here, it seems clear that Chandar Bhān is not really all that interested in giving a historical account per se. He moves quickly from mention of the siege of Daulatābād to the Mughal conquests in Bijāpūr and Golconda, noting with pride that “the ‘Ādil Khān, Qutb al-Mulk, and other conquerors of the Deccan pulled the saddle-cloth of faithfulness and sincerity onto their shoulders” (35), after which the khutba came regularly to be read in Shah Jahan’s name throughout their lands, and

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63 For a recent account of Malik ‘Ambar’s career, see Richard Eaton, Social History of the Deccan, 105-28.

64 For those details, see for instance ‘Inayat Khan, The Shah Jahan Nama of ‘Inayat Khan, 97-116
multilingual ambassadors" (îlciyân-i zabân-dân) were sent to express their allegiance at the imperial court (35).  

He then spends a bit of time berating Khân-i Jahân Lodî (a.k.a. Pîr Khân, or, as Chandar Bhan refers to him, “Pîr Afghân”) and Jujhâr Singh Bundela (son of Bîr Singh Bundela, who himself retained great notoriety for his assassination of Abû al-Fazl) for their rebellions early in Shâh Jahân’s reign. Khân-i Jahân’s flight and insurrection dragged on from 1629-1631 CE (i.e. before the siege of Daulatâbâd), and Jujhâr Singh’s open rebellion was a few years later, in 1635 CE (i.e. after Daulatâbâd). So once again, as with the early part of chaman one, adherence to chronology is clearly not one of Chandar Bhân’s pressing concerns. This does not, of course, mean that his account is not historical, but rather that it is not historicist in the way that modernists — or even an early modern contemporary like ‘Inâyat Khân, for that matter — might want or expect. His agenda is not to record events in a linear narrative with causal explanatory power, but rather to draw upon those events that stand out to him — even if he has to make them stand outside of time — in order to project a certain image of imperial power and justice. Thus he points out that Khân-i Jahân’s high status was, essentially, a byproduct of his alliance with the Mughals in the first place, implying that his flight from court was the act of a deluded/paranoid (mutawawhim) ingrate. As for Jujhâr Singh, his acts are portrayed  

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65 For general details on the campaigns in Bijapur and Golconda, see B. P. Saksena, History of Shahjahan of Dhiili (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1958), 150-81.  

66 For details on both of these rebellions, see ‘Inayat Khan, The Shah Jahan Nama of ‘Inayat Khan, 34-9 and 44-57 (for Khân-i Jahân); 27-31 and 149-65 (for Jujhâr Singh Bundela). For a recent analysis of Khân-i Jahân’s importance as a key figure in crafting the “ethnogenesis” of Afghan identity among the diaspora of Central Asians in India, see Nile Green, “Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood in Afghan History,” Journal of Asian Studies 67, 1 (2008): 171-211.
as the combined result of his greed, “the barbarism/ignorance that dwells in the heart of this [Bundela] clan” (jahālatī kih dar nihād-i īn jamāʿat mutamakkīn ast) (35), and his vain presumption that the harsh terrain and jungles surrounding Bundelkhand would deter the imperial armies.

In other words, Chandar Bhān seems to be telling us, both of these rebels were disruptive fools, whose actions were completely unjustified. No doubt he is biased in favor of the imperial cause, but that is only relevant insofar as we are interested in determining right and wrong, which is obviously not my task here. The point is to demonstrate that this part of Chahār Chaman is clearly trying to project power in a certain way, a propagandistic goal for which the dates and particulars of these events seem somehow irrelevant.

We should also take note of the language used to project this power. Chandar Bhān has no hesitation in describing the imperial army, for instance, as a collection of “victorious ghāzīs” (34). Continuing on with the narrative, after his account of Jujhār Singh’s insurrection, Chandar Bhān takes us east to the Mughal army’s capture of the Bengali port of Hugli under the command of Qāsim Khān (36), and then further to the conquest of Assam under Islām Khān, during which “countless Assamese, more even than a swarm of ants or locusts (ziyādaḥ az mor-o-malakh) fell to the swords of the victorious ghāzīs” (36). This language prompts a word or two about the place of religion in this military-political milieu. It would likely be going too far to try and suggest that in Chandar Bhān’s worldview religion played no part in Mughal life and politics. We have already
seen that if one reads between the lines we can detect a possible hint of resentment at the perceived chauvinism directed at Rājā Todar Mal, Rājā Raghunāth, and to some extent Chandar Bhān himself. But even in those cases, one cannot make any definitive assessment one way or another. And in the section under discussion here the idea that Chandar Bhān might show some partisanship toward, say, Shāhuji Bhonsle or Jujhār Singh Bundela simply because they were fellow Hindus is virtually out of the question. One has to wonder, then, about a Brahman like Chandar Bhān’s use of terms like ghāzī to describe the imperial armies. What it really suggests is that terms like this had to some degree become almost emptied of their sectarian meanings, and could be deployed almost formulaically as markers of imperial rather than specifically Islamic power. The trace of the original meaning remains — and thus leaves the potential for a great deal of mischievous (mis)reading — but the gesture is pure rhetorical performance. When colonial and modern scholars took the harsh sectarian language of many Indo-Persian chronicles at face value, or accused Hindu writers like Chandar Bhān of shameless sycophancy for echoing that language (cf. H.M. Eliot, “Original Preface”), they entirely missed — or willfully overlooked — this philological reality. But we postcolonial scholars have, perhaps, also gone a bit too far in the other direction, trying to argue that such language is always just an empty formal gesture. For there is no question that Chandar Bhān could have used other, more value-neutral terms besides ghāzī, and yet he chose not to. In other words, the language of Chahār Chaman tells us that neither the colonial-modern metanarrative of fixed communities ever at war with one another, nor the postcolonial narrative of accommodative, harmonious composite culture, fully
captures the complex reality of how sectarian identities were deployed discursively in Mughal India.

This survey of early victories concludes with a few words about 'Ali Mardān Khān’s unilateral surrender of the fort of Qandahār to the Mughals in 1638 CE (though again, Chandar Bhān doesn’t mention the date). 'Ali Mardān Khān had been the governor of Qandahar while it was under Safavid control, but decided to put his lot in with the Mughals instead after an apparent dispute with Shāh Safī and his new wazīr Sārū Taqī over alleged revenue arrears. As with his account of the events at Daulatābād, Chandar Bhān does not go into any detail about the intrigues, negotiations, or military maneuvers that accompanied 'Ali Mardān Khān’s handover of the fort. He simply notes that 'Ali Mardān Khān, “with an eye toward preserving his life and code of honor (nāmūs),” managed to successfully hand the fort over to the Mughals “in spite of the large assemblage of Qizilbash forces and the arrival of [a detachment led by the Safavid military commander (qullar aqasi)] Siyāwush Khan from Iran, not to mention the

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67 For details on the conflicting accounts of 'Ali Mardān Khān’s motivations, see B. P. Saksena, History of Shahjahan of Dihli (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1958), 216. Shāh Safī was, in general, not well liked, and alienated many of his nobles. It is thus no coincidence that 'Inayat Khan prefaxes his account of 'Ali Mardān Khān’s handover of Qandahār as follows: “Be it not concealed that the territory of Qandahar and Zamindawar formerly had been for a long period in the possession of the servants of this eternal government. However, during the reign of the late Emperor Jahangir, Shah ‘Abbas, the ruler of Iran, mounted an expedition to retrieve this portion of his dominions, and after a protracted contest he succeeded in laying hold of it. On the demise of that ruler equaling Jamshid in dignity, his grandson Shah Safi succeeded to the throne of Iran; and from absurd motives and frivolous apprehensions, he overthrew nearly all of his predecessor’s chief ministers” (Shah Jahan Nama, 221-2). For details on Sārū Taqī’s rise and machinations at the Safavid court, see Sussan Babaie, Kathryn Babayan, Ina Baghdiantz-McCabe, and Massumeh Farhad, Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 42-6.

68 For details on the entire affair, and the persistent Mughal-Safavid disputes and skirmishes in Qandahar throughout Shah Jahan’s reign, see B. P. Saksena, History of Shahjahan of Dihli (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1958), 210-36.
duplicity (nifāq) of a number of ‘Alī Mardān Khān’s short-sighted comrades” (36).

Apart from this rather general statement, Chandar Bhan notes only that various Mughal military elites received robes of honor and mansab promotions for their service in Qandahār.⁶⁹ In other words, he does not mention the Mughals’ subsequent inability to maintain their hold on Qandahār, nor their nearly two decades of continuous and unsuccessful attempts to secure it. Chandar Bhān was surely well aware of these later developments, particularly since the most devastating of the Mughals’ failed Qandahār campaigns had been led by his own sometime patron, Prince Dārā Shukoh.

Perhaps he did not want to spoil the mood of the text with unpleasant details. But of course, generically speaking, this is again precisely the point: chronicles, whatever their level of detail, and no matter how propagandistic their discursive agenda, cannot always simply gloss over such things. Whereas for Chandar Bhān’s imagistic purposes, mention of the takeover of Qandahār is one felicitous “victory” among many, and contributes nicely to his overall projection of Mughal imperial power. The failure to mention the later struggles over Qandahār thus likely had less to do with self-censorship or ignorance of the true state of affairs than utter disinterest. As we have seen, he is not all that

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⁶⁹ Among them he lists Sa’dullah Khān Bahādur Fīrūz Jang, “who was head of the army” (kīh sardār-i lashkar būd). This actually seems to be an error on Chandar Bhan’s part — Sa’dullah Khān clearly participated in later skirmishes in Qandahār, but does not appear to have had crucial role in the events surrounding ‘Alī Mardān Khān’s initial handover of the fort, for which the army detachment was led by Prince Shāh Shujā‘ (cf. ‘Inayat Khan, Shah Jahan Nama, 221-32; Sakse, History of Shahjahan, 210-36). Chandar Bhan was possibly referring here to a noble named ‘Abdulāh Khān, whose moniker was Bahādur Fīrūz Jang, but from other sources it is not clear that he had anything to do with these events either. It could also be that Chandar Bhan meant to list Khān Daurān, who did participate as a commander in the 1638 campaign, and whose epithet at the time was Bahādur Nusrat Jang. In any event, the others whom Chandar Bhan singles out are Rāja Jagat Singh and ‘Iwaz Khān Qāqshāl. Chahār Chaman, 36.
interested in contextual details throughout *Chahār Chaman* in any case, preferring to use them only insofar as they can be put to some rhetorical purpose.

Indeed all of these victories — Daulatbād, Bījāpūr, Golconda, the police actions against Khān-i Jahān and Jujhār Singh Bundela, Hughly, Assam, Qandahār — are dealt with in a mere two pages, and can really be seen as a kind of descriptive prelude to the much more detailed account of the campaigns in Balkh and Badakhshān which makes up the bulk of this section of the text. In the printed edition of *Chahār Chaman* the account of these campaigns in Transoxiana extends for nearly ten full pages, making it far and away one of the longest single sections of the entire book. This account is followed by another longish section on the crisis in Mewār with the Rānā of Udaipur, which basically closes out the first *chaman*. Thus much like in the earlier section on *wizārat*, which began with a prelude about various great *wazīrs* of earlier reigns (Rājā Todar Mal in particular), Chandar Bhan’s account of Mughal military victories in the third part of *chaman* one begins with this prelude that briefly sketches the important (successful) campaigns that took place before he entered the imperial service, and only then turns to a more extensive dilation on events and personages with which he was much more personally familiar.

He goes into much detail about the background and various intrigues involving Nazar Muhammad Khān, Khusrau Sultān, and other key Central Asian players in the Balkh campaign, but it is clearly Chandar Bhan’s status as an eyewitness that really seems to merit its inclusion here at such length. It is one of the only places in all of *Chahār Chaman* where he notes specific dates for events — e.g. the departure of imperial forces
under Murād Bakhsh and ‘Alī Mardān Khān on 12th Zī al-Hijja of the 18th Regnal Year (39); the arrival of Shāh Jahān and his entourage in Kabul on 10th Rabī‘ II of the 19th Regnal Year (39); the arrival of Khusrav Sultān at the Mughal camp seeking asylum on 25th Jumādī I of the 19th Regnal Year, whereupon Sa‘dullāh Khān and the Sadr al-Sudūr Sayyid Jalāl were sent out to receive him (40).

Thus even without getting into all of Chandar Bhān’s details of the Balkh campaign, most of which are also available from other sources that have already been translated into English,70 one can tell that there is something different about this section of the text. A major difference between the Balkh campaign and those mentioned earlier in this section, at least in terms of authorial perspective, is the fact that Chandar Bhān actually participated in the Balkh campaign, and traveled there as part of Sa‘dullāh Khān’s retinue. Consequently, as he himself tells us, “this lowest of servants…is well-acquainted with the events that transpired there” (kamīrīn bandagān…az sawānīh-i ān-jā wāqīf ast) (44).

Once again, then, the munshī’s spectating eye as the engine of the narrative comes to the fore. Moreover, Chandar Bhān clearly kept some kind of detailed records while on assignment in Balkh, probably in his capacity as part of Sa‘dullāh Khān’s administrative

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team. Sa‘dullāh Khān was himself at least partially responsible for managing the army budget and salaries, and Chandar Bhan would surely have assisted him in that role. A record of this kind would likely have helped him compile the list which he includes in the text (the only one of its kind in all of Chahār Chaman), of all those “illustrious āmīrs who gained top honors in contributing to the tumultuous contest for Balkh and Badakhshān” (umarā‘-yi nāmdār ki martaba-i awwal dar fath-i balkh-o-badakhshān ḥangāma-ārā-yi nabard būdana). As with Qandahār, Chandar Bhān does not follow this account up with any discussion of the later difficulties the Mughals would encounter in retaining possession of the ancestral Central Asian homeland that they prized so dearly. For by now it should be clear that his concern lies elsewhere.

He follows up the list of heroes of the Bakh campaign with a copy of Shāh Jahān’s letter of congratulations to ‘Alī Mardān Khān for his part in commanding the victorious army (46). As with many of the letters included earlier in Chahār Chaman, it is certainly

71 Inayat Khan, Shah Jahan Nama, 339.

72 “Of the great āmīrs and brave sons of āmīrs who earned top honors in the conquest of Balkh and Badakhshān as a result of their exemplary performances, the complete list of names is as follows: the āmīr of āmīrs, ‘Alī Mardān Khān; Bahādur Khān, Fath Khān, Rustām Khān, Asālāt Khān, Khalīl Allāh Khān, Mīrzā Nauzar, Dānā Dīl, Nazar Bahādur, Muḥtashīm Khān, Iklās Khān, Multāfī Khān, Daulat Khān, Qayām Khān, Turktāz Khān, Murād Qullū Sultan Gharakar, Khushhāl Beg Kāshgārī, Khanjar Khān, ‘Abd al-Azīz [Khān, one of Nūr Muhammad’s sons], Bahādur Laḥāḥānī, Rūmī Khān [a.k.a. Pahlawan Darvish], Qubād Khān, Shukr-Allāh, Nūr al-Dahr, and others like them. Among the sword-wielding sayyids were: Sayyid ‘Ālam, Nūr al-‘Iyān, Sayyid Bīhkan, Sayyid Sādāt, Sayyid Jāvan, and Khwāja ‘Abd al-Rahman. Among the Rājpūts were: Rājā Bhītal Dās, Rājā Rāy Singh, Rājā Bahādur Singh, Rājā Debi Singh, Rājā Sarsāl [Satr Sāl?], Mahesh Dās Chauhan, Rāy Trilok Chand, Chandar Mohan Bundela, Rāy Singh [Rathor?], Amar Singh Gwāliyār Narwari, Gokāl Dās, Sajān Singh, Jagrahm, Ugar Sen, Mohkam Singh, Gopāl Singh, and others. Those of the Kachhawāṭa clan (gaum) were: Narwar the son of Rūz-Afzān, Mahā Singh Bhaḍārīya, Rāy Singh Jahālīla, Kishan Singh Tunūr, Indar Man, Chandar Bhān Naroka, and several others. The notable subalterns (ahl-i khādmar) were: Kifāyat Khān, Ishāq Khān, Qūzī Nizāmī, Nūr Bahksh, Muhammad Sālīh the artillery officer (mustārif-i top-khāna), Shaikh Mūsā Gīlānī, Sālīh Rashkūrī, and other loyal servants. And finally, the various zāmīndārs of both the mountains and the plains would require a whole separate volume to list completely.” (45-6)
possible that Chandar Bhan himself had a hand in composing this one; unfortunately, he is far too demure to let on one way or the other.

After his account of the Balkh campaign, the last important section of chaman one describes an imperial crisis toward the end of Shāh Jahān’s reign that had been building for several years but finally came to a head in 1654 CE between the Mughals and the Sisodia Rajput chieftain, Rānā Rāj Singh of Mewār. The Rānās of Mewār were unlike many of the other notable Rajput clans in that they never fully acquiesced to Mughal power.73 As Jahāngīr himself had once put it, “they have bowed in submission to no sultan of the land of India, and most of the time they have been in a state of insubordination and insurrection.”74 Still, a relatively stable peace had prevailed since a truce with “the damn Rana” Amar Singh (d. 1620 CE) was negotiated during Jahāngīr’s reign in 1615 CE.75 Part of the negotiated peace had been a mandate that the Mewār Rajputs not repair their strategic ancestral stronghold at Chittor, much of which had been damaged during various battles. Those earlier skirmishes included, of course, Shāh

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73 So proud were the Mewāris of their refusal to concede to Mughal power that they looked down on other clans for collaborating — during Akbar’s reign, for instance, the Mewāri Rānā Pratāp Singh had reportedly refused to dine with Mān Singh of Amber because of the latter’s close ties to the Mughals. There’s also a story that Rānā Pratāp once presented his own turban to an itinerant bard whose performance he especially liked; when that bard later performed at the Mughal court and the time came to salute the emperor, he removed his turban and held it up in the air as he himself performed obeisance, so as not to suggest that Rānā Pratāp was bending down — Pratāp thus became known as popularly as “The Unbendable.” Maharana Raj Singh and His Times, 13-4.


75 For details of the campaign against Mewār under Jahāngīr, and the eventual truce, most of which was overseen by none other than Prince Khurram (i.e. Shāh Jahān), see Jahangirnama, 149-58 and 164-7. Jahāngīr refers to Amar Singh as “the damn Rana” throughout his memoir, and at one point goes so far as to call him “one of the worst infidels of Hindustan,” adding that “in my father’s time troops had been repeatedly sent against him, but it had never been possible to repel him” (Jahangirnama, 29).
Jahān’s own successful campaign against Mewār when he was still a prince, — the resolution of which had led directly to the détente that ostensibly remained in place until the 1654 crisis. While still a shāhzāda, Khurrām’s connections with Mewār continued to be relatively strong, and thus when he himself rebelled against his father Emperor Jahāngīr it was Rānā Amar Singh’s son Karan Singh who gave him temporary asylum; another of Amar Singh’s sons, Arjun Singh, later accompanied Khurrām on his march to Delhi following Jahāngīr’s death, and remained in attendance for the prince’s coronation as Emperor Shāh Jahān.\(^76\)

In other words, despite a long history of Mughal-Mewār tension, Shāh Jahān had managed as prince and then as emperor to improve relations enough that the Rānās of Udaipur were able to maintain a sense of local authority and independence, even while finally accepting the reality of Mughal overlordship. But appearances were not necessarily what they seemed. Karan Singh’s successor Rānā Jagat Singh (r. 1628-1652 CE) began, at some point, to repair sections of the Chittor compound, in direct contravention of the 1615 truce. Another mandate of the treaty had been that the Mewār Rānās, now officially part of the Mughal mansabdāri system, would be responsible for providing 1000 cavalry troops to the imperial army should the latter need it. And yet Jagat Singh’s successor Rānā Rāj Singh (r. 1652-1680 CE) had not only continued the renovations at Chittor, but also, apparently, failed to provide the requested number of troops to assist Dārā’s failed Qandahār expedition. The truce, therefore, was uneasy.

Chandar Bhān does not specifically mention how Shāh Jahān learned of the construction projects going on at Chittor, but he does hint that the news came through some sort of covert espionage networks, and we know in any case from other sources that even after hearing of the illicit repairs he sent an agent named ‘Abd Allāh Khān Uzbek to confirm and report back on the activity in Mewār.⁷⁷ Once he was sure, Shāh Jahān decided to move the imperial camp to Ajmer, from which he could more easily police the developing situation; and this, essentially, was the state of affairs where Chandar Bhān picks up the narrative in Chahār Chaman:

Account of the siege of Chītor Fort, among the most famous citadels in Hindūstān, and the submission and obedience (inqiyād-o-itā‘at) tendered by the cream of Rājas of illustrious lineage, Rānā Rāj Singh, through the brilliant strategy and threat of the world-conquering Emperor’s sword

Since some deep thought is constantly swelling in the boundless ocean of the Emperor’s profound intellect (khātir-i daryā-maqātir), the world- and universe-conquering pādshāh, acting on the sound intelligence concealed in his mind bright as the sun and hidden in his intellect superior to the angels of heaven (ba-muqtażā-yi maslahatī [khi] māknūn-i zamūr-i aʃfāb-nazir va markāţ-i khātir-i malakāţ-nāzir būd) decided to mobilize the enormous matériel, apparatus, and army that are the pride of this perpetual empire and set out from the Seat of the Caliphate Shāhjahānābād for wealth, fortune, blessings and victory to the land of Ajmer.⁷⁸ [Meanwhile] he dispatched the great exemplar (dastūr), the grand wazīr Sa‘dullāh Khān toward the citadel of Chītor with a mighty detachment of conquering imperial forces.⁷⁹ When he apprehended the reality of the victorious imperial armies marshaled against him, Rānā Rāj Singh — the descendant


⁷⁸ Both Salih (‘Amal-i Sāliḥ, vol. 3, 146-7) and ‘Ināyāt Khan (Shah Jahan Nama, 501) note that the official stated purpose of the shift to Ajmer was Shah Jahan’s desire to visit the shrine of Mu’in al-Dīn Chishti, a traditional place of pilgrimage for the Mughal emperors which he had not visited in some twelve years.

⁷⁹ According to Salih, Sa‘dullāh Khān’s contingent was made up of 30,000 cavalry, an overwhelming force even if it is slightly exaggerated (‘Amal-i Sāliḥ, vol. 3, 147).
of Rānā Amar Singh — dispatched several trusted advocates (vakils) to the imperial court that is the refuge of lesser kings, to beg forgiveness for his offenses. 80 This churned the ocean of the Emperor’s kindness and benevolence, and as a result [the Rājā’s] apology for his crimes was accepted on condition that he send a personal representative to the court of imperial magnificence and grandeur, and only after the victorious imperial forces had finished demolishing the fort of Chittor and returned. This most humble servant, who is among the trusted imperial attendants at the forefront of the assembly of confidantes, was favored with the gift of a robe of honor and delegated to depart from the majestic and dignified imperial presence and travel with the Rānā’s vakils in order to convey the good news of this generosity (iblāgh-i muzhda-i īn ihšān) and chaperone the Rānā’s son back to the audience of His Majesty the Refuge of the World. This faithful servant arrived in Udaipur with the greatest possible alacrity (sur’at-i tamām); and the Rānā, whose determination had been shaken (sabāt-ash...mutazalzal gashtā) by the menace of the conquering armies and the singularity of the pādshāh’s censures (dahshatt-i ‘ītab-o-khitāb-i pādshāhī), listened to my prudent advice and valuable counsels and pulled back from his untoward intentions. The Rānā, who had a receptive mind and an ear amenable to reasonable speech (gāsh-i sukhan-shināwā va khirad-i rasā dāshh), assembled his various lieutenants, relied on (takya sākhta) the grace of the god and the Emperor’s benevolence, and sent his son — who was like a piece of his own liver, and only six years old at the time — for the purpose of learning the ways of sublime service at the exalted court (jigār-gosha-i khud rā kih dar sin-i shash sālagī būd bah ‘azm-i dar-yāft-i mutlāzamat-i aqdas-a-lā ravañah-i bār-gāh-i mu’āllā namūd). Meanwhile (muqārin-i ān), the elder statesman (mashikhat-manzalat) Shaikh ‘Abd al-Karīm arrived [in Udaipur] from the court of the Refuge of Lesser Sultāns. He had brought with him an imperial edict addressed to the Pillar of State Sa’dullāh Khān authorizing the return of the victorious army, and thus according to this sublime order the powerful

80 Chandar Bhan’s special mention here of the erstwhile Rānā Amar Singh is obviously no coincidence. He clearly assumes that his readers will know at least some of the details surrounding Shah Jahan’s prior role in bringing Mewar into the Mughal fold a few decades earlier, and the striking parallels between the earlier events as narrated in Jahāngīr’s memoirs and those described here. In Jahāngīr’s account, once Amar Singh finally decided to capitulate he too sent two “important and intelligent men in his service...[to] plead for the forgiveness of his offenses.” He also sent his son and eventual successor Karan Singh to court (just as Rāj Singh will do) “so that he might be enrolled among the servants of this court and render service like the rest of the rajas.” The memory of Jahāngīr’s explanation for why he was gracious in victory would not have been lost on Chandar Bhan’s audience either: “Because it is always our intention, insofar as possible, not to ruin ancient families, it was our basic purpose that Rana Amar Singh and his fathers were overly proud of the impregnability of their mountains and dwelling and had not seen or rendered homage to even one of the padishahs of Hindustan, this should not continue into the days of my reign. I pardoned his shortcomings on account of my son [Khurram]’s plea, showed him favor that would allay his fears, and issued a decree with our royal hand print.” Jahangirnama, 164-5.
imperial forces withdrew from Chitor [after completing their demolition]. The Rānā’s son accompanied the abovementioned Shaikh and this humble servant back to the most sacred land of Ajmer. There he was brought graciously into the sublime imperial service (bah mulāzamat-i ashrāf-a 'lā mustas' ad gardād), and with an abundance of favor was granted the title Subhāg [Singh] and honored with the gift of an elephant and a khil ‘at. His retinue were also each ennobled by gifts of horses and robes of honor. (47-8)

This passage is actually, ironically, almost more interesting for what it leaves out than for what it tells us. For one thing, it is clear that Chandar Bhan assumes that his readers will at least be familiar with the background to this crisis, as he sees no need to provide any prefatory information. Even with regard to the actual events, he once again decides not to give specifics, dates, and so on, contenting himself with the basics: in response to the developing crisis, Shāh Jahān moved his camp to Ajmer so that he could be closer to the action in Mewār; meanwhile Sa’dullah Khān was dispatched with a huge army to put a stop to the Chitor reconstruction project, and, if necessary, be prepared to inflict further punishment on the Rānā’s forces and the surrounding area; the Rānā realized the precariousness of his position, and thus sent two representatives to the court who apologized on his behalf, and in return Chandar Bhan was deputed to Udaipur to stipulate the imperial terms and escort the Rānā’s son back to court as a show of good faith; most importantly for all concerned, all was resolved without further hostilities.

To be sure, this is far more elaborate than all the earlier victory narratives in Chahār Chaman, with the sole exception of that of the Balkh campaign. But unlike all of those

81 Ja’fri’s edition lists the boy’s name as “Subhāg Chand,” but according to most other sources he was known as Subhāg Singh. See for instance ‘Amal-i Sālih, vol. 3, 149.
other events, Chandar Bhān was personally, intimately involved in the Mewār crisis and its resolution, and thus could have given us a much more comprehensive account of these events. Yet for some reason, he chose not to, leaving a number of clearly intentional omissions.

Firstly, he makes no mention here of Dārā Shukoh’s part in interceding with his father on the Rānā’s behalf.\(^{82}\) This is not a small detail, for it gets right to the heart of the political situation at the time. It was Dārā’s expedition to Qandahār that suffered due to the Rānā’s failure to send support troops. And given Dārā’s reputation, his association with Mewār in spite of this snub might possibly have created suspicion among others at court, in particular his brothers. Of course, the decision not to mention Dārā here fits Chandar Bhān’s larger erasure of the prince from Chahār Chaman – but we should not rule out the possibility that Chandar Bhān is avoiding the topic of Dārā here not in order to protect himself, but rather to protect Dārā’s own memory from an association with the recalcitrant Mewārīs, who would later come to further friction with Aurangzeb.

Whatever the reason(s), though, Chandar Bhān’s decision not to discuss Dārā here is significant not just because it muddles our understanding of the 1654 affair, but also because it obstructs a clearer view of Chandar Bhān’s own biography. As we will see in Chapter Four, the memory of Chandar Bhān among later generations of the Mughal intelligentsia became indelibly linked with that of Dārā, specifically through a series of anecdotes that cultivated an image of our munshi essentially as Dārā’s Hindu sidekick. In concrete empirical terms, however, we have very little evidence of what their relationship

\(^{82}\) For details, see Inayat Khan, Shah Jahan Nama, 501-4.
actually was. We have the circumstantial evidence suggesting that, as noted above, Chandar Bhân was in attendance at Dārā’s dialogues with the yogī Bābā Lal, and was assigned to translate them into Persian. But we do not know to what extent Chandar Bhân participated in Dārā’s many other intellectual projects, if at all. It is certainly possible, and even likely, but we do not have any empirical corroboration. We do know, however, that they did have some sort of working relationship toward the end of Shāh Jahān’s reign, because both ‘Ināyat Khān’s Shāh Jahān Nāma and Muhammad Sālih Kambūh’s ‘Amal-i Sālih go so far as to refer to Chandar Bhân as Dārā’s “diwān,” which in this context probably means his chief administrative assistant.83 The fact that both of these references come during the chroniclers’ accounts of the situation in Udaipur, and both suggest that it was Dārā himself who suggested that Chandar Bhân be appointed for the diplomatic aspect of this mission, makes Chandar Bhân’s failure to specify Dārā’s role in the affair, and his own relationship with the prince, all the more mystifying.

Perhaps an even bigger irony is the fact that Chandar Bhân has provided a more extensive account of his mission to Udaipur elsewhere, namely in four letters to Shāh Jahān that are included in his Munsha‘āt.84 Collectively, these four letters are much more detailed than the brief synopsis that he offers in Chahār Chaman. They offer details of


Chandar Bhān’s journey and reception at Udaipur, and more importantly report on our munshi-cum-diplomat’s listing of the Rānā’s crimes in the latter’s hall of audience. The foremost, obviously, was the mischief at Chittor. But Chandar Bhān also chides the Rānā for another incident that is left out of Chahār Chaman entirely, in which the Rānā had apparently trespassed through crown lands with a large military retinue while Shāh Jahān was away at the northwest frontier, under the flimsy pretense of going to bathe in the Ganges — obviously a display of impertinence, if not outright insurrection. Chandar Bhān also raises the issue of the Rānā’s harboring of several fugitives from the imperial court, and finally he rebukes the Rānā for the abovementioned failure to provide enough troops to the Qandahār expedition.

Clearly, then, Rānā Rāj Singh had been pushing the limits of détente for some time, and Shāh Jahān’s ire was piqued by far more than simply the business at Chittor. Be that as it may, the important point here is that it is not at all clear why Chandar Bhān would leave all these relevant details out of his account of these events in Chahār Chaman. In fact, for a text that freely includes epistles of many types, the decision not to reproduce Chandar Bhān’s own letters on this topic here is all the more mysterious. One might surmise that he omitted them out of a sense of self-abnegation, but then why draw attention to this episode at all? Moreover, since nearly the whole of chaman three is comprised of excerpts of Chandar Bhān’s personal epistolary production, why would he be so shy here? Once more, we are tempted to speculate that he might have been reticent to draw attention to the crisis in Mewār because Aurangzeb had already become emperor by the time he was compiling Chahār Chaman. The whole incident does seem to have
remained a bone of contention with Aurangzeb, who tried to play up Shāh Jahān’s aggression toward Mewār when trying to elicit the Rānā’s support in the war of succession, and tried to implicate Dārā in that aggression despite the latter’s intercession on Mewār’s behalf. But if some hypothetical fear of Aurangzeb were truly Chandar Bhān’s concern, then why mention the incident at all?

In the end, we simply cannot know what went into Chandar Bhān’s decision to organize the Chahār Chaman account of these incidents in the way he did. But the importance of these final two main episodes of chaman one lies in the way that they expand our understanding of the scope of an imperial munshi’s responsibilities, beyond the limited ambit of the court. In the case of the Balkh campaign, Chandar Bhān was expected to travel with the imperial army and perform a number of executive functions directly from the front. And in the case of the Udaipur mission, Chandar Bhān himself was raised to the level of imperial representative and sent to negotiate directly with a subordinate — and somewhat hostile — power. In fact, if we take the implicit purpose of chaman one to be Chandar Bhān’s attempt to map out the range of possible functions of the munshi in Mughal courtly life, then his brevity with respect to Mewār actually becomes a relative non-issue. He has clearly made the point that one major part of the political and cultural package expected of the imperial munshi is to be trained in diplomacy and adept at negotiations on the emperor’s behalf. Having made that point through a demonstration of his own experience, he sees no need to dilate on personal and historical details. He thus

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85 S. R. Sharma, Maharana Raj Singh and his Times, 26.

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moves on to a brief notice of the granting of a Mughal title to the ‘Ādil Khān in Bijapur, and with that brings chaman one to a close.

A Day in the Life of a Mughal Bādshāh

Up to this point we have only reviewed the first of four chaman, and our analysis has already grown quite lengthy. It was necessary to dilate on the text and its organization in some detail, though, for several reasons. Firstly, the subject matter; even this brief analysis should indicate that Chahār Chaman is a complicated account that channels multiple different tenors of the munshi’s voice and role within the Mughal intellectual world. There are definitely three main subsections, but how they work together as a composite text remains almost completely implicit, subtextual, and textural. The first section covers the munshi’s role as a public litterateur. The second covers the munshi’s vision of idealized norms of administrative comportment, as exemplified by character sketches of administrators whom Chandar Bhān saw as worthy of emulation, all the while invoking the classical genre of courtly wisdom literature as a sort of mini-nasīhat-nāma for the aspiring imperial munshi, vakil, or wazīr. And finally, the third section presents a vision of imperial power and diplomacy as a part of court life in which the talented munshi could and did play an integral role — as an intimate confidante; as a drafter of diplomatic correspondence and victory notices (fath-nāmas); as a recorder of events for posterity; as an administrative agent making up part of an expeditionary force; and even as a diplomat and agent of the court in his own right. There is an implicit didactic thread that runs through all three sections, which, though most obvious in the second section on
wizārat, builds a picture of the range of courtly possibility and means of advancement for any aspiring young Mughal official. Be literary, be prudent, be spiritual, and be worldly, he seems to be saying, and you will do well in Mughal life.

Second, since so few of these passages have ever been translated before — and indeed, were only published in a complete printed edition for the first time in 2004 — it seemed important to include extended translations of some important passages. On the one hand, so that scholars who do not have access to the Persian text might benefit from the opportunity to consult, for instance, Afzal Khān and Sa'dullah Khān’s ideas about governance; but also in order to give the reader a sense of the flavor of Chandar Bhan’s prose. It should be obvious already from the passages already cited that the range of compositional modes that he deployed under the umbrella rubric of inšā’ was quite various, and extended far beyond epistolary writing alone. Letter-writing was certainly a major part of the composite compositional style that inšā’ comprised, but the evidence from Chahār Chaman clearly demonstrates that it was only one mode within a much larger continuum of generic possibility. Even within the limited sphere of letter-writing norms, we have seen — and will continue to see — that there were many degrees of formality, subject matter, etiquette, and style that could all be appropriate to epistolary correspondence depending on the compositional context. Thus even though one could easily summarize the contents of the first chaman without going into such detail, much of this textual and textural variation would very likely be completely lost.
With the next chaman, we enter an almost entirely different set of concerns. The didactic impulse seems to recede somewhat — though it will continue to reappear throughout the rest of the text — as we move into a more overtly propagandistic and panegyric mode. For chaman two is all about projecting the pomp and grandeur of the imperial court, with a particular attention to the person of the emperor as the epitome of power, piety, and justice. Chaman two is thus also subdivided into sections, in this case two main parts rather than three: the first part paints a composite, idealized picture of the emperor’s daily routine, mapping out his movement from place to place in the palace complex (whether in Delhi, Agra, or Lahore), from prayer niche to hall of public audience to privy chamber to harem to hunt. After building this image of the emperor as an imperial microcosmos unto himself, Chandar Bhan radiates outward in the second half of the chaman to the imperial macrocosm, describing the main geographical divisions of the empire, subah by subah. In other words, the text moves away from Chandar Bhan’s personal spectating eye in chaman one, to a greater focus on the person of the emperor as microcosm of the empire’s good qualities, to the larger metageography of the empire in macrocosm.

The first half of chaman two’s micro-macro binary is actually the most well-known portion of the entire text. This is the part of Chahār Chaman that came to be circulated separately as Guldasta, a.k.a. Qawā’id al-Sultanat (-i Shāh Jahān), or “The Practice of
Governance under Shāh Jahān” — which is still the only significant part of Chandar Bhan’s entire oeuvre that has ever been fully translated and published in English.86

It is also, in some ways, the least interesting section of *Chahār Chaman*. For one thing, it is likely the least original part of the text, being quite similar to the account of the emperor’s daily routine provided in Lahorī’s *Pādshāh Nāma*.87 This does not mitigate its usefulness to the Mughal cultural historian; indeed, this section of *Chahār Chaman* has been used extensively over the years by scholars like Stephen Blake, B. P. Saksena, Wheeler Thackston, and others, to help build up a picture of court life in Shah Jahan’s day. But precisely because this section is so court- and emperor-centric, and so full of repetitive and unadulterated praise for the bādshāh, one could argue that it is, ironically, the most monotonous and least splendid passage in a text entirely devoted to the splendor of court life. (Then again, to say so simply reflects a (post)modern bias against such frilly panegyric.)

It begins with a lengthy prefatory panegyric, couched in an expression which should by now be recognized as typical of Chandar Bhan, begging his readers’ indulgence for the fact that language — specifically, *his* language — is simply incapable of approximating the glory of the bādshāh’s court (49-50). It becomes clear right away that we’ve shifted

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87 'Abd al-Hamid Lahauri and Asiatic Society (Calcutta, India), *The Bādshāh Nāmah* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1865); compare also the extract “Daily Activities of the Emperor Shah Jahan,” included as an appendix in Begley and Desai’s translation of Inayat Khan’s *Shah Jahan Nama*, 567-73.
away from the implicit didacticism in the mode of classical advice literature that was so prevalent in chaman one, and into a much more explicitly and hyperbolically panegyrical style. He follows this preliminary apologia with the beginning of chaman two proper, stating that “ever since the heavenly throne of sultanate and world conquest was beautified and graced by the accession of...[His Majesty Shâh Jahân]...the four gardens of the world (chahâr chaman-i rûzgâr) took on an added splendor and verdancy” (50). Chandar Bhân further insists that it was the bâdshâh’s wisdom and knowledge of the rules of governance and world stewardship (qawânîn-i jahândârî-o-jahânbânî), not to mention his “innovations in the conventions of warfare and conquest” (mukhtara‘-i âdâb-i mulk-gârî va kishwar-satânî) that allowed him so deftly to “bring forth in the lands of Hindûstân a steady resolve and scrupulous attention (hazmî va ihtiyâfî) to stable and upright regulation and management (nasaq va nizâm-i dar-nishast va bar-khâst), intricate practices and laws (qawâ‘id-o-qawânîn-i tarâzî), and an institutionalized system of legislation, regulation, and organization of imperial state affairs for the safeguarding of territory and wealth” (50). In other words, what makes Shâh Jahân so great is not simply that he is a powerful monarch, but that he has used his power wisely to create a stable set of government institutions that work for the collective good. Here Chandar Bhân adds yet another reminder that he has been an eyewitness to the bâdshâh’s governmental praxis, and that status is what gives his authorial voice a unique power and authenticity:

Because this humblest of servants in the court of celestial stature has been among the disciples attached to the victorious stirrup right from [Shâh Jahân’s] sublime accession, both when he has been in residence and when traveling (az âghâz-i jûlûs-i wâlâ dar safar-o-hazar az tilmîzân-i rakâb-i zafar-intisâb), the fidelity of my longtime service and the gracious and kind emperor’s paternal feeling and appreciation (‘utûfât va qadar-dânî) has resulted in an appreciative affection for my sincere contributions. In
this volume I have compiled some of the unique characteristics of this eternally adorned empire that have been witnessed by my truth-seeing eye (kih didāh-i haqq-bīn mushāhada namūda) and inscribed them with the pen of representation, [so that] the narration of His most blessed Majesty’s daily activities and state of happy repose will become a like a bouquet of flowers in the assembly of master litterateurs (guldasta-i bazm-i arbāb-i sukhan mī-gardānad). (50)

It is the special access and relationship with the emperor that Chandar Bhan’s role as munshi affords him that, he claims, gives the account to follow its authenticity — for he has seen all these things with his “truth-seeing eye.” Note too his explicit remark that as a work of inshā’ the text is not necessarily addressed to once and future historians, but as a “bouquet” (guldasta) to an audience of literary connoisseurs (arbāb-i sukhan).

 Appropriately enough, then, he punctuates these remarks with a fifteen-line qasīda in praise of the emperor. This is followed by yet another half page or so of further adulation for Shāh Jahān’s wisdom, justice, power, good governance and generosity.

There is very little here that could be explicitly instructive for an aspiring munshi or administrator, as was the case with the bulk of chaman one (and even there, the didacticism was almost entirely implicit). It would be going way too far, therefore, to give the misimpression that Chahār Chaman is a didactic work tout court. In terms of style, moreover, despite Chandar Bhān’s protestations of humility, we are clearly at the extreme end of inshā’s capacity for ornamental panegyric, and thus our munshi has shown no hesitation in showing off his talent for stringing together long threads of rhymed prose (saj’) throughout this section. Most ordinary clerks, accountants, and
copyists, even if fluent in Persian, would not have been expected to be able to compose such florid prose, even if it remained an ideal.

It is worth noting, too, that this entire prelude to *chaman* two does not appear in Gladwin’s version of *Qawā‘id al-Saltanat*, even though we know from many contemporaneous eighteenth-century manuscripts that the prefatory remarks just quoted and the accompanying *qasīda* were indeed usually considered a part of the *Guldasta* / *Qawā‘id al-Saltanat*. Perhaps Gladwin simply found such hyperbolic *belles-lettres* superfluous and ostentatious. Or, perhaps he did not want to draw attention to the fact that all this praise of a Muslim monarch was being offered up by a Hindu. Indeed, one hates to be unnecessarily conspiratorial, but lending credence to this latter possibility is the undeniable fact that Gladwin doesn’t appear ever to even mention that this text was originally penned by a Brahman *munshi* named Chandar Bhān. However Indophilic he might have been, Gladwin was nevertheless an employee of the Company, and thus had a stake in the larger project of portraying the erstwhile Mughal *bādshāhs* as opulent oriental absolutists, for whose pleasure the wealth of the entire subcontinent had been exploited. To project this image of opulence, he — or his own *munshīs* — could not have chosen a more strategic excerpt of the source text, *Chahār Chaman*, with which it is hard to believe a man of Gladwin’s erudition wasn’t familiar. If his goal were solely to give his readers a sense of Mughal administrative norms, he could easily have provided his readers with more informative texts, either by others or by Chandar Bhān himself — say, the sections on administrative norms and ideals of *wizārat* discussed above, or some of the extended remarks on the theory and practice of a proper administrative education.
that are both in *chaman* three and in *Munsha‘ât-i Brahman* — either in addition to or instead of the hyperbolic litany of the emperor’s daily activities and genius that we find in *chaman* two and the *Guldasta / Qawā‘id al-Saltanat*. Then again, one also has to recognize that in 1795 the East India Company would have been less interested in how the Mughals governed — the British had their own ideas about that — and more curious about court rituals, etiquette, and so on precisely because conformity to those norms and pageantry would still have been necessary simply for the sake of doing business. Thus rather than some insidious plot to cast Shāh Jahān as the epitome of oriental despotism, perhaps Gladwin was simply trying to draw his readers’ attention to the fact that they would likely have to show the same kind of deference to the current bādshāh, however diminished his actual power was by the late eighteenth century, that was on display in Chandar Bhān’s depiction.

Whatever his agenda and motivations, Gladwin’s version begins at the point where Chandar Bhan’s opening eulogies end, and *chaman* two properly begins. From here Gladwin’s *Qawā‘id al-Saltanat* and most manuscript versions correspond almost exactly, albeit with relatively minor textual variations, to the remaining contents of *chaman* two up to the point where it shifts from details of the courtly routine to its account of the empire’s geography.

We learn that emperor’s day begins very early, as the nighttime darkness is transitioning to dawn, when the emperor rises for private morning prayers and reading of the *Qur’ān*. It takes Chandar Bhan about ten full lines to convey this information, which should give
some idea of the degree to which this part of the text reveals in the kind of verbosity that
has caused inshā’ to be so vilified by straight-laced colonial and modernist scholars. Of
course, those who would have vilified such prose have ignored the fact that where inshā’
was concerned the medium often was the message; one could only approximate the
splendor of the court through splendidous artistic prose, and the mere conveyance of
information would have come across as unsophisticated and brutish. Remember, this is a
text that is explicitly addressed to the arbāb-i sukhan, and thus part of the intended
pleasure of the text for readers would have come from the play of language — in this
case, Chandar Bhan’s weaving a cluster of words suggestive of the sun, moon, stars,
night, day, and sky into his epithets for Shāh Jahān, all of which are juxtaposed and
meant to resonate with the quotidian information that the latter rises at daybreak to pray.
It is the collision par excellence of “documentary” and “worklike” discursive functions,
with the latter clearly taking precedence.

After the emperor’s initial morning prayers, Chandar Bhān tries immediately to highlight
Shāh Jahān’s munificent generosity by describing some sort of elaborate morning
breakfast buffet. All sorts of tasty drinks, fragrant liqueurs (mashrūbāt-i muʾattar), amber-
scented confections (nuqlāt-i muʾambar), and multi-colored halwas are served to those in
attendance, along with “various fruits from all the regions of Hindūstān” (52).88

88 For some interesting examples of what she calls “the political language of fruit...[as] a metaphor of
power and prestige” in Mughal India — and of Mughal culinary practices generally — see Lizzie
Oxford University Press, 2006), 13-39. In Gladwin’s and some manuscript versions of Qawāʾid al-
Sultanat, this passage also includes a striking list of the variety of fruits served, which came from all over
the entire region: melons from Balkh, plums from Kashghar and Ghaur, habshī and sāhibī grapes, pears and
apples from Samarqand, pomegranates from Yazd and Jalalabad, Central Asian apricots, mangoes from
Already then, Chandar Bhān has set the imperial *mise-en-scene* — the emperor is the center of everything, just as the sun, to which he is compared right away. The emperor is also first and foremost a pious man, who rises early and prays first thing in the morning, giving him a special strength and wisdom. And even at breakfast, we are told, the *bādshāh* makes every effort both to display his grand wealth and to share the fruit — literally — of his dominion with those assembled. And from this suggestive breakfast bounty, after a taking some time to dispense certain unspecified “special favors” (*ni‘mat-i khās*), “in keeping with the ancient practice (*qā‘ida*) of this magnificent empire and grand caliphate, [the emperor] turns his attention toward the viewing balcony (*jharoka-i darshan*) which overlooks the riverfront in the imperial palaces at the Seat of the Caliphate Shāhjahānābād, the Abode of the Caliphate Akbarābād, and the Seat of the Sultanate Lahore, and looks out onto a heart-opening and extensive field” (52). Here the morning’s entertainment would often consist of elephant fights, which Chandar Bhan seems to have taken a special enjoyment from, since he spends more time (about ten lines in Ja‘fri’s printed edition) describing the pachyderm contests than he did the significant conquests of places like Daulatābād, Bījāpūr, and Golconda. The entertainment is usually rounded out with performances by various types of entertainers, singers, dancers,
jugglers, etc. But also, importantly, Chandar Bhan points out that the balcony of the
jharoka-i darshan could also be a (relatively) informal space wherein the emperor could
hear all kinds of requests and grievances.

Because intention of His Most Sublime Majesty’s pure mind is to be
always and everywhere a seeker of justice and fairness, the needs of those
in search of some objective can reach the blessed ear of the emperor, who
is willing to listen to their pleas without the meddling of any intermediary.
(53)

In other words, even though the jharoka-i darshan was obviously dedicated to the
amusement of the emperor and his inner circle, it also created a space of opportunity for
savvy courtiers to build relationships and be heard.

Indeed, what ultimately makes all of chaman two more than just an ostentatiously
verbose portrayal of splendor is that behind all the panegyric rhetoric Chandar Bhān is
constantly emphasizing a sort of dialectic between the sublimity of the bādshāh’s
presence and the minutiae of his routine of governance — the emperor is in the details, as
it were. (Perhaps Gladwin understood this fundamental subtext, and this is what he was
trying to convey to his own EIC audience.) This dialectic plays out in multiple ways as
Chandar Bhān continues leading us on a tour from the jharoka-i darshan to the Hall of
Public Audience (jharoka-i khāss-o-‘ām), and from there to the privy chamber (ghusl-
khāna), and into the inner apartments of the imperial harem as the day progresses.
However lavish his descriptions, and however much awe he might express at the
grandeur of life at the imperial palace, he always comes back to the fundamental message
that the emperor was deeply involved, at every point in the day, with the business of
running of the empire, that it was a full time job, and that the bādshāh was always making time for good governance. All of these themes thus play consistently on this dialectic between the imperial sublime and administrative quotidian.

First, and most predictably, throughout this chaman Chandar Bhan continually returns to the theme of Mughal power and the cosmopolitanism that it encourages and ensures. The most obvious expressions of this vision are Chandar Bhan’s endless rehearsals of the greatness and might of the emperor himself. But his vision of imperial power also implies other subthemes, such as attention to custom and precedent, the importance of using power wisely, the role of the imperial bureaucracy and administration in providing safety, law, order, and justice throughout its territories, and even a certain metageographical vision of the world coming together at the Mughal court. Consider these excerpts from Chandar Bhan’s lengthy description of the public audiences held at the jharoka-i khās-o-‘ām:

Renowned imperial princes and potentates, illustrious sons of kings, and beneficent sultāns [i.e. lesser princes of the royal extended family], station by station, rank by rank, received permission to take their place near the throne of the caliphate and bolster of the sultanate. Khāns, sultāns, mīrs, and mīrzās of the heartland (wilāyat) of Iran and Turan, noble wazīrs who are masters of both the sword and the pen, amīrs of high station, the sons of amīrs who are in the imperial service...[and a number of different types of military men like mace-bearers, etc.]...plus other men worthy of respect, elite sayyids, great shaikhs, eminent scholars, ingenious doctors, and agreeable courtiers of various classes from Arabia and ‘Ajam, Turks, Tajiks, Kurds, Georgians [?], Tatars, Russians, Ethiopians, Circassians, and various others from the lands of Rūm, Egypt, Syria, ‘Irāq, Arabia, ‘Ajam, Persia, Gilān, Māzandarān, Khurāsān, Transoxiana, the Qipchak steppes, Turkistān, Georgia, and Kurdistān, each in their turn; so too with the various communities of Hindustan, from among the masters of excellence and perfection, and men of the sword and the pen, such as sayyids of pure ancestry, martial shaikh-zādahs, Afghan tribes (alūsāt)
like the Lodis, Rohillas, Khwāshgīs, Yūsufzā'īs, and others, not to mention various classes of Rajputs, Ranas, Rajas, Raos, and Rais, among them the Rathors, Sisodias, Kachwāhas, Hādās, Kūrūs, Chauhāns, Jhālas, Chandrāwats, Jāduns, Tonwars, Baghelas, Baishwaras [?], Gūjars, Pawārs [Paramaras], Bhadauriyas, Singhis, Bundelas, Shagarwāls, and other attendees from the rest of India...from the plains and the mountains, from the countries of Karnata, Magadha, Assam, Udaipur, Srinagar, Kumaun, Bāndhū, Tibet, Kishτvār, and other countries of the realm...likewise multilingual ambassadors from the Caesar of Rūm [i.e. Ottoman Turkey] and the rulers of Iran and Turan arrive with letters and gifts — the crucial implements of diplomatic concord — and are given permission to stand in the palace audience according to their status. Ministers and lords from the Deccan, too, such as the representatives of the ʿĀdil Shāh, Qub al-Mulk, and the people of Karnata, exposed to the munificent light of the Imperial Presence, also demonstrate their loyalty with petitions and gifts. And the class of captains of commerce (malik al-tujjār) — represented by various merchants, profiteers, and suppliers from every quarter of ʿIrāq, Khurāsān, Rūm, Syria, China (chīn), Greater China (mā-chīn), Cathay (khata), Hotan (khutan), Turkistān, Europe (farangistan), and various other far-off countries (mamālik-i baʿīda) and famous islands and ports — visit the world-protecting court carrying expensive jewels, finery, curios, exotica, and other wares, and display their cargo in the spacious audience hall. Then, made prosperous and delighted by their lavish profits and gains (fāwāʿid wa munāfaʿ-ī kullī), they carry testimonial evidence of the kindness and good name of this eternal empire in every direction and to every far corner of the world, [spreading the word] that this magnificent and majestic court is the gībla of the hopes of this world and all other worlds. It is filled with experts in the sword and the pen, men of excellence and perfection, masters of wisdom and intellection, authors of elegance and eloquence, and various other classes of masterful artists, artisans, and other skilled people from all over the civilized world — including Istanbul, Aleppo (halab), Egypt, Basra, Baghdad, Hamadan, Shirwan, Shamakhi, Gilan, Mazandaran, Astarabad, Ganja, Barda‘, Tabriz, Ardabil, Qazwin, Qom, Saugan [??], Tehran, Yazd, Isfahan, Simnan, Danqhan, Bastam, Sabzawar, Nishapur, Merv, Mashhad, Tus, Tabas, Qayin, Tun, Isfārayin, Jam, Herat, Khowf, Bakhtar, Sistan, Farwan, Qandahar, Balkh, Badakhshan, Bukhara, Samarqand, Andijan, Tibet, Kashghar, other parts of Turkistan and various other far-off cities — for all manner of men come to this court of global refuge, the central axis of the world’s turning quadrants, bringing their hopes and dreams with them... (53-8).89

This truly dazzling procession of military, trade, and cultural attendees from all over India and the world at Shâh Jahân’s court shows clearly that Chandar Bhân’s sense of his place in the world was not limited to the area of immediate Mughal suzerainty, or even Asia, but rather far afield, basically to the limit of his geopolitical imagination. Later in this chaman, he will describe the Mughals’ area of direct political control much more specifically, subah by subah, “from the tip [of the subcontinent] to Qandahâr, from Bîjâpûr to Balkh” (84). But even in this latter passage he will proffer a vision of himself and the Mughals as key participants in a wider world of language, culture, and commerce which clearly exceeds their local horizons. The account thus clearly reflects a Mughal awareness of the increasing globality of the world that they inhabited, a sensibility that one also sees increasingly depicted in Mughal art from the seventeenth century.\footnote{See for instance Sumathi Ramaswamy, “Conceit of the Globe in Mughal Visual Practice,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 49, 4 (October 2007): 751-782.} This sense of being the center of a globally cosmopolitan network of trade, commerce, and culture fostered in turn a dual understanding of Mughal tolerance that was both inward and outward looking. Of course, much has also been written about the Mughals and their tolerant political vision, so much so that it has become almost a cliché. But in most cases the discussion of that tolerance has described the inward-looking variety, detailing the Mughals’ policies of religio-political accommodation within Hindustan. Chandar Bhân, too, was a personal beneficiary of that tolerance, but he also notes other examples. For instance, referring with pride to Shah Jahân’s interest in the arts and sciences of India—at one point during his account of the emperor’s activities in the privy chamber (ghusl-
khāna) he notes that the bādshāh made a point of regularly consulting “with all manner of yūnānī and Indian physicians, astronomers, astrologers, Brahmins, pundits, etc.” (60); also that during his evening recitals the emperor often “listened to Kashmiri and Hindi songs, and various Hindustani musical performances into the middle of the night” (66).

Setting aside the question of what kind of “Hindi” this was (probably some form of Braj), the metageographical vision implied by Chandar Bhan’s description of the audience at the jharoka-i khās-o-‘ām strongly suggests a concurrent vision of Mughal inclusiveness and sulh-i kull that looked outward too, both welcoming visitors from all quarters and asserting a cultural and political superiority premised upon that very inclusiveness. In fact one finds repeated evidence of this sensibility throughout chaman two, and even in the later section on Hindustani geography he makes a point of emphasizing that the commercial and literary scenes in cities like Delhi, Agra, and Lahore were all infused with scholars, traders, and litterateurs from all over the world, all of which contributed greatly to his prideful sense that the Mughal empire was a place where, as Chandar Bhan himself put it above, “all manner of men come...bringing their hopes and dreams with them.”

Another important aspect of the Mughals’ sense of imperial governance, at least in Chandar Bhan’s eyes, was a conscious attention to custom and genealogical precedent. As has been well-documented, the Mughals’ great pride in their Timurid and Chingizid ancestry played a significant role in their vision of the duties and obligations of exercising imperial power of a certain sort. Such memories of ancestral grandeur also
affected their geopolitics, most prominently in their minor obsession with reconquering Balkh and Badakhšān. But we see from Chandar Bhān’s prose that their sense of being mere caretakers of a much deeper lineage of power was expressed even at the level of descriptive language. We saw above that Chandar Bhan describes such mundane behavior as Shāh Jahān moving from the morning breakfast assembly to the jharoka-i darshan as being “in keeping with the ancient practice (mutābiq-i qā’ida-i qadīm) of this magnificent empire and grand caliphate” (52). Such offhand formulations that invoke early practice and precedent recur throughout chaman two, and distinctly locate Shāh Jahān not simply as a sovereign in his own right, but much more expansively as part of an ancient genealogy of kings and sultans, a legacy that carries with it tremendous responsibility. Such traditions, Chandar Bhān adds, were reinforced through almost daily readings of passages “from reliable history books, such as Rauzat al-Safā, Zafar-nāma, Wāqi‘āt-i Bāburī, and Akbar-nāma, read by courtiers of eloquent expression and historians with mellifluous voices” (66). This attention to royal precedent and genealogy is made even more explicit, incidentally, in one of Chandar Bhān’s apocryphal texts, known simply as the “Historical Calendar of the Kings of Delhi and Hindustan” (tārikh-i rāja-hā-yi dehli-yi hindūstān), a text which was likely meant to be Chandar Bhān’s contribution to a larger subgenre of royal genealogies that grew prevalent especially in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Rajput kingdoms. In that “Calendar of Kings” he begins his litany of Delhi sovereigns not with the erstwhile Khaljī or Tughlaq sultans, nor even Tīmūr — as one might expect with the Mughals — but rather some two thousand years earlier with the epic reign of Yuddhishtira (judishtar), and the account proceeds in very brief notices of every subsequent king that reigned from Delhi, right up to Shāh
Jahān’s own reign. Clearly, then, Chandar Bhān is trying to locate Mughal power within an extremely ancient lineage not only of Islamic kingship and saltanat, but specifically and unequivocally as an Indian monarch in the epic tradition, with all the privileges, burdens, and responsibilities toward dharma that such an identity might entail.

One of the key imperial responsibilities, of course, was to provide law, order, and most of all justice (‘adālat). Thus Shāh Jahān’s attention to public safety and fair dispensation of justice is another persistent theme in chaman two. Chandar Bhan notes with pride in one passage that:

The justice and order administered by this great empire along the highways, waystations, and stopovers (shawāri’ va marāhil va manāzil), creates the utmost safety on the roads, to such an extent that merchants, traders (bayopāris), and other travelers and wayfarers can move about with peace of mind and free from anxiety. And if something somewhere should be stolen (talaf shavad), the damages will be the responsibility of the local authorities (‘ummāl), along with a fine for their negligence (59)

Obviously, one can’t draw specific empirical conclusions about crime and so forth from such a proposition, but the very fact that Chandar Bhān is so insistent that public safety was high on Shāh Jahān’s list of priorities shows that, at least at the level of discourse, the Mughals saw it as a part of their imperial duty. Indeed, he gives a detailed list of the security precautions in the capital at nighttime, and claims that Delhi was so well-guarded overnight with various sentinels, chaukidārs, mace bearers, spies, and other police that every street and bazaar was safe to move about in. According to Gladwin’s version of the text, in fact, Chandar Bhān goes so far as to insist that people felt so secure in Shāh

91 Chandar Bhān Brahman, Tarikh-i Rāja-hā-yi Dehli-yi Hindūstān, MS, Gujarat Vidya Sabha, Ahmedabad, Main Catalogue #46, 2b.
Jahān’s Delhi that they slept with their doors open at night (Ja‘fri’s edition, 66-7; Gladwin, 59).

And according to Chandar Bhān, the emperor would often still be awake, even so late, and continue to receive intelligence and reports of the state of affairs in the city no matter what the hour, and apparently no matter where he was in the palace (including the harem). He insists that emperor remained mindful of imperial affairs “without respite (bī-fursat),” it seems, “from the break of dawn right up to the middle of the night” — because in the emperor’s eyes “work that can be done today should not be left until tomorrow,” and “good governance and justice are the epitome of spiritual devotion” (saltanat-o-‘adālat kih ‘ain-i ‘ibādat ast) (61). Here the terms normally associated with the negative image of political Islam are completely inverted: it is good governance and justice take precedence over a ruler’s piety, rather than the other way around. A ruler can only be considered truly spiritual, in other words, to the extent that he guarantees justice and stability to his subjects, irrespective of any reference to sectarian affiliations.

Chandar Bhān is clearly drawing on the akhlāq tradition for this language, but the fact that he is being somewhat unoriginal actually shows the degree to which the language of akhlāqī norms was not simply an intellectual exercise but actually pervaded the collective mindset at multiple levels of the Mughal administrative and cultural intelligentsia. The akhlāqī emphasis on a ruler’s sense of justice (‘adl) over his promotion of the Faith (dīn) or pietistic enforcement of shari‘a was thus not simply an idealized norm, but a principle that Chandar Bhan wants us to understand was practiced every day by Shāh Jahān and his
executive administrators, in keeping with the lines from *Akhlāq-i Jahāngīrī* with which Chandar Bhan would likely have been familiar:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{`Adl-o-insāf dān na kufr-o-na dīn} \\
\text{ān-chi dar hifz-i mulk dar-kār ast} \\
\text{`adl-i bī dīn nizām-i `alam rā} \\
\text{bihtar az zulm-i shāh-i dīn-dār ast}
\end{align*}
\]

Know that it is Justice, not Infidelity or Faith that ensures the safety of the country; for the world is better served by justice without Faith, than by the tyranny of a Faithful king.\(^2\)

Accordingly, Shah Jahān also set aside at least one day a week to hold an audience in which those who could not get a public hearing through other channels could present their grievances directly to the emperor (61-3). This directness of contact with the imperial presence feeds into another theme of *chaman* two, i.e. the emperor’s accessibility. We are often prone to think of the Mughal emperors as distant figures, closed off from their subjects behind a wall of formality, ceremony, and rigid etiquette. But the imperial presence could often be just that: present, and available (with certain limitations, of course) to interact with subjects, hear petitions, address grievances, patronize artists and craftsmen, hold dialogues with intellectuals and religious figures, and so on. A perfect example of this is the activity described by Chandar Bhān during the emperor’s afternoons spent in the *ghusl-khāna*, a much more intimate and informal space than the stiffly ceremonial hall of public audience. Obviously, we are talking about relative degrees of informality here — the emperor remained the emperor, and the *ghusl-khāna* was a very private chamber, so it is not as if just anyone could enter.

\(^2\) Quoted as translated in Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 73.
Access to the emperor’s person further fostered the sense that he was a just monarch, and
to this end Chandar Bhān casts Shāh Jahān as a figure of Solomonic wisdom, even going
so far as to narrate the classic tale of Solomon and the child of disputed parentage as if it
had been about Shāh Jahān himself (62).\textsuperscript{93} Even more than wisdom, Chandar Bhān wants
to insist that Mughal justice was not always simply about crime and punishment, but also
mercy and forgiveness, for which Shah Jahan had a special “taste” (\textit{lazzat-i ‘afw va
bakhshish}) (62). Indeed, he poses Shāh Jahān’s inclination toward clemency in a way
that specifically situates mercy and worldly legal decisions as paramount vis-à-vis the
demands of \textit{shari’a} (cf. Alam, \textit{Languages of Political Islam}).

Together, all three of these major subthemes — a cosmopolitan vision of imperial
metageography, the importance of imperial custom and precedent, and the importance of
justice, law, and order — constitute a more general theme that runs throughout \textit{Chahār
Chaman} but is most pronounced in this “garden”: namely, a vision of Mughal power that
is just, tolerant, and works for the good of all its subjects. One can dispute whether or not
this vision represents the reality of Mughal rule; but there is absolutely no contesting the
fact that Chandar Bhan, himself a \textit{brahman} from relatively humble beginnings in Punjab,
felt this way.

\textsuperscript{93} This was, however, a somewhat regular conceit in Indo-Persian texts on royal justice. And here, of
course, Chandar Bhan is also simply invoking a very common theme in Mughal art and literary culture.
See for instance Ebba Koch, “The Throne \textit{jharoka} and its Niche as a Solomonic Throne” and “The
Solomonic Peace among the Beasts as a Symbol of the Ruler’s Justice,” in \textit{Shah Jahan and Orpheus: The
Pietre Dure Decoration and the Programme of the Throne in the Hall of Public Audiences at the Red Fort
Of course, this general theme of the empire, its power, and the glory of the Mughal dispensation is not the only subtheme of chaman two. Woven in with this sublime subject matter is an abundance of quotidian detail, much of it specifically regarding the importance of the secretarial arts, even where the emperor himself is concerned. For instance, although the jharoka-i darshan is the site for imperial spectacle, much of the actual business of running the empire took place once the emperor retired to the relative privacy of the ghul-i-khāna. This is where Shāh Jahān turned his attention to state matters (umūr-i daulat), and where various types of edicts, mandates, and imperial farmāns were actually drafted, all of which, according to Chandar Bhān, received the special attention of the emperor himself (az awwal tā ākhir bāh mutāla‘a-i khās dar mī-ārand) (58). The emperor used his “gaze of alchemical effect” (nazar-i kimiyā asar) (59) to edit the drafts and suggest corrections, after which the final drafts were copied out by “munshīs quick and clever as Mercury” (munshīyān-i ‘utārid-nishān) (59). But Chandar Bhān is just as quick and clever to point out that the emperor was skilled enough in the secretarial arts that he was in no way dependant on munshīs and other administrative assistants.

Oftentimes the enforceable mandates on important matters that are addressed to accomplished and renowned princes, or to powerful nobles, are written out in the emperor’s own special blessed hand, either in the broken shikasta script or in the descending nasta‘liq, which he writes with the utmost correctness and extreme loveliness and gracefulness; the firm and florid expressions in these pragmatic and concise communiqués, which could be a model for all erudite intellectuals (dastūr al-‘amal-i arbāb-i dānish), are inscribed by his amber-perfumed pen, and no minister, counselor, or scribe (wazīr va mushīr va dabīr) has anything to do with it. (59)

This last detail serves an important and clever dual purpose. On the one hand, Chandar Bhan is typically eager to praise the bādshāh’s intellectual and governmental abilities, in
this case by suggesting that he is so literate in the administrative arts that he has no actual need of secretarial assistance. At the same time, he formulates this praise in such a way that actually exalts the craft of munshīgīrī itself, as if to emphasize the fact that the secretarial arts were so integral to Mughal political and intellectual life that they had to be mastered even by bādshāhs. Even the emperor, in other words, had to have good penmanship and a prose style that could be “a model for all erudite intellectuals.”

Chandar Bhān goes on to explain some of the different types of edicts that might be drafted in the ghusl-khāna on a typical day, including prohibitions on the local collection of unauthorized tolls and taxes on travelers, a regular practice that Shāh Jahān tried to interdict in the interests of commercial expediency and revenue fluidity. The passage cited above regarding the emperor’s insistence on public road safety occurs just after this, as if to drive home the point. It was also, apparently, quite regular for the emperor to inspect different types of military hardware during these sessions in the ghusl-khāna, and to invite all manner of jewelers and artisans to display their wares for his private inspection (59-60). Basically, the ghusl-khāna served as a kind of imperial executive office suite, wherein Shāh Jahān could both oversee the imperial administration and indulge some of his various interests in a relatively relaxed and informal way. Among those pursuits was an abiding interest in the scribal and bibliographic arts, not to mention other branches of knowledge production:

And because the pādshāh always keeps the brilliance of the beauty of meaning foremost within his gaze (dar madd-i nazār), renowned books in Arabic and Persian, often in the author’s own hand, are brought into the hair-splitting and discerning view of the emperor of form and meaning, the art-loving shāhīnshāh: albums and calligraphic samples in various scripts,
such as sulus, naskh, ta‘līq, nasta‘līq, and shikasta, in the hands of the most accomplished calligraphers in the world today, such as Ya‘qūb, Sarfī, Mullā Mīr ‘Alī, Sultān ‘Alī, Mīr ‘Imād, Mullā Darwīsh, [Ashraf] Khān, Muhammad Khān, and Muhammad Husain Isfahānī, as well as paintings by the finest artists, such as Mānī, Bahzād, Nādirah-i Zamān, and the like. In another part of the room, masters of eloquence and excellence from ‘Irāq, Khurāsān, Māwarā al-Nahr, and Hindūstān employ their refined discourse for intellectual debates. Every point put forth along the path of knowledge, however trivial or significant (har nishīb-o-farāz), is settled by the reasoned and rational judgments (dalā‘il-i ‘aqlī-o-naqlī) of His Majesty, the excellent guide, the complete tutor, with the aid of his reasonable temper and the force of his wise mind. On yet another side of the room eloquent poets recite qasīdas and masnavīs in praise and encomium for the benevolent and ocean-hearted emperor’s angelically pure soul (zā‘i malaki safat-i pādshāh-i karim-taβ ), and they in turn are rewarded with gifts of cash and cries of “Bravo!” (in ‘āmāt va afr); accordingly, because of their talents the most notable poets have been weighed many times against their equivalent in red and white gold on the scales of imperial grace and favor. And on yet another side of the room, golden-penned munshīs and calligraphers submit their petitions and news reports. (60)

Here again we see Chandar Bhan’s repeated efforts to insert praise of Shāh Jahān into his narrative at every possible opportunity. But we also see clearly that behind all the panegyric he paints a vivid picture of courtly routine wherein the secretarial arts and associated intellectual pursuits — calligraphy, poetry, etc. — are highly valued as an integral feature. A bit further on, he returns again to the theme of the emperor’s personal involvement in the day-to-day running of imperial governance, noting that even while relaxing in the harem later in the day:

…the blessed emperor remains informed, aware, vigilant, and cognizant [of imperial affairs] to such a degree that every incident and occurrence that surfaces at any given moment is brought to his attention, from morning to evening, and evening to morning, without respite or procrastination (bi-fursat-o-ta‘allul), and the pādshāh gives his full attention to the truth of each matter. (67)
He follows this with another extended description of Shah Jahan’s mastery of the secretarial arts as they relate to imperial accounting (siyāq) and provincial governance:

The angel-voiced soul of His Majesty the perfect guide, for whom divine grace and assistance is everywhere and always a friendly presence of joyous bounty, is never in need of [the assistance of] anyone or anything for any work or any matter. If the chief minister is dispatched somewhere, the affairs of supreme wizārat can all be supervised in whole or in part by His Majesty. With his refined instincts (nafs-i nafs) and world-adorning intellect he carefully examines the revenues and tax receipts from the imperial dominions, and the state of affairs in all the provinces, districts, cities, towns, villages, and locales. In the process of verifying various increased expenditures and bonuses, whatever that mind as deep as the ocean settles on (dar mahal mī-rasad) is accordingly entered into the official registers. The revenues and accounts from the jāgirs and cash accounts are balanced in his exalted presence, and the drafts of generous farmāns that are dispatched to the protected dominions in every direction become decorated by the emperor’s most blessed correction. Those petitions from the provincial divāns, amīns, and wealthy local elites (karoriyān) that require review come in for special examination, and the reply to each case receives the honor of inspection by the refultgent imperial presence, in accordance with the true law and a fair accounting. (67-9)

Chandar Bhān continues this discussion of Shāh Jahān’s personal involvement in running the mire for several pages, reiterating at every stage that, in dealing with the written aspects of administrative culture Shāh Jahān “had no need of any wazīr or dabīr” (68). He marvels repeatedly at the emperor’s mastery of the munshi’s skill set, and the way that the bādshāh’s “beautiful blessed penmanship...had the effect of scattering pearls” in his midst (husn-i khatt-i mubārak...guhar-fishān mī-ārand) (70-1). He also returns to an episode already narrated above to stress the point. In this later telling, after Sa’du’llāh Khān’s death it is the emperor himself who oversees the office of divānī until Mīr Jumla could arrive from the Deccan (68).
Clearly, then, Chandar Bhān is as impressed with Shāh Jahān’s attention to mundane details as he is with the sublime majesty of the bādshāh’s courtly pomp and splendor — perhaps even more so. The munshi’s art is featured as integral to this day-to-day business of empire, far more than the extravagant display of lavish wealth on which much of the Mughals’ fame so justly rests. And thus one of the primary messages that one comes away with from reading Chahār Chaman is a sense that the imperial sublime and the administrative quotidian are completely intertwined — one simply could not have the pomp and grandeur of the empire without also engaging in the basic work, and doing so with humility and spiritual awareness. The opulence of the court is simply the outer manifestation (the sūrat, if you will) of Mughal greatness, whereas the true substance (ma’ntî) lies in living up to the normative administrative and political ideals that Chandar Bhān has laid out for his readers.

Indeed, he reinforces this suggestion of a constant overlap between luxurious imperial privilege and the business of governance by noting that even on hunting trips Shāh Jahān made a point of using even his recreational journeys as opportunities to “inspect the condition of the provinces.” Thus even while going out beyond the environs of the court governance — rather than mere imperial entertainment — was considered a top priority. This shift of attention from the courtly center to the hinterlands serves Chandar Bhān as a prelude of sorts to his extensive description of the mobile imperial camp a few pages later (77-83), which itself serves as a nice narrative transition away from the court and the person of the emperor to his account of the many provinces of the Mughal empire.
Chandar Bhān’s Imperial Macrocasm

One of the first questions to be pondered when considering Chandar Bhān’s geographical account of the empire is, what is it doing in Chahār Chaman in the first place? In one sense, his sūba by sūba sketch of each of the major provinces harkens back to Abū al-Fazl’s Ā’īn-i Akbarī. But the accounts of most of the sūbas are actually so cursory that it is hard to see this as the sort of authoritative administrative compendium that Abū al-Fazl was out to create. To put it bluntly, there is very little “useful” information in this section of the text — and this, perhaps, is why so few modern commentators have bothered to examine its contents.

Then again, it depends how one wants to define useful. It also depends whom you infer as being the text’s audience. For if, on the one hand, we can safely assume that Chahār Chaman was intended to have a local South Asian audience, there is also no doubt whatsoever that the text is addressed to a global Persophone audience as well. And here, perhaps, we have some inkling of what is going on in Chandar Bhān’s survey of “the various provinces of happy Hindustan” (ta’dād-i subajāt-i hindūstān-i bahjat-nishān) (84). For if we posit an audience beyond South Asia, then the goal of laying out the metageography of Mughal power becomes a bit clearer, as an attempt to put the vastness of the realm on display for other Persophone intellectuals in the lands of rivals like the Ottomans and Safavids. Chandar Bhān stresses at every opportunity the cultural vibrance of various commercial entrepots and centers of urban life like Delhi, Lahore, Agra, and port towns like Thatta. And in his discussion of virtually every locale, he makes sure to mention not only mundane information such as who had been the governors of the
province in question, but also a great deal of local information that can only be described, for lack of a better word, as touristic. In other words, if one goal of Chahār Chaman as a whole is to project Mughal India as an inviting place, where intellectuals and spiritual savants to enjoy the protection of a sovereign who respects intellectual and religious freedom, then this section takes the further step of touting the attractions of various local places within Mughal dominions. Some of these attractions simply project Mughal power (impregnable forts, and so on); but others describe the fantastic architecture of a place, or the bustling markets and multilingual atmosphere, or even, in many cases, the various Sufi buzurgs whose shrines are located in a given suba, so as to guide visitors from abroad in their mystical pilgrimages. At every turn, he projects Mughal India as an inviting place for intellectuals, spiritual seekers, and commercial entrepreneurs of all kinds.

I have translated the entire account and included it below, as Appendix A. In closing this chapter, however, I’d just like to draw attention here to a few key passages which make Chandar Bhān’s global metageographical vision clear. He begins, predictably enough, with a sketch of the capital, Shāhjahānābād. And the way he frames the opening already hints at the themes just outlined, and should make clear that he is not simply speaking to an Indian audience:

Of course, the crown territories and lands (ihātah-i mulk-o-mamālik) possessed by our sovereign imperial King extend from the [eastern?] frontier [in Bengal?] all the way to Qandahār, and from Bijāpur [in the south] up to Balkh [in the north]. And in every region (zila’) there are great provincial centers (sūbajāt-i ‘umda) — such as the Abode of the Caliphate, the capital Shāhjahānābād; the Crucible/Repository (mustaqīr) of the Caliphate, Akbarābād [Agra]; the Abode of the Sultanate, Lahore;
the Equal of Paradise, Kashmīr; the Abode of the Realm, Kābul; the
Abode of Peace, the district of Multān; the joy-increasing district of
Thatha; the Abode of Blessing, Ajmer; the Land of Delight (*muż'hat-
ābād*), Gujarāt. There are also the Deccan provinces such as Berār;
Daulatābād; Khāndes; Telangana; the dominion (*wilāyat*) of Baklāna; the
province of lovely water and weather, Mālwa; the plentiful cream of
provinces (*sūbah-i zuhdah-i ser-hāsīf*), Awadh; the broad and spacious
district of Allahābād; the great province of Bengal; and the pleasant climes
of Orissa — each of which contains excellent cities, famous villages,
countless towns, townships, locales (*ma ważi*) and wards (*ma'hāl*), not to
mention renowned fortresses like Daulatābād Fort, Āsīr Fort, and various
forts of the Deccan, as well as the citadels at Gwalior, Chitor, Kālanjar,
Chanādha, Rohtās, Junāgah, and so on, and famous ports like Sūrat,
Lāhrī, Khambāyat (Cambay), Hüślī, etc.

And in each of these regions and cities, many splendid buildings and
pleasant gardens have been constructed. *Masnavī*:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Shumār-i mulk-ash afzūn az hisāb ast} \\
\text{Kīh ā dar mulk-girī āftāb ast} \\
\text{Burāq-i himmat-ash ān tūz-gām ast} \\
\text{Kīh jaulān-gāh-i 'azm-ash rūm-o-shām ast}
\end{align*}
\]

The Emperor’s provinces are beyond count,
For in conquering territory he is the Sun;
The mighty steed (*burāq*) of his power is so fleet of foot
That it needs all of Turkey and Syria just for an exercise pitch

Nevertheless, on account of its myriad special charms and features, the
Abode of the Caliphate, the capital Shāhjahānābād — which has been
completed in this eternal and felicitous reign of His most exalted Majesty
the Emperor, the ocean of justice and benevolence, after whose most
celebrated name of names it has received its own name — has pride of
place for its excellent qualities (*mustaghmī al-ausāf ast*) [is beyond
description?]. As the couplet goes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{agar firdaus bar rū-yi zamīn ast} \\
\text{hamīn ast va hamīn ast va hamīn ast}
\end{align*}
\]

If there is a heaven on this earth
It is right here; right here; right here. (84-5)\(^94\)

\(^{94}\) N.b., this couplet is not Chandar Bhan’s own. It is normally attributed to ‘Urff Shīrāzī, and though it is
inscribed on the walls of the Red Fort at Delhi, it said to have originally referred to Kashmīr.
This opening clearly posits Mughal India as a powerful, paradisiacal, inviting land, where opportunity abounds in multiple regions, for all types of people who will enjoy the badshāh’s protection.

He goes on to describe Shāhjahānābād’s impressive forts and gardens, particularly the imperial Red Fort complex. But even this central symbol of Mughal power, the imperial palace, is depicted by Chandar Bhān as being part of a much wider network of global intellectual and commercial activity:

Within this impregnable fort complex (hisn-i hasīn), on one side a grand, impressively long bazaar has been arranged (tartib yāfta), containing shops, coffee houses, pavilions (tāq-hā), and tent galleries (riwāq-hā). Here merchants (tājirān), profitiers (saudā-girān), impresarios (mutamaawilān) and jewelers (sunār: goldsmiths?) from every city and region ply their stocks of all manner of diverse merchandise for a comfortable livelihood.

‘irāqī-o-khurāsānī zi hadd bīsh
nihādah pīsh-i khud sarmāyah-i khwīsh
farangi az farangistān rasīdah
nawādir az banādir besh chīdah
chu shāh az mulk-i khud āghā bāshad
zi mashriq tā bah maghrib rāh bāshad

Iraqis and Khurasanis beyond limit
Spread their fortunes out before them;
Farangīs newly arrived from Europe
Do likewise with choice rarities from seaports;
Indeed, when a king is attentive to the needs of his realm
A path from East to West is cleared.

The ample and abundant fineries in the shops of these seated merchants burst with capital, jewels, merchandise (cf. matā’), fine silk linens (cf. gumāsh), and choice rarities from every region. The bazaar, the lanes, the inns, the railings/balustrades (katahra-hā), the markets, and the city within a city all achieve a varied and extreme beauty and adornment from the bustle of all the people coming and going. On every patch of open space
there is some entertainer or performer, and there are ghazal-singers, melody-makers, storytellers, and expert musicians and revelers sitting and standing in every house:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{chi shahr \ä n kih misr az wai nish\ä n\ä} \\
\text{Her\ä t az k\ä chah-i \ü d\ä st\ä n\ä} \\
\text{bah ma \ä m\ä r\ä t-o-\ä b\ä d\ä chun\ä n ast} \\
\text{kih dar har k\ä chah-ash sad Isfah\ä n ast} \\
\text{nishasta har taraf gohar firosh\ä} \\
\text{bar \ä wurdah zi dary\ä h\ä khurosh\ä} \\
\text{fit\ä d\ä h har taraf sad la'\ä l-i rakhsh\ä n} \\
\text{buvad dar har duk\ä n k\ä n-i badakhsh\ä n} \\
\text{bar \ä y\ä d az bar\ä y\ä i imtih\ä n\ä} \\
\text{ma\ä t\ä-i haft kishwar az duk\ä n\ä}
\end{align*}
\]

What a city it is, from which Cairo takes its cue,
And the lore of its lanes is found even in Herat;
It has such architecture and cultivation
That there are a hundred Isfahans in its every alley;
There are so many pearl vendors in every direction
That the seas heave a bereaved sigh of lamentation;
At every turn a hundred glittering rubies are strewn
As if every shop was a mine in Badakhshân;
And popping up for your perusal,
The wares of seven continents abound in each dukân (86-7)

He goes on to describe the marvelous architecture Delhi’s Great Mosque, making sure to specify, for his global audience, the exact equivalents of the expenditure in other currencies: “A total cost of 12 lakh (1.2 million) rupees — which comes to 40,000 ‘Irâqî tumâns, or 60 lakh (6 million) Transoxanian khânîs — was spent on it by the imperial government” (87). This is followed by “A poem in praise of the Great Mosque,” which yet again situates Delhi as a center of world religious culture:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{bah rif'at \ä sm\ä n yak p\ä yah-i \ü} \\
\text{mah-o-khurshid z\ä r-i s\ä yah-i \ü} \\
\text{riwâq-ash gibalh-i ahl-i yaqîn ast} \\
\text{nazr-i masjid-i aqsâ hamîn ast} \\
\text{bah sahn-ash faiz-i dîgar mî-tavân yâfi}
\end{align*}
\]
zi hauz-ash āb-i kausar mī-tavān yāfī

Just one of its steps has the stature of the sky
Under its shadow is where moon and sun fly;
Its galleries are the Qiblah of all people of faith
For this is the very equal of Jerusalem’s Temple Mount (maṣjid-i aqsā);
Just by entering its courtyard one gains a special grace
And from its reservoir imbibes the nectar of paradise (88)

He then describes Delhi’s “most refreshing (tarāwat-bakhsh) and enlivening (rūḥ-afzā)”
climate — something which modern readers who have been to Delhi might be inclined to
dispute, but which would certainly have appealed to readers in far-off lands thinking of
migrating to Mughal India.

After situating the city thus, Chandar Bhān makes sure to detail Delhi’s power as a
spiritual attraction for Sufis. He describes the various saints (and poets, like the
celebrated Amīr Khusrau) whose shrines are in “Old Delhi,” i.e. the modern-day
neighborhood of Nizāmuddīn:

Old Delhi is one of the most renowned ancient cities in the world. Many
gnostics and other holy men (‘ārifān va darweshān) have their final
resting place in this area, such as that wise knower of truth, Khwāja Qutb
al-Dīn [Bakhtīyar Kākī]95; the purest of eminent saints, Shaikh Nizām al-
Dīn Aulīyā; Shaikh Naṣīr al-Dīn “The Lamp of Delhi” (chirāgh-i dehli);
and Shaikh Hamīd al-Dīn Nagaurī; not to mention other friends of the
world like that Parrot of the Rose Garden of Eloquence, Amīr Khusrau;
and that friend to holy men who has traveled the world over, on land and
sea (khādīm al-fuqarā [va] saiyāh-i bahr-o-barr), Mullā Jamālī.96 The

95 For further details on these tombs, see Stephen P. Blake, Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal
India, 1639-1739 (Cambridge University, 1991), 152-6.

96 I.e., Mullā (sometimes “Maulānā”) Hamīd bin Fazl Allāh Jamālī (d. 1535), author of Siyar al-‘Ārifīn.
See Mahmud Husain Siddiqui, The Memoirs of Sufis Written in India: Reference to Kashaf-ul-mahjub,
Siyar-ul-auliya, and Siyar-al-ārifīn (Baroda: Dept. of Persian, Urdu, and Arabic, Faculty of Arts, Maharaja
Sayajirao University of Baroda, 1979).
qasba of Pānīpat, on the outskirts of Delhi, is similarly ennobled (sharf dārad) by the eternal presence of that overflowing existence (bāh wujūd-i fāʿiz al-wujūd), Shaikh Sharf. 97 (88-9)

He adds that “the ancient buildings of Old Delhi,” such as Humāyūn’s tomb, “fill the eyes of tourists and rural visitors with wonder and amazement” (89).

These themes continue as Chandar Bhān moves from province to province, as the glorious architecture, lush gardens, and bustling commercial and intellectual life of each major city and province in Mughal India are detailed for the reader. Agra’s great monuments and gardens are singled out for praise, especially, of course, the newly completed Taj Mahal. Fathpūr Sikrī is noted for the presence there of Salīm Chishti’s auspicious shrine, and the glorious architecture of the erstwhile capital. But perhaps the aesthetic of this section of Chahār Chaman is best exemplified by Chandar Bhān’s account of his own home suba of Lahore, which touches on all of these themes:

Particulars of the felicitous district (subah-i bahjat-sirisht),
the Seat of the Sultanate, Lahore (91-4)

This city of a celestial foundation that is the equal of paradise, the Abode of the Sultanate, Lahore, is among the most magnificent and grand cities in all of Hindūstān. Because of its pleasant weather (latāfat-i āb-o-havā), variety of special attractions, and numerous delights it stands totally above and beyond the other towns and cities of the world (tarjīh va tafaawwq-i tamām bar bilād-o-amsār-i rūzgār dārad). Its impressive grand architecture, its delightful and enchanting mansions, the polish of its buildings, the decoration of its bazaars, the purity of its delicious water, the abundance of its fruits and produce (fawākīh-o-asmār), all make it the most beautiful place on the face of the earth:

97 I.e., Sharf al-Dīn ʿBū ʿAlī Qalandar (d. 1324). See Anna Aronovna Suvorova, Muslim Saints of South Asia: The Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries (Routledge, 2004), 185.
Hazārān minnat ai lāhor bar bāgh-i jinān dārī
Zi khūbī har chī dar andīshah gunjad bīsh az ān dārī
Barand az yaksar-i bāzār-i tū dar shish jihat sāmān
Matā'-i haft kishwar dar miyān-i yak dukān dārī

O Lahore, you have thousands more delights than the garden of paradise,
You have more charms than one has the capacity to imagine;
From your singular bazaar they export goods in all six directions,
And the commodities of all seven continents are available in every one of your shops.

The buildings of the imperial palace overlook the river, their rooftops rubbing up against the sky and breathing the same air as the wheel of Atlas (dam musāwīt bah charkh-i 'atlas mī-zanad). Every morning the world-illuminating sun appears through the porticoes of this heavenly imperial threshold, and the moon that lights up the night looks like a benighted beggar compared to the polished plazas of this palace that arches up to the sky. The houses of renowned princes are truly something else, and the estate of the great commander Āṣif Khān is like another city within the city, the premises (jīhāta) of which completely exceed the limitations of writing. The mansions of high noble amīrs such as the Pillar of State ‘Alī Mardān Khān, the Amīr of Amīrs and Most Learned Man of the Age and the Realm, Afzal Khān, the Wise Man of the World, Sa‘dullāh Khān, and other great men of the empire such as Islām Khān, A‘zam Khān, Wazīr Khān, Ja‘far Khān, and so on, all add to the beauty of this city that is the peer of paradise. The homes of the city-dwellers are arranged close together, with excellent design and suitably good taste, each in excellent condition in full accordance with [architectural] principles. In every street and alley the delicious running water is reminiscent of the water of paradise, and thanks to its special water and climate this urbane land (khītā-i ‘ashrat-pairā) has become a mine of delights and a mansion of beauty:

tamāshā dar tu sūrat-hā-yi ma‘nī mī-tavān kardan
ba-dast-i āyīna az ‘aks-i rukhsār-i butān dārī

In you one can behold the infinite forms that lead to true meaning,
You hold in your hand the mirror made from reflections on the cheeks of idols\(^98\)

\(^98\) Here I have used the version of this couplet that appears in S. M. M. Qadiri’s text and Urdu translation of Chahār Chaman, 107. The version in Ja‘fri’s printed edition (tamāshā‘i zī sūrat-hā-yi ma‘nī mī-tavān kard / ba-dast āyīna-hā az ‘aks-i rukhsār-i butān dārī) seems to be missing something, and in any case does not scan metrically.
Indeed, the [city’s] inner beauty exceeds even its superficial beauty. Deeply learned scholars (‘ulamā’-yi mutabahhīr), erudite intellectuals, masters of asceticism and self-control, men of ecstasy and spiritual transcendence, mystics acquainted with truth, hermits (munzawīyān) seeking the basis of Reality, pure-hearted sufis, and free-spirited recluse all lend an added flair to this city of bounteous foundation. Poets of exquisite language and sweet expression heat up the bustling literary scene in every corner and ever direction with the gift of scintillating and exciting meanings; even precocious youths and adolescents, faces marked by new lines [of facial hair] (khat), practice their [calligraphic] lines (khat) and recitations, doing able justice to [the standards of] graceful and elegant penmanship, and to the smooth flowing of literary expression (salāsat-i ravānī-yi sukhan).

Of course, within the environs of Lahore there are many verdant and flowery gardens of eternal spring, such as Bāgh-i Dil-gushāy, Bāgh-i Dil-āwiz, Bāgh-i Nāmūs al-‘Ālmān-i Amīr-i Nawāb-i Qudsī-Alqāb Begum Sāhib, Bāgh-i Mīrzā Kāmhrān, Bāgh-i Naulakha, and Bāgh-i Shālamār. But among these the most bountiful and pleasing is Bāgh-i Shalamar, which was completed during the reign of His Majesty the Second Lord of the Celestial Conjunction, may His rule last forever. Its verdant and lush flora, wide expanses, moderate air, lovely landscape (husn-i manzar), delightful pavilions, decorative array of heavenly buildings, the purity of its flowing water, its broad ponds, huge reservoirs, wide rivers and long streams, and various other types of decoration and adornment put it head and shoulders above the other gardens. Its burst of colors polishes the mirror of hearts (fazā-yi ān rang zidā-yi āyina-i dil-hā), and the sweeping splendor of its flower beds adds a sparkle even to the eyes of those accustomed to spectacular sights. Nevertheless, there is a consensus that the excellent garden on the estate of Mīr ‘Abdullah is also among the best local recreational grounds, because in springtime, when the spectacle of blossoming flora lends freshness also to the garden in men’s hearts, the retinue of His Majesty the Sovereign Lord of the Age, whose soul is itself a garden of eternal spring even fresher than the petals of a rose, often honors the said garden with a noble visit, and in so doing bestows an even greater beauty on that bounteous garden with the splendor of his auspicious imperial presence (ba-farr-i qudūm-i maimanat-luẓūm).

Even though there are yearly and monthly impromptu (ghair-muqarrar) performances, throughout the city’s precincts, especially at the tombs and shrines of the giants along the path of gnostic Truth, the Thursday gatherings at the blessed tomb of that knower of mystical stages, Pīr ‘Ali Hujwīrī, takes the bustle of people to a level of maximum perfection. Darvishes and other free spirits, literati, poets, and all manner of people gather there to demonstrate their piety. Then on Fridays the masters of
literary perfection, eloquent men of pleasing expression, and poets of linguistic delectation, group after group of eloquents from Iran, Turan, and Hindustan gather in that house of firm foundation (buq’a-i khair-asās), i.e. the Wazir Khān mosque complex — one of the most exemplary buildings in the world (zarb al-masal-i biqā’-i rūzgār) — and heat up the literary and poetic action. Meanwhile, countless Persian and Arabic books, and reliable manuscripts of histories, epic romances, dīvāns of the classical and the latest poets (mutaqaddimīn va mut‘ākhkhirīn), letter collections (munsha’āt), anthologies (fīqrāt), epistolary primers (ruq ‘āt), biographies, chapbooks, samples of the best calligraphers of the times, and all the other tools and equipment for practicing every genre and course of study are widely available for sale or purchase in this wonderful place. And, since this is also the day when school children have the most free time, from every street and lane young boys with notebooks in hand and girls with flowers in their hair come strutting around the bazaar (khirāmān ba sa‘īr-i bāzār mī‘āyand), in keeping with the promise of youth. This bustle of activity continues until well after midnight, and is a delight to the eyes of all urbane people watchers.

This city of celestial foundation has two forts. The first contains the pādshāh’s heavenly imperial palace complex. And the second is the walled citadel, which, on account of its width and breadth, stature, fortifications, massiveness and impregnability, strikes wonder into the eyes of all those who see it. This main citadel has twelve gates. The first is the Roshanā’ī Gate, which is located near the imperial treasury, and it is precisely because of this association [with the imperial treasury] that it has gotten this name, the “Gate of Light.” It is the main entry point to the city for sojourners from places like Qandahār, Kābul, and Kashmīr. Another entrance is Delhi Gate, the most famous of the city’s entry points. People from Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Gujrat, the Deccan, Akbarābād (Agra), and most other cities and towns come into the city through this gate. There are ten more, near which are located many of the estates of various amīrs and imperial servants—in fact, the house of this feeble ant, the author of these artful pages, is located in this same neighborhood. The Kāngra Fort, among the most famous citadels in Hindūstān, is also associated with this subah, and it is a custom that every year people from all over India flock there for pilgrimage.

In previous years, this province has been governed by the likes of Āqā Afzal [Fāzil Khān], Qāsim Khān, Sādiq Khān, ‘Ināyat Khān, Āsaf Khān, Wazīr Khān, Mu‘tāmad Khān, Sayyid Khān-i Jahān, Qīlī Khān, Sa‘īd Khān, and the amīr of amīrs ‘Alīmardān Khān. More recently, other men like Qāzī Muhammad Afzal, Sayyid Salābat Khān, Shaikh ‘Abd al-Karīm, Khwāja Mu‘īn, Bahādur Khān, and Sayyid Izzat Khān have governed this region.
India is thus positioned as explicitly a key destination for the world’s literary, commercial, and spiritual elites. There are sights to see, and there is business to be done, all in an atmosphere of thriving intellectual freedom and exchange, and where the emperor “is himself acquainted with Truth and is a friend to holy men” (94). This worldview — quite literally — informs Chandar Bhān’s account of virtually every other province in some way or another. Thatta, for instance, is singled out not just for having a “lush and breezy climate that is beyond the bounds of description,” but also specifically for being “a key destination and port of entry for foreign mystics and free spirits (fiqarā va āzādagān), and a place where many poets and other eloquent intellectuals turn up” (97).

This worldly outlook and vibrant sense of India in the seventeenth century as a hub of global commercial and intellectual exchange puts all of the earlier sections of *Chahār Chaman* in yet another new light. For the goals of articulating the norms of imperial administration and secretarial skill, situating Chandar Bhān’s own practices within a much wider and deeper tradition of Perso-Arabic ādāb and akhlāq, and profusely exalting the emperor as a generous protector of his subjects who understood the inner workings of an ideal administration, all served a dual purpose of advertising India’s charms to a wider, transregional audience. Regardless of whether that global audience was actually paying attention to him — which is, of course, another question entirely — it seems clear that Chandar Bhān was trying to speak to them.
Moreover, this sense that the world was increasingly interconnected contributed mightily to someone like Chandar Bhān feeling that he lived in an entirely new era of human history, an era in which Mughal India was the place where that newness could be most powerfully experienced. And, as we will see in Chapter Three, this sense of novelty infused not just Chandar Bhān's inshā', but also his poetry.
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

SECRETARY-POETS IN MUGHAL INDIA AND THE ETHOS OF PERSIAN:
THE CASE OF CHANDAR BHĀN BRAHMAN

VOLUME TWO

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
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DEPARTMENT OF SOUTH ASIAN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

BY
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CHAPTER THREE

The Stale “Style of the Ancients”? Mughal Poetry and Chandar Bhān’s Attempt to Make it Fresh

\begin{quote}
sukhan zi ‘ālam-i bālā magar firod āmad
ki āmad īn ghazal-i tāza bar zabān imrūz
\end{quote}

Surely the words must have alit from skies above
For such a fresh lyric to have found my tongue today

We have seen in Chapter One the degree to which Chandar Bhān’s worldview presumed a deep historical set of secretarial norms, norms that included not just the workaday business side of scribal work, but also a whole system of ethics, social decorum, mystical vocabularies, and the mastery of ādāb and akhlāq traditions. These norms informed both his understanding of his place in society as a munshī-yi haqīqī, and his understanding of the demands of compositional style. Those demands, in turn, included an expectation that Mughal inshā’—whether epistolary or not—reflect the established norms of social etiquette through the vehicle of prose style, in a highly sophisticated way that summoned the expertise of multiple intellectual and literary disciplines. And, as we saw in Chapter Two, this constellation of interdisciplinary requirements are all on full display in Chandar

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1 Portions of this chapter have appeared recently as “Fresh Words for a Fresh World: Tāza-Gū’ī and the Poetics of Newness in Early Modern Indo-Persian Poetry,” *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory* 3, 2 (2007): 125-49 (Special Issue: Time and history in Sikh and South Asian pasts).

Bhān’s master work of *inshā*’, “The Four Gardens” (*Chahār Chaman*). The latter work not only presses us to expand our understanding of what constituted legitimate, “pure *inshā*’”, but also to try and tease out the ways in which a text like *Chahār Chaman* shows the classical *munshī* at work, putting all the implicit norms of secretarial traditions in practice. Upon close reading, we saw that the deployment of such sophistication and mastery was not merely an exercise in “vanity” for the delectation of “polished society,” but a way of projecting the Mughals’ imperial power as benevolent and just, and inculcating a moral code of governance for administrators and secretaries of all types to emulate. This vision of just power and governance was articulated both didactically, as an idealized code of conduct for an internal audience of South Asian readers, and propagandistically, as an advertisement to a global audience of literary connoisseurs and would-be travelers to Mughal India.

But to really have an integrated sense of Chandar Bhān’s worldview, we have to remember also that he was a practicing poet, and try to put is poetry and *dīvān* in some sort of perspective. For quite apart from the deep secretarial traditions that Chandar Bhān mastered and evoked in his *inshā’-pardāzī*, his poetry has had another life of its own within the trajectory of Indo-Persian literary history and historiography. And as we will see, any attempt to locate a figure like Chandar Bhān within that larger trajectory is fraught with some serious conceptual and comparative literary difficulties.

He lived at a time when early modern Mughal and Safavid poets and other literati across the transregional Indo-Persian ecumene of ‘Ajam were articulating an unprecedented
break with their literary past, a temporal distanitation most often invoked through calls for ingenuity and “freshness” (tāzagī) in poetic expression.\textsuperscript{3} It was not a complete break, though, in that even the most inventive “speakers of the fresh” (tāza-gūyān) — Chandar Bhān included — never went so far as to completely renounce the Persianate literary tradition that they inherited. Rather, they continued to see themselves in a dynamic relationship with their poetic forebears, a relationship in which they, as the “latest” generation (muta'akhkhirīn), took up the classical precedents of “the ancients” (mutaqaddimīn) and brought them to new and transcendent levels through poetic ingenuity and imaginative effort (khayāl-bandī). Thus even though for the most part poets continued to adhere to the same basic set of norms that had been developing in Persophone literature for centuries — the Persian language itself, obviously, but also its rhymes, meters, prosody, and conventional poetic tropology — they did so in very self-conscious and formally innovative new ways. The goal, in the celebrated Mughal poet Faizī’s (1547-1595 CE) terms, was to use the same “old words” (lafz-i kuhan) to generate “new meanings” (ma’nī-yi nau), and thereby to create an updated, “fresh” (tāza)

sensibility for a new era in an increasingly interconnected new world. The primary mode of envisioning this newness was through a radical reconfiguration of how early modern poets situated themselves, both within their own cultural history and vis-à-vis the arc of human temporality.

As it happens, this nearly universal urge to “make it new” emerged some three full centuries before Ezra Pound would issue his own famous modernist dictum, and would thus — or so one would think — be of considerable interest to scholars of literary

---


5 We are not dealing here with the abstract structural, philosophical, socio-religious, or theological notion of “Islamic time” of the sort described, for example, by Louis Massogna, “Time in Islamic Thought,” in Man and Time: Papers from the Erasos Yearbooks (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 108-14; or Gerhard Bowering, “The Concept of Time in Islam,” Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 141, 1 (1997): 55-66. We should however keep in mind that the latter part of the sixteenth century CE, i.e. the very historical moment that saw the emergence of the poetics of tâzâgî, also coincided with the end of the first Islamic millennium. This period thus saw widespread eschatological speculation, messianism, and a belief that a new age of human history had arrived. From Abû al-Fâzîl’s visionary ideology to Bâdîyûnî’s bitter apocalypticism, from the Mahdavi belief in the messiah’s impending arrival to Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindî’s claim to be the “renewer of the second millennium” (mu’addid-i alf-i sâni), intellectuals throughout Mughal India, and the Islamic world generally, were thus engaged in a bold reimagination of the very meaning of human time. One could certainly surmise, then, that this millenarian spirit also played a part in the sense of renewal voiced by the Indo-Persian poets of this period. The subject of millenarianism in the wider world has been taken up recently by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Turning the Stones Over: Sixteenth-Century Millenarianism from the Tagus to the Ganges,” Indian Economic and Social History Review 40, 2 (2003): 129-61. For millenarianism in the Ottoman context, see Cornell Fleischer, “Secretaries Dreams: Augury and Angst in the Ottoman Scribeal Service,” in Armagan: Festschrift für Andreas Tietze (Prague: Enigma Corp., 1994); “Imperialism and the Apocalypse, 1450-1550,” (Annales, forthcoming). Millenarianism specifically in Mughal India, particularly as evidenced in the writings of ‘Abd al-Qâdir Bâdîyûnî, is the subject of an ongoing doctoral dissertation by A. Azfar Moin at the University of Michigan; for an overview, see his 2005 University of Texas M.A. thesis, “The Islamic Millenium in Mughal India: A Historiographical Analysis”.

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modernity generally. Strangely, though, this has not really been the case. Instead, the emic understanding of time and literary historical progression built into the tāza-gū ī movement has been supplanted in modern scholarship by what might be called a metageographical model, which treats variations in literary styles more as a product of local geography, climate, and essentialized national character than as a literary historical process. That is to say, rather than see the development of Indo-Persian poetry writ large as a function of time, i.e. as a diachronic succession of literary historical periods, modern (and even many postmodern) scholars have tended to map out the various stylistic eras of Persianate literature—formative golden age, high classical period, post-classical experimental phase, etc.—onto certain places, as the geographically determined outcomes of timeless regional and national essences. Thus, for instance, the poetic fashion that the avant-garde early modern poets and even their contemporary critics would have called tāza-gū ī (to emphasize its ingenuity and the implied sense of temporal distantiation from earlier, more old-fashioned styles), modern scholars are in the habit of calling sabk-i hindī, or the “Indian Style” (to emphasize what they see as India’s specific effect on the aesthetics of the period).

---

6 It is also worth noting that Pound himself attributes his famous dictum to Tching Tang, who ruled China in the seventeenth century B.C. (cf. Canto #53). In other words ancient, classical, and exotic material was not to be dispensed with, but reconfigured and “made new” and relevant again.

7 I use the term “metageography” here in the most general sense elaborated by Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen, The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), ix: “By metageography we mean the set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world: the often unconscious frameworks that organize studies of history, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, or even natural history.” Literary history would, presumably, be an acceptable addition to this list.
What follows in this chapter constitutes a preliminary inquiry into the basis of this shift in terminology, the resulting conceptual disconnect, and the question of what all of this might mean for how we situate a figure like Chandar Bhān as a poet. As an initial gesture in what I hope will become a sustained case for abandoning this metageographical vocabulary entirely, we will briefly historicize some of the anachronistic features of the concept of sabk-i hindī, and test their conceptual logic against Chandar Bhān’s work and career. Chandar Bhān is, in many ways, ideal for such a test case. He lived at the height of the period in question, and, though he is not as well known today as some of his more illustrious poetic contemporaries like Faizī, ‘Urīfī, Sā’īb, Bīdīl and some others, he was a very highly regarded poet in his own day, and certainly saw himself as part of the tāza-gūī vanguard. Moreover, as a Hindu writing in Persian, a brahman like Chandar Bhān would ostensibly be the archetypal example of the blending of Indic and Persian languages and literatures that is said to epitomize the so-called “Indian Style” (sabk-i hindī). His attitude toward poetry therefore presents us with a vivid barometer for assessing the concept, and thereby much of the modernist discourse and assumptions about Safavid-Mughal literary and political culture generally.

**Chandar Bhān and the Mughal Literary Context**

Let us recall that Chandar Bhān was born in late sixteenth-century Lahore, and most likely died in 1662-3 CE, i.e. a few years into Aurangzeb’s reign. He thus lived through part or all of the reigns of four Mughal emperors, and spent the bulk of his adult life and professional career in the first half of the seventeenth century — the key historical moment for the popularization of the discourse of tāza-gūī. Throughout his upwardly
mobile administrative career trajectory, Chandar Bhān also gained a reputation as a poet of some distinction, and like most poets of his day he collected his substantial body of Persian verse into a volume normally referred to simply as the Diwān-i Brahman. His prose works, as we have seen, are also peppered with ghazals and rubāʾīs, and as we saw in Chapter One, his poetic style has generally been praised by his contemporaries for both its fluid elegance and its searching mystical temperament. Muhammad Sāliḥ Kambūh claimed that Chandar Bhān used to get so overcome with the pain of mystical yearning that he often wept while reciting his verse, and further described him as “the idol-worshiper in the temple of poetic expression” (sanam-parast-i but-khāna-i sukhan). This clever characterization both plays on Chandar Bhān’s religious identity as a brahman, and also specifically invokes the established Sufi and poetic trope of the unattainable beloved as an idol (but), and the poet-lover-mystic as an idol-worshiper (sanam/but-parast). Chandar Bhān, in other words, was an idol-worshiper both as a Hindu and as a mystic poet always yearning for the perfect, unattainable, logos that can only be glimpsed approximately through poetry, just as one uses an idol as a means of conceiving a transcendent, immanent God. Sāliḥ thus feels comfortable insisting that “even though [Chandar Bhān] appears to be a sacred thread-wearer, his intellect transcends infidelity;
even though he has the form (sūrat) of a Hindu, in essence (dar maʾnī) he [also] breathes Islam.\(^9\)

Indeed, although the fact that Chandar Bhān never shied away from his “Hindu” heritage, it is equally clear that his mystical interests were wide ranging. We have already seen this reflected in his prose oeuvre, for instance above in his discussions of patrons Afzal Khān and Saʿdullāh Khān; but it also informed his poetry, and gave him a unique opportunity to play on the kind of religio-mystical tropes that Sālīh’s assessment reflects. He was certainly fond of toying with Persian poetry’s existing antinomian vocabulary for expressive effect, and there is no doubt that as a brahman his deployment of classic topoi such as the zunnar, the notion of the poet-lover as an infidel (kāfīr), and so on, had an added poignancy.\(^10\) We have already noted one such verse that plays on the notion of Chandar Bhān’s “special relationship” with his sacred thread (see above, Introduction).

In another verse he warns, tongue-in-cheek:

\[
\begin{align*}
mard-āzmā-st bāda-i tauhīd barhaman \\
nā-āzmūda mast ba yak jām mīshavī
\end{align*}
\]

The wine of monotheism tests a man, O Brahman; A naīf like you will get drunk off of just one cup!\(^11\)

Or cleverly combines Sufistic antinomianism with a different kind of devotion for a lovely poetic conceit:

---


\(^11\) *Diwān-i Brahman*, 335.5.
dāman-i 'isyān ba āb-i dīda shustam barhaman
lek naqsh-i sīrā-i but bar ja'bīn dārām hānūz

I wash the robe of transgression with my tears, O Brahman;
But I will always have the mark of prostration to the idol on my forehead.\(^{12}\)

One could go on giving such examples. And, as I have noted above, his eclectic tastes have also, perhaps unsurprisingly, caused Chandar Bhān to become indelibly associated in the Indo-Persian historical memory with the eclectic atelier of Prince Dārā Shukoh — an association that, as we will see especially in Chapter Four, has not been without historiographical consequences. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that by deftly weaving together various strands of Vedanta, Sufism, and the relatively non-sectarian conventional imagery of the Indo-Persian poetic tradition, the contents of Chandar Bhān’s Dīvān vividly epitomize Mughal composite culture at its apogee.\(^{13}\)

Sālih goes on to say that “[Chandar Bhān’s character], like his poetry, is pure in its perfect lack of ostentation,” and it is important to note that he did not mean this pejoratively. For it seems clear that an effect of poetic tāzagī did not always have to involve complex, bombastic, and intricate formal experimentation; it could also involve simply being elegant in a new and refreshing way, or using the conventional apparatus of Indo-Persian poetry to address a new and interesting theme. It also did not — or at least, not necessarily — require the poet to draw on exotic themes simply for the sake of being exotic. Thus even when Chandar Bhān exploits his interstitial subject position, or draws

\(^{12}\) Dīvān-i Brahman, 231.5

\(^{13}\) For a concise overview of the non-sectarian strain in Persian poetry, see Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 115-40.
on “Indic” tropes, he almost always does so within the standard norms of Persianate poetic convention, meter, vocabulary, and imagery. For instance, this verse, on the thirst for awareness being thwarted by the false water of the mirage —

\[\text{zi āb-o-rang-i jahān chī-st barahman hāsil} \]
\[\text{ba-mānd tishna-lab ān kas ki bar sarāb nishast} \]

What does one gain from the glistening color of the world, O Brahman? He who sits in a mirage will remain thirsty\(^\text{14}\)

— recalls ‘Urfi’s opposite take on a similar theme (mazmūn):

\[\text{zi nāqs-i tishna-labī dān ba-‘aql-i khwesh manāz} \]
\[\text{dil-at farīb gar az jalwa-i sarāb nakhwurd} \]

Don’t be so proud of your intellect; know that it is simply a lack of thirst; Your mind is deceived if you don’t drink from the mirage

Chandar Bhān has at least five shi’rs in his Dīvān that play specifically on this classic theme alone. And even when he invokes a theme like religious infidelity (kufr) he often does so couching it specifically within a Sufi idiom:

\[\text{chu dard-i ‘ishq rasad khwāhish-i davā kufr ast} \]
\[\text{dar īn ma‘āmla azhār-i mudda‘ā kufr ast} \]

When the agony of love comes, hope for a remedy is heresy; In this business, having an end in sight is itself infidelity

\[\text{dar īn tarīq ba-juz chashm-i tar makun taklīf} \]
\[\text{ki tāt-yi marhala-i dostī ba-pā kufr ast} \]

On this path do not exert anything but your tearful eyes; To walk the journey to the Friend on earthly feet is itself infidelity\(^\text{15}\)

\(^\text{14}\) Dīvān-i Brahman, 55.5

\(^\text{15}\) Dīvān-i Brahman, 27.1, 27.4
It is precisely by reformulating such classical thematic conventions (*mazmūn-āfirīnī*) and remixing words and tropes to create new meanings (*maʿnī-āfirīnī*), that poets like Chandar Bhān sought to “refresh” the canons and conventions of old. Aesthetic form and thematic content both played a part in this process of renewal, as another of Chandar Bhān’s verses makes clear:

\[
\begin{align*}
barahman \; & \; \text{dar radīf-i tāza mazmūn-i tāza bar bastī} \\
nihāl-i tāza zibā-tar numāyad nau-zamīnī rā
\end{align*}
\]

O Brahman, plant a fresh theme (*mazmūn*) in a fresh refrain (*radīf*); A new shoot always looks prettier in new sod.\(^{16}\)

There is a delightful play here on the word *zamīn*, which literally means “earth,” “ground,” “land,” etc. (and I have translated here as “sod”), but also has a technical meaning, viz. the prosodic “ground” that specifies a given *ghazal*’s rhyme (*qāfiya*) and refrain (*radīf*). So *zamīn* works here not just on the literal level of the ground for planting new flowers, but also the formal structure into which the innovative *radīf* called for in the first line will be inserted.

Needless to say, such wordplay would not have been lost on Chandar Bhān’s contemporary audience, and it is this aesthetic which allows him to boast repeatedly of his ability to produce an effect of freshness (*tāzagī*) in poetic expression (*sukhan*). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the words *tāza* and/or *sukhan* appear some eighty-five times in his *Dīvān* alone. It is this consistent effort to “make it fresh” that led another of his renowned literary contemporaries, Munīr Lahorī, to lavishly introduce him as:

\(^{16}\) *Dīvān-i Brahman*, 15.5.
...the eye and lamp of invention, the head slate in the book of learning and insight, the pride and joy of the courageous and fortunate imperial house [of the Mughals], the opening verse in the preface of wealth and glory, the [auspicious] lines on the forehead of elegant language, the imprint on the seal-ring of eloquence, the Sahbān of the age, the most elegant man of the times, the lord of poets (malik al-shu’arā) Chandar Bhān.¹⁷

Of course, Chandar Bhān lived and worked at a time when Persian language and literature flourished all over India, both as a courtly medium of elite literary expression (as it had already done for upwards of half a millennium), and, as noted above in Chapter One, as the official language through which the administration of the Mughal imperium was conducted.¹⁸ State policy encouraged Persian-medium education throughout the Mughal territories — including Chandar Bhān’s native Punjab — not just for the literary and courtly nobility, but across the social and religious spectrum. Chandar Bhān’s father, both brothers, and son Tej Bhān all appear to have been accomplished Persian writers, and the addressees of his letter collection, the Munsha ‘āt-i Brahman, are representative of nearly every demographic imaginable. Meanwhile, the lavish patronage available to poets and other literati at the Mughal court attracted a steady flow of Central Asian and Persian poets and litterateurs to India, where they found a congenial and lucrative haven in which to practice their craft. Political unrest in Central Asia had made consistent patronage difficult to secure in much of the Persophone world of ‘Ajam, but India was


¹⁸ For further details on the trends summarized in this paragraph, see above, Chapter One; see also Muazzam Alam, “The Pursuit of Persian: Language and Mughal Politics,” Modern Asian Studies 32, 2 (1998): 317-49.
another matter. As one poet of the times put it, "Great is India, the Mecca for all in need / particularly for those who seek safety." One factor was the Safavids’ increasingly restrictive vision of a shī‘a state, which had created a censorious atmosphere in Iran that was inhospitable to overly provocative and antinomian poetry. Ghazālī of Mashhad (b. 1527), to take just one of many possible examples, was a very well-traveled and well-known literary figure long before he ever came to India. But in the sectarian political climate of Safavid Iran, Ghazālī’s poetry gained a reputation for immodest (bī-‘itidāl) subject matter and an “uninhibited style” (shewa-i bī-qaidī) — so much so that a group of ‘ulamā actually issued a fatwā calling for his execution. It was fear that this fatwā would be carried out that led him to leave for India, where, no longer fearing for his life, he eventually thrived as the emperor Akbar’s first poet laureate (malik al-shu‘arā).

Indeed, Mughal India came to be viewed all over the wider Persian cosmopolis (to borrow Sheldon Pollock’s useful term) as a haven for intellectual freedom and literary genius, a place of such bounteous opportunity that, according to a verse of Tālib Āmulī — another Iranian expatriate, who at one time served as Jahāngīr’s poet laureate — any traveler who got homesick while sojourning there “should be ashamed of himself”

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20 For details on the fatwā and other particulars of Ghazālī’s life and poetry, many of which come from Badayūnī’s account, see Nabi Hadi, Mughalôn ke Malik al-Shu‘arā (Allahabad: Shabistan, 1978), 23-78.

(sharm bād-ash). For poets in particular, Mughal India developed a reputation as one of the only remaining places where sufficient patronage and institutional appreciation was available with which to perfect one’s craft — a sentiment neatly summed up by ‘Alī Quṭb Salīm’s very famous couplet:

\[
\begin{align*}
nīst \text{ dar īrān-zamīn sāmān-i taksīl-i kamāl} \\
tā \text{ nayāmad sū-yī hindūstān hinā rangīn nashud}
\end{align*}
\]

The means of acquiring perfection do not exist in the land of Iran
Just as henna has no color, until it comes to Hindustan.23

As with henna, so too with poets, and thus there was a kind of double infusion of Persophone intellectual production into India under the Mughals: one homegrown and “grassroots,” made up of relatively new South Asian demographics (represented by intellectuals like Chandar Bhān and his family) who were mastering Persian and deploying that mastery within the ambit of Mughal imperial and subimperial administration, commerce, art and culture; and the other transregional and cosmopolitan, made up of expatriates from across ‘Ajam (and even Europe, for that matter) who came to India in search of asylum, patronage, commerce, employment, or plain old adventure. Some wound up settling in the subcontinent, while others, like the celebrated poet Sā‘īb Tabrīzī (1601-1677 CE), stayed for a relatively short time before returning home or continuing their peripatetic careers elsewhere. But in general — and particularly in terms


23 This verse is quoted in innumerable books, articles, and collections. Among others, see for instance Shibli Nu’mani, Shi’r al-‘Ajam, vol. 3 (reprint] ’Azamgarh: Shibli Academy, 2002), 8; Wahid Qureshi, “The Indian Persian,” in Mutāli‘ah-i Adabīyāt-i Fārst (Majmū‘ah-i Maqālat) (Lahore: University Oriental College, 1996), 1-33; E.G. Browne, Literary History of Persia, vol. 4, 166; Alam, “Pursuit of Persian,” 322-3. The translation is mine, as are all others unless otherwise noted.
of available patronage and tolerance for freedom of literary expression — Mughal India so dominated the larger Persian cosmopolis during this period that, as mentioned above, many have come to refer to the entire early modern era of Persophone literary history, roughly the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, simply as the era of the sabk-i hindī, or “Indian Style.”

**Historicizing Sabk-i Hindī and the Metageographical Approach to Indo-Persian Literature**

In terms of periodization, then, it would seem fairly straightforward to at least be able to say that Chandar Bhān was a seventeenth-century Mughal poet of the Indian Style. But in a very crucial way, this designation would be completely inappropriate. For one thing, when scholars have spoken of sabk-i hindī, they have almost always meant the term pejoratively — something that Chandar Bhān and his Mughal-Safavid contemporaries would never have accepted, even if they had heard of the term (which they hadn’t). There are notable exceptions, of course. But in general, the idea of the Indian Style of Persian poetry has almost always carried with it a host of negative associations: “mannerist” courtly decadence, hyperbolic flights of fancy, vapid intellectualism, rhetorical extravagance, and so on. In other words, where Chandar Bhān and his contemporaries would have seen refreshing originality and aesthetic ingenuity, modern historians and literary critics in both Iran and India have instead seen the unnatural and

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24 A number of very accomplished scholars who have continued to employ the term sabk-i hindī in recent years have done so with a clear sense of appreciative admiration for the ingenuity of early modern poetics, rather than the invective hurled by many other modern scholars. But, however noble the gesture, trying to shift the semantic valence from “sabk-i hindī = bad poetry” to “sabk-i hindī = good poetry” does nothing to address the underlying flaws of speaking metageographically about poetic styles in the first place. As will become clear below, then, I would like to suggest that the terminology should be retired altogether.
contrived products of a tradition that had “[faded] out in [cultural] exhaustion.”\textsuperscript{25} And that decadence has come to be attributed not just to the literary historical period as such, wherever in the Persophone world the poetics of innovation found fertile ground, but specifically and almost exclusively to India, and by extension to its climate, civilization, and alleged cultural effect on the Persian language.\textsuperscript{26}

Where did this notion come from? Again — it bears repeating — the metageographical term \textit{sabk-i hindī} was never employed by sixteenth-eighteenth century Indo-Persian literati themselves. The term does not seem to have been used, in fact, until the early twentieth century, when it was probably coined by the Iranian scholar and poet laureate (\textit{malik al-shu‘arā}) Muhammad Taqī Bahār (1886-1951 CE).\textsuperscript{27} Bahār first deployed this

\textsuperscript{25} Ehsan Yarshater, “The Indian or Safavid Style: Progress or Decline?” in \textit{Persian Literature}, edited by Ehsan Yarshater (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 277. Indeed, Yarshater describes the period as “culturally exhausted” no less than six times in one short article!

\textsuperscript{26} Perhaps the most concise list of the literary faults generally associated with \textit{sabk-i hindī} is to be found in a very short review by Muhammad Taqī Bahār, called “Sā’ib va Shewa-i ū” (Sā’ib and His [Aesthetic] Style), \textit{Yaghmā} 23, 5 (1970-1): 264-5. This list is paraphrased in English (with significant omissions, such as Bahār’s ambivalent remarks on Khān Ārzū) in Wheeler M. Thackston, “Literature,” in \textit{The Magnificent Mughals}, edited by Zeenut Ziad (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 94; and Thackston’s version is in turn quoted by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi in “Stranger in the City,” 21. For another overview in English of \textit{sabk-i hindī}’s alleged faults, compare Ehsan Yarshater, “The Indian or Safavid Style: Progress or Decline?” in \textit{Persian Literature}, edited by Ehsan Yarshater (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 249-88. Yarshater recoils from the poetry’s “dazzling structures on precarious foundations,” and, in a common complaint, questions the early modern poets’ emotional sincerity, casting them as “jugglers of images and tropes rather than interpreters of feelings,” whose “mental acrobatics” are at cross purposes with “real life experience.” A similarly bleak appraisal of the Indian Style’s cultural value is that of Jan Rypka, \textit{History of Iranian Literature} (Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel, 1968), 295-6, who laments the “affected and artificial elements” and “vulgar expressions” that preclude “expression of emotion,” and turn the poems into “true labyrinths, riddles that often make the impression of being soluble only with the aid of geomancy and the astrolobe.”

notion of a decadent “Indian Style” as a foil, in a series of essays that advocated a “cultural return” (bāzgasht-i adabī) to what he considered to be the norms of a prelapsarian, romanticized Persian/Iranian golden age. He then further elaborated the concept in his magisterial three-volume study of cultural “Stylistics” (sabk-shināsī). Bahār had come from a noted literary family and also trained as a philologist, studying Avestan and Pahlavi with the noted German Iranologist Ernst Herzfeld — training that would prove decisive for how he approached the literary past. He sought to bring what he saw as modern scientific rigor to the study of cultural production, an approach that he further infused with a potent Iranian nationalist sensibility and a modernist sense of geographical determinism. Just as British colonialists in India had bemoaned the enervating physiological — and by extension civilizational — effects of the subcontinent’s climate, Bahār too would contend that exposure, first to the Arabian, and then especially to the Indian environment had similarly enervated Persian language and literature. His sensibility thus fit well within the broader tilt toward a “mythohistorical” understanding of Iranian national space during the Qājār and Pahlavi periods, which tended to invoke mythic texts like Firdausi’s Shāhnāma to celebrate the glories of Iran’s

28 These lectures were originally published in a journal called Armaghān, and have all recently been reprinted in Bahār va Adabi-i Fārsī: Majmū’ā-i Yak-sad Maqāla az Malik al-Shu’arā Bahār, edited by Muhammad Gulban, volume 1 (Tehran: Shirkat-i Sahāmī-yi Kitāb-hā-yi Jībī, 1351/1972), 43-66.

29 Muhammad Taqī Bahār, Sabk-Shināsī: Yā, Tārikh-i Tatavvur-i Nasr-i Fārsī (Tehran: Chāpkhāna-i Khudkār, [1942-3]). While it’s true that, as the title indicates, Bahār was primarily concerned in Sabk-Shināsī with the development (tatavvur) of prose stylistics, it is fair to say that his analysis extends well beyond, into poetry and literary culture generally. Indeed, to see just how seamlessly Bahār’s model has been applied specifically to poetry, see, among others, Sīrūs Shamsi, Sabk-Shināsī-yi Shī’r (Tehran: Firdaws, 1374 A.H. [2001 C.E.]); ‘Alī Akbar Shahābī, Ravāḥt-i Adabi-yi Īrān va Hind (Tehran: Chāpkhāna-va Kitābfurūshī-yi Markaz, 1316 A.H. [1938]).
ancient pre-Islamic past, and in turn use the memory of that mythic past to certify modern Iranian cultural and territorial claims in the wake of the colonial Great Game.  

For Bahār, this mythohistorical vision of Iranian national space was — perhaps paradoxically — a crucial element of his understanding of modernity, and of the role literary history and cultural memory should play in the process of Iranian modernization. He valorized the heroic Sāsānian past as a golden age of simple, refined elegance, the culture of which had been corrupted by successive stages of history and geographical dislocation. His advocacy of a “return” (bāz-gasht) to those simpler times was thus ultimately all in the service of a project of modernist cultural reform; looking back in order to look forward, he attached a powerful didactic value to the project of Sabk-shināsī:

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30 On these and other mythohistorical elements of Iranian nationalism, see Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999). See also Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2001), especially 96-104. A particularly incisive illustration of how such ideas worked in practice is Kashani-Sabet’s account of a meeting intended to settle the Irani-Afghan dispute over the Sistan boundary: “On 10 August 1872 a meeting took place in Niavaran, at which General Goldsmit attempted to clear up some ambiguities before determining the final arbitration of the Sistan boundary...Articulating Iran’s position on Sistan, Malkum Khan remarked that ‘the Persian Government considered Seistan [sic] to belong to Persia, as an integral and original part of the Persian kingdom from the most remote times’...In these negotiations, Iran had also put forth its ‘natural and universally-acknowledged right’ to Sistan by drawing on ancient claims to verify Nasir al-Din’s hereditary ownership of the region: ‘Jamshid married the daughter of the Prince of Sistan, and had a son named Ahut, whose son was Gurshasp, whose son was Nariman, whose son was Sam, the father of Zal, and grandfather of Rustam...Sistan claims to be the scene of battle between Kai Khusru and Afrasiab...[and] During the 425 years of Sasani Kings...I find that Sistan was included with Khurasan and Karman.’ Persian mythohistory served as another useful device for fortifying Iran’s territorial claims. The Shahnamah, which was in general circulation at this time because of its frequent printing in Iran and India, became an essential geographical source for Persian irredentists, as the preceding passage suggests. It embodied the lore of the land and supplied proof, despite its mythical character, of the Iranian right to ownership of disputed domains by focusing attention on Iran’s formerly expansive dominions. The Sistan negotiations also recalled the mythical rivalry between Iran and Turan. If Zal and Rustam, Iran’s greatest heroes [sic], came from Sistan, could there be any doubt that Sistan was unquestionably Iranian?” (35-6).
The use of stylistics...familiarizes students with the grammar of the Persian language (both Pahlavi and Dari)...to understand classical terms and phrases, to learn the manner of writing in a given period, to distinguish between and amongst texts of various periods, to read different and dissimilar texts from ancient and middle periods, to find out the beauties and faults of prose, and to comprehend the reasons for the progress or decline of prose in each period...The overall result of [Sabk-shināšt]...would be the perfection of students' literacy in Persian and the exploration of his ability to select a pleasing style and refuse errors and tastelessness (bi-salīqagī) that have caused Persian prose to wither its natural and innate beauty.\textsuperscript{31}

Bahār's explanation for how such "errors and tastelessness" had entered the Persian language was, in its own way, quite ingenious. He postulated that the entirety of Persian literary cultural history could be broken up into several different styles (sabk-hā), each of which was associated at successive historical stages with a corresponding geographical space, metonymically represented by one of three major historical centers of Persianate patronage: first Khurāsān, then 'Irāq, and finally India.\textsuperscript{32} Of course, the Persian language had been used for culture and politics in all three of these regions, as part of an integrated

\textsuperscript{31} Quoted as translated in Ahmadi, "Institution of Persian Literature," 144-5.

\textsuperscript{32} Note too that "sabk" was not a conventional term for denoting literary styles until Bahār's intervention. For a useful overview of some of the more traditional terms (tarz, shewa, and so on), along with their subtle shades of meaning, see Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, "A Stranger in the City: The Poetics of Sabk-i Hindi," Annual of Urdu Studies 19 (2004): 1-93. Bahār, for his part, explains the choice of the term sabk as follows: "In Arabic dictionaries ( lughat-i tāzī), sabk is defined as 'melting' (gudākhtan) or 'pouring', i.e. of gold or silver, and an ingot of melted precious metal is called a sabika. However, scholars of the last century have used sabk symbolically to mean 'a special manner (tarz) of verse or prose', and have employed it almost identically to the European 'stär / Style'. In European languages Stil / Style is derived from the Greek word stīlēs, meaning 'column/pillar' (stīnā)." He goes on to explain that it came to refer to "the individual features and distinct aspects" (mushakkaḥhasāt va wujūh-i imāyāt) of individual artists, and points out that the etymological connection of stīlās to wooden or metal writing implements (ālatī-yi filizān vā chābīn), along with its metonymic use to refer to a person's overall literary output, has parallels with the use of the Perso-Arabic word qalam. Thus, he explains: "even nowadays Iranians use the term 'qalam' — a medium for drawing patterned designs on paper, walls, cloth, or tablets — just like 'stär', and give it a meaning similar to 'sabk', for instance when they say that 'so and so has a good qalam,' i.e. his artistic style (sabk-i nigarāsh) is good; but this usage is only appropriate with reference to prose, not poetry... for which one would have to say 'he has a good sabk or a good shewa.'" Sabk-Shināšt, vol. 1, 36-8.
cosmopolitan knowledge system known as ‘Ajam, almost from the beginning of the post-Islamic era of “New Persian.”33 But to Bahār, these three regions’ periods of influence were sequential, each diminishing in linguistic purity (and thus aesthetic quality) as they increased in both temporal and geographical distance from the ancient Sāsānian cultural repository that he posited as the germinal site of Persian’s “natural and innate beauty.” Thus Bahār argued that the emergence of Islam and subsequent Arab conquest of ‘Ajam had initiated profound — and mostly negative — consequences for Persian language and literature, and here his anti-Arab disposition dovetailed with that of many of his Orientalist European contemporaries.34 Still, for Bahār the beginning of the Islamic era had also, at least initially, fostered a period of energetic creative borrowing and dynamic cultural production between the Persians and Arabs. He labeled this early phase of elegant cultural exchange the “Khurāsānī Style” (sâbk-i khurāsānī). This sâbk-i

33 Indeed, given North India’s two millennia of interactions “with the traditions emanating from Old and Middle Persian,” and especially the fact that northern India “came in contact with the emergent New Persian culture sometime around the third quarter of the ninth century, when...Persian was still evolving as a language of literary expression in the Islamic East,” Muzaffar Alam has shown convincingly that: “...northern India became a part of the Perso-Islamic world in precisely the same way as did Transoxania, Ghazna, or Ghor. Just as Bukhara, Tirmiz, Nishapur, Isfarain, Sabzavar, and Herat were important in this cultural landscape, so too Delhi and Lahore acquired a place there and a reputation. In the thirteenth century there was a certain degree of cultural integration with a coherent Perso-Islamic identity (in opposition to the Arab culture) that is identified with the term “‘Ajam” (“Culture and Politics of Persian,” 132-4).

34 Consider, for instance, the explicitly anti-Arab triumphalism of E. G. Browne’s remarks on rise of the Safavids: “The rise of the Safavi dynasty in Persia at the beginning of the sixteenth century of the Christian era was an event of the greatest historical importance, not only to Persia herself and her immediate neighbours, but to Europe generally. It marks not only the restoration of the Persian Empire and the recreation of the Persian nationality after an eclipse of more than eight centuries and a half, but the entrance of Persia into the comity of nations and the genesis of political relations which still to a considerable extent hold good...in truth it marks the transition from mediaeval to comparatively modern times. The Arab conquest in the middle of the seventh century after Christ overthrew the Zoroastrian religion and the Sasanian Empire, and reduced Persia to the position of a mere province of the Caliphate, until the Caliphate itself was destroyed by the Mongols or Tartars in the middle of the thirteenth century...To the Safavi dynasty belongs the credit of making Persia ‘a nation once again,’ self-contained, centripetal, powerful and respected, within borders practically identical in the time of Shāh ‘Abbās the Great (A.D. 1587-1628) with those of the Sasanian Empire.” Literary History of Persia, vol. 4, 3-4.
khurāsānī, which had the (metageographical) benefit of being both close in time to the Sāsānian legacy and relatively far in geographical space from Arabia, bloomed under the Saffārids (861-1003 CE), and had its high water mark under the patronage of other Central Asian dynasties like the Sāmānids (875-999 CE), the Ghaznavids (962-1187 CE), and the early Saljūqs (1037-1194 CE).

But, in Bahār’s narrative, as these cultural centers of Khurāsān waned in power and influence, particularly in the face of the Mongol march across the Muslim world, the epicenter of Persophone patronage and cultural production shift westward to Iraq. This second major dislocation ushered in a new “Irāqī Style” (sabk-i ‘irāqī), which he argued displaced the heartfelt, sincere clear-speaking (sāda-gū’ī) literature of the earlier phase. Sāda-gū’ī now gave way to a new rhetorical excess, particularly an excess of ostentatious formalist antics like rhymed prose (saj‘), literary puzzles (mu’amma), allegory

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35 “Khurasan” here does not mean the recently subdivided province of Khurasan in the modern nation state of Iran, but rather the larger territory known as “greater Khurasan” (khurāsān-i huzurg), which made up the vast eastern quadrant of the Sāsānian Empire. This was the last Persian region to be conquered by the Umayyads (647 CE), a fact not without significance for Bahār’s project. Be that as it may, at the peak of Sāsānian influence Khurāsān is said to have covered not just modern Iranian cities like Nishāpūr and Tūs (i.e. Mashhad), but also the Transoxanian urban centers of Herāt and Balkh, Afghan cities like Kābul and Ghaznī to the east, Merv and Sanjān in modern-day Turkmenistan, the Uzbek cities of Samarqand and Bukhāra, and even much of modern-day Tājikistān. In medieval times, this grouping of territories was never part of any unified Persian empire, but the ancient Sāsānian precedent, and the widespread use of the Persian language throughout the region, forms the basis of the modern Iranian claim to the cultural production of the region as a whole. Of course, this claim has not gone uncontested. The Delhi Sultans, for instance, saw themselves as the saviors of this cultural legacy in the face of thirteenth-century Mongol aggression, and the Mughals, too, would eventually claim much of this region as their own Timūrid dynastic inheritance — a fact that only exacerbated their rivalry with the Iranian Safavids. And all along, various other ethnic and tribal groups (Afghans, Uzbeks, Tājiks, Pashtuns, etc.) have retained cultural memories that suggest claims to some or all of this region and its cultural traditions.

36 Here too, Iraq does not refer to the modern nation-state of that name. In premodern times Persian Iraq (‘irāq-i ‘ajam) — as opposed to the Mesopotamian Iraq of the Arabs — referred to the area basically east of the Zagros Mountains, which included major cultural centers like Isfahān, Qazvin, and Kashān.
(tamassul), and other types of “pedantic expressions” (istilāḥāt-i ʿilmī).\(^{37}\) According to Bahār these were not natural literary developments of a historico-temporal process, but rather the deleterious effects of a spatial shift, of newly emergent patronage centers being in culturally hazardous proximity to the Arab heartland. Thus even though Bahār had to acknowledge many of the literati of this period as true luminaries of classical Persianate literary history — Farīd al-Dīn ʿAttār (ca. 1145-1220), Khāqānī (ca. 1122-1199), Nizāmī Ganjāvī (ca. 1141-1217), Saʿdī (ca. 1213-1292), Rūmī (1207-1273), Hāfīz (ca. 1310-1390), Amīr Khusrau (1253-1325), and Hasan Dehlavī (ca. 1275-1336) all come to mind — Bahār nevertheless insisted that the shift away from Khurasan, and the trend “toward imitation of the Arabs” (ba taqlīd-i ʿarab) had already done irreversible damage to Persian national culture. The resulting literary defects, coupled with the growing popularity of the ghazal, only foreshadowed yet further deterioration to come — a downward slide that crystallized with the arrival of the “Indian Style” (sabk-i hindī) beginning sometime around the turn of the sixteenth century, and culminating under the Mughal dispensation into which Chandar Bhān was born and lived out his career.

Strangely, then, in Bahār’s estimation the expansion of Persian’s geographical reach as a cosmopolitan language of medieval and early modern courtly literature, diplomacy, and

historiography across Western, Central, and Southern Asia (ca. 800-1800 C.E.) was nothing to be proud of. Rather, this process had instigated a dangerous dilution of Persian’s natural — read national — purity, and an exposure to ever more corrosive foreign influence. Note too, however, that the fact of the style being named “Khurāsānī” or “‘Irāqī” did not prevent the inclusion even of Indian, Central Asian, or Anatolian poets under their banners.\(^{38}\) Never mind, for that matter, that the Delhi Sultans, too, had seen themselves as legatees of Sāsānian political and cultural traditions via their Ghaznavid lineage\(^{39}\) — prominent Indian poets of the era like Amīr Khusrau and Hasan Dehlavī would nevertheless fall into Bahār’s 
\(sabk-i \ ‘irāqī\) category, despite never having gone there, or in Khusrau’s case being flagrantly anti-Arab in his boasting. Conversely, a non-Indian poet like “Bābā” Fīghānī (d. 1519) could nevertheless be seen as a progenitor of the new Indian style, even though he was born in Shīrāz, most likely died in Mashhad, and never once even traveled to India.\(^{40}\) Indeed, it made no difference where a poet

\(^{38}\) Of the poets listed in the preceding paragraph, ‘Attār was from Nishāpūr (Khurāsān); Khāqānī was originally from Shirvan (Azerbaijan), but did spend much of his career traveling across Perso-Arabic Iraq before dying in Tabrīz; Nizāmī was from Ganja (Azerbaijan); Ḥāfiz and Sa’dī were both from Shīrāz, though the latter spent much of his life traveling all over the Islamic world; Rūmī was originally from Balkh, though he eventually settling in Anatolia (a.k.a. Eastern Rome, and hence his name); and Amīr Khusrau and Hasan were both from Delhi.

\(^{39}\) See for instance the relevant passages in ‘Abd al-Malik ‘Iṣāmī, \textit{Futūḥa’s salātūn: or, Shāh Nāma-i Hind of ‘Isāmī: translation and commentary}, edited by Agha Mahdi Husain, 3 vols. (Bombay, New York: Published for the Dept. of History, Aligarh Muslim University [by] Asia Pub. House, [c1967-1977]). Indeed, drawing a direct parallel between Firdausi’s master text and his own \textit{Shāh-Nāma}, ‘Iṣāmī explicitly projects Ilutmish and his successors as heroic saviors of Perso-Islamic culture, providing a refuge from Mongol mischief. Thus “Delhi became the Ka’ba of the seven continents (\textit{haust iqlim}) and the whole region became the home of Islam” (vol. 2, 226-7).

\(^{40}\) For details on Fīghānī’s life, poetry, and literary-historical context, see Paul Losensky, \textit{Welcoming Fīghānī: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal} (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1998). For what it’s worth, Bahār was actually quite aware of this discrepancy, and tried to explain it away by acknowledging, up to a point, that his metageographical distribution of poetic styles had no true basis in empirical reality: “Although it is said that such and such a poet composed in the \textit{Khurāsānī} style, or another in the \textit{‘Irāqī}, the aim is not to say that the location had an effect on these two styles, but rather that this difference is a product of time.” But even if Bahār was willing to admit this subtle point,
actually lived and worked at any given time, since the sabk{s} themselves designated notional, not empirical geographical spaces. Perceived aesthetic flaws could thus be sourced to specific, non-Iranian spaces, but still applied across the entire ecumene, and then simply superimposed onto the temporal phases of what amounts to an almost banal narrative of cultural decline: from formative golden age (= sabk-i khurāsānī), to high classical period (= sabk-i ’irāqī), to decline, corruption, and decadence (= sabk-i hindī).41

Each sabk in Bahār’s model thus always indicates both a discrete temporal phase and/or the reified place to which it refers, creating a great deal of slippage among historical, socio-linguistic, and aesthetic analytic frameworks. For instance sabk-i hindī can refer, separately or even simultaneously, to: 1) the specific era of peak Mughal patronage; 2) and/or “the Indian mind”42 as manifested by its culture and “special climate”43 (both of which obviously antedate the Mughals); 3) and/or the post-classical aesthetic

and further to recognize that the Mughal-Safavid poetics of tāza-gū’ī (what he was calling sabk-i hindī) “flourished throughout Iran, Turkestan, and India,” he nevertheless clung ultimately to the deterministic proposition that the so-called Indian Style was “born of the water and weather of that clime.” All three of the passages cited here are from Bahār’s articles in Bārgasht-i Adabī, quoted here from Matthew Smith’s extensive and penetrating analysis in “Literary Courage,” 48-50.

41 Followed, of course, by the modern bārgasht. This pattern — golden age, fall from grace, redemptive return to glory — could also be seen as a product of Bahār’s essential Romanticism. Nearly all the European Romantics had a similarly cyclical understanding of literary historical temporality (on which, see for instance M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York, Norton [1971]); Jacques Barzun, Classic, Romantic, and Modern (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961)). Iranian reformers like Bahār, and Indian reformers like Altāf Husain Hali, for instance, were thus not simply interested in naturalist poetics for their own sake, but also in the larger vision of temporality and redemption that went with them.


developments that are blamed on the convergence of these “Indian” factors, despite occurring simultaneously across all of ‘Ajam. Amid this constellation of possible referents, the early modern poetics of tāzagi have themselves become essentially an afterthought, simply folded into the larger framework of Bahār’s metageography as a mere subset of a deeper, timeless, corrosive Indianness.

Where someone like Chandar Bhān fits — or rather does not fit — in such a model will become clear presently. But for now suffice it to say that the India of the Indian Style is not really India at all — if by “India” one means India as a geographically historicized, empirical (or even national) space — because it is meant rather as a metonym for cultural degeneration as such, across the entire ecumene, ca. sixteenth - eighteenth century. But nor is sabk-i hindi, strictly speaking, a literary period, because it is also meant to suggest that it is the subcontinent qua civilizational entity that has produced this deleterious effect on the literature. “India” serves, then, as a heterotopic and a heterochronic abstraction — an other in both space and time onto which Bahār could foist any and all cultural trends that were at odds with his vision of modern, national, neo-classical renewal. As such, India came to serve as a convenient foil, a doubly Orientalized proxy on which to deflect blame for the sort of cultural failings that European Orientalists were ascribing to Persians and the Orient as a whole — effete courtly decadence, the triumph of form over substance, rhetorical artifice over sincere human feeling, and the type of compact poetic

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ingenuity so infamously and dismissively summed up by William Jones’s evocation of Ḥāfiz’s verse as “Orient pearls at random strung.” Bahār could have simply disavowed the era in question as pompous and outmoded, as even many modernist Indian reformers like Sayyid Ahmad Khān, Altāf Husain Hāfī, Muḥammad Husain Āzād, and Shibli Nu‘mānī had done. But Bahār’s way of formulating Sabk-shināsī had the added benefit of, in effect, absolving Iranian national culture entirely of such embarrassments by simply giving them an Indian provenance. Ironically, though, because so many of the producers of this early modern corpus came not just from India but from all over the Persophone world, Bahār was forced to disavow several centuries’ worth of his and Iran’s own cultural heritage as well. His “cultural return” thus bypassed even the many outstanding Iranian poets of this era for the simple sin of having traveled to, settled in, or merely existed during a time when there was more patronage available in India than most other places.

**Sabk-i Hindi and Philology**

Underlying all of this, of course, was Bahār’s set of modernist philological presuppositions about languages, their origins, and the arboreal structure of their

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45 Note, however, that even in the late nineteenth century a reformer like Shibli Nu‘mānī continued to see the entire Indo-Persian tradition as the product of one integrated cultural space, as indicated by the very title of his magnum opus, “Poetry of Ḥājī” (Shi‘r al-Ḥājī). On Shir Sayyid, Hāfī, and Āzād, see for instance Frances W. Pritchett, Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Muḥammad Husain Āzād, ʿAb-ʾe Ḥayāt: Shaping the Canon of Urdu Poetry, translated and edited by Frances W. Pritchett and S. R. Faruqi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); Christopher Shackle and Javed Majeed, eds., Ḥālī’s Musaddas: the Flow and Ebb of Islam (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).
genealogy.⁴⁶ And it is crucial to recognize that many of these underlying assumptions about how language trees worked in human space and time were also shared by Bahār’s Indian counterparts. This partly explains the continuing and puzzling persistence of Bahār’s sabk-shināsī model and its terminology — despite all their pejorative resonance — even in the subcontinent, and even after Bahār’s basic premises have long since been essentially debunked. The philological assumptions underlying sabk-shināsī thus merit a brief exposition.

The very notion of sabk-i hindī contains within it a basically reified conflation of two related, but nevertheless quite distinct modes of looking at imagined cultural communities — the philological-linguistic and historico-temporal. Each is informed, in its own way, by Bahār’s overarching metageography (Iran good, Arabia bad, India worse), but that only makes it harder to disambiguate them. If, however, we were to attempt such a disambiguation, we would see that the term sabk-i hindī can be deployed in both ways, with completely different implications, often in the very same sentence.

⁴⁶ The implications of the spatial, even metageographical, metaphor of the language tree for more general modernist views of culture and temporality are cleverly summed up in a well-known passage by Bernard S. Cohn: “As with genealogies, which could represent all the members of a family or descent group visually as a tree with a root, trunk, branches, and even twigs, so could dialects and languages be similarly represented and grouped. Significantly, the trees always seemed to be northern European ones, like oaks and maples, and the British never seemed to think of using the most typical South Asian tree, the banyan, which grows up, out, and down at the same time. The [British] comparative method [thus] implied linear directionality: things, ideas, institutions could be seen as progressing through stages to some end or goal. It could also be used to establish regression, decay, and decadence, the movement through time away from some pristine, authentic, original starting point, a golden age in the past. The decline rather than the progress model came increasingly to be applied by the Europeans and some Indians to the textual traditions of India.” ("Command of Language and the Language of Command," in Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 55.)
Regardless of its ideological perspective, the philological approach to the category 
*sabk-i hindî* tends to understand it not in its literary historical and aesthetic senses, but primarily 
as one of language, that is to say of linguistic purity as a function of national space. The 
Persian language is treated as having a natural *a priori* essence that is — and has always 
been — intrinsically Iranian. The development of the language in areas beyond the 
modern borders of Iran, or the Persianization of loan words from, say, Arabic, Turkish, or 
Hindi, are seen as having either added to or detracted from this linguistic essence, 
dependning on the critic’s ideological perspective. Obviously, Bahār himself felt that they 
detracted from it. But even for South Asian scholars, for some of whom the pejorative 
valuation of *sabk-i hindî* is diminished, absent, or even reversed, the underlying 
philological premise is nevertheless identical: the concept of *sabk-i hindî* is loosened 
from its historico-temporal moorings and treated instead as a cumulative process of 
Indian culture, words, and linguistic adaptations (*tasarrufat*) gradually transforming 
Persian poetics in the subcontinent into something somehow fundamentally different 
from — and usually more degraded than — the Persian poetics elsewhere in ’Ajam. 
These changes within India, in turn, are understood to have sent out linguistic 
shockwaves that affected *all* of Persian literature, wherever it was produced. The passage 
of time is relevant only insofar as it tracks ever more exposure of the Persian language to 
the subcontinent and the resulting linguistic admixture that the encounter produced. This 
postulate seems to underlie the entire sub-genre of modern literary-philological 
scholarship which has attempted, almost word by word, to trace phenomena like “the 
influence of Hindi” on Persian.47

Within this framework, it is but a short step from language to thought. Indian words, so the argument goes, opened the door to the entire South Asian episteme, from peculiar hindavī expressions and colloquial idioms dressed up in Persian garb, all the way to outright adaptation of South Asian tropes, thematic topoi, myths, and religious ideas.

There is no doubt that some of this occurred. But it is quite a different argument entirely to suggest that examples of Indic myths and stories being written about in the Persian language count as evidence that the Persian language was thereby structurally Indianized. Nevertheless, this is essentially what has been argued in the sabk-shināsī framework, whereby the process is seen to culminate in the Mughal period, with the entry of wider social demographics — and especially Hindus, who are presumed to have brought their exotic mentalité with them — into Indo-Persian literary and political culture. And here is where the slippage, from understanding sabk-i hindī as a specific and discrete period in literary historical time, to understanding it as a deep philological structure, intrinsic to the subcontinent, has caused it to be spoken of with a kind of always-alreadiness: it was there even before it was historically identifiable, even before the appearance of tāza-gū ṭ; it was there all along, in the poetry of Abu al-Farāj Rūnī, Masʿūd Saʿd Salmān, and Amīr Khusrau; and more than anything, it was there lying dormant in Indic words, ideas, and myths until finally a tipping point after which their cumulative effect overpowered the entire Persianate literary world, forcing abstruse Indic intellectualism onto even unsuspecting poets in faraway places like Shīrāz and Tabrīz.

This basic narrative has dominated much of Indo-Persian literary historiography for the last century or so, in various shades ranging from the very subtle to the crudely mechanistic. To get a sense of the conceptual arc, consider the typical argument as put forth by the modern Indian scholar Momin Mohiuddin in an article called, appropriately enough, “Sabk-i Hindi.” To begin with, Mohiuddin has so internalized the proposition that sabk-i hindī is an appropriate name for the literary era that corresponded to the Mughal period that he does not even feel the need to establish any evidentiary basis for calling it that; and, because he has also internalized the philological basis for Bahār’s argument, he spends the bulk of his article arguing beyond the limited temporal framework “Mughal.” He takes Amīr Khusrau’s assertion that Indians in the fourteenth century followed a Persian pronunciation closer to that of Central Asia (Tūrān) than that of the Persian province of Fārs to mean that by Khusrau’s fourteenth century Indian Persian was already one step removed from a de facto Iranian linguistic standard. He further argues that “in the course of time” — note the lack of specificity — even this “purity of idiom, of which Khusrau boasts, was lost to the Persian language of India” because of gradual “changes” (tasarrufāt) in pronunciation and spelling, which grew further and further away from “the standard Persian of Persia.”

In other words, where Amīr Khusrau had seen multiple competing dialects and standards — among which he professed India’s as a perfectly legitimate variant of the Tūrānī — for

Mohiuddin the only true “standard” is that attributed to the normative pronunciation of a retroactively nationalized modern Iranian territory. And India is seen not as a place of cosmopolitan litterateurs, using intellectual agency to engage proactively with a translocal knowledge system in which, by Khusrau’s floruit, the subcontinent had already participated for several centuries, but rather as a place of almost lazy capitulation to the enervating South Asian environment, as if Persophone literati in India adopted Indian loan words basically in spite of themselves. Again, Mohiuddin: “Although to introduce Hindawi words into pure Persian was considered unpleasant, it was an unforced necessity with Khusrau, [Ziya al-Dīn] Baraṇī, [Shams Sirāj] ‘Afīf, and other writers, like the sūfīs. The ready access to Hindawi for homely expressions... was a natural process and more practicable than coining or neologism.”

The conceptual correlative to this capitulation is the supposedly active intervention of Hindus — like, say, Chandar Bhān — who are presumed to have been somehow more Indian than their Indian Muslim brethren. Thus although he never states it explicitly, Mohiuddin also seems to be working from the dubious premise that such Hindus constituted a stable linguistic community who, by implication, were even less capable of writing “pure Persian” than Indian Muslims, and further whose effect on Persian is, concomitantly, presumed to have been that much more profound. We see this clearly with Mohiuddin’s argument about the increasingly prevalent use of Indo-Persian neologisms:

...the earliest dictionaries must have helped [in] supplying ready-made [Hindi] loan words [for Persian writers in India]. Neologism, the peculiar formation of composite words with Persian and Hindi, and analogous [sic] expressions in Persian were equally peculiar to the munshīs of the Moghul period, and reached their acme in the composition of the Hindu Munshīs [sic]. (24)

Of course, this completely ignores the fact that many of these “earliest dictionaries” of which Mohiuddin speaks, composed ca. 1000 – 1650 CE, were often lexicons not just of Persian, but also of Arabic and Turkish.50 Some, like Ibrahim Qiwām Fārūqi’s Sharaf-nāma-i Ibrāhīmī (written in Bengal, ca. 1428-45 C.E.) did give Hindi equivalents and Indic pronunciations of Persian words. But the Sharaf-nāma gave just as much attention, if not more, to botanical and medical terminology, along with whole sections devoted to explanations of mythohistorical names and tropes from works whose canonical credentials are beyond reproach, such as, for instance, Firdausī’s Shāh-nāma. Another immensely significant lexicographical opus of the period, Jamāl al-Dīn Husain Injū’s multi-volume Farhang-i Jahāngīrī (most of which, its title notwithstanding, was actually compiled during Akbar’s reign) contains not only sections on numerous subfields of linguistic analysis, but also on geography, a special treatise on rare words of the Shirazi dialect, and an extended treatment of archaic words from Zand and Pazand — actually, the sort of thing one suspects Bahār himself might have really found fascinating. Thus the idea that medieval and early modern Persophone lexicographical studies in India were launched with the intention of supplying lazy poets with “ready-made” loan words with

which to substitute for “pure Persian” is quite misleading, to say the least. One should also keep in mind that even many contemporary Safavid intellectuals saw Indian lexicographical studies of this period as worthy contributions to the collective knowledge system of ʿAjam, as evidenced powerfully by the lavish and uninhibited praise heaped on the *Farhang-i Jahāngīrī* by Muhammad Qāsim Surūrī, a scholar from Kāshān who relied heavily on Injū’s *Farhang* for the compilation of his own dictionary, the *Majmaʿ al-Furs* (second edition composed ca. 1630 C.E.).51

In any event, with Mohiuddin’s postulate the argument regarding the Indian style comes full circle. This added barrier of religious difference deposits Hindus, civilizationally speaking, even further from the supposed epicenter of pure Persian, perhaps not in geographical space, but certainly in metageographical distance. And thus India’s corruption of what Mohiuddin consistently calls “the standard Persian of Persia” delivers its *coup de grâce* with the growing participation of Hindus in the Mughal administration, as if linguistic competence and literary talent were simply a matter of ontology:

Persian became more Indianised when the Hindus took the study of Persian...A great majority of Hindu Munshis, all of whom flourished during the Moghul regime, enriched the Persian language with Indian vocabulary, homely metaphors and imageries drawn from the Hindu-Muslim beliefs...This Indianisation was complete when Persian succumbed to the influence of Indian customs and creeds, legends and mythology, romance and folk-lore. It was not only a change of form but a change in spirit and mood...the essentially pantheistic mind of Medieval India... (25)

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51 Indeed, he refers to Injū as the “Nawāb of exalted title, the receptacle of majesty and glory (*shaukat-o-ubbahat-maʿāb*), full of grandeur and magnificence, the cup-bearer of empire and nobility (*sultanat-o-imārat aiyāb*), the pillar of sovereigns and magistrates, King Jamāl al-Dīn Husain Injū.” (Muhammad Qāsim Surūrī, *Farhang-i Majmaʿ al-Furs*, edited by Muhammad Dābir Siyāqī (Tīhrān: ʿAlī Akbar ʿIlmī, 1338 AH), 7; also quoted in Blochmann, “Contributions,” 16.)

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Thus, by a subtle sleight of discourse, does sabk-i hindī become sabk-i hindū, the Indian Style the Hindu Style, and composite culture a corrupted culture.

The added attribution of “homeliness” to the Hindus’ vocabulary, metaphors, and imagery taps into a whole other set of presuppositions which contrast Persian as a language of high culture with a more unrefined, rustic, and emotional “Hindi” — regardless of whether the latter be Braj, Awadhi, Khari Boli, or some other north Indian dialect. This binary is used to explain, for instance, the use of Hindi by Sufis who sought the path to ecstatic union with the divine through a feeling heart rather than a thinking head, and thus used Hindi for musical assemblies, qawwali, poetry, or other occasions when they wanted to get in touch with their non-rational feelings and emotions.52 This use of Hindi by Sufis is also said to have aided in the process of spreading Islam in the subcontinent, because the connection between emotive language and music is said to have led poets and Sufis to write songs in the vernacular rather than Persian, and it was this that helped them ingratiate themselves with the local rural populations.53 But even if one grants that there is some evidence to support this line of argument, to use the fact that Sufis, and even some poets (notably Khusrau) tried their hand at literary expression in Hindawī as proof of a concomitant decline in Persian language and literature in India is

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53 For an example of how this process might have worked, see Richard Eaton, “Sufi Folk Literature and the Expansion of Indian Islam,” in Essays on Islam and Indian History (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 189-99.
simply unsupported by the facts. Nevertheless, Mohiuddin obviously has this in mind when he writes that:

The Sufis...made [a] great contribution by bringing about a happy harmony in the various social groups. Their contribution to the social and cultural developments are equally glorious. They popularized the common tongue Hindi; wrote süfî verses with uncommon combinations of Persian and Hindi, and gave to the Persian language a mass of literature on the süfî doctrine...The ordinary sentences [of many süfî writings] seem to be a direct translation from the Hindi in which they normally thought. Such expressions consequently found their way into the Persian composition of other writers.\(^{\text{54}}\)

This argument completely ignores other factors in the trend toward Indian vernacularization, such as the bhaktî movement(s), the emergence of Braj as a “courtly vernacular,” and so on.\(^{\text{55}}\)

Moreover, in a very profound sense literary periodization, historical temporality, and even aesthetics are completely irrelevant to this model. Tāza-gūṭi as a literary movement and a specific fashion which we can in fact locate in specific historical time — and which itself contained a self-conscious, novel, and translocally accepted reconfiguration of historical temporality — has been completely effaced here by a notion of a temporally open-ended sabk-i hindî, with no beginning and no end point, that exists completely outside of historical process — as if it was there all along, in the South Asian


pronunciation, words, expressions, thoughts and temperament, lying dormant until a tipping point when it could “dazzle” and “overmaster” the entire Persophone world.\textsuperscript{56}

There is, then, a peculiar bind here for the serious (post)modern scholar. many will point out that Indian Persian in the medieval and early modern period did in fact have certain distinctive characteristics that have been attested — and contested — over and over again, by intellectuals from Amīr Khusrau (if not earlier) to the well-known philological inquiries of Sirāj al-Dīn ʿAlī Khān Ārzū (1689- 1756 CE). I am certainly not disputing that fact. Far from it, I believe that we must do some serious neo-philological work of our own, in order to put the relationships among Indianized linguistic usage (istiʿmāl-i hind), Indian thematic interventions such as translations of South Asian myths and romantic legends, and the specifically early modern poetics of freshness in their proper, disambiguated contexts. But in the analytical language of sabk-i hindī it is nearly impossible to acknowledge one of these factors without conjuring up the all the others, and that too with the implicit ideological judgment that (ancient) Iranian Persian is good, while all Indian Persian is defective (or at least must be defended by those who think otherwise). The problems are exacerbated, and the slippages become even more slippery, when one tries to equate local variations of pronunciation and linguistic usage at different points in history with wholesale shifts in normative literary standards across the entire cosmopolitan cultural zone. For there is an enormous conceptual gulf between acknowledging the existence of such local variations in diction, pronunciation, and even

\textsuperscript{56} Jan Rypka, \textit{History of Iranian Literature} (Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel, 1968), 296.
lexicon, and accepting the teleological ignominy whereby all Persian poetics everywhere
became fundamentally different and unacceptably complex as a result, or that tāza-gū'ī
was solely a product of the encounter with India rather than some other, transregional (or
even global) literary historical trajectory.

One sees the logical leap all over modern scholarship. Jan Rypka, for instance, argues
that “[The ‘Indian Style’] is a movement that adopted several characteristics of the
Timurid period (signs of this appear already in the works of Amīr Khusrau).”
As with Mohiuddin, Rypka offers Amīr Khusrau as a forerunner of the Indian Style, one who
showed early “signs” of “adopting” certain features of the classical period. But the
language of “adoption” inaccurately implies that Khusrau was somehow an outsider to
the rest of the poetry produced in the Timurid period, and thus further distances India
from ʿAjam even before the appearance of the Indian Style proper. Moreover, though
Rypka is obviously trying to be diplomatic here, it is clear that the “several
characteristics” that he suggests were adopted by Khusrau and the Indian Style were, by
clear implication, the allegedly decadent, Arab-influenced ones decried by Bahār in his
assessment of the sabk-i ʿirāqī. To these the Indian Style is said to have added new, even

57 Jan Rypka, History of Iranian Literature, 295. Rypka’s “Timurid period” basically corresponds to
Bahār’s sabk-i ʿirāqī. But here notice another slippage. For the rest of ʿAjam, Rypka has dispensed with
Bahār’s metageography in favor of a temporal model of historical process—thus his chapters follow
various dynasties and historical events, e.g. “The Beginnings of Persian Literature,” “The Samanids,” “The
Ghaznavid Period,” “The Prose of the Seljuq Period,” etc. It is only the “Indian Style” that he retains, and
rejects as the poetry of “true labyrinths, etc.” Yet it is also clear from Rypka’s language that he knows how
fundamental the temporal shift implied by the poetics of tāza-gū'ī was to what he persist in calling the
Indian Style. Even if he never mentions tāza-gū'ī explicitly, he does contrast the literature of the “Indian
Style” specifically with that of “The Classicists,” further noting that “The Indian elements owe their effect
to their novelty and result in an alienation of the poets from the old established masters.” Of course, I
would argue that rather than a sense of alienation the early modern literati maintained a profound respect
for the “old established masters,” even as they tried to innovate.
more ungainly features, despite Rypka’s acknowledgement “that [The Indian Style’s] masters were for the most part of Persian birth and that this same manner of writing not only flourished in India but also found its way to Persia and Transoxania and especially to the Tajik people... The affected and artificial elements are a legacy from Herat; the Indian Style expanded these traits and made them even more baroque.”

Here the circularity of the entire metageographical model is again in plain view. The Indian Style’s original features come from outside (from the degraded, Arabicized portions of the sabk-i ʿirāqī, particularly, in Rypka’s view, as evidenced most garishly in Herat); many of those poetic practices were themselves in vogue in earlier periods, e.g., obviously, the Timurid; its most accomplished “masters” were mostly Persia-born; it was fashionable not just in South Asia but across Central and West Asia; and yet somehow Rypka sources this entire process to India’s “special climate,” with nary a mention of tāza-gūr, and not one acknowledgement that Persophone intellectuals in South Asia might simply have been legitimate participants in a fashion that caught on across the wider knowledge system of ʿAjam.

Indeed, consider that even the ingenious Khusrau (d. 1325), admittedly one of Persian literature’s most vocal innovators, and perhaps the most adamant partisan of the South Asian local in all of Persian literature, never produced anything that was completely out of step or incompatible with the literary production of, say, Shiraz, Herat, Samarqand, Isfahan or Ghazni. He was read and generally respected all over the Persian cosmopolis, as was his contemporary Hasan Dehlavi (d. 1336-8), who was himself so renowned for
his lyrical ghazals that he was often referred to as the "Sa'di of Hindustan." Thus not only did Indian poets throughout this period, both before and during the so-called sabk-i hindi, look outward across the Persian cosmopolis for inspiration; other intellectuals across the ecumene, far from viewing Indian poets as harbingers of literary degeneration, saw them as equal and legitimate poetic interlocutors. Bear in mind, too, that by the fourteenth century, as one modern Indian scholar put it (with admittedly rather sweeping judgment): "The whole tract of land extending from the borders of Delhi to the centres of learning in Persia was one long connecting chain...from the man in the street to the king on the throne, the distinction between Ghazni and Lahore or Khurasan and the Punjab was never felt." Even if this appraisal seems hyperbolic, the main point about the interconnectedness of medieval Persian literary centers across vast swaths of territory, under numerous different political formations, cannot really be disputed. These different centers of poetic production might well have developed local fashions, and even local superiority complexes. Such rivalries have, in fact, been well attested, not just between Iran and India but among nearly all the major premodern centers of urbane Persian

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58 There is also a well-known story, perhaps apocryphal, but significant nonetheless in terms of cultural memory, that Prince Muhammad Sultan — a.k.a. Sultān Shahīd, the son of Sultan Ghiyās al-Dīn Balban (r. 1266-1286), and governor of Multan — bestowed lavish patronage and built up the cultural institutions of his court for the stated purpose of making it the "Shiraz of India." In pursuit of this goal, he tried repeatedly to invite none other than Shaikh Sa'di to his court, only to have the latter demur. Sa'di cited his old age, but also made a point of insisting that India didn't need Sa'di because "in India, Amir Khusrau was plenty" (dar hind khusrau bas ast). For further details, see Ghani, Pre-Mughal Persian, 392-3; Shibli Nu'mānī, Shi'r al-'Ajam, vol. 2, 103-4; Alam, "Culture and Politics," 138-9.

literary culture.⁶⁰ But in their very rivalries, in their constant imitations of and
protestations of superiority over their poetic counterparts in far off lands, the Persophone
intellectuals spread out across ‘Ajam actually prove the translocal cosmopolitan principle
rather than the reverse. Khusrau himself looked to the celebrated Shaikh Sa’dī Shīrāzī
(ca. 1213-1292 CE) as an inspiration and fellow traveler in the art of ghazal, cf. his boast:

\[
\begin{align*}
tā ba-jā’ī ki hadd-i pārsiyān \\
andar-īn ‘ahd do tan gasht ‘iyān \\
z-ān yakā sa’dī-o-thānī-yash hamā-m \\
har do rā dar ghazal ā’īn tamām
\end{align*}
\]

As far as they speak Persian
In this age two have shone forth:
One of them is Sa’dī, the other myself;
Each has brought the ghazal to its full potential⁶¹

Khusrau was also said to have been instructed by none other than the great Chishti Sufi
Nizām al-Dīn Auliya that he should write “like the Isfahänis” (har tarz-i isfahāniyān)⁶²,
and his most ambitious project was an imitatio of Nizāmi of Ganja’s (1141-1209 CE)
five-fold magnum opus of romantic epics, the khamsa. The great ‘Abd al-Rahman Jāmī
(1414-1492 CE), in turn, acknowledged from Herat that no one had written a better
answer poem (javāb-gū’ī) to Nizāmī’s khamsa than Khusrau.⁶³ A couple of generations

⁶⁰ For instance, Auff’s Lūbāb al-Albāb mentions the cultural rivalry between ‘Irāq and Māvarā’al-Nahr
(Transoxiana), and Daulat Shāh’s Tazkirah describes numerous “schools” (dabistāms), in Khurāsān,

⁶¹ Khusrau, Nuh Sipih (quoted in Shibli Nu’mānī, Shi’r al-‘Ajam, vol. 2, 40).

⁶² As reported by Shaikh ‘Abd al-Haqq Muhaddis Dehlavi, quoted in Ghani, Pre-Mughal Persian, 391-2.

⁶³ Shibli Nu’mānī, Shi’r al-‘Ajam.
later, the abovementioned Ghazālī Mashhādī (d. 1572-3) began his *kulliyāt* with some twenty *javābs* in imitation of Hasan Dehlavī’s *ghazals*.\(^{64}\)

Rather, then, than see the poets’ rivalries and ubiquitous boasting (which was itself a very ordinary literary convention known as *ta‘allū*, or “self-exaltation”)\(^{65}\) as evidence of radically different parochial aesthetics, we could just as easily see them as trying to outdo one another in the same game, with the fundamental translocal cosmopolitanism of the period never far from view. Seen from this perspective, the famous *ta‘allū* of Ḥāfiz takes on a different metageographical significance, showing clearly that he sees the audience to whom he is speaking extending all the way to Bengal:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{shakkar-shikan shavand hama tūtiyān-i hind} \\
\text{zin qand-i pārsī ki ba bangāla mī-ravad}
\end{align*}
\]

All the Indian parrots will be crunching the sugar
Of this Persian candy that I send all the way to Bengal

—or to Samarqand and Bukhara, as in this equally famous couplet:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{agar ān turk-i shīrāzī ba-dast ārad dil-i mā rā} \\
\text{ba khāl-i hindū-yash bakhsham Samarqand-o-Bukhārā rā}
\end{align*}
\]

If that Shirazi Turk would only place my heart in her hands,
I would give up all of Samarqand and Bukhara for just one of her freckles

Back on the other side of the Indus, even the prideful Khusrav saw the metageographical limit of his speaking range extending all the way to Egypt in the west, and the Central Asian homeland of his own Turkish ancestors in the north:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{shakkar-i misrī nadāram k-az ‘arab gūyam javāb}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{64}\) Losensky, *Welcoming Fīghānī*, 204.

\(^{65}\) Faruqi, “Stranger in the City,” 69.
turk-i hindūstāniyam dar hindavī gūyam javāb

I don’t have Egyptian candy with which to answer an Arab;
I am a Hindustani Turk — I reply in Hindavī

And yet, ironically, however feisty Khusrau’s assertions, in order to reach his desired translocal audience he had to play by the rules of the cosmopolis and pen this and other well-known protestations of his “Hindavi” genius in Persian:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{chu man tūti-yī hind-am ar rāst pursī} \\
\text{zi man hindavī purs tā rāst gūyam}
\end{align*}
\]

Since I am a parrot of Hind, if you want to enquire correctly,
Ask in hindavī, that I may reply correctly

Khusrau may well be posturing in favor of “hindavī” here, and however much verses like this demonstrate Khusrau’s “Indianness” — and surely, in a certain sense they do just that — the fact that they are written not in any local spoken language, but in a cosmopolitan idiom intelligible across South, Central, and West Asia must be no less forcefully acknowledged.\(^6\) It is a localistic claim couched in a cosmopolitan idiom, neither of which is, to Khusrau, mutually exclusive. It is also a claim that Chandar Bhān would himself echo, with similar paradoxical force, some three centuries later:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{barahman az lab-i hindī-nizhādān nukta mīsanjad} \\
\text{zabān-i pārsī va turkī va tāzī namī-dānād}
\end{align*}
\]

This Brahman serves up his subtleties with Indian-born lips
He does not know Persian, Turkish, or Arabic.\(^7\)

---


\(^7\) Divān-i Brahman, 218.5.
Moreover, in purely aesthetic terms, if an earlier poet like Khusrau is to be posited as the forerunner, and Hindus like Chandar Bhān the completers, of an Indian style characterized by euphuistic mannerism, thematic complexity, and so on, then these verses would actually seem to bear witness to an utterly contrary poetics. Not only are they written in the language of the cosmopolis, they are grammatically straightforward, contain no difficult vocabulary — either Hindi or Arabic — and are written in three of the most common meters in the entire Perso-Arabic prosodic system.\textsuperscript{68} In what sense, then, other than the ex-post-facto attribution to them of pseudo-nationalistic content, can we slot these verses as harbingers of the formal decadence so often associated with \textit{sabk-i hindi}?

In short, however much some poets and other intellectuals were invested in local variations, there was always an equally potent sense of participation in a larger translocal knowledge system, the medium of which was the Persian language, in Persian meters, with mostly Persian tropology — even in India, and even for innovators like Khusrau and Hindu \textit{munshīs} like Chandar Bhān. In this context even local inflections of diction and vocabulary, such as the \textit{isti\'māl-i hind}, nevertheless played by the larger cosmopolitan rules, and from Shiraz in the west all the way to Bengal in the east and the Deccan in the south, kings, politicians, poets, and intellectuals were all savoring one and the same “Persian candy” (\textit{qand-i pārsī}). This remained true centuries later, and was certainly the case for Chandar Bhān, as we will see.

\textsuperscript{68} The two from Khusrau are in \textit{Ramal} (\textit{musamman sālim}) and \textit{Mutagārib} (\textit{musamman sālim}); and Chandar Bhān’s is in \textit{Hazaj} (\textit{musamman sālim}).
The View from the Seventeenth Century

Indeed, the view from Chandar Bhān’s seventeenth century is radically at odds with both Bahār and Mohiuddin’s visions of Indo-Persian literary historiography. For one thing, if Mohiuddin’s argument were valid, then we should expect Chandar Bhān, as the foremost Hindu munshi of his era, to have used Hindi words and “homely expressions” throughout his oeuvre. But apart from place names and certain physical objects that have no real Persian equivalent — pān, for instance — we do not find much evidence of such “Hindi influence.” Moreover, one gets no sense from either Chandar Bhān or his contemporaries that it was his or any other Hindu’s participation in the Persophone knowledge system that caused any of the aesthetic shifts — again, prolix extravagance, abstruse intellectualism, and so on — that are so often taken to be hallmarks of sabk-i hindī. Besides, whatever trend toward literary ingenuity and formal innovation did occur, Chandar Bhān would in any case have described unequivocally as an effort to achieve tāzagī, not some sort of encroachment of Indic “customs and creeds, legends and mythology, romance and folk-lore.” In fact, he was just as, if not more likely to draw on the Perso-Arabic religious and folk traditions than the Indic; and thus much of his verse demonstrates clearly that an effect of tāzagī — or at least the poetic assertion of such an

69 At least one Hindi-Urdu ghazal has indeed been attributed to Chandar Bhān, but he himself never mentions it (or any other vernacular compositions), and I have not been able to trace any mention of it prior to Sri Rām Lālā’s Khumkhāna-i Jōved (Delhi: Naval Kishore Press, 1908), 574-5. It is safe to say, then, that unless further evidence comes to light, and beyond the possibility of it having being preserved in the oral tradition (apparently without being written down by anyone for over two hundred years), we can treat its authenticity with some skepticism.
effect — did not depend on the sort of simplistic “Indianization” postulated by Mohiuddin and others. Here, for instance, he invokes Majnūn:

\[\text{‘umṛī-st k-az tariqa-i Majnūn asar namānd} \\
\text{īn rasm-i kuhna tāza shavad dar diyār-i man}\]

It’s been ages since there’s been any trace of the ways of Majnūn; This ancient lifestyle shall be refreshed (tāza shavad) in my era \(^70\)

And again here:

\[\text{bū’ī zi sar-i zulf-i tu khwāham ba-junūn dād} \\
\text{tā tāza shavad rasm dar-in silsila az man}\]

I’ll give just one whiff of the tips of your tresses to [today’s] lunatics of love
And thus, through me, the ways of this lineage (silsila) will be refreshed \(^71\)

Without knowing beforehand that these four lines were Chandar Bhān’s one might struggle in vain to decipher where (and by whom) they could have been written, because really they could have been written anywhere in the Indo-Persian ecumene. But given the poet’s insistence on producing tāzagī, there can be little doubt about when they were written. Thus here again, on the most basic level of literary historical analysis, the term sabk-i hindī simply fails to account for the most salient feature of the verse in question, namely Chandar Bhān’s effort toward poetic renewal.

Moreover, like most members of the Mughal cultural establishment Chandar Bhān had a much more dynamic metageographical vision than Bahār and Mohiuddin’s nationalist

\(^70\) Divān-i Brahman, 318.2

\(^71\) Divān-i Brahman, 304.3. The lineage in question being, of course, that of Majnūn the prototypical lover. Note too the clever play on the word silsila. In this context it obviously refers to a “chain of transmission,” i.e. a poetic or especially mystical genealogy; but in poetry silsilas also refer to the “chains” made of the beloved’s tresses — thus the “chain” of cultural genealogy is being refreshed by means of the scent of the very “chains” which the beloved uses to trap lovers like Majnūn and drive mad.
frames allow for. As we saw toward the end of Chapter Two, the Mughals' sense of their sphere of interaction and influence in the world had, by the seventeenth century, expanded to an almost global outlook. And thus, like Amīr Khusrau before him, Chandar Bhān too was in the regular habit of cultivating a dialectic whereby parochial claims to Indian cultural superiority and uniqueness were nevertheless couched within cosmopolitan discursive norms. Yet another problem with the sabk-i hindī model, then, is that it emphasizes (and usually abhors) only the former, while ignoring the continuing reality of the latter. Thus Chandar Bhān might exalt his ruler Shāh Jahān's inimitable might with a competitive hyperbole—

\[
\begin{align*}
shumār-i mulk-ash afzūn az hisāb ast \\
ki ū dar mulk-gīrī āflāb ast \\
Burāq-i himmat-ash ān tīz-gām ast \\
ki jaulān-gāh-i 'azm-ash rūm-o-shām ast
\end{align*}
\]

The Emperor's provinces are beyond count, For in conquering territory he is the Sun; The mighty steed (burāq) of his power is so fleet of foot That it needs all of Turkey and Syria just for an exercise pitch\(^{72}\)

— but he does so using a Qur'ānic allusion (to Burāq) placed in a global context. Almost always, though, he insists that it is precisely the Mughals' welcoming of others that opened "a path from East to West" and allowed such a cosmopolitan culture to flourish within their territories:

\(^{72}\) Brahman, Chahār Chaman, 87. The reference here to Burāq is not insignificant. "Burāq" can just mean "lightning," but this was also the name of the mount ("larger than a donkey but smaller than a mule," according to Steingass) that carried the Prophet Muhammad from Jerusalem to heaven. It thus has obvious poetic associations with the speed and agility of horses, the wind, flashes of lightning, and so on. But it also underscores yet again that Chandar Bhān's repertoire of poetic imagery looked to the classical Perso-Islamic tradition as much as — if not more than — the Indic, and thus further undermines the contention of those who have argued with Mohiuddin that Hindu participation in the Persianate ecumene necessarily caused some sort of classical dilution.
‘Irāqi-o-khurāsānī zi hadd bīsh
nihāda piš-i khud sarmāya-i khwīsh
farangī az farangistān rasīda
nawādir az banādir bīsh chūda
chu shāh az mulk-i khud āḡāh bāshad
zi mashriq tā ba maghrib rāh bāshad

Iraqis and Khurasanis beyond limit
Spread their fortunes out before them;
Farangīs newly arrived from Europe
Do likewise with choice rarities from seaports;
Indeed, when a king is attentive to the needs of his realm
A path from East to West is cleared.  

In either case, the audience is always global, as we have seen demonstrated repeatedly in passages from Chandar Bhān’s other writings.

Of course, the Mughals did not invent such boastful and expansive metageography. Even in the formative years of the Delhi Sultanate, ‘Isāmī’s Futūh al-Salāṭīn projected a vision of India — and Delhi in particular — as a participant in, even a savior of, the wider Perso-Islamic world. As argued earlier, texts like ‘Isāmī’s crafted an image of the early Sultans as, on the one hand, inheritors of Sāsānian glory via their Ghaznavid heritage, and, on the other, as creating an Islamic new world, a refuge from the increasing devastations wrought by the advance of the Mongols which culminated in the sack of Baghdad in 1258 CE. Thus ‘Isāmī reports that Iltūmish specifically invoked the

73 Brahman, Chahār Chaman, 87.

74 See for instance the description of a parade quoted above (described in Chahār Chaman, 53-8) which boasts of attendees from an astonishing array of locales from all over the world — all of whom, he insists, “will carry testimonial evidence of the kindness and good name of this eternal empire in every direction and to every far corner of the world.”

mystique of Ancient Persia when asserting his claim to the Delhi throne, and specifically connects his own text with Firdausi’s master text in order to project Iltūtimsh as an Indian Muslim ruler with a just claim to the inheritance of the Sāsānian heroic ideal:

In the Shah Namah, the old man of Tus [i.e. Firdausi] has written many things in every story that he was pleased to write. But for the most part he describes these four things: amongst the kings he always praises highly and immensely Faridun and Kaikhusrau; amongst the heroes he applauds Rustam and he describes his horses, weapons and armour. Verily, whatever is liked by God is applauded by the people. Had there been no help from God, Faridun would not have been favoured with fortune. If Providential help were not forthcoming, neither Rustam nor his horse nor his armour would have had any effect.

In short, when King Iltutmish who was the light of religion and the world made Delhi his capital his troops raided the remotest parts of the country. The city wore a bright look. Verily every new thing is a pleasure. Many a Saiyed of correct descent came over there from Arabia. Many tradesmen from the land of Khurasan, many painters from the country of China, many ‘Ulama of the Bukhara stock and many a devotee and men of piety came from different regions. Craftsmen of every kind and every country as well as beauties from every race and city; many assayers, jewelers and pearl-sellers, philosophers and physicians of the Greek school and learned men from every land — all gathered in that blessed city like moths that gather round the candle light. Delhi became the Ka‘ba of the seven continents (haft iqlim) and the whole region became the home of Islam.76

This type of expansive metageography was not even limited to Persophone literature. In Manjhan’s Awadhi romance Madhumālatī (1545 A.D.), for instance, we find praise for the poet’s patron Salīm Shāh Sūr expressed with a similarly vast geospatial conceptual horizon — Kabul in the north, “Hanuman’s bridge” in the south, and Syria and Rome in the west.77 Surely numerous other examples could easily be adduced.


77 Note too that Manjhan seems perfectly at ease locating Salim Shāh within Indic traditions of kingship, describing him as “a Yudishthira in virtue, a Hariścandra in truth...King Bhoja cannot equal his merits or knowledge; in valour, Vikrama cannot compare.” Madhumālatī: An Indian Sufi Romance, translated by
In Chapter Two, we saw Chandar Bhān’s powerful expression of the Mughals’ globalized worldview articulated as part of a discussion of Delhi and its pivotal role as the political and cultural seat of the empire. His praise of the capital is of course predictably fulsome, including fine descriptions of the roads, buildings, and city architecture. But what stands out the most for Chandar Bhān is clearly the connection between localized Mughal urbanity and the transregional cosmopolitan literary scene that the Mughal dispensation creates space for. He boasts, for instance, that “there are ghazal-singers, melody-makers, storytellers, and expert musicians and revelers sitting and standing in every house,” and punctuates the thought with another short masnavī fragment that directly connects Delhi’s vibrant literary culture to its thriving commercial culture, and connects both in turn to a number of canonical metageographical reference points of the Persian cosmopolitan imagination:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{chi shahrī ān ki misr az wai nishānī} \\
\text{Herāt az kūcha-i ī dāštānī} \\
\text{ba ma’mūrī-o-ābādī chunān ast} \\
\text{ki dar har kūcha-ash sad Isfahān ast} \\
\text{nīshasta har taraf gohar firoshi} \\
\text{bar āwurda zi daryā-hā khuroshī} \\
\text{fitāda har taraf sad la’l-i rakhshān} \\
\text{buvaḍ dar har dukān kān-i badakhshān} \\
\text{bar āyad az barāyī imthānī} \\
\text{matā’-i haṭk kishwar az dukānī}
\end{align*}
\]

What a city [Delhi] is, from which Egypt takes its cue,  
And the lore of its lanes is found even in Herat;  
It has such architecture and cultivation  
That there are a hundred Isfahans in its every alley;  
There’s a seller of pearls everywhere you look,

As if a pleasant sigh had risen up from every sea;
At every turn a hundred glittering rubies are strewn
As if every shop was a mine in Badakhshān;
And popping up for your perusal,
The wares of seven continents abound in each dukān.\(^{78}\)

In one sense, such boasting is simply the common poetic convention of “self-exaltation” (\(ta'āllī\)), expanded to a geopolitical scale.\(^{79}\) But more importantly the poem also creates an imaginative space in which Mughal sulh-i kull and cultural inclusivity are advertised to the broader world as the foremost reason for India’s pre-eminence over rivals like the Safavids and Ottomans. The literary and cosmopolitan dimension to this is that Chandar Bhān fully expects his South Asian readers instantly to decode the significance of places like Cairo, Herat, and Isfahan to the Indo-Persian metageographical imaginaire, and, just as important, he expects to have sympathetic readers from those places as well, whose own spatial imaginations he seeks to conjure.

In the long passage Chandar Bhān’s detailing praise for Lahore, quoted in Chapter Two, recall that his praise was formulated specifically in terms of literary cultural transregionalism. He marvels at the number of mystics (of all faiths) who live in the city, and is especially impressed by the vibrant scene at the tomb of ‘Alī Hujwīrī, the eleventh-century author of the earliest surviving treatise on Sufism, the Kashf al-Mahjūb (“Unveiling of the Veiled”) — yet further proof, by the way, that a general cultural aesthetic of freshness (\(tāzagī\)) could coexist unproblematically with continued reverence

\(^{78}\) Brahman, Chahār Chaman, 87.

\(^{79}\) On \(ta’āllī\), see Faruqi, “Stranger in the City,” 69.
for past masters. Chandar Bhān is equally impressed by the “poets of exquisite language and sweet expression [who] heat up the bustling literary scene in every corner and every direction, pouring forth scintillating and exciting meanings... [and] smooth flowing literary expressions.” Chandar Bhān makes clear that these were not just local poets, for the poetic gatherings included “group after group of eloquents from Iran, Turan, as well as Hindustan,” all of whom availed themselves of the thriving local book trade, wherein “countless Persian and Arabic books, and reliable manuscripts of histories, epic romances, dīvāns of the classical and the latest poets (mutaqqaddimīn va muta’akhkhirīn), letters collections (munsha ‘āl), model specimens (fiqrāt), epistolary primers (ruq ‘āl)” and all manner of other texts were available.\footnote{Note his clear differentiation between the earlier and “the latest” poets, as well as his praise for “smooth flowing expression” — an aesthetic posture completely at odds with the characterization of so-called sabk-i hindī poetry as lasting only after ostentatious verbal convolution.}

Chandar Bhān thus places himself and his work securely within a larger set of cosmopolitan networks, and one gets no sense whatsoever that he expected this translocal audience to have difficulty enjoying, much less understanding his Persian poetry and prose, as the sabk-i hindī model might lead one to suspect.\footnote{Of course, Bahār and others might well argue that this proves nothing other than that Chandar Bhān’s entire translocal audience — whether real or imaginary — had already been equally corrupted by India’s degradation of Persian. The very fact that they might appreciate the Persian oeuvre of a Hindu in India would, a fortiori, prove it. But this requires us to believe that they could have somehow already gained an appreciation for a style to which, according to Bahār’s own model of causality, they could not yet have been exposed, that they had somehow already been “dazzled” and “overmastered” (pace Rypka) by a literary historical force of which poets like Chandar Bhān were themselves the agents. Thus here again, the sabk-i hindī model’s circular ingenuity shines through.} In fact, Chandar Bhān himself gives no indication in his writings that he is using anything but pure, fluent Persian in the tradition of all the past masters. Thus even as the Mughal-Safavid political
rivalry was growing increasingly potent in his lifetime; and even though he boasts clearly that his own melodious voice is proof positive of India’s cultural superiority over Iran —

\[\text{sharaf bar khitta-i trān-zamīn hindūstān dārad}\
\text{ki shāh-i ‘asr chūn man tūf-yi shakkar-fishān dārad}\]

There’s no doubt that India enjoys nobility over the land of Iran
When the King of the Age [Shāh Jahān] has a sweet-singing parrot like me

— the poetics of his ta‘allī are, like nearly all of his verse, incontrovertibly classical.\(^2\)

Likewise in this verse:

\[\text{ba trān mī-barad afsāna-i hindūstān bulbul}\
\text{barahman rā shakkar afshānī ar bāshad hamīn bāshad}\]

Carry this message from Hindustan to Iran, O Nightingale:
That if they require a sugar-scattering Brahman, I am the one.\(^3\)

The latter verse, in particular, plays on both Rūmī’s classical tale of the parrot who sent a message to India with a trader, and Hāfiz’s famous verse boasting that the “Indian parrots” will become “sugar-crunchers” when they consume his verse. On purely aesthetic grounds, then, not only are these verses thoroughly imbricated within classical Persian canons, but also, even using the philological mode’s own standards, one would be hard-pressed to see in this verse evidence of the type of linguistic degradation so often associated with sabk-i hindī, and with the Hindu munshīs in particular. Thus here again, one would be better served recognizing that Chandar Bhān saw Mughal India and Safavid

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\(^2\) Specifically, there are no Hindavi words, and the meter is utterly ordinary (ha\(\text{zaj muthamman sālim}). Yes, Chandar Bhān projects himself as a parrot, a bird often associated with India even before Amir Khusrau, the paradigmatic poetic tu\(\text{ūf-yi hindī}. But this trope also has intertextual resonance with Hāfiz, Rūmī, ‘Attār, and countless other classical poets. Likewise the notion of the poet as a sugar-scatterer (shakkar-fishān), strewing sweet turns of phrase with every utterance, was one of the most common literary to\(\text{pol} of any period, in every place where Persian was spoken or written. So even though this verse certainly provides superficial evidence of a growing Indo-Iranian rivalry, its language is nothing peculiar to India, or Hindus, or some kind of exclusively Indian literary style.

\(^3\) Divān-i Brahman, 206.5.
Iran, for all their rivalry, as competing players, yes — but they played by the same cosmopolitan rules, with the same canonical literary equipment, on the same cultural playing field. It thus makes perfect sense that, Chandar Bhān’s protestations of India’s cultural superiority notwithstanding, he nevertheless feels compelled to insist elsewhere that “the books and writings of this supplicant have gained fame all over Iran and Turan, and reached every corner of Hindustan, in every region and every district.”

All of this suggests a fundamental cosmopolitan reality of constant human movement and exchange — both commercial and intellectual — that the philological mode of understanding sabk-i hindī seems tailor-made to put under almost total erasure.

_Historicizing Tāza-Gū’ī_

Indeed, it was an awareness of such geospatial dynamism, far more than any static national identifications, that most characterized the worldview of the majority of early modern “fresh-speakers” (tāza-gūyān). And why wouldn’t it, since so many of them were extremely well-traveled, and had experienced firsthand the financial and intellectual benefits of moving from place to place amidst the “relative porosity of early modern South Asia...[where they] encountered little or no state concern or control”? Historically speaking, it is somewhat difficult to say precisely when this urgency to “make it fresh” was first propounded — a difficulty only exacerbated by the fact that

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84 Brahman, _Munsha‘āt-i Brahman_, 14-5.

scholarship on the subject is so sorely lacking due to the overwhelming modern reliance on the terminology dictated by the sabk-i hindī model. But we can say with some confidence that terms like tāza-gū ṭī were not prevalent yet during Bābā Fīghānī’s (d. 1519 CE) era, even though later Mughal and Safavid commentators and tazkira-writers often credited him with being the progenitor of the new poetic style.86 Shiblí Nu’mání, for instance, argues that “after Bābā Fīghānī a particular style (tarz-i khās) emerged; ‘Abd al-Bāqī Rahīmī, an Iranian, [later] called this ‘tāza-gū ṭī’, and openly admitted that its founder and pioneer was Abu al-Fath.”87 ‘Abd al-Bāqī here refers to ‘Abd al-Bāqī Nahāvandī (1570-1637 CE), an émigré to Mughal India from the Persian province of Hamadān, and the author of Maʿāsir-i Rahīmī, an account of the life of the celebrated Mughal noble and literary patron ‘Abd al-Rahīm Khān-i Khānān.88 “Abu al Fath” refers to the renowned scientist and intellectual “Hakīm” Abu al-Fath Gīlānī (d. 1589 CE), also an émigré who, along with his brothers Hakīm Hamām and Hakīm Nūr al-Dīn, fled Safavid persecution for the sanctuary of Akbar’s court.89

In other words, three of the most commonly acknowledged early promoters of the poetics of tāza-gū ṭī (a.k.a. sabk-i hindī) hailed from Iran itself. Nahāvandī himself, according to

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86 For details, see Losensky, Welcoming Fīghānī; S. M. ‘Abdollāh, “Tāza-gū ṭī.” In modern times, of course, this “credit” for inventing the poetics of freshness has often turned to blame for the sabk-i hindī.


89 For details see Shāh Navāz Khān, Ma‘āthīr-ul-Umarā, edited by Baini Prashad, translated by Henry Beveridge, vol. 1, 107-10.
one count, uses the term tāza-gūʾī some fifty times in Maʿāṣir-i Rahīmī to refer to the aesthetic of various poets.\footnote{S. M. ‘Abdullah, “Tāza-Gūʾī: Ek Adabī Tahrīk,” 114.} This is the earliest known literary historical source to deploy the term so liberally, and thus it is equally significant that Nahāvandī credits not Fīghānī, but Abu al-Fath Gīlānī with spreading the new poetics:

The literati and poets of this age all have a confident belief that tāza-gūʾī — which in this day and age is considered the height of beauty among poets, and is the style (ravīsh) propagated by the likes of Shaikh Faẓī and Maulānā ‘Urfaī Shīrāzī, et al — was a product of [Abu al-Fath Gīlānī’s] direction and teachings.\footnote{Quoted in ‘Abdullah, “Tāza-Gūʾī,” 114.}

To explain this apparent contradiction, arbiters of the sabk-i hindī argument would suggest that, because such intellectuals found refuge in India, India somehow must have changed them.\footnote{Empirically speaking, this obviously can’t be true of Fīghānī because he never went to India. But the reception of Fīghānī did change toward the latter half of the sixteenth century, and stories began to spring up about how the poets of Herat had rejected him. These stories have proved exceedingly difficult to corroborate (for details, see Losensky, Welcoming Fīghānī); but in a sense, so the argument goes, his poetry did have to travel to India for favorable reception, just as ‘Abd al-Bāqī Nahāvandī and Abu al-Fath Gīlānī would later do.} But how could that be, when so many of the acknowledged masters of the period had already traveled widely and built up poetic reputations well before they arrived in India, or in many cases had to leave for India precisely because of their innovative poetic styles?

The entire assumption rests on the modernist exceptionalism about the stalled, static nature of premodern societies — as if “India” could have produced and contained a unique, hermetic civilizational sensibility that affected, but was not affected by, the
constant dynamic flow of people and goods into, through, and back out of the subcontinent. But as recent scholarship has made very clear, and as Chandar Bhān’s own vision of urbane cosmopolitanism attests, by the early modern Mughal era such movement was at an all time high, throughout the Indian Ocean littoral zone, at least up to that point in history. Even the kind of movement that we might think of as strictly commercial had an enormous effect on the flow of ideas and cultural capital, and the resultant rise of new merchant classes in this early modern period also created new patronage networks that became, in turn, yet another resource for poets.⁹³ When discussed, this early modern spurt of travel and trade networks is often seen exclusively as the preserve of Europeans, their “Age of Discovery” or some such.⁹⁴ But the Asian traders, mystics, and litterateurs of the early modern world were equally likely to travel over vast stretches of space, with almost no restrictions on their movement.

I have already mentioned Ghazālī, who left Iran under threat from the local ‘ulamā, found sanctuary in India, and is best known for having been Akbar’s first poet laureate (malik al-shu’arā). Admittedly, these facts contribute superficially to a narrative of radical difference between the cultural sensibilities of Iran and India, a narrative which undergirds the entire sabk-i hindī model. Ghazālī’s poetry was, after all, found


unacceptable in Iran, and by contrast he found great fame and fortune in a receptive India — he is thus, predictably, almost always associated exclusively with India and the early phase of sabk-i hindī. But consider his itinerary before arriving in Mughal India. While still a youth he left his hometown of Mashhad for Shāh Tahmāsp’s court, where he quickly gained prominence as a poet of some repute, particularly for his panegyric qasīdas. In the course of his early career he traveled all over the region, to Herāt, Qazwīn, Tabrīz, Kirmān, Shīrāz (where he encountered ‘Urfī’s ustād, Maulānā Husain Darwīšh), and likely numerous other towns and cities in between. In each of these places he sought out and gained a reputation among the local literary masters, and thus one cannot take the faīwā against him as evidence that he was unpopular in Iran as such, but only among a group of particularly influential religious and political authorities. Overall, his reputation was well-established, in multiple cultural centers, long before he ever came to India — and even on that score, note that initially he did not even come to Mughal Hindustan, but rather to the Deccan.95

Ghazālī’s biography indicates that it was not necessarily India that changed the poetics of the day, but rather that the poetics were changing in a way that did not conform to the sectarian outlook of the new Safavid dispensation.96 India only provided the congenial environment and financial opportunities — “the means of acquiring perfection” — with which to practice their craft, along a literary historical path that one could argue

95 For further details, see Nabi Hadi, Mughalon ke Malik al-Shu’arā (Allahabad: Shabistan, 1978), 23-78.

96 This postulate is further underscored by the fact that several literati whom Akbar invited to come to his court were executed by the Safavid Shāh. See Alam, “Pursuit of Persian,” 319-22.
Persianate poetics across ‘Ajam would almost certainly have taken anyway. India of course had its part to play in articulating that “fresh” sensibility, and as a result Ghazālī’s pattern was repeated by more and more poets, nearly all of whom certainly found reinvigorated inspiration from India. But virtually all of these poets were also equally well-traveled and well-reputed even before arriving in India.

Moreover, within this cosmopolitan framework, a great respect for classical Indo-Persian poetic traditions remained firmly in place. For instance the great poet Muhammad Husain “Nāzīrī,” originally from Nīshāpūr, made his reputation in Kāshān long before setting out for India, where he initially became attached to the court of ‘Abd al-Rahīm Khān-i Khānān, and eventually emerged as one of Jahāngīr’s favorite court poets before retiring to Gujarāt where he died. Despite his great success in India, and despite spending his entire career during the era of tāza-gū’ī, Nāzīrī is actually best known for having self-consciously patterned his gāṣidas after those of the twelfth-century Khurāsānī master Anwarī, and his lyrics have in turn been compared favorably with both the modern Iranian poet Qa’ānī (d. 1854), and the fourteenth-century master Hāfiz Shīrāzī, whose ghazāls he imitated.97

One of Nāzīrī’s great rivals was Jamāl al-Dīn Muhammad “‘Urfī”, who was originally from Shīrāz, but traveled widely before coming to India, where he was already so well-known that he was invited to stay with the great Faizī at Fathpūr Sikri. After a falling out

97 On Nāzīrī, see Muhammad ‘Abdul Ghani, History of Persian Language and Literature at the Mughal Court, (Bābur to Akbar), vol. 3 (Allahabad: The Indian Press, Ltd., 1930), 67-103.
with Faizī, he availed himself of the hospitality of none other than Abu al-Fath Gīlānī, one of the key early promoters of ṭāza-gū ′ī mentioned above, after whose death he wound up in Ḥābd al-Rahīm Khān-ʾi Khānān′s circle. In other words, like most poets of his day, he rarely stayed in one place, bouncing from city to city, patron to patron, interacting with all manner of intellectuals and other people along the way. And Ḥurfī, too, despite nowadays being associated almost exclusively with India and the eccentric decadence of sabk-i hindī, was in his own day seen as someone whose poetics, however “fresh,” comported perfectly well in both form and content with those of earlier masters like Anwarī, Khāqānī, and Zahir Faryābī (d. 1201 CE), and some of whose most famous qasīdas are in praise of none other than the Prophet Muhammad. 98

Another contemporary of Ḥurfī, Faizī, and Nazārī who is often associated with India and sabk-i hindī was Nūr al-Dīn “Zuhūrī” (d. 1615 CE). 99 It is not entirely clear where he was born — possibly Tehran, but more likely in a village called Khujand, in the Khurāsānī district of Tarshīz — but we do know a bit more about his travels later in life. After a basic education in topics like grammar, literature, prosody, and rational sciences, he had already gained quite a reputation as a poet while still a youth in Khurāsān. This renown had clearly already spread to other localities, and when he traveled as a young man to Yazd his reputation preceded him — securing him both the hospitality of one Nawāb Mīr Ghiyās al-Dīn Mīr Mīrān, and an almost immediate rivalry with “Wahshī,”

98 For details see Ghani, History of Persian Language and Literature at the Mughal Court, vol. 3, 103-9.

99 For details on Zuhūrī′s life and career, see Ghani, History of Persian Language and Literature at the Mughal Court, vol. 3, 181-219.
the leading local poet. From Yazd he traveled to Shīrāz, where one of the many regular poetic assemblies he participated in was held in the shop of a local baker known simply as Mīrzā Husain. He stayed in Shīrāz for seven years, where he continued his poetic training and mastered the art of calligraphy under the tutelage of one Maulānā Darwīsh Husain. Eventually he became affiliated with the court of Shāh ‘Abbās, but, feeling underappreciated and bereft of the necessary patronage, left for India. He first settled not at the Mughal court, but rather at the Gujarati court of Burhān Nizām Shāh, and thence to Bījāpūr. It was during this sojourn in the Deccan that he met Faizī, who was himself on a diplomatic assignment in the south.

In short, each of these poets of the so-called sabk-i hindī already had clearly established reputations before arriving in India, and in some cases did not even begin their Indian careers at the Mughal court. This is not meant to support the argument, put forward by some recent Iranian scholars, that sabk-i hindī should be renamed the sabk-i isfahānī or some such — for that would simply replace one flawed metageography with another.\(^{100}\) The point is to emphasize that even these brief biographies of Ghazālī, Nazīrī, ‘Urīfī, and Zuhūrī should demonstrate clearly that such static metageographical designations are completely inappropriate to a pre- and early modern context wherein poets rarely remained in one city for too long, much less one country. They traveled in circuits from one intellectual center to another, attaching themselves to a succession of local literary salons and patrons, sometimes moving out of need, and sometimes simply in search of a

\(^{100}\) *Pace* Ehsan Yarshater, “The Indian or Safavid Style,” 249-88.
change of scenery.\textsuperscript{101} And Iran, Central Asia, Mughal north India, the Deccan, Anatolia, and other places too all contributed to the cosmopolitan ecumene in their own ways.

That is a major reason why, for the poets of this period, their geographical location was far less important as a marker of identity than their location in time, vis-à-vis the canon of past masters whose works they so admired and struggled so hard to surpass. Far from requiring a mere shift to a new civilizational climate, the path of renewal required poets to refresh the “simple” (sāda) poetics of a tradition grown “cold” and stale (afṣurda), as in this couplet by Jahāngīr’s one-time poet laureate, Tālib Āmulī:

\begin{verbatim}
zī sāda-gū’i-yi afṣurda nādīm-am tālib
man-o-sukhan ba-hamān tarz-i isti ‘āra-i khwesh
\end{verbatim}

I am ashamed of stale simple-speak, Tālib;
My poetry and I require a metaphoricity all their own.\textsuperscript{102}

In other words, no matter where a poet lived, the most important indicator of poetic excellence was not Indianization, but ingenuity — a fresh poetic voice that was “all their own.” Stale and bland images were to be spiced up and given new flavors, as Chandar Bhān suggests in this culinary image:

\begin{verbatim}
barahman īn ghazal-i tāza rā digar namakī-st
magar khayāl lab-ash bar dil-i kabāb guzasht
\end{verbatim}

Brahman, this fresh ghazal has a saltiness all its own;
As if the imagination ran its lips along the heart of a kabāb.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{101} And as we have seen, Chandar Bhān, too, had a succession of patrons, both local and imperial, and saw plenty of travel in his lifetime — we know definitively that apart from his native Lahore he spent time in Delhi, Agra, Udaipur, Balkh, Afghanistan, possible Benares, and likely many more parts unknown.


\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Diwān-i Brahman}, 81.7

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We have to remember, however, that we are talking about a cultural context in which the criteria and parameters for originality were not quite the same as they are nowadays. One thus has to admit, it’s nearly impossible to pin down a precise definition of what makes any given verse “tāza.” As is so often the case when trying to define contrastive concepts (so too with “modernity,” for instance) the standard often seems by turns elastic, narrow, slippery and sometimes outright tautological — as in, the poem is tāza because it is tāza, the main proof being that the poet asserts that it is so. In the case of Fighānī, for instance, modern scholars who have argued that he invented sabk-i hindī have often simply take earlier commentators’ praise for his “originality” — an appreciation which in most cases came long after Fighānī’s own lifetime — and flip the terminology from tāzagī to “Indian Style.” But however original he was, he was equally considered to have been securely embedded within the classical chain of canonicity. Thus Taqī al-Dīn Kashi’s Khulāsat al-Ash’ār (completed 1607-08 CE) states that “in ghazal style/pattern (tarz-i ghazal) and the ways of eloquence [Fighānī] safeguarded the path of Khwāja Hāfiz, and thus scholars have called him ‘Little Hāfiz.’”¹⁰⁴ Paul Losensky accurately observes that this is akin to calling a western writer “Shakespeare Junior” — so if the alleged progenitor of the poetics of freshness was so steeped in the established canon that he is amounts to no more than Hāfiz Jr., then what kind of originality are we talking about here?

¹⁰⁴ Original Persian quoted in Losensky, Welcoming Fighānī, Appendix A. See also Losensky’s discussion, 30-1.
Moreover, the language of Taqī al-Dīn’s reference to Fighānī’s debt to Hāfiz “in the ghazal format” (dar tarz-i ghazal) is revealing. Shamsur Rahman Farūqi has offered an excellent analysis of the subtle shades of meaning that differentiated terms like tarz, ravish, shewa, and uslūb, all of which are often translated into English simply as “style.” In it he draws attention to a revealing passage from Amir Khusrau on the meaning of the word tarz, from his celebrated treatise on poetics, the Dībācha-i Dīvān-i Ghurrat al-Kamāl. “The polo-player of the field of speech,” Khusrau suggests, “cannot but be of one of three kinds.” The first kind is a poet like Sanā’ī, Anvari, Zahīr Faryābī, or Nizāmī, a master who has developed a manner (tarz) all his own, and is “king of that domain.” These are the type of poets that we would normally think of as “original” voices, but note that for Khusrau, there is plenty of room for poetic mastery and originality even for those who do not invent their own tarz. Thus the second kind of great poet is one who faithfully follows the precedents of earlier poets, or who “walks after the manner (tarz) of the Ancients [mutaqaddamān] and the Contemporaneous [mutʾākhirān].” In other words, one can “walk after the tarz” of an earlier poet like, say, Hāfiz without being considered derivative — indeed, one can still be considered a truly inventive master poet like Fighānī.

Khusrau reinforces the point with a striking dose of humility:

And if no special method or way (tarīq), or no mode (ravish) of specialization becomes apparent for the embroiderer of the pearl-strings of poetry (naẓm), he takes his business forward by following behind his predecessors and pulling behind those who are the remnants...I regard him too as “Master,” but only half a one. Thus a Master is one who owns a manner (tarz), and the follower in the footsteps of that Master is the Disciple...Whatever I have composed in situations of preaching and wise
words, my case is that of a follower of the temperaments of Sanā‘ī and Khāqānī...and whatever I have let flow in masnavī and ghazal, is by virtue of my following the temperaments of Nizāmī and Sa’dī...Thus, how could I be [suited for the title of] Master?

Needless to say, there is absolutely no sense here that one’s geographic location necessarily implied a distinct chain of influence or style of poetic production. More to the present point, Khusrau’s observations vividly demonstrate that the emic Indo-Persian understanding of originality did not necessarily imply a total break with literary precedent. Thus as Faruqi rightly concludes: “words like tarz, ravish, and mode, represented an ontological, and not an epistemological situation. Poems existed in certain modes, and each mode is a tarz, and each tarz can have any number of followers or imitators.”

Fīghānī, like nearly every tāza poet who came after him, innovated within established parameters, with no prohibition against looking back to the classics for inspiration.

And thus the “old words” with which Faizī suggested that poets create “new meanings” could come from just about anywhere. We have already seen that a number of Chandar Bihān’s verses quoted above are in direct poetic conversation with other poets, both of the mutaqaddimīn (e.g. Hāfiz and Rūmī) and the muta’ākhīrīn (e.g. ‘Urff). It was standard practice, in fact, for poets to engage in imitative retelling of entire stories and epics from the canon, particularly those of the Khamsa, or “Five” great masnavis of Nizāmī Ganjavī. Just as Shakespeare saw fit to retell the stories of Julius Caesar, Henry the Fifth, and

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105 All these quotes, and the discussion of tarz vs. sabk, appear in Faruqi, “Stranger in the City,” 6-9.
countless others to suit his own time and narrative purposes, and Shakespeare’s own
reworkings have themselves been subsequently and repeatedly reworked in cinematic
versions, in various languages, Persian poets were constantly reworking the thematic and
narrative material of stories like Layla-Majnūn, Yūsuf-Zulaykha, and so on. When
Chandar Bhān claims to revive the spirit of Majnūn — along with the Sufistic ideals of
antinomian withdrawal that he represents — he also, by extension, draws a direct
connection between himself and all the great poets, Nizāmī Ganjavī, Amir Khusrau, and
countless others, who had already built up Majnūn as a literary topos over the centuries,
and thus he participates in charting what Losensky has aptly referred to as a “poetic
historiography.”

Losensky has also ably demonstrated the degree to which poetic imitation at the much
more narrow level of the ghazal — a practice known as ʾistiqbāl, or “welcoming” of the
prior precedent into one’s own work — was itself a gateway to innovation. A poet would
write his or her own offering in the same meter and rhyme scheme as that of some
already well-known ghazal masterpiece from the canon; and since the majority of
connoisseurs could be expected to know the precedent from which one was working, the
question of real formal invention was itself a non-issue. One had to be ingenious
without, as it were, necessarily being unprecedented. In fact part of the challenge was
precisely in demonstrating one’s verbal ingenuity within such pre-assigned formal and/or
thematic parameters. This practice not only became part of the rigorous training that
poets underwent, which required them to master the entire canon before they could be
considered worthy (not unlike rock bands nowadays who start out by covering the songs

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of established groups); it also fit perfectly within the growing competitive practice of poetic performance. A poetic assembly, *majlis,* or *mushā‘ira* would often be arranged as a collective response to a single formal pattern, with the explicit challenge being to improve upon or “refresh” an already well-known poem. With all participants facing the same formal challenge and writing structurally equivalent poems (same meter, same rhyme, same refrain), everyone knew basically what to expect, and the only way to stand out was through increasingly deft wordplay and thematic innovation.\textsuperscript{106}

\textit{Refreshing the Fresh Style}

In thus arguing that we rethink the very idea of an “Indian Style” of Persian poetics, let me be clear. I am not trying to claim that there was no such thing as an *isti‘māl-i hind,* or that Indic words, themes, and topoi did not in fact become increasingly integral features of the Persophone literature produced in India (and elsewhere too, in many cases). Rather, what I want to argue is that these linguistic and thematic accretions in and of themselves — which the philological approach views as so decisive — did not result in a separate literary “style,” much less a corrupt one that could in any way be considered peculiar to India, at any point in the subcontinent’s history. For one thing, according even to the standards of the early modern *tāza-gūyān,* the mere inclusion of a Hindavi word or topic here and there did not necessarily produce originality. Again, as per Faizi’s dictum, the point was to be innovative within certain established parameters, using the same “old words” that the classical masters had already conventionalized. The poetic

\[\textsuperscript{106}\text{The most comprehensive discussion of the practice of *istiqābūl* remains Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī.*}\]
watchword was “freshness” (tāzāgī), not outright newness or exoticism for its own sake. Indic words or content could certainly contribute to such an effect if used properly, and there are countless examples of this, even from Faizi’s own oeuvre; but as Chandar Bhān’s verses quoted above indicate, one could also be tāza, or at least boast of being so, without adding any Indic content whatsoever to one’s work.

We might say, then, that when Indo-Persian poets constantly reworked already-established thematic and narrative material, it was not because they were too unoriginal or “culturally exhausted” (pace Yarshater) to come up with their own stories, but rather because their very definition of true originality required demonstrating excellence and ingenuity within certain established parameters. “Newness” was never theorized as a process of radical rupture with existing canons, but rather one of revision, of constantly unveiling a truth that was already there, constantly giving newly intelligible form (sūrat) to an elusive but immanent truth (ma’nī). Tāza-gū’ī thus represented a break with the past, but one that nevertheless consistently respected the achievements of past masters.

Again, there is no doubt that in this context Indic words and themes, translations of classic Indian myths and legends, and so on, did sometimes help lend an air of exotic novelty to a great deal of poetry, especially in early modern South Asia. One oft-cited example of this would be the large corpus of Mughal translations of Sanskrit epics and other Indic literature into Persian. But even these translation projects could also, in some sense, be productively viewed as part of a literary mode of artfully re-rendering content that was presumably already well-known to some or all of its intended audience — as per
A. K. Ramanujan's famous postulate that "in India and Southeast Asia, no one ever reads the Ramayana or the Mahabharata for the first time. The stories are there, 'always already.'" Such Sanskrit-Persian translations have generally — and quite rightly — been seen as part of a broader political project of creating an accommodative and tolerant atmosphere at the Mughal court, particularly under Akbar. But if that were all that the Indo-Persian poets and literati — not to mention their patrons — were thinking about, there would be no need for multiple versions of individual works. And yet there numerous different Persophone translations (perhaps recreations is a better term) of the Rāmāyana, Nal-Daman, Shakuntala, and numerous other works produced at various times and places throughout the Mughal period, continuing well into the eighteenth and even early nineteenth centuries. Far too many of these different versions lie unstudied and unedited in archives, partly because of the general attitude of disdain that has colored scholarship on the Persophone literature of the Mughal period, and partly because of the idea that if you've seen one, you've seen them all. But seen in the context of a wider convention of poetic imitatio that was itself constituted precisely by the urge toward ingenuity and innovation, such multiple versions of the classics assume new relevance, not as attempts to rework Indic material instead of the classical Persian romances, but in addition to them, as one more archive among many potential canonical referents. The material was different — occasionally even thematized as fantastically exotic, even within India — but the language, poetic meters, and individual poets' sense of having a

dynamic imitative relationship with past literary benchmarks was often virtually identical whether one was rewriting one of Nizāmī’s masnavīs or a tale from the Mahābhārata. 108

In fact, it is worth noting that even Bahār, for all his Indo-phobia, developed a minor fascination with the Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata. In a series of articles called “Indian Literature” (adabīyat-i hindī), he notes with approval that the Mahābhārata had been translated into both Persian and Arabic as early as the third or fourth century AH. He even kept a handwritten manuscript of a Mughal Rāmāyana in his personal library, about which he has this to say: “This book has been translated into a Persian that was very clearly the fashion of its era, and some of its vocabulary is quite different from the Persian which we speak nowadays in Iran, but it is still obvious that it has emerged from the pen of an extremely mature and erudite writer.” This is a striking and unexpected acknowledgement from the patriarch of anti-Indian bias in Persianate scholarship, and for this very reason the comment perfectly captures the crucial distinction between seeing Indian words and aesthetics as a problem, but Indian themes and content as perfectly acceptable terrain for poetic production. Indeed, Bahār himself draws a clear line between the two when he says at the outset of this series of articles that “here ‘Indian

literature' (adabiyāt-i hindī) indicates not the manner and mode of poetry known as 'sabk-i hindī', but rather Sanskrit literature generally.\(^{109}\)

Thus in terms of assessing the aesthetic quality of a given verse or work, its tāzāgī, the presence of Indic content was itself somewhat epiphenomenal. Indic words or themes were by no means necessary to make a poem tāza, nor could Indic words, tropes, topoi, by themselves guarantee that a poem would be seen as fresh.

Moreover, it is clear that temporality and periodicity mattered, far more so than a poet’s place in a metageographical atlas. Poets of the oldest generations like Masʿūd Saʿd Salmān — or Amīr Khusrau, or Nizāmī, or Saʿdī, or Hāfiz, or any number of other classical poets — though greatly admired, were clearly classified as “ancients” (mutaqaddimīn), and it was the job of newer generations of poets to use their ingenuity to revivify their literary precedents. Obviously, all the discussion of the sabk-i hindī model over the last century or so, whether for or against, has occluded our ability to see early modern Indo-Persian poetry the way the poets themselves would have viewed it — namely, as a locally inflected yet utterly cosmopolitan; as new and fresh yet in perfect harmony with past precedents and classical prototypes. An even more damaging result of this occlusion, perhaps, is that it has also significantly hindered our ability to see the emic

\(^{109}\) All the quotes in this paragraph appear in Muhammad Taqī Bahār, Bahār va Adab-i Fārsī, edited by Muhammad Gulban, Vol. 1 (Tehran: Shirkat-i Sahāmī-yi Kitābhā-yi Jibī, 1351 A.H. [1972]), 253-4. Unfortunately, Bahār does not specify the author of the Rāmāyana that he consulted. Perhaps he himself did not know, since he indicates that the manuscript was damaged.
understandings of time and space that inform the poetics of tāza-gūʾī in their wider comparative context.

Indeed, tāza-gūʾī did not simply appear in a Persianate vacuum. It emerged at a time when a similar outlook of renewal took hold in a number of other knowledge systems around the world. Thus, for instance, at basically the same historical moment when Indo-Persian poets were making their assertions of tāzagī, and pitting the innovative work of the latest poets (the mutaʿakhkhīrin) against that of the ancients (mutaqaddīmīn), Sanskrit intellectuals were aiming at similar renewal of their own knowledge system, a gesture that likewise rested on drawing a sharp contrast, for the first time in Sanskrit intellectual history, between “new” (navya) intellectuals and the “antiquated” (jīrna) scholars of generations past, resulting in a “new historicality by which intellectuals began to organize their discourses.”\textsuperscript{110} Obviously there are crucial distinctions to be made between these two efforts at cultural renewal, for example the fact that for Sanskrit’s navya intellectuals the major stylistic innovations “[consisted] above all in a new philosophical metalanguage” rather than the aesthetic metalanguage of tāza-gūʾī. But there are also fascinating parallels, such as the undeniable fact that just like the Sanskrit makers of the new, the Indo-Persian tāza-gūyān, for all their braggadocio and occasional incorporation of Indic words and ideas, never really transcended “the traditionalism of the [poetic] problematics” that had informed Persophone poetry for nearly a thousand years — the

rose, the nightingale, the garden, wine (both real and symbolic), the beloved (both physical and transcendent), and the eternal poetic quest to access mystical truth (*haqq*) by means of verbal artistry (*sukhan*), and so on.

Though it is certainly possible, it strains credulity to think that the parallel emergence of these two cultural movements — which both culminated at the height of Mughal power in the seventeenth century, and preoccupied most of the intellectuals working in the two most widely used cosmopolitan languages in India at the time — is mere coincidence. And yet, to my knowledge, no sustained comparative analysis of the theoretical and historico-temporal bases of Sanskrit *navyata* and *tāza-gūrī* has ever been suggested, much less attempted. Surely this is due in large part to the difficulty of mastering both the Sanskritic and the Persianate traditions. But it is also a predictable result of the fact that scholars (on the Persianate side, anyway) have been so preoccupied with denouncing early modern poetry and adhering to the metageographical model of Bahār’s *sabk-shināsī* that few, if any, have made much of an effort to locate *tāza* poetry in the historico-temporal context of South Asian, much less global early modernity.\footnote{Four noteworthy exceptions would be the four scholars whose work I cited at the beginning of this chapter: S. M. ‘Abdullah, Muzaffar Alam, Paul Losensky, and S. R. Faruqi.}

There are, moreover, further comparative possibilities with the Sanskrit knowledge system if we are only willing to look. For instance, on the question of the interplay between regional variations in literary culture versus cosmopolitan norms, recent scholarship has exposed yet another striking parallel between long term developments in...
Sanskrit literary culture and the type of model that I have been trying to suggest above. For instance, in speaking of what they call the “metapoetic awareness” of regional “Sanskrit of the place” in late medieval and early modern India, the words of David Shulman and Yigal Bronner could, with few if any alterations, apply equally to the Persophone ecumene in the same period:

...we could postulate that as a rule, wherever we find a mature ‘Sanskrit of place,’ we will also find a commensurate body of literary theory unique to that area or at least some salient expression of metapoetic awareness. Such localized poetic theories inevitably engage with classical or normative schemes and categories, and with canonical theoreticians... This kind of intertextual conversation inevitably generates a certain intellectual or experiential depth. The same kind of complexity is an essential feature of what we are calling regional Sanskrit poetry. Local themes, conventions, genres, concepts, names and places are consistently plotted against the old, rich cosmopolitan set of images and patterns... [but] Sanskrit still allows a poet to transcend his or her parochial context and reach out to a space shaped by a wider, inherited discourse. At the same time, Sanskrit enables a skilled poet to condense into the space of a single work — even a single verse — an entire world of specific associations, contents and meaning.\(^{112}\)

Shulman and Bronner’s recognition of the constant a dialectic between the local and the cosmopolitan, and the “fundamental tension” that accompanies it, opens up a space for us to see that, as with Sanskrit, participation in the Persian literary cosmopolis, no matter how locally adamant — cf. Amir Khusrau’s boasts, or Chandar Bhān’s geopolitical ta’alli quoted above — always meant “positioning oneself in relation to wider literary universes,” and enabled “a unique connectedness of the various domains...all conveying

a sense of worldwide potential [since even] a highly local milieu allows a skilled poet to
dig deep, to tap into these underlying currents.\footnote{113}

Another development in South Asia that was almost exactly coeval with the emergence
of tāza-gūṛī was the flowering of Braj Bhasha as a “courtly vernacular.” Beginning
especially at the Rajput Bundela court of Orchha in the latter half of the sixteenth
century, and increasingly patronized by the Mughals throughout their territories, Braj
poets like Keshavdās worked hard to develop a style of ornamental (rītī) poetry that could
compete with Sanskrit (and Persian, too).
\footnote{114} But rather than distance themselves from
Sanskrit’s cosmopolitan norms, Braj vernacular poetics engaged rather in a dynamic
project of appropriating those classical literary theoretical norms, even as they worked to
set themselves (and Braj poetry) apart as a viable cultural alternative with equal courtly
prestige value to Sanskrit. This too was a relatively new historical development that
happened right alongside the emergence of the Persophone poetics of tāzagī. Obviously,
the two processes — vernacularization vs. renewal within the cosmopolitan Indo-Persian
tradition—are quite different in their scope and goals. But we do know that many of the
major Braj poets of the period were in contact with their Persophone counterparts, and
that a great deal of cross-pollination between the aesthetics of rītī poetry and those of
contemporaneous Persian poetry took place. The sābk-i hindī model would see all this
simply as further proof of the Indian environment’s pollution of pure Persian. But it

\footnote{113} Bronner and Shulman, “Cloud Turned Goose,” 5.

\footnote{114} Allison Busch, “The Anxiety of Innovation: The Practice of Literary Science in the Hindi/ Riti
Courtly Vernacular: The Transformation of Brajbhāsha Literary Culture (1590-1690),” PhD Diss.,
stands to reason that further comparative analysis could, instead, emphasize the fact that rūṭī-kal Braj poetry and the Persianate poetics of tāza-gūṭī were simply both part of a whole constellation of literary responses to the changing intellectual milieu of the early modern world.

Again, this does not mean that Indianization of Persian did not occur, or that there was no controversy about Indian Persian’s status even in the early modern period. Indeed, the heated debates about the very legitimacy of Indian Persian — for instance, between Iranian intellectuals like Shaikh ‘A lã Hazûn and their Indian counterparts like Sirāj al-Dīn ‘A lã Khān Ārzû — have been well-documented. But those debates, actually, were primarily an eighteenth-century development, as was the related emergence of rekhta (i.e. Urdu) as an alternative literary lingua franca to Persian. Like Braj, Urdu too was no ordinary vernacular, but one with cosmopolitan reach across the subcontinent, and with a similarly agonistic but nevertheless symbiotic relationship with its normative (in this case Persian) counterpart. One must try to ponder, then, the connection between a cultural obsession with newness and different modes of vernacularity, for it seems obvious that as

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115 Although it is important to keep in mind that even a relatively modern scholar like Khān Ārzû, even in the context of this rivalry with Iranian critics over the very legitimacy of Indian Persian, could be perfectly at ease invoking a canonical master from outside India, Nizâmî Ganjavî, as the inspiration for the title of one of his lexicographical masterpieces, Chīrāgh-i Hidâyat ("The Guiding Light"). As volume two of Ārzû’s larger work, "The Torch/Spotlight on Languages" (sirāj al-lughât), Chīrāgh-i Hidâyat focuses on the idiomatic expressions of the most modern (mut’akhkhîrîn) Persian poets that are not found in any lexicographical book such as the Farhang-i Jahângîrî, Surûrî, Burhân-i Qâ’î, and so on.” He explains his choice of title in the preface: “Anyone who has hunted down the truth and bothered to find out knows the extent to which my soul is scorched having ignited this lamp; and thus, among the verses of the venerated Shaikh, Khwâja Nizâmî Ganjavî, God’s mercy upon him, this croupet has emerged as a kind of prophecy for the truth of this work: ’You have lit the mind’s eye / You have set ablaze the guiding light’. My hope from His Divine Majesty is that this light will remain lit until the Day of Judgment, with grace/honor from His [stern] majesty and [luminescent] dignity.” Farhang-i Chīrāgh-i Hidâyat, edited by Muhammad Dâbir Siyâqî (Tehran: Ma ‘rifât, [1959]).
with Braj vis-à-vis Sanskrit, those who chose to use Urdu did not do so out of some incapacity to use Persian — as has been argued, following the logic of Persian decline inherent to the sabk-i hindī model — but through a conscious choice, through an appropriation of some Persianate norms and a reconfiguration of others, and through an active transformation of the spoken language into a widely used cosmopolitan vernacular. And here again, where the sabk-i hindī model would simply conflate three hundred years’ worth of Mughal poetry, poetics, and literary historical development into one worthless category, completely ignoring any shift in sensibility between, say, Chandar Bhān’s mid-seventeenth century and Ārzū, Saudā, and Mīr’s mid-eighteenth, a more historicized approach that tries to put tāza-gūrī in its comparative context could do more help us to understand the multiplicity of possible ways of using (and, admittedly, sometimes abusing) Persian, and then Urdu, in early modern India. For something fundamental changed, in Iran, in India, and between Iran and India, in the hundred-odd years that separate, for instance, Surūrī’s effusive praise of an Indian dictionary like Farhang-i Jahāngīrī and Hazīn’s repudiation of Indian Persian as worthless and pedestrian. And yet we have only begun to scratch the surface.

Finally, there is a global dimension to all this too. The sixteenth-century Ottoman intellectual, cultural, and administrative world has been recently characterized as “remarkable for…innovation that is often extreme,” an age in which millenarian “eschatological expectation” fostered imagery that was “marked perhaps more by radical,
even catastrophic, disjuncture with the past than by smooth continuity." Given the
popularity there too of tâza poets like Faizî, who has been described as among "the chief
foreign influences on the development of Ottoman Turkish poetry," and the degree to
which Ottoman literary and commercial cultures were integrated with those of Europe via
the Mediterranean basin, we can also rightfully draw an arc that forces us to reclaim
some of the striking parallels between the poetics of tâza-gû'r and those of European
Mannerism, to which sabk-i hindî has often been derisively compared. The Mannerists
have also suffered greatly at the hands of modern critics, many of whom saw the
Mannerists' artistic and literary innovations in terms quite similar to those attributed to
Persian poets of the tâza era. Where critics of sabk-i hindî have been exasperated by
its "abstract ideas, farfetched similes, quaint metaphors, queer fancybuilding and morbid
imagery [that] had reduced the lyric to an absurdity," European critics have likewise
seen in Mannerism "a demand only to advance incomprehensible and dazzling

116 Cornell Fleischer, "The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of
Suleymân," in Soliman le magnifique et son temps, edited by Gilles Veinstein (Paris: Documentation
française, 1992), 159-77.


118 Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpakh. The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern

119 Ironically, in European cultural history the concept of Mannerism is, like sabk-i hindî, a twentieth-
century invention. It began as an art historical term used to decry the period of self-consciously
intellectualized aesthetic formalism that emerged in sixteenth-century Italian art—i.e. between the late
Renaissance, and immediately preceding the Baroque periods. Despite this art-historical provenance, and
the fact that the term itself comes from Italian maniera, Mannerism has come to be applied as a category
not just in the visual arts, and not just in Italy, but in numerous cultural fields throughout Europe. As James
V. Mirollo explains, the term is derived from maniera, by way of "Latin manus and manalis, meaning 'the
hand,' or 'of the hand,' including the artist's hand or touch and thereby 'finishing touch.'" Mannerism and

remarks.” 121 Like tāza-ğūţ, in other words, Mannerism has been dismissed simply as
vain anti-classicism, a vapid fad for poetic prestidigitation from which the arrival of
Baroque’s emotional sincerity was considered — not unlike Bahār’s bāz-gasht — a
welcome relief. 122 Critics have gone so far as to decry their approach to aesthetic
ingenuity, a mere “stylish style,” as the art historian John Shearman called it, as
completely lacking in human substance, a formalism that “precludes overt passion,
vioent expression, real energy.” 123

This response to Mannerist innovations was basically a product of Romanticism, and
almost exactly parallels that which has greeted the tāza-ğūyan via the sabk-i hindī model.
But just as European scholars are beginning to see the Mannerists in a more favorable
light, and to view their insistence on formal innovation less as an empty gesture and more
as a dynamic response to their changing early modern historical milieu, so too can we
profit by a similar reappraisal — both aesthetic and historical — of the tāza-ğūyan. One
could also argue that, within the global context of early modernity, a comparative
analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of the two movements is both justified and

121 Leo Catana, Vico and Literary Mannerism: A Study in the Early Vico and His Idea of Rhetoric and
Ingenuity (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 18.

122 Interestingly enough, though, mannerism too is undergoing somewhat of a favorable critical reappraisal
of late, thanks no doubt to increased postmodern tolerance and respect for formal ingenuity. See for
instance Leo Catana, Vico and Literary Mannerism: A Study in the Early Vico and His Idea of Rhetoric and
Ingenuity (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Arnold Hauser, Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and
University, 1986); John M. Steadman, Redefining a Period Style: “Renaissance,” “Mannerist,” “and
“Baroque” in Literature (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1990); James V. Mrollo Mannerism and
Renaissance Poetry: Concept, Mode, Inner Design (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Henri

necessary. On a purely historical level, the contemporaneity of the two movements, the
degree to which they both prefigure the high formalism of nineteenth- and especially
twentieth-century literary modernism, and the way that they have both been subject to an
orphaned, in-between historical periodization would pose an interesting challenge to
many current models of literary history in both India and Europe. And on a literary
theoretical level, it is hard not to notice the striking parallels between the theoretical
postures underlying the two movements. Beyond the broad conceptual agreement
between the notions of mannerist “ingenuity” and tāza-gūʾī, there is an uncanny harmony
even in their theoretical minutiae — e.g. Mannerist “acuteness” of expression (acutezza)
vis-à-vis tāza-gūʾī’s “tightness” or “connectedness”(rabt); the Mannerists’ attention to
metaphor as the staple of literary revivification vis-à-vis tāza-gūʾī’s similar obsession
with innovative metaphor (istiʿāra); or the Mannerist sense that an artistic expression, as
the seventeenth-century Mannerist theoretician Matteo Peregrini insisted, “must be rare
and remote from the normal way of using the words in question”124 compared with Indo-
Persian literary theorists’ definitions of īhām, a kind of punning in which the poet
intentionally thwarts readers’ expectations by intending a word’s “remote” meaning
rather than the “near” one.

Moreover, for the Mannerists, no less than for the tāza-gūyān, there was general
agreement that a historically informed, cosmopolitan “sensus communis [was] of utmost

124 See Catana, Vico and Literary Mannerism, 18.
importance” as a prior condition of ingenuity. In other words, one had to respect and master the existing canon and conventions before one could successfully innovate. And thus the ubiquitous Indo-Persian trope of Truth (haqq) as an immanent but veiled reality in a constant process of being disclosed anew by what Chandar Bhân himself called “magical descriptions” (jādū-bayâni) finds a striking parallel in Peregrini’s assertion that “the intellect does not create, but only unveils and presents.” Or, as Bedil put it:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{gar nisâb-i sukhan shikâfâ-i} \\
&\text{ān-chi dar vahm nîst yâfta-i}
\end{align*}
\]

If you tear asunder the veil on poetry’s face  
You get to things that are beyond imagining

Perhaps what we are really seeing here is a combined sense of both anxiety and excitement about the early modern world, a sense that manifested itself in various ways from the salons of Europe to the salons of Delhi — perhaps not with total “symmetry,” but with undeniable “simultaneity.” What an analysis of these various literary simultaneities might yield is impossible to say given our current state of knowledge. Perhaps many of them, if pursued, will lead nowhere, or maybe even contradict much of what has been written in the preceding pages. But even if the best we can hope for is a more sensitive excavation of the medieval and early modern meaning of comparative linguistic terms like istî’mâl-i hind within the Persophone world, combined with an effort

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126 *Divân-i Brahman*, 43.5.


128 Quoted as translated in S. R. Faruqi, “Stranger in the City,” 18 (English), 73 (Persian).

to examine what, if any relationship such terms bore to the emic theorization of aesthetic developments like tāza-gūḥ, it would still be a marked improvement over the continued casual usage of the outdated and still ideologically charged language of sabk-i hindī.

Indeed, Jacques Barzun once wrote that “cultural periods are united by their questions, not their answers.”

Perhaps, then, we can return to asking, with Chandar Bhān:

gufī ba-tāzagī ghazal-i tāza barhāman
in tarḥ-i tāza tarz-i kudām-o-kalām-i kīst

Brahman, you have recited this fresh ghazal in such a fresh voice; What precedent, and whose oeuvre, could such a fresh style possibly be modeled after?

From Making it Fresh to Making it Memorable

Even if we do so, however, there is yet another twist to the story of Chandar Bhān. For despite his constant protestations of being among the tāza-gūḥ of his day, something funny happens on the way to the construction of a cultural memory about him. He began, within a couple of generations after his death, to be seen rather as someone who had written in a much older, crisper style of “the ancients.” Ironically, this has served him in good stead among later modernist critics who recoil at the more extreme innovations of so-called sabk-i hindī, and thus see Chandar Bhān’s elegant verse as a throwback to an

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130 Jacques Barzun, Classic, Romantic, Modern, xx.
131 Divān-i Brahmaṇ, 69.5.
era of more elegant, sincere poetry. But in eighteenth-century India the suggestion that Chandar Bhān wrote in the “stale” style of the mutaqaddimān was, in fact, a way of diminishing his status as a poet. Further, the increasingly common assertion that he was a second-rate poet began to be reinforced specifically by the propagation of a number of anecdotes that emphasized both Chandar Bhān’s Hindu-ness and his association with Dārā Shukoh.

This complex project of diminution was carried on primarily in a genre of literary biographical compendia known as tazkiras, to which we turn in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Persistence of Gossip: Memories of Chandar Bhān and Memorative Communication in the Early Modern Indo-Persian Tazkira

...the problem of memory is indirectly concerned with what could be considered a phenomenology of mistakes.  

A poem does not exist within the pages of a book. It makes little sense to look for it there, or to read it silently. The poet to whom it may be ascribed is not its author. And as to its meaning — a poem rarely means anything alone.

...And the manner of our old compositions was such that it never occurred to people to write about these things in books. They felt all these minor points to be the small change of gossip...

We have seen in the preceding chapters that focusing on different ways of "looking through Chandar Bhān’s eyes" can produce radically different results. To try and really get a sense of the administrative and ethical benchmarks that informed his understanding of what it meant to be an official in the Mughals’ courtly bureaucracy, we had to dig deep into the world of akhlāqī norms and the canons of inshā’ as they developed over several

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centuries, as well as how they were recalibrated under the British. As an elite munshi, Chandar Bhān was perforce familiar with those norms and canons, which, as we saw in Chapter Two, shows clearly in a text like Chahār Chaman. We also saw that reading a text like Chahār Chaman as an exemplary, composite work of inshā’ allows us not only to get a sense of how he viewed his place in Mughal literary and political culture, but also to try and think through some of the generic categories that Chandar Bhān would have worked with, and see why he deployed various forms of prose in the way that he did. The first two chapters, then, basically tried to grapple with Chandar Bhān’s role as a munshi and a master prose stylist of his day.

One thing that we saw in Chahār Chaman, though, is the degree to which Chandar Bhān’s understanding of the Mughal world included a broadening sense of the world at large. That larger world beyond South Asia figured clearly in his vision of the bustling cosmopolitanism of the court and of Mughal urban life generally. It also contributed to a sense of historical newness, one major articulation of which was the poetics of freshness that Chandar Bhān clearly saw himself contributing to in his literary career and Dīvān. We also quickly saw in Chapter Three, however, that to see Mughal poetry through Chandar Bhān’s eyes was in some sense insufficient to truly grasp his place in the trajectory of Indo-Persian literary history. For that we had to look through the various telescoping lenses of literary historiography, and we saw that tāza-gū’ī, sabk-i hindī, modern romanticism, nationalist and socio-religious understandings of linguistic identities, and so on, all had a part to play in framing the discussion about Mughal-era poetry and the place of someone like Chandar Bhān in it.
Yet another possible lens through which we can look at Chandar Bhān is that of those who constructed “memories” of him in the generations after his death, in the archive of Indo-Persian *tazkiras* (biographical compendiums) that were produced ca. 1680–1800 CE. Here too, we will find that as soon as we scratch a bit beneath the surface of the various *tazkira* accounts of Chandar Bhān’s life, career, and place in Mughal society, we also open up a space for discussion of the broader discursive mechanics of the *tazkira* tradition itself, in particular the way that certain kinds of literary information and knowledge were (and, in a sense, continue to be) transmitted over time.

We have encountered a significant selection from Chandar Bhān’s writings and their historical context in the above chapters. And yet one of the most fascinating things about our *munshi* is that his single most famous poetic utterance was, in all likelihood, not actually composed by him. The verse itself, and the story that goes along with it, are first recorded about twenty years after his death, ca. 1680 CE. This first account sets in motion a series of anecdotes and “memories” of Chandar Bhān that often seem completely at odds with what we know of him from his own writings and those of his immediate contemporaries. Of course, the Indo-Persian *tazkira* tradition is vast, comprising hundreds of works over several centuries in both Persian and Urdu, and there was a particular efflorescence of *tazkira*-writing in the eighteenth century. I therefore cannot hope to make definitive or comprehensive statements here. But by carefully examining some of the key versions of the stories told about Chandar Bhān in various *tazkiras* and modern accounts over the course of nearly two centuries, I hope to suggest
that we can learn a great deal about the function of memory and “memorative communication” in Indo-Persian literary cultural historiography from the persistence of what amounts, basically, to literary gossip.

Of Secretaries and Kings: Chandar Bhān the Heretic

Virtually all the elements of what would eventually become the dominant memorative image of Chandar Bhān’s biography are present in the first two tazkira entries which mention him: Muhammad Afzal Sarkhūsh’s Kalimāt al-Shu’arā and Sher Khān Lodi’s Mir’at al-Khayāl. Sarkhūsh himself tells us that the title Kalimāt al-Shu’arā is a chronogram, which places the initial composition of the text in 1093 AH/1682 CE. He writes:

Chandar Bhān Brahman had a capable nature (tab ‘-i rasā). He recited poems in the style of the ancients, clear and distilled (shusta-o-sāf), and was a treasure among the Hindus. He compiled a dīvān of poetry, and also possessed a genius for epistolography. One day, the order for him to recite a poem came down from the Seat of the Imperial Caliphate [i.e., from Shāh Jahān’s court]. He recited this verse of his:

marā dilli-st ba-kufr āshnā ki chandīn bār
ba-ka’ba hurdam-o-bāz-ash barahman āwardam

I have a heart so acquainted with infidelity that, however many times I took it to Mecca I brought it back still a Brahman.

The Emperor Shāh Jahān, protector of the faith, was furious. He exclaimed: “This ill-starred infidel is a heretic. He should be executed.” Afzal Khān submitted that “The following couplet of Hazrāt Shaikh Sa’dī is an appropriate rejoinder” (munāsib-i hāl-i īn bāt ast):

khar-i ṯisā agar ba-makka ravad
chān biyāyad hanūz khar bāshad

[Even] If Jesus’s donkey goes to Mecca
It’s still just a jackass when it comes back.
The Emperor smiled, and turned his attention elsewhere. They quickly escorted him [i.e. Chandar Bhān] to the door out of the privy chamber (diwān-i khās).

This is the basic form of the anecdote which will be the primary object of analysis for the rest of this chapter. Besides the obvious tenor, which seeks to cast Chandar Bhān as an impudent fool, note especially Sarkhūsh’s suggestion that Chandar Bhān wrote “in the style of the ancients” (ba tarz-i qudamā) In light of the historiographical trajectory examined in the previous chapter, it should be clear that this was a way of, at best, damning the munshi with faint praise.

We cannot really know the provenance of the anecdote as a whole, or the verse in question, because Sarkhūsh doesn’t tell us. He does, however, go on to provide the earliest known written account of another verse often attributed to Chandar Bhān, but adds an interesting twist. Sarkhūsh knows that latter the verse is not by Chandar Bhān, and yet he reports on it in connection with the munshi anyway, perhaps in order to further the mnemonic association of Chandar Bhān with antinomian verse and poor manners.

The following couplet is widely attributed to him [Chandar Bhān], but research makes clear [fol. 8b] that it is [the composition] of some other Hindu:

babīn karāmat-i but-khāna-i marā ai shaikh
ki chūn kharāb shavad khāna-i khudā gardad

Just see the miraculous power of our idol-house, O Shaikh — When it gets destroyed, it becomes a house of Allāh!
Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali Māhir⁴ asked him: “Is this verse yours?” He said, “Perhaps I composed it...I don’t remember.” Here too he employed a clever strategy (injā ham harīfī ba-kār burd) — if it had really been his own verse that he ‘didn’t remember’ (chūn sh‘er-i bar-jasta az wai ba-khātīr nabūd), then mention of the verse should have sufficed to remind him. This faqīr (i.e. the author) prefers the writing of poems sincerely and truly. (ash‘ār (-i) rāst ba-rāst nawishtan faqīr rā khush mī-āyad).⁵

Here, Sarkhūsh seems to be suggesting that Chandar Bhān could have just said “hmm, I don’t remember”; instead, by saying “maybe I composed it” he slyly accepts credit for a verse that he might not have composed, without actually lying about it. To this effect, another of the manuscripts at Aligarh contains an addendum in which Sarkhūsh gives an example from his own experience to drive the point home:

This faqīr had composed a couplet in praise of the Prophet and his companion, which has become quite well-known:

Muhammad yeki bā ‘Ali walī ast
chu yek kas ki nām-ash Muhammad ‘Alī ast

Muhammad and ‘Alī have such a singular friendship —
That they’re like one person whose name is Muhammad ‘Alī

Mīrzā Bīdīl said that “I have heard this couplet attributed to Mīr Ḥāshmī.” I said: “Mīr Ḥāshmī is not capable of this type of [mystical] searching. Perhaps there has been some mix-up (tavārud).⁶ But I, for my part, revel in what you have said — we have both [I and Mīr Ḥāshmī] gained prestige [by the association].”

⁴ Māhir, a prominent poet himself, was Sarkhūsh’s ustād, and Sarkhūsh was in turn the ustād of Brindāban Dās Khūshgū (author of Safīnā-i Khūshgū) and Bhūpat Rai Br-gham Bāirāgī. For details, see Sayyid ‘Alī Reza Naqvi, Tāzikra-Navīsī-yi Fārsī dar Hind va Pākistān (Tehran: Mu’assasa-i Matbu’at-i ‘Ilmi, 1964), 210-12.

⁵ Kalimāt al-Shu’arā, MS, Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, University Collection #95 (Farsiya Akhbar), 8a-8b.

⁶ “Tavārud” is a technical term which sometimes indicates an incidental or “accidental quotation” of another’s verse, and sometimes indicates that two poets came up with the same conceit independent of one another. It is distinguished from plagiarism on grounds of intentionality. For details, see Losensky, Welcoming Fīghānī; Faruqi, “Stranger in the City.”
[Only] One of Brahman’s couplets has some good flavor — citing it will be sufficient:

\[
\begin{align*}
chi \ ikhtilāt \ ba-\text{arbāb-}i \ 'aql \ shaidā \ rā \\
ba-taur-i \ khud \ baguzārid \ lahza-i \ mā \ rā
\end{align*}
\]

What business does the mad lover have with the masters of reason? Traverse the twinkling of our eye (i.e. life) in your own style.

Sarkhūsh’s point here is to demonstrate an appropriate, polite response in the event of a (suspected) literary misattribution, to contrast with what he views as Chandar Bhān’s coy, self-serving response. In Sarkhūsh’s eyes Chandar Bhān, on top of having two potentially offensive verses associated with him, has compounded the problem by committing a serious breach of etiquette: in the first verse by not knowing his place, and in the second verse apparently by affecting nonchalance where a forthright admission of tavārūd would have been more appropriate.

One can see, even in this short excerpt, the conversational style that he adopts and the way in which various local personalities factor into his process of remembrance. Sarkhūsh’s urban perambulations brought him into contact with all manner of interlocutors, and the conversational banter which he hears from the likes of Mīrzā Bīdil, Mirza Muhammad ‘Alī Māhir, et al, does not simply add flavor and local character to the text; it is, rather, constitutive of the text itself. Sarkhūsh himself articulates this in the preface to Kalimāt al-Shu’arā, immediately after complaining of the repetitious and unoriginal style of previous tazkiras and histories:

From among the essential particulars of the circumstances and opinions of various literati who achieved the highest rank discovery of meaning via the ladder of perfection (mi’rāj-i kamāl), from the reigns of Nūr al-Dīn...
Jahāngīr Shāh until the age of ʿĀlamgīr Shāh, this beggar Sarkhūsh was graced by conversations with many of them, and had the benefit of being contemporaries with some of them. That which I heard was more or less suitable for alphabetical arrangement, and has been consigned to the prison of the pen and the regulation of the quill under the name Kalimāt al-Shuʿarā...7

Thus his tazkira is built not on textual research (not solely, at least), but rather on what Sarkhūsh has seen or heard from witnesses whom he considers to be reliable — other poets, nobles, family members, and so on. Indeed, one can even read this dialogic thematic into the very title of Sarkhūsh’s tazkira. Kalimāt literally means “words,” but also has the connotations of “discourse” and “speech,” and therefore by extension “dialogue” and “conversation.” This resonates clearly with the meaning of a related word drawn from the same root, mukālama, or “talking together, conversation; dialogue; conference.”8 And thus the “words” in Sarkhūsh’s title are not necessarily the written words of his textual sources or of poets’ poetry, but rather the “words” of his conversations with them, and the anecdotes and biographical knowledge which he gleaned from those conversations.

This dialogical imperative does not in and of itself make Kalimāt al-Shuʿarā unreliable, though that charge has been at times leveled at the entire tazkira genre. Generally speaking, because of their authors’ conversational styles, alphabetical (rather than chronological) arrangement, and anecdotal source material, most tazkiras have been assumed to be susceptible to what one recent scholar diplomatically summarized as “the

7 Kalimāt al-Shuʿarā, MS, Azad Library, AMU, University Collection #95, fol. 2b; also cited in Naqvi, Tazkira-Navisī, 215.

8 Cf. Steingass, 1043, 1298.
thorny historiographical problems of reliability and bias that are common to most secondary, non-documentary evidence. But at least one modern scholar, Sayyid ‘Alī Rizā Naqvī, argues that Sarkhūsh’s social familiarity with his sources in fact makes him more reliable than if he had relied solely on his textual sources, such as the personal notebooks (bayāz) of Mīr Mu‘izz Mūsvī Khān, his ustād Māhir, and Muhammad Zamān Rāsikh. This would certainly be true of those poets and personalities who were known to Sarkhūsh, but as the case of Chandar Bhān demonstrates it cannot be extended much beyond his immediate circle of acquaintances, at least from the standpoint of empirical verifiability.

In any event, such interlocutory building blocks remain constitutive of tazkiras well into the modern period. They must therefore be reckoned as fundamental to the way ‘remembrance’ of this literary culture is itself a social, collective, community process — what Sudipta Sen has recently referred to as a “living archive of precedent.” Indeed, it is a deep fear of the impending disappearance of this living archive which prompts

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11 See his “Imperial Orders of the Past: The Semantics of History and Time in the Medieval Indo-Persianate Culture of North India,” in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, edited by Daud Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 231-57, in which he partly addresses, albeit in a much more general context, the distinction between historical memory and what I describe here as ‘interlocutory memory’: “A medieval historical imagination, we can posit, did not occasion such a rift between the social and the personal or between historical veracity and collective memory per se...Given an age where the disjuncture between the historical and collective memory does not obtain, where the past is not quite the object of mourning or nostalgia, but a living archive of precedent, what is historical is also memorable.”
Muhammad Husain Āzād to write Āb-e Hayāt — considered by many to be both the last traditional tazkira and the first modern literary history — nearly two centuries later:

Since I have—or rather my language has—been raised in the service of just such people, these thoughts made my heart burst into flower... But with it came regret, that the jewelers through whom these jewels reached me lie mingled with the dust. The people who remain are like blown-out lamps left in such a wilderness that no one cares to light them, or to take light from them. So if these things — which in truth establish their essential accomplishment — are left in the custody of tongues, they will be erased in a matter of days from the page of existence. And in fact not merely these things will be erased — but these venerable elders themselves will remain in the world only as poets known by name, with nothing said about them that could have the effect of truth on the hearts of those who come after us. Even though their works remain to commemorate their accomplishment, mere volumes that pass from hand to hand for money can never entirely fulfill this purpose without particulars of the poets’ lives. Nor can such volumes show in this time the world of that time; and if this is not achieved, then nothing is achieved.

...And the manner of our old compositions was such that it never occurred to people to write about these things in books. They felt all these minor points to be the small change of gossip... how could they know that the page of the times would be turned—that the old families would be destroyed, and their offspring so ignorant that they would no longer know even their own family traditions? And if anyone would tell them something of these matters, they’d demand evidence!

All these thoughts made it incumbent upon me to collect what I knew about the elders or had found in various references in different anthologies, and write it down in one place... in such a way that speaking, moving, walking pictures of their lives should appear before us and attain immortal life. 12

For Āzād, then, in the face of a fading collective cultural memory, the “custody of tongues” on which writers like Sarkhūsh and Loḍī depended can no longer suffice, and that “small change of gossip” which two hundred years earlier had been the intellectual currency par excellence was now lost in the cushions of some great modern sofa.

12 Muhammad Husain Āzād, Āb-e Hayāt. Shaping the Canon of Urdu Poetry, translated and edited by Frances Pritchett in association with Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 54-6. Of course, as Pritchett details in her introduction, Āzād had his own agendas and preoccupations with bringing Urdu literary culture into the modern age; but this does not change my argument insofar as his view of how Urdu (and Persian) literary culture had functioned up to that point.
Of course, Āzād’s attitude in this regard certainly reflects the colonial impact on the old forms of social and literary culture. Yet we should not be lulled into a belief that such attitudes were solely the product of the colonial encounter. Indeed, what’s interesting is that the fear of imminent cultural loss, along with the lurking sense that the “living archive” was by its very nature transitory, and therefore always-already in danger of permanent erasure, was present long before the post-1857 anxiety that Azad struggled against. Similar anxiety was clearly in evidence among seventeenth-century writers like Sarkhūsh and, especially, as we will see, Sher Khān Lodī. It can, in fact, perhaps be noticed even farther back, all the way to the early tazkirās of Auffī and Daulat Shāh Samarqandī. Thus the urge to communicate the contents of this living archive by way of ‘remembrance’ (tazkira) of the words and deeds of poets has a much deeper and more complicated history than those scholars who focus solely on Urdu or colonialism allow for in their analyses.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^\text{13}\) In addition to Hermansen and Lawrence (“Indo-Persian Tazkirās as Memorative Communications”), I have in mind here one of their main sources, namely Frances Pritchett. See the latter’s *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), as well as her introduction to Ḍev-e Ḥayāt. All three of these writers seem in turn to be following Farman Fatehpuri’s earlier analysis in *Urdu Shu’arā ke Tazkire aur Tazkira-Nigarī* (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1972). What is most troubling about these analyses, especially that of Lawrence and Hermansen, is that they seem to focus solely on Urdu tazkirās (the title of their article notwithstanding), and worse still rely almost exclusively on secondary sources such as Pritchett for their arguments. Thus other than a token nod to Auffī’s *Lubāb al-Albāb*, they do not incorporate a single Persian poetic tazkira written in India prior to 1752. As a result, despite the fact that they claim to “give particular stress to those poetic and saintly tazkirās that emerged from Mughal India,” they proceed to do nothing of the sort.
Before continuing with the analysis of the *tazkiras*, however, it will be worthwhile to refresh our own memories about how Chandar Bhān was viewed by his contemporaries, and how he himself described his relationship with Shāh Jahān.

*The Irrelevant Archive: The Counter-Evidence to the Memorative Image of Chandar Bhān*

One can easily find numerous reasons to doubt the possibility that Chandar Bhān had an encounter with Shāh Jahān matching the one that Sarkhūsh describes. The first and perhaps most obvious would be the fact that Chandar Bhān himself never mentions any such incident anywhere in his entire oeuvre. In fact, not only does he not describe any encounter like this, but on the contrary, Chandar Bhān describes in *Chahār Chaman* how he had been presented before Shāh Jahān at least once or twice during his early career, when the Emperor had visited Afzal Khān while passing through Lahore — and on one occasion was even presented with the handsome gift of an elephant. We have also noted above that Chandar Bhān gives a very moving and detailed description in *Chahār Chaman* of the circumstances surrounding the audience with the emperor that would lead directly to his employment in the imperial *dār al-inshā* — an audience at which he recited a very innocuous quatrain praising the emperor, and that took place after the death of his patron and mentor Afzal Khān, the man who is supposed to have defused the situation in Sarkhūsh’s account by citing Sa’di’s witty verse. In fact Chandar Bhān

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quickly impressed the Emperor with his erudition and expressive skills, and moved up through the ranks of the dār al-inshāʾ, eventually earning the title Rai and being promoted to the highest available secretarial post, mīr munshi, i.e. Chief Secretary. Anyone who had read Chahār Chaman even cursorily would have known these basic chronological facts as provided by Chandar Bhān himself, and could not possibly have made the mistake of placing Chandar Bhān and Afzal Khān together at the imperial palace in Delhi.

But here is a crucial point: there is nothing in Sarkhūsh’s version of the story that can really be disproved. The fact that Chandar Bhān himself never mentions the encounter does not necessarily mean that it never happened. Indeed, had such an unpleasant audience actually taken place, one can reasonably suppose that Chandar Bhān would have been not only highly embarrassed by it, but also somewhat hesitant to write about it. And yet something about the story flies in the face of everything we know about Chandar Bhān’s personality and his relationship with the emperor. From everything Chandar Bhān himself tells us, the emperor was very kind and affectionate to him. Moreover, as we saw clearly in Chapter Two, Chandar Bhān spent a great deal of time with Shāh Jahān in the course of his daily routine, according to the demands of his job as wāqiʿa-navīs and drafter of farmāns. And at no time during his entire service as the emperor’s personal diarist (bayāz-i khāssa-i pādshāhi) do we hear of Shāh Jahān ever getting so much as annoyed with his “Persian-knowing Hindu” (hindū-yi fārsī-dān) much less so angry that
the situation required punishing the munshi.\textsuperscript{15} Nor do we ever hear of a single occasion where Brahman’s religious background is raised as an issue of concern with respect to his ability to do his job. The overriding impression one gets is that Chandar Bhān was well-liked, went about his business, impressed everyone with his learning and erudition, recited poetry publicly during many important festivals and ceremonial occasions, and never, ever, ruffled any feathers whatsoever, much less those of the bādshāh.

In short, nowhere among these sources do we find evidence of the type of brazen tone of the verse in question. Chandar Bhān’s tone is, actually, consistently one of extreme — some would even argue obsequious — deference to the emperor’s majesty. He always follows Mughal conventions by referring to himself with great humility, as the kamtarīn-i bandagān (“lowest of slaves”), or as īn mor-i za‘īf (“this feeble ant”), or some similarly self-deprecating epithet. He emphasizes the grandness of the emperor: the “alchemical effect” of his gaze (which, of course, if favorable, can literally create gold for the poet); his excellent taste and “difficult-to-please nature”; his luminous and august bearing; his power, so great that it not only approximates the divine, but in fact exceeds it to the degree “that angels would rather come down to earth and be his subjects than remain in heaven.” This type of deferential, eulogistic language is not simply one aspect or mode of Chandar Bhān’s writings — it is a consistent, pervasive feature of his entire prose corpus. And on every recorded occasion which affords him the opportunity to offer up a

\textsuperscript{15} Cf. Chahār Chaman, 109-11.
poem in the emperor's presence, it is almost inevitably, like the one recited after Afzal Khān’s death, a rubā‘i in praise of the emperor himself.\footnote{Numerous such occasions are recounted in Chahār Chaman, printed edition, 6-14. For a brief summary of these and other verses recited by Chandar Bhān in the emperor’s presence, see also Kulshreshta 32-3 and 43-62. Chandar Bhān did not compose any lengthy qasā‘id that we know of. All of his panegyrics came in the form of such rubā‘iyāt, masnavīs, and the occasional line(s) from a ghazals.}

One should add that the verse in question does not, to my knowledge, appear in any extant manuscript of Chandar Bhān’s poetic dīvān, or even among the prodigious amount of poetry contained in his surviving epistolary works. For that matter, there doesn’t even appear to be a verse with requisite combination of meter and rhyme as the one quoted by Sarkhūsh. Thus, again, while this type of counterpositive evidence is not definitive — in the sense that it is of course possible that he composed such a verse and then left it out of his dīvān — it certainly is compelling.

We have also seen in the chapters above that many of Chandar Bhān’s contemporaries liked him very much. He seems to have had a very amiable relationship with all of his patrons, and with fellow poets like Muhammad Jān Qudsī (with whom he corresponded regularly) and Munir Lahori, whose high praise has been quoted above. Another of Chandar Bhān’s younger contemporaries, a munshi from Hisār named Bāla Krishan, gave his own treatise on inshā‘ and munshīs the title of Chahār Bahār in deference to Chandar Bhān’s own Chahār Chaman. So great was his admiration for Chandar Bhān’s character that, after a passage in which he dilates extensively on the demanding qualities required of a great munshī — literary mastery, sociability, discretion, and so on — Bāla Krishan singles out Chandar Bhān as the most well-liked and admired secretary-poet of his era:
“he had a pleasant way with everyone he met, in his discreet advisory role in service of Kings and Sultans…and also with everyone else, including faqīrs, the poor and needy, and mystics; whether they be friends or complete strangers, great or small, he had a way of being graceful and gentlemanly.”17 Thus all the evidence strongly suggests that for Chandar Bhān to opt for such a heterodox verse in the emperor’s presence would be, to say the least, shockingly out of character.

But suppose for argument’s sake that Chandar Bhān had in fact recited such a verse before the emperor. The idea that Shāh Jahān would get so angry on hearing it is itself not really credible, given what we know of antinomian tendencies in Persian poetry generally, and during Mughal times in particular. As we saw in Chapter Three above, Mughal India was, after all, the place regularly hailed by early modern Indo-Persian literati as a land where one was relatively free to think — and poeticize — unorthodox thoughts. The Sufi idiom had generally given Indo-Persian poetry a vocabulary with which to deal with esoteric heterodox themes. And thus ostensibly heretical practices such as idol-worship were valorized,18 and orthodoxy of all kinds was dismissed as hypocritical.19 Within this tradition, even such basic tenets of Islamic religiosity such as

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18 Cf. Amīr Khusrau: khalq mīgīyad ki khusrau but-parastī mīkundad / ārī ārī mīkunam! bā khalq mà rā kār nīś (People say that Khusrau engages in idol-worship / Fine, fine, so I do! What business do I have with the public?); or, nearly five centuries later, the Urdu poet Khwāja Mīr Dard as quoted and translated in Alam, Languages of Political Islam, 178: jin ke sabab se dair ko tū ne kīyā kharāb / ai Shaikh un buton ne mere dīl mein ghar kīyā (The idols that made you turn the temple desolate / O Shaikh! They’ve chosen my heart for their home).

19 Cf. Tālib Anull, a Mughal poet of Shāh Jahān’s reign: na malāmat-gar-i kufr-am na ta’assub-kash-i dīn / khanda-hā bar jadīl-i Shaikh-o Barhāman dāram (I do not condemn infidelity, I am not a bigoted believer
the importance of Mecca as the Muslim sacred space *par excellence* were not off limits. Nizām al-Dīn Auliyā himself had once infamously quipped that a pilgrimage to the tomb of one’s pīr ("spiritual preceptor") in India was equal in spiritual value to making the *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca. Poets throughout the centuries played with this type of insouciant rejection of orthodox strictures, finding cleverer and cleverer ways to express such imagery "freshly" (*batāzāgī*). And beyond the serious ethical and theological issues at play in such antinomian poetic topoi, there was a degree of jocularity, performative excess, and recitational gamesmanship to Mughal court poetry that has been well-documented, if rarely praised in modern scholarly works that view Mughal poetry only as decadent *sabk-i hindī*. This antinomian strain continued even after the transition to *rekhta* (i.e. Urdu) as a poetic medium in the eighteenth century: "In the convention of the Urdu ghazal [this potentially subversive trend] does dominate, and is not only made explicit but, like almost everything in the ghazal, is carried to an extreme." Such an extreme, in fact, that another scholar has gone so far as to suggest that dissent — as opposed to love — is in fact the primary theme of Urdu poetry as it emerged from the early modern *tāza-gū`i* poetry of the seventeenth century.

/ I laugh at both, the Shaikh and the Brahman); quoted and translated in Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 138.


Chandar Bhān certainly played with such themes in his own verse, as we saw in Chapter Three. And when we see it in context, we see that the type of verse attributed to Chandar Bhān by Sarkhūsh was merely a cleverly deployed variation on a very conventional theme. In fact, the identical trope was deployed a few decades later in two verses by the great Urdu poet Mīr Taqī Mīr:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\textit{makke gayā madīne gayā karbalā gayā} \\
&\textit{jaisā gayā thā waisā hī chal phir ke ā gayā}
\end{align*}
\]

I went to Mecca, went to Madina, and went to Karbala;
And after all that gadding about came back the same as when I left

\[
\begin{align*}
&\textit{hajj se ko 'i ādmī ho to sārā 'ālam hajj hi kare} \\
&\textit{makke se ā'ē shaikh jī lekin vai to wahī haiN khar ke khar}
\end{align*}
\]

If going on Hajj made one a man,
then the whole world would go;
Thus Mr. Shaikh has returned from Mecca,
still the same ass of asses as before 23

One could go on and on quoting verses like this from Mīr (and many others), but even these two should be enough to demonstrate that the verse which allegedly caused so much offense to Shāh Jahān was, however clever, very much within the parameters of commonly acceptable poetic themes and imagery.

And thus even if we were to grant the possibility that Chandar Bhān might have recited such a verse, the idea that Shāh Jahān would get so angry at such a perfectly conventional verse simply doesn’t fit the spirit of Mughal literary culture. Again, it is impossible to prove this empirically, but one might speculate that the image contained in this anecdote

23 Both of these verses from Mīr are quoted in Russell and Islam, Three Mughal Poets, 171-2; I have modified the translations slightly.
— of the emperor as “protector of the faith,” as a strong force for Islam in India, meting out exemplary punishment to the insolent Brahman poet — was less an accurate representation of the emperor’s relationship with Chandar Bhān, than an exaggeration which somehow suited some Muslim tazkira-writers’ impulse to project cultural (and political) superiority at a time when centralized Mughal power was already beginning to wane. In fact, what Sarkhūsh really seems to be doing is echoing Chandar Bhān’s own account of his audience following Afzal Khān’s death, but performing a complete narrative inversion. All three key players are the same, even if one of them was deceased in the first instance; and the occasion did indeed call for the munshī to produce a verse. But in Sarkhūsh’s version, Chandar Bhān’s is cast not as the talented secretary-poet whose well-chosen verse gains him an imperial promotion, but as a heretic — precisely in order to highlight the bādshāh’s role as a “protector of the faith” (dīn-panāh), which was a conventional enough epithet, but here becomes literalized in defense against a supposed brahmanical heresy.

Ironically, this projected image of Shāh Jahān maps so perfectly onto the archetype of the quick-tempered dispenser of harsh justice that, had it been penned by a European, we might be quick to denounce it as shamelessly Orientalist. The fact that the anecdote comes from precolonial seventeenth-century Muslim source should therefore be great cause for critical reflection. Indeed, in most of the eighteenth-century versions of the story the tazkira-nāvīs is clearly on the side of the indignant Emperor.
To contrast with Sarkhūsh’s anecdote, let us examine the first direct historical account of Chandar Bhān’s life and career outside of his own writings, which comes down to us from his acquaintance and contemporary Muhammad Sālih Kambūh’s history of Shāh Jahān’s reign, the ‘Amal-i Sālih (also known as Shāh Jahān-Nāma). I have noted some of Sālih’s praise for Chandar Bhān in earlier chapters, but perhaps it will be useful here to quote his entire entry on Chandar Bhān — not just to contrast his tone with that of Sarkhūsh, but also because, as we will see below, Sālih’s account would itself become an important source for a number of later tazkira-writers, some of whom copied his language explicitly. Sālih’s account of Chandar Bhān comes toward the end of this work, where he followed a relatively common historians’ practice of including what basically amounts to a tazkira of sorts, i.e. an account of the various nobles, religious figures, intellectuals, and poets of his era.24 He lists Chandar Bhān twice, the first reference coming in the section headed Tabqa-i Shu’arā, or “The Class of Poets”:

_Chandar Bhān, pen-name ‘Brahman’:_ Having turned up an agreeable mixture from the soil of Lahore (az khāk-i lahaur paźrā-yi sirisht

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24 Examples abound of such historical works which include lists of poets, and even biographical sketches, from the earliest stages of Indo-Persian poetry (cf. Nizami ‘Arūzi Samārqandi’s Majma’-al-Nawādir, a.k.a. Chahār Maqāla (551 AH) and Abū Bakr Najm al-Dīn Muhammad bin ‘Ali Rāwandi’s Rāhat al-Sudār va Ayat al-Surūr (599 AH)) all the way into the Mughal period (cf. Abū al-Fazl’s Akbar-Nāma and Bādāyūni’s Muntakhāb al-Tawārīkh). The generic question, however, of whether such literary-biographical compendia within larger works can be considered tazkiras in their own right is a difficult one. Though they do contain similar information, and are sometimes arranged similarly, they seem to have a different purpose — perhaps simply to serve as a references or appendices to the larger work of which they are a small part. Indeed, the fact that Sālih lists Chandar Bhān twice, under difference categories, might bear out this speculation. In the final analysis, though, the question is probably moot. And yet, it is odd to find scholars taking such drastically opposite views, even on such a seemingly minor issue. Thus Bruce Lawrence and Marcia Hermansen accept virtually any source which contains biographical information as a tazkira for their argument, whereas Sayyid ‘Ali Rizī Naqī and Fārmān Fathpūrī — who is himself a major source for Lawrence and Hermansen — categorically reject works such as Chahār Maqāla, etc., as being tazkiras, at least for the purposes of generic analysis. See Hermansen and Lawrence, “Indo-Persian Tazkiras as Memorative Communications”; Fārmān Fathpūrī, _Urdū Shu’arā ke Tazkire aur Tazkira-Nigarī_ (Lahore: Majlis-i Tāraqqi-yi Adab, 1972), 11-19; S. A. R. Naqī, _Tazkira-Nawishi-yi Farsi dar Hind-o-Pakistan_ (Tehran: Mu’assasa-i Matbu’āt-i ‘Ilmi, 1964), 1-48.

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gardida), and settled down in the Abode of Safety [and] Peace with All (dar dâr al-amân sulh-i kull âramida), [he] arrived/alit (wâqi’ shuda) [with/possessing] a very agreeable manner (pasandâda wazi’) and excellent sociability (khush-ikhtilâî). 25 He is the idol-worshiper in the temple of expression, and the [noble] sweeper of the threshold of that exalted art. He has a capable disposition, and his thought is the summit of investigation. He writes the broken script correctly, and the tongue of his pen also speaks nasta ‘îq (ba-zaban-i qalam nasta’âliq harf mi-zanad); in the norms (âr ‘în) of prose and letter-writing he follows Abû al-Fazl. When he recites his fluid verse, water flows from his eyes, and since he is always pouring out poetry his tear-filled eyes forever have moist lashes. He draws breath from the pain of [mystical] searching. Even though in appearance he is a wearer of sacred thread, his intellect transcends infidelity (sar az kufr bar mûtâbad); and although his form (sûrat) is Hindu, in essence (ma’ni) he [breathes] Islam; and, like his poetry, he lives in perfect simplicity and without ostentation. The tongue of his pen is extremely eloquent, and his ability is at the summit of skill in this art. At the beginning of his career, he was connected to Mîr ‘Abd al-Karîm, the chief of buildings in Lahore. After that, he spent his time with the minister of pure soul (dastûr-i pâk-ravân) Afzal Khân. Now he is included among the servants of court of celestial stature, and these are among his verses [several couplets follow].

And then again, under the heading Tabqa-i Arbâh-i Inshâ’ (“The Class of Masters of Belles-Lettres”)

Chandar Bhân: Who, like his expression (sukhân) is clear in the perfect lack of ostentation, and possesses correct practice in the art of epistles and belles-lettres. In letter-writing and conveying of [epistolary] subject-matter he has a skill approaching perfection. In the beginnings of his career he was with Mîr ‘Abd al-Karîm, the chief of buildings in Lahore. After that, he had a position with the [Prime] Minister of Hindustân Afzal Khân; after the passing of that pure soul, having become a select servant of the noble government, he set the thoughts/desires of many of his fellow courtiers to writing [i.e., he worked as an amanuensis]. Because he had a weighty temperament, he also thought to compose poetry, a complete account of which has been given [literally, “brought to pen”] in the section on versifiers.

25 Sâlih’s description of Chandar Bhân uses a number of words which translate as mixed/mixture/mixing, and so on, that also have the sense of nature/disposition (e.g., sirish, ikhtilâî). It is not clear whether these puns are intentional, but if so perhaps he is slyly riffing on the “mixed/composite” nature of Chandar Bhân’s personality.
 Needless to say, there is no mention here of any encounter between Chandar Bhān and Shāh Jahān, much less one so highly charged as that described by Sarkhūsh. Generally speaking, the Chandar Bhān described by Sālih would be very familiar to readers of the munshi’s own works — well-liked, humble, a master of Persian in both literary and official prose styles, and a man of “weighty” poetic temperament, prone to mystical leanings which drew heavily on both Sufism and Vedanta, but who conducted his affairs “in perfect simplicity and without ostentation.” Even Sālih’s gentle, witty puns playing on Chandar Bhān’s Hindu-ness could not be in starker contrast to the condescending tone Sarkhūsh and much of the later tazkira tradition. Further, the fact that Sālih feels no compunction about calling him an “idol-worshipper” in the “temple” of literary expression (sukhan) — in an official history, no less, of the very emperor whom the tazkira-writers allege was so likely to be enraged by such talk — only confirms the suspicion that, where poetry and artistic prose were concerned, there was a great deal of leeway for heterodox language, so long as it was clever and aesthetically pleasing.

To sum up, then: there are numerous reasons to doubt the historical possibility of any encounter between Chandar Bhān and Shāh Jahān which matches that described by Sarkhūsh in Kalimāt al-Shuʿarā. First, the fact that one of the main dramatis personae of the vignette, Afzal Khān, was dead before Chandar Bhān even began working for the emperor; in fact, as attested in Chahār Chaman, it was Afzal Khān’s death itself which occasioned Chandar Bhān being taken on as a scribe by the emperor, and that too only after the munshi impressed the emperor with a performative poetic encounter which could not be farther in tenor from the event narrated by Sarkhūsh. Second, even a cursory
analysis of Chandar Bhān’s writings yields a strong sense of his attitudes, character, and most importantly his relationship with Shāh Jahān, that simply does not conduce with the kind of naïve impudence attributed to him in the Kalimāt al-Shuʿarā and later tazkiras. Third, even if he had been so “insolent,” the likelihood of the emperor actually getting so angry and offended by a verse that, however heterodox it may appear, is perfectly commensurate with the standards of thematic content in Persian poetry, and well within the bounds of mystico-poetical boasting, does not measure up to critical scrutiny. Fourth, the event is never described in any work, in any genre, by Chandar Bhān himself; nor is the couplet in question present in any available version of his poetic dīvān, or in the abundant poetry which is quoted so extensively in Chahār Chaman, Munshaʿāt-i Brahman, Guldasta, or Qawāʿid al-Sultanat. And finally, the story is never told, or even hinted at, by any of Chandar Bhān’s immediate contemporaries, particularly Sālih who, for his part, paints a picture of Chandar Bhān’s personality that is completely at odds with that found in Kalimāt al-Shuʿarā. Thus, though this is all perhaps counterpositive, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that the encounter described by Sarkhūsh simply did not happen — indeed, very likely could not have happened.

From Living Archive to Memorative Communication:
The “Mirror of Thought” as Collective Memory

Far more significant, though, than whether or not Sarkhūsh’s anecdote actually happened is the question of why it was written, and why it was taken to be credible despite ample easily available evidence that it probably did not occur. What does the anecdote signify within the context of the early modern and modern South Asian literary cultural
imaginaire? There are no easy answers to these questions, but the fact remains that even today, if you mention Chandar Bhân to nearly any intellectual or scholar versed in the canons of Indian Persian, they are very likely to recount the tale of this encounter, and perhaps even recite the verse for you.

Moreover, using the type of counter-evidence adduced above to prove that that the story is "untrue" does not really get us very far. Many of the tazkira-navīsān who propagated this and other anecdotes about Chandar Bhân did have access to his works and those of his contemporaries like Sālih. But as we saw with Sarkhūsh, there was an oral, interlocutory space of commemorative authority that ran parallel to, in juxtaposition with, and even in opposition to textualized authority. Many stories in the tazkira tradition have their origin in the casual whisperings exchanged in the bazaars, or heard through the grapevine in networks of poetic assemblies and contests (mushā'iras and/or majālis). Once entered into the tazkiras, however, such casual anecdotes were committed to the ineluctability of textuality, i.e. to what Sarkhūsh himself described as the "prison of the pen and regulation of the quill" (qaid-i qalam va zabt-i raqm). That is to say, the tazkiras extracted memorable anecdotal knowledge from a living interlocutory sphere of conversations and urban legends, wrote it down, and thereby turned it into a fixed "representation that...is intended to communicate to others the quality, the cultural residue that commends its content to would-be readers...a collective testimony."  

26 Muhammad Afzal Sarkhūsh, Kalimāt al-Shu'ārā, MS, Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, University Collection #95, fol. 2b.

27 Hermansen and Lawrence, "Indo-Persian Tazkiras as Memorative Communications," 150.
The modern scholar’s relationship to such “testimony” was (and is) fraught with methodological tension: the *tazkira* tradition has been quite regularly denigrated as unreliable, too anecdotal, too randomly organized, and so on; and yet it simultaneously serves in many cases as the scholar’s only primary source material for much of the literary canon he seeks to analyze. The further irony, then, is that once the positivist era arrived there was often a moment in the life of many anecdotes such as the one described here after which they began to be retold, often word for word, with only a footnote pointing to the source (e.g., “Mir’āt al-Khayāl, fol 38a”), rather than with the numerous disclaimers and qualifications so often deployed by the *tazkira* tradition (e.g. “I heard from so-and-so that...”; “They say that...”; “According to Sarkhūsh’s tazkira...”). As a result, anecdote triumphs over facticity not at the hands of the *tazkira*-navīsān themselves, but by means of the supposedly more disengaged, objective, and “scientific” modern scholarly apparatus.

The rest of this chapter will try to engage this more general confrontation in *tazkiras* between the “regulation of the quill” and the ephemeral — but memorable — conversational anecdote. In Chandar Bhān’s case, we will see that ultimately what many of the anecdotes do is reify his status not as the *munshī* extraordinaire, but as the synoptic image of the Hindu par excellence. In that capacity, he comes to be projected either as failing to live up to a certain standard of Mughal etiquette (as in Sarkhūsh’s version), or more actively as resisting Mughal — or, more generally, orthodox Muslim — authority. In this latter mode, the cultivation of an image of Chandar Bhān as an acolyte of Dārā Shukoh becomes integral to the overall picture. As I have noted in earlier chapters, our
tangible evidence for Chandar Bhān’s relationship with Dārā is in fact quite thin. And we can likely say with some confidence that he worked much more closely with Shāh Jahān and several of his prime ministers than he did with Dārā. Nevertheless, in many of the tazkira accounts this relationship too is inverted, so that Dārā can be cast as a naif who violates his normative role by fraternizing with brahmans like Chandar Bhān and other heterodox characters like the Armenian merchant-mystic, Hakīm Sarmad.

The next tazkira that carries Sarkhūsh’s anecdote forward is Sher Khān bin ‘Alī Amjad Khān Lodī’s expansive Mir ‘āt al-Khayāl, completed in 1102 AH / 1690-1 CE. Lodī gives the date of the text’s completion by means of the following clever chronogram, found in the work’s khātimā:

\[
\text{sūrat-i anjām-i tārīkh-ash tawān bī parda dīd}
\text{gar tā‘ammul parda bar-dārad zi mir ‘āt al-khayāl}^{28}
\]

The date of its completion can be discovered,
If concentration lifts the veil from the Mirror of Thought

That is to say, by “lifting” (subtracting) the numerical value of the word veil (pardah = 211) from the value of the work’s title, “Mirror of Thought” (mir ‘āt al-khayāl = 1313), one is left with 1313 – 211, i.e. 1102 AH (1690-1 CE).^{29}

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^{28} N.b., the version cited by Rieu reads “sūrat-i tārīkh-i itmām-ash tawān...”; and the Aligarh manuscript also gives a slightly different verse for the chronogram — but the numerical value is the same.

^{29} This date would place Lodī’s account after Sarkhūsh’s by nearly a decade. But it should be noted that Sarkhūsh continued to add references, stories, and even whole notices of new poets to the work, without changing the title, or even noting that any changes had been made. Thus despite the fact that the title remained Kalimāt al-Shu‘urā throughout, continuing to give the chronogrammatic impression that it was completed before Lodī’s tazkira, dates as late as 1108 AH/1696-7 CE (i.e. several years after the completion of Mir ‘āt al-Khayāl) occur in the text. This makes it difficult, in the absence of a reliable, very early manuscript, to establish when a given biographical sketch entered into the work, and thus we cannot say for certain whether Sarkhūsh’s account of Chandar Bhān did in fact precede Lodī’s. Lodī, for his part, claims that apart from his notices of ancient poets, all of the other sketches are his own original
If Sarkhūš’s version was unreliable, Lodī’s account will give us even more reason to disbelieve. Significantly, he informs us in the epilogue to Mir‘āt al-Khayāl that after the death of his father and brother, “feeling his memory weakened by grief and cares, he resolved to relieve it” by writing a tazkira.\(^{30}\) His project to recover and preserve a certain type of cultural memory, in other words, is thus framed specifically as a way to relieve the author’s anxiety over a personal sense of loss.

It is a fascinating work, with the notices of poets divided into six groups, beginning with the ancients (mutaqqaddimīn) and going right up to the “latest” poets (muta‘akhirīn), i.e. those who flourished during the reign of Shāh Jahān, and the author’s own contemporaries.\(^{31}\) Lodī is also an excellent source for the study of female poets, as he includes notices of a number of poetesses, for several of whom we might have no other source. Mir‘āt al-Khayāl is also interspersed with several treatises which Rieu has dismissed as “digressions of considerable extent, connected by the most slender thread with the leading subject,” but which nevertheless offer his unique perspective on such compositions; if he were copying Sarkhūš he could hardly have claimed this credibly, at least insofar as a poet as recent as Chandar Bhān was concerned. Be that as it may, another strong possibility is that the story had already become a kind of anecdotal commonplace (the word on the street, so to speak) even by the time of Sarkhūsh and Lodī. Perhaps they both heard the story independently of one another, and embellished it according to their own set of concerns. Indeed, Sarkhūsh’s mention of a companion verse (babīn karāmat-i but-khāna...), and his insistence that though it is widely attributed to Chandar Bhān, research has shown that it is by “some other Hindu,” suggests that literary gossip about Chandar Bhān was already widespread soon after his death if not even before. Bearing in mind all of these qualifications, however, it is nonetheless the case that Kalimār al-Shu‘arā was technically written first. And, given that it is missing some of the additional details that Lodī’s version offers (most notably Dārā Shukoh’s role in the event), perhaps it is safe to assume that Sarkhūsh’s was the first written version of the story.


\(^{31}\) For details and a list of Lodī’s chronological groupings, see Naqvi, *Tazkira-Navisī*, 222-3.
varied topics as meter and rhyme, music, the interpretation of dreams and physiognomy, geography, and ethics. In addition to being a now rare and valuable source for contemporary ideas about such matters in Mughal India, these discussions in Mirʾāt al-Khayāl also expands our very notion of what constitute the appropriate parameters of the tazkira as a genre. This was clearly not just a biographical compendium, but rather a record of Lodi’s take on a whole range of disciplines which were prevalent in Mughal literary culture generally.

Lodi’s account of Chandar Bhān is as follows:

[fol. 92a] Chandar Bhān, the sacred thread-wearer (zunnar-dār), was among the residents of Akbarābād [Agra], and made his takhallus ‘Brahman.’ He was not without a mystical temperament (khāli az wārastāgī nabūda), and got started in the office of munshīs under the supervision of the King of Great Fortune Sultan Dārā Shukoh. He arrived at the empire of accepted language (ba-daulat-i ham-zabānī) through the gift of a supple tongue (ba-dast-āwez-i charb-i zabānī), and his poetry and prose became a joy to the Prince’s heart. Among his writings, the work Chahār Chaman gives evidence of his rhetorical skill and clarity of expression (matlab-nawīsī), and cannot mask the silkiness of his verse.

It is strange that the Prince’s blessed heart had fallen under the spell of his plain expression (sukhan-i sāda-ash) — notwithstanding the abundance of able men (mustaʾiddān) in the [Mughal] court of the universe who used a variegated admixture of glittering words to dapple (mutalauwin mī-sākhthand) the folio of the heart of the masters of learning with a thousand colors like vernal twilights. This circumstance (maʾnī) cannot be dissociated (khāltī nabūdeh bashad) from [one of] two possible factors: either the prince had a special affinity for that [simple] style (tarz), or he [Chandar Bhān] achieved this rank through sheer luck (iāli).

They say that once one of his couplets greatly impressed the prince. One day, in the heart of the privy chamber (ghusl-khāna: lit., “bath-house”), which was the assembly of able men of the seven climes, he petitioned the Second Lord of the Auspicious Planetary Conjunction [i.e. Shāh Jahān] that “a wonderful new couplet has been composed by Chandar Bhān Munshī. If ordered, I will call him to your presence.” By this method
Dārā Shukoh had an eye toward demonstrating [Chandar Bhān’s] talent and proficiency. The Emperor ordered him to present himself, and when [Chandar Bhān] appeared, he [the emperor] commanded [fol. 92b]: “Recite the couplet of yours that Bābā [Dārā] has liked so much today.” Chandar Bhān recited this verse:

marā dīlī-st ba-kufr āshnā ki chandān bār
ba-ka ‘ba būrdam-o-bāz-ash barahman āwardam

I have a heart so acquainted with infidelity that, however many times I took it to Mecca I brought it back still a Brahman.

Upon hearing that, the faith-protecting, sharʾīa-following Emperor was enraged, wrung his hands and said: “Can anyone answer this infidel?”

Among the esteemed gentlemen Afzal Khān, who was known for being quick with an answer, came forward and said: “If ordered I will respond with a couplet from the master.” The Emperor nodded, and Afzal Khān recited this couplet of Hazrat Shaikh [Sa’dī], that had refuted it 400 years in advance:

khar-i ‘īsā agar ba-makka ravad
chūn biyā Yad hanūz khar bāshad

[Even] If Jesus’s donkey goes to Mecca
It’s still just a jackass when it comes back.

The Emperor’s blessed heart relaxed and, thanking [Afzal Khān], he said: “It was by the power of the faith, may Allāh be propitious and bless it, that this type of answer arrived, otherwise from anger I might have killed him.” He [the emperor] ordered gifts for Afzal Khān, warned the prince not to bring such blasphemies (muzakhraṣāt) into his presence again, and had Chandar Bhān removed from the privy chamber.

At any rate, the aforementioned, having renounced his employment after the death of Dārā Shukoh, went to the city of Benares and busied himself there with his own [i.e. ‘Hindu’] ways and customs, until finally in the year 1073 he became ash in the fire-temple of annihilation.32

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32 Sher Khān Lodī, Mīrʾāt al-Khayāl, MS, British Library, Or. 231, folios 92a-92b; cf. MS, Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Zakhīrā-i Ehsan collection #920/3, f. 38a-38b
Lodi then cites a single ghazal, "from [Chandar Bhān’s] whole Dīvān," before moving on to his account of the Armenian mystic, Hakīm Sarmad.

This version of Chandar Bhān’s life adds several features to Sarkhūsh’s account. To begin with, the incorrect assertion that Chandar Bhān was from Agra rather than Lahore. This is perhaps a trivial discrepancy, but considering the fact that Chandar Bhān states clearly in part three of Chahār Chaman that he is indeed from Lahore, it gives us some reason to suspect that Lodi has not actually read that work, notwithstanding the fact that he mentions it as evidence of Chandar Bhān’s literary skill.33

Much more significant, however, is Lodi’s introduction of Dārā Shukoh’s role in the alleged incident. Lodi tries to give the impression that it was Dārā who made Chandar Bhān into an imperial munshī, patronized him, and hoped to advance the his career by bringing his talents to the emperor’s attention. But here too, as we know from the above discussion, based on Chandar Bhān’s own account in Chahār Chaman, he worked for Shāh Jahān first. And if indeed he ever worked directly for the prince in any significant capacity — for which there is, admittedly, some evidence — it most definitely did not precede Chandar Bhān’s introduction to the emperor. To anyone who has read Chahār Chaman this would be obvious, and there could be no possible way to have read that text and simultaneously hold he view that it was Dārā who introduced Chandar Bhān to the bādshāh. Some evidence from other sources, like the chronicles of ‘Ināyat Khān and

Sālih, suggests that Dārā did at one point briefly take Chandar Bhān on as his senior munshi, only to have Shāh Jahān requisition his services once again. In any event, beyond providing further evidence that Lodī seems unfamiliar with the actual contents of Chahār Chaman, the introduction of Dārā to the story tells us a great deal about Lodī’s larger agenda as reflected in this anecdote. How, then, did certain types of socially circulated information like this become authenticated as “historical sources”? How, in other words, did gossip and innuendo made the transition to textually reified history?

Lodī was writing toward the end of Aurangzeb’s reign (1608-1707 CE), a time when the memory of Dārā would still have been tainted in some circles. No doubt exaggerated stories of his and Chandar Bhān’s eclectic ways came to be circulated in certain social spheres — which would, of course, account for Sarkhūsh being acquainted with them too.34 Indeed, whether or not Lodī had Aurangzeb in mind as a potentially critical audience, such condescending portrayals of an infantilized Dārā and his insolent Brahman sidekick would play up a memory of them both as naïve and heterodox. Once Lodī writes it down, he becomes a ‘source’ for this information, indeed a source that is relied upon well into the modern era, and quoted far more often than Chandar Bhān’s own writings or any of the other countervailing evidence cited in this chapter.

Lodī’s attitude toward the prince and his alleged protégé is clearly one of obvious condescension, as evidenced by his remark that “it is strange that the Prince’s blessed

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34 For an analysis of how anecdotes like this did in fact circulate in Mughal India, and their potential political implications, see for instance C. M Naim, “Popular Jokes and Political History: The Case of Akbar, Birbal, and Mulla Do-Piyaza,” in Urdu Texts and Contexts: The Selected Essays of C.M. Naim (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 225-49.
heart had fallen under the spell of his plain expression.” It serves specifically to deny Chandar Bhān any status among the tāza-gūr avant-garde, and to reinforce the notion that, whatever his talents, Chandar Bhān was in the final analysis a second-rate litterateur who deserved neither his position at court, much less the direct patronage of the royal family. Lodī even implies that there was either sheer luck, or some lack of taste on Dārā’s part, involved in Chandar Bhān’s employment. And, though Lodī nowhere states overtly that Chandar Bhān’s religious affiliation was determinative of his skills as a poet or Persianist, the implication is certainly present, for instance when he expresses wonder that Dārā would choose Chandar Bhān from among all those other (presumably Muslim) “able men...who used a variegated admixture of glittering words to dapple the folio of the heart of the masters of learning with a thousand colors like vernal twilights.” In contrast to these mustaʿiddān, the emphasis on Chandar Bhān’s “plain expressions” (sukhan-i sāda) recalls Sarkhūsh’s assessment that he wrote in the “clear and distilled style of the ancients” (ba tarz-i qudamā) but with a much more explicitly pejorative intent.

Dārā, for his part, would have been susceptible to the munshī’s “spell of plain speech,” due to his perceived naïve and overly liberal personality, which is directly contrasted with Lodī’s image of Shāh Jahān (and perhaps, by implication, also with that of Aurangzeb). Thus Shāh Jahān has become in Lodī’s rendition not simply a “protector of the faith” (a pretty standard epithet), but also a mutasharriʿ, i.e. one well-versed in the standards of the shariʿa, with the obvious implication that the verse in question is not merely offensive, but in fact heretical on some legal level — and hence, too, the patronizing
"warning" to Dārā at the end of the anecdote. Whereas Sarkhūsh tells us simply that Chandar Bhān was shown the door at the end of the incident, Lodī adds that the prince was told to refrain from "such blasphemies" — and by extension "blasphemers" like Chandar Bhān — an admonition which only reinforces the picture of Dārā as naïve and unwise, as too open to heterodox influences and people like Chandar Bhān.

Much of this implicit, "commentative" aspect of Lodī’s treatment of Chandar Bhān becomes quite explicit in Mir’āt al-Khayāl’s very next entry, on Hakīm Sarmad:

Hakīm Sarmad:

His was originally from Faringistān (Europe), and he was Armenian. Having demonstrated acquisition of diverse arts (fanān-i shattā) with the help of his penetrating nature, he busied himself as a commercial trader (ba-kasb-i tajārat par-dākhī), and amassed abundant wealth. Once during a voyage he landed up at the city of Thatta. There, through the medium of a Hindu boy (ba-vasātāt-i Hindu pesāri), the Sultan of Love gained control over the country of his heart, and plundered (ba-tārāj burdā) the merchandise (matā’) of his sense and intellect, which are the stock-in-trade of the treasury of mankind. In that external passion and internal struggle, he gave whatever he had over to the beauties (yaghmā’iyān). He didn’t even keep a cover for his own lower private parts (sitr-i ‘aurat bar khwud na-dāsht), and from then on lived completely naked, and kept on pissing and shitting in sight of all creation (baul va ghāyat dar nazr-i khalq kardī).

Since the heart of Sultān Dārā Shukoh was inclined toward toward madmen (majānīn), he [the prince] partook of his [Sarmad’s] company. For a time, he [the prince] was intoxicated by his [Sarmad’s] charms (tarśī ‘āt, lit. “adorments”), until fate had other designs (tā ān-ki rūzgār tārī-dīgār andākhī), and in the year 1069 the throne of the Caliphate and governance (jahāndārī) became decorated (muzāyān gardīd) with the Grace-Adorning Presence, Abū al-Muzaffar Muḥī al-Dīn Muḥammad Aurangzeb Bahādur ‘Ālamgīr Bādshāh Ghāzī, may God keep his power and sultanate forever (khallad allāhu mulkahu va sultānahu).
Thereafter, the resounding voice of divine worship descended on the world. The customs of Akbar and Jahāngīr dwindled (bar-iftād), and the innovations (bid’at-hā) of Dārā Shukoh and Murād Bakhsh were discarded (yak-sū shud). From fear of the whip of justice (az haibat-i durra-i ‘adl), the black beauty-mark seducing good people into infidelity (khāl-i kāfir-kesh-i khūbān) was reformed by prayers in the glistening prayer-niche (dar mihrāb-i āb-rū musta’idd-i namāz gardād), and from dread of fate’s tribunal (az nahiib-i mahkama-i qazā), the blood-spilling wink of the idols became a hermit in the blink of an eye (ghamza-i khūnīz-i butān dar hujra-i chashm chilla-nashīn gasht). The naked betook themselves to precious raiment, and men clothed [in falsity] were denuded of their robes of borrowed wisdom (‘uryānān ba-libās-i fākhir rasīdand va mardum libāsī az libās-i hunar-i musta’ār ‘uryān gashtand)...

During these times of glorious beginning and prosperous result, in which every day the true religion (dīn-i mubīn) has a fresh luster, and every hour the shining faith has an immeasurable polish (jallā t-yi bī-andāz), they urged Sarmad to clothe himself. But due to his mad temperament he paid no mind (ū az saūdā-mizājī tan dar nadādā). Within months (fī shuhūr), he was condemned in the year 1072 to die by the sword of the command of the illustrious shari‘a, and the legal basis for executing him was one of his quatrains, which casts doubt as to the Prophet’s ascent (ki az ān shā‘iba-i inkār-i mi ‘rāj lāzim mī‘ āyad):

ān k-ū ki sirr-i haqīqat-ash bāwar shud
khud pahn-tar az sipihr-pahnāwar shud
mullā guyad ki bar shud ahmad ba-falak
sarmad guyad falak ba-ahmad dar shud

The one to whom God’s mystery of Truth became revealed
Himself emerged vaster than the expansive heavens;
The Mulla says that Ahmad [i.e. Muhammad] rose up to the sky
Sarmad says, the sky came down to Ahmad

When they took Sarmad to the execution ground and the executioner arrived, they wanted, according to custom, to blindfold him. But Sarmad refused, looked at the executioner, smiled and said: “I will recognize you, in whatever form you come.” At that moment, he recited this couplet:

shorī shud va az khwāb-i ‘adam chashm kushūdīm
dīdīm ki baqī-st shab-ī fitna ghunūdīm

There was a commotion, and I opened my eyes from the sleep of nonexistence;
I saw that the night of discord continues, and nodded off again
And with that, he bravely (mardāna-vār) placed his head beneath the
sword and gave up his life.

Clearly, then, Lodī has a sense that the earlier policies of Mughal sulh-i kull were an
aberration, and Aurangzeb’s more orthodox dispensation had instituted a more properly
orthodox social framework. One could, of course, see Lodī’s message here simply as
part of a larger historiographical tendency in Aurangzeb’s reign to “treat his becoming
pādshāh after a struggle with his brothers as the outcome of a divine decision to reverse
an age of decay by a renewed dispensation of justice.” But this was only one example
of a more general trope, routinely invoked by historians, in which the passage of time
was seen as the cause of social decay, against which the current ruler — whoever he
happened to be — was a bulwark of “truth, justice, and good behaviour.” Regardless,
there is no doubt that Sarmad’s placement in Mir’āt al-Khayāl, just after the entry on
Chandar Bhān, is no coincidence. Chandar Bhān and Sarmad are clustered together as as
heterodox seducers of Dārā, whose heart “was inclined toward madmen,” and all three
together emerge as a symbolic triumvirate of heterodoxy. This symbolism of grouping
the three of them together remains potent — although thoroughly reevaluated — in the
general understanding of Dārā’s atelier to this day, as evidenced by the recent
Encyclopedia Britannica online entry, “Indian Literature in Persian”:

The heir apparent of the Mughal Empire, Dārā Shikoh (executed 1659),
also followed Akbar's path. His inclination to mysticism is reflected in

35 Peter Hardy, “Premodern Concepts of Time in Indo-Muslim Historical Writing,” in Medieval India: 
Essays in Intellectual Thought and Culture, Volume I, edited by Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui (New Delhi: 
Manohar, 2003), 62.

both his prose and poetry. The Persian translation of the *Upanisads*, which
he sponsored (and in part wrote himself), enriched Persian religious prose
and made a deep impression on European idealistic philosophy in the 19th
century. A group of interesting poets gathered about him, none of them
acceptable to orthodoxy. They included the convert Persian Jew Sarmad
(executed 1661), author of mystical *roba‘iyat* [sic], and the Hindu
Brahman (died 1662), whose prose work *Chahar chaman* ("Four
Meadows") gives an interesting insight into life at court. With the long
rule of Dārā Shikoh's brother, the austere Aurangzeb (died 1707), the
heyday of both poetry and historical writing in Muslim India was over.
Once more, orthodox religious literature gained preeminence, while poets
tried to escape into a fantasy world of dreams. 37

Lodi's account is also the first mention, anywhere, of Chandar Bhān's alleged retirement
to Benares, which both reinforces the image of Chandar Bhān's attachment to Dārā, and
his synoptic status as the Hindu *par excellence*. Similar to the story of the infamous
verse and its performance, we have no way of knowing whether he was simply noting a
tale that was already in circulation or if he simply invented it.

But we do know that however despondent Chandar Bhān might have been after Dārā's
execution, he found the time to write Aurangzeb a letter of congratulations, replete with a
*rubā‘i* praising the new emperor's grandeur and munificence:

\[
\begin{align*}
shāhā & \ 'ālam muṭ\-yi farmān-i tū bād \\
lab-rīz-i adā-yi shakkar-fishān-i tū bād \\
chū zāt-i tu khālq rā nigah-bān bāshad \\
har jā bāshi khudā nigah-bān-i tū bād
\end{align*}
\]

O Emperor! May the world obey your command
And lips drip with sugar-scattering praise of you.
Since it is your nature to protect the people,

37 *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.a. "Islamic Arts → Indian Literature in Persian,"
Wherever you may be, may God protect you!\textsuperscript{38}

This is clearly not the sort of thing one would expect someone whose supposed benefactor had just been utterly vanquished, publicly humiliated, convicted of apostasy, and executed, to say to the person who has committed these acts. One could, of course, construe it simply as a politically expedient attempt to ingratiate himself with the new emperor, and to distance himself from Dārā’s alleged heresies — Chandar Bhān would surely have seen the ill fate which had befallen others, like Sarmad. But a second extant letter from Chandar Bhān to Aurangzeb belies this possibility. In it the munshi does in fact request that emperor give him leave to retire (which also suggests, of course, that he continued in government service for at least a short time after Aurangzeb’s accession); however, he makes this request not on the basis of any longing for Dārā’s patronage, or any explicit (or even implicit) dislike for Aurangzeb himself, but rather on account of his old age, and a desire to return to Punjab! Nowhere does he make any mention that he has ever even visited Benares, much less that he harbored a longing to go there after withdrawing from his long and productive career. In fact, he did return to Lahore after withdrawing from imperial service, and spent his last days managing the tomb complex of Aurangzeb’s grandfather, Emperor Jahāngīr. This is confirmed by a third letter, in which he reports to Aurangzeb on the finances of the tomb complex and a neighboring fort, and gives a florid account of a mushā‘ira held there during a festival.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{38} Munsha‘āt-i Brahman, MS, Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, ‘Abd al-Salām collection #294/64, f. 8b.

\textsuperscript{39} For all three letters, see Munsha‘āt-i Brahman, MS, Azad Library, AMU, ‘Abd al-Salām collection #294/64, ff. 8a-10a; for a summary of Chandar Bhān’s retirement and his correspondence with Aurangzeb see Kulshreshta, “Critical Study of Chandra Bhān Brahman,” 63-6.
Again, the point here is not simply to prove that Lodī got it wrong. The real question is why, in the face of so much evidence which contradicts his story — evidence, again, which would have been easily available to both Lodī and Sarkhūsh, as well as to their contemporaries — does Lodī feel so comfortable telling these tales? There is obviously a logic internal to the tazkira tradition which makes this kind of story not only plausible, but so readily acceptable that few if any later tazkira-nawīsān feel it necessary to openly question Lodī’s account. What, then, can this odd disconnect between what is verifiable empirically and what is important to Lodī tell us about the tazkira as a genre, as a means for transmitting a kind of literary and social knowledge which in fact defies empirical analysis, and is therefore distinct from that of its properly historical counterpart, tārīkh?

In this case, it seems pretty obvious that Lodī is out to use Chandar Bhān as a synechdoche for Hindus in general, particularly in terms of their interactions with imperial power. This raises the broader question of the tazkira as a genre. Bruce Lawrence and Marcia Hermansen have in fact, argued that the tazkira is a “memorative communication” which exists in order to sacralize Muslim space, or rather to establish a sacred space for Muslims within South Asia, by invoking the memory of past and present Muslim “heroes” — i.e. saints, nobles, and poets. Lodī’s portrayal of Chandar Bhān, taken at face value, does provide some circumstantial evidence for their postulate that tazkiras can be used to “authorize the cultural symbolism of South Asia as an urban, and
also an urbane, Muslim realm...both to honor heroes and to authenticate Muslim urban spaces.\textsuperscript{40}

Indeed, Lodī’s entire portrayal of Chandar Bhān, Shāh Jahān, and Dārā Shukoh seems to be a parable about the ineptitude, even insolence of Hindus such as Chandar Bhān who would attempt to encroach on that urbane space by insinuating themselves into elite literary and cultural circles. On the one hand, Lodī valorizes the emperor for upholding good taste and taking due offense to the perceived affront to Islam contained in the verse. Afzal Khān is held up as the clever representative of the nobility, who not only puts Chandar Bhān in his place, but does it in just the right way — i.e., by utilizing a sanad from a canonical Persian master to counter a literary offense from an upstart. This in turn allows for the image of the emperor to be doubled: he is both ideally uncompromising in his defense of the faith (din-panāḥ), and ideally merciful for not punishing Chandar Bhān once an appropriate literary rejoinder has undercut him. But it is an ambiguous mercy — the threat of his power still lurks, hence they must usher the offending munshī out of the room while Shāh Jahān’s now bemused attention is mysteriously turned elsewhere, i.e. before his mood changes again. The entire moment can be read a parable about royal power and the idealized, discretionary exercise of that power.

And in this parable, Chandar Bhān is made to play the part of the idealized kāfir who stands in for all Hindus. He (and by extension they) might well learn Persian well

\textsuperscript{40} Lawrence and Hermansen, “Indo-Persian Tazkiras,” 152. I remain somewhat unconvinced, however, of their larger argument, since it fails entirely to account for the dominant literary (i.e. utterly non-religious) mode of most poetic tazkiras; not to mention the fact that there was significant production of such tazkiras by non-Muslims, too.
enough for the quotidian purposes of employment at court, but they’ll never be cultured, at least not in the broader social, literary, and even ethical senses of the word — “the ethos of Persian,” so to speak.\textsuperscript{41}

To historicize this sentiment a bit further, it is also worth remembering that if having a Hindu at such an elite post was still a relative novelty for Sālih and Shāh Jahān in the mid-seventeenth century, it was in no way the case by the time Lodī was writing Mirʾāt al-Khayāl. By the latter part of the seventeenth century, and certainly by the early eighteenth century, Hindus had begun to dominate the Mughal secretarial and bureaucratic classes — even after “the customs of Akbar and JAHANGIR had dwindled, and the innovations (\textit{bidʾat-hā}) of DĀRĀ Shukoh and MurāD Bakhsh were discarded (\textit{yek-sū shud})” by Aurangzeb. More and more Hindus were writing Persian poetry and participating in literary circles, contributing to all the Persian philological, lexicographical, and exegetical sciences, and generally making their presence felt in elite urban circles like those in which Lodī socialized, fueled by the prominent influence of such luminaries as Anand Rām Mukhlis, Siālkoti Mal Wārīsta, Tek Chand Bahār, and a host of others.

Moreover, this is also the period in which rivalry with Iran took a particularly interesting turn. Mughal and Safavid political rivalry had of course been a fact of life from the early days of the Timurid Empire in India. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, the

debate increasingly turned less on poetic boasting and one-upmanship, i.e. literary superiority, than on the more fundamental question of linguistic and idiomatic authenticity. Iranians like Shaikh 'Ali Hazīn sharply rebuked the Indian poets for taking liberties with Persian usage, essentially undercutting all the Indian claims to poetic innovation (īṭā-gūṭ) by arguing that many of their literary experiment were inappropriate, or evidenced a poor facility with an allegedly purer Iranian idiom. This type of argument provoked heated debate and numerous counterattacks by Indian intellectuals — most notably Sirāj al-Dīn 'Ali Khān Ārzū, for instance in his scathing polemical treatise, “A Warning to the Ignorant” (Tanbih al-Ghāfilin) — but there is no doubt that the recriminations of Hazīn and other Iranians during this period left a chip of humiliation on the shoulder of Indo-Persian literary circles.42

All of these controversies about Indian Persian versus Iranian Persian were brewing precisely at the historical moment when Lodī wrote Mir'at al-Khayāl (though the debate between Ārzū and Hazīn would not take place for a few decades yet). Thus it would be fair to speculate that people of Lodī's intellectual generation were beginning to feel a new kind of pressure, both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, their claim to authentic Persian mastery was being undermined by the likes of Hazīn, whose nativist Iranian critique left no room for Indian-born intellectuals among the ranks of the authentically eloquent ahl-i zabān, much less within the rarefied echelon of eminent poets. Meanwhile

42 For further details see Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, “Unprivileged Power: The Strange Case of Persian (and Urdu) in Nineteenth-Century India,” Annual of Urdu Studies 13 (1998): 3-30. Indeed, it is no coincidence that this is the exact historical moment when Indian poets began to forego Persian in favor of rekhta, i.e. Urdu. In this context, Ārzū’s admonition to Sauda that he should write in his native tongue rather than Persian, because he will never achieve true fame in Persian, is especially telling (cf. Jamil Jalibi, Tārīkh-i Adab-i Urdū, vol. 2, pt. 2 (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1975 [?]), 684).
vertically, from "below," their erstwhile and exclusive elite status within India was being
trespassed upon by an upwardly mobile and newly prominent class of Hindu bureaucrats
and literati, all with their own claims to Persian linguistic and literary mastery.

What better way, then, to put such upstarts in their place than to revisit the memory of the
most famous of their ilk, Chandar Bhān, and lampoon him? Better yet, lampoon the
patron saint of syncretism, Dārā Shukoh, right along with him, and do it in such a way
that recasts Shāh Jahān as resistant to the prince's liberal and eclectic agenda, and
therefore by extension politically resistant to Dārā himself in favor of the eventual
successor and Lodī's own emperor, Aurangzeb.43

Lodī is demarcating a particular kind of space for cultural authority and exclusivity here.
On the one hand, there is a local demarcation, in which an invitation to join the elite
literary community is at once extended and retracted, as if to say that Chandar Bhān had
his chance, but he blew it. He didn't even know better than to recite such an
inflammatory verse in the presence of the emperor, and thereby evidenced a failure of
both intelligence and etiquette — with the added implication that it is a failure predicated
precisely on the fact that he was a Hindu, and therefore could never truly be among the
mustaʿiddān of the age. Then, as if further proof were needed, Lodī suggests that despite
his apparent success, Chandar Bhān couldn't hack it once his indulgent benefactor Dārā

43 I have explored these themes further in a recent paper, "Infantilizing Bābā Dārā: Negative Portrayals of
Dārā Shukoh in 17th- and 18th-Century Indo-Persian Literary Texts" (presented at the Annual Conference
on South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, October 9, 2005).
was gone, and was forced to retire to Benares, like any good Hindu would, so that he
could busy “himself there with his own ways and customs.”

On the other hand, there is also a global demarcation: in the very act of asserting this
local exclusivity within India, Loḍī is also obliquely staking a claim for a high standard
of Indian etiquette and literary culture, and for Indian Persian as being heir to the same
tradition and canon as its Iranian counterpart — hence the warrant (sanad) from Shaikh
Saʿdī, whose canonical literary status is beyond question.

None of this, unfortunately, really tells us any more about where the anecdote came from.
But it certainly gives us a more historicized context in which to read the story, to
understand why it made sense to writers like Loḍī and Sarkhūsh, and to grasp why it
found such a receptive audience among some Indo-Muslim elites of their and successive
generations throughout the eighteenth century.

A Possible Alternative: Hamīsha Bahār and its Sources

In an interesting twist to all this, it was a member of that very class of “upstart” Hindu
Persianists who composed the next major tazkira of this period, the Hamīsha Bahār
(“Eternal Spring”) of Kishan Chand “Ikhlās.” Ikhlās was a khattārī and resident of Dehli,
the son of one Achal Dās Dehlavī, who seems to have been somewhat of an intellectual
gadabout himself, and an avid follower of various Sufi darwīshes in and around Delhi.
toward the end of the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{44} According to its author, Hamīsha Bahār was completed in 1136 AH / 1723-4 CE,\textsuperscript{45} i.e. four years after the accession of Muhammad Shāh (1719 CE), placing it about 30 years after Lodī’s Mir’āt al-Khayāl, and making it one of the first purely literary tazkiras (if not the first) composed in India in the post-Aurangzeb period. Perhaps much more significantly it is also, to my knowledge, the first surviving tazkira written by a non-Muslim in India.\textsuperscript{46}

It is certainly likely that Ikhlās’s father had frequented the same literary circles in Delhi as Lodī and Sarkhūsh, and Ikhlās might well have been familiar with the type of anecdotes about Chandar Bhān which these earlier writers had included in their tazkiras. In fact, Ikhlās acknowledges Kalimāt al-Shu’arā as one of his major sources, especially for poets with whom he was not personally acquainted.\textsuperscript{47} Chandar Bhān would certainly have fallen into this latter category, making it all the more intriguing that Ikhlās completely bypasses Sarkhūsh and Lodī’s accounts of the munshi’s encounter with Shāh Jahān, and instead adds his own curious anecdote to the mix. His account is as follows\textsuperscript{48}:

\textsuperscript{44} For available details on Ikhlās’s life, see Wahid Qureshi’s Urdu introduction to Hamīsha Bahār (Tazkira-i Shu’arā-yi Fārsī) (Karachi: Anjuman-i Taraqqi-yi Urdū, Pakistan, 1973), 22-52. See also Naqvi, Tazkira-Nawī-yi Fārsī, 229-30.

\textsuperscript{45} Cf. the chronogram extracted from the title itself, according to the following riddle: “Whoever brings the repeated name of this treatise to his tongue will know the date of the manuscript’s completion” (har kasi ki mukarrar nām-i in risāla bar sabān ārad sāl-i itmān-i in muskha ma’alām kuna). I.e., Hamīsha Bahār = 568, which, when repeated gives 568 x 2 = 1136. The riddle appears on page 4 of Qureshi’s printed edition; see also the MS, Azad Library, AMU, University Collection #181, f. 3a.

\textsuperscript{46} Unless, that is, one counts the (now lost) tazkira attributed to Chandar Bhān himself. For details, see above, Chapter Two.

\textsuperscript{47} Qureshi, introduction to Hamīsha Bahār, 19-20.

\textsuperscript{48} This translation is based on my own collation of the Persian text as it appears in MS, Azad Library, AMU, university collection #181, ff. 17a-18a, and Qureshi’s printed edition, 41-2.
Rai Chandar Bhān Brahman was a native of Lahore; he resided (āramīda) in the Abode of Security and Peace with All, and was very much admired; he had a compassionate disposition (waz'ī dardmand), and was a friend to poverty (faqr-dost, i.e. he had a humble character with implied mystical leanings).

It has been heard from the mouths of many a knower of secrets and many skilled historians in this ancient land that, from the beginning of the Timūrid era up to the present, such a great Hindu has not appeared in the realm (hinduy ba-īn khūbi ba-'arsa-i zuhūr nayāmada) — even though, compared to Rājā Todar Mal and some other Hindus, he was neither blessed with such a degree of worldly resources, nor was he so wont to exploit his talents for profit (az fazl-ō-kamāl nīz ān qadar bahra-andāz nabūd). There had been many other pre-eminent Hindus (hindu ān-i sāhīb-i kamāl) [fol. 17a] who demonstrated acquisition of rational ('aqūlī), practical (naqūlī), natural (tab 't), and spiritual (ilāhī) sciences, and so on. But insofar as he placed great faith in highly distinguished holy men (i'tiqād ba-firqa-i 'ālyya-i fuqrā bisyār dāshī), he was able to inhale an extra whiff of Truth.

He was the beauty-worshipper in the idol-house of Meaning, and also wrote the broken script (shikasta) correctly. In the field (ā 'īn) of inshā' he emulated the excellent master (arbāb-ī fazl), Shaikh Abu al-Fazl.49 When reciting poems, tears flowed from his eyes, and he used to sigh with the lamentation of [mystical] searching. In the beginning of his career he was with Mīr 'Abd al-Karīm, the superintendent of buildings in Lahore; after that he was attached to the minister (dastūr) of pure soul, Afzal Khān, and entered the service of Emperor Shāh Jahān.

Praise God! (subhān allāh)!50 How fortunate is he whom one remembers fondly after his death! If one spends all day and night rooting in filth and

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49 Ikhlas, following Salih, is using a pun here on ā 'īn (“institutes” or, perhaps better here, “precepts” or “principles”), as in the famous treatise, Ā 'īn-i Akbarī. Actually, the whole sentence is a pun on the fact that Chandar Bhān is the successor to Abū al-Fazl’s stylistic mastery: “In the Ā 'īn of inshā’ he is the follower of the arbāb-ī fazl Shaikh Abū al-Fazl” (whose most famous book is the Ā 'īn-i Akbarī).

50 This expression should not be construed as Islamic, per se. It was (and continues to be) a part of common idiomatic parlance. Even more intriguing than such idiomatic expressions was the practice of Hindu writers, including Chandar Bhān and Ikhlas, regularly beginning their compositions with the invocation of Allah, bismillāh al-rāhman al-rāhīm. Sir Henry Elliot would later vehemently denounce this practice, insisting that, rather than a reflection of composite Hindustani culture, or even a simple show of respect for a Muslim’s patronage, it was indicative simultaneously of munshīs’ obsequiousness and Mughal despotism: “From one of that [Hindu] nation we might have expected to have learnt what were the feelings, hopes, faiths, fears, and yearnings, of his subject race; but, unfortunately, he rarely writes unless according to order or dictation, and every phrase is studiously and servilely turned to flatter the vanity of an imperious Muhammadan patron. There is nothing to betray his religion or his nation, except, perhaps, a certain stiffness and affectation of style, which show how ill the foreign garb befits him... He is so far wedded to
worrying about the wolf and the lion, then what’s the use? [?] As the melodist in the rose garden of mystical meanings, Mirza Muʿizz Mūsāwī Khan, points out:

ān chūnān zī ki chu az hādisa bar-bād ravi
husn-i mʾanī naguzārad ki tu az yād ravi

Live such that when calamity comes
and you go to your destruction;
Your true spirit does not go with you,
because you have been forgotten

From among Brahman’s glistening verses: [six verses follow, of which I quote only the last]

babīn karāmat-i but-khāna-i marā ai shaikh
ki chūn kharāb shavad khāna-i khudā gardad

Just see the miraculous power of our idol-house, O Shaikh —
When it gets destroyed, it becomes a house of Allāh!

This last couplet, which has become inscribed at the front of the niche of fame in the opinion of elite and common alike, is attributed to him, but this is simply a mistake. I have heard firsthand from [Bhūpat Rai] Bī-Gham that it comes from the jocular/garrulous (pur-sūrūtī) Dayāl Dās.

They say that one day Rai [Chandar Bhān] was passing through the bāzār of Akbarābād (Agra) riding in a chariot with his disciple Shiv Ram — who, in the time of Emperor ‘Ālamgīr, was assigned to serve as a draftsman for Nawāb Fāzil Khān, the head of supplies, and who, being in the onset of youth, captivated the heart with flirtatiousness and coquetry through every expression of his mind and body. Suddenly, the Rai’s gaze fell on a beautiful woman dressed in a ravishing outfit who was sitting in a

the set phrases and inflated language of his conquerors, that he speaks of ‘the light of Islam shedding its refulgence on the world,’ of ‘the blessed Muharram,’ and of ‘the illustrious book’. He usually opens with a ‘Bismillah’...and the ordinary profession of faith in the unity of the Godhead, followed by laudations of the holy prophet, his disciples and descendants, and indulges in all the most devout and orthodox attestations of Muhammadans...there is not one of this slavish crew who treats the history of his native country subjectively, or presents us with the thoughts, emotions, and raptures which a long oppressed race might be supposed to give vent to, when freed from the tyranny of its former masters, and allowed to express itself in the natural language of the heart, without constraint and without adulation.” “Sir Henry Elliot’s Original Preface,” History of India as Told by Its Own Historians, vol. 1, (London: Trübner and co, 1867-77), xxi-xxii.

51 Who was, let us recall, Sarkhūsh’s own pupil.
storefront selling pipefuls (chillums) of tobacco to her customers for one rupee apiece, and these enchanted customers of the peerless beauty were busy buying and selling in a heated frenzy (dar dād-o-gīr sar-garm būdā). Stopping the chariot, the Rai handed Shiv Ram a rupee and said: “You also buy a chillum from her.” When the youth approached this beloved, the saucy lady looked toward them and said: “This bizarre old man is really stupid (ablāh), that he gave you money, sent you before me, and thus placed me in your hands.”52 Exposed on hearing these words (ba-mujarrad-i shanīdan-i īn ĕr)53, they both remained too flabbergasted to answer, and simply went on their way.

The first thing to notice about this passage is its appropriation of several lines not from Sarkhūsh, but from ‘Amal-i Sālih. This might not seem so odd, except for the fact that Sarkhūsh was by far Ikhlās’s primary source, so much so that Wahid Qureshi, the modern editor of Hamīsha Bahār, felt compelled to note every instance in the text wherein Ikhlās has explicitly followed Sarkhūsh. Given this overwhelming reliance on Kalimāt al-Shu’arā, it is certainly strange to find no mention of Chandar Bhān’s alleged encounter with Shāh Jahān here. It also shows clearly that Sālih’s text was in wide circulation and being used as a historical source, even by tazkira-writers. In a footnote, Qureshi states simply that Ikhlās “didn’t take anything from Kalimāt al-Shu’arā” (Kalimāt al-Shu’arā se kuch nahin liya) for the section on Chandar Bhān — but he does not address the more vexing question of why Ikhlās would or wouldn’t follow Sarkhūsh in any given instance. Sarkhūsh has been a perfectly valid source for him throughout Hamīsha Bahār, so what causes Ikhlās to avoid Kalimāt al-Shu’arā here?

52 That is, “if he wanted to flirt with me he should have come himself instead of sending such a handsome young man, with whom I might fall in love instead of him.”

53 This phrase is in the printed edition, but not in the AMU ms.
Perhaps, having read Sālih carefully, Ikhlās simply found Sarkhūsh’s information less reliable in this instance. Though it would be far too simplistic to suggest that Ikhlās ignores Sarkhūsh and Lodī’s portrayals of Chandar Bhān solely because, as a Hindu, he found them distasteful and damaging, it is hard to resist speculating along those lines. Ikhlās would certainly have sensed the same subtext in Lodī and Sarkhūsh’s versions that I have adduced above. And, as a Hindu himself, he might have had his own experience with the social and literary controversies of the day, and would have been acutely aware of Sarkhūsh and Lodī’s biases and their implications. He therefore bypasses their versions, turning instead to that of Chandar Bhān’s own friend and contemporary Sālih, from whom Ikhlās copies several passages, practically word for word.

But beyond demonstrating that social and religious biases could play a part in certain types of knowledge transmission, Ikhlās also seems to sense some of the limitations of his primary source. This is crucial not just for the limited goal of reassessing the memory of Chandar Bhān, but in fact for the much broader goal of understanding the entire tazkira genre — how did tazkira-writers see their role as researchers, and what type of methodological choices did they make in constructing their texts? How did they distinguish between valid and invalid sources, and what were their criteria for sifting reliable from unreliable sources? What was the relationship between oral, anecdotal material and textual canons, and how did that relationship factor into the decisions made by the tazkira-nawīs?
Modern scholarship has not yet even begun to address these sorts of questions, in part because, like the inshā’ canon, such tazkiras have generally been read in modern times simply as sources of data, rather than as a textual tradition with its own set of internal norms. In the nineteenth century colonial context, it was assumed that because tazkiras tended not to be organized chronologically, and tended not to dwell on historical minutiae such as birthplaces and life-stories, that tazkiras were simply further evidence of native intellectual deficiency, of the inability of the medieval mind to produce scientifically rigorous works which conformed to standards of linear historical narrativity. But later defenders of the tazkira have fallen into the trap of simply trying to defend against the accusation directly, i.e. of trying to defend the tazkira as more historical than its modernist detractors would care to admit, rather than pointing out that there is no basis for holding these texts to a historical standard in the first place, since they did not have historical goals. Thus the debate is still framed in terms of historical standards, when all the while it has been rarely acknowledged that the tazkira constitutes a genre completely distinct from tarīkh, or history proper. Indeed, any analysis of the genre as a whole ought to begin by seeking to comprehend this generic distinction, internal to the Persian intellectual tradition, between “remembrance” (tazkira) and “that which is dated, i.e. history” (tārīkh). On a fundamental level, the tazkira eschews historical narratives intentionally, because there is no need for them — they already exist, in histories (tawārīkh) themselves. Instead, the tazkira focuses not on what has been recorded, but on what is worth remembering — a murky standard, admittedly, but one which is fundamental to why tazkiras are written the way they are, and how the writers of tazkiras made decisions about what information to include or exclude from their accounts.
Indeed, we cannot assume that because tazkira-writers didn’t footnote like nineteenth-
century positivists they therefore had no sense of the difference between true and false, or
between a reliable source and an unreliable one, and that they had no research
methodology with which to discriminate among different types of sources. Ikhlās, for
instance, is clearly distinguishing here between two sources (Sālih and Sarkhūsh),
including some information from one, and excluding the entirety of the other. We might
say that there is a distinction being made here between that which is empirically
verifiable (or at least believable) and that which has some anecdotal or rhetorical truth-
value. The information which Ikhlās gleans from Sālih falls into the former category, and
is therefore deemed worthy of inclusion in his own account; but the unpleasant
information which had possessed worthwhile anecdotal truth-value for Sarkhūsh (i.e. the
story of the encounter with Shāh Jahān) does not meet that standard for Ikhlās, and
therefore gets left out of Hamīsha Bahār entirely.

Still, it is important to recognize that these two modes are not necessarily mutually
exclusive.54 Indeed, they often overlap in unexpected ways, as in the case of Chandar
Bhān’s second infamous verse, babīn karaamat-i but-khāna-i marā (“Just see the
miraculous power of our idol-houses…”). This verse, like the verse allegedly recited
before Shāh Jahān, appears nowhere in any of Chandar Bhān’s surviving poetic, prose, or

54 For instance, speaking of Amīn Rāzī’s extrapolations from Sām Mirzā’s much earlier tazkira, Losensky
theorizes the interplay of these modes as part of what he calls “the intertextual logic of ‘authorized
deviation’…Citing an earlier, respected source, far from limiting Amīn Rāzī’s discussion, serves to ground
and legitimate his interpretive elaborations.” See Welcoming Fīghānt, 27-8.
epistolary works. Sarkhūsh nevertheless cleverly uses the verse (never mind who actually composed it) to round out his portrait of Chandar Bhān as impolite — indeed, having him take credit for the verse without actually having composed it comes across as an even worse breach of etiquette than if Chandar Bhān had written it in the first place. Sarkhūsh gives no source for the general attribution of the verse to Chandar Bhān — it’s treated as common knowledge — but he does give an explanation for why this common knowledge is faulty, namely that “research has shown” (ba-taqīq pāiwasti) this to be the case. But what does this “research” consist of? Sarkhūsh could easily have stated the obvious, i.e. that the verse doesn’t appear anywhere in Chandar Bhān’s oeuvre. Instead, he reports what he has heard directly from a reliable witness, namely his own ustād Mīrzā Muhammad ‘Alī Māhir. Māhir’s testimony supersedes any textual research Sarkhūsh might have done, and enters the tazkira as its own self-evident proof of empirical truth.

This should not, really, be so surprising. Despite sophisticated methods of circulating texts, manuscripts were nevertheless expensive and difficult to acquire, sometimes even for elite members of society. It is conceivable that writers like Sarkhūsh, Lodī, and Ikhlās knew about Chandar Bhān’s various works, but did not have access to actual copies of some or even all of those works. We have seen a hint of this already with Lodī, who, though he mentions Chahār Chaman, seems clearly not to have read it. Moreover, in a culture wherein personal authority — of a parent, of a guru, of a Sufi shaikh, of a literary ustād, etc. — was and remains somewhat self-authenticating, it should also come as no surprise that in the absence of easily available texts the oral testimony, especially of one’s ustād, would go unquestioned. Thus even Ikhlās debunks Chandar Bhān’s
authorship of the “babīn karāmat” verse not by stating the obvious fact that it appears nowhere in the latter’s oeuvre but by resorting, like Sarkhūsh, to the testimony of a respected, reliable witness: “I have heard firsthand from Bīgham that [the verse in question] comes from the jocular Dayāl Das.”

Still, there is a clear difference in the way the two verses are treated, throughout the tazkira corpus. The corollary verse (“babīn karāmat”) comes pre-debunked, as it were, right from the moment it first appears in Kalimāt al-Shu’arā. Sarkhūsh and everyone after him know that the verse is not Chandar Bhān’s, and yet they very often cite it anyway, even if only to protest that though most people think he composed it is in fact by someone else. Usually, this someone else is simply “some other Hindu,” a remark which is itself cause for some reflection. Despite the reference to the “power of the idol-house” (karāmat-i but-khāna) and the fact that the couplet is addressed to the theologian (shaiikh), there is nothing necessarily “Hindu” about the verse. Such heterodoxies, as noted above, were characteristic of a great deal of Persian poetry, especially in this period, by Muslims and Hindus alike. Is it possible that the verse was written by a Hindu as a rejoinder to a Muslim theologian, or to none other Aurangzeb himself (as some anecdotes have it)? Yes, of course. But without some context, it is impossible to know, and Sarkhūsh’s blithe attribution serves to subtly reinforce the way in which Chandar Bhān is made to stand in synoptically for all Hindus. It is, in a sense, a falsity with anecdotal truth-value. Even Ikhlās reports on it, though he rejects the “some other

55 Compare, for instance, the famous Urdu verse by the legendary eighteenth-century Muslim poet Sauda: ka‘ba agar chi tūā to kyā jā‘i gham hāi shaiikh / yih qasr-i dil nahīn ki banāyā na jā‘e gā (“If the Ka‘ba is broken, what place is there for grief, O Shaikh? / This is not the citadel of the heart, which can’t be rebuilt”)
Hindu” salvo in favor of actually naming another possible author (who does, in fact, turn out to be a Hindu!).

But to return to the main subject of this chapter, the encounter with Shāh Jahān and its accompanying verse (“I have a heart so acquainted with infidelity”), it is curious that this story never elicits doubt, whereas the corollary verse always does. Ikhlās obviously had his own personal doubts, because he leaves it completely out of Hamīsha Bahār. But it is unclear why, even if he found it unreliable, he couldn’t relate the story as a false anecdote, the way he and just about everyone else does with the “bābīn karāmat” verse. He does nothing directly to contradict Sarkhūsh, despite the fact that he obviously disagreed with Sarkhūsh’s portrayal of Chandar Bhān. It is in this context that we might read the Ikhlās’s story of Chandar Bhān and his shāgird Shiv Ram riding through the market and being embarrassed by a local woman. Perhaps Ikhlās is attempting to insert his own alternative memorable anecdote into the tradition, as an attempt to provide a more innocuous narrative to compete with the one offered by Sarkhūsh and Lodī. But if this was indeed Ikhlās’s goal, then he was ultimately unsuccessful. Only one other tazkira-navīs — ironically enough, Sarkhūsh’s own disciple Brindāban Dās Khushgū — took up this vignette about Chandar Bhān and Shiv Ram riding through the market, and that too slightly altered. Thus despite Ikhlās’s best efforts, and despite the major influence which Hamīsha Bahār had on later writers, it was Lodī and Sarkhūsh’s versions of Chandar Bhān which came to dominate accounts of him for the remainder of the eighteenth century, and beyond.
The Return and Consolidation of the Anecdote:  
Wālih Dāghistānī’s Riyāz al-Shu‘arā̀

This triumph is clearly in evidence when one examines the notice about Chandar Bḥān in the enormously influential Riyāz al-Shu‘arā̀ (“The Meadows of Poets”), compiled by Nawāb Khān-i Zamān Bahādur Zafār Jung ‘Ali Qulī Khān “Wālih” Dāghistānī (1712 – 1756 CE), and completed in 1161 AH / 1748 CE.⁵⁶ Wālih was born in Isfahān to a distinguished family, and moved around quite a bit in early life as a result of disturbances caused by the Afghan invasions of Iran (1721-2 CE) before eventually winding up in India, finally reaching Delhi in 1734-5 CE. He served under various Mughal rulers, beginning with Muhammad Shāh (r. 1719-1748 CE), and eventually achieved the notable mansab ranking of 7000 under ‘Ālamgīr II (r. 1754-1759 CE) before dying in Delhi in 1756 CE⁵⁷

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⁵⁶ This date is confirmed by yet another truly ingenious chronogram: Ṣī tāzkira āwardam tarah-fazā-yi dil shud / tārikh-ash rā dil az khirad sā’īl shud / guftā zi riyāz al-shu‘arā raft khazān / dar wai chā bahār (-i) sar-zada dākhi shud. The quatrain translates as follows: “Since this tāzkira has become a joy increaser for the heart / the heart asked the intellect the date of its completion / [The intellect] replied: ‘Autumn left the Meadows of the Poets / when Spring entered them suddenly’.” The riddle seems straightforward enough. If one subtracts the numerical value of “Autumn” (khazān = 658), which has departed, from that of “Meadows of Poets” (Riyāz al-Shu‘arā̀ = 1613), one is left with 1613 – 658 = 955. Then one must add the value of “Spring” (bahār = 208), which has entered “suddenly,” resulting in 955 + 208 = 1163. But we are not finished, because the last line contains a pun on the word sar-zada, which is often used adverbially to mean “without permission” or, as here, “suddenly”; but the literal meaning of the compound is the adjective “headless,” as in “[one who has had his] head (sar) cut off (zada).” The riddle encoded in the lines hinges on this clever double meaning, which allows us to read the last line as either “when Spring suddenly entered them (the meadows)” or “when Spring, headless, entered it (the book Riyāz al-Shu‘arā̀).” This latter reading gives the key to the chronogram. Since Spring is also headless, one must subtract an additional 2 (the value of B, the first letter [head] of bahār) yielding the final answer, 1613 – 658 + 208 – 2 = 1161 AH

⁵⁷ For more complete biographical details on Wālih’s fascinating life story, see for instance: Naqvi, Tāzkira-Navast, 293-310; Bland, “On the Earliest Biography of Poets,” 143-7; Storey, Persian Literature, 830-3.
Wālih basically follows Sarkhūsh in his notice of Chandar Bhān, and the most noticeable feature of his account is the fact that, for him, Chandar Bhān’s encounter with Shāh Jahān has become practically the only thing worth mentioning about the munshī:

Chandar Bhān, pen-named ‘Brahman’ was among the Brahmans of Hind and the munshīs of Shāh Jahān Bādshāh. One day the order came from the Seat of the Caliphate (pesh-gāh-i khilāfat) that he submit one of his poems. He recited this couplet:

marā dīlī-st ba-kuf r āshnā ki chandīn bār
ba ka’ba burdam-o-bāz-ash barahman āwardam

I have a heart so acquainted with infidelity that however many times I took it to Mecca I brought it back still a Brahman.

According to the demands of piety (ba muqtazā-yi dīn-dārī), the enraged Emperor declaimed: ‘This wretch (shaqī) should be killed.’ Afzal Khān submitted that ‘This verse of Sa’dī affirms his [i.e. Chandar Bhān’s impudent] character’ (misdāq-i hāl-i ī-ṣt):

khar-i ḫesā agar ba-makka ravad
chūn biyāyad hanūz khar bāshad

Even if Jesus’s donkey goes to Mecca
He’s still just a jackass when he comes back

The Emperor smiled and turned his attention elsewhere, and those assembled at the foot of the exalted throne removed him [Chandar Bhān] from the eminent chamber.⁵⁸

This is all Wālih has to say about Chandar Bhān— which is a bit odd, considering that he is basically following Sarkhūsh here, but for some reason does not do so completely.

Indeed, Wālih had numerous sources available to him, yet as this instance suggests, his relationship to those sources remains a bit unclear. He claims to have studied over seventy poetic collections and numerous biographical and historical texts — including

the tazkiras of Auﬁ, Taqī Auhadī, and (significantly for our purposes) Sarkhūsh and Lodī as well — in preparing his work.59 Moreover, as several scholars have pointed out, he was generally speaking very attentive to these sources’ credibility, even going so far as to see himself as adjudicating the matter when his sources disagreed. As one recent scholar has marveled, “Vālih deploys all his resources...He gathers new material, critiques his sources, and brings some older material up to date.”60 It would appear, however, that in the case of Chandar Bhān he has deployed few if any of these scholarly resources. He does not examine any of Chandar Bhān’s own writings, and he leaves out a fair amount of Sarkhūsh’s account, including the notorious “babīn karāmat” verse. He also ignores Lodī’s many additions, such as Dārā’s role in the matter and Chandar Bhān’s supposed retirement to Benares, and does not seem even to be aware of Ikhlās’s revisions and additions.

This is perhaps the obverse of a process of repetition in tazkiras observed by Paul Losensky in his excellent treatment of how the tradition responded to Fighānī. Having observed that Mir ‘Abd al-Razzāq Aurangābādī’s notice on Fighānī is “an undisguised repetition of Amīn Rāzī’s Haft Iqlīm,” Losensky goes on to conclude: “Such wholesale, undifferentiated repetition is hard to assess: Does it indicate indifference to its subject matter or rather a full reference to the earliest source available to the author without the convenience of footnotes? The obviousness of Aurangābādī’s borrowing perhaps

59 For details of Vālih’s sources, see for instance Naqvi, Takira-Navīsī, 304; Bland, “On the Earliest Biography of Poets,” 144, 147.

60 Losensky, Welcoming Fighānī, 45.
suggests the latter.”

In this case, however, we are perhaps forced to conclude that it is rather the former — in other words, was Wâlih curtly distilling the Chandar Bhân story down to its most memorable constituent part simply out of indifference?

If so, even this indifference had a proactive logic to it. Wâlih is making scholarly choices here, about what is or isn’t worth being passed on to posterity. The contrast with his treatment of Fighânî is again instructive. Whereas Wâlih “finalizes Fighânî’s literary and saintly canonization” by going to great lengths to “[evaluate] Fighânî’s importance in terms of the entire Safavid-Mughal literary tradition and his own personal poetic development,” he seems to perform the opposite operation on Chandar Bhân. He excises all other competing information and finalizes the memorative image of Chandar Bhân: not as the affable hindû-yi fârsî-dân employed by Shâh Jahân; or as the mystically inclined sanam-parast-i but-khânah-i sukhân of Sâlih’s contemporary account; or as the master epistolographer in the tradition of Abû al-Fazl; or as the author of numerous Persian works of which Chahâr Chaman, Munsha’āt-i Brahman and Dīvān-i Brahman were only the most famous; or even as the synoptic image of the Hindu envisioned by Lodî as detrimental to Prince Dârâ’s character…but rather, simply and solely, as the impudent Brahman who one day angered the emperor with a heretical verse, and nearly paid for it with his life.

61 Losensky, Welcoming Fighani, 45.

Concluding Thoughts: The Tablet of Chandar Bhān's Memory

Thus within a century of Chandar Bhān’s death, Wālih consolidates a complex process of negotiating the parameters within which remembrance (literally, tazkira) of the celebrated munshi would be defined in literary circles. This is not to say that all writers after Wālih simply followed Riyāz-al Shu‘arā, or that no one after him ever questioned the story’s veracity. Of course, this is not the case. The image has been doubted by several scholars, and even openly questioned by a handful. But even those who have been most vehement in refuting the possibility of the encounter have failed to account for its persistence, or to try and offer some explanation of why it was even told in the first place. Thus the fact remains that after Wālih virtually no one (including myself) has been able to write about Chandar Bhān without dealing with this story in one way or another. It frames the entire context within which he is remembered, and has dominated the memory of him right down to the present day.

In fact, in some cases the image has only intensified. For instance, the early nineteenth-century tazkira of Shaikh Ahmad ‘Alī Ĥāshimī Sandelvī, Makhzan al-Gharā‘īb (“Treasury of Wonders”, completed in 1218 AH / 1803-04 CE), basically follows Lodī’s account of the incident. Thus Sandelvī too mistakenly states that Chandar Bhān was from Akbarabād (Agra), and argues that Chandar Bhān retired to Benares after Dārā’s

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64 Shaikh Ahmad ‘Alī Ĥāshimī Sandelvī, “Makhzan al-Gharā‘īb,” MS (Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh), Habīb Ganj Collection #51/6-5/(3-2-1), vol. 1, f. 59.
death. But Sandelvī doesn’t simply copy Lodī’s account. Writing at the tail end of the
debates on Iranian Persian versus Indian Persian and, and being a vigorous partisan of the
Iranian side, it was even more crucial for Sandelvī than it had been even for Lodī to paint
Chandar Bhān as emblematic of the negative effects of Hindu (and by extension Indian)
influence on Persian literary culture. In Sandelvī’s account Chandar Bhān is not simply
an infidel, but an uncultured, boorish one: an “uncultured sacred-thread-wearer” (zumnār-
dār-i bī adab). And whereas Lodī had reported that Dārā was warned at the end of the
incident not to engage in “such blasphemies” (muzakhrafāt), Sandelvi takes it a step
further and tells us that the emperor warns the young prince not to bring “such people”
(i.e. insolent Hindus?) into his presence again. The subtext of the earlier accounts was, in
other words, becoming increasingly explicit; and long forgotten is Sāliḥ’s seventeenth-
century contemporary account, in which the fact that Chandar Bhān was a Hindu might
have remained worth noting as a marker of religio-cultural difference, but nevertheless
made no difference whatsoever in his ability to master Persian and its literary cultural
ethos. In its place, Sandelvī anchors his entire account to a determinist framework which
posits religious affiliation as the critical factor in achieving linguistic expertise —
something that even Lodī and Sarkhūsh had merely hinted at. Of course, this type of
determinist view would only gain momentum as the nineteenth century progressed,
culminating in the bitter divisiveness of the Hindi-Urdu debate, and the nationalistic
vision of sabk-shināsī explored in the previous chapter.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ This shows, too, that the kind of anti-India bias that one finds in Bahār (cf. Chapter Three above) clearly
had a much deeper genealogy. I remain convinced, however, that we will only understand the true nature
of these early modern debates once we have abandoned terms anachronistic terms like sabk-i hindi.
It is also worth noting that Sandelvī openly cites Lodī as a source, albeit at the end of his account, and that too only with reference to the ghazal of Chandar Bhān’s which he quotes. Indeed, if one didn’t know better, one might think that Sandelvī had written the biographical account on his own, and was only referring to Mir`āt al-Khayāl for the poetic quotation. Be that as it may, the explicit citing of sources is a gesture that became increasingly common in this period, which suggests that literary historiography was also becoming an increasingly sophisticated discipline during this period, with an established canonical archive. Whether this trend is also indicative of European influence is difficult to assess. On the one hand, we have already seen an increasing attentiveness to source material in earlier tazkira-writers, Wālíh in particular. And yet there is some evidence that the increasingly prominent European presence in the subcontinent was indeed having an effect.

For instance, consider Nashtar-i ‘Ishq (“Lancet of Love), the voluminous tazkira written by Āqā Husain Qulī Khān “Āshiqī” Azīmābādī over the course of nearly a decade, and completed in 1233 AH / 1818 CE.66 Āshiqī definitely had some connections with East India Company officials, and it has been suggested by Sprenger that “he undertook [to write his tazkira] at the request of Mr. Elliot.”67 Still, while this is an indication that there was increasing European attention to Indo-Persian literary history, it tells us nothing about whether or not Elliot had anything to do with ‘Āshiqī’s methodology, approach, or writing style.


67 Storey, Persian Literature, 886n.
Indeed, ʿĀshiqī’s main motivation in writing Nashtar-i ʿIshq appears to have had far less to do with ingratiating himself among the Europeans than with contesting the received literary canon. Though he was born in Patna, it is reported that ʿĀshiqī gained most of his poetic knowledge during the numerous visits to Agra and Delhi which he made over the course of his life. (This pattern, it should be noted, was true for Sandelvī as well, who was not a native of Delhi, but credits his conversations with various expatriate Khurasani and Iraqi poets living in Delhi for teaching him the true fundamentals and ethos of Persian literary culture.) But upon reading Wālih’s Riyāz al-Shuʿārā, ʿĀshiqī was so unimpressed by its selection of poets and insipid characterizations that decided to write his own alternative. His entire tazkira can thus be read in dialogic relation to Riyāz al-Shuʿārā, as a direct contestation of that latter work’s vision of what constituted the Indo-Persian literary canon, and moreover of what constituted the best way of encapsulating that canon.

It is no coincidence, then, that ʿĀshiqī’s portrayal of Chandar Bhān represents the most sustained attempt to provide an alternative to Wālih’s version — or rather, if not quite to counter Wālih’s version, then at least to expand on it by providing multiple versions of the infamous anecdote.68 ʿĀshiqī also self-consciously foregrounds his methodology, quoting from source material and providing full attributions of those sources. Thus after providing some introductory background on Chandar Bhān, mostly taken from Sālih, he goes on to quote the notices of both Sarkhūsh and Lodi, in their entirety, and in

68 ʿĀshiqī Azīmābādī, Tazkira-i Nashtar-i ʿIshq, 256-61.
succession. He does not comment on whether or not either source is reliable, but he obviously has some doubts, and the fact that he assembles his sources in such a way shows that he is perhaps trying to distance himself from those sources which he deems suspect. In other words, drawing his readers' attention so self-consciously to the fact that he is quoting them is also a way of bracketing them — of no longer treating them as interlocutory sources, but rather as archival sources, and implying that his readers to do the same.

‘Āshiqi also adds a new anecdote to the memorialistic canon about Chandar Bhān, but in this case, suspiciously, does not reveal his source. Recall that Chandar Bhān claims in his Munsha‘āt (quoted above, Chapter Three) that his writings had achieved fame throughout Iran and Turan, and all over Hindustan. ‘Āshiqi, perhaps wishing to highlight the bad manners (bī-ādabī) of Iranian and Turanian rivals in his own day, turns Chandar Bhān’s boast on its head. He reports that Chandar Bhān once sent a gilt, ornamented, and beautifully bound copy of his Divān to the master poets of Iran and Turan — though he doesn’t specify which specific poets, a fact that only adds to the suspicion that he meant to generalize. In turn these rude Iranian and Turanian poets abroad — all of them, apparently — are said to have kept the expensive bindings and sent Chandar Bhān’s poems back to him.

For ‘Āshiqi, then, Chandar Bhān begins to stand as a symbol of Indian resistance to perceived slights coming from other regions of ‘Ajam. And, in a sense, this symbolic transformation will recombine with Sandelvi’s religio-linguistic determinism to produce
yet another odd effect by the end of the nineteenth century. Precisely because of his interstitial position in Mughal society and in Indo-Persian memory, Chandar Bhān came to stand in as the paradigmatic exemplar of an odd sort of equation whereby “pure Hindi + Persian = Urdu.” And thus, perhaps unsurprisingly, by the end of the nineteenth century an Urdu ghazal begins to be circulated and attributed to Chandar Bhān. Just like the two Persian verses made so famous by Sarkhūsh and the other tazkira-writers, this Urdu ghazal also does not appear anywhere in Chandar Bhān’s existing oeuvre.

Nevertheless, beginning with Śrī Rām Lāla’s Khumkhāna-i Jawed (1908), and carrying forth in later decades to Jigar Barelvi’s Yādgār-i Raftagān (1943), Brij Mohan Dittatriyah Kaifi’s Kaifiyyah (first published in 1942), and as recently as Jamil Jalibi’s Tārīkh-i Adab-i Urdu, Chandar Bhān has been transformed in some cultural mnemonics into a progenitor of modern Urdu literature. Kaifi puts it most explicitly when he says: “Urdu’s first poet was Amīr Khusrau, and its first prose writer was [the great Chishti Sufi] Hazrat Gīsū-Darāz; but the oldest Urdu ghazal that is still available is that of a Hindu writer named Brahma.” Kaifi had explained this a bit earlier in the text:

Thinking that on hearing Wali’s poetry north India developed a sudden taste for Urdu poetry is a violent injustice to history. A ghazal by a poet of Śhāh Jahān’s reign is offered here as proof. The poet was Rai Pandit Chandar Bhān, takhallus Brahman, whose birth was nearly a century before Wali’s (Wali was born in 1079 AH, Brahman in 982 AH).

Brahman was the mīr munshī in Śhāh Jahān’s darbār, and was a powerful

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69 Śrī Rām Lāla, Khumkhāna-i Jāwed (Delhi: Naval Kishore Press, 1908).


poet and prose stylist in Persian. He passed away in 1073 AH. Along with Persian, he also used Urdu, and several scholars agree that the ghazal copied below is the first Urdu ghazal ever written...

Multiple dynamics are in play here. On the one hand, there is an attempt to reclaim Urdu for north India, away from the trajectory which posits Wali Deccani as the founder of modern Urdu. But there is also an unmistakable — albeit implicit — way in which it simply makes sense to a certain type of modern audience that Chandar Bhān, who combined the Indic and Persianate traditions so effectively, would have written in Urdu.

Ultimately, though, he is far better remembered for having been the Hindu who recited a subversive verse in front of Emperor Shāh Jahān. We might get some insight into why this is so from the workings of another tradition, the oral cātu poems of South India that have recently been analyzed by V. N. Rao and David Shulman. They make a useful categorical distinction between the recorded text (which, in my analysis, would be the evidentiary proof marshaled against the anecdote) and the received text (that is, the memorable anecdote and verse, both of which exist outside of any logic and proof against them). I would like to suggest that the tazkira canon serves as an extension of this oral received text, and thus exists somewhere in between textually archived historiography and oral memory. For it inscribes the moment of oral reception, and communicates it beyond what Rao and Shulman (following Habermas) call the “premodern cultural public space” (embodied, for instance, by the mushā’iras, the bāzārs, and the coffee shops of Shāhjahānābād). In doing so, it also gestures toward a much larger textual community,

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the community of readers which extends indefinitely, in time and in the memories and reading patterns of a community of experts.

A couple of very recent examples might bear this out. One example comes from popular memory, as evidenced in a 2002 article published in the Chandigarh Tribune newspaper. Quite sensibly opining on the immoral futility of communal attacks on rival religious institutions, the author refers his readers to our very own munshi Chandar Bhan:

> Is there any wisdom in hurting the religious susceptibilities of the people by desecrating or destroying their places of worship? When Aurangzeb decided to demolish the famous temple of Benaras and build a mosque on its site, poet Chandar Bhan Brahman, who had held many important posts under the inexorable Emperor, said in a satirical verse:

> Ba-been karaamat-e-butkhaana-e-mara ai Shaikh
Agar kharaab shavad khaana-e-Khuda gardad

> (O' Shaikh! See the miracle of my idol-temple. Even after its demolition it becomes the abode of God, i.e., a mosque). 74

The image of Chandar Bhan as the rude, defiant Brahman standing up to orthodoxy is here transvalued, from Sarkhush and Lodhi's derision to a post-Nehruvian, secular admiration for Chandar Bhan's willingness to speak truth to power.

But such persistence of tazkira knowledge does not have to be explicitly socio-political. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, one of the most eminent scholars of Urdu and Persian in India today, recently released a delightful collection of Persian verses called Shadow of a Bird in Flight. Despite the fact that Faruqi is a very learned and ordinarily exceedingly careful

scholar, the verse from Chandar Bhān’s infamous encounter with Shāh Jahān is one of only two couplets which he quotes from the celebrated munshi, which he translates as:

My heart is so much in love  
with heresy  
that times out of mind  
I took it to the Ka’ba, yet  
every time  
it came back  
the same old Brahmin\(^75\)

Faruqi seems completely unaware that there could be some doubt about the verse’s authenticity, and who can blame him? There is almost nothing in the tazkira tradition itself which casts specific doubt on the verse or the occasion on which it is said to have been recited. Thus no one who wasn’t either doing specific research on Chandar Bhān, or actively scouring the archives in a targeted effort to authenticate it would have any reason to doubt. It is by far “his” most famous verse, and it is a very good one at that. It is thus, in a very real sense, worth remembering, and has gone from the oral public space of the seventeenth century to the oral (and printed) public space of the twenty-first century, kept alive in the intervening years by its inscription in innumerable tazkiras and modern literary histories. The anecdote vividly encapsulates a moment of encounter — between Hinduism and Islam, and between ordinary subject and emperor — which gives the verse itself an added power and provides a context in which to frame the memory of

\(^75\) S. R. Faruqi, Shadow of a Bird in Flight: A Collection of Persian Verses, selected and translated by S. R. Faruqi (New Delhi: Rupa and Company, 1994), 82-3. The other verse which he cites (pp. 88-9) is Chandar Bhān’s lovely rubā’ī:

dil dark khum-i zulf-i yār bastīm va khushīm  
dar gāshā-i ‘āfyat nishastīm va khushīm  
har chūz ki buwād ranj-i rūhānti buwād  
paimāna-i ārzū shikastīm va khushīm
an already memorable and clever verse. Again, Rao and Shulman's thoughts on the cātu seem particularly apropos: "Most poems have a story that goes with them, and each is invariably memorable, a perfectly worked-out expression of skilled composition, though often disarmingly simple...Together, they represent a literary culture and a tradition built up for centuries. They bring to mind, in addition to aesthetic judgment, a host of literary, political, and cultural contexts, indeed a whole world view."\textsuperscript{76}

Indeed, the moment and the verse are so deeply entrenched in the collective memory of Chandar Bhān that they have both found their way into this, the only known pictorial depiction of the munshi:

\textsuperscript{76} Rao and Shulman, \textit{Poem at the Right Moment}, 4.
The picture is reproduced in the first modern, but nevertheless quite obscure twentieth-century edition of Chandar Bhān’s poetic divān, the Gulzār-i Bahār, Maʿārif ba-Bazm-i Nazm-i Brahman, compiled by one Bhagwant Rai Sunnāmī. It is not at all clear whether the painting is authentic, especially since there are no other known paintings of Chandar Bhān, and in any case this one does not appear to conform at all to seventeenth-

77 I have been unable to confirm a date for its composition, but it is most likely pre-Independence. My photocopy of the book contains no date.
century Mughal style. There is also the added fact of its tellingly vague caption, which states simply that it is “an exact reproduction of the ancient painting.” Be that as it may, even if the painting is a complete fabrication, an invention of Sunnāmī himself, it perhaps proves my point even more. The memory of Chandar Bhān has become so invested in this single moment that a modern scholar who is doing research on the munshi cannot imagine Chandar Bhān’s life and legacy without reference to this encounter. Moreover, he knows that any reader educated in the Indo-Persian tradition is likely to know, instantly, exactly what this painting depicts, without much reference to anything outside the painting itself.

The painting’s Persian caption should, by now, strike a familiar note: “Prince Dārā Shukoh’s introduction of Munshi Chandar Bhān Brahman to the Presence of Emperor Shāh Jahān in the Blessed Private Chamber (ghusl-khāna) of Delhi.” Shāh Jahān is seated to the left, being fanned by an attendant, faced by Dārā (bearded) and Chandar Bhān (mustachioed) on the right hand side, with heads deferentially bowed. The painting cannot speak to us, obviously, but the artist has employed an ingenious device with which to communicate the kernel of the anecdote for us. Since he cannot come of the page and recite the poem for us, Chandar Bhān is depicted as holding a tablet (lauh), on which is written our infamous verse: “I have a heart so acquainted with infidelity that however many times / I took it to Mecca I brought it back a Brahman.”

78 N.b., the tablet depicts a relatively common variation on the verse, with the second line reading: ba-ka’ba raftlam va bāz-ash barahman āvurdam (“I went to Mecca, and brought it back a Brahman”).
Figure 2: Detail of Figure 1, close up on Dārā Shukoh, Chandar Bhān Brahman, and a writing tablet

It is a fitting image, in particular because of the strong connection between the writing tablet (lauh), and memory in the Islamicate philosophical imagination. It is the primordial preserved-tablet (al-lauh al-mahfūz) “on which the destinies of men have been engraved since the beginning of time.” But there is a double meaning to this symbolism, because that which has been “preserved” has also been “memorized” through “a sequence of articulations of what has been preserved on this primordial tablet.”79

In a way, then, we might end by suggesting that the *tazkira* as a genre, analyzed diachronically, presents us with a similar sequence of articulations which are bound up with received memories and the inscription of those memories. And thus in the case of Chandar Bhān it is not the recorded texts of history, or even his own writings which serve as the primary reference point for the remembrance of him. Rather, it is this “sequence of articulations” in the *tazkiras* which come to be preserved, and memorized, on the imaginative tablet upon which his legacy has been written for him.
CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation at a level of relative minutiae: a prince of Mughal India having a meeting with a relatively obscure north Indian saint, accompanied by a secretary. But that single meeting, and the attempt to put it and one of its main participants into a wider historical context, opened up a whole range of questions and lines of inquiry. I hope that I have been able to address some of those questions in the preceding pages, even if only to a limited extent.

I have covered a great deal of material, obviously, and yet I have also, in so many ways, barely scratched the surface. But what I have tried to do more than anything is to show the complex interpretive possibilities that are available to us if we are willing to take seriously and examine anew the intellectual lives of Mughal cognoscenti like Chandar Bhān. In Chapter One I tried to show that, modern received wisdom notwithstanding, Mughal inshā' was not merely a self-contained litany of empty rhetoric, but rather a complex and varied constellation of expressive prose possibilities that drew self-consciously on very deep traditions and norms from a variety of social and textual traditions. In short, my guiding principle was that if someone like Chandar Bhān had a sense of the importance of those deep norms and traditions in his own intellectual life, then we too should try to be cognizant of their origins and development.
In Chapter Two I tried to step out of the historical trajectory of *longue durée* norms, and into the world of secretarial practice, as embodied in Chandar Bhan's prose magnum opus, *Chahār Chaman*. That analysis grew quite lengthy, despite in the end being limited basically to the first two of Chandar Bhan’s “Four Gardens”; still, I hope that even with that limited scope I was nevertheless able to give a sense of *Chahār Chaman*’s complicated textual architectonics, and the “kaleidoscope” of knowledge systems, cultural vectors, and political ideals that informed the daily life of an elite imperial *munshi* like Chandar Bhan. I tried, too, to show that, despite Chandar Bhan’s own status as an elite, he was very self-consciously aware of the potentially expansive didactic role of a text like *Chahār Chaman*, even to an audience that was much broader — both demographically, and in terms of its transregional appeal to the entire Persian cosmopolis — than simply his fellow *munshi*s and administrators.

That appeal to the larger Persophone cultural ecumene was, obviously, also a central concern of Chapter Three. In that Chapter I grappled with the complex, multi-layered, and sedimented discourse of Indo-Persian literary historiography. That discourse has developed in such a way as to make it exceedingly difficult even to *describe* the locus of a poet like Chandar Bhan within the tradition, and thus, in a very real sense, we do not even have a modern critical vocabulary that is adequate to capture his literary historical moment more generally. As a preliminary suggestion for a remedy, for lack of a better option, I proposed finally that we return to the contemporary early modern terminology of *tāza-gūt* that Chandar Bhan himself used so often, and begin anew — from first principles, as it were — the meticulous work of critical philology that will be necessary
to disambiguate pre- and early modern linguistic concepts like “istiʿmāl-i hindī” from the later, anachronistically nationalistic, and structuralist metageography of terms like sabk-i hindī. For a term like sabk-i hindī, and the larger framework of sabk-shināsī generally, does not capture the degree to which premodern Indo-Persian literati were comfortable with local idioms and regional cultural differences within a cosmopolitan framework. And thus, in some sense what I object to is not the “hindī” part of the equation, but the “sabk” part — for the other metageographical periods in Bahār’s system, the sabk-i khurāsānī and sabk-i ʿirāqī, are equally dubious in terms of their ability to capture the literary reality of their eras.

Finally, taking the question of difference within a cosmopolitan framework a step further, in Chapter Four I tried to show that however much Chandar Bhān might be an enticing symbol of relatively non-sectarian composite culture under the Mughals, this does not mean that there was no awareness of religio-cultural difference in his world, or that such alterity did not sometimes produce tension. I traced one discursive arc emblematic of such tension through the image of Chandar Bhān that developed in tazkirās from the late seventeenth century onward, right down to our own day. And here again, the interpretive field was basically wide open, because so little scholarship has been done on the tazkira as a genre. I tried to show, at the very least, that the genre is deserving of a great deal of future study, and I have been encouraged in recent years by conversations with colleagues like Stefano Pello, Sunil Sharma, and others who feel the same way. Hopefully, we can each build on our own specific interests in this prolific archive, and
collectively work toward a reappraisal of the nexus of early modern South Asian social life, the public sphere, and the politics of anecdotal memory.

In each case, I have tried to press the interpretive possibilities to the limit that time, archival opportunities, and my linguistic capabilities have allowed, and tried simply to see where the material would take me. At times, no doubt, I have allowed portions of this dissertation to venture too far “down the rabbit hole,” as my teacher Sheldon Pollock used to say. But in all seriousness, I believe that a dose of bold scholarly excess is what is needed in the study of premodern Indo-Persian intellectual history, and indeed South Asian intellectual history generally. And in this sense, in many ways, I feel certain that I have not gone nearly far enough. Much of this thesis could surely be improved — both on the specific points and the general arguments — and each of the chapters could also easily have been expanded into a separate dissertation unto itself. I could also have easily chosen from among a whole list of Mughal intellectuals, many of whom I have listed above in the introduction, and performed a similar study, using many of the same materials. Due to a particular concatenation of factors, Chandar Bhān and his munshi’s world appealed to me, but despite his intriguing singularity as a secretary-poet, he was also in many ways just an exemplary product of his times, and a serious study of any number of other intellectuals from his era would have yielded equally interesting — to me, anyway — results.

In conclusion, then, I’d like briefly to try and broaden the scope even further, and discuss a bit where I think a study like this can go forward, and how the life, career, and milieu of
someone like Chandar Bhān fits into a wider historical conversation among professional historians.

First off, though, I should point to some of the themes specific to Chandar Bhān that I was not able to address, whether due to time or other constraints. One area that I have hardly even touched on is the opportunity that a writer like Chandar Bhān affords us for a deeper understanding of religious philosophy, Sufism, and Vedānta in early modern India. One could begin with a much closer inspection of his translation of Dārā’s dialogues with Bābā Lāl, and other portions of his oeuvre that deal with such themes. I think there is great scope for a serious analysis of his poetry, for instance, at the levels of both mystical thought and literary criticism. (Indeed, it would certainly be a legitimate gripe if one were to note that, given some of the arguments that I have made, I have not examined Chandar Bhān’s poetry nearly to the extent that it merits.) So too, to date there has been no serious analysis of the translation of a yogic text, called Ātma-Vilāsa, and purported to be by Shankarāchārya, that is attributed to him.¹

In fact, much of this mystical flair is also repeatedly deployed in Chandar Bhān’s letters, particularly to his brothers, and in the speculative philosophical ruminations that litter the latter sections of Chahār Chaman. Given more time, I would have liked to expand Chapter Two to include an analysis of some of these themes and key passages, not only for mystical themes but also for the question of epistolary production and circulation in

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¹ I refer here to Nāzuk-i Khīyālāt, purportedly a translation of Ātma Vilāsa. For details, see under “Sankara Acarya” in Edward Edwards’s Catalogue of the Persian Printed Books in the British Museum.
Mughal India; but for now it will have to await a future project, or the expansion of this study into a book.

At a broader level, there is much scope for a more globally informed contextualization of early modern secretarial traditions and bureaucratic practices. I have gestured in this direction at times in the preceding pages, but not nearly to the extent that is actually called for. A more sustained engagement and comparative study of many of these themes at the level of tri-imperial cultural histories of the Mughals, Safavids, and Ottomans would be valuable in and of itself, but it would also, I expect, help us to further critique the Euro-centric discourse of modernity that still dominates the western historical imagination — if no longer necessarily for practicing scholars, then certainly for the populace at large, and sadly for our policy makers too.

Even further, one could look for profitable comparative avenues to the contemporaneous administrative contexts of Europe and other locales. Justin Steinberg’s fascinating recent analysis of the social and political implications of the interpenetration of scribal, accounting, and literary cultural practices in the official registers (memoriali) of the Bolognese government of Dante’s era presents one such comparative possibility for future work.² Or, for the later early modern and modern period, one might compare and contrast the world of Indo-Persian munshīs with that of the “lettered” elite (letrados) in the Iberian colonies of Latin America, to whose intense, mutually reinforcing nexus of

² Justin Steinberg, Accounting for Dante: Urban Readers and Writers in Late Medieval Italy (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).
writing, urbanism, and state power in *la ciudad letrada* Angel Rama has recently drawn our attention. Indeed, I think that as we learn more about the intellectual history of *inshā*’ and *munshīs* like Chandar Bhān, a sustained critical engagement with such scholarship can contribute to the growing body of work that has sought to (re)integrate pre- and early modern India with global networks of political, commercial, and cultural exchange. And thus in my much narrower context, by trying to give the comprehensiveness and complexity of the Indo-Persian secretarial arts their due — rather than dismissing them simply as vain posturing — I hope that I have been able to show that an entire world of intellectual production is missing from our received image of Mughal courtly and imperial life.

A perfect example of this blind spot is the image of powerful nobles like Rājā Todar Mal, Afzal Khān, and Sa’du’llāh Khān, all of whom are discussed at length in *Chahār Chaman*. Because of the almost total neglect of Mughal intellectual history — despite the much ballyhooed “cultural turn” of recent decades — such men have continued to be seen almost exclusively in terms of their military and political careers. But as we saw above, especially in Chapter Two, Chandar Bhān’s image of such men points clearly to a whole other side to their personalities, which is available in epistolary and other archives, and which inclined in very serious and dedicated ways toward the mystical, the literary, the artistic, and the humanistic branches of human inquiry.

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It is this side of Mughal life that I hope to continue pursuing in the near and distant future. As for the present moment, I would not be surprised or offended if some readers will come away from this study finding in me an echo of Saul Bellow's classic academic anti-hero, Moses Herzog:

Oh, he was earnest, he had a certain large, immature sincerity, but he might never succeed in becoming systematic... [five] hundred pages of chaotic argument which had never found its focus.

But hopefully the result will not be found too painful, wanting, or devoid of interest; and in any case, I shall endeavor to correct this effect in future work. Until then, I beg the patient indulgence of all readers, sympathetic and critical alike. And for now, unfortunately, I will have to content myself with feeling as Chandar Bhān himself must have when he lamented:

ämad bahār va rū-yi chaman tāzagī girift
bar shākh mānda mīwa-i mā nīm-ras hanūz

Spring has come, and the face of the garden is refreshed; But alas, my fruit remains on a tree, as yet only half ripe.
APPENDIX:

Chandar Bhān’s Geography of Mughal India

_The various provinces of happy Hindustān (ta’dād-i subajāt-i hindūstān-i bahjat-nishān)¹_

_The Seat of Government (dār al-hukūmat), Shāhjahānābād (84-7)_

Of course, the territories and lands (ihātah-i mulk-o-mamālik) of our sovereign imperial
King extend from the [eastern?] frontier [in Bengal?] all the way to Qandahār, and from
Bījāpūr [in the south] up to Balkh [in the north]. And in every district (zila’) there are
great provincial centers (sūbajāt-i ‘umda) — such as the Abode of the Caliphate, the
capital Shāhjahānābād; the dwelling place (mustaqarr) of the Caliphate, Akbarābād
[Agra]; the Abode of the Sultanate, Lahore; the Equal of Paradise, Kashmīr; the Abode of
the Realm, Kābul; [85] the Abode of Peace, the district of Multān; the joy-increasing
province of Thatha; the Abode of Blessing, Ajmer; the Land of Delight (nuz‘ hat-ābād),
Gujarat. There are also the Deccan provinces such as Berār; Daulatābād; Khāndes;
Tilangāna; the dominion (wilāyat) of Bakhāna; the province of lovely water and weather,
Mālwa; the cream of plentiful provinces (sūbah-i zubdah-i ser-hāsil), Awadh; the broad
and spacious district of Allahābād; the excellent province of Bengal; and the pleasant
province of Orissa — each of which contains excellent and prominent cities, qasbas,
villages, and countless revenue districts (mahāl), not to mention renowned fortresses like

¹ Cf. British Library Or. 1892, 140ff, in which this section appears at the beginning of the second chaman.
Daulatābād Fort, Asīr Fort, and various forts of the Deccan, as well as the citadels at Gwalior, Chittor, Kālanjar, Chanādha, Rohtās, Junāgarh, and so on, and famous ports like Sūrat, Lāharī [Lāhorī?], Khambāyat [Cambay], Hügli, etc.

And in each of these regions and cities, many splendid buildings and pleasant gardens have been constructed. *Masnavī:*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Shumār-i mulk-ash afzūn az hisāb ast} \\
\text{Ki ū dar mulk-gīrī āflāb ast} \\
\text{Burāq-i himmāt-ash ān fūz-gām ast} \\
\text{Ki jaułān-gāh-i āzm-ash rūm-o-shām ast}
\end{align*}
\]

The Emperor’s provinces are beyond count, 
For in conquering territory he is the Sun; 
The mighty steed (burāq) of his power is so fleet of foot 
That it needs all of Turkey and Syria just for an exercise pitch

Nevertheless, on account of its myriad special charms and features, the Abode of the Caliphate, the capital Shāhjahanābād — which has been completed in this eternal and felicitous reign of His most exalted Majesty the Emperor, the ocean of justice and benevolence, after whose most celebrated name of names it has received its own name — is beyond description (*mustaghnī al-ausāf ast*). As the couplet goes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{agar firdaus bar rū-yi zamīn ast} \\
\text{hamīn ast va hamīn ast va hamīn ast}
\end{align*}
\]

If there is a heaven on this earth 
It is right here; right here; right here.²

² N.b., this couplet is not Chandar Bhān’s own. It is often attributed to ‘Urūf Shīrāzī (and sometimes to Amir Khusrau) and though it is inscribed on the walls of the Red Fort at Delhi, it said to have originally referred to Kashmir.
This great city contains two forts. The first is the citadel of the imperial palace of celestial foundation, which, on account of its impregnability (hasānat), towering height (rifʿat), and sturdy fortifications (matānat) is like a second celestial vault (sānī-yī charkh-i akhrar). It has deep and wide moats on each side, and [it is so lofty and imposing that it seems as though] (Masnavī):

falak bar kangur-ash akhtar fashānda
az-ū tā āsmān yak rūthā mānda
ba gird-i ū falak dar pīch-o-tāb ast
ba burj-i ū muzūl-i āflāb ast

The firmament has spread stars on its battlements
And it is but one step from its pinnacle to the sky;
The heavens dance and play all around it
And the sun alights right there on its towers

The section of the citadel that faces the river [Jumna] is full of wonderful structures, built on a beautiful and enchanting patch of land — handsome, impressive homes; recreational grounds; revivifying, enchanting, and comfortable gardens — all of which remind one of paradise. The picture is completed by the flowing waters, the long, wide streams (nahr-hā), the large ponds (ṭalāb-hā), the big tanks, and the huge fountains (faūwāra-hā).

Indeed, because of the overwhelming pleasantness and beauty at every step and every spot:

karishma dāman-i dil mī-kashad ki jāy īnjā-st

Charm tugs at the hem of the heart’s skirt, as if to say:
This is the place [you have been looking for]

This lowest of servants has written these lines in praise of the entire complex:

ba-nāz-am bar ʿimārāt-i shahinshāh
k-az-ū bā charkh bāshad yak-qadam rāh
zi rif'at az falak bog 'zasht shān-ash
mah khurshid jast [az?] āstān-ash
tilā-yi nāh chandān shud bar-ū kharj
ki nat 'vān kard dar lūh-ī falak darj
chi sān güyam sukhan az jawhar-o-sang
ki az āyināh-i dil-hā barad zang
chu firdaus-i barīn-ash har makānī
buvad dar har makānī būstānī
khayābān-ash chunān 'ishrat-sirisht ast
ki güyī kūchah-i rāh-i bihisht ast
havā-yash dil-gushā -o- dil-nashīn ast
tarāvat khānah-zād-i in zamān ast

I take such pride in the Emperor’s palace
From where it is only one step to the sky;
Its lofty nobility transcends the firmament
The sun and moon arise from its threshold;
So much pure gold (tilā-yi nāb) was spent on it
That it couldn’t be counted even in a cosmic ledger;
So how could I use mere words to describe its jewels and stones,
Which polish the rust (zang) off the mirror of [dejected] hearts?
Every house is like a sublime heaven (firdaus-i barīn),
And every building has a paradisiacal garden;
Its avenues are so utterly delightful (‘ishrat-sirisht)
You might say they’re bylanes off the road to paradise;
Its breezes find their way into your heart,
And verdure itself is a child of this ground.

Within this impregnable fort complex (hisn-i hasīn), on one side a grand, impressively long covered bazaar has been arranged (tātīb yāfta), containing shops, coffee houses, pavilions (tāq-hā), and canopied galleries (riwāq-hā). Here merchants (tājirān), traders (saudā-girān), impresarios (mutamauwilān) and jewelers (sunār: goldsmiths?) from every city and region ply their stocks of all manner of colorful merchandise for a comfortable livelihood. [87]

‘irāqi-o-kurāsānī zi hadd bīsh
nihādah pīsh-i khud sarmāyah-i khwīsh
farangī az farangistān rasīda
nawādir az banādīr bīsh chīda
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And popping up for your perusal,
The wares of seven continents abound in each dukān

There are also a great number of mosques, both in the center and in every direction of this bountiful city, in particular the Great Mosque\(^3\), which is of such extreme loftiness (rif'at) that its heights scrape the sky, and such expansive dimensions that it is as if it has room inside for an entire world. It has soaring porticoes (aiwān-hā-yi murtafi') studded with bright polished pillars, latticed apartments and worship halls (hujra-hā-yi va 'ibādat-khāna-hā-yi musaffā), pavilions and galleries (tāq-hā va riwāq-hā), great domes the spires of which reach out to the heavens with golden cupolas, towering entry gates with carved benches and skyscraping domes of their own — all with such glorious open-airied spaces that even the residents of the heavens lower their heads and pray there, while mere mortals will not want to lift their own heads up from prostration. It also has a capacious reservoir, brimming with pure water and finished with an inlay of marble and red stone in a pattern and design the likes of which has never been seen even by worldly and experienced men. A total cost of 12 lakh (1.2 million) rupees — which comes to 40,000 'Irāqī ūmāns, or 60 lakh (6 million) Transoxanian khānis — was spent on it by the imperial government. [88] A poem in praise of the Great Mosque:

\[
\begin{align*}
  ba \ rif'at \ āsmān \ yak \ pāya-i \ ū \\
  mah-o-khurshīd \ zīr-i sāya-i \ ū \\
  riwāq-ash qibla-i ahl-i yaqīn ast \\
  nazīr-i masjid-i aqsā hamīn ast \\
  bah sahn-ash faiz-i digar mī-tavān yāft \\
  zi hauz-ash āb-i kausar mī-tavān yāft
\end{align*}
\]

\(^3\) khusūsī-yi kalān, by which he presumably means the Jāma' Masjid; British Library Or. 1892 (143) has va khusūs masjid-i kalān, which makes more sense.
Even one of its columns has the stature of the sky
Under its shadow is where moon and sun fly;
Its galleries are the Qibla of all people of faith
For this is the very equal of Jerusalem’s Temple Mount (masjid-i aqsā);
Just by entering its courtyard one gains a special grace
And from its reservoir imbibes the water of Kausar

The air of this heavenly city is most refreshing (tarāwat-bakhsh) and enlivening (rūh-afzā), in every season and all weather. On winter days it is so pleasant that the spirit swells within one’s body, and even in summer the weather feels so moderate along the bazaars and city streets that there’s no need of retreating to a cooled bungalow (khas-khana) or cellar (tah-khāna)? Moreover (zamīmah-i ān), there’s always plenty (wufūr) of ice and cool snow-water arriving from the northern mountains. During the monsoon, the delightful weather injects a certain freshness to the soul, especially the breeze in and around the high imperial house, which overlooks the river (mushrif-i daryā ast). When it is pouring down drops and drizzles and showers (dar hangām-i rezish-i qatrāt va matarāt va tarashshuh), the wind’s scattering of these watery pearls (īr-i durr-fashān) lends an intoxication that is something else (kaifiyat-i dīgar) to the wafting breath of dawn, the morning zephyr, and the effulgence of evening. The [Jumna] river becomes so high and wide from the excess of heavy downpours that, for miles upon miles (fārsang dar fārsang) the water causes prints on [the imperial?] tents to run with a silvery tincture (āb bah chādar-hā-yi munaaqash basmah-i nuqra...mī-gardad), and the pearl-embroidered bolsters, the carpets (namada-hā) of woven pashmīna, the gossamer silver-threaded veils (parda-hā-yi tā ‘ish-i nuqra-bāf), and all manner of other accoutrements become streaked from end to end with an ornamental and decorative alabaster sheen. And next to this

4 I.e., the heavenly spring.
shimmering splendor that illuminates the entire imperial assembly, the full moon on the horizon looks like a mere bowl in the hand of a beggar.

One of the most well-designed recreational grounds of this city that is the peer of paradise is the A‘azz-ábād Park, which, on account of the beauty of its various buildings, its waters flowing through streams, ponds, and lakes, and its general freshness, verdure, pleasantness, and luscious foliage augments the flower bouquet in the in the minds’ eye of all who appreciate beauty. And in springtime, the flower blooming season, the rainy season, and on moonlit nights (kasht-i māh-tāb) it has a state of beauty all its own. Oftentimes, it is graced by the imperial step, and becomes the envy of heaven on high.

Particulars of the Dār al-Mulk, Old Delhi (88-9)

Old Delhi is one of the most renowned ancient cities in the world. Many gnostics and other holy men (‘ārifān va darweshān) have their final resting place in this area, such as that wise knower of truth, Khwāja Qutb al-Dīn [Bakhtiyar Kākī]⁵; the essence of eminent saints, Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn Auliyā; [89] Shaikh Naṣīr al-Dīn “The Lamp of Delhi” (chirāgh-i dehlī); and Shaikh Hamīd al-Dīn Nagaurī; not to mention other friends of the world like that Parrot of the Rose Garden of Eloquence, Amīr Khurau; and that friend to holy men who has traveled the world over, on land and sea (khādīm al-fugārā [va]

⁵ For further details on these tombs, see Stephen P. Blake, Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India, 1639-1739 (Cambridge University, 1991), 152-6.
saiyāh-i bahr-o-barr), Mullā Jamālī. The qasba of Pānīpat, on the outskirts of Delhi, is similarly ennobled (sharaf dārad) by the eternal presence of that overflowing existence (bahr wujūd-i fā'iz al-wujūd), Shaikh Sharaf.⁷

The ancient buildings of Old Delhi fill the eyes of tourists and sightseers (tamāshā'iyān va nazzāragiyān) with wonder and amazement, particularly the luminescent tomb complex of His Majesty of Celestial Station, Whose Resting Place is in Eternal Heaven, and Who is Nestled in the Garden of Paradise, Emperor Hūmâyūn, which is also situated in this dār al-mulk. 'Abd al-Rahīm Khān-i Khānān and the great military commander Mahābat Khān, who were among the most celebrated nobles of this era, have also laid their heads for eternal sleep in this same patch of land.

Other important districts and counties (chakla-hā va sarkār-hā) are also associated with this sūba, for instance the chakla spanning the do-āb [alluvial plain between the Ganges and Jumna rivers] and the sarkār of Hisār [in modern-day Haryāna], which is the epitome of breadth and cultivation, or the chakla of Sirhind, the governance and safekeeping of which was entrusted (mufauwaz) to Rājā Todar Mal, right up to the border with Multān.

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⁶ I.e., Mullā (sometimes “Maulānā”) Hamīd bin Fāzīl Allāh Jamālī (d. 1535), author of Siyar al-‘Arīfīn. See Mahmūd Ḥusain Siddiqui, The Memoirs of Sufis Written in India: Reference to Kashf al-mahjub, Siyar-ul-auliya, and Siyar-ul-arifin (Baroda: Dept. of Persian, Urdu, and Arabic, Faculty of Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, 1979).

⁷ I.e., Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Bū Ḍā’ī Qalandar (d. 1324). See A. A. (Anna Aronovna) Suvorova, Muslim Saints of South Asia: The Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries (Routledge, 2004), 185.
Past governors of the sūba of Old Delhi have included Mahābat Khān, Iʿtiqād Khān, Bāqir Khān, Asālat Khān, Allāh Wardī Khān, Makramat Khān, Khalīl-Allāh Khān, and Siyādat Khān. At present it is where the ever-victorious imperial camp [of the bādshāh] is pitched (al-hāl mazrab-i khiyām-i nusrat farjām ast).

**Particulars of the Seat of the Caliphate, Akbarābād (Agra) (89-91)**

The Seat of the Caliphate Akbarābād is among the most important sūbas and greatest places in paradisiacal Hindūstān. By reason of its various unique qualities and assorted excellences (khūbī-hā), it has become the imperial residence and Abode of the Caliphate (maqarr-i sultānāt va makān-i khilāfat). In fact so many cities, towns, neighborhoods and plentiful villages are associated with this sūba that it would take a whole extra book to describe them in detail. The towering, sky-scraping buildings of the imperial palace complex (ʿimārāt-i buland-i fālak-farsā-yi daulat-khānah-i shāhinshāhī), which is situated on the banks of the river, present a vision of beautiful dwellings, heavenly mansions, and attractive, enchanting locales that is reminiscent of the garden of paradise. The exquisitely designed apartments of the princes of high character, and the havelīs of many celebrated noble — such as the Right Arm (ʿazd) of the Caliphate Āsaf Khān, the Pillar of State Shāyista Khān, the Pillar of the Great Sultanate Iʿtiqād Khān, as well as Saif Khān and many other amīrs of the great state — [90] are all situated, by design, next to one another along the riverbank, each of them with a lovely finish and formal accomplishment.
On the waterfront overlooking the riverbank there are several *parterres* that are the equal of paradise, earthly vestiges of the celestial garden. For instance, the Jahān-Ārā Garden, the lawns of the Motī Mahal, the Moonlight Garden, and others, each of a decorative and ornamental design and pattern that call to mind patches of highest heaven. Of course even though there are verdant and lush gardens throughout the city (*dar sawād-i shahr*), each with sublimely constructed pavilions, nevertheless the Nūr Mahal Garden attached to the imperial lands has no equal in terms of its illimitable length and immeasurable breadth (*tūl- bī-hadd va ʿarz-i bī-ʿadd*), its freshness, lusciousness, succulence, and verdure, the beauty of its pavilions, its various ponds, lakes, streams, creeks, and other distinguishing features.

All around the imperial palace of celestial foundation is an impregnable citadel wall and a sturdy, heavy, massive fort complex — the imposing, high, hard, and wide battlements of which rub right up against the wheel of the firmament (*sar ba-charkh-i akhzar mī-sāyad*). The builder of this fortress as high as the sky was His Majesty of Celestial Station (*rizwān-manzilat*) who is Nestled on the Divine Throne (*ʿarsh-āshiyānī*), Emperor Akbar.

The surrounding metropolis is so vast and widespread that its environs scoff at being contained by writing (*kih ihāta-i ān az hītah-i tahrīr mustaghnī ast*). It is full of various bazaars and arcades (*maʿmūr*) bursting with gems and jewels and fine merchandise and all classes of rarities that simply boggle the mind of anyone who sees them all on display.
Of course, one of the great monuments of this city is the splendid tomb of His Majesty of Celestial Station Nestled on the Divine Throne (hazrat rizwān-manzilat ‘arsh-āshiyānī) [i.e. Akbar]. But the sacred tomb (maqbarah-i mutahhara) of that Rābi‘a of the Age, the Fātima of the Times [Empress Mumtāz Mahal] — completed during this eternal bounteous reign under the supervision of Makramat Khān and Mīr ‘Abd al-Karīm⁸ — has an especially mesmerizing quality. So much capital was spent on its construction that it couldn’t be matched even by the revenue of some entire countries, or the spoils from some great kingdoms.

One other noteworthy building in the province of the Abode of the Caliphate [Akbarābād], in the town (gasba) of Fathpūr [Sikrī] a mosque has been built in dedication and acknowledgment of the spiritual attainments of Shaikh Salīm Chishti, which is among the most blessed of structures. Emperors of great stature like their majesties ‘Arsh-Āshiyānī (Akbar) and Jannat-Makānī (Jahāngīr), as well as His Majesty the Second Lord of the Celestial Conjunction (Shāh Jahān) have traveled many times to that firm house of goodly foundation (buq‘a-i mustahkam-i khāir-asās) to demonstrate their devotion. In the town itself and the surrounding villages there are many mystics, free spirits, and hermits busily engaged in their devotion and spiritual exercises. There are also many local litterateurs and intellectuals busy spending their time practicing teaching and learning (ifāzat-o-ifādat).

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⁸ The onetime superintendent of building in Lahore, who, incidentally, was one of Chandar Bhān’s earliest employers.
The fortress of Gwalior, famous among strongholds, is also associated with this sūba.

Qāsim Khān, Islām Khān, [91] Muhtashim Khān, Iftikhr Khān, Bāqī Khān, Diyānāt Khān, Siyādat Khān, and Rājā Girdhar Dās each in their turn had sole governorship of this region. Āgāh Khān was also for many years the faujdār of the local army. He passed from this transitory world to the way station of the everlasting in the illustrious [Emperor’s] thirtieth regnal year.

**Particulars of the felicitous district (subah-i bahjat-sirisht), the Seat of the Sultanate, Lahore (91-4)**

This city of a celestial foundation that is the equal of paradise, the Abode of the Sultanate, Lahore, is among the most magnificent and grand cities in all of Hindūstān. Because of its pleasant weather (latāfat-i āb-o-havā), variety of special attractions, and numerous delights it stands totally above and beyond the other towns and cities of the world (tarjīh va tafauwuq-i tamām bar bilād-o-amsār-i rū zgār dārad). Its impressive grand architecture, its delightful and enchanting mansions, the polish of its buildings, the decoration of its bazaars, the sweetness of its delicious water, the abundance of its fruits and produce (fawākīh-o-asmār), all make it the most beautiful place on the face of the earth:

_Hazārān minnat ai lāhor bar bāgh-i jinān dārī_
_Zi khūbī har chi dar andīsha gunjad bīsh az ān dārī_
_Barand az yaksar-i bāzār-i tū dar shish jihat sāmān_
_Matā ‘i haft kishwar dar miyān-i yak dukān dārī_
O Lahore, the garden of paradise owes you a thousand thanks;
You have more charms than one has the capacity to imagine;
From your singular bazaar they export goods in all six directions,
And the commodities of all seven continents are available in just one of your shops.

The buildings of the imperial palace overlook the river, their rooftops rubbing up against the sky and making a rival claim to the wheel of Atlas (\textit{dam-i musāwāt ba charkh-i ‘atlas mī-zanad}). Every morning the world-illuminating sun appears through the porticoes of this heavenly imperial threshold, and the moon that lights up the night begs to borrow light from the polished plazas of this palace that arches up to the sky. The houses of renowned princes are truly something else, and the estate of the great commander Āsaf Khān is like another city within the city, the premises (\textit{ihāta}) of which completely exceed the limitations of writing. The mansions of high noble \textit{amīrs} such as the Pillar of State ‘Alī Mardān Khān, the Amīr of Amīrs and Most Learned Man of the Age and the Realm, Afzal Khān, the Wise Man of the World, Sa‘dullah Khān, and other great men of the empire such as Islām Khān, A‘zam Khān, Wazīr Khān, Ja‘far Khān, and so on, all add to the beauty of this city that is the peer of paradise. The homes of the city-dwellers, both low and high, according to their own abilities, are adjacent to each other. In every street and alley the delicious running water is reminiscent of the elixir of life, and thanks to its special water and climate this urbane land (\textit{khīta-i ‘ashrat-pairā}) has become a mine of delights and a mansion of beauty:

\textit{tamāshā dar tu sūrat-hā-yi ma’nī mī-tavān kardan}
\textit{ba-dast-i āyīna-hā az ‘aks-i rukhsār-i butān dārī}

In you one can behold the form of meaning,
You hold in your hand the mirror made from reflections on the cheeks of idols.\footnote{Here I have used the version of this couplet that appears in S. M. M. Qadiri’s text and Urdu translation of \textit{Chahār Chaman}, 107. The version in Ja‘fri’s printed edition (tamūshā‘ī zi sūrat-hā-yi ma‘nī mi-tavān kard \text{/} ba-dast ṣīyām-hā az ‘aks-i rukhsar-i butān dārī) seems to be missing something, and in any case does not scan metrically.}

Indeed, the [city’s] inner beauty exceeds even its superficial beauty. Deeply learned scholars (‘ulamā-yi mutabahhir), erudite intellectuals, masters of asceticism and self-control, men of ecstasy and spiritual transcendence, mystics acquainted with truth, hermits (munzawīyān) seeking the basis of Reality, pure-hearted sufis, and free-spirited recluses all lend an added flair to this city of bounteous foundation. Poets of exquisite language and sweet expression heat up the bustling literary scene in every corner and every direction with the gift of scintillating and exciting meanings; even precocious youths and adolescents, faces marked by new lines [of facial hair] (khat), practice their [calligraphic] lines (khat) and recitations, doing able justice to [the standards of] graceful and elegant penmanship, and to the smooth flowing of literary expression (salāsat-i ravānī-yi sukhan).

Of course, within the environs of Lahore there are many verdant and flowery gardens of eternal spring, such as Bāgh-i Dil-gushāy, Bāgh-i Dil-āwīz, Bāgh-i Nāmūs al-‘Ālamīn-i Amīr-i Nawāb-i Qudṣī-Alqāb Begum Sāhib, Bāgh-i Mīrzā Kāmrān, Bāgh-i Naulakha, and Bāgh-i Shālamār. But among these the most bountiful and pleasing are the Bāgh-i Faiz-Bakhsh and Bāgh-i Farkh-Bakhsh, which were completed during the reign of His Majesty the Second Lord of the Celestial Conjunction, may His rule last forever. Its verdant and lush flora, wide expanses, moderate air, lovely landscape (husn-i manzar),
delightful pavilions, decorative array of heavenly buildings, the purity of its flowing water, its broad ponds, huge reservoirs, wide canals and long streams, and various other types of decoration and adornment put it head and shoulders above the other gardens. Its burst of colors polishes the mirror of hearts (fazā-ī ān rang zīdā-ī āyīn-a dīl-hā), and the sweeping splendor of its flower beds adds a sparkle even to the eyes of those accustomed to spectacular sights. There is also a an excellent garden on the estate of Mīr ‘Abdullah which is among the best local recreational grounds (sa‘īr-gāh), and thus in springtime, when the spectacle of blossoming flora lends freshness also to the garden in men’s hearts, His Majesty the Sovereign Lord of the Age, whose soul is itself a garden of eternal spring even fresher than the petals of a rose, often honors the said garden with a noble visit, and in so doing bestows an even greater beauty on that bounteous garden with the splendor of his auspicious imperial presence (ba-farr-i qudūm-i ma‘īmanat-huzūm).

Even though there are yearly and monthly impromptu (ghair-muqarrar) performances, throughout the city’s precincts, especially at the tombs and shrines of the giants along the path of gnostic Truth, the Thursday gatherings at the blessed tomb of that knower of mystical stages, Pīr ‘Alī Hujwīrī, takes the bustle of people to a level of maximum perfection. Darvishes and other free spirits, literati, poets, and all manner of people gather there to observe the spectacle Divine Creation. Then on Fridays the masters of literary perfection, eloquent men of pleasing expression, and poets of linguistic delectation, group after group of eloquents from Iran, Turan, and Hindustan gather in that house of firm foundation (buq‘a-i khārar-asās), i.e. the Wazīr Khān mosque complex — one of the most exemplary buildings in the world (zarb al-masal-i biqā‘-ī rūzgār) — and
heat up the literary and poetic action. Meanwhile, countless Persian and Arabic books, and reliable manuscripts of histories, epic romances, divans of the classical and the latest poets (mutaqaddimin va mut’akhirin), letter collections (munsha’at), anthologies (figrāt), epistolary primers (ruq’at), biographies, chapbooks, samples of the calligraphers of the times, and all the other tools and equipment for practicing every genre and course of study are widely available for sale or purchase in this wonderful place. And, since this is also the day when school children have the most free time, from every street and lane young boys with notebooks in hand and with flowers in their hair come strutting around the bazaar (khiramān ba sair-i bāzār mī-āyand), in keeping with ways of youth. This bustle of activity continues until well after midday, and is a delight to the eyes of all urbane people watchers.

This city of celestial foundation has two forts. The first contains the pādshah’s heavenly imperial palace complex. And the second is the walled citadel, which, on account of its width and breadth, stature, fortifications, massiveness and impregnability, strikes wonder into the eyes of all those who see it. This main citadel has twelve gates. The first is the Roshanā’ī Gate, which is located near the palace, and it is precisely because of this association that it has gotten this name, the “Gate of Light.” It is the main entry point to the city for sojourners from places like Qandahār, Kābul, and Kashmīr. Another entrance is Delhi Gate, the most famous of the city’s entry points. People from Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Gujarāt, the Deccan, Akbarābād (Agra), and most other cities and towns come into the city through this gate. There are ten more, near which are located many of the estates of various amirs and imperial servants — in fact, the house of this feeble ant, the author
of these artful pages, is located in this same city. The Kāṅgra Fort, among the most famous citadels in Hindūstān, is also associated with this suba, and it is a custom that every year people from all over India flock there [to the temple Jawāla-Mukhī] for pilgrimage.

In previous years, this province has been governed by the likes of Āqā Afzal [Fāzil Khān], Qāsim Khān, Sādiq Khān, ‘Ināyat Khān, Āsaf Khān, Wazīr Khān, Mu‘tamad Khān, Sayyid Khān-i Jahān, Qīlīj Khān, Sa‘īd Khān, and the amīr of amīrs ‘Alīmardān Khān. More recently, other men like Qāzī Muhammad Afzal, Sayyid Salābat Khān, Shaikh ‘Abd al-Karīm, Khwāja Mu‘īn, Bahādur Khān, and Sayyid ‘Izzat Khān have governed this region.

_A digression that decorates the bustle of life_  
_(afsāna-i hāngāma-ārā‘i) (94-5)_

During one sojourn, when His Majesty the Emperor of the Sea and the Land ordered the grand imperial camp [from Kashmīr] toward the region of Punjāb, he stopped along the way with an agreeable heart and eager mind at that joyful abode, the remote and isolated hermitage (zāwiya-i khumūl-o-āzādī) of Miyān Mīr, where the two held spiritual discussions. ¹⁰ Many of the specifics of that exceptional dialogue have been summed up by an inspired tongue in the following couplet:

¹⁰ Miyān Mīr (ca. 1531-1635) was a renowned Sufi of the Qādirī order, who spent the bulk of his career in Punjāb with brief stints in Sindh. He was also consulted on spiritual matters by Jahāngīr, and even the
āsmān sajda buvad pīsh-i zamīnī ki bar-ū
yak do kas yak do nafas bahr-i khudā ban'šīnand

The heavens themselves will bow down before a patch of ground on which
Two people, two souls, sit seeking God together

Indeed, this is especially true for two great masters of form and meaning such as these,
one of whom bangs the drum of the shadow of God (kos-i zill-i ilāhī nawākhta), while the
other raises knowledge of devotion to its acme (‘ilm-i ‘ibādat bar-afraṣhta). Around the
same time, His Majesty visited the khāṅqāh of that ocean-hearted pīr, Shaikh Balāwul,
with whom he discussed numerous matters of gnosis and esoteric meaning. In heavenly
Kashmīr that great knower of mystical Truths, Mullā Shāh, visited the assembly of the
Emperor — who is himself acquainted with Truth and is a friend to holy men — where
they held a vibrant discussion.

While en route to Kābul, the Emperor once dispatched that Wise Man of the Age and the
Empire, Sa’dullāh Khān, to see Shaikh Muhammad Sharīf Rasā’ī. Despite the fact that
on one side there was a pinnacle of erudition, and on the other side the height of
asceticism, their conversation was pure and unpretentious (suhbat-i bi-gharzāna wāqi’
shud). Later, in Kābul itself, he took a tour of the village Mānjī, which was ablaze with
arghawān blossoms, [95] where he met with a local darwīsh named Sayyid ‘Ālam.

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Iranian Shāh ‘Abbās Safavī had reportedly entreated Miyān Mīr to bless the Safavid siege of Qandahār.
Shāh Jahān appears to have met with him at least twice, one of which was in 1634 — a meeting also
attended by Dārā Shukoh, and which thus became a key moment in the development of the latter’s
attachment to the Qādirī silsila and his interest in esoteric spiritual matters generally (cf. Tasadduq Husain,
Miyān Mīr’s life and career, see S. A. A. Rizvi, History of Sufism in India, volume 2 (New Delhi:
Munshiram Manoharlal, 2002), 103-8.
Indeed, because of their lofty natures, all great and glorious emperors have had an affinity for the company of holy men acquainted with Truth, the accoutrements of empire and the state notwithstanding. Such masters of renunciation turn up for most of the festivals and assemblies at court, and contribute to the grand audience by holding spiritual discussions. The Emperor, a friend to all holy men, became particularly fond of conversing with a man at an advanced stage of Truth named Khwāja Jāwīd Mahmūd, who hailed from charming Kashmīr, and was given a seat right next to the imperial throne. Shaikh Nāzir, the details of whose career are beyond description, was a fixture at the palace both day and night. And Khwāja ‘Ābd al-Razzāq, whose material position was that of a Hindūstānī ahādi [i.e. a part of the Emperor’s personal security retinue], in fact tread the path of [mystical] precedents (ba-tariq-i salaf mī-guzarānīd). Indeed, elite shaikhs who had reached a level of friendship [with God] were constantly arriving at the sublime mahfīl, where they were the featured members of the assembly. Mīr ‘Ārif and Mīr Fakhir al-Dīn became honored and revered guests, and at one point Sayyid Muhammad Qanaujī also attended the eternal assembly, where he conversed with the Emperor who knows all the finer points of intellectual matters.

*The Province of Multān (95-6)*

Multān is one of the most blessed ancient locales in the world. Many great men, Gnostics, and mystics acquainted with Truth have been laid to rest in that land, such as that ‘ārif acquainted with God, Shaikh Bahā’ al-Dīn Zakariyā, Shaikh Sadr al-Dīn,
Shaikh Rukn-i ‘Ālam, Sayyid Yūsuf Gardezī, Shaikh Jalāl Khoka, and Bibī Rāstī. Also the refulgent mausoleum of that treader on the path of Truth and gnosis, Shaikh Farīd [al-Dīn] Ganj-i Shakkar, is located in the local qasba of Pattan. And the great spiritual master (makhdūm), Shaikh Jalāl Makhdūm Jahāniyān, and several other great men are buried in the town of Uchh.

The city [of Multān] is among the most well designed and cultivated cities in the realm, with running water in every precinct and corner of town. The borders of the province extend up to Bhakkar [on one side] and Sīwistān [on the other]. The provincial governors of that place before now were Bāqir Khān, Amīr Khān, Ahmad Khān, Nijāt Khān, and Qilī Khān. For a time [96], the illustrious prince Sultān Murād Bakhsh was appointed [governor of Multān], as was the great, famous, successful and victorious prince Muhammad Aurangzeb Bahādur. Since then the governors of this region have been: Muhammad ‘Alī Khān, Mirān Sayyid ‘Abd al-Razzāq — who was given the title Ghairat Khān — and the high-ranking lord Shaikh Mūsā Gīlānī.

Kashmīr, the equivalent of Paradise (96)

The sūba of Kashmīr is among the most attractive, delightful, bucolic, enchanting, fair-weathered places in the entire world, and among the various provinces of Hindūstān it is, as it were, the “Ruler of the Garden” (dar mamālik-i hindūstān hukm-i bāgh dārad).

Thanks to its heavenly gardens, captivating architecture, sweeping meadows, flowing waters, enchanting recreational grounds, beautiful mansions, lush lawns, and fertile fields
bursting with greenery, fragrant herbs (*riyāhīn*), and cornucopias of flowers, it has every variety of delight and all manner of unique qualities such that one could call it a second heaven. Of course, the stages of the journey along the main route through Kashmir are filled with enormous mountains and peaks that brush the sky, around which even the bird of the imagination could not possibly wrap the wings of desire, and [thus the journey is one of] extreme difficulty and the utmost rigor (*dar ghāyat-i suʿūbat va kamāl-i dushwārī asr*). Nevertheless, a tour through heavenly Kashmir, seeing its captivating spaces, and taking in its pleasant air and water, rubs away all the rust of melancholy from the mirror of hearts (*zang az āʿīna-i dil-hā mī-barad*).

Its lovely qualities have, in fact, achieved an even higher degree of distinction because they have appealed so many times to the Emperor’s alchemical gaze. The sight of spectacular gardens such as Bāgh-i Firdaus-Nazīr, Bāgh-i Faiz Bakhsh, Bāgh-i Farrukh-Bakhsh, Bāgh-i Nishāt, and Bāgh-i Naṣīm, excursions on boats and gondolas (*zauraq-hā*), and tours through Kashmir’s famous recreational grounds have all found favor with the exalted Emperor’s discriminating taste.

The governance (*iyālat*) of this felicitous land was for many years deputed to that chief of eloquent men, Zafar Khān, and thereafter was assigned to Husain Beg Khān. After that it was entrusted (*tafwīz yāfī*) to the Pillar of State ‘Alī Mardān Khān, the noblest of nobles (*amīr al-umārā*). Nowadays, the governor is Lashkar Khān.
Many mystics and other liberated souls, moreover, have emerged from this region. [For instance] the khāngāh of that soaring falcon of gnosis (shāhbāz-i auj-i maʿrifat), Mīr Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī is located in Kasmīr.

**Kābul**

[97] The sūba of Kābul is among the most important [in the empire], and the details of its [lovely] climate are in no need of description or elaboration here. Every house there has running water, abundant fruit, and colorful flowers. The length of this province stretches from the River Atak [a.k.a. “Attock”] to the Hindū Kūh Mountains, which form the frontier with Hindūstān. These great mountains, which present a tremendous challenge even for birds to cross, run along the entire province, which also contains cities like Kābul itself, Peshāwar, Jalālābād, Ghaznīn, Gardez, and Khāvat [Sawāt?]. For years the governors of this region were Zafar Khān, Lashkar Khān, Saʿīd Khān, ‘Alī Mardān Khān the noblest of nobles, and Mahābat Khān’s son Lahrāsp Khān — who himself was afterward distinguished with the title Mahābat Khān. After them the governorship went to Rustam Khān Bahādur Firoz Jang, and then it was again assigned to the Pillar of State Mahābat Khān. Many sword-wielding imperial servants — Mughals, sayyids, Afghāns, and Rajpūts — have been stationed in this sūba, and His Majesty Whose Dwelling is in Heaven Emperor Bābur has also been laid to rest in this same blessed land.

**Thatta**
The sūba of Thatta is situated just inland from the salty [Arabian] Sea (daryā-i shor).

The port of Lāhirī, which is among the most famous ports in Hindūstān, is located in this province. The pleasantness of its lush and breezy climate is beyond the bounds of description, and the region is renowned for its widespread hospitality. It is also a key destination and port of entry for foreign mystics and free spirits (fuqarā va āzādagān), and a place where many poets and other eloquent intellectuals turn up. For a while the governorship there was assigned to Yūsuf Muhammad Khān, Amīr Khān, Shād Khān, Dilāwar Khān, Mughūl Khān, and then Zafar Khān. More recently, [it has been governed] by Muhammad ‘Alī Khān, and then Sayyid Ibrāhīm Badauli Dāl [???] [or is this rather, “Sayyid Ibrahim, who got the promotion due to a fraud (ba-dawalī dā’l rasīd) of some kind”?].

Ahmadābād

Ahmadābād is among the great, essential provinces of Hindūstān. It has an exalted place among all the towns and cities, thanks to its variety of unique characteristics and delights. Indeed, it is a beautiful place, and a mine of precious rarities from around the world. A number of important cities, like Pattan and Sirohi, and famous ports like Sūrat, Khambāyat (Cambay), and Bahrūch are associated with this sūba, along with many other wealthy districts (mahāl-i ser-hāsil). For quite some time the governance of that country was assigned variously to Sipahdār Khān, Bāqir Khān, Islām Khān, A’zam Khān, and Mīrzā ‘Alī Khān. But after that it was entrusted to the renowned prince, His Highness Muhammad Aurangzeb Bahādur. Since then the jurisdiction was
assigned to Ghairat Khān, and then after him His Highness the prince Sultān Murād
Bakhsh took over.

A number of great mystics and holy men have also come from this area, including Shaikh
Ahmad and Shāh ‘Ālam.

The Deccan

The Deccan region is a vast country, a place with a lovely climate. The city of
Burhānpūr, which is among the most well-known cities in Hindūstān, dominates the
entire area (hākim-nashīn-i ān mulk ast). Provinces like Khandes, Birār, Ahmadnagar,
Daulatābād, and Telangāna are the important sūbas usually associated with that frontier
land (marz-o-būm). In the early years after the accession to the august imperial throne of
His Majesty the Sovereign of the Age, he directed the magnificent imperial camp toward
Daulatābād. Meanwhile, he dispatched Makramat Khān to Bījāpūr, and ‘Abd al-Latif
Lashkar Khān to Golconda. Eventually the ruler of that frontier land, Shāh Qutb al-
Mulk, draped the saddle-cloth of obedience onto his shoulders, offered petitions of
sincere allegiance, and agreed to begin sending yearly gifts and tax revenues. Thereafter
the ‘Ādil Khān, by accepting the benefits of obedience, earned the title of ‘Ādil Shāh.

Jurisdiction over this vast land has generally been entrusted to great nobles, such as
Khān-i Daurān Bahādur-i Nusrat Jang, Islām Khān, Shāhnawāz Khān, and Shāyista
Khān. [99] For a while, His Highness Prince Sultān Murād Bakhsh took over, but
nowadays it is assigned to the deputies (wukalā’) of the renowned and successful prince, the Subduer of the World and Conqueror of the Universe (‘ālam-gīr va āfāq-sitān), Muhammad Aurangzeb Bahādur. Many great nobles and elite Rājas have been posted to this province, and [as a result] the Deccan kings like the justly ranked (‘adālat-i martabat) ʿĀdil Shāh [of Bijāpūr, and] the Qutb al-Mulk [of Golconda], have reached pacts of obedience and submission (mutī’-o-munqād) to the authority that is obeyed by the entire world, and cement their ties with petitions and gifts sent to the imperial court of celestial stature.

Although there are many great and famous forts located in this country, two of them are among the most celebrated forts in all of Hindūstān. The first is the fort at Daulatabād, the strength and impregnability of which has neither equal nor rival, and which is among the recent conquests (futūhāt-i tāza) of this perpetual empire. The second is the Asīr Fort, which is situated on the outskirts of the city of Bijāpūr, and was conquered during the reign of His Majesty whose nest is now in heaven (ʿarsh-ūshiyānī), Emperor Akbar.

Many great spiritual leaders and mystics such as Sayyid Muhammad Gīsū Darāz, Shāh Zain al-Dīn, and Shāh Burhān al-Dīn are also laid to rest there.

_Mālwah_

The province of Mālwah is one of the most developed, cultivated, and temperate regions, famous throughout Hindūstān. Great cities like Mānḍū, the length and breadth of whose
fort cannot be captured by a mere written description, and other great cities like Ujjain, Saronj, Sārangpūr, and Chanderī are all associated with that province. For many years the provincial governorship of that country was assigned to Khān-i Daurān Bahādur-i Nusrat Jang, [followed by] Shāh Nawāz Khān, Sardār Khān, and Shāyista Khān. Thereafter it was assigned to the Pillar of State Ja‘far Khān.

_The Abode of Felicity, Ajmer_

[100] Ajmer province is among the most exquisite in all of Hindūstān, and is the homeland of various Rājpūt clans, Rānās, Rāos, and Rājas. It has garnered added prestige because the beneficent shrine of the Pillar of Spiritual Pillars, the Revealer of Secrets, Khwāja [Mu‘in al-Dīn] Chishti, and the luminous tomb of Mīrān Sayyid Husain_khang suwār are both located there, and because exalted emperors like His Majesty of celestial station ‘Arsh-Āshiyānī (Akbar), His Majesty Jammat-Makānī (Jahāngīr), and His Majesty the Second Lord of the Celestial Conjunction (Shāh Jahān), have all repeatedly betaken themselves to that auspicious abode. Mount Kalānī [?] is near the city, and the buildings of the imperial palace are situated overhanging a beautiful lake — indeed, there are many beautifully constructed palaces worth seeing in that land. The Chītōr and Ranthambhōr forts, which are among the most famous in the whole world, and the city of Nāgpūr [Nāgaur?] are all located here as well.
Earlier the government of this country was assigned to Mîr Shâh `Alî Abû Sa`ïd — the grandson of I`timâd al-Daula — and then to Bahâdur Kambûh followed by Mîr Ja`far. Thereafter it was entrusted to Sayyid Ahmad.

_Awadh_

This is yet another famous province in Hindûstân, and numerous important urban centers like Khairâbâd, Lucknow, and so on are associated with this region. Various military commanders and _jâgîrdârs_ have governed there, such as Sayyid Murtazá Khân and the like. Right now the governance of Awadh has been assigned to Tartîb Khân.

Also, a number of important _darwîshes_ and hermits also reside in Khairâbâd and environs.

_Allahâbâd_

[101] The _sûba_ of Allahâbâd is likewise one of the most famous provinces in Hindûstân. Its city of Banares, for instance, is among the most impressive and sacred places, and among the most fascinating and captivating dwellings [in the world]. Chunâda [?] and Kâlinjar forts, which are among the most renowned citadels in India, are also associated with this _sûba_. In recent times the governorship has fallen in turn to Ghairat Khân, Sayyid Mahmûd, Salâbat Khân, and Shahâmat Khân.
Jaunpur, too, is another great city located in the area, the governance of which has at various times been entrusted to Makramat Khan and Allah Wardi [Khan].

_Bihār_

Bihār is a very blessed place (_jā-yi mutabarraka_), and the major urban center there is the town of Patna. It is a vast country, a sweeping land embellished by a variety of unique features. Because of its moderate weather, lushness, and verdure, you could say that it is a small slice of heaven. For years it was governed by Ḥādīd Khan, and after that by Saʿīd Bahādur-i Zafar Jang. More recently it has been governed by Ṭūṭāt al-Mulk Jaʿfar Khan, then Zū al-Fiqār Khan, and after that the assignment passed to Allah Wardi Khan.

Rohtās Fort, one of the most sturdy (_ustuwār_) citadels [in Hindūstān] is located there, and in that delightful land (_sarzamīn-i muqhat-āyīn_) is also the [tomb? something missing from text] of Sar Afrāz Khan, the son of Lashkar Khan. Also, several great spiritual men of the world are laid to rest there, such as Hazrat Shaikh Yahyā Manerī, Hazrat Makhduṯ-i Jahāniyān, and others of their ilk.

_Bangāla_

The _sūba_ of Bengal is among the most remote provinces in Hindūstān, and one can’t get a true sense of its vast length and breadth from a mere written account. Likewise, the
beauty, verdure, and freshness of that land are beyond description. [102] Jahāṅgīr Nagar, also known as Dhāka, and Akbar Nagar, better known as Rāj Mahal, are its two major urban centers (ḥākim-nashīn).

Many palaces fertile districts (mahāl-i ser-hāsil) and important counties are associated with this province, but the chief means of commercial transport in that sūba is by boat. For many years the provincial governors there were Mahābat Khān, Qidā‘ī Khān, Islām Khān, and I‘tiqād Khān. Nowadays it is ruled by the illustrious prince Sultān Shujā‘.

Udīsa [Orissa]

The province of Orissa neighbors Bengal, and is an attractive place with a lovely climate. Its frontier extends right along the edges of Golconda. Men like Bāqir Khān, Mu‘tamid Khān, Muhammad Zamān, Tarbiyat Khān, and various others have all been governor of this country.

Qandahār, The Abode of Tranquility (dār al-qarār)

Qandahār Province, the Abode of Tranquility, came under the jurisdiction of imperial territories earlier in [Shāh Jahān’s] infinitely wealthy reign. Due to its pleasant climate, many gardens, abundance of fruit, and various other delights, it has become one of the most famous places in the world. For a while it was governed by Sa‘īd Khān, Qilīj Khān,
and then Daulat Khān. Of course, repeated heroic battles have taken place there between the victorious imperial forces and the army of Iran.

Many famous sites are also associated with this province, including the strongholds of Bust, Zamīndāvlar, and Shahr-i Safā. The luminous shrine of Bābā Walī is also situated on the outskirts of Qandahār city; it has a beautiful and spacious courtyard in front, and on Fridays the people of the city and suburbs make pilgrimages there.

**Balkh and Badakhshān**

[103] For many years, the sūba of Balkh and Badakhshān was governed with great pomp by Nazar Muhammad Khān. Since then, through the lovely serendipity of destiny, excellent planning, and the might of the sword, it has entered the jurisdiction of the patrons of victorious empire (tasarruf-i auliyya'-i daulat-i qāhira dar āmad), and it became customary in that bounteous region to accept the seal and read the khutba of that most exalted of names and the servants of His Majesty the Emperor, the Divine Shadow. When Nazar Muhammad Khān returned from his hiatus Iran, he took refuge at the court of wealth and fortune, and thus Balkh and Badakhshān were once again entrusted to the said Khān as per prior custom (ba-dastūr-i sābiq).

The special features of that country are so famous as to require no publicity (az ghāyat-i ishtihār muhtāj-i azhār nīst). The humblest of imperial servants, the author of this
exquisite book (*naskha-i badi‘*), has traveled to that land, and is therefore very well-acquainted with the quality of its climate.

The cream of experts in Truth and Faith (*zubda-i arbâb-i sâdq-o-yaqîn*), Khwâja Abû al-Nasr Pârsâ [Naqshabandî] and Shâfiq Balkhî are both laid to rest in this very land.

Numerous great cities and towns, such as Halim, Akhcha, Sar-i Pul, Surghân, the Khyber Pass (*dara-i khyber*), Qabâdiyân, and Chahâr Sad, as well as the jurisdictions and territories (*‘ummâlât va wilâyât*) of Tirmiz, Sâl-Chârik [?], Andkhûd, Chalchakto, Maimana, Ghurjistân [Ghûr?], Shahr-i Safâ, Kâhamrûd, Îmâqât, Hazârajât, Aimâqât [a.k.a. Aimâkât], the districts of Râhdâra, which is a part of the Khujân Pass and is associated with Bâkh. Badakhshân is known especially for its deposits of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and iron (*kân-i tilâ va naqra va lâjaward va āhan*), as well as the estates and mansions of the provincial capitals and other urban centers like Qandahâr, Ghûrî, Tâftân, Hazrat-i Imâm, Herât, Āqâ Sarâ, Kîshm, Baghlân, Farkhâr, Khost, Kûlâb, Hisâr, Hasan Bâgh, Adras [?], Kâranda Sarâ, Harzûrdistân [?], Nuqul-i Bâlâ va Pâyân, Awîmâqât, and Hazârajât.

The second *chaman* recounted by Chandar Bhân Brahman ends here.
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