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Master and *Munshī*: A Brahman secretary's guide to Mughal governance

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This article aims to contribute to a growing body of scholarship on the cultural world of the early modern Indo-Persian state secretary, or munshī. Our guide will be the celebrated Mughal munshī, Chandar Bhān Brahman (d. 1662–63), whose life and career shed considerable light on the ideals of administrative conduct that informed political and intellectual culture during the reigns of the emperors Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān. After examining Chandar Bhān's background and socio-intellectual milieu, we will focus in particular on a section of his prose magnum opus, Chahār Chaman ('The Four Gardens'), which served as both a memoir of his career in Mughal service and a didactic guide for exemplary ministerial theory and practice, or wizārat. Chandar Bhān's ideal wazīr, embodied by ministers like Afzal Khān Shirazi (d. 1639), Sa'd Allāh Khān (d. 1656), and Raghūnāth Rāy-i Rāyān (d. 1664), was not only tolerant and humane in the exercise of power, but also an expert in the secretarial arts in his own right, and a model of civility (akhlāq) and mystical awareness (ma'rifat) for others. In modern historiography such virtues tend to be primarily associated with Akbar's court, but at least in Chandar Bhān's eyes, they continued to have lasting relevance throughout the Mughal seventeenth century.

Keywords: Mughal Empire, governance, mysticism, nobility, *munshīs*, *wazīrs*, Chandar Bhan Brahman

Introduction

This article examines the relationships among secretarial elites and the Mughal nobility through the eyes of the celebrated early modern *munshī*, Chandar Bhān Brahman (d. 1662–3). After some background and context on Chandar Bhān himself, the analysis will centre on a particular section of the great secretary's memoir of his career in Mughal service, *Chahār Chaman* ('The Four Gardens'), in which

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he also gives his assessment of the careers of numerous Mughal *wazīrs* and other administrators, many of whom he knew personally and worked with during the course of his life. The portion of the text that we will focus on, while basically autobiographical, also draws on the Indo–Persian tradition of didactic *naṣīhat-nāmas*, or ‘advice books,’ especially the sub-genre known as *dastūr al-wizārat*, or ‘manuals for *wazīrs*.’ In other words, this part of *Chahār Chaman* was meant to be read not only as an account of Chandar Bhān’s and others’ administrative careers, but also as a kind of guide book, demonstrating the type of exemplary prose, administrative competence and genteel civility that any aspiring Mughal civil servant or administrator ought to emulate.

We do not know exactly when Chandar Bhān was born, but it was almost certainly sometime towards the end of Akbar’s reign (1556–1605), meaning that he came of age and spent the bulk of his career during the reigns of emperors Jahāngīr (1605–28) and Shāh Jahān (1628–58). After that, he continued for a brief time to serve under Aurangzeb ‘Ālamgīr (r. 1658–1707) before, citing old age, he retired from imperial service and returned to his native city of Lahore, spending his twilight years as caretaker of Jahāngīr’s tomb. Chandar Bhān thus lived through part or all of the reigns of four Mughal monarchs; and there are a number of reasons why his extant writings offer us a slightly different perspective on Mughal political culture than we are perhaps used to seeing in a lot of modern scholarship.

For one thing, Jahāngīr’s and Shāh Jahān’s reigns have not received nearly the attention that Akbar’s has, either in scholarship or in the popular imagination. One effect of this neglect is that while many of the fellow secretaries, literati and nobles that Chandar Bhān writes about will be familiar to a small circle of Mughal specialists, most of them are barely known in the larger historiography of South Asia, despite the power and prestige they commanded in their own day, at a time when the Mughal state was at the peak of its power, majesty and territorial reach. Many of them, surprisingly enough, do not even appear in histories of the Mughal Empire itself.¹ Thus, by engaging Chandar Bhān’s experience of Mughal governance, we not only learn a lot about who was doing the actual governing over the first six decades of the Mughal seventeenth century, we will also gain a lot of

¹ Consider, neither of Shāh Jahān’s two greatest *wazīrs*, Afzal Khān Shirazi and Sa’d Allāh Khān (both of whom are discussed below), is even mentioned in Robinson, *The Mughal Emperors*, or Schimmel, *Empire of the Great Mughals*. Sa’d Allāh Khān does merit a passing mention in Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (pp. 132, 134, 144), but only in his capacity as a military commander. There is, of course, a rich archive of social historical scholarship which has indexed the hierarchy and basic composition of the Mughal nobility during this period (see for instance Athar Ali, *Apparatus of Empire* and idem. *Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*; Husain, *Nobility under Akbar and Jahāngīr*; Anwar, *Nobility under the Mughals (1628–58)*). The utility and value of these exhaustively researched statistical surveys are beyond question; but a *mansab* ranking is not a window onto the soul, and thus, the ground-breaking recent work of scholars like Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam notwithstanding, there remains much work to be done to complement this existing body of research with an equally sustained body of serious cultural and intellectual historical analysis.

insight into the way that certain aspects of Mughal political culture that tend to be associated almost exclusively with Akbar actually continued to evolve in later decades. In particular, Chandar Bhān's network(s) of interlocutors show us the depth and breadth of Hindu participation in the Mughal ecumene; and his view of the lives and careers of various members of the Mughal nobility demonstrate that he and others who thought about ministerial theory and practice (*wizārat*) continued to place a great premium on virtues like mystical awareness (*ma'rifat*), scholarly erudition, governmental humility, administrative efficiency, legislative impartiality, religious tolerance and the public good.

Second, Chandar Bhān's autobiographical perspective gives us a glimpse of the kind of powerful friendships and bonds of personal intimacy that often existed among courtly, administrative and intellectual elites in Mughal India—bonds that were only amplified by the robust culture of epistolary correspondence which prevailed at the time. The Mughal Empire is often depicted in such fabulous terms that one might easily forget that there were actual people who lived there, forming friendships, working bureaucratic jobs, mourning lost loved ones, drinking too much, having existential crises and so on. Unfortunately, many of the very texts that are most revealing of such networks of subjectivity, the bulk of which, like *Chahār Chaman*, tended to fall under the generic category of 'stylized prose' (*inshā'*) have, until recently, not been considered especially 'useful' for the construction of modernist historical narratives.² One hope for what follows, then, is that it will contribute to the growing body of recent scholarship which proves that a renewed attention to early modern secretarial culture and some of these lost gems of Mughal *inshā'* can be instructive after all.³

² The classic articulation of this position was that of Jadunath Sarkar, who described Mughal *inshā'* as being 'of little historical value' specifically because of the 'literary vanity' of *munshīs* like Chandar Bhān (see his *Mughal Administration*, pp. 216–9). The somewhat artificial distinction between literary versus 'official' *inshā'* has further hamstrung scholarship on this rich archive. For an analysis of historiographical effects of these latter genre distinctions, see Kinra, 'Secretary-Poets,' pp. 51–158.

³ Besides the other essays in this issue, see also Alam and Alavi, introduction to *A European Experience of the Mughal Orient*, pp. 1–91; Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'Making of a *Munshī*' and 'Witnesses and Agents of Empire'; Zilli, 'Development of *Insha* Literature to the End of Akbar's Reign' and introduction to *The Mughal State and Culture*, pp. 7–93. For comparative South Asian perspectives beyond the Mughals, see for instance Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*; Deshpande, *Creative Pasts*, pp. 19–39; O'Hanlon and Minkowski, 'What Makes People Who They Are?'; Guha, 'Speaking Historically'; Flores, *The Firangis in the Mughal Chancellery*, 'Distant Wonders,' and 'Empires and Cultural Brokers'; Chatterjee, *Cultures of History*. For a comparative perspectives in the wider Islamic world, see for instance Farooqi, *Mughal-Ottoman Relations*; Gully, 'Epistles for Grammarians' and *The Culture of Letter-Writing*; Islam, *Indo-Persian Relations*; Mitchell, 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind', 'Provincial Chancelleries', 'Safavid Imperial Tarassul', and 'To Preserve and Protect'; Sood, 'Correspondence is Equal to half a Meeting' and 'The Informational Fabric'; Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, 'Between the Lines,' and 'Secretaries' Dreams'; Şahin, 'In the Service of the Ottoman Empire.'

Third, above all, we see in Chandar Bhān's approach to *wizārat* evidence of the practical application and lasting relevance of a whole range of normative Indo–Persian principles concerning ethical behavior (*ādāb* and *akhlāq*), administrative competence and idealized masculine conduct.⁴ Informed by this larger discursive framework regarding gentlemanly comportment, Chandar Bhān's milieu was also one in which a certain cluster of the secretarial arts, specifically, was normalised and idealised as applicable—indeed, as necessary—not just for the professional training of *munshīs*, but also for the politico-moral regulation of royalty, ministers, nobles and elites generally. Just as Machiavelli had done, the authors of normative texts on moral and political wisdom in the Indo–Persian *ādāb* and *akhlāqī* traditions had always placed a heavy emphasis on the importance of the state secretary—known in Persian texts variously as a *dabīr*, *kātib*, or *munshī*—to the proper functioning of government. Certain skills, like penmanship (*khwush-nawīsī*), accounting (*siyāq*), the ability to write stylised prose (*inshā'-pardāzī*) and to traffic in what the medieval treatise *Qābūs-nāma* called 'coded language' (*sukhan-i marmūz*),⁵ were obviously a critical component of any imperial *munshī*'s basic professional toolkit. But even in medieval royal advice books like *Qābūs-nāma* and *Chahār Maqāla*, a much broader spectrum of qualities like social etiquette, diplomatic savvy, political discretion, literary flair, scholarly erudition and even mystical sensibility came to be associated with truly great *munshīs* and *dabīrs*. Few were considered capable of fully mastering this comprehensive cultural package, which is part of what made becoming truly adept *munshī*, or *munshī-yi haqīqī*, so rare. Nevertheless, for aspiring civil servants a talent for the secretarial arts (*funūn-i dabīrī* or *munshīgīrī*) was seen as a critical pathway to upward social mobility. For princes, meanwhile, an education in the *funūn-i dabīrī* was likewise considered essential, allowing them to comprehend what was going on in the administrative apparatus around them, and thus, to maintain power and govern effectively. This instrumental view of the secretarial arts as keys to power applied to *wazīrs* and other nobles as well, while, by extension, the broader spectrum of less tangible secretarial qualities came to be seen as critical components of gentlemanly conduct, moral sentiment, social civility and ethical politics.

These intellectual historical trends were well established in Indo–Persian literary and political culture long before the consolidation of the Mughal Empire and thus it is not surprising to see them so clearly reflected in Chandar Bhān's narrative. As we will see, he viewed the Mughal state as one in which meritocracy mattered

⁴ For background, see Alam, 'Akhlāqī Norms and Mughal Governance' and idem. *Languages of Political Islam*, pp. 26–80. On the specific question of Mughal administrative and court etiquette, see Richards, 'Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers.' On the cultures of masculinity that informed such norms, see for instance O'Hanlon, 'Kingdom, Household, and Body' and idem. 'Manliness and Imperial Service in Mughal North India'; Brown, 'If Music be the Food of Love.'

⁵ Kai-Kā'ūs ibn Iskandar, *Qābūs-nāma*, 208.

and social mobility was possible if one had talent and was willing to work hard. But perhaps more significantly he also considered it perfectly appropriate to judge the competence of various nobles and *wazīrs* on the basis of criteria specific to the realm of the secretarial arts. Indeed, in his view attributes like high birth and martial valour, while certainly important, were not nearly enough to make someone a great leader, much less a great *wazīr*. Rather, having a knack for skills like calligraphy, managing accounts and drafting elegant letters augmented one's competence as a manager, while possessing the correct balance of diplomacy, discretion, religious tolerance, mystical sensibility and *akhlāqī* civility was what separated the truly great Mughal ministers like Rājā Todar Mal, Abū al-Fazl, Afzal Khān, Sa'd Allāh Khān and Raghūnāth Rāy-i Rāyān from others whom he saw, as it were, 'merely' as great military commanders like Mīr Jumla or taskmasters like Islām Khān. It is true that Chandar Bhān was far too polite to criticise these latter two directly, but he nevertheless draws a noticeable line in his memoir between those administrators who had outstanding secretarial skills versus those who did not. This distinction will become clearer when we examine *Chahār Chaman's* section on *wizārat* in detail. But before proceeding to that analysis, let us begin by examining Chandar Bhan's background, literary career, and rise to the top of the secretarial profession.

Chandar Bhān's *Oeuvre* and Early Intellectual World

Over the course of his career, Chandar Bhān authored numerous works of stylized prose, or *inshā'*, among which the two best known are *Chahār Chaman* and his collected letters, usually referred to as *Munsha'āt-i Brahman*.⁶ *Chahār Chaman*,

⁶ Many manuscripts of both texts survive in collections around the world, but happily *Chahār Chaman* (ed. Ja'fri, 2007) and *Munsha'āt-i Brahman* (ed. Qasimi and Siddiqi, 2005), are now also available in printed editions with substantial introductions (in Persian). In the continuing absence, however, of any published biographies or scholarly monographs, Chandar Bhān's own writings remain the best sources for information about his life and career. Among alternative primary sources, the best and most contemporary account is contained in Muhammad Sālih Kambūh, *Amal-i Šāliḥ*, vol. 3, pp. 336–8, 343–4. Notices of Chandar Bhān also feature regularly in early modern *taẓkiras*—see for instance the relevant entries in Muhammad Afzal Sarkhwush, *Kalimāt al-Shu'arā*; Sher Khān Lodī, *Mir'āt al-Khayāl*; Kishan Chand Ikhlās, *Hamesha Bahār*; Mīr Husain Dost Sanbhalī, *Taẓkira-yi Husainī*; 'Alī Qulī Khān Wāliḥ Dāghistānī, *Riyāz al-Shu'arā*; Muḥammad Qudrat Allāh Gopāmawī, *Natā'ij al-Afḵār*; Shaikh Ahmad 'Alī Hāshimī Sandelvī, *Maḳḳazan al-Gharā'ib*; Lachmī Narāyan Shafīq, *Taẓkira-yi Gul-i Ra'nā*; and Husain Qulī Khān 'Āshiqī 'Azīmābādī, *Nishtar-i Ishq*, to name a few. These accounts are often fascinating in their own right, but are also not systematic or especially reliable. For an analysis, see Kinra 'Secretary-Poets in Mughal India,' pp. 367–437, and 'Infantilizing Bābā Dārā.' The most extensive studies besides my own are theses by Nath, 'Chandar Bhan Brahman: A Critical Edition of His Unknown Chahar Chaman' (Delhi University, 1974) and Kulshreshta, 'A Critical Study of Chandra Bhan Brahman and His Works' (Aligarh, 1976). There is also a considerable bibliography of published scholarship, much of it informative, but none comprehensive. In Urdu, see for instance 'Abdullah, 'Chandar Bhān Brahman' and *Adabiyat-i Fārsī meṅ Hindū'ōṅ kā Ḥiṣṣa*, pp. 70–6, 79–83; Nadvi, 'Rāy Pandit Chandar Bhān Brahman'; Mārahraṇvī, *Umarā-yi Hunūd*,

with which we will primarily be concerned here, is actually a composite work in which Chandar Bhān puts a number of different modes of *inshā'*-*pardāzī* on display—memoir, short essay, epistolography, travel reportage and various other types of occasional writing. The style throughout is highly ornate; but this should not distract us, as it did many colonial and other modernist historians, from the fact that the author was a real person, depicting real emotions, people, places and events that he witnessed, as he put it, with his own 'spectating eye' (*chashm-i tamāshā'ī*). The order of the contents sometimes varies from manuscript to manuscript, but in most versions *chaman* one contains a description of various court assemblies and other festivals at which Chandar Bhān publicly recited poetry, followed by the autobiographical essay on *wizārat* discussed below, and an account of several imperial campaigns, including a diplomatic mission to Mewar in which the author himself participated. In *chaman* two, Chandar Bhān gives us a detailed glimpse of Shāh Jahān's daily routine, not unlike the one found in 'Abd al-Hamid Lahori's *Pādshāh-nāma*, to which is appended a descriptive digest of various *šūbahs* of the empire. This digest echoes certain sections of the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* in both content and prose style, and also includes vivid depictions of the bustling activity in Chandni Chowk, the Lahore bazaar and interesting sites like Sufi shrines and other pilgrimage destinations. *Chaman* three is primarily a memoir of the author's life story, supplemented with personal letters (many of which also appear in *Munsha'āt-i Brahman*) that shed light on what, in certain other contexts, would confidently be referred to as Chandar Bhān's 'epistolary self.'⁷ And finally, *chaman* four contains miscellaneous letters and short essays on topics ranging from the cosmic nature of linguistic expression (e.g., the essay on *marātib-i sukḥan*), to meditations on philosophical and mystical subjects such as the desire for spiritual detachment (*lazzat-i tark-i ta'alluq*), constancy along the path of acceptance of divine fate (*istiqāmat bar jāda-yi tawakkul*), the nature of Truth (*kaifiyat-i aṣl-i ḥaqīqat*) and other esoteric matters.

Chahār Chaman is, in other words, a richly layered text, of which we can only examine a small part in what follows. But to get a sense of Chandar Bhan's overall perspective, there were other important aspects to his writing career that are

pp. 183–8. In English, see Husain, 'Chandar Bhān Brahman (A Hindu Writer of Persian Prose and Verse)'; the introduction to Chandar Bhān's poetic *dīwān* in Farooqui, ed., *Aḥwāl wa Āḡār-i Chandra Bhān Brahman wa Dīwān-i Pārsī*; and Chopra's short pamphlet, 'Chandra Bhan Brahmin.' On Chandar Bhān in the specific context of Mughal *inshā'* and the technical aspects of secretarial administration, see for instance Mohiuddin, *The Chancellery and Persian Epistolography under the Mughals*. Aspects of Chandar Bhān's urban subjectivity have also recently been analyzed in Zaman, 'Inscribing Empire,' pp. 93–129, and his views on the high level of education required of a successful *munshī* (expressed in an extensive letter to his son Tej Bhān) have been briefly examined in Alam, 'Culture and Politics of Persian,' pp. 164–5, and Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'The Making of a Munshī,' pp. 62–3.

⁷ Cf. Earle, ed., *Epistolary Selves*.

also worth briefly noting. In the preface to *Munsha'āt-i Brahman*, Chandar Bhān names several other works written by him: *Guldasta*, *Tuḥfat al-Wuzarā*, *Kārnāma*, *Tuḥfat al-Fuṣahā*, *Majma'al-Fuqarā* 'and others besides.'⁸ Among those 'others' was probably the intriguing 'History of the Kings of Delhi' (*Tārīkh-i Rāja-hā-yi Dihlī-yi Hindūstān*), an almanac that lists the names, dates and brief details about every ruler who sat on the throne of Delhi from Yuddhishtira through Shāh Jahān.⁹ But of the texts which he specifically names, only *Guldasta*, which was also widely circulated under the title 'Principles of Statecraft under Shāh Jahān' (*Qawā'id al-Saltanat-i Shāh Jahān*), seems to have survived. This text was really just a digest of certain sections of *Chahār Chaman*—a 'flower bouquet' (*guldasta*) plucked from 'the four gardens' (*chahār chaman*) of the parent text, if you will—which, as the alternative title indicates, dealt mainly with Shāh Jahān's daily routine and approach to governance.¹⁰ This text continued to be very popular throughout the eighteenth century and was even included as a sample of model Persian prose by the noted East India Company Persianist Francis Gladwin, in his widely disseminated textbook for British administrators, *The Persian Moonshee* (1795).

Sometime towards the end of his career Chandar Bhān also worked in some capacity with Prince Dārā Shukoh; it was in this context that he translated Dārā's Hindi dialogues with the Punjabi spiritual divine Bābā Lāl Dayāl into Persian, a text that was itself later translated into Sanskrit under the title *Praśnottarāvalī* (A Series of Questions and Answers).¹¹ Much has been made of Chandar Bhān's relationship with Dārā, both in early modern biographical compendia (*tazkiras*) and in modern scholarship; but it should be noted that we have few verifiable details regarding the actual extent of their association, which has probably been

⁸ *Munsha'āt*, 1.

⁹ There appears to be only one known manuscript of this text, housed in the Gujarat Vidya Sabha, Ahmedabad (Main Catalogue #46).

¹⁰ Compare for instance *Chahār Chaman*, 85–123, with the manuscript *Guldasta*, *Mausūm ba-Qawā'id al-Saltanat*, Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University (Suleiman Collection #664/42) or the five other Aligarh manuscripts of varying titles containing roughly the same text (Suleiman Collection #664/44; Subhān Allah collection #891'5528/20; 'Abd al-Salām collection, #289/59; 'Abd al-Salām collection, #291/61b; Habīb Ganj Collection #56/1).

¹¹ See for instance the manuscripts *Gosht-i Bābā Lāl Dayāl hamrāh-i Shāhẓādah Dārā Shukoh*, Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, Jawāhir Museum Collection #70; *Sawāl-u-Jawāb-i Dārā Shukoh wa Bābā Lāl*, British Library, Or. 1883, ff. 169b–175a. For a partial translation, see also Clément Huart and Louis Massignon. 'Dara Shikoh's Interview with Baba La'1 Das at Lahore,' 106–30 (originally published as 'Les Entretiens de Lahore [entre le prince imperial Dārā Shikūh et l'ascète Hindou Baba La'1 Das],', *Journal Asiatique* 209 (December 1926): 285–34). I am grateful to Christopher Minkowski for drawing my attention to the Sanskrit version, which appears to survive in only one manuscript, currently housed in the City Palace Jaipur.

greatly exaggerated.¹² Chandar Bhān, for his part, did not preserve any correspondence with the prince in his *Munsha'āt*, nor does he discuss Dārā in any of his other major writings.¹³

Chandar Bhān was also a poet of considerable stature. He has left a highly-regarded *dīwān* of collected poetry and much of his epistolary correspondence with the nobility and intellectuals of the time also contained poetry, usually *ghazals* which he almost always described as having been ‘freshly’ (*ba-tāzagī*) composed. This usage not only alerted his correspondents to the fact that he was sharing new material, but also signaled that he considered his verse to be at the vanguard of trends in seventeenth-century Indo–Persian literary culture, chief among them the widespread effort to reinvigorate the classical canon through poetic innovation and ‘speaking the fresh’ (*tāza-gū'ī*).¹⁴ Most of his contemporary audience, needless to say, would have appreciated the double entendre. Meanwhile, through his training as a *munshī* he was well-versed in the Indo–Persian poetic canon, from which he quotes often, and in his capacity as a state secretary in attendance at courtly festivals and imperial assemblies he intermingled with many of the elite poets of the era, a number of whom reciprocated Chandar Bhān’s admiration for them with praise of their own. He corresponded, for instance, with Muhammad Jān Qudṣī (d. 1646), the famed émigré from Mashhad whose verse once so impressed Shāh Jahān that he was rewarded with his weight in gold, and whom Chandar Bhān refers to in one letter as the ‘nightingale of a thousand tales’ (*bulbul-i hazār dāstān*).¹⁵ Another friend and correspondent was Abū al-Barakāt Munīr Lahorī (1609–45), whom Chandar Bhān saw as his fellow traveler ‘across the country of glowing expressions and through the garden of jewel-scattering meanings’ (*bar kishwar-i sukḥan-i tābān wa dar gulshan-i ma'nī-yi gauhar-afshān*).¹⁶ Munīr,

¹² Numerous late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Persian *taẓkiras*—e.g. Lodi’s *Mir'āt al-Khayāl*, Sanbhalī’s *Taẓkira-yi Husainī*, Sandelvī’s *Makḥzan al-Gharā'ib*—contain notices of Chandar Bhān which give the quite erroneous impression that Dārā’s patronage was somehow responsible for the *munshī*’s career success. For an analysis of the significance of this persistent cultural memory, see Kinra, ‘Infantilizing Bābā Dārā.’ For a more complete listing and translations of many of the *taẓkira* accounts, see Kinra, ‘Secretary-Poets in Mughal India,’ 367–437.

¹³ There is, however, at least one other Persian translation of a yogic text attributed to Chandar Bhān, a Sanskrit treatise referred to as *Ātma-Vilāsa*, with the Persian text called *Nādir al-Nukāt*. It was published in a printed edition by Naval Kishore Press, but to my knowledge there are no surviving contemporary manuscripts, making Chandar Bhān’s authorship difficult, in the absence of further evidence, to corroborate.

¹⁴ See Kinra, ‘Fresh Words for a Fresh World’; ‘Make it Fresh’.

¹⁵ *Chahār Chaman*, pp. 155–6. For brief details on Qudṣī’s career, see Ahmed, ‘Safawid Poets,’ p. 123; Rahman, *Persian Literature in India*, pp. 141–6; Losensky, ‘Qodsi Maṣḥadi,’ *Encyclopedia Iranica* (online).

¹⁶ *Chahār Chaman*, pp. 156–7. For details on Munīr’s career, see Rahman, *Persian Literature in India*, p. 148. Memon, ‘Abu’l Barakāt Lāhūrī,’ *Encyclopedia Iranica* (online); Rashid, *Taẓkira-yi Shu'arā-yi Punjāb*, pp. 348–51. For a discussion of the historical significance of Munīr’s debates with contemporary poets and *Kārnāma*, his polemic against early modern *tāza-gū'ī* poetry, see Alam, ‘Culture and Politics of Persian’, pp. 182–4, and Kinra, ‘Make it Fresh’.

who was known before his untimely death as a sharp critic unafraid of heated rivalries with fellow poets, lauded the *munshī* in one of his own letters as:

... 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, 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

Chandar Bhān's poetry was also appreciated by other luminaries of the period, including the celebrated itinerant poet Mīrzā Muhammad 'Alī Sā'ib Tabrīzī (ca. 1592–1676), who spent a number of years in India, and included at least one of Chandar Bhān's compositions in his personal anthology (*bayāz*) of great poets.¹⁸ Likewise, a number of Chandar Bhān's *ghazals* are included a generation later in the personal *bayāz* of Mīrzā 'Abd al-Qādir Bedil (1644–1721), one of the most renowned metaphysical poets of early modern Indo–Persian literature.¹⁹

Chandar Bhān was, in fact, among only four intellectuals of Shāh Jahān's reign whom his contemporary, the historian Muhammad Sālih Kambūh, considered noteworthy as both a master prose stylist and an elite poet.²⁰ Sālih, too, was one of Chandar Bhān's epistolary correspondents;²¹ and in *'Amal-i Sālih*, his chronicle of Shāh Jahān's reign, he noted that Chandar Bhān was very sociable (*khwush-ikh̄tilāt*), playfully describing him as 'the idol-worshiper in the temple of poetic expression' (*ṣanam-parast-i but-kh̄āna-yi suk̄han*) before adding:

In the norms (*ā'in*) of prose and *inshā'* he follows Abū 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 mītābad*); and although his form (*ṣūrat*) is Hindu, in essence (*ma'nī*) he [breathes] Islam.

¹⁷ Quoted in Shafiq, *Tazkira-yi Gul-i Ra'nā'*, p. 9. 'Sahbān' here refers to Sahbān Wā'il, the celebrated medieval Arab orator proverbial for his eloquence.

¹⁸ *Bayāz-i Sā'ib*, MS, Oriental Manuscript Library and Research Institute (OMLRI), Hyderabad, #6170. On Sā'ib's career and poetic legacy, see Ahmed, 'Safawid Poets,' p. 123; Rahman, pp. 135–41; Losensky, 'Sā'eb Tabrizi,' *Encyclopedia Iranica* (online).

¹⁹ *Bayāz-i Bedil*, MS, British Library, Add. 16,802, ff. 283a, 286b–287a, and 315a; Add. 16,803, f. 73b. For details on Bedil's career, see Ghani, *Life and Works of Abdul Qadir Bedil*.

²⁰ The others were Mullā Shaidā, Abū al-Barakāt Munīr Lahorī, and Hakīm Hāziq; see *'Amal-i Sālih*, Vol. 3, pp. 305–44.

²¹ See his letter to Chandar Bhān in *Bahār-i Suk̄han*, MS, British Library, Or. 178, ff. 96b–98a.

Like his poetry, he lives in perfect simplicity and without ostentation. The tongue of his pen is exceptionally eloquent, and his talents are the summit of skill in this art.²²

Of course, in some ways it is precisely because of his tremendous success as a litterateur, in particular as a Hindu savant of Persian, that Chandar Bhān is often remembered nowadays as some sort of singular figure. But it is worth remembering that he was not even unique in his own family, much less in Mughal society writ large. As he tells us in the ‘Third Garden’ of *Chahār Chaman*, his father Dharam Dās was actually the first in his family to learn Persian and enter Mughal service:

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.... The birthplace and early training of this supplicant were in the Abode of the Sultanate, the city of 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. He was a scribe of considerable skill (*nawīsanda-i kārdānī būd*), and after a time managed to earn a reputation among the *mansabdārs* of the imperial government ranks. Later, with an eye toward the fickleness of unpredictable fate, he resigned from government service and his *mansab*, and retired to a quiet corner.²³

Note that Chandar Bhān sees no conflict between pride in his Brahmanical heritage and his family’s affinity for either the Indo–Persian ecumene or Mughal administrative service. Quite the contrary, Chandar Bhān seems to have viewed his caste status less in terms of ritual purity than in terms of a general commitment to intellectual excellence. He notes that even though Brahmans as a class (*tā’ifa*) ‘engage in various worldly professions,’ what sets them apart is that they have ‘retained the ability to discern visible and hidden meanings’ (*pās-i marātib-i suwārī wa ma’ nawī dāshta*) and continue to live ‘in conformity with the ways prescribed for them in reliable ancient books’ (*ba wajhī ki dar kutub-i mu’tabar-i qadīm dar bāra-yi īn guroh šabt shuda*). His understanding of Brahman-ness thus definitely had a ‘traditional’ component, but it was not so restrictive that a mere interest in Persian literature, expertise in Sufi mystical idioms, or Mughal service could threaten it. Indeed, he reinforced this expansive understanding of his caste identity through his selection of ‘Brahman’ as his literary pen-name (*takhallus*)—a decision which meant, of course, that every Persian *ghazal* he ever composed would include at least one couplet in which he could meditate playfully on the meaning and

²² *Amal-i Šāliḥ*, Vol. 3, pp. 336–8.

²³ *Chahār Chaman*, pp. 145–6.

nature of Brahmanness.²⁴ Sālih's witty description of him as the 'idol-worshiper in the temple of poetic expression' suggests, moreover, that at least some of his Muslim audience openly relished the cleverness of this literary ploy.

Chandar Bhān's brothers, too, were both Persian savants. After telling us about his father, he continues:

Rāy Bhān and Uday Bhān are the true brothers of this *faqīr*. The passion for self-liberation fell into Rāy Bhān's head, and he developed an antipathy toward earthly attachments. But Uday 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, 'Āqīl 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 Uday Bhān lifted a 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 worldly people.²⁵

Though one of the brothers mentioned here, Rāy Bhān, was apparently a bit of a hermit, nonetheless Chandar Bhān's numerous extant letters to both brothers suggest that they too had a high degree of Persian literacy, secretarial training and familiarity with Sufi and literary idioms.²⁶ This is also true of Chandar Bhān's son, Tej Bhān, about whose life we unfortunately know very little, but who clearly knew enough Persian to read his father's many elegant letters to him.²⁷ Moreover, a willingness to engage Mughal composite culture wasn't just a family affair in Chandar Bhān's early life. He tells us in a passage from *Chahār Chaman* that 'this *faqīr* first studied *ta'liq* script with one Banārasī Dās, the son of Pratāp Rāy Kāyastha,' who appears to have been some sort of provincial treasury officer.²⁸ He also mentions a number of '*shūdra*' acquaintances who were part of the network of scribes and revenue officials in Punjab at the time, for instance in this passage from a letter to his brother, in which he informs the latter of the death of one of his old teachers:

²⁴ That is, because conventionally a *ghazal*'s final verse, or *maqta'*, always contains the poet's pen-name. For examples, see Brahman, *Dīwān-i Pārsī* (ed. Farooqui), *passim*.

²⁵ *Chahār Chaman*, pp. 145–6.

²⁶ *Munsha'āt*, 75–80, 82–93, 105, 107–8, 110–16.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 93–104, 106–7. For an English translation of one of these letters to Tej Bhān, see Alam, 'Culture and Politics of Persian,' pp. 164–5, and Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'The Making of a Munshī,' pp. 62–3.

²⁸ The passage does not appear in the printed edition of *Chahār Chaman*, but is in the manuscript housed in the National Museum, New Delhi, MS #3340 (55043/2217), fol. 97a—quite possibly the oldest extant manuscript of the text. Also, n.b., the Banārasī Dās mentioned here is almost certainly *not* the famous author of *Ardhakathānaka*.

During the bloom of youth, this faithful supplicant took lessons in the broken script (*khatt-i shikasta*) from Jatmal Shūdra, who, having left the bodily cage has glided away (*khirāmīda*) to the world of the spirit, and the only living reminder of that world-traveler is now his brother, Nisbat Rā'o, who was known among his contemporaries for originality, balanced temperament, and the power of his words (*matānat-i kalām*). There was also Gopi Chand Shūdra, who has a great flair for writing *ta'liq* and *shikasta*. In fact, among the community (*qaum*) of *shūdras* [there are also] Bhagavant Rāy and Nārāyan Dās, and their other brothers, [who] have all become quite famous for draftsmanship, and this *faqīr* is an avowed disciple of this community.²⁹

To modern ears accustomed to hearing about the inflexibility of 'traditional' premodern caste strictures, Chandar Bhān's relaxed attitude here is a refreshing corrective. But more importantly for present purposes, his remarks clearly indicate that the spread of Persian literacy in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Punjab went well beyond the imperial bureaucracy, and was by no means exclusive to a few token Hindus, or to specific communities like *khattrīs* and *kāyasthas*. Indeed, if one examines Chandar Bhān's entire collected letters, one finds that there are not only dozens of Persian letters addressed to other Hindu elites like Rājā Muhkam Singh, Rājā Dhokal Singh, Rājā Najab Singh, Rāy Mohan La'l, Rāy Thakur Dās and Rāy Gobind Dās,³⁰ but also numerous letters of 'recommendation' (*sifārish*) addressed to various Mughal officials, both Hindu and Muslim, in which Chandar Bhān attests to the Persian literacy and scribal talents of many more friends, family members and disciples of varying social and caste backgrounds. Most of the people in this extended network have left little trace in the historical record beyond their names—Shankar Dās, Sūrat Singh, Prān Nāth, Khwāja Sāgar Mal and so on—as they appear in Chandar Bhān's letters; and very few will likely have been all-around literateurs even approaching Chandar Bhān's caliber. But the echo of their voices in his correspondence nevertheless speaks volumes about the wide pool of talented Hindu intellectuals and service professionals, among whom the vast majority saw Persian as a relatively unproblematic, neutral language of everyday correspondence, literary expression and social mobility.

The traces of such networks are also a potent reminder that everyday intellectual life in Mughal north India, even among relative elites, did not begin and end with whatever was going on in the imperial court. The peccadilloes of emperors and the royal family notwithstanding, there was still an empire to be run, and the bulk

²⁹ *Chahār Chaman*, MS, National Museum, New Delhi, #3340 (55043/2217), ff. 97a–97b. Nath, 'Chandar Bhān Brahman,' pp. 9–10 also mentions two more of Chandar Bhān's early interlocutors, named Devī Dās and Arjun Mal Shūdra.

³⁰ *Munsha'āt*, pp. 64–71.

of that administrative work was performed by *wazīrs*, *wakīls*, nobles, provincial magistrates, state secretaries and other officials whose day-to-day existence and working relationships with subordinates tended to be marked by a confident pluralism and the widespread accommodation of cultural diversity in the areas they governed. Indeed, without the acceptance of such values among a broad swath of nobles and other subimperial officials out in the provinces, the ideology of *ṣulḥ-i kull* propagated from the rarefied atmosphere of the imperial court would likely not have amounted to much more than an idealistic desideratum.

In Chandar Bhān's case, we see that his whole family was connected quite amicably to a cluster of Mughal nobles, minor officials and intellectuals in Jahāngīr-era Lahore. In the passage cited above he does not specify who his father Dharam Dās's *mansabdār* patrons were, but note the profound respect and pronounced tone of mystical longing which he uses to describe his brother Uday Bhān's affection for his friend and patron, 'Āqil Khān Ināyat-Allāh (d. 1649). Chandar Bhān, too, had a friendly epistolary correspondence with 'Āqil Khān,³¹ who had a long career in Mughal service dating back to the beginning of Jahāngīr's reign.³² He was said to have been 'accomplished in both poetry and accounts' (*az naẓm wa siyāq bahra-war būd*), and served for a time in the position of *arẓ-mukarrar*, or editor of royal petitions, the sort of appointment that would definitely earn an elite *munshī* like Chandar Bhān's appreciation.³³ After the death of 'Āqil Khān's father, also a minor Mughal official, he was adopted by Afzal Khān Shukr-Allāh Shirazi (d. 1639), a long-time confidante of Shāh Jahān who eventually became Prime Minister of the empire, and was also one of Chandar Bhān's own key patrons (see the following sections). 'Āqil Khān was also, incidentally, married to the adopted daughter of Satī-al-Nīsa Khānum (d. 1647), the erudite *muhr-dār* of the royal harem, tutor of Princess Jahānārā and sister of Jahāngīr's poet laureate, Tālib Āmulī.³⁴

Chandar Bhān also had a profound respect and admiration for his own first employer, Mīr 'Abd al-Karīm, who was at the time the chief architect (*mīr-i'imārat*) of Lahore, but later went on to greater renown as one of the key superintendents of financing and construction for the Taj Mahal.³⁵ While his brother was working for 'Āqil Khān, he tells us:

Meanwhile, this faithful Brahman benefited from worldly training in the service of Mullā 'Abd al-Karīm, a master among principled men of the world (*maḥḥdūm-i qā'ida-dān-i 'ālam*), a sojourner on the path of asceticism,

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–4.

³² See for instance the early mention of him in Jahāngīr's memoirs: Khan, ed., *Tūzuk-i Jahāngīrī*, p. 34; Thackston, trans., *Jahāngīrnāmā*, p. 59.

³³ Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma'āsīr al-'Umara*, Vol. 2, pp. 790–2.

³⁴ On Sati-un-Nisa, see Begam, *Princess Jahān Ārā*, pp. 5–6; Mukherjee, *Royal Mughal Ladies*, pp. 37, 70, 177.

³⁵ Koch, *The Complete Taj Mahal*, p. 89; Begley and Desai, *Taj Mahal*, pp. 277–81.

renunciation, equanimity, and resolve (*'ābir bar jāda-yi faqr wa ghinā' wa qiyām wa mustaqīm*); my apprenticeship to that master proved to be like a precious and enduring pearl. (*shāgirdī-yi ān makhdūm durr-i muṭman-i mujarrab ast*).³⁶

'Āqil Khān and Mīr 'Abd al-Karīm were both well-respected and well-connected figures; but in the grand scheme of things they were also, ultimately, relatively minor officials—nowhere near the power and influence of truly elite grandees like 'Abd al-Rahīm Khān-i Khānān, Āsaf Khān and the select group of others on whom the historiography of the Mughal nobility tends to focus. Yet it was precisely such people from the middling to lower tier of Mughal officialdom, almost completely unknown today, who not only provided a level of administrative continuity from one reign to the next, but also set a tolerant example and dispensed the kind of local, everyday patronage that made the broader ideology of *ṣulh-i kull* actually work in practice. Without figures like 'Āqil Khān and Mīr 'Abd al-Karīm to recognise their talent and facilitate their careers early on, people like Chandar Bhān and his family would very likely never have even entered Mughal service, much less had such success once they did so.

Another provincial officer who made a big impression on Chandar Bhān early in his career was 'Ināyat Khān 'Ināyat-Allāh (d. 1618), the one-time governor of Lahore province. In a letter written later in life to Āsaf Khān, the illustrious member of the extended royal family,³⁷ Chandar Bhān recounts having had the opportunity to witness firsthand the governor's elegant comportment, adding that the latter 'had neither peer nor equal in terms of honesty and integrity' (*dar rāstī wa durustī 'adīl wa naẓīr nadāshī*).³⁸ 'Ināyat Khān had heard about Chandar Bhān's abilities, and promised to introduce him to Āsaf Khān, of whom he was a protégé of sorts, but 'the vicissitudes of fate had kept this from coming to pass' (*az ittifaqāt-i rūzgār īn ma'nī dast ba-ham nadād*)—perhaps a polite way of referring to 'Ināyat Khān's problems with substance abuse, which led to his untimely death in 1618.³⁹

³⁶ *Chahār Chaman*, p. 146. The text of the printed edition reads *qā'ida-dādan*, but this is almost certainly a misprint for *qā'ida-dān*.

³⁷ Āsaf Khān was not only the brother of Empress Nūr Jahān (and thus, Emperor Jahāngīr's brother-in-law), he was also the father of Mumtāz Mahal (and thus, Emperor Shāh Jahān's father-in-law). For details on his life and career, see Kumar, *Asaf Khan and his Times*; Shāhnawāz Khān *Ma'āẓir al-Umarā*, Vol. 1, pp. 151–60.

³⁸ *Chahār Chaman*, p. 151; *Munsha'āt*, pp. 15–6.

³⁹ 'Ināyat Khān' was a title, not a name. The usual sources contain very few biographical details about this particular 'Ināyat Khān, although Jahāngīr's account of his death from alcohol abuse is very moving (Thackston, *Jahāngīrnāma*, pp. 279–81; Khan, *Tūzuk-i Jahāngīrī*, pp. 247–8). The Thackston edition of *Jahāngīrnāma* also reproduces an excellent portrait of him ca. 1610 (p. 104), as well as the famous Bālchand painting of the dying, emaciated Khān in his final days (p. 280). For further details, and a discussion of the art-historical significance of the latter painting, see also Smart, 'The Death of 'Ināyat Khān.'

Now, years later, Chandar Bhān explained that since he had nevertheless managed to enter the royal service through the auspices of Afzal Khān, he considered himself a servant of Āsaf Khān as well, looked forward to learning from him, and wished him a long life and good fortune.

As the letter indicates, following his stint in the employ of Mīr 'Abd al-Karīm, Chandar Bhān entered the service of Afzal Khān Shukr-Allāh Shīrāzī (d. 1639), who had come to India via Surat in the early part of the seventeenth century, made his way to the court of 'Abd al-Rahīm Khān-i Khānān in Burhanpur and subsequently joined the retinue of Shāh Jahān while the latter was still a prince serving in the Deccan.⁴⁰ Afzal Khān was widely acknowledged as one of the most learned men of the times, often saluted, like Akbar's great minister Abū al-Fazl, with the epithet '*Allāmī*, i.e. 'the learned one.' We do not know exactly when or how Chandar Bhān entered Afzal Khān's service, but it was certainly one of the biggest turning points in the *munshī*'s career. He had great admiration for his new patron, a respect that was, at least as far as Chandar Bhān could tell, mutual. In the autobiographical section of *Chahār Chaman* he insists that Afzal Khān was fastidious about not showing favoritism among his employees, yet can't help adding a telling boast:

Although many *munshīs* of excellent penmanship and knowledge of the rules of writing from Iran, Turan, and Hindustan had all worked closely over the years with that eminent scholar, and the grace of the great man's alchemical gaze was consistently impartial in both appearance and reality, nevertheless, because of my knack for being an agreeable companion and with help from my lucky stars, he promoted this feeble ant ahead of all others.⁴¹

One proof of his patron's sincerity in this regard, according to Chandar Bhān, was that when Shāh Jahān had come to tour Afzal Khān's newly built Lahore estate, the Khān honoured Chandar Bhān by personally introducing him to the emperor. Afzal Khan also gave Chandar Bhān an elephant, 'so that,' he tells us, 'I could always travel alongside that illustrious Khān' to keep him company while on official business.⁴² Chandar Bhān was a fixture at the Khān's literary salons,

⁴⁰ Afzal Khān is regularly mentioned throughout *Jahāngīrnāma* and the various chronicles of Shāh Jahān's reign. For brief notices of his career, see also Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma'āṣir al-Umarā*, Vol. 1, pp. 145–51; Bhakkārī, *Zakhīrat al-Khawānīn*, Vol. 2, pp. 255–6; and Nahāwandī, *Ma'āṣir-i Rahīmī*, Vol. 3, pp. 23–6, where he is included among the prominent *ulamā*' and *fuṣṣalā* of the times. Likewise, Muhammad Sādiq's *Ṭabaqāt-i Shāhjahānī* (p. 36) also lists Afzal Khān first among the 'scholars, wise men, and learned people' (*ulamā' wa ḥukamā wa fuṣṣalā*) of the times.

⁴¹ *Chahār Chaman*, pp. 146–7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 147. Chandar Bhān was clearly quite taken with his new mode of transportation, and notes with pride in a letter to his brother Rāy Bhān (undated) that he rode the elephant while accompanying Afzal Khān on a trip to Daulatabad (*Munsha'āt*, pp. 75–6).

both as an audience member and as a participant, and the two also carried on a regular epistolary correspondence.⁴³

Afzal Khān was serving as *Mīr-i Sāmān* toward the end of Jahāngīr's reign and continued in that post in the early part of Shāh Jahān's. But in the second regnal year he was promoted to grand *wazīr*, an occasion marked by a chronogram that exalted both the king himself and his trusted adviser in grand historical terms: 'Plato has become the minister of Alexander' (*shud Falāṭūn wazīr-i iskandar = 1038 AH = 1629 CE*).⁴⁴ Thus began a remarkable stretch in which, over a period of roughly three decades, Chandar Bhān worked in some capacity for every Mughal Prime Minister, or directly for the emperor himself. It is to his observations of life and governance during this period that we now turn.

***Wizārat, Ma'rīfat and Munshīgīrī:* Chandar Bhān's Vision of Mughal Governance**

Midway through the first 'garden' of *Chahār Chaman*, Chandar Bhān begins a new section which recounts the 'efficacious and knot-unraveling' accomplishments (*kār-farmā'ī wa girih-gushā'ī*) of various *wazīrs* of Hindustan. As noted above, Chandar Bhān is invoking here a sub-genre of *akhlāqī* texts that dealt specifically with ministerial theory and practice, such as Qāzī Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Hasan al-Husainī's *Akhlāq-i Humāyūnī*, which were generally referred to as 'Manuals for *Wazīrs*' (*dastūr al-wizārat*).⁴⁵ But Chandar Bhān, writing from the *munshī*'s perspective rather than that of the political theorist, provides his own take on what makes a great imperial administrator, particularly the spiritual and secretarial qualities that enhanced a leader's ability to handle affairs of state. Indeed, the notion that all good imperial servants should cultivate this trivium of ideal qualities—selfless ministerial leadership (*wizārat*), spiritual gnosis (*ma'rīfat*) and mastery of the secretarial arts (*munshīgīrī*)—is reiterated throughout.

He begins with a brief survey of important ministers under Akbar, such as Bairām Khān, Mun'im Khān and various others, before singling out Akbar's celebrated *khatrī* finance minister Rājā Todar Mal for special praise.⁴⁶ Chandar Bhān notes that in addition to Todar Mal's military accomplishments it was his financial and administrative expertise that had earned him the title 'Master of the Sword and the Pen' (*ṣāhib al-saif wa al-qalam*), adding that many of the regulatory principles established by Todar Mal, aimed at improving agricultural productive

⁴³ See for instance *Chahār Chaman*, p. 152; *Munsha'āt-i Brahman*, pp. 16–7, 55–7.

⁴⁴ Ināyat Khān, *Mulakḥḥaṣ-i Shāh Jahān Nāma*, pp. 78–9; 'Amal-i Ṣāliḥ, p. 275.

⁴⁵ Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, pp. 51–4.

⁴⁶ For details on his life and career, see Das, *Raja Todar Mal*; Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma'āṣir al-Umarā*, Vol. 2, pp. 123–9.

capacity (*ma'mūrī-yi mulk*) and assuring the well-being of the people (*rifāhīyat-i ra'iyat-parwarī*) remained, even decades later, 'the textbook for expert administrators of the world' (*imrūz nazm wa nasaq-i ān dastūr al-'amal-i arbāb-i rūzgār ast*).⁴⁷ He relates two anecdotes which highlight key principles of good *wizārat*, in particular 'the Rājā's integrity, virtue, trustworthiness, expertise, political acumen, and erudition' (*rāstī wa diyānat wa amānat wa kār-dānī wa mu'āmala-fahmī wa dānā'ī*)—in other words, precisely the sort of characteristics that any good *wazīr* or imperial secretary ought to emulate. He then concludes:

Indeed, the proof of the Rājā's true wisdom is that the great intellectual of the times, Shaikh Abū al-Fazl, whose attributes and qualities are famous the world over, said of him that whatever [knotty problems] he was able to unravel, no one else could have unraveled, and has said with utmost praise that, like [the great Qādirī sufi] Miyān Shāh Mīr [d. 1635]'s understanding of spiritual truths and advanced esoteric knowledge, the expertise displayed by the Rājā in the fields of agrarian and administrative science [had made him] a *khalīfa* of the times.⁴⁸

The message is clear: a great leader's true power stems not from the sword, but from the intellect, and from the sort of humility, self-discipline and spiritual detachment exemplified by great Sufi *shaikhs* like Miyān Mīr—the power of *wizārat*, in other words, is nothing without the wisdom of *ma'rifat*. For *munshīs*, too, the message is clear: just as a mastery of the secretarial arts enhances a *wazīr*'s abilities, so too must the ethos of *wizārat* and *ma'rifat* be a part of the secretary's intellectual repertoire.

A good work ethic is another quality that Chandar Bhan emphasises repeatedly. Following the discussion of Rājā Todar Mal, he moves on to a brief account of Jahāngīr's *wakīls* and *wazīrs*, such as I'timād al-Daula (d. 1622), Āsaf Khān (d. 1641) and Khwāja Abū al-Hasan Turbatī (d. 1633), the scion of an important family of patrons and litterateurs, who struck Chandar Bhan as particularly notable for his dedication and the amiable atmosphere he cultivated in the *dīwānī*:

The Khwāja never abandoned his post, and almost never left [the *dīwān*'s office]; he was renowned for his efficient work ethic (*tarz-i nishast wa bar-khāst*), for he used to arrive at the *dīwān-khāna* even before dawn, and managed to handle his administrative duties in just a quarter of the day. During the period of Khwāja Abū al-Hasan's tenure as *wazīr*, Sādiq Khān was the paymaster

⁴⁷ For details on the new land-revenue system implemented by Todar Mal, see Richards, *Mughal Empire*, pp. 83–6; Habib, *Agrarian System*, pp. 230–341.

⁴⁸ *Chahār Chaman*, p. 49.

(*mīr bakḥshī*), and Mīr Jumla was the quartermaster (*mīr sāmānī*); all three of these men had the utmost affection and amicability toward one another.⁴⁹

Others come in for praise as well, including ‘Abd al-Rahīm Khān-i Khānān for the ‘bravery, courage, fortitude, poise, virtue, and composure (*shujā‘at wa shahāmat wa himmat wa ḥālat wa faẓīlat wa jāmi‘īyat*)’ that he displayed ‘right up to the end of his life,’ and especially for his intellect and patronage, thanks to which ‘the convivial atmosphere and collection of literati, eloquent writers, and intellectuals that assembled in his *majlis* shone even brighter than the sun.’⁵⁰ Chandar Bhān also includes here a letter from the Safawid monarch Shāh ‘Abbās, in which the erstwhile Mughal envoy, Khān-i ‘Ālam, is praised especially for his ‘knowledge of literary style, diplomatic etiquette, epistolary eloquence and gracious habits (*tarz-dānī wa ādāb-i safārat wa tablīgh-i risālat wa luṭf-i mu‘āwadat*)’—in other words, skills squarely within the domain of the secretarial arts.⁵¹

At this point begins the part of the account dealing with those *wazīrs* whom Chandar Bhān knew and worked with personally. When Shāh Jahān came to power, the chief administrative responsibilities were initially split between the *wazīr*, Irādāt Khān and the *wakīl*, Āsaf Khān, whose assistant, Rāy Mukund Dās Kāyastha, Chandar Bhān reminds us, ‘was also at his side for much of his career.’⁵² Within a year, Afzal Khān replaced Irādāt Khān and shortly thereafter ‘was appointed *wazīr* in his own right, on account of his intellect of Aristotelian genius’ (*fahhāma-yi Arastō-manish*).⁵³ As he had before, Chandar Bhān worked closely with Afzal Khān during the latter’s entire tenure as *wazīr*. He consistently praises not only the Khān’s intellect and administrative abilities, but also, especially, ‘the inner purity and compassionate heart of that knower of spiritual and universal mysteries.’⁵⁴ He was, in Chandar Bhān’s estimation:

Singular among the literati of the world, the title page in the book of ‘*ulamā* of the times, the cream of renowned *wazīrs*, the acme of elite *amīrs*, the epitome

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 50. For details on Abū al-Hasan Turbatī’s career, see Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma‘āṣir al-Umarā*, Vol. 1, pp. 737–9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵² On Mukund Dās, see also Bhakkārī, *Zakḥīrat al-Khawānīn*, Vol. 2, pp. 401–3; Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma‘āṣir al-Umarā*, Vol. 2, pp. 237–8. Bhakkārī gives the impression that Mukund Dās earned great wealth and prestige in Āsaf Khān’s employ, and notes that after the latter’s death Mukund Dās continued to work in Shāh Jahān’s government—first as supervisor of royal factories and stores (*dīwān-i buyūtāt*), then auditor of crown lands (*khālīṣa-yi sharīfa*), and then chief payroll officer (*shāhib-i tan*)—adding that ‘even today he continues to be honored, respected, and held in great esteem.’

⁵³ *Chahār Chaman*, p. 51.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

of mastery over manifest and hidden meanings, the knower of spiritual and worldly subtleties, the grand *wazīr* of Hindustan, the scholar of the age and times ('*allāmat al-'aṣr wa'l-daurān*), Afzal Khān, who achieved universal fame for his virtue, learning, civility (*ḥusn-i khulq*), gentility, and kindly nature.⁵⁵

These salutatory titles might seem like flowery and pointless hyperbole, but from the pen of a writer as careful as Chandar Bhān they were definitely not random; rather, such compliments were carefully calibrated to point to certain qualities in the *wazīr* rather than others. In this case, Afzal Khān's fame as a military commander notwithstanding, Chandar Bhān wants his readers to focus on the Khān's erudition, spiritual introspection and generosity rather than simply be overawed by his might and power. Such character virtues were, after all, ones that anyone could emulate and if they did so the polity would be better for it.

A good *wazīr* also had to be always open to new ways that the system might be improved. The next passage thus emphasises Afzal Khān's administrative acumen, written in prose that strongly echoes the language used earlier to eulogize Rājā Todar Mal. The Khān's dedication to maximising 'economic productivity and the affluence of the people' (*kifāyat-i māl wa rafāhat-i ra'īyat*), Chandar Bhān was confident, would definitely earn him 'a good name for himself in the present and next life.'⁵⁶ And then, to emphasise that a truly great *wazīr* must also have the humility and ascetic ethos born out of a mystical sensibility, Chandar Bhān narrates two brief anecdotes with accompanying epistles:

An interesting story

One day the Plato-esque scholar Afzal Khān was sitting on the throne of *wizārat*. This lowest of servants, who had been nourished and trained by that eminent 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 gained renown (*ishihār dāsh*) as a disciple of that wise master—this *faqīr*, then, myself brought him an interesting passage from a book for his analysis. [It concerned the notion] that the moment of actual physical death requires a more violent exertion than the moment of the separation of the soul [from the body], because the former demands fleeing from creation, whereas the latter is [a moment of] arrival at the Creator. As one familiar with ecstatic moods, when the 'Allāma heard this he was transported to another mental state, and spontaneously bolted up from the *dīwān*'s dais to go be in private, overcome by compassion. When he regained his senses, his happy pen wrote the following letter

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 52–3.

to Āqā Rashīd, who was among the sagacious Khān's most respected and intimate friends.⁵⁷

Copy of the precious missive (*raqīma*) which the wise scholar Afzal Khān had written to Āqā Rashīd

One can only hope that God on high, upon gladly and gently severing the likes of you and me from these worldly environs, may grace us with awareness of Himself. May He distance our hearts from the pursuit of status in this world, which, after all, is merely a cipher for actions which draw one toward the Almighty. Although He wants to lead His servants on a path toward Himself, yet He makes us terrified of leaving this world. And out of this terror, men appease themselves with rank and status in this world, considering these things to be a sign of divine favour.

To this friend of yours there is also an urgency (*dā'īyat*) that you will recognize. Having achieved a lot [in life], but come to a point of indifference toward worldly affairs, it has become clear that in my seventieth year the entries in my life story are coming to an end—just as, while there is no limit to the Word, one does, ultimately, run out of paper.

Another anecdote

One day [Mīr Mūsá] Mu'izz al-Mulk, the *mutaşaddī* of the port of Surat, had sent an eye-glass [as a gift] for that 'Allāma of the age who is among the highest echelon of men of understanding.⁵⁸ Since it did not pertain to official financial business, out of courtesy [Afzal Khān] accepted it (*chūn māliyatī nadāshst az rū-yi ahlīyat qabūl farmūdand*), and wrote this letter (*ruq'a*) to Mu'izz al-Mulk.

Copy of the missive (*raqīma*) that the learned, Aristotle-like Afzal Khān had written to Mu'izz al-Mulk

One can only hope that Allāh on high will grant our ilk deliverance from the prison of this illusory existence (*hastī-yi mauhūm*) and from the contemplation of this ephemeral multiplicity. The viewing glass that you sent—which shows

⁵⁷ This is very likely Āqā 'Abd al-Rashīd Daylamī (d. 1670–71), one of the most celebrated calligraphers of Shāh Jahān's reign. He was Prince Dārā Shukoh's personal calligraphy instructor (for details, see Hasrat, *Dārā Shikūh: Life and Works*, pp. 160–1), and dabbled in various artistic and scholarly pursuits. Details about his career are available in Dihlavi, *Tadhkira-i-Khushnavīsān*, pp. 95–100, where he is described as the 'prophet of the empire of penmanship' (*paighambar-i mulk-i khatā'ātī*); there is also a brief mention of him in 'Amal-i Šālīh, in which the author notes that 'for exquisiteness of calligraphic line, loveliness of *oeuvre*, and gentility of character, he is famed throughout the world' (Vol. 3, p. 344).

⁵⁸ Mu'izz al-Mulk was governor of Surat from 1629–36, and again from 1639–41 (Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India*, pp. 31–43).

one thing as a multiplicity—has arrived.⁵⁹ [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, point him out to me so that I can enlighten my eye by meeting him, and I can take that glass in my hand, and see through it, and thus deliver myself from the prison of multiplicity.⁶⁰

These examples of Afzal Khān's *ma'rifat* are followed by a discussion directly out of the *naṣīhat-nāma* tradition, recounting the 'Plato-esque' (*Aflātūn-kirdār*) minister's advice on the art of *wizārat* and the duties and obligations of imperial servants—including *munshīs*—to king and empire:

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

Now, the late and deceased Khān used to say that *wazīrs* are of two kinds: *first*, the one who correctly comprehends whatever the Emperor says, and acts accordingly; *second*, the one upon whose counsel and advice the Emperor acts. Alas, we *wazīrs* of the current era do not [even] have the [former] capability for correctly comprehending the *bādshāh*'s commands and then executing the blessed will and temperament, much less making it into the second category (*hālat-i dīgar*).

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

Also, one should never blurt out in public (*dar kaṣrat*) that which could be counseled in private. For kings have a proud (*ghayūr*) nature, and God forbid the king should repudiate you in front of so many people. On the other hand, if he doesn't accept private [advice], a well-wisher (*daulat-kh̄wāh*) can always raise the matter with him again later.

Also, since the knowledge embodied by royalty (*'ilm-i kh̄ilāfat*) transcends [mere] administrative expertise (*'ilm-i wizārat*), the science of *wizārat* should never be used to subvert the policies of kings. For whatever inspiration illuminates the minds of this illustrious group [i.e. kings], that will be the true reality. Still, if a specific proposal that is beneficial to the state comes to mind

⁵⁹ Though the word Chandar Bhān consistently uses to describe it simply means 'eye-glass' (*'ainak*), the context suggests that this was some sort of kaleidoscope.

⁶⁰ See also two of Chandar Bhān's letters to his brother, which each have separate anecdotes regarding Afzal Khān's mystical sensibility: *Munsha'āt*, pp. 88–90, 111–14.

based on your administrative expertise, never offer it with an arrogant attitude, for one must always give due deference to the king's wisdom (*maṣlahat*).

Also, if an important problem presents itself, but one is too daunted by king's grandeur and majesty to raise it with Him [openly], the need to seek good advice and guidance demands that one should still search for an opportune moment when the king will not be perturbed, whereupon [you can ask and] he can reveal his own insights to you. At that time, if you have come up with a suggestion that benefits the empire, you should offer it. If the king agrees, fine—if not, then at least by advancing a proposal for the good of the empire you will have fulfilled your basic responsibility [as an advisor].

Also, when the time comes to counsel [a king] you should make sure first to have considered every potentiality and pitfall, whether powerful or trifling, and swept clean the prudent corner of your mind with the broom of sound intellect, so that nothing will be left out. Then, begin by explaining whatever is of primary importance; anything which follows from that can be deferred until the appropriate time.

Also among the late Khān's sayings was that, to ensure the strength and firm foundation of the empire, a wise and visionary emperor requires four pillars—i.e., four wise advisors⁶¹—so that whichever way he turns, from whichever of them he might enquire, there will be someone to offer unveiled truth in any matters that require clear advice. Then the *bādshāh*, having taken each of their words to heart and weighed them with the scales of his wisdom, can decide which counsel is most sound in word and meaning (*muttafiq al-lafẓ wa'l-ma'nī*), and proceed to enact it.

More than anything, a powerful monarch requires an abundant treasury. If he does not have wealth, he cannot mobilize an army. If he does not have an army, there can be no law and order (*ẓabt*) in the realm. If there is no law and order, wealth cannot accumulate, and the state's treasury can only grow if the country itself is prosperous. The realm can therefore flourish only if it has a capable administrator (*ṣāhib-i mu'āmala*) who is attentive to imperial business, and derives a sense of personal satisfaction from it.⁶²

Also, even though one can build an army using wealth alone, the real management and conquest of the hearts of soldiers is not possible without the stewardship of a commander who is authoritative (*ẓābit*), well-mannered (*khayush-sulūk*), un-greedy (*ser-chashm*), open-minded (*wasī'-mashrab*, lit. 'who is religiously wide,' not a narrow bigot), courageous (*ṣāhib-i haṣala*), tolerant (*mutahammil*), sincere (*durust ikhlās*), battle-tested (*āzmūdah-kār*), and of pleasant demeanor (*shigufta-peshānī*). Such a person must be so reliable that

⁶¹ Likely an allusion to the 'four pillars of state' outlined in Nizāmī 'Arūzī's *Chahār Maqāla*, in which the first and foremost of these four key advisors is none other than the imperial secretary.

⁶² That is, works for the benefit of all, rather than use his position for personal gain.

he can be absolutely independent (*mukhtār-i muṭlaq*) in matters of promotion, demotion, bonuses, supervision, and hiring and firing. And his salary must be sufficient to support a large enough retinue that other elites and pillars of the empire will consider him someone to reckon with.

Finally, [a king requires] an aide who can be candid in both private and public (*khalā' wa malā'*), without calculating whether it might please or anger (*'itāb wa 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, they are definitely available for the king who seeks them.⁶³

Afzal Khān was so widely admired for his grace, wisdom and decency that even Emperor Shāh Jahān was deeply distraught when, as Chandar Bhān put it, 'the noble humors and graceful essence of that wise role model veered away from equilibrium,' adding that 'His most exalted Majesty the Sovereign of the Times betook his own noble and precious self to that peerless *wazīr*'s mansion, where He personally tended to and lavished all manner of kindness and affection [on him]' (*anwā'-i talatṭuf wa mihrbānī mar'ā wa mabzūl gardānīdand*).⁶⁴

When Afzal Khān died in January of 1639, Shāh Jahān held a special audience with the Khān's family members and attendants, and was so impressed with Chandar Bhān that he took him on as a personal secretary and diarist (*wāqī'ā-nawīs*). In another section of the text, Chandar Bhān explains that his duties included not only drafting papers related to the emperor's personal business (*khidmat-i taṣṭīr-i bayāz-i khāṣṣa*), but also traveling with the royal retinue to Kabul, Kashmir and other places, tasked with recording his daily impressions of the landscape and particulars of the climate, flora and fauna for the imperial diary.⁶⁵ He was also expected to participate in court audiences, festivals and literary assemblies, during which, 'notwithstanding the many verses of many famous poets that passed through the luminous imperial gaze, the verses of this supplicant also received a hearing from His Majesty's illustrious ear, and often earned me the honor of promotions and rewards.'⁶⁶ Besides his work as an amanuensis in the official department of royal correspondence (*dār al-inshā'*), he tells us that he dabbled as well 'in a variety of important capacities related to the office of imperial accountants.'⁶⁷

⁶³ *Chahār Chaman*, pp. 55–7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, for descriptions of some of these occasions, along with examples some of the poetry that Chandar Bhān recited at them, see pp. 33–47.

⁶⁷ *Chahār Chaman*, p. 150.

Meanwhile, following Afzal Khān's death, the position of Prime Minister went to Mīr 'Abd al-Salām Mashhadī, a.k.a. Islām Khān (d. 1647).⁶⁸ At the time, however, the new *wazīr* was serving as governor of Bengal, and thus there was a period of nearly a year, from January until October of 1639, between Islām Khān's official appointment and his arrival at court to assume his new responsibilities. In the interim, virtually the entire administrative apparatus of the central Mughal *dīwānī* was overseen by another of Chandar Bhān's Hindu contemporaries, Diyānat Rāy, who was promoted to the title Rāy-i Rāyān. Diyānat Rāy had been in the Mughal administrative service since Jahāngīr's time, with many of those years being spent, like Chandar Bhān, in the offices of Afzal Khān. Indeed, Afzal Khān's dependence on Diyānat Rāy became the stuff of minor legend. Despite his many talents, apparently Afzal Khān was known to be somewhat hopeless in accounts (*siyāq*); and thus for decades after his death an anecdote continued to circulate in which a wag at his funeral eulogised the Khān by suggesting that when the angels of death, Munkar and Nakīr, appeared at his grave to ask him to account for his life and deeds, he had replied: 'Ask Diyānat Rāy, he'll be able to answer' (*az Diyānat Rāy bapursad, ū jawāb khwāhad dād*).⁶⁹

According to Chandar Bhān, during his time as interim *dīwān* Diyānat Rāy 'supervised all the activities usually managed by the grand *wazīr*, such as the salaries (*tan*), unassigned imperial lands (*khālīṣa*) and other important fiscal responsibilities... and it was he who performed the chief *dīwān*'s job of signing the *dols* and *siyāhas* recording *jāgīr* assignments, and then affixing the imperial seal to memoranda and circulars sent to various finance ministers and revenue collectors (*dīwānīyān wa karoriyān*).'⁷⁰ On certain documents he was, however, specifically instructed by Shāh Jahān to leave the space designated for the *wazīr*'s signature blank. This was probably more to preserve formal appearances and hierarchy than an indictment of Diyānat Rāy's capabilities; but in this regard there does seem to have been a bit of friction between Diyānat Rāy and another imperial *munshī* named Sabhā Chand, who had once served in the Lahore *dīwānī*, and later as *faujdār* of Dāman *chakla*, Sialkot.⁷¹ Sabhā Chand was now serving as the *dīwānī*'s fiscal auditor (*mustaufī*), and Chandar Bhān describes him as 'well-known for his rectitude and integrity' (*diyānat wa bī-gharazī*). Thus, when Diyānat Rāy tried to discharge certain of the *wazīr*'s responsibilities for which he had not been specifically authorised, it was Sabhā Chand, not the emperor, who blocked him.⁷²

⁶⁸ On his life and career, see Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma'āṣir al-Umarā*, Vol. 1, pp. 162–7; Bhakkārī *Zakhīrat al-Khawānīn*, Vol. 3, pp. 25–7.

⁶⁹ Bhakkārī *Zakhīrat al-Khawānīn*, Vol. 2, pp. 255–6; Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma'āṣir al-Umarā*, Vol. 1, p. 150; see also Marāhravi, *Umarā-yi Hunūd*, pp. 198–9.

⁷⁰ *Chahār Chaman*, p. 57.

⁷¹ *'Amal-i Šālīh*, Vol. 2, p. 253; Vol. 3, p. 154.

⁷² *Chahār Chaman*, pp. 57–8. The office of *istīfā* worked under the *Dīwān* as a sort of comptroller, auditing accounts and settling claims submitted by provincial *jāgīrdārs* and other revenue collectors,

Once Islām Khān arrived at court to begin his tenure as *wazīr*, the efficiency and morale of the *dīwāni* began to falter a bit. To begin with, Islām Khān and Diyānat Rāy seem to have rubbed each other the wrong way. Islam Khān did have certain traits that might have endeared him to the elite *munshīs* in the *dīwānī*; for instance, Chandar Bhān draws particular attention to the Khān's flair for the secretarial arts:

He wrote beautiful *shikasta* calligraphy, and composed well-expressed tripartite verses (*muṣallaṣīn*). He was at the head of the class of calligraphers and *munshīs* of the age, with a proud nature and a high intellect; indeed, one of the sayings of that Khān of sweet expression used to be: 'all the world's work is the job of one perfect man' (*tamām kār-i dunyā kār-i yak mard-i kāmīl ast*).

But Chandar Bhān also describes Islām Khān as having a somewhat 'martial mentality' (*dimāgh-i imārat*), a man who, though highly gifted, was also strong-willed (*qawī-nafs*) and had a tendency to be quite pushy (*ṣāhib-i dā'iyat*). Thus, though Chandar Bhān never comes right out and says it, he strongly hints that the Khān's ego got in the way of him and Diyānat Rāy working together—as he delicately put it, 'the image of their association did not sit well with the Khan' (*naqsh-i suḥbat-i ū bā khān-i mashār-ilaihi durust na-nishast*). As a result, Diyānat Rāy resigned, and was honorably re-assigned (*iftikhār yāft*) to the *dīwān-i khāliṣa*, while Islām Khān, 'became the unquestioned *dīwān*' (*dīwān-i mustaqil gardīd*), and, 'his martial mentality notwithstanding, managed the affairs of *wizārat* well enough' (*bā wujūd-i dimāgh-i imārat ba umūr-i wizārat pardā k̄ht*).⁷³ The contrast between the authority of command (*imārat*) and Chandar Bhān's ideal of true leadership (*wizārat*) could not be starker. And, as if it weren't plain enough, Chandar Bhān reiterates the point a few lines later. Just a few years after Islām Khān became *wazīr*, the eminent Khān-i Daurān Bahādur Nusrat Jang, who had been assigned to govern the Deccan, was murdered by one of his servants before he could travel south.⁷⁴ In the wake of this awful news, Shāh Jahān, needing someone to take over the crucial Deccan governorship—and perhaps recognizing that his new *wazīr* was not a terribly effective administrator in any case—turned to Islām Khān, 'upon whose resolute stature,' in Chandar Bhān's words, 'the robe of command was a much better fit than the office of *wizārat*' (*khil'at-i imārat bar qāmat-i khwāhish-i ū chust-tar az tashrīf-i wizārat būd*).⁷⁵

with the chief auditor, sometimes referred to as the *mustaufī*. (For details, see Richards, *Document Forms*, pp. 25, 63–4).

⁷³ *Chahār Chaman*, p. 58.

⁷⁴ The circumstances are somewhat mysterious, but for details see Ināyat Khān, *Mulakhkhaṣ-i Shāh Jahān Nāma*, p. 399.

⁷⁵ *Chahār Chaman*, p. 58.

This contrast between *imārat* and *wizārat* was again recapitulated in Chandar Bhān's portrayal of the careers of the next two Prime Ministers, Sa'd Allāh Khān (d. 1656) and Mīr Muhammad Sa'īd Ardastānī 'Mu'azzam Khān,' better known simply as Mīr Jumla (1591–1663). Sa'd Allāh Khān took over when Islām Khān left for the Deccan, and was widely respected for having quickly worked his way up the ranks of Mughal nobility through his intelligence and talent, rather than political connections or birth.⁷⁶ He emerged as one of the great military commanders of Shāh Jahān's reign, which of course only increased the prestige with which most seventeenth-century commentators regarded him. But as we have seen, great military ability alone was not enough to make a great administrative leader as far as Chandar Bhān was concerned. Rather, it was Sa'd Allāh Khān's managerial acumen, generous disposition and spiritual awareness that made him truly great. He too was typically saluted as '*Allāmī*, or 'the learned,' Sa'd Allāh Khān, and Chandar Bhān explicitly compares his 'Aristotle-like' intellect to that of 'the peerless and inimitable Shaikh Abū al-Fazl.'⁷⁷ The *munshī* was especially impressed with Sa'd Allāh Khān's mastery of secretarial arts such as accounting and prose composition, which allowed him to oversee the Mughal administration with a deft, hands-on touch:

He drafted exquisite letters (*nāma-hā-yi wālā*) on His Majesty's behalf to the rulers of Turan and Iran, doing true justice to eloquence and verbal artistry.... In addition to Arabic and Persian, he was completely fluent in Turkish, and whenever conversing with eloquent men of Arabia or 'Ajām his superiority was on display. In drafting replies to the revenue and property officers he had no need of accountants and auditors (*peshkārān wa mustaufiyān*); in fact, there was hardly any matter in which he needed anyone's assistance.⁷⁸

His ability and willingness to do some of the elite secretarial work himself, in other words, clearly endeared Sa'd Allāh Khān to assistants like Chandar Bhān, who found in him someone they could respect as a fellow expert in the *funūn-i dabīrī*. His managerial style, too, seems to have been much more appreciative of his staff's efforts, for Chandar Bhān repeatedly describes him as *qadar-shinās*, i.e., someone who 'recognizes others' ability.' Finally, though he was indisputably one of the great military commanders of the Mughal era, Sa'd Allāh Khān's demeanor was nevertheless considerably more genteel, spiritual and humanistic than that of his generalissimo predecessor. 'Many times,' Chandar Bhān recalls, 'I conversed from dusk until dawn with that Khān who had an appreciation for talent, as if we were of one mind,' adding that 'even though his business was

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60; Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma'āşir al-Umarā*, Vol. 2, pp. 441–9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

worldly, he also had a penchant for mystical introspection, and right there in the epicenter of worldly affairs he breathed an air of detachment' (*bā wujūd masghalā-yi rūzgār shagh̃l-i bā'inī dāsh̃t wa dar 'ain-i ta'alluq dam az bī-ta'alluqī mīzad*).⁷⁹

Chandar Bhān worked with Sa'd Allāh Khān for over a decade, during which time he also accompanied the Khān for at least part of the military campaigns in Balkh and Badakhshan.⁸⁰ Their extant correspondence, however, deals mostly with mystical and literary themes.⁸¹ And, as in his account of Afzal Khān, Chandar Bhān's account of Sa'd Allāh Khān also includes one of the Khān's mystically-themed letters to a friend, as well as another extended passage in the *naṣīhat-nāma* tradition—this time, in the form of a dialogue in which the *wazīr* summarises his precepts on the responsibilities of governance for his *munshī*. Chandar Bhān begins the conversation with a fundamental question: 'Should one's own interests (*irāda-yi kh̃yud*) take precedence over the will of the public (*irāda-yi kh̃halq*), or should one rather give preference to the public interest over one's own?' As any ideal *wazīr* would, Sa'd Allāh Khān answers unequivocally that 'to the best of one's ability' (*tā maqdūr bāshad*) public benefit should always override an administrator's desire for personal gain. And what follows is an extended meditation on the type of sound character that those who wield power must cultivate in order to best serve the public good, for instance: 'one should strive to the extent possible for the public good (*kh̃hair-i kh̃halq*), and not discriminate among the people (*bā ahl-i rūzgār yak-sān wa yak-rang bāshad*), whether they are in your presence or not'; an imperial servant must 'cast aside his own emotional and physical desires (*agh̃rāz-i nafsānī wa jismānī*), and have an eye toward the safeguarding of truth (*ḥaqq*) in every matter'; in worldly matters he should be 'deliberate, calm, and free of rancor and malevolence' (*āhista wa āramīda wa bī-shor-o-sharr*) rather than 'impatient, brash, and brazen' (*bī-tahammul wa bī-bāk wa bī-āzarm*); he should not flaunt his position, for 'doing and not saying is far superior to talking and not doing'; he should not use his power to usurp other people's wealth (*taṣarruf dar māl-i dīgarī nakardan*); he should be humble, and avoid jealousy toward others (*ḥāsīd wa mu'ānid-i kasī nabāyad būd*); and, perhaps most importantly, he can continue to emulate the great mystics (*buzurgān*) of the past, even in worldly service to kings, so long as he transforms the engagement with politics into an opportunity to do 'the work of God's servants' (*kār-i banda-hā-yi kh̃hudā*).⁸²

Chandar Bhān, like many of his contemporaries, was deeply saddened by Sa'd Allāh Khān's death, and includes in *Chahār Chaman* the full text of an ornate eulogy circulated by Shāh Jahān to announce the sad news, in which the Khān is lauded, among other things, for being: singular among the erudite of the world

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Described in *Chahār Chaman*, pp. 68–81; for the larger context, see also Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia*.

⁸¹ See for instance, *Chahār Chaman*, pp. 154–5; *Munsha'āt-i Brahman*, pp. 35–6, 41.

⁸² *Chahār Chaman*, pp. 62–4.

(*yagāna-yi dānishwarān-i jahān*); the model for wise men of the times (*qidwa-yi khiradmandān-i zamān*); the textbook for scholars of the age (*dastūr al-‘amal-i dānāyān-i rūzgār*); the arbiter of visible and hidden perfections (*maẓhar-i kamālāt-i suwārī wa ma‘nawī*); the touchstone of the sciences (*mihakk-i ‘ulūm*); the assayer of eloquence (*naqqād-i sukḥan*); the penetrator of truths (*darrāk-i ḥaqā‘iq*); the unveiler of subtleties (*kashshāf-i daqā‘iq*); and the treasure of knowledge (*ganj-i ‘ilm*).⁸³ As above, with Chandar Bhān’s praise of Afzal Khān, such strings of panegyric compliments were clearly intended to have a hyperbolic rhetorical effect, but that did not mean that they were random; in this case, note especially the fact that even in the emperor’s opinion what was worth remembering about Sa‘d Allāh Khān, what elevated him to greatness, was his intellectual talents and accomplishments rather than his distinguished military record, which is barely alluded to in the entire eulogy.

After Sa‘d Allāh Khān’s death, while ‘the dust of grief was still settled on the mirror of [Shāh Jahān’s] heart,’ once again there was a period during which an official *wazīr* was yet to be named. During that time, another celebrated Hindu administrator who has all but vanished from most history books, Raghūnāth Rāy Kāyastha, actually ran much of the government. Like Diyānat Rāy before him, Raghūnāth Rāy, whom Chandar Bhān describes as the ‘frontispiece in the book of men of the pen’ (*sar-daftar-i arbāb-i qalam*), worked as the ‘acting *wazīr*’ (*wizārat-intimā*). His title was elevated to ‘Rāy-i Rāyān,’ and Chandar Bhān, too, was awarded the title of ‘Rāy.’⁸⁴ Raghūnāth Rāy had also spent years working in the *dīwān*’s office as a protégé of Sa‘d Allāh Khān, and was thus well-regarded as a competent administrator.⁸⁵ Eventually, however, the official post of grand *wazīr* was awarded to another military man, Mīr Jumla, who had originally come to India as a diamond merchant, gotten involved in Deccan politics, and become incorporated into the Mughal hierarchy through his connections to Prince Aurangzeb.⁸⁶

Chandar Bhān begins his account of Mīr Jumla’s tenure by noting the latter’s superior skill (*mahārat-i tamām*) in the various arts and sciences of war (*ādāb wa funūn-i sipāhgirī*).⁸⁷ Of course, in almost any other context this would surely be viewed as a compliment, but given what Chandar Bhān has already told us about the difference between *imārat* and *wizārat*, we cannot take this ‘praise’ at face value. Sure enough, less than a year after Mīr Jumla’s appointment in 1656 he was sent back south to accompany Aurangzeb in the Deccan campaigns.⁸⁸

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 61–2.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁸⁵ See for instance the notices in Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma‘āṣir al-Umarā*, Vol. 2, p. 282; *Umarā-yi Hunūd*, pp. 233–7.

⁸⁶ For details, see Sarkar, *Life of Mir Jumla*; Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma‘āṣir al-Umarā*, Vol. 3, pp. 530–55.

⁸⁷ *Chahār Chaman*, p. 66.

⁸⁸ Ināyat Khān, *Mulakḥḥaṣ-i Shāh Jahān Nāma*, pp. 614–6.

Chandar Bhān notes this quick turnaround in *Chahār Chaman*, and also includes the gracious farewell letter that he wrote to Mīr Jumla in his *Munsha'āt*.⁸⁹ He also notes, however, that even though Mīr Jumla had left the court for the Deccan front, he nevertheless retained his official title, while his son, Muhammad Amīn Khān was 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.'⁹⁰

The suggestion, clearly, is that Mīr Jumla was for all intents and purposes a prime minister in name only. Even after his practical authority was transferred to Muhammad Amīn Khān, Chandar Bhān tells us, '[Raghūnāth] Rāy-i Rāyān continued supervising his own administrative domain' (*dar kār-i khayud istiqlāl dāsh*t). Chandar Bhān then gripes that 'because [Mīr Jumla's] sojourn in the Deccan grew extended,' the accounting work of the *dīwānī* became 'clogged with delays' (*dar uqda-yi ta'wīq uftād*), leading Shāh Jahān to assign nearly all of his the official *wazīr*'s administrative duties—running the finance ministry, keeping revenue accounts, drafting orders and so on—to Raghūnāth Rāy-i Rāyān in any case. Considering Chandar Bhān's earlier praise for a *wazīr* like Sa'dullah Khān's ability to run his own departments, keep track of accounts and draft his own *jawābs* to provincial administrators, it seems difficult to read this as anything but a rebuke of Mīr Jumla's appointment and approach to *wizārat*. Such figurehead *wazīrs* like Mīr Jumla and his son, whose skill sets were almost entirely military, only caused delays and disrupted the administration. Indeed, Muhammad Amīn Khān was so inexperienced in administrative practices that Shāh Jahān re-assigned Chandar Bhān to Raghūnāth Rāy's office just so that he could work as a liaison and 'train [Muhammad Amīn Khān] in such matters' (*az in ma'nī muṭṭali'sāzad*).⁹¹

Finally, in late 1657, in order to settle down the *dīwānī*, Shāh Jahān appointed a respected noble, Ja'far Khān, to take over officially for Mīr Jumla.⁹² Chandar Bhān has great praise for the new *wazīr*'s 'dignity, eminence, forbearance, prudence, civility, ability, and talent' (*shān wa shaukat wa burdbārī wa hoshiyārī wa husn-i khulq wa qābiliyat wa isti'dād*)—an obvious repudiation of Ja'far Khān's predecessor.⁹³ Meanwhile, he also notes that Raghūnāth Rāy kept his title, office, and responsibilities overseeing financial affairs, as a kind of dual administration co-superintended by him and Ja'far Khān was settled upon. By that time, however, Shāh Jahān's reign was already basically at an end; and yet, while many would

⁸⁹ *Munsha'āt-i Brahman*, p. 39. (The letter is addressed to 'Mu'azzam Khān,' Mīr Jumla's official title following his promotion to *wazīr-i kull*).

⁹⁰ *Chahār Chaman*, p. 66.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67. Chandar Bhān, incidentally, appears not to have been the only person with a low opinion of Muhammad Amīn Khān, who seems to have been somewhat of a boor. See for instance Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma'āşir al-Umarā*, Vol. 3, p. 531.

⁹² Ināyat Khān, *Shah Jahan Nama*, (trans. Begley & Desai), p. 546.

⁹³ *Chahār Chaman*, p. 67. See also Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma'āşir al-Umarā*, Vol. 1, pp. 531–5.

probably assume that a Hindu like Raghūnāth Rāy would fare poorly once Aurangzeb came to power, in fact the opposite is true—it was Aurangzeb who gave him the highest promotion of all.

Conclusion

Chandar Bhān says nothing of the war of succession, saying only that ‘Rāy-i Rāyān was appointed to the full Prime Ministership’ after Ja‘far Khān was appointed governor of Malwa—an event that we know, from other sources, happened right at the beginning of Aurangzeb’s reign. It is worth remembering then, that Aurangzeb, for all his reputation for sectarian bigotry, is in fact the one who elevated Raghūnāth Rāy to the chief ministry and gave him the full title ‘Rājā.’ Raghūnāth Rāy had not only supported Aurangzeb’s effort to win the throne, but also participated in the later battles against Dārā Shukoh and Shāh Shujā‘; and once Aurangzeb’s power was secure, Rājā Raghūnāth continued as chief of the *dīwānī* for over half a decade, right up to his death in the sixth year of Aurangzeb’s reign (1664).⁹⁴ Later in life, Aurangzeb fondly remembered Rājā Raghūnāth in letters to others, noting that he was one of the greatest administrators he had ever known.⁹⁵ Chandar Bhān, meanwhile, closes his *dastūr al-wizārat* by eulogising Raghūnāth Rāy in a way that resonates with all we have seen in the foregoing sections:

Numerous other ministers, despite ostensibly being skilled enough in the art of *wizārat* that they needed no help, had always approached the Rājā 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 Rājā 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-implā’*), and is famous for his excellent manners, politeness, and civility (*ḥusn-i sulūk wa murūwat wa mudārā*).⁹⁶

Chandar Bhān himself also made sure to send a letter congratulating the new emperor on his accession to the throne,⁹⁷ and continued to work in Aurangzeb’s imperial administration for at least a short time. Not long after, however, he wrote again to the ‘the kind, merciful, just, and loving Emperor,’ lamenting his old age, and requesting permission to return to Lahore, where he planned to continue serving

⁹⁴ Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma‘āṣir al-Umarā*, Vol. 2, p. 282. His death is also mentioned in various chronicles of Aurangzeb’s reign, e.g., Khāfi Khān, *Muntakhab al-Lubāb*, Vol. 3, p. 166; Sāqi Musta‘id Khān, *Ma‘āṣir-i ‘Ālamgīrī*, p. 29.

⁹⁵ *Ruqa’āt-i ‘Ālamgīrī*, pp. 21, 46–7.

⁹⁶ *Chahār Chaman*, p. 68.

⁹⁷ *Munshā’āt*, pp. 11–2.

the royal family by overseeing the management of Jahāngīr's tomb complex—which, he noted, 'is situated between this world and the hereafter, and thus will gain me favour in the present life and the next.' He added that 'if so designated, I would bring the same passion to this service that has been reflected in the dedication, lack of self-interest, and essential knowledge of administrative affairs that I have displayed in all my years of experience in the imperial fiscal offices, and remain busy in steadfast dedication, purity of motive, and sincere amity with the prayers for Your long life and continued prosperity.'⁹⁸

Little did Chandar Bhān realise that Aurangzeb would rule for another four decades after the *munshī's* death, or that the new emperor would wind up as one of the most vilified men in Indian history. Be that as it may, the totality of Chandar Bhān's perspective on imperial governance clearly suggests that in the seventeenth-century Mughal ideal of *wizārat*, intellect and competence were valued above all. Those were not, however, the only qualities necessary to truly set one apart, as a penchant for *ma'arifāt* and expertise in the *funūn-i dabīrī* were also considered vital character assets, not simply to make one a better person, but also to augment one's basic aptitude for the governmental tasks at hand. The contrast between Afzal Khān and Sa'd Allah Khān's tenures versus those of Islām Khān and Mīr Jumla, at least in Chandar Bhān's version of events, amply demonstrates this set of principles—principles that he observed, in practice and in person, for roughly six decades of post-Akbar Mughal rule.

It is also worth reiterating the remarkable fact that it was a Brahman who so clearly articulated these ideals of Mughal civility and governmentality. We saw that Chandar Bhān had a great deal of pride in his Brahman identity and also made a point of highlighting the careers of fellow Hindus like Todar Mal and Raghūnāth; but he also saw little or no conflict between these commitments to Mughal service and his dharmic propriety as a Brahman. On the contrary, his sense of Brahmanical identity as comprising a dual commitment to personal piety and intellectual excellence left him a wide scope to embrace Indo-Persian literary and political culture without feeling, as it were, communally threatened. Moreover, one must also give credit to the many Mughal elites and minor officials who, at least as far as we can tell from his own writings, do not seem to have given Chandar Bhān any *reason* to feel that his Hindu identity was under threat.

There are clear parallels here to some of the observations that Kumkum Chatterjee has made, also in this volume, regarding the considerable acculturative power of Mughal ideals of civility and erudition for Bengal's class of clerical Brahmans. Chandar Bhān's case and that of the subjects of Chatterjee's essay make an interesting contrast to the latent sense of unease and struggle that Sumit Guha and Rosalind O'Hanlon observe, also in this volume, for upper-caste service elites in the Maratha regions. There, the clerical skills of long-established Brahman

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–3.

communities had been equally vital to the Bahmani kings and the states of the Delhi Sultanate, while command of Persian language had long been central to a successful administrative career. But the openness to new knowledge systems and non-Brahman religio-cultural influences, whether from Turko-Persian Muslims, or even from fellow Hindus like *kāyasthas*, seems to have been far more restricted in early modern Maharashtra than it was farther north for someone like Chandar Bhān. As a result, the seventeenth-century Maratha terrain was fraught with much sharper cultural struggles over the status of clerical service and expertise among those who were not connected, in terms of *varna* status, with the highest echelon of the sacred. For Chandar Bhān, his masters, and many of his other Mughal interlocutors, such conflicts seem practically unimaginable.

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