Writing Self, Writing Empire

Rajeev Kinra

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In the previous chapters we examined myriad facets of Chandar Bhan’s experience as a prominent Hindu, secretary, and poet at the Mughal court—his literary self, his administrative self, and his political self, in particular. But what was Chandar Bhan’s view of the emperor whom he served in all these capacities, and of Mughal sovereignty generally? There has been some notable scholarship in recent years on the general question of Mughal theories of sovereignty and royal legitimacy. But how did Chandar Bhan, as a Hindu, and a Brahman no less, treat the question of the legitimacy of Muslim rule in India, and how did he connect it with traditions of Indic rulership that predated the Mughal Empire and the Delhi Sultanate before it? What were his observations of Mughal court culture, both when the court was in residence at one of its major urban centers and when it was on the move, either in transit from one city to another or on a military campaign? What was his view of the larger expanse of the empire, beyond the privileged space of the court? What was his understanding of the horizons, both physical and conceptual, of the Mughal imperium?

We get some insight into the first of these questions from one of Chandar Bhan’s lesser-known works, known as Tārīkh-i Rajahā-yi Dihlī (A history of the kings of Delhi). It is a relatively short work, of which only one manuscript is known to have survived; yet in just under twenty folios Chandar Bhan manages to trace, one by one, the entire chain of rulers who had sat on the throne of Delhi from mythical times right up to his own day—up to and including Shah Jahan himself.
Chandar Bhan appears to have done a considerable amount of research in preparing the text, explaining that he got his information from various “Hindi books and other historical tomes” (az kutub-i hindi wa digar jarā‘id-i tawārīkh). Despite its name, though, the Tārīkh is not quite a “history” of Delhi, as such, but rather a chronology of rulership. Thus for most of the monarchs in question Chandar Bhan gives scant details other than their name and the number of years, months, and even days that they ruled. Sometimes he gives the length of time that particular dynasties ruled, before listing the individual kings. And as he gets closer to the kings of his own era, he begins to give a little more information, presumably because he had access to more sources and more recent cultural memories.

But in at least a few instances Chandar Bhan does insert brief bits of commentary even for some of the ancient kings. For instance, of King Yuddhishtira, one of the heroes of the Sanskrit epic Mahābhārata, and the first king of Delhi whom he treats individually, Chandar Bhan explains: “He was among the greatest kings of Hindustan [az buzurg-tarīn rāja-hā- yi hindūstān būda], and it is known that every day he used to sit down to eat himself only after having fed ten thousand people; he ruled [hukūmat karda] for a period of thirty-three years, eight months, and twenty-five days before departing his residence in this perishable world” (TRD, fol. 2b). Of the legendary King Janamajeya, said to be a descendant of Yuddhishthira’s heroic brother Arjuna, Chandar Bhan tells us that “Janamajeya ruled [salṭanat karda] for a period of eighty-four years, five months, and seventeen days; it was during his reign that the book Mahābhārata, which concerns the exploits of the Pandavas [wāqi‘āt-i pāndawān], was compiled by the sage Veda Vyasa; and in its entirety this book is composed of one hundred thousand verses” (TRD, fol. 3a). Of the tenth-century Tomar king Raja Suraj Pal, besides telling us that he ruled (farmān-dihī karda) for fifty-eight years, two months, and five days, Chandar Bhan notes with admiration that the celebrated monarch “was among the greatest kings of Hind; he owned no less than six thousand elephants, and in the domain of world conquest he was singular in his era [dar ‘ālamgīrī yagāna-yi rozgār būda]” (TRD, fol. 5a). Of one Raja Jiwan Jit, who “raised the banners of victory in the realm of Hindustan for a period of twenty-six years, nine months, and twenty-seven days,” Chandar Bhan adds the tantalizing comment that the king “had a complete mastery over esoteric mystical practices” (dar ma‘rifat-i wājib sa‘y maufūra dāsht) (TRD, fol. 6a). Alas, he does not elaborate and tell us what sort of gnosis (ma‘rifat) the king engaged in. But Chandar Bhan does report with a touch of wonder that the eleventh-century ruler Raja Anand Pal, who famously tussled on several occasions with the Central Asian conqueror Mahmud of Ghazni, “had seven thousand women in his harem and would be busy cavorting with all of them for two days at a stretch” (TRD, fol. 7a).

This list of mythical, ancient, and medieval Hindu rulers then transitions directly into a discussion of India’s medieval Muslim rulers—a transition that is
made virtually without comment, other than a subheading denoting the advent of “the era of kingship by the just emperors and ocean-hearted monarchs who ruled from the imperial throne of Delhi” (muḍḍat-i saṭṭanat-i pāḏshāhān-i ṣādil wa shahryārān-i daryā-dil ki bar takḥt-gāh-i dihlī pāḏshāhī kardand) (TRD, fol. 11b). The mere fact that Chandar Bhan felt the need to include this heading suggests that he did perceive that some sort of new phase of Indian history had begun with the introduction of Muslim rule in the subcontinent and that he did have some vague sense that a kind of religio-cultural difference existed between Delhi’s pre-Muslim rulers and their later Muslim counterparts. Yet nowhere does he actually code this new type of ruler as specifically “Muslim” or even “other.” The difference is implied, at best, perhaps meant to be intuited simply from the use of the term pādšāh rather than rājā, and of course the fact that the new rulers’ religion could obviously be distinguished by their names. But our author gives no indication whatsoever that this “new” period augured any sort of large-scale civilizational shift, much less outright decline (as British colonial and Hindu nationalist historiography would have us believe), or even any sort of disruption whatsoever. He simply moves on to a new set of names, and even the terms that he uses to denote the act of rulership (e.g., ḥukūmat kardan, saṭṭanat kardan, farrān-dihī kardan) are the very same verbs that he used for the earlier Hindu kings.

Likewise, the very fact that these later rulers are all also included under the same larger umbrella category denoted by the work’s title— “the rājās of Delhi”— gives us further reason to complicate any simplistic narrative suggesting that the arrival of Muslim kings in India represented some sort of radical rupture, essentially foreign and incommensurable with Hindu cultural memory and ideas about kingship. For Chandar Bhan, at least, the sovereignty emanating from the bodies of Delhi’s medieval and early modern Muslim rulers was simply a continuation of that which existed in earlier eras, in a line extending deep into the mythical past and continuing right into his seventeenth-century present.

It should be noted, too, that Chandar Bhan also displays plenty of admiration for the various Muslim rulers whom he mentions along the way. Thus he says of Ghiyas al-Din Balban (r. 1266–87) that “they say that he possessed uncommonly great courage” (mīgūyand ki khailī ‘ālī himmat dāshīt) (TRD, fol. 12a–12b). He says of Balban’s successor Muʿizz al-Din Qaiqubad that he was a connoisseur of poetry and “a man of great generosity” (sāhīb-i sakhwāt) (TRD, fol. 12b), who, Chandar Bhan reminds us, was also one of the key patrons of the great Indo-Persian poet Amir Khusrau. "Ala al-Din Khalji is described as “among the greatest sultans of Hindustan” (az buzurg-tarīn saḷāṭīn-i hindūstān) (TRD, fol. 13b), whose campaigns in southern India are also mentioned by Chandar Bhan without reproach, simply as part of the business of conquest. Note too the exact parallel with the language he used to describe Yuddhishtira, simply replacing raja with sultan.
It would perhaps be easy for a cynic to dismiss all this as so much sycophantic pandering. Chandar Bhan is not, however, above criticizing Muslim rulers whom he judges to be particularly unjust, sectarian, or otherwise not fulfilling their duty as kings. Regarding one of the later Tughlaq princes named Ahmed Shah, for instance, Chandar Bhan says that he “gave his father a lot of trouble” by rebelling, and “struggled mightily to promote the religion of Muhammad” (afzāyish-i din-i muḥammadī jahd-i balīgh dāsht) (TRD, fol. 14a). He offers an even more explicit censure of the very next king he lists, Shah Tughlaq: though he credits him with having built many mosques, wells, traveler’s inns (sarais), and Sufi centers (khānaqs), he also notes that the king “rattled the foundations and destroyed many houses of worship [ʿibādat-khānā-hā] that were among the monuments of the great rajas, collected the protection tax [jizya] from the people of India, and made great efforts to promote the shariʿa through his edicts” (TRD, fol. 14a–14b).

Chandar Bhan does not, in other words, simply offer blanket praise of India’s Muslim rulers across the board. He has done his homework and appears perfectly willing to criticize those who deserved it. But those who do come in for criticism aren’t chided merely for being rulers who happened to be Muslim, or othered as somehow “foreign” to India. Rather, they are singled out for specific excesses, usually for the crime of being unjustly sectarian or of going out of their way to try and impose Islam. Indeed, when read in the larger context of the work as a whole, the two sultans mentioned in the previous paragraph whom Chandar Bhan criticizes for such behavior actually serve as exceptions that prove the rule—minor, isolated instances of sectarian excess in an otherwise unbroken chain of rulers, both Hindu and Muslim, whom he considered to have been perfectly acceptable and legitimate.

Sure enough, Chandar Bhan goes on to explain that “Sultan ‘Ala al-Din” (presumably, ‘Ala al-Din Sikandar Shah, d. 1394?), besides having an improbable ten thousand lovelies (sāhib-i ḫusn) in his harem, had the more important distinction of having undone some of the unjust practices of his predecessor and “set aside the jizya throughout all the lands of Hindustan” (jizya az kull-i mamālik-i hindūstān bar ʿaraf sākht) (TRD, fol. 15b). Likewise, Bahlul Lodi (r. 1451–89), whom Chandar Bhan hails as “one of the great Afghans of Thatta” (i.e., Sindh), is praised not only for being very brave and building many forts but also for having “erased every trace of tyranny from the face of the earth” (āsār-i zulm az ṣafha-yi ʿālam pāk namūda) (TRD, fol. 15b).

Overall, the message is clear: Delhi is the site from which political power in northern India emanates, passed on from dynasty to dynasty in a chain of kings whose individual reigns (their “natural bodies,” in Kantorowicz’s terms) are recognized as mortal, impermanent, and even sometimes imperfect, but also where the institution of Delhi kingship itself (“the body politic”) is lasting, permanent, and continuous. The Mughals, and the Delhi sultans before them, are just the latest in this eternal genealogy going back to mythological times.5
When it comes to the Mughals themselves, Chandar Bhan gives, as might be expected, considerably more information than he provided for most of the earlier rulers of Delhi. With regard to the founder of the Mughal Empire Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, for instance, he provides Babur’s entire personal family genealogy going back to the famed Central Asian conqueror Amir Timur (d. 1405). In an interesting aside, he also notes pointedly that Timur himself “cannot be counted among the chain of rulers of India” (dar silsil-yi salāṭīn-i hind munsalik nīst) (TRD, fol. 16a–16b) because, even though he conquered northern India late in the fourteenth century, he did not stay and rule from Delhi. Of Babur’s successor Humayun he says, somewhat counter to that ruler’s reputation for ineffectuality in modern historiography, that although he spent a good part of his reign tied up in struggles with the Sur Afghans, who would eventually defeat and send him into a fifteen-year exile he also “spent much of his reign occupied by administrative matters, and that ocean-hearted king is to be credited with many [governmental] innovations” (wāqi‘āt-i khwud rā dar silk-i nazm kashida-and wa mukhtarā‘āt-i ān shāh-i daryā-dil bisyār ast) (TRD, fol. 16b).

Chandar Bhan then lists each of those very same Sur sultans, beginning with Sher Shah (1486–1545)—a bit of a surprise, perhaps, for a Mughal propagandist—before providing another brief entry on Humayun’s triumphant return from exile in 1555. This is followed by an entry on Hemu (1501–56), another significant challenger to Mughal rule who claimed the throne after Humayun’s death in 1556 and won a series of important battles before finally being defeated and killed by the young Akbar’s forces under the command of the regent Bairam Khan.

In short, though Chandar Bhan’s accounts of all these kings are extremely concise, he has made every effort to be comprehensive, even if it means acknowledging the reigns of the Mughals’ rivals for power. It should be reiterated, too, that a considerable amount of research would have gone into the compilation of a work like this. We mentioned above that Chandar Bhan notes in the preface that he consulted many works of history in “Hindi” and other languages, and in his notices of the individual Mughal emperors Chandar Bhan also refers his readers more specifically in a couple of cases to other histories for further reading, such as Akbar Nāma (fol. 18a) and Shāh Jahān Nāma (TRD, fol. 19a). But the overall logic of Tārīkh-i Rājahā-yi Dehlī is clearly to situate the Mughals, and specifically Shah Jahan, within an institutional genealogy of Indian kingship.

THE KING, THE COURT, AND THE ROUTINE OF IMPERIAL GOVERNANCE

If one purpose of Chandar Bhan’s History of the Kings of Delhi was to establish a genealogy of legitimate Hindustani kingship for the Mughal emperors, when it came to his magnum opus Chahār Chaman that legitimacy was entirely taken
for granted. The whole work is shot through with effusive praise for the grandeur of the empire and its reigning monarch, but perhaps nowhere so much as in the text’s second “garden,” an extended meditation on daily life at the court of Shah Jahan, including a great many details about the daily routine of the emperor himself.

As we noted in the Introduction, this section of the text is, relatively speaking, perhaps the best known in all of Chandar Bhan’s oeuvre among English readers, having been partially excerpted and translated in the Orientalist Francis Gladwin’s compendium *The Persian Moonshee* under the title “Kowayid us Sultanet Shahjehan; or Rules Observed at Court during the Reign of Shahjehan.” Intended to help mitigate East India Company officers’ dependency on native South Asian *munshis* and other tutors—whom they typically viewed as unreliable and untrustworthy—Gladwin’s work functioned largely as an introductory textbook that would, at least in theory, instruct the British in the various forms of linguistic and cultural expertise necessary to do business in late Mughal India in the same way that a real-life “Persian *munshi*” would. The text quickly emerged as required reading for nearly all aspiring British officials and administrators who hoped to pass the new Persian-language exams instituted by the company in the late eighteenth century, and thus *The Persian Moonshee* went through numerous printings and became a very well known and widely circulated text well into the early decades of the nineteenth century. A copy of it was found, for instance, among the possessions of the British veterinarian, horse trader, and adventurer William Moorcroft when he died of a fever in northern Afghanistan in 1825.

This portion of Chandar Bhan’s oeuvre thus played a significant role in shaping the early British colonial state’s image of the opulence of the Mughal court in its seventeenth-century heyday. Gladwin, however, never names Chandar Bhan as the author of these “rules observed at court,” nor does he alert his readers to the fact that the text itself was actually an excerpt of a much longer work, much less one written by a high-caste Hindu. It is possible that he was simply unaware or confused, given that this section of *Chahār Chaman* had in fact circulated widely as a separate text among the early modern Indo-Persian intelligentsia. One reason that it was so popular was, in part, simply that it was a memorable firsthand account of the activities at Shah Jahan’s court. But another very important reason was that Chandar Bhan’s reputation as a literary stylist made it an exemplary model of expressive Persian prose (*inshā’*) that other aspiring *munshis* and early modern literati sought to emulate.

In a list of his own works provided in the preface to his collected letters, Chandar Bhan himself referred to the extract by the title of *Guldasta* (a “bouquet,” plucked as it were from the “four gardens” of the work as a whole). But as it circulated and was copied and recopied over time it also acquired secondary and
even tertiary names, a composite of which would be something like (Guldasta-i) Qawā‘id al-Saltānāt (-i Shāh Jahān). Eventually, it appears that scribes and archivists began simply to drop the original, perhaps vaguer, title of Guldasta entirely, preferring instead the more specific Qawā‘id al-Saltānāt-i Shāh Jahān (which we may more accurately translate as “The Routines of Governance under Shah Jahan”) — and this is probably the form in which Gladwin actually encountered the text. But there remained great variation, and thus, for instance, in the collection housed in Aligarh’s Azad library alone there are at least six manuscripts of the text, nearly every one of which refers to it by a different title (and sometimes by different titles within the same copy!).

There is no exhaustive catalog of Chandar Bhan manuscripts worldwide, but one suspects that a similar variation would be found in the many versions of this text housed in archives elsewhere in India, in England, and around the world.

If specificity in terms of actually naming the content was one reason that the secondary title of Qawā‘id al-Saltānāt-i Shāh Jahān grew in popularity among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scribes, another might have been the fact that the text evoked the memory of a deep tradition of other writings on Indo-Persian political culture such as some of those mentioned in the previous chapter, as well as other texts like the Aḥkām al-Sultāniya of Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi (d. 1058), or the Zakhārat al-Mulūk of Mir Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani (d. 1384), which specifically uses the phrase qawā‘id-i saltānāt in discussing “the principles of the form and substance of power and governance” (lawāzīm-i qawā‘id-i saltānāt-i šuwarī-o-ma’nawī). As we will see, however, Chandar Bhan’s observations on these questions deal less with abstract principles and norms than they do with the day-to-day business of governance, with the focus in the early passages on activities of the emperor himself and those in his immediate presence. What did the emperor do when he woke up? What time did he usually have his first public audience? What was the setting like? When did he pray? When did he legislate? When did he deal with the business of revenue administration? When did he take a break for entertainment? When did he receive guests with special access in the privy chamber? And so on.

In short, Guldasta / Qawā‘id al-Saltānāt and the corresponding portion of Chahār Chaman are not meant to be an account of a single, specific “day in the life of the emperor” but rather a composite image of the typical routine and of the sorts of things that could potentially happen on any given day. This part of the text, at least, is similar to an account of the emperor’s daily routine found in another chronicle of the period, the Pādshāh Nāma of ‘Abd al-Hamid Lahori (d. 1654). But after the early subsections dealing with the emperor’s personal routine, Chandar Bhan widens his gaze to include the general atmosphere of the court, both while it was in residence in one of the trio of grand Mughal capital cities of
Delhi, Agra, and Lahore and when it traveled as a massive, mobile tent city. This is where the text of the extract *Guldasta / Qawā‘id al-Saltanat* typically ends. But in the second garden of *Chahār Chaman* this expansion of perspective—from the body of the king himself to the “body” of the imperial cities and the peripatetic imperial camp—leads directly into an even further widening of Chandar Bhan’s gaze, as he ends the second *chaman* with a long excursus on the various provinces of the empire, the “body” of the Mughal dominion as a whole. Let us examine this progression a bit more closely, paying special attention to Chandar Bhan’s own words and the specific language that he uses to describe the king, the court, and the empire.

*The King*

The version of the text that appears in *Chahār Chaman* begins, as all four “gardens” do, with a preface explaining Chandar Bhan’s reasons for writing it. Thus, while the bulk of what is to follow centers on his general observations of the emperor, the courtly milieu, and the imperial metageography, the narrative itself is framed, like the first *chaman*, once again as a form of self-expression and self-examination—not just any old information about Shah Jahan’s court but an account of what Chandar Bhan himself has personally seen and heard. As we saw in the previous chapter, Chandar Bhan was intimately involved in the day-to-day administration of the empire for nearly three decades, often working out of the prime minister’s office. But we also know that he spent at least some amount of time working in the personal presence of the emperor as Shah Jahan’s private diarist, or *wāqi‘a-nawīs*, giving him a consistency and intimacy of access that would have been uncommon even for many in the upper nobility. It is this personal perspective that Chandar Bhan wants to share with his readers.

Even his opening lament regarding the incapacity of language to fully capture the splendor of the court strikes this inward-looking tone: “Since a true expression of gratitude for the generosity of His Royal Highness and a true description of the lofty positions and virtues of the elite members of this heavenly court are above and beyond the narrative powers of this meager slave and Brahman of the Hindi tongue, after searching my mind and the deficiency of my talents, I had become resigned to impotence and failure.” Chandar Bhan immediately explains, however, that the thought of the emperor’s great qualities inspired him to proceed nonetheless, despite the impossibility of words—*his* words—to convey those very qualities.

But what sort of language, specifically, does he use to eulogize the emperor? I quote Chandar Bhan’s own words in full, having taken the liberty of bracketing the praise for the emperor that comes midway through the sentence and placing it in a column, to make the syntax a bit easier to follow. I have also placed some of the original Persian words in bold text, in order to highlight the rhythm and rhyme of Chandar Bhan’s prose:
I had become resigned to impotence and failure. But the verdant flower in the garden of eloquence became infused with the hue and fragrance of eulogy and praise for the angelic qualities of the universe-conquering emperor—

the Asylum of the Entire World (ʻālam-panāḥ)
the King of World-Conquering Kings (shāhinshāh-i gīṭi-sitān)
the Subduer of the Heavens (falak-dastgāḥ)
the Truth-Knowing Sovereign (khīdev-i ḥaqq-shinās)
the Lord Whose Foundation Is Truth (khudāwand-i ḥaqiqat-asās)
the Friend to Truth (ḥaqq-pasanād)
the Seeker of Truth (ḥaqq-talab)
the Desirer of Truth (ḥaqq-khwāḥ)
the Chooser of What Is Right (ḥaqiqat-guzīn)
the Way Station of Reason (maurid-i ‘aql)
the Impetus for the Primal Element/Essence (nashā’-i jauhar-i awwal)
the Perfect Guide (murshid-i kāmil)
the Just Sovereign (kẖāqān-i ‘ādil)
the Manifestation/Embodiment of Power (maẓhar-i qudrat)
the Wellspring of Excellence (maṣdar-i ḵāir)
the Unalloyed Bounty (faiż-i maḥz)
the Total Intelligence (tamām-kẖirād)
the Complete Civility (hama-lutf)
the Utter Munificence (jumla-karm)
[the One] Whose Mystery Is His Intellect (ramz-ash ‘ilm)
Whose Intellect Is His Art (‘ilm-ash hunar)
Whose Art Is His Wisdom (hunar-ash ḥikmat)
the Jewel in the Span of the Universe (jauhar-i ‘arsā-yi mujūdāt)
the Binding on the Book of Existence (shīrāza-yi nuskha-yi maujūdāt)
the Epitome of the Qualities of Truth (mauṣūf ba šīfāt-i ḥaqq)
the Shadow of the Ultimate Being (šāya-i zāt-i muqīlaq)
the Decipherer of the Signs of Wisdom (šināsā-yi rumūz-i ḥikmat)
the Pearl Diver in the Ocean of Reality (gauwās-i bahr-i ḥaqqat)
the Brilliance on the Gemstone of Plenty (ābrū-yi gauhar-i futūwat)
the Pupil in the Eye of Masculinity (mardumak-i dīda-yi murūwat)
[the One] Whose Oaths Are Firm (‘ahd-ash ustuwār)
Whose Purpose Is Resolute (azm-ash bar qarār)
Who [gives with] an Open Hand (abr-dast)
Whose Heart Is an Ocean (daryā-dil)
the Morning of the Soul [of humanity] (sубh-i nafs)
the Sun on the Forehead [of mankind] (afiāb-i jabīn)
the Knower of Hidden Mysteries (dānā-yi rāz-i niḥānī)
the Witness to Divine Splendor (bīnā-yi jilwa-i rabbānī)
the Shadow of God (zillus-i ṣubhānī)
the Merciful caliph (khalīfat al-rahmānī)
the Second Lord of the Celestial Conjunction (sahīb-i qirān-i șānī)
May God keep his realm intact forever (khallad-allāhu mulkahu)

—and so out of divine inspiration I have named this garden in the eternal spring of meaning the Chahār Chaman of Brahman. I hope that it will be refreshed and
invigorated by showers of kindness and appreciation emanating from the clouds of His Blessed Majesty’s bountiful heart and discerning intellect.

I trust that wherever the generous spirits of the masters of knowledge and visionaries of the intellect may find one of those mistakes and errors that all ignorant mere mortals are prone to, perhaps they will do this humble supplicant the courtesy of fixing it with the pen of correction. (CC, 85)

This is exactly the sort of flourish of ornamental *inshā’* that has given many modern historians fits. It contains no specific new information that is particularly “useful” (i.e. no names, dates, events, etc.), and its syntax appears purposefully convoluted, with the main sentence interrupted by some ten lines (in the printed edition) of “artificial” praise for the emperor.

But no one forced Chandar Bhan to write in this way—so to dismiss such passages as meaningless verbiage, as so many modern scholars have done, is to take the easy way out and perhaps to miss the entire point. The basic content is straightforward enough, along the lines of: “I was having doubts about whether my linguistic abilities were up to the task of effectively depicting the splendors of Shah Jahan’s court, but my pen was inspired by the emperor’s many qualities, which are like a resplendent garden, to go ahead and give it a try; I have called my account “The Four Gardens’ (*Chahār Chaman*) and hope that he and other readers like it and forgive me for any errors of style or substance.” Merely understanding this basic content, however, does not fully capture the surplus “meaning” conveyed by the passage’s prose style.

The first thing to notice is that Chandar Bhan does not merely list the emperor’s virtues. He turns that mundane act of listing into an aesthetic event, deploying all the tools of rhyme, consonance, and assonance that good poetry typically displays, and introducing a consciously performative quality to the prose whereby the pleasure of reading (or better yet, reciting) the words is itself a key part of the text’s “meaning.” There is an almost percussive rhythm to the list of Shah Jahan’s virtues, a cadence that is next to impossible to recreate in English, and difficult even to replicate in Persian without reading aloud. But this parade of rhymes and parallel constructions is quite consciously designed to trip along the tongue, impelling the reader’s eye forward and bringing delight to the connoisseur. Far from being stilted, the words flow almost effortlessly when one knows what they mean and how to read them properly, as most of Chandar Bhan’s early modern Perso-phone contemporaries certainly would have. (Translating them effectively is, of course, another matter entirely.)

Aside from purely aesthetic considerations, there is also actual historical insight to be gleaned from reading a panegyric litany like this carefully, modern historiography’s biases to the contrary notwithstanding. That modern bias would have us believe that this is all merely the perfunctory verbiage of a lackey who was cowed by the emperor’s despotic power into sycophantic hyperbole or
constrained by courtly literary convention into ostentatious verbosity, or both. Hence, it is not to be taken seriously when it comes to questions of how we interpret Shah Jahan’s reign, or Hindu-Muslim relations during that reign, or any number of other topics of interest for the history of early modern India generally. But to accept this interpretation means accepting the conclusion that the words themselves, and the author’s agency in writing those words, do not matter. It means taking as our analytical starting point the unfounded premise that it was impossible for someone like Chandar Bhan to actually mean what he said about the emperor, or to have crafted his words with a specific message about the nature of Mughal power in mind.

Yet surely it matters that in this lengthy list of Shah Jahan’s virtues hardly any—only three, by my count—speak specifically of the emperor’s capabilities as a warrior and conqueror. Given all the tired clichés about the intrinsic violence of Muslim rule in India, and Shah Jahan’s own martial severity in particular, this in itself is a noteworthy absence. Did it simply go without saying to Chandar Bhan’s way of thinking that Shah Jahan was the greatest conqueror in the world? Or was it rather that conquest alone was not necessarily as worthy of his praise as we might be inclined to assume?

By the same token, surely it matters that Chandar Bhan, who could have chosen any set of imperial characteristics to eulogize, focuses nearly all of his rhetorical energies on praising Shah Jahan’s justice, wisdom, intellect, reason, sense of fairness, yearning for Truth, and even esoteric mystical knowledge. Indeed, any specialists reading this will have surely noted that a good deal of the idiom here is infused with a generic Sufi mystical sensibility and idiom—the emperor as a “knower of Truth” (ḥaqq-shinās), a “seeker of Truth” (ḥaqq-ṭalab), “the Perfect Guide” (murshid-i kāmil), “the Decipherer of the Signs of Wisdom” (shināsā-yi rumūz-i ḥikmat), “the Pearl Diver in the Ocean of Reality” (ghauwās-i bahīr-i ḥaqīqat), “the Knower of Hidden Mysteries” (dānā-yi rāz-i nihānī), and so on. These are humanist virtues of the intellect and esoteric spirituality, about as far from the thundering bombast of worldly power or even the shrill hectoring of clerical orthodoxy as one can imagine.

In other words, even if we make allowances for the fact that Chandar Bhan is intentionally laying it on a bit thick, and even if we recognize that some of these forms of praise are at least partly formulaic and that we don’t have to take every word literally, it does not necessarily follow that the underlying sentiment is not genuine—which, in turn, means that there is still something telling about the manner of praise on display here. For one thing, it gives us a powerful glimpse of the Mughal ideology and value system, one in which the legitimacy of a king was judged less on the monarch’s brute ability to conquer and hold territory—though that too was obviously important—than on the justice, fairness, equitability, and even spirituality of his rule. For another, it tells us something about what
Chandar Bhan thought mattered to his readers in the wider Persianate world when it came to kingship, and about what he thought distinguished Mughal rule from that of rivals like the Ottomans and Safavids. Remember, Chandar Bhan’s effusive praise of Shah Jahan was not just meant for local Hindustani consumption; it was also clearly intended to advertise the Mughal court’s justice and generosity to readers in Anatolia, the Iranian plateau, Central Asia, and even the Deccan, and in so doing perhaps to lure away artists, intellectuals, mystics, traders, and other talented individuals from those rival locales who might be in search of patronage and might further add to the luster of Shah Jahan’s court.

In the next few pages, Chandar Bhan reiterates and builds on many of these same themes. In the section immediately following the one we have just discussed, for instance, he draws our attention to another important quality that he admires in the emperor, namely, the latter’s administrative acumen:

> Ever since the prosperous throne of governance and conquest that is the envy of heaven was beautified and adorned by the accession of His Majesty the Emperor of the Age, the Sovereign of the World, the Ruler of the Land and Sea, and the King of Kings of the Seven Climes, the four gardens of the world [chahār chaman-i rozgār] have grown even more verdant and lush, and the gardens of hope and serenity have become green and succulent.

Since His Majesty the Emperor’s lofty and discerning intellect is an innovator in the precepts of government and politics [qawānīn-i jahāndārī wa jahānbānī], and the establisher of norms of rule and conquest [ādāb-i mulkgīrī wa kishwar-sitānī], he has cultivated in the lands of Hindustan a sense of conscientiousness and attentiveness to the proper principles of governance and management, the creation of new laws and statutes, and regulations for the revenue, administration, and smooth running of this great empire for the safeguarding of land and property [dar mamālik-i hindūstān nasaq-o-nizām dar nishast-o-bar-khāst wa qawā'id-o-qawānīn-ţarāzī wa ā'īn dar ūzbat-o-rabt-o-band-o-bast-i umūr-i daulat-i wālā ba muhāfīzat-i mulk-o-māl ĥazmī-o-ihtiyātī padīd āmad]. (CC, 86)

The prose may well be florid, and it may not exactly be hard evidence, but at the very least this is suggestive testimony from a contemporary witness insisting that—again, contrary to so much modern historiography—Mughal administrative practices were far from static after Akbar’s death in 1605. We saw in the previous chapter that Chandar Bhan reserved special praise for prime ministers like Afzal Khan and Sa’d Allah Khan who, in his opinion, had made an effort to improve the Mughal administrative and revenue system—not just for the empire’s own extractive benefit, but also, at least in Chandar Bhan’s view, for the benefit of the peasants and cultivators themselves. And here he makes a similar claim for the emperor himself, and for the emperor’s hands-on approach to administration and governance.

This theme will recur a number of times in the pages that follow, but first Chandar Bhan once again inserts himself into the narrative, making a point of
reminding us that his long service to the court is what gives his testimony credibility, and reiterating that this is a firsthand account of what he has personally seen:

Since this humblest servant of the celestial court has been among the followers [\textit{talmīz}] of the victorious royal stirrup ever since the beginning of [the emperor’s] august accession to the throne, whether the royal camp was in residence or on the move, I have enjoyed the special benefit of the privilege of longtime service, friendship, and appreciativeness of the kind, generous, affectionate, and discerning emperor.

With a hopeful pen I have thus selected and set down in this compilation [\textit{nuskha-yi jāmi’ā}] some of the particulars of life at this eternal court that I have witnessed with my very own objective eyes [\textit{ki ba dida-yi ḥaqq-bin mushāhida namūda}]. May this depiction of the daily life and most happy and blessed events be like a bouquet in the assembly of the masters of expression [\textit{guldasta-yi bazm-i arbāb-i sukhan}]! (CC, 86)

This is followed by yet another panegyric to the emperor, this time in verse:

\begin{verbatim}
The tongue of whosoever’s mouth has words
Is a singer of praise for the King of Kings of the World,
The fortunate emperor who possesses the earth,
Who has the sun for a crown, the heavens for a throne.
Every morning the sky opens up its heart
And showers its pearls upon the dust of his path.
The shade of his umbrella [\textit{chatr}] spreads across the universe,
More majestic even than the celestial wheel.
Under the shade of that august parasol, the auspicious Huma\textsuperscript{15}
Augurs wealth for the empire.
The heavens are a mere vestibule in his mansion;
The lamp of the sky merely a moth [to his flame].
The legendary steed of his courage [\textit{burāq-i himmat-ash}] is so fleet of foot
That it needs all of Anatolia and the Levant [\textit{rūm-o-shām}] just to go for a gallop.
The number of his dominions is impossible to reckon,
For in conquest [\textit{mulk-gīrī}] he is the sun.
His effusive heart is boundless as the ocean;
For earrings he uses Pisces [\textit{māhī}] and the moon.
O heaven [\textit{falak}], you are but a tent in his realm;
O celestial dome [\textit{gumābd-i gardūn}], you are but a castle in his country.
Everyone you see has prospered in his domain;
The foundations of tyranny [\textit{binā’-yi żulm}] have crumbled in his reign.
\end{verbatim}
His knowledge [‘ilm] can fairly be measured against that of a scholar [‘ālim],
For he is wise in every science and every matter [dar har ‘ilm-o- dar har kār].

When he spreads his jewel-scattering hands
He empties the ocean and mine of his heart.

The dust of his path is a balm of kohl for troubled eyes,
The brilliance of his intellect a guiding light for sight.

The world-displaying mirror, the heart with knowledge of the unseen:
These are the interpreters of the wisdom emanating from his tongue of magical expression.

[zabān-i har ki goyā dar dāhān ast
šanā-khwān-i shahinshāh-i jahān ast

shahinshāh-i jahāndār-o-jawān-bakh
ki khwāsheard-ash sazad taj āsmān takht

falak har subh säzad az bar-i khwesh
nišār-i khāk-i rāh-ash gauhar-î khwesh

bar āfāq ast chaṭr-ash sāya-gustar
ki bāshad dar shukoh az chaṛkh bar-tar

Humā dar sāya-yi ān chaṭr-i wālā
kunad sarmāya-yi daulat muhaiyā

falak tāqī-st dar kāshāna-yi ā
chirāgh-î āsmān parwāna-yi ū

Burāq-i himmat-ash ān tez-gām hast
ki jaulān-gāh-i ghurrisht Rūm-o-Shām hast

shumār-i mulk-ash afzūn az ūsāb hast
ki ū dar mulk-giri āshā hast

dil-ash daryā-yi bī-pāyān-î pur-josh
zi māh tā ba māh-ash ḥalqa dar gosh

falak az bāṛgāh-ash khaima dāri
zi mulk-ash gumbar-i gurdun ūsārī

ba daur-ash har ki bīnī kāmyāb hast
bīnā-yi zulm dar ‘ahd-ash kharāb hast

ba ‘ilm andāza-yi ‘ālam kunad rāst
ki dar har ‘ilm-o-dar hast dānā-st

chu afshānad kaf-i gauhar-fishān rā
tahi säzad dil-i daryā-o-kān rā
Again, while Shah Jahan’s greatness as a conqueror is of course celebrated here, there is a near-equal emphasis on his intellect, generosity, and wisdom—on knowledge (‘ilm) triumphing over the “foundations of tyranny” (zulm), as Chandar Bhan suggests in couplets 11 and 12.

After a few more lines of praise for the emperor (this time once again in prose), Chandar Bhan finally begins his description of the daily routine at court, and this is the spot where most manuscripts of the digest Guldasta / Qawā’id al-Saltānāt begin. He opens with a series of celestial metaphors, comparing the emperor to the moon and the rising sun before explaining that Shah Jahan would typically rise very early at the break of dawn to pray and spend some time reading the Qur’an. Notably, this hint of Muslim piety on the emperor’s part does not seem to perturb our Brahman commentator in the least. On the contrary, Chandar Bhan frames Shah Jahan’s prayerful routine as a reflection of the emperor’s virtue and humility rather than as a threatening harbinger of orthodoxy and indeed barely comments on it before moving on to other topics.

Next we are taken on an intimate tour of the palace’s inner quarters during the early morning hours. Here we learn, for instance, that breakfast in the royal apartments usually consisted of a variety of juices and other drinks, as well as a bountiful selection of fruits from all over India and the surrounding regions. Chandar Bhan’s description of this assortment of fruits serves not only to highlight the rare and luxurious comestibles available in the palace but also to remind readers of the territorial extent of Mughal power, which assured access to such exotic fruits in the first place and provided a safe network of roads and territories through which to transport them. Indeed, the multiplicity of fruits on offer at the court is itself arguably intended to serve as a metaphor for the inclusive ethos of empire as a whole:

Since the Emperor’s bounteous generosity is as deep as the ocean, the key that throws open the gates of kindness and favors, every morning he distributes a rich array of delicious food, aromatic drinks, amber-scented confections [nuqlāt], sweets of various colors, and fruits of every variety: melons from Balkh and Kariz, plums from Kashgahr and Ghur, black and purple Habshi and Sahibi varieties of grapes, Samarqandi pears and apples, pomegranates from Yazd and Jalalabad, Kardi peaches, and various other fruits of Persia and Central Asia [mewa-hā-yi wilāyat] that are always arriving at the court that is the asylum of the world. There are also Hindustani fruits [fawāḵiḥ-i Hindūstān] such as mangoes from Gujarat and the Deccan, pomegranates from Thatta, watermelons from Kashmir, delicious pineapples and juicy sugarcane, delightful figs, seedless mulberries, oranges of every shape and size, and many other
kinds of juicy and fresh fruit that are delivered daily in baskets from the provinces and gardens throughout the empire—all generously shared on silver and gold trays among the princes [nūbār] of this great and magnificent court, the nobles of the everlasting state, and other familiar servants of the court.

Even breakfast, it would appear, was intended to be a display of Mughal cosmopolitanism, a chance to show that the fruits of the whole world were available at the court and generously shared with its denizens. In material terms, this inventory of delicacies shows just how hooked into the circulatory trade networks of Asia the Mughal court really was. But there is also little doubt that Chandar Bhan was trying to use all this sumptuous bounty as a kind of metaphor for the court’s pluralism and generosity more generally. In some manuscripts of the text, moreover, he adds an interesting aside noting that in addition to the organized networks of fruit delivery, there was a coordinated system for bringing ice down from the mountains (presumably, the lower Himalayas) in the blistering heat of the summer months, whereupon it would be distributed “among the principal officers, according to their respective ranks.”

After breakfast, the emperor dispensed certain special favors in private and then made his way to the public viewing gallery, or jharoka-darshan, “according to the long-standing practice of this great empire and magnificent caliphate” (muṭḥabiq-i qā‘ida-yi qadīm-i daulat-i ‘uzmā wa khilafat-i kubrā). Chandar Bhan explains that in all three major Mughal cities—Agra, Delhi, and Lahore—the jharoka-darshan was situated alongside the riverbank facing out onto a wide-open space where the elite and common (khās-o-'āmm) alike could assemble, and where “the eyes of the hopeful and expectant could be lit up by contact with the luminous imperial gaze” (dīda-yi umedwārān wa muntazirān rā ba didār-i fā'īz al-anwār munawwar misāzand). The same gallery and attached field were also sometimes used for other kinds of entertainment, such as elephant fights—“a marvelous spectacle,” according to Chandar Bhan, “as if two mountains were crashing into one another”—as well as performances by “a variety of master players, dancers, and jugglers from every region” (ijtimā‘-yi arbāb-i la‘b wa raqqāšān wa bāzīgarān-i har diyār) (CC, 89). But the jharoka-darshan was not meant solely for the passive visual experience of beholding the emperor, or the morning’s imperial entertainment. It was also a space, Chandar Bhan tells us, where petitions for charity, the redress of some grievance, or some other form of justice (‘adl-o-dād) could be lodged directly with the emperor himself and could “reach the blessed ear of the just emperor unmediated” (ba wasātāt-i ghairī ba sam‘-i mubārak-i pādshāh-i ‘ādil firyād-ras mīrasad) (CC, 89).

After this session the emperor usually proceeded directly to a much more formal assembly in another part of the palace known as the Hall of Special and Public Audience (jharoka-yi khāss-o-‘ām) (CC, 90–95). It was here that the main daily business of the court was conducted—audiences with officers who were being posted to a new assignment, or perhaps returning from a campaign; the reading of
imperial edicts, newsletters, and memoranda; the receiving of diplomats and other distinguished visitors; the dispensing of patronage for artists, literati, scientists, and other intellectuals; and so on. In Akbar’s day, this public audience could last up to four and a half hours, and according to the contemporary historian Badayuni (1540–1615) “Huge crowds assembled and there was much bustle.” This seems clearly to have still been the case under Shah Jahan, if Chandar Bhan’s account is any indication, though it would appear that the ceremonial aspects of such assemblies had become much more regimented by our author’s time. The emperor made his entrance to the booming of kettledrums, which, according to Chandar Bhan, resounded for miles around, whereupon he was received by “the assembled servants of this court that is the asylum for kings, who are blessed and graced with the opportunity to bow before him.” The first order of business was a kind of military review, beginning with a parade of horses and elephants in full regalia, creating a spectacular commotion that Chandar Bhan acknowledges (with characteristic modesty) was “entirely beyond the capacity of words to describe” (CC, 90).

Shah Jahan’s court is well known in modern historiography for the strict formality of its ceremonial, and this impression is at least partly confirmed by Chandar Bhan, who notes that the assembled nobility and other courtiers like himself were required to stand and were typically arranged in rows according to their rank. But here he also treats us to a lengthy excursus on the rich diversity of regional, ethnic, and religious identities that might be represented in the audience of the jharoka-yi khāṣṣ-o-‘ām on a typical day. First the various princes and members of the royal family were “permitted to sit, rank by rank, according to their status, near the throne of the caliphate and sultanate.” (Note that there was an explicit official hierarchy even within the extended royal family, one that was embodied in practice during Mughal assemblies through proximity to the royal person.) Next came the upper echelon of the Mughal nobility: “khāns, sultāns, mīrs, and mīrzās hailing from the lands of Iran and Turan, followed by illustrious wazīrs who are masters of the sword and the pen, nobles of high rank and their sons who served the court.”22 Alongside these were arrayed various other types of military subalterns, arranged in groups for maximum effect: swordsmen, armormers (qūrchiyān), archers, mace bearers, matchlockmen, and so on. Next to these were another set of “estimable” (wājib al-ihṭirām) denizens of the court: “Sayyids of lofty status, great [Sufi] shaikhs, eminent men of learning, ingenious doctors, and other able courtiers” (CC, 90).

Various ethnic and regional identities were represented among these generic categories of courtiers and those to follow. Thus, Chandar Bhan explains, the rest of the Hall of Public Audience was filled out with attendees of “various ethnicities” (tābaqāt-i mukhtalif):

from Arabia and ‘Ajam, Turks, Tajiks, Kurds, [Lurs], Tatars, Russians, Africans [ḥabash], Circassians, and various others from the lands of Anatolia, Egypt, the Levant, ‘Iraq, Arabia, ‘Ajam, Persia, Gilan, Mazandaran, Khurasan, Transoxiana,
the Qipchaq steppes, Turkistan, Georgia, and Kurdistan, each in their turn; so too with the various communities [aqwām] of Hindustan, from among the masters of learning and perfect wisdom, to men of the sword and the pen, such as sayyids of pure ancestry, martial shaikh-zādas, Afghan tribes [alūsāt] like the Lodis, Rohillas, Khweshgis, Yusufza’is, and others, not to mention various classes of Rajputs, ranas, rājās, raos, and rays, among them the Rathors, [Sisodias], Kachwahas, Hadas, Kurus, Chauhans, Jhalas, Chandrawats, Jadauns, Tonwars, Baghelas, [Maheshwars], Gujars, [Panwars], Bhadauriyas, Sanghis, Bundelas, Shagarwals, and other attendees from the rest of India, arranged in descending order from ranks of 7,000 to 1,000, and then 1,000 to 100, and then 100 to individual troopers [ahadis]. (CC, 90–91)

[Several of the toponyms and ethnonyms in this list are quite unclear in Ja’fery’s printed edition of Chahār Chaman (2007), but I have clarified some of them by consulting various manuscripts of the text, and indicated these by placing the names in brackets. Cf. Guldasta, Mausūm ba Qawā’id al-Saltanat, MS, Azad Library, AMU, Aligarh (Suleiman Collection #664/42: fol. 5a); Guldasta / Qawā’id al-Saltanat, MS, Azad Library, AMU, Aligarh (Suleiman Collection #664/44: fol. 5a); Qawā’id al-Saltanat-i Shāh Jahān, MS, Azad Library, AMU, Aligarh (Habib Ganj Collection, #56/1:4–5).]

We may pause here to note that when discussing the various classes of Muslim elites such as sayyids and shaikh-zādas, and even the various Afghan tribes represented at the Mughal court, Chandar Bhan is perfectly comfortable considering them to be among the “communities of Hindustan” (aqwām-i Hindustān). Being a Muslim—even one such as a “sayyid” whose entire claim to elevated social status was based on an avowed pride in Arabian origin and direct descent from the prophet Muhammad—simply did not make one “foreign” in Chandar Bhan’s eyes, and certainly not in the modern nationalist sense. As for the Afghan tribes, Chandar Bhan’s comments here are a powerful reminder that the premodern South Asian geographical imagination often included much of modern-day Afghanistan, which, far from representing a cultural space that was incommensurably other, had been a recognized part of the zone of political, cultural, and commercial circulation along the trans-Indus corridor since antiquity.

In any event, Chandar Bhan’s parade of diversity is not done. Lest we think that his metageographical horizons—and those of the Mughal court generally—are limited to northern India and Central Asia, he proceeds to tell us about yet more cultural and ethnic groups from further afield that were usually present in Mughal assemblies, including “landed gentry [zamīndārs] from the plains and the mountains, from the countries of Karnataka, Magadha, Assam, Udaipur, Srinagar, Kumaun, Bandhu, Tibet, Kishtvar, and other countries of the realm, who rank by rank according to their status were ennobled by the honor of kissing the threshold of the Saturnal court [dargāh-i kaiwān-jāh].” Here Chandar Bhan reiterates that all of these groups were dressed in their best finery and arranged according to their ranks, adding that “no one moved without permission” and that “even though all were standing very close to one another, they were expected to maintain strict silence” (CC, 91–92).
Such ceremonial discipline notwithstanding, it is nevertheless striking the degree to which the religio-ethnic diversity of the empire, personified by the attendants at such assemblies, is framed by Chandar Bhan as something not merely to be tolerated by the Mughal state but in fact to be celebrated and promoted among the primary virtues of Mughal dominion—as if the very purpose of Mughal power was to maintain the conditions of possibility for such plurality.

Chandar Bhan also seems to have recognized quite clearly that tolerance was, as it were, good for business, and he makes a clear connection between Mughal pluralism and the empire’s political economic health. Thus as he continues this extraordinary excursion on the participants and routine of the jharokā-yi khāṣṣ-o-ʿām he frames his next set of comments specifically around various forms of Mughal hospitality toward outsiders. There was geopolitical hospitality: “Likewise multilingual ambassadors from the Caesar of Rum [i.e., the Ottoman Sultan] and the rulers of Iran and Turan arrive with letters and gifts—the crucial implements of diplomatic concord—and are given permission to stand in the palace audience according to their status. Ministers and lords from the Deccan, too, such as the representatives of the ‘Adil Shah, Qutb al-Mulk, and the people of Karnataka, exposed to the munificent light of the Imperial Presence, also demonstrate their loyalty with petitions and gifts” (CC, 92). There was also commercial hospitality:

And the class of captains of commerce [malik al-tujjār]—represented by various merchants, profiteers, and suppliers from every quarter of ‘Iraq, Khurasan, Anatolia, the Levant, China [chīn], Greater China [mā-chīn], Cathay [khatā], Hotan [khutan], Turkistan, Europe [farangistān], and various other far-off countries [mamālik-i baʿīda] and famous islands and ports—visit the world-protecting court carrying expensive jewels, finery, curios, exotica, and other wares and display their cargo in the spacious audience hall.

Then, made prosperous and delighted by their lavish profits and gains [fawāʿid wa munāfaʿ-i kulli], they carry testimonial evidence of the kindness and good name of this eternal empire in every direction and to every far corner of the world, [spreading the word] that this magnificent and majestic court is the qibla of the hopes of this world and its inhabitants. (CC, 92)

And cultural hospitality:

There is a surfeit of experts in the sword and the pen, men of excellence and perfection, masters of wisdom and intellelction, authors of elegance and eloquence, and various other classes of masterful artists, artisans, and other skilled people from all over the civilized world [az ma’mūra-yi ʿālam]—including Istanbul, Aleppo [hal-āb], Egypt, Basra, Baghdad, Hamadan, Shirwān, Shamakhi, Gilan, Mazandaran, Astarabad, Ganja, Barda’, Tabriz, Ardabil, Qazwin, Qom, Savgan, Tehran, Yazd, Isfahan, Simnan, Damghan, Bastam, Sabzawār, Nishapur, Merv, Mashhad, Tus, Tabas, Qayin, Tun, Isfārayin, Jam, Herat, Khwāf, Bakhtar, Sistan, Farwan, Qandahar, Balkh, Badakhuṣhan, Bukhara, Samarqand, Andijan, Tibet, Kashghar, other parts of Turkistan, and various other far-off cities.
For all manner of men come to this court of global refuge, the central axis of the world’s turning quadrants, bringing their hopes and dreams with them, which are in turn fulfilled by their attaching themselves to the bounteous court that is a refuge for the world and its inhabitants. (CC, 92–93)

As I have noted above, there is no doubt that this is all a form of propaganda, an advertisement for the benefits of Mughal rule. But this in itself does not mean that Chandar Bhan’s pride in the court’s posture of universal civility (ṣulḥ-i kull) is not genuine.

Tolerance, moreover, is far from the only theme that Chandar Bhan addresses in this account of the routine at Shah Jahan’s main public audience, or darbār. He explains, for instance, some of the intricacies of Mughal court ceremonial and further notes that it was in this type of public assembly that official titles of nobility and bureaucratic assignments were usually handed out personally by the emperor: “Royal titles such as shah, general [sipah-sālār], commander of commanders [amīr al-umarā], khan of khans, sultan, maharaja, raja, ray, ray-i rayan, rana, and various other epithets suitable to individual capabilities were bestowed by His Majesty the Caliph, while the important governmental posts relating to the provinces such as the regional and city qāzīs, judges, inspectors [ihtisābs], qānūn-gos, chaudhrīs, and other officers were also appointed by the luminous Imperial Presence” (CC, 93). Mughal bureaucracy, in other words, did not simply run on autopilot. Keeping the central, provincial, and local administrative positions filled and supervised required constant attention from the court, including the direct intervention of the emperor himself on an almost daily basis. There was, moreover, a good deal of turnover in such positions, and Chandar Bhan notes that many of these provincial and local officers were subjected to a kind of institutionalized formal review process, one that took place out in the open for all to see during such public assemblies: “On one side stood the various governors [ṣūbadārs], administrative heads [dīwāns], amīns, and ʿāmil s who had been [newly?] assigned by His Great and Magnificent Majesty to the various provinces, districts, cities, and towns of the realm, while on another side stood those who had been in charge of this or that governmental post but had been relieved of duty [maʿzūl shuda]. Having arrived at the court that is the refuge of the world, they were there to reap the appropriate reward or punishment resulting from their good or bad performance” (CC, 93–94). Some of those whose performance was approved by the emperor were specially favored with the opportunity to approach the throne and were literally given a “blessed pat on the back” (dast-i muqaddas bar pusht mīguzārānand), while others were acknowledged more subtly, perhaps only with a glance or a nod of approval from the emperor.

But behind all the ceremony, the main point for Chandar Bhan definitely seems to be that the administration of the empire was an ongoing process, one in which the emperor was personally interested and engaged. Thus, he continues:

Because of [His Majesty’s] resolve to vouchsafe the obligations of governance, all edicts concerning matters related to land, property, mansāb rankings, jāgīr assign-
ments, monthly stipends, per diem allowances, gifts, charitable land grants, and various other matters are submitted to His Highness for review. Also submitted to the blessed gaze are reports of events in every land and territory, outlined in memoranda ['arā'iz] sent by the officials, governors, intelligence agents, watchmen, and news reporters of each locality.

In turn, inviolable orders are issued for enhancing the well-being of the people [rafāhat-i āhwāl-i khalā'iq], promoting cultivation, building infrastructure, policing bandits and rebels, and safeguarding the guarantees of utmost justice and fairness [pās-i marāsim-i ‘adl-o-dād-i arfa’]. (CC, 94)

Chandar Bhan goes on to explain that during the darbār various types of officials were given the opportunity to consult directly with the emperor on important matters of state and were usually given answers right then and there. This observation once again affords him the opportunity to offer an extended praise of Shah Jahan’s reason, intellect, and humane approach to governance, a point that Chandar Bhan punctuates by noting that another important activity during the assemblies of the jharoka-yi khāṣṣ-o-‘ām was the public distribution of various types of charity—including gold—for the poor and the indigent, as well as charitable land grants (madad-i ma’āsh) for religious institutions. As Chandar Bhan notes, these gifts were managed through an officer known as the šadr al-ṣudār, but what he wants to convey here is that the emperor did not simply delegate these matters to a functionary but took an active role in supervising their administration.

This theme is revisited repeatedly in the subsequent sections. After the assembly in the jharoka-yi khāṣṣ-o-‘ām has concluded, Chandar Bhan brings us along as the emperor retires to his privy chamber, or ghusl-khāna, for further consultations with his most trusted advisers in a more intimate, relaxed setting. Officially, this part of the palace was known as the diwān-khāna-yi khāṣṣ (or sometimes the daulat-khāna-yi khāṣṣ), that is, the “special administrative chamber.” But, as Chandar Bhan reminds us, it was better known by the colloquial name of “the bathhouse” (ghusl-khāna) because it was situated directly between the royal apartments and the baths. The important point to note, however, is not the etymology of the term but simply the fact that this was an area of extremely limited access for all but the most trusted advisers, or those with special permission. There is thus a hint of self-promotion here by Chandar Bhan, always mindful of his status as an insider eyewitness and never shy about using his narrative perch to remind us of the privileged access he enjoyed. (As we will see in the final chapter, this penchant for flaunting his insider status, and specifically his claim to special access to the emperor’s ghusl-khāna, will eventually be turned on its head and used against our munshī in the construction of a collective memory about his exploits in later generations. But let us not get ahead of ourselves.)

Shah Jahan typically conducted business in the ghusl-khāna until just after midday, according to Chandar Bhan. It was a setting for various different types of activities, but the first order of business—and the one that Chandar Bhan spends
the most time telling us about—was to continue the administrative work of managing the empire that had begun earlier in the day during the public darbār. A “summary agenda” (khulāsā-yi maṭālib) prepared by a council of ministers was presented to the emperor, who began by reviewing and giving directions with regard to all the most pressing matters (mahāmm-i lāzim al-anjām). This was also his time to consider any new or pending written requests (‘arā’iz) from high-level princes, nobles, provincial governors, and the like, which “were read by him with careful attention from beginning to end,” while the gist of some other general requests was summarized for him orally. Any orders and edicts that in turn needed to be issued to the princes and various other officials—“ṣūbadārs, army commanders, provincial administrative officials, and the like”—were “presented first in the form of a rough draft [musauwada] to [the emperor’s] alchemical gaze for blessed editorial corrections,” and only after the emperor’s personal approval did Chandar Bhan and the other “munshīs as fast as Mercury” copy out the orders in final draft form (CC, 95–96).

Here yet another theme from the previous chapter resurfaces: Chandar Bhan’s special admiration for those members of the royal family and the ruling classes who cultivated expertise in the secretarial arts and thus were able to perform certain types of administrative and managerial tasks on their own. As we saw with regard to Chandar Bhan’s assessment of the various prime ministers of Shah Jahan’s reign, he clearly felt that some competence in skills such as penmanship, composition, and accounting was an essential quality of an effective leader of government because it made such a leader much more competent to keep the bureaucracy functioning efficiently, to manage and assure the quality of his assistants’ work, and even, in some cases, to set the standard for quality workmanship himself. And so it is with Chandar Bhan’s view of the emperor: “Often the imperial edicts as effective as Fate [manāshīr-i qazā-ta’sīr] on important subjects addressed to the renowned and successful princes or powerful nobles were set down in the blessed writing of [His Majesty’s] own amber-scented pen, in a shikasta or nasta’līq script that displayed the highest quality and the utmost grace and refinement, with pithy, concise content delivered in a bold, vivid prose style that could serve as a template [dastūr al-‘amal] for even the most knowledgeable people, leaving the ministers, officials, and secretaries nothing to add” (CC, 96). Chandar Bhan notes that the emperor also personally inspected the accounts and receipts relating to all manner of imperial business, such as provincial agricultural production and revenue, and kept handy a ledger listing the names and ranks of all the high-profile members of the Mughal administrative apparatus who held positions of responsibility “for the care and well-being of the soldiery and cultivators” (barā-yi pardākht wa rafāhiyat-i ḥāl-i sipāh wa ra’iyat) (CC, 96).

Chandar Bhan goes on to note that in order to stimulate provincial trade Shah Jahan at some point suspended the collection of certain commercial taxes and
levies such as the *tamghā* (a kind of sales tax aimed specifically at merchants) and the *rāhdārī* (the “road tax,” a levy on the transport of goods). This was part of a wider set of policies relating to the Mughal provincial economies, one that included a very high standard for maintaining law and order expected of local officials (*āmils*). In particular, Shah Jahan continued the established Mughal practice of holding such officials responsible for any property lost to theft or robbery in their jurisdiction, for which they were expected not only to pay restitution (*tāwān*) to the victim of the crime but also to pay a fine (*jarīma*) as punishment for their institutional negligence.

“It is because of these very same just laws and policies,” Chandar Bhan adds, “that the sense of security on the roads, highways, and rest stops in this grand dominion is so great that the merchants, traders, and other wayfarers do not hesitate to travel from place to place with hearts at ease and peace of mind” (CC, 96).

The *ghusl-khāna* was more than a place for transacting imperial business, however. It was also a kind of salon where various types of private entertainment could be staged for the emperor and his inner circle. At times it served as a sort of boutique showroom, where especially luxurious or exotic merchandise such as fine jewelry was brought in for private browsing. Chandar Bhan gives a number of examples of such items and dwells at length on the particular interest Shah Jahan took in rare and fine books, for the perusal of which the *ghusl-khāna* often served as a convenient setting.

Celebrated books in Arabic and Persian, often in the author’s own handwriting, were brought in from the royal library and displayed for the hair-splitting and discerning critical gaze of the Emperor of Form and Content, the King of Kings of Aesthetic Appreciation, along with miscellaneous albums of art and calligraphy in a variety of scripts such as *šūlus*, *naskh*, *ta’līq*, *nasta’līq*, and *shikasta*.

Many of these albums included samples penned by some of the great calligraphers of the world, such as Yaqut [al-Musta’simi? (d. 1298)], [‘Abd Allah] Seyrafi [14th cent.], Mulla Mir ‘Ali [Haravi? (d. ca. 1550)], Sultan ‘Ali [Mashhadi (d. 1620)], Mir ‘Imad [al-Hasani (d. 1615)], Mulla Darwish, [Mir Muhammad Asghar] Ashraf Khan [d. 1575], Muhammad Khan, and Muhammad Husain Isfahani, as well as images by some of the most talented painters, for instance Mani [3rd cent.!?], [Kamal al-Din] Behzad [d. ca. 1535], [Abu al-Hasan] Nadir al-Zaman [d. ca. 1630], and the like. (CC, 96–97)

Granted, for most readers today the names of these master painters and calligraphers from the medieval and early modern Persianate world will not mean very much. But to the cosmopolitan Indo-Persian intelligentsia of Chandar Bhan’s day the mere mention of many of these artists, let alone the idea that so many samples of their exquisite works would be available for viewing in one private collection, would surely have induced a sense of envy and awe.²⁹ Indeed, this was precisely the intention. After all, we must always remember that Chandar Bhan was writing with the wider Persianate audience in mind, on the one hand simply to
burnish his own literary credentials, but also with the avowed goal of advertising the wealth, splendor, and aura of luxurious possibility that he felt was characteristic of the Mughal court and might attract the interest of other talented intellectuals in the wider Indo-Persian cosmopolis.

This cosmopolitan outlook is of course a consistent, if intermittent, feature of Chahār Chaman as a whole, and it is one that Chandar Bhan expands upon here as he continues his account of the goings-on in the ghusl-khāna. He tells, for instance, of the “masters of perfect learning and intellect from Iraq, Khurasan, Transoxiana, and Hindustan [who] debate intellectual questions in elegant discourses” in one part of the room, discussions that were moderated by “His Majesty the perfect guide and complete teacher” (hażrat murshid-i kāmil wa ustād-i mukammal) (CC, 97). Meanwhile, on another side of the room there might be “eloquent poets reciting panegyrics and epics [qaşa’id wa maṣnawi] in eulogy and praise for the angelic nature of the generous and ocean-hearted emperor, and receiving bounteous rewards for their efforts.” Because of the emperor’s good taste and “appreciation for talent” (qadar-dānī), Chandar Bhan boasts, many celebrated poets (shu’arā-yi nāmdār) “have received their weight in red and white gold” (CC, 97). (I.e., if you are an aspiring poet, this is the place for you.)

In another part of the room munshīs and calligraphers showed off their exquisite penmanship, and in still another “physicians of the Perso-Hellenic [yūnānī] tradition and doctors of the Hindi tradition test[ed] each other’s skills and methods for applying proper remedies and courses of treatment.” Astronomers and astrologers, including “Brahmans, hindīs, and Zoroastrians,” were also regularly in attendance, “while other accomplished and talented intellectuals of every discipline engaged in all manner of theoretical and practical discussion” (wa dīgar dānāyān-i hunarwar wa hunarmandān-i har hunar ba muqaddamāt-i ‘ilmī wa ‘amalī bar zabān dārand) (CC, 97).24 Among these on any given day might be painters and other artists, mathematicians, and designers.

Chandar Bhan closes his account of the typical activities in the ghusl-khāna by noting that it was also a space for private performances. Sometimes these were quasi-gladiatorial displays of hand-to-hand combat among “dexterous youths” (jawānān-i sabuk-dast), and on such occasions the ghusl-khāna also turned into a kind of showroom for exquisite hand-crafted military implements—“glistening swords of Indian steel,” some of them inlaid and jewel-encrusted, matchlocks, armor, and so on—“that to describe them all in detail would require an entirely separate volume” (CC, 97). On other occasions exotic animals, such as “eastern and Punjabi antelopes” (āhuwān-i pūrabī wa panjābī), were brought in to lock horns in combat with one another as the emperor and his guests looked on, “a sight that is second to none” (tamāshā-yi ghair-mukarrar) according to our author (CC, 98). But most often the afternoon’s entertainment consisted of storytelling, singing, and dance performances by troupes of “melodious crooners, musicians, and other
performers of exquisite style from places like Iraq, Khurasan, and Kashmir, as well as kalāwant and courtesans [tawā'if] from Hindustan, some of which were employed as resident artists by this bounteous government, while others had traveled from other courts in every country and region” (CC, 98).

Such diversions notwithstanding, the real business of governance was never far from Chandar Bhan’s mind—or, if he is to be believed, from the emperor’s mind either. He thus returns to this topic again and again in the next few sections of the text. In introducing the next section on the administration of justice, for instance, he insists that on some days Shah Jahan would remain busy with administrative matters “from the crack of dawn until the middle of the night,” adding that such “dedication to the important matters of governance and justice is the essence of devotion” (ba ishtighāl-i umūr-i salṭanat-o-‘adālat ki ‘ain-i ‘ibādat ast) (CC, 98).

He further explains that even though there were many institutions and officials in place to ensure fairness and the rule of law throughout the realm, Shah Jahan made a special point of setting aside at least one day during the week when, “for the greater ease of the people” (ba wāst-yi wufūr-i āsān-yi khalā’iq), he would personally hold court and hear the complaints of “the oppressed and the seekers of justice” (mazlumān wa dād-khwāhān), whereupon he would issue immediate rulings “in conformity with the splendid rule of law and the supreme principles of justice” (bar tābq-i sharī’at-i gharrā’ wa ‘adālat-i ‘uzmā) (CC, 99). Here he goes out of his way to praise not only Shah Jahan’s justice but also his inclination to be merciful (lazzat-i ‘afūw wa bakhshish) whenever possible, and humane when the occasion unavoidably called for some form of punishment (CC, 99–100).

Chandar Bhan also adds here an observation of some significance for how we interpret even some of the court’s leisure and recreational activities, noting that they were often undertaken with a commendable ulterior motive. “On many occasions,” he tells us, “royal excursions that appeared to be for the mere purpose of recreation or hunting were actually designed to glean information about the state of governance and the object of people’s desires, so that the most needy [arbāb-i ihtiyāj] could have unhindered and unfettered access to the royal person, and so have their needs addressed” (CC, 100).

After a morning filled with attention to these “various important matters of state” (iqsām-i umūr-i daulat), the emperor typically went from the ghusl-khāna to the most secluded part of the palace, the royal apartments (hāram-sarāi). Here Shah Jahan would rest, enjoy some private time, and perform his afternoon prayers “with the kind of humility that is fitting for emperors who seek an understanding of Truth and an acquaintance with Reality” (bā niyāz ki ā‘īn-i pādshāhān-i ḥaqq-shinās wa ḥaqīqat-guzīn ast) (CC, 100). After that, lunch was served, and the emperor took a nap before returning to the ghusl-khāna for another round of attending to imperial business.
During these afternoon sessions, Chandar Bhan tells us, Shah Jahan used to meet with his principal administrative officers, such as the prime minister (diwān-i a’lā), the chief army record keepers and paymasters (bakhsheeyān-i iżām), the head of equipment and matériel (mīr-i sāmān), the superintendent of imperial infrastructure (roads, buildings, irrigation, etc.) (diwān-i buyūtāt), and “all the other accounting officers [mutaṣaddiyyān] responsible for important matters of revenue and land administration” (CC, 101). These officials were expected to submit financial reports on various matters ranging from the general health of the Mughal economy to the details of expenditures from the treasury for military salaries, the account balances with respect to land-tenure assignments (jangīrs), the inventories of imperial supplies and infrastructure, and so forth. If any bureaucratic or administrative actions required the approval of the emperor, this was the time and place for such requests to be submitted. Meanwhile, Chandar Bhan again stresses the emperor’s personal interest in “facilitating the productivity, cultivation, and settlement of the land for the benefit of the common soldiers and peasant-cultivators” (CC, 101).

Having all of his chief economic advisers assembled in one meeting was also, apparently, a good opportunity for the emperor to consider and organize the various types of charitable expenditures that the court routinely doled out. Thus, Chandar Bhan tells us, “the gates of charity and good works [abwāb-i khairāt wa mabarrāt] of this empire remain forever open, so that their blessings may be experienced universally by the world and its inhabitants” (CC, 101). Even so, however, there were particular types of charity on which the court tended to focus its energies. For instance, during particularly holy days and months—Chandar Bhan does not specify of which tradition(s)—the court would make special donations to “men of learning and intellect, masters of piety and virtue, and various classes of darweshes, holy men, and the poor and needy masses of every region,” many of which, he adds, were personally “granted audience with the noble and sublime Imperial Presence before having the skirts of their hopes and well-being overflow [dāman-i āmāl wa āmānī rā lab-rez misāzand] with the gift of red and white gold” (CC, 101).

One did not have to have direct access to the emperor’s person to benefit from the court’s philanthropy, however. The emperor was also weighed periodically during the year, for instance in well-known ceremonies on his solar or lunar birthdays, and Chandar Bhan tells us that “the equivalent of the blessed weight was issued from the royal treasury and sent to the provinces for the purposes of charity and the support of the people who were most deserving and needy” (CC, 101–2). He mentions, too, that beyond such cash donations the court also financed various types of public works projects. Thus, in addition to mosques, “schools, Sufi centers, traveler’s inns, hospitals [dār al-shifā’], and other useful buildings and structures have been and continue to be built through funding
from the generous government” (CC, 102). “Specific sums were also designated,” he adds, “for the daily support of poorhouses and food kitchens [langar wa ghaliil-khana] in every village and town, the benefit of which was intended to reach the poor, the indigent, widows, and other sheltered women” (CC, 102). Finally, Chandar Bhan notes that in addition to regularly sending large cash donations to the holy sites in Mecca “for offerings and alms” (ba taqiiq-i nazr wa khairat), Shah Jahan used to collect and send along some of the “precious rarities of Hindustan” (nafa’is-i hindustan) as gifts (CC, 102).

As evening approached, the emperor would wind up these afternoon meetings with his financial advisers and then head out from the ghusl-khana to attend the twilight congregational prayers in the company of some of the ‘ulama, as well as other “learned men” (fuza’la) and notable courtiers. Once again, our Hindu author uses this moment not as an opportunity to express—or even hint at—any reservations about Shah Jahan’s piety but rather to laud the emperor’s “emotional poise, interior and exterior grace, and utter humility and adherence to the norms of prayer” (jam’iyat-i khattir wa latifat-i batin-o-zahir ba adab-o-niyaz-i tamm). Once the evening congregational prayer services were completed, the impressive sight of thousands of city lights being lit all around the palace and the surrounding neighborhoods would begin, a spectacle so grand, we are told, that “the heavens themselves with all their eyes would be amazed at the sight of it.” Meanwhile, the reciters of public prayers (salawat-khana wa anan) turned their attention to reciting lyrical odes and quatrains (ghazal wa rubai) wishing for the continued success of the empire and for the continued “peace and tranquility of the world and its inhabitants, in eloquent language, before pronouncing ‘Amen” (CC, 102).

At this stage, Shah Jahan typically retired to the private royal apartments for a predictably sumptuous dinner, during and after which various forms of entertainment were staged. First among these, according to Chandar Bhan, was “the hearing of marvelous tales and interesting anecdotes” (isghayi hikayat-i badi’a wa nikat-i gharib), as well as the reading aloud of selections from “reliable books of history [tawarih-i mu’tabar] such as Rauzat al-Šafā, Zafar Nama, Wāqi’āt-i Bāburi, and Akbar Nāma, by eloquent courtiers who were knowledgeable about historical matters” (CC, 103). None of the texts listed here suggest any particular ideological or sectarian predilections on Shah Jahan’s part, though a couple of them do provide further evidence of the emperor’s keen interest in his Timurid heritage and the legacy of Timurid kingship in Mughal politics.

This sensibility was, moreover, consciously historicist in nature, basing itself on the study of sources that were deemed “reliable” (mu’tabar) and transmitted by courtiers who were “tawarih-dan”—that is, specialized in historical knowledge. One of the texts listed, Mir Khwand’s fifteenth-century Rauzat al-Šafā (Garden of Purity), was an influential Persian history of the “kings, prophets, and caliphs” of the Muslim world that also included the stories of many widely respected figures.
from the Greco-Hellenic and Christian traditions such as Alexander the Great, Kings David and Solomon, and Jesus. Rauzat al-Ṣafā thus also included abundant discussions of the norms, theory, and practice of kingship, as well as an extended historicist disquisition on the specific benefits—especially for kings—of studying and learning from history generally. Another of the texts on the list, Sharaf al-Din Yazdi’s Ṣafar Nāma (1424–25), was a historical synthesis of the life and times of Shah Jahan’s ancestor Timur, drawn from multiple earlier sources. According to the modern historian John Woods, Yazdi’s Ṣafar Nāma “has long been the best-known representative of early Timurid historiography in Persian . . . widely acclaimed as a model of elegance and style for historical writing in Iran, Central Asia, and India.”

We also cannot fail to note the specific mention here of the memoirs and chronicles from the reigns of Shah Jahan’s own immediate Mughal ancestors, Babur and Akbar. In other words, what we have here is an open cultivation of an appreciation for the history of Shah Jahan’s dynastic lineage, as well as the precedents, norms, and traditions of Timurid-Mughal kingship more generally—not exactly the curriculum one might expect from an emperor who is thought to have initiated the process of consciously veering away from the Akbari cultural and political dispensation.

The evening’s entertainment also usually included “listening to captivating and delightful Kashmiri and Hindi songs until well into the night.” These songs were accompanied, according to Chandar Bhan, by a variety of regional musicians, as well as jugglers and “Hindustani dancers” who in their speed and agility, and the deftness of their eye, hand, and footwork, had such an inimitable style that “they appeared more lively than even the wind and the lightning” (teztar as barq-o-bād minumâyand) (CC, 103). One suspects, perhaps, that this is yet another passage intended more to impress the audience in the wider Persianate world than, say, the audience in South Asia itself—who would, presumably, have been more than familiar with the sounds and styles of Indian dance. Indeed, Chandar Bhan punctuates his lavish praise of the dancers themselves with a burst of four short couplets that deftly reframes the beauty and grace of the Hindustani musicians’ and dancers’ art as a metaphor of the greatness of the empire as a whole:

The melodists in the assembly of the King of the World
Carry off with their tunes the sorrows of my heart.

The musicians strike such a chord on the strings
That they animate the very paintings on the wall.

Sing, O minstrel, of how so long as time continues to pass
Shah Jahan will remain the King of Kings of the World.

Bless him with long life,
And a thousand new victories with every refrain.
This transition leads Chandar Bhan to return once more to the theme of governance, specifically to the emperor’s vigilance about matters of state and public safety even during moments of entertainment and recreation such as the evening performances. “His Blessed Highness is so intent on remaining aware, informed, vigilant, and alert,” we are told, “that every incident or event that transpires, at whatever time of day, from morning to night and likewise from night until morning, is reported to him without delay or procrastination, and the emperor gives it the immediate attention of his penetrating intellect.” Meanwhile, outside the palace, Chandar Bhan reports that various official cadres of night watchmen, sentinels, police, spies, and other agents of public order guard the city “in front, back, and all around the imperial palace, as well as in every lane and market, throughout the night” (CC, 104). Because of these robust security measures, Chandar Bhan insists:

The people of the city and even the shopkeepers in the bazaars pass the night with the doors to their houses and shops unlocked, free from worry. Throughout the whole city, in all the lanes and markets, there is so much light from the municipal lamps that the darkness of night is transformed practically into the light of day. And in the areas surrounding the palace of celestial foundation there are also the households of so many renowned gentlemen with their own trusted followers, auxiliaries, and devoted subalterns such as mace bearers, servants, slaves, and sons of the house, always armed and prepared to intervene [in any disturbance]. Thus, if there is even so much as an unusually loud noise, it is reported within minutes to the alert ears of the emperor who hears the Truth. (CC, 104)

Obviously, Chandar Bhan has a proclivity toward gilding the lily in both style and substance, so one may be forgiven for treating these assertions of an utterly crime- and care-free urban milieu with due skepticism. But the important thing for us to recognize is the larger truth underlying his admittedly somewhat exaggerated characterization of the degree of public safety and order: namely, that the Mughal bureaucracy under Shah Jahan took such matters seriously in the first place and that there was a vast, centrally organized network and hierarchy of urban police set up to maintain law and order.
Indeed, it may not have been the Weberian ideal of a modern bureaucratic state, but it was clearly far more than the decadent, orthodox, insulated, and aloof court that one continues to find even in twenty-first-century portrayals. Consider, for instance, the recent and much-ballyhooed British Library exhibition catalog (*The Lives of the Mughal Emperors*, 2012), which tells us, quite matter-of-factly, and without any supporting evidence, that the problem with the post-Akbar court was simply that “alcohol and drugs such as opium were constant temptations for many members of the Mughal dynasty, and there was always the danger of enjoying court life and the harem too much and neglecting state affairs, as was the case with Shah Jahan later in life.”

Besides being an unfortunate perpetuation of all the old stereotypes, such characterizations also do little to help us understand basic questions of how most people actually lived, or, in this case, how law and order were actually maintained in a Mughal city like Delhi or Lahore on a day-to-day basis (while the emperor and his circle were so busy “enjoying court life and the harem . . . neglecting state affairs”). Chandar Bhan’s account may well be short on details, but it nevertheless gives us at least a glimpse of a much more active administrative culture, not to mention the direct involvement of Shah Jahan’s court in keeping tabs on such regulatory matters.

At this point, Chandar Bhan’s tour through the typical day in the life of the emperor comes to a close, but not before he adds a few more words about Shah Jahan’s active interest in administrative matters. Here our *munshi* is again characteristically effusive, but there is still something to be learned from the specific qualities he praises in the emperor. Once again, there is almost zero discussion of Shah Jahan’s martial capabilities, with the emperor’s erudition and intellectual talents instead taking center stage. In particular, Chandar Bhan revives his insistence that one of Shah Jahan’s chief merits as a ruler was his ability to perform many of the necessary administrative and secretarial tasks on his own, and to do so effectively. This was not mere idle praise. For Chandar Bhan, it was also a matter of optimizing bureaucratic efficiency, something that was possible only with effective management from the top. Thus, he explains:

If the chief minister [*diwān-i a’lā*] was away on some assignment, the emperor would oversee the business of the *wazīr*’s office himself, whether in part or in whole. He would closely review all the invoices and expenses relating to the crown lands with his own penetrating and world-illuminating intellect and would examine the status of accounts relating to the various provinces, districts, cities, towns, villages, and neighborhoods.

Whatever action regarding promotions or increases in expenditure entered the emperor’s mind, as boundless as the ocean, on the basis of these audits [*tahqiq*], was entered into the official registers. The ledgers and accounts connected with land assignments and cash salaries [*jāgīr wa naqdī*] were also balanced in the emperor’s exalted presence, and the drafts of the happy *farmāns* that were distributed in all directions to various regions of the realm were adorned by his august personal corrections.
He inspected the requests and petitions from regional ministers and other officials and answered each one himself according to the proper protocols and regulations. (CC, 104–5)

Chandar Bhan goes on to explain that the emperor made a point of knowing the mansab rankings of all the important officials in the state apparatus by heart, along with the jāgīr assignments, the length of imperial service, and the time of promotions for many more servants of the court. But even so, as a precaution to avoid mistakes, he made sure that “seasoned clerks were always present with the relevant records.”

In other words, when the career administrative officers were away, or otherwise indisposed, Shah Jahan himself would step in and personally oversee the business side of the Mughal imperial enterprise. His skill in such matters, in fact, is probably a large part of what so endeared him to someone like Chandar Bhan. Remember, this is coming from a professional, career civil servant with a lifetime of expertise in Mughal administrative and accounting procedures. He is praising the emperor not for his heroism or manly virtues but rather for the relatively unglamorous—but no less important, in Chandar Bhan’s eyes—ability to engage in quotidian administrative and secretarial functions, and to do so competently, so that the bureaucratic machinery could continue operating smoothly even in the absence of a prime minister or other top official.

As evidence of this principle, Chandar Bhan reminds us here of the interim period in 1656, after Sa’d Allah Khan’s death but before Mir Jumla could take over as prime minister (discussed in greater detail above, in the previous chapter), during which “all the important commercial and administrative business was reported directly to the blessed royal ear, and he was kept informed of all the details and accounts relating to the boundless empire” (CC, 105). Let us also recall that during that time it was a fellow Hindu administrator, Raghunath Ray-i Rayan, who stepped in to oversee the logistics in the central diwānī office, answering directly to the emperor himself. Meanwhile Chandar Bhan, who by his own account was working with Raghunath Ray in the diwānī during those days, was presumably among the many “auditors, financial supervisors, deputies, munshīs, and assessors in the central diwānī” whose work on “various particulars relating to official matters like the administration of unassigned crown lands [khālaṣa-yi sharifa], imperial salaries, and the apportioning of lands within the realm” was conveyed to the emperor by the ray-i rayan and was personally scrutinized by the former’s “alchemical gaze” (CC, 106).

Here again, Chandar Bhan insists that Shah Jahan’s agricultural policies were designed not merely to be extractive but to improve productivity, and in so doing also to improve the lives of the cultivating classes (ba rafāhat-i ra’iyat). Nor were they arbitrary, being based rather on a series of established “rules, regulations, and policies” (zawābit wa qawāid wa dastūr al-‘amal), some of them
inherited from previous Mughal administrations and others newly formulated by Shah Jahan and his chief administrators. The officials “in every district and province” were thus under specific imperial orders “to engage in whatever improvements were necessary to facilitate the productivity and satisfaction of the cultivators” (dar ān chi kašrat-i ma’mūrī wa rižāmandi-yi ri’āyā bāshad ‘amal numāyand) (CC, 106).

Many such improvements involved upgrades to canals, wells, and other means of irrigation because, Chandar Bhan explains, “despite the vastness of Hindustan, much of the suitable agricultural land is already under cultivation or designated for cultivation after lying fallow” (CC, 106), and thus new production could occur only with successful water management. Finally, he mentions once again in this connection that often the emperor’s recreational journeys and hunting trips were really just a ruse, the true purpose of which was to give Shah Jahan an opportunity to observe firsthand the performance of his provincial officials and the circumstances of the peasants and other cultivators in the countryside so that he could take any necessary action to improve their condition or the management of the court’s agricultural policy.

Even during periods when the regular administrative chain of command remained intact, Shah Jahan apparently continued to be actively engaged in the running of the empire. Chandar Bhan explains, for instance, that the emperor routinely gave written advice and instructions to the princes with regard to their conduct and their management of the domains for which they were responsible (CC, 106–7). He also consulted routinely with his chief fiscal secretaries and advisers, as we have seen throughout this chapter. Here Chandar Bhan seizes the opportunity to once again extol the emperor’s wisdom in various worldly and esoteric domains, repeatedly lauding the “gravity of his thoughts” (matānat-i andeshā), his “far-sighted wisdom” (‘aql-i dūr-bīn), and so on. The passage is once again infused with a Sufi mystical idiom, casting the emperor also as the perfect spiritual guide, and occasionally Chandar Bhan punctuates these observations with verses to that effect. For instance:

His mind is the manifestation of god’s light,
The knower of what is black and what is white.

His heart is the lucid mirror of meanings
In which all the hidden secrets are revealed.

[ zamīr-ash mazhar-i nūr-i ilāhī
shināsa-yi safedī-o-siyāhī

dil-ash āyīna-yi ṣāf-i ma’ānī
dar ū paidā hama rāz-i nihānī] (CC, 107)
The minds of ordinary knowledgeable people (ahl-i dānish) were no match for the emperor’s “otherworldly intellect” (khāṭir-i malakūt), Chandar Bhan continues, because the emperor was “acquainted with the Real” (ḥaqq-shinās); thus, “when he directed his gaze toward ordinary visible things, he endowed the material world of attachments [ʿālam-i taʿalluq] with the brilliance and color of fresh insight [āb-o-rang-i ḥikmat-i tāza].” Even wise men “as knowledgeable as Plato” (dānāyān-i aflātūn-manish) were routinely baffled by the emperor’s degree of insight and superior intellect, Chandar Bhan insists (CC, 107).

Our munshi does not close this section on Shah Jahan’s personality and personal routine, however, without one last dip into the well of praise for the emperor’s mastery of the finer points of the secretarial arts. It is almost as if, as an elite secretary himself, Chandar Bhan simply cannot resist the urge to repeatedly impress upon his readers the importance of such skills in the makeup of the complete Mughal gentleman. Thus the emperor’s “fine penmanship” (husn-i khatt) and the “boldness of his expressions” (matānat-i ‘ibārat) both “light up the eyes of expert calligraphers and scribes, and set the standard for the masters of prose style and diction [inshā’-o-imlā’]” (CC, 108). The emperor also understood numbers: “Even the pens of expert accountants and record keepers tremble in their hands when exposed to the emperor’s nuanced and hair-splitting abilities in the practices of accounting, bookkeeping, and annotation, while their papers shuffle across the lap of ignorance as they confess their comparative ineptitude” (CC, 108).

THE COSMOPOLITAN TRAPPINGS OF
SHAH JAHAN’S COURT

At this point, still only midway through the second chaman of the “Four Gardens,” Chandar Bhan begins to expand his gaze outward, from his intense focus on the body and person of the emperor to the wider social and cultural life of the court, and then beyond even the court to the various districts and provinces of the empire as a whole. The section begins with a detailed description of the lavish decorations used to adorn the court and its environs on festival days and other types of public celebrations (dar aiyām-i sharīf wa roz-hā-yi jashn). Among these was the famed “jeweled throne” (takht-i murāsā’)—later commonly referred to as the “Peacock Throne”—the precious ornamentation of which Chandar Bhan describes in some detail, adding that it cost a gaudy one crore (i.e., 10 million) rupees to produce. This, Chandar Bhan helpfully translates for his audience outside India, was equivalent to “more than 300,000 Iraqi tumans, or 50,000,000 khānis in Transoxiana,” and in a set of verses that accompanies this observation he goes on to boast somewhat improbably that the cost of the throne alone would have exhausted the entire annual budget of rival polities in Iran and Central Asia (kharāj-i kishwar-i īrān-o-tūrān) (CC, 109).
Clearly, we have arrived at a portion of the text that was expressly designed to reach—and to impress—cosmopolitan readers in the wider transregional Persianate world. Chandar Bhan goes on to describe in exquisite detail the various types of jewels, precious stones, and inlay work that adorned the decorative canopy (shāmiyāna) above the throne, the surrounding pavilions, the pillars, and even the incense burners. He tells us of the smooth velvets and rich silk fabrics that were used for the Mughal festival tents and the intricate embroidery and brocade work that went into each one. He tells, too, of the gorgeous carpets and luxurious shawls that helped make denizens of the court comfortable and the fragrant scents that perfumed the bodies of the emperor and his courtiers. For their mouths, there were trays of pān—a mouth-freshening Indian delicacy wrapped in a betel-leaf—carefully bound in silk string. For their eyes and ears, there were performances by singers, musicians, and “Mughal, Hindi, and Afghan dancers so colorfully dressed, and with melodies so graceful and voices so enchanting that they would stop a bird in flight, or water in its tracks.” These performers were, of course, dutifully and handsomely rewarded for their efforts by the “treasure-dispensing emperor” (pādshāh-i ganj-baksh). And during special occasions like the Persian New Year’s festival (nauroz), Chandar Bhan continues, “the usual fun and entertainment reaches another level entirely” (‘aish-o-‘ishrat rā rawāj-i digar mibāshad) (CC, 110). Chandar Bhan also mentions that in addition to nauroz, various Hindustani festivals were also celebrated at Shah Jahan’s court, such as the spring festivals of Basant and Holi, which he refers to as ‘id-i gulābī.

It would appear, then, Shah Jahan’s court regularly celebrated not only “proper” Muslim ceremonial occasions but also various Persian and Indian festivals that were far from orthodox. From our present vantage point, however, perhaps the most interesting thing about Chandar Bhan’s descriptions of all these festivities is less the sportive atmosphere than the cosmopolitan perspective implied by the material culture on display during such occasions and the global origins of many of the most valued commodities. During nauroz, for instance, Chandar Bhan specifically mentions that the palace walls were decorated with, among other things, “velvets from Kashan” (maḵmal-i kāshānī) and “Gujarati brocades” (ṯās-i gujarātī) (CC, 110). In the next section of the text, on the various types of luxury commodities one might typically see at Shah Jahan’s court, he mentions “rubies from Badakhshan” (la’l-i badaḵhshān), “Chinese porcelain” (chīnī-hā-yi faghfūrī), and “mirrors from Aleppo” (āyīna-hā-yi ẖalabī) as just a few of the deluxe accouterments of life in the palace originating “from every land and region” of the world (CC, 111). The most highly prized horses were Arabian, with those bred in Iraq and Khurasan fetching prices of “thousands of tumans.” But the royal stables also included horses bred in Turkistan and Hindustan—which, Chandar Bhan insists, “in their build, temperament, stride, and gait are on a par with the horses of Iraq” (CC, 111–12)—as well as colts and mares from other
parts of India such as Kutch, which was well known for its fine horses, and the breed known as Sunūjīs, which came from western Punjab.⁹

Here, in a charming moment of levity, Chandar Bhan tells us that the finest equine specimens in the royal stables were regularly given affectionate pet names such as “King’s Favorite” (pādshāh-pasand), “Super Standard” (tamām ‘iyār), “Blessed Victory” (zafar-i mubārak), “World’s Sweetheart” (maḥbūb-i ālam), “White Elephant” (fil-i safed), and the like. This was also true of the many battle elephants “sturdy as mountains and swift as the heavens” (koh-miṣal [wa] falakraftār) that were bred for the court and were given names like “World Elephant King” (ālam gaj rāj), “Splendor of the Universe” (jagat sobha), “Majestic Mountain” (koh-i shukoh), “War Hero” (jang jodha), “Ganesh Incarnate” (ganesh awatār), and so on (CC, 112).¹² Chandar Bhan does not tell us the names of any camels, but he does inform us that the court maintained huge populations of particular breeds, such as Boghdis, dromedaries, and Jamazas. There were also plenty of donkeys and other beasts of burden, including “thousands upon thousands of sturdy oxen” pulling “Gujarati chariots” (bahli-hā-yi gujarātī).

A good deal of Mughal military hardware and matériel was also sourced from all over South Asia and the surrounding regions. Chandar Bhan tells us that “western, southern, and ‘Hindi’ swords” were all commonly used by Mughal gentlemen and warriors, and he describes the intricate inlay work and other decorations that often adorned their blades, daggers, and other fighting implements. Some of these were produced in official imperial workshops and foundries (kārkhanās), while others were imported. He specifically mentions “Gujarati arrows” (tīr-hā-yi gujarātī) (CC, 111–12),¹³ bows from Central Asia, Lahore, and Multan (kamān-hā-yi wilāyatī wa lahorī wa multānī), European spears (neza-hā-yi farangī), a kind of chain mail known as “Dawudi” (zirih-i dāwudi), and various other types of weaponry.

Like military animals, sometimes these weapons, too, were given amusing nicknames. Swords were called things like “King Akbar” (akbar shāh), “The Blood Spiller” (khūn-rez), “The Splitter” (do-pāra), and so on. Mughal guns and artillery also commonly had nicknames, such as “The Beast” (dhūrdhānī), “The Hummer” (gung), “The Fort Buster” (qil’a-gushā), “The Enemy Slayer” (dushman-kush), “The Fire Breather” (ātish-dam), and other colorful epithets (CC, 112). These armaments, Chandar Bhan adds, were forged and maintained “under the supervision of artillery specialists from Europe and the Deccan” (ba ihtimān-i top-sāzān-i farangi wa dakhani) who were specially employed by the Mughal court for that purpose (CC, 113).

Much of this finery and firepower went on full public display during the festival parades and other ceremonial occasions that Chandar Bhan proceeds to describe in the next section. Indeed, if Chandar Bhan is to be believed, massive crowds used to come out to see the imperial processions pass through Delhi and other
Mughal cities not only on specific festival days but also on days when the court was in transit from one city to another and arrived at a new location with full pomp and éclat. Crews would clear and clean all the boulevards, lanes, and markets beforehand, and then during the processions themselves the streets would be lined with horsemen, mace bearers, and other soldiers. Meanwhile, Chandar Bhan tells us, “Throughout the city people decorated their doors, walls, and shops along the streets and in the bazaars with bright, beautiful, and colorful fabrics,” and as the processions themselves passed by, “innumerable throngs of people converged from all over the city and suburbs, congregating on balconies, verandahs, and the rooftops of houses three or four stories high, while in the markets, boulevards, and shops it was as though the whole world had crowded in together” (CC, 113).

The emperor would pass by on his way to the festival grounds (‘id-gāh) with his cortège, sometimes mounted on a horse, other times seated atop an elephant, “showering heaps of gold on the fortunate multitudes in every direction” (CC, 114). Following behind the emperor himself would usually be the princes, followed by the upper nobility with their own retinues of attendants, chelas, and other servants, and Chandar Bhan goes into considerable detail about all the decorations, fashions, sights and sounds of such occasions. Often, we are told, all the pomp and circumstance notwithstanding, such processions would end with the emperor himself and his inner circle attending the evening’s public congregational prayer services, joining “elite and common alike” (khawās-ṣ-o-‘awāmm) in prostrating themselves “in the place of prayer on the ground of humility to the true Lord of Grandeur” (dar sijda-yi haźrat-i rabb al-‘izzat bar jā-yi namāz bar zamīn-i niyāz guzāsht) (CC, 115).

Everyone loves a parade, it would seem, then as now. But this vision of crowds of ordinary people decorating their shops and homes and coming from all over the city and environs just to catch a glimpse of the royal procession is precisely the sort of simple detail from Mughal daily life that is so often left out of most modern historiography. Clearly, if Chandar Bhan is to be believed, there was quite a bit of public interest and enthusiasm for the chance to come out and see the royal family and its entourage pass through the streets of Delhi, to cheer as they passed by, and to bask in the carnivalesque spectacle. These processions, which happened multiple times during the year, served as a way of connecting the court with the wider population and of giving the latter an emotional stake in the splendor and success of the court. Indeed, let us not forget that for most people in early modern Mughal cities the court and its denizens represented not just an abstraction called “the nobility” but also the closest thing they had to socialites and public celebrities. Thus, in addition to the kind of adulation Chandar Bhan describes here, many Mughal elites were also the subject of plenty of salacious gossip that was rampant among common folk in the bazaars, cafes, literary salons, and other pockets of the urban Mughal public sphere—a kind of public fascination with the “lifestyles of
the Mughal rich and famous,” as it were. As we will see below, Chandar Bhan also paints a vivid portrait of the hustle and bustle of life in such high-traffic urban locales, where the sight of this or that nobleman or courtier out for a stroll would not have been uncommon.

**COSMOPOLITANISM ON THE MOVE: THE MOBILE IMPERIAL CAMP**

Meanwhile, when the imperial court was on the move from one city to another, it resembled a giant floating urban space all on its own, creating a vast spectacle and logistical operation to which Chandar Bhan devotes the next three sections of the text. He begins by describing the extensive advance personnel necessary to convey the imperial equipage to the next stage of the journey—quartermasters, water bearers, equipment haulers, and other logistical teams. This advance party would journey ahead to select a suitable spot for the royal encampment, bringing crews with them to fill and patch holes so that the ground would be as level as possible, after which the tents and pavilions of the mobile court were pitched in a configuration similar to the layout of the palaces in Delhi, Lahore, and Agra. Thus each royal encampment was replete with its own Dīwān-Khāna-yi Khāṣṣ-o-‘Āmm, a set of private royal tents, a privy area meant to serve the same function as the ghusl-khāna, and so on, all of it set up before the imperial retinue even arrived. Some of the tents had built-in windows, and all of those in the royal areas of the camp would have been well appointed with silk carpets and deluxe wall hangings made of fine materials like “Kashani velvet” (makhlī-i kāshānī), “European satin” (atlas-i farangī), “chintz from Masulipatnam” (chīnt-i machli-patan), and other luxurious exotic fabrics (CC, 115–16).

All in all, the tents and other structures of this mobile city were said by Chandar Bhan to take up a space of nearly two square miles (baṭūl-i yak kuroh bar pā mishawad), in part because the central area containing the official residences and pavilions of the “court” was surrounded on all sides by several mobile markets (bāzār-hā-yi muta’addid) that traveled with the imperial retinue wherever it went, “well stocked with every type of good and every variety of commodity imaginable” (CC, 116). In this, the mobile imperial camp really did resemble an urban settlement, with all sorts of satellite populations and commercial economies constantly traveling with it. There was even a system of urban planning of sorts, whereby the tent residences of the princes and other nobility were laid out according to a specifically designated pattern, according to their official rank, with different flags and banners used to designate each residence “so that each one could be distinguished at a distance.”

Meanwhile, Chandar Bhan explains, the elite ladies’ tents constituted another entire wing of the encampment, with its own stable of horses and elephants and
its own community of guards, servants, ladies-in-waiting, and other attendants. These tents were guarded, as was the common practice in the palace as well, by a contingent of eunuchs, who, along with the others, kept the women’s area of the camp so secure that “even the morning zephyr could not pass through” without permission (CC, 116–17). Those familiar with the stock imagery of Indo-Persian literature may detect a bit of playfulness here on Chandar Bhan’s part, given that the morning breeze, or bād-i šabā, which was of course able to come and go freely and discreetly through even the strictest households, was often anthropomorphized by romantic ghazal poets as the ideal courier for conveying desperate messages of love to otherwise inaccessible beloveds. But in this case, our munshī somewhat cheekily turns the classic trope on its head, as if to say: “Don’t bother falling for a Mughal princess, because even the morning breeze won’t be able to help you get a message to her!”

While the camp was on the move, Chandar Bhan adds, the ladies of the court were further protected by “multiple contingents of Rajputs, so famous for their bravery and loyalty [shujā’at wa ikhlās], who rode alongside the ladies’ retinue encircling it like a cordon of iron” (CC, 117). It is yet another reminder that, for all the talk of orthodoxy and a so-called “return to Islamic political culture” at Shah Jahan’s court, Hindu bureaucrats like Chandar Bhan and aristocrats like Rajput warriors remained as invested in, and essential to, the imperial enterprise under Shah Jahan as they had ever been and were even routinely trusted with some of the royal house’s most sensitive tasks.

We are also reminded, in the very next sentence, that Shah Jahan and his officials were far more attentive to the needs of ordinary subjects than some of the clinical modern analytical terms often used to describe the Mughal political system—its “autocratic centralism,” its “patrimonial-bureaucracy,” and so on—can possibly hope to capture. Specifically, Chandar Bhan addresses the issue of the potential inconvenience to local populations that could arise when the imperial camp was passing through their district. Beyond the brute fact of thousands upon thousands of people, animals, carts, wagons, and so forth trampling the ground and taking up space for the actual royal encampment, there was of course the potential for denizens of the imperial camp to misbehave, either directly by treating the locals badly or even indirectly by, for instance, taking fruits and other crops from local orchards and fields. One can imagine how disruptive the royal progress could wind up being for the locals if members of the vast imperial retinue were even slightly undisciplined, much less got out of hand. Shah Jahan and his officials were apparently very mindful of this potential, as Chandar Bhan explains:

Despite such a huge crowd of both nobility and commoners on the move, including the many workers and laborers of the workshops, and all the multitudes and vicissitudes of the camp, there is such a degree of fear and respect for the emperor’s authority, as well as dread and awe of his justice, that not a single person [associated
with the royal retinue] can so much as lay a hand on a piece of fruit or the crops [belonging to the local people], lest he wash his hands of his own life or become his own executioner.

There is also a special corps of officers, ranking men, and troopers designated for protecting the roads and the crops, and on every journey there are specific officials [darogha wa āmin-i pāy-mālī] in charge of making sure the local fields don’t get trampled along the way. But if in spite of these policies and precautions it so happens that the people’s crops ever get damaged, the officials are authorized to pay compensation to them directly from the royal treasury. (CC, 117)

The logistical difficulties of operating such a massive mobile camp were not limited to the land, moreover. While in transit from one city or region to another, or on military campaign, the camp routinely encountered sizable bodies of water that needed to be crossed. There was thus an entire department, Chandar Bhan tells us, for transporting, maintaining, and operating the many portable bridges, rowboats, ferries, and other equipment required to help the camp ford large rivers, or for the use of the emperor for fishing or other pleasure boating. He adds that in some cases royal boats were maintained permanently at major crossings along the more common routes taken by the court (CC, 118).

In short, Chandar Bhan sums up, “The world-traversing camp was like entire city on the move, indeed a whole civilized realm unto itself.” There were even whole communities of “tradesmen and artisans for whom the camp’s bazaar was like their native country [waṭan-i ma’lūfa], a class of people for whom the expression ‘a whole house on their shoulders’ [khāna ba-dosh] was coined.” Some in these communities, according to Chandar Bhan, lived out much of their lives in the imperial camp and experienced the full range of human existence while on the move:

With their bundles, loads, families, and entire households, they enthusiastically and contentedly pass the time from one stage to the next telling tales and singing songs. Whether in transit or encamped, they marry, get pregnant, and give birth to sons and daughters right there in the exalted camp [urdū-i mu’allā]. They put the children in baskets slung across their shoulders and in this way carry them to the next stage.

And because both divine protection and imperial justice [ḥifz-i ilāhi wa ‘adālat-i shāhinshāhī] extend to all people, despite the immense throngs and multitudes of people [on the move], everyone from a child born yesterday [tīf-l-i yak roza] to an old man of a hundred years can carry on safely, even from the feet of the horses and elephants. (CC, 118)

Even away from the elite royal and noble quarters, Chandar Bhan continues, the entire camp was imbued with a festive atmosphere, constantly humming with the sounds of “musicians, dancers, and jugglers from every region” (mutṭribān wa raqqāsān wa bāzīgarān-i har diyār) singing, playing drums, and ringing bells, cre-
ating a commotion that, when added to the general bustle of people and animals, “could be heard for miles around” (CC, 118).

Not everything about life in the imperial camp was easy. Yet the emperor and his officials appear to have been attentive to some of the potential problems, and they tried to address them through policy. For instance, Chandar Bhan points out that when the imperial caravan had to cross rivers, narrow mountain defiles, or other constrained terrain the press of the crowd was enormous. But there were crews specially assigned to facilitate these crossings, as well as “officers posted at intervals to supervise and make the crossing easier for the people.” The crowds at such bottlenecks were such that “people were sometimes held up for two or three days on the side of a river,” and in some cases Shah Jahan would even halt the caravan entirely in order to make things easier on the residents of the camp (barā-yi rafāhiyat-i mardum) (CC, 118–19). When the imperial camp traveled through mountainous areas like Kashmir and Kabul, it often hired local porters (muzdūr) to help convey the people and equipment through the difficult terrain. “Thousands of such porters were available for hire” in these areas, Chandar Bhan notes, with the “Hindustani porters” (muzdūr-i hindustānī) possessing uncommon strength, “enough even to carry a sick man over the mountains in a harness slung onto their back” (CC, 119).

Children sometimes got lost, too, apparently, amid all the bustle and confusion of so many people on the move. But again, there were officials specifically charged with handling such cases and ensuring that lost children were reunited with their parents. And sometimes things worked out simply because of the kindness of fellow members of the camp population. For instance, Chandar Bhan tells us the following anecdote: “One night a young girl got lost and separated from her poor mother. [Believing her dead,] the distraught mother hired some professional mourners [nauha-kunān] in the camp to sing laments in the daughter’s name. One of the men in the camp heard sounds coming from under his tent and realized it was the lost girl, who had fallen under while it was being pitched. He pulled her out and returned her into the arms of her mother, who gave thanks to God and said a prayer for the soul of the emperor as well” (CC, 119).

One can wonder why the emperor would deserve any credit in such a circumstance, but I think that Chandar Bhan’s point is that Shah Jahan set a tone of law, order, and civic duty from the top down within the environs of the imperial camp, for which its population was clearly grateful. There were “patrols, sentries, police, and watchmen” (‘asasān wa chaukidārān wa jāsīsān wa naqr-bāzān) charged with maintaining order in the camp, facilitating the recovery of lost or stolen property, and returning it to its rightful owners (CC, 119). There was even a kind of motel area specially set up—right next to the royal tents, no less (nazdīk-i daulet-khāna-yi wālā)—where “anyone who reached the exalted camp at night after a long day’s journey and could not find the accommodations of someone
familiar to him” could pass the night and “make any necessary inquiries so that
he could eventually locate his destination” (CC, 119). These temporary quarters
were usually set up directly under a giant torch that went by the Sanskrit name
of “ākāsh-dīvā,” or “lamp of the heavens,” which Chandar Bhan also helpfully
translates for his Persian readers as chirāgh-i āsmān. This appellation will be fa-
miliar to many South Asians even today as a common name for the decorative
homemade lanterns people use during the annual Diwali festival in order to light
the way for Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of good fortune, to enter their homes.
From a Mughal institutional perspective, then, the metaphor and the message are
equally striking: even traveling wayfarers and strangers in the night were to be not
only accommodated and treated with hospitality but in fact welcomed as potential
boons to Mughal society, like the wealth that Goddess Lakshmi showers on her
devotees.

Perhaps because of such open access, Chandar Bhan gushes, “even many ar-
ticles that are unobtainable in some great cities and countries are available in the
exalted camp, which is a refuge for all sorts of people and a point of convergence
for many of the finer things in the world” (CC, 119). He goes on to list some of the
many types of merchants, businessmen, commercial brokers, booksellers, tailors,
grocers, artisans, animal trainers, and others who set up shop or otherwise plied
their trade right there in the camp, creating “an extraordinary degree of cheap-
ness and variety for every type of commodity” (arzâni wa farâwâni-yi har jins wa
har chîz ba marâtaba-yi a’lî mishawad) (CC, 119–20). In the evenings, the bustle
in the camp bazaar picked up even more as the various soldiers and other people
finished their daily occupations and went around to do their shopping, or strolled
around simply to do some people watching (ba kharid-o-firosh nishasta wa istâda
tamâshâ mikunand). “Everyone was busy with some activity,” our munshi re-
ports, “and every shop had a lamp lit in front of it, so that the entire camp and
bazaar were lit up.” Meanwhile, “there were storytellers, musicians, dancers, and
jugglers everywhere, energetically showing off their skills.” And, as in an ordinary
city, there were apparently even accommodations for the poor, the needy, and
holy men within the camp. As Chandar Bhan explains, “The front of practically
every amîr’s tent was frequented by some faqîr,” many of whom resided in special
hostels set up at the edges of the camp complex (CC, 120).

URBANITY AND PUBLIC CULTURE IN THE
MUGHAL METROPOLIS

Here Chandar Bhan offers a brief digression regarding the emperor’s preferred
modes of hunting, and some of the many varieties of game that were commonly
hunted at the time, followed by another small excursus on the extraordinary sight
of the lighting of lamps around the court pavilions at the end of each day, as well
as the official firework displays that the court sometimes put on throughout the
year (CC, 120–23).

But for our munshi the cosmopolitan exuberance of life in the mobile royal
camp was merely a synecdoche for that of the empire as a whole, particularly for
the three bustling urban metropolises of Mughal North India: Delhi, Agra, and
Lahore. Thus the next major section of Chahâr Chaman, a survey of the “various
provinces of happy Hindustan” (ta’dâd-i šubajât-i hindûstân-i bahjat-nishân), is
unsurprisingly dominated by Chandar Bhan’s urban perspective, with nearly two-
thirds of the overall account being taken up with his entries on these three cities.
He begins, however, by laying out the extent of the empire as a whole before mov-
ing on to descriptions of specific cities and provinces:

Although the territories and lands of our sovereign imperial king extend from the
[eastern] frontier in Bengal all the way [west] to Qandahar, and from Bijapur [in the
south] up to Balkh [in the north]; and in every region [žila’] there are major prov-
inces [šubajât-i ‘umda], such as

Shahjahanabad, the Abode of the Caliphate [dâr al-khîlafat]
Akbarabad, the Dwelling of the Caliphate [mustaqâr al-khîlafat]
Lahore, the Abode of the Sultanate [dâr al-saltânat]
Kashmir, the Equal of Paradise [jannat-nažir]
Kabul, the Abode of the Realm [dâr al-mulk]
Multan, the Abode of Peace [dâr al-aman]
Thatta, the Joy-Increasing Province [šûba-yi nishât-afzây]
Ajmer, the Abode of Blessing [dâr al-barakat]
and Gujarat, the Land of Delight [nuz’hat-âbâd],

and although there are also the Deccan provinces such as Berar, Daulatabad,
Khandes, and Tilangana, as well as

the dominion of Baklana
Malwa, the province of lovely water and weather
Awadh, the cream of plentiful provinces
the broad and spacious district of Allahabad
the excellent province of Bengal
and the pleasant province of Orissa

—each of which contains excellent and prominent cities, qaṣbas, villages, and count-
less districts [mahâll], not to mention renowned fortresses like Daulatabad, Asir,
and various forts of the Deccan, as well as the citadels at Gwalior, Chittor, Kalanjhar,
Chanadhra, Rohtas, Junagarh, and so on, and famous ports like Surat, Lahiri, Khambayat
[Cambay], Hugli, and so on; and in each of these regions and cities many
splendid buildings and pleasant gardens have been constructed; verse:

The emperor’s provinces are beyond count,
For in conquering territory he is the sun;
The mighty steed [burâq] of his power is so fleet of foot
That it needs all of Anatolia and the Levant [rûm-o-shâm] just for an
exercise pitch
—nevertheless, on account of its myriad special charms and features, the Abode of the Caliphate, the capital Shahjahanabad—which has been completed in this eternal and felicitous reign of His Most Exalted Majesty the Emperor, the Ocean of Justice and Benevolence, after whose most celebrated name of names it has received its own name—is beyond description [mustaghñi al-ausāf ast]. As the [famous] couplet [usually attributed to Amir Khusrau (d. 1325), and also inscribed on the walls of the Red Fort’s diwān-i khāṣṣ] goes:

If there is a paradise on this earth  
It is right here, it is right here, it is right here.

[agar firdaus bar rū-yi zamīn ast  
hamīn ast wa hamīn ast wa hamīn ast]  
(CC, 123–24)

Here once again, one suspects that Chandar Bhan is writing primarily with the wider Persophone audience beyond Hindustan in mind. The listing of Mughal territories, the explanation of the importance of Delhi as the political center of the Mughal world, and the advertisement for Shah Jahan’s outstanding power and rule all would have been somewhat superfluous for the core Mughal audience except as an exercise in pure rhetoric. But to readers beyond Hindustan, whether they were in Persia, or Central Asia, or the Deccan, or even someplace further afield in the Indian Ocean world, it would have functioned almost like an inviting guidebook for tourists, entrepreneurs, intellectuals, and other adventurers.

Thus in each section that follows, Chandar Bhan provides his readers with many of the details that a first-time visitor to India in the seventeenth century might find interesting or useful. For the major urban centers like Delhi, Agra, and Lahore, this includes extended descriptions of the cultural life of the markets and bazaars. But he is also very attentive to India’s sacred, spiritual, and political geography. For instance, wherever it is relevant he makes sure to list the important Sufi shrines and other spiritual centers that might be of interest to religious pilgrims coming from abroad. He also tends to mention each city or territory’s most noteworthy tourist attractions—monuments, public parks, gardens, and the like—many of which were built by, or otherwise connected to, prominent members of the Mughal nobility or even the royal family. Thus, in the process of mentioning each city’s most noteworthy sights, Chandar Bhan is also able to construct a cultural memory of the continuity and stability of Mughal rule, as evidenced by a tour through its built environment.

Some examples should make this a bit clearer. Continuing with his description of Shahjahanabad, Chandar Bhan explains that “this great city has two citadels,” the first being the “imperial palace of celestial foundation,” what is now commonly called the Red Fort. Because of its “impregnability, towering height, and sturdy fortifications,” he explains, it was “like a second vault of the heavens”—an observation punctuated with a bit of verse:
The firmament has spread stars on its battlements
And it is but one step from its pinnacle to the sky;
The heavens circle and spiral all around it
And the sun comes to rest right on its towers on high.

For readers who may not know Delhi, Chandar Bhan goes on to explain that
the fort is situated alongside the banks of the Jumna river, adding that the palace
is really composed of an entire neighborhood complex replete with “handsome,
impressive mansions, recreational grounds, and revivifying, enchanting, and
pleasant gardens,” as well as various waterways, streams, ponds, reservoirs, and
fountains, all of which “remind one of paradise” because of the “overwhelming
pleasantness and beauty at every step and every spot” (CC, 124). Here again, he
resorts to poetry to capture his feelings:

I take such pride in the emperor’s palace
From where it is only one step to the sky;
Its lofty nobility transcends the firmament
The sun and moon arise from its threshold;
So much pure gold [tīlā-yī nāb] was spent on it
That it couldn’t be counted even in a cosmic ledger;
So how could I use mere words to describe its jewels and stones,
Which polish the rust [zang] off the mirror of [dejected] hearts?
Every house is like a sublime heaven [firdaus-i barīn],
And every building has a paradisiacal garden;
Its avenues are so utterly delightful ['ishrat-sirisht]
You might say they’re bylanes off the road to paradise;
Its breezes find their way into your heart,
And verdure itself is a “son of the house” [khāna-zād] in this land.

(CC, 125)

Note the first-person perspective in these lines. It is Chandar Bhan himself who
“takes pride” (nāz) in the city, its rulers, and its architecture. It is he himself who
asks, “What sort of words can I use” (chi sān gūyam sukhān) to capture Shahjah-
anabad’s charms. Once again, in other words, it is the eyewitness perspective that
animates his narrative.

But perhaps more important, for present purposes, is the cosmopolitan nature
of that perspective. Thus Chandar Bhan goes on to describe the bustling multiplicity
of the city’s commercial life:
Within this impregnable fort complex [hisn-i hasīn], on one side a grand, impressively long covered bazaar has been arranged, containing shops, coffeehouses [qahwa-khāna-hā], porticoes [taq-hā], and canopied galleries [riwāq-hā]. Here merchants [tājirān], traders [saudagarān], impresarios [mutamauwilān], and jewelers [sunār] from every city and region ply their stocks of all manner of colorful merchandise for a comfortable livelihood.

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

[’irāqi-o-khurāsāni zi ḥadd besh
nihāda pesh-i khwud sarmāya-i khwesh
farangi az farangistān rasida
nawādir az banādir besh chida
chu shāh az mulk-i khwud āgāh bāshad
zi mashriq tā ba maḥrib rāh bāshad]
(CC, 125)

Iraqis, Khurasanis, and Europeans—all are welcome and able to ply their trade because the Mughal emperor is “attentive to the needs of the realm” (az mulk-i khwud āgāh bāshad). As a result, Chandar Bhan continues, the shops of Delhi “burst with capital, jewels, commodities, silks, and choice rarities from every region,” while the streets, bazaars, and specialty markets are all “enriched and adorned by the bustle of people coming and going” (CC, 125).

These public commercial spaces, moreover, were also prime real estate for the city’s lively public literary and artistic culture. Thus, Chandar Bhan adds, “On every patch of open space there is some entertainer or performer, and there are ghazal singers, melody makers, storytellers, and expert musicians and revelers sitting and standing all over the place” (CC, 125). Once more, this prompts Chandar Bhan to muse in verse about Delhi’s distinctive place in a much grander cosmopolitan metageography, outdoing even great metropolises like Cairo, Herat, and Isfahan in both commercial and literary vitality:

What a city, of which all of Cairo would be just a part
And Herat just a fable in one of its lanes;
It has such architecture and cultivation
That there are a hundred Isfahans in its every alley;
There are so many pearl vendors in every direction,
That the seas heave a bereaved sigh of lamentation;
At every turn a hundred glittering rubies are strewn
As if every shop was a mine of Badakhshan;
And popping up for your perusal,
The wares of seven continents abound in every shop.

[chi shahrī ān ki Miṣr az ān nishānī
Herāt az kūcha-yi ū āstānī
ba ma’mūrī-o-ābādī chunān ast
ki dar har kūcha-ash ṣad Isfahān ast
nishasta har ū taraf gauhar-faroshi
bar āwurda zi daryā-hā khuroshī
fitāda har ū taraf ṣad la’l-i raḵshān
buwad dar har dukān kān-i Badakhshān
bar āyad az barā-yi imtiḥānī
matā’-i haft kishwar az dukānī]
(CC, 125–26)

This wider cosmopolitan perspective is an undercurrent even in Chandar Bhan’s descriptions of Mughal monumentality. For instance, his description of Shahjahanabad’s jāma’ masjid, or great mosque, begins conventionally enough with praise for the structure’s “height so towering that it brushes up against the sky” (ki az ghāyat-i rif’at sar ba falak mīsāyad), its expansive dimensions, soaring porticoes, great domes, and so on—“all with such glorious open-aired spaces,” he gushes, “that even the denizens of heaven lower their heads and pray there, while mere mortals will not want to lift their own heads up from prostration.” Meanwhile, in those days Delhi’s jāma’ masjid also had a huge attached public reservoir that was, he tells us, “brimming with pure water and finished with an inlay of marble and red stone in a pattern and design the likes of which have never been seen even by worldly and experienced men” (CC, 126).

Such wonderful architecture did not come cheaply, however, and thus Chandar Bhan goes on to boast that “a total cost of 12 lakh [i.e., 1.2 million] rupees was spent on it by the imperial government”—an eye-popping sum that, he helpfully translates once again for his non-Indian audience, “comes to 40,000 ‘Iraqi tumāns, or 60 lakh [i.e., 6 million] Transoxanian khānīs” (CC, 126). These reflections are punctuated yet again with a few lines of Chandar Bhan’s own verse, in which he compares Delhi’s grand mosque favorably with, among other things, the iconic Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem:

Each one of its columns is as high as the sky;
Under its shadow is where the moon and the sun fly.
For people of faith its galleries are the Qibla,
For this is the very equal of the masjid-i aqṣā.
Just by entering its courtyard, one gains a special grace
And from its reservoir imbibles the water of paradise.

[ba rif’at āsmān yak pāya-i ū
mah-o-khwushed zir-i sāya-i ū]
At this point we are treated to an extended dilation on the loveliness of Delhi’s “refreshing [tārāwat-bakhsh] and enlivening [rūḥ-afzā]” climate, something that will perhaps come as a surprise to modern residents and visitors to that notoriously scorching city. One might even be tempted to scoff at Chandar Bhan’s panegyric to idyllic Delhi weather as pure fantasy, but we should also remember: he was writing not only long before the city’s modern population boom and industrial development, when there was much more cooling greenery throughout the city, but also at the height of the so-called “Little Ice Age,” when the peak annual temperatures around the early modern world were considerably lower than they are today. Thus, while we may find it difficult to believe that there was ever a summer in Delhi when, as Chandar Bhan insists, “the weather feels so moderate along the bazaars and city streets that there’s no need of retreating to a cooled bungalow [khas-khāna] or underground cellar [tah-khāna]” (CC, 126–27), perhaps the claim is not so outrageous as it first appears.

He reminds us, too, as he did above during his account of the daily activities of the court, that there was a steady traffic in “plenty of ice and melted snow-water arriving from the mountains” (CC, 127) to help keep Delhi residents cool. The yearly monsoons, he adds, also brought heavy downpours that cooled the city considerably, albeit only seasonally. The monsoons also helped Shahjahanabad’s many royal and public gardens to thrive, and Chandar Bhan closes his description of the city with a brief description of A’azzabād Park, one of the most well known such spaces, which was often visited by Emperor Shah Jahan himself, and which, our munshī tells us, “on account of the beauty of its various buildings, its waterways, ponds, and lakes, and its general freshness, verdure, pleasantness, and luscious foliage augments the flower bouquet in the mind’s eye of all who appreciate beauty” (CC, 127).

Next up, Chandar Bhan gives us “some particulars regarding the Abode of the Realm, Old Delhi” (kaifiyat-i dār al-mulk dihlī-yi kuhna), by which he means basically the area known today as Nizamuddin, just southeast of India Gate and Khan Market. Though the entire area is one continuous settlement today, for most of the period prior to the construction of British “New Delhi” in the twentieth century there would have been a vast plain separating the Mughal “new Delhi” of Shahjahanabad from “old Delhi” (dihlī-yi kuhna) and its surrounding province to the south. And for Chandar Bhan and his contemporaries, “old Delhi” appears to have served mainly as a repository for a certain idealized spiritual and cultural memory.
Thus he begins by noting the “many gnostics and other holy men ['ārifān wa darweshān] [who] have their final resting place in this area, such as that wise knower of truth, Khwaja Qutb al-Din [Bakhtiyar Kaki], the essence of eminent saints, as well as Shaikh Nizam al-Din Auliya, Shaikh Nasir al-Din ‘the Lamp of Delhi’ [chirāgh-i dehlī], and Shaikh Hamid al-Din Nagauri.” Chandar Bhan also includes among his list of saintly tombs of old Delhi that of the celebrated poet Amir Khusrau (d. 1325)—“the parrot in the rose garden of eloquence,” according to our munshi—as well as those of Mulla Hamid bin Fazl Allah Jamali (d. 1535) and that of Shaikh Sharaf al-Din ‘Bu ‘Ali Qalandar (d. 1324) on the outskirts of Delhi in the suburb of Panipat, which “was permanently ennobled by the eternal presence of Shaikh Sharaf’s overflowing munificence” (ba wujūd-i fā’iz al-jūd-i Shaikh Sharaf sharaf dārad) (CC, 127–28).

Mentioning such spiritual landmarks served not only the esoteric function of including India within the wider sacred geography of the Perso-Islamicate world but also the practical function of alerting potential travelers to India to what they ought to see when they visited particular cities. Indeed, this is not idle speculation on my part. We know, for instance, that major Sufi shrines were often among the first tourist destinations of newly arrived visitors even in early modern India, as, for instance, several of the tombs mentioned here by Chandar Bhan—such as those of Nizam al-Din Auliya, Khwaja Qutbuddin, and a number of others, as well as the nearby tombs of many of the erstwhile Delhi sultans—were all among the first sites visited by Babur upon his conquest of northern India. We know, too, from other roughly contemporary accounts such as Dargah Quli Khan’s early eighteenth-century Muraqqa’-i Dihlī (A Delhi scrapbook) that the city’s Sufi shrines, in particular, and even those of prominent poets like Khusrau or ‘Abd al-Qadir Bedil (1642–1720), were very popular destinations for tourists and pilgrims traveling even within India. It has recently been proposed that “sightseeing in India” did not begin until the late eighteenth century, but this is clearly not the case.

Of course, the tombs of the Mughal emperors themselves, as well as some of their most celebrated nobles, also in turn emerged as major tourist attractions of early modern India. The most prominent such site in Delhi in Chandar Bhan’s day—and even in today’s south Delhi—was the tomb of Shah Jahan’s great-grandfather, Emperor Humayun:

The ancient buildings of Old Delhi fill the eyes of tourists and sightseers [tamāshā’iyān wa nazzāragiyān] with wonder and amazement, particularly the luminescent tomb complex of His Majesty of Celestial Station, Whose Resting Place Is in Eternal Heaven, and Who Is Nestled in the Garden of Paradise, Emperor Humayun, which is also situated in this seat of the region [dār al-mulk]. ‘Abd al-Rahim Khan-i Khanan and the great military commander Mahabat Khan, who were among the most celebrated nobles of this era, have also laid their heads for eternal sleep in this same patch of land. (CC, 128)
There is, in other words, the creation of a kind of monumental geography at work here, both sacred and political. If you travel to Delhi, Chandar Bhan seems to be saying, these are the major religious and architectural landmarks you should see. Then, as now, “monuments mattered.” And Chandar Bhan’s purpose here seems not simply to produce a handbook for potential tourists but also, by repeatedly alerting us here and in subsequent pages to the final resting places of Shah Jahan’s ancestors, to reinforce a culture of appreciation for the Mughal dynastic heritage, using a tour through the built environment of Delhi and other locales as an advertisement for the very genealogical prestige with which we began this chapter.

Also important to our munshi, it would appear, was an appreciation for a kind of administrative institutional memory. Thus he closes his entry on Delhi with a note about the province’s geographical borders, along with a list of those who had served as its governor:

Other important districts and counties [chakla-hā wa sarkār-hā] are also associated with this sūba, for instance the chakla spanning the do-āb [alluvial plain between the Ganges and Jumna rivers] and the sarkār of Hisar [in modern-day Haryana], which is the epitome of breadth and cultivation, or the chakla of Sirhind, the governance and safekeeping of which were at one time entrusted to Raja Todar Mal, right up to the border with Multan.

Past governors of the sūba of Old Delhi have included Mahabat Khan, I’tiqad Khan, Baqir Khan, Asalat Khan, Allah Wardi Khan, Makramat Khan, Khalil-Allah Khan, and Siyadat Khan.

At present it is the site where the ever-victorious imperial camp is pitched. (CC, 128)

The intended audience and exact purpose of this list of the province’s former governors are not entirely clear. Without more specific details, especially dates, the list is practically useless as historical “evidence” from the modern scholarly perspective and would require an extensive cross-check of other contemporary archival and administrative records—many of which have not even survived—even to corroborate its accuracy. Yet it indicates a desire on our munshi’s part to call attention to the institutional history of the province, even if it is short on specific detail. In fact, he closes his account of each and every subsequent province with a similar list of governors, so it cannot be accidental. Perhaps the explanation is simply that he wanted to include such lists because he could do so. As a career secretary who, as we have seen, spent much of his time working either in the Mughal prime minister’s office or directly for the emperor, he would have had easy access to all the ledgers and other records necessary to compile such lists, even if we cannot always do so today. It suggests an implicit self-reflexiveness on Chandar Bhan’s part regarding his own role as a maintainer of Mughal administrative records, and thus, too, his role as a bearer of a certain kind of institutional memory.
Chandar Bhan next tells us about Agra, the “Seat of the Caliphate” (dār al-
khilāfat), which had officially been renamed “Akbarabad” in honor of Shah Jahan’s
grandfather early in the latter’s reign. Agra had been the Mughal capital city
for over a hundred years by the time Shah Jahan acceded the throne, except for
a relatively brief interlude when Akbar had tried to relocate the court to a newly
built “City of Victory” (fathpūr) centered at the nearby village Sikri—a project
that was eventually abandoned after barely a dozen years (for reasons that need not
detain us here). Thus until the official relocation of the court to Shahjahanabad
in 1648, Agra/Akbarabad had been the political and symbolic epicenter of the
Mughal Empire practically since its inception, a fact that is reflected in the rich
variety of its surviving monuments, gardens, mansions, and other visible remind-
ers of its former heyday (the Taj Mahal being only the most famous example).

For Chandar Bhan, Agra was “among the most important provinces and best
places in all of heavenly Hindustan,” not least for its impressive architecture and
planning. “The towering, sky-scraping buildings of the imperial palace complex
[‘imārāt-i buland-i falak-farsā-yi daulat-khānah-i shāhinshāhī],” he tells us, “pres-
ent a vision of beautiful dwellings, heavenly mansions, and attractive, enchanting
locales that is reminiscent of the garden of paradise.” Like the Red Fort in Shah-
jahanabad, the palace at Agra was “situated on the banks of the [Jumna] river,”
and the surrounding area on both sides of the river was also home to many private
mansions and estates owned by members of the royal family and nobility, such
as the official residences of various Mughal princes and those of esteemed court-
tiers like Asaf Khan, Shayista Khan, and other “notable amīrs” (umarā-yi nāmdār)
(CC, 128–29).

These residences were not just put up willy-nilly, anywhere there was room to
build. As the modern architectural historian Ebba Koch (2008) has shown, there
was a specific plan to the Mughals’ “riverfront garden city,” which was organized
mainly around the waterfront of the River Jumna and radiated outward from the
central location of the imperial palace—a fact corroborated by Chandar Bhan,
who specifically comments that the mansions and hawelis of most of the royal
family and nobility were all clustered together and “situated, by design, next to
one another along the riverbank” (ba qawā'id-o-tartīb-i tamām yak-dīgar bar
kinār-i daryā hūsn-i anjām wa šūrat-i itmām yāfta) (CC, 129).

As with Delhi, Chandar Bhan also has high praise for Agra’s gardens, which
he lauds as “earthly vestiges of the celestial garden.” He explains that there are
“verdant and lush gardens throughout the city” but that among his favorites are
the Jahan Ara Garden, the lawns of the Moti Mahal, and especially the Bāgh-i
Nūr-Afshān (the light-scattering garden), which is nowadays referred to as Ram
Bagh or Aram Bagh, but which Chandar Bhan refers to as the “Nur Mahal Gar-
den.” Of course, the fact that the planning and maintenance of such gardens was
an important feature of the Mughal lifestyle is well known, but perhaps not so
well appreciated is the fact that, as the names of several of these gardens indicate, the design and patronage of a great many of them were financed by the women of the court. The Jahan Ara Garden, named for Shah Jahan’s eldest daughter, was actually originally built by her mother, Empress Mumtaz Mahal, though the princess took over responsibility for its maintenance after her mother’s death.\(^\text{43}\)

And the garden that Chandar Bhan refers to as the “Nur Mahal Garden” and lavishly praises for its “boundless expanse and immeasurable breadth, its freshness, lushness, succulence, and verdure, the beauty of its pavilions, as well as its various ponds, lakes, streams, creeks, and other distinguishing features” (CC, 129) was designed and patronized by Empress Nur Jahan (1577–1645), the wife of Shah Jahan’s predecessor Jahangir.\(^\text{44}\)

Here Chandar Bhan returns to the theme of dynastic memory, noting that the impressive citadel surrounding the imperial palace complex at Agra was originally built by Emperor Akbar. He also briefly commends the impressive bazaars in the city and surrounding suburbs, which, he says, like those of Delhi, were practically “bursting with gems, jewels, fine merchandise, and all types of rarities that simply boggle the mind of anyone who sees them all displayed” (CC, 129). The mention of all these glistening jewels, apparently, was the perfect transition for him to at last mention the Taj Mahal, the world-famous structure with which Agra is practically synonymous today.

Interestingly enough, particularly for a man who ended up as the caretaker of the complex toward the end of his life, Chandar Bhan has surprisingly little to say about the Taj. About all he tells us is that even though Akbar’s tomb is one of the great monuments of the city, “the sacred tomb [\textit{maqbara-yi mu\texttt{\textbar{}}ahhara}] of that Rabi’a of the Age, the Fatima of the Times [i.e., Empress Mumtaz Mahal], completed during this eternal bounteous reign under the supervision of Makramat Khan and Mir ‘Abd al-Karim, has an especially mesmerizing quality [\textit{kaifiyat-i digar d\texttt{\textbar{}}rad}]” (CC, 129). From our present vantage point it may seem quite odd that apart from a brief additional remark about the Taj’s cost—so exorbitant, he exclaims, “that it couldn’t be matched even by the revenue of some entire countries, or the spoils from some great kingdoms”—this is all that the loquacious Chandar Bhan has to say about the single most famous architectural landmark of Mughal India. But one also has to remember, when the Taj was originally built it was, however distinctive and “mesmerizing,” only one among many extraordinary structures all clustered together as part of a continuous monumental, urban, and garden landscape. As Koch points out, “No individual or prominent site was chosen for the Taj Mahal”; rather, it was simply “integrated into the riverfront scheme” in the nucleus of the planned cityscape. Perhaps, then, in its original built environment it did not stand out as much as it appears to nowadays, when so many of the impressive structures that originally would have surrounded it are no longer standing. Meanwhile, the true focal point of the city was meant to be the
overall plan itself, radiating out from the palace and the surrounding gardens as a microcosm meant “[to reflect] the concept of the garden as primordial residence of the Mughal dynasty, and in a wider ideological sense [to serve] as a symbol of the bloom of Hindustan under the just rule of Shah Jahan.”

Another important symbol of the justness and liberality of Mughal rulers was the patronage, protection, and devotion they offered to various Sufi orders and other mystical religious institutions. Among the most prominent of these were the community of Sufis centered on the shrine of the celebrated saint Salim Chishti (1478–1572) in the nearby town of Sikri, which, as Chandar Bhan notes, fell within Agra’s provincial boundaries. As many readers will recall, it was from Salim Chishti that Akbar sought counsel early in his reign when he had yet to produce a male heir; thus, when the long-awaited son (who would later become Emperor Jahangir) was born, he named him Salim, after the saint, and decided moreover to build his new capital (the aforementioned Fathpur Sikri) in the saint’s village in order to increase the court’s physical proximity to this auspicious site.

Chandar Bhan does not get into all these details, perhaps because he assumed that contemporary readers would already be familiar with the site’s historical and religio-political significance, but also, as I mentioned above, because by Shah Jahan’s time the new capital at Fathpur Sikri had in any case long since been abandoned as an expensive boondoggle. Our munshi does, however, take special note of the Sufi complex in Sikri, reminding his readers that emperors of great stature like their majesties ‘Arsh-Āshiyānī [Akbar] and Jannat-Makānī [Jahangir], as well as His Majesty the Second Lord of the Celestial Conjuction [Shah Jahan], have traveled many times to that firm house of goodly foundation [buq’a-i mustahkam-i khair-asās] to demonstrate their devotion.

In the town itself and the surrounding villages there are many mystics, religious figures, free spirits, hermits, Sufis, and clerics [darweshān wa dīn-dārān wa āzādagān wa gosha-nishīnān wa sūfiyān wa zāhidān] busily engaged in their devotion and spiritual exercises. There are also many local literati and intellectuals [fuzālā wa ‘ulamā] busy spending their time practicing teaching and learning.

Again, this was not just a way of touting the Mughal dynastic practice of protecting Sufi mystical communities—a practice that continued under Shah Jahan—but also of advertising points of interest within India’s larger cultural and sacred geography that might be of interest to curious readers in the wider Persophone world, both within and beyond Hindustan. After briefly noting that “the famously impregnable fortress of Gwalior” fell within the same administrative province, Chandar Bhan closes his description of Agra/Akbarabad with a list of former governors and officials similar to the one he provided for Delhi—one of whom, a certain Girdhar Das, may well have been
the kāyastha of the same name who had translated the Ramāyanā into Persian in 1626–27, toward the end of Jahangir’s reign.

Chandar Bhan then turns his attention to his native city of Lahore, in his estimation “among the grandest and most magnificent cities in all of Hindustan.” Many of the themes that characterize his descriptions of Delhi and Agra recur here, as he takes us on a tour through Lahore’s architectural landmarks, its commercial and intellectual culture, its gardens, and its sacred geography. He praises the delightfulness of Lahore’s weather (laṭāfat-i āb-o-hawā), and, along with the obligatory adulation for the city’s impressive palace architecture, mentions a number of the grand estates and mansions of members of the extended royal family and the nobility that “all add to the beauty of this city that is the peer of paradise.” As in the case of Agra, there was an organized plan to Lahore’s layout in Chandar Bhan’s day, for he explains that “the houses of the people, from the lowest up to the most noble, were arranged in proximity to one another by design, in accordance with each individual’s taste and status” (khāna-hā-yi ahl-i shahr az ważī‘-o-sharīf darḵwār-i saliqa-o-hālat-i har kudām ba qawā‘id-i tamām muttaṣīl ba-ham tartīb yāfta) (CC, 131). Among these, Asaf Khan’s estate was especially grand according to our author, “like another city within the city, a description of which completely exceeds the limitations of writing.” He tells his readers, too, that “this feeble ant, the author of these artful pages, also maintains a residence in this city” (CC, 133), and elsewhere he praises a number of Lahore’s marvelous gardens, with their fabulous flora, waterways, ponds, and reservoirs, all of which also “lend freshness to the garden of men’s hearts” (CC, 130–31).

But perhaps the most memorable portions of Chandar Bhan’s discussion of Lahore are those that deal with the city’s mystical and literary culture. The city “has an inner beauty that exceeds even its superficial beauty” (husn-i ma‘nī ziyāda az husn-i šūrat dārad), he explains, largely because of the abundance of “deeply learned scholars [‘ulamā‘-yi mutabahkhīr], erudite intellectuals, masters of asceticism and self-control, men of ecstasy and spiritual transcendence, mystics acquainted with truth, hermits seeking the basis of Reality, pure-hearted Sufis, and free-spirited recluses, [who] all lend an added flair to this city of bounteous foundation.” Meanwhile, according to our resident munshī and poet, Lahore had a plentiful supply of “poets of exquisite language and sweet expression [who] heat up the bustling literary scene in every corner and every direction with the gift of scintillating and exciting meanings.” Even the young literati of this eminently literary city were top-notch, Chandar Bhan explains with a bit of playful punning: “Even precocious youths and adolescents, faces marked by new lines [khatt] [of facial hair], practice their [calligraphic] lines [khatt] and recitations, doing able justice to [the standards of] graceful and elegant penmanship, and to the smooth flowing of literary expression [salāsat-i rawānī-yi sukhan]” (CC, 131).
Chandar Bhan’s tour through Lahore reminds us, too, of the degree to which Indo-Persian mystical and literary cultures were inextricably intertwined, often even sharing the same physical space within the urban landscape. Thus, for instance, he describes the hubbub of the public culture in the vicinity of two of Lahore’s most famous spiritual landmarks, the tomb of the eleventh-century saint Pir ‘Ali Hujwiri and the eponymous Wazir Khan mosque, built in 1634–35 by the widely admired Mughal physician and governor of Lahore under Shah Jahan:

Even though there are yearly and monthly impromptu performances throughout the city’s precincts, especially at the tombs and shrines of the giants along the path of esoteric Truth [buzurgān-i rāh-i haqīqat], the Thursday gatherings at the blessed tomb of that knower of mystical stages, Pir ‘Ali Hujwiri, create an especially remarkable commotion. Darvishes and other free spirits, literati, poets, and all manner of people gather there to observe the spectacle of Divine Creation.

Then on Fridays the masters of literary perfection, eloquent men of pleasing expression, and poets of linguistic delectation, group after group of eloquents from Iran, Turan, and Hindustan gather in that house of firm foundation [buq’a-i khair-asās], the Wazir Khan mosque complex—one of the most exemplary buildings in the world—and heat up the literary and poetic action.

Meanwhile, countless Persian and Arabic books, and manuscripts of reliable histories, epic romances, diwāns of the classical and the latest poets [mutaqaddimin-o-muta’ākhkhirin], letter collections [munsha’āt], anthologies [fiqrāt], epistolary primers [ruq’āt], biographies, chapbooks, samples of the calligraphers of the times, and all the other tools and equipment for practicing every genre and course of study are widely available for sale or purchase in this wonderful place.

And, since this is also the day when schoolchildren have the most free time, from every street and lane young boys with notebooks in hand and flowers in their hair [bayāz dar dast wa gul bar sar] come strutting around the bazaar [khirāmān ba sair-i bāzār mi-āyand], in keeping with ways of youth. This bustle of activity continues until well after midday and is a delight to the eyes of all the urbane onlookers [arbāb-i basīrat]. (CC, 132–33)

These observations, perhaps especially the mention of the poets “from Iran, Turan, and Hindustan,” remind us that Lahore was yet another cosmopolitan Mughal city, with people and populations from all over the surrounding regions participating in its vibrant commercial and cultural life. Indeed, for centuries Lahore had been the main urban contact zone at the frontier of South, Central, and West Asia, with the traffic in people and goods flowing in from all three directions. In fact, in terms of its Persianate literary culture Lahore and its surrounding area could arguably boast a tradition even older than that of Delhi, dating back at least to the eleventh-century heyday of medieval Ghaznawid frontier poets like Mas’ud Sa‘d Salman and Abu al-Faraj Runi, not to mention Pir ‘Ali b. Usman Hujwiri (d. after 1089), the Sufi saint whose shrine Chandar Bhan mentions here,
and who authored perhaps the earliest prose treatise on Sufism ever written in Persian, the famed *Kashf al-Mahjūb* (Revelation of the veiled).46

Chandar Bhan gives some inkling of this kinetic frontier atmosphere when he describes the city walls and gates. Lahore’s citadel, he explains, “has twelve gates, the first of which is the ‘Roshana’i Gate’ located near the palace, and it is precisely because of this association that it has gotten this name, the ‘Gate of Light.’” This northern gate, he adds, was “the main entry point to the city for sojourners from places like Qandahar, Kabul, and Kashmir.” Meanwhile, “the most famous of the city’s entry points” was the so-called “Delhi Gate,” which was situated on the eastern side of the walled city and thus served as a convenient entry point for the heavy commercial traffic to Lahore from other parts of India like “Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Gujarat, the Deccan, Akbarabad, and many other cities and towns” (CC, 133).

Here in a side note Chandar Bhan adds that Kangra Fort, which was “among the most celebrated fortifications in Hindustan,” and which is nowadays located in the mountainous modern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh (about 250 kilometers east of Lahore, as the crow flies), actually fell under the administrative jurisdiction of Lahore province during his own time. But this was noteworthy not so much because of the fort itself as because the Kangra district was also home to the popular Hindu temple of Jwalamukhi, to which, Chandar Bhan explains, “it is a custom that every year people from all over India flock for pilgrimage” (CC, 133).

At this point in the text, after listing seventeen of Lahore’s former governors, Chandar Bhan offers an extended digression about Shah Jahan’s connection to a number of prominent Sufi saints of the time. The most important of these, as those familiar with the history of the period will know, was the celebrated mystic of the Qadiri order known as Miyan Mir (ca. 1531–1635), to whose “isolated corner of reclusiveness and liberation” (zāwiya-i khumūl wa āzādī) Shah Jahan directed the imperial camp while en route from Kashmir to Punjab so that the two could hold “spiritual discussions” (ṣuhbat-i rūhānī).

Chandar Bhan notes the spiritual depth of their conversations, describing Shah Jahan and Miyan Mir as “two great masters of form and meaning,” one of whom “bangs the drum of the Shadow of God” (kos-i zill-i ilāhī nawākhta) while the other “raises knowledge of devotion to its acme” (‘ilm-i ‘ibādat bar afrāshta). He adds that it was “around the same time” that the emperor visited the khānqāh of another “ocean-hearted pīr, Shaikh Bala’ul [d. 1636–37], with whom he discussed numerous matters of gnosis and esoteric meaning” (CC, 134).48

Meanwhile, on another occasion, “in heavenly Kashmir that great knower of mystical Truths, Mulla Shah, visited the assembly of the emperor—who is himself acquainted with Truth and is a friend to holy men—where they held a vibrant discussion” (CC, 134). Mulla Shah (d. 1661), another prominent Sufi of the Qadiri order, was Miyan Mir’s most celebrated disciple, and in modern historiography the
two saints are most often associated with Prince Dara Shukoh. But as Chandar Bhan reminds us, Shah Jahan also had an important relationship with both Miyan Mir and Mulla Shah. In fact, it was Shah Jahan who introduced Prince Dara to these Qadiri saints in the first place, a fact that routinely goes unacknowledged in modern scholarship. Shah Jahan also provided the home in Lahore to which Mulla Shah retired, not long before the saint died, which gives some inkling as to the lasting nature of their relationship.

Chandar Bhan notes, too, that it was not just the emperor himself who made a habit of consulting with spiritual and mystical adepts but also his officials. Thus he tells us of an occasion when the wazīr Sa’d Allah Khan sought and received permission to leave the imperial presence while en route to Kabul so that he could visit a darwesh named Shaikh Muhammad Sharif Rasa’i. Chandar Bhan adds that “despite the fact that on one side there was a pinnacle of erudition, and on the other side the height of asceticism, their conversation was very down-to-earth [suḥbat-i bi-gharaẓāna waqī’ shud].” A short time later, in Kabul itself, Sa’d Allah Khan also took a tour of a nearby village called Manji, “which was ablaze with arghawān blossoms, and where he met with a local darwesh named Sayyid ‘Alam” (CC, 134).

By way of a concluding thought on this relationship between Shah Jahan’s court and the prominent Sufi saints of the era, Chandar Bhan explains that the patronage and protection of holy men was an essential feature of good kingship—and thus, “because of their lofty natures, all great and glorious emperors have had an affinity for the company of holy men acquainted with Truth [suḥbat-i darweshān-i haqq-shinās], the trappings of empire and the state notwithstanding [bā wujūd-i asbāb-i daulat-o-jahāndārī].” In other words, Shah Jahan’s good relationship with the mystical personalities of his time was not simply a matter of the emperor’s own personal spiritual well-being, it was a crucial index of the well-being of the state and the realm as a whole.

“Such masters of renunciation,” Chandar Bhan adds, “turn up for most of the festivals and assemblies at court and contribute to the grand audience by holding spiritual discussions.” Shah Jahan himself, “a friend to all holy men,” apparently became particularly fond of conversing with “a man at an advanced stage of Truth named Khwaja Jawid Mahmud, who hailed from charming Kashmir and was given a seat right next to the imperial throne.” Another Sufi saint named Shaikh Nazir, “the details of whose career are beyond description,” was, according to our munshī, “a fixture at the palace both day and night.” Chandar Bhan notes that Shah Jahan was particularly fond of another figure named Khwaja ‘Abd al-Razzaq, “whose material position was that of a Hindustani ahadī [a freelance soldier in the emperor’s personal security detail] but who in fact trod the path of [mystical] precedents [ba-ṭariq-i salaf mī-guzarānīd].” And he mentions three other figures by name—one Mir ‘Arif, one Mir Fakhr al-Din, and
Sayyid Muhammad Qanauiji—all of whom were treated as “honored and revered guests” of the court and who held dialogues with the emperor, “who knows all the finer points of intellectual matters” (CC, 134–35).

“Indeed,” Chandar Bhan concludes, “elite shaikhs who had achieved a level of divine friendship were constantly arriving at the sublime mahfil, where they were the featured members of the assembly” (CC, 135). But they were also important cornerstones of the South Asian spiritual landscape writ large, as we will see in the next and final section of this chapter.

**THE CONCEPTUAL HORIZONS OF THE REALM**

As our author returns his attention to the various provinces of the realm, there is a repeated emphasis on the noteworthy population of saintly figures associated with each locality. The province surrounding the city of Multan, for instance, is described by Chandar Bhan as “one of the most blessed ancient locales in the world,” thanks in large part to the “many great men, gnostics, and mystics acquainted with Truth [who] have been laid to rest in that land, such as that ‘ārif acquainted with God, Shaikh Baha’ al-Din Zakariya [ca. 1182–1262], Shaikh Sadr al-Din [‘Arif] [d. 1286], and Shaikh Rukn-i ‘Alam [aka Rukn al-Din].” Among the other notable saints from Multan, Chandar Bhan specifically mentions Sayyid Yusuf Gardezi, Shaikh Jalal Khoka, and Bibi Rasti. But he reserves special reverence for “the refulgent mausoleum of that treader on the path of Truth and gnosis, Shaikh Farid [al-Din] Ganj-i Shakkar” (d. 1265), which, Chandar Bhan reminds his readers, “is located in the local qasba of Pattan.” Meanwhile, he notes that in the nearby town of Ucch “the great spiritual master [makhdūm] Shaikh Jalal Makhdum-i Jahaniyan [1308–84] and several other great men” (CC, 135) are also buried.

We cannot possibly delve into the biographies and spiritual careers of all the many saints whom Chandar Bhan mentions here and in subsequent pages, which would probably require another entire chapter, maybe even a whole book. (I have tried to direct the interested reader to basic information and resources in the footnotes.) The important point for present purposes, however, is not so much the details of the individual Sufis themselves but rather the fact that Chandar Bhan is so particular about mentioning them at all. Remember, our author proudly self-identifies as a high-caste Hindu; his deep familiarity with the spiritual landscape and personalities of Sufi Islam is thus, in itself, fairly noteworthy. But it also speaks to the larger question of the continuing salience of the “mystical dimensions of Islam,” in Annemarie Schimmel’s famous formulation, for Mughal ideology generally and for the Mughals’ understanding of political Islam in the post-Akbar period. Over and over again, Chandar Bhan emphasizes that in the grand cosmic scheme of things power and renunciation go hand in hand, and
that kings, including Shah Jahan, are great only to the extent that they afford protection to the poor, the weak, and the vessels of spirituality—even esoteric and unorthodox spirituality—in their dominions. The king’s quest for worldly power was, of course, always in tension with the mystical ideal of spiritual renunciation. But this is precisely why Shah Jahan and his officials placed so much emphasis on promoting, surrounding themselves with, and seeking the counsel of a broad cross section of India’s mystical population.

Chandar Bhan closes his entry on the šūba of Multan with a brief mention of its excellent irrigation system, along with, as usual, a list of its recent and former governors—which in this case included two princes of the royal house: “the illustrious prince Sultan Murad Bakhsh” as well as “the great, famous, successful and victorious prince Muhammad Aurangzeb Bahadur” (CC, 135).

Next up is Kashmir, “the equivalent of paradise,” the gorgeous scenery and pleasant environs of which made it, in Chandar Bhan’s words, “the ruler of all the gardens in the land of Hindustan” (dar mamālik-i hindūstān ḥukm-i bāgh dārad). He does acknowledge that Kashmir’s “steep mountains and peaks that brush the sky, around which even the bird of the imagination could not possibly wrap the wings of desire,” made the journey there extremely arduous. But this, in a sense, is precisely what made the enjoyment of Kashmir’s delights so rewarding, “rubbing away the rust of melancholy from the mirror of hearts” (zang az ā’īna-i dil-hā mībarad). Kashmir was—and remains—also famously home to many scenic valleys, lush gardens, and lakes and ponds on many of which one could, even in Mughal times, enjoy boat and gondola rides. And, in keeping with the theme we have just discussed, Chandar Bhan explains that “many mystics and other liberated souls have emerged from this region,” drawing our attention in particular to the khānqāh of “that soaring falcon of gnosis” (shāhbāz-i auj-i ma’rifat), Mir Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani (1314–84), a renowned fourteenth-century saint of the Kubrawi Sufi order (CC, 136).

The province of Kabul, too, is praised by Chandar Bhan for its lovely climate and scenery, as well as for the fact that “every house there has running water, abundant fruit, and colorful flowers.” He points out that strategically speaking it is “among the most important” šūbas in the empire, whose boundaries stretch “from the River Atak [aka “Attock”] to the Hindu Kush Mountains, which form the frontier with Hindustan, and which [are so high that they] present a tremendous challenge even for birds to cross” (CC, 137). Careful readers will note that these boundaries bear no relationship to the modern nation-state of Afghanistan, straddling as they do the modern boundary between that country and Pakistan. Be that as it may, for Chandar Bhan the important thing is that Kabul served as a crucial buffer between Mughal South Asia and the empires of the Uzbeks and other Central Asian rivals to the north. It could also serve, as we saw in the previous chapter, as the key staging ground for Mughal campaigns in the opposite direction, in particular the
campaigns in Balkh and Badakhshan in the 1640s. Thus, Chandar Bhan explains in his list of governors, it was important that “many sword-wielding imperial servants—Mughals, sayyids, Afghans, and Rajputs—have all been stationed in this šūba.” Moreover, he explains, Kabul represented a hugely important symbolic site in the sacred geography of Mughal dynastic heritage, given that the founder of the empire, “His Majesty Whose Dwelling Is in Heaven, Emperor Babur, has also been laid to rest in this same blessed land” (CC, 137).

The nexus between Mughal commercial, literary, and mystical cultures also figures in Chandar Bhan’s next two geographical entries, on Thatta (Sindh) and Ahmedabad (Gujarat). Often overshadowed by some of the more famous ports down the western coast of India, such as Bombay, Goa, Calicut, Mangalore, and especially Surat, the coastal Sindhi city of Thatta and its associated port of Lahiri have nevertheless served as a major entrepôt in the vigorous triangular trade between the Middle East, Central Asia, and India since antiquity. Situated just inland off the Arabian “salt sea” (daryā-i shor) at the mouth of the Indus river delta, Thatta was ideally suited to commercial exchange of all kinds. But in addition to this bustling commercial atmosphere, or perhaps indeed because of it, Thatta was also, in Chandar Bhan’s words, well known for being “a place where all manner of faqirs, free spirits, literati, and other intellectuals made their entry [into the subcontinent]” (maḥal-i wurūd-o-nuzūl-i fuqarā'-o-āzādagān, wa makān-i ḥūr-i fużalā-o-fuṣahā ast) (CC, 137–38).

Similarly Ahmedabad—which in Mughal parlance meant the entire region of Gujarat—is described by Chandar Bhan as being “among the most important provinces in Hindustan,” in large part because it was home to “world-famous ports like Surat, Khambayat [Cambay], and Bahruch.” As a result of this status as a cosmopolitan contact zone between India and the larger Indian Ocean world, Gujarat was, in Chandar Bhan’s view, not only “a mine of rarities from around the world” but also “an area from which many great mystics and holy men have hailed” (CC, 138). In particular Chandar Bhan mentions Shaikh Ahmed Khattu (1336–1445) and Shah ‘Alam Bukhari (1414–76), both of whose shrines remain important sites of religious activity and pilgrimage to this day.

We can see that after beginning with the three urban capitals at the core of the Mughal realm, Chandar Bhan starts tracing a circle of Mughal dominion around South Asia. First he made his way northwest via Multan and Kashmir all the way up to Kabul, and now he is working his way back down the western coast of India, whence he will eventually circle all the way back around.

Thus, continuing down the western coast from Gujarat, the next entry is on the Deccan, the large swath of territory south of the Vindhya Mountains that stretched across the subcontinent from coastal Maharashtra on the Indian Ocean side to Golconda (modern Andhra Pradesh and Telangana) on the Bay of Bengal side. Though the entire Deccan was considered a single province from the
Mughals’ administrative point of view, they were of course well aware that this “vast territory” (mamlakat-i wasī’), as Chandar Bhan describes it, actually comprised numerous subregions and political formations, all vying both with each other and with the Mughals for control of the lucrative coastal trading zones and fertile agricultural plains in the interior hinterlands of the plateau. Among these, the centrally situated city of Burhanpur (at the southern edge of the modern state of Madhya Pradesh), which had long served as an important staging area for Mughal campaigns further south, is described by Chandar Bhan as “the seat of power for the entire region” (ḥākim-nishīn-i ān mulk ast), while other areas like Khandes, Birar, Ahmadnagar, Daulatabad, and Telangana were, according to our author, “among the important šūbas of that frontier region” (šūbajāt-i ‘umda ba ān marzubūm) (CC, 138).

Chandar Bhan gives a few snippets of Mughal political history in the region, particularly pertaining to Mughal relations with the Qutb Shahi sultans of Golconda and the ‘Adil Shahi sultans of Bijapur. He also lists the series of Mughal viceroys in the Deccan, among whom the most notable were two of Shah Jahan’s own sons—“His Highness Prince Sultan Murad Bakhsh,” and then later “the renowned and successful prince, the Subduer of the World and Conqueror of the Universe, Muhammad Aurangzeb Bahadur” (CC, 139). Chandar Bhan also draws his readers’ attention to the “many great and famous forts located in this territory.” Among these were “two of the most celebrated citadels in all of Hindustan” —namely, Daulatabad Fort, the Nizam Shahi capital subdued by Shah Jahan’s forces in 1633, “which is among the fresh conquests [futūhāt-i tāza] of this perpetual empire”; and Asir Fort, just north of Burhanpur, which Chandar Bhan explains “was conquered during the reign of His Majesty Whose Nest Is Now in Heaven, Emperor Akbar” (CC, 139). Again, Mughal dynastic memory is given a featured place in the landscape of Chandar Bhan’s geographical imagination. So too, again, the sacred geography of Sufism enters into the picture, as he closes his account of the Deccan by reminding his readers that “many great spiritual leaders and mystics are also laid to rest there, such as Sayyid Muhammad Gisu Daraz, Shah Zain al-Din, and Shah Burhan al-Din” (CC, 139).

The remaining entries in Chandar Bhan’s geographical tour of the empire are, for the most part, quite brief. Regarding Malwa, for instance, besides the list of that province’s Mughal governors, and a list of important cities such as Ujjain, Saronj, Sarangpur, and Chanderi, he does not have much to add other than to extol the architecture of Mandu, “the length and breadth of whose fort cannot be captured by a mere written description” (CC, 139–40). We may recall, of course, that many of the structures in Mandu’s fort complex had been renovated in Emperor Jahangir’s time by none other than Chandar Bhan’s own first employer, the architect Mir ‘Abd al-Karim. But Chandar Bhan himself does not deem it necessary to mention it here, for whatever reason.
The entry on Ajmer, meanwhile, focuses primarily on its political and spiritual significance. It is “among the most exquisite provinces in all of Hindustan,” Chandar Bhan tells us, adding that “it is the homeland of various Rajput clans, ranas, raoys, and rajas.” But the province’s luster did not rest solely upon its importance as the native land of certain Hindu chieftains who were among the Mughals’ most crucial military and strategic allies. It also “garnered added prestige” because it was home to “the beneficent shrine of that Pillar of Spiritual Pillars, the Revealer of Secrets, Khwaja Mu‘in al-Din Chishti” (CC, 140). Here Chandar Bhan is referring to the dargah, or shrine complex, of the celebrated medieval Sufi saint Mu‘in al-Din Chishti (d. 1236), a site of immense significance in the spiritual and mystical geography of South Asia generally, of course, but also, in particular, for the Mughal dynasty, which had very close ties to the keepers of the shrine complex.59

Thus Chandar Bhan’s consistently twinned themes of Mughal dynastic memory and South Asian sacred geography converge here as he explains that “exalted emperors like His Majesty of Celestial Station ‘Arsh-Ashiyāni [Akbar], His Majesty Jannat-Makānī [Jahangir], and His Majesty the Second Lord of the Celestial Conjunction [Shah Jahan] have all repeatedly betaken themselves to that auspicious abode” (CC, 140). Meanwhile, we learn from at least one other source that after he had outmaneuvered his brothers in the struggle to succeed Shah Jahan, among the first orders of business for the newly crowned emperor Aurangzeb ‘Alamgir was a visit to the Chishti shrine at Ajmer, “where he bestowed offerings of thanksgiving.”60

Chandar Bhan also mentions that Ajmer is home to the tomb of Miran Sayyid Husain Khing Suwar (the White Horseman), a thirteenth-century military commander under the first Delhi Sultan, Qutb al-Din Aibak, who emerged as another important figure in the history of medieval Sufism in South Asia. Sayyid Husain Khing Suwar had been a contemporary and possibly even a disciple of Mu‘in al-Din Chishti, but, as the modern architectural historian Catherine Asher points out, the shrine dedicated to his mystical exploits did not actually become a major pilgrimage site until early modern times, when it became the beneficiary of substantial patronage from the Mughal emperors and nobility, especially among the “lesser elite.”61

The provinces of Awadh and Allahabad are both dealt with in short order. Regarding the former, Chandar Bhan does note that Awadh contains “several important urban centers such as Khairabad and Lucknow” and that “a number of important darweshes and hermits reside in Khairabad and environs” (CC, 141), but in this case he does not elaborate. As for Allahabad, he notes that it is among the most well-known provinces in Hindustan, thanks largely to its being the home of the city of Banaras—“one of the most impressive and sacred sites and one of the most enchanting and captivating places [in the world]” (CC, 141). But again, he does not elaborate.62
Meanwhile, the eastern provinces of Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa are also dispatched fairly quickly. Chandar Bhan notes that Bihar is “a very blessed place” (jā-yi mutabarraka), in which the major urban center is Patna, and the most important regional fort is Rohtas. He also lists a few of the officials who have served as Bihar’s Mughal governors and states that “several great spiritual men of the world are laid to rest there, such as Hazrat Shaikh Yahyá Maneri [also pron. “Munyari”], Hazrat Makhdum-i Jahaniyan, and others of their ilk” (CC, 141–42).

Bengal, he continues, “is among the remotest provinces in Hindustan,” but it is also extremely large, he adds, “and one cannot get a true sense of its vast length and breadth from a mere written account” (CC, 142).

Chandar Bhan praises the pleasantness of the Bengali climate and notes for his readers that the two major urban centers (hākim-nishīn) are “Jahangir Nagar, also known as Dhaka, and Akbar Nagar, better known as Raj Mahal.” He also lists the various prominent Mughal officials who had governed Bengal since its conquest by Akbar in the late sixteenth century, including Shah Jahan’s second son, Prince Shah Shuja’, “who has served two tenures in that capacity.” Meanwhile, with a nod to the importance of Bengal to the Mughal commercial economy, Chandar Bhan also notes that “many fertile tracts and important districts, as well as ports and peninsulas, are associated with this sūba,” reminding any would-be travelers that “the chief means of commercial transport in that province is by boat” (CC, 142–43).

As for Orissa, about all he has to say—perhaps simply by way of situating it geographically for readers outside South Asia—is that “it neighbors Bengal, and in fact is connected to Bengal,” that it is “a delightful place with a lovely climate,” and that “its frontier extends right alongside the borders of Golconda” (CC, 143).

From these eastern environs, Chandar Bhan circles back again to the northwest frontier for two final entries. First up is the “Abode of Stability” (dār al-qarār), Qandahar, whose stately epithet in Mughal parlance is belied by the fact that it was a city of great strategic importance, at the crossroads of a number of major commercial routes, over which the Mughals and their Safavid Persian rivals had struggled almost constantly over the first half of the seventeenth century. Chandar Bhan does allude to this situation, explaining that the province “came under the jurisdiction of imperial territories earlier in [Shah Jahan’s] infinitely successful reign” (in 1638), but he comes just short of acknowledging the subsequent disastrous failure of the Mughals’ Qandahar policy, specifically their loss of the fort city once again to the Safavids in 1648–49 and their inability to retake it despite numerous attempts thereafter. Regarding all of this Chandar Bhan is willing only to say, somewhat diplomatically, that “repeated heroic battles have taken place there between the victorious imperial forces and the army of Iran” (CC, 143). But he does add that the important satellite fortresses of Bust, Zamindawar, and Shahr-i Safā were also situated in Qandahar province, and, striking a note that is familiar by now, he calls our attention to the local sacred geography—specifi-
cally, “the luminous shrine of Baba Wali, which is situated on the outskirts of Qandahar city.” “It has a beautiful and spacious courtyard in front,” Chandar Bhan adds, “and on Fridays the people of the city and suburbs make pilgrimages there” (CC, 143).

Chandar Bhan closes his geography of the empire with an entry on the Central Asian territories of Balkh and Badakhshan, the Mughal campaigns in which during the 1640s were discussed in the previous chapter. Chandar Bhan revisits some of those events briefly here and lists many of the important cities and towns of both provinces. He notes that Badakhshan, in particular, was “well known for its deposits of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and iron” (kān-i ṭīlā wa naqra wa lājaward wa āhan), and he mentions that Shafiq Balkhi and Khwaja Abu al-Nasr Parsa Naqshbandi, “the cream of experts in Truth and Faith” (zubda-i arbāb-i ṣīdq-o-yaqīn), were among the many important Sufi mystics who “are laid to rest in this land.” He reminds us, too, of the importance of his status as an eyewitness narrator, stating that “this humblest of imperial servants, the author of this exquisite book [nushka-i badi’], has traveled to that land, and is therefore very well acquainted with the quality of its climate,” even if the region’s special features “are so famous as to require no publicity” (CC, 143–44).

With this, our author concludes, “the second chaman recounted by Chandar Bhan Brahman is at an end.” But what, exactly, is going on with this tour through the Mughal imperial geography? At one level, it is simply a gazetteer of sorts, meant to introduce readers to the main provinces of the empire and to offer some interesting particulars about each locale. Perhaps, too, it was meant as a kind of echo or update of the much more famous gazetteer penned by Chandar Bhan’s celebrated predecessor at Akbar’s court, the magisterial Ā’īn-i Akbarī of Abu al-Fazl ibn Mubarak. But if so, Chandar Bhan’s version is not nearly as exhaustive—it is not even in the same league, really—and for that matter it is not particularly “useful,” from an empirical standpoint. One suspects, then, that this may be part of the reason that this section of Chahār Chaman has received almost no attention in modern scholarship.

But as I’ve tried to suggest, Chandar Bhan’s survey of the various provinces of the empire was clearly aimed at a wide cosmopolitan readership among the mobile intellectual populations of the Persianate and Indian Ocean worlds, a fact that accounts for some of its “tourist guidebook” qualities—especially its emphasis on the bustling mercantile and cultural life of Mughal India’s major urban centers, as well as the consistent reference to the must-see landmarks of India’s political and sacred geography. Coming on the heels of the earlier portions of the chaman, in which Chandar Bhan paints such a vivid portrait of the welcoming atmosphere at Shah Jahan’s court and the just and humane rule of the emperor himself, it would
not be too far to speculate that this section was intended not just as a gazetteer, or as a general advertisement for Mughal dynastic grandeur, but also as a clear invitation to traders, poets, mystics, and other talented people across the Persianate world to travel to India and settle there—so that they too could, in turn, add to the existing dynamism of the empire’s commercial and religio-cultural life. Wherever you come from, and whatever your religious persuasion, Chandar Bhan seems to be saying, come to India and Shah Jahan will protect you.

Another tantalizing way to interpret Chandar Bhan’s minigazetteer of the empire would be to see it as a kind of Mughal version of the classical Indic narrative of the just king’s triumphal “conquest of the directions,” or digvijaya. The most famous, and possibly earliest, such narrative is that which appears toward the end of the Sanskrit epic Mahābhārata, in which King Yuddhishtira, the eldest of the five heroic Pandava brothers, sends each of his other four brothers out to conquer a different quadrant of the world. After having done so, they all perform another tour of the four directions together to consecrate and legitimate their just rule.

This distant echo of an epic text like Mahābhārata brings us right back, in fact, to where we began this lengthy chapter, with Chandar Bhan’s attempt to situate the Mughal rulers as part of a classical genealogy of legitimate Indian kingship emanating from Delhi, one that went all the way back to none other than Yuddhishtira. In Chandar Bhan’s Mughal version, however, we are presented with an updated imagining of Indian imperial and religio-political space—a new tour through the conquered dominions of another “King of the World” (shāh-i jahān), with special attention drawn at every turn to the monuments of his dynasty and the sacred geography that not only helps to consecrate his rule but also demonstrates that it is tolerant, benevolent, and just.