

The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir*

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INTRODUCTION

After AD 1720 the Mughal empire was no longer a tightly centralized political entity. Muhammad Shah (AD 1719–48) and his successors could no longer freely command the flow of money, goods, information and personnel to and from the capital nor direct the inter- and intra-provincial movement of these entities. Nevertheless, in spite of its sudden political collapse, the legacy of the imperial system remained. The imperial model for concentration and power retained its compelling appeal for Marathas, Jats, Rajputs, Sikhs, and ultimately the British. The expansion, and consolidation, of the empire had irrevocably reordered human relationships throughout the subcontinent in virtually every aspect of society.

As late as the first years of the nineteenth century, the Mughal agrarian order decayed, but still recognizable, offered a rationale and techniques for recognition and assimilation of aristocracies rooted in local control of land and peasants. The imperial land tax structure still set limits, levels and acceptable modes of assessment and collection for the state's share of agrarian production. Under the East India Company and the princely states the Mughal currency system flourished in its essential metrology, bi-metallic composition, coin types, and minting system. Mughal courtly rituals, etiquette, terminology, honorific symbols, etc. retained their appeal in virtually every region. Imperial aes-

*From J.F. Richards, ed., *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin South Asian Studies, 1978).

thetic standards in painting, calligraphy, literature, architecture, still provided a cultural reference point. Imperial techniques for the management, recruitment and control of military élites continued to have great influence. Debased and distorted Mughal numerical ranks, and the ubiquitous *jāgīr* or lands assigned for salaries and troop maintenance were utilized by Rajput and French rulers alike.

Most dramatic of these survivals was the continuing near-monopoly of the later Mughal emperors over the dispensation of legitimate authority in the form of Mughal offices, ranks and honours. The downward movement of these rights, in the absence of a centralized political order (as Stewart Gordon has shown), is one of the continuing aspects of high politics in the eighteenth century. As is well known, the East India Company found it useful to perpetuate the fiction of Mughal supremacy as late as 1857. The tenacity with which the imperial myth of authority retained its fascination, and utility for the tough, calculating politicians, military leaders and kings of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century India is somewhat baffling. Nonetheless, such longevity does suggest that for a very long period of time, as much as a century or more, imperial authority, embodied in the Emperor, systematically destroyed and/or assimilated to it all competing sources of legitimate rule. Only in exceptional circumstances did the rebel Bhonsle Maratha dynasty (prior to 1689) and the Sikh Khalsa rise independently. On the one hand, this is perhaps only stating the obvious: that an imperial structure existed before 1720. On the other hand, it raises the central issue behind the truly impressive achievements of the 'Great Mughals'. Why and how were the Mughal Emperors able to create a system of symbols, and rituals necessary for a pervasive network of authoritative, hierarchical relationships? Why and how did this authority system develop so firmly that it allowed the Emperors to mobilize the active energies of the imperial political elect, i.e. the nobility and their military followers, the burgeoning civil service, and other official groups such as the '*ulama* in state employment? Preceding Indo-Muslim dynasties in north India failed in precisely this area. The Afghan Lodi rulers were never able to overcome satisfactorily fissiparous tendencies among their nobles and fellow tribesmen.

Akbar, after surviving at least one attempted coup and two concerted rebellions (in 1567 and 1579–80), fashioned new relationships between himself and his military/administrative élite. In part, Akbar succeeded by a careful balancing of old and new ethnic groups as he rapidly expanded his cadre of army commanders and administrators to keep

pace with the speed of territorial conquest.¹ But Akbar's political achievement was far more difficult than the simple balancing of ethnic and factional interests within the élite.² He and his advisers successfully shaped a new individual and group identity: that of the imperial *mansabdār* or *amīr*, i.e. a military commander and imperial administrator. The wealth, powers, status and lifestyle of the *amīr* or noble became and remained a pervasive model of secular attainment for ambitious, able, men whether rajas, lineage chiefs, aristocratic Muslim migrants to India or even peripatetic European adventurers.

Akbar carefully fostered the inherited advantages of his own personality. A complex mixture of acute intelligence, great sensitivity and warmth, and an easy, yet never abandoned dignity marked his overwhelming appeal as a political leader. His open style was remarkable for an Indo-Muslim autocrat. As Father Monserrate observed:³

It is hard to exaggerate how accessible he [Akbar] makes himself to all who wish audience of him. For he creates an opportunity almost every day for any of the common people or of the nobles to see him and to converse with him; and he endeavours to show himself pleasant-spoken and affable rather than severe toward all who come to speak with him. It is very remarkable how great an effect this courtesy and affability has in attaching him to the minds of his subjects.

By a series of symbolic acts, Akbar built upon his personal appeal to establish an image or metaphor of the Emperor's person as an embodiment of the Empire. To challenge or destroy the Emperor's person was

¹ cf. Iqtidar Alam Khan, 'The Nobility Under Akbar and the Development of His Religious Policy, 1560–1580', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1968), pp. 29–36.

² S.A.A. Rizvi in his recent *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign* (New Delhi, 1975), has been the first scholar to notice and to discuss the intellectual connections between the ideology of illumined descent set forth in the *Akbar-Nama* and the doctrines of the most important Iranian philosophical schools. However, the great significance of Professor Rizvi's finding has not yet been fully understood or recognized. Partly this is due to less than full development of the argument and partly to difficulties with the organization of the volume as a set of topical essays.

³ António Monserrate, *Commentary*, tr. and ed. J.S. Hoyland and S.N. Banerji (London, 1922), p. 197. Monserrate also noted that Akbar 'is especially remarkable for his love of keeping great crowds of people around him and in his sight and thus it comes about that his court is always thronged with multitudes of men of every type, though especially with the nobles ...'. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

to challenge or destroy the imperial system, for they were identical. In furthering this metaphor, Akbar (or his advisers) established a degree of paramount spiritual authority for the Emperor unprecedented in previous Indo-Muslim experience. This assertion merged with the recognized familial charisma residing in direct descent from the Timurid line which, for Muslims at least, connoted legitimate monarchy. All of these elements were eventually expressed by Abul Fazl in a dynastic ideology which explicitly set out Akbar's infallible, unchallengeable authority.

Glorification of the Emperor's person in this manner provided a basis for more intense, emotive ties with the imperial nobility. The latter increasingly felt a sense of direct, personal obligation to the Emperor. The ruler and his élite shared a complex Indo-Persian etiquette and ritual which delimited and patterned transactions of authority and subordination. Over time, *amirs* and even lesser commanders and administrators displayed similar, predictable, responses to the rituals and symbols of imperial authority. By the time Jahangir, who followed his father's policies, completed his 22-year reign, in 1627, the system was firmly set. Younger generations, sons of nobles anticipating imperial service from childhood, were readily assimilated into the imperial élite.

From an external perspective, the bureaucratic structure of the empire with its specialized offices, systematic procedures, and hierarchies of technically proficient officials, was the most impressive aspect of the empire. However, the core of the imperial system embedded within the outer structure was formed by the complex matrix of ties of loyalty and interest between the *amirs* and the Emperor.

However, the system could only have succeeded by transforming the values of high-status warrior-aristocrats of diverse origins. The sense of honour for each *amir* had to shift from personal, lineage, or sectarian pride—that of the 'free' warrior chief—to a more impersonal, imperial pride—that of the 'slave' warrior-administrator. In this transformation the search for the display of martial honour necessarily changed from bardic or epic glory immortalizing feats of victory (or defeat) in battle, to chronicled fame testifying to service of the Empire and its Master. Honour in the latter case also became advancement, i.e. the greater honour of promotion or movement nearer to the person of the Emperor. Honour found in unconditional service and obedience was a salient characteristic of the new role for an imperial commander. The sense of discretionary personal honour of the warrior-aristocrat, leader of a lineage group or war band, obviously did not disappear altogether, but its subordination to a less parochial concern within the imperial context was generally assured.

THE PUBLIC IMAGE

In common with all gifted political leaders, Akbar, from his earliest days of independent rule (i.e. from about 1560), virtually intuitively, presented to various social groups and tested for responses facets of his public personality. Akbar's personal behaviour and traits evolved coterminously with his strategic and administrative policies. The sixteenth-century version of political reporters and analysts: courtiers, nobles at court, agents of nobles and *mansabdārs* sent to the imperial audiences, agents of tributary rajas or of mercantile houses; spies of as yet unconquered regional kingdoms, all carefully watched every perceived and reported action or speech of the Emperor. Close, unremitting public scrutiny (aided by Akbar's inclination towards open accessibility) gave the young Emperor an opportunity to create an image of certain, absolute (but not capricious) power. Gradually, by a series of symbolic actions undertaken during the first two decades of his mature reign, he underscored the fact that no minister, no noble, nor any group could challenge or limit that authority. After 1580, with the entrance of Abul Fazl to the select group of the Emperor's closest advisers, the Emperor's approach shifted towards a more didactic, verbally expressed ideology.

One of Akbar's earliest public expressions of his intended autonomy emerged from his decision not to make Delhi the imperial capital. Instead he embarked upon an extensive programme of urban construction and fortification. For two and a half centuries Delhi had been the unassailable redoubt, the refuge for Indian Muslims and the seat of the Sultans of Hindustan. By moving first from Delhi to Agra, and later to his own capital at Fatehpur Sikri (as shown below) Akbar reduced existing associations of legitimate rulership with Delhi. Neither Akbar nor a possible rebel henceforth could easily claim the imperial throne by virtue of possession of the citadels, the palaces, or the active support of the volatile populace of the old imperial city.

For more than 15 years, Akbar diverted much of his resources towards the building of three massive palace-fortresses: Agra, defending the gateway to central Hindustan; Allahabad (formerly Prayag), commanding the eastern Gangetic valley; and Lahore, capital of the Panjab and a Muslim military base since Ghaznavid times. The Emperor and his builders and architects designed walls and battlements of dressed stone construction running thousands of yards to encircle each city and its palace and citadel (e.g. at Agra the 'enclosure wall ... consists of a solid sandstone rampart just under seventy feet in height

and nearly one and a half miles in circuit').⁴ The elaborate array of palace and official buildings placed within each fortress allowed the Emperor to move freely and comfortably with his household and central administration from one to the other city as political or military considerations demanded direct supervision or command. To complete the new imperial strategic pattern, Akbar designed a smaller, but strongly defended, fort at Ajmer, the northern gateway to Rajasthan. Ajmer fort became the headquarters for the Mughal governor of the directly controlled districts in Rajasthan, and defender of the plain against possible future Rajput revolts. Finally, older fortifications at the extremities of the northern plains were strengthened. Attock and Rohtas forts (built by Sher Shah Sur) on the Indus and Jhelum rivers guarded the north-west trunk route to Lahore, while the identically named Rohtas fort, served as a major stronghold in the eastern Gangetic valley.

Akbar firmly broke with the Delhi-centred political tradition in 1571, when he selected a site for a new imperial capital at Sikri, a village located some 20 miles from Agra. Renamed Fatehpur Sikri, the new capital, despite its characteristic red sandstone battlements, was primarily a courtly city—essentially dependent upon the proximity of Agra for economic and military support. Akbar's meticulous concern (continuing for well over a decade) for site selection, for the spatial arrangement of buildings and streets, for the distinctive shared style of building architecture in red sandstone has long been seen as an aesthetic effort of great appeal and near-genius.⁵ However, the city was also a firm political statement and symbol of the new order. The uniform architecture, and configuration of streets and public buildings designed only for the needs of centralized rule and administration, proclaimed the Emperor's personal and dynastic supremacy. Enclosed within the walls, adjacent to and dependent upon the palace rose the great public mosque of the city, an integral part of the urban plan. So also did the tomb of Shaikh Salim Chishti, a Sufi mystic and recluse who, before his death, had often met and discussed spiritual questions with the Emperor (as noted below). Thus, the new capital contained both a great congregational mosque and the tomb (*dargāh*) of a widely revered, still-

⁴ See Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture (Islamic Period)* (Bombay, 1968 5th edn.), pp. 92–6 for a description of these structures. Unlike Lahore, Agra, or Allahabad, Fatehpur Sikri 'was never intended to be of any strategic value being purely a ceremonial capital', (p. 94).

⁵ cf. S.A.A. Rizvi, 'Mughal Town Planning Fatehpur Sikri: A Case Study', *Abr-Nahrain*, XV, pp. 98–112.

worshipped Sufi saint—the binary institutions of legal and mystic Indian Islam.

Within the city, the single most dramatic symbol of Akbar's autocratic rule extant is the interior design of the arcaded audience chamber (the *Diwān-i Khāss*) intended for more restricted court audiences (as opposed to the *Diwān-i 'Amr*, the Hall of Public Audience). At the precise centre of the two-storey open hall stands a massive pillar and platform carved of red sandstone.⁶ Towards the top of the great column a vertical series of three carved circular brackets (or corbelling) begin radiating outward. The uppermost (and largest) bracket supports the heavy square platform. From this square platform diagonal passageways, guarded by carved railings, reach to the four corners of the hall. Whether, in actuality, Akbar used the so-called 'throne' platform as a throne support or not, or whether, as local legend has it, he sat on his throne beneath the great pillar, is unimportant. The pillar dominates the physical space of the grand audience hall just as Akbar dominated the new political and social space of the empire in the sixteenth century.

Choosing Sikri as a site also underscored the young Emperor's widely noted mystical affinities—a tendency which would later buttress his assertion of spiritual authority. The village of Sikri was the residence of Shaikh Salim, whom Akbar frequently visited, for, as Abul Fazl puts it, there existed 'a bond of union between them'.⁷ Such marked attraction between these two powerful figures must have attracted considerable popular attention. Obviously, Akbar, a young, vigorous and victorious Emperor created a sense of drama in virtually all his actions. Shaikh Salim was renowned as 'one of the greatest Shaikhs of Hind, and a high master of the different stages of the advancement in the knowledge of God'.⁸

⁶E.W. Smith, *The Mogul Architecture of Fatehpur Sikri*, Archaeological Survey of India, *Annual Reports*, XVII and XVIII (4 vols) (1895–96), I., p. 22 and plates. This work contains a description, scaled drawings and plans, and plates for each of the remaining edifices of the city. The frontispiece to vol. I is a much reproduced plan of the city's remains. A more readily accessible colour plate of the throne pillar may be found in Bamber Gascoigne, *The Great Moghuls* (London, 1971), p. 102. A small accompanying inset photograph shows the arrangement of the four diagonal passageways intersecting at the top of the pillar.

⁷'Abd-ul-Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawārikh*, ed. Ahmad Ali et al., 3 vols Calcutta, 1864–69; trans. T.W. Haig et al., reprint, Delhi, 1973–83 I., p. 112 (translation).

⁸Ibid., I., p. 140.

Recognition by the Shaikh implied, at least, the validity of Akbar's mystical concerns. The latter is also inherent in the seeming intensity of Akbar's religious struggle. Two publicly reported mystic episodes took the external appearance of trance-like seizures associated with the hunt. The earliest, in early adulthood, apparently arose from Akbar's unanticipated solitude in the desert. The second, in mid-life occurred in 1578, when the court was engaged in the mass slaughter of all quarry within a ring fence (a *gamargha* hunt prepared by beaters days in advance of the event). Suddenly, the Emperor experienced 'the sublime joy' of the 'attraction (*jazaba*) of the cognition of God', in Abul Fazl's terms or 'a strange state and strong frenzy' in the words of a hostile critic.⁹ Upon recovery, Akbar immediately forbade the killing of those animals surviving. Later he proclaimed that on certain days the slaughter of animals was to be prohibited. He also cut his hair in the style of an ascetic.¹⁰

In the long-prevailing Sufi tradition of pastoral concern, Shaikh Salim also counselled Akbar in regard to the aspiring dynast's most vexing problem: his inability to produce a live male heir from among his wives. Finally, when Shaikh Salim foretold the birth of the long-awaited first prince of the line, the grateful Emperor named his son Salim (later the Emperor Jahangir). After Shaikh Salim died in 1571, Akbar selected Sikri for his new capital, renaming it Fatehpur Sikri, or 'Place of Victory'. To preserve his mentor's memory, the Emperor directed construction of a carved white marble tomb within the courtyard of the great public mosque at Fatehpur. The tomb, located at what had become a busy imperial metropolis, rapidly became a major pilgrimage site (*dargāh*) for worship of Shaikh Salim as a saint.¹¹

By thus emplacing Shaikh Salim's tomb within the walls of the Fatehpur Sikri mosque, Akbar was able to draw upon that perceptible sanctity adhering to it, and to assimilate this to his own authority. Moreover, he did not permit Shaikh Salim's sons to succeed him, nor even to retain control over and management of the newly established *dargāh* and its enormous potential for secular profit and spiritual status. Instead, in another measure of incorporation, Akbar strongly encouraged

⁹Abul Fazl, *Akbar-Nama*, tr. H. Beveridge, 3 vols. reprint (Delhi, 1977) II, pp. 348–56. Badauni, II, p. 261. The earlier incident occurred when Akbar was hunting wild asses in the desert (see Abul Fazl, *Akbar-Nama*, II, p. 522.)

¹⁰Abul Fazl, *Akbar-Nama*, II, p. 356.

¹¹Badauni, I, p. 140. The tomb is one of the finest extant examples of Mughal building.

the sons and grandsons to enlist in his service as *mansabdārs*. Several of these men, attaining high ranks, provided exceptional service for the empire, while continuing to retain an aura of spiritual distinction as descendants of Shaikh Salim.¹² Perhaps the most distinguished member of this group was the general and governor Islam Khan Chishti, architect of the early seventeenth-century Mughal conquests in Bengal, under Jahangir. As governor and conqueror in distant Bengal, Islam Khan began challenging Jahangir's imperial authority by adopting various royal perquisites (e.g. the 'viewing', or *jharoka*, of the governor on a balcony at set times of day by the general populace). In part, Islam Khan felt he could challenge the spiritual aspect of the Emperor's inherited, illuminated authority by citing his own descent from Shaikh Salim.¹³ The latter point implies, at least, that Akbar's own connection with the incorporation of a leading family of the Chishtiyya was of some importance to him, in that he could assimilate and share the mystical qualities of that family.

The Emperor extended his ties with the Chishtiyya to other sections of the order. Since 1562, he had regularly visited the sacred tomb of the founder of the Chishtiyya order, Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer.¹⁴ In 1570, fulfilling the terms of a vow made prior to the birth of his son, Akbar walked the 228-mile distance from Agra to Ajmer to worship at the tomb and to give thanks for his gift. However, when bitter, open quarrels broke out among the supposed descendants of the Khwaja over division of the Emperor's gifts to the shrine, Akbar reacted much as he did with the corrupt official '*ulama*' of his administration: he ordered an investigation. The legitimacy of these descendants proving to be dubious, he expelled them, seized control of the shrine and appointed an imperial *mansabdār* as superintendent. This officer was to utilize the gifts and income of the tomb for proper charitable purposes such as the repair and maintenance of mosques, or other such enterprises.¹⁵ That Akbar's interest in the Chishtiyya originated in genuine religious concerns, his frequent pilgrimages leave little doubt; that he was able to make use of control over two major Chishtiyya

¹²Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, pp. 182–3.

¹³See Jadunath Sarkar (ed.), *History of Bengal, Muslim Period, 1200–1750* (Patna, 1973 reprint edn), p. 282.

¹⁴For one of Akbar's first visits to Ajmer in 1562, see Abul Fazl, *Akbar-Nama*, II, p. 243.

¹⁵Abul Fazl, *Akbar-Nama*, II, pp. 510–11.

shrines and his growing influence over members of the order in an ongoing ideological struggle with the orthodox *'ulama* is also likely.

Certainly, association with the Chishtiyya, one of the most well-regarded Sufi orders of north India, must have added to Akbar's political appeal and his own popular reputation as a mystic. Thus, by 1590, when Abul Fazl began a systematic affirmation of Akbar's claim to universal authority in the *Akbar-Nama*, he included an anecdote which indirectly stated Akbar's superiority over even the most famed Chishtiyya saint. In the narrative for the year 1568, Abul Fazl noted that Akbar had made a vow (similar to that made after Salim's birth) that if he could capture the massive Rajput fortress at Chitor, he would walk the full distance from Chitor to Ajmer in order to worship at the tomb of Khwaja Muinuddin. However, soon after the king and his entourage had started out, along the route came a message from the attendants of the shrine (still at that point the purported descendants of Khwaja Muinuddin), saying:¹⁶

... his holiness the Khwaja had appeared in a vision and announced that the spiritual and temporal king [i.e. Akbar] had ... formed the intention of visiting the shrine of his humble self on foot, and had directed them [his living disciples] to restrain the caravan conductor of truths way from his design by every means in their power. If he knew the amount of his own spirituality he would not bestow a glance on me the sitter-in-the-dust of the path of studentship.

By the 1580s Fatehpur Sikri rapidly added the economic functions of a true city. Court income and expenditures, the flow of taxes and tribute, as well as the type of demand usually associated with a major imperial capital, diverted local regional and inter-regional trade from Agra to the new site. Merchants and contractors dependent upon court-generated trade necessarily responded to the new shift by migrating to Fatehpur. Constant building by the grandees of the empire, as well as lesser officials and merchants began to create the appearance of a more spontaneous, less planned urban space. Residential suburbs appeared outside the enclosure walls. Suddenly, however, the Emperor moved his entire court and administration to the palace-fortress at Lahore, presumably to better supervise operations against the Yusufzai, a rebellious Pathan tribe in the Hindu Kush. Not to be reoccupied thereafter, Fatehpur Sikri was gradually deserted leaving its shell in a Pompeii-like effect virtually intact.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 476-7.

Whether the threat from the Afghans merited this sudden response on Akbar's part, or whether he moved for a mixture of motives is difficult to determine. It may be that what was becoming a most rigid, set daily court ceremonial, (clearly necessary for the continuing socialization and disciplining of the new nobility being formed), carried out in essentially an artificial urban setting, bore the danger of isolating and eventually incapacitating the Emperor. The Indo-Persian court rituals from which Mughal practices were largely derived, were primarily an elaborate metaphor for overwhelming authority and political stability. But, as such, these reassuring images of unchanging order could confine, circumscribe and, in extreme cases, destroy the ruler.

Any contradictions between a more passive, immobile ceremonial role for the Emperor, and a more aggressive, active role undoubtedly intensified with the enhanced wealth and size of steady territorial growth. Akbar's characteristically innovative solution to this tension was to revert to the ambulatory court camp capital of his Turko-Mongol ancestry. Although every Chaghtai, Timurid ruler and noble was at ease living and moving with tents, the true precedent or model for the Mughal imperial camp must be traced back to the practices of Timur and even earlier to the army encampments of the Mongols.¹⁷ Akbar revived and expanded upon this tradition by devising a mobile capital containing all the necessary parts of the central administration: his household; his official audience and consultation halls, the imperial archives, and chancery; the treasury and mint; the horse stud and elephant stables; field and siege artillery; armouries and powder magazines; court attendants, and bodyguards; kitchens and bazaars; and the larger portion of the central army. Each of the accompanying noble encampments replicated these arrangements on a smaller scale. The gigantic size and precise organization of the imperial camp capital was a source of amazement and a staple description for those foreign travellers or visitors reporting back to their European or Middle Eastern homelands.

Akbar's camp, after his departure from Fatehpur Sikri in 1585, became a mobile version of that capital. Instead of dressed stone, the camp contained structures of canvas tenting, timber, supports, rope, thousands of yards of cloth passageways, and rich carpeting and hangings. Moreover, each tent and structural component was duplicated so that a second camp could be sent on ahead for assembly and erection

¹⁷ Ruy González de Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy to the Court of Timour*, trans. and ed. C.R. Markham, Hakluyt Society, no. 26 (London, 1856), pp. 140–63, *passim*.

in preparation for occupancy at the end of the day's march. Clearly, this giant organism was far different in its conception and use than the fast-moving military column which Father Monserrate accompanied on Akbar's march toward Kabul in 1579.¹⁸ In the slower-moving court-camp the Emperor placed his residence pavilion, unvaryingly at the centre of the east end of a rectangle running along an east-west axis some 1500 yards in length. Akbar occupied a two-storeyed red-dyed canvas structure, the highest in the camp. The residence area was surrounded by a cloth-walled, screened enclosure, 150 yards square. Inside this royal space the Emperor had reception facilities for private consultations with his seniormost officers, ambassadors or other dignitaries. All of the Emperor's tents were dyed scarlet, the Timurid and, previously, the Sasanian royal colours.¹⁹ The next westward segment of the formal encampment was allotted to enclosed and closely guarded harem tents. The third section towards the west provided space for a gigantic audience tent and its elevated throne. When closed, the audience tent was the *Diwān-i Khāss* or 'select' audience hall, when opened, it extended to an uncovered roped area to accommodate the largest public audiences (i.e. the *Diwān-i 'Amm*).²⁰ Finally, at the western border of the enclosure, the various official administrative tents housing the treasury, etc. were placed.

Tents for the princes and most distinguished nobles were pitched at allotted distances within the royal enclosure respectively on the right and left sides of the Emperor's quarters. Other nobles erected their residence structures and cover for their entourages in sites determined by their rank, and current favour at court, surrounding and facing the

¹⁸ On the march to Kabul, the Mughal grand army was scarcely encumbered by the paraphernalia of the courtly camp. As Father Monserrate commented: 'He [Akbar] carried those black standards, the sign of war to the death, which Timur the Lame—ancestor of the Mongol kings—had been wont to employ in his wars.' Monserrate, *Commentary*, p. 73.

¹⁹ Clavijo, *Narrative*, p. 145. cf. G. Widengren, 'The Sacral Kingship of Iran', International Congress for the History of Religions, *La Regalita Sacra* (Leiden, 1959), p. 254. 'The king's proper dress was red, thus associating him with the class of warriors, for red was the colour of this class in Indo-European society ...'.

²⁰ See Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, Blochmann trans., I, p. 47 ff. for a description and drawings of the layout of the encampment. M.A. Ansari, in *Social Life of the Mughal Emperors (1526–1707)*, has compiled from the *Ain-i Akbari* and other sources a more detailed and comprehensive plan and description, Ansari, pp. 201–2.

royal enclosed rectangle. On the outer perimeter of the court-camp were various bodies of troops, bodyguards, as well as the artillery park. A neatly ordered bazaar and residence area for merchants, etc. met the supply needs of the camp.

In function, but in appearance as well, the imperial encampment bore a striking resemblance to Fatehpur Sikri. Noticeable similarities exist between the unchanging plan of the mobile capital and the urban space of the stationary capital. If Abul Fazl's drawings are to be trusted, even the external design of the tents of the camp and the surviving buildings of Fatehpur Sikri contain similar features. For example, in cross-section the south facade of the imperial palace at Fatahpur (the *Mahal-i Khāss*) looks very much like the east wall of the canvas two-storeyed structure used for the Emperor's private quarters (the *Gulāl-bār*). Similar comparisons can be made, structure by structure. The design of the arcades of the tents virtually duplicates the earlier design of the buildings.²¹

Numismatic evidence also suggests identification of the imperial camp with the capital of the empire. After Akbar's departure from Fatehpur Sikri, the encampment seems to have become the true seat of legitimate imperial authority—regardless of its location or whether the Emperor was actually journeying. According to P.L. Gupta's arguments, the camp-mint became the leading centre of coinage for the empire. Rather than being struck with the name of a town or city, gold and silver coins bore legends such as 'struck at the camping ground of good fortune' (*Zorb Mu'askari-i Iqbāl*). By the year 1000 AH (the Muslim millennium from the Hijra Muhammad, i.e. 1591–92) gold and silver issues from Akbar's camp carried the legend *Dār-ul Khilāfat* or the 'seat of the caliphate', in other words the capital of the Caliph of the Age, Akbar. More humble copper issues from the camp-mint carried only the name of the often-obscure town adjacent to the camp when the coins were struck. These names, however, can be correlated with the known movements of Akbar during the latter years of his reign.²²

²¹Cf. the illustration in the Blochmann edn of the *Ain-i Akbari*, plate iv, p. 50 with Smith, *Mogul Architecture*, I, plate II.

²²P.L. Gupta, 'The Mint-Towns of Akbar', in H.R. Gupta, *Essays Presented to Sir Jadunath Sarkar*, 2 vols (Hoshiarpur, 1958), I, pp. 154–69. See also L.N. Kurkuranov, 'The "Urdu" Issues of Emperor Akbar', *Museum Notes*, American Numismatic Society, xv (1969), pp. 137–40. Gupta's analysis draws upon the observations of S.H. Hodivala, 'Abul Fazl's Inventory of Akbar's Mints', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, new series, XVI (1922), pp. 165–90.

To summarize, first Akbar designed and built Fatehpur Sikri as a completely new capital devoid of any of the political associations of Delhi, Lahore or any of the other long-occupied Muslim cities. His own creation, Fatehpur Sikri, was thus completely identified with Akbar's policies and personal authority. Later, concerns for defence and perhaps as we have suggested, rejection of possible ceremonial immobilization, led to the abandonment of Fatehpur. Thereafter, the imperial camp rather than a specific city, became Akbar's capital, titled the seat of the *Khilāfa*. For the Indo-Muslim rulers of Hindustan prior to Akbar, including his father and grandfather, possession and political domination of Delhi was of supreme importance. Similarly in the earlier Central Asian tradition of the Timurids, possession of Samarkand, coronation, and political support from the populace was a matter of continuing concern. Akbar reversed this fixed concern, fusing, instead, all authority within himself and ultimately within the dynasty which succeeded him.

DYNASTIC IDEOLOGY

Towards the end of Akbar's third regnal decade, the Emperor had identified and attracted to him a significant addition to that small coterie of his closest advisers. Abul Fazl and his brother, the poet Faizi, were as capable, versatile, and imaginative as earlier entrants to this select cluster of Akbar's 'companions'. However, unlike men such as Todar Mal, primarily a superb administrator, Abul Fazl's breadth of vision, powers of political analysis, and trained understanding of philosophy, mysticism, and the other disciplines of Islam, made him an outstanding ideologue and propagandist for Akbar. That Abul Fazl and Akbar were attracted to each other despite the difference in status and years is manifest.

From the time of his appearance at court, Abul Fazl began erecting an intellectual scaffolding upon which to build a Timurid dynastic ideology—an edifice firmly establishing a new legitimacy for Akbar and his descendants. If done well, such an ideology would pre-empt the challenges certain to re-emerge from the fissiparous claims of the Mirzas (Akbar's collateral Timurid princes) or from new coalitions of disgruntled orthodox '*ulama*' and imperial grandees. Abul Fazl achieved this end by asserting the divinely illumined right of the Emperor to rule mortals with lesser qualities. The actual development of the new imperial doctrine was the result, however, of a brilliant partnership, in which Akbar's own intuitive sense of political need, his desire for broad

political support (the most useful context in which the adjective 'tolerant' can be applied to the Emperor) and what seems to have been a mystical sense of his own mission, found a direct response in the mind of Abul Fazl. The latter, with a few collaborators, began to express the dynastic formula in a number of modes: discussions at court, eulogistic poetry, and a continuing and wide-ranging official and private correspondence.²³ Abul Fazl's most systematic exposition of the new ideology is set out in the best-known Mughal history, the voluminous *Akbar-Nama*, an annual recounting of the events for 47 regnal years along with its equally bulky appendix: the three volumes of the *Ain-i Akbari*, an imperial manual and gazetteer. After years of effort, Abul Fazl presented the magnificently bound and calligraphed first volume of the finished manuscript to Akbar at a court audience in 1595. To further aid the intended effect of the work, several hundred miniature paintings, found on virtually every page, illustrate the most dramatic events described in the work.²⁴

Outwardly, the *Akbar-Nama* is merely another example in an extensive genre of Indo-Islamic court eulogies, perhaps more ambitious than most, but little more. A more careful reading reveals that the *Akbar-Nama* is also unquestionably a product of serious, historical scholarship. Abul Fazl based his detailed narrative upon official records, no longer extant, and upon interviews with eyewitnesses and participants in events. At the core of the work, however, permeating nearly every passage, is an ideology of authority and legitimacy. The aim of Abul Fazl's panegyric is to demonstrate either openly or subtly with every possible rhetorical device, his master's superiority to ordinary men. That is, Akbar's claim to rule over all men rested on an ultimate legitimacy far surpassing the accidents of conquest, coup or secession. Even the solemn recognition of authority in the recurring

²³ cf. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, pp. 300–22 for discussion of Abul Fazl's extant letter books.

²⁴ The *Akbar-Nama* paintings from this earliest manuscript are in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Other manuscript versions of the history, apparently widely circulated in the royal and noble circles of Mughal India, were also similarly illustrated by imperial artists. Gavin Hambly, in *Cities of Mughal India: Delhi, Agra and Fatehpur Sikri* (New York, 1968), p. 24 has included a large colour reproduction of a painting by Govardhan, 1602–5, depicting Abul Fazl presenting the second volume of the *Akbar-Nama* to Akbar in a court scene. The latter is part of an *Akbar-Nama* manuscript in the possession of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.

prayers of the Indo-Muslim community (i.e. the *Khutba*) was weakened by the intercession of fallible human agency.

In direct contrast to the fallible nature of the ordinary Indo-Muslim Sultan, Akbar was a superior being, existing ontologically closer to God, to true reality. This assertion was confirmed by the hidden light passed to its final recipient through a chain of ancestors (see below). Moreover, the ineffable radiance emanating from the brow of Akbar was perceptible only to superior men—men whose spiritual capacities were highly developed, and who could recognize the signs of true authority. For adepts, or for those men willing to be properly instructed, the veil guarding the outpouring of light from Akbar was removed, and his true nature revealed. He had esoteric knowledge and authority greater than the recognized interpreters of the Sharia, (i.e. the *Mujtahid* of the age), than the most saintly of Sufi masters (*Pir*) or the most renowned of the charismatic saviours (*mahdi*).²⁵

Such an assertion was not a rhetorical device in the accepted conventional description of the Indo-Muslim Sultan as the 'Shadow of God'. Faizi, in one of his eulogistic quatrains (*rubā'iyyat*) says:²⁶

He [Akbar] is a king whom on account of his wisdom, we call *zūf unūn* [possessor of the sciences] and our guide on the path of religion.. Although kings are the shadow of God on earth, he is the emanation of God's light. How then can we call him a shadow?

²⁵ Akbar's assertion of the right of final judgement between the various interpretations and interpretations of the sacred law resulted from his long struggle with the conservative 'ulama holding state positions in the 1560s. The final resolution of this appeared in the much discussed 'testimony' (*mahzar*) of 1579. This document, signed under duress by the chief Qazi and the Sadr of the Empire, stated 'that the rank of a just Sultan is higher in the eyes of God than of a mujtahid'. The most comprehensive discussion of this conflict is that of Rizvi in *Religious and Intellectual History*, pp. 141–75. For Akbar's incorporation of the most prominent Chishti family and shrine under his authority see below. For the attitude of Akbar toward Bayazid Ansari (d. 1572) who claimed to be a *hadi* or 'guide' possessing a divine call to lead his followers in the path of the Prophet Muhammad, see also S.A.A. Rizvi, 'Rawshaniyya Movement', *Abr-Nahrain*, VI (1965) pp. 62–91; VII (1967–8), pp. 62–98. Instead of using the name Rawshaniyya or 'Followers of Light' for this predominantly Afghan movement, Abul Fazl employed the term *Tarikian* or 'Followers of Darkness'. A Mughal armed contingent eventually hunted down and killed Bayazid in the Hindu Kush.

²⁶ Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, I, p. 631.

Thus, Akbar possessed resplendent power which was the gift of 'the world-adorning Creator'.²⁷ He obtained this power and its accompanying piercing quality of vision in a process both miraculous and intricate.

The masterfully composed miniature paintings found within the pages of the Victoria and Albert manuscript (one of the first *Akbar-Nama* manuscripts if not the original), in addition to their aesthetic appeal, served to enhance the central theme of the narrative. The great artists directing each painting carefully planned the compositions to depict each of the major incidents and affairs of the history, usually on facing pages of the manuscript. In a seldom appreciated aspect of their genius, the Emperor's artists, image after image, conveyed Abul Fazl's view of Akbar: 'absolute light which would carry ... conviction as an image of absolute power'.²⁸ More than 50 paintings survive, directly portraying the Emperor. In these, the artists contrast the divine order, self-control and harmony of the Emperor as illumined person, with the turgid, struggling disorder of those unwieldy masses of men and mankind seen in the remainder of the painting.

To achieve this ideological end (transmuted to an aesthetic focus for the series), the Emperor's master painters avoided obvious techniques such as differential scaling for the Emperor's figure, elaborate identifying dress, symbols of authority or even, in many instances, rendition of Akbar's figure as the central compositional focus of the painting. Frequently, on first viewing, he appears as a still, nearly unnoticed figure, who, after a few moments of study, becomes truly dominant. Although dressed very simply in colours contrasting with the apparel of those near him, Akbar always bears characteristic, recognizable features. Other men may be identifiable by careful portraiture in one painting, but in another remain anonymous. The Emperor consistently is iconically supreme. In each composition, intersecting curves, rhythms, stresses and lines lead the viewer's eye to a figure which is the source

²⁷ Abul Fazl, *Akbar-Nama*, II, p. 501.

²⁸ Debra Brown Levine, 'The Victoria and Albert Museum *Akbar-Nama*: A Study in History, Myth and Image', 2 vols. Ph.D. dissertation (University of Michigan, 1974), I, p. 47. The artists of the Mughal atelier had progressed in the course of nearly 30 years from the single plane conventions of the perfected Persian miniature style to the use of new European techniques of 'deep space'. The latter combined receding horizon lines, visual curves, and diminished figure size. Experimentation with these new devices clearly enabled the painters to avoid more obvious visual clichés such as actually attempting to show divine light coming from the Emperor's brow.

of intense potential energy—a calmly controlled energy which engenders harmony in the confusing mass of human action. By means of such subtle techniques the court painters presented to the cognizant reader of the *Akbar-Nama* the radiant, infallible, powers of their master and patron. The Emperor's synergistic capacity calmed and directed the energies of his servants, his subjects, and ultimately of all mankind.

Abul Fazl explicitly states the core of his ideology in the introductory *Akbar-Nama* passages describing Akbar's ancestry and descent.²⁹ Beginning with Adam, the ancestor of all men, Abul Fazl in 52 human generations traces the passage of the hidden Divine resplendence until it reaches and illuminates the spirit and intelligence of Akbar, its intended recipient. Akbar's 'heaven descended forefathers' from the seven planets all came to earth as 'kings, kings of kings, kingdom bestowers and king makers [who] governed the world by God-given wisdom and true insight'. Adam, born 7000 years ago, was the first ancestor (as, of course, he is for all men).³⁰ Thereafter, Abul Fazl briefly lists five biblical prophets before reaching Ikhnush³¹ or Enoch, who, among his other accomplishments 'guided men to the reference of the Great Light [the sun]'.³² The continuing line of male descent leads through Joseph to his son Turk, ruler of Turkestan, thus shifting from biblical prophets (common to Islam and Christianity) to the first Turko-Mongal figure.³³

Mughal Khan, the son of a Turk, is the first eponymous ruler in an unidentified series of nine Mughal (or Mongol) kings. The last, or ninth generation of the dynasty, is defeated, massacred and dispersed by an enemy. The survivors retire in confusion to a mountain valley, Mughalistan, hidden far to the east.³⁴ After 2000 years in seclusion, a most important natal event occurs. Alanqua (Alan-qo-a) a Mughal

²⁹To substantiate these points Levine analyses a number of well-known paintings. See, for example an incident at the siege of Chitor, the great Rajput fortress in the painting. 'Akbar Uses Sangram to Shoot Jaimal at the Siege of Chitor', Levine, 1, pp. 63–4.

³⁰Abul Fazl, *Akbar-Nama*, 1, p. 143.

³¹At this juncture, Abul Fazl engages in a lengthy digression in which he explains the Hindu and Jain views on the age of the universe. These essentially cyclical cosmologies suggest that countless Adams may well have begun each of innumerable ages of man. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

³²Ikhnush is also Hermes, a key figure in the philosophy of Suhrawardi Maqtul (see below).

³³*Ibid.*, p. 168.

³⁴According to Blochmann, this withdrawal to Mughalistan derives directly from the Mongol traditions. *Ibid.*, p. 175n.

princess, married to Zubun Biyan, king of Mughalistan, becomes a childless widow when her royal husband dies prematurely. But Alanquwa is a woman of the utmost purity from whose forehead shone the 'lights of theosophy' (*anwar Khudā shināsī*) and the 'divine secrets' (*asrār-i-hāfi*). As the princess lay sleeping in her tent one night, a ray of light miraculously entered her body and impregnated her.³⁵

The progeny born from this conception were triplets, three brothers, who collectively were called 'nairun' or 'light-produced'. Abul Fazl describes the introduction of the divine illumination into the body of Alanquwa, and its transmission to her sons as the 'first manifestation' (*aghāz zahūr*) of the divine origin of Akbar. From the eldest of the three brothers, who possessed the illumination of his mother to the greatest degree, the hidden light passed through generation after generation until the *Shāhinshāh* of mankind, Akbar, was born in 1542.³⁶

Following short notices of nine Turko-Mongol rulers, members of the chain of descent, Abul Fazl arrives at Chingiz Khan (Temuchin), who, somewhat surprisingly, he does not glorify. In an apologetic passage he concedes the prevailing Islamic view of Chingiz Khan as a destructive monster. But the myopia of most men means that 'everything which comes into existence in the world of evil [its] real nature the superficial cannot perceive'.³⁷ That is, one of Chingiz Khan's well-hidden virtues is that he bore the veiled light for his descendant who would benefit men as much as his distant ancestor had harmed them.

Rapidly descending the generations from the early thirteenth and the late fourteenth centuries, Abul Fazl begins his most extended discussion to that point. Amir Timur Gurgan of Samarkand the 'Lord of Conjunctions of the Planets' (*Sāhib Qirān*) was, of course, the conqueror of those Central Asian lands in Balkh, Badakhshan and Ferghana inherited by his politically fragmented fifteenth-century descendants. Moreover, Timur's exploits, his control of Samarkand, his methods of rule afforded a source of legitimacy for all subsequent Timurid princes as well as a model of conquest and rule on the greatest possible scale. Timur was 'a hero fit for and capable of a great sovereignty' (*wālā'iq*

³⁵Ibid., p. 179; Abul Fazl, *Akbar-Nama*, 3 vols (Lucknow edn.), I, pp. 51–2. I have used this edition of the *Akbar-Nama* text to verify key passages and phrases from the translation because the *Bibliotheca Indica* edition was not accessible at the time of writing.

³⁶*Akbar-Nama*, (trans.), I, p. 180; (text) I, p. 52.

³⁷Ibid. trans., I, p. 196.

*Saltanat).*³⁸ Always, 'the lights of celestial victories illuminated that world conqueror', whose feats of both destruction and reconstruction in Central Asia forecast those of his sixteenth-century descendant in Hindustan and the vast, heavily populated regions of the subcontinent.³⁹

Thus, formal legitimacy for the Timurids began when, in April 1370 Amir Timur, firmly seated on a throne in Samarkand, placed on his own head the 'crown of world conquest'.⁴⁰ More than three decades later, at considerable expense and effort, he ensured complete recognition as a true Muslim king: 'In the pulpits of Mecca, Medina and other holy places, the *khutba* was read in his name'.⁴¹ Babur, in a practice followed by his son, grandson, and all subsequent Timurid rulers, began his dynastic genealogy with Amir Timur (or *Sāhib Qirān*, the posthumous title). The magnificently calligraphed, etched iron seals and ceremonial gold coins of the dynasty invariably bear this official statement of dynastic authority.⁴² Surviving manuscripts of histories of Timur, profusely illustrated, also demonstrate that these were not merely formulaic expressions, but represented a deep and continuing interest in Timur (and one suspects in measurement against his achievements) on the part of emperors such as Shah Jahan (1627–58), reigning at the apogee of the empire.⁴³

³⁸Ibid., (trans.), I, p. 204; (text), I, p. 61.

³⁹Ibid., (trans.), I, p. 210, (text), I, p. 62. 'wa anwār fatāhāt āsmāni bar ruzgār ān jahāngīr 'ālam-peraya'.

⁴⁰Ibid., (trans.) I, p. 208; (text), I, p. 61. 'ikhlīl-i-kishwār-kishā'i'.

⁴¹Ibid., (trans.) I, p. 212; (text), I, p. 62. The term used for monarchy is *farmānrawā'i*.

⁴²For a seal of Babur see Momin Mohiuddin, *The Chancellery and Persian Epistolography Under the Mughals* (Calcutta, 1971), p. 77. For a more elaborately decorated seal of Akbar, bearing the *tughra*, see the picture, text and translation in B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal, *The Mughals and the Jogs of Jakhbar* (Simla, 1967), pp. 57–61. (The *tughra* was a square, etched, vermilion rendition of the Emperor's titles placed beside the official seal at the head of all formal descripts.)

⁴³See Khan Sahib Abdul Muqtadir, 'Note on a Unique History of Timur and his Descendants in Iran and India ...', *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* III, 175–263. The handsomely calligraphed and illustrated '*Tārikh-i-khāndān-i-Tumuriyah*' was compiled by an unidentified author in Akbar's reign. It bears an autograph note of Shah Jahan describing its contents as 'the history containing an account of the circumstances of Hazrat Sahib Qiran, the "world seizer" and his descendants' (p. 268).

Concluding his account of Timur, Abul Fazl pursues the lineage from Miranshah, son of Timur, to Sultan Muhammad Mirza (of the second generation), to his son Sultan Abu Said Mirza (1427–64), ruler of Samarkand and most of Transoxania (of the third), to ‘Umar Shaikh Mirza (1456–94), one of 11 sons of Abu Said Mirza (of the fourth generation). Until his accidental death, ‘Umar Shaikh Mirza ruled the valley of Ferghana from the city of Andijan, revived and repopulated under Timurid rule. By this time, the Turko-Mongol appanage system ensured that the Timurid ancestral territories were free of centralized control. Three of ‘Umar Shaikh Mirza’s siblings also ruled as kings: one at Kabul, one at Samarkand, and one at Kunduz. This generation of Timur’s descendants was continuously engaged in a swirling struggle for dominance and for survival against the challenges of other siblings of the Chaghtai line anxious to rule. The forceful intrusion of the Uzbeks from the steppe, added another confusing dimension to the political milieu.

However, when Babur assumed the deceased ‘Umar Shaikh Mirza’s responsibilities at Andijan (supported by various adult advisers), the divine illumination flared out again for the first time since the exploits of Amir Timur. Abul Fazl compares Babur’s seizure of Delhi and retention of the city against desperate Rajput and Afghan resistance with the feats of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, Sultan Muhammad of Ghur, and Amir Timur, all of whom commanded gigantic armies. That Babur could emulate their example by taking and holding the heart of Hindustan with only 13,000 followers was proof of ‘divine aid’. Therefore, Babur was the ‘carrier of the world-illuminating light’ (*hāmil nūr jahān āfrūz*), which would reach its full glory in only two generations.⁴⁴

As one might expect after the long narrative of descent, Abul Fazl, in his account of the life and reign of Humayūn, minimizes the latter’s apparent incompetence and defeats, to stress the imminent appearance of Humayun’s son, Akbar. Prior to his flight and wandering exile, Humayun’s ‘shining forehead’ lit the world with the power of the divine light which, originating ‘in the time of the ocean pearl-shell Alānqūā’, had traversed the centuries and generations hidden ‘under the veils of women in travail’.⁴⁵ At the foreordained nativity of Akbar, the divine illumination would shine forth in its full glory (but only for those capable of proper perception). Humayun’s political failures were simply calamities assigned by God to ‘quicken the attention of the

⁴⁴ Abul Fazl, *Akbar-Nama*, I (trans.) I, pp. 243–5; (text) I, p. 76.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* (trans.) I, p. 287.

"noble-minded", or to alert them that showing forth of the final cause of that light to wit, the holy incarnation of his majesty, the king of kings was at hand'.⁴⁶

Humayun, defeated and despairing in 1540, found reassurance in a majestic night vision. God sent him an illuminated message that 'an illustrious successor whose greatness shone from his forelock' would be bestowed upon the exiled ruler—a successor whose greatness would more than rectify his father's losses.⁴⁷ The nativity of Akbar was further presaged by a mysterious light which entered the bosom of Akbar's putative nurse.⁴⁸ God's all-powerful, omniscient will had determined that the moment was at hand for bringing forth the receptacle for that hidden light so long in its passage through the ages.⁴⁹

Hyperbolic and excessive as the above treatment of Akbar's ancestry may seem, it was not entirely a concoction of Abul Fazl's inventive mind. If the doctrine were to have any widespread recognition and response it necessarily needed to possess and retain an easily recognizable affiliation with already existing religio-political traditions. Thus, Abul Fazl fused two well-known doctrines: the ancient origin myth of the Mongols and the illuminationist theosophy of Suhrawardi Maqtul, the Persian mystic and philosopher.

The probable source for Abul Fazl for the traditional Mongol genealogical motif is one of the Mongol histories widely available in the sixteenth century. Mirza Haidar, who compiled a history of his Mongol ancestors 40 years before the writing of the *Akbar-Nāma*, in the mid-sixteenth century, states: 'All histories [i.e. of the Mongols] trace the genealogy of ... Alankua Kurkluk, back to Japhet, son of Noah (upon them be peace) and detailed accounts of all her ancestors are given in these histories'.⁵⁰ All the Mongol chronicles available to Mirza Haidar included variants on the story of the conception by means of a divine light of Alankua Kurkluk (which means an immaculate woman) and the subsequent birth of her son Burunjar Khan. However, Mirza Haidar minimizes this clearly pagan, pre-Muslim motif, and begins his full narrative only after the acceptance of Islam by the Mongols in Transoxania. He comments that 'the object of this book [the *Tārikh-i*

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 353.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 42.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 44–5.

⁴⁹Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat, *Tārikh-i Rashidī*, trans. N. Elias and E.D. Ross, *A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia* (London, 1895), p. 5.

⁵⁰Ibid.

Rashidi] is not to tell tales such as these, but simply to point out that Burunjar Khan was born of his mother without a father'.⁵¹ That Mirza Haidar thought it necessary to include any mention of the myth suggests its earlier importance and possible appeal to Mongol pride even in the sixteenth century. Collective oral (and written) memories of vast conquests over a humbled Muslim world three centuries before could not have faded so easily.⁵²

Abul Fazl leaves no doubt as to the source of the illuminationist theme systematically interwoven with the Mongol myth of descent. In the course of his description of the five biblical prophets down to Ikhnush or Hermes, Abul Fazl states that he has been following the commentary of 'the very learned Shahrazūri'.⁵³ The 'Tārikh-i-Hukama' by Shamsuddin Muhammad Shahrazuri (d. 1243 AD) is a collective Arabic biography of pre-Muslim and Muslim philosophers and sages. Included among these is the life of Shihabuddin Suhrawardi Maqtul (d. 1191 AD) the spiritual and intellectual master of Shahrazuri, and founder of the 'Eastern' or 'Ishraki school of Persian philosophy. For his adaptation of the Mongol genealogy, and portrayal of Akbar's antecedents Abul Fazl freely utilized many aspects of Suhrawardi's complex system.

The central vision of the 'Ishraki school (that is, Suhrawardi and those who followed his teachings) 'regards Beings and Knowledge as irradiations of the Pure Light which rises in the East'. In other words, Suhrawardi's 'East' is not merely the eastern philosophy of Neoplatonism, but the east of the origin of light and the metaphorical 'East of Thought'. 'Ishrak (the east), as a symbol of light, 'is not

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Abul Fazl, *Akbar-Nama*, I, p. 157. In 1101 AH (1602–3) Prince Salim, later the Emperor Jahangir, commissioned the paraphrased translation from Arabic into Persian of Shahrazuri's work (titled in Arabic *Raudatu'l Afsah wa Nuzhatu'l Arwah*). This was completed in 1610 during Jahangir's reign by Maq ud'Ali Tabrizi. See Muhammad Ashraf, *A Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Salar Jang Museum and Library*, 3 vols (Hyderabad, 1965–6), II, p. 238, Catalogue no. 595. Hermann Ethé, in the *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the India Office Library*, lists another copy of the same manuscript, but ascribes the original to Shamsuddin Muhammad Suhrawardi instead of Shahrazuri, no. 614, p. 249. For the transmission of 'Ishraki ideas to India in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries see Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, pp. 40–2, and for direct influence of 'Ishraki thought upon Abul Fazl see ibid., pp. 339–73.

⁵³ R. Arnaldez, "'Ishrākī' and 'Ishrākiyyūn'" *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn.

reduced to the general notion of illumination which confers upon the spirit a truth inaccessible to the abstract concepts of reason; it is more fundamentally, a delight in the source of all light, whence proceed all beings and all authentic knowledge.⁵⁴ All life, all 'reality' in the world, according to Suhrawardi, is light given existence by the constant blinding illumination of the Light of Lights (*nūr-al anwār*), or God. The degree of luminosity each being or object possesses is a measure of its ontological reality and also an expression of its self-awareness.

God's light reaches earth and mankind through the intervention of a hierarchic chain of dazzling angels. In this descending vertical or longitudinal order of angels, the supreme archangel receives the 'divine irradiation' of God, veils its intensity and transmits the remainder of the light to the next subordinate angel until the chain is ended at the fixed stars in the heavens. This, the feminine order of angels, is a vertical chain of love and acceptance by means of which light and life reach earth. The horizontal, latitudinal order of angels, existing beside one another, is the 'masculine' order of domination. These platonic archetypes preside over a still lower order of angels who govern the human soul. The dominant force within this lower order of 'lordly lights' is the guardian angel for mankind, the Angel Gabriel (identified with the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad), the revealer to man of true knowledge of God.

Each individual human soul possesses a core of light imprisoned within the body. This luminous core or 'divine spark' is divided or separated from an angelic light still remaining in the heavens (the soul's guardian angel) in order to enter the body. Thus man's soul longs to be reunited with its angelic counterpart. Of three groups of men, the lowest have lives shaded by ignorance and wickedness; the second have attained some measure of goodness, or enlightenment; and the third consisting of the saints have already become aware of their own illumination and that of God. They are the true theosophists and masters of the age. Masters like Plato or Suhrawardi himself understood both illumination and the limits of rational discursive thought. For Suhrawardi, the origins of this wisdom of the east, i.e. of the firmament of the stars in his geographical symbolism, was first revealed to man by the prophet Hermes. The latter's teachings followed two chains of transmission,

⁵⁴ The following synopsis is drawn from Seyyid Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), pp. 52–82.

one through Persia and the second through Greece. Suhrawardi felt that he recombined the two modes of thought.⁵⁵

Although the above is only a summary of Suhrawardi's 'Ishraqi philosophy, we can readily discern its influence upon Abul Fazl. His emphasis upon Hermes in describing the earliest of the biblical prophets is apparent. So also is his adaptation of the concept of a chain of transmitters possessing a divine luminosity so intense that it must be veiled to prevent harm. The direct generation of human life by a star, a feminine angelic form, and the subsequent transmittal of this inner light to Akbar clearly gave him the enhanced awareness of Suhrawardi's 'Master of the Age'. Simultaneously, however, conception induced in the Mongol princess by light from a star enabled Abul Fazl to utilize the basic male-female opposition in Suhrawardi's angelology.

The vertical 'longitudinal' chain of generative, loving, stars and the horizontal, 'latitudinal' array of protecting, commanding guardian angels has its counterpart or parallel in the extended *Akbar-Nama* portrayal of Akbar's character. With alternating love and sternness, he extends his esoteric knowledge (the 'light from his brow') to all his subjects. In the well-known doctrine of *sulh-i kul* 'peace for all', appearing later in the *Akbar-Nama* we find a shorthand expression of Akbar's nurturing and punishing roles. Rather than simply 'toleration' of the Hindu or non-Muslim subjects of the empire, Abul Fazl was subtly clearing the way for a broader ideology of imperial concern which would abate the grim tensions between rulers and ruled seen in earlier Indo-Muslim regimes.⁵⁶

IMPERIAL DISCIPLESHP

The ideological formula of the *Akbar-Nama* (as distinct from the narrative text) drew together, and made more coherent, Akbar's eclectic, publicly displayed religious practices—the apparent resolution of an incessant, at times tortured spiritual quest. In so doing Abul Fazl

⁵⁵ Nasr provides a summary of the two parallel chains of transmission (p. 62). 'The Master of *Ishraq* therefore considered himself as the focal point at which the two traditions of wisdom that had at one time issued forth from the same source were once again unified. He thereby sought to synthesize the wisdom of Zoroaster and Plato.'

⁵⁶ For a discussion of the earlier conception of proper relationships between rulers and ruled, see C.E. Bosworth's description of the Islamic 'power-state' in *The Ghaznavids* (Edinburgh, 1963).

succeeded in integrating into a comprehensive symbolic framework the illumined dynastic legitimization of the Timurids with Akbar's predilection for worship of the sun. This made a broad appeal to the imperial official élite, to the landed regional aristocracies (i.e. the *zamindārs*) and to varied groups of other local notables in the empire.⁵⁷ If viewed in this way, the hoary scholarly controversy over the nature and purpose of Akbar's so-called 'Divine Faith' has been misdirected. Since the early nineteenth century, generations of historians in sorting out the various rituals and beliefs of Akbar, have tried to determine influences and filiation—whether Zoroastrian, Sufi, Nath Yogia, or Brahminical practices and beliefs. A general tendency has been to treat the 'Divine Faith' as a bizarre concoction of Akbar's fertile intellect.⁵⁸

By 1583, Akbar had apparently rejected public prayer and other formal aspects of orthodox ritual Islam in what seems to have been a steady process of religious questioning. In place of Muslim prayer, Akbar began to worship the sun publicly four times a day with prostrations, facing east before a sacrificial fire and accompanying rituals of his own invention. The latter, according to Badauni, included, among others, recitations of 1001 synonymous Sanskrit names for the sun at the noontime ceremony.⁵⁹ His continuing interviews with famed holy men of all sects and the religious debates carried on at Fatehpur Sikri were obviously part of this effort. In addition, various forms of abstinence (exceptional for an Indo-Muslim ruler) marked his behaviour. Akbar avoided excessive meat eating, sexual intercourse, and alcoholic consumption.⁶⁰ Possibly persuaded by the Hindu doctrines of metempsychosis, Abkar had the crown of his head (the tenth opening of his body) tonsured to allow his soul to escape freely at the moment of death.⁶¹

⁵⁷ To what extent Abul Fazl's origin myth for the Timurid dynasty retained any appeal for Akbar's successors is uncertain. A privately compiled, unofficial history of the early eighteenth century does reproduce a summary of the myth for its account of Akbar's reign. Khafi Khan, in the first volume of his *Muntakhab-ul Lubāb* provides the essentials of the birth of the three light-conceived Mongol princes and the passage of the interior light to Akbar. Khafi Khan, *Muntakhab-ul Lubāb*, *Bibliotheca Indica*, 3 vols (Calcutta, 1869).

⁵⁸ Cf. the comments of S. Roy, in his contribution to R.C. Majumdar (ed.) *The Mughal Empire, the History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bombay, 1974), vi, pp. 138–40.

⁵⁹ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, p. 338.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

One of the most controversial and puzzling aspects of the 'Divine Faith' is the Emperor's ability to attract a number of his courtiers and highest official élite to his beliefs. Blochmann, the late nineteenth-century translator of the bulk of the *Akbar-Nama*, compiled a listing of 18 nobles who could be identified as adherents or disciples of Akbar and subscribers to the new 'Divine Faith'. Based on this enumeration, the generally accepted interpretation has been that the disciples were part of a tiny group equivalent to an élite 'order' in the British knightly, honorific sense. However, S.A.A. Rizvi in a recent analysis of the body of references pertaining to this issue, has concluded that the term 'Divine Faith' was misapplied by Blochmann. The enlistment of disciples by Akbar simply cannot be dismissed as the egomania of the Emperor aided by the sycophancy of his courtiers. Instead, imperial discipleship, possessing a serious political purpose, found its ideological grounding in the *Akbar-Nama* and Akbar's symbolic association with the sun and light. In Rizvi's view, discipleship represented a major effort to create an exceptionally loyal and reliable cadre of nobles, carefully screened and recruited to form a body of life-guards. Far more than 18, unspecified as to total number, but clearly substantial bodies of men, were inducted every week in groups of twelve into this more intense relationship with the person of the Emperor.⁶²

At noon on Sunday, the Emperor himself presiding, the newly selected disciples underwent an initiation ceremony. Each Muslim initiate signed a declaration repudiating the orthodox bonds of conventional (*taqlidi*) Islam and agreeing to reverence Allah directly. He also swore to accept four degrees of devotion: the unhesitating willingness to sacrifice one's life (*jān*), property (*māl*), religion (*dīn*) and honour (*namūs*) in the service of the Master (Akbar). During the ceremony, the new disciple placed his head on the feet of the Emperor in the fashion of the Sufi disciple's prostration (*sijdah*) to his master or *Pīr*. Upon conclusion of the ceremony, the Emperor raised up the supplicant, and, placing a new turban upon his head, gave him a symbolic representation of the sun, and a tiny portrait of Akbar to wear upon his turban.⁶³ Thus, the four degrees of devotion were a means 'to unify the new Mughal élite around the ... throne'.⁶⁴ Instead of the ties of common ancestry, ethnicity, and familial hereditary service which bound Babur's tiny élite to him, Akbar's Persian, Rajput, and Khatri,

⁶²Ibid., pp. 391–2. For the Persian terms see Badauni (text), II, p. 304.

⁶³Rizvi, p. 401.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 398.

and Indian Muslim disciples were widely disparate in their beliefs and ethnicity. Exacting such a solemn commitment to an Emperor who had reached the highest degree of purity, knowledge and ontological status possible for a mortal, was one solution to the recurrent problem of challengeable legitimate rule, and an alternative to the potentially divisive balancing of factions within the élite.

Popular understanding of the Emperor's assertions of divinely sanctioned ancestry, illumined wisdom and spirituality, clearly permeated among the populace of the court/camp and other major urban centres of the empire. Ultimately this understanding became so pervasive that a continuing memory of Akbar's powers was even absorbed into the folk culture of rural society within the various regions of the empire.⁶⁵

Discipleship, however (although evidently its existence was not secret), was never publicized by Abul Fazl or the Emperor in the same fashion. Certainly, the nobility, and more informed observers from the secondary and tertiary ranks of the imperial political élite, must have fully comprehended the true significance of discipleship. But, unfortunately, extant written references to its operation in the last decade or so of Akbar's reign are muted.

Jahangir, who seems to have been caught in the dilemma of imitation versus rebellion against his father, common to the sons of men of extraordinary stature, did perpetuate the imperial order of disciples. He demanded worship from his disciples in the mode established by his father. Unlike Akbar, however, he viewed many of the renowned saintly figures of his time as competitors, rather than spiritual masters.⁶⁶ Interesting direct testimony to this effect comes from the letters and journals of Sir Thomas Roe, ambassador from James of England to the Mughal Emperor. A university graduate, a minor aristocrat with a family mercantile background, a courtier and diplomat of long experience, and

⁶⁵ E.g. in his description of the Kunbis, the most numerous peasant caste in Maharashtra, R.V. Russell detailed the birth customs of the caste from ethnographic material collected in the first years of the twentieth century. If the labour of a Kunbi woman were unduly prolonged, among the folk remedies recounted 'she is given water to drink in which a Sulaimāni onyx or a rupee of Akbar's time has been washed;...the virtue of the rupee probably consists in its being a silver coin and having the image or device of a powerful king like Akbar'. 'Kunbi', in R.V. Russell, *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, 4 vols (London, 1916), II, p. 29.

⁶⁶ E.g. Jahangir's response to the Sikh Guru Arjun's untimely, accidental meeting with Prince Khurram during the latter's rebellion against his father.

possessor of a high level of analytic intelligence, Roe's observations are worth considering. Moreover, in the course of nearly three years (January 1615 to September 1618) in attendance at the court/camp of Jahangir, Roe was able to establish an affable relationship (partly based on drink) with the Emperor who seems to have enjoyed the company and the supplies of the ambassador. In a lengthy letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury written at the end of October 1616, Roe reported on the general perception of Akbar's religious position:⁶⁷

Ecbar-shae [Akbar] himself continued a Mahometan, yet he began to make a breach into the law; Considering that Mahomett was but a man, a King as he was, and therefore reuerenced, he thought hee might prove as good a Prophett himself.

Roe noted, however, that Jahangir:⁶⁸

Falling upon his father's conceipt, hath dared to enter farther in, and to professe himselfe for the Mayne of his religion to be a greater Prophett than Mahomett; and hath formed to himself a New Law, mingled of all ...

Imperfect though his understanding of the subtleties of Akbar and Jahangir's doctrinal position may have been, Roe correctly grasped from his informants at court the unusual nature of such religious beliefs. His assessment of Jahangir undoubtedly reflects the commonly held view in the court and capital that the Emperor was pressing assertion of his religious authority more openly than Akbar had found necessary.

Considerable evidence also exists that Jahangir imitated his father's practice of selecting and initiating disciples from among his most favoured nobles. In a short passage from his memoir, Jahangir mentions Shaikh Ahmad Lahauri, newly promoted to the office of *Mir 'Adl*, who had been initiated as a disciple by Akbar before Jahangir's accession. One of Shaikh Ahmad's duties in his new office was to advise 'who is worthy of receiving *shast wa shabah*', i.e. the seal (or ring) and the imperial likeness which were the symbols of discipleship. Then Jahangir describes the details of the enrolment ceremony. His account is in

⁶⁷ William Foster (ed.), *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul, 1615–1619*, 2 vols (London, 1894, Hakluyt Society, new series), II, pp. 313–14.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

essential agreement with Abul Fazl's description.⁶⁹ Roe himself, although again he was not fully aware of the entire significance of the event, became a disciple at Jahangir. In August 1616, more than a year and a half after his arrival at court, Jahangir favoured the ambassador by enacting, without warning, the ceremony of initiation. Roe describes this in some detail:⁷⁰

August 17—I went to visit the King, who, as soone as I came in, called to his woemen and reached out a picture of himselfe sett in gould hanging at a wire gould Chaine, with one pendant foule pearle, which he delivered to Asaph Chan [Asaf Khan, the *wazir*] warning him not to demand any reuerence of mee other than such as I would willingly giue, it beeing the Custome, when soever hee bestowes any thing, the receiuer kneeles downe and puttis his head to the ground. ... So Asaph Chan came to mee, and I offered to take it in my hand; but hee made signe to putt of my hatt, and then putt it about my neck, leading mee right before the king. I understood not his purpose, but doubted hee would require the Custome of the Country called *Size-da* [i.e. the full prostration of *Sijdah* of discipleship]; but I was resolved rather to deliure up my present. Hee made sign to mee to giue the king thancks, which I did after my owne Custome. Wheratt some officers called me to *Size-da*, but the King answered no, no, in Persian. So with many gratious woordes sent mee, I returned to my place. You may now Iudg the kings liberallitye. This guift was not woorth in all 30 *li.*, yet it was five tymes as good as any hee giues in that kynd, *and held for an especiall fauour, for that all the great men that weare the kings Image* (which *none may doe but to whom it is given) receive noe other than a meddall of gould as bigg as sixpence, with a little chayne of 4 inches to fasten it on their heads,* which at their owne Chardg some sett with stones or garnishe with pendant Pearles.

A more significant indication of the growing significance of the master-disciple tie in Jahangir's reign, lies in the response of nobles and *mansabdārs*—especially the younger men, members of a new generation coming to maturity since Akbar's death. In this context, we are fortunate that the autobiographical memoir, of 'Alauddin Isfahani, a Persian noble known as Mirza Nathan, has survived. This extraordinary document contains a full account of Mirza Nathan's career and service

⁶⁹ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, p. 400 quotes the full passage. In checking the original text, Professor Rizvi has found that a mistranslation of a critical sentence in the English edition makes it appear that Jahangir is referring to his father's practice of initiation, not his own.

⁷⁰ Foster, I, pp. 244–5. A portion of this passage is also quoted in Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, p. 404.

on the marches of Muslim expansion in north-eastern Bengal and Assam during the second and third decades of the seventeenth century. The *Bahāristān-i-Ghaybī*, written in the third person in Persian, was completed by Mirza Nathan in 1632.⁷¹ His account is one of the most important sources for the operations of the imperial armies in the riverine terrain of that region against the unsubdued Bengali rajas. Later, the Mughal commanders were forced to meet the aggressive attacks of the Ahom mass armies pressing down the Brahmaputra valley. However, the *Bahāristān* is also noteworthy for its recounting of the details of the personal life, emotions and reactions of the author, who as he attained experience and maturity rose in rank and status to become an *amir* or noble.

In 1607, Mirza Nathan as an adolescent youth, accompanied Ihtimam Khan, his father, to the eastern frontier. Ihtimam Khan was posted to serve as commander (*Mir Bahr*) of the imperial war fleet of armed river boats in use in Bengal. Shortly after his arrival in Bengal, Mirza Nathan became seriously ill and lapsed into a fever. His condition deteriorated until, on the seventh night of sickness, the young officer had an awesome vision. In his sleep 'the king of the spiritual and temporal domain', (that is Jahangir) appeared and addressed him: 'O Nathan! Is this the time for a tiger to lie down? Arise, we have granted you security from pain and trouble by our prayers to the Almighty and Omnipresent Lord. Be quick, and placing the foot of manliness and sincerity in your devoted work be a comrade to your great father and be his support.' In the morning, Nathan awoke, fully cured and convinced of his mission. Through his father and the governor of Bengal, Islam Khan Chishti, Nathan sent a petition to the Emperor entreating the favour of enlistment as one of his disciples—reciting the detail of his mystical vision. Somewhat later, an imperial messenger returned

⁷¹ Mirza Nathan, *Bahāristān-i Ghaybī*, ed. and trans. M.I. Borah, 2 vols (Gauhati, 1936). The only extant manuscript of this text is that possessed by the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris). As with a number of other exceedingly important sources for Mughal India, this was discovered by Jadunath Sarkar by a careful reading of the Bibliothèque Nationale's catalogue. Sudhindra Nath Bhattacharya has made extensive use of the *Bahāristān* manuscript in his chapters on the early seventeenth-century Mughal advances to the east in Bengal and Assam in Jadunath Sarkar (ed.) *The History of Bengal Muslim Period 1200–1757* (Patna, 1973, reprint edn), pp. 234–315. Bhattacharya, (and Sarkar earlier) has shown that the details of Nathan's work are generally accurate while the Assamese chronicles refer to him by his title, in the context of an able enemy commander.

bearing a tiny portrait (*shabah*) of Jahangir 'adorned with a genealogical tree' of the Timurid dynasty. Although he was not brought back to court for a personal ceremony, by placing this image in his turban, Mirza Nathan openly displayed devotion to his master and membership in the imperial elect.⁷²

In referring to Jahangir, Nathan frequently used the terms *pir*, *murshid*, or even *qibla* as a synonym, i.e. equating the Emperor with that portion of a mosque towards which worshippers directed their prayers. That Nathan equated his service to Jahangir with a form of worship seems a reasonable inference. At one point in the narrative, the young disciple, speaking under great stress, states that for six years on the Bengal frontier he had always considered his imperial service 'to be greater than the worship of God'.⁷³ It is to the nature of Mirza Nathan's service as a disciple, and the authoritative relationship between the elect body of disciples and the Emperor to which we now turn.

NEW IMPERIAL IDENTITIES

By the early years of the seventeenth century the diverse Mughal élite had become a corporate body of paid officers, with status and posting ultimately determined by the wish of the Emperor. Most members of this motley élite depended almost entirely on their imperial careers for a livelihood and worldly success. A minority—Rajputs, some Afghans and Indian Muslims—retained hereditary ties to landed patrimonial domains to which they could return if necessary.⁷⁴ By various devices (such as the numerical ranking system and titles) Akbar successfully subordinated dozens of particularistic group identities and jealously guarded personal dignity to the demands of authority. Touchy, bellicose

⁷² Nathan, *Bahāristān*, I, pp. 17, 74. The recurring genealogy in this, as in other contexts, is apparently a reference to the illumined descent of Akbar and Jahangir. It is also analogous to the genealogy of masters and disciples given Sufi initiates by their Shaikhs.

⁷³ Ibid., I, p. 295. In a later portion of the memoir the Mirza uses all three terms of refer to Jahangir. Ibid., II, p. 743.

⁷⁴ M. Athar Ali has reproduced a dramatic mid-seventeenth-century description by a Mughal bureaucrat of the 'various classes and groups of persons from every race and people [who] have sought asylum in the Imperial court' both foreigners and Indians and 'men of the pen and men of the sword'. M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb* (Aligarh, 1966), p. 15. For a discussion of partrimonial holdings or *watan-jāgirs*, see ibid., pp. 79–80.

views of the honour of the individual warrior-soldier were transmuted into an acceptance of group and individual honour enhanced in service to the Emperor. Somewhat paradoxically, as the bureaucratic systems of the empire evolved, the Persian, Indo-Muslim, Brahmin, Khatri, and Kayastha technicians who extended, consolidated and maintained the administrative system, also acquired martial, warrior values to accompany their inclusion. They too were assimilated into the general, military-oriented honour-bound system of ranks, rewards, and assignments emanating from the Emperor.

For this new military-administrative service élite, a basic model and idiom seems to have derived from the centuries-old tradition of Islamic corporate military slavery. Always closely associated with the Turks, this institution was a time-honoured means of incorporating ethnic groups for reliable service to dynasties of Sultans, often insecure and themselves of slave origin. To have immediately at hand bodies of troops and cadres of slave commanders, at least partially deracinated, beholden to the King for their lives and employment, was an invaluable tool for the parvenu Muslim ruler. Legally free though they were, the Mughal nobles and lesser *mansabdārs*, especially those on the Muslim side, did adopt some of the attitudes of military slaves.

The term *bandah* or slave was actually employed by the Mughal nobility in reported speech. For example during a heated altercation between Islam Khan Chishti (a grandson of Akbar's preceptor), the overbearing governor of Bengal, and his war fleet commander, Mirza Nathan's father, Ihtimam Khan, the latter stood and protested to the governor: 'You forget yourself' (meaning the governor had gone too far). Islam Khan also rose and shouted: 'I am that very Islam Khan whom your master [i.e. Jahangir] has asked you to serve and attend.' Replying in the same tone Ihtimam Khan said, 'I also am not inferior to you. Every one of us is the slave of the master.'⁷⁵ Such usage reflected that of Jahangir, who frequently referred to or addressed his officers as 'slaves'.⁷⁶ Usage of such terminology in both spoken and written language suggests that normative connotations developed over centuries of corporate military slavery in the Muslim world, helped to shape the expectations, style and intensity of the relationship between the imperial master and his servants as well as the collegial and hierarchical relationships among that body.

⁷⁵ Nathan, *Bahāristān*, 1, p. 27.

⁷⁶ Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir*, 2 vols, trans. A. Rogers, ed. H. Beveridge (London, 1909–14), *passim*.

The practice of escheat carried out by both Akbar and Jahangir in regard to the treasuries, mansions, armouries, stables, and other property of their deceased servants, certainly supports this interpretation. Contrary to the precepts of canonical law for the inheritance of free Muslims, but permissible of course for slaves, the practice remained unchallenged and unremarked upon save by foreign observers. When Mirza Nathan's father, Ihtimam Khan died suddenly of illness, the governor of Bengal quickly instituted the regulation procedure. On the fifth day of mourning, at a formal ceremony, the governor, Islam Khan, bestowed robes of honour upon Mirza Nathan and the other bereaved relatives. Afterwards, the Mirza surrendered his father's and his own elephants, and the guns, munitions and accounts of their joint armoury. He also confined the armoury treasurers and cashiers to ensure an accurate audit. At a legal proceeding held in the provincial *diwān*'s office (the *kachari*) the Qazi and the Superintendent of the court witnessed formal transfer of the dead officer's treasury, and other valuable property (save for a few personal items) to the agents of the governor. The Bengal governor then sent the sealed, secured money and valuables directly to the capital, along with the head accountant of Ihtimam Khan. The latter, Tula Ram, was expected to produce for verification his dead master's complete accounts of income and expenditure.⁷⁷ After concluding this procedure, the governor promoted Mirza Nathan from 100 *zāt*, 50 *suwār* to 500 *zāt*, 250 *suwār*, gave him two female elephants from his father's herd, and transferred seven *parganas* (subdistricts) from the *jāgīr* holdings of his father (necessary to defray the Mirza's increased salary and allowances).⁷⁸

Emerging from this master-slave connection between the Emperor and his service élite were two more intensely felt bonds. The first, that of discipleship, for an elect chosen by the Emperor, we have already discussed. The second, that growing out of familial hereditary service, by the early 1600s was becoming of equal or even greater importance. *Khānazāds*, both Hindu and Muslim, had proven their devotion, reliability and capabilities over as many as three or even four generations.

⁷⁷ Nathan, *Bahāristān*, 1, pp. 205–10. This procedure conforms to that described by Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility*, pp. 63–4. Aurangzeb seems to have confined his expropriations to those debts left outstanding to the imperial treasury. The earlier Emperors seized all properties and gave what they chose to the heirs.

⁷⁸ Nathan, 1, pp. 206–9. The governor also advanced the Mirza money to pay for the funeral ceremonies of his father *ibid.* 1, p. 203.

In Jahangir's time, the term *khānazād* (literally, 'son of the house') seems to have connoted actual residence in or connections with the imperial court palace or camp. To the extent that even the childhood and maturation of the *mansabdār* was known to the imperial family—as in the case of Mirza Nathan himself—the term may have referred to a type of informal page system for the harem and palace. Later, as the century progressed, *khānazād* came to have the wider meaning of pride in hereditary imperial service alone, without the necessary impetus of an initial personal relationship with the Emperor. Moreover, the conception permeated downward from the apex of the élite, the *amirs* and nobles of 1000 *zāt* or more, to middling and lower *mansabdārs* and private officers in the service of imperial grandees. Obviously, if properly nurtured, *khānazādī* was a powerful conception which could intersect with the dynastic ideology put forward by Abul Fazl.

Mirza Nathan's night vision of the Emperor and his eagerness to act upon this occurrence, presumably derived from his birth and upbringing as a *khānazād*. When Prince Khurram, later Shah Jahan, rebelled and arrived in Bengal, he referred to the Mirza as 'one of the special servants of our Court, ... who was brought up from childhood under our feet'.⁷⁹ Undoubtedly rhetorical, Shah Jahan's phrasing nonetheless does convey a sense of personal familiarity with Nathan in boyhood and adolescence. Possibly, as the new generation of a Persian émigré family in imperial service, Nathan did grow up in the Emperor's giant household. Under such circumstances, if Nathan (as he seems to have) demonstrated qualities of military leadership and administrative skills, he received preferment and early command responsibilities in common with other able young *khānazāds* of similar background. As we have seen, further zealousness could bring the reward of discipleship and concomitant membership in an especially devoted élite cadre of *mansabdārs*.

Sustaining the bonds of hereditary familial service, and discipleship, was relatively easy for the Emperor at the imperial capital. Private, less formal audiences and interviews at fixed hours in the Emperor's consultation rooms or tents (the so-called *ghusul khāna* or 'bath-room') obviously provided opportunities for exhortation, private orders, and other matters with trusted *mansabdārs*. During the great daily 'public' assemblies in the audience hall of the palace or camp, the Emperor and his officers enacted formal rituals of authority and subordination. Imperial officers called before the throne offered at a minimum several

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 702.

gold coins (*muhurs*) to the Emperor. After the sovereign uttered formal verbal confirmation of promotions, new titles, postings, etc., he favoured the officer with a full or partial robe of honour, a horse or an elephant, jewelled weapons, money or other artefacts. Most of the gifts for personal use thus bestowed could be construed to have some symbolic reference to the body and person of the King: e.g. the robe of honour, if not actually worn by Jahangir, was brushed momentarily across his shoulder.⁸⁰

In the case of military campaigns, however, the Emperor rarely supervised or commanded in person. Thus, during the five years from 1608 to 1613 when Islam Khan energetically directed the conquest and administrative organization of Mughal Bengal, Jahangir remained at the imperial capital (either Agra, Lahore, or Kashmir in the hot season). Similarly, during later campaigns against the Arakanese or the Ahoms, Jahangir never visited Bengal in person. Moreover, the complete absence of any reference to a visit to court in Mirza Nathan's narrative suggests that he, and perhaps other mid-ranked field commanders, remained on the eastern frontier without recall for years on end (possibly even the 16 years from 1608 to 1624 covered by the memoir).

How, in view of such prolonged separation from the imperial centre, could even a pretence of personalized authority and loyalty between Emperor and disciple of *khānazād*, endure? One tangible, continuing contact with the Emperor was the confirmation of promotion in rank and a concomitant rise in pay, status and responsibility (or punitive demotion) following recommendation in the reports of the Bengal governor. From his first promotion to 500 *zāt*, 250 *suwār* at the death

⁸⁰Cf. Thomas Roe, who received from Jahangir 'a cloth of gould Cloake of his owne, once or Twice worne, which hee caused to bee put on my back, and I made reverence it is here reputed the highest of fauor to give a garment warne by the prince, or being New, once layed on his shoulder'. Roe, *Embassy*, II, p. 334. cf. the early analysis of F.W. Buckler in which he points out that kings in the Middle East, both ancient and Muslim, all employed the robe of honour. When the 'Eastern King' gave these dresses to his servants, 'he was incorporating into his own body, by means of certain symbolical acts, the persons of those who share his rule' (p. 239). In Arabic, *khil'at* and in Persian *saropā*, the robe of honour, as it is customarily translated, conveys 'some idea of continuity or succession' and 'that continuity rests on a physical basis, depending on contact with the body of the recipient with the body of the donor through the medium of clothing' (p. 241). F.W. Buckler 'The Oriental Despot', *Anglican Theological Review*, X, 1927-28, pp. 238-49.

of his father in 1612, Mirza Nathan progressed upward until, in 1621, after his part in the suppression of a Muslim *zamindār's* rebellion, he became a noble or *amīr*, at 1000 *zāt*, 500 *suwār*. The imperial rescript sent to the Mirza, signed jointly by Jahangir and his wife Nur Jahan, also gave him a new honorific identity, the title Shitab Khan and a robe of honour.⁸¹ To complete the transaction Mirza Nathan (now Shitab Khan) sent 42,000 rupees to the Empress Nur Jahan to acknowledge the superior value of the great favour bestowed upon him.

Other, personal gift exchanges with the distant master presumably helped to prolong this illusion. On various occasions, Nathan received via a special imperial messenger, a set of soft shawls (probably from Kashmir); a shield directly from the hand of the Emperor; and two sets of pendant pearl earrings (form among a set of 36 pairs sent to the Bengal commanders).⁸² Whenever possible, Nathan organized a wild elephant hunt (*a kheda*) and sent his best captives to court as reciprocal personal offerings to the Emperor.⁸³

Officers in Bengal, in common with their colleagues in other parts of the empire, also received written orders (*farmāns*) sealed with the great seal and *tughra* of the Emperor. Such special rescripts were brought rapidly from the court by either one or a pair of mace bearers, or by gentlemen cavalry troopers (*ahadīs*). Reception of such an order demanded that the recipient act as if the Emperor himself were arriving in person: riding with his retainers several miles to meet the messengers (if they sent advance notice); performing the court obeisance; and placing the object on his head and eyes and even kissing it before opening the container. The Emperor employed a more pointed form of personal substitution as well, in which his messenger, usually a man of considerable but not noble status and rank, at an appropriate moment recited verbatim injunctions, orders and reprimands to amplify the written orders.

In an attempt to reduce the notorious factiousness and inefficiency of Qasim Khan, governor of Bengal after Islam Khan, Jahangir sent a revenue officer, Ibrahim Kalal, with orders of censure for the governor,

⁸¹ Nathan, II, p. 666. The interval between 500/250 was accomplished in two steps, the first to 625/250 for Nathan's part in the conquest of Kuch (ibid., II, p. 503); the second 700/350 to reward him for his assignment to pacify the Dakhinkul country and finally to the status of a noble at 1000/500 (ibid., II, p. 632.).

⁸² Ibid., I, pp. 299–300.

⁸³ Ibid., II, pp. 667–87.

the provincial *dīwān*, the *bakhshī*, and the Bengal newswriter. When the envoy arrived at Dacca, the provincial capital, the governor met him, performed the proper obeisances to the imperial order, and installed the messenger in quarters near the governor's palace. The next morning, when the Governor, his three chief officers and all his army commanders (*khāns*) were assembled in the audience hall, Ibrahim Khan solemnly delivered from memory the Emperor's verbal rebuke to each of the four chief officers in turn. Without soliciting a reply he left rudely and abruptly to return to court.⁸⁴

Such devices as these may have been effective in reasserting and strengthening the converging modes of personal authority and personal service: Emperor and disciple; Emperor and hereditary servant (*khānazād*); and Emperor and military slave—gradually fusing into what was to prove to be for the Indo-Muslim political tradition, a remarkably durable structure of imperial control. Clearly, the ability to perceive the person of the Emperor behind the material symbols of protestation, or his voice in the speech of a surrogate had become an imperial ritual—just as necessary for all nobles as acceptance and usage of the niceties of Indo-Persian courtly etiquette. Nevertheless, the bedrock of imperial authority lay in its appeal to a value for more pervasive. Jahangir, in rebuking the faulty leadership of Qasim Khan, stressed the governor's gravest excess:⁸⁵

Although through our kindness to slaves we address with our pearl-scattering tongue Qāsim Khān as our son, it is incumbent upon him to protect the honour of the imperial officers, high and low. It is also obligatory on the part of our slaves, for the sake of protecting their honour, to prefer death to the adoption of any dishonourable conduct.

The Emperor's admonishment was double-edged, for he was censuring the governor for plundering the house, and violating the honour of the provincial *dīwān* (fiscal officer), while at the same time he was also censuring the *dīwān* for not defending and asserting his honour as a warrior and imperial servant.

Whether 'men of the pen' or 'men of the sword', *khānazāds* or foreign-born aristocrats, rural Indian Muslims or urbane Persians, or Turks or Rajputs, the paradoxical appeal to enhancement of honour by submission to the Emperor's personal and dynastic authority cut across

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 307–10.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 309.

previously impassable social boundaries. Slaves could only possess honour, especially dignity of the warrior, in the reflection of a master of numinous powers and consummate honour. At the same time, however, it was the responsibility of the noble or *mansabdār* to preserve his individual honour and that of his family, status, group, or lineage. He must firmly demonstrate his readiness to defend his sexual honour, if the modesty or chastity of his women be threatened; his patrimonial honour, if the security and sanctity of his residence and property (including slaves and servants) be endangered; his familial honour, if his blood relatives be assaulted; and his religious or sectarian honour, if the sacred symbols of his religion be blasphemed. If the warrior-noble, or warrior-*mansabdār* could not thus uphold his reputation or name as an adherent of the code of the warrior, his utility as an imperial servant, as a commander or administrator of men was severely curtailed. At any time a threat to the warrior-commander's honour could come from other *mansabdārs* engaged in the ceaseless struggle for individual or group precedence (i.e. honour) from the Emperor. Or, alternatively, defeat in battle could cause the same threats from a different source. Under the most desperate circumstances in battle, the warrior-commander must be prepared for an epic sacrifice (or martyrdom in Muslim idiom) to retain his personal honour, his lineage honour and the honour of the Emperor, his master.

Violent, self-sacrificial death on the battlefield certainly found an important place in the Indo-Muslim martial tradition, in the ideal of the *ghāzī*. However, the norms of that tradition also placed more pragmatic restraints upon the self-destructive urge of the warrior, which in the emotional stress of perceived defeat or reverse could be expressed in battle as a desire for release for death, with personal honour intact. But for the servant of an imperial master or in the case of Mirza Nathan, a select and ardent disciple, such a response was self-indulgent since it did nothing to further either the reputation or the possessions of the Emperor.

These elements are sharply etched in Mirza Nathan's memoir. After more than a decade of service in Bengal, he suffered one of his few disastrous defeats in a battle with the Ahoms. Themselves an aggressive power, the Ahoms were expanding down the Brahmaputra valley when they first clashed with the Mughal armies.⁸⁶ Possibly grown somewhat

⁸⁶ For a detailed discussion of the Ahom-Mughal wars, inadequately analysed in general treatments of the Mughal empire, see Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 295–7.

careless, Mirza Nathan had moved his troops forward to the extremity of Mughal territory at Ranihat. Here he built a stockade fort and outlying watchtowers, brought up his women and entire household, and supply establishment (*mahal*), while waiting for fresh troops to build up his battle-depleted forces.⁸⁷

In one of the more dramatic episodes of the lengthy narrative the Ahom armies discovered the presence of the Mughal outpost. Acting under the personal orders of the Ahom king, they attacked quickly and in force. The first night after making contact, the Ahom generals utilized one of their most successful tactics: rapid construction of an immense wooden, palisaded stockade wall at a distance of one cannon shot opposite the outer wall of the Mughal fortification. The next day the Ahom general outmanoeuvered Mirza Nathan by generating a false report that the Mughal supply and communications line to the rear was blocked. This drew off part of the depleted Mughal force, whom Mirza Nathan sent to restore communications. Moreover, Shaikh Kamal, a Mughal noble who had clashed earlier with Mirza Nathan in a dispute over possession of *jagir* lands, held up the sending of reinforcements and supplies. The first full-scale Ahom assault resulted in occupation of the outlying Mughal stockade and total encirclement of Mirza Nathan's weakened forces. During the following night, the Ahoms, constructing a wooden and earthen wall fronted by a ditch, totally invested the imperial stockade walls. During the next day they regrouped and rested in preparation for the final assault. The Ahom commanders sent a demand to Mirza Nathan to surrender, offering to spare the lives of the imperial garrison.

At this point, a small group of 13 imperial *mansabdārs* evaded the Ahom guards and entered the fort. The 13 horsemen constituted a small lineage group of Usmani Afghans, serving as field cavalry at low ranks (possibly 20 to 80 or 100 *zār*) who had campaigned with Mirza Nathan on earlier occasions. Disobeying the orders of Shaikh Kamal they had travelled to the Mirza's assistance. That night, distraught, Mirza Nathan was preparing to die fighting: he dismissed his servants and camp followers, ordering them to flee in the hope that the Ahoms would not bother with them. Next, in consultation with his officers and troops, Mirza Nathan found full agreement with the argument that they should reject the Ahom demand to surrender. He and his Muslim officers and troops each wrapped his shroud (*kafan*) around his head.

⁸⁷ See *ibid.*, II, pp. 588–606 for the extended narrative of this episode.

They sent a reply to the Ahoms: 'As we have taken the salt of Jahāngir, we consider martyrdom to be our blessings [sic] for both the worlds. You will see what [feats] we perform before you till our death.' Nathan, bringing out his gold plate and utensils from his household, ordered the paymasters to meet the salary arrears of all his soldiers. He then demanded of all Muslims that they take an oath on the Koran, and all Hindus that they swear 'according to Hindu custom' that they would remain together and 'would accept martyrdom following one another's footsteps'.

Remaining somewhat detached from these proceedings, the small groups of Usmani Afghans approached Nathan and argued that he should act rather than simply wait to be killed in the trap which the fort had become. They appealed to his obligation to avenge both his betrayal by Shaikh Kamal and his defeat and dishonour by the Ahoms for he had 'neither a son nor a brother ... who would be able to take vengeance on [his] internal and external foes'. Nor would his defeat and slaughter help the prestige of the empire. Implicit in the latter argument was the perception that a glorious death in defeat, while satisfying the individual honour of the self-sacrificing commander, was, in essence, selfish, and not commensurate with the more important interests of the Emperor and the empire. Dead, Mirza Nathan also could not satisfy the imperative of vengeance for betrayal (by Shaikh Kamal) and defeat by the Ahoms.

Persuaded by these arguments, Nathan loaded his field artillery on his elephants, and organized his soldiers into an assault column. The one remaining elephant served to carry Mirza Nathan's wife, sister and a companion. He put the women in charge of Nik Muhammad Bek (whose family had served Nathan's family for four generations) with orders to kill the women if Nathan died in battle. Thereafter Nik Muhammad Bek was to 'display whatever manliness you can and attain happiness'. Surprisingly, Nathan then ordered the 50-odd women remaining in the fort to perform immolation by fire, in the Hindu rite of *jauhar*. Several Mughal soldiers who were afraid of losing their honour if captured, joined the women in this rite of collective suicide. These preparations completed, the Mughal commander led his column from the fort. A running, desperate engagement followed, but as the Afghans had predicted, Nathan and at least some of his dispirited army managed to cross the Brahmaputra river to safety. The following day Nathan removed his turban (presumably with the Emperor's image

attached) wrapped a ragged black shroud around his head, and made an oath not to remove it until he had avenged his defeat. A fresh army soon recruited, after several months of campaigning he won a substantial victory over the Ahoms. His officers were thus able to persuade him to remove his self-inflicted symbol of disgrace and put on his turban of honour once again.