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CONCLUSION

Ending at Just the Beginning

A colleague of mine who studies ancient and medieval South India once asked me: “Aren’t you worried that the Mughals have been studied to death, and there won’t be anything new to say as you get older?” I chuckled. To someone like my friend, who works on a time and place for which the surviving archival and archaeological evidence is admittedly much thinner than what I have to work with, I suppose it is easy to look on the Mughal specialist’s embarrassment of riches with a touch of envy. From the outside looking in, one could easily get the impression that the Mughals *have* been studied endlessly, certainly in comparison with some of the other important political formations of medieval and early modern South Asia like the Cholas, the Delhi Sultanate, the Bahmani Sultanate, Vijayanagara, and the Deccan Sultanates, to name just a few. If one goes to a good university library, the shelves and shelves of books on the Mughals must look imposing indeed.

But as I hope to have shown in this book, we do have quite a lot more to learn about the Mughal Empire, especially where its cultural history is concerned—and I confess now to my chagrin that in the preceding pages I have barely scratched the surface even in Chandar Bhan’s case, much less that of Mughal cultural history writ large. In fact, all those imposing shelves of musty tomes notwithstanding, one could easily argue that until very recently, beginning largely with the extraordinary contributions of Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam in the last couple of decades, we have barely begun to grapple seriously with Mughal cultural history.

How can this be true? After all, the reader might be asking him- or herself, don’t I see endless coffee-table books with the Taj Mahal on them down at the Barnes & Noble? Aren’t big museums always doing opulent shows on Mughal art,

especially all those gorgeous miniatures? Don't I hear constantly about Akbar the Great as a model of tolerance and understanding for the modern Muslim world? Even Thomas Friedman wrote about him in the *New York Times*.¹ How can it really be that the cultural history of *that* empire has yet to be written?

The beginnings of an answer would be to admit that yes, it is true that on the surface the Mughals get a lot of attention, particularly where the art and architectural history of the empire are concerned. But in terms of the remaining components of cultural history—literature, literary criticism, letters, essays, memoirs, music, and the like—the dropoff in knowledge is swift and steep. Forget about Chandar Bhan for a moment and just imagine: as best I can tell, there has not been a single scholarly monograph in English on Jahangir's poet laureate Talib Amuli since Nabi Hadi's *Talib-i-Amuli: The Poet Laureate of Jehangir, His Life and Times* (1962). Meanwhile, apart from a handful of encyclopedia entries and scattered notices in general literary histories, there does not appear to be even a single book-length study of Shah Jahan's poet laureate Abu Talib Kalim (d. 1651) ever written in English (much less currently available); and even in Persian and Urdu there doesn't appear to have been much work on him in the last fifty years, perhaps not since Shareefunnisa Begum Ansari's *Ḥayāt-o-Taṣnīfāt-i Mirzā Abū Ṭālib Kalīm Hamadānī* (1961). If no one is even studying the poets laureate, then what chance do the other literati have? And if we as a twenty-first century postcolonial readership have so little understanding of the literary culture that saturated the Mughal intelligentsia's social world, animated their lives, and informed their politics, how can we understand what made them tick? How can we understand their views on religion, or, say, something like "political Islam," when we are not even familiar with their basic cultural idiom? It would be like claiming to understand the Elizabethan Age without ever having read a word of Shakespeare.

At its most basic level, then, this book has simply been a modest attempt to address a tiny part of this gap in our knowledge by reintroducing the life, writings, and cultural outlook of a major Mughal intellectual of the seventeenth century to current conversations about early modern South Asian history. Persian literacy has dwindled considerably in India since its heyday in the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries, putting the works of countless Mughal poets, scholars, and intellectuals like Talib Amuli, Abu Talib Kalim, and our own Chandar Bhan out of reach even for otherwise very well educated Indians today. In fact, even among professional scholars of South Asia, access to Persian texts—especially the many texts from the Mughal archive that remain unpublished and are available only in manuscripts—is quite limited. As a result, the vast majority of scholars and other commentators are at the mercy of whatever primary texts and secondary works are available in English. And in many cases, despite tremendous advances in Mughal scholarship just in the last couple of decades, too often this means that they are forced by necessity to turn to dusty old relics of the colonial archive, the narrative framework

and cultural assumptions of which—at least where the Mughals are concerned—have had a tenacious afterlife in a good deal of postcolonial South Asian scholarship and commentary.

Even where scholars have explicitly reacted against the old-fashioned Orientalist narratives of British colonial historiography, the results, though often extremely illuminating in some ways, have not necessarily done much to advance our understanding of Mughal cultural and intellectual history. One reason for this is that it was precisely the desire among many modern South Asian scholars to prove the classic Orientalist narrative about Indian history wrong—to prove, in other words, that India's so-called “Muhammadan period” was not simply an unvarnished tale of eight centuries of stagnation, atavistic carnage, serial absolutism, and capricious tyranny—that led them to move away from cultural history toward an emphasis on topics like state formation and socioeconomic institutions. Many of the historians in this new structuralist tradition lodged their response to the colonial historiography from a decidedly Marxist point of view, and thus, as one might expect, their general approach has greatly privileged the analysis of social and economic institutions, structures, and systems over the niceties of poetry, letters, and biography, or the larger *mentalités* exhibited by individual personalities like Chandar Bhan. Attempts to read class formations and relations back into the Mughal structures of social power have loomed large in this body of scholarship, as has the desire to understand the markers of status, privilege, and authority that featured in the composition of the Mughal nobility, allowing the latter to perpetuate their control over India's economic surplus, particularly the agrarian surplus that was the foundation of Mughal wealth.

In the process, many nationalist and postcolonial scholars, especially those of the so-called “Aligarh school,” have over the years marshaled a veritable mountain of evidence to show the exceeding complexity of, and diffusion of power within, the Mughal state, bureaucracy, *manṣabdārī* system, and political economy writ large. One cannot help but admire the amazing intricacy and detail of this body of scholarship, even if one has reason at times to debate some of the particulars.² The classic volume in this genre is of course Irfan Habib's seminal *Agrarian System of Mughal India* ([1963] 1999), an exhaustive technical overview of the details of Mughal land measurement techniques, the features of their agrarian bureaucracy, and the trifold relationships among Mughal rulers, local potentates (*zamīndārs*), and peasant producers in rural village communities. Habib viewed the Mughal state almost exclusively in terms of its capacity for revenue extraction and economic exploitation, a view that was largely consistent with the broader anti-“Muhammadan” message of colonial historiography, even if Habib's own intention as a radical secularist was largely to counter the colonial discourse of premodern South Asian society's ineluctable stagnation with a stagist Marxian revision.

But the main point here is that culture, broadly conceived, has been almost entirely absent from the discussion.³ This is true, too, of most of the very fine surveys of the composition of the Mughal nobility that have emerged from basically the same school of historiography. There are a number of notable works in this genre,⁴ but by far the most comprehensive and ambitious is M. Athar Ali's *Apparatus of Empire* (1985), an extraordinary tabular almanac of virtually every member of the Mughal nobility's "ranks, offices, and titles" for the entire period of 1574–1658. It is a truly impressive tome, the product of decades of painstaking research. But it also highlights some of the limitations of viewing the Mughal state simply as a hierarchical series of points on a spreadsheet of ranks and titles. Chandar Bhan, for instance, exists in *The Apparatus of Empire* solely as "S6404: 1066; 1655–6; Chandra Bhān Munshī (now Rāi) (H); 500/100; Wārīṣ, 229(a)" — that is, as a serial number (the "S" in S6404 stands for "Shah Jahan"); two corresponding dates in the Hijri Era (1066) and the Common Era (1655–66); a name; an "H" to indicate that Chandar Bhan was a Hindu; his *manṣab* ranking (500/100) as of his promotion to the title *rāi* in 1655; and finally a nod to the chronicler Muhammad Wārīṣ for providing the data.⁵

The larger historical meaning of these bits of data is left entirely to the reader's imagination, as is any sense that the careers of people like Chandar Bhan, or, say, those of *wazīrs* like Afzal Khan and Sa'd Allah Khan, had narrative trajectories all on their own, beyond the specific points in time when they happened to get promotions. The idea that their careers may have transcended the sharp demarcation between the reigns of the (multiple) emperors they served, or that they were not simply cogs in a self-replicating state machinery but in fact part of the dynamic and ongoing process of making that entire Mughal "apparatus" actually continue to function, is simply absent from the discussion.

In this context, too, there is a resilient strain of Akbar exceptionalism, one that Athar Ali gives voice to right from the very first lines of *The Apparatus of Empire*: "Modern students of the Mughal empire have shown increasing awareness of the immense degree of systematization that was a characteristic feature of the empire. In the main that systematization was the work of its greatest emperor, Akbar (A.D. 1556–1605). The Mughal polity, so long as it functioned with any effectiveness, say, until the early years of the eighteenth century, continued basically with the organizational forms that Akbar instituted."⁶ This sense that all that is needed to understand the Mughal state is to make sense of the basic "organizational forms that Akbar instituted" has contributed mightily to the ongoing diminution, noted above, of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in early modern South Asian historiography generally. But it has also had a very specific, direct, and sharply negative impact on the approach to all manner of Mughal prose genres. In point of fact, the usual materials that one typically considers the building blocks of cultural and intellectual history—including letters, essays,

memoirs, biographical compendia, travelogues, and even more basic historical sources like chronicles—have been specifically targeted for exclusion from the category of “historical relevance” except insofar as they can “serve” the modern historian by providing raw data.

This assumption that writers like Chandar Bhan were somehow writing *for* the modern historian—and if they weren’t, that they should have been—is generally presented politely enough or, more often, simply implied, as in the formulation of one recent scholar who mentions Chandar Bhan’s *Chahār Chaman* in passing among a list of sources that “extend valuable help in constructing the biographical details of various leading nobles, and throw light on the political, economic and social conditions of this period.”⁷ However innocuous the statement may be, it nevertheless seems to suggest that the true purpose of a text like *Chahār Chaman* is somehow external to the text itself. It is a call simply to document, and any questions about what Dominick Lacapra (following Heidegger) once described as the text’s “worklike” properties—the author’s subject position, his aim in writing it, the literary and intellectual genealogies to which it is heir, the possible reasons for its textual architectonics, the ways in which it might have been received by its potential contemporary audience, or the sociocultural conditions of possibility that might have been necessary for a text like this even to have been produced—are all set aside in favor of the extrinsic expectation that the work “extend help” to later generations of historians by providing empirical data that “throw light” on the structure of Mughal institutions.

So long as a text could do this without too much interference from ornate compositional norms and the “affectation of style” so vehemently decried by the British historian H. M. Elliot, then it might be considered useful to the modern historian. But until very recently the authors themselves, and the worldviews that informed the writing of their texts, have by and large been deemed almost entirely irrelevant to the project of modern Mughal history. How else is one to explain the fact that neither of Chandar Bhan’s two main prose works, *Chahār Chaman* and *Munsha’āt-i Brahman*, was even available in a printed edition until the twenty-first century? Or that no part of either of them has, to this date, been translated into English since Gladwin’s brief excerpt of *Chahār Chaman* was included in *The Persian Moonshee* all the way back in 1795? Or that neither text was even translated into a local South Asian language until Sayyid Muhammad Murtazá Qadiri’s 1992 Urdu edition of *Chahār Chaman*?

The classic formulation of this dismissive attitude toward such works of Mughal *inshā’* was that of Jadunath Sarkar, whose perspective on Indian history has been the focus of considerable renewed interest of late.⁸ In a study entitled *Mughal Administration*, Sarkar acknowledged that the wealth of details contained in the epistolography and belles lettres of *munshīs* like Chandar Bhan renders them “of inestimable service to the modern student of Mughal history.”⁹ Again, the trope

of “service” to the modern scholar is invoked; but very quickly we see that Sarkar’s praise for the archive left behind by Mughal *munshīs* is, in fact, both faint and damning:

But the main wealth of historical information regarding Aurangzib lies in the contemporary *letters*, which together with the above *ākhbārs* [i.e., imperial circulars and news memoranda] form the very raw materials or the most authentic source for the history of his reign. The preservation of these letters we owe not to any action on the part of the Emperor, nor to the practice of any secretariat archive, but to a private source, namely, the literary vanity of the secretaries (*munshīs*) who drafted them. . . . The *munshīs* had not the future historian of the Mughal empire before their mind’s eye, but the polished society of their own days. Their aim was not to leave historical records for posterity, but to show their own mastery of style and to set models of composition before students of rhetoric and epistolary prose. . . . Such letter-books, however, belonged to a decadent age, when the Court had ceased to make history.¹⁰

Here again, the arc of decline sketched above is recapitulated. By Aurangzeb’s time “the Court had ceased to make history.” And here too we find repeated the notion that literary “style” automatically equals “decadence.” Sarkar is grateful that some of the Mughal letter collections have been preserved, but he winces at the “vanity” of the secretaries themselves; he laments that the secretaries did not think to compose their texts in a manner more suitable to a modern audience, rather than the “polished society” of their own day; indeed, as far as Sarkar is concerned it is precisely the *munshīs*’ neglect of “posterity” in favor of their own will to “mastery of style” that represents the truest indication of their, and their entire era’s, essential decadence—a decadence that is formulated specifically in terms that place them and their works outside the realm of the properly historical. Ironically, then, this sense that Mughal prose works should exist solely to serve the interests of what modern historians deem relevant is precisely what tends to *de*-historicize them, as the emphasis on texts’ documentary “raw materials” trumps nearly all other considerations.

Of course it is true, as we have seen in this book, that a text like Chandar Bhan’s *Chahār Chaman* may not be especially helpful in corroborating certain types of empirical data, historical dates, the details of war and peace, the precise tabulation of numerical indices of social power and rank, and so on. But neither is it pure ornament, however much it may be written in what Sarkar chided as “the vicious style” of Mughal prose after Abu al-Fazl.¹¹ Note, too, Sarkar’s insertion of an explicit form of socioreligious determinism into the matter of *when*, precisely, this viciousness entered Mughal Persian prose and caused it to lose its historical utility:

From the middle of the 17th century onwards, most of the *munshīs* were Hindus, and their proportion rapidly increased. The Hindus had made a monopoly of the lower ranks of the revenue department (*diwānī*) from long before the time of Todar Mal

(Akbar's revenue minister), probably from the very dawn of Muslim rule in India. Todar Mal's [late sixteenth-century] order to have all their papers written in Persian (instead of one set in Persian and a duplicate set in Hindi, as under Sher Shah [d. 1545]), compelled all the Hindu officials of State to master the Persian language, and the effect of this change became manifest in the next century, when the Hindus filled the accounts department (*hisāb*) of the State, and even rose to be deputies and personal assistants (*nāibs* and *pesh-dasts*) to the heads of many departments. Most of the nobles and even princes in the late 17th century engaged Hindu *munshis* to write their Persian letters. The docile abstemious hardworking and clever Hindu did the work well and cheaply. A Persia-born or Persia-trained Muslim clerk would have been cleverer and would have written a purer idiom, but he was too costly a luxury in India, and the supply of such men from the Persian home-land was dried up at its source by the political disorders in that country at the close of the 17th century. Indian Muhammadans, as a rule, were unsatisfactory for clerical work.

However "hardworking and clever" the seventeenth-century Hindu *munshis* might have been, according to Sarkar the "purer idiom" of Persian simply eluded them. Clearly, Sarkar had internalized the same set of assumptions that had led Elliot to decry the Hindu *munshis'* excess "affectation of style"—Hindus and Muslims are from totally incommensurable cultures; Persian is a Muslim language; ergo, Hindus by definition cannot achieve true competence in the language and must overcompensate with mimicry and forced affectation.

Perversely, rather than commend the relatively nonsectarian ethos that made such cosmopolitan amicability possible, even under Aurangzeb, under whom more Hindus worked in the Mughal administration than at any previous time, Sarkar simply echoes the canard once propounded by Elliott in the preface to his notorious anthology, *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*, that Indo-Persian prose ceased to have "historical value" as soon as Hindus began to write it. In making this point, he specifically singled out Chandar Bhan: "The earliest Hindu *munshi* of note (after Harkarn Itibarkhani, c. 1624), known to me was Chandrabhan (poetical name *Brahman*), a protégé of Shah Jahan's wazir Sadullah Khan, who has left works in elegant prose and conventional verse besides some letters of little historical value."¹² In Sarkar's formulation, then, the entire archive of Mughal prose produced by writers like Chandar Bhan could be written out of history not, as with subalterns, because they could not speak to us, but rather because they were thought to have nothing to say.

As I've tried to show in the chapters above, however, writers like Chandar Bhan did have something to say, and their letters, other *inshā'*, and even poetry are of more than a little "historical value." Indeed, they are precisely the kind of voices we should listen to if we ever want to reconstruct a truly postcolonial version of Mughal cultural and political history. Chandar Bhan has shown us, for instance, good reason to treat the classic narrative of growing post-Akbar "orthodoxy" in Mughal culture

and society with new skepticism. The ideals of *ṣulḥ-i kull* did not simply vanish, and many of the nobles, administrators, and other intellectuals in Chandar Bhan's midst remained committed to a relatively nonsectarian ethos of civility and gentlemanly conduct that crossed communal boundaries, creating a space for forms of friendship, emotional intimacy, and everyday civility. Chandar Bhan has also shown us the high value that continued to be placed on secretarial skills, a good work ethic, a commitment to the public good, and the benefits of bureaucratic innovation and efficiency among the administrators at Shah Jahan's court.

We have seen, too, that Chandar Bhan clearly saw Shah Jahan as an Indian ruler who happened to be Muslim, rather than as a "Muslim ruler"—an important distinction that allowed the *munshī* to locate Shah Jahan, and the Mughal dynasty more generally, within a genealogy of Delhi kingship going back to mythical times. To Chandar Bhan, in other words, the Mughals were not "foreign conquerors" bearing alien values but rather Indian kings who were continuing an ancient legacy and promoting Indian values of kingship. Thus, as we saw, while our *munshī*'s explication of the emperor's typical day-to-day routine is certainly full of the type of glowing panegyric that in modern scholarship has been derided as mere sycophancy, it is nonetheless illuminating that Chandar Bhan's emphasis is almost entirely on Shah Jahan's wisdom, his learning, his mystical intuition, and his commitment to justice in the *akhlāqī* tradition, rather than merely on the emperor's worldly power, wealth, and glory. Chandar Bhan's Shah Jahan is not the stern, orthodox, and aloof caricature depicted in so much modern historiography. On the contrary, in Chandar Bhan's telling Shah Jahan could be a man of great kindness, affection, and even warmth, whether in his concern for a convalescing Jahan Ara Begum, his grief at the deaths of his *wazīrs* Afzal Khan and Sa'd Allah Khan, or even in his expression of personal condolences when our *munshī*'s own father died. Quite appropriately for a person who valued the benefits of training in the secretarial arts, Chandar Bhan also saw the king as a kind of super *munshī*, a capable and hands-on administrator who was competent in all the requisite instruments of Mughal bureaucracy and governmentality. It was precisely these characteristics and capabilities, above and beyond his military might, that made Shah Jahan such an able and effective ruler in Chandar Bhan's eyes.

Chandar Bhan has also given us a glimpse of the bustling commercial and cultural cosmopolitanism of life at Shah Jahan's court, in urban centers like Delhi, Lahore, and Agra, and even in the mobile imperial camp. Not only did one encounter people from just about every part of the world in such locales, but these sites were also important points of contact for multiple Mughal publics—traders, artisans, literati, intellectuals, mystics, and ordinary people from all walks of life who made their living as service professionals of various kinds. There is a liveliness and kinetic energy to these scenes of social and cultural interaction that modern Mughal historiography has often simply failed to capture. And that liveliness

surely contributed to many Mughal intellectuals' feeling that they were living in a "fresh" new era, and to work that sense of renewal into the kind of literary modernism that we examined in chapter 5.

Here yet again, in trying to recover the literary sensibility of Chandar Bhan's age, we run up against generations of modern Indo-Persian literary historiography that has completely erased the modernist tendencies of the *tāza-gū'i* movement from our collective memory. As a result, the potential significance of the Indo-Persian "quarrel between ancients and moderns" has remained almost completely invisible in wider scholarly conversations about global early modernity. Imagine, though, how the views of Western scholars and students alike with respect to the cultural history of places like India, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan would change if they were made aware that intellectuals in those places, too, struggled with the tension between tradition and modernity, the classical and the new, in ways that had nothing to do with Islam or Islamicate political culture as such. Imagine how commentators who simply assume that "the modern" as a conceptual category is unique to Europe, or that it came to South Asia exclusively via European colonialism, might have to adjust their theories if they were actually presented with the overwhelming evidence that seventeenth-century Indo-Persian literati and other intellectuals, like their European counterparts, also drew increasingly sharp distinctions between the "ancients" (*mutaqaddimīn*) and the moderns (*muta'ākhkhirīn* / *mu'āṣirīn*).

Similarly, the type of autobiographical and epistolary self-fashioning that we examined in chapter 4 needs much further investigation. Chandar Bhan was just one author, but he was clearly participating in a much wider culture of letter writing through which Mughal intellectuals of all stripes constructed their "epistolary selves." This rich archive of Mughal epistolography has gone unexamined for so long that many nonspecialists probably don't even realize that it ever existed in the first place—making it that much easier to perpetuate, even if only unconsciously, the same old Eurocentric shibboleths about the "self" and early modern forms of self-fashioning being exclusively European phenomena, diffused to the rest of the world only belatedly via colonialism.

Taking someone like Chandar Bhan's intellectual legacy seriously has even shown us—albeit indirectly—that empirically unreliable sources from the period can be quite "useful" and informative, too, if read with a bit of context and critical scrutiny. It would be all too easy simply to dismiss the "false" image of Chandar Bhan that percolated in the bazaar gossip and literary salons after his death, only to be further inscribed in the Indo-Persian cultural memory and circulated via literary biographical compendia (*tazkiras*), as a worthless collection of clever lies. But it is precisely the power of these fascinating falsehoods that allows for a reconsideration of crucial features of late Mughal cultural life, and even political critique, just prior to the onset of British colonial hegemony. Clearly, certain anxi-

eties about the complex and rapidly changing cultural, political, and commercial world of South Asia that are on display in the *tazkira* archive were also attended by vigorous debates about good taste, literary etiquette, and canonicity. Meanwhile, many of these texts, like Sher Khan Lodi's *Mir'āt al-Khayal*, shared a palpable sense of urgency to recover and conserve the classical Indo-Persian literary tradition before it was lost—a staple modern anxiety if ever there was one. And thus, at virtually the exact historical moment when Samuel Johnson began writing his “Lives of the Poets,” Indo-Persian literati were engaged in an analogous effort to compile the biographies of important literary figures, exemplary samples of their literary oeuvres, and anecdotes about their wit and ways of being in the world.

Why all this was happening, and what it all means, are questions that remain to be answered. I have tried to give some provisional suggestions above, but much work remains to be done. Even after our examination of Chandar Bhan's small part in all of this, we still do not know exactly why, for instance, Indo-Persian poets and other intellectuals began to articulate such an unprecedented vision of literary newness at the precise moment that they did, at the tail end of the sixteenth century. Why then? And how did the collective wisdom about what constituted literary “freshness,” and cultural newness generally, change over the next two centuries? Similarly, we do not know why, exactly, there was such a boom in letter writing and other forms of *inshā'* during precisely the same time frame, or to what extent other authors, like Chandar Bhan, used such genres as a vehicle to explore various modes of self-fashioning. We do not know why there was such a boom in the compilation of literary *tazkiras* at exactly the same historical moment. All we know is that these things did happen. And we haven't even begun to discuss the robust scholastic cultures of translation, comparative philology, and other disciplines that were also thriving during this period.

It is simply hard to imagine that all of this extraordinary Indo-Persian cultural production, authored by Hindus and Muslims alike, could have flourished during an era characterized by the type of wholesale decline, despotism, orthodoxy, and political chaos that the classic narrative of Mughal history has told us was the norm from 1605 onwards. Chandar Bhan certainly didn't see his world that way, so if we are willing to take his testimony seriously then we are left with a difficult conundrum: the old models have to go, but we still don't have a complete picture to replace them with because the very texts and genres that would be most useful in critiquing those old models—letters, other modes of *inshā'*, poetry, *tazkiras*—have been consigned to such oblivion for so long that the bulk of the archive still sits unpublished, out of print, or otherwise barely accessible even for many of those who actively *want* to engage it.

So at this stage, even after such a lengthy book, it is hard to end on anything like a triumphal note. Despite my best efforts, time pressures and the limitations of space have kept me from offering as comprehensive account even of Chandar

Bhan's own oeuvre as I had once hoped would be possible in this book. An exhaustive analysis of his letters awaits future work. A full literary analysis of his poetic *dīwān* likewise remains only a desideratum. There are a handful of other miscellaneous minor works attributed to him to which we were not even able to give cursory attention but that would surely yield many further insights into not only Chandar Bhan's own cultural sensibility but also the literary, political, and religious culture of the age more generally. Meanwhile, the lives and works of so many of his literary and intellectual contemporaries lie similarly in wait of renewed attention, translation, and critical scrutiny.

Perhaps, then, the most honest way to conclude would be to admit a simple reality: we still have no idea just how much we don't know. We don't even know, necessarily, that we actually know what we think we know. So for now, let us content ourselves with letting Chandar Bhan have the last word:

Spring has come, and the face of the garden is refreshed;
But alas, the fruit of my labors lingers there on the tree, as yet only half ripe.

[*āmad bahār wa rū-yi chaman tāzagī girift*
bar shākh mānda mewa-i mā nīm-ras hanūz]