Introduction

The period of Afghan rule in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is generally portrayed as one of ‘chaos’ and ‘anarchy’. It is assumed that the kings merely headed a decentralized-tribal confederacy of the Afghans. The Afghan kings, it is said, set aside the usual medieval royal insignia such as the umbrella and the throne. Instead, they sat on a big platform, which they shared with their nobles who were generally members of their clans. The king was content to be virtually one among the many clan chiefs. Thus the king, it is suggested, lacked both the ritual status and the requisite power to assert his authority and control over his ambitious nobles, ever in search of an opportunity to raise the banner of rebellion. The conflict between the sons of the outgoing sultans and the frequent revolts of powerful nobles eroded the king’s power and position, generating, as it has been put, a crisis in society with immorality and perversion becoming rampant throughout the dominion. In such a situation even the sufis, otherwise devoted to spiritual and otherworldly pursuits,

1 Khaliq Ahmad Nizami writes that the “Afghan kings had to struggle against the fissiparous tendencies of the age on one side and against the tribal traits of the Afghan character on the other”, The Lodis (1451-1526), in M.Habib and K.A. Nizami, eds., A Comprehensive History of India, Vol. V, Part One, The Delhi Sultanate (A.D. 1206-1526), first published 1970, second edition (Delhi, 1992), pp.664-709, especially p.664. Pointing to the disintegration of the centralized Delhi Sultanate and the “moral decline” in the period, Muhammad Zaki notes that the “crumbling structures – political as well as cultural – served as material for the reconstruction of Indian culture under Akbar”, Muslim Society in Northern India During the 15th and first half of the 16th Century (Calcutta, 1996).


3 For such a characterization of the society. see Zaki, Muslim Society in Northern India, pp.28-29.
began to aspire for political power, many of them indeed behaving like kings.⁴

The present study seeks to reconsider the problem of politics and governance, and the role of religion in politics during the Afghan period. For, much of the above conclusions seem to be based on premises which in our view do not get full support from the existing source material pertaining to the period. On occasion, the use of evidence itself appears to be arbitrary. It will be appropriate to illustrate in detail the established proposition on the nature of Afghan polity with reference to R.P. Tripathi’s authoritative work, *Aspects of Muslim Administration*. Tripathi suggests that “the sturdy Afghans with their love of tribal independence were hardly prepared to recognize easily the idea of an indivisible absolute sovereignty”.⁵ The author further writes that according to the Afghan tradition the father of Bahlūl Lodī (r. 1451-89), “Malik Kālā, had vanquished Jasratha Khokar and had become an independent ruler. On assuming the sovereign power he ordered the construction of a throne spacious enough to seat all his brethren. As a throne of that dimension was an obvious impossibility he satisfied himself with a throne on which he could sit with thirty to forty leading Afghans”.⁶ While drawing on Muhammad Kabīr’s *Afsāna-i-Shāhān*, Tripathi seems to agree with the fiction that Kālā had actually assumed “sovereign power”. He writes that “Bahlūl Lodi, in keeping with the sentiments of the

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⁵ Tripathi, *Muslim Administration*, p.80.

⁶ Ibid., p.81.
Afghans and the tradition of his father, claimed to be nothing more than one among the peers. He was quite satisfied with the title of Sultan and the leadership of the Afghans. In his days the Afghan empire was a sort of confederation of tribes presided over by the Lodis. Thus, “Bahlul would not sit on the throne even on the occasion of public audience, and would not issue orders savouring of command”.7

Tripathi further states that Sikandar Lodì (r. 1489-1517) was gradually introducing a change in the Afghan conception of kingship, though the ruler “took care to respect the susceptibilities of the Afghans and refrain from any radical change in the policy of his father”.8 Although the sultan “sat on the throne in the open Darbar and issued orders in the form of commands”, the Afghan nobles were “hard headed, and liberty-loving people and could not easily adapt themselves to the new idea of kingship”.9 Sikandar’s son and successor, Ibrāhīm (r. 1517-26) “turned his attention against the Afghan leaders who enjoyed great freedom and power in the previous regime and were likely to offer an obstacle in carrying his policy to its logical conclusion”.10 However, “Ibrāhīm Lodì paid for his haste and rashness with his life”, as the disaffected nobles not only rebelled but also invited the Mughals to attack Hindustan. Tripathi notes: “Blinded by selfishness and mad after revenge the discontended Afghans could not see their real interest and adopted a policy that eventually led to the ruins of the Afghan power. Without attempting to justify their foolishness and short-sightedness it might be said that they were not the only Muslims

7 Ibid., p.83.
8 Ibid., p.86.
9 Ibid., pp. 86-87.
10 Ibid., p.89.
who took recourse to such mean measures”.\textsuperscript{11} In Tripathi’s opinion, unlike İbrāhīm Lodī, Sher Shāh (r. 1540-45), emerging as the “leader of the Afghan national movement against the Mughals”, was “too wise and cautious to act precipitately and throw off the mask prematurely”. He therefore resorted to a “compromise between the early Turkish principle of absolute monarchy and tribal leadership of Bahšūl”.\textsuperscript{12}

Later authorities on the period have largely followed the same line.\textsuperscript{13} However, S.M. Imamuddin has noted a difference between the Lodī and Sur polities. According to him, while the polity under the Lodīs remained tribal, Sher Shāh succeeded in establishing a truly autocratic form of government which continued even under his son, Islām Shāh Sur. Both Sher Shāh and Islām Shāh were able to curb “Afghan tribalism” by maintaining large standing armies and supervising in person the relationship between the soldiers and their commanders. Under the weak successors of Islām Shāh, the various tribal features, internal rivalries and factionalism resurfaced, eventually plunging the whole kingdom into anarchy.\textsuperscript{14} Reacting to the characterization of Afghan polity as “tribal”, I.H. Siddiqui takes another extreme position by calling it “despotic”.\textsuperscript{15} Making a more critical use of largely the same set of sources, Siddiqui highlights elements of absolutism in Afghan kingship. In doing so, however, the author tends to neglect the crucial linkages that existed between religion and politics of the period, which to an extent restricted the

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p.91.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., pp.94-97.
\textsuperscript{14} Imamuddin, “Nature of Afghan Monarchy”, pp.268-75.
\textsuperscript{15} I.H. Siddiqui, Some Aspects of Afghan Despotism in India (Aligarh, 1969).
power of the sovereign. We shall refer below to several anecdotes of bestowal of kingship to the rulers by the sufi shaikhs, who enjoyed considerable political clout in the dominion. We shall also draw attention to their involvement in succession crisis, and in the conflict between the rival Muslim polities. The rulers' frantic attempts at placating the sufis, through public protestation of respect and devotion, offer of cash and landgrants to them, betrays their search for legitimacy. These are some important issues which should not be ignored while making an assessment of the nature of polity during the period.

In view of the above discussion, it will be worthwhile to attempt a fresh approach to study the nature of sovereignty and governance in the period. This is also because Siddiqui's criticism of the dismissal of Afghan polity as "tribal" remains marginalized. This is evident from the dominant scholarship on medieval Indian history which contrasts the so-called "tribal-confederacy" of the Afghans with the sophisticated monarchical structure of the Mughals. It will be proper if we illustrate this through a discussion of Muhammad Zaki's recently published work, *Muslim Society in Northern India*. The book takes into account the disintegration of "the centralized political structure" of the Delhi Sultanate, resulting in "anarchy" and "chaos" in all walks of life during this "transitional" or "formative" period, before Akbar (r. 1556-1605) restored normalcy by providing an "all-India administrative edifice". Zaki finds an "obvious moral decline" during the period, and refers to several cases of "love affairs", "homosexual love", "faithless wife", etc. Following the medieval writers, he notes that these "immoral practices" lead to failures in various fronts. Zaki ascribes the success of Sultan Bahlul and Sher Shah to their religiosity. Conversely, the destruction of the Sharqis of Jaunpur is attributed to their
excessive indulgence in dance and music.\textsuperscript{16}

The author notes that certain "Muslim festivals where men and women could mix freely provided opportunities for immoral practices", and singles out the gatherings at the shrines of the sufi shaikhs for the purpose. He suggests that the period witnessed "spiritual anarchy", in that the sufis of various orders (silsilas) were hankering for power and wealth. More shocking for him is the case of Shāh ‘Abdullāh Shaṭṭārī (d. 1485) who marched with armed followers and behaved like a king.\textsuperscript{17}

Thus, according to Zaki, "political and religious disorder" in the period provided the favourable context for the rise of a "mahdī" in Sayyid Muḥammad (1443-1504) of Jaunpur. His preoccupation with signs of disintegration during this period as against order and prosperity in the reign of Akbar has compelled him to ignore the millenarian hypothesis for the rise of the Mahdawi movement. It may be mentioned here that the Islamic east was under the grip of severe apocalyptic worries during the period as it coincided with the approach of the end of Islam's first millennium heralding the rise of the mahdī and the advent of qayāmat (Day of Judgment). In India, Sayyid Muḥammad's movement, however, could evoke only limited response. We shall briefly refer to this movement in chapter six where we shall also see how the Raushaniyas were brutally crushed by the Mughals. Zaki does not mention this last point, as it perhaps does not fit well with his evaluation of Akbar.

Further, the chapter entitled "The Bhakti Movement and the Muslim Society" in Zaki's book is largely a compilation of long quotations from the English translation by Macauliffe of the saints' verses which attack orthodoxy and ritualism in medieval

\textsuperscript{16} Zaki, \textit{Muslim Society in Northern India}, pp.28-29. For Jaunpur, see next chapter.

\textsuperscript{17} Zaki, \textit{Muslim Society in Northern India}, pp. 29, 110 and 116.
Islam and Hinduism. The chapter fails to give any valuable insight on the Muslim society during the period. However, the last page of the chapter does refer to the Muslims having borrowed certain practices from the Hindus. Elsewhere in the book, the author has referred to the "Hindu practice of Jauhar" having been "sometimes actually performed" by the Muslims. Zaki has not cited any evidence to this effect.

Returning to the Bhakti movement, the chapter leaves a lot to be desired as issues such as the reason for the spurt in saint-cults during the period and the source of the saints’ ideas have not been taken up for an in-depth analysis. Further we have echoes of the same old historiography of the period in his characterization of the Afghan polity in India as "tribal", "centrifugal", or for that matter a "crumbling structure". Also, it is incorrect to assume that tribal polity is necessarily chaotic. Moreover, there may be few takers for the suggestion that the lack of a centralized all India government meant political crisis, social chaos, or moral and religious degeneration of society.

The major propositions of the political history of the period seem to be primarily based on a reading of the works of two late sixteenth century Afghan chroniclers, Abbās Khān Sarwānī and Muḥammad Kabīr, without locating them in their context. Writing after the collapse of Afghan power, Sarwānī and Kabīr were ruminating on the loss of a ‘golden’ past; the latter also hoped for its revival. Kabīr’s Afsāna-i-Shāhān has been found to be a dubious source suffering from "glaring defects", and extremely anecdotal though otherwise valuable for a study of Indo-

18 Ibid., pp. 31 and 62.
Afghan cosmology during the period. Most of our historians have used Kabīr in a very selective manner. For instance, while the anecdote about the Lodi sultans sitting on a large throne resembling a dais has been utilized as the basis for the central argument in several of these works, the suggestion of Kabīr that Bahlūl Lodi's father Malik Kālā was also a sultan of Delhi is quietly glossed over. Kabīr writes that Sultan Kālā ruled the country for thirteen years, nine months, one day and five gharīs (hours). 19 With such anecdotes in the Afsāna, Kabīr has to be read with caution.

Curiously, Kabīr's accounts have often been preferred to those of 'Abbās Sarwānī's. This is however not to suggest that 'Abbās is a safe guide either. On the contrary, any reliance on 'Abbās alone can be fraught with serious problems. The example of the alleged letter of Sultan Bahlūl to the Afghan chiefs of Roh mentioned by 'Abbās may be noted here. 'Abbās has recorded that Bahlūl Lodi, faced with a serious threat from the Sharqī sultan of Jaunpur, had sent a letter to the Afghan chiefs requesting them to come to the rescue of their fellow Afghans in Hindustan, adding that the captured booty and newly acquired territories would be shared with them as brothers. In response to this letter, 'Abbās adds, the Afghans came from all quarters like "ants and locusts". 20 Modern historians have used this account rather uncritically. According to them, the allusion to the 'share' of territories 'as brothers' is incompatible with sovereignty. In suggesting this, however, they ignore a crucial sentence in the so-called letter, which makes it clear to the Afghans that, "the sovereignty shall no doubt be in my (Sultan Bahlūl's) name". 21 Further, the

19 Muḥammad Kabīr, Afsāna-i-Shāhān, Ms. British Museum, Ad. 24, 409 ff. 9b-14a, as cited in Siddiqui, Afghan Despotism, pp. 4-5, fn.2 (p.4).


21 Ibid, p.6.
suggestion that in response to Bahā'ūl's appeal the Afghans came from Roh like ants and locusts is also to be accepted with a pinch of salt. A comparison of the strength of the Lodī and Sharqī armies at this stage confirms the numerical superiority of the latter. It may however, be added here that there was nothing new or unusual in the 'invitation' to the Afghans to come to Hindustan. Even the Turkish rulers earlier had 'imported' or invited and 'settled' the Afghans at strategic places. In fact, such push and pull dynamics had long been operative behind the immigration and settlement of the Afghans.

Instead of depending merely upon some tribal customs and genealogy, the Afghan rulers like their predecessors drew upon the universal tropes of kingship. Muslim rulers before them, in India and elsewhere, had already appropriated from diverse traditions, a wide range of symbols of sovereignty for the enunciation of their power. Though the sources do not provide much information on the elaborate court rituals representing the power of the Afghan kings, the right to place the crown upon

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22 For Roh, see chapter two.


24 In a refreshing new study on Muslim kingship in general, Aziz Al-Azmeh writes: Specific manners and colours of dress, particular rhythms of activity, visual prerogatives, the exclusive possession of emblematic objects, titles, specific charismatic manifestations, and the combination of all these with a particular etiquette and the specific spatial and temporal disposition of the bodies, manners, gaze, and speech of various classes of subjects in relation to the position and aspect of the king—all were deployed in the enunciation of royal power, or power fashioned after the model of kingship, and were integral to its constitution. They serve to dramatise the locus of power, to diffuse the enunciation of kingship among a populace that may have no access to formal and emblematic enunciations spoken and written in courtly circles, to amplify absolutism by entrancing its beholders at court and enchanting those beyond, and to reaffirm in ritual both the unilaterality and individuality of power and the hierarchy of its attendant personnel, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* (London/New York, 1997), p.131.
the head, sit on the throne, read the *khutba*, mint coins (*sikka*) and collect revenue vested with the kings and not with the ‘tribal’ chieftains. Similarly, *chatr* (royal umbrella), *āštābdīr* (sun-umbrella), *naubat* (large kettle drum), and *naqqara* (kettle drum) were the paraphernalia of royalty, which were the special prerogatives of kings.

The titles, adopted by the kings after their enthronement, are also useful indicators of how they perceived their sovereignty and projected their power. Prince Nizām took up the title of Alexander or Sikandar and thus located himself in Islam’s grand tradition, which had appropriated the symbols of sovereignty from divergent sources. Earlier, the title was used by the Khaljī Sultan, ‘Alā’-ud-Dīn (r. 1296-1316). Fārid Khān combined his two titles of Sher Khān and Shāh Ālam to be known as Sher Shāh: asserting thereby that the lion was the king of the world. However, use of the lion or tiger-motif for the projection of the kingly power was not entirely an innovation of Sher Shāh. The Saljuq rulers earlier had effectively utilised the title: lion-hearted. Later Tipu Sultan of Mysore adopted the tiger-motif to project his power. Further, the titles inscribed on the coins of the Afghan kings are also significant for the understanding of their power projection. Whereas Bahlūl Lodi claimed to be the ‘nāḥīh amīr-ul-muminīn’, Sher Shāh counted himself amongst the rightly guided caliphs – Ābū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUṣmān and ʿĀlī – and referred to himself as ‘as-sūltān al-ʿādil abul muṣaffar farīd-ud-duniya wad-dīn’. Subsequently, the names of the first four caliphs were discarded by Sher Shāh who claimed to be the caliph of

26 For Tipu Sultan, see Kate Brittlebank, *Tipu Sultan’s Search for Legitimacy: Islam and Kingship in a Hindu Domain* (Delhi, 1997).
28 Ibid., p.264.
the time (khalīfa az-żamān). Also significant was the kalima (the profession of faith in Islam) inscribed in a square on the obverse of Sher Shāh’s coins. On the other hand, he made his claims to power intelligible to his largely non-Muslim subjects by inscribing the legend, ʻSrī ʻSrī Sāh or ʻSrī ʻSrī Sāhī in devnagiri script on the reverse of the coin.

It may be noted here that the paucity of coins of the Lodī period is attributed to the shortage of precious metals in the empire to the extent that they were not available for minting coins. This hypothesis ignores the reports of the huge treasures, which the Lodīs had accumulated in the course of their conquests. It also neglects the impressive numbers of gold and silver coins issued by the contemporary rulers of the various regional kingdoms such as Kashmir, Malwa, Jaunpur, Bengal and Gujarat. Even the Sayyids had struck gold and silver coins.

Further, Bābur (r. 1526-30) was able to mint gold and silver coins after his conquest of Hindustan, and altogether eighty silver coins of the emperor survive from the period of his brief rule. Certainly the conqueror did not bring precious metals from outside for minting coins in India! In fact he refers to the vast Lodī treasury that had fallen into his hands in the aftermath of his victory at Panipat.

We understand that the Mughals had captured only a portion of the Lodī treasury as the vast chunk of it was kept at forts like Chunar, which fell into the

29 Ibid., pp.323-25.
30 Ibid., pp.263-89.
33 For Chunar, see chapter one.
hands of Sher Khān not long after the sack of the Lodī Sultanate. The Afghan empire-builder himself issued gold and silver coins, and a large number of them, mainly silver, have survived. 34 This evidence clearly modifies the suggestion that there was a shortage of precious metals in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in North India which prevented the Lodīs from striking gold and silver coins. The Lodī rulers’ silver mixed copper coins known as billon have, survived. Though J.F. Richards agrees that there was no shortage of precious metals in the period, he attributes the debasement of coins under the Lodīs to the decentralized, tribal nature of the administrative and political system, which curtailed the economic power of the sultans. 35 This suggestion is not very convincing in the light of the fact that the Lodīs were continuously asserting their power and using whatever tools of dominance they found effective. It appears that the silver and gold coins of the Lodīs were probably taken out of circulation by the invading Mughals even as Bābur issued coins in his own name. After his death, coins were struck in the name of Humāyūn, and subsequently, as noted above, by Sher Shāh. Whereas the Afghans of the previous generation did not care to preserve the Lodī coins partly because of their disenchantment with Ibrāhīm Lodī, they kept those issued by Sher Shāh even as they cherished the memory of his ‘just’ rule.

Together with coinage, the Afghan rulers also used architecture as a visual enunciation of their royal authority. Hectic building activities took place during the period. Sikandar Lodī laid the foundation of the city of Agra and made it the seat of his power so that he might exercise more effective control over the chiefs.

34 Wright, The Coinage and Metrology of the Sultans of Delhi, pp.263-90.
of the unruly neighbourhood. The historians of architecture, however, do not seem to be impressed with the building activities of the Afghan period in general. This again is influenced by the notion that Afghan polity was tribal in nature and, therefore, lacking in grandeur and magnificence. Percy Brown, for instance, wrote that the imperial power at Delhi had been of an unsubstantial nature under the LodíS. This is shown in the type of building erected during their period. Under their diminishing influence, "all forms of constructive enterprise languished, and what architecture was produced reflects the weakening spirit of the time... no great structural undertakings are recorded, no capital cities were founded, no imperial palaces, no fortresses or strongholds were created, no mosques of importance, no colleges, and no public buildings were erected". (emphasis added). Brown not only ignores the foundation of the capital city of Agra by Sikandar Lodí but also contradicts his own position by noting the construction of a number of mosques and tombs under the LodíS that served as precedents first for Sher Shāh, and then for the Mughals. Yet, for Brown, the proliferation of tombs under the LodíS is a sign of decline. He writes that almost the only form of monument that appealed to the ruler(s) and their court officials at this juncture were those expressive of dissolution. They excelled in memorials to the dead, converting Delhi and its environs into a vast necropolis. Another historian of architecture, Catherine Asher, also attributes the

36 Suggesting that Sikandar Lodí shifted his capital to Agra in 1506, I.H. Siddiqui notes that formerly Agra was a pargana included in the sarkar of Biyana, but the sultan separated it with other nine parganas to constitute the sarkar of Agra. As the new city was to develop into the metropolitan city, it was reserved for khāliṣa and Miān Zaiṭūn, the shiqqdar was assigned the duty of looking after its administration as well as development, “Position of Shiqqdar under the Sultans of Delhi”, PIHC, 28th Session, Mysore, 1966, pp.202-208, especially pp.204-205.


38 Ibid., p.638.
proliferation of tombs under the Lodis to the tribal polity of the Afghans, but does not
ascribe the same meaning to the continued construction of tombs under the Mughal
rulers and their nobles.\textsuperscript{39}

Fortunately for Sher Shāh, historians of architecture have appreciated the
construction of tombs and mosques under him. Sher Shāh had made it a custom to
demolish existing royal structures in the cities he conquered and build new mammoth
forts and well planned cities in their place. Indeed, there is a significant linkage
between Sher Shāh's architecture and his desire for an exalted genealogy, and the
continuation of the Sūr style and symbolism in Mughal architecture.\textsuperscript{40} Brown has
noted that the octagonal plan of Lodī tombs, some of which were of "style and
distinction", was developed further by Sher Shāh at Sahsaram\textsuperscript{41} in a very splendid
manner.\textsuperscript{42} The tombs at Sahsaram represent "the final flowering of that style and it is
a florescence of notable size and splendour; so much so, that the principal example,
that containing the remains of Sher Shāh Sūr himself, is an architectural production of
which any country might be proud".\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{39} Catherine Asher, \textit{Architecture of Mughal India} (Cambridge, 1992), pp.13-14.

\textsuperscript{40} Catherine Asher, "Legacy and Legitimacy: Sher Shah's patronage of Imperial
Mausolea", in Katherine P. Ewing, ed., \textit{Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam} (Berkeley, 1988); idem, \textit{Architecture of Mughal India}.

\textsuperscript{41} For Sahsaram, see Francis Buchanan, \textit{An Account of the District of Shahabad in 1812-13}, first published 1934, reprint (Delhi, 1986), pp. 86-103; B.P. Ambashthya, ed., \textit{Beames' Contributions to the Political Geography of the Suba of Awadh, Bihar, Bengal and Orissa in the Age of Akbar} (Patna, 1976), pp.37-39; Irfan Habib, \textit{An Atlas of the Mughal Empire, Political and Economic Maps with Detailed Notes, Bibliography and Index} (Delhi, 1982), 10A, Notes.

\textsuperscript{42} Brown, "Influence of Sher Shah on Islamic Architecture", p.639. For a more recent study of Sher Shah’s tomb, see also, Catherine Asher, "The Mausoleum of Sher Shah Suri", \textit{Artibus Asiae}, XXXIX, ¾, 1977, pp.273-98. Buchanan found the tombs at Sahsaram in 1812-13 in a very bad shape with no arrangements for their maintenance, \textit{District of Shahabad}, pp.91-100.

\textsuperscript{43} Brown, "Influence of Sher Shah on Islamic Architecture", p.641. Buchanan was not impressed by the decoration of the interior of the tomb. In what may be viewed as an early 'Orientalist' criticis
Shāh from the other buildings of this series at Sahsaram, built c. 1540, is that it has the almost unique location in the centre of a large artificial expanse of water. Such an unusual scheme adds very considerably to its romantic and monumental effect. Another tomb of the Sultanate period set in a lake is that of Ghiyāṣ-ud-Dīn Tughluq. However, the spirit of this tomb differed from that of Sher Shāh. According to Asher, the Tughluq tomb utilized water like a moat around the fortress-like tomb with its high slopping pentagonal walls. By contrast, water at Sher Shāh’s wall-less tomb does not appear as a barrier but rather serves as a transition between the outside world and the tomb itself. Apart from the Tughluq tomb, other structures too influenced the making of Sher Shāh’s tomb. The earlier Jal Mandir at Pawapuri, 90 miles to the east of Sahsaram, and the seventh century Śiva temple on the top of the Mundesvari Hill, four miles south of Chainpur, may have served as the sources of inspiration for Sher Shāh’s tomb. Criss-crossing the entire eastern forest regions early in his career, Sher Shāh may have crossed this octagonal temple situated in the middle of a lake.

The link between the architecture of the Sultanate and the Mughal periods is provided by the Masjid-i-Qīfā-i-Kuhna, another masterpiece of Sher Shāh, built c. 1540 at Delhi. The structure of the mosque is enceinte with ideas, some of the past, others original and still more of an experimental order, so that few other buildings contain so many elements of tradition and promises of development. Brown writes:

"of Indian architecture, he suggested that “the attempts at ornament are in the very worst taste, and are rudely executed. Had the walls being perfectly plain, they would have had a better effect; a few simple but neat cornices with well formed doors and windows, and good masonry, would have rendered the whole grand and solemn; but here as usual in native masonry, the workmanship in rude”, District of Shahabad, p.97."

Asher, “The Mausoleum of Sher Shah”, p.278.

Ibid.
“above all it is supreme in the quality of its artistic treatment and intensely living in its architectonics, a composition well worthy of close and scientific study”\(^{46}\). Nath de-emphasizes the Sūr influence on Mughal architecture and doubts that such a masterpiece as the *Masjid-i-Qilâ-i-Kuhna* could have been built by the Afghans\(^{47}\). Located inside the city founded by Sher Shāh at Delhi, of which only the citadel known as the Purana Qila and some of the gates have survived, the mosque also represented a crystallization of the forms and experiences seen in a series of small mosques built under the Lodīs. Within the walled enclosure of the Purana Qila, in addition to the mosque, there was a concentration of secular buildings, palaces and courts, *darbār* halls and pavilions, for the accommodation of Sher Shāh and his royal entourage, most of which were “swept away” by the Mughals. That these were buildings of notable architectural merit is proved not only by the character of the mosque, but by the exceptionally fine treatment of the gateways to the citadel, as for instance the Bara Darwaza or main entrance in the middle of the Western wall. There can be little doubt that the palaces within were of the same high standard\(^{48}\). According to Brown, it was from this group of buildings that the Mughal emperor Akbar obtained the spirit and incentive as well as many of the distinctive qualities of his own productions\(^{49}\).

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\(^{47}\) Nath suggests that the sources “do not help us to ascribe the Old Fort, its three gateways, and the *Qala-i-Kuhna Masjid* and the *Sher-Mandal* inside it, to Sher Shah”. They were built by Humayun, *History of Mughal Architecture*, Vol. I (Delhi, 1982), pp.131-41. Sir Sayed Ahmad Khan suggests in his *Asar-us- Sanadid*, ed., Khaleeq Anjum, Vol. I (Delhi, 1990), pp.335-36, that Sher Shah built the mosque in 948/1541.


\(^{49}\) Ibid., p.646.
Whereas the architecture served to enhance the grandeur of the Afghan kings, and also was a symbol of their might, the particular way in which royal *farmāns* were to be received by the nobles also indicated the nature of Afghan monarchy. Referring to the imperial order issued to the nobles posted in the regions, Mushtāqī writes that they would go out on foot for one to three *karohs* to receive the *farmāns*. A platform was erected on which the bearer of the *farmān* stood, and the noble standing below received it in the most respectful manner, placing it upon his head. If he was instructed to read it on the spot publicly, he did so; otherwise he took it with himself.\(^{50}\) Niẓām-ud-Dīn Aḥmad adds that if the order was that the *farmān* should be read out in a mosque from near the pulpit, it had to be complied with.\(^{51}\) The practice of paying respect to the *farmāns* continued under the Mughals. J.F. Richards has rightly suggested that the elaborate reception of a *farmān* demanded that the recipient act as if the emperor himself were arriving in person.\(^{52}\) Further, the instruction that the order should be read out from the pulpit of a mosque was presumably intended also to lend to it a measure of sanctity and special authority.

It is often suggested that the kings had to share power with their powerful Afghan nobles. P. Saran, a leading specialist of Mughal administration recognizes that provincial boundaries which had hitherto been "shifting and vague" were systematized by Sher Shāh, and that the limits of the *sūbas* (provinces) defined by


\(^{51}\) Niẓām-ud-Dīn Aḥmad, *Ṭabaqāt-i-Akbarī*, eds., B. De. (Calcutta, 1913-31).

him remained practically unchanged after him. Akbar seemed to have maintained the 
**status quo** until he undertook a systematic reorganization of the empire into the 
provinces. Regarding the overall Afghan polity, however, Saran also follows the view 
that it was tribal and suggests that even under Sher Shāh it continued to be so. He 
adds that the Afghan “system” of division of the kingdom among nobles “was not in 
the least altered or modified” by Sher Shāh.53 Our sources, however, show that the 
nobility under Bahlūl and his successors was quite broad based, the non-Afghan 
Muslims and Rajputs each forming a fairly large group.54 Also, the Afghan kings 
often asserted their supreme position by making such statements as:

\[
\text{دو مسمی دو مسمی چاپ و در کم کم چاپ شرک آزم گیرن}.
\]

(Just as two swords cannot be kept in one scabbard, two rulers cannot rule at one 
place simultaneously).

They also reminded their nobles that they should not expect a share in the 
government as this was the kingdom of Hindustan where the law of the king and not 
the “tribal” customs of Roh constituted the law of the land.55 The undisguised exercise 
of force in punishing the ambitious nobles who tried to defy royal power, and 
arbitrariness and innovations in carrying out the executions highlighted the 
unaccountability of the Afghan rulers.

Furthermore, the suggestion that the rulers before Akbar were inward looking, 
or that they did not consider themselves as rulers of the same status as the Ṣafavids or

pp.55-56, 63 and 144-50.


the Ottomans, is not entirely true in the case of at least Sher Shâh, who died in an accident before his ambitious plans could reach their culmination. One of his major projects which remained unaccomplished was the colonization of the route to Afghanistan. The idea of having Afghan settlements along the route was significant not only for obstructing any invasion from the Northwest, which often destroyed the political ecology of North India, but also for expansion in future. Sher Shâh had even planned to send an emissary to the Ottoman sultan for a pact to undertake a joint campaign against the growing menace of the Qizilbâsh under the early Safavids. The idea was to engage the Qizilbâsh on two fronts simultaneously – on land, and at sea, by the Ottomans and the Afghans. In fact, an order for the building of ships, though ostensibly for the Hajj pilgrims, had already been issued. Mîr Rafi-ud-Dîn, a leading saint of that time, was to leave for Rum as an envoy. Evidence for the two projects are found in the works of Ni‘matullâh Harawi56 and Mulla ‘Abdul Qâdir Badaûnî,57 which merit respect from the scholars, and cannot be rejected as a mere fanciful imagination of ‘Abbâs Khân Sarwânî, the bete noire of scholars of Mughal history.

The author of the Tawârîkh-i-Daulat-i-Sher Shâhî gives a plausible reason for Sher Shâh’s animosity against the Safavids. According to him, Sher Shâh had sent an ambassador to the court of Shâh Ţahmâsp, requesting him to capture Hamayun and hand him over to his men. Instead of obliging the Afghan king, Shâh Ţahmâsp cut off the ears and nose of the Indian envoy. Sher Shâh, as a reprisal, ordered the mutilation

and expulsion of all the Qizilbash nobles who had links with the Mughals, and were still living in any part of his dominion. Further, he ordered all the Persian inhabitants of his kingdom to be expelled and their properties to be attached to the state, anyone offering them help or protection was to be treated as an outlaw. Certain Indian nobles of Tughluq and Khalji extraction who had been secretly in touch with the Mughals and plotting against Sher Shāh were also punished, and their leaders executed. 58

In the light of the evidence of a relentless imperialistic project under the Afghans, it is difficult for us to agree with the “tribal-anarchy” hypothesis. Furthermore, to evaluate the Afghan polity in a more nuanced perspective we may refer to a few models of state in medieval India identified in a recent work. 59 These include: (a) Marx’s notion of oriental despotism and the Asiatic mode of production, which concedes to the ‘unchanging’ state a strong centralised coercion for external warfare and internal exploitation of the village communities. (b) The Indian historiographical model of a rather unitary centrally organised and territorially defined kingdom with a strong bureaucracy. (c) The Marxist inspired model of Indian feudalism of a decentralized and fragmented feudal state. (d) The model of the segmentary state, which locates the early medieval state between the tribal ‘stateless’ form of government and a patrimonial state. (e) The patrimonial state depicts the Mughal empire as household-dominated, rather than a highly structured bureaucratically administered state. 60 The presence of a powerful, centralized

59 Herman Kulke, eds., The State in India, 1000-1700 (Delhi, 1995).
bureaucracy as the vital characteristic of historical empires has been stressed by some scholars. While accepting the idea of a bureaucratic dominance, some other scholars have asserted that the diffusion of firearms, especially siege artillery, explains the aggregation of central power, which brought the Mughal empire into being. This view, termed as the "gunpowder empire hypothesis", is not applicable to the empire-building activities of the Afghans as they almost entirely depended upon the cavalry for their conquests, as we shall see subsequently.

Besides these major concepts of the state in medieval India there exist a considerable number of what Hermann Kulke characterizes as the 'non-aligned' contributions, which emphasize processes of state formation rather than the state as a given entity. These are attempts at an analysis of political processes and the changes in the structure of polity in medieval India, and perceive political changes through centralization and integration. Even though these changes tended to be restricted to certain periods and regions, they regularly relapsed, usually during dynastic crisis, but normally did not fall back into status quo ante. Thus a certain degree of structural alterations survived these dynastic changes. They also underscore the series of processes, for example, extension of agrarian society through peasantisation of tribal groups; improvement of trading networks; emergence and spatial extending of ruling lineages by so called "Kshatriyaisation" or "Rajputisation"; "greater penetration of the royal will into local arenas of power"; and never ending though rarely successful attempts to centralize administrative functions, particularly revenue collection, etc.

63 Ibid., p.41.
Another major topic of various recent studies is the role played by religious institutions in the process of state formation. They take into account various aspects of the medieval socio-religious developments, for example, religious and socio-political integration through religious networks, royal legitimization and expansion of royal influence through patronage of temple, and royal intervention in management of temples.  

Among these, the contributions which highlight the processes of state formation with the significant role played by religious institutions are valuable for an appreciation of the Afghan polity. Indeed, the sources suggest that religion was an important factor in the articulation and projection of Afghan power. It ensured that the Afghan king was both absolute and limited. Being a representative of God on earth, he enjoyed certain discretionary powers and was accountable to “Him” only. But if he failed to ensure peace and order in the realm, and oppressed the subject population, he could lose his “job” on account of the prayer of a saintly person, for example, a sufi shaikh. The sources mention several anecdotes in which a reigning king was removed from the throne by the shaikh, and kingship being bestowed upon some one who was portrayed as a more deserving person. It is no wonder then that the rulers tried to keep the saints in good humour, and in return, sought legitimacy from them. Significantly, in this connection, Sher Shāh is said to have insisted upon his nobles to maintain dignity in public and to fear God. Thus, any study of Afghan polity must necessarily take into account the role of religion in it. The sufis’ involvement in politics with all their visions and miracles was of particular significance.

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64 Ibid., pp.42-43.
65 See chapter two.
The intermingling of religion and politics does not imply that Afghan polity was theocratic in nature. The rulers' dependence on the 'ulamā and the sufis for support and legitimacy was crucial in a political tradition without a strong rule of primogeniture. Moreover, the support of the minority Muslim population, whose political understanding was informed by the religious institutions like the mosques and khānaqāhs, was also necessary for the king who projected himself as the protector of the faith. The Muslims did feel secure and comfortable in such a dispensation even as they were aware of the fact that the rulers did not make any serious attempt to implement the sharī'at as the law of the land. On the other hand, the Afghan rulers understood that a strict adherence to the sharī'at was impracticable for ruling the vast majority of non-Muslim population.

The sources need therefore to be read afresh for an apposite appreciation of the period. Such an effort will also have to be combined with a reading of other significant texts prepared during the period. Of the so-called Afghan chroniclers, only 'Abbās and Kabīr belonged to that qaum or birādarī, others were either Saiyads or Shaikhzādas in the service of the Mughals. They did not stand to gain by extolling the achievements of the enemies of their masters. 'Abbās himself, in his composition presented as a gift to Akbar, emerges as an apologist for Sher Shāh seeking favours from the emperor! The memory of the reverses the Mughals encountered at the hands of the Afghans under Sher Shāh continued to haunt them for long. Shāh Nawāz Khān has recorded that Akbar was always apprehensive of Daulat Khān Lodi, known as one of the bravest men of his age. When the news of his death was conveyed to Akbar he heaved a sigh of relief, and said, "This day Sher Khān Sūr has departed from the
world". Indeed, the Mughals spared no efforts to marginalise the Afghans after the restoration of their rule. Significantly, in 1647-48, the Afghans comprised merely 5.9% of the total number of mansabdar above 500 zat, while the Rajputs, for instance, constituted 16.5% of the total strength.

On the other hand, Mughal chroniclers have invariably voiced their masters’ hostility in their panegyric accounts of the reign of Humayun. Prominent amongst them is Abu'l Fa'izz who presents the Afghans as the dangerous ‘other’, totally unreliable since “treachery” of their leader Sher Shah had cost the Mughals their dominion. Incidentally, Abu'l Fa'izz did not recognize Sher Shah as the badshah of Hindustan, as he has used the Afghan king’s earlier title of Sher Khan throughout. Moreover, he has used his stock of abusive epithets for the Afghans generally, and for Sher Shah in particular.

The Mughal or Akbari hegemony continued to shape the texture of subsequent historiography. History of the Afghan period became a victim of this hegemony. Mostly produced under the Mughals, the texts dealing with the Afghans have also been rather arbitrarily utilized. When the choice is, for instance, between the conflicting accounts of ‘Abbās and Kabīr, the latter is generally preferred. When both these Afghan authorities concur on a point, the divergent opinion of either Abu’l Fa’izz or Jauhar Āftābchī (another ‘His Majesty’s voice’), is considered to be “authentic”. The Mughal chroniclers enjoy such a pervasive influence on modern scholarship that

67 Richards, The Mughal Empire (Delhi, 1993), pp.20, 145.
while Āftābchī is said to have recorded everything "faithfully", 69 'Abbās Sarwānī's intentions are often doubted. 70 We may submit that the account of 'Abbās Sarwānī needs to be treated more carefully. Short of hyperboles, an earlier authority, Shaikh Rizqullāh Mushtāqī, corroborates his account. Another writer, Niẓām-ud-Dīn Aḥmad, who is generally respected for his balanced narrative, further confirms the account of 'Abbās Sarwānī to a great extent. 'Abdul Qādir Baghdānī not only supports 'Abbās Sarwānī but actually glorifies the history of the earlier period. He takes pride in the fact of his birth in the "blessed" reign of Sher Shāh. 71 Other scholars such as Ni‘matullāh Harawī and Aḥmad Yādgār 72 have produced a more balanced narrative even as they have drawn on 'Abbās Sarwānī's work and have reflected the perception that perhaps the Afghan rulers had greater regard for justice.

Glorification of Akbar's achievements sometimes leads to the vulgarization and belittling of Afghan exploits. Mention may be made here of the circulation of the scandalous report that Sher Shāh had occupied the strong Ruhtas fort by sending armed soldiers inside the citadel disguised as women, in dolis. Unable to digest Sher Shāh's capture of one of the most impregnable forts, Abūl Fāzī writes that by a "hundred flatteries and deceptions the simple minded Raja was persuaded by the trick of that juggler (Sher Shāh)". 73 Later writers have also followed Abūl Fāzī's

69 See chapter one.
The circulation of this story must have considerably affronted the Afghans as it clearly amounted to their insult and expressed contempt for their capabilities as honourable warriors. ‘Abbās, for one, rejects it as “simply false and slanderous”. In this connection, the example of Abū’l Fazl’s propagation of an alleged statement of Bābur that Sher Shāh’s eyes betrayed “turbulence” and “strife-mongering” may also be cited. It is evidently the Akbarnāma from which Ni‘matullāh borrows Bābur’s alleged remark that:

(μάθατην ἀνένναγκν Σὲρ Ἰάνα ϕατάντα ἀνάλλαται μεγαλεῖρα πάντοτε ἀποτίαρνεῖον.

(The eyes of this Afghan named Sher Khan betray turbulence and strife mongering).

The Mughal court painters were not behind in getting the message through such treatment, some of them were, indeed, quick to grasp this image of Sher Shāh. A portrait of the Afghan ruler existing from, at least, as early as the reign of Jahangir, clearly depicts his eyes itching for “fitna” (turbulence) and “shor-angezi” (strife mongering). Conversely, as J.F. Richards points out, in more than fifty paintings directly portraying emperor Akbar, “the artists contrast the divine order, self-control and harmony of the emperor as the illumined person, with the turgid, struggling

74 Tankh-i-Khan-i-Jahan-Iwa Makhzani-Afgani, Vol. I, pp. 293-95; Tankh-i-Sala•fn-i-Af•ghina, pp. 187-89; Masir-ul-Umara, VI, pp. 226-27. Firishta adds that the merit of the invention of this stratagem of sending soldiers in the guise of women is not due to Sher Shah; the fort of Asir in the Deccan having been long before surprised in the same manner by Nasir Khan Farrukh, ruler of Khundesh, M. Qasim Hindii-Shaib Astrabadi known as, Firishta, Gulshan-i-IbrahimIi usually called Tankh-i-Firishta, Eng. tr., J. Briggs, London 1829, rp. (Calcutta, 1966): Vol II, pp. 72-73.

75 Tankh-i-Sher ShāhI, p. 264.

76 Akbarnāma, Vol. 1, p. 327.


78 Portrait published in Gulbadan Begam, Humayun-Nama, ed. and trans. A.S. Beveridge, rp. (Delhi, 1983), facing p. 133.
disorder of those unwieldy masses of men and mankind seen in the remainder of the painting”. Thus, the artists conveyed Abū’l Fazl’s perception of Akbar as a luminous being, which further could carry conviction as an image of absolute power.79

A logical follow up of all this is also the general representation of the Afghans as rustic people always engaged in pillage and undue aggrandizement. Though the Afghans themselves provided some of the material for the dissemination of their image as “foolish rustics”,80 much of it was invented by the Mughals in the wake of their all out effort to discredit the Afghan rulers. To illustrate this point further, let us take the case of the reconstruction of Sher Shāh’s early life by K.R.Qanungo. The author suggests that during his student days at Jaunpur Sher Shāh (then Farīd) a “robust and daring youth”, operated as “part time thief”, graduating in course of time as a “bandit chief”.81 This is in flagrant disregard to the evidence in the Persian sources which state that Sher Shāh had utilised his period of stay at Jaunpur in not only studying the standard texts on inter-alia statecraft and history, but also in cultivating himself in the company of the noted ‘ulamā and the mashāikh (sufi saints) of the area. Badāuni, for instance, wrote:82

(He was busy cultivating himself in the company of the scholars and shaikhs of that region).

79 Richards, “Formulation of Imperial Authority”, p.262.

80 See, for instance, the deliberately enacted idiotic behaviour of the followers of Bahlul in the latter’s quest to capture power at Delhi, Wāqi‘āt-i-Mushtāfi, pp. 4-5; Ṭabaqāt-i-Akbarī, Eng. Trans., I, pp. 338-39.

81 K.R.Qanungo, Sher Shah and his Times, an old story retold by the author after decades from a fresh standpoint (Calcutta, 1965), pp.32-33.

Qanungo, however, cites Rizqullāh Mushtāqī and Abū’l Fāżl as his authorities in this connection. The latter has recorded that after the death of his father, all the property fell into Farīd’s hands, and he began to create trouble in the territory of Sahsaram and in the jungles of Chaund by way of thefts, robberies and murders.\textsuperscript{83} Qanungo corrects Abū’l Fāżl and suggests that Farīd practiced theft and robbery (omits murder) \textit{not after} (emphasis original) the death of Hasan but during his lifetime probably in places other than “Sahsaram and the jungles of Chaund”.\textsuperscript{84} Siddiqui differs from Qanungo to suggest that Farīd “had taken to robbery” after having been removed from the position of shiqqdar of the parganas, and not as a student in Jaunpur.\textsuperscript{85} We have already drawn attention to the dubious nature of Abū’l Fāżl’s account of this period. Any reliance on him alone can be disastrous. Let us turn to Mushtāqī’s narrative. He reports that while campaigning in the region of Malwa, Sher Shāh told Mallū Khān that in his early life he had associated himself “with the dacoits and highwaymen and plundered the country all around”.\textsuperscript{86} On the basis of this evidence, Qanungo suggests that as “even the most taciturn of men, prone to excessive reserve, are known to indulge in their lighter moods in old age when in the company of kindred spirits, when they can well afford to laugh at their own juvenile follies, we have no reason to distrust Sher Shāh’s alleged confession” to Mallū Khān.\textsuperscript{87} The use of such phrases as the “lighter mood” and “the company of kindred spirits” by the author clearly shows that Qanungo first accepts Abū’l Fāżl’s version

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Akbarnāma}, Vol. I, pp.327-28.
\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Sher Shah Sur and his Times}, p.43.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Wāqī‘ūt-i-Mushtāqī}, pp.144-49. Subsequent references to Mallū Khān in the \textit{Wāqī‘ūt} are from these pages only. The ‘confession’ appears on p.145.
\textsuperscript{87} Qanungo, \textit{Sher Shah and his Times}, p.33.
and then reads Mushtaqi to locate a corroborative evidence, divesting the reference to brigandage here of its context.

Mallū Khān, it must be noted, was one of the few warlords who had refused to accept Sher Shāh, as the king of Hindustan even after the latter’s victory over the Mughal emperor, Humāyūn. The former had even pretended to be a sovereign in his own right, styling himself as Qādir Shāh.88 It is to chastise him, and also the “Purabiya” upstart Puranmal that Sher Shāh had to undertake his Malwa campaign. Mallū Khān, however, surrendered before Sher Shāh soon after the arrival of the latter at Sarangpur. The subsequent account of the treatment meted out to Mallū Khān, a captive in Sher Shāh’s camp, shows a deliberate attempt on the part of the king to terrorise him with the purpose of driving home the point that kingship was not his cup of wine. The army’s march to Ujjain, fully equipped with arms and weapons, with the soldiers putting on iron armour in the “hot sun”, the leading nobles faking an attack on Sher Shāh during the march and their ensuing submission and salutation, and the narration of the hardships faced in early life including the reference to dacoity and plunder were designed to instil terror in the Khan’s mind. The strategy actually worked on the desired line. A “completely astounded” Mallū Khān fled away in the direction of Gujarat. Having done away with the pretender, at least for the time being, Sher Shāh turned his attention to the slightly more powerful Puranmal. Sher Shāh’s action against Puranmal and his Purabiya followers who were reportedly massacred at his command, has been condemned as “treacherous” by the modern scholars, and is generalized to prove his “failure” to break the shackles of Islamic orthodoxy as also

his inability to incorporate the Rajputs in the Indo-Muslim political network. We shall return to this problem in chapter four.

It may however be mentioned here that the criticism of the Afghan rulers' alleged intolerance in existing historiography seems influenced by an enthusiasm to establish that Akbar commenced the policy of tolerance towards non-Muslims. Our own reading of the sources suggests that hardly any ruler of the Delhi Sultanate attempted to annihilate the non-Muslim population, or used force to convert them to Islam and impose the *shari'at* as the basis of governance. On the contrary, the emphasis was on integrating the regional warlords in an imperialistic project. The sources throw invaluable light not only on the military campaigns of the Muslim rulers; much of the material available therein actually elucidates the early Muslim endeavour to come to terms with the local reality through rapprochements and appropriations. ‘Awwī’s *Jawāmiʿ-ul-Ḥikāyāt*, completed sometime after 1230, comprises a whole section on counsels for “good government, stable administration and welfare of the subjects”. Further, a *farmān* of ‘Alā’-ud-Dīn Khaljī stresses the minimum use of violence and bloodshed both for conquest and enforcement of ‘law’. Dictionaries compiled by the middle of the fourteenth century incorporate non-Persian words and terms indicating a quest for an acceptable politico-cultural idiom. The translation of the Arabic classics in the thirteenth century and the Persian adaptation of the ancient Indian tales such as the *Basātiḥ-ul-Uns* of Malik Ikhtisān, completed in

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89 J.F. Richards suggests that the increasing employment of unconverted free Indian nobles by the Muslim rulers was not “solely a matter of increased ‘tolerance’ on the part of the Muslims, but the end result of forced Hindu acceptance of a harsh reality”. ‘Introduction’, in idem, ed., *Kingship and Authority*, p. X; For the problems faced by the early Delhi sultans in establishing their authority, see also, Peter Hardy, “The Growth of Authority over a Conquered Political Elite: The Early Delhi Sultanate as a Possible Case Study”, in Richards, ed., *Kingship and Authority*, pp. 192-214.
1325-1326, may also be viewed in terms of the willingness to adapt to, or incorporate from, diverse sources of tradition.\footnote{For relevant sources, see Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, Perso-Arabic Sources of Information on the Life and Conditions in the Sultanate of Delhi (Delhi, 1992).}

The role played by the sufis in this process of assimilation was particularly significant. Existing historiography does highlight their role in the building of a "syncretic" medieval culture. We shall adduce further such evidence in chapter six. We shall also analyse there some stories of miraculous encounters between the sufis on the one hand and the non-Muslim spiritual power-holders such as the brahmanas and the yogis on the other. These anecdotes are a valuable source material for a better understanding of the complexities of religious tensions in our period. The sufis' pursuit of an authoritative position in society brought them in contact with the rulers as well. We have noted above how some modern scholars suggest that the period witnessed "spiritual anarchy" because the sufis of various silsilas hankered after power and wealth. We will later examine in chapter five in some depth the weakness/strength of this suggestion. It would suffice to say here that it is based on a premise that the sufis, in particular the Chishtiis of the earlier period, that is, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, maintained distance from the politics of their time. This assumption has already been questioned in some recent researches. The role of the sufis in politics, including those of the Chishti order, is no longer viewed as something profane and soul-pollutant.

There are thus some serious lacunae in the historiography of the Afghan period. Studies of the nature of politics and the role of religion in it seem to be heavily influenced by the "hegemonistic" and imperialist Mughal discourse. The present
study is an effort to reconsider and analyse issues relevant to religion and politics in a
search of a balanced and empirically sustainable picture of the period. We will
particularly take into account the questions of sovereignty and governance, the
problem of the incorporation of the regional “elites”, mainly Rajputs, in the imperial
enterprise, and the role of religion with reference to the intervention of the sufis in
shaping the nature of politics and social order of the period. We shall focus on the
Afghan imperialistic project under Sher Shāh, who is often dismissed as a “warlord”-turned - “sultan”, equal in rank to perhaps such Purabiya upstarts as Puranmal. It
may be noted here that the status and prestige of the “sultan” had considerably
deprecated by the early sixteenth century. Muslim rulers were increasingly styling
themselves as bādsḥāhs, and called several of their sons sultans. Also, we shall
illustrate in detail in chapter three, how the Afghan rulers located themselves in the
grand tradition of Muslim kingship. Afghan tribal lineages and customs were invoked
generally for the purpose of mobilisation and conquest. Once the purpose was served,
the rulers were quick to set aside the tribal customary practices and instead asserted
their sovereign power. Similarly, they used the bogey of Islam in the wake of the
conflict with the non-Muslim chieftains, but had little hesitation in ignoring the
injunctions of the shari'atu in matters of actual governance.

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91 This is clearly reflected in chapter two of Dirk Kolff’s Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy. The term ‘Sultan’
appears too frequently to be cited here.