II. Political Ideals and Institutions
3. Norms of Governance and Aspects of Administration

As regard his justice on this earth, I say that none gives pain even to a creeping ant. Even Nausherwan who has been described as a great judge could not equal Sher Shāh in giving right decisions. When he dispenses justice like Ūmar, all the world looks up with admiration and praises him. None has the courage to touch even a nose-ring lying (without its mistress); people scatter gold along the road, the cow and the lion move by one path, and the two drink water at one place. 

Jāisī in Padmāvat.¹

Malik Muḥammad Jāisī’s statement is significant not only for the evaluation of the norms of governance under the Afghans, but also because it highlights an important feature of the history of Muslim polity, namely the integration of diverse non-Islamic political ideals in classical Islam. The Afghans drew on the ideals and institutions of the medieval Indo-Persian tradition of governance which were evolved over centuries of interaction between the classical Islamic ideals on the one hand and those of the Persians on the other. This process of appropriation had begun within the first century of Islam. The limitations of the sharī'at for ruling the fast expanding Muslim frontier was already realized by the early caliphs. Also, the slow but gradual incorporation of the ʿĀjamīs and the other non-Arabs paved the way for the replacement of the tribal-Arab norm of governance with a more sophisticated method drawn from the Byzantine and Sassanid political systems. Further, recovering from the initial shock administered by the Arab cultural imperialism, the Persians, dismissed as dumb people by the Arabs, not only turned the tables but also emphasized more and more, in a revivalistic campaign, the greatness of their non-Islamic past. It must be said to

the credit of Sunni Islamic orthodoxy that it strove hard for ensuring what it viewed as the pristine purity of Islam, condemning the “innovations” and deviance from the true path. Ironically, however, the orthodoxy succumbed to the forces of history to adopt elements from the non-Islamic traditions, and even to bear with the non-Islamic saltanat and bādshāhat. Yet the shari'at was not entirely replaced by secular, or customary laws. The Muslim rulers were expected to maintain a delicate balance between the two. At least, a public declaration of respect and adherence for the shari'at was expected from the rulers.

The balance between the sacred and the secular began with the Siyāsāt-nāma of Nizām ul-Mulk Ṭūsī, and was eventually very well reflected in the thirteenth century Nasirean akhlāq, particularly in the section on politics and state organizations. The authors of the akhlāq digests, though Muslims, borrowed from the views and sayings of the ancient Greek masters, and supplemented them with stories and anecdotes from Persia. The divine institute in these texts was presented to be the same as the universal metaphysical ideal. And if the authors noticed any divergence, they, like the early philosophers, resorted to interpretation to get at the real inner meanings (bāṭin) behind the apparent words (zāhir). Conversely, they invoked the shari'at and illustrated their discourses with anecdotes from classical Islam in cases where they found support in them for their ideals, thereby enhancing the acceptability of their views in Muslim orthodox circle. Yet the connotations of the shari'at in these writings were not the same as the ones used in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). Also, the prime duty of the

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ideal ruler, in their opinion, was to ensure the well-being of the people of diverse
groups, and not of Muslims alone.\(^3\)

The king, having projected himself as a viceregent, or shadow of God on
earth, was not expected to discriminate between Muslims and non-Muslims in
providing protection and justice to his subjects. A section of the \('ulamā\), however,
continued to emphasize the necessity of complying with the letter of the law. The
opinion of the mid-fourteenth century chronicler and political theorist of the Delhi
Sultanate, Žiyā Baranī, on this matter is not without value. In a passage which shows
his remarkable understanding of the context of time and space, Barani has suggested
that the total annihilation of the innovators and opponents of the \(shari'at\), was not
possible, either through the guidance and preaching of the Prophet or through the
violence and authority of the kings. According to him, they can at most be kept
suppressed and disgraced, and debarred from high offices of the realm and seats of
responsibility, as they pose a grave threat to the honour of Islam. Patronage to these
would be tantamount to discrediting the pious Muslims, the high-born and the God-
fearing. Thus, while Baranī's ideal polity demanded marginalization of the infidels
and deviant Muslims, the ruler being a representative of God was expected to
personify his basic attributes like mercy, forgiveness, justice and equity. There was no
question of discrimination on the basis of religion in such matters as protection and
justice (\(lāl-wa-imāf\)) to the people. More significantly, the limitations of the
parameters of the \(shari'at\) in tackling the complexities of the contemporary problems
has been noted, and the need to follow more effective secular state laws (\(zawābit-i-\)

\[^3\] Muzaffar Alam, "Indo-Persian Norms".
Indeed the Delhi sultans were hardly to be found as shar'ī'at-bound. Early in the thirteenth century Ilutmish (r.1210-1236) turned down the 'ulamā’s demand to take action against the Hindus, and later nominated Rāziya (r.1236-1240) as his heir-apparent. No contemporary alim dared challenge it. Ghiyāṣ-ud-Dīn Balban (r.1266-1286) following the Persian theory of kingship, organised elaborate court rituals and adopted the title of Ḿilluḷāh (shadow of God), which though not novel was juridically un-Islamic. ‘Alā’-ud-Dīn’s rebuke to Qāẓī Mughūs over the legality of his measures and his assertion that he did not care about the statutes of the sharī’at in matters of government is well known. His son Mubārakshāh (r.1316-1320) claimed to be the viceregent of God on earth. Muḥammad bin Tughluq (r.1325-1351) did not give any privilege to the ‘ulamā, and his successor Firuz Tughluq (r.1351-1388) paid lip service to Islam.

This is, however, not to suggest that politics and governance under the sultans were completely secular in orientation. In fact, there appears to be a critical interdependence between the ‘ulamā and the rulers. This was because most of the institutions engaged in training and employment of the ‘ulamā were established by the political elites and funded through charities and grants. Also, a qualified ‘alim’s main hope of employment was to get a job within the administration as a qāżī or mufīt.

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Thus, even if he wanted to become the imām or khaṭīb in a mosque, or a madrasa teacher, he had to depend upon the generosity of the ruler. By and large, therefore, the ʿulamā acted as paid servants of the state. They generally interpreted the shariʿat to suit the policies of the sultans. They were certainly not allowed to dictate policy. They were employed in administration to act as judges and religious advisors to make the Muslim subjects believe that the Sultanate was an Islamic state. They also legitimized the rulers’ campaigns against the non-Muslim chieftains by characterizing them as jihād. The khutba read in the mosques presented the rulers as protectors and promoters of Islam and Muslims. The same need for legitimacy led early sultans to seek investiture (manshīr) from the caliphs. At the practical level, the ruler was expected to provide relief to his subjects from tyranny, irrespective of their religion, and suppress crime and villainy, ensure prosperity of the realm, safety on highways, comfort of traders and soldiers, etc. Thus, the ideal include both a non-sectarian concern for the general welfare of the subjects across their religious affiliation and also for the statutes of the shariʿat, which served as a major source of legitimacy. There was constant vigil to maintain a balance between the two, but it would often be dislocated too. Such was the case in the early phases of our period.

The sixteenth century writers have not only appreciated the “good” deeds of the Afghan kings, but also highlighted their image as pious Muslim rulers. Shaikh

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Jamāli and Shaikh Rizqullāh Mushtaqī, for instance, almost exaggerate the rulers’ veneration of the sufi shaikhs. Quoting Shaikh Samā’-ud-Dīn’s son and successor, Shaikh Naṣīr-ud-Dīn, Jamāli wrote that after the death of Bahlūl Lodi his pīr, Samā’-ud-Dīn visited the sultan’s grave. After reciting the fātiha, he meditated for a while. Shortly afterwards the shaikh raised his head and remarked that on account of his devotion to the friends of God this man was successful both in this world and the hereafter.6 Mushtaqī, writing later noted that Sulṭān Bahlūl held the learned and pious men in respect. He personally heard the complaints of the people and passed suitable orders. From the very beginning of his reign, he attended religious sermons, and used to go to the mosque on Friday for the congregational prayers.7 Mushfaqī went on to narrate some anecdotes which highlight the sultan’s attitude towards the holymen of the realm.8 He traces the sultan’s devotion towards religion since his childhood, and narrates an incident in which the sultan’s uncle, Islām Khān, had prophesied that the child would bring power and glory to his family. One day Islām Khān was offering his prayers. Bahlūl stepped on the prayer carpet. One of the maid-servants forbade him, saying: ‘It is forbidden to place one’s foot on the prayer carpet without due reason’. Islām Khān intervened: ‘He is still a child. It is excusable even if he places


7 Wāqi‘āt-i-Mushfaqī, p.9.

8 One may be recounted here. Once in the beginning of his reign, he went to the Jāmā Masjid. Bandagi Miān Qādan Dānishmand was delivering the sermon from the pulpit. Sulṭān Bahlūl was also present there. When the Mulla came down, he exclaimed: ‘Praise be to God! Strange people (Afghans) have appeared. I do not know whether they are the predecessors of the antichrist or themselves possess the nature of the antichrist. They call the mother, mār; the brother, rūr; the house, gūr; the village, shūr; soldier, tūr; and the man, nūr. While he was saying these things, Sulṭān Bahlūl smiled and said: ‘stop it Mulla Qādan. We are all servants of God’. Wāqi‘āt-i-Mushfaqī, p.9.
his foot on my head'. Even as these words surprised the people, the Khān predicted: ‘One day he will attain to high position and power, and my family will rise into prominence due to him’. In fact, the sources also refer to the bestowal of kingship to Bahālīl by a majzūb when he was a youngman, as we shall see below.

Such representation then continued and became part of the overall evaluation and treatment of the history of their time. Niẓām-ud-Dīn Aḥmad, writing in the reign of Akbar, noted that Bahālīl Lodī was adorned not only with personal piety, but was also completely bound in obedience to the laws of the Prophet. In all matters, he followed the path of the law and was very enthusiastic in attending to justice and equality. He passed a great part of his time in the society of the learned and in the company of the faqīrs; and considered it right to show kindness to the poor and the needy. The contemporary sufi texts lavish equal praise on Sikandar Lodī and his reign. The sultan’s friend and philosopher Shaikh Jamālī hailed his noble qualities including his interest in poetry and devotion towards men of religion. Mushtāqī’s estimate of the reign of Sikandar Lodī is both detailed and full of praise. He has noted that he wrote the Wāqi ṭī-Mushtāqī to describe the events of the reign of Sikandar Lodī along with the attainments of some sufis and nobles who were his contemporaries. According to him, Sikandar Lodī was a great king devoted to the sharī‘at. He loved justice and was unmatched in bravery and generosity. During his reign people were prosperous. Agriculture and construction activities increased

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9 Wāqi ṭī-Mushtāqī, p.9.
12 Wāqi ṭī-Mushtāqī, pp.29-30.
considerably. Later Ni‘matullāh also noted that during the time of Sikandar Lodī there was plenty of rain and there was no deficiency of food-grain throughout the dominion. The people lived in peace and tranquility. Mushāqī further adds that the soldiers enjoyed immense prestige under Sikandar Lodī. The traders used to travel in the dominion with a sense of security. The artisans and the peasants had such peace and order in the wilāyat that even the robbers and highway-men submitted on their own, became law-abiding and settled down to live peacefully. If anyone turned from the path of obedience, the sultan either got him beheaded or banished from the empire.

Highlighting the sultan’s religiosity, Mushtāqī further wrote that in every city and territory, Islam prospered considerably and its laws were enforced. The mosques, jamā‘atkhānas, and the khānqāhs were full. Muhātasibs were chosen from amongst the competent persons. Scholars and teachers were appointed in the madrasas, and nobles, their sons and soldiers kept themselves busy with acquiring knowledge and learning, and in performing religious acts. Every man who was ahl-i-nīzāb, that is, under religious obligation to pay zakāt, paid it. During the winter, they distributed blankets, sheets of cloth and garments to the widows, the indigent and the beggars.

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13 Ibid., p.16.

14 Tārīkh-i-Khān-i-Jahānī wa Makhzan-i-Afghānī, Vol. I, p.212. However, famine did occur in some parts of North India under Sikandar Lodī. Elsewhere, Ni‘matullāh suggests that the sultan in order to mitigate the hardships of the famine stricken people of his time, remitted the payment of zakāt (religious cess) in corn. Henceforth, the system of paying corn as zakāt was abolished, ibid., Vol. I, pp. 186-87; A Rashid, “Famine in the Turco-Afghan Period”, PIHC, Ranchi Session, 1964, pp. 84-89, especially p.87.

15 Wāqī‘āt-i-Mushāqī, p.16.
Food grains, clothes, cattle and other essential items were cheap. In every city, huge amount of money was disbursed from the royal treasury two times a year amongst the scholars, learned men, widows and other deserving people. The officers were ordered to prepare the list of deserving persons in the localities under their charge. They regularly sent to each whatever was fixed for him. In the *farmāns* issued to the nobles regarding the assignment of the *parganas* and the territories, it was specifically mentioned that the *imlāk* and *wazāif* (landgrants) were excluded.

Mushtāqi virtually portrayed Sikandar Lodī as a religious bigot and claimed that no territory in his kingdom could be called a *dār-ul-harb*. He wrote that the sultan banned and abolished the innovations in religion. The Hindus were prevented from taking a ritual bath in public at Mathura. Also, he wanted to destroy the tank at Kurukshetra where the Hindus gathered on religious occasions for bathing. The *ʿulamā*, however, prevented him from doing this by denouncing it as an un-Islamic act. Further, the people were stopped from worshipping *śiṭla* (the goddess of small-pox). The sultan’s reformist zeal also saw the banning of the procession of the spear of Sālār Masʿūd Ghāzī and the demolition of ‘fake’ graves. Mushtāqi concluded his account of the reign of Sikandar Lodī with the verses composed by Amīr Khusrau in

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16 Mushtāqi further noted that it was a common custom that everyone kept foodgrains at his door for distribution among the poor. As the nobles rode out, they took with them money according to their means for distribution among the beggars who sat on the way side. If, by chance, they rode out several times in a day, they did not violate this custom at any time. The beggars and the disabled just sat on the roadside without even asking for money. These passers-by gave them alms on their own. On Fridays, in every house *jumāqī* (amount of money for distribution on Fridays) was set aside for the beggars. In the mosques too, at the time of the congregational prayer on Fridays such almsgiving occurred. If a beggar died, his belongings, whether they were worth thousands or a lakh or more, were handed over to his legal heir. In case there was none, his belongings were distributed among the beggars, *Wāqiʿāt-i-Mushtāqi*, pp.17-19.

17 *Wāqiʿāt-i-Mushtāqi*, p.18.

18 Ibid., pp.17, 19-20. It is also suggested that the sultan prevented the women from visiting the shrines and the graveyards, *Tārikh-i-Khan-i-Jahānī wa Makhzan-i-Afghānī*, Vol. 1, pp.216-17.
praise of ‘Alā’-ud-Dīn Khaljī where the king is referred to as the second Zulqarnain (Alexander the Great).\textsuperscript{19}

Mushtāqī also records a story to substantiate his claim about the sultan’s religiosuity. He relates that when the ruler fell seriously ill before his death, he ordered his \textit{imām} Shaikh Lādhān\textsuperscript{20} to prepare an estimate of the \textit{kaффāra} (compensation) for unlawful acts committed by him such as neglecting prayer (\textit{namāz}) and not keeping fast during the month of Ramażān, shaving off his beard, taking wine and also inflicting unlawful punishments like severing the ears of the criminals. The shaikh did accordingly, noting down in detail the compensation for every sin, and submitted it to the king. The latter also prepared a list of the sins he had committed from the period of adolescence onwards, and handed it over to the shaikh asking him to calculate the amount due as compensation. When the shaikh finally submitted his report containing the sultan’s sins and the equivalent amount, the sovereign ordered the \textit{khażānādār} (treasurer) to take out the money from the treasury and give it away to the ‘ulamā. The latter enquired from the \textit{khażānādār} as to which section of the treasury was the money taken out for distribution. He replied: ‘The presents and gifts which the nobles send along with the petitions every year, are accumulated in the treasury separately. We are supposed to spend from it only when the sultan would order. The amount taken out for distribution belonged to this section’. The ‘ulamā praised the ruler for his wisdom,

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Wāqī'at-i-Mushtāqī}, pp.106-107.

\textsuperscript{20} Son of Shaikh Samā’-ud-Dīn Kamboh Suhrawardi, Shaikh Lādhān had distinguished himself as an authority on Islamic jurisprudence and was held in esteem by Sultan Sikandar and his nobles for his scholarly attainments, \textit{Wāqī'at-i-Mushtāqī}, p.67, f.n.61.
for they considered the amount being distributed as lawful.\textsuperscript{21}

Mushtaqi's nephew ʻAbdul Ḥaqq also praised Sikandar Lodī for his piety and to it he seems to attribute the prosperity of his reign. According to him, the king was particularly devoted towards the saints, ʻulamā, and other noble men – a large number of whom had come from Arabia and other parts of the Islamic world, during his reign. Suggesting that the qualities of the sultan were beyond description, ʻAbdul Ḥaqq wrote:\textsuperscript{22}

Nizām-ud-Dīn Aḥmad suspected most of the work on Sikandar Lodī to be a product of exaggeration and cited the merit of his work being nearest to the reality.\textsuperscript{23} He has, however, closely followed Mushtaqi's account of the assessment of the reign of the sultan.\textsuperscript{24} It is also suggested that Sikandar Lodī possessed information about the condition of his rādīyats and soldiers to such a degree that even details of the domestic affairs of the people reached him; and sometimes he received information of what happened to some persons when they were quite alone; so that it was suspected that the ruler had a jinn who was intimate with him, and gave him information of what was to occur in the future.\textsuperscript{25} In fact, Mushtaqi has alluded to the sultan's ability to

\textsuperscript{21} Wāqiʻi ʻAl-i-Mushtaqi, pp.67-68.

\textsuperscript{22} ʻAbdul Ḥaqq also noted that Sulṭān Sikandar was enthroned in 894/1488-89, and he died in 923/1517-18 after ruling for 39 years, Akhbar-ul-Akhyār, pp.470-71.


\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., Vol. I, pp.384-87.

perform miracles, and this is corroborated by Abdul Haqq. Such claims concerning Sher Shāh will be referred to below. The sufis also wrote qasīda (panegyrics) in praise of the rulers, and mawṣiya (elegy) on their death, and dedicated their works to them. Jamāli completed his Siyar-ul-ʿArifin in the reign of Humāyūn, and prayed to God for the continuation of his rule till the day of judgement.

The sufis not only highlighted the virtuous deeds of the sovereigns, but often praised them for being very handsome or good looking. Mushtaqī has noted that Prince Nizām, later Sultan Sikandar, was known for his excellent temperament and remarkable personality. Everyone ‘who possessed a heart and looked upon him, had his heart captivated at the very sight’. He was unrivalled in beauty. Mushtaqī has illustrated his point with the story of Shaikh Hasan, the grandson of Shaikh Abū Lālā, who had fallen in love with the prince. One day Nizām was sitting in his private chamber when suddenly Shaikh Ijasan entered it. The prince asked why he had come inside without permission. The shaikh answered: ‘Do you not know why have I come inside?’ The prince said: ‘You think you are fond of me’. The shaikh replied: ‘I have no control in this matter’. The prince ordered him to come near him. When the shaikh did so, he caught hold of the shaikh’s neck, and pulled him near the flame of the stove which was burning near him, and pushed the head towards it. The shaikh himself

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26 See Wāqiʿ-ʿal-i-Mustafā. A. Halim writes that innumerable and sometimes incredible stories are extant regarding Sikandar Lodi including the one in which he is credited with the resurrecting of a dead body, History of the Lodi Sultans, p. 111, citing Ahmad Yādgār, Buhar Ms.


28 Jamāli wrote qasīda in praise of Bābur and Humāyūn, see chapter five.

29 Jamāli also wrote mawṣiya on the death of Sikandar Lodi. One couplet had already become popular in the lifetime of Jamāli, see chapter five.

30 Siyar-ul-ʿArifin, pp. 144-45. Badāunī has referred to Jamāli’s Siyar-ul-ʿArifin, but pointed out that the work was not entirely free from defects and discrepancies, Muntakhab-ul-Tawārikh, Vol. I, pp. 325-26.

placed his head on the fire and did not make the slightest movement. In the meantime, Mubārak Khān Nūhānī entered the chamber. The prince told him that the man was Shaikh Ḥasan. Mubārak Khān remarked: ‘O man who fearest not God, what are you doing? Neither fire nor water harms these people. You have done harm to yourself. What can you do against them?’ The prince said: ‘He calls himself my lover’. The Khān suggested: ‘You ought to be thankful that you have become the beloved of a saint. If you desire to obtain felicity in this world and the next, you should serve him’. Then he removed the hand of the prince and raised the head of the shaikh from the fire. They found that the shaikh was not hurt at all. The prince ordered the shaikh to be put in chains with his neck, hands and feet tied, and had him locked in a room. Sometime afterwards, people came from the bazaar and informed the prince that Shaikh Ḥasan was dancing there. The prince ordered him to be arrested, and brought before him. When he was brought, the prince asked him: ‘You call yourself my lover. Why did you escape from my prison?’ The shaikh answered: ‘I did not go on my own. My grandfather Shaikh Abū Lālā took me out’. The room where he was imprisoned was found locked when the shaikh was caught dancing in the bazaar. Seeing the miracle, the prince stopped treating Ḥasan with disrespect. An abridged version of this story is also given by Ḥāqq Muḥaddīṣ Dīhlawī.33

The above episodes recorded mainly by Jamālī and Mushtaqī, and recounted by subsequent authors, served to strengthen the image of the rulers as pious. They sought company of, and blessings from, the religious divines, and were concerned also to establish the ‘holy law’ in their realms. The Lodi kings also contributed to the

32 Ibid., pp.30-31.
33 Akhbār-ul-Akhyār, p.575.
projection of such an image in their quest to legitimise their ceaseless efforts to build an empire. This was particularly necessary in view of their long drawn struggle with the Sharqīs of Jaunpur. As we shall see in chapter five, a number of the sufis had thrown their lot in favour of the Lodis as they felt that the cause of Islam would be served better under them. However, it is interesting to note that Sikandar also planned to pull down the Jāmāʿ Masjid of Jaunpur, identified with the glory and power of the Sharqīs, after his conquest of the city. The ʿulamāʾ present there dissuaded the sultan from doing so, and thus the mosque was spared. Further, we shall give below some details which illustrate how at times Sikandar Lodī could be indifferent to the dictates of the sharīʿat and mock at the power and prestige enjoyed by the religious leaders.

Thus, the invocation of the ‘holy law’ was more or less a matter of convenience with the Lodīs and so was the case with Sher Shāh subsequently. Sher Shāh’s actions during the campaign in Malwa and Rajasthan were justified by the chroniclers. It may also be that the ruler himself provided religious colour to the cold-blooded massacres of the Rajputs by keeping the ʿulamāʾ and sufis in good humour. The sources suggest that his welfare mechanism, personal piety and madad-i-maʿāsh grants to holy-men also made him fit in the image of an ideal ruler. Long passages on statecraft attributed to Sher Shāh from the very early days of his career, to be found in the Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāhī, show that the ruler’s vision of an ideal government was quite broad-based. It may be that he had imbibed these ideas, as a student at Jaunpur, where he was probably exposed to the early “mirror for princes” literature. The passages recorded by ʿAbbās Sarwānī and their summarized versions in other texts clearly echo the views of such political theorists as Imām Ghazālī and Niẓām-ul-Mulk Tūsū. A few examples to be given below will reveal the debt of Sher Shāh, or at least his biographer, to the formulations of these early thinkers. Such an exercise will be more
fruitful if we briefly take cognizance of the political theorists' understanding of the institution of the Sultanate whose emergence was synchronized with the decline and decay of the Abbasid caliphate.

Defending the rule of the sultan in his *Iqtisād-ul-İfiqād*, Ghazālī wrote that the decline of the *imāmate* does not mean that the people should stop obeying the law, dismiss the *qāżîs*, declare all authority to be valueless, and pronounce the acts of those in high places to be invalid. He suggested that by recognising that the *imāmate* really exists and all acts of the administration are valid, some semblance of stability and order could be maintained. For according to him, necessity made lawful what was forbidden. It was not lawful to feed on a dead animal; still, it would be worse to die of hunger. Further, Ghazālī counterposed: "which is to be preferred, anarchy and the stoppage of social life for lack of a properly constituted authority, or acknowledgement of the existing power, whatever be it? Of these two alternatives, the jurist cannot but choose the latter".34

Two things, in the opinion of Ghazālī, brought about the ruin of a country: the weakness of the king and his tyranny. Coercive power was for him a very important element in kingship; what he feared most of all was civil strife and disorder. In his *Naşihat-ul-Mulūk*, a "mirror for princes" written sometime between 498/1105 and 505/1111, Ghazālī wrote, that it was necessary for the king to exercise coercive power and to have authority, because he was the representative of God. The awe in which the ruler was held should be such that when the subjects saw him from afar they did

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34 Quoted in Levy, *Sociology of Islam*, I, p.306. The noted historian Ibn Khaldūn has also defended the transformation of the caliphate into kingship, as the qualities of the caliphate survived in the preference for Islam and its ways which remained, and adherence to the path of truth. The only change which became apparent was in the restraining force which had been in religion and was now changed into ḥiṣb and the sword, Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, p.173. For Ibn Khaldūn’s life and works, see also M.Talbi, ‘Ibn Khaldun’, *EI* (new ed.).
not dare to rise to their feet. For, if the king were weak or powerless, religion and the world would suffer injury and damage. Further, “the tyranny of a sultan for a hundred years causes less damage than one year’s tyranny exerted by the subjects against each other. When the subjects indulge in tyranny, God most High will appoint over them a forceful and violent sultan”.

Further, in his *Ihya Ulum-ud-Din*, Ghazālī recommended support for and submission to even an unjust and ignorant ruler. According to him, obedience be rendered to an evil-doing and barbarous sultan so long as he is supported by military force, as the attempt to depose him would create unendurable civil strife and destruction. He supported his suggestion with a *haddīs* regarding the duty of obedience to those invested with command and the prohibition on withdrawing one’s hand from assisting them. He concluded that the caliphate is contractually assumed by that member of the ‘Abbasid house who is charged with its functions, and that the office of government in the different regions is validly executed by the sultans who profess allegiance to the caliph, by mentioning the latter’s name in the *khuṭba* and the *sikka*. In his *Naṣīḥat-ul-Mulūk*, Ghazālī also effected a fusion of the Islamic ethic and the Sassanian norms of governance. He stated, “God sent prophets to His servants to guide them to Him and to restrain them from one another and He chose kings to whose wisdom He relegated the welfare of His servants, giving to them a high rank – as is stated in the tradition, ‘the sultan is the shadow of God on earth’. That person to whom kingship and the divine effulgence (*farr-i-īzadi*) has been given must therefore

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be loved and kings must be obeyed". Quoting the Qur'anic verse, 'Obey God, obey the prophet and those in authority among you', Ghazâlî interpreted 'those in authority' to mean not those holding religious authority but those holding military authority. "Thus", he stated, "he to whom God gave religion must love kings and be obedient and know that this kingship is given by God and God gives it to whomsoever He wills". The obligation to treat kings with respect was absolute: in no circumstances was rebellion permitted.

Like Ghazâlî, Nizâm-ul-Mulk Tûsî also, in his Siyâsat-nâma, attempted to combine something of the Islamic ideal with the Sassanian notion of the ideal ruler. He stated that he should have a comely appearance, good nature, integrity, manliness, courage, horsemanship, knowledge, ability to wield different kinds of arms, an understanding of crafts and skills, compassion and mercy towards people, steadfastness in fulfilling vows and promises, a liking for right religion and right belief, and obedience to God, and he should perform supererogatory prayers and fasts, have respect for the learned, the devout, the righteous and the wise, give alms continually, treat the poor, his subordinates and servants well and restrain the tyrannical from ill-treating the subjects.

Further, an early sixteenth century treatise, the Akhlaq-i-Humâyun of

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38 Lambton, State and Government, p.121.
39 Darke, Book of Government, pp.10-11. Curiously, Lambton suggests that in spite of their attempt to create an amalgam of Islamic and pre-Islamic ideals, Ghazâlî and Nizâm-ul-Mulk, by their emphasis on the absolute power of the ruler and his unaccountability except to God, helped to perpetuate the fundamental disharmony between the ideal of Islam and the ideal of pre-Islamic Persia, Lambton, State and Government, p.26.
Ikhtiyār-ul-Ḥusain enumerated the following principles for the stability of the Sultanate: a) in each matter that the king takes up, he should assume himself as a subject and the other as the king. He should not tolerate in others what he considers improper for himself; b) he should not wait for the needy to approach his court; c) he should not be totally given to the bodily appetites and joys; d) benevolence and favour and not force and violence should be the corner-stone of his activities; e) he should endeavour to please his people for the sake of God; f) he should not disobey God for people's sake; g) he should be just and fair when people ask for his decisions, and be forgiving when they look for mercy from him; h) he should seek the company of the pious and thus obtain peace of heart; i) each should be kept within the limits of his ability; and j) it is not enough that he is not a tyrant, but he should manage the country in a manner that none in his territory can afford to be cruel.

Sher Shāh’s utterances and actions clearly resonate the writings of the political theorists. Before leaving for the parganas to take up the assignment as shiqqādār, Fārīd had lectured his father on the need to maintain law and order in the realm, and the way to ensure it. According to ‘Abbas Sarwānī, Fārīd in his sermon harped on the need to establish justice as it leads to the consolidation and expansion of the kingdom, the prosperity of the exchequer, and the populousness of the villages and towns. Conversely, tyranny causes the destruction of the empire and the ruination of the country, leading to damnation in this world and the next. It was also suggested that the well-being of the kingdom depended upon the bestowal of favour upon all the subjects, particularly the down-trodden who have been entrusted by God to the care of

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40 Muzaffar Alam, ‘Indo-Persian Norms’.
the able and powerful ones so that they are protected from the oppression of the tyrants. Further, the suggestion that the affluence of a country depended upon the dispensation of justice and punishment is illustrated through an interesting simile in which the state is referred to as a plant, and the administration as water. Hence it is obligatory to keep the roots of the tree of the kingdom alive with the water of justice and chastisement so that the fruits of peace and order could be enjoyed by the people.\textsuperscript{41} Much of it appear to be literally quoted from the writings of Ghazālī.

Farīd also showed particular concern to ensure that the subordinate officers do not oppress the peasantry as it might lead to their dispersion. When the ráfiyat are scattered the country becomes desolate, the revenue diminishes and the treasury becomes empty; the soldiers cannot get their emoluments, leading to their desertion. Thus, the prosperity and survival of the kingdom is based on the affluence of the ráfiyat, and this is possible when the nobles stopped committing oppression.\textsuperscript{42} Later, while addressing public meetings in his father’s parganas as a shiqqdiir, Farīd again stressed the need to augment cultivation and warned the corrupt revenue officials and the zamindars to stop exploiting the peasantry as cultivation was not possible if oppression and tyranny were not done away with.\textsuperscript{43}

Even if we assume that the above statements are not the original words of Farīd, they are evidently drawn from the discussions on justice and prosperity in the works of the medieval Muslim political theorists. For instance, Ḥabīb Sarwānī’s long


\textsuperscript{42} Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāhī, pp.20-21.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pp. 21-25.
passages on the need to establish justice in the dominion, though attributed to Sher Shāh, remind the reader of the views of Imām Ghazālī on the subject. The latter wrote: “Justice is the glory of religion and the strength of the temporal government (sultan) and in it lies the well-being of the elite (khass) and the common people (‘amm). ..He who is most worthy of rank and kingship is he whose heart is the abode of justice, whose house is the resting-place of the religious and the wise, whose judgement is in accordance with the judgement of the wise and whose intercourse is with wise men and good counsellors”. 44 Ghazālī further stated, “Public function (wilayat) is a great privilege (nimati) and whoever fulfills its responsibilities acquires an unsurpassed happiness, but anyone who falls short (in carrying out its responsibilities) suffers tribulation unequalled except by the tribulations of unbelief. Proof of the high nature of this privilege is that the Prophet of God, upon whom be blessing and peace, said ‘the justice on one day of a just sultan is more excellent than the worship of sixty years’”. 45

The chroniclers' debt to Ghazālī is further reflected in the discussion on taxation. Ghazālī wrote that the king should not allow his tax collectors to take anything unjustly from his subjects. It was also incumbent upon him to see that his officials carried out his orders, because they were often deflected from carrying out his orders by bribes. He must look after the world as he would his own house, so that it became prosperous. If the subjects were reduced to misery, he should go to their rescue, especially if there was a famine and they lost their means of livelihood. The king must give them food and help them with money from the treasury. He must not

44 Naṣḥat-ul-Mulūk, pp.149-50, quoted in Lambton, State and Government, p.122
allow his entourage to oppress the people because they would become impoverished and abandon his kingdom. Thus, the revenues of the sultan would diminish, profit would accrue to storekeepers and hoarders and the sultan would be cursed and get a bad name.\textsuperscript{46} Further, Ghazālī identified prosperity with virtue which is reminiscent of Zoroastrianism. He stated, "It must be known that the prosperity and desolation of the world depends on kings. If the king is just, the world will be prosperous and the subjects secure, as it was in the time of Ardashir, Afridun, Bahram Gur and Anushirwan. But if the king is tyrannical, the world will be depopulated as it was in the time of Zahhak, Afrasiyab and Yazdigird the sinner. The kings of ancient times strove to make the world prosperous because they knew that the greater the prosperity the longer their (exercise of) government and the more numerous their subjects. They knew that the wise men of the world had spoken rightly when they said, 'Religion depends on kingship and kingship on the army and the army on wealth and wealth on prosperity and prosperity on justice'".\textsuperscript{47}

The sixteenth century writers extol Sher Shāh’s methods of administration and public works. In particular, the focus is on his justice and charity. According to Šabbās, Sher Shāh personally made inquiries into the condition of the ṭair, soldiers and merchants and talked to the weak ones. He never tired of meeting seekers of justice. For according to him, justice is most precious of all religious acts and has been acclaimed alike by the Islamic and infidel sovereigns. None of the devotions and prayers can be equated with justice and here all sections of the infidelity and Islam are one on the point. If the shadow of the justice of the king be removed from the head of

\textsuperscript{46} Naṣḥat-ul-Mulūk, quoted in Lambton, State and Government, pp.125

\textsuperscript{47} Lambton, State and Government, pp.122-23.
the people, the knots of the concourse and population will be broken off. The powerful will wipe off the weak. He therefore ascertained the true state of the oppressed and the seekers of justice and never helped the oppressor, even if the latter be his near relations, his son, a notable chief or a member of his own tribe. He never delayed or showed hesitation in bringing the oppressor to book. 48

It is difficult to get evidence of the influence of Nasirean akhlāq on Sher Shāh’s ideals, even though we know that Jalālud-Dīn Dawwānī’s Akhlāq-i-Jalālī was known in parts of Sikandar Lodī’s dominion. 49 We have referred above to Sher Shāh’s training at Jaunpur in the company of the ʿulamā and the sufis of the place. It may also be that he evolved his own style of governance on the basis of his long experience as an administrator at various levels. Impressed by his public works and charitable endeavours, and also by the late sixteenth century intellectual milieu which provided the postulates for evaluating good governance, the chroniclers probably attributed to Sher Shāh what they found in the works of the theorists. A brief summary of the details given by the authorities can serve to illustrate how Sher Shāh’s rule was perceived by his contemporaries, and by the near-contemporaries even in the aftermath of the hostile Mughals returning to power with a vengeance. We shall also assess as to what extent the history of his style of governance is a construction of the late sixteenth century Afghan chroniclers. It is stated that his administrative measures wiped off poverty from the realm as he spent a lot in charity, and was always concerned about the well-being of the people. 50 In order to check the occurrence of

48 Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāhī, pp.749-52.
49 Muzaffār Alam, “Indo-Persian Norms”.
famine, Sher Shāh had arranged for state-stores of grain from where grain could be sent to famine-stricken areas. By this measure, so much grain was collected that commodities became very cheap. And as long as Sher Shāh lived, there was no famine.⁵¹ He built rest-houses for the poor and the public-kitchen (langar) was started where food was available for them all the time. Five hundred tolas of gold was sanctioned for running the public-kitchen. Besides, allowances were fixed for the blind and the helpless everywhere in the dominion, whether villages or towns.⁵² The royal kitchen was spacious enough to accommodate several thousand men where they were attended to everyday. Sher Shāh himself took his food in the company of the 'ulamā and the sufis.⁵³

After ascending the throne, Sher Shāh had resumed the existing land-grants to the dīmma, and started granting them afresh. According to Abbās Khān, when it came to his knowledge that those who, after the end of Ibrāhīm Lodī’s rule continued to hold the charity land and remained religious mendicants only in their attire, and had appropriated more land than what was granted, he resumed their madad-i-ma‘āsh or charity land. And after giving his personal attention, he gave them their exact dues. He believed that the populousness and prosperity of the towns depended upon the holders of charity land. The students, travellers and the needy who cannot go to the king can receive help from the grantees. It thus makes possible the enjoyment of life by the travellers and the impoverished and it leads to the extension of education, knowledge and faith. He did not let any soldier go unattended, and even paid him the necessary money for his journey. He also gave money in cash as pension to those who

⁵² Wāqi‘at-i-Mushtāqi, p.136. Also see, Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāh, pp.769-70.
⁵³ Wāqi‘at-i-Mushtāqi, p.136. Also see, Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāh, p.750.
could not earn their livelihood such as the blind, the old and the infirm, the widow, the crippled and the sick.  

The sources also note that peace and order reigned supreme in Sher Shāh’s reign to the extent that even an old woman with gold in her possession could pass her time in the forest without the fear of being robbed. It is also asserted by Mushtāqī and ʿAbdullāh that since the day of his accession to the throne, no case of highway brigands and theft had ever come to light. If it occurred anywhere, the muqaddams of the village concerned were arrested and the restitution for the robbery was extracted from them. The owner of the stolen goods was fully compensated. Consequently, the muqaddams became cautious and ensured that no such cases occurred in their area.  

ʿAbbās Khān gives a detailed description of how the traveller was protected from the ravages of the thieves and highway-robbers. According to him, Sher Shāh had issued strict orders to his officers that if any such incident took place in his kingdom and its perpetrators were not traced, then whatever had been carried away or plundered by the thief or the robber, whose whereabouts could not be ascertained in the village, would be made good by the muqaddam of the area. If he produced the thief or the robber and showed his whereabouts, then after the payment of compensation, the muqaddam of the village where he was hiding would be made to pay the compensation money to the one who had to pay it earlier. The thief and the highway robber would then be punished in accordance with the holy law. In the eventuality of the murderer having absconded, the muqaddam was to be arrested and imprisoned and given a certain length of time to produce the murderer. If he produced him or showed his

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54 *Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāh*, pp. 770-71.
55 Ibid., p. 787.
56 *Wāqiʿī-i-Muṣṭaqī*, p. 136; *Tārīkh-i-Dilāl*, pp. 218-19.
whereabouts, the former would be let off and the murderer would be slain. If the muqaddam failed to prove the guilt against the offender, he would himself be put to death. 57

According to 'Abbās, Sher Shāh was convinced that theft and highway-robbery could never take place without the concurrence of the muqaddams; and if, in exceptional cases, any incident took place without their cognizance, they were sure to get all the information after a thorough investigation about the crime and those involved in it. For they not only knew which villages were infested by the miscreants, but also in some cases were related to and friendly with them; hence they could easily elicit the required information. Thus theft and highway-robbery were committed either at the instance of the muqaddams or at least they had full information about them. 58 'Abbās Khān claims that in the time of Sher Shāh and Islām Shāh the muqaddams used to guard the limits of their villages so that the thieves, highway-robbers or their enemies were prevented from harming the travellers. Sher Shāh also issued orders to his āmils to mete out good treatment to the travellers and the merchants and ensure that they were not harmed in anyway. If any merchant died in accident and without heirs, the āmils must not lay their hands of oppression and violence on his property. 59

Sarāis were built at distance of every karoh along the highways in the various directions of the empire. In every sarāi, a mosque and a well were constructed, in addition to a store-house where cooked and uncooked food were kept ready for travellers. Separate arrangements were made for water and food for the Hindu and

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57 Tarikh-i-Sher Shāh, pp. 764-65.
58 Ibid., pp.765-66.
Muslim travellers. They were not charged for these services. A *shahna* and several watchmen were posted in the *sarāi*. In the mosque attached to the *sarāi*, a *mu`āzin* and an *imām* were appointed. All of them were allotted lands at the same place for their maintenance. Further, tall fruit trees were planted on both the sides of the road which provided the much needed shadow to the travellers, particularly in the scorching summer. The major roads with such trees and *sarais* included: a) from Sonargaon in Bengal to the river Indus; b) from Ruhtas to the frontier of Mandu near Burhanpur; c) from Agra to Jodhpur; and d) from Jaunpur to Bayana and Ajmer. There were two post horses in each *sarai*, known as *dākchaukā*, so that information could travel up to three hundred *karohs* a day. The construction of roads with *dākchaukās* and *sarais*, coupled with the rules concerning highway-robbery, should be viewed not merely as aspects of public welfare, but as measures clearly designed to ensure the state's control of the regions. The highways could facilitate the rapid movement of the army for the campaigns in the regions as part of the imperialistic project. Further, the attempt to maintain law and order on the roads ensured increased trade and commerce in the dominion, with the subdued petty chiefs refraining from harassing the merchants.

It is suggested that a certain degree of uniformity was maintained in the style of functioning of the administration. The king would wake up early in the morning, take bath, offer prayer and call his officials to his presence who would brief him on the state of affairs in the realm. It was in this sitting from morning till mid-day that

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60 For more details on Sher Shāh's administrative and welfare measures, and their appreciation by the medieval authorities, see *Waqi'ī-i-Mushtaqī*, pp.136-37. Also see, *Tārīkh-i-Daulah*, pp.216-21; *Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāh*, pp.761-62.

61 'Abbās Khān writes that the kings are the partakers in virtues and vices of their servants and subjects alike. Vices and inequity serve as impediments to the beneficial results that emanate from the
he inspected the revenue which came from the various provinces and scrutinized the accounts of the amils. The petitions of the nobles posted in the provinces were presented before the emperor. The umara\textsuperscript{2} and the zamindars also visited the king in the morning. In the afternoon, he devoted sometime for steps to be taken for the welfare of the nobles and the soldiers.\textsuperscript{62}

The Afghan chronicler writes that from the day Sher Shāh occupied the throne, none in his dominion had the courage to oppose him or to raise the standard of rebellion. The nobles, thieves and highway robbers did not dare to misappropriate the goods of others.\textsuperscript{63} Abbās also claimed that theft and highway-robbery never occurred in the kingdom of Sher Shāh and the travellers were free from all apprehension during the journey. The zamindars of the region were vigilant and watchful lest any harm should come to them which would become the cause of their disgrace and imprisonment.\textsuperscript{64} Thus, Abbās concluded, that Sher Shāh was a unique personality of his age. In a very short period he brought the country under his control, restored peace and order on the road, provided an efficient government and gave to the peasantry and soldiers peace and tranquility.\textsuperscript{65}

conquests. The kings should remain grateful to God for the favour that he has put his creations under his command, and therefore should not deviate from the commands of God. Accordingly, Sher Shāh never allowed the hours meant for prayers to go without offering them. Days and nights were divided for the various kinds of works. He woke up when only one-third of the night remained to pass, offered his prayer and busied himself in supplications. Then he attended to the affairs of the realm. For the sovereign should ever remain vigilant and wakeful and on account of his being of high lineage and lofty rank, should not treat the affairs of the kingdom as little and small. He should not repose much confidence in nobles as they were not found to be wholly honest. The kings often entrusted the affairs of their kingdom to their chiefs while they themselves remained engrossed in pleasure which led to corruption by the nobles, \textit{Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāh}, pp. 748-51.

\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Wāqi 'Āl-i-Mushtāq}, pp.137-38.

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāh}, p.786.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., pp.786-87.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., pp.787-88.
It would be incorrect to assume that these are mere constructions of the late sixteenth century Afghans who were in search of a golden past. As seen above, the non-Afghan Persian authorities of the period corroborate ʿAbbās Khān’s account of Sher Shāh’s achievement in the field of politics and administration. One of them Mulla ʿAbdul Qādir Badauni goes on to celebrate his good fortune of having been born in the blessed reign of so just a sovereign as Sher Shāh. Undoubtedly, this celebration was particularly heightened by his dissatisfaction with Akbar’s unorthodox ways.

Moreover, the Afghan chronicler was not the first to give all the details about Sher Shāh’s administrative measures and welfare mechanism. As seen above, Rizqullāh Mushtāqī, a non-Afghan, whose work has come down to us gives a similar report. ʿAbbās Sarwānī has evidently drawn on the account in the Wāqī ‘at-i-Mushtāqī. It may be that these authorities, influenced by advances made under Akbar and yet in search of an ideal ruler, have projected backward in time some of the later developments. However, such a proposition becomes questionable in view of an almost verbatim account of Sher Shāh’s reign, and of his image, in a work produced in the reign of the ruler himself, Padmāvat of Malik Muḥammad Jāisī.

A passage dealing with Sher Shāh’s justice has already been given in the prescript of this chapter. Some more details given by Jāisī can probably help us understand the ruler’s image in his own time. The author wrote: “In the darbar he distinguishes between water and milk, and separates the one from the other. His justice is in accordance with law, his statements are true, and the weak and strong are given equal consideration by him. Folding its hands, all the world bows down to the ground, and prays that the emperor may live as long as there is water in the Ganges.
and the Jamuna”. Further, highlighting the king’s charitable endeavours Jaisī claimed: “God has made him extremely liberal. None has given so much in charity as he. Bali and Vikrama have been said to be very charitable, and Hatim and Karna were very generous. But even these could not satisfy the suitors to the same extent as Sher Shah who has Meru and the ocean as his treasures. In the darbar is sounded the drums of his charity, and the fame there goes across the seas. Coming into contact with Sher Shah, the world has been transformed into gold, and poverty fleeing thence has gone to other countries. One who went and asked for even a boon was never without food and clothes throughout one’s life. Even a performer of ten asvamedha sacrifices did not equal him in merit and liberality. Such a great giver of gifts is Sher Shah born in this world that there neither was, nor will one be like him, nor does any one now equal him in dispensing charity”.

The account of Sher Shāh’s justice and charity is indeed exaggerated, but what will be difficult to disprove is the fact that the image of Sher Shāh as a benevolent ruler had already spread within the first couple of years of his short reign. More significantly, the process of his deification had also started within his lifetime. This may be found in the description of the beauty of his physical form by Jaisī, and the paranormal power attributed to him by Rizqullāh Mustāqi. Jaisī wrote, “When he goes out, all the world gazes at his face. Even the moon of the 14th lunar day created by God is surpassed in splendour by his beauty. On seeing him, sin departs, and the bowing world showers blessings on him. Like the sun he sheds his lustre over the world, and overpowers the beauty of everything else. So glorious is this Sur king that

67 Ibid.
his glory is ten times that of Sura (the sun). One cannot look him full in his face. Those who do that are obliged to bow down their heads. Day by day he increases in beauty. God has made him far more handsome than the rest of the world. He has a shining jewel on his forehead. The moon is inferior, and he is superior. The world eager to see him stands on one side and sings his praises.”

Supernatural power is generally attributed to the sufis. In a significant reversal, however, Rizqullāh Mushtāqī makes the noted sufi, Shaikh Khālīf, suggest that the ‘kings possess miraculous powers, but we see only the outward things’. The shaikh was impressed by the ruler’s ability to catch the fraud in the course of branding. This anecdote of the ability of Sher Shāh of performing miracles is supplemented by the frequent suggestion that the monarch was a representative of God on earth. This is further substantiated by the dreams in which the Prophet is said to have bestowed kingship on Sher Shāh following an order from God with the direction to establish justice (adl-wa-insāf) in the realm. Further, reports of bestowal of kingship to Sher Shāh by wandering darweshes are also to be found in the Persian histories. Whatever happened in the subsequent period, despite serious attempts at vulgarization by the Mughals as noted above, constitutes an interesting study in the growth of the legend of Sher Shāh. A recent visit to Sahsaram was an eye opener as it was found that Sher Shāh is venerated there as a local saint. His tomb is taken as a shrine, called the ‘roja’ (rauza) in local parlance, which people frequent to seek blessings and benedictions, and place ritual sufic chādar on the grave. The image of the philanthropic monarch and a thaumaturgic sufi is subsumed in the personality of

\[68 \text{Ibid.}\]
the king. Conversely, as we shall see in chapter five, a large number of sufis are found to be deeply involved in the politics of the period. To return to the ideals and institutions of governance, we shall briefly discuss below the administrative structure under Sher Shāh. This will further help us understand the political institutions and governance under the Afghans, as also in a measure under the Mughals in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Administrative Set-up

It was Sher Shāh who for the first time essayed seriously and with success to define the territorial limits of the provinces and to establish a uniform system of government.  

Saran writes that Sher Shāh consolidated his government by making his provincial governors (called iqṭadārs or mulūk-i-tawāf) realise that they were liable to punishment for the least violation of the statutes and that they had no claims to any particular iqṭā or jāgīr. Thus under Sher Shāh the provinces attained, both territorially and administratively, a definite stage in their evolution which became the substructure of Akbar’s administrative edifice. Though Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui dismisses what he calls Saran’s ‘sweeping generalisations’, he himself goes on to state that certain far-reaching changes were set in the administrative system of the wilāyat of Sher Shāh, and that they served as a model for Akbar when he organized his empire by grouping sarkārs into sūbas. William Erskine suggests that many of Sher Shāh’s revenue regulations were retained or renewed by Akbar, and seem to have been

70 Ibid.
incorporated into Todarmal’s improved system of finance.  

Recognizing the “exceptional” aspiration of Sher Shāh for large-scale state-building, J.F. Richards notes that during “that brief period his energetic administration forecast many of the centralizing measures in revenue assessment and military organization that would be carried to completion by the Mughals”.  

Any discussion on Sher Shāh’s administrative set-up must take into account the fact that he ruled the country merely for about five years and that the Sūrs were shortly afterwards succeeded by the Mughals who were not expected to acknowledge any of his achievements. Thus, though the issues concerning the territorial divisions of Sher Shāh’s empire and their administrative organisations have been debated by historians for a long time now, lack of sufficient material in the sources prevents us from believing that a very sophisticated ‘system’ or ‘structure’ of administration existed under him. Nor do we actually view the sixteenth century administrative history in terms of a rigid, unchanging structure, including that of the latter half under Akbar with which we are not immediately concerned.  

The chronicles reveal that Sher Shāh was constantly making experiments in different regions and at various levels of his dominion. Instead of rejecting his administrative innovations and reforms as ad hoc arrangements, they need to be studied as part of the historical processes with all their tensions and turbulence. Our aim here is however limited. We shall give a general outline of the various territorial divisions of Sher Shāh’s empire and the duties of the officials appointed by him to run the administration.


73 The Mughal Empire. pp.11, 81.

74 For a different view, see Ibn Hasan, The Central Structure of the Mughal Empire and its Practical
Sher Shāh’s empire extended from Sunargaon in the east to the Gakkar country in the north-west, the western boundary being formed by a line joining Balnath Jogi on the Jhelum in the north to Khusab nearly a hundred miles south-west, and hence running across the Jhelum along the bank of the Indus down to Bhakkar. On the south his territories were bound by the Vindhya and Karakoram ranges, as he had brought within his sway practically the whole of western Rajputana, Malwa and Kalinjar.75 The whole empire was divided into nine provinces called wilāyat, more popularly known under the Mughals as ṣūbas, comprising the territory from Delhi to the western boundary of Rohilkhand, from Rohilkhand as far as Awadh and Jaunpur, Bihar, Bengal, Malwa, Ajmer including Jodhpur and Nagaur, Punjab, Multan including the Gakkar country, and Sindh. Though the traditionally defined boundaries of the provinces were more or less retained by Sher Shāh, what is of particular interest is his effort to establish a uniform administrative machinery in his empire. Thus the regions which were formerly outside the control of the Delhi sultans, particularly in the fifteenth and early decades of the sixteenth centuries, were integrated into a larger, increasingly centralized network of administration. The permanent and hereditary military fiefs, or iqṭāʾīs, gave way to a more sophisticated territorial division of the empire into provinces. As mentioned above, while Saran recognizes that the provincial boundaries were systematized or defined by Sher Shāh, he suggests that the polity under him continued to be ‘tribal’, and the ‘system’ of division of the kingdom among the leading nobles ‘was not in the least altered or modified by Sher Shāh.’76 Ibn Hasan also notes that ‘Sher Shah favoured the centralization of power’ and his

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75 Saran, Provincial Government, p.44.
76 See Introduction.
reforms suggested certain lines of action to his successors', but it was 'reserved for Akbar to take up the work of reconstruction in the light of the lessons and experiments recorded by three centuries of Muslim rule in Northern India'.

The provincial governors appointed by Sher Shāh were variously called ẖākims, muqāṣṣ, or faujdārs. They enjoyed vast powers for collection of revenues, to deal with insurrections and maintain law and order in the province. Like in the imperial court, they held grand darbārs in their provincial headquarters, and extended patronage to scholars and religious mendicants. But they were expected to remain within bounds and not act against the king's wishes, or else be prepared for punishment which included a transfer, demotion in rank and posting to a smaller inconsequential wilāyat, imprisonment and death. Most of the administrative arrangements were made by Sher Shāh in the course of his conquests. In a measure which speaks of the exigencies of the time and was aimed at keeping the nobles in check, the governorship of certain provinces was given to more than one person. For instance, Punjab was entrusted to at least three nobles with 'same authority and powers to control the administration', before Sher Shāh had to cut short his campaign in the west and rush to check the rising tide of rebellion of Khizr Khān in Bengal. Saran mentions five nobles Haibat Khān Niyāzī, Khawās Khān, Ḥsā Khān Niyāzī, Habīb Khān and Rāi Ḥusain Jalwānī, as being incharge of the whole country between Lahore and the frontier. Similarly at the time of the initial conquest the

77 The Central Structure, pp.50-51.
79 Siddiqui, Sher Shah Sur, p.123.
80 Provincial Government, p.52.
territories of Rajasthan were given to the charge of Khawāṣ Khān and ʿIsā Khān who were assisted by some other nobles.\footnote{Ibid., p.54.}

Understandably, this arrangement was conditioned by the rebellious activities of Khizr Khān in Bengal as well. Khizr Khān was appointed as the supreme muqṭā' of Bengal in 1539. Sher Shāh however had to rush to Bengal within a couple of years and remove the governor, though the latter had pledged his loyalty. With a view to minimising the chances of rebellion, the province was split up into 'manageable sarkars', or sub-provinces.\footnote{Siddiqui, \textit{Sher Shah Sur}, p.123. Saran, \textit{Provincial Government}, p.51} The administrators of these smaller units were independent of one another, but responsible to the emperor through an amīn, who was given the responsibility for supervising and controlling the general administration of the province. The post of amīn was created with the object of keeping internal turbulence in check, and for protecting the province from ambitious neighbours. As a ‘trustee’ he was responsible to the emperor for the province as a whole. Saran suggests that the amīn’s office roughly resembled that of the later Mughal viceroy of the Deccan under whom several minor provinces were combined into a single viceroyalty with the same object in view, namely to facilitate the control of a distant province and keep in check the fissiparous tendencies of the local chiefs.\footnote{Provincial Government, pp.49-50.} Returning to the issue of Sher Shāh’s keeping more than one governor in the same province, this arrangement did not last for long. Constantly engaged in administrative reshuffles, and realizing that the arrangement did not function successfully, Sher Shāh gave the
charge of the whole of Punjab including Multan to Haibat Khan. Other nobles were withdrawn. Haibat Khan was to be assisted by Fateh Jang, who in turn was given the charge of Multan. Other provinces such as Bihar and Malwa also came to have faujdars, answerable directly to the emperor.

As in the case of Bengal, the provinces were divided into sarkars. The executive head of the sarkar was called a faujdar, muqti, or shiqqdar-i-shiqqdaran. The faujdar was an important army officer who wielded authority over all the government servants in the shiqqs under the Delhi sultans. Sher Shah revived the institution of faujdar just after he had established his sway over the vast territories in North India. In all the sarkars reserved for the khaliya, faujdars were posted as the head of the government. The muqti, who also appears to have held the charge of certain sarkars, enjoyed a higher status in the nobility than the faujdar, and for this reason they were assigned almost the full or a major portion of the revenue, yielded in a sarkar. The references to the designation shiqqdar-i-shiqqdaran for the head of the sarkar are also to be found in the sources. Saran likens the sarkar to the present day Commissioner's division, serving as a medium of communication between the provincial government and the district (pargana) and as an agency of general supervision over the pargana administration. He notes that the executive head of the sarkar was the shiqqdar-i-shiqqdaran or chief shiqqdar, with whom the office of faujdar was also generally combined. Siddiqui doubts whether Sher Shāh created the office of the shiqqdar-i-shiqqdaran. He suggests that Rizqullāh Mushtaqī referred to shiqqdar-i-shiqqdaran because the officer being the executive-cum-military head

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85 Waqī‘at-i-Mushāqī, p.139; Tārikh-i-Sher Shāh, p.756; Tārikh-i-Dāudī, p.213.
86 Provincial Government, pp.69-70.
of the *sarkār* held authority over so many *pargana shiqqār* in his *sarkār* and forgot to indicate his real designation of *faujdār* or *muqta*. Later authorities 'Abbās Khān and 'Abdullāh have merely quoted from Mushtaqī. Thus, Siddiqi concludes, in the absence of any independent source other than Mushtaqī's it cannot be presumed that *shiqqār-i-shiqqāran* was ever adopted by Sher Shāh as an official appellation to be used for the head of the *sarkār* government. 87

The head of the *sarkār* who combined in himself the functions of the military and those of the executive officer was expected to provide military support required, if any, in the realization of revenue, and to maintain law and order. Together with *munsif-i-munsifān*, the supreme judicial officer in the *sarkār* who handled revenue matters as well, he kept himself posted with the affairs of the *parganas*. According to the Afghan chronicler, they ensured that no injustice was committed against the *rādyāt*. 88 Further, they were to settle boundary-disputes between the *amils* of the *parganas*. 89 Finally, when the *rādyāt* created trouble in the collection of revenue, they were to subdue them by exemplary punishment which would serve as a deterrent. 90

Under Akbar the head of the *sarkār* known as the *faujdār* was to assist the 'amalguzār (incharge of revenue) in the realization of revenue. His main function was to guard the rural areas of his *sarkār*. In the army he regularly inspected the local militia and kept it well-equipped and in good trim. 91

87 *Sher Shah Sur*, pp.121-22.

88 *Tarikh-i-Sher Shāh*, p.756. 'Abdullāh also records that the *shiqqār-i-shiqqāran* and the *munsif-i-munsifān* were expected to ensure that the *rādyāt* was not oppressed and the revenue was not embezzled, *Tarikh-i-Deudir*, p.213.

89 *Tarikh-i-Sher Shāh*, p. 756.

90 Ibid., pp. 756-57.


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The dāroghas or thānedārs, who could have the ranks even of one thousand sawārs, were posted in the thānas established at strategic points for the protection of highways from the robbers. The thānas were also to be found in small towns. In the big cities such as Lahore, the officer in charge of the police administration was known as the kotwāl. The post of the kotwāl was civil in nature. He had quite a large staff at his disposal, and was responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the city. The kotwāl’s soldiers could be seen patrolling the city at night. Another official with varying responsibilities posted in the cities was the shiqqādār. While, he looked after the civil and police administration of the city of Delhi, he was responsible for the development of the new city at Qannauj and keeping the roads safe from the highway-robbers. Besides, a network of courts was said to be functioning from the province downwards, in every sarkār and pargana headquarters.

Finally, to turn to the lowest unit of Sher Shāh’s administration, the sarkārs were further divided into parganas. Sher Shāh’s reforms, innovations, and efforts for the efficient functioning of the general administration of the pargana, including its revenue administration, has been appreciated by scholars. However, R.P. Tripathi has a different opinion. Though he recognizes Sher Shāh’s ‘aim to revitalise the government and introduce efficiency’, he suggests that it was ‘unhistorical to say that Sher Shāh created any new pargana machinery of the government unknown to the early Sultans. What he is credited with having done he had already found in operation

92 Siddiqui, Sher Shah Sur, pp.118 and 122.
93 Saran, Provincial Government, pp.198 and 337.
when he took the charge of his father’s Jagir. Sher Shah was not an innovator. Our earliest Persian authority, Mushtaqī suggests that in every pargana Sher Shāh appointed a shiqqādār, a munsīf, a khazāndār, a munsīf-i-khaizāna, a Persian writer and a Hindvi writer. Following him, ‘Abdullāh mentions shiqqādār, amīn, khotadār, clerk (Hindvi), and clerk (Persian), but drops munsīf-i-khaizāna from the list of officials at pargana level. The Afghan historian, ‘Abbās Sarwānī also does not refer to munsīf-i-khaizāna in his list of officials which included a shiqqādār, an amīn (or an āmil), a fotahdār, a kārkun (clerk) to write in Hindi, a kārkun to write in Persian, and a qānūngo.

The shiqqādār being the executive head of the pargana was in charge of the general administration, including law and order and criminal justice. The terms āmil, amīn, and munsīf, were synonymous in the official jargon of Sher Shāh’s time. The official was responsible for the mandatory annual assessment and realization of revenue from the pargana. Besides, he also assisted the shiqqūdār together with the headmen of the villages in maintaining law and order and punishing the miscreants.

95 Tripathi, Muslim Administration, p.356. See also, Siddiqui, Sher Shah Sur, p.104.
96 Wāqiʾāt-i-Mushtaqī, pp.139.
97 Tarikh-i-Dāudī, p.213.
98 Tarikh-i-Sher Shāhī, pp.755-56.
99 According to Siddiqui, under Sher Shāh, the shiqqādārs governed the parganas and cities entrusted to their charge, and suppressed the rebels by cleaning the dense forests which they used as hideouts. They dispensed justice to all without discrimination. To make the shiqqādārs more active in suppressing the criminals, Islam Shah held him responsible like the muqaddam for every crime committed within his jurisdiction, Siddiqui, “Position of Shiqqdar”, p.206. However, Irfan Habib has suggested that the shiqqādār performed the role of the revenue collector only, “Evidence for sixteenth-century Agrarian Conditions in the Guru Granth Sahib”, PIHC, 25th Session, Poona, 1963, pp.186-94, especially p.191.
100 Tarikh-i-Shah Shāhī, p.756; Saran, Provincial Government, p.196. Irfan Habib suggests that the munsīf seemed to be in control only over the assessment process, “Evidence for Sixteenth-Century Agrarian Conditions”, p.191.
Being a lucrative post with a number of incentives, a revenue officer was posted in the **pargana** for a maximum period of two years.\(^{101}\) The revenue collected from the **pargana** was to be kept in the treasury the incharge of which was called the **khażānadār**, **khotadār** or the **fotahdār**, as noted above.\(^{102}\) The reference to the **munṣif-i-khażāna** as a **pargana** official is to be found only in the ***Wāqi‘at-i-Mushtaqqi***. If such an officer existed he would be an inspector of treasuries and would belong to a bigger unit than a **pargana**.\(^ {103}\) The **kārkun** was ‘a sort of camp clerk and accountant in one’, both to the chief **āmil** and to the one in the **pargana**, who accompanied them on their tours of assessment. He maintained a record of the transaction which took place between the officials and the cultivators at the time of assessment, on behalf of the government so that the collector might compare his accounts with those of the headman and the **patwārī**.\(^ {104}\) For a convenient functioning of the local administration, a duplicate set of clerks for the purpose of keeping records in Hindvi was appointed. The **qānūngo** referred to by **‘Abbās Khān** was probably a semi-government official who kept a record of the past and present state of agriculture in the **pargana** and was expected to indicate the future prospects as well.\(^ {105}\) He was paid by means of a commission of one per cent of the assessed revenue.\(^ {106}\) In every village there was a **muqaddam** and a **patwārī**. The former assisted the revenue officials in the collection

\(^{101}\) *Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāhī*, pp.757.

\(^{102}\) Under the Mughals the standard **khażāndār** was retained. Saran, *Provincial Government*, p.269.


\(^{104}\) Saran, *Provincial Government*, p.270.

\(^{105}\) *Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāhī*, pp.756. According to Saran, he was in a way the head of the **patwārīs** of his **pargana** since he had to keep the same records for the **pargana** as the **patwārī** had to keep for the village, *Provincial Government*, p.274.

\(^{106}\) According to Saran, under Akbar the **qānūngos** were paid cash salaries from the public treasury,
and served as a link between them and the peasantry within his jurisdiction. For this service he was given a percentage of the revenue allowed to him by the government. The *patwārī* kept all the agricultural records of the village. He also received one percent commission for his service.¹⁰⁷

Though it will be difficult to establish that the intermediary headmen were completely removed and direct links were forged with the cultivators at the *pargana* level throughout the empire, it is clear that the attempts made by Sher Shāh witnessed a larger degree of diffusion of the state authority at the local level. J.F. Richards points out that Sher Shāh’s revenue measures were flawed by excessive uniformity. When his officials tried to fix near-uniform rates of assessment on the harvest across the entire domain, they generated considerable resistance. Converting harvest into cash with a single schedule for a large portion of North India was impracticable and created enormous inequities, as it ignored the differences in fertility between localities. Later, Todarmal understood and addressed this problem with more complete area and production statistics collected from the *qanungos*.¹⁰⁸

Commenting on Sher Shāh’s administrative set-up, Parmatma Saran observes:¹⁰⁹ “It was this administrative organisation which Akbar found in existence when he ascended the throne, and we are not told that he made any noteworthy modification in it. Nor was it possible or necessary for him to do so as Sher Shah’s machinery was a very elaborate and well-tried one... There were over a hundred

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¹⁰⁷ For *muqaddam* and *patwārī*, see Tripathi, *Muslim Administration*, p.354. For *patwārī*, also see. Saran, *Provincial Government*, pp.259 and 275.

¹⁰⁸ *The Mughal Empire*, pp.83-84.

¹⁰⁹ *Provincial Government*, p.70.
Sarkars and three thousand parganas or mahals in the empire (of Akbar) in the year 1596 (40 regnal year). Excepting the adoption of new names for certain old offices and the introduction of some new functionaries, Akbar does not seem to have thought it advisable to make any material alterations in the framework of the sarkar or pargana government”. In the light of the information analysed above, it may not be unfair to say that even if the idealized portrayal of the Afghan rule in our sources is to be taken with some reservations, it is clear from the evidence adduced that Sher Shāh’s age, as suggested recently, formed a significant stage in the evolution of what we often tend to attribute to Akbar. And this was not simply in administrative institutions. In the genealogy of the Indo-Persian ideals of governance too, the Afghan regime represented a notable stage. What is more significant is the fact that despite the overwhelming presence of the dominant Mughals for centuries after, Sher Shāh seems to be remembered as the just and ideal ruler. Important in this connection was the incorporation of non-Muslims in the Afghan attempts at empire-building.

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4. The Afghans and The Rajputs: Conflict and Accommodation

Common misfortune had brought the young *yavan* horseman Farīd Khān and the Ujjainiya prince Badal close together. Both of them having swords in their hands, took vows to remain friendly to each other all through their lives and to help each other in times of misfortune.

Bodhraj in *Ujjainiya ki Varta*¹

Modern studies of medieval Indian past have largely been conducted on two lines. On the one hand are those historians whose approach implies virtual denial of the existence of separate Hindu-Muslim identities prior to the British rule; they hold that the incidents of temple destruction were limited to a very brief and early phase of encounter, the motivation being economic aggrandizement rather than religious zeal. In their views, all the ills in this connection emanate from the British colonial construction.² On the other hand, there has existed a group of "separatist" and "communal" scholars. The Muslims among them believe that Hindus and Muslims are two different "nations". For this view, they seek legitimacy in the writings and

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¹ Bodhraj, "Ujjainiya ki Varta", Eng.trans, B.P.Ambashthya, in Non-Persian Sources of Indian Medieval History (Delhi, 1984), p.22. Bodhraj belonged to Pugal in Bikaner. He was a contemporary of Nain Singh, the author of the famous *Khyat*, and the Prime Minister of Jodhpur in the second-half of the seventeenth century. Bodhraj travelled a lot in search of the material for his history of the Pramaras, and visited Jagdishpur in Shahabad district of Bihar in 1719 V.S/ 1663 A.D., where he stayed for six months. Ibid, foreword, pp.I-IV. Also see Brahmadeva Prasad Ambashthya, "Tradition and Genealogy of the Ujjainiyas in Bihar", PIHC, 24th Session, Delhi, 1961, pp.122-27.

activities of the Naqshbandī sufi, Mujaddid Al-ī-Sānī Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī in the early seventeenth century, if not in Muḥammad bin Qāsim’s conquest of Sindh in 711-
12. The Hindu historians in this group begin and end with a belief that medieval India under Islamic rulers, with large-scale destruction of temples and constant humiliation faced by the Hindus represented a dark phase of India’s history. From this perspective, most of the evils facing the Hindu society today are a legacy of Muslim rule in India.

In recent years there have also been some attempts independent of these two rigidly demarcated approaches, but they are limited to just one or two, even though very important, aspects. In the following pages we have extended, in a measure, this approach in a more comprehensive manner, giving details from both the politics and religion. Such an exercise is necessary as the diverse views on the question of Hindu-Muslim relations and forms of religious identities in medieval India need to be reconsidered and revised in a large measure. It appears that religious identities, in their various forms, did exist in the period. It is also clearly visible that in the conflict over political control of a territory, mobilisation on religious lines was not uncommon; also, religious symbols were frequently used. Muslims seemed to be

3 A leading exponent of this separatist narrative is I.H. Qureshi The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent. For a “liberal” Muslim attack on the “reactionary” and “Sunni fanatic” Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi who “sought to whip up communal frenzy” in medieval India, see S.A.A. Rizvi, Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India in the 16th and 17th Centuries (Agra, 1965). For criticisms on similar lines and dismissal of the shaikh’s influence over the Mughal political elite as unimportant, see also, M. Mujeeb, Indian Muslims.

4 See, for example, K.S. Lal, The Legacy of Muslim Rule in India (Delhi, 1992).

engaged in a recurrent *jihād* against the *kuffār* (sing. *kāfir*) or infidels/Hindus in India, with hordes of *ghāzīs* (victorious soldiers) and *shahīds* (martyrs) indulging in large-scale loot and plunder, including razing of temples, gaining thereby rich rewards both "here" (in this world) and "hereafter" (in the next).

The experience of Indian Islam, however, was special in the sense that here the Muslims had come to live with the infidels albeit in the dominant position as rulers. The Muslim rulers with all their pretensions of following the *sharī'at* had not converted the conquered territories into *dār-ul-Islām* in the strictly orthodox sense of the term, nor did they convert the entire local population to Islam. The non-Muslims

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6 Theoretically, since *jihād* is nothing more than a means to effect conversion to Islam or submission to its authority, there is only occasion to undertake it in circumstances where the people against whom it is directed have first been invited to join Islam. However, it is argued that there was no need to address a formal invitation to the enemy, as Islam being sufficiently widespread in the world the people are presumed to know that they are supposed to join it. Yet it is considered desirable to repeat the invitation, except in cases where there is ground for apprehension that the enemy, thus forewarned, would profit from such a delay by better organising his defences and thus, compromising the successful outcome of *jihād*. Further, the duty of *jihād* exists as long as the universal domination of Islam has not been attained. The maxims go: 'Until the end of the world', and 'until the day of resurrection'. Peace with non-Muslims, thus, is a provisional state of affairs only, E. Tyan, ‘Djihād’, in *EI* (new ed.).

7 The word *kāfir* is used in the Qur'ān with reference to the unbelieving Meccans who endeavoured to refute and revile the Prophet. Not only were the non-believers threatened with God's punishment and help for denying or "concealing" his blessings, the Muslims were ordered to keep apart from them, and to defend themselves from their attacks and even to take the offensive against them. In an Islamic state, they should be forced to convert or killed or reduced to slavery. W. Bjorkman, "Kafir", *EI* (new ed.).

8 *Dār-ul-Islām*, "the land of Islam" is the whole territory in which the law of Islam prevails. Its unity resides in the unity of the law, and the guarantees assured to the members of the 'umma, the community of the followers of Prophet Muhammad. The Islamic state, established in consequence of the 'final' revelation, also guarantees the faith, the persons, possessions and religious organizations, albeit on a lower level, of the *zimmēs*, which we shall refer to below. In the classical doctrine, everything outside *dār-ul-Islām* is *dār-ul-harb* or 'the land of war'. See further A. Abel, "Dar-ul harb" and "Dar al-Islam" in *EI* (new ed.).
were given the status of the *zimmās* or *ahl-i-kitāb*, and were allowed to stay peacefully by paying *jizya* or annual tributes. Though at times, a pietistic sovereign seemed to be concerned about the violations of the rules by the *zimmās* the occasional intolerance was often due to political and economic factors, or for the need for legitimacy, as we shall see below.

The conquered people in India, however, did not fully reconcile to a subordinate position. The Hindu resistance in the period appears to be of both the overt/open and covert/‘everyday’ variety. At times, however, both sufi literature and court chronicles show an extraordinarily magnanimous attitude towards the Hindus. Perhaps also as a mark of protest against Islamic orthodoxy, Perso-Urdu poetry in India has a long tradition of using the analogy of *kafir* for the beloved, beauty, elegance, etc. Yet in a hostile political context, Muslims and Hindus treated each other as dangerous ‘other’. It is in this context of the frequently emerging faultline that the process of the formation and consolidation of community identities in

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9 The term *ahl-i-kitāb*, or “people of the Book” in the Qurān and the resultant Muslim terminology, denotes the Jews and the Christians, repositories of the earlier revealed books, *al-Tawrat* (the Torah), *al-Zubur* (the Psalms), and *al-Injil* (the Gospel). The use of this term was later extended to the Sabaeans, both the genuine (mentioned in the Qurān) and the spurious ones (star-worshippers of Harran), to the Zoroastrians, and in India even to the ‘Hindus’. See G. Vajda, “Ahl al-Kitab”, *EI* (new ed.).

10 The word *jizya* occurs in the Qurān in the somewhat loose sense of compensation for non-adoption of Islam, and always as collective tribute, not differentiated from other forms of taxation, and the nature of its content is left uncertain. The precedents for such taxation can be found even in pre-Islamic Arabia outside the religious sphere, in the conditions of submission of inhabited oasis to more powerful tribal groups, in return for protection. Thus there was no hesitation over the fact that the *zimmās* of a territory conquered by the Muslims had to pay a tax which, from the point of view of the latter, was material proof of their subjection, just as for the inhabitants it was a continuation of the taxes paid to the earlier regimes. Further, *jizya* was to be levied only on those who were male, adult, free, capable and able bodied, so that children, old men, women, invalids, slaves, beggars, the sick and the mentally deranged were excluded. Cl. Cahen, “Djizya”, in *EI* (new ed.).
medieval India need to be understood. An attempt may also be made to recreate a picture of Hindu-Muslim interactions in terms of actual practice and behaviour, focusing on both conflict and coexistence as is apparent from the sources.

The nature of relationship between the Afghans and the Rajputs in our period of study is an important problem which needs careful study. Generally, rulers like Sikandar Lodī and Sher Shāh are condemned in the historiography as bigots. Undoubtedly, the Persian sources from the Mughal period have contributed to the making of such an image of the Afghan rulers. Sikandar Lodī is reported to have “levelled to the ground all the places of worship of the kāfsīrs and left neither their name nor any vestige of them”. Though they recognise the exaggerated phraseology of the chroniclers, most modern authorities pick up the examples of intolerance from the sources to illustrate the fanaticism of the rulers. In the case of Sikandar Lodī the examples which are cited include (a) his desire as a youth to put an end to the bathing festival at Kurukshetra; (b) the execution in his reign of a brahmaṇa who had declared that “Islam was true, but his own religion was also true”, and had refused to convert to Islam; (c) at Mathura and other places, he turned some temples into mosques; (d) release of a Hindu prisoner from jail and giving an important assignment on the condition of his embracing Islam; (e) he banned the worship of Shīlā, the goddess of small pox; (f) display of īḍīyas during Muharram and the annual procession of the standard of Šālār Mās‘ūd Ghāzī were stopped; (g) women were forbidden to visit the tombs; and (h) barbers were prevented from shaving the Hindus at Mathura. 11 Though K.S. Lal condemns Sikandar Lodī as a bigot, he notes that the incidents which portray

11 For more details and references, see chapter three.
his uncompromising attitude “do not point to a definite and persistent policy of persecution”. He further writes that the king’s acts of persecution were confined to the regions which had opposed the Sultanate relentlessly. In other words, “his religious persecution was associated with political subjugation. Thus there does not seem to be anything extraordinary in the acts and policies of Sikandar Lodi”.  

The chieftains who accepted the suzerainty of the Afghan kings and paid tributes were allowed to administer the territories under their control. Several examples can be given from the reign of Bahlul Lodi, but they are not discussed or highlighted by the Muslim chroniclers as they did not involve any cry for jihad. Instead, the chroniclers focus on the “rebels”, for instance, the Bachgoti Rajputs under Sikandar Lodi, who were to be eliminated or subdued, and campaigns against whom were portrayed as jihad involving destruction of temples as well. On the contrary, the chroniclers do not show much enthusiasm in narrating the kings’ campaigns against the Muslim administrators in the regions. The Afghan sovereigns reinstated those administrators who did not oppose them and included their name in the khuṭba and the sikka while those opposing them were to be crushed. We shall further illustrate the Afghan rulers’ attitude towards the Rajputs through Sher Shāh’s campaigns in Rajasthan and Malwa.

With the Mughals driven out of Hindustan and the pretender Mallū Khān, styled as Qādir Shāh, made to realise that kingship was not his cup of wine, the politico-military suzerainty of the Afghans under Sher Shāh was poised to take on the

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formidable Rajputs in Rajasthan and Malwa. There were two options open to the Afghan ruler in the matter. One option was to force or persuade the chieftains to accept his suzerainty and allow them to run the local administration with his governors supervising the affairs of the region from ‘above’. This arrangement could have served several purposes. The acceptance of the ritual status of the king as the sovereign of Hindustan meant expansion in Rajput strongholds without much resistance and violence. The indirect rule initially arranged could gradually become more pervasive, and the local administration may in course of time be centralized. Moreover, the acceptance of suzerainty ensured the flow of revenue in the form of annual tributes without much care for the revenue extraction machinery in a newly subjugated area. Finally, the chieftains and their retainers once integrated in the imperial army through, inter alia, the rule of branding, could well be used for subsequent campaigns in other regions such as the Deccan, and later for more ambitious plans to conquer Afghanistan and Coastal Iran.

The other option was to aim at a direct and uniform rule throughout the dominion, involving annihilation of the Rajput chieftaincies with large scale loss of soldiers on both sides. Even if a capable but reckless Muslim empire-builder took such a step, the problem of legitimacy for ruling the predominantly non-Muslim population would continue to haunt him. Sher Shāh realised that the first option was much more viable. Thus his policy towards the Rajputs was primarily aimed at

14 For the rājas bringing their soldiers for dāgh, Wāqiāt-i-Mushtāqi, p.141.
incorporating them in his imperial network. The significance of the incorporation of the “loyal” Rajput clans was already brought home to him in his early career as the shiqqdar of his father’s iqta in Bihar. He befriended the loyal zamindars and destroyed the belligerent ones. Subsequently, he conferred zamindari rights on the Ujjainiya Rajputs along with the others. The Ujjainiyas, whom Sher Shāh favoured in the beginning of his career, sprang into prominence after his rise to power.\footnote{Siddiqui, \textit{Afghan Despotism}, p.96. Also, the Raghuvanshis of Jalhupur and Sheopur in Banaras owed their rise from the days of Sher Shāh when Daman Deo, their ancestor received from Sher Shāh the rent-free grant of the pargana of Katehar. The place he made his headquarters was named Chandrawati after his wife, or daughter. He also built a massive fort there on the steep bank of the Ganges the ruins of which are the reminder of his prowess, \textit{Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteers, Varanasi}, p.49.}

Bodhraj refers to the significant role played by Gajpati, styled as Maharaja Gajraj, and his two thousand Ujjainiya Rajputs in Sher Khān’s victory against the Bengalis in the battle of Surajgarh. In fact, it is suggested that the leader of the Bengal army, Ibāhīm, was killed at the hands of Gajpati while trying to escape from the battlefield. Sher Khān was much pleased with Gajpati for his bravery, and allowed him to retain the spoils of war, comprising elephants, horses and other equipments which had fallen into his hands. At the time of the Maharaja’s departure, Sher Khān tied with his own hands the bejewelled sword on his waist, bound his arm with a jewelled armlet, placed a string of pearl round his neck, put a bejewelled kalangi on his sirpech (head-dress), and gave Baksar in assignment. Besides, some gifts for the Maharaja’s younger brother, Bairishal, were also sent.\footnote{“Ujjainiya ki Varta”, pp.25-33. Also see, Syed Hasan Askari, “The Ujjainia Ancestors of Babu Kuar Singh”, \textit{Journal of the Bihar Research Society}, Vol. XLI, Part I, March 1955, pp.106-31; Brahmadeva Prasad Ambashthya, “The Accounts of the Ujjainiyas in Bihar”, \textit{Journal of the Bihar...}
entered into an alliance of friendship. We shall return to Bodhraj's account later in this chapter for the image of Sher Shāh in the Ujjainiya memory.

During his campaigns in Malwa and Rajasthan after ascending the throne, the rājas were left untouched in their ancestral possessions on usual conditions of obedience and service to the king. Such Rajput bastions as Chittor which had long tradition of resistance to Muslim rule were peacefully captured by Sher Shāh, with the rājas formally handing over the keys of the forts to his officials. After the formal subjugation, the chieftains were reinstated in the ancestral gaddīs. According to Abbas, Sher Shāh marched towards Chittor following the campaign against Maldeo in 950/1543. When the fort of Chittor remained only at the distance of twelve kos, the rāja of the palace sent him its keys. Thus Sher Shāh came into the fort, and appointed Shamshar Khān (the younger brother of Khawāṣ Khān), Miān Aḥmad Sarwānī and Ḥusain Khān Ghilzai as its in-charge. Based on an inscription found on a step-well called Ganesh Baori at Toda Raising, dated V.S. 1604/1547 A.D, D.C. Sircar has suggested that Rana Udaysimha offered his allegiance to Sher Shāh in 1543 or 1544 and continued to rule as a feudatory of the Sūrs for some years even after the death of Sher Shāh and the accession of Islām Shāh to the throne. Even Chanderi for which Bābur had to fight a much trumpeted jihād came in his possession without any

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21 Tarikh-i-Sher Shāhī, p.657.
bloodshed.\textsuperscript{23} The fort was soon handed over to a more legitimate Rajput claimant.

Devoid of any war cry for the cause of Islam, these peaceful conquests could not take the pride of place in the late sixteenth century Muslim expansionist discourse, which forms the basis of modern knowledge on Sher Shāh. It may be noted here that the popularity of ḥiḍād in the Sunni Muslim circles was heightened during the period. Knowing that what sold was the account of “resistance” and how it was overcome, the intellectual labour accordingly emphasized the importance of the role of the sword or the gun, and as also on the invisible men of God (\textit{mardān-i-ghaib}) who were said to have fought on behalf of Sher Shāh. The latter’s “achievements”, that is the destruction of chieftains who had refused to accept the imperial authority, is extolled. For instance, Rizqullāh Mushfaqī takes pleasure in recording that Sher Shāh achieved three grand victories through the blessing of God. One of them was the destruction of Mahārath, the infidel; second, the infidels of Raisin were massacred and, third Maldeo was driven away from his \textit{wilāyat} and Islam and Muslims were again strengthened in the \textit{khitta} of Nagaur. If God wills, it may turn out to be the cause of his salvation.\textsuperscript{24}

We shall return below to the Muslim chroniclers’ perception of Sher Shāh’s action against certain Rajput warlords and see how they were shaped by the ethnic, political and ideological affiliations of the authors themselves, and the context in which they were producing their works. Besides, we shall take up the writings of some modern scholars to see their treatment of medieval accounts and point out how their

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Wāqi‘ āti-Mushfaqī}, p.150

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p.156.
conclusions were also influenced by the dominant historiographical trend of their own time.

It will be appropriate here to turn to the Rajputs who dared to offer resistance to Sher Shāh, and see what was in store for them. The besieged chieftains were continuously bombarded by the Afghans. For a change, artillery came to play an important role in Sher Shāh’s campaigns. Earlier we have noticed how the highly mobile cavalry gave a death blow to the Mughals led by Humāyūn. Recollecting the shocking affairs of Chausa and Qannauj, the Mughals however erroneously felt that artillery was the mainstay of Sher Shāh’s army. It may also be noted that though their increasing presence must have curtailed the mobility of his army, Sher Shāh made a judicious use of the elephants in destroying the Rajput death squads attacking the Afghans with barchhas, or swords in hands. Returning to the besieged Rajputs, they had at least three options. Firstly, they could still ask for terms, accept a subordinate position, and shift to a different iqṭā‘ assigned to them. Secondly, having vacated the fort and the territory they could go to any area hitherto not in control of Sher Shāh. Finally, pushed to a point from where they could only think in terms of resorting to jauhar, and fight to the finish. These three options were available to Puranmal of Malwa, Māldeo of Rajasthan, and to Kīrat Singh of Kalinjar.

25 *Tārīkh-i-Rashīdī*. Earlier Bābur also referred to a very effective use of artillery by the Bengalis, *Bāburnāma*. It may be noted that gunpowder had come to India from China before 1351 through varied agencies and channels. It came to Bengal and Calicut through sea, and to Assam by land. In the north-west, it was introduced by the Mongols in the second half of the thirteenth century. Iqtīdar Alam Khan, “The Role of the Mongols in the Introduction of Gunpowder and Firearms in India”, *PIHC, 55th Session*, Aligarh, 1994, pp. 194-200; idem, “Origin and Development of Gunpowder Technology in India: A.D. 1250-1500”, *I.H.R.*, Vol.IV, No. 1, July 1977.
Puranmal was allowed by Sher Shāh, during his Malwa campaign shortly after the victory at Qannauj, to continue to hold the charge of the fort of Raisin and the adjoining region, although he was amongst those guilty of not responding to the farman to attack Agra and Delhi in collaboration with Qutb Khān leading to his death at the hands of the Mughals. But the die was cast when Puranmal upheld the cause of Mallū Khān and the Miāna Afghans who were resisting Sher Shāh’s expansion in Malwa. Accordingly, the king started his Malwa campaign for the second time and came to besiege the fort of Raisin (1543). After the siege of the fort for six months when the continuous cannon-shots began to breach the wall of the fort on all sides, Puranmal was struck with fear and came out in person to pay his respects to Sher Shāh. Soon it was agreed that Puranmal would take out his family from the fort and hand over its charge to Sher Shāh’s nobles. The assurance of the safety of Puranmal and his family was given by Sher Shāh’s son ‘Adil Khān and the nobleman Qutb Khān Naib. Puranmal came out of the fort with his family and occupied the place allotted to him by Sher Shāh in the middle of his army camp. Surrounded from all sides by the Afghans, Puranmal had no scope for flight in the eventuality of a sudden attack on him. Armed with a fatawā from the leading Muslim religious leaders, Sher Shāh ordered the massacre of the Rajputs. Even before they were attacked, the Rajputs started killing their women and children, and then rushed out to die in honour. Barring a few wounded women and children, they were all put to death.


Rizqullāh Mushtaqi explains that since infidelity prevailed in the fort of Raisin during the reign of Sultan Ibrāhīm who never took any step for the cause of Islam, Sher Shāh had resolved to take revenge against the infidels for the honour of Islam. On becoming bādshāh of Hindustan, he felt he was in a position to take this step. While starting the campaign, he announced that in case he died, he would die in the way of God and be rewarded for this sacrifice. He also sought Mīr Saiyid Rafi-ud-Dīn’s opinion with these words: “The fact about the illtreatment of the followers of Islam by the infidels of Raisin is widely known. We want to punish them and serve the cause of Islam. We may get hold over them in any way and kill them, we may even make peace with them on oath and violate it, if it is required by prudence”. Then he sought fatawa from the saint, which the latter drafted and gave to him. In conformity with the fatawa, he started his expedition against the fort of Raisin.

The Afghan chronicler further adds that some days after Puranmal had encamped at the place fixed for him the women of the saintly people of Chanderi presented themselves before Sher Shāh on the roadside and cried out for redress. They addressed him as the saviour sent by God to rid them of the evil tyrant. ‘Abbās explains that Sher Shāh with tears in his eyes, told the oppressed women to keep

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28 Wāqi ‘at-i-Mushfīq, pp. 151-52. According to I.H. Siddiqui, the territory of Raisin never formed the part of the Lodi empire. It belonged to the kingdom of Malwa. But the territory of Chanderi was seized by Rāi Salhādī from the Afghans during the reign of Ibrāhīm Lodi. At this time both Raisin and Chanderi were controlled by Puranmal. Sher Shāh was displeased by the latter because of his secret alliance with Malfū Khan, Afghan Despotism, pp.100-02.

29 According to ‘Abbās they complained: “We have experienced various kinds of tyranny and oppression at the hands of this malicious one (Puranmal) who is an infidel. He has killed our husbands, got in chains our daughters whom he caused to dance along with the dancing girls and has seized all our lands and earthly possessions. It has been for a long time that we, having been afflicted with sufferings, have been praying to God in our utter helplessness to send a faithful and just king who may wreak vengeance on this tyrant for having committed oppression and crime
patience for he had brought Puranmal out of the fort on the strength of oaths and vows. They submitted that the matter be referred to the ʿulamāʾ of the time and requested him to act upon whatever fatawa they gave. Sher Shāh summoned the ʿulamāʾ who were in the camp of his army and told them of Puranmal’s misdeeds and demanded fatawa from them. Mīr Saiyid Rafi-ud-Dīn and others who were there gave a fatawa for his being slain.30

According to Nizām-ud-Dīn Aḥmad, Puranmal, the son of Raja Salhadi Purabiya of the Gehlot Rajputs tribe, ruled oppressively in the fort of Raisin; and had taken two thousand Hindu and Musalman women into his harems, including them in the band of dancing women. In the year 950/1543, Sher Khān embarked on the conquest of Raisin. During the prolonged siege, peace proposals were made and terms agreed upon with Puranmal to the effect that his life or property would not be harmed, provided he surrendered the fort. He then came out of the fort with his family and adherents and four thousand Rajputs of note. The learned men of the age, especially Amīr Saiyid Rafi-ud-Dīn Ṣafāvī, gave a legal opinion to the effect that Puranmal should, in spite of the agreement with him, be slain.31

Sher Shāh’s attention then turned towards Rajasthan. The decade (1530-40) during which Humāyūn was preoccupied with his campaigns against Bahādur Shāh in Malwa and Gujarat, and Sher Shāh in the east, the chieftains in Rajputana were left to fend for themselves. Free from any threat of intervention from outside, Māldeo of Jodhpur had emerged as the most powerful rāja of the region annihilating all the

30  Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāhī, pp. 607-608.
31  Ṣabaqāt-i-Akbarī, Vol.
smaller chieftaincies around, including Nagaur and Ajmer which boasted of sizeable Muslim presence. Nagaur had been captured from the control of a Muslim administrator during the reign of Sultan Ibrahim Lodi.\(^\text{32}\) Norman Zieglar has attributed the emergence of Marwar under Maldeo to his ability to assemble huge forces and to exploit the mobility that the greater use of horses allowed,\(^\text{33}\) though at this stage horses were not used by the Rajputs in combat.

The capture of a territory from the control of a Muslim administrator was a sufficient provocation for the Afghan rulers; if the khutba and the sikka had any meaning for the general Muslim population in North India, the ruler was expected to respond to the challenge. More serious from the point of view of the Mughal-Afghan interface was Maldeo’s non-cooperation in capturing fugitive Humayun who had sought to use Rajasthan as a base to fight back against Sher Shāh.\(^\text{34}\) Besides, the small chieftains smarting under the “highhandedness” of Maldeo were inviting Sher Shāh to undertake a campaign in the region against the rāja. A Sanskrit work called Karma Chandra Vansotkirtankam Kavya, composed in 1593, records that Jet Singh, Rao of Bikaner, being attacked by Maldeo, sent his minister Nag Raj to Sher Shāh to seek help against the Rathor prince. The chief of Merta, Biram also reportedly sought his

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\(^{34}\) Siddiqui, *Afghan Despotism*, p.104.
aid against his oppressor.\textsuperscript{35}

Under these circumstances Sher Shāh started his campaign against Māldeo in 950/1543-44. Instead of allowing the Afghans to besiege him in a fort, Māldeo came with a large body of horsemen to the borders of Ajmer and began skirmishes. Sher Shāh found himself in danger when he learned that his supply line was cut off by the Rajputs. It is reported that Sher Shāh quickly resorted to a stratagem to handle the situation. He got letters to be written which looked as if they were issued by the nobles of Māldeo, the contents of which were to the effect: “The king (Sher Shāh) should not give way to fear and anxiety, for we will seize Māldeo just during the fight and will bring him before you”. The letters were put in a bag and were dropped near the tent of Māldeo’s wakīl who picked it up, and sent the letters to Māldeo. Having read the letters, Māldeo was seized with fear, and despite all that the nobles did in swearing about their fidelity, he did not believe them and fled to the fort of Siwanah. His nobles decided to offer a fight, and some two thousand Rajput soldiers were massacred.\textsuperscript{36}

Mushtāqī explains the cause of Sher Shāh’s action against Māldeo to the latter’s aggrandizement in the region, especially the execution of the local Muslim administrator of Nagaur who also happened to be his son-in-law, and spread of infidelity in the wilāyat. The author attributes this Rajput aggression to the reign of Sūlṭān Ibrāhīm. According to him, the sultan did not take any notice of Raisin being captured by the infidels, and neglected the affairs of Nagaur also in a similar manner.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ishwari Prasad, \textit{Life and Times of Humayun}, p.176; Siddiqui, \textit{Afghan Despotism}, p.104.
\end{itemize}
The Muslims of Nagaur came to Sultan Ibrahim and prayed for justice against Māldeo, but he did not pay any heed to their entreaties. Sher Shāh (then Farīd) prayed to God during the lifetime of his father as he had done in the case of Raisin that he would take revenge for the honour of Islam, if he was rendered by God capable of doing so. At last the reign of Sher Shāh began, and God enabled him to punish Māldeo. This was the divine will that he should attain to kingship and take revenge from the accursed infidels and destroy them for the glory of Islam. Accordingly, Māldeo was driven away from there and Islam and Muslims were again strengthened in the khīṭṭa of Nagaur. 37

Beginning with an explanation of a secular nature that when a king captured a whole kingdom he would become anxious to conquer another, the Afghan chronicler writes that Sher Shāh, quite at ease in matters concerning the kingdom of Hind as there was no dissent left in that country, was contemplating his next moves while staying in Agra during the rains. The nobles suggested that he should march towards the Deccan where some ungrateful wretches had become heretics and were reviling the holy apostles. Sher Shāh responded that their advice was sound, but that after the death of Sultan Ibrahim, the zamindars who had filled the wilāyat with unbelievers had destroyed the mosques and shrines of the Musalmans and converted them into places of idol-worship. He declared that so long as he did not cleanse the area of these infidels and made it holy, he would not turn his attention towards other kingdoms. He therefore decided to first chastise Māldeo, “the accursed infidel”, who was previously the servant of the ruler of Nagaur, Ajmer and Marwar. The latter had great faith in

37 Wāqi‘ ūl-Mushtaq, p.156; Nizām-ud-Dīn Ahmad does not give any explanation for the attack on Māldeo.
Māldeo who however slew him and forcefully occupied his territories.38

In the case of Kalinjar which cost Sher Shāh his life, Raja Kīrat Singh did not ask for peace; in view of the massacre at Raisin, the ruler must have held that any terms of agreement with Sher Shāh were meaningless. Sher Shāh was thus compelled to capture the fort by force. The Afghan chronicler however suggested that the motive behind the capture of the fort was to acquire a dancing slave girl in Kīrat Singh’s ḥarem, about whom Sher Shāh had heard a lot of praise. If he seized the fort by force, the chieftain would certainly cause jauhar and thus burn that slave girl as well.39 Be that as it may, the fort was captured by force and the Afghans “carried out a general massacre and sent all the non-believers to hell”. The rāja who had confined himself in a house with his seventy soldiers was killed by the Afghans, after Sher Shāh had succumbed to the burns on 10 Rabi I 952/22 May 1545.40

Significantly our earliest authorities have not been able to offer any tangible pretext for the siege and capture of Kalinjar. Niẓām-ud-Dīn Aḥmad notes that when Sher Shāh marched towards Kalinjar, which was the strongest fort in Hindustan, the rāja of Kalinjar took a hostile attitude, and shut himself up in the fort.41 'Abbās Sarwānī suggests that when Sher Shāh arrived near Kalinjar, Raja Kīrat Singh “did not come to receive him. Sher Shāh, therefore, surrounded the fort and threw up

38 Tārīkh-i-Sher Shāhī, pp.651-54.
39 Ibid. p.724.
41 Tabaqāt-i-Akbarī.
entrenchment around it”. Then the issue of Sher Shāh’s desire for the slave girl, noted above, is mentioned as the motive behind the capture of the fort. Realizing that it was not a very convincing explanation, recourse has been made to the suggestion of certain leading sufis to the effect that “no prayer can equal the conducting of a crusade against the infidels; if one is killed, he becomes a martyr; if he survives, he becomes a ghāzī”. Following the suggestion, Sher Shāh gave order for the occupation of the fort by force.

Later reports add that certain supernatural beings played a significant role in the capture of the fort. Bādāūnī writes that he heard a story from a “most trustworthy source”, that on that eventful day of assault, in which the deeds of every individual assailant were conspicuous, and the standards and faces could be easily identified, he saw a soldier armed cup-a-pie, who had not previously been seen nor was ever after seen, clothed from head to foot in black, wearing a plume of the same colour upon his head, and urging and encouraging men in the battle. Then he entered one of the galleries and made his way into the fort. Bādāūnī’s informant searched for him everywhere after the battle, but did not find him. The men in the other trenches also gave the same account, saying they saw several horsemen wearing these clothes who kept advancing until they had entered the fort and vanished. Thus, a report became current that in the battle, certain men from the invisible world had come to the aid of the Muslims.

42 Ṭārīkh-i-Sher Shāhī, p.723.
43 Ibid., p.724.
44 Muntakhab-ut-Tawārīkh, p.483.
The chroniclers' celebration of Sher Shāh’s reported action against the chieftains in conflict may have stemmed from a search in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century for an alternative in the wake of emperor Akbar’s alleged deviation from Islam. Thus, while the accounts of Sher Shāh’s conflict with the Bengalis or the Mughals are not entirely free from religious elements, his campaigns against the Rajputs have been portrayed as *jihād*. The reasons for his action are generally given as aggrandizement of the *rājas*, denigration of Islam and humiliation of the Muslims at their hands. In the accounts of Mushtaqī and ‘Abdullāh who often copies Mushtaqī, Sher Shāh is shown to be approaching the ‘ulamā for not only a *fatwā* to undertake a campaign against the infidels, but also to legalize the unilateral breach of oaths and vows, and chastisement of the infidels at an appropriate moment.45 ‘Abbās Sarwānī and Badūnī seek to establish that either Sher Shāh was compelled by popular pressure to ask for *fatwā* or he was merely acting in conformity with the “just” suggestions of the leading ‘ulamā and the sufis who accompanied him during the campaigns.46 Finally, Ni‘matullāh Harawī blatantly resorted to an alleged tradition of the Prophet which sanctioned the legal validity of treachery with the enemy (*al-ḥarb khud ‘at*).47

Modern authorities have taken a strong exception to Sher Shāh’s “bigotry” and

45 *Waqī ‘at-i-Mushtaqī*, pp.151-52; *Tarikh-i-Dinawī*, p.152.

46 *Tarikh-i-Sher Shāh*, pp.607-08 and 724; *Muntakhab-ut-Tawārikh*, p.476.

“treacherous action” against the non-Muslims.\textsuperscript{48} Clearly, the condemnation stems from an uncritical acceptance of the accounts given by Afghan chroniclers. The accounts of the cold-blooded massacres of the Rajputs at Raisin and Kalinjar are read literally, and generalized to confirm the assumption as true. In doing so, these studies ignore the question whether the alleged treatment of the Rajputs by Sher Shāh was unique for the period; that he had particularly singled out the Rajputs for this “special” treatment; and that his attitude towards them was similar or uniform with all the clans in different regions throughout his career as a ruler in Bihar or as a king of Hindustan. Further, this evaluation also emanates from an understanding that it was Akbar who started the policy of tolerance towards the non-Muslims and their incorporation in state service in medieval India. In our opinion this assumption needs reconsideration as it not only neglects the attempts at integration by the earlier sultans, nobles and the sufis but also ignores the complex processes of attraction and repulsion of Muslim and non-Muslim groups/individuals in medieval India.

As an indication of the degree to which Sher Shāh could go in chastizing his opponents during the course of his conquest, the case of the Gakkar chief Sārang Khān may be cited. Owing allegiance to the Mughals, the Khān had offered some resistance to the Afghan army campaigning in pursuit of the fugitive Humāyūn after the battle of Qannauj. When he was compelled to submit before Sher Shāh, the

\textsuperscript{48} Sri Ram Sharma, \textit{The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors}, first published 1940 (Bombay, 1972), pp.26-27; Ishwari Prasad, \textit{Life and Times of Humayun}, p.172 (for ‘Jehad’ against Raisin); Dirk Kolff, \textit{Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy. Qanungo, Sher Shah and his Times}. Denying the accusations of religious fanaticism levelled against Sher Shāh, Siddiqui has suggested that the ruler was actually a forerunner of Akbar in adopting a policy of tolerance towards all irrespective of race or creed, \textit{Afghan Despotism}, pp.105-06 and 108.
emperor ordered him to be executed, had his skin filled with straw and then displayed.\textsuperscript{49} In this context, mention may also be made of the powerful Khān-i-Khānān Lodī who enjoyed considerable prestige amongst the Afghans despite his association with the Mughals, and was unceremoniously put to death. The case of the Mughal governor of Bengal, who was killed after being lured into a false treaty is yet another illustration of this. It must be noted that all these victims of Sher Shāh were Muslims. Thus, the view that the treatment meted out to Puranmal was unusual and was influenced by religious factors needs reconsideration. Further, the close cooperation with the Ujainiya Rajputs, and the restoration of the chiefs after the peaceful conquest of Rajputana does not fit with the model of a Muslim ruler out to destroy the infidels, and convert Hindustan into a dār-ul-Īslām.

It will be fruitful to consider here an evidence which provides a different perspective. As a measure of recognition of the power that they enjoyed and the need for legitimacy from them, the Indo-Muslim rulers alienated a large chunk of land under their control for revenue free grants, variously called suyūrghāl, madad-i-ma'ṣh or \textit{in'ām} to the men of religion chiefly the ālāmā and the sufis. Realizing that such grants to the non-Muslim spiritual power holders such as the \textit{brahmanas} and the \textit{yogis} can be more helpful in diffusion of their authority, the rulers generously conferred the grants on them as well. Such grants were quite frequent under the Mughals, but the practice was prevalent in the time of Sher Shah as well. The \textit{Tawārīkh-i-Daulat-i-Sher Shāhī} contains a \textit{farmān} of Sher Shāh according to which the pious and deserving people amongst the Hindus got land-grants from him for their maintenance. He also

\textsuperscript{49} Ishwari Prasad, \textit{Life and Times of Humayun}, p.162.
granted land as *waqf* for the upkeep of the temples.\(^{50}\) The need to portray him as a devout and orthodox Sunni Muslim ruler may have compelled the Persian authorities to suppress the information concerning the grant to the non-Muslim divines. Yet one such grant to a *brahmana* (*zunnārdār*) by Sher Shāh has sneaked into the narrative of ʻAbdullāh. It is reported that while moving in a boat for the campaign towards Kalinjar, Sher Shāh came across a *brahmana* taking bath on the bank of the river, at *pargana* Hamirpur in Kalpi. The boatmen were asked to anchor the boat to the bank. The *brahmana* did not recognize the king and thus remained indifferent. Sher Shāh was, however impressed by his honesty and granted him as *in 'ām* the village where he stayed. Five hundred rupees in cash was also given to him.\(^{51}\) This evidence has been neglected by the modern historians of the Mughal period. J.F.Richards, for instance, believes that Akbar’s “inclusion” of the non-Muslim grantees as subjects of state largesse was a “new departure”.\(^{52}\)

The quest for legitimacy may also be seen in Sher Shāh’s architecture, chiefly his tomb at Sahsaram. Any Hindu visitor to his mausoleum, treated now as a holy shrine, is bound to have a feeling of *déjà vu* as the building is located in the middle of a lake. Though the water of the lake and the allusion to water and greenery of the

\(^{50}\) The extant fragments of the *Tawārīkh-i-Daulat-i-Sher Shāhī* of Ḥasan ʿAlī Khān were published along with the English translation of the portion said to be containing the *farman* s of Sher Shāh in *Medieval India Quarterly*, Vol. I, No. 1, July 1950. S.A.A.Rizvi and I.H.Siddiqui have, however, condemned it to be a later forgery. Siddiqui specifically dates its ‘fabrication’ to the reign of Shāh Jahān, when Sujiān Rāi utilized it for his *Khulāsat-ut-Tawārīkh*, see Rizvi, *Medieval India Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 2, October, 1950, pp.74-80; Siddiqui, “Examination of the Contents of *Tawārīkh-i-Daulat-i-Sher Shāhī* of Hasan Ali Khan”, in idem, *Mughal Relations with the Indian Ruling Elite*, pp.178-89.

\(^{51}\) *Tārīkh-i-Dāwūd*, pp.138-39.

\(^{52}\) Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, p.92.
heaven in the Qur'anic verses inscribed on the inner walls of the tomb may be viewed as an index of Islamic religiosity, the lake attached to a temple complex symbolizing ritual purity, and also for the actual purpose of bathing, is a common feature at noted tirthasthans in India. Thus, the layout of the tomb serves the purpose of eliciting the admiration of the Muslims and the non-Muslims alike. The attempt at integration may also be viewed in Sher Shāh’s coinage. As noted above, the details inscribed on the coins were both in Arabic and Devnagri scripts. Thus it does not need to be emphasized that Sher Shāh like the Mughals, was in conflict with only those who challenged, or refused to acknowledge, his political power. Generally, he showed a liberal and tolerant attitude towards the non-Muslims. His relationship with the Rajputs was clearly marked by an honourable alliance of dominance and subordination which recognised the status of the latter as the rāja of his territory. In such alliances, the chieftain was expected to give his daughter to the ally as an acknowledgement of the acceptance of his inferior position, and for ensuring the durability of the relationship. Marriage was indeed a significant determinant in the Rajput alliance with the Afghans, as was to be the case with the Mughals later on.

Further, as Norman Ziegler suggests, Rajput loyalties and identifications on a local level may be conceived in terms of both descent, operative within the brotherhood among those related by ties of male blood, and sets of hierarchical,

53 Catherine Asher highlights Islamic elements in the architecture, and denies any influence of the non-Muslim environment. She also ignores its impact on the local religious milieu, “Mausoleum of Sher Shah Suri”.

54 See Introduction.

dyadic relationships based on service and exchange, operative within a kingdom between a ruler and his servants. Each of these institutions or sets of relationships also had a territorial aspect, based on the extent of kin recognition which defined the *watan* of a brotherhood, and was based on structural ties between a ruler and his retainers, which defined the territory of the kingdom. Cross-cutting all levels and included within the concept of “territory” were also affiliations through ties of alliance and marriage with *sagai*. 56 Ziegler points out that in understanding medieval Rajput cultural conceptions, it is important to note that the Muslim was also treated as a Rajput. The traditions generally represent the Rajput *jati* (caste) as being divided into two categories: Muslim/Turk and Hindu. This category of “Muslim” within the Rajput *jati* did not include all Muslims, but only those who were warriors and who possessed sovereignty and power equal to, or greater than, the Hindu Rajput. The Muslim emperor in particular, held a position of high rank and esteem, and the traditions often equate him with the Ksatriya cultural hero Ram. What basically distinguished the king from the local Rajput rulers was simply his possession of greater sovereignty and power and his greater ability to grant favours and rewards. Service for the Muslim sovereign or one of his subordinates was thus no different from service for a local ruler or *thakur*. 57 Thus, Ziegler concludes that the Rajput support for, or adherence to the Mughal throne rested primarily upon a basic “fit” between Rajput ideals and aspirations, and Mughal actions in this area, which did not challenge fundamental Rajput tenets regarding order and precedence. Mughal policy


57 Ibid., p.235.
of support for local rulers, of alliance through marriage, and of granting lands in
return for service and allegiance all found a base of support in local ideology and
allowed Rajputs in turn to find fulfillment of their own ideals through subordination
and loyalty to the Mughal throne.58

Before moving further, we would like to have a general overview of the role
of the Rajputs in the Mughal-Afghan conflict. During the early period of Babur’s
invasion and conquest of Hindustan, the Rajputs fought with the Afghans, and
continued to offer resistance through the Afghan pretender Sultan Mahmud. The
period of Sher Shah’s conflict with Humayun witnessed the Rajputs settling scores
with each other and generally resorting to an ambivalent attitude towards the two,
though complaints of the capture of the territories previously under the control of the
Muslims were not uncommon. Once the issue of bâdshâhat of Hindustan was settled,
the Rajputs, barring a few, did not make any delay in acknowledging the suzerainty of
the Sûr emperor.

In fact non-Muslims in the service of the Afghans could be noticed from an
earlier period. Siddiqui has listed a number of non-Muslim chiefs in the service of the
Lodis.59 Later, Hemû’s elevation to the status of the chief commander of the Sûr
army, who died fighting against the Mughals after Humayun’s return from Persia,60
speaks volumes on the incorporation of non-Muslims in the Afghan imperial project.

58 Ibid., p.240.
59 Siddiqui, “Composition of the Nobility”.
60 Referring to Hemû, the ‘Hindu’ general who had styled himself as Raja Vikramaditya, J.F.Richards
suggests that his success in the second battle of Panipat would have been a remarkable reassertion
of the Sanskritic/Brahmanical monarchical tradition, long subservient to Muslim rulers, in North
India, The Mughal Empire, p.13.
The extent to which this incorporation, or alliance, was effective may further be seen in the fact that Akbar’s early encounters with the Rajputs during the period of Mughal consolidation in the second half of the sixteenth century was actually a corollary to the latter’s support to the Afghans as noted above. Perhaps this alliance continued in, and resistance dragged to, the seventeenth century as well. It is in the context of the recurrent resistance of the Rajputs against the Mughal expansion that Bodhraj’s account of the lasting Ujjainiya-Sūr alliance can be understood. Apart from the importance of this backdrop, the memory of Sher Shāh’s generous help and political support to the Ujjainiyas and the latter’s spirit of sacrifice reflected chiefly in the battle against the Bengalis is significant in itself. Finally, though it sounds heretical to suggest that “Afghans” or “Rajputs” were synonyms in the military tradition of medieval North India, the extent to which they identified with each other may be seen in the claims of a Rajasthani bardic poem, Qaimkhan Raso, that Sher Shāh was the son of a Rajput mother. It is suggested that Sher Shāh’s mother was “a daughter of the ruling Qaim Khani Rajput family of Fatehpur-Jhunjhun (Shekhawat)” near Narnaul. Mention may be made here of Mīān Ḥasan’s early connections with the Rajputs. Abū’l Fażl has noted that Hasan was, for a long time, in the service of Rāimal, the grandfather of Rāīsal, a noble in Akbar’s court. The possibility of Ḥasan picking up a Rajput wife cannot be denied, but the suggestion that Sher Shāh was born to her is not only scandalous from the point of view of the Afghans, but also is

61 Dirk Kolff, Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy, pp.57-58.
62 Qanungo, Sher Shah and his times, p.XI.
However instances of Afghan nobles marrying Rajput women were not unusual during the period. Sher Shāh himself married at least two non-Muslim women. The *Tawārīkh-i-Daulat-i-Sher Shāhī* relates that the relationship between Faḍfīd and his father, Ḥasan Sūr had strained due to the former’s love affair with the daughter of a Rajput chief, Jai Singh Rathore. Fascinated by her beauty, Faḍfīd fell madly in love with her and lost his mental peace. When Jai Singh came to know of the affair between Faḍfīd and his daughter, he decided to run away with her, but in vain. Faḍfīd got an inkling of the plan, at once threw Jai Singh into prison and obtained the hand of the girl in marriage. Shortly afterwards Jai Singh was set free as he had outwardly reconciled to Faḍfīd, although inwardly he was determined to take revenge. One day Jai Singh turned up and after some conversation took out his dagger and attacked Faḍfīd. The author of the *Tawārīkh*, Ḥasan ʿAlī Khān, who claims to be present there quickly jumped up, caught hold of the dagger and put Jai Singh to death. The news of Jai Singh’s murder caused severe grief to his daughter. She stopped taking food and passed away after sometime. On her death, Faḍfīd also lost interest in worldly affairs. As the grief caused by her death to Faḍfīd was too severe to bear, he also decided to follow her in death by committing suicide. The author again claims that he consoled Faḍfīd in such a way that he refrained from taking such a drastic step.\(^64\)

The sources of the Afghan period relate several episodes in which the lovers do not hesitate to take the “drastic step” and sacrifice their lives for their beloved. The tales end with the suggestion that the lovers unite and live together after their

departure from this world. The purpose of the narration of these stories was to suggest that the people of the Afghan period were not only “sincere” in their love, but also as Shaikh Rizqullah Mushtaqī put it: “The time was good”. Writing in his old age, in the reign of Akbar, the shaikh lamented: “Today neither love nor time is sincere; such people have passed away”. Though, we shall return again to the sufi shaikhs’ reflections on their contemporary society in chapter six, we may turn to a few anecdotes to have a feel of the “time”. Two episodes which we shall recount here are useful for the Hindu-Muslim tangle in medieval India and the different ways in which the rulers sought to handle the problem. Also comes in the picture the ubiquitous sufi with his love for God and the desire for love.

Mushtaqī records that a student reached a place called Bhogaon in the course of his journey. Being thirsty, he went to the well and found a beautiful girl drawing water. He saw her and was captivated by her at the very first sight. Although, the other women offered him water to drink, he insisted on taking it from her hands. Her companions said to the girl: ‘He is a traveller. Be kind to him’. On their advice, she agreed to give water to the student who took his hands to his mouth to drink it. The girl poured water upon his hands from her bucket. As he continued to stare at her face, the water fell down and he could not drink. Irritated, the girl drew away the remaining water from her bucket and turned away her face in anger. Again, other girls offered him water but he said: ‘I shall take water only from her hands, otherwise not, and I will die’. The girls said to their companion: ‘We offer him water but he refuses to accept it; he will accept water from your hands only’. She said: ‘If I ask him to jump into the well, will he do it?’ No sooner had he heard these words that he leapt into the

65 Wāqiʿat-i-Mushtaqī.
well, causing an uproar among the girls. They said to her: ‘What have you done? You are responsible for his death’. She felt ashamed and also jumped into the well.

The matter was reported to the shiqqdtär who reached the spot along with the relatives of the girl and others. The nets were drawn into the well and their dead-bodies were brought out. They were found holding each other by hand. The relatives of the girl wished to cremate her, but the shiqqdtär differed from them, saying, ‘she has died for the sake of a Musalman. They have been brought out together, therefore, it is not proper for you to cremate her body’. It was ultimately decided that she should be buried near the grave of the student, and the order of the shiqqdtär was carried out. At night the relatives of the girl decided to open the grave and take out her body for cremation. When they opened her grave, they did not find her body. They examined the grave and found a passage between the two graves. A candle was also burning and both the boy and the girl were sitting on a cot. When they saw this, they closed the grave and went away.\(^66\) Clearly the tale highlights the sufic adherence to the fundamental unity of mankind, and the notion that the differences between Hindus and Muslims are of a superficial nature, and that the lover unites with his beloved in death.

Another anecdote related by ‘Abdul Ḥaq Muḥaddis Dehlawi refers to a conflict between the Mughal governor Mīrzā Muḥammad Zamān and the sufi shaikh, Saiyid Sultān Bahrāichī over a Hindu woman. The relatives of the woman had sought the Mīrzā’s help in taking away the woman from the shaikh’s protection. However, the Mīrzā had to submit before the shaikh as the latter counterposed his action on the basis of the shari‘at. He argued that the Hindu woman whom he loved, and had

\(^{66}\) Ibid., pp.51-53.
married, had converted to Islam at his hands; and drew out his sword for a fight with the Mirzā on the issue. The above episode not only points to the sufis’ interest in conversion, but also the occasional tension in their relationship with the rulers. Significantly, the religious divines at times took rigid *sharīʿ* position and wanted things to be different from what the rulers were comfortable with. Indeed, on several issues the kings are found to be taking a liberal position despite pressure from the ‘orthodox party’. We saw above that there was hardly any serious and systematic attempt on the part of the rulers to implement the *shariʿat* as the law of the land, destroy places of worship of non-Muslims, convert them to Islam, or even collect *jizya* on a regular basis. Yet the ‘ulamāʾ and the sufis portrayed them as the ideal Muslim rulers, and ignored or legitimized many of their acts of omission and commission. The sufic approach to some such problems will be examined in the next chapter.