The establishment of Turkish rule in India saw the development of the Persian tradition of historiography which in early medieval period consisted of writing about the political achievements and military exploits of kings and the nobility. Although recent trends in medieval Indian history have centred around a multidimensional research, with a gradual shift from biographical, political and military themes to cultural, economic and institutional ones, the trend by no means is suggestive of having exhausted studies and research on different aspects of polity.

Since the history of medieval India is to some extent the record of the achievements and failures of the nobility, this institution has also attracted the attention of scholars, as is proved by important works on nobility as an institution. Athar Ali's *Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (1966); S.B.P. Nigam's, Nobility under the Sultans of Delhi (1968); Narain Singh Yadav's *Hindu Nobility under Akbar* (1973) Pritpal Singh Bedi’s *Mughal Nobility under Akbar* (1985); Afzal Hussain's *The Nobility under Akbar and Jahangir – A study of Family Groups* (1990); and the recent Firdoz Anwar's *Nobility under the Mughals, 1628-58* (2001) are some important works on this institution.

Specific aspects of the nobility like the *Wizarat* have also attracted scholarly research. Ibn Hasan’s, *Central Structure of the Mughal Empire* (1936), analyses the position of the Vakil and the *Wazir* in medieval India in general and that of Mughals in particular. R.P. Tripathi also discusses the office of *Wazir* at length in *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration* (1964).

The office of the Prime Minister has always been very significant in the political history of any country. In the administrative setup which gradually developed after the establishment of Turkish rule in India, the
Wazir or Prime Minister always occupied a central place. As the chief counsellor and an instrument for the execution of his policies, the Wazir/Vakil exercised considerable influence on the political decisions of that time.

I would like to concede that the Mughal Wazir cannot be equated with the Prime Minister in the present context. Technically speaking it would be misleading to call him the Prime Minister but in the absence of a better equivalent in English language for the official who was the premier noble and the highest official in the administrative hierarchy (referred to as Prime Minister by several scholars) it seems appropriate for the period under review. Even under the Marathas, the ‘Peshwa’ who was the king’s senior most officer had been termed as the Prime Minister. Moreover, during the Mughal period the office has not been known by a common nomenclature. The Vakil-us-Sultanat, the premier noble under Akbar, disappeared as an administrative office once Akbar reorganized the political setup with the creation of the office of Diwan/Wazir in 1564 A.D. and was only retained as an honorific one. The office remained in abeyance during most of Jahangir’s reign as well as that of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb when the Wazir held supreme charge.

There appears to be a direct relationship between the functions of Wazir and Vakil throughout 1526-1707 A.D. When the office of Vakil was in use the Wazir/Diwan looked after finance. When there was no Vakil, the Wazir supervised general administration as well as finance and was the premier noble. Therefore, with very few exceptions, the medieval synonym for the Prime Minister represents only the first among equals and is the generally accepted term for the medley of terms like the Wazir, Vakil, Diwan, Diwan-i-Ala, Diwan Wazir which were used for the senior-most noble under different Mughal emperors.
Considering the importance of the office in medieval polity, which is proved by its historical continuity notwithstanding the change in nomenclature, scholars have taken up research on individual prime ministers. Munshi Debi Prasad Kayastha's *Khan-i-Khanan Nama* (1860) in Urdu is a biographical depiction of Abdur Rahim, Khan-i-Khanan, Iqtidar Alam Khan's *Political Biography of a Mughal Noble, Munim Khan, Khan-i-Khanan* 1497-1575 (1969). Jagdish Narayan Sarkar's *The life of Mir Jumla - The General of Aurangzeb* (1979) and Sukumar Ray's *Bairam Khan* (1992) are some of the important works. However Laiq Ahmad was the first to undertake a study of prime ministers under an individual monarch. His work, *Prime Ministers of Aurangzeb* (1976), is a biographical account of the Wazirs who served the last of the great Mughals. To the best of my knowledge no comprehensive research work on the status and role of prime ministers under the Mughals has been attempted so far.

The present research although related to the institution of prime minister under the Mughals is different in its perspective and line of treatment. I have tried to assess the varying status of the senior-most official after the emperor, as well as the contribution of the important incumbents of the office in providing assistance to the monarch in not only expanding the territorial limits of the empire which happened to be the primary concern of Mughal emperors but also providing it with strength through the sound economic reforms undertaken by them. My research also focuses on the extent to which they left their mark on the social, literary and cultural life of the age, by way of personal examples, the patronage provided to craftsmen and the infrastructural input needed for such endeavours, neutralising the belief that the nobility's role in matters other than political was only peripheral.

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(Gauri Pandit)
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