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**Poetry and Legitimacy at the Mughal Court**  
**Selected Tasks of a Poet according to the Text of *Čahār čaman***  
**by Chandar Bhan Brahman\***

**ABSTRACT:** The present paper proposes to take a new look at the imperial Mughal court's pattern of patronage of arts and letters as a vital and indispensable component of the imperial state machinery on the one hand and an instrument of historical change on the other. It focuses on, and draws from, *Čahār čaman*, a mid-17<sup>th</sup>-c. work by Chandar Bhan Brahman, one of the prominent figures among poets, writers, scribes and secretaries in Mughal service; a person involved in the never-ending, and aesthetically intricate, ceremonial exchange of goods, honors, acts of refined praise and proofs of recognition that not only made up the rich and variegated courtly milieu of the period but also gave form and actively shaped the ethos of the Mughal state's pattern of self-representation—all in the service of legitimating the imperial power and its expanding claim over increasingly vaster stretches of the Indian subcontinent and its regional rulers and their riches. The same was done in the garb of sophisticated aesthetics of imperial power that demanded rulers, princes, prominent chiefs and officers, executive clerks, accountants and administrative professionals to communicate and ever prove anew their status and position in the language and manners

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recognized as aesthetically pleasing and in the form requiring literary, if not poetical, skills and competence based on knowledge of recognized expressive forms and appropriate genres as well as individual talent and personal ambition.<sup>1</sup>

**KEYWORDS:** Chandar Bhan Brahman, Mughal, patronage, Persianate, legitimacy

One of the aims of the present paper is to present preliminary results of research on the patterns of courtly life pertaining to the position of a poet at the Mughal court in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is primarily based on the work named *Čahār čaman*, a widely circulated, copied and probably read, later on to be put to print and soon much reprinted treatise on statecraft authored by Chandar Bhan Brahman, one of the famous secretaries at the Mughal court in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century India.<sup>2</sup> This brilliant treatise on courtly life capturing the peak moment of the Mughal supremacy in Northern India remains in many respects understudied.<sup>3</sup> The present paper intends to highlight several of such hitherto understudied aspects by way of an in-depth and contextualised reading of selected passages concerned primarily with the Mughal court literary life of the period. Chandar Bhan's work offers penetrating insights not only into the matters of state, but also into the daily life of the court staffed, among others, by men of arts and letters. While we lack extra-textual historical confirmation regarding many of the matters mentioned, the insights

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<sup>1</sup> Personal names follow the anglophone usage, hence Chandar Bhan not Čandar Bhān, Afzal Khan and not Afzal Xān; the Persian words and quotations from the text are transcribed following scientific transcription employed for Persian.

<sup>2</sup> The article is based on the critical edition of *Čahār čaman* prepared by Syed Mohammad Yunus Jaffery, who edited it using three sources: a copy of the manuscript held in British Museum, a version kept at Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, and a late Urdu-Persian printed copy from Hyderabad (Jaffery 2007: 21–22). All quotations from the original Persian text are from this edition unless specified otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> In spite of a handful of recent seminal studies like Kinra 2015.

appear to be based on author's own successful career as a poet and a munshi in the chancellery of more than one noble employer and patron of the period.<sup>4</sup> Current study focuses specifically on those passages of the work that concern the relationship between poets and their patrons, including such matters as occasions that called for the patron to reward a court poet, the variety of specified tasks that awaited the candidate who aspired to become a court poet as well as other components intrinsic to the actual working of the rich and vibrant courtly culture of appreciation and reward that were a vital part of functioning of the Mughal empire. All in the form of sophisticated aesthetics of imperial power that demanded rulers, princes, prominent chiefs and officers, executive clerks, accountants and administrative professionals to communicate and ever prove anew their status and position in the language and manners recognized as aesthetically pleasing and in the form requiring literary, if not poetical, skills and competence based on the knowledge of recognized expressive forms and proper genres as well as individual talent and personal ambition.

Chandar Bhan Brahman, son of Dharam Das, a government official, was born in Lahore at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the family of Brahmins (Qāsemi 1990: 755). He is best known for his poetry, collected in his *divan*, letters (*monša'āt*) to various government officials and friends and the *Čahār čaman* ('Four Gardens'), a detailed treatise on and an account of the courtly life supplemented with remarks on statecraft and a concise autobiography of the author. *Čahār čaman* is divided into four essential parts, named "gardens"<sup>5</sup>. The first garden focuses on various types of state festivities and court gatherings, in which the author apparently participated himself in the capacity of a munshi, or a competent secretary and contractor as well as an interpreter. The second garden is a description of the emperor's activities, his

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on life at Mughal court and emperor's daily routine see: Wink 2008.

<sup>5</sup> *Čaman* refers to a particular place in the garden, which is surrounded by trees. The place filled with grass which serves the purpose of a sitting space.

duties, daily routine, and life at the imperial court. The third part depicts selected details from Chandar Bhan's own life and is set forth in the form of the genre of *enšā* ('essay') and letters. It provides an exemplary stylistic model of this genre for future generations of munshis, the fact amply proven by many extant manuscripts of the work as well as numerous examples of its emulation (Kinra 2015: 7). The fourth and last garden is a highly ornate treatise on philosophy, with segments dedicated to esoteric topics and mysticism. The addressees of *Čahār čaman* were most probably aspiring Mughal civil servants or administrators, as they could use the text as a practical guidebook and draw on Chandar Bhan's examples of well written prose, administrative competence and genteel civility as models worthy of emulation (Kinra 2010: 528). Many of the passages in the text could be used as a reference, such as the author's career in the court, his adherence to the values of Indo-Persian culture, especially notion of proper etiquette or decorum and also particular stylistic features, employed in the text of *Čahār čaman*. An example of the most striking linguistic feature, discernible throughout the text, is the articulation of modesty, presented in multiple ways aimed at elevating others and downplaying the achievements of the narrator. Such mannerism is a well-established factor present in numerous works in Persian where authors display their knowledge and fidelity to the customs by resorting to traditional ways of honouring the guests. These customs were later transferred to many important aspects of daily life, such as communication, literature or celebration of festivities. The above-mentioned deportment is rendered in Persian by the term *adab* ('etiquette', 'education'), which is most often connected with notions such as culture, art, knowledge, acceptable conduct, etc. (Mo'in 2002: 109). This principle may be traced in the full-grown literary strategy deployed when the author of *Čahār čaman* refers to himself using terms such as *kamtarin-e bandegān* ('the littlest of servants'), speaks of his own poetry as *qazali az zāde-hā-ye tab'-e nāqes* ('a ghazal of the deficient type') or *marqum-e qalam-e šekaste* ('written with a broken pen'). These expressions remain in stark contrast to the way he writes about his

patrons and benefactors, who are presented as knowledgeable in all forms of art, possessed of high critical skills and are embodiment of all grace.

Chandar Bhan describes his presence at the court during various important ceremonies. He often refers to his patrons, especially Afzal Khan, as persons well versed in various types of arts, literature, morality or understanding. An example of one of these depicts Afzal Khan as:

(...) the only one from among the scholars of the world, the head of the office of scholars of the present time, chosen from the famous ministers, the foremost of the princes of high importance, possessing suitability in appearance and in spirit, knowing the religious and worldly details, the great minister of Hindustan, the scholar of present age and all the times, Afzal Khan (...)<sup>6</sup>

The reader might expect that the narrator, being a beneficiary of the court minister's protection, was suitably reciprocating favours already received in order to solicit his benefactor's favours to an even greater extent in the future. However, at the time of the composition of the text Afzal Khan was referred to as *maqfur va marhum* ('deceased and in hope of God's mercy'), so Chandar Bhan obviously tried to eulogise his patron even after his death. He mentions him very often thus setting an example for other candidates aspiring to the role of court poets or munshis so that they remember their benefactors long after their death. It is noteworthy that the high position, which the author was appointed to, was given to him during the ceremony in which all the secretaries and servants of the late Afzal Khan were presented at the imperial court, as was the custom of the day. It can be assumed that this introduction took place sometime in 1638/39 on the initiative of Aqel Xan, a nephew of the de-

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<sup>6</sup> "yegāne fozalā-ye ḡahān, sar-daftar-e olamā-ye zaman, zobde-ye vozarā-ye nāmdār, omde-ye omarā-ye vālāmeqdār, ḡāme'-e kamālāt-e suri va manavi, dānā-ye daqāyeq-e dini va donyavi, vazir-e a'zam-e Hendustān, allāme asr-o-d-dourān Afzal Xān" (Jaffrey 2007: 62).

ceased (Kulshreshtha 1976: 44). Another passage from the work seems to testify to the crucial role that recognised literary skills could play in one's career at the Mughal court: in the presence of various dignitaries, Chandar Bhan was presented to the court and as a test of his literary prowess, was asked to recite a poem, obviously his own. The recitation impressed the gathering to such a degree that he was offered on the spot the position of the emperor Shah Jahan's diarist.

After the departure of the worth-knowing khan, Afzal Khan, from this corporeal dust-pot towards the spiritual world, those who were selected by the amirs of Aqel Khan, all appointed and dependant on that khan, whose place was with the cherubs, were made to appear before the most holy and high gaze and every one of them, worthy of status, share and respect, acquired honour. When the turn came for this poor person, the cursive of this destitute one, that wasn't empty of merit, was shown to the alchemical gaze and a ghazal of a flawed sort reached the ears of splendour and glory receiving a degree of acceptance, it appeared to the liking of the one hard to please. Because of a convenient vacancy in the group of chroniclers, he was appointed by the luminous presence and also the service of recording in an [imperial] journal the kingly matters was assigned to this destitute person.<sup>7</sup>

The passage above describes in detail circumstances that led to Chandar Bhan's appointment as an imperial diarist in Shah Jahan's service. After the death of his benefactor, Afzal Khan, who was the prime minister at the court of Shah Jahan and a patron of numerous

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<sup>7</sup> "B'ad az रहलत-e xān-e qādrdān-e Afzal Xān, az xākān-e ġasmāni be soub-e 'ālam-e rouhāni montaxabe-ye al-omarā-ye 'āqel xān ġami'-e montasebān-o-mota'leqān-e ān xān rezvān-makān az nazar-e aqdas a'lā' gozarāyande va har yeki darxor-e hālat-o-qesmat va re'āyat sarbolandi yāft. ĉun noubat be faqir resid, xatt-e šekaste-ye in niyāzmand ke xāli az dorosti nabud be nazar-e kimyā-asar dar āmad va qazali az zāde-hā-ye tab'-e nāqes be masāme'-e ġāh-o-ġalāl resid va daraġe-ye qabul yāft va pasand-e tab'-e moškel pasand oftād. Be moqtażā-ye monāseb dar selk-e vāqe'-nevisān hozur-e pornur entezām gereft va xedmat-e tastir-bayāz-e xāsse-ye pādešahi niz be in niyāzmand moqarrar gašt" (Jaffrey 2007: 15).

poets such as Chandar Bhan Brahman, Jalāl ad-Din Tabātabā'i and Mohammad Amid Qazvini (Begley 1984: 601), according to the custom of the day, all servants of the deceased dignitary were presented to the emperor and reassigned. As mentioned earlier, the author refers to himself either as *faqir* ('poor') or *niyāzmand* ('needy', 'destitute'), which contrasts with the way he speaks of Afzal Khan or the emperor himself, portrayed as those in possession of absolute knowledge, good literary and artistic taste, critical mind and hard to please. They required their servants to be able to meet high standards, which provided a lesson for the future generation of munshis and civil servants. It is worth bearing in mind that though the term munshi referred basically to a secretary or a scribe, munshi was often regarded as a mediator or a spokesman, especially in the later period, when he was viewed as a person who could read and draft documents in Persian and possessed an understanding of the political reality (Alam and Subrahmanyam 2004: 61). Chandar Bhan highlights also the manner in which he acquired his post: by reciting a well composed poem that showed his accomplishments as a well-educated man, capable of fulfilling his role at the position requiring such skills. It was a matter of luck that at times an opportunity presented itself and a position lying vacant might have been then given to a deserving person just introduced to the imperial presence. This was the case of the author, who was found fit to fill up the role of a royal diarist and chronicler. By assigning this post to a person of high literary skills, loyal to the court and meeting the set criteria by displaying his familiarity with the rules of *adab* the emperor expected good results, especially considering the proposed person's legacy and legitimacy. Court poets were not only tasked with entertainment during the numerous ceremonies, feasts and festivities, but were entrusted with the crucial role of commemorating deeds, virtues and notable events in the life of the emperor. Chandar Bhan was one of such court poets, who from the time of his assignment as an imperial diarist (*vāq' e nevis*) set on a course as a companion to the royal entourage, wherever it moved. In a later passage he mentions the victorious banners arriving in Kashmir, where the retinue stayed

for some time and he was tasked with describing salient features of the landscape, ceremonies at the court and celebrations of victory. A part of his assignment was to provide the court with new poems commemorating the event, which he then recited publicly. His verses again gained a degree of applause and appreciation, which resulted in reward presented to him on this occasion. In general terms, appointment to the position of a diarist may be considered an important promotion from the point of view of Chandar Bhan's career. It was often the case that the amirs would purposefully introduce their proteges to the higher government officials with a view of finding them a position at the court and thus building a strong network of influence (Lefèvre 2014: 89).

What is conspicuous of *Āhār ĉaman* is its repeated self-centered orientation, projecting itself as a work of art, skills and knowledge (e.g., "A quatrain of this poor person was put on display and received some compliment... Singers set it to music and sung it often at the heavenly court"<sup>8</sup>) and its author as an accomplished and successful man of letters, style and etiquette: we find in the text numerous mentions of Chandar Bhan referring to himself, for example, when speaking of presenting his own poetry at the court and its finding the highest favour in the emperor's eye. What is especially worth noting is that the poems said in the work to be presented at the court are also said to have been used during various other functions. One of them was the occasion when the emperor happened to have refrained from making his customary appearance in front of the people for a whole day. This ceremony must have been regarded as an important part of royal duties, since we are told that crowds used to gather before they commenced their daily work to have an auspicious viewing of the figure of the ruler, a viewing apparently understood by many to work as a blessing for their assigned endeavours (Hansen 1986: 102). The courtiers became restless because of the emperor's absence at the public appearance, so the next day when he

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<sup>8</sup> "... in robā'yi-ye faqir az nazar gozašte , daraḡe-ye tahsin yāft... Qavalān in robā'i rā tarāne baste budand ke dar aksar-e ouqāt dar mahfel-e xold-āyyin mi-xāndand" (Jaffery 2007: 40).



did appear everyone was grateful for his presence and Chandar Bhan voiced this gratitude by composing a poem. This is yet again an important part of a poet's role at the Mughal court. Especially since it pertains also to the royal munshis, with Chandar Bhan being one of them. In this manner the poet aimed to present himself as the voice of the people and a guardian of tradition and ceremony in order to secure and maintain his position. In a fragment titled *afsāne-ye 'ešrat-serešt* ('Tale of Blissful Nature') of *Čahār čaman*, he describes this event in detail:

One day, the sunny sky of the caliphate and universal governance, whose glint of forehead and gaze are the cause of light-perception of the world and those inhabiting it, hasn't risen from the place government and good fortune for the sake of the utmost need of mankind. When on the next day, he appeared like a Sun illuminating the world, the sound of "blessed be" came from all the sides and quatrain of this poor person was presented to the benign sight [i.e., of the emperor].  
Quatrain:

*Oh King! May the world obey your command as  
everybody's dear lives may be sacrificed for you.  
May your essence be the guardian of the creation  
Wherever you are, may God protect you.*<sup>9</sup>

Chandar Bhan compares the king to the sun rising every day to illuminate the world. As sunrise is one of the most natural phenomena to be observed and so is the duty of the ruler to present himself to his people. By making this comparison Chandar Bhan highlights the nature of Mughal universal rule (*sulh-i kull*) as an internal part of

<sup>9</sup> "ruzi āftāb-sepehr-e xelāfāt-o-ġahāndāri ke foruq-e ġabineš va binešeš bā'es-e roušani-dide-ye ġahān-o-ġahāniyān ast az matla'-e doulat-o-eqbāl be moqtazā-ye lāzeme-ye bašari tolu' nafarmude budand. Čun ruz-e digari mānand-e xoršid-e ġahān afruz ġelve zohur farmudand, sedā-ye mobārak bādi az har taraf bar-xāst va robā'i-ye faqir az nazar-e feyz-asar gozašt. Robā'i:

Šāhā! 'ālam moti'-e farmān-e to bād čun  
ġān-hā-ye garāmi hame qorbān-e to bād  
Zāt-e to xalq rā negahbān bāšad

harġā bāši xodā negahbān-e to bād" (Jaffery 2007: 44).

reality, such as the appearance of day and night. Poet claims to serve as a proclaimer of the people's voice, who wish all good fortune to the ruler and recites verses to uphold the legitimate claim of the Mughal state to rule over the world. Like the sun rises and travels from the East to the West, so does extend the authority of the ruler, as stated in the quatrain authored by Chandar Bhan. The king is an internal part of the world order that deserves reverence and sacrifice if he is to fulfil his duties, such as protection of the realm. If all conditions are met, he is to be protected at all cost and God himself shall be his protector. The notion of ruler as an anointed of God is deeply present in the Indo-Persian culture and this is also reflected in the way the author refers to the emperor as "the shadow of God on Earth", or the one possessing most holy gaze and all religious competence. This is an old concept of the divine right underwriting the kingship and jurisdiction of the Islamic ruler who is accountable only to God (Esposito 2003: 285). A court poet is expected to maintain the legitimacy of the ruler by highlighting this connection between the natural phenomena and the role of a good king, who is to be praised on every occasion as he is the manifestation of the stability of the kingdom. If for whatever reason he fails to fulfil this role, the same is met with surprise and disappointment, especially as far as ceremonies that require his presence are concerned. One of such ceremonies is the daily *darśan* where the ruler shows himself to his subjects who view his appearance as a good sign for the coming day.

Court poets used to present themselves during various ceremonies as already mentioned. One of the important occasions, during which they received considerable reward for their work, was the periodic weighing of the emperor. The author of *Čahār čaman* portrays the weighing as a regular ceremony meant to proclaim and legitimize emperor's position and maintain the state power and prestige. The ceremony has a long history on Indian subcontinent and is mentioned in various Sanskrit literary works describing court ritual practices. It is considered to be one of the six acts called *mahādāna* ('great gift') in which a person is ceremoniously set down on a scale and the equal of his weight in gold (*tūlapuruṣa*) is then distributed

among the Brahmanas (Mishra 1973: 70). In most cases it is a part of the annual celebrations of kingdom's prosperity, with the ruler seen as the representative of the state, and the ability to perform this ceremony reflects the condition of the state. The weighing, often depicted in various Mughal miniatures, used to be performed at least once a year. On one scale sat the emperor, clothed in ornate robes adorned with gold, while on the other scale the designated government official would put the amount of gold or silver equivalent to the weight of the emperor. The ceremony continued as an exchange of gifts between courtiers and the ruler, who rewarded the people of the court with their share of the weighted metal. Among those who were rewarded were the court poets who praised the king for his generosity and bestowed onto him the wishes for a long and prosperous life. Chandar Bhan Brahman, as one of the state secretaries, witnessed these ceremonies and described one of them in *Āhār ĉaman*. It is a detailed description of the procedure with the list of the people present and the rewards they had received. It is important to mention that the court poets would be performing during the ceremony of royal weighing as described in the fragment below:

(...) In the span of few days, first the weighing according to solar calendar and then according to the lunar were celebrated. Princes of high lineage and the greatest of amirs: Alimardan Khan, the Amir of Amirs, the amirs of high standing namely Rostam Khan, Maharaja Jasvant Singh, Mirza Raja Jai Singh, the Chosen of the Kingdom Ja'far Khan, the Protection of the Realm Khalilollah Khan, the Might of the State Qasem Khan, Mir Owais and other famous amirs have come to offer their submission and "Blessed be" together with lavish gifts to be presented before the enlightened gaze (of the emperor). Most of the servants obtained honour in multitude and joyfully filled all their clothes and robes with gold. When a quatrain of the littlest of servants was presented before the holy gaze, it was rewarded with an ornament of praise and a gift. Quatrain:

*Always be successful in desires,  
It is the first century of the rule,*

*In every moment be in joy and happiness  
May you live a hundred centuries more<sup>10</sup>*

The above-mentioned fragment highlights one of the qualities that a ruler should possess: generosity. It is often mentioned in *Čahār čaman* as an important element of stories narrated by the court munshi; generosity shown towards the subjects, the inhabitants of the realm, who get rewarded beyond their expectations. The expectations of receiving a reward after completing an assigned task is one of the reasons the people mentioned in this text take part in various ceremonies. They play their part in the complex network of Mughal bureaucracy which facilitates the administration over such a vast political entity. A court poet is expected to fulfil his part and as a result may expect to be honoured in the form of being promoted to a higher position. The terms Chandar Bhan uses often, such as *sarafrāzi yāftan*, suggest that this is connected closely to career advancement, due to meeting the expectations required of the given task or even exceeding them. For state secretaries, as described by Chandar Bhan, honour is intertwined with tasks assigned to them by government officials, who are always prominently positioned in the stories. Mughal dignitaries, princes, governors, administrators and ministers are revered and praised when they fulfil their tasks and contribute to smooth running of state machinery. Their presence is

<sup>10</sup> "... dar 'arz-e čand ruz, avval ġašn-e vazn-e mobārak-e šamsi, b'ad az ān ġašn-e moqaddas-e vazn-e qamari surat entezām yāft. Pādešāhzāde-hā-ye vālātabār va 'omarā-ye 'azām alimardān xān amir-ol-omarā va omde-ye omarā-ye mani'-oš-šān rostam xān va mahārāġa Ġasvant Singh va mirzā rāġā Ġai Singh va 'omdat-ol-molk Ġa'far xān va emārat-panāh Xalilollah xān va velāyat-manzelat Qāsem xān va Mir Oveys va digar omarā-ye nāmdār taslim va mobārak bād be taqdim resāndidand va piškeš-hā-ye gerān-māye az nazar-e anvar gozašt va aksar-e bande-hā-ye be ezāfe-hā sarafrāzi yāftand va ahl-e 'eyš-o-nešāt tabaq-tabaq va dāman-dāman por az zar bardāštand. Čun robā'i-ye kamtarin-e bandegān be nazar-e moqaddas dar āmad be pirāye-ye tahsin va en'ām emtiyāz yāft. Robā'i:

Peyvaste be kām kāmṛāni bāši

in avval qarn-e doure-ye soltanat ast

Har lahze be 'eyš-o-šādmāni bāši

sad qarn-e degar be zendegāni bāši" (Jaffery 2007: 45–6).

necessary for the sake of upholding legitimacy of the state and when any of them needs to be replaced, all other servants are put under scrutiny as well to establish whether they are capable of fulfilling their roles. Such was the case after the death of Afzal Khan, when numerous secretaries, civil servants and dependents were presented to the emperor, so that they may be reassigned. The task of a poet in this highly bureaucratic reality was to support imperial ambitions in the hope that success of the ruler might provide prosperity to his subjects, who in turn wished him fulfilment of goals and longevity of life.

The group of servants of the high court from among the famous amirs and khans of high-esteem, powerful and well-related lords, servants in the service worthy of status, nominated and at the positions, by the royal favour were graced by such generousities as elephants, horses, robes of honour, even more positions, gifts of money. Lords of virtue and completeness, and the needful among the dervishes, the hermits and the praying beggars, supplicants have thrown themselves to the possessors of long life and the lords of eloquence and wit from among the well-spoken poets of the present time like Mohammad Jan Qodsi, Taleb Kalim, Mir Elohi, Molla Mohammad Amin, Mirbakhshi, Yahya and the others have recited qasidas, masnavis, and quatrains describing this dear festivity, who have been graced with monetary reward and robe of honour. The sweet-talking congregation and Hindi-speaking Brahmins, gentiles, astrologers and those like them have received the grace of robe of honour. The lords of music and joy, enjoyers of merrymaking and bliss from among the singers, musicians from Iraq and Khorasan, composers of melodies and songs from Kabul, Kashmir and Kalavant, various Indian tribes presented their art and were graced with reward of various robes of honour, which were benevolently overfilled beyond any expectation with gold. The gathered in this curation of Rabe'e az-Zamani, because of appropriate purity, had made effort and were honoured by additional positions, monetary rewards, elephants, robes of honour and the likes of such beneficences.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “Ġami’-e bande-hā-ye dargāh-e vālā az omarā-ye nāmdār va xavānin-e boland-eqtedār va arbāb-e qodrat-o-nesbat, bandegān-e ahl-e xedmat darxor-e hālat

The passage cited above provides some important clues about the life of Mughal court and the patronage pertaining to various government officials, poets, musicians and supplicants. During some important events, such as anniversaries, *Nou Ruz* (Persian New Year), solar and lunar weighing ceremonies, return of the victorious armies or many others mentioned in text of *Čahār čaman* we witness the bestowing of various gifts, including positions at court, horses, elephants, gold, money and particularly robes of honour. The last item is of singular importance, as it symbolises the status of a person and his dedication to the state. Robes of honour or state robes were an important piece of courtly culture at Mughal and Sa'favid courts. The tradition of state attire was present for a long time in the Persianate world, especially important was the garb called *xal'at*, which appears in Chandar Bhan's description of rewards presented to the courtiers. This has been recognized as an act of investiture and granting of special favour from ancient times in the Middle East (Floor 2017: 226). The distribution of honours and wealth was arranged in such a way that it could please the representants of multiple layers of Mughal society, courtiers on one hand, but also poets, artists and destitute and pious people. The state used

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dar manāseb-o-manzelat be 'enāyat-e šāhenšāhi az marhamat-e fil va asb va xal'at-hā-ye fāxere va ezafe mansab va en'ām-e naqd sarafrāz gardānidand va ashāb-e fazl-o-kamāl va ahl-e ehtiāg az darvišān va guše-nešinān va do'ā-guyān va vazife-dārān va omidvārān be xeirāt va mabārāt-e zaxire-ye 'omr-hā-ye derāz anduxtand va arbāb fasāhat-o-belāqat az šo'arā-ye fasih-e zaman mesl-e Mohamad Ġān Qodsi va Tāleb Kalim va Mir Elohi va Molla Mohammad Amin va Mirbaxši va Yahya va qeyr-e ān qaside va masnavi va robā'I dar ta'rif-e in gāšn-e garāmi gofte be en'ām-e naqd va 'enāyat-e xal'at sarboland gaštand va maḡlesyān-e širin-bayān va brahmanān-e hendi-zabān va gabrān monaḡḡemān va emsāl-e ān be marhamat-e xal'at sarafrāzi hāsel kardand va arbāb-e naqme-o-nešāt va ahl-e sorur-o-ambesāt az xānande-hā va sāzande-hā-ye 'erāq-o-xorāsān va naqme-sāzān va tarāne-pardāzān-e Kābol va Kašmir va Kalavant va tavāyef-e hendi arz honar dāde be 'enāyat-e xal'at-hā-ye gunāgun moftaxar gardidand va be karāmat zar-hā-yi az andāze-ye birun-e dāman-e omid rā labriz gardānidand va ḡam'i ke dar mo'āleḡe-ye ān rābe'e-az-zamāni az ru-ye axlās dorost kušēš nemude budand; be ezafe mansab-o-'enāyat az naqd-o-fil-o-xal'at-o-anvā'-e marhamat sarafrāz gaštand" (Jaffery 2007: 37).

to support various pious foundations as prescribed by religious authorities and this also manifested itself in supporting the poor during multiple celebrations. On such occasions artists had an opportunity to present their special works to the emperor and the court. The examples of occasions for this exchange of gifts can be listed as: appearance after lengthy absence, arrival from provinces, festivals such as *Nou Ruz*, weighing of the emperor, completion of architectural projects, successful military campaigns, recovery from illness, etc. (Harit 2019: 115). *Čahār čaman* mentions multiple genres of literature that were composed for such occasions, works that were often long like *masnavis* or some of the *qasidas*, while on the other hand there were also short compositions like *ghazals* or *rubaiyats*. Chandar Bhan Brahman mentions the presence at the court of brahmins and gentiles who came to participate in the distribution of gifts. They played an important role in state affairs, as they were a link between the Muslim government and the predominantly Hindu population. Mughal dynasty and bureaucracy were largely dependent on these people, as their support was vital for maintaining the idea of *sulh-i kull* or the universal peace wielding the empire together. In later period of the Mughal rule, it evolved into term equal to the “habitus of civility or good manners” (Kinra 2020: 163). Some positions in the government were filled by non-Muslims, an example of this may be Chandar Bhan himself as well as his father, Dharam Das, before him. Common role for Hindu subjects was the position of a secretary, court poet or artist receiving state patronage. In this way Mughals maintained institutions enabling them to secure their position as the hegemon of the Indian Subcontinent as well as patrons of arts and literature. The prerequisite for maintaining this state of affairs was to support the people whose task was to build up prestige, respect and power of Mughal authority. It was well understood by Akbar and later continued by Jahangir and Shah Jahan, whose secretary was Chandar Bhan. It made possible the emergence of phenomenon of Indo-Persian culture, supported by the court, in which artists, poets and musicians from India, Central Asia and Iran were working hand in hand to secure the legitimate rule of their

benefactors. It was a necessity, considering highly diverse society of Mughal India. On the one hand there were many soldiers and military commanders hailing from Iran and Central Asia, on the other there were the local rulers and regional centres of authority, that remained often unchanged. Both had to be upheld, which resulted in the situation described by Chandar Bhan, where artists from Khorasan, Iran and local tribes were rewarded for their support of the empire and its legitimacy. It generated the image that Mughal rulers wanted to present to their subjects and outside world. On the one hand they were patrons in the Persianate world, on the other they maintained traditional institutions present from early on in the numerous Indian kingdoms. This way the benefit of such actions was the local support for the rule, as well as prestige in the eyes of the subjects of Safavid Iran and the inhabitants of Central Asia. The reward for supporting the Mughals was beyond comparison according to the author of *Čahār čaman* and the number of occasions, where it used to manifest itself was also high.

(...) The orders which the world obeys, are sent to the princes of high lineage, governors, military commanders, staff of the ministers of state, and issued from the presence of rulership. Firstly, the draft is present to the alchemical gaze (of the emperor) and corrected according to the Blessed One. Later clever secretaries copy the joyful orders with a pen. In most cases the fate-affecting orders in the matters pertaining to selected matters in the name of famous and prosperous princes and majestic amirs in the special, blessed cursive and *nast'aliq* script, which is in the proper form and has the final beauty and delicacy and gracious and colourful expressions, but also concise and beneficial, that could be the instructions of the lords of wisdom are written with the mixture of fragrant ambergris.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "... farāmin-e ġahān matā' ke be pādešāhzāde-hā-ye vālātabār va soube-dārān va fouġ-dārān va divāniyān-e soubġāt va emsāl-e ān az pišġāh-e saltanat be šaraf-e sodur mi peyvandād, noxost mosavvade-ye matlab az nazar-e kimyā asar gozašte be eslāh-e moqaddas dorost mišavad. Ba'd az ān monšiyān-e 'atāred nešān az ru-ye farāmin-e sa'ādat-āyin qalami minamāyand. Aksar-e ouqāt manošir qazā-ta'sir dar bāb-e matāleb-e 'omde be nām-e šāhzāde-hā-ye nāmdār-e kāmġār va



The secretaries at the Mughal court were also tasked with preparing various government documents which are described in *Čahār čaman*. Chandar Bhan Brahman provides detailed description of the process that in part was quoted above. Firstly, the most important of the documents were verified by the emperor himself. He corrected the phrasing, for, as mentioned in the already quoted passage, the language needed to be free of any errors. What was also important was the form of the documents issued by the state chancellery, as both the texts and its form represented the government and could not be in any way faulty. For this reason, they were checked multiple times for slightest errors and written down with special fragrant ink, incorporating rare substances such as ambergris. Not only the material used for the ink was of special importance, but also the type of script used. Persian calligraphy has a very long and established traditions, which flourished under Mughal rule. Many Mughal rulers, including Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb patronized calligraphy or even practiced it themselves, one example being the copies of the Qur'an made by Aurangzeb in his own hand and sent to the religious centres (Yūsofi 2000: 715). As is mentioned by Chandar Bhan, two types of script were employed in the imperial chancellery: *xatt-e šekaste* ('cursive') and *nasta'liq*, the latter being a highly ornate way of writing in Persian. The script represented the person sending the message, so the very choice of script and its calligraphic beauty were a way Mughal dynasty wanted to present itself, obviously in the most positive manner, to the people of high position, who were part of the government. The ability to compose a concise, well composed and beautifully written imperial order was a task of a secretary who was also a poet. In this way the secretaries-cum-poets were directly involved in maintaining order and legitimate claim over the administration of Mughal empire. The instructions that were sent to the princes, amirs and military com-

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omarā-ye zey-eqtedār be xatt-e xās-e mobārak-e šekaste va nast'aliq ke dar qāyat-e dorosti va nahāyat-e hosn-o-letāfāt ast va 'ebārāt-e matin-o-rangin va mazāmin-e moxtasar-o-mofid ke dastur-ol-'amal-e arbāb-e dāneš tavānad bud, raqm-pazir-e xāme-ye 'ambar šammāme mi gardad" (Jaffery 2007: 95).

manders were part of the important government agenda, and the form in which they were couched was entrusted to the same people who were often both secretaries and poets. Their literary abilities were highlighted in the text by the use of the adjective *'atāred-nešān* ('marked by Mercury'), thus sharp-witted and akin to quicksilver. It was a necessity at the court to possess such abilities, as often diarists, munshis and poets had to show their wit in numerous competitions, among which *mushaira* was particularly famous. During such a poetic tournament people gathered to listen and evaluate literary works, which had to obey specific rules with regard to subject-matter, employment of literary figures, etc. For example, the participants had to follow certain metre or use an anaphor selected by the opponent.

*Čahār čaman* is a part of a wider cultural phenomenon of a literary genre present in Indian Subcontinent and Iran. In Persian *handarz* or *andarz* denotes broadly a genre of wisdom literature usually authored by rulers, religious authorities or otherwise exceptional individuals for educational purposes and the sake of preserving one's legacy. The famous Middle Persian examples include *Andarz of Xosrou, son of Kavad*; *Andarz of Adurbad, son of Mahrspand*; and a compendium known as *Selection of Andarz of Ancient Sages*, all of which have their roots in the Zoroastrian tradition of the pre-Islamic Iran. This idea of a spiritual and literary testament has its continuity in the later works of classical Persian literature such as *Qābus-nāme*, *Kimiyā-ye sa'ādat* or *Siyāsatnāme*. *Čahār čaman* draws on this rich literary tradition that became popular at the Mughal court during Akbar's reign, when texts such as *Axlāq-e Nāseri* or works of Sanskrit literature such as *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana* together with popular retellings of ancient tales such as *Singhāsan Battīsī* became more prominent in shaping the idea of kingship (Lefèvre 2019: 64).

In the world described by Chandar Bhan Brahman, the courtly poets appear to have had an important task of conveying the message of empire's splendour to the courtiers, foreign emissaries, military forces and common people. The text of *Čahār čaman* provides

good examples of all these tasks, exemplified by the stories from real life of its author. Chandar Bhan had deep insight into the affairs of the court, when he served as a diarist of Shah Jahan, a munshi and a court poet. Individuals working in such a capacity were responsible for maintaining the legacy of the Mughal dynasty and its legitimacy. As attested by the text, often the compositions written by the court poets gained popularity beyond the court, among various subjects of the empire. Poets' involvement and commitment to the administration of the vast domain of Mughal India led to the emergence of a new bureaucratic class that was deeply involved in the government affairs. Their position depended on the continuation of tradition that became internal part of the administration, such as conveying elaborate orders, participation in distribution of wealth and positions at court or keeping written accounts of all the actions taken by the emperor or his personal activities. Such tasks required high intelligence, wit and political skills that would enable swift response to the ever-changing situation in the growing empire reaching for and wide and including even vaster territories and dependent kingdoms. As shown by Chandar Bhan's example the people belonging to this administrative class came from various backgrounds—Hindus, Muslims, locals, foreigners—all of them employed by numerous officials of the Mughal court. The type of patronage, which enabled them to relocate to the important administrative centres of the empire and perform their duties must have been one of the key organizing principles in the working of the Mughal state as such. *Čahār čaman* provides an example of a particular type of imperial patronage of art and literature. It encouraged Persianate aesthetics with its roots in the Indo-Persian culture that came to flourish during Mughal period, but also shaped the imperial ethos. By promoting rivalry between aspirants competing for various titles and positions, it cemented the idea of a never-ending expansion of the Mughal Empire as a base of its organisation and macroeconomic functionality resulting in inclusion, exclusion and constant need for confirmation of the right to participate in the social life of the empire. Moreover, service and commitment of the administrative class

was expected to be met with a due and suitable reward bestowed by the emperor himself or a Mughal prince or other nobleman in service of the empire and capable of understanding, appreciating and actually deploying the recognized system of ceremonial exchange of praise, honours, recognition and symbolic gifts including assignments to higher positions, if their work and influence reached the point of recognition. *Čahār čaman* as a successful work embodying through its material form a successful item of such an exchange supported by this type of patronage and the figure of its author inscribed in its very text as a paragon example of a perfect poet-munshi's career appear in the work itself as a ready-made pattern to emulate. And probably indeed the work lived up to its expectations. Even more than that: when Mughal ecumene slowly lost its propelling force, as most historical empires sooner or later do, and entered the phase of slow but inevitable decline, the work of Chandar Brahman had an afterlife that its author could not have imagined himself. It drew the interest of an altogether new variety of readers who took it over and made it to serve as a textbook for the incoming representatives of the colonial powers, especially that of the British East India Company which frantically sought a textual database to train its legal representatives and judges in the re-designed justice administration of its new possessions across expanding stretches of North India.<sup>13</sup> It was used both as an example of concise, well written and clear Persian prose, but also as a good source for understanding the political, cultural and social roles of courtiers, poets and munshis. For contemporary scholarship it remains to be studied with a view of gaining a better understanding of the specific patronage culture that contributed to, if not actually shaped, the Mughal empire from within, at least in its model, most refined form while formulating and feeding on the potential for historical change at the same time.

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<sup>13</sup> For more information regarding circulation of key texts used by British administration in North India see: Bayly 1996.

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