

Persians' Diaspora: Its Ideological Influence on the Religious Convictions of Mughal India during 1526-1605

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Abstract

India is a luxuriant field for the growth of schism and sects. Islam which had already broken up into the traditional seventy-three sects, got further distinguished in Hindustan since its introduction into this country. The majority of the Muslim community was Sunni no doubt; but the people converted to Islam did not change all at once. Some of them retained their heretical practices, and formed themselves into new sects. The establishment of Shi'ah-ism in Persia on the commencement of sixteenth century A.D. led to a degree of estrangement between the lands under Safawid control and those of the Mughals and Uzbeks. Although the break was never complete, the centre of gravity for Persian culture felt an eastward pull towards India, carried by a severe 'brain-drain' of talented Persians seeking greater success under the wealthier and more tolerant Mughals. This Persians' Diaspora indeed laid some momentous ideological influence on the religious

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convictions of Mughal India that still exist today in Indian Subcontinent.

Introduction

The word Islam means surrender, it has been shown that submission to the will of God is an essential part of the Muslim religious consciousness. As a result of repeated foreign invasions the region of Subcontinent became a junction of different religious influences.¹ In fact, the advent of Islam not only introduced some fundamental changes in the political, economic and religious life of Persia, but it influenced awesomely Indian Subcontinent too.² However, Jadunath Sarkar says that; "with the coming of Islam India and Persia were again brought nearer, though at first in a rather brutal way."³ Islam entered Indian Subcontinent from Afghanistan and Persia. In the history of culture Persia had been playing a dominant role, along with India, from time immemorial. Persian culture after 1500 A.D. developed into a strong Shi'ah culture.⁴ At the end of fifteenth century A.D. most of the Shi'ahs by descent was Arabs, and they were well established mostly in holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, situated in Iraq, and were acknowledged and named with Hazrat Ali and Hazrat Hussain respectively. Most of the Persians were Sunnis, but the city of Qum was considered as a centre of Shi'ahs in Persia. Likewise, an appropriate part of population was also Shi'ah in Seistan and Khurasan. Soon after the establishment of Safawid Empire (1501-1736) in 1501 A.D. by the desperate efforts of Shah Ismail-I, Shi'ah Faith was declared as an official and so far a compulsory religion of Persia. Thereafter, this religious change led to the new sectarian confrontation between Ottoman and Safawid Empires with that of the Catholic-Protestant enmity in

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- 1 Khan, Ansar Zahid, *History and Culture of Sind* (Karachi: Royal Book Company), 1980, p.273.
 - 2 Mumtaz Hasan, *Iran and Pakistan: The Story of Cultural Relationship Through the Ages* (Karachi: Elite Publishers Ltd.), 1971, p.xx.
 - 3 J.N Sarkar, (Sir.) & S.K Saraswati, *Glimpses of Mughal Architecture* (Calcutta: Gossain & Company), 1953, p.7.
 - 4 L. Robert Canfield, *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 1991, p.21.

Europe. These empires adopted some harsh and cruel measures in their jurisdiction against the opponent sects, that ultimately consequence as a big blow towards the solidarity of Islam.⁵ The imposition of Shi'ah-ism upon an overwhelmingly Sunni population was not liked by the Turks. An aggressive Shi'ah state which had shown hostility since its very inception was a threat to the Ottomans by its very nature.⁶

Shah Ismail-I made Shi'ah or Ithna Ashariyah doctrine as the official creed of Persia, and also carried his energy so far in this endeavor that "he ordered the tombs of persons of suspected orthodoxy or of known Sunni proclivities to be destroyed."⁷ Shah Ismail-I remained successful in making Shi'ah-ism as a factual faith of Persia, over the whole of which he gradually extended his sway. As a matter of fact this religious unification was proved an important factor in bringing about national unity in Persia.⁸ Gradually he brought the rest of Persia under his control. His first action on accession was the proclamation that henceforth Shi'ah-ism would be the official religion of the new Safawid Empire. Shi'ah-ism was then forced on the population with tremendous coercion, the penalty for nonconformity being death. The imposition of Shi'ah-ism on a country which, officially at least, was still predominantly Sunni, obviously could not be achieved without incurring opposition, or without a measure of persecution of those who refused to confirm. Disobedience was punishable by death, and the threat of force was there from the beginning. As far as the ordinary people were concerned, the existence of this threat seems to have been sufficient. The *Ulema* (theologians) were

5 Karren Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, Urdu Tr. M. Ahsan Butt as 'Khuda Kay Liye Jang' (Lahore: Nigarishat Publishers), 2003, p.92.

6 I.H Qureshi, *Akbar the Architect of Mughal Empire* (Marachi: Ma'aref Printers), 1978, p.119.

7 Edward G. Brown, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol.III (London: Cambridge University Press) Rp. 1969, pp.419-20.

8 Laurence Lochart, *The Fall of the Safavid Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press), 1958, p.20.

more stubborn; some were put to death, many more fled to areas where Sunni-ism still prevailed.⁹

The Ottoman and Uzbek attitude towards the Mughals was largely governed by their desire to encircle Persia by a ring of friendly powers and squeeze her out of existence. Ottoman Turks were also committed to the policy of the containment of Shi'ah-ism within the borders of Persia. In the fulfillment of both these objectives they needed Mughal support.¹⁰ The difference of ideological element that has been an essential feature of the struggle between Shi'ahs of Persia and their Sunni neighbors¹¹ was much more involved to supersede each other. The new Safawid dynasty had achieved power as champions of Shi'ah-ism and for political as well as religious reasons had to adopt a policy which involved them in conflict with the Sunni kingdoms of Turkey and Central Asia, and which ushered a new era of Shi'ah-Sunni bitterness. Collectively, the Safawids showed eagerness to establish a Shi'ah state and to promulgate Shi'ah doctrines and hemmed in by the neighboring Sunni states, were potentially hostile to the rest of the Sunni world.¹² Emperor Jahangir also observes in his *Tuzuk* that, "in Persia, there was room for Shi'ahs only, and in Turkey, India and Turan (Central Asia), there is room for Sunnis only."¹³ However, commenting in contrast to this sectarian disparity, Clement Huart says; "Persia to-day is overwhelmingly Muhammadan (Muslim)."¹⁴

9 *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol.I (London: Cambridge University Press), 1970, p.398.

10 Naim-ur-Rehman Farooqi, *Mughal-Ottoman Relations* (Dehli: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Dehli), 1989, p.39.

11 Charles Melville, *Safavid Persia*, Vol.IV (London: I.B Tauris & Company Ltd.), 1996, p.234.

12 I.H Qureshi, *A Short History of Pakistan* (Karachi: Karachi University Press), Rp. 2000, p.436.

13 Noor-ud-din Muhammad Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, Eng Tr. Alexander Rojers as The Memoirs of Jahangir, Vol.I (New Dehli: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd.), 1978, p.37.

14 Clement Huart, *Ancient Persia and Iranian Civilization* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), Rp. 1972, p.191.

It is difficult to estimate the effect of the royal acceptance of Shi'ah doctrines upon the masses. Shah Ismail cruelly persecuted Sunnis in Shiraz and Herat, and no doubt in other places too. His son and successor Shah Tahmasp was no less bigoted, the author of the *Lubbu't-tawarikh* was cast into prison and died there because he was a Sunni. Shah Ismail-II seems to have been inclined towards Sunni views, but this peculiarity was as unpopular as was his murderous behavior towards his relations. Conceivably in this regard, Badauni perhaps rightly says that; "(Shah) Ismail-II, became excessive Sunni in opposition to the opinions held by his father."¹⁵ Therefore, Hasan-i-Rumlu the celebrated author of *Ahsanut-Tawarikh* after observing upon this variability writes that: "It is perhaps worth nothing that Shi'ah-ism was not by any means a specialty of men of Persian race."¹⁶ Nonetheless, under the Safawids, Shi'ah-ism became the dominant sect of Islam in Persia. Those who would not accept Shi'ah-ism were persecuted, and during the following sixteenth and seventeenth centuries A.D. many poets, writers, painters and calligraphers immigrated to Mughal India.¹⁷ This research paper is an effort to divulge the role of these Persian immigrants who performed as an indispensable fraction in influencing the religious life of Mughal India during the specified chronological limits of the topic.

Confrontation between Shi'ah-Sunni Nobility at the Mughal Court

The theoretically egalitarian approach of Sunni Islam in determining who was to rule an Islamic state was eventually subsumed by the ancient cult of hereditary monarchs which had been so popular in ancient Persia and Central Asia. The Safawids were vulnerable in Turan or the Uzbek lands in

15 Abdul Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, Eng Tr. George S.A Ranking, Vol.II (Karachi: Karimsons), 1976., p.327.

16 Hasan-i-Rumlu, *Ahsanut-Tawarikh*, Eng Tr. C.N Seddon, Vol.II (Baroda: Oriental Institute), 1934., p.xiv.

17 Stephen P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India 1639-1739* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press), 1991, p.135.

Central Asia, and the Mughals uneasy over the Shi'ah rulers of Golconda in the Deccan.¹⁸ Furthermore, both Mughals and Safawids were interested in Deccan states, though in different ways. The Outb-Shahis were descended from the Qara-qoyunlu (the Black Sheep) who ruled Persia for a short period in fifteenth century A.D. The Outub-Shahis, the Adil-Shahis and Nizam-Shahis had already accepted Shi'ah-ism and declared it as state religion under the inspiration of Safawid Persia. Exchange of embassies with Persia and the employment of Persians in high offices further strengthened the ties between the Deccan dynasties and the Safawid Persia. The diplomatic relations between Persia and the Deccan kingdoms and the recitation of the Shah's name in the *khutba* in Golconda were highly irritating to the Mughals.¹⁹ In view of the specific religious circumstances of India, as Muslims were in minority and were conscious people, therefore, "a religion conscious community could not be free from sectarian feeling."²⁰ Mughals followed Sunni sect of Islam, however, they were also strongly influenced by the Persians.²¹ There was indeed a spiky contest between the Shi'ah and Sunni forces for the prime position of honor in the circle of contemporary brotherhood of Islamic people. The Shi'ahs made the best of necessity and gave them now to an ambition for religious leadership. The representatives of the House of Ali became the indispensable heads of Islam, the *Imams* of the believers. From such early Shi'ah sects grew the later *Sevens* and *Twelvers*.²² As far as Shi'ah-

18 John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (New Delhi: Foundation Books), Rpt. 2002, p.111.

19 Riaz-ul Islam, *Op. Cit.* p.179.

20 I.H Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent (610-1947)*, (Karachi: Bureau of Composition), Compilation and Translation, University of Karachi-Pakistan, Rp. 1999, p.96.

21 Khalid Anis Ahmed, "History of Mughal Painting with special emphasis on the Timurid and Safavid influences on the Early Mughal Miniature," Central Asia: History Politics and Culture, Proceedings of the International Conference on Central Asia, Ed. Riazul Islam, Kazi A. Kadir and Javed Husain, (Karachi: Institute of Central and West Asian Studies, B.C.C & T. Press, University of Karachi), 1999, p.240.

22 Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* (Allahabad: The Indian Press Ltd.), 1936, p.53.

Sunni contrasts in India are concerned "there were religious and political differences between the Shi'ahs and the Sunnis, and the traditional rivalry of the Safawid and the Chaghatai (Mughal) dynasties."²³

At this juncture, the situation of Indian Subcontinent had become more confused because of the Shi'ah-Sunni differences. The Mughal state drew inspiration from three different sources, Turki, Arabian, and Persian and all three ultimately blended into the Indian. Specially, Shi'ah nobles got immense power and freedom in their religious matters when Humayun returned back to India. With the arrival of Persian Shi'ah immigrants from Humayun's visit, the Mughal Court ceased to be a citadel of orthodoxy,²⁴ thus, a colossal controversy began between Shi'ah and Sunni nobility at the Mughal Court. The Persians were representing Shi'ah while the nobility of Central Asians (*Turani*) and Indian Muslims were representing Sunnis. Afterwards, Shi'ah nobility got mammoth power indeed as result with the influx of Ghiyas Beg and her daughter Nur Jahan Begum and his son Asaf Khan in the scenario of Mughal politics and administration during the epochs of Akbar and Jahangir. Later on, Mumtaz Mahal also played a vital role in this regard during Shah Jahan's reign.

According to I.H Qureshi, "the community also lost its sense of solidarity by the importation of the Shi'ahs from Iran, because sectarian and group jealousies began to undermine the unity of the Muslims."²⁵ The Mughals failed to see the advantages of having as homogenous a body of supporters as their Muslim neighbors, the Safawids of Persia and the Uzbeks of Central Asia, possessed. They failed to see that in the ultimate analysis their power could be safely entrenched only in the deep loyalty of the Muslim community. They could get as much support as they liked

23 Muhammad Ziauddin and Munir Ahmed Baloch, "Humayun in Exile", *Research Journal: University of Balochistan*, Pakistan, Vol. 2 (1), Quetta: June, 2004, p.108.

24 J.N Sarkar, (Sir.), *Mughal Polity* (Delhi: Idarah-i- Adabiyat-e-Dehli), 1984, p.53.

25 I.H Qureshi, 1999, *Op. Cit.* p.188.

from heterogeneous elements while they prospered, but in times of stress, only the Muslim community would come to their help. It was, therefore, a mistake to weaken it by introducing into it the elements of internal strife and providing a rival to its dominance by setting up Hindus as the equals of Muslims in the government. It was natural that a tradition should grow up of co-operation between the Shi'ahs and the Hindus against the major section of the Muslim community. In this way Mughals made it more acute in their empire by following policies which sought to derive advantages from these differences.²⁶ It was, however, equally impossible to ignore the feelings of the non-Muslims and the Shi'ahs. They held important offices and the emperors needed their co-operation. Jahangir and Shah Jahan reconciled orthodoxy, but in doing so, they did not offend others. It was understood that the dominant partners in the empire were the orthodox Muslims and also that the emperor belonged to the same group.²⁷

The Shi'ahs, whether of extreme or moderate parties, held one cardinal tenet, that of the *Imamate*; for Shi'ah-ism centers religious authority in an inspired person whose presence is the only true guarantee of right guidance."²⁸ During Akbar's regime for the first time came a group of Shi'ah learned men into his *Ibadat Khanah* which was so long an assembly exclusively of the Sunnis. The unsavory discussions and debates between the Shi'ahs and Sunnis in the *Ibadat Khanah* were sickening to Akbar. "In the course of a long reign his (Akbar's) attitude in matter of religion developed from that of a fairly orthodox Sunni Muslim, through Shi'ah and Sufi influences and a decade of questioning rationalism and skepticism, to an eclecticism which was embodied in the *Din-i-ilahi*."²⁹

26 *Ibid.* pp.188-89.

27 I.H Qureshi, *The Administration of the Mughal Empire*, (Karachi: The Director of Publications, University of Karachi), 1966, p.35.

28 Tara Chand, *Op. Cit.* pp.52-53.

29 John Correia Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court* (Bombay: Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture), 1980, p.4.

Alamgir, both by temperament and necessity, had to rely on the support of the orthodox, and he failed to get the fullest co-operation of the non-Muslims and the Shi'ahs. The reasons were complex. The conflict between the Mughals and the Safawids regarding Qandahar had put the loyalty of the Shi'ahs to some strain even under the previous two monarchs; the war against the Shi'ah Sultanates of the Deccan, howsoever necessary, was not popular with them.³⁰ The restoration of orthodoxy by the Aurangzeb Alamgir, to power could not be viewed with enthusiasm by the Shi'ahs because of the history of hostility between the two sects in many countries. To the Shi'ahs, the issues were not defined so sharply; they did not see the struggle of orthodoxy as a battle for Islam. Sunnis should have been ready to make greater efforts to win the Shi'ahs over to their side and to wean them from their alliances with the non-Muslims. This effort was made but only when Islam had become politically too weak. In fairness to the movement was directed as much against them as against the dominance of the non-Muslims in the Councils of the Empire. The movement aimed at the moral regeneration of the Muslims and at freeing them from un-Islamic influences also sought to fight Shi'ah-ism. "This made it impossible for the Shi'ahs to co-operate with the orthodox or to look upon their movement as an endeavor to save Islam."³¹

The Religious Role of Persians during the Mughal Regime

Ibn-i-Khaldun says that most of the *hadith* scholars who preserved traditions for the Muslims also were Persians or Persian in language and upbringing, because the discipline was widely cultivated in the Iraq and the regions beyond. Furthermore, the same applies to speculative theologians and to most Holy *Quran* commentators. Only the Persians engaged in the task of preserving knowledge and writing systematic scholarly works. Thus, the truth of the following statement by the Prophet Muhammad becomes apparent:

30 I.H Qureshi, 1966, *Op. Cit.*

31 I.H Qureshi, 1999, *Op. Cit.* p.182.

"If scholarship hung suspended in the highest parts of heaven, the Persians would attain it."³² In the course of centuries Islam became the dominant religion of the areas now constituting West Pakistan and the territories adjacent to it. This was achieved by the patient historical endeavors of the Muslim missionaries. In this region the Shi'ah School has been a late-comer with the rise of the Mughal Empire, which for various reasons encouraged the immigration of Shi'ah officials and others from Safawid Persia. Scattered in this population are a fair number of the descendants of such Muslims as migrated from time to time.³³

Toleration in the true sense of the term had been the sheet-anchor of Muslim rule in India, and the Indian kings never interfered with the religion of their subjects. An interesting aspect of Mughal monarchy was the appointment of Shi'ah Prime Ministers almost throughout their tenure.³⁴ The Mughal Emperors preferred to send *Sayyids* as ambassadors to Persia since their claims to be descendants of the *ahl al-bait*, or family of the Holy Prophet, were thought to be pleasing to the Shi'ah Safawids. "The Iranian influence on Indian religious life has been subtle and penetrating."³⁵ The Indian Subcontinent was opened to Persian influence with Islamic missionary activities in the early centuries of Islam, and later by the conquests of the Ghaznavid Mehmud in the eleventh century A.D. Abolghasem Dadvar, a current Irani historian says: "Besides, most of the Timurids in India though Sunnis were non-sectarian, also some of them had leanings towards Shi'ah doctrines and consequently they had no difficulties in being closely allied to Persia. This was in sharp contrast to the other Sunni powers of Central Asia. An obvious explanation

32 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Eng Tr. Franz Rosenthal as An Introduction to History (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 1970, pp.429-30.

33 I.H Qureshi, 1999, *Op. Cit.* p.59.

34 S.S Abdur-Rehman, *Hindustan Kay Salatin, Ulemah Aur Mashaiq Kay Taluqaat Per Aik Nazar* (Karachi: National Book Foundation), 1990, p.11.

35 Nalinee M. Chapekar, *Ancient India and Iran: A Study of their Cultural Contacts* (Dehli: Ajanta Publications), 1982, p.34.

of this could be found in the peculiar Mughal Indian religious and political culture. The Mughal Emperors were also tied to the Safawids by matrimonial bonds. Many Safawid princesses were married to Mughal princesses."³⁶

The phrase "Orthodox Muslims" means Sunnis and they far exceed in number the other sects. At present they predominate in all Muslim countries, except Persia. In India, the Sunni's *Hanafi* School was in a predominant position. Mansura Haider says that "the emigrants from Persia mostly included the Sunnis who feared the Persian Shahs and the retaliatory genocide in that country."³⁷ In contrast to that there were a large number of Persian immigrants during the Mughal regime, and they were by sect Shi'ahs. It has been noticed that the tradition of clan politics implied a more decentralized pattern of authority than was found in the Mughal imperial system. This led to problems between the Mughal rulers and their Central Asian, often Uzbek, military commanders, who also felt a certain amount of friction on religious grounds with the Persian Shi'ahs who vied for power at court and were more used to accepting an unchallenged emperor in the Persian imperial tradition.³⁸ The Shi'ahs stoutly deny that the succession can be open to election, and in consequence they reject (and often denounce) the first three Caliphs as usurpers. Their particular views on this question of the succession led to the formation of strange religious doctrines which further widened the breach between themselves and the orthodox.

Persians' Ideological Influence on Mughal India during 1526-1556 A.D.

As being a founder of Mughal dynasty, Babur was a liberal monarch, and adopted almost lenient policy in

36 Abolghasem Dadvar, *Iranians in Mughal Politics and Society (1606-1658)*, (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House), 2000, p.26.

37 Mansura Haider, *Indo-Central Asian Relations: From Early Times to Medieval Period* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors), 2004, p.146.

38 John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (New Delhi: Foundation Books), Rp., 2002, p.19.

religious matters throughout his regime in India. He had a very few Persian nobility in his administration while the majority of his nobility were consist over Turani, who were by sect stout Sunnis. Hence, neither Babur faced any sort of Shi'ah-Sunni controversy in India, nor there was any pondering role of Persians in the religious life of the relevant regime. As far as Emperor Humayun is concerned, he spent nearly twelve years in exile in Persia and was heavily exposed to Shi'ah-ism and the Safawid Court. In addition the five Islamic kingdoms of the Deccan had all been Shi'ah from before the time of Akbar and had maintained close diplomatic and cultural ties with Persia through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries A.D. Their conquest by the Mughals in the early seventeenth century A.D. increased the Persian, Shi'ah influence at their Court.³⁹ After his return from Persia, Humayun reverted to his Sunni Faith, as is evident from his coins. The Shah still pretended to accept him as a Shi'ah, for in a letter he emphasized their mutual identity of faith. In any case Humayun adhered to a liberal sectarian policy. Many Shi'ah Persians joined his service; some came at his invitation while others joined of their own, in some cases even without the Shah's permission. According to Badauni, "Humayun's army at Kabul had a large proportion of Shi'ahs."⁴⁰

When Humayun returned from Persia, the influence of Shi'ah officials accelerated in Mughal Empire and they got more religious independence.⁴¹ Consequently, a large number of Persian scholars and theologian arrived India. In Southern India, some Shi'ah states were established in Golconda and Bijapur, similarly, the rulers of the province of Oudh also came under the Shi'ah influence. Consequently, for the education of their children and for performing Ithna Ashari religious traditions, a number of *Imam-Bargahain*

39 Stephen P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India 1639-1739* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press), 1991, p.33.

40 Riaz-ul Islam, *Op. Cit.* p.197.

41 A.M Nasir, *Balochistan main Perwan-e-Ali*, (Urdu), (Karachi: Cozak Publishers), 1998, p.179.

(Shi'ah Mosques) and schools were established there. Moreover, in the educational institutions, the similar syllabus was adopted with that of Persia which resulted with the promulgation of the same specific religious thoughts, traditions and customs of Persian Shi'ahs in the Indian Shi'ah community.⁴²

Humayun appears to have been, like his illustrious father, always free from strong sectarian prejudices. He and Bairam Khan, an Ithna Ashari Persian, were lifelong friends. The famous Persian historian, Khwandamir who was also a Shi'ah, remained in Humayun's service till his death in 1536 A.D. Firishta observes that Humayun, from his princely days, patronized Persians of Shi'ah persuasion, and that after his accession many Persians came and joined his service. Humayun had a weakness for innovations and new ideas, sometimes with a touch of fantasy, and this tendency seems to have found its way in religious matters also. All this shows him to be free from rigid orthodoxy. It is also said that some of Humayun's own commanders deserted him after his defeat by Sher Shah, on the specific ground of his favoring the Shi'ahs.⁴³ Bairam Khan as a trustworthy friend of Humayun, had refused to wear the Persian Shi'ah cap during the exile in Persia, because, he pointed out that he was the servant of another monarch. He was first a servant of the Mughal dynasty and then Shi'ah. While, at the other hand probably Humayun had become suspicious of his fidelity because "Bairam Khan was a Shi'ah and by birth a subject of Persia and consequently was in the Shah's favor."⁴⁴ Riaz-ul-Islam says; "Bairam Khan's distinguished Persian ancestry, his Shi'ah-ism, his remarkable gifts as a diplomat and a negotiator and his urbanity and broad culture, enabled him

42 Dr. Zahoor-ud-Din Ahmed, "Barre Saghir Main Ajami Aqayad Kay Asraat," *SAFEENEH: A Research Journal of Persian Language Literature and Culture*, Ed. Muhammad Saleem Mazhar, Department of Persian, Punjab University Oriental College, Lahore, Pakistan, Vol.1, No.1, Lahore: 2003., p.255.

43 Riaz-ul Islam, *Op. Cit.* p.196.

44 Sukumar Ray, *Bairam Khan* (Karachi: Institute of Central and West Asians Studies, University of Karachi), 1992, p.102.

to play a great role in Persia."⁴⁵ It was only Bairam Khan who as a mediator remained very successful to remove the ill humor of bigoted Shah Tahmasp to salvage the life of Humayun and his hundreds of retinues in Persia.

Persians' Ideological Influence on Mughal India during 1556-1605 A.D.

Akbar's reign appears to have favored the emergence of a community of Shi'ah Muslims in Mughal India in the sixteenth century A.D. When the Persian Shah Ismail-II adopted Sunni-ism in 1576 A.D. a large number of Persians came from Persia. During this temporary period of Sunni promulgation, most of the Shi'ah scholars and theologians had to face forced persecution; therefore, the arrival of Shi'ah immigrants in India accelerated.⁴⁶ The Shi'ahs had an advantage in Hindustan, because the Muslims were fewer and the Shi'ah-Sunni bitterness less keen in their new home. The regency of Persian Shi'ah Bairam Khan in a Sunni Sultanate indicates a high water-mark of the Shi'ah influence at the Mughal Court. But this influence was not at the beginning aggressive and intolerable to the Sunnis, because in a Sunni country, the Shi'ah could accommodate themselves by outward conformity with the Sunni practice without incurring any sin if his mental reservation for Shi'ah-ism was genuine if not open. Under the Mughal Empire, the Shi'ahs could be trusted in any position except in fighting against Persia.⁴⁷

When the situation improved for the Mughals after their victory in the War of Panipat-II in 1556 A.D. the real power was indeed exercised by Akbar's guardian, Bairam Khan, who was suspected of entertaining Shi'ah beliefs. The first few years of Akbar's kingship under the custody of Bairam Khan were also influenced by his Shi'ah teacher Shaikh Abdul Latif. Soon Bairam Khan appointed Shaikh Gadai, who was also accused of Shi'ah leanings as the *sadr-us-*

45 Riaz-ul Islam, *Op. Cit.* p.182.

46 S.M. Ikram, *Op. Cit.* p.34.

47 Mohammad Yasin, *Op. Cit.* pp.6-7.

sudur, the highest religious dignitary in the state. However, the forms of orthodoxy were maintained and neither Bairam Khan nor Shaikh Gadai openly professed the Shi'ah doctrine. Later on, the Shi'ah tendencies were effaced by the influence of his staunch Sunni, *Sadr-us-Sudur* Abdun Nabi.⁴⁸ As Akbar grew up under the guardianship of Bairam Khan and Mir Abdul Latif, the Shi'ah nobles, such antecedents made Akbar open to views that came from sources outside the orthodox Sunni tradition to which his family subscribed.⁴⁹

Moreover, during the Akbar's regime, some important socio-religious Persian traditions like the festival of *Nouroz* and act of prostration to the king penetrated into the Mughal Court. The celebration of *Nouroz* by the Persians is not Islamic holiday but was rather an ancient Persian cultural festival. It was celebrated as New Year's Day on the spring equinox, the 21st of March. The fair of *Nouroz* which is also called *Noroz-i-Jalali*, was celebrated with great éclat on the coronation day as a mark of connection with the social life of Persia as Akbar felt that the feeling of Persian residents in the Court had been wounded after the recital of the *Khutbah* and the issue of the *Mahdar* (1580-81 A.D.). "Akbar with his pronounced Persian attitude towards kingship, even demanded from his courtiers the act of prostration performed at the courts of the ancient kings of Iran, a practice resented as blasphemous by the proud Afghans and the Turks from Central Asia, and which Shah Jahan abolished."⁵⁰

Akbar's Divine Light Ideology

This monarchical ideology defined the relationship between the Mughal Emperor and his elite. The exclusiveness of the *kings's* position, as guarantor of justice and stability, symbol of religious authority, and beneficiary

48 Roy M.L. Chowdhury, *Op. Cit.* p.189.

49 Iqbal Husain, "Iranian Ideological Influences at Akbar's Court." *A Shared Heritage: The Growth of Civilizations in India & Iran*, Ed. By Irfan Habib, Aligarh Historians Society, Tulika Books, New Delhi: 2002, p.118.

50 Gavin Hambly, *Cities of Mughal India: Dehli, Agra and Fatehpur Sikri* (London: Paul Elek Productions Ltd.), 1977, p.113.

of God's will, predictably centralized his role in state maintenance. And while the Emperor was regarded as the symbol of unity and potency, the nobility were seen as a potential source of disintegration and anarchy.⁵¹ "The synonymous nature of light and kingship in the Perso-Islamic world was, of course, one of the many cultural features assimilated from the Persian Sassanide tradition."⁵² Mughal dynastic rule came at a point in Perso-Islamic history when using sun-emperor or light-kingship metaphors were enjoying their highest popularity among poets, *munshis*, and political theorists. Jahangir's personal recognition of this ideology is seen in a poem he recites in his memoirs;

"O God, Thy essence has *shone* from eternity
The souls of all the saints receive light from Thine
O king, may the world ever be at thy beck
May thy Shahjahan ever rejoice in thy *shade*
O Shadow of God, may the world be filled with thy light
May the Light of God ever be thy *canopy*."⁵³

The prominent role of light-related terminology (shone, shade, canopy), combined with the reference here to the shadow of God, suggests that the principles of Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* were very much in vogue in the early seventeenth century A.D. This theory also concerns with the monarchical powers of sovereignty. In the preface to *Ain-i-Akbari*, royalty is described as "a light emanating from God and a ray from the Sun, the illuminator of the universe, the argument of the book of perfection, the receptacle of all virtues. Modern language calls this light *farr-i-izidi* (the divine light) (the sublime halo) and the tongue of antiquity called it *kiyan khura*. It is communicated by God to kings without the intermediate assistance of any one."⁵⁴ Abul Fazl asserted the divine right of Akbar's rule by tracing a series of

51 J.N Sarkar, 1984, *Op. Cit.* p.71.

52 Colin Paul Mitchel, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire*, Area Study Centre for Europe University of Karachi (Karachi: Colin Mitchell), 2000, p.120.

53 Noor-ud-din Muhammad Jahangir, *Op. Cit.* p.29.

54 Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Eng Tr. H. Balochmann (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal), 1927, p.3.

lineages, starting with Adam through the Biblical prophets, to the first Turko-Mughal figure, Mughal Khan. This transmission of divine illumination continues with Babur, whom Abul Fazl describes as "the carrier of the world-illuminating light (*hamil-i nur-i jahan afruz*), to Akbar."⁵⁵ Having established the invulnerability of his claims, the 'divine light' argument was protracted to ratify Akbar's monarchical infallibility. Abul Fazl supersedes the religio-legal constraints on Muslim leadership by asserting that "(Akbar) is a king whom on account of his wisdom, we call *zu-funun* (possessor of sciences), and our guide on the path of religion. Although kings are the shadow of God on earth, (Akbar) is the emanation of God's light. How then can we call him a shadow?"⁵⁶ Abul Fazl's theory of divine largesse imbued the Emperor with the necessary qualities and virtues to govern successfully: trust in God and prayer, devotion, and most important, a paternal love for his subjects. This emphasis on hereditary transmission of divine power is, of course, directly borrowed from Shi'ah and *Sufi* theologies, whereby the community is led by a series of family-related temporal and spiritual masters guided by the *ruh-i-quds* (Holy Spirit). Whether Abul Fazl's ideology was influenced by the prevalent *Sufi Tariqahs* of northern India, or the large Shi'ah number of Persian immigrants in the Court, is difficult to say. More than likely, it was a combination of the two traditions. Akbar, seeking elements of unity in Indian cultural life, looked to religious syncretism as a means of stabilizing his heterogeneous Empire.⁵⁷

This paradox became still more manifest in Akbar's attempt to win recognition, through the famous *mazhar* of 1579 A.D. as *Padshah-i-Islam* and *Sultan-i-Adil* having with the authority to arbitrate between different schools of Sunni jurisprudence. It virtually amounted to the theologians assigning to him the role of the head of Orthodox Sunni Muslims in India at a time when the

55 Colin Paul Mitchel, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire*, Area Study Centre for Europe University of Karachi (Karachi: Colin Mitchell), 2000, p.116.

56 Abul Fazl, *Op. Cit.* p.631.

57 Colin Paul Mitchel, *Op. Cit.* p.117.

nobility created by him was already a group in which Persians (majority of them Shi'ahs) and Rajputs and other Hindus put together represented 33.1 percent (Persians 17.27 percent and Rajputs plus other Hindus, 15.83 percent) of the total strength.⁵⁸ In fact, this move of *mazhar* is marked as an attempt to attribute to him the status of a true guide (*mahdi*). The Shi'ahs were actually bound to perceive it as a move towards further restricting the space for the practice of their faith in the Mughal Empire. It is significant that subsequent to the *mazhar*, the *fatwa* of *kufr* against Akbar was issued by a Shi'ah divine, Mulla Muhammad Yazdi, who according to Badauni, was earlier allowed by Akbar to make statements in his presence that were hurtful for the Sunnis. The text of Yazdi's *fatwa* is nowhere reproduced. But the circumstances suggest that its main point of reference was the *mazhar* signed exclusively by six leading Sunni divines of the realm, though five of them did so reluctantly. One cannot but connect Mulla Muhammad Yazdi's response to the *mazhar* with the fact that in the rebellion of nobles during 1580-81 A.D. unlike the revolts of 1564-67 A.D. an appreciable number of Persians were also involved. In short, the *mazhar* not only failed to open up the sensitive issue of *ijtihad* that had the potential of alienating from him a very large section of the Persian nobles as well.⁵⁹

It is, therefore, understandable that soon after its issuance; the *mazhar* was consigned to cold storage to the extent that in 1594 A.D. Abul Fazl found it embarrassing to reproduce the text of this document drafted by his own father Shaikh Mubarak. Akbar's turning away from the *mazhar* of 1579 A.D. and his recourse to a policy of total tolerance under the principle of *Sulh-i-Kul* (Absolute Peace), appears to have paved the way for a fresh influx of Persian notables into the Mughal Empire.⁶⁰ The Persian Shi'ah notables who came to the Mughal Court during this time included distinguished men of letters like Nurullah Shustri,

58 Iqtidar Alam Khan, "The Nobility under Akbar and the Development of his Religious Policy, 1560-80," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Nos.1 and 2, London: 1968, pp.34-35.

59 Iqtidar Alam Khan, "The Mughal Empire and the Iranian Diaspora of the Sixteenth Century," *A Shared Heritage: The Growth of Civilizations in India & Iran*, Ed. Irfan Habib (Aligarh Historians Society, Tulika Books, New Delhi) 2002, pp.106-07.

60 *Ibid.*, p.107.

Shah Fath-ul-lah Shirazi, Hakim Lutf-ul-lah, Mulla Huzuni, Mulla Mirza Jan, Muzaffar Husain Sabzwari and Jamal-ud-Din Anju. Some others who had arrived India before 1580 A.D. but became famous at Akbar's Court now included Hakim Abdul Fath, his brothers Hakim Hamam and Hakim Nur al-Din, and also Syed Muhammad Jamal al-Din Urfi Shirazi and Sharif Amuli. Among them, perhaps, the most distinguished was Urfi who, in his short stay at the Court, earned enduring literary fame. This accretion in the strength of the Persians occupying high positions in the nobility and Akbar's close personal association with many of them appears to have created a general impression that they were gaining an upper hand in the administration after side lining the Turani and Rajput nobles. It was, perhaps, this situation that is characterized by Badauni as the time when Shi'ah Persians were in great favour. At another place in the same context, he speaks of Shi'ahs having become *ghalib* (predominant) and Sunnis *maghlub* the (conquered people).⁶¹ Akbar's claim to be the caliph, which was never given up, could be sustained only by the Sunni schools of jurisprudence; this did not suit Abul Fazl. No school of Islam could really serve his purpose; therefore, he put forward a theory which he thought would satisfy all. According to Abul Fazl, "royalty is a light emanating from God (which) is communicated by God to kings without the intermediate assistance of any one; (and) no dignity is higher in the eyes of God than royalty,"⁶² Abul Fazl, however, goes further and expects the king to be the spiritual guide of his people as well, because 'the light emanating from God' is the true mark of the 'royalty' and also 'the ray of Divine wisdom, which banishes from his heart everything that is conflicting.' Sitting 'on the throne of distinction,' he is 'equally removed from joy or sorrow.' Such an ideal monarch would naturally be the most suitable spiritual preceptor of the people. Abul Fazl also says that "Akbar was such an ideal monarch, and was born with a spiritual and temporal destiny; in plain language this

61 *Ibid.*, p.108.

62 Abul Fazl, *Op. Cit.*, pp.ii-iii.

means that Akbar's spiritual destiny was not shared by all monarchs; this theory of kingship is not universally applicable, and was merely invented to extol Akbar and to justify his spiritual claims."⁶³

Conclusion

Toleration in the true sense of the term had been the sheet-anchor of Muslim rule in India, and the Indian kings never interfered with the religion of their subjects. At the other hand, the relations between the Sunnis and the Shi'ahs (Ithna Asharis or Twelvers) have not always been friendly at the popular level or in the matter of politics. Besides, considerably there were religious differences between the Shi'ahs and the Sunnis, and the traditional rivalry of the Safawid and the Mughal (Chaghatai) Dynasties. The Mughal Empire was certainly much more liberal and pragmatic in religious affairs than the contemporary Ottoman and Uzbek Empires. When Persia and the Ottoman Empire were at loggerheads, the Mughal Empire maintained more affable relations with the Safawids, and their political rivalry was not coloured by sectarian ill-feelings. In fact, the Muslims of the Subcontinent have been more tolerant of these differences. It must be underlined that although the Mughal Emperors were Sunnis, but they always welcomed Persian men of talent who were mostly Shi'ahs.

Babur after establishing Mughal Dynasty in India remained as a noninterventionist monarch, and adopted almost lenient policy in religious matters throughout his small regime in India. He had a very few Persian nobility in his administration while the majority of his nobility were consisted over *Turani* or Central Asians, who were by sect Sunnis. Hence, neither Babur faced any sort of Shi'ah-Sunni argument in India, nor there was any contemplative religious role of Persians during his reign. Humayun was born of a converted Shi'ah father, Babur, and a born Shi'ah Persian mother, Maham Begum. Humayun's early education was carefully planned by Babur when the Shi'ah influence was on him of supreme. Indeed, during his exile the Emperor Humayun in view of his political necessity had professed Shi'ah-ism formally by signing a paper presented by Qazi Jahan Qazwini, *Diwan* of the Shah Tahmasp. The relations of the Mughals with Persia had drawn closer since Humayun's flight and return from the Persia. Safawid

63 I.H Qureshi, 1966, *Op. Cit.*, pp.37-38.

military aid to re-occupy his lost domain in Central Asia, which later on resulted by regaining his throne in India, must have had something to do with the increase in the Persian strength at the Mughal Court in the mid of the sixteenth century A.D. Humayun acknowledged the great help he had received from the Shah Tahmasp and after his return from Persia his letters addressing to the Shah show that he regarded him as his ally. Although, Humayun had re-embraced Sunni-ism after his return from Persia, but as he had no hesitation in marrying Shi'ah Hamida Bano Begum during his flight to Persia, similarly after his coming from Persia, he appointed Shi'ah Bairam and Abu al Ma'ali as his chief officers of the state.

After Humayun, when the situation improved for the Mughals, the real power was exercised by Akbar's guardian Bairam Khan who was suspected of entertaining Shi'ah beliefs. Akbar's reign appears to have favoured the emergence of a community of Shi'ah Muslims in Mughal India in the sixteenth century A.D. As Akbar grew up under the guardianship of Bairam Khan and Mir Abdul Latif, the Shi'ah nobles, such antecedents made Akbar open to views that came from sources outside the orthodox Sunni tradition to which his family subscribed. Bairam Khan appointed Shaikh Gadai, a Persian who was also accused of Shi'ah leanings as the *Sadr-us-sudur*, the highest religious dignitary in the state. However, the forms of orthodoxy were maintained and neither Bairam Khan nor Shaikh Gadai could openly allege the Shi'ah creed. Later on, these Shi'ah tendencies were effaced by the influence of his staunch Sunni, *Sadr-us-Sudur* Abdun Nabi. During the Akbar's reign, some important socio-religious Persian traditions like the festival of *Nouroz* had penetrated into the Mughal Court. His Divine Light Ideology also substantiated his inclination towards Persian religious philosophy. Akbar with his pronounced Persian attitude towards kingship even demanded from his courtiers the act of prostration as performed at the courts of the ancient kings of Persia.