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Imperial Transgressions and Spiritual Investitures: A Begam's "Ascension" in Seventeenth Century Mughal India

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Abstract
Islamic jurisprudence and social customs regarding laws of inheritance privilege Muslim males as legitimate successors to family legacies and wealth. Furthermore, these heads of households were and are expected to sustain and uphold family values while representing the noble "face" of their legacies. Though women in pre-modern Islamic societies were awarded property and income to support them, they were neither required nor encouraged like their male counterparts to use their agencies or largesse to make banner representations of their lineage or heritage. This essay challenges androcentric ideas and practices surrounding Islamic laws of inheritance through the example of the Mughal princess Jahānārā Begam (1614-81) and her articulations of ascension. This analysis demonstrates how the princess's extraordinary relationship with her emperor father, Shah Jahān (r. 1628-59), facilitated her spiritual and imperial achievements and elevated her rank in imperial and Sufi hierarchies.

Keywords
Mughal, Sufism, Women Saints, Qāderiya, Jahānārā Begam

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Mughal India the patterns of imperial succession, informed by Islamic laws of inheritance, remained specific to male members of the royal family. The oldest son or heir-apparent assumed his father's, the emperor's, rank and with it political and fiscal powers. Additionally, each heir to the throne was charged with perpetuating legacies as "reifications" of the imperial past and legitimizing the future of the dynasty. Though Mughal emperor Shah Jahān's (1592-1666) reign was plagued by competing sons who made rightful claims to the throne in 1631, his eldest daughter, Jahānārā Begam (Bēgom), by default assumed the role of head of the

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imperial harem upon the untimely death of her mother Momtāz Mahal. The princess's artful negotiations and publicly sanctioned articulations of her unprecedented and elevated role reveal her unique stature in Mughal history and the particular imperial transgressions and spiritual investitures that facilitated her potent magnanimity.

The position as head of the harem was automatic for the eldest daughter, however, and Jahānārā Begam's accrual of authority and bold representations of power were unprecedented among imperial women and even some males. The emperor equipped his daughter with record sums that enabled her to erect a widespread network of monuments far surpassing the limited undertakings of her imperial predecessors. The princess's list of accolades and activities included but were not limited to the following: keeper of the imperial seal, patron of major architectural commissions, a de facto Sufi *khelāfat* (deputyship), and a figure of sufficient status to warrant being publicly weighed against gold, normally a ceremony restricted to imperial males. Jahānārā's multiple and seemingly imperial "transgressions" were not only sanctioned but were held in high esteem by her father, the emperor Shah Jahān, and elicited a favorable public response from the public and in official chronicles (Schimmel, 199).[2] Shah Jahān also expressed the extent of his adoration, affection and high esteem for his eldest daughter through unofficial and personal means. During Jahānārā's recovery from critical burns she sustained in 1644 after her dress caught fire, Shah Jahān exhausted all resources and even repealed his own imperial decrees in an effort to remedy his daughter's health.

This paper explores Jahānārā Begam's claim, cultivation and translation of her imperial and spiritual personas using the framework of Sufism within the Qāderiya order and as consort queen to the powerful emperor Shah Jahān. The princess's extraordinary relationship with her father facilitated, located and encouraged spiritual and imperial authority both in text and in form: her Sufi writings and her monumental commissions in the Mughal landscape. Jahānārā Begam's close relationship with and study of her father's imperial visions suggests that she recognized the mediating role of architectural patronage as a means to convey and make visible her own ideology and persona. The Agra mosque (fig. 1) is analyzed as an example of the princess's official representation and the Mollā Shah mosque and *khānaqāh* complex in Srinagar, Kashmir

[2] Ritual weighing (*jashn-e wazn*) involved the ceremonial weighing of the males of the imperial family. A Mughal tradition established by Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605), it was carried out twice each year on the first days of the solar and lunar years at an hour calculated by the court astrologers. The emperor himself or one of his sons would be weighed in a great balance against gold, silver, or other metals that were later distributed to the poor.

(fig. 2), is considered her private and to some extent metaphysical representation. This work maintains that Jahānārā Begam's activities and contributions to the Mughal landscape are direct functions of the princess's active and public participation in the Qāderiya Sufi order—a participation whose details are recorded in her two personal treatises: *Munes al-arvāh* (Confidant of Spirits [1639]) and *Resāla-ye Sāhebiya* (Message of the Madame [1640]). These public and pious testimonies use the language of mysticism to express socio-political and religious subjectivities as well as to expose a feminine space in Islam. They include thirty-nine pages of passionate narrative that employ religious symbols and mystical language to detail Jahānārā's experiences and her motivations in seeking an alternative Islamic "space" and "voice" to empower her religiosity and distinguish her imperial authority.

The quest to satiate spiritual longings through the Qāderiya order of Sufism ultimately linked Jahānārā Begam to her Persian-Timurid past and allowed her to reclaim imperial legitimacy through the Sufi-Sovereign partnership imperial. In *Munes al-arvāh*, the princess refers to Sufi ideology and its dialectical and contested relationship with the dominant Islamic discourse, particularly Shah Jahān's ambivalence towards the Cheshti Sufi order, and to the social and religious ambiguities and divergent practices that characterize *shariʿa* and *tariqa* modalities. In the following excerpt from the princess's treatise, she legitimizes the Cheshti Sufi order by linking it to Prophet Mohammad's family and thereby spiritually conforming to the *shariʿa* mode of spiritual practice and ideology:

> . . . the current emperor who is the father of this weak woman (*zaʿifa*), didn't know the truth of the importance of the clear path. Because of this, he was always wondering about it and was floundering. And I, the lowly (*faqira*), constantly told him that Cheshti was a *sayyed* but he didn't believe me until he read the Akbarnāma, in which Abu'l Faz'l [Fazl] wrote about the ideology and thoughts of Cheshti. From that day, the true meaning [of the path] that was brighter than the sun, became clear to Shah Jahān, the shadow of God: that Cheshti was an honored member of the family of prophets . . . his [Cheshti's] relation to the Prophet Mohammad is fifteen generations apart. (Jahānārā Begam, *Munes*, fols. 15-16, tr. Sharma)

As part of imperial ideology and practical politics, the ruling house relied on female agency to convey the sovereign's pietistic and Islamic "face" through "public" acts of patronage, prayer and pilgrimage. Jahānārā Begam exceeded the imperial charge on her gender by redefining and wielding her imperial powers through prevalent patterns of male authority in the sacred sphere as a *piri-moridi* or (master-disciple), and in the secular realm by commissioning a congregation mosque in Agra, the Mughal capital and seat of government

(Pemberton, 3-39).[3] The patronage of congregation mosques within the Timurid and Mughal empires had been the domain of imperial men or high-ranking nobles. Women's patronage of sacred monuments was specific to private devotional mosques, Sufi shrines, tomb-mausoleums, and gardens. The imperial and semi-divine/saintly image cultivated or realized by the pious princess through her sacred commissions is an extension of the princess's persona. Just as a *pir* is venerated as the means through which a disciple can interface with an "other-worldly" spiritual authority, the attributes of the *pir* are perceived as inter-active extensions of the patron's saintly or pious attributes. Jahānārā Begam's Sufi treatises and architectural commissions create spaces where spiritual authority and temporal power intersect and embody a powerful and "palpable" presence of the princess as a *pir*.

Mughal political alignment with Sufism and particularly the Cheshti order reflected the exclusive relationship between Sufis and emperors and what Ebba Koch regards as "exponents of worldly and spiritual powers" (Koch 2001, 176). The Sufi-Sovereign affiliation established an "aura of sanctity" physically and spiritually around the imperial family, and metaphysically around Mughal-sponsored shrines and mosques (Rizvi, 123-25).[4] Jahānārā Begam's Sufi association in the Qāderiya order and subsequent spiritual ascension under the guidance of her *pir*, Mollā Shah Badakhshi (d. 1661), extended the imperial imperatives imposed on her class and gender and cultivated a new paradigm for female authority in an official and private capacity.[5] The princess reached beyond her relegated role of female agency in service of the state and was motivated to seek an elevated spiritual state as a *piri-moridi* or *khelāfat* that legitimized her spiritual authority and made claims to an enduring Timurid-Mughal legacy (Pemberton, 10-11).[6] Jahānārā writes in the *Sāhebiya*:

> In our family no one took the step on the path to seek God or the truth that would light the Timurid lamp eternally. I was grateful for having received this

[3] For an overview of the *piri-moridi* state, see Pemberton, 3-38. As the term is not used in the context of Sufism earlier than the twentieth century, the author has taken liberties to label Jahānārā's spiritual persona to facilitate discussion and to distinguish her rank within the Qāderiya order. A *piri-moridi* is a Sufi disciple in a liminal and advanced "master-disciple" stage and is qualified to ascend to the rank of a master. Women were never given this honorary role or position within Sufi institutions.

[4] Rizvi analyses the Safavid precedent and tradition of cultivating a shrine-specific "imperial aura" and culture to visibly "enact their vision of rulership."

[5] For a biographical sketch of Mollā Shah Badakhshi's life and works, see Tavakkol Beg, fols. 4a et passim.

[6] See Kelly Pemberton's contemporary classification of this liminal Sufi-devout state.

> great fortune and wealth. There was no end to my happiness. (Jahānārā Begam, *Resāla*, fols. 12-13, tr. Sharma)

After "lighting" the Timurid lamp, Jahānārā claims her "rightful" place on the same mantle as the prophet Mohammad, his revered companions, and Mollā Shah:

> Even though it is not acceptable for a *faqira* to talk about herself, since meeting the others in my spiritual reverie last night and being blessed with eternal happiness, I need to include myself among the *zumra* of this group. (Jahānārā Begam, *Resāla*, fol. 13, tr. Sharma)[7]

Jahānārā's elevated status is further substantiated in the writings of Mollā Shah's seventeenth century biographer and disciple, Tavakkol Beg:

> She passed through all the normal visions and attained a pure union with God and gained an intuitive perception. Mollā Shah said of her, "She has attained so extraordinary a development of the mystical knowledge that she is worthy of being my representative if she were not a woman." (Tavakkol Beg, fols. 12, 11-14, tr. Sharma)

"Fātema" Jahānārā[8] and her brother Dārā Shokuh had been initiated into the Qāderiya order of Sufism in the 1630s.[9] The order was originally founded in Iraq in the twelfth century but was formally established in India in the fourteenth century. Its influence grew from southern India into the Punjab region. The order is considered the earliest of the Muslim formal mystic Sufi orders

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[7] *Zumra* in Arabic means sacred group or the blessed group given entry into Paradise.

[8] Idem, fols. 12-13. After disciples are formally initiated into the Sufi order, they are given an honorific name or title signifying the *morid*'s (disciple's) crossing of a threshold into a new spiritual "state." Mollā Shah gave Jahānārā the honorific "Fātema," thereby confirming her initiation into the Qāderiya order.

[9] The Qāderiya order, considered the earliest of the Muslim formal mystic Sufi orders and based entirely upon the principles of *shariʿa*, was founded by the Hanbali theologian ʿAbd al-Qāder Jilāni (1078-1166) in Baghdad. Jilāni may have intended the few rituals he prescribed to extend only to his small circle of followers, but his sons broadened this community into an order and encouraged its spread into North Africa, Central Asia, and especially India. The Sufis of the Qāderiya order laid great stress on the purification of the Self. According to this philosophy, cleaning the "rust" of the mundane world from the mirror of the heart is an essential part of one's spiritual journey and purification. The Sufis maintain that the human soul is capable of reflecting Divine Light, but due to impurities of the Self accumulated through greed, jealousy, etc., and attachments to worldly desires, it is unable reflect the truth of the Beloved's illumination. When the rust is removed, it begins to reflect clearly. Thus, if the mirror of the heart is clean, the beauty of the Beloved (God) reflects in it and one can see this in the personality of the seeker, inwardly and outwardly.

and is based entirely upon the principles of *sharīʿa*; it stressed the purification of the self through annihilation or *fanā'* and placed a great emphasis on cleaning the rust of the mundane world from the mirror of the heart as an essential part of one's spiritual journey (Ernst, 6). In the *Sāhebiya*, Jahānārā indicates the success of her purification though the annihilation of her mundane self:

> Oh Beloved, I am filled with infinite happiness that you made me unconcerned and detached from worldly matters and focused on the oneness of God. I knew I had to die so I can live in truth. I have neither the wealth of this world or the next world. I am without bag and baggage but have attained the means of reaching divine knowledge and union. (Jahānārā Begam, *Resāla*, fol. 18, tr. Sharma)

In 1637, after spending six months in Kashmir, Jahānārā indicates in the *Sāhebiya* her reluctance in leaving Kashmir, but finally with a "spiritually heavy heart" left Mollā Shah's aura and returned to Agra. In addition to the Taj Mahal, Shah Jahān had several urban projects in Agra adjacent to the imperial palace and fort complex. Enāyat Khan indicates Shah Jahān ordered the construction of a large forecourt, bazaar, and a congregation mosque across from the Agra fort in front of the Delhi gate (Begley and Desai, 205-06). Still immersed in the reverie of her mystical experiences in Kashmir, Jahānārā "begged that the new sacred place of worship might be erected out of her personal funds" (ibid). The Agra mosque is based on a standard Shah Jahān archetype appropriated from the Sultanate architecture of Delhi: an oblong prayer hall formed of vaulted bays or rooms arranged in a row with a dominant central *pishtāq* (a high portal) surmounted by three domes (Koch 1991, 54). One enters the courtyard on axis to the nearly thirty meter tall *pishtāq* (portico) framing the main arch. An extraordinary feature of the central *pishtāq* is the subject and content of the inscriptions framing the entrance to the *mehrāb* (niche) that enunciate Jahānārā's dual personas in verse. The Persian eulogies, in *naskhi* script, boldly praise the details of the mosque and Jahānārā Begam's dual persona:

> It [the Jāmeʿ mosque] was built by her order who is exalted in dignity, who is as elevated as the firmament on which it sits, screened with curtains bright as the sun, possessing a glorious palace as illuminated as her wisdom, veiled with chastity, the most revered of the ladies of the age, the pride of her gender, the princess of the realm, the possessor of the three domes as worldly crowns, the chosen of the people of the world, the most honored of the issue of the head of the Faithful, Jahānarā Begam. (Latif, 186-88)[10]

[10] The author has relied on her own photographs and Latif's transcribed Persian text of the *pishtāq* inscriptions on the Agra mosque for the English translation. The directed translation was

The praise of Jahānārā's virtues and physical attributes are metaphorically woven into the mosque's architectural features to the extent that one perceives the very personification of the princess in the dialectic of verse and structure. That the princess's name was not merely inscribed but profusely eulogized on a congregation mosque in the capital city may certainly indicate the ineffectual ulema during Shah Jahān's reign, but more telling is how the encomiums make transparent an imperial female as a spiritual and imperial exemplar among women. Further, the poetic narratives reference Jahānārā's dual persona and authenticate her place in both imperial and Sufi hierarchy. Jahānārā's name and praises are located high on the *pishtāq* lintel and strategically placed and read alongside those associated with the emperor. The praises for each imperial, occupying nearly an equal amount of surface, are in the decorative bands framing the *pishtāq*.

Inscriptional programs on Mughal mosques were purposeful. They played a socio-political role in conveying the sovereign's religious policies and attitudes, and at times constructed literary allegories of his rule (Begley and Desai, 7-11). Mughal conventions for mosque epigraphy used complete verses from the Koran to adorn significant and highly visible locations of the mosque. The Mughal epigraphic program inscribed on most Shahjahāni mosques followed imperial patterns until the unprecedented encomiums on the *pishtāq* of the Agra congregation mosque. The Persian eulogies in this mosque are unique features that have no Mughal precedent among female-sponsored congregation mosques. Only two imperial women commissioned private mosques prior to Jahānārā Begam: Maryam al-Zamāni, mother of Emperor Jahāngir (r. 1605-27), commissioned the Begam Shahi mosque in Lahore in 1611 (Asher, 116-17, 190-91), and the Patthar mosque built in 1620 in Srinagar, Kashmir, was commissioned by the "prescient feminist" Nur Jahān, wife of Jahāngir (Kak, 79-81).[11] The epigraphical program of each female-sponsored mosque conforms to imperial standards without grandiose Persian praises or personification of the patroness.

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completed in December 2006, with the invaluable assistance of Yunus Jaffrey in Delhi and Sunil Sharma in Cambridge, Mass.

[11] It is noteworthy that only two Mughal women built mosques prior to Jahānārā, subsequent to the completion of Agra congregation mosque (*masjed-e jāme'*) in 1650; however, four private and congregation mosques were commissioned by imperial females and constructed in Shah Jahān's new capital Shāhjahānābād or Delhi. Each mosque emulates the Agra mosque in its formal planning and to some extent its details, but each also conforms to the traditional epigraphic program for mosques and none includes Persian encomiums or dedications praising the female patron. Though praises for the patroness are excluded in the female-sponsored mosques built after the Agra mosque, it is clear that Jahānārā's bold contribution of a congregation mosque in a Mughal capital sanctioned and emboldened other imperial females to follow her example.

In 1650, two years after the construction of the Agra mosque, Jahānārā commissioned the Mollā Shah Badakhshi mosque in Srinagar. Drawing upon the newly articulated epigraphic idioms in the Agra mosque and the nearby Patthar mosque, the intensity of Jahānārā's religiosity finds its fullest expression in the mosque dedicated to her *pir*, Mollā Shah. Like the Patthar mosque, the overall structure is compact in its organization and exhibits an attempt towards a standard Shahjahāni typology, including baluster columns, multi-cusped arches, and an "intuitive" symmetry in the overall design of the plan and elevation. The mosque is both inward and outward-facing in its organization and embellishment with many of its distinguishing features articulated on each exterior wall of the complex. A comprehensive analysis of the mosque complex is beyond the scope of this study; however, the overall design and plan of the complex organically emerges and conveys Shahjahāni standards and idioms.

Remarkable features on the southern elevation are the bands of Persian poetic verses inscribed within four framed panels of the blind arches (figs. 3, 4). Based on the stylistic composition of each verse and the unique ending (Pers. *āmad* "he came, arrived"), Shah Jahān's court poet, Abu Tāleb Kalim (d. 1650), may be the author.[12] A complete translation of the verses is not possible due to the panel's ruinous state; however, the following verses are mostly intact and translated as: The guide for the lost heart has come. The conquest of the hearts is all in His hands. The Beloved has come to fill the goblet. This is the second Mecca. For circumambulation the enlightened King has come. The chronogram from God has come.

Though the overall structure may have been understood by the populace as Mughal and serving the political motivations of empire, the embedded meanings of the verses conform to Jahānārā's personalized representation: simultaneously revealing and hiding the complexities and dualities of her "metaphysical" aura and ideology. Jahānārā's poetry also expresses the duality of Mollā Shah's identity and their relationship. Seen together, the following excerpts from (a) the mosque panel inscriptions and (b) *Resāla-ye Sāhebiya* display remarkable similarity of intent and language: 1. (a) The guide for the lost heart has come. (b) You, Mollā Shah, who have come, are the guide to my

[12] Close analysis of the Persian poetic verses from the exterior of the Mollā Shah mosque with Sunil Sharma in Cambridge, Mass., December 2006, and with Yunus Jaffrey in Delhi, January 2007, lends further credence to the notion that court poet Abu Tāleb Kalim authored the inscriptions. Wheeler Thackston's dissertation, which provides a comprehensive analysis of Kalim's work and ideology, gives literary evidence indicating Kalim was present in Kashmir in the late 1640s. See Thackston, 254-55.

heart (Jahānārā Begam, *Resāla*, fols. 17-18, tr. Sharma); 2. (a) The conquest of the hearts is all in His hands. The Beloved has come to fill the goblet. (b) O, Mollā Shah, you are the Beloved who conquers and fills the hearts like empty goblets (ibid).

The Persian verses on the Mollā Shah mosque in their prescribed role translate Jahānārā's spiritual ambition and authority. The intertexuality of the verses consign her commission as the second "Mecca" and her *pir* as the "king" or savior who is sanctioned by God to fulfill or satiate her spiritual emptiness and those of the disciples studying in the *khānaqāh*. The princess's agency was necessary to create the physical and metaphysical phenomenon at the particular site of her complex without which the "guide to the lost hearts" would not have been in residence. Jahānārā's authority is woven into and couched in the discursive realm of Sufi poetry and ideology and coated with an Islamic veneer; more importantly, it is assigned not through perfunctory royal acts or decrees but through divine ordination. Though the artful and unconventional mode of self-promotion and ascension of the princess's agency seemingly falls outside of the boundaries of socio-religious propriety, it is Jahānārā's hallmark of success that her assertions of authority were received by the populace with adulation and without contestation. The sense of authority made visible here relates to an elite woman's influence in sustaining both Sufi ideology and imperial ethos and not undermining it or, worse, surpassing it. The spiritual folk traditions of the Timurid-Mughal heritage are revived and upheld and used to promote practical politics and piety.

In addition to supporting imperial mores and traditions, the poetic Persian verses emblazoned on the panels of the Mollā Shah complex and their abstract language of love and spirituality inextricably link Jahānārā to Mollā Shah as both her beloved and her *pir*. The panels exalt the spiritual attributes of Mollā Shah and by proxy, of Jahānārā. As the devoted Sufi disciple, Jahānārā stands at the nexus of Mollā Shah and the complex's aura of sanctity, and publicly conveys her dual persona within the subtext of Kalim's and her own poetry. As a point of comparison and departure, Empress Nur Jahān (Jahānārā's contemporary) uses bold and blunt synecdoche to command her authority through her monumental and exuberant commissions. Nur Jahān's construction of self illuminates the specific challenges she faced in constructing legitimacy from the outer and lower limits of nobility (Faruqui, 198-200).[13] Nur Jahān used her agency to visualize her royal status and perfunctory piety as part of practical

[13] As Jahāngir's wife, Nur Jahān actively campaigned to locate her own family members within the imperial hierarchy, forging a network of retinues that would support and advocate her authority alongside the reigning emperor and throughout the Mughal domains.

politics, while Jahānārā's nuanced spiritual and imperial ambitions and self-proclamations are praised for resurrecting her genealogical past and she is presented as an arbiter of Timurid-Mughal legacy.

The Mollā Shāh mosque-cum-*madrasa* and *khānaqāh* in Srinagar, situated in a rural context, displays an original aesthetic dialogue between Islamic and regional Hindu and Buddhist architecture of Kashmir and is more reflective of Jahānārā's Sufi affiliations and *piri-moridi* persona than of Mughal ideology. Each commission enunciates the princess's personal and political objectives in the construction of empire and of self while simultaneously advancing the lineage and heritage of dynastic rule led by her male kin. Jahānārā's matronage of the mosque complex conforms to earlier models of Timurid and South Asian donative acts in which imperial women cultivated the pietistic face of empire through their public-serving commissions and their public support of religious leaders. It is the particular brand of Jahānārā's contributions that makes her charitable acts distinct and illuminates the details of her character.

Jahānārā Begam's sacred commissions in Agra and Srinagar were part of consistent building objectives through which the princess constructed her spiritual persona and conveyed her philanthropy, humanity, and authority, thereby, gaining support for the sovereign and empire. Though precedents for Jahānārā's patronage are navigated through imperial male contributions, the princess's visions of legacy and the artful construction and representation of self were distinct and even personalized in their typology and details. Unlike the hegemonic masculinity that was politically endorsed and conveyed through emperor-sponsored capital projects, Jahānārā's works in their relative simplicity, modesty, and "populist" dimension promoted folk religious traditions that spoke not only of the princess's humble attributes but emphasized her Sufi piety and her desire to enhance her reputation as a supporter of a more pluralistic vision of empire. Jahānārā Begam's commissions were for the most part visually restrained; it was neither their monumentality nor their stylistic originality that made them distinctive, but rather her unprecedented qualities and each monument's typology and function. Through these contributions, Jahānārā's reputation for humanitarian largesse—along with that of the royal family—was enhanced, contributing to the greater glory and continuity of Shah Jahān's reign.

Jahānārā's imperial persona and identity was further inscribed into the Mughal landscape through her privilege and prestige of issuing royal edicts in the form of *farmāns, neshāns*, and *hokms* at the tender age of seventeen.[14]

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[14] *Farmāns* were imperial orders issued with a royal seal assigning land grants or food grants for benevolent or meritorious purposes. *Neshān* is translated as a sign, signal, mark, impression,

Following the death of her mother, Momtāz Mahal, the title Sāhebat al-Zamān (Mistress of the Age) was conferred upon Jahānārā; with this title she was given the royal seal for political, social and commercial transactions and was considered its official keeper, an honor that had never before been conferred upon an imperial female (Enāyat Khan, 74). As a keeper of the seal, Jahānārā's imperial identity and authority were also made visible in the commercial sphere as she was granted the territory of Surat and the revenues collected from the highly trafficked international port (idem, 318). In 1612, the British defeated the Portuguese in the Battle of Swally near the port of Surat, the most active and international port on India's western coast. As a result of their victory, the British claimed all trading rights at Surat. In 1615, the Mughal emperor Jahāngir granted the British, via Sir Thomas Roe, the right to build their own factory at Surat and to travel and trade freely throughout the empire (Foster, I, 319).

The port of Surat, its territories and its abundant annual revenues were presented to Jahānārā Begam by her father as part of the "bountiful gifts of gratitude for the recovery of that sun of modesty" upon her first recovery three months after the 1644 burning incident (idem, 320). On 4 April 1644, while attending the traditional festival of the Persian New Year, the gauzy material of Jahānārā Begam's dress had brushed against a floor lamp and was instantly engulfed in flames. Before the princess's attendants could extinguish the fire, it had badly burned Jahānārā's back and hands and some parts of the front of her body and caused the death of two of her attendants. The princess's injuries were so severe that she required twenty months to recover (Enāyat Khan, 309-10). The events that followed include the immediate and urgent call by Shah Jahān for medical treatment without prejudice from the local and international communities in both the sacred and secular realms.[15] The frequent and impassioned attempts by Shah Jahān to locate effective treatments for Jahānārā,

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emblem issued by princes of royal blood and similar to *farmān* in issuing informal deeds of land, revenue, or foodstuff. *Hokm* is a privileged order of a queen consort, queen mother, or any favored person with any kind of relationship with the royal family.

[15] Unani (*Yunāni* "Ionian, Greek") medicine was introduced into India in the seventh century CE; however, its real development took place throughout the Mughal period starting in Akbar's reign. The roots of Unani medicine can be traced to Hippocrates and Avicenna and its concepts are similar to ayurvedic practice. Apart from the literary works done on the Unani medicine since its introduction to India, several hospitals were established by Mughal emperors and nobles in various parts of the country to privilege both the aristocracy and the public. It allowed the Mughals to control the dispensation of medicine and medical care as part of their all-encompassing notion of kingship as "semi-divine" which renews and preserves. Development of Unani medicine in India during the Mughal period was superior both in quantity and quality as compared to the development made during the pre-Mughal period. For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Alphen, 52-5; Alavi, 853-97; Azami, 29-39.

to some extent politicized her recovery. Medical treatment through sanctioned and unofficial means was desperately sought; in exchange for it, the emperor issued financial pardons, allowed international trade through the Surat port without tariffs, and granted penitence and early release for the incarcerated in imperial prisons. Jahānārā's tragic accident and her process of treatment and recovery is an event that reveals not only the nuanced and private inner workings of the emperor but the intensity of his adoration, compassion, and respect for his daughter and the manner in which the import of her person imbued the limits of the social, political, and poetic Mughal landscape.

Jahānārā's burning incident also presented an opportunity for court poets and the emperor to extend her representation into the literary landscape of panegyric court poetry. Abu Tāleb Kalim, the court poet, composed poetry for official imperial functions, incidents, or events that required notice as well as commemoration of imperial edifices and/or commissions. *Qasida*s in particular were written for public recitation during the various court festivals or ceremonies held at the imperial court.[16] During a celebration for her recovery held on 25 November 1644, eight months after the incident, Kalim read a *qasida* for Jahānārā that includes a long description of her illness (Thackston, 171). Some excerpts from the *qasida* read:

> The celebration of your health is better than spring for the world, your well-being is the ornament of the garden of the world.... From every side of the world, may the people's hand in prayer serve in protection like eyelashes... In the confines of the candle the flames were restless and in their restlessness jumped on your skirt... The spark and flame acquired honor and respectability by touching your noble skirt..... The candle became ashamed and the moth left it in disgust for its crime in burning you... You are the sea of mercy and your blisters are pearls that which became precious from the blazing fire...,[17] Did the blisters become manifest on your body out of the intensity of the fire or did stars suddenly appear in the heavens that fateful night?... The fire of your devotion to God made a mark from the heart. The effects of the fire of your heart have manifest itself on your body.... The mirror of your being is pure of dust.... The ambition of the pure people of every land had a hand in your recovery. (Kalim, *Divān*, 59-60, tr. Sharma)

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[16] The vast majority of Kalim's *qasidas* were written to be read during one or another of the various court festivals or ceremonies. Of the official court functions for which Kalim composed, Nawruz, held on the vernal equinox, and the aforementioned weighing festival, are the most represented in his *divān.*

[17] The poetic metaphor that associates blisters with pearls is a common reference in later Persian poetry to convey the Sufi concept of "suffering to reach spiritual maturity." According to Thackston (193), Kalim had used this conceit liberally from 1633 since composing a poem for Darā Shokuh's wedding celebrations.

Almost half of the forty-seven lines of the *qasida* describe Jahānārā's condition, praise her, and offer her benediction. The remainder recalls through cosmological references the burning incident.[18] Candle flames, sparks and fire are implicated in the crime: the sin they commit is their collective shame in burning the noble and pious princess. Kalim invokes and describes a parallel universe of the celestial bodies and the details of the Sufi-devout princess's wounds. The court poet deems the burn wounds on Jahānārā's as the stigmata of her devotion to God and the evidence of the potency of her piety that ultimately saves her life.

Chandar Bhān Brahman, a Hindu poet and chronicler, was also present at Jahānārā's recovery ceremony and recorded the particulars of the events (Chandar Bhān, I, 2-5). In sum, Chandar Bhān's recordings are faithful to Kalim's poetic renditions of the recovery ceremony and the events surrounding the burning incident. A few details depart from the stock description of the event primarily in the metaphoric typology that is used by Chandar Bhān to describe Jahānārā and her recovery. The encomiums conform to Shah Jahān's self-proclaimed image of a renewer (*mojadded*). However, in the second half of Chandar Bhān's description, he uses animistic references that associate Jahānārā's recovery to a sequential renewal of nature in spring and divided into eight parts as part of eight assemblies or celebratory events to mark her recovery. Nature and the cosmos are collaborating to ensure the princess's recovery where flames and fire conspire to consume her life. Kalim explores the human qualities of the self through the princess's body or form as the oneness of God in Islam, versus Chandhar Bhān's Hindu pantheism and reliance on an animistic framework.

> Eight assemblies (heavens) were held from the fifth of *shawwāl* to the twelfth. All the spending made the people awash in riches.
> (1st Majles): Beginning of the victorious Spring.
> (2nd Majles): Abundance of vegetation in the garden.
> (3rd Majles): Abundance of flowers of celebration and happiness.
> (4th Majles): Strewn pearls of generosity and benevolence.
> (5th Majles): A ring decorating the garden of celebration.
> (6th Majles): Planting a garden of good fortune.
> (7th Majles): Fresh and verdant is the bountiful rose garden.

[18] The equal representation in text of Jahānārā and Shah Jahān in Kalim's *qasida*s parallels the verses on the central *pishtāq* on the Agra mosque. The right half of the *pishtāq* is in praise of the emperor and the left half is dedicated to Jahānārā. This equanimity privileges Jahānārā on two counts: Shah Jahān makes visible his respect and the high esteem he holds his daughter, and she is perceived on equal footing to the emperor in the imperial hierarchy.

(8th Majles): Gathering of the bounteous bouquets from the garden
All this was the cause of the blossoming and gladdening of hearts. (Kalim, *Divān*, 4-5, tr. Sharma)

The elaborate eight-part association of Jahānārā's characteristics with elements of nature (Koch 2006a, 222-23), its beauty, its purity, mystery and grandeur, is consistent with Chandhar Bhān likening of her to the eight century female mystic Rābʿea al ʿAdawiya and the widely-held perceptions of the princess's noble and devout persona.

Ebba Koch describes the use of floral imagery both in Kalim and generally in court poetry as synonymous with and conducive to an iconic representation of Shah Jahān's kingship, imperial symbolism and propaganda (Koch 2006a, 222-23). Koch notes, "The writers and poets of Shah Jahān eulogized him as the 'spring of the flower garden of justice and generosity'" (ibid.). Further, the floral metaphors that served as imperial insignias also extended to Jahānārā Begam (Begley and Desai, 15). It follows that Chandhar Bhān's personification of spring as Jahānārā's renewed and recovered person locates and conveys another visual axis of her power and status in the imperial hierarchy as commensurate with that of the emperor. In Chandhar Bhān's poetic recordings, the spring of Shah Jahān's "divine" kingship is at the heart of her recovery. The eight-part series of Jahānārā's recovery celebrations and the consistent use of nature metaphors in the poetry associated with these events create an image of Shah Jahān's kingship as both omnipresent in the person or body of the princess and as the renewer of her being.

The precedent for female-owned trading ships and conducting maritime trade was established by Emperor Jahāngir's mother, Maryam al-Zamāni, and by his wife, Nur Jahān. Each woman had her own Chinese junk built to conduct trade overseas and to visibly announce her financial holdings and authority in the Mughal commercial sphere (Findly, 227-38; Qaisar, 7). In 1644, after Jahānārā was given the Surat port and its revenues, a ship was dispatched to Bassein to retrieve guns as well as material to build a new junk for the princess (Qaisar, 50). As befitted her pious personality, it seems that Jahānārā's ship, named Sāhebi (after her royal title, Begam Sāheb), transported pilgrims to Mecca along with her cargo more than any other chartered ship. According to Waris, on 3 Dhu'l-Hejja 1065 "ʿĀbed, brother of Khwāja Bahā al-Din Samarqandi . . . came for pilgrimage from Samarqand, to Kabul, from there to Hindustan and finally to Mecca in a ship the *Sāhebi* which belongs to Jahānārā Begam" (Waris, 115). Surat allowed passage for Muslim pilgrims to Mecca and to the Shiʿa shrines of Najaf and Karbalā'. As the overland passes of

the Hindu Kush became unsafe for extended journeys, shorter and safer voyages by sea through ports like Surat became more popular among merchants, scholars, political refugees, and excursionists.[19]

The Surat port as Jahānārā's possession and representation reveals yet another axis through which the princess's position, power and persona were perceived and made visible. The Sāhebi served Jahānārā as the conveyor on which the religious goals of pilgrims were achieved and merchants and their wares transported safely. The Sāhebi was the princess's proxy and as such was charged with imperial ideological objectives and assurances: to promulgate and preserve spirituality, ensure safety for royal subjects and sustain empire and the sovereign through lucrative commercial activities and their revenues. Further, the female-owned trading ships represented their owners to some extent and could be perceived as the repositories of male honor in Islam's socio-religious belief systems and were rarely pirated. In the event they were pirated, as was the case in 1614 with a ship belonging to emperor Jahāngir's mother, Maryam al-Zamāni, due to disagreements regarding tariff charges for the port of Surat, the dishonor was directed toward the male relative, namely emperor Jahāngir (Findly, 227). The wording of the pass that was issued to Maryam al-Zamāni's vessel, the Rahimi, stated that the pass was "guaranteeing *her* [Rahimi] against molestation." The particular choice of the word *molestation*, used when referring to a living being, along with the fact that ships are gendered as *her* or *she* certainly associates the assault on the ship with a direct attack on Jahāngir's honor (idem, 228). After the abduction of the Rahimi, pirates may have reappraised attacking female-owned ships when they considered the unusually harsh, cruel, and even unjust retaliation carried out by the Mughal court to punish the pirates of the Rahimi (idem, 238-39).[20]

Shah Jahān and his imperial retinue were undeniably cognizant of the generous revenues procured at the port of Surat and associated Jahānārā's province of the port with the empire's fiscal successes. The extraordinary proceeds of Surat are extolled by Enāyat Khan, who writes, "She was also granted the territory of Surat, which yields an annual revenue of three crores of dams, equivalent to seven *lakhs* and 50,000 *rupees*—but its port dues are nowadays nearly double as much, owing to the increased traffic of merchants

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[19] Douglas Haynes surveys the history of Surat and its ports in the seventeenth century when it occupied a dominant place in India's domestic and international trade until the nineteenth century. See Haynes, 32-46.

[20] Though Maryam al-Zamāni's ship was attacked and looted in 1614, sources do not indicate if the Sāhebi was similarly pirated or any other ship after that event. The large shipping and passenger vessels were exclusively owned by imperial females of which there were only three: Maryam al-Zamāni, Nur Jahān, and Jahānārā Begam.

from all quarters" (Enāyat Khan, 318). The gift of Surat allowed Shah Jahān to boost Jahānārā's imperial authority and agency by entrusting her with vast sums of money to use in the manner befitting her official title. Additionally, the Surat endowment reveals Jahānārā's substantial involvement and agency in the crucial building of empire and in pre-modern India's foreign trade.

The Surat revenues and imperial allowances were used to fund a consistent building program from 1648-51 through which Jahānārā's public and pious persona was constructed in the urban centers of Agra, Delhi, Ajmer, Lahore, and in the valley of Kashmir in Srinagar. Travelers, both foreign and local, who passed through the imperial capitals for commercial and spiritual purposes would have become aware of Jahānārā's self-presentation and influence in both the sacred and secular realms. As trade tariffs were paid at Surat, goods exchanged, passage on the Sāhebi negotiated, or as pilgrims were carried to Mecca in the Sāhebi (whose journey to Mecca was heavily subsidized by Jahānārā's largesse), the memory, presence, and authority of the princess was continually invoked. In this way, the representation of her pious and public persona extended beyond Mughal domains. The sponsorship and safe passage of the pilgrim's spiritual quest to Mecca can be seen as a corollary and extension of Jahānārā's own religious persuasions that continually confirmed her elevated spiritual and imperial status. Similar to Shah Jahān, she served as the renewer, and further perhaps as the redeemer of spiritual longings. Dealings with the princess, however formal, are documented in the English factory records showing officials communicating directly with Jahānārā to curry favors or *farmān*s through her seal and authority and her influence with Shah Jahān (Foster, 148).

Her fiscal holdings and yearly income and revenues exceeded those of any imperial woman in Mughal history. Mughal administrative records also indicate that Jahānārā frequently exercised her authority as the keeper of the royal seal both in local administration and in conducting international trade and commerce.[21] Though the issuing of royal edicts through the royal seal was for the most part a perfunctory act, Jahānārā nevertheless indelibly represented her authority in official records. Further, passing royal edicts was often a two-step process that required both stamping and publicly announcing the edict, and its issuer from within a state-sponsored and highly visible Shahjahāni building. This display played a pivotal role in publicizing Jahānārā's authority throughout the empire, arrogating to her a status commensurate to that of the emperor.

[21] Several political and commercial edicts can be found in three sources by Tirmizi. See References.

In temporal matters, Jahānārā took risky political initiatives, acting as a social and political intermediary during the turbulent war of succession in 1658 between Shah Jahān and his youngest son, Aurangzeb (Owrangzēb; Sarkar, II, 74-75). As Shah Jahān and Aurangzeb jockeyed for the throne of Delhi, Jahānārā played a pivotal role as an intermediary, assuaging and mitigating the potential violence and familial rift among the male members of her family. Though the heir-apparent was Dārā Shokuh, Shah Jahān's eldest son, Aurangzeb claimed the right to the throne based on his capabilities and military achievements. At a critical point in the military operations, Jahānārā wrote an impassioned letter to Aurangzeb asking him to withdraw his troops and accept the emperor, empire and God's will for Dārā Shokuh to ascend the throne. The following excerpt highlights the themes central to her argument.

> You should yourself judge how impolite it is on your part of encounter and draw the sword against your own father, in whose obedience lies the pleasure of God and His Prophet, and to shed blood of innocent people. Even if your expedition is due to the antagonism to Prince Dārā Shokuh it cannot be approved by the principal of wisdom, for according to the Islamic law and convention the elder brother (Dārā Shokuh) has the status of father . . . for the life of a few days in this transitory and evil world and its deceitful and deceptive enjoyments are no compensation for eternal infamy and misfortune . . . you should refrain from shedding the blood of the followers of Islam during the auspicious month of Ramadan. You should submit yourself to the orders of your benefactor and your ruler, as the commandment of God in that respect refers to obedience to the Emperor. (Sarkar, II, 73-74)

Jahānārā invokes God, his Prophets, Islamic jurisprudence, duty to the empire and its subjects, and filial piety to induce Aurangzeb to give up his military stance. As God's shadows on earth, the Mughal family and particularly the imperial line is obligated to abide by God's laws and man's laws to sustain and legitimate their rule. The letter, written when the princess was only thirty, reveals her diplomatic skills that utilized her religious acumen and equanimity, and conforms to the noble, graceful, and pious princess described in Mughal chronicles and histories.

Jahānārā Begam's unparalleled rank and authority among royal Mughal women and her literary and aesthetic representations in the sacred and secular landscape were facilitated by her imperial rank, fiscal holdings, freedoms assigned by her father who recognized in her person abilities and not just gender, her extraordinary political acumen, and pious proclivities. The emperor's official histories and chronicles cite the unmarried princess as the personification of the feminine "ideal" and is recalled and remembered in history and in inscription as the personification of virtue, nobility, purity, divine compassion

and justice. It was an ideal to which the emperor and elite Mughal society and to some extent the empire's subjects hoped all women would aspire through Jahānārā's imperial and spiritual agency and example.

The princess's authority, social and spiritual aura, and accomplishments also attracted the attention of European travelers to India, who were both sympathetic toward and intrigued by Jahānārā Begam. However, they perversely construed meaning from her spiritual devotions and speculated that her extraordinarily close relationship with her father Shah Jahān was an incestuous one and may have fulfilled the unmarried princess's burning desires for carnal love and intimacy (Manucci, 216-19). These extraordinary speculations and recordings on the part of the male European traveler were inversely proportioned to their lack of access to the imperial harem and/or its inhabitants; this lack of access created a breadth of imperial tall tales. In Francois Bernier's (1656-68) and Nicolao Manucci's (1653-1708) historical accounts of Shah Jahān's and Aurangzeb's reigns, the chapter on Mughal women projects skepticism regarding Jahānārā's chastity and religiosity by exoticizing her persona.[22] Each traveler's account perversely portrays Jahānārā's unusually close relationship with Shah Jahān, relating that the monarch killed the princess's lover, who was hidden in a bathing cauldron, by lighting a fire underneath. Further, the European narratives allude to her un-Islamic affinities for drinking, dancing, and having illicit affairs (Manucci, 218; Bernier, 11). The unsavory and un-Islamic characterization of Jahānārā by European travelers is suggestive of Orientalist fantasies about the East. Regardless of the reasons for the inauthentic depictions, Jahānārā's constructed and imagined characteristics and misdeeds in the travelogues of European visitors makes patently obvious that her authority, prestige, and close relationship with her father was somehow well-known even to outsiders, even if not directly visibly or personally experienced. The accrual details of her official and pious persona were enigmatic enough preoccupy the western imagination to the extent that her place of privilege was at the center of the machinations of the Mughal court surrounded by all the ingredients fit for a fiction of intrigue. In this regard, Jahānārā's importance as a central figure in the Mughal machine is upheld because the European traveler invests in her character dramatic authority and centrality in the theatrical renderings of the princess, even if exaggerated and perversely documented.

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[22] In Manucci's *Storia*, great details are given about the physical structure of the harem but stories of imperial females are generalized accounts, perceived as second- if not third-hand information relayed to Manucci.

Jahānārā Begam's literary contributions and architectural assertions demonstrate how seventeenth-century Islamic and imperial codes of conduct and ascension were expanded, modified, reclaimed, and recast through a process of astute negotiations that tested the acceptable limits of propriety and increased the princess's renown throughout the empire. The trajectory of Jahānārā and her male relatives' imperial activities exhibit the shifting, organic (rather than static and resolute) nature of Islamic jurisprudence and hereditary referents where youngest brothers usurp the throne from oldest brothers and imprison the emperor father, and where a princess assumes the rank of an empress without marital ties and ascends to the rank of a de facto Sufi *pir* without the required spiritual investitures save for the claim of divine favor. The monuments and the Sufi treatises both were crafted to unveil the pious princess's semi-divine inner virtues and pious acts that imbued the Mughal landscape on an empire-wide scale while effectively broadcasting her ascendancy, which occurred as a function of imperial transgressions and self-promoting spiritual investitures and not through conventional modes of imperial inheritance. Jahānārā's spiritual and official personas were cultivated through artful negotiations that tested the acceptable limits of social and religious propriety, and were praised and inscribed in stone and in Mughal legacy.

This case study broadly suggest the ways in which one Muslim woman in the seventeenth century may represent an archetypal elite female who exercised agency within/out the confines of Islamic religious and social custom that ordinarily would have limited her self-expression and ascendancy. The study then asks the question: How do women's subjective modes of prominence conform to Islamic laws of jurisprudence specific to inheritance that apparently contradict, challenge, and contest those very ideals? This work presents one answer through the princess's choices. Jahānārā crossed the social and spiritual boundary into what was, and still is, considered male territory by commissioning a mosque and other high profile projects and through her Sufi ascension. The princess, however, cloaked her signs of prominence in a guise of modesty and compliance as the ideal of female subordination to male hegemony: she fulfilled the imperial charge imposed on her gender by performing charitable acts and thus represented the pietistic "face" of empire. The freedom to broadly interpret *how* Jahānārā articulated the demands of imperial ideology with the culturally and religiously coded signifiers of status and authority is specific to her bond with her father. The princess's uncontested prestige was rooted in a mutually beneficial daughter-and-father relationship that could strengthen rather than threaten the dynastic image of the empire. This relationship was consistently laced with religious sentiments: for Jahānārā, Sufi Islam was central to the argument for her political and spiritual ascen-

dancy and was used as a form of defense and sanction for her father's imperial transgressions as well as her monumental sacred commissions, Sufi treatises and fiscal control. These modes of representations cultivated and activated her dual personas and inscribed her authority in the annals of Mughal history. The silent but potent vigor with which Jahānārā articulated her authority is confirmed by the court poet Abu Tāleb Kalim's *mathnavi*:

> *bar owj-e sarvari kh*^{v}*orshid-e dowlat*
> *vali dāyem nehān dar abr-e esmat*
> *hamisha bād in ṣāniy-e Maryam*
> *harimafruz-e shāhanshāh-e ʿālam*
> *ba farq-ash sāya bād az zell-e yazdān*
> *neshān tā bāshad az kh*^{v}*orshid-e rakhshān*
>
> Though the princess [Jahānārā] is on the apex of sovereignty of the sun of fortune [Shah Jahān], she is always hidden behind the cloud of chastity. May the second Mary always endure the splendor of the king of the World. May the shadow of God be on her head as long as the sun is shining. (Kalim, *Divān*, 151, tr. Sharma)

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Fig. 1. Agra Mosque elevation at courtyard with *pishtāq* entry arch, 1648, Agra.

Fig. 2. Mollā Shah Mosque Complex, 1650, Srinagar, Kashmir.

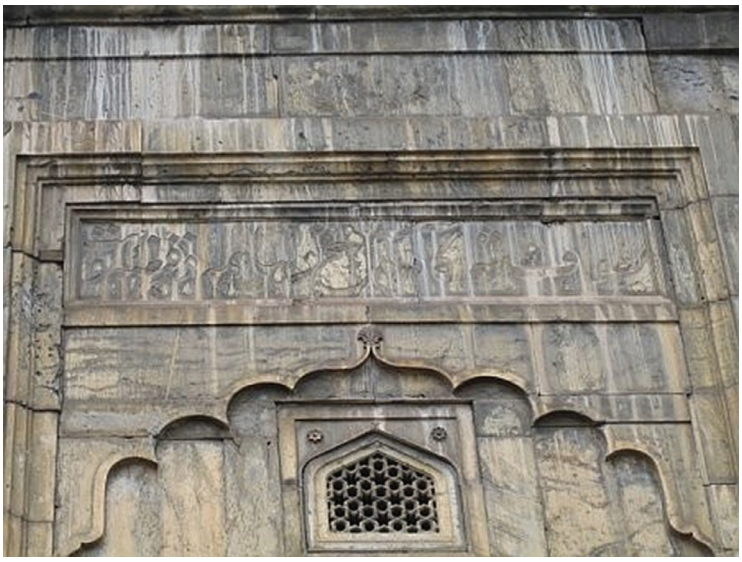

Fig. 3. Detail of band with Persian verses.

Fig. 4. Mollā Shah Complex at north elevation with bands of Persian poetry over the blind arches.