Published: December 15, 2004
Last Updated: March 27, 2012

INDIA VII. RELATIONS: THE AFSHARID AND ZAND PERIODS

INDIA

vii. POLITICAL AND CULTURAL RELATIONS: THE AFSHARID AND ZAND PERIODS

The invasion of the Persian capital (Isfahan) by Ḡilzai Afghan (q.v.) forces in 1722 and the collapse of Safavid central authority had a marked impact on Indo-Persian relations, disrupting diplomatic relations between Persia and the Mughal empire in the Indian subcontinent and seriously undermining Indo-Persian trade. The ensuing political and economic turmoil would, in the long run, intensify competing tribal dynastic ambitions in Persia, contribute to the erosion of central authority in Mughal India, alter the role and influence of European trading companies in the region, and affect the patterns of Persian migration to the Indian subcontinent as well as cross-currents of cultural and political contacts between Persia and the subcontinent.

NADER SHAH AND INDIA

Under the military leadership of Nāderqoli Beg of the Afšār tribe, Safavid control was gradually restored over much of the former Persian territories

with the expulsion of the Afghan forces in 1729. In the coming years, Nāderqoli (later Ṭahmāsbqoli Khan and Nāder Shah) succeeded also in subduing various tribal and regional potentates, recapturing territories annexed by the Ottoman empire to the west, and concluding a territorial accord with Russia in the north. While serving the Safavid ruler, Nāderqoli consolidated his own military power and political influence, finally seizing power in 1736 and founding the Afsharid dynasty (q.v.). Having seized power as the new monarch, Nāder Shah (r. 1736-47) continued his military expeditions against remaining regional and tribal contenders for power and embarked upon territorial conquests in Central Asia and the Afghan territories, with the population of Persia being fleeced by the heavy burden of taxation that financed these military campaigns (Lockhart, pp. 38-95; Avery, pp. 25-38). It would be these military campaigns in the Afghan territories and Nāder's desperate need for additional sources of revenue in maintaining his vast army of tribal forces and mercenaries—including those engaged in other ongoing military operations—as well as financing government administration and accumulating personal wealth, that resulted in the most climactic episode in modern Indo-Persian relations, in the form of Nāder Shah's invasion of the Mughal empire in 1739.

Nāder's invasion of India. The pretext for Nāder Shah's invasion of Mughal territory was the failure of the Mughal emperor Rowšan Aḵtar "Moḥammad Shah" (r. 1719-48) to make an official pledge of preventing Nāder's Afghan adversaries from crossing over into Mughal territory in search of refuge after Nāder's capture of Qandahār in 1738 (Fraser, passim; Malcolm, pp. 70-71, 78-79; Sykes, 259; Islam, 1970, pp. 143-45; Lockhart, pp. 122-24). However, the prospect of plundering Mughal territory was also a highly alluring temptation for the cash-strapped Persian monarch. Nāder's invasion of the Mughal empire and the sacking of its capital Delhi came at a time of ongoing disintegration of Mughal central authority and increased internal and regional challenges to Mughal rule. During the three decades prior to the Persian invasion, the Mughal empire had been subject to regional fragmentation and autonomous provincial challenges, as in the case of the Sikh contestation of provincial power in Punjab (Alam, chap. 4; Grewal, chap. 5), as well as territorial raids and annexations by neighboring regional powers, such as the Maratha incursions from the south—including an invasion in 1737, during the Maratha Peshwa of Baji Rao I, which brought the enemy forces to the environs of Delhi (Gordon, chap. 5).

In December 1738 Nāder Shah's forces left their Afghan bases, soon crossing the Indus and pushing on to Lahore in January 1739, where Sikh resistance and the forces of the Mughal governor failed to halt the invaders. The Persian troops now proceeded towards Delhi. As the invading army captured and plundered city after city, Nāder also appointed or retained his own choice of regional governors, at times further augmenting the authority of regional Mughal officeholders (*manṣabdār*s) who surrendered and complied with Nāder's ordinances, as in the case of Zakariya Khan the governor of Lahore (Punjab), who originally had resisted the invaders. Later on, Nāder would even allow detachments of his elite Qezel-bāš cavalry and other forces to remain behind in the subcontinent and join the service of regional governors contesting direct Mughal rule (see also Islam, 1970, pp. 163-64). On February 24, the decisive battle of Karnal got underway, with the Mughal ruler Moḥammad Shah having reached the city earlier in the month. The superior rapid-firing musket power of the Persian *jazāyerčī*s and the mounted swivel zanburaks assured Nāder's victory in the battle, with an estimated ten thousand Indians and a much smaller number of Iranian soldiers killed. On the 26th, Mohammad Shah abdicated his throne in submission to the Persian conqueror and visited Nāder's camp. The next month, Nāder, accompanied by his vanquished "host," reached the Mughal capital Delhi. On March 21, coinciding with both the Persian New Year and the Muslim feast of the sacrifice, the sermon (*ḵoṭba*) in the congregational prayers was delivered in the name of the Persian conqueror, and coins were struck in his name in recognition of his supremacy. Before the end of day, Nāder was informed of mob attacks in the city directed against units of his Qezelbāš troops, during which a number of Persian soldiers were killed. The following morning, Nāder ordered the indiscriminate massacre of residents in those sections of the city where his soldiers had been slain. It is estimated on March 22 approximately 20,000 inhabitants of Delhi (of differing religious persuasions) perished between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., when Nāder finally directed his forces to halt their orgy of blood, pillaging, and extensive destruction of buildings (Fraser, pp. 152-223; Sarkar, 1973, passim; Lockhart, pp. 123-49); earning the Persian conqueror a most reviled status in the annals of Indian history, with the expression "Nāderšāhi" coined as a popular synonym for "massacre" (see also Tucker, 1998, pp. 207-17).

The next month, Nāder ordered the marriage of a Mughal princess with his younger son Naṣr-Allāh. The remainder of Nāder's long sojourn in Delhi, before finally departing on his homebound journey in mid-May, was devoted

to exacting tribute from various city wards, the Mughal nobility, and officials. Along with the most precious Mughal imperial jewels and treasures already surrendered to him by Moḥammad Shah, including the famed Peacock Throne and the Kuh-e nur and Daryā-ye nur (q.v.) diamonds, Nāder's total loot is estimated in excess of 700,000,000 rupees, conveniently enabling him to exempt the financially drained population of Persia from taxation for the next three years. On May 12, the Persian conqueror reinstated Moḥammad Shah as the Mughal emperor during a "durbar" (darbār) ceremony. The beholden Mughal ruler in return ceded to Nāder the empire's chahar mahal (čahār maḥāl) provinces of Gujrat, Aurangabad, Sialkot, and Pasrur and all territories to the west of the Indus, including Thatta and Sind (Grewal, p. 85).

The financial despoiling and the devastation wrought by Nāder Shah, his appointment of semi-autonomous regional officials in northwestern Mughal territories, along with the increased autonomy of regional governors (nawwābs) in some other parts of the empire—as in the case of ʿAliverdi Khan, the nawwāb of Bengal, who ceased to remit provincial revenues to Delhi—and the blow to the Mughal military power, which now appeared even less capable than before in resisting internal and external challengers, were among additional developments contributing to the long-term weakening of Mughal central authority. The already vulnerable empire was now prone to further internal disarray and outside incursions, despite renewed efforts by the authorities in Delhi and some other provinces to augment Mughal rule and the revived prosperity and rebuilding of Delhi and other cities in the coming years (see also Asher, p. 301). At the same time, it should be noted, the waning Mughal central authority and the emergence of more effective regional powers on occasion proved conducive to improved local security and long-distance trade.

Though it was by no means the leading factor in hastening the gradual collapse of the Mughal empire and the eventual rise of British hegemony throughout the subcontinent, after Nāder's invasion the Mughal empire faced further disarray. It was now more susceptible than before to attacks by the formidable Marathas, whose vigorous empire-building and recurring raids into Mughal territory had preceded Nāder's invasion. Maratha forays into Orissa and Bengal (1740) were followed by the Dorrāni Afghan leader—and a former commander in Nāder's 1739 invasion force—Aḥmad Shah Abdāli's sack of Delhi (1748 and subsequently), further regional fragmentation, and the expanding military leverage of rival European commercial companies in the

Indian subcontinent, namely the French East India Company (Compagnie des Indes Orientales) and the English East India Company (EIC). Additional developments contributing to the long-term decline of Mughal power were the rampant court intrigues and the growing provincial autonomy of various nawwābs, as well as the Anglo-French wars (the War of the Austrian Succession, 1740-48, and the Seven Years' War, 1756-63) with their accompanying military conflicts between the French and English East India companies. The formation of European-officered native sepoy armies by the two European companies and their respective treaties with various local power-brokers for both providing regional security and challenging the commercial standing of their rival company would eventually pave the way for the EIC's conquest of Bengal in the east (1757), the EIC's virtual exclusion of its European competitors from the subcontinent (1763), and the subsequent British imperial domination of the subcontinent (see also Marshall, 1987).

Indo-Persian trade during the Afsharid era. The preceding developments in both Persia and the Indian subcontinent had a detrimental effect on Indo-Persian trade. In the Safavid era traders and financiers from the Indian subcontinent, predominantly Muslim but also a substantial number of Hindus, and chiefly from Marwar, Shikarpur, and Multan and often commonly referred to in Persia as "Multani," had played a pivotal role in Indo-Persian commerce, as well as in Indian and Persian trade with Russia. The size of their various communities throughout Persia numbered in the thousands before the Afghan invasion of the Safavid empire. The Afghan invasion of Persia, the subsequent political and regional disintegration of the country, Ottoman occupation of western Persia, all of which drastically undermined Persian trade with India and Russia, and, later on, Nāder Shah's exorbitant financial levies on the population, jointly dealt a serious blow to the commercial activities and fortunes of "Indian" traders, whose communities in Persia rapidly dwindled in size, with a number killed during the various Afghan, Ottoman, or Persian forays (Dale, pp. 66-75, 128-31; Alam, pp. 141-42; Levi, passim; see also xiii., xxx., and xxxi. below). According to a contemporary Armenian source, the Ottoman forces occupying Hamadān "killed many prominent merchants and especially the cow-worshipping (i.e., Hindu) *Moltani*" (Abraham of Ervan, p. 44).

Multan was spared devastation by Nāder Shah's invading army in 1739, as well as during the subsequent occupation (1752) by the Afghan leader Aḥmad Shah Abdāli, who had earlier served as a military commander in Nāder's

invasion of the Mughal empire and had later emerged as the successor to Nāder's Afghan and Indian dominions and as the new owner of the looted Kuh-e nur diamond (see also Gommans, pp. 57-58, passim). Yet, these invasions and periodic attacks by Sikh forces and developments inside Persia took their toll on the prosperity and commercial reach of some leading Multani mercantile families. In the meantime, the large-scale destruction unleashed on Shikarpur by the Afghan forces in the mid-century, as well as the concurrent dynastic wars underway in Persia, eroded the commercial influence of Shikarpuri merchants and financiers in Persia.

Similarly, the political and economic crisis in Persia following the Afghan invasion in 1722, Nāder's exaction of heavy taxation both before and after seizing the throne, the atrocious treatment of the general populace by Nāder's governors and local administrators, his outbursts of religious intolerance towards non-Muslims, as well as developments in the Indian subcontinent in the middle decades of the 18th century, all adversely affected other major regional players in Indo-Persian trade, namely the Armenian merchants (Bournoutian, chap. 14). Also affected was the Indo-Persian trade conducted by factors of the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie/VOC) and the English East India Company (EIC) operating out of the Indian subcontinent and Persian Gulf bases, with both companies struggling to remain afloat in their Persian trade in light of Afghan extortion of funds, Nāder's exaction of tribute, and the overall dwindling trade in southern Persia due to unrelenting financial levies on the populace and disruption of many former trade routes (see INDIA x. COMMERCIAL RELATIONS; DUTCH-PERSIAN RELATIONS; EAST INDIA COMPANY; Greaves, pp. 350-73; Floor, 1998).

Additionally, the two competing European companies found themselves pressured into providing naval support for Nāder's expeditions against the ruler of Muscat in his attempt to recapture former Persian territories in the Persian Gulf and against the Ottomans. While both companies largely succeeded in rebuffing Nāder's relentless pressures in this regard, they also had to contend with recurrent requests of assistance with the purchase of ships for Nāder in his attempt to build a Persian fleet, which could have embroiled the two companies in contretemps with other regional powers and undermined their own position in the Persian Gulf trade (Lockhart, pp. 182-84, 212-22, Appendix I; Floor, 1987, pp. 31-53). The attempt to procure the support of the English EIC in developing a Persian navy was continued by the founder

of the Zand dynasty, which shortly was to capture much of the Afsharid dominions (Perry, 1979, pp. 157-59, 165-68, 176-79).

INDO-PERSIAN RELATIONS DURING THE ZAND ERA

Indo-Persian trade slowly rebounded, particularly following the establishment of the Zand dynasty in Persia in 1751, four years after Nāder Shah's assassination by his own guards. Karim Khan (r. 1751-79) seized control of much of Persia as the founder of the new dynasty (1751-96), with the Afsharids retaining control of the northeastern provinces and, similar to a number of other tribal groups such as the Qajars, attempting to wrest away territorial control from the Zands (see Perry, 1979, 237-71; 1991, pp. 99-100).

Karim Khan directed particular attention to reviving the economy and normalizing foreign trade. Given the significance of Indo-Persian trade in this regard, the Zand ruler took steps to afford greater security and more comfortable arrangements for merchants from the subcontinent. It is estimated that during the Zand era Indian trade accounted for well over one-third of the Zand state's volume of foreign trade (Perry, 1979, pp. 248-49, 271). Armenian and Indian merchants, now also including a larger number of Sikh traders in their ranks, resumed their vital role in the expanding trade between Persia and India. By the late 18th century, Zoroastrian Parsi merchants in the subcontinent had also stepped up their participation in this trade. Meanwhile, the EIC, which had previously doubted the profitability of its Persian trade, emerged as the leading European commercial and political-military power in the Indian subcontinent after 1763 and the major European player in Indo-Persian trade (see xiii. below; Markovits, chap. 3).

Beginning in 1770, Karim Khan's government also received representatives from the independent, Muslim-ruled kingdom of Mysore in the Deccan in southern India. In addition to seeking expanded trade in the Persian Gulf through establishing a trading post on the Persian coast, the ruler of Mysore, Hyder Ali (Ḥaydar ʿAli; d. 1782), who had just concluded a successful defensive war against the EIC and its regional allies in 1767-69, also sought a formal alliance with the Zand court directed against the EIC in the Persian Gulf; neither of these objectives appears to have succeeded. Following the deaths of Karim Khan and Hyder Ali, the latter's heir to the throne Tipu Sultan (r. 1783-99) also attempted to expand Mysore's commercial base in the Persian Gulf and made abortive attempts to form an anti-British coalition with the Zand court and its successor Qajar state in Persia, along with other regional

powers and France, as he militarily clashed with British forces in India before being finally defeated and killed in battle (see also Habib, 1999, passim; Perry, 1979, pp. 270-71; Bayly, pp. 95-97).

PERSIAN EMIGRATION TO INDIA IN THE 18TH CENTURY

In this period, as in the past, the Indian subcontinent served as a place of refuge for Iranians, many of whom were now fleeing the onslaught of the Afghan invasion and harassment by Persian authorities. The subcontinent also served as a destination for impoverished Iranians seeking livelihood elsewhere. There were also those fleeing religious persecution and intolerance in Persia and the educated and skilled individuals who, since the early days of the Mughal empire, had continually sought lucrative professions and administrative positions in India and elsewhere, as had the likes of Saʿādat Khan Bahādor Borhān-al-Molk (formerly Mir Moḥammad Amin b. Sayyed of Nišāpur), who had arrived in the Mughal empire earlier in the century. Rising up the administrative ranks in the Mughal province of Awadh (Oudh) and supporting Muhammad Shah's claim to the imperial throne, he was appointed governor of Awadh before Nāder's invasion. Initially siding with the Mughal emperor in resisting the Persian invader in 1739, he went on to found his own "nawwāb wazirs" dynastic rule in the province shortly before his suicide in 1739. Others included the prominent Shiʿi scholar and poet Shaikh Moḥammad ʿAli Ḥazin Gilāni (q.v.) from Isfahan, who joined the service of the Hindu raja of Benares after leaving Persia in 1734 consequent to falling out of favor with Nāder Shah's governor of Lār (Cole, 1988, p. 51).

While Persia's non-Muslim minorities were not the primary target of the Sunnite Afghans' wrath during the period of the Afghan occupation (1722-29), they fared no better economically and in terms of overall security than their Shiʿite Muslim counterparts, who felt the brunt of Afghan sectarian religious persecution. In fact, the Jewish communities in Persia seem to have suffered greater prejudice under the military rule of Nāder Shah who, even while serving his Safavid patron (and all along attempting to overcome Shiʿite-Sunnite discord), confronted them with the choice of remitting increasingly exorbitant religious poll taxes (*jezya*) or conversion to Islam, notwithstanding occasional acts of tolerance towards some Jewish communities (Levy, parts 7 and 8; Moreen, 2002, pp. 70-71; 1990, pp. 13, 15, 16-17). Faced with such persecution, as well as the general economic hardship in Persia during these years, some Jews opted for emigration to the Indian subcontinent, where, together with Jews from the Ottoman empire and Afghanistan, they came to be

designated as “Baghdadi” Jews (Roland, p.16).

Fleeing Nāder’s onerous taxation and the general insecurity, some Armenian merchants left Persia for Mughal commercial centers such as Madras, Bombay, and Surat. In the Safavid era Armenian merchants from Persia and the diaspora communities in various parts of Europe and Asia had played a central role in long-distance trade between Europe and Persia, South Asia, and East Asia. Despite signs of decline in this trade nexus prior to the Afghan takeover of Safavid Persia, mainly due to increased religious intolerance in the late Safavid period and the rising competition of European commercial companies in Eurasia and Asia, it was the post-1722 political crises and general climate of insecurity in Persia that led to the diminished role of Iranian Armenians in trade with the outside world. Some Armenian traders now joined the service of their rival European companies in Persia, such as the EIC, while many others simply left the country. Among Armenian merchants from Persia emigrating to the Indian subcontinent in the 18th century was Edward Raphael of New Jolfā, who converted to Catholicism and settled in Madras, where in 1788 “he founded the first joint-stock bank in southern India,” the Carnatic Bank (Curtin, chap. 9)—with the introduction of modern banking in Persia itself only occurring in the latter decades of the 19th century (see BĀNKDĀRI). In the latter part of the 18th century, Armenians from Persia settling in Madras published the first Armenian-language periodicals, beginning with the Rev. Arratoon Shumavon’s (Harutiun Shmavonian) Azdarar (Intelligencer) in 1794 (Seth, 1937b; idem, 1937a, pp. 27-28, 160-61; Bournoutian, pp. 47-49). Among other minority groups opting for emigration to the subcontinent in light of recent conditions and the overall religious intolerance were members of the Zoroastrian community, who frequently relocated to cities such as Surat and Bombay, where their Parsi co-religionists were establishing enterprising commercial communities (see also Eršād, passim). Improved security, greater religious tolerance, and the more conducive economic conditions during Karim Khan’s reign led to the return of some members of the émigré groups to Persia (Perry, 1979, pp. 237-40).

CULTURAL CONTACT IN THE 18TH CENTURY

Despite the turbulent political developments in both Persia and the Mughal empire in the first half of the 18th century, the period was nevertheless marked by continued cross-cultural transmission, dating back to ancient times. Shiʿite scholars from Persia continued to settle in northern provinces of the Mughal empire under the patronage of local Shiʿite strongmen (see Cole,

1988). Persian would remain the language of official transactions in much of the Indian subcontinent until 1835, even after the establishment of British suzerainty in the late 18th century, as well as the literary medium. Indian literati (Muslim, Hindu, and others) continued to contribute to the development of Persian poetry (*sabk-e hendi*), which emerged during the period of the 10th-13th centuries (see xiv. below), and the Persian-language dissemination of knowledge in general, including translations of European scientific and intellectual thought which were then transmitted to Persia (see also Browne, 1978, passim; Tavakoli-Targhi, pp. 11-13). Many Iranian artists, poets, literati, and scientists continued to find lucrative employment in the Mughal empire and in other parts of the subcontinent. This Persian and Indian Persophone culture would also serve as the bedrock of knowledge for the early generation of European orientalists (ibid., chap. 2).

Among many other cultural and artistic crosscurrents, such as the continued influence of Persian styles in Mughal painting (see xvi. below), were the 18th-century developments in north Indian music (see xxvi. below). Just as Indian musical forms and instruments had in the past influenced the development of Persian music, the evolution of Hindustani music in the northern Indian subcontinent, as opposed to the Karnatic (Carnatic) music of the south, continued to be influenced by Persian music, particularly the Khayal, Sarod, Qavali, and Ghazal melodic Urdu poetry singing styles in the 18th century with the royal patronage of Muhammad Shah.

At the end of the 18th century, with the rapid consolidation of British leverage in the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf, the emergence of a new Qajar dynasty in Persia, the shifting European balance of power throughout the region, and Persia's growing importance as a buf-fer state between British India and Russia, among numerous other developments, Indo-Persian relations underwent fundamental transformations. By the time of the founding of the Qajar dynasty in Persia in 1796, Indo-Persian diplomatic relations was increasingly passing into the control of the EIC and the British government. At the same time, the reciprocal Indo-Iranian cultural and intellectual cross-influences were increasingly giving way a more one-way flow of cultural and intellectual influences from British India to Persia.

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