Adab as Ethics of Literary Form and Social Conduct: Reading the *Gulistān* in Late Mughal India

Mana Kia[1]

Abstract: This essay examines the role and meaning of Shaykh Mushrif al-Dīn "Sa'dī" Shīrāzī's *Gulistān* in late Mughal India. As the prose primer for a Persian education, the *Gulistān* encompassed the double meaning of *adab*, as exemplar both of literary form and of proper conduct. I explore instances in which the original text is cited in the work of Sirāj al-Din 'Ali Khān Ārzū (1689-1756 CE), a scholar and poet, who also wrote a commentary on the text. I then explore the larger context of Ārzū's life and work in the context of mid-eighteenth-century Delhi, to situate the stakes of social and literary *adab* in a time of political fragmentation and social upheaval. Patronized by high-ranking Mughal officials, Ārzū was engaged in a larger project of recouping the cultural prestige of the imperial capital as political power devolved to regional centers in the face of factional politics and external invasion. Such an analysis seeks to historicize particular readings of classical texts of Persianate education.

In addition to training several generations of scholars in a number of languages, Wheeler Thackston's numerous translations of Persian and Turkish texts from all over the Islamicate world have made them accessible to readers without language training. These translations are in pithy, precise English that is contemporary, yet captures the tone and tenor of the original. Among his recent efforts is an English translation of the most important prose work in the Persian language, Shaykh Mushrif al-Dīn Muṣliḥ Sa'dī Shīrāzī's *Gulistān*, presented alongside an easy to read typeset of the Persian original.[2] While it is widely accepted that for centuries Shaykh Mushrif al-Dīn Muṣliḥ Sa'dī Shīrāzī's *Gulistān* was the most commonly read Persian prose work, we still know little about how historically it was read and understood. This is a critical undertaking if we are to understand what it meant culturally and socially that individuals across political, regional, and parochial boundaries received a similar basic education.

Thackston himself notes that "[a]lmost from the time it was written it was the first book studied by school children throughout the entire Persian-speaking and –reading world from

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2 Sa'dī Shirazi, *The Gulistan (Rose Garden) of Sa'di: Bilingual English and Persian Edition with Vocabulary*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Bethesda: Ibex Publishers, 2008). All further quotations of the *Gulistān* are from this edition.

Constantinople to Bengal and from Central Asia to East Africa."[3] As the prose primer for a Persianate education, the *Gulistān* was the paramount example of *adab* as literary form.[4] The topics of the chapters, the modular form of its *ḥikāyāt* or exempla[5] and individual verses were disseminated widely in other genres and orally into the social transactions of everyday speech. The text itself is also interwoven with the already existing body of Perso-Islamicate literary and historical texts, making references to pre-Islamic Persian kings, pre-Islamic Qur'anic figures, early Islamic leaders and luminaries, as well as famous literary figures such as Laylī and Majnūn.

Perhaps even more importantly, the *Gulistān* was an exemplar of social *adab*; it was both reflective of Persianate cultural sensibilities and instrumental in their transmission. Social *adab* was not just proper social conduct, but also the attitudes and sensibilities behind these idealized forms of behavior. Together, *adab* and *akhlāq* can be considered as ethics, distinguished according to the two subsets of the English definition. *Akhlāq* was moral quality and its literature can be characterized as "a systematic inquiry into the universal nature and necessity of morality." *Adab* was proper form or conduct and its literature illustrates "the variety of moral principles that help define cultures and individual behavior." Both of these types of literature aimed to "cultivate virtue in human beings" and taken together they are the ethical sensibilities and behaviors that in large part defined Persianate culture.[6] The *adab*/*akhlāq* complex consisted of two indivisible parts of a whole. *Adab* was specifically a kind of proper conduct that was virtuous because it was part of an individual's moral cultivation. Thus those who were in possession of virtuous moral qualities (*akhlāq*) were also refined in conduct (*adab*). The specific connotative structure of these qualities and their manifestation in conduct were Persianate, a particular moral imagination according to which the social was made intelligible.

Just as *adab* and *akhlāq* were interlinked through their shared stake in moral virtue, *adab* itself had dual valences, the literary and the social, which have been described as "both polite learning and its uses: the improvement of one's understanding by instruction and experience… results in civility and becomes a means of achieving social goals." The *adīb* was an individual with "a knowledge of history, poetry, ideas, proverbs, parallels, precedents and the correct and pleasing use of language," which was "the social and intellectual currency of the elite and of those who aspire[d] to be a part of it." In early modern India, its acquisition was significant socially and politically for both men of learning and men of power, who were sometimes one and the same, as something to

3 Wheeler M. Thackston, "Translator's Preface," in *The Gulistan,* iv.

4 William Hanaway notes that during the *bāzgasht-i adabi* (neoclassical period), "[u]nlike poetry, only one model was held up by nineteenth-century prose writers as the ideal of eloquent writing, and this was Saʿdī's *Golestān*" ("Bāzgasht-i adabī"). Hamid Dabashi's recent work on *adab* as Persian literary humanism begins with the Gulistān as a prime locus (*The World of Persian Literary Humanism*, 2-5).

5 Merriam-Webster defines an "exemplum" (singular of "exempla") as "an anecdote or short narrative used to point a moral or sustain an argument." Accessed 9/26/2012, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exempla. Yavari also refers to the *ḥikāyāt* as "moral exempla" ("Mirror for Princes," 48). For an illuminating study of exempla in the medieval English context, see Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority and Power*. I thank Manan Ahmed for bringing this parallel to my attention.

6 GhaneaBassiri, "Ethics," 241.

produce, practice, or patronize. In the broader context of Islamicate societies, men of learning saw "themselves as architects of civilization and guarantors of its survival in the teeth of political upheavals."[7]

This is certainly the case for Sa'dī's work, given that he lived through the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century.[8] "The expansion and consolidation of Mongol power was marked by the destruction of old centers of culture and civilization, the upheaval of established political institutions, and the mass migration of populations." Born in 1209-10 CE in Shiraz, Sa'dī traveled extensively through the western Islamicate world before returning around 1257 to Shiraz (where he was laid to rest in 1291) with an already lustrous literary reputation. During this time, the Salghurid Atabegs, whose dynastic name was Sa'd, ruled the city. Sa'dī's pen name was therefore a declaration of loyalty to the ruling family of his homeland, an indication of how affiliations with place and political rule were mutually constitutive of poetic persona.[9] Within a year of his return, he presented the *Būstān* to the Salghurid ruler, Abū Bakr ibn Sa'd, and the *Gulistān*, its prose counterpart, the year after, in an effort to reestablish ties with the court after his long absence. This was 1258, the same year Genghis Khan's grandson, Hulagu Khan, tore through central and west Asia, sacked Baghdad, and ended the Caliphate. The *Gulistān*'s prologue locates it firmly within its time, with Sa'dī beseeching God to protect Shiraz and its sultan against the ravages of the Mongol invasion, which seemed like the end of the world as he knew it.[10]

If such traumatic events were the context in which the *Gulistān* was written, how was it read centuries later, in another time marked by invasions and disintegration? This essay explores the question of what it meant to read what was understood to be a text of timeless wisdom at a particular historical moment by focusing on the social and literary use of the text by Sirāj al-Dīn 'Alī Khān "Ārzū" (1689-56), a scholar and poet in eighteenth-century Mughal Delhi, who faced the cataclysmic prospect of a rapidly disintegrating empire. What follows is a discussion of the *Gulistān*'s place in the often thorny and muddled discussions around ethical literature, and of the particular role of its most prominent feature, the *ḥikāyat*, or exemplum. After outlining the *Gulistān*'s role in early modern Persianate education, I examine instances of its use in late-Mughal *taẕkirah*s (biographical commemorative texts), followed by a consideration of the politics of social *adab* at the court of the Mughal emperors Muḥammad Shah (r. 1719-48) and Aḥmad Shah (r. 1748-54).

7 Bray, "Adab," 13. For other discussions of *adab*, see Loewen, "Proper Conduct (*Adab*) is Everything;" Metcalf, introduction to *Moral Conduct and Authority*; Richards, "Norms of Comportment;" and O'Hanlon, "Manliness and Imperial Service."

8 For more on the Mongols, see May, *The Mongol Conquest*; Krawulsky, *The Mongol Ilkhans*; and Morgan, *The Mongols*.

9 Losensky, "Sa'dī." There is surprisingly little written about Sa'di in English. In addition to Losensky's succinct entry, see Southgate, "Love and Sex in the works of Sa'di"; Katouzian, *Sa'di,* which is a revised and condensed version of *Sa'dī: Shā'ir-i 'Ishq va Zindagī* (Tehran: Nashr-i Markaz, 2006). By contrast, the secondary literature in Persian on Sa'di is vast. For example see, Danishpazhuh, *Jāygāh-i Naṣr-i Shīrāz va Fārs*; Zarrīnkūb, *Hadīṯ-i Khvush-i Sa'di*; Kamālī Sarvistānī, *Sa'dī shināsī*; and Āẕar, *Būstān va Gulistān*. For a recent translation of some of this Persian scholarship, see Dashti, *The Realm of Sa'di*.

10 Sa'di, *Gulistān*, 4.

I argue that the *Gulistān* was deployed in discussions about the most pressing moral concern of the time, the ethics of loyalty, or its perceived lack.

The Garden of Ethics and Early Modern Persianate Education

Texts that became exemplars of the two faces of *adab* were sources of emulation, both for idealized sensibilities manifested as proper conduct, and for composition. Up through the late nineteenth century the *Gulistān* also inspired a number of self-declared imitators, like ʻAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's *Bahāristān*, though they are not as close to the original as later retellings of Niẓāmī's *maṯnavī*s.[11] The spirit of these later works is the same: to educate in social *adab*, according to whichever topics the author saw to constitute such proficiency; and to demonstrate literary *adab*, to express such ideas in pleasing and elegant language. But while narrative epics like Nizami's *maṯnavī*s were retold, the *Gulistān*'s imitations were written complementarily. That the *Gulistān* spurred so many commentaries is telling of the continued importance of the original.[12] The *Gulistān* and its imitations are also composed almost entirely of *ḥikāyāt* (plural of *ḥikāyat*), or short vignettes, designed to impart a moral point.[13]

There is a wider body of texts that concern themselves with ethical topics and that make prominent use of *ḥikāyāt* in doing so. These range from the *Qābūsnāmah*, the *Siyāsatnāmah*, and *Nasīḥat al-Mulūk*, to the numerous *akhlāqī* texts of the medieval and early modern periods. The same project of instructing moral sensibilities and their attendant ethical behaviors through the use of *ḥikāyāt* creates a generic relationship between these texts. Instead of being studied together, the presence of *ḥikāyāt* has often been the basis for dismissal by modern scholars, who see them as desultory and detracting from the "proper" work of a more straightforward philosophical discussion.[14] The presence of *ḥikāyāt* becomes a qualifier for the mirror for princes genre, though most scholarship on this genre tends to exclude the *Gulistān,* and read *ḥikāyāt* as a kind of window onto contemporaneous society.[15] This expectation – that ethical literature be undertaken in a more elevated tone

11 One of the most famous nineteenth-century imitations is by Ḥabībullāh "Qa'āni" Shīrāzī's *Kitāb-i Parīshīn*. This was published in India as *Gulistān-i Ḥakim Qa'ānī* (1872; repr., Kanpur: Naval Kishor, 1897). Hanaway notes that besides Qa'ānī, there were at least six other imitations produced over the course of the nineteenth century ("Bazgasht-i Adabi"). One such imitation was *Kitāb-i Riżvān* by Āqā Khān Kirmānī, presumably before he decided that all Persian literature was worthless (Bayat Philipp, "Mirzā Āqā Khān Kirmānī," 55). The *Bahāristān* explicitly professes to imitate Saʻdī's *Gulistān*, has the same number of chapters, but differs in its topics. See Gardner, "Constructions of Gender and Sexuality in the Bahārestān," and Wickens, "Baharestan."

12 I thank Sunil Sharma for bringing this distinction to my attention.

13 Shaked and Safa, "Andarz: ii. Andarz Literature in New Persian."

14 G. M. Wickens is typical in this regard. He calls the *Bahāristān* "an inadequate indication of his [Jami's] characteristic skill and periodic profundity" ("Baharestan"). Wickens is even more disparaging of Davvānī's *Akhlāq-i Jalālī* and Kāshifī's *Akhlāq-i Muḥsinī* ("Akhlaq-e Jalali" and "Akhlaq-e Mohseni").

15 See for instance Lambton, "Islamic Mirrors for Princes," 419-20. She explicitly draws a distinction between philosophers and their ethical texts and administrators and their mirrors texts. As my discussion below shows, there is no indication that early modern readers themselves drew such a distinction.

using a directly expository style – assumes that it is meant to be part of a high intellectual corpus for a court-centered elite. But some authors, Sa'dī included, wrote in a self-consciously pedagogical way, sometimes explicitly addressing young people, or a wider swath of the reading public than the intellectual elite. This confusion about the proper bounds of ethical literature is compounded by the confusing array of scholarly descriptors by which these texts are known: as *adab*, *akhlāq*, or *andarz/naṣīḥat* (advice) literature,[16] or else as *Fürstenspiegel* (mirror for princes). This last genre has recently been characterized as "a particular genre of prose composition in which those in authority are invited to reflect on the nature of efficient and ethical rule," especially in light of individual behavior. Such a purpose, the ethico-didactic, and a generic feature, the *ḥikāyat,* draw together mirrors, advice, and *akhlāqī* texts into a recognizable general category of related literature.[17]

Actual accounts of early modern education in India outside of formal madrasa curriculums are rare.[18] Few biographical and autobiographical accounts are explicit about its most basic aspects, largely because their content was considered self-evident. When explicitly mentioned, they are often specialized or particularly difficult texts meant to show the specific nature of an individual's learning, rather than their grasp of what was considered part of a basic education that all their readers would have shared. Thus when 'Alī Qulī Khān "Vālih" Dāghistānī (1712-56) writes about his education, he describes entering primary school (*maktab*) at the age of five, and by the age of nine after "having just finished the study of the Quran, [he] was studying Persian books [*kutub-i fārsī*]."[19] Though Alam and Subrahmanyam locate scribes (*munshī*s) in a realm of "the realities of politics," away from *adab* as a form of comportment of the "aristocrat," Rajeev Kinra has shown that Persianate ethics brought together literary competence, social comportment, and ideal masculinity as a basis for the seventeenth-century *munshī*'s self-definition and self-cultivation.[20] This ethical training was central to the functioning of Persianate society as a whole, "not just for professional training of *munshī*s, but also for the politico-moral regulation of royalty, ministers, nobles and elites generally."[21] And it began with the earliest texts an individual encountered in their education.

In his *Chahār Chaman*, Chandar Bhān "Brahman" (d. 1662-63), Shahjahān's (r. 1628-58) *mīr munshī* (chief secretary), outlines a curriculum for his son which begins with Sa'dī's *Gulistān* and *Būstān* because they can "open up language in an auspicious way."[22]

16 Shaked, "Andarz: i. Andarz and Andarz Literature in Pre-Islamic Iran." He defines *andarz* literature as containing "injunctions for proper behavior."

17 The most obvious exception is Nasir al-Din Tusi's *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī,* which is written as a straightforward philosophical treatise devoid of stories. This style of discourse is rooted in its textual genealogy; it is a Persian reworking of Ibn Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, an Arabic interpretive translations of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. By contrast, the *ḥikāyāt*-based texts were rooted in the linked pre-Islamic literary traditions of Persian *andarz* or Sanskrit, as seen in the *Pañcatantra*.

18 See Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*.

19 Vālih, *Riyāż*, 4:2536.

20 Alam and Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," 185.

21 Kinra, "Master and Munshi," 530.

22 Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Making of a Munshi," 188. For the original see Brahmin, *Chahār Chaman*, 176. The curriculum is given in a letter Chandar Bhān wrote to his son in the form of a *naṣīḥatnāmah* within the *Chahār Chaman*, a memoir-cum-administrative manual.

He groups the *Gulistān* and *Būstān* with the formal philosophical *Akhlāq-i Naṣirī* and the increasingly more *ḥikāyat*-based *Akhlāq-i Jalālī* and *Akhlāq-i Muḥsinī* as the texts that "form the capital of one's opportunities through the acquisition of the happiness of knowledge [*sa'ādat-i 'ilm*]. They are among the foundations of necessary moral refinement [*tahẕīb-i akhlāq*]."[23] Once again the attainment of literary *adab* is indistinguishable from the acquisition of social *adab*. Similarly, in his autobiography, Nek Rāi, a later-seventeenth-century *munshī*, describes Sa'dī's work as among the first books he was given to read, after two years of learning the basic mechanics of reading and writing.[24] He studied these texts, along with other ethico-didactic texts like the *Tūtīnāmah* and *Iskandarnāmah*, all before he was fourteen years old.[25] As a primary, rather than juvenile text of instruction, the *Gulistān* was relevant and read well past childhood. In a seventeenth-century *Mīrzānāmah* the author, Mīrzā Kāmrān, lists ten stipulations that distinguish a *mīrzā* (learned gentleman). The third is that he must have mastered Sa'dī's *Gulistān* and *Būstān* before the age of thirty.[26] This trend continued as William Jones's advice to translate the *Gulistān* resulted in its use as a primer for the study of Persian at the East India Company's Fort William College in Calcutta.[27]

Mastery required understanding and thus aids to this endeavor were in the forms of commentaries written by the learned across the early modern Persianate world, in Persian, Ottoman Turkish and, Arabic. One such Persian commentary was written by Sirāj al-Dīn Khān Ārzū in the early eighteenth century.[28] The commentary concerns itself with elucidating the meaning of a Persian text written nearly five hundred years earlier in Shiraz, thus creating a spatial and temporal distance of idiom. Clarifying the meaning of obscure words, unfamiliar Persian and Arab proverbs and verses, and reconciling manuscript variations, the commentary contains features reminiscent of modern scholarship.[29] This should be no surprise given that among other things Ārzū is known as the first person to propose the linguistic kinship between Persian and Sanskrit.[30] The commentary also displays features of the lexicographical tradition in Persian, which overtly acknowledged and reflected the fact that Persian had always been regionally and temporally specific, even within what were considered Iranian lands.[31]

That the *Gulistān* was read in the eighteenth century as primary level text is evinced by Ārzū's description of his commentary in *Majma' al-Nafā'is* (1750-51), the poetic *taẕkirah* he wrote toward the end of his life. It is listed with his other written works, grouped with

23 Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Making of a Munshi," 188. For the original see Brahmin, *Chahar Chaman*, 175.
24 Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Making of a Munshi," 195.
25 Ibid., 196.
26 Mirza Kamran, "Mirzanamah," 9.
27 Lewis, "Golestān-e Sa'di."
28 Ibid. Ārzū himself mentions Mīr Nūrullah Aḥrāri, Mullā Sa'd Tattavī, and "others" (*Khiyābān-i Gulistān*, 2). Also see note 40.
29 Ārzū, *Khiyābān-i Gulistān*, 2.
30 Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 23-31.
31 Kinra, "This Noble Science." For more on Ārzū's overarching scholarly project, see Keshavmurthy, "The Local Universality of Poetic Pleasure," and Dudney, "A Desire for Meaning."

his other commentaries (one of the *Iskandarnāmah* and the other of 'Urfī's *qaṣīdah*s). It is called an "explanation of the *Gulistān*, which was written in the seasons of my youth [*awvān-i ṭiflī*], named *Khiyābān* (Path), close to three thousand lines."[32] In the preface of the *Khiyābān* itself Ārzū notes that he had written the commentary thirty years before and the manuscript had "remained secreted away in the vault of forgetfulness [*bar ṭāq-i nisiyān māndah*] because of the privations of the time and constant itinerancy," of his life before AH 1132/1719-20 CE, when he settled in Delhi. As a result, "the dust of age was strewn on its pages until, in these days, it came once again under [my] scrutiny and its defects [have been] excised to the degree possible." A work of the young Ārzū, it was revised by a more mature, established Ārzū, who explains why he circulated it:

> The learned [*fużalā'*] among the powerful and the most high among the 'ulamā', like [our] most learned contemporaries, having the mementos of the ancients like Mīr Nūr Allāh Aḥrārī, Mullā Sa'd Tattavī and others, have had commentaries on this book. But because of the carelessness and indulgence [*tasāmuḥī va tasāhulī*] that has occurred in some places, [which] has resulted in ignorance and foolishness, such that among old and young the hand of confusion [*ikhtilāṭ*] has not lifted from the waist of connection [*irtibāṭ*].[33]

Ārzū frames the *Khiyābān* as a learning aid meant for those beyond the elite, who have knowledge of and access to other commentaries. In this view, a commentary can dispel confusion surrounding the text, bringing about a proliferation of virtue, or *fażl,* a word that associates learning and virtue, to remedy the spread of ignorance and foolishness.

Ārzū was one of these learned elites. His friend and contemporary, Ghulām 'Ali "Āzād" Bilgrāmī (1704-81), describes Ārzū as having "studied the usual books [*kutub-i mutadāvilah-yi darsī*] with the learned of the age by the age of twenty four," thus completing his education.[34] It was as a student that he completed the initial version of the commentary. Accordingly, after attaining this education, Ārzū "had attained merit in numerous disciplines [*funūn*]" and then entered into associations with the king's nobles (*manṣabdārān-i pādshāhī*). This quickly brought him to Shāhjahānābād (Delhi), where the start of his residence in the imperial capital coincided with the start of Muḥammad Shah's reign (1719-48). That the *Khiyābān* is listed in all major *taẕkirah*s that name his written works is evidence that the commentary was known in the decades after it was first circulated.[35] Ārzū's position at the time of revision, as a scholar, a learned companion and beneficiary of nobles, a notable participant in literary gatherings, and the teacher of many Persian and Urdu poets, facilitated its circulation well into the nineteenth century.[36]

32 Ārzū, *Majma'* 1:189. Dudney notes that start date of the text is given in a chronogram as 1707-08 CE, when Ārzū would have been roughly eighteen or nineteen years old ("A Desire for Meaning," 71n84).

33 Ārzū, *Khiyābān*, 2.

34 Āzād, *Sarv*, 227.

35 See mention of it in Āzād, *Sarv*, 228, and Khalīl, *Ṣuḥuf*, 65-66.

36 See for instance Mīr Taqī Mīr's *Nikāt al-Shu'ara'* (1752) which locates him as the third in a chain of Persian poets, after Amīr Khusraw and 'Abd al-Qādir Bīdil, and names him as teacher to many *Rīkhtah* (proto-Urdu) poets as a Delhi-centric way to frame his memorializing of eighteenth-century Urdu poets (*Nikat*, 2-4). For an admiring description of Ārzū as a participant at poetic gatherings, see Dargāh Qulī

The journalist, scholar, and historian ʻAbd al-Ḥalīm Sharar (1869-1926) recounted how his paternal uncle used travel across north India, selling lithographed Persian books from Lucknow to Rawalpindi in the late nineteenth century.[37] Among the books he sold hand over fist were copies of the *Gulistān* and *Būstān*, mentioned by name, for three or four rupees each.[38] Among the numerous editions of the *Gulistān* published in India, several editions were published in Kanpur and Lucknow, which Sharar identifies as the center of Persian book publishing, producing larger numbers of classical Persian texts.[39] Among them were Ārzū's *Khiyābān* and various other aids to reading the *Gulistān*, some which went through multiple printings up through the late nineteenth century, emphasizing the continuing importance of reading and understanding this text.[40]

Uses of the *Gulistān*: *Ḥikāyat* as Synecdoche for Moral Intervention

As ubiquitous as *ḥikāyāt* were in ethical literature, so were borrowings of and references to them in other types of literature. In the case of the *Gulistān*, a *ḥikāyat* is usually referenced through one of its verses, which acts as a synecdoche for the *ḥikāyat* as a whole, often to illustrate a moral point. Verses in a *ḥikāyat* encapsulate its overall meaning. These stories were meant to connect with a reader on more than one level; they illustrated ethico-didactic meaning, but could also work imaginatively with the more refined reader to enact moral transformation. It is through mastery of asthetics, of literary *adab*, that ethics could be realized in its fullest sense. But this was not apparent to all. Saʻdī himself anticipated criticism for the way in which he chose to deliver his moral lessons. In his epilogues he writes,

> Mostly Saʻdī's speech is entertaining and amusing, and for this reason the tongues of some shortsighted people have grown long in criticizing me, saying that to "squeeze the brain in vain and to swallow smoke from a lamp for no gain is not what intelligent people do." However, it is not hidden from the enlightened minds of *ṣāhibdil*s [literally, possessors of heart], who are primarily addressed here, that pearls of healing counsel [*durr-i mawʻiẓah-hā-yi shāfī*] have been drawn onto strings of expression, and the bitter medicine of advice [*dārū-yi talkh-i naṣīḥat*] has been

Khān, *Muraqqaʻ-i Dilhī*, 80-81.

37 For more on Sharar, see E. S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain, "A Note on Abdul Halim Sharar," in Shahrar, *Lucknow*, 17-24.

38 Shahrar, *Lucknow*, 107.

39 Sharar mentions publishers such as Naval Kishor by name (107-08). For a bibliography of Saʻdī's *Gulistān*, see Thackston, 182-89.

40 See for instance, Ārzū, *Khiyābān*, (Naval Kishor, 1876); Ghiyāṯ al-Dīn's *Bahār-i Bārān* (Lucknow: Naval Kishor, 1891 and 1906) and *Farhang-i Gulistān* (Naval Kishor, 1888), and Shaykh Valī Muḥammad Akbarābādī, *Sharḥ-i Gulistān-i Fārsī* (Lucknow: Naval Kishor, 1890). This last commentary was completed in Akbarābād (Agra) in 1753.

> mixed with the honey of wit, so that their weary natures may not be deprived of the good fortune of receptivity [*dawlat-i qabūl*].[41]

For some, the problem with the *Gulistān* would not be the wisdom it sought to impart, but the form of its expression. By understanding his literary *adab* as superfluous, as only for entertainment, these detractors marked themselves as capable of seeing only the most superficial aspect of the work. But the sensibilities of the *ṣāhibdilān* or perceptive ones, to whom the text is addressed, illuminate their perspective, allowing them to see the underlying ethico-didactic level of social *adab*.[42] These two levels of *adab* work together in the text, the honey of the literary form more effectively conveys the healing, yet bitter counsel allows for a proper grasp of ethics. In this sense, asthetics *is* ethics. The *ḥikāyat*'s "entertainment and amusement" enables this necessary counsel's greater reach, bestowing the good fortune that comes with wisdom's successful reception (*qabūl*), which, as we shall see, is a key part of the possibility of Persianate perfection.

Sa'dī's presentation of the intertwined social and literary *adab* most effectively taught through *ḥikāyāt* are echoed in other ethico-didactic texts. One such eighteenth-century text is *Fayż-i Mīr*, a collection of five *ḥikāyāt*, by Mīr Muḥammad Taqī "Mīr" (1723-1810), a famous Urdu poet, and a student and relative of Ārzū. In the opening lines, Mīr notes that "in these days, my son, Fayż 'Ali, has developed an enthusiasm for reading composition readers (*tarassul*), therefore, I have taken the brief occasion to write five stories containing many moral benefits [*favā'id*]." Mir makes the specifically beneficial nature of these morals explicit, noting that "anyone who takes these five stories to heart [*ba-dil khānad*], will largely be able to overcome difficulty or trouble."[43] Here again is an oblique reference to two levels of readers: one childlike, reading and enjoying stories while learning the basic contours of writing; and the other, who reads the stories for truly grasping them, allowing them to transform them and enable the navigation of hardships.

In eighteenth-century poetic *tazkirah*s, Sa'dī was noteworthy as the architect of the *ghazal*, the most popular poetic form in the early modern period.[44] Beyond this, his *Gulistān* was almost always mentioned as a text with esoteric properties, particularly for those who achieved a particular level of moral refinement through its mastery. For Vālih Dāghistānī, Ārzū's contemporary in Delhi, Sa'dī was a multifaceted figure, an eminent Sufi shaykh, a gifted man of letters, who spent a good portion of his life and work "occupied with the instruction of human nature [*ifādah va tarbīyat-i khulq*]."[45] Of all of his well-known written works,

41 Sa'di, *Gulistān*, 173.

42 The heart is the seat of understanding, of an empathic rather than intellectual nature. Thackston, "Translator's Preface," v.

43 Mir, *Fayż-i Mīr*, 44. For more about this text, see Naim, introduction to *Ẕikr-i Mīr*, 8-9. Naim thinks that Mīr wrote the text in the years following his flight from Delhi during the Maratha attack in August 1760.

44 Losensky, *Welcoming Fighani*. In addition to Vālih and Ārzū who identify Sa'dī as the first person to exalt the ghazal as it existed in their time, Āzād Bilgrāmī in the Deccan also shared this view (*Khizānah-yi 'Āmirah*, 248-49).

45 Vālih, *Riyāż*, 2:909.

> which are remembered on the tongues of all, is the book the *Gulistān*, that is in truth a talisman that cannot be undone except by an able hand like his [*ṭilismī ast kah juz bah sarpanjah-yi miṯl-i ū'ī gushūdah na-gardad*]. Of his eminence the Shaykh's (may his grave be blessed) final issue [*ma'āl*], the books of the *Gulistān* and the *Bustan*, are sufficient to bring forth a fortunate state [*aḥvāl-i farkhundah*]. Whomever is inclined to perception should look to my writing. Among the unusual things [*khavāriq*], of which the book of the *Gulistān* has many, is that its reader, on the condition of good fortune and insight [*bah sharṭ-i naṣīb va biṣārat*], will comprehend that it is a kind of bounty exceeding writing or speech [*ān chahgūnah fayż ast bah taḥrīr va taqrīr na-gunjad*].[46]

The *Gulistān* is a talisman that can bring good fortune through its ability to bestow a sense of perception. Like Sa'dī and Mīr's understanding of the power of the *ḥikāyāt* and its moral meaning, for Vālih, perception itself is good fortune. Those who possess this potential for perception are able to grasp intangible and indescribable deeper meaning.[47] There is an element of possibility, where the condition of perception is ambiguously attendant on both the substance of the person and his effort. A text such as the *Gulistān* is not a juvenile text because it is something that grows with the reader, even as it ideally causes the reader to grow. Similarly, in his entry on Sa'dī, Ārzū notes that "his book the *Gulistān* is a miracle of the religion of imagination (*mu'jiz-i dīn-i khiyāl*), and this cannot be known except by the person who, in perfect imitation, himself composes poetry."[48] The *Gulistān* can provide moral refinement for those refined enough to compose poetry and thus access its esoteric meaning.

To better understand this framing of the *Gulistān*'s attributes, broader depictions of Sa'dī are instructive. For Vālih, Sa'dī is the successor of two people, reflecting the mystical nature of literary perfection. Shaykh Shahāb al-Dīn Suhravardī gives Sa'dī his patched cloak (*khirqah*), authorizing him as a master of mystical knowledge. As an *adīb* of formal learning, Sa'dī's possession of "all that knowledge ['*ilm*] and the sweetness of compositional style [*shīrīn zabānī*] was a result of the felicity of companionship and the saliva of his majesty Khizr – peace be upon him," for "it is well-known that Khiżr put his celebrated saliva in the Shaykh [Sa'dī]'s mouth."[49] Ārzū is less graphic, merely noting that Sa'dī "repeatedly perceived/was acquainted [*dar yāft*] with Khiżr," before going on to note that he was a disciple of Suhravardī.[50] Neither *taẕkirah* author felt the need to gloss the significance of Khiżr, a Qur'anic figure, well known as an immortal traveler of both the world and the spiritual path.[51] Companionship with Khiżr is both testament to Sa'dī's

46 Ibid., 2:908-09.

47 Yavari has noted that "hidden meaning that is not revealed even when put into an openly authored text" is a feature of Islamicate advice literature, a perception shared by its eighteenth-century readers ("Mirror for Princes," 52-53).

48 Ārzū, *Majma'*, 2:565.

49 Vālih, *Riyāż*, 2:909.

50 Ārzū, *Majma'*, 2:565. The transference to Sa'di of poetic inspiration and wisdom by Khizr through saliva is one first told by Jami (Franke, "Drinking from the Water of Life," 119.)

51 *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "al-k̲h̲aḍir (al-k̲h̲iḍr)." For his significance in literature, see Franke,

extraordinary nature, and imbued Sa'dī with spiritual wisdom and poetic originality. The immortal Khiżr guards the water of life, and passing some of his own water onto Sa'dī gave his writing immortality as well.

Neguin Yavari has suggested that *ḥikāyāt*, as forms of advice, can provide a veil "for the expression of dissent, and innovations."[52] Thus to understand the use, dissemination, and reproduction of a *ḥikāyat* requires more than just obvious historical background, it requires a more thorough sort of context.[53] *Ḥikāyat*-based advice literature has often been a source of frustration for scholars seeking a definitive meaning, since a *ḥikāyāt* on a particular subject can seem to contradict each other within the same text. But what if these texts were not concerned with conveying a unified, singular meaning? Common features constitute advice literature's *ḥikāyāt*, such as the pairing of opposites and certain stock figures like kings, viziers, Sufis, Turks, Persians, heretics, and pagans. The universality of these pairings and tropes – like the Muslim and the infidel, the good king and bad vizier, and scheming women – in texts across time and place "argue against a direct correspondence with historical events."[54] As these stories proliferate to other texts, "every reiteration and every borrowing recreates meaning and at the same time enhances the authoritativeness of the anecdote and its message."[55] *Ḥikāyāt* could also travel another way, by means of referencing in the context of a new story. An early modern Persian could recite a verse from a text as universally known as the *Gulistān* and expect referential recognition. When verses from Sa'dī's *Gulistān* are evoked in *taẕkirah*s, they produced an effect similar to the moral *exemplum* from which they originate. But, as we shall see, from these broader universal moral meanings derived from *Gulistān ḥikāyāt*, they also produce more local meanings that resonate in their specific contexts.

There is an infamous anecdote featuring the oral use of Sa'dī's verses at the Mughal court in the seventeenth-century, one that was transmitted in the *taẕkirah* tradition through the early nineteenth century. Rajeev Kinra, on whose analysis the following discussion is based, has noted that the biography of Chandar Bhān "Brahman" (d. 1662-63) is dominated by an anecdote of heresy.[56] This anecdote first appears two decades after Brahman's death in Muḥammad Afżal "Sarkhvush"'s *Kalimāt al-Shu'ara'* (AH 1093/1682 CE). It is as follows: At court, Shahjahān asks Brahman to recite a verse and he produces the following: "Mine is a heart so acquainted with unbelief that several times / I have taken it to the Ka'ba and brought it back still a Brahman."[57] The Shah was outraged and nearly called for his execution. Afżal Khān, Brahman's patron and the chief minister of the realm, then intervened, telling the emperor, "this verse that Shaykh Sa'dī has said is appropriate to [describe] his [Brahman's] state: If Jesus' donkey should go to Mecca / when it returns it will still be an ass."[58] This clever and apposite use of Sa'dī's verse placated Shāhjahān, who

"Drinking from the Water of Life."

52 Yavari, "Polysemous texts," 329.

53 Ibid., 329-30.

54 Yavari, "Mirror for Princes," 49 and 52.

55 Ibid., 52.

56 Kinra, "Secretary-Poets in Mughal India," chapter 4.

57 "*marā dil-ast ba-kufr āshnā kah chandīn bār / ba-Ka'bah burdam-u-bāz barahman āvardam*."

58 "*khar-i 'Īsā agar ba-Makkah ravad / chun bīyād hanūz khar bāshad*." This verse is rendered identically

"smiled and became engaged in another direction" allowing Brahman to be escorted from the private audience hall (*dīvān-i khāṣ*).

Kinra goes on to detail the longest version of Sarkhvush's entry on Brahman, which continues with a famous verse that Brahman is narrated as slyly allowing to be attributed erroneously to himself. Kinra notes that some manuscripts even goes so far as to include an additional interaction between Sarkhvush and the illustrious Mīrzā 'Abd al-Qādir Bīdil (1642-1720), demonstrating the proper ethical response to literary misattribution.[59] But significant variations in manuscripts should make us wary of treating these texts as fixed in the way of modern printed works. The 1951 published edition (based on three manuscripts) has the initial anecdote about the incident in Shāhjahān's court, but then simply states that when Brahman was asked whether the famous verse was his, he replied that he might have composed it, but that he could not remember.[60] In this version there is no moralizing narrative frame, and Sarkhvush's only intervention is to note that "research has shown that it the work of another Hindu."[61] Another manuscript of *Kalāmat al-Shu'ara'* has no entry on Brahman at all.[62] When drawing conclusions about historical meaning, it is worth considering that because of the inherent variability of manuscript culture, contemporaneously circulating copies of the same text often painted different commemorative images of a person. Similarly, not all iterations of Brahman's biography in subsequent texts were the same, even when ostensibly reproducing the same material.

The core of the anecdote, Brahman's near-fatal recitation of heretical verse at Shahjahan's court, remains similar in most manuscripts of *Kalimāt al-Shu'ara'* and was transmitted to most later *taẕkirah*s, regardless of variations in other parts of his biography.[63] This is almost certainly a fallacious anecdote, with no mention of it in any contemporary sources, especially given that after Afżal Khān's death, Chandar Bhān entered Shāhjahān's service directly as his head *munshī*.[64] Kinra has argued that the anecdote's function is to enframe Brahman as a "synoptic Hindu," a prominent member of a group who is made to stand in for the whole.[65] But does this representation of Brahman as synoptic Hindu reflect a timeless Muslim disdain and mistrust of Hindus? Or a more specific bigotry according to which the rise of Hindus in the Mughal system evoked anxieties in Muslim elites?

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in Sarkhvush, Ārzū and Vālih's versions, in contrast to the slightly different wording in Thackston's edition of the *Gulistān*, though the meaning remains the same.

59 For the longest version of the entry see Sarkhvush, *Kalimāt* (2011), 53-54.

60 This 1951 edition is from three manuscripts: one dated 11 Muharram 1153 / 8 April 1740, copied by a Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥāfiẓ in Surat, and two undated and unsigned ones. Maḥvī Lakhnavī, "Editor's Introduction," ixxvi-xxxvii.

61 Sarkhvush, *Kalimāt* (1951), 36-37.

62 This manuscript, also unsigned and undated, jumps straight from 'Abd al-Qādir "Bīdil" to Mullā 'Alī Riżā Tajalī. It was part of a *majmū'ah* (collection) together with selections from *Tazkirah-yi Shu'ara'-yi Akbar Shāhī*. Houghton MS Persian 92. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

63 See for instance, Vālih, *Riyaz*, 1:412; and Ārzū, *Majma'*, 1:281. The exception to this is Kishan Chand "Ikhlāṣ"' *Hamīshah Bahār*, which omits the anecdote entirely. Kinra, "Secretary-Poets in Mughal India," 409-14.

64 Kinra, "Secretary-Poets in Mughal India," 378-89.

65 Ibid., 406.

On one level, the point of this anecdote is to remind the presumed Muslim reader that Brahman, a learned Persian though he may be, is still an infidel.[66] In doing so, it articulates anxieties haunting idealized notions of ethical conduct, such as the potential for corruption; when form and substance are incongruous, mastery of Persianate *adab* does not equal the existence of Muslim *akhlāq*. This is particularly apparent if we read the Brahman's anecdote along side the *ḥikāyat* Sa'dī's verse evokes. The verse is from the first *ḥikāyat* in chapter seven, on "The Effects of Education [*tā'aṯīr-i tarbīyat*]."

> A vizier had a stupid son. He sent him to one of the learned, saying, "Give him some education. Maybe he will become intelligent." He taught him for a long time, but it had no effect. He sent someone to the father to say, "He will not become intelligent, and he has driven me crazy."
>
> When the base is essentially [*aṣl*] receptive [*qābil*], education will have an effect.
> No one knows how to polish iron that is essentially bad.
> Don't wash a dog in the seven seas, for when it is wet it is even more polluting.
> If Jesus' donkey is taken to Mecca, when it comes back it will still be an ass.[67]

Sa'dī illustrates the view that efforts to instill intelligence through education are in some cases wasted. Without an essence that is *qābil* (receptive, worthy, or capable) of education, a person cannot learn. The third verse underscores the way in which Brahman's defiant verse can be understood by an eighteenth-century Mughal reader as an affront to Islam. By attempting to mitigate the impure nature of a dog, a believer renders it even more polluting, in spite of pure intentions. The evocation begs the parallel with a Hindu like Brahman having the capability of rendering his infidel thoughts into good Persian verse and uttering them at the court of a Muslim sovereign. The last verse, which appears in the anecdote itself, highlights the importance of the royal court as the setting for Brahman's recitation of heretical verse. In Sa'dī's verse, even the sancifying presence of Islam's holiest place cannot transform a donkey into a being capable of accepting religious faith. Its placement in the anecdote implies that the font of just power that is Shahjahan's person and inner court likewise cannot compel moral transformation, as this gross abrogation of social *adab* demonstrates. What is under attack is not Brahman's Hindu-ness per se, but its assertion in a way that that demanded submission, not defiance. To make such an assertion as the servant of the king, to his face in court, overlays the poetic trope of infidelity to Islam with infidelity to the monarch.

Ārzū provided little commentary on Sa'dī's original anecdote in the *Khiyābān*.[68] He assumed that even the unremarkable Persian speaker in eighteenth-century Hindustan would have little trouble reading the literary *adab* of this *ḥikāyat*. In his own *taẕkirah* entry

66 Ibid., 405-06.

67 Sa'di, *Gulistān*, 130.

68 He provides a definition for the word *kūdan* (stupid) from various Arabic and Persian lexicographies. He also briefly glosses the hemistich, "Don't wash a dog in the seven [*haft-gānah*] seas," explaining that "*gānah*" is a particle used for enumeration and that the seven seas correspond to with the seven climes. Ārzū, *Khiyābān*, 149.

on Brahman, Ārzū reproduced the heretical anecdote, but it is muted and overshadowed by his own scholarly interventions in the commemorative image of his subject.[69] Ārzū prefaces the anecdote with the equivocal "they say" (*gūyand*), a word he uses to distinguish what he knows from what other sources have said. His rendering of Shāhjahān's reaction to Brahman's verse has some small differences from Sarkhvush, who has Shāhjahān saying, "This ill-fated infidel is a gross apostate [*sakht murtadd*], and he must be killed."[70] Ārzū has Shāhjahān saying, "This ill-fated one is an apostate, he must be killed."[71] Ārzū softened the phrase, by dropping the word infidel (*kāfir*) and the modifier (*sakht*) that amplifies the apostasy, a term he chose to keep.[72] It is worth taking a moment to consider why Brahman would be called an apostate. Neither in the text nor in the historical record of his life is there any indication that he converted to Islam. To be apostate (*murtadd*) is to have broken a promise, to have reneged, and the only way Brahman had bound himself in the context of the court was in service to the king. In a poetic culture of double entendres, this resolute Hinduism in the face of a Persian education, where its ideal bearer was male, Muslim, and of Middle East origin, signified as apostasy only through the shadow it cast as the potential betrayal of loyalty to a Muslim monarch.[73] That political betrayal, a heresy of the social ethics of loyalty, is the central stake in this anecdote, is further underscored by Shīr Khān Lūdī's version that links Brahman with the Mughal prince Dārā Shikūh (1615-59), whose political transgressions were similarly cast in religious terms.[74]

This was the threat of the anecdote, by evoking Sa'dī's verse and its attendant *ḥikāyat*, it posed a question about the ability of non-Muslim Persians, who had so flooded the echelons of Mughal government, to remain steadfastly loyal to a self-consciously Muslim monarch. To a certain extent, the birth of this anecdote in 1682 and its repetition by later *taẕkirah* writers can be read as an expression of unease accompanying the Hindu predominance in Mughal bureaucratic and secretarial classes from the late seventeenth century, and their attendant prominence in elite urban social circles.[75] But is that all? It certainly cannot be read as an indication of their actual social realities, since from the time that this anecdote about Brahman proliferated in *taẕkirah*s, Hindus enjoyed a more prominent political place and more integrated social relations with Muslims than under

69 In the rest of the entry Ārzū sets addresses the verse that Brahman is accused of misattributing to himself, which Sarkhvush claims was composed "by some other Hindu." Subsequent *taẕkirah* writers each offer different ideas about the famous verse's origin, and Ārzū takes the opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of his learning by clarifying the verse's provenance (*Majma'* 1:281).

70 *Kalimāt* (1951), 36.

71 *Majma'* 1:281.

72 Vālih's version is even less incendiary; Shāhjahān merely refers to Brahman as a "wretch [*shaqī*]" and notes that he should be killed. The outrage is in accordance with piety (*dīn-dārī*) but the subtle alterations have flattened out the multiple layers of meaning of the earlier versions (*Riyāż*, 1:412).

73 Munis D. Faruqui discusses the ways in which Shahjahan was the first Mughal emperor to self-consciously use Islam to ground his imperial image. "Princes and Power," 270, and 275-77.

74 Kinra, "Secretary-Poets in Mughal India," 394-96. I have not explored this version of the anecdote, since both Vālih and Ārzū clearly draw on Sarkhvush's version. For more on the religious and the political in Dārā Shikūh's life and work, see Kinra, "Infantalizing Bābā Dārā."

75 Kinra, "Secretary-Poets in Mughal India," 406.

previous Muslim rule.[76] The anecdote about Brahman exceeds Hinduism in the sense that it is not about Muslim and Hindu relations in that time, or even solely about later anxieties; its relation to social and political realities is far more oblique. The particular anxiety of the disloyal Hindu was part of broader anxieties about dissolution and dissent in the context of a set of economic and social crises that decreased opportunities for everyone and strained the loyalties of many nobles, regardless of their faith.[77] Brahman's anecdote functions as a *ḥikāyat*, and here and in many other places in *taẕkirah* writing, as seen in above descriptions of the *Gulistān*, religious language is a powerful descriptive tool.[78] In the context of early modern discussions around gender transgressions, Alan Bray notes that it is all too easy to assume that descriptions are plain windows onto fears, "that these comments are historical evidence of what their authors feared rather than strictly only of what they *said* they feared." Bray instead proposes that such "expressions of fear may be the traces of strategies that were not necessarily designed to identify the ends they served."[79] Like in Bray's England, displacing criticism onto opposites, often onto deviations of normative ideal types, such as women, sexual transgressors, pagans, rebels, and heretics, is a common way of voicing warning or dissent in Persian texts.

As an exemplum, the anecdote of Brahman illustrates a point about excess, and dangers inherent to its ideals when literary and social *adab* do not line up. But is the Persianate Hindu's excess the sole object of critique here? Who is responsible for Brahman's presence at court? Who invites his verse? The trope of the heretical Hindu courtier at the inner sanctum of Muslim sovereignty draws attention to what should be there instead – the particular points to the state of the normative.[80] Brahman, as the synoptic Hindu, then, reflects and refracts a message about the normative relations of the court, between the figure of the Muslim sovereign and his learned courtiers. If Sa'dī's verse functions to make this state of affairs clear to those possessing perception, then what does the lack of transformation say about the court? It is Shāhjahān, the ostensible protector of the faith, who does not kill Brahman, becoming placated and then distracted by the witticism of his Muslim courtiers, who then spirit Brahman away. Something is not right here, but it is more than the person of Brahman himself, who is only the extremity of what is more generally wanting in the ethical ideals, and thus masculinity, of the Muslim elite.[81]

76 Alam and Subrahmanyam call the eighteenth-century "the century of the scribe in South Asian history." They focus on Hindu *munshī*s and argue that men of the pen often simultaneously inhabited the roles of scribe, historian, and politico-military actor ("Eighteenth-Century Historiography," 397-99).

77 The accompanying threat of subversion of the social or political order was often the context of evoking religious heresy in other contexts as well. See Alan Bray, *The Friend*, 183-98 and 272-77; and Yavari, "Polysemous Texts," 332, 336.

78 Yavari, "Mirror for Princes," 50. For another example, see Ārzū's entry on his primary patron, which is littered with such language (*Majma'*, 1:181-85.)

79 Bray, *The Friend*, 182. Emphasis in the original.

80 I am indebted to Yavari's reading of the topoi of women and heresy in "Polysemous Texts," 337-39.

81 O'Hanlon specifically links the ethics of imperial service and ideal masculinity, but it can be extended more broadly since in spiritual, martial, and political contexts, idealized masculinity was coeval with ideal ethics, as the presumed normative person was male. See O'Hanlon, "Manliness and Imperial Service."

Comparison with another instance in which Ārzū invokes Sa‘dī in his *taẕkirah* can put Brahman’s anecdote into perspective, also demonstrating the ways in which the *Gulistān* was understood to be a text about moral sensibilities and deployed as such. Ārzū’s blunting of Sarkhvush’s original anecdote is particularly notable in contrast to his entry on Muḥammad ‘Alī “Ḥazīn” Lāhījī (1692-1766), where he pulls no punches in casting aspersions on his subject’s abilities and reputation. In the midst of this expression of bitter enmity Ārzū invokes Sa‘dī’s verses. Such enmity was embedded in particular Delhi-based literary disputes over acceptable forms of poetic imitation and innovation. The debate had many participants, but Ārzū was one of the most prominent figures advocating new forms of innovation pioneered in Mughal domains. Ḥazīn was a leading figure on the other side, calling these poetic innovations nonsensical, and aesthetically bad poetry. Ḥazīn is reported to have snubbed Ārzū and his friends at literary gatherings, as well as verbally denigrating their poetry. Ārzū responded in writing, and his *taẕkirah* entry on Ḥazīn was his final and most devastating attack. These literary disputes and the attacks on his poetic reputation caused Ḥazīn to leave Delhi in 1748, the year of Muḥammad Shāh’s death and the Afghan Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī’s first foray into north India, and settle in Benares.[82]

The entry, which I have examined at length elsewhere, makes several rhetorical moves, all culminating in the attempt to discredit Ḥazīn as a poet.[83] Ārzū begins by undermining his claims to lofty lineage and pointing out his violations of social *adab*, before moving on to attack his piety and status as a Shaykh. In this regard he says,

> At this time, having set out for [the ports of] Bengal with the intention of performing Hajj and pilgrimage to the ‘Atabāt [Iraqi shrine cities], he returned from ‘Aẓīmābād [Patna] to Benares, which is the great place of pilgrimage of the Hindus, and settled there.
>
> I am afraid that you will not reach the Ka‘ba, O [Bedouin] Arab
> For this road that you take leads to the land of unbelief [*kufristān*][84]

This verse is Sa‘dī’s, used to underline how Ḥazīn’s intention to make pilgrimage to the central Islamic heartlands became its antithet, a journey to Benares, the city holiest to Hindus. To call his *akhlāq* as a shaykh into question required a convincing account of the ways in which Ḥazīn’s behavior violated the social *adab* of such a position. The published edition Ārzū’s *Majma‘* that I cite notes that some manuscripts render Sa‘dī’s verse unchanged, while others add the above twist, so that while it is still recognizable as Sa‘dī’s, the speaker’s location is mapped onto a Mughal geocultural landscape. The second hemistich of Sa‘dī’s original verse names the destination as “*Turkistān*,” rather than “*kufristān*,” demonstrating one of the ways in which the multiplicity of manuscript culture

82 For more on these disputes and their stakes, see Kia, “Contours of Persianate Community,” chapter 3, and Dudney, “A Desire for Meaning,” 148-215. For more on the Safavid-Mughal literary style, see Losensky, *Welcoming Fighani*. Also see Kinra, “Fresh Words for a Fresh World.” For a strong argument against using *Sabk-i Hindi* as a descriptor, see Kinra, “Make It Fresh.”

83 Kia, “Contours of Persianate Community,” 196-202.

84 Ārzū, *Majma‘*, 1:379. “*Tarsam narasī ba-Ka‘bah, ay a‘arābī /ka-īn rah kah tū mīravī ba-kufristān ast*.”

allowed texts to be locally appropriated. The intent is similar; *Turkistān* is to the northeast of Sa'dī's Shiraz, the opposite direction from Mecca. This is more than just an apt verse with which to cast Ḥazīn's relocation to Benares as sign of flawed moral substance; as a verse from the *Gulistān* it is the elcudation of Ḥazīn's state and its *ḥikāyat* of origin resonates with Ārzū's framing of Ḥazīn's controversial life in Delhi.

The *Gulistān ḥikāyat* from which Sa'dī's verse is drawn is the sixth in the chapter ,"On the Morals [*akhlāq*] of Dervishes," as follows:

> An ascetic [*zāhid*] was the guest of a king. When they sat down to eat, the ascetic ate less than was his desire, and when he rose to pray, he prayed more than was his custom – all in order that he might be thought more pious [*tā ẓann-i ṣalāḥiyat dar ḥaqq-i ū ziyādat kunad*].
>
> I fear you will not reach the Ka'ba, O [Bedouin] Arab, for the road you are traveling goes to Turkistan.
>
> When he returned home, he asked for the table to be laid so that he could partake of food. He had an insightful [*sāhib firāsat*] son, who said, "Father, didn't you eat at the Sultan's assembly?"
> "While they were watching, I didn't eat anything that would count."
> "Then make up your missed prayer," he said, "for you didn't do anything that would count."
> You who hold your virtues in the palm of your hand and keep your faults under your arm,
> What will you buy, O deluded [*maghrūr*] one, with your counterfeit [silver] coin on the day of need?[85]

In the *Khiyābān*, Ārzū offers no commentary on this *ḥikāyat*, indicating that he assumed its words and expressions would be clear to an eighteenth-century Hindustani Persian reader.[86] Thackston notes that in general, Sa'dī lends a generally disapproving cast to the figure of the *zāhid*, who is concerned with extreme forms of asceticism that renders his piety an exercise in vanity and makes him overly judgmental of others.[87] The message of this *ḥikāyat* is fairly straightforward – in the attempt to look more pious than than he actually is, the beliver deceives and ultimately degrades his moral substance, for the deceit of false piety undoes the virtue of a truly pious act. To engage in these deceptions is to be *maghrūr*, deluded or baselessly conceited. The son that calls out his father's actions is a possessor of *fīrāsat*, or one who has the ability to judge inner substance from external appearance, and here, what he finds is worthy of reproach. At another level, this chastisement is even more humiliating since it is the son instructing the father, a reversal of the normative order.

85 Sa'di, *Gulistān*, 49.
86 *Khiyābān*, 36.
87 "Translator's Preface," v.

Ārzū describes Ḥazīn as a figure similarly deserving of reproach, one who is a braggart making grand claims about his lineage, travel, and poetry.[88] He has also displayed the behavior of a coward motivated by greed and the desire for undeserved recognition. Equally reprehensible, he has insulted high and low in India, "from beggar to king," all the while accepting a huge monetary grant from Muḥammad Shāh through the intervention of the king's favorite, 'Umdat al-Mulk Amīr Khān "Anjām" (d. 1746). The source of Ārzū's outrage is the implication for his moral substance embedded in Ḥazīn's accusation of base aesthetic sensibilities, which were an important part of the stakes of the poetic dispute. But any discussion of morals also included social *adab*, here to do with politics of loyalty (and its lack) that haunted the mid-eighteenth-century Mughal capital. It is the same Amīr Khān 'Umdat al-Mulk mentioned twice in this entry who provides a connection between moralizing references to Sa'dī and the strained ethics of loyalty in the conflict riven Mughal court.

The *Adab* of Loyalty in Late Mughal Delhi

A sense of how pressures on loyalties in this period were articulated in texts, how literary *adab* was bound up with social *adab*, requires a view from several decades later. 'Alī Ibrāhīm Khān "Khalīl" Banārasi, chief judge (*qāżī*) of Benares under East India Company rule, completed his *taẕkirah*, *Ṣuḥuf-i Ibrāhīm* (1208 AH/1793-94 CE), after "the ruin of Delhi."[89] He describes Ārzū as

> one of the celebrated poets of Hindustan and one of the established masters of the learned. He did justice to all the different forms of poetry, especially the *ghazal*, and fresh compositions and lofty meanings are born of his brilliant nature. One of the possessors of genius in Muḥammad Shah's era, he is recognized for his pleasing disposition and elevated abilities. He is one to whom recourse was made in ascertaining the truth of obscure matters [*ghavāmiż*], and the ambiguities of language [*sukhan*]. He was a venerable orator and an adornment of assemblies on the battlefield of dispute [*qīl va qāl*]. As a result of his quickness of mind, he was prominent for his joviality [*shūkhī*], effortlessness [*bī-bākī*], witty repartee [*baẕlah gū'ī*] and measured humor [*laṭīfah-sanjī*]. Dear in the affections of great and small, in particular he was the intimate companion [*anīs va jalīs*] of Navvab 'Umdat al-Mulk Amir Khan and Najm al-Dawlah Mohammad Isḥāq Khān Bahadur. Through the bounty of his instruction, a group became acquainted with witty speech [*maẕāq-i sukhan*], and attained appropriate taste [*salīqah*] and cleverness of thought [*fikr-i rasā*].[90]

88 Ḥazīn claimed descent from Shaykh Zāhid, the spiritual guide of Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī (1252-1334), the progenitor of the Safavid dynasty (r. 1501-1736) of Iran. He also claimed to have composed three lost divans of poetry prior to immigrating to India. Ārzū, *Majma'*, 1:379-80. For Ḥazīn's memoir to which Ārzū refers, see Ḥazīn, *Tārīkh va Safarnāmah*.

89 Khalil, *Ṣuḥuf*, 66. For more on 'Ali Ibrāhīm Khān, see Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 81-82.

90 Khalil, *Ṣuḥuf*, 65.

Ārzū's association with 'Umdat al-Mulk is not a mistake on Khalil's part. Vālih, Ārzū's contemporary, notes that "in graceful behavior [*adā dānī*], improvised recitation [*badīhah sukhanī*], witty repartee [*baẕlah gū'ī*] and other praiseworthy qualities, the deceased Amir Khan ['Umdat al-Mulk], who was an authority [*musallam*] of the time [with respect to these qualities], took account of him [Ārzū]."[91] Vālih terms Ārzū's praiseworthy qualities (*ṣifāt-i ḥamīdah*) according to mastery of the refinements of social *adab*, the manifestation of moral substance and the courtly expression of idealized masculinity – elegance and grace in word and gesture, the proper and aesthetically pleasing physical and verbal responses. These qualities are similar to what Khalil describes, the ability to eloquently orate a position in a dispute, to extemporize verse, and to give witty and humorous rejoinder, all of which demonstrated Ārzū's refined taste and thought, and were the paired signs of virtue and learning. Among Vālih's fellow nobles, 'Umdat al-Mulk was the most sound in his mastery of these forms, and that he took Ārzū as an exemplar said a great deal about Ārzū's own abilities as an *adīb*.

By contrast, the only patrons to whom Ārzū links himself in his *taẕkirah* are Isḥāq Khān "Isḥāq" Mu'tamin al-Dawlah (d. 1740), Muḥammad Shāh's *Khān Sāmān* (Master of Household), and his son, Muḥammad Isḥāq Khān Najm al-Dawlah (d. 1750).[92] In histories written of court politics, then and now, Ārzū's first major patron, the elder Isḥāq Khān, is associated with 'Umdat al-Mulk, rising with him in rank through the ascendance of the Irani Mughal faction at court after Nādir Shāh's departure.[93] However, not only does Ārzū fail to mention himself in conjunction with 'Umdat al-Mulk, who emerged as the leader of this so-called Irani Mughal faction, but Ārzū's *Majma'* has no entry for him at all. This may at first seem surprising since 'Umdat al-Mulk was enough of a poet to have a pen name, while Ārzū included individuals who did not have pen names, who only wrote poetry insofar as was expected of a *mīrzā*, an educated gentleman.[94] But ethical substance of a particular sort, manifested in word and gesture, rather than poetic talent, was Ārzū's primary basis for inclusion, especially the honorable fulfillment of the *adab* of loyalty to the Mughal sovereign. Refined abilities, such as poetic composition, were thought to be generalized manifestations of this substance, but they could also mask an insidious threat to idealized social and political order when this refined behavior was put to immoral ends. It is tempting to blame the exclusion of 'Umdat al-Mulk on Ārzū's own personal sense of betrayal over his support for Ḥazīn, but 'Umdat al-Mulk was seen as betraying another, much more important friend. Ārzū's vitriolic entry on Ḥazīn served to shame a living rival who did not deserve his high standing as an *adīb* due his failure to demonstrate proper *adab* toward the Mughal sovereign. As a highly regarded poet, Ḥazīn could not be ignored, while 'Umdat al-Mulk Amīr Khān, as a talented imperial servant, whose high-handed behavior

91 Vālih, *Riyāż*, 1:347.

92 Ārzū, *Majma'*, 1:182 and 1:188. For more on this father and his sons, see Shāhnavāz Khan, *Ma'āṣir al-'Umarā*, 3:774-76.

93 Malik, *The Reign of Muhammad Shah*, 173, and Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, 291.

94 For instance, see Ārzū's laudatory entry on Mīrzā Muḥammad Hāshim Mu'tamid al-Mulūk 'Alavī Khān Shīrāzī, Muḥammad Shah's *ḥakīm bāshī* (chief physician) (*Majma'*, 2:1094-95).

eventually caused the Mughal emperor to have him executed at court, was excised all together.

I have argued elsewhere that *taẕkirah*s are commemorative texts of self and community, an interpretation that makes Vālih's *Riyāż* and Ārzū's *Majma*', two extensive *taẕkirah*s authored simultaneously in the same city, comprehensible as something other than redundancy.[95] Quite simply, Ārzū and Vālih were constructing different selves brought into relief through the biographical narration and signification of somewhat diverging communities. In doing so, they vied for the power of commemorative definition at a time when polities were reconfiguring, populations dispersing, and societies fraying under military and economic pressures. Ārzū's *taẕkirah* charts a genealogy of Mughal sovereignty, centered in Delhi, as the inheritor of Persian literary culture, especially after the fall of the Safavids (1722 CE). Paramount to the health and integrity of this realm, and the cultural characteristics that define it, are the proper relations of its nobles to its king. In contrast, for the Isfahani-born Vālih, the almost apocalyptic consequences of Safavid dynastic collapse resulted in his self-fashioning as a member of a translocal Persianate elite, defined as much by his lineage of service to the last Safavid rulers, as by his current service to the Mughal emperor.

The disparities in their communities are not solely because of divergent itineraries, they also held different, yet symbiotic, stations in life. Ārzū was the kind of person in elite society referred to as an *adīb*, one type of learned man whose companionship was sought after as a way for those who held worldly power to cultivate virtue. These men of wealth and position, khans such as Amīr Khān, Isḥāq Khān (Ārzū's patron), and 'Alī Qulī Khān (Vālih), in turn provided protection and patronage in the shelter of which *adīb*s could work and instruct. Ideally, all were united in reverence to the figure of the Shah, the central loyalty that ordered the intricate systems of social and political affiliations in which elites were imbricated. As the embodiment of virtue, the *adīb* in particular was suppose to stand above the fray of political conflict, but this ethical imperative was often trumped by the demands of loyalty to a patron himself particularly aligned in factional politics. In his *Riyaz*, Vālih makes no mention of either of Ārzū's patrons though the elder Isḥāq Khān wrote enough poetry to have a pen name. That both of Ārzū's patrons and Vālih were part of the so-called Irani Mughal faction should give pause to scholars who treat these ethno-factional monikers as cohesive categories of identity and loyalty.[96]

The omissions in Ārzū and Vālih's *taẕkirah*s are fault lines in community created by factional politics spilling out onto the texts of the period, but they cleave according to ethical standards of proper conduct, the *adab* of loyalty, not ethno-factional affiliations. The origin of these fault lines dates back to when the exempla of Brahman first came into circulation. Satish Chandra notes that from the late seventeenth century there was a crisis in

95 Such already constituted protonationalist ethnic designations pepper accounts of the later Mughal period. For example, see Malik, *The Reign of Muhammad Shah*, 170-76; and Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, 281-83. Chandra is far more aware of the problems of such ethnic designation (13-19).

96 Such already constituted protonationalist ethnic designations pepper accounts of the later Mughal period. For example, see Malik, *The Reign of Muhammad Shah*, 170-76; and Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, 281-83. Chandra is far more aware of the problems of such ethnic designation (13-19).

the Mughal *jāgīrdāri* (land revenue) system.[97] In theory, a *jāgīrdār* was to take the costs of administration, a fixed military contingent for the king, and his own expenses from the tax revenue of an administrative unit of land (a *jāgīr*).[98] 'Ālamgīr's (r. 1658-1707) conquests of the Deccan precipitated a sharp decline in the availability of viable *jāgīr*s. The empire suffered from the effects of overreach, where revenues were not able to sustain the costs of administration, imperial wars, and support of the ruling class according to their accustomed lifestyle, resulting in heightened competition among the nobility for the shrinking *jāgīrs* and other profitable posts at court.[99] In response, the more powerful nobles "sought to create a band of devoted followers by a careful distribution of patronage." Creation of these factions "increasingly became not merely a device for the capture of supreme power but a necessity for economic survival."[100] Competition for position deadlocked political efficacy, which further exacerbated the economic condition. After attempts to reform the *jāgīrdārī* crisis early in Muḥammad Shah's reign came to nothing, nobles focused instead on carving out and administering their own smaller principalities.[101] Nādir Shāh's invasion all but dissolved the central government and solidified the rise of these regional kingdoms. After Muḥammad Shāh's death, the struggle among nobles for ultimate power shifted to a struggle over the person of the emperor, who remained the symbol of legitimate sovereignty.[102]

Chandra notes that though noble contingents were mixed between what he calls Muslim and Hindu Hindustanis, Irani and Turani Mughals, and Afghans, there was still a sense of rivalry that sometimes led to open conflict.[103] The term Mughal referred to a migrant or his descendant from West Asia (Iran) or Central Asia (Turan) who came to India and stayed. The historiography of recent decades has generally foregrounded Mughal administrative and institutional structures over previous political explanations assuming already constituted modern notions of race and ethnicity as responsible for imperial decentralization.[104] In spite of best attempts made by Chandra and others to sideline these factions as causal factors, it is impossible to ignore the fact that they are prominent in eighteenth-century chronicles. But lack of critical interrogation and historicization of textual sources has made it so that terms such as "Irani" produce the effect of modern protonationalist meanings intelligible only as foreign to India, in contrast to Hindustani Muslims and Hindus. These are nineteenth-century meanings used to narrate a colonial historiography that sought to render Mughal rulers and their nobles, which British rule was supplanting, as foreign to India.[105]

97 *Parties and Politics*, xii.
98 Ibid., 7.
99 Ibid., xii-xvi.
100 Ibid., 281.
101 Ibid., 296-97.
102 The standard account of larger north Indian politics is Barnett, *North India Between Empires.*
103 Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, 13-17.
104 Chandra, *Parties and Politics*; Alam, *The Crisis of Empire*; and Alam and Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State*.
105 Both Malik and Chandra rely on two histories written in the 1780s under East India Company patronage for ethnic accounts of factional politics in the first half of the eighteenth century without

Somewhere between a transhistorical rational self-interest and an idiosyncratic protonationalism that made loyalty to the Mughal emperor tenuous, are sensibilities of morality and honor shared by all educated Persians. There was, as we have seen, an aesthetic of word and gesture, a set of skills, which were universally valued in this society as signs of virtuous learning and moral refinement. Its purveyors were the *adīb*s, who as the beneficiaries and teachers of khans, and often as officeholders themselves, spread its sensibilities to the corridors of power. The obligations and privileges of this reciprocal relationship were articulated in the language of friendship, though this was not the private relationship between peers that the modern use of the term implies.[106] Ārzū's economic livelihood and social standing were directly dependent on his professional reputation, which derived from his performance of social *adab* as much (if not more) as the merit of his written works. In his entry on Ārzū, Vālih notes that "The nobles and grandees of the state are united in their respect for him and labor to tend [to him], and he carries on with complete willingness [*bī-i'tinā'ī*] and humility [*vārastagī*]." Ārzū's learned stature elicited care from the powerful, the required ethical behavior for men of power seeking to cultivate virtue. In return, Ārzū demonstrated the ethical conduct of the learned, offering companionship and instruction generously and humbly.

The ideal manifestation of this companionship is summed up in Khalīl's description of the elder Isḥāq Khān Mu'tamin al-Dawlah. After noting his serious disposition, his excellent progress "in some of the usual sciences [*'ulūm*]," his acquaintance with music, his precise poetry, perceptive mind, his ability to compose prose well in both Persian and Arabic, Khalil finishes this list by noting his distinction "in the sphere of sincere attachments [*'ālam-i ikhlāṣ*]." Isḥāq Khān was someone who fostered companions (*rufaqā'-parvar*) and nurtured men of excellence (*nujabā'-navāz*), he was a great patron of learned men, though significantly Khalil uses descriptive terms of solicitous friendship. Ārzū himself declares, "During twenty-some years in his service, this poor Ārzū was true in his sincere attachment and devotion [*ikhlāṣ va bandagī*]. For this reason, he observed the most perfect kindnesses [toward Ārzū]."[107] To be a devoted friend was to create relationships with men of learning whom Isḥāq Khān supported, spent time with, and learned from, an act which in its ideal form was a sign of his own nobility, signifying virtuous self-cultivation. Patronage of *adīb*s also furthered the creation and spread of knowledge at a more general level, signifying a society's virtuousness.

In Ārzū's extremely laudatory entry on the elder Isḥāq Khān, he offers an anecdote illustrative of Isḥāq Khān's even demeanor and his witty speech (*shiguftah rū'ī va laṭīfah gū'ī*).[108] 'Abd al-Bāqi Khān, one of Nādir Shāh's ministers, was jealous of the Shah's regard for Isḥāq Khān. This was the spring of 1739, when Nādir Shāh occupied Delhi after

consideration of how later concerns might have affected the constitutions of earlier historical subjects. For a fuller discussion of how origin was constituted in this period, and the meaning of the term *Mughal* in particular, see Kia, "Contours of Persianate Community," chapter 2.

106 Kia, "Contours of Persianate Community," Chapter 3, and Bray, *The Friend*.

107 Ārzū, *Majma'*, 1:182.

108 Khalīl articulates this evaluation of Ārzū's entry and reproduces the story almost verbatim (*Ṣuḥuf*, 53).

defeating the Mughal armies at Karnal. Before leaving the city, Nādir's armies were given leave to kill and pillage through the city for three days, in addition to extorting huge sums from the king and nobility.[109] Ārzū details 'Abd al-Bāqi Khān's needling statement that the people of Delhi would like to experience another massacre (in lieu of the staggering indemnities they were forced to pay), which was a grave insult uttered to an servant of the Mughal king. Isḥāq Khān's immediate response was:

> There is no one left to kill with your boastful blade
> Unless you bring the people back to life and kill them again[110]

Isḥāq Khān's ability to recall and recite such an appropriate verse at the right moment demonstrated his quick wit and elegance. Decades later, Khalīl reproduced this same anecdote and glossed it by saying "in sum, he was extremely able in the composition of meaning and ready answers [*ma'nī yāb va ḥāżer javāb*]."[111] It was these skills of articulation and wit, as well as the knowledge of the right time to speak and what to say, that were a sign of cultivation, the yield of companionship with the learned. In this case, Isḥāq Khān's reputation as a celebrated courtier defines his memory, as one who caught the admiring eye of the invading monarch and bested his minister in a contest of *adab*. He cuts a more refined and ethical figure than Nādir's aggressive, bloodsoaked minister, recouping Nādir's victory of arms against Mughal forces by prevailing on the field of moral aesthetics. Isḥāq Khān's skills serve to soften the blow to Mughal imperial honor, an act of loyalty which reflected well on the tutelage of someone like Ārzū. In contrast, Ārzū elided the figure of 'Umdat al-Mulk Amīr Khān altogether, whose accomplishments were put to shameful use.

'Umdat al-Mulk is universally described as a master of the norms of social *adab*, the example to which figures such as Isḥāq and Vālih strove to imitate in both grace and ability. Shāhnavāz Khān, a noble from Muḥammad Shāh's time, recounted later (1762) that "when the Shah's disposition became enamored of leisure and pleasure-seeking" Amīr Khān came much into favor because "his speech was a collection of elegance [*majmu'ah-yi rangīnī*]."[112] Vālih notes that he was unparalleled in his quick-witted nature (*ṭab'-i rasā*), pleasing perception (*ḥusn-i idrāk*), balanced wit (*baẕlah sanjī*), ready answers (*ḥāżir javābī*), and knowledge of elegant expressions (*adā fahmī*), as well as being accomplished in "Hindustani music," a talent much in vogue at the time.[113] Because of these abilities, the Shah favored 'Umdat al-Mulk's company, awarded him high rank and lofty title, and declared that "one moment of companionship with him is better than the world." In spite of

109 For details of Nadir's invasion and occupation, see Axworthy, *The Sword of Persia*, prologue and chapter 7. For estimates of the amount of money with which Nadir left Delhi, see Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, 290.

110 *Kasī namānd kah dīgar ba-tīgh-i nāz kushī / magar tū zindah kunī khalq rā va bāz kushī. Ārzū, Majma'*, 1:182. This is thought to be Amīr Khusraw's (c. 1254-1325) verse.

111 *Ṣuḥuf*, 53.

112 Shāhnavāz Khān, *Ma'āṣir al-'Umarā'*, 2:839-40.

113 Vālih, *Riyāż*, 1:345. For the role of Hindustani music at the Mughal court, see Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 134-36, 142-44, 156-59.

this mastery, accounts of his involvement in factional politics, arrogance toward other nobles, and his over-familiarity toward the king, lead to his execution at court, an act widely framing him as failing to show proper loyalty to the sovereign.[114]

The problem with Amīr Khān ʻUmdat al-Mulk was that in spite of his authoritative mastery of literary form and social conduct, his lack of loyalty to the king made him an ethically dubious and even disturbing figure, someone who gave lie to the correspondence between substance and form. His transgressions and then shocking murder at court on Muḥammad Shāh's orders made him an emblem of moral decay surrounding Mughal sovereignty. He is the one that the king *did* kill, the real life example of what the story of Brahman was meant to warn against. Two years later Muḥammad Shāh himself would die, just as Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī, who was Nādir Shāh's successor in eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and northwest India, began his near yearly invasions of the subcontinent. This mid-century moment heralded the deathblow to Delhi. That this was not just a lament limited to the poetic imagination is evinced by the elite migration to regional kingdoms, of which Ārzū was a part.[115] In late 1754, Ārzū went to Lucknow with with Sālār Jang, Isḥāq Khān's younger son, who along with Vālih was in the service of the new Navvāb of Awadh, Shujāʻ al-Dawlah.[116] After Ārzū's death in Jumādī II 1169 (March 1756),[117] his body was transported back to Delhi for burial at his own request.[118] This short-lived migration to Lucknow occurred just after the next disloyal and treacherous noble, ʻImād al-Mulk, blinded the next emperor, Aḥmad Shāh. Hard on the heels of Afghan depredations across northwest India and the resurgence of Maratha power from the Deccan, came the battles with the East India Company, which by 1767 left the English joint stock company in charge of a land army and the *dīvānī* (tax collection) rights to Bengal, one of the richest provinces in India. It was as a servant and friend of Warren Hastings, the Governor-General of the East India Company based in Calcutta, that Khalīl Banāresi wrote his *taẕkirah*, a different context of production from Delhi in Muḥammad Shah's time.

114 Vālih merely says that the Shah's love turned to enmity, while Shāhnavāz Khan is more explicit about ʻUmdat al-Mulk's disrespectful behavior (*Maʼāṯir al-ʻUmarāʼ*, 2:840-41).

115 See for instance, Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Of Princes and Poets in Eighteenth-Century Lucknow."

116 Ḥakīm notes that Ārzū's migration occurred after Ṣafdār Jang's death, which was 5 October 1754. Ḥakīm, *Mardum Dīdah*, 57.

117 Āzād, *Sarv*, 230-31.

118 Khalīl, *Ṣuḥuf*, 66.

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Wheeler Thackston dancing to a medley of "Give My Regards to Broadway" and "It's a Grand Old Flag."

To Wheeler Thackston on His 70th Birthday.

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