



## 2. The nature of Persian Autobiographical writings in 17<sup>th</sup> century South Asia, with emphasis on Jahangir-Nama

**Yashasvi Verma**

Email- [yashasvi.verma.14@gmail.com](mailto:yashasvi.verma.14@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the nature of Persian autobiographical writing in seventeenth-century South Asia, with particular emphasis on the *Jahangirnama*, the memoir of Mughal emperor Jahangir. Situating the text within the broader Timurid-Mughal tradition of imperial self-narration, the study highlights how royal memoirs functioned not merely as personal records but as political instruments of legitimacy, dynastic continuity, and imperial identity.

The paper explores Jahangir's distinctive narrative style, characterized by its chronological structure, personal tone, and rich descriptive detail. Unlike earlier imperial chronicles, the *Jahangirnama* offers an intimate portrayal of the emperor's personal experiences, including his struggles with addiction, familial relationships, and reflections on governance. It also provides extensive observations on natural history, social customs, and administrative practices, revealing Jahangir's intellectual curiosity and engagement with the diverse cultural landscape of Mughal India.

Furthermore, the study analyzes the memoir as a constructed text shaped by political intent, particularly in its portrayal of succession, legitimacy, and imperial authority. It also addresses historiographical challenges such as authorial bias, issues of translation, and inconsistencies in chronology.

The paper argues that despite its limitations, the *Jahangirnama* remains an invaluable historical source, offering deep insights into Mughal kingship, court culture, and cross-cultural interactions in early modern South Asia. It ultimately demonstrates that Persian autobiographical writings were not merely reflective narratives but active tools in shaping imperial ideology and memory.

**Keywords:** Jahangirnama, Mughal Empire, Persian historiography, autobiography, imperial ideology, Timurid legacy, Jahangir, early modern South Asia, court culture, dynastic politics, Mughal memoirs, kingship

### **Introduction**

The fourth emperor of Mughal empire, Sultan Salim, who ruled under the name Nuruddin Muhammad<sup>1</sup> and the title Jahangir during the year 1569-1627, kept a personal record of his reign much as his great-grandfather Babur had done. While the Babur-nama portrays an era of empire building, the Jahangir-nama portrays a period when political control was comparatively

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<sup>1</sup> He wanted to change his name because he didn't want people to confuse him with the rulers of Anatolia (Ottoman Sultan Selim I and Selim II), and also While he was a prince he heard from the sages of India that when the time of Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar Padishah's rule was over, one named Nuruddin would succeed to the rule. Hence, he named himself Nuruddin Muhammad Jahangir [light of religion].



stable and hence time could be devoted to life's pleasures. Jahangir starts his memoirs from the year 1605, writing about his birth and accession to the throne. In 1622, Jahangir became ill and had to have his personal secretary, Mu'tamad Khan, write and continue his memoirs. This continues till 1624, after which the memoirs abruptly end. In the eighteenth century a historian named Muhammad-Hadi added a preface encompassing a brief account of Jahangir's life until his accession to the throne, as well as an extension from the point at which the memoirs end through Jahangir's death in 1627 and Shahjahan's succession the subsequent year. While reading the memoir one can easily make out the difference in tone of the memoir being written before the emperor's death and the one which was added after.

Earlier scholars failed to see the importance of Jahangir's reign and have often called him as a weak political ruler who was dominated by his wife, Nur Jahan. Recently historians have started to see him with a different vantage point, and valued his memoir for its informal nature and the detailed descriptions he provided us with. In this essay we will try to locate Jahangir and his interests with the help of his own written work, will discuss the writing style, chronology, language, purpose and the inspiration to write an autobiography in the first place, along with his personal and professional experiences and inclinations.

“Historical writing had been a regular feature at the royal courts of Jahangir's ancestors in West and South Asia”<sup>2</sup>. The Timurid tradition of imperial memoirs goes back to Timur himself as he had been deeply involved in the production of his royal court chronicles, which later proved to be influential for the Mughal dynasty<sup>3</sup>. Written in Chaghatay Turkish, the *Malfuzat-i Timuri* gave an account of his life, from his seventh year to his death, and are followed by an appendix called the *Tuzukat-i Timuri*, which records the regulations of the monarch. This literary precedent thus established the recording of events in the guise of royal memoirs. Timur's descendants continued to produce court chronicles, treating their dynastic histories as a model for rule and an assertion of their own inherited dynastic political charisma.

## I

Jahangir's great-grandfather, Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, wrote what is often described as the ‘first autobiography of the pre-modern Islamic world’, and certainly the most important and influential of the imperial histories of the Timurid-Mughals. He named it the *Vaqa'i-i Baburi* (*Baburnama*). For Jahangir's own period, in addition to his own memoir, two important accounts are the *Iqbalnama*, by the emperor's secretary Mu'tamad Khan, and the *Maasir-i Jahangiri* by Khwaja Kamgar Husaini.

In the words of Lisa Balabanlilar in her text ‘Imperial Identity in the Mughal Empire’, “Even amongst his fellow Mughals, Jahangir was remarkable for his relentless attention to dynastic

<sup>2</sup> [1] Balabanlilar, L. (2021). *The Emperor Jahangir: Power and Kingship in Mughal India*. I.B. Tauris.

<sup>3</sup> Page 10, Lefèvre, C. (2007). Recovering a Missing Voice from Mughal India: The Imperial Discourse of Jahāngīr (R. 1605–1627) in his Memoirs. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 50(4). <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852007783245034>



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lineage and the maintenance of Timurid political and cultural continuities”<sup>4</sup> She draws attention to how the use of Timur’s imperial title, ‘Sahib Qiran’, became central to Mughal identity, symbolizing divine authority. After his death, his descendants used it to assert legitimacy beyond mere ancestry. By the 1500s, even Ottoman officials acknowledged that ‘Sahib Qiran’ carried more weight than royal bloodlines. It became Timur’s posthumous regnal name, invoked to channel his legacy and reinforce the dynasty’s sacred right to rule.

When Jahangir, Babur’s great-grandson, ascended the throne in 1605, he was especially delighted by a chronogram penned by the courtier Maktub Khan. The verse hailed the new emperor as a second Sahib Qiran (Lord of the Conjunction), drawing a direct parallel to his illustrious ancestor Timur: “King of kings Jahangir, a second Timur, Seated in justice upon the throne of victory. Success, fortune, triumph and splendour encircle him, eager to serve with devotion. This marks the year of his glorious rise, when fate itself bows to the second Lord of Auspicious Conjunction.” The poetic tribute not only celebrated Jahangir’s coronation but also reinforced his claim to Timur’s legacy, framing his rule as divinely ordained and historically inevitable.

Shah Jahan, embraced Timur's title Sahib Qiran Sani, even stamped it on his coins. Even Sufi scholars recognized this Timurid legacy. Dara Shikoh's spiritual teacher wrote: "The first and second Lords of Conjunction, Timur and Shah Jahan, ruled empires. But our Dara Shikoh rules hearts<sup>5</sup>." This shows how deeply the Mughals tied their power to Timur's mythical authority. “Genealogy has always been a kingly preoccupation<sup>6</sup>”, it is therefore no surprise that the Mughals have associated themselves with illustrious ancestors as the world-conquerors Chingīz Khān and Tīmūr. Their descent from such famous figures constituted a real asset concerning their Ottoman, Safavid and Uzbek competitors and among the Turco-Mongol and Iranian elements of their nobility. For instance, Babur takes care to record in the first pages of his memoirs that his father ‘Umar Shaikh Mīrā was a great-great-grandson of Tīmūr, while his mother Qutlaq Nigār Khānum was a thirteenth-generation descendant of Chingīz Khān. Lisa Balabanlilar further explains how Jahangir was deeply committed to upholding his family’s legacy, particularly the Timurid traditions of politics and culture. In his memoirs, he often spoke of Transoxiana as his vilayet-i marusi ("hereditary lands") and mulk-i marusi ("ancestral homeland"). Halfway through his reign, he made an emotional pilgrimage to Kabul, the former capital of his ancestor Babur, which he fondly called "our home dominions" in his writings. Jahangir had another platform carved beside it, engraving his own name alongside

<sup>4</sup> Balabanlilar, L. (2015). *Imperial identity in the Mughal Empire: Memory and Dynastic Politics in Early Modern South and Central Asia*. Bloomsbury Publishing, page 45

<sup>5</sup> “While our Dara Shikoh is the Sahib Qiran of the heart (*ma sahib qiran-i dil*) Sakinat ul-Awliya, quoted in *Majma’ ul- Bahrain (The Mingling of Two Oceans)* by Prince Muhammad Dara Shikoh, M. Mahfuz-ul-Haq, trans. And ed., Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1929, reprint 1982

<sup>6</sup> Lefèvre, C. (2012). In the Name of the Fathers: Mughal Genealogical Strategies from Bābur to Shāh Jahān. *Religions of South Asia*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1558/rosa.v5i1/2.409>



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Timur's, reinforcing the dynasty's lineage. The Mughals continued maintaining Timur's mausoleum, the Gur-i Amir in Samarqand, well into the 1700s.

At the same time, the Mughals believed their Indian territories were just as much a part of their Timurid heritage<sup>7</sup>. During his 1510 campaign in India, Babur ordered his troops not to loot, citing Timur's conquest of northern India in 1398. He declared, "These lands have long been Turkic domain. We are here to govern, not to pillage" Later, he repeated, "Since we regard Turk-conquered lands as ours, there will be no oppression." a move seen as the first step toward establishing the Timurid-Mughal empire in Delhi and Agra. Presenting himself as the rightful heir to Timur, he demanded the Lodi sultans surrender regions historically ruled by Turks. To Babur, his soldiers, and later generations, India had been Timurid territory for over a century. For the last independent Timurid prince, reclaiming it was only natural<sup>8</sup>.

The Mughal fascination with Timurid ancestry continued through their final ruler, Bahadur Shah Zafar who reigned from 1837 to 1858<sup>9</sup>. His royal workshops produced an elaborate silsilanama, an illustrated genealogical record in verse form that meticulously traced the imperial lineage from Timur down to Zafar himself. What makes this document particularly intriguing are its unexpected inclusions: Afghan ruler Sher Shah who expelled Humayun from India in 1540, Persian monarch Shah Tahmasp Safavi, and even Nadir Shah who famously plundered Delhi in 1739. By incorporating these former adversaries into the royal genealogy, the Mughals may have sought to legitimize these contentious historical episodes.

The imperial seal served as the most visible embodiment of Mughal dynastic claims. The tradition began with Babur's 1521 seal, designed during his Timurid period, which connected him to Timur through five ornate border panels. Akbar later expanded this concept into his "Great Sacred Seal." These seals became such powerful political tools that during the violent 1658 succession struggle, Prince Murad Baksh temporarily inserted his name as the eleventh successor. When Aurangzeb emerged victorious, he not only removed his brother's claim but appropriated the eleventh position for himself. This practice of seal modification became standard procedure, allowing new rulers to literally erase unsuccessful claimants from the official record while reinforcing their own Timurid legitimacy. As the ultimate symbol of Mughal authority, these evolving seals manifested the dynasty's connection to its prestigious Central Asian heritage

The Timurid princely courts and their successors, are well-known for their apparent willingness to include expressions of individualism through evocations or depictions of idiosyncratic

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.. 45

<sup>8</sup> Notably, the Timurid rulers in India never called themselves "Mughals"—a Persianized term for Mongols. Though Babur's mother was a Chaghatay Mongol, he and his followers identified as Timurid Turks. In his writings, Babur stressed the legitimacy of pure Timurid descent, unlike earlier Timurids who prized their connection to Genghis Khan. For 250 years, the dynasty referred to itself as 'Silsilah-i Guregen' or 'Guregeniyya' the lineage of the son-in-law, referencing Timur's marriage to a Chingisid princess.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid..49



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personalities in the place of bare impersonal stereotypes. An example is that of the evolution of the traditional “tadhkira”<sup>10</sup>. Rejecting his father’s model of encouraging a devotee to create the record of his reign, Jahangir chose to follow the precedent of the Mughal founding father, Babur and used his personal memoir to re-invent himself and justify his ascension. Jahangir continued his great-grandfather's legacy by writing his own memoir, the Jahangirnama, establishing memoir-writing as a royal tradition. As explained by Lisa Balabanlihar in her work ‘the imperial dynasty of the Mughal empire’, both the emperor’s writing style differed drastically reflecting Babur's desperate struggles to build a kingdom versus Jahangir's comfortable reign over an established empire however, both memoirs served the same crucial political purpose. These were never private journals but carefully crafted public documents designed to legitimize their rule. Both emperors presented themselves as architects of their own destiny while ultimately grounding their authority in their Timurid heritage. Babur justified his kingship through military victories and loyal followers; Jahangir emphasized divine justice and royal grace. Yet beneath these surface differences, both narratives returned to the same fundamental source of legitimacy: their direct descent from Timur. This shared bloodline connected them to generations of ambitious Timurid princes who had staked their claims to power not through territory or wealth alone, but through the irresistible prestige of their lineage and cultivated cultural sophistication.

The memoirs thus became more than personal accounts - they were strategic tools that transformed family history into political capital, reminding readers that true sovereignty flowed through Timur's blood.

The name of the memoir is contested between historians as, some denote it as ‘Tuzuk-i Jahangiri’ meaning ‘The Regulations of Jahangir’ or a guidebook intended for his descendants, but others refer to it as the emperor himself called the memoir Iqbalnama (The Auspicious Story), or simply, and most often, Jahangirnama (The Story of Jahangir). The chronicle covers most of his reign, which moves alternately between descriptions of things and events and personal musings on items of interest. Jahangir emerges from this text as an interesting but at the same time a complex man like all other human personalities. The strengthening of Mughal power and the concomitant rise of Persian as the new language of culture and administration is evident in the fact that Jahangir unlike his great grandfather chose to write in Persian. There is no doubt that Jahangir was greatly influenced by Babur and his memoir that he himself decided to write one. There are multiple references of Babur-nama in his memoir indicating his affiliation with the text. His language is both informal and fluent and at the same time very personal in nature as, his memoir also details Jahangir’s struggles with alcoholism and drug use, with his father’s complex legacy, his own rebellious sons and disloyal courtiers, his evolving defence of his own kingship and his passionate curiosity regarding the natural world.

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<sup>10</sup> The classical Persian professional biographies of renowned poets and literati, which have been shown in the Timurid period to have begun exploring contemporary lives, rather than historical types, the authors even including themselves in their encyclopaedias



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In the words of Lisa Balabanlilar, we can read the “Jahangir-nama as a conscious and deliberate self-portrayal that is in some ways more revealing than the author likely intended”.

In the year of his accession to the throne of the Mughal Empire of India, Jahangir began to record the events of his reign and for seventeen years, Jahangir wrote in the form of a chronological diary, commencing each year with the Persian festival of Nowruz. However after his death a preface was added by Muhammad Hadi where he started the narrative with the prince’s birth, following with the palace of Fatehpur-sikri being made, rank being given to Jahangir and then his marriages with princesses of Amber and Marwar respectively, The birth of his first daughter and then son Khusraw, soon following with Prince Parvez and Khurram, Province of Ajmer given as a fief, the death of close ones, like of Parvez’s mother and later khusraw’s mother and of Jahangir’s mother. Consequent start of rebellion against his father, and the murder of Abul Fazl, and ending it with Akbar’s death.

The preface appended by Muhammad Hadi to Jahangir’s memoirs serves as a critical historiographical device, framing the emperor’s contentious actions against his son, Khusraw, within a narrative of political necessity. Hadi’s portrayal of Khusraw as "clever" (zīrak) functions as a double-edged characterization—acknowledging his intellect while subtly undermining his reliability. This rhetorical strategy becomes particularly evident in the contrasting depiction of the two brothers during the elephant incident, where Khusraw is shown exaggerating events to Akbar, while Khurram (the future Shah Jahan) emerges as a peacemaker. Such binary representations are not incidental but reflect deliberate authorial choices to shape perceptions of legitimacy and moral authority.<sup>11</sup> The death of Akbar further accentuates this constructed dichotomy. Hadi’s narrative assigns explicit blame to Raja Man Singh and his son-in-law, Azam Khan, for bolstering Khusraw’s claim to the throne, a portrayal that aligns with Jahangir’s broader efforts to discredit opposition factions and Prince Khurram not wanting to leave his grandfather’s side<sup>12</sup>. Khurram is quoted by Hadi, "As long as there is a breath of life left in my grandfather, there is no possibility of my being separated from him." This carefully curated quotation not only reinforces Khurram’s loyalty but also positions him as the rightful heir in both political and symbolic terms.

In the same manner Jahangir has given us insight into his personal life as well as about his decisions as an emperor. Apart from this we also see how Jahangir was able to forge a stronger

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<sup>11</sup> “Khusraw and a group of his chatterboxes ran to His Majesty to report with great exaggeration the audacity of His Highness's men and the wounding of the elephant keeper, making a mountain out of a mole hill. Prince Khurram went to his grandfather and reported with all shows of politeness, saying, "Shah Bhai did not consent to this audacious effrontery, and it did not take place with his knowledge. Actually, it was misreported." Jahangirnama, page 16-17

<sup>12</sup> “Around this time the tragic death of His Majesty Arsh-Ashyani occurred. Sultan Khusraw was the nephew of Raja Man Singh and the son-in-law of Khan A'zam, which two had absolute control of all administrative affairs of the empire, particularly at that time. It occurred to these two ingrates that, despite the existence of His Highness, they would raise the unworthy Khusraw to the throne and foment trouble and strife. Prince Khurram stood his ground in the midst of enemies and malevolents and refused to leave his grandfather”. Jahangirnama, page 17-18



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alliance with the Rajputs and was able to solve the issue with Mewar, as well as the Bundela rajputs to form an alliance. He gives us detailed account of the ranks and titles being given to all the officials, and the promotions he gave to some. Jahangir also describes various Hindu festivals such as Diwali, Holi<sup>13</sup>, Rakhi<sup>14</sup>, the urs festival of jammu and Kashmir<sup>15</sup> etc. and even tried to explain the complex caste system of the time. He has described Indian, flowers<sup>16</sup>, fruits<sup>17</sup> and tree's<sup>18</sup> animals<sup>19</sup>, birds<sup>20</sup>, climate, geography etc. Scientists have explored the Jahangir-nama for its observations on biology, botany, geology, ornithology, and zoology<sup>21</sup>. Jahangir's description of the breeding habits of the saras crane for instance, and the study by one of his painters of the now extinct Mauritius dodo have become part of the ornithological literature. Jahangir was also interested in scientific experiments and was very mindful about precise weights and measurements. He praises himself for the breeding techniques under him and surprisingly compares it to Shah Abbas the ruler of Persia not being able to do it

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<sup>13</sup> "On the eve of this day they light fires in all the lanes and streets. When it is daylight they spray powder on each other's heads and faces for one watch and create an amazing uproar. After that, they wash themselves, put their clothes on, and go out to gardens and fields. Since it is an established custom among the Hindus to burn their dead, the lighting of fires on the last night of the year is a metaphor for burning the old year as though it were a corpse." Ibid..147

<sup>14</sup> "During my exalted father's time the Hindu amirs and other groups celebrated Rakhi by tying on his blessed arms rubies, pearls, and flowers studded with precious gems strung on threads." Ibid..147

<sup>15</sup> "The urs is a custom observed in Hindustan. Every year on the anniversary of the death of a beloved, food, sweets, and various aromatics are arranged according to one's station and ability, and the learned, pious, and others gather. Sometimes the assembly lasts a week. On this day I sent Baba Khurram to my father's blessed tomb to hold the assembly. Two thousand rupees were given to trusted servants to distribute to the poor and needy" .ibid 147

<sup>16</sup> Wrote about Crowned Imperial Lily, Violet flower, Almond flower, peach flower, blue jasmine, white jasmine, lotus, rose, iris etc.

<sup>17</sup> A Description of Indian Fruits- Melons, mangoes, and other fruits are good in Agra and its vicinity. My particular favorite is the mango. During the reign of His Majesty Arsh-Ashyani, most fruits of the vilayat that were not in India were introduced, Jahangirnama page 24

<sup>18</sup> Few of the fruit bearing trees he mentioned are, sweet cherry, Apricot, Pear, Apple, Guava, Grape, Pomegranate, Water-melon, Mango etc.

<sup>19</sup> He has written about his favorite elephant along with some wilder animals such as, wild buffalo, the nilgai, the yak, the markhor or mountain goat as he calls it, the wild goat, wild boar, red deer, hog deer, tiger, monkey etc. Source: Khan, E. (2011). Wild mammals in mughal sources. <i>Proceedings of the Indian History Congress

<sup>20</sup> He mentioned birds like Peacock, European Cuckoo, green pigeon, indian cuckoo, lord lilford crane, stork, red crested pochard, sunbird, black robin, wood pigeon etc.

<sup>21</sup> Source: KOCH, E. (2009). Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature.



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successfully like him<sup>22</sup>. He describes the decoration works undertaken by him while also giving information regarding the gems and metal values of the time.<sup>23</sup>

He explains the castes of India as well as attaches a festival to each while describing their customs and professions followed. In his imperial memoirs, Emperor Jahangir presents a structured analysis of the Hindu caste system that reflects both his personal observations and the broader Mughal engagement with Indian social traditions. His description provides valuable insight into how early modern Islamic rulers sought to understand and document the complexities of Hindu society.

Jahangir begins by identifying the four primary castes, noting that each maintains distinct customs and practices. His characterization of Brahmins as those who "make the unqualifiable deity known"<sup>24</sup> demonstrates an attempt to interpret Hindu concepts within an Islamic framework. He carefully enumerates their six principal responsibilities, ranging from the acquisition of knowledge to the acceptance of gifts, showing particular interest in their dual role as both spiritual leaders and intellectual authorities. The text describes Kshatriyas, referred to as Chhatri or Khattri, primarily in terms of their martial function as protectors of the oppressed. Jahangir draws clear distinctions between their duties and those of the Brahmins, noting that while members of this caste study and worship, they do not take on teaching or missionary roles. This comparative approach reveals the emperor's methodological interest in social hierarchies. His treatment of Vaishyas focuses on their economic activities, including agriculture, commerce, and financial transactions such as moneylending. The inclusion of interest-based transactions is particularly noteworthy given Islamic prohibitions on usury, suggesting either careful documentation of local practice or perhaps subtle cultural commentary. Regarding Shudras, Jahangir presents them as occupying the lowest position in the social order, serving other castes while being excluded from their privileges<sup>25</sup>. While this description follows classical varna theory, the absence of any mention of subcastes or untouchable groups indicates either a deliberate simplification or the limitations of his aristocratic perspective.

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<sup>22</sup> "Until now, breeding the wild bird called tazarv [pheasant] in captivity had never been heard of. During my exalted father's time much effort was expended to produce an egg, but it never happened. I ordered several males and females kept together, and little by little they produced eggs. Everyone who heard of it was absolutely amazed and related the fact that my brother [Shah Abbas] in Persia had taken great pains, but absolutely no eggs were produced and therefore no chicks resulted". Jahangirnama, page 134

<sup>23</sup> Redecoration of the Hall of Public and Private Audience, "After completion it was reported 880 Persian maunds, had been used. It had truly acquired a different splendor and look." Ibid.. page 145

<sup>24</sup> "First is the caste of the Brahmin, which means one who makes the unqualifiable deity known. Their duties consist of six things: to acquire knowledge, to teach others, to worship fire, to guide the people to worship, to give something to the needy, and to receive gifts." Ibid..146

<sup>25</sup> "The fourth caste is the Shudra, the lowest of the Hindu castes. They serve everyone and take no part in any of the things that pertain to the other castes." Ibid..146



Jahangir-nama, while undoubtedly shaped by his royal viewpoint and Persianate cultural lens, remains an important historical source for understanding early modern cross-cultural perceptions and the complex relationship between Islamic rulers and Hindu social structures. The text establishes how Mughal emperors engaged with Indian traditions not merely as foreign observers but as rulers seeking to comprehend the societies under their governance.

### III

There are so many instances in the memoirs where the emperor has given a personal glimpse into his life, for example while describing his own struggles with addiction he also mentioned his two brothers who faced the same problem but unfortunately couldn't overcome it despite many efforts from his father. In his memoirs, Emperor Jahangir offers a remarkably candid reflection on his relationship with alcohol.

Jahangir notes the beginning of his regular drinking to a specific moment during a military campaign. He recounts: "the chief of my uncle Mirza Muhammad Hakim's gunners, said to me, 'If you drink a beaker of wine, it will relieve the exhaustion.'" He describes how he ordered a servant to fetch wine from a physician's house, receiving "a phial and a half of yellow coloured, sweet tasting wine in a small bottle." His reaction, "I drank it and liked the feeling I got" marks the start of what would become a serious addiction.

The emperor does not shy away from documenting his gradual descent into excessive drinking. "After that I started drinking wine, increasing it day by day until I no longer got a kick out of grape wine and started drinking liquor," he admits. His detailed account of consuming "twenty phials of double distilled spirits" daily, totalling "six Hindustani seers"<sup>26</sup>, highlights the severity of his addiction. The physical toll becomes evident as he describes how "my hands shook and trembled so badly I couldn't drink myself but had to have others help me."

Jahangir recalls consulting Hakim Humam, a trusted physician, "In perfect sincerity and compassion he said, with no beating around the bush, 'Highness, the way you're drinking, in another six months God forbid things will be so bad it will be beyond remedy.'<sup>27</sup>" The emperor acknowledges the impact of this blunt warning, noting that the physician's genuine concern for his wellbeing made "a great impression" on him. This moment of clarity, where Jahangir confronts the potential consequences of his actions, reveals his capacity for self reflection and change.

Jahangir neither glorifies nor condemns drinking, but presents it as a complex aspect of courtly life that could easily spiral out of control. His narrative serves multiple purposes: it humanizes the emperor by showing his struggles, provides insight into Mughal medical practices, and offers a cautionary tale about the dangers of excess. Jahangir's memoirs distinguish themselves from conventional royal chronicles by documenting these intimate details without guilt or glorification. The very act of recording these personal practices in an official memoir

<sup>26</sup> approximately one and a half Iranian maunds

<sup>27</sup> Jahangir-Nama, page 184-185



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underlines their significance, not as weaknesses to hide, but as integral threads in the fabric of kingship.

Jahangir notes with characteristic precision: "On Thursdays and Sundays I don't eat meat—Thursday because it is the day of my accession, and Sunday, my exalted father's birthday, because he venerated it greatly." These weekly abstentions were not by-chance but served as living memorials, the Thursday fast commemorating his own ascension to power, the Sunday observance honouring Akbar's legacy.

The emperor's transition to opium consumption reveals another dimension of his personal life. "After a while I substituted opium for the philonium<sup>28</sup>," he states, marking a deliberate shift in his regimen. His description becomes remarkably specific: "Now that I am forty-six years and four months old by solar reckoning, or forty-seven years and nine months by lunar reckoning, I have eight surkhs of opium after the elapse of five gharis of the day and six surkhs after the first watch of the night." This exacting routine, with dosages timed to celestial movements and watches of the night, suggests a systematized approach to consumption.

The emperor's personal writings preserve a remarkable account of the invention of what would become known as Jahangiri Attar, he begins with an expression of dynastic nostalgia: "I have the same regret with regard to jahangiri attar, that his royal nose did not smell this perfume."<sup>29</sup> Suggesting that the fragrance carried significance beyond its pleasant aroma, representing a tangible connection to imperial heritage<sup>30</sup>.

"In fragrance it is of such a degree that if one drop is rubbed on the palm it will perfume a whole room and make it seem more subtly fragrant than if many rosebuds had opened at once." His description captures both the physical properties and emotional impact of the scent, noting how "It cheers one up and restores the soul."

"As a reward for this invention I gave the inventor a pearl necklace," Jahangir records, demonstrating the Mughal tradition of rewarding innovation. The naming ceremony completed the process: "Salima Sultan Begam, God rest her soul, was present and named the oil jahangiri attar," forever linking the fragrance to imperial identity.

Jahangir's decision to include such details in his memoirs underlines how material culture and daily life formed an integral part of imperial self-representation.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid..185

<sup>29</sup> Ibid..163

<sup>30</sup> The discovery occurred during routine rose water production under the supervision of Nur Jahan Begam's mother. Jahangir describes the process: "While she was making rose water, grease formed on the utensils she was using to get the hot rose water out of the pot.", "Little by little she collected the grease, and when a lot of rose water had been made, there was a palpable amount of grease."



His memoir also describes the traditional Indian diamond mining methods during the dry season when water levels dropped<sup>31</sup>. This reveals how miners combined natural observations with practical techniques to locate and extract precious gems.<sup>32</sup>

Jahangir addresses the subject of tobacco, reflecting his concerns for public health, he states, "Because of the evil effect tobacco has on most constitutions and natures, I ordered that no one was to consume it." The emperor further strengthens his position by invoking regional solidarity, noting, "My brother Shah Abbas is aware of its deleterious effects and has ordered that in Iran no one is to smoke it."<sup>33</sup>

Another case in point is the relationship between Jahangir and his 'Lucky son' Khurram (the future Shah Jahan). Emperor Jahangir's memoirs reveal a special relationship with his son Prince Khurram that blended paternal affection with imperial favor. The emperor frequently referred to Khurram as "my lucky son," a term that showed both personal warmth and recognition of his son's capabilities. When sending Khurram to lead the Mewar campaign, Jahangir displayed fatherly pride in his preparations. "I send my lucky son Baba Khurram<sup>34</sup>," he wrote, personally selecting fine gifts for the expedition. These were not just ceremonial gifts but tangible signs of a father's and an emperor's regard towards his favourite son. The campaign's success deepened their bond. Jahangir recorded with admiration how Khurram overcame difficult terrain and harsh weather to defeat the Rana. When news of the victory arrived, the emperor's joy was visible in his immediate decision to increase Khurram's rank to match his brother Parvez, with an additional quarter as special reward<sup>35</sup>.

At the birth of Khurram's son Dara Shikoh, Jahangir himself chose the name, expressing hopes the child would bring his father continued good fortune, here too we find the wish being made for Khurram, "I named him Dara Shikoh. It is hoped that he will bring his father good fortune in this eternal state."<sup>36</sup> When Khurram presented ruby to his father, Jahangir gave his honest appraisal of the gem while still appreciating the gesture, like any father might do with a child's gift.

During Khurram's weighing ceremony we find Jahangir giving his son permission to drink wine on special occasions, quoting Avicenna's wisdom about moderation<sup>37</sup>. This fatherly

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<sup>31</sup> Experienced miners identified potential diamond sites by observing swarms of insects near specific pools, then marked the area and constructed stone walls around promising locations. This way they occasionally discovered exceptionally valuable stones worth substantial sums.

<sup>32</sup> "...When they search through the gravel that comes out, they get diamonds, large and small. Sometimes they find a diamond worth a lac of rupees", Ibid..188

<sup>33</sup> Ibid..207

<sup>34</sup> Ibid..164

<sup>35</sup> "I ordered his rank of 12000/6000 increased to match that of his brother Prince Parvez, which was 1 5000/7000, and an extra quarter added as a bonus and prize. I also gave him a personal elephant named Bijai Gaj with trappings worth twelve thousand rupees." Ibid..175

<sup>36</sup> Ibid..172

<sup>37</sup> "I said, "Baba has children, and monarchs and princes have always drunk. Today, which is your weighing ceremony, I let you drink wine and give you permission to drink on festival days, on Nawroz, and on great occasions, but you must keep to the path of moderation because drinking wine to the point



advice came with another rank increase soon Increasing rank of khurram, "I increased his rank of 15,000/8,000 to 20,000/ 1 0,000."<sup>38</sup>

The emperor's trust became most evident during the Deccan campaigns. Disappointed by Parvez's failures<sup>39</sup>, Jahangir turned to Khurram, granting him the prestigious title "Shah" and later "Shah Jahan."<sup>40</sup> The ceremonies were lavish - Jahangir showered gems over his son's head while Nur Jahan presented gifts worth fortunes. These were not just state functions but a father's proud recognition of his son's growing stature.

Jahangir's affection extended to Khurram's associates too. When Khurram requested higher rank for his father-in-law I'timad ud Daula, the emperor agreed, increasing his position calling it a "baba khurram's request".<sup>41</sup> This showed how the personal relationships influenced broader court dynamics.<sup>42</sup>

The relationship between the two reaches its peak when Jahangir presents Shah Jahan, the first bound copy of his memoir, personally inscribing it for "the first of all my sons in everything."<sup>43</sup> In this moment, the emperor was not just passing on political authority but sharing his life's work with his most beloved son.

It is through such interactions, Jahangir's memoirs reveal a multidimensional relationship where imperial honours and fatherly pride intertwined, portraying how a Mughal kingship was not just about politics but about the human connections behind imperial decisions, he even mentions that no emperor before him has ever shown so much public endearment to their son. But all of this changes when the very same son decides to rebel, and Jahangir is left heartbroken

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that you lose your reason is not allowed by the wise. There must be a profit and benefit in drinking. Avicenna, the greatest physician and doctor, has said this in poetry: 'Wine is an enemy to the drunk and a friend to the sober. A little is an antidote, but too much is venom. / In too much the harm is not insignificant; in a little there is much benefit.'" Ibid..184

<sup>38</sup> Ibid..196

<sup>39</sup> "Since the leadership and command of the Deccan campaign had not gone as well as i had wished under my son Sultan Parvez, it occurred to me to summon him and then make Baba Khurram, who was clearly competent, the vanguard of the imperial forces and go myself in his wake. ".Ibid..192

<sup>40</sup> "I made my son on this occasion was the title of shah, which I made part of his name and ordered that he henceforth be called Shah Sultan Khurram." Ibid..201

<sup>41</sup> "Also during these days i increased I'timaduddawla's rank to 5000/200. By request of Baba Khurram" ibid..157

<sup>42</sup> After the death of Man Singh, his brother was given the title of Mirza raja by Jahangir, making his own relations with the Rajputs instead of following his father's. "so although the chieftainship of the line should have gone, according to the rule customary in India, to Maha Singh, the son of the raja's eldest son, Jagat Singh, who had died during the raja's lifetime, I ignored the custom and gave Bhao Singh the title of Mirza Raja and the rank of 4000/3000. I also gave him Amber, the homeland of his fathers and forefathers." Ibid..161

<sup>43</sup> "Since it was the first copy to be made, I gave it to my son Shahjahan, whom I consider the first of all my sons in everything. On the back of the book I wrote in my own hand that it had been given to my son on such-and-such a date in such-and-such a place and that I hoped a perusal of the contents would be acceptable to the Creator and occasion praise by the people." Ibid..271



from the same. He in fact mentioned how he stopped hunting, an activity which he loved for protecting and wishing his son's and his family's well-being.

Surprisingly he does not tell us very much about personal life of his wife Nur Jahan, but when she does appear in his text, she is clearly pivotal in his life and a dominant force at court.<sup>44</sup> Jahangir showed his special regard for Nur Jahan when he decided to change her title, writing "Around this time I ordered Nurmahal to be called Nur Jahan Begam<sup>45</sup>." This change from "Light of the Palace" to "Light of the World" marked her rising importance in both his life and the empire. Her influence became so great that she even hosted celebrations for Jahangir's sons, with the emperor noting "Nur Jahan Begam gave a celebration for my son Shah Jahan," where she presented lavish gifts.

He further writes how Nur Jahan cared for his health. The emperor openly admitted "Nur Jahan Begam's remedies and experience were greater than any of the physicians<sup>46</sup>." He trusted her completely, writing "I now relied on her affection, gradually reduced my intake of wine, and avoided unsuitable things."

However, this bond created tensions with Jahangir's favourite son, Khurram. The emperor had always shown special Favor to Khurram, calling him "the first of all my sons in everything" when giving him the first copy of his memoirs. But when Khurram seized lands belonging to Nur Jahan and her preferred successor Shahryar, Jahangir became furious. He wrote "During these days it was repeatedly reported that Khurram had taken over some of Nur Jahan Begam's and Shahryar's jagirs<sup>47</sup>," showing how this betrayal hurt him deeply.

The emperor expresses how he had once given up his beloved hunting for five years after praying for Khurram's sick son to recover, writing "Despite the enjoyment I derived from hunting, particularly hunting with guns, I didn't do it for five years." But after Khurram's actions against Nur Jahan, Jahangir took up hunting again in anger, ordering that "no one be allowed in the palace without a gun<sup>48</sup>."

Through these accounts, we see how Jahangir's relationship with Nur Jahan blended deep personal affection with real political power. She became his closest companion and advisor, but this very closeness created conflicts with other important figures in his life, particularly his son Khurram. Their story shows us the human side of Mughal history, where love and loyalty competed with ambition and family tensions in the halls of power.

#### IV

The idea of Justice was very central to him, the same can be seen in his text, "After my accession, the first command issued by me was to have a chain of justice hung so that if those

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<sup>44</sup> for more refer to Findly, E. B. (1993). *Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press.

<sup>45</sup> "The Eleventh Regnal Year: Around this time i ordered Nurmahal to be called Nurjahan Begam.' Nurmahal means 'light of the palace', Nurjahan means 'light of the world", Jahangirnama, page 190

<sup>46</sup> Ibid..368

<sup>47</sup> Ibid..380

<sup>48</sup> Ibid..380



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charged with administering the courts were slack or negligent in rendering justice to the downtrodden, those who had suffered injustice could have recourse to the chain and pull it so that the sound would cause awareness.<sup>49</sup>”

He even wrote explicitly about his twelve decrees which included the prohibition of alms, construction of a caravansary, mosque, and a well to encourage habitation in the caravanserai, Ban on opening merchant’s packets without their permission and consent, property was to be turned over to the heirs when anyone dies in the realm, No wine, spirits, or any sort of intoxicant or forbidden liquor was allowed to be manufactured or sold<sup>50</sup>, No one's house was to be used for quartering troops, he forbade the cutting off of anyone's ear or nose for any crime whatsoever, the prohibition on seizing of land by superintendents of royal lands and jagirdars, The revenueers of royal lands and jagirdars not to intermarry with the people of the parganas in which they reside without emperor’s permission, In large cities hospitals are to be built and physicians appointed to treat the sick, prohibited killing of animals for some days<sup>51</sup>, and lastly that Akbar’s servants' ranks and jagirs would remain unchanged.

On the themes of kingship and affirmations of his own personal political legitimacy, he continually reinforced his identification with and loyalty to Akbar, nostalgically referenced his ancestry and dynastic legacy, making use of a dynastic literary tradition to authorize the legitimacy of his inheritance, allowed, as Jahangir would claim, by both the dynastic and the divine. Jahangir used the device of memoir to affirm his position as a conduit of the powerful ideas of his ancestors, offering detailed and explicit descriptions of Timurid-Mughal courtly traditions; understandings of kingship, law, religion, succession and inheritance; and ideas of beauty, poetry, gardens and architecture. His memoir also details the workings of the seventeenth-century royal court of India, including descriptions of the monarch’s relationship with his diverse nobility as well as the steady stream of merchants, adventurers, ambassadors and rivals who arrived before his throne.

While assessing the nature of emperor’s relations with the Muslim elite and institutions we see that, on one hand, there are references that indicate that the emperor attempted to conciliate the ulema and the religious minded members of the Muslim nobility, hoping to appeal their support against his elder son Khusraw, Jahangir hence bestowed numerous favours on them during the time of his rebellion in Allahabad. On the other hand, Jahangir has often appreciated his father’s religious tolerance and the fact that he wants to continue making peace for all of his subjects, as he is a fair and just ruler from whom everyone is equal.

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<sup>49</sup> He even described the Chain he ordered to be made: I ordered a chain made of pure gold, thirty ells in length, with sixty bells. It weighs four Hindustani maunds, which is thirty-two Persian maunds.

<sup>50</sup> It is here that the emperor discusses his own struggle with alcohol addiction.

<sup>51</sup> The days were: eighteenth of Rabi' I, Jahangir’s birthday, two days of every week, one being Thursday, the day of accession to the throne, and the other Sunday, Akbar's birthday.



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Although no work of akhlaqi tradition is referred to in the memoirs, the influence of this genre is clearly visible in some distinctive features of the emperor's writing, best example of this is his story of a king and a gardener which shows how much the prosperity of a kingdom depends on the good intentions of its ruler. Another indication is the fact that he often ends his account of some political event with a maxim and the animal stories he is so fond of telling sometimes bear a strong resemblance to moral, even political, fables.

Jahangir interestingly though very consciously tried to surpass Babur's *Vaqa'i*<sup>52</sup>, by expressing pride in his innovative illustration of the memoir. As a devoted patron of the arts, when establishment at Allahabad, Salim supported and voraciously commissioned and collected works of art. Jahangir as early as 1612, begun ordering paintings to accompany his text. Early in 1618, before the first copy was bound, his favourite painter, Abu'l Hasan, who he had honoured with the title of Nadir al-Zaman, the Pinnacle of the Age, had painted a picture of Jahangir's accession to serve as the frontispiece of the *Jahangir-nama*. Within the text of the *Jahangir-nama* itself, the emperor explicitly described several commissions of miniatures, sketches, nature studies and portraits, and there is no doubt that many extant imperial miniatures were originally produced to illustrate his memoir. A North American turkey and an African zebra, brought to Jahangir from the port at Goa, were ordered painted by Jahangir's master painter, Mansur, specifically as an increase by seeing them'.

Jahangir has mentioned the Europeans as "franks" in his memoirs and despite the fact that Sir Thomas Roe actually accompanied the emperor for almost two and a half years, he doesn't get mentioned in his text. But it is through these paintings that we can see the European influence, for example James 1 is included in an allegorical painting in which Jahangir prefers a Sufi Shaikh to various rulers of the world. Another indication is the fact that wall paintings of European dignitaries and Christian figures formed a distinct decoration in Jahangiri palaces. In the upper right corner of his white marble throne, known as a *jharoka* was also a painted image of the Virgin Mary. Individual folios that were likely intended for the pages of the *Nama* include a painting of the submission of Rana Singh of Mewar, which retains marks that indicate it was intended to illustrate an album. Jahangir intended his illustrated memoir to fit neatly within the larger dynastic project of narrative and remembrance. Commencing with Jahangir, a new device, the 'Nimbused head', was adopted to express this imperial status. A double-page portrait was made to show the Sufi saint Muin al-Din Chishti, handing Jahangir a globe on top of which is a Timurid crown, symbolizing the emperor's right to rule.

Jahangir decorated his text with poetic quotations from classical Persian authors such as Firdausi, Nizami, and Saadi or Hafiz. The diversity of the languages used by Jahangir in his work is truly commendable, the Persian narrative being combined with Turkish, Hindustani, or

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<sup>52</sup> He wrote: 'Although Firdaws-Makani ["He who is in the place of paradise," i.e., Babur] wrote in his memoir about the shapes of some animals, he does not seem to have ordered artists to depict them...I both wrote about them and ordered the artists to draw them for the *Jahangirnama*.'



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Kashmiri words. Jahangir's sensitivity to his Indian environment is also apparent in his familiarity with Hindustani poetry and its imagery.

All these narratives are very interesting but at the same time quite complex in nature, it's important for us to think beyond the text written and analyse the reason behind it being written along with the details which have been missed from the text. There are few things which should be kept in mind while analysing the text, first of which is the use of it as a credible source can be challenging because of the biasness an autobiography inherits. Although the emperor's descriptions of specific events and actions are mostly confirmed by other sources from the period, in attempting to reveal his motives and beliefs we should be cautious, as the Jahangir-nama was somewhere an extended effort at self-promotion. Second issue, is of dating, each regnal year, was labelled by the Islamic year in which it began, so many dates in any given regnal year actually belong to the next Islamic year. In addition, the Islamic "day" begins at sundown, so what Jahangir calls "Thursday eve" is what we call Wednesday night. Third identified issue is the problem of translations; the Persian essence seems to sometimes lose its meaning when translated to English. If the author translates the work literally there are chances that it won't catch that exact feel, but if you summarize and paraphrase it in your own words, there are chances of the author adding personal opinions through interpreting the text. Last concern is that titles are sometimes repeated or changed hastily, which makes it hard to identify the person emperor has written about, for example at various places, there are three different jahangir-Quli Khans, two Asaf Khans, and two Khan Jahans.

### V

“Of all the Mughal emperors, Jahangir was the most observant of the world around him, and his memoirs leave no doubt about his delight in the unusual landscapes, animals, flowers, and characters he encountered in India. Visual sensations were especially powerful to him, and consequently the descriptions in his text are minutely detailed.” Rightly said in the words of Milo Cleveland Beach, the Writings of the Emperor Jahangir are no doubt a true autobiographical sketch and for this reason Jahangir-nama should be acknowledged as an important historical source for the period, despite its shortcomings. It is because of this memoir that we get to know so much about the imperial household, his personal affiliations, feelings towards people he was close with, important information about titles and court life, along with his numerous traveling experiences, his keen interest in nature, art and so much more. The historical worth of such a document can't be reduced by his lack of political campaigns or the fact that it is an autobiography and must be appreciated for the abundance of knowledge it provides us with regarding the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

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