

AURANGZEB THROUGH THE EYES OF KHUSHAL KHAN KHATTAK: A PASHTUN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This research explores the portrayal of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb through the eyes of Khushal Khan Khattak, a 17th-century Pashtun poet-warrior, whose perspective offers a critical lens on Mughal-Afghan relations. Initially a loyal ally of Aurangzeb, Khushal's outlook evolved dramatically following his imprisonment. Through a qualitative analysis of his poetry and historical sources, this study examines Khushal's depiction of Aurangzeb as a tyrannical and duplicitous ruler. Khushal Khan Khattak condemns Aurangzeb's actions—such as imprisoning his father, Shah Jahan, and executing his brothers—as evidence of a power-hungry despot whose outward piety masked cruelty and injustice. The research highlights Aurangzeb's mistrustful policies toward Afghan chiefs. By focusing on Khushal's perspective and portrayal of Aurangzeb, this study illuminates the complexities of Mughal-Afghan relations and contributes a distinct Pashtun viewpoint to the historiography of Aurangzeb's reign.

INTRODUCTION

Khushal Khan Khattak, a 17th-century Pashtun poet and warrior from the Khattak tribe, descended from Malik Akor, who settled in the Nowshera district. The area, named Sarai Akora after his great-grandfather, was where Mughal Emperor Akbar appointed Malik Akor to collect taxes from the region's people. Khushal Khan's ancestors remained loyal to the Mughal dynasty, as did Khushal himself until he was imprisoned by Emperor Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb ascended to power through a fierce struggle within his family and implemented a policy to abolish taxes collected by tribal chiefs, which affected Khushal Khan Khattak. Despite this, Khushal did not initially resist. However, his imprisonment, orchestrated through a conspiracy by Mughal officials, marked a turning point in his perspective on the Mughal dynasty. This incarceration led Khushal Khan to view the Mughals differently, raising his emergence as an

Afghan nationalist and prompting resistance against their rule. His personal relationship with Aurangzeb soured significantly. Although he initially supported Aurangzeb, Khushal's time in prison turned him against the emperor. His extensive literary works include sharp criticisms of Aurangzeb, portraying him as a tyrannical ruler. Inspired by this literature, I decided to explore Aurangzeb through the eyes of Khushal Khan Khattak's. Aurangzeb's historical legacy is contentious: some admire him as a devout religious leader, while others condemn his rigid religiosity and harsh policies toward non-Muslims. In contrast, my approach examines Aurangzeb through Khushal Khan's eyes, focusing on his policies toward Afghans and his interactions with Afghan chiefs.

Significance of Research

Khushal Khan Khattak is a pivotal figure in Mughal history, indispensable for understanding the era's dynamics. As a revered Pashtun poet and warrior, his resistance against the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and his extensive contributions to Pashto literature underscore his historical importance. This research thesis holds significant value for historians and students, offering a unique perspective on Aurangzeb through Khushal Khan Khattak's writings, which reflect Mughal-Afghan relations in the 17th century. For those studying Aurangzeb's reign, this work provides critical insights into his policies and their impact on Pashtun tribes. From a Pashtun academic perspective, this study is vital, addressing the need for scholarly discourse, often underrepresented in academic circles.

Literature Review

Khushal Khan Khattak's own work, *Daastar nama*, is a significant text that outlines the strategies and approaches a ruler should adopt for effective and successful governance (Khushal Khan Khattak, 2007). The biography *Sowanih-Hayat Khushal Khan Khattak* by Dost Muhammad Kamil Mohmand provides a comprehensive account of Khushal Khan Khattak's life, proving instrumental in addressing research questions for my thesis (Mohmand, 1951).

Another detailed work, *Life and work of illustrious Khushal Khan Khattak (Chieftain of Khattak)* by Dr. Miss Khadija Begum Feroziuddin, is divided into two sections. The first part, focusing on Khushal's life, was particularly valuable in answering my research queries and supporting my arguments during thesis development (Feroziuddin, 2007).

The article "Khushal Khan Khattak and Swat" by Sultan-e-Rome explores Khushal Khan Khattak's visit to Swat, offering insights into his activities and influence in the region (Sultan-i-Rome, January - June, 2014).

In *The Pashtuns*, Abubakar Siddique discusses Khushal Khan Khattak's resistance against the Mughals and his persistent efforts to unify Afghan tribes, igniting a sense of nationalism and a struggle for liberation. His political vision, as a poet and warrior, underscores his role as a forward-thinking figure (Siddique, 2014).

The research article "Khushal Khan Khattak by Zandani Naghmy" by Noor ul Basar Aman focuses on

the literary works Khushal produced during his imprisonment, providing critical support for my research thesis (Aman, 2012).

Baz Nama of Khushal Khan Khattak Translated in English, translated by Prof. Arif Naseem, is an English rendition of Khushal's *Baaz Nama*, which details the care and training of his hawk (Khattak, 2007).

Khushal Khan Kay Afkar by Raza Hamdani and Farigh Bukhari translates Khushal Khan Khattak's poetry and thoughts into Urdu, presented in poetic form (Bukhari).

Armaghan e Khushal by Syed Rasool Rasa is a comprehensive study of Khushal Khan Khattak's resistance against the Mughals, his historical and literary significance, teachings, life philosophy, and poetry. This work is highly relevant and aids in addressing my research questions (Rasa, 2001).

Methodology

This study employs qualitative, historical, and descriptive research methods. Primary data was gathered through the analysis of Khushal Khan Khattak's books and poetry, while secondary data was sourced from both physical and digital materials, including research papers and books relevant to the subject.

Aurangzeb and Afghan chiefs

Afghan chiefs played a pivotal role in the battles for the Mughal throne among the princes. Mughal princes heavily relied on the support of Afghan chiefs. In these conflicts, most Afghan chiefs aligned with Aurangzeb, primarily due to their religious differences with Dara Shikoh. However, Afghan chiefs were generally pragmatic, frequently shifting their allegiances to favor the prince who appeared to be winning the war.

The Afghan chiefs provided significant support to Aurangzeb during his struggle for the throne. Many sacrificed their lives and those of their loved ones in these efforts. In return, after Aurangzeb's victory, he rewarded them generously, granting them prestigious positions. Nevertheless, the Mughals, particularly Aurangzeb, harbored a deep mistrust of Afghan chiefs. They believed the Afghans could revolt at any moment, leveraging their power to undermine Mughal authority. The precedent set by Sher Shah Suri served as a stark example. Joshi R. (2001) cites

Abul Fazl Mamuri, noting that Aurangzeb was initially cautious about allowing Afghans to occupy or be promoted to higher ranks (p. 145).

Mughal-Afghan Relations during Aurangzeb's Reign

According to Khan K. (1976), considering the behavior of former Afghans, the Mughal Empire was reluctant to grant Afghans significant power. Bhimsen, a historian during Aurangzeb's reign, noted this sentiment. Joshi R. (2001) references Bhimsen, stating that he observed the Mughals' mistrust and doubts toward Afghans (p. 145). Bernier, who observed the Mughals from 1656 to 1668, shared similar views regarding the Mughal attitude toward Afghans. According to him, the Mughals had no choice but to recruit Afghans because of their fighting prowess, as they were as strong as the Rajputs and capable of maintaining security (Bernier, 1916, p. 211).

Aurangzeb was compelled to recruit Afghans into his army due to numerous uprisings during his rule. To suppress these insurgencies, he had to enlist Afghans, even against his will. Additionally, Aurangzeb had learned from his ancestors that Afghans were skilled fighters. Therefore, in wars fought for the kingdom, he sought to include them to strengthen his forces. However, he remained wary of them due to their historical precedents. The Afghans had ruled India multiple times and demonstrated the ability to do so again, as evidenced during Sher Shah Suri's era.

Bhimsen (1972), while describing Aurangzeb's policy, writes that Emperor Aurangzeb never trusted Afghans. Kings Babur, Humayun, and Akbar came to Hindustan, learned the sense of pride from Afghans, and captured the kingdom of Hindustan. It was not surprising that Afghans possessed such qualities. Manucci also states that the general rule in the Mughal Empire was to distrust Afghans. Numerous forts across India, from Kabul to Bengal, were governed by loyalists—princes, Syeds, or Mughals—but Pashtuns were rarely appointed as governors due to their perceived threat. This practice was also evident during King Humayun's reign (Manucci, 1913).

Furthermore, Aurangzeb endeavored to keep Afghan chiefs away from the princes, fearing they might incite rebellion against the king. While this suspicion may have alienated loyal Afghan chiefs, there were instances where Afghan chiefs indeed provoked

princes against the king. According to Joshi R. (2001), Aurangzeb also took care not to deploy Afghans to suppress rebellions against Rajputs, fearing that these two groups might unite against the Mughals (p. 160). In the Mughal court, Afghans were seldom trusted, particularly when accused of crimes. Their testimonies were often disregarded. The case of Dalir Khan exemplifies this: accused of inciting a prince against the king, he was not given a fair hearing, was poisoned, and killed without evidence. Aurangzeb also mistrusted Afghan governors. Joshi R. (2001) concludes that Afghans were generally considered disobedient, free-thinking, willful, uncultured, combative, hot-tempered, arrogant, unwise, and politically inept, and were hated for these reasons (p. 176).

She adds that the Mughal attitude toward Afghans was neither overly friendly nor overtly hostile. Instead, Afghans were treated based on situational needs. However, it was an undeniable fact that the Mughals perpetually feared Afghan uprisings. Consequently, Afghans were rarely granted significant freedom or authority to prevent them from attempting to reclaim their lost kingdom. This caution shaped Mughal interactions with Afghans.

Conversely, the Afghan nation was internally divided. Tribes fought against one another, and even in the battles of Mughal princes, Afghan chiefs and tribes pursued their own interests. The Afghan nation lacked a sense of nationalism, with a complete absence of "Afghaniyat" in their political endeavors. Although every Afghan chief was engaged in conflict, their struggles lacked national spirit and consciousness. The tribes were embroiled in internecine warfare, driven by mutual animosity.

Khushal Khan Khattak and Aurangzeb

During this period, Khushal Khan Khattak, an Afghan chief, aligned himself with Aurangzeb. As previously noted, Khushal Khan supported Aurangzeb because Dara Shikoh had stripped him of Yousafzai territory and transferred it to Bahadur Khan. Dara Shikoh showed a clear preference for the Yousafzai tribe. Additionally, religious differences between Khushal Khan and Dara Shikoh contributed to this decision. However, Yaqubi (2015) highlights another factor: Khushal Khan's close associates, Bahadur Khan and Asalat Khan, were also staunch

supporters of Aurangzeb. Furthermore, Bahadur Khan's sons played a significant role in securing Aurangzeb's victory. The majority of the Khushgi chiefs also backed Aurangzeb, which likely influenced Khushal Khan Khattak's decision to side with him (p. 164).

In addition to the aforementioned reasons, it is crucial to recognize that Khushal Khan's allegiance to Aurangzeb was driven by personal benefits, motives, and interests. As noted, Afghan chiefs frequently shifted allegiances during the conflicts among Shah Jahan's sons, prioritizing their own interests. Initially, Khushal Khan Khattak had no disputes with Aurangzeb. In loyalty to Aurangzeb, he continued to wage battles against the Yousafzai, Bangash, and Mandarns. He also participated in the Battle of Tirah in 1659, fighting against the Afridi and Orakzai tribes. Opinions about Aurangzeb vary widely. Some criticize him for being a rigid, hardline religious ruler, while others praise him for the same quality. However, this debate is beyond the scope of this topic. The focus here is to examine Aurangzeb through the perspective of Khushal Khan Khattak, as expressed in his poetry. The Khushal Khan's portrayal of Aurangzeb, eloquently captured in his poems, emerged primarily during his imprisonment. He referenced Aurangzeb in more than 20 poems, most of which were likely composed during this period. When Khushal Khan was arrested, he held high hopes that upon being presented before the emperor, Aurangzeb would grant him a pardon. He believed he had committed no offense and that his arrest stemmed from a conspiracy against him.

Khushal Khan was confident that once the emperor learned the truth, he would be treated honorably. This belief was rooted in his lifelong loyalty to Aurangzeb, including his support during the war for the throne. Consequently, when he was first arrested in Peshawar and transported to Lahore, he urged his people not to rebel against the Mughal authorities. He expressed this sentiment himself: "I, too, was quite satisfied to go to the Emperor, /All my life I had been loyal, my hope was for honourable treatment" (Biddulph, 2013, p. 47). However, the outcome was far from his expectations. Although the emperor initially granted him bail, Aurangzeb, at the request of Amir Khan, ultimately refused to release Khushal Khan. This decision was nothing short of a tragedy for him.

Khushal Khan Khattak about Aurangzeb

Khushal Khan Khattak faced profound humiliation and dishonor despite his unwavering loyalty. The emperor, Aurangzeb, no longer trusted Khushal's fidelity and refused to heed his pleas. Furthermore, Aurangzeb ordered Khushal's family to be taken hostage, and his hometown was ravaged. This profound disrespect for Khushal's loyalty led him to view Aurangzeb as morally diminished. He lamented, "Gone was my fame and honour from the confidence of the Moghal / 'Disloyal' was the name they gave me who had ever been loyal to them" (Biddulph, 2013, p. 52). Khushal believed that the loyalty his ancestors had shown to the Mughals, often at the cost of their lives, would be reciprocated. Yet, under Aurangzeb's reign, everything was turned upside down. Not only was Khushal punished, but his son and family were also denied clemency. He expressed his anguish, stating:

Filled was my heart with good will towards the learned
and the devout,
Ill the designs I had upon the faithless and the
rebellious;

Filled was my heart with anger at the enemies of the
Emperor;

Passed as had been my life in loyalty and honour:
In no one action of mine was any treachery to the
Moghals;

My father and grandfather had sacrificed themselves
for the sake of their honour to them.
No other Pathan was there whose honour was equal
to mine,

And yet my son was in prison, and I from my country
an exile;

And how many ills fell upon me without fault or error
of mine.

Scattered and dispersed, where has my family gone?
(Biddulph, 2013, p. 53)

According to Khushal, Aurangzeb's tyranny extended beyond him, ensnaring many others, including prominent chiefs and nobles. Prisons overflowed with captives, yet Aurangzeb remained indifferent. Khushal noted widespread discontent among the populace, pointing out that Aurangzeb's father, Shah Jahan, was his first victim in the brutal struggle for the throne. Khushal recounted how Aurangzeb imprisoned his father and orchestrated the deaths of his brothers, asserting that his oppression was

pervasive. He warned that such tyrannical rule would lead to the world's ruin, describing Aurangzeb as a power-hungry tyrant who spared neither his father nor the oppressed and impoverished. In his poetry, about Aurangzeb's treatment of his family, Khushal wrote: When coming here from the Deccan his standard he raised aloft, By his violence and treachery many had he brought to ruin.

First with Murad Bakhsh an oath and engagement he made.

Then to Oojein he came, and Jeswant Singh he defeated;

Then he came to Agra, and dark was the day for Dara. Shahjehan he imprisoned, and deprived him of all his retinue;

Again Murad Bakhsh he reconciled to Shahjehan, And then to Mooltan he bore his standard in pursuit of Dara.

Then came he back again, and trouble he brought on Shuja.

It was in the battle of Kajwa that put to flight was he. Then again Dara fought with him in Ajmere, more or less;

With his face then to the West Dara Shah fled in fear and confusion.

He was taken by the Chief of Jun to his house for design of his own.

Thence was he sent to Delhi where his head from his body was severed.

Again Suleman Shekh, the honoured son of Dara, The Rajputs gave up to him, and trouble thus fell upon him.

His eldest son fled to Shah Shujah, and then in terror was he.

But he separated them from one another by many a wile and deceit.

Next in intrepidity to Shah Shujah was his brother Muazzim,

But him he expelled from his home, now who knows where he draws breath?

Such was the grief that he brought on the house of his own father. (Biddulph, 2013, p. 54)

Historical records confirm that Aurangzeb imprisoned his father and killed his brothers, Murad Bakhsh and Dara Shikoh, as well as Dara's son. Khushal observed that the regions of Arabia and Persia were bewildered by these tumultuous events, attributing Aurangzeb's success to mere fortune rather

than merit. He noted that neither children nor the elderly were safe, questioning whether Aurangzeb's arrogance stemmed from his position or a deeper moral failing. Khushal further criticized Aurangzeb's self-aggrandizing speech, marked by constant references to "I" and "we," and declared that a person of such base character could never be purified, no matter how often they bathed.

Khushal's resentment was intensified by his personal oppression. He believed that his greatest fault was his loyalty to the Mughals. He argued that a king should be merciful, attentive to his subjects, and just, yet Aurangzeb's reign was the antithesis of these virtues. In a poem composed during his imprisonment, Khushal reflected on his ancestors' loyalty while condemning Aurangzeb's tyranny, describing him as a power-drunk, ruthless destroyer of his own family and a ruler who betrayed his forefathers' principles. Khushal regretted his loyalty to the Mughals, though he was unperturbed by the loss of his privileges. He attributed the seeds of his rebellion to Aurangzeb's actions, which had grown into a resilient force. Khushal branded Aurangzeb a foolish king, incapable of distinguishing friend from foe, whose reckless governance would lead to his own downfall. He cautioned, "No distinction does he make between his friends and his foes. / See how misguided are the ways of Aurangzeb! / He who has ruined by his tyranny the devotee and stranger. / What fault is there in him that he has robbed Khush-hal of his rank? / By the deprivation of his rank not a bit distressed / Is Khush-hal's heart; still it is joyous, as God knows" (Biddulph, 2013, p. 115).

Khushal foresaw that Aurangzeb's oppressive rule would not endure, predicting that rivers of blood would flow and that others would soon share his fate. He deemed it futile to seek justice from a man who imprisoned his father and murdered his brothers and nephew, questioning how such a ruler could be expected to deliver fairness. He wrote, "If Aurang Shah keeps on ever such course of action / As now he has taken in hand, God preserve us from its end! / Either it is in this year or next year that people will hear / That rivers of red blood will full and flowing be. / What indeed am I? But there are others who will act like me. / Countless are their names, the lords of the mountain lands. / He who had no compassion on his father, nor yet on his son, / How will he stay his

hand on any one else in the world?" (Biddulph, 2013, p. 60).

Khushal also highlighted Aurangzeb's arrogance, noting that when faced with complaints, the emperor responded with violence rather than empathy. He criticized the rampant mismanagement and bribery at the grassroots level, where officials abused their authority with impunity. Khushal pointed out that even a judge's ruling held no weight against a governor's word, stating that one directive from the governor could override twenty judicial decisions. Without bribes or a governor's endorsement, individuals were left to suffer in confusion and despair (Haq, 2017, p. 115). Khushal himself fell victim to this systemic corruption, particularly at the hands of Kabul's governor, Amir Khan. At Amir Khan's behest, Aurangzeb authorized force against Khushal, leading to his imprisonment without a fair hearing, driven by the governor's personal enmity.

Comparing Aurangzeb to his father, Shah Jahan, Khushal emphasized the stark contrast in their treatment of him. He and his ancestors had endured countless battles and wounds for the Mughals, yet only Shah Jahan genuinely valued his contributions. In contrast, Aurangzeb's disregard was evident to all. Khushal lamented, "Aurangzeb is a fool who abused me. I hardly can draw my breath and no one listens to my pain. No doctor or lotion can cure the wound in my heart which has been given to me by Aurangzeb" (Biddulph, 2013, p. 85). He further blamed Aurangzeb for promoting discord, even between fathers and sons, noting, "Such is the custom that has been inaugurated in Aurung's reign, / That every son should be jealous of even his father's life" (Biddulph, 2013, p. 114).

Aurangzeb, a tyrant king

In one of his poems, translated by Haq (2017), Khushal Khan sharply criticizes Aurangzeb, portraying him as a tyrant akin to historical oppressors. He writes, "I am not the only one under the oppression of Aurangzeb. If he survives, he will trample on hundreds. He has started tyranny like Bakht Nasr and I am imprisoned in his hands like Daniyal. Whoever comes under him, he humiliates him unnecessarily. If he did not forgive his father, how much it would be difficult for him to abuse others? Frankly, he does not act like a king but a robber. He has no comparison in

cunningness and oppression, if someone that would be Hajjaj and Yazid" (Haq, 2017, p. 97). Khushal Khan further asserts that a king lacking justice and moderation finds his prayers becoming "a shackle around his neck." He describes Aurangzeb's courtiers as "beasts" and notes that even the nobility under him is as obstinate as Aurangzeb himself, with many originating from "ignoble" classes (Haq, 2017, p. 97). In the same poem, Khushal Khan critiques the nobility and officials under Aurangzeb, stating that despite their wealth, they "snatch money from the hands and pockets of the poor and beggars" (Haq, 2017, p. 98). He cites specific examples, such as Syed Amir, who devastated the province of Kabul, and Mir Baba, who caused chaos in Banaras. Khushal Khan laments that under Aurangzeb's reign, a wise person would have settled in England or Portugal, as life had become unbearable. He singles out Fidai Abdul Qawi, a close associate of Aurangzeb, as someone whose hobby is "evil and mischief," and Yousifi of Gujarat, the judge, as "the most shameful and disgraceful person." Khushal Khan also questions Aurangzeb's virtue, suggesting that the emperor is more interested in delivering poor decisions than just ones (Haq, 2017, p. 98).

Aurangzeb's Enmity with Afghans

In another poem, translated by Bukhari and Hamdani (1952), Khushal Khan exposes Aurangzeb's enmity toward Afghans. He states, "I have eaten a lot of Mughal's salt and was being loyal to them but it is Aurangzeb, who still made me victim of oppression. The truth is that, I have the sense of judging right and wrong in the context of Mughals as I have got to know them very well. In fact, Aurangzeb hates Afghans. Even if he comes in connection with them, he will maintain alliance as long as the Afghans work as his tools. As soon as he doesn't need them. They become victim of Aurangzeb's oppression" (Bukhari & Hamdani, 1952, p. 68).

This sentiment is linked to Khushal Khan's imprisonment. According to Howell and Caroe (1988) and Rasa (2001), a shift in Mughal policy favored reconciliation with the Yousafzai tribe, who had previously opposed the Mughals. As Khushal Khan had been used to counter the Yousafzai, he was no longer needed in his former capacity. Consequently, Aurangzeb allowed Amir Khan, the

governor of Kabul, and Abdul Rahim, the Diwan of Peshawar, who harbored personal enmity toward Khushal Khan, to target him. Feroziuddin (2007) notes that they made Khushal Khan an example to intimidate other Afghans, demonstrating that once his utility diminished, Aurangzeb discarded his loyalty and left him at the mercy of his adversaries (Feroziuddin, 2007).

Khushal Khan Khattak and Aurangzeb in the Context of Mughal-Afghan Relations

Khushal Khan's imprisonment reflects Aurangzeb's broader mistrust of Afghan chiefs. While Aurangzeb recruited Afghans for their martial prowess, particularly during his wars for the throne, he never fully trusted them. He neither granted them high positions nor deemed them credible, viewing them with suspicion due to historical precedents like Sher Shah Suri, who had previously usurped Mughal power (Noamani & Pershad, 2000). This mistrust was exacerbated by Aurangzeb's inherently skeptical nature. Dr. Mubarak Ali, in the introduction to *Aurangzeb* by Noamani and Pershad (2000), notes that Aurangzeb's paranoia extended even to his own children, whom he prevented from gaining administrative experience during his 49-year reign, casting a "deep shadow" over them (Noamani & Pershad, 2000, p. 14). Thus, the complaints of Amir Khan against Afghan chiefs, combined with Aurangzeb's distrust, led to Khushal Khan's arrest despite his long history of loyalty.

Aurangzeb: A Luxurious and Hypocritical King

Khushal Khan also challenges Aurangzeb's image of simplicity and piety. In a poem written after hearing of a royal celebration, he states, "Aurangzeb describes himself as a religious person but he is engaged in the decoration of the throne. When his death comes, his throne will be destroyed. Then people will remember his luxuries associated with him" (Bukhari & Hamdani, 1952, p. 46). Khushal Khan argues that Aurangzeb's religiosity is superficial, citing his murder of his brothers and imprisonment of his father, Shah Jahan, as evidence of his unjust nature. He asserts that Aurangzeb's actions contradict Islamic principles of justice and equality, rendering his piety a "shackle around his neck" (Shah, 1992, p. 3).

Aurangzeb's treatment of his family further fuels Khushal Khan's criticism. Shah Jahan had four sons: Dara Shikoh, the eldest and designated crown prince; Shah Shuja; Aurangzeb; and Murad Bakhsh. When Shah Jahan fell ill in 1658, a war for the throne ensued. According to Shah (1992), Dara Shikoh and Shah Shuja fought independently, while Aurangzeb allied with Murad Bakhsh. The royal army was defeated, and Dara Shikoh was captured. As Shah Jahan supported Dara Shikoh, he too was imprisoned. Aurangzeb executed Dara Shikoh and Murad Bakhsh, and Shah Jahan died in pitiable conditions, attended only by his daughter Jahan Ara and a few servants, with Aurangzeb absent from his funeral (Shah, 1992, p. 7).

Khushal Khan portrays Aurangzeb as a hypocrite whose outward piety masks a cruel and greedy nature. He compares Aurangzeb to Hulagu Khan, the Mongol conqueror who devastated Baghdad, suggesting that Aurangzeb is similarly destructive (Shah, 1992, p. 7). In a poem translated by Caroe (1958), Khushal Khan encapsulates his critique:

"I know well Aurangzeb's justice, his equity, His orthodoxy in the Faith, his fasts and penances; His own brothers, time after time, cruelly slain by the sword, His father overconle in battle and thrown in prison! Though a man strike his head on the ground a thousand times, Or by fastings bring his navel and spine together, Unless he desire in truth to act with goodness, His adorations, his devotions, are all false, and a lie. The way of whose tongue is one, and of his heart another, Let his very vitals be torn out and lacerated! Outwardly the serpent is handsome and well-formed, In the inward parts it is unclean and filled with venom. The true man's deeds are many, but few his words, The recreant's acts are few and ill, his boastings many: Since Khushhal's arm cannot reach the tyrant in this world, May God Almighty have no mercy on him in the day of doom." (Caroe, 1958, p. 239)

Khushal Khan depicts Aurangzeb as cunning, more deceitful than the devil, and intent on harming others. He believes the only solution is Aurangzeb's removal, expressing a collective desire for a just ruler: "Khushal Khan Khattak considers getting rid of Aurangzeb as the only solution to the problems of the people. He wishes that kingdom of Aurangzeb may pass away like a plague and let another good king

come in his place. Then he says that this is not only his wish but this is actually wish of all the people” (Haq, 2017, p. 72). He further criticizes Aurangzeb’s claim to rule in the name of Islam, noting that the emperor rejoices at the death of Pashtuns, even innocent ones (Haq, 2017, p. 19).

Khushal Khan Khattak: An Enemy of Aurangzeb

Khushal Khan’s criticisms culminated in open rebellion. He declares, “I am the enemy of Aurangzeb. I wander day and night in the forests and deserts. I am trying to protect the honor and dignity of the Pashtuns and they have befriended the Mughals” (Haq, 2017, p. 119). In 1674, when Aurangzeb visited Hassan Abdal following Mughal defeats against Afghans, Khushal Khan wrote, “King Aurangzeb has reached Lahore full of grief and anger. Tomorrow will decide that who will survive and who will destroy. A courageous person has only two options. Either he succeeds or he sacrifices. I see a fight between eagles and crows, where rivers of blood will flow and at the end. God will make eagles successful” (Mohmand, 1951, p. 208).

Celebrating his victories, Khushal Khan writes, “Every victory has been ours up to now, / For the future we must trust to the omnipotent. / Now is the year that Aurangzeb is camped against us, / Haggared in his features and wounded in his heart. / Year after year it is that fall his nobles, / Of his army destroyed what account is there. / The treasure of Hindustan have been scattered before us, / Swallowed by the mountains has been his ruddy gold. / Still of emperor’s folly there is no listening, / It must be that from his father is this infatuation, / Between him and us there is no result apparent” (Biddulph, 2013, p. 86). Ultimately, Khushal Khan concludes, “For this state of things, no other termination can be seen, / Than that the Mughals be annihilated, or the Afghans undone” (Raverty, 1869, p. 152).

Aurangzeb’s policies sowed the seeds of rebellion in Khushal Khan. The Mughal fear of Afghans, rooted in Sher Shah Suri’s legacy, shaped their policies, particularly under Aurangzeb. Khushal Khan notes that while Shah Jahan held him in esteem, Aurangzeb’s actions alienated him. Inspired by Sher Shah Suri, Khushal Khan sought to unite Afghans against the Mughals, adopting Sher Shah’s politics as

a model, highlighting Aurangzeb’s failure to maintain loyalty (Haq, 2017).

Conclusion

The Mughal policy toward Afghans was rooted in skepticism, driven by the historical precedent of Sher Shah Suri. Aurangzeb’s deep mistrust led him to recruit Afghans for their martial skills but deny them high positions or significant responsibilities. When Amir Khan, the governor of Kabul, accused Afghan leaders of obstructing Mughal policies, Aurangzeb readily authorized force. Even after Khushal Khan’s innocence was established, Aurangzeb did not release him, shattering Khushal Khan’s expectations given his family’s long service to the Mughals.

Khushal Khan viewed Aurangzeb as an ungrateful, tyrannical ruler who imprisoned his father, killed his brothers, and filled jails with innocent people. He portrays Aurangzeb as power-hungry, arrogant, and incapable of distinguishing friend from foe. Aurangzeb’s hatred for Afghans was evident in his joy at their suffering, using them only as tools before discarding them. Khushal Khan labels Aurangzeb a hypocrite whose outward religiosity masks a cruel and cunning nature devoid of Islamic ethics. He highlights corruption and mismanagement under Aurangzeb, where justice was inaccessible without connections to senior officials. Comparing Aurangzeb to tyrants like Hulagu Khan, Hajjaj, and Kasra, Khushal Khan rejects his rule and advocates for his removal, ultimately declaring himself an enemy of Aurangzeb and rallying Afghans against the Mughals, inspired by Sher Shah Suri’s legacy.

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