
Advice Literature in the Time of Akbar: A Sixteenth-Century mathnawī as a book of advice for the Emperor of Mughal India



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Abstract

This article is an attempt to add a mathnawī of the sixteenth century Mughal India composed by a Mughal poet and noble, Mīrzā Khanjar Beg, for his contemporary ruler, Akbar, to the vast treasure of what is known as the advice literature or Mirror for Princes. The article deals with the content, structure, and style of the mathnawī, and contextualises it in contemporary partisan politics along with an emphasis on its features as an advice book for rulers.

Keywords: Mirror for Princes; Sanā'ī; Khanjar Beg

1. Introduction

Didactic poetry is an important genre of Persian literature. It gained popularity in the medieval Perso-Islamic world after its formal introduction in the eleventh century by Ḥakīm Sanā'ī through *Ḥadīqat al-Ḥaqīqa*, a *mathnawī* (a poem in couplets) on ethical and religious themes.¹ Many poets followed Sanā'ī's didactic model in the subsequent centuries and composed didactic poetry on various subjects concerning human life, ethics and political advice.² The significance of didactic poetry at that time is evident from its extensive production in the various forms of Persian poetry like panegyric poem (*qaṣīda*), quatrain (*rubā'ī*) *qit'ā* and *mathnawī*.³ Moreover, Persian literary historians' approach of dedicating a chapter or section

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¹J. T. P. de Bruijn, 'Sana'ī', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 17/5/ 2012, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sana-i-poet> (accessed 27 February 2021); Zakira Sharif Qasmi, *Fārsī Shā'irī: Ek Muṭāla'*, (Delhi, 1978), p.112.

²Jamāl Isfahānī, Khāqānī followed his model in their panegyric poems while Niẓāmī Ganjawī in his *mathnawī*. Moreover, Shaykh Sa'dī Shīrāzī, and 'Umar Khayyām also composed didactical poetry on ethics and politics. See, Qasmi, *Fārsī Shā'irī*, p. 113–116; For the advisory works written in both prose and poetry, see Muhammad Amin Amir, 'Fārsī Adab mein Akhlāqī Qadrein', *Tahqīqāt-i Islāmī* 28, 4 (2009), pp. 83–106.

³Qasmi, *Fārsī Shā'irī: Ek Muṭāla'*, pp. 108–109.

to didactic poetry in their respective works is also an evidence in this regard.⁴ However, the most dominant approach of modern scholarship, developed in recent years, is to investigate the features of advice literature or mirror for princes, a literary genre on the art of governance in Persian poetry, and to analyse poetic works as books of advice for rulers. This approach has been adopted in the writings of Julie Scott Meisami, Nasrin Askari and Chad G. Lingwood. Meisami inquired into the advisory elements in the topics of kingship and justice in Persian panegyric, love and lyric poems, and analysed the role of court poets of the medieval Perso-Islamic world as the authors of advice literature giving ethical and political advice to rulers.⁵ However, tracing the features of the genre of advice literature, the writings of Askari and Lingwood considered a particular poetic work as a book of advice for rulers. Askari and Lingwood dealt with the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī and Jāmī's *Salāmān wa Absāl* respectively by considering these texts as advisory works on statecraft.⁶

Indo-Persian didactic poetry is also an important area of research but it has not received sufficient attention. Some Indian poets composed didactic poem on the model of Perso-Islamic poets during the medieval and early modern India. Amīr Khusrow (1253–1325), the poet of the Delhi Sultanate, composed *Maṭla' al-Anwār* in the form of *mathnawī* following the model of Niẓāmī Ganjawī's *Makhzan al-Asrār* in dealing with ethical and courtly matters including the duties of king.⁷ Similarly, Shaykh Faiḍī (1547–1595), the poet laureate at the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) composed *Markaz al-Adwār*, a didactic *mathnawī* on the same line dealing primarily with ethical matters.⁸ Furthermore, 'Urḩī Shīrāzī (1555–1591), another known poet of Mughal time, composed *Majma' al-Abkār* on ethical and didactic anecdotes on the same model.⁹ Despite the fact that the Mughal poets composed didactic poetry in the sixteenth-century India on ethical subjects, Indo-Persian literary scholars have not discussed any poetic work on statecraft in the sixteenth-century India except the *mathnawī* of Mīrẓā Khanjar Beg (d. 1567)—a poetic work on the art of governance, composed in the early years of Akbar's reign.

Khanjar Beg's *mathnawī* deserves to be studied for several reasons. It has to be the only writing containing advice on the art of governance that was ever composed during Akbar's reign in India. The reason is that neither the historians of Mughal poetry discuss any single poetic work on political advice except the *mathnawī* for the emperor nor the historians who worked on the Mughal advice literature written in prose give any single reference to the composition of any text on statecraft for him during his reign.¹⁰ The absence of any

⁴Shiblī No'mānī, *She'r al-'Ajam* (Azamgarh, 2014), v, pp. 156–160; Qasmi, *Fārsī Shā'irī*, pp. 108–109.

⁵Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton, 1987), p. 14.

⁶Nasrin Askari, *The Medieval Reception of the Shāhnāma as a Mirror for Princes* (Leiden, 2016); Chad G. Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry and Sufism in Medieval Iran: New Perspectives on Jāmī's Salāmān wa Absāl* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 16–20.

⁷Sunil Sharma, 'Kāmsa of Amīr Khusrow', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 20 April 2012, <https://iraniconline.org/articles/kamsa-amir-kosrow> (accessed 13 March 2021).

⁸Sayyid Sabāḩ al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḩmān, *Bazma-i Timūriya* (Azamgarh, 2011), i, p. 131; Munibur Rahman, 'Abu'l-Faiẓ Fayẓī', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 24 January 2012, <https://iraniconline.org/articles/fayzi-abul-fayz> (accessed 15 March 2021).

⁹Paul Losensky, 'Orfi Širazi', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 20 July 2003, <https://www.iraniconline.org/articles/orfi-of-shiraz> (accessed 15 March 2021).

¹⁰Muzaffār Alam's work on the genre of advice literature or mirror for princes written in prose form in Mughal India does not discuss any advisory text composed for Akbar in the sixteenth century. See Muzaffār Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India c. 1200–1800* (New Delhi, 2004), pp. 26–69; Similarly, Sayyid Sabāḩ al-Dīn 'Abd

reference to the production of advisory texts on statecraft for Akbar in his reign leads to a general assumption that between the composition of Ikhtiyār al-Ḥusainī's *Akhlāq-i Humāyūnī*, a prose advisory text on the art of governance written for the founder of Mughal Empire, Babur (r. 1526–1530) and the composition of advisory texts of the seventeenth century written for the successors of the emperor Akbar, no advisory text for him was composed in India.¹¹ However, it does not mean that his reign did not witness the production of any advisory writing on statecraft. Although a text on statecraft was not composed for him, several advisory texts on statecraft and didactic poetry comprising ethical and political advice, which were produced in the medieval Islamic world, were in circulation during his reign.¹² Moreover, an advisory text, *Tuhfat al-wulāt wa Naṣīhat al-ra'īyyat wa al-ru'āt* written by Shaykh Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir Pattanī, the contemporary of Akbar, for Sher Khān Fawlādī, the independent governor of Pattan in Gujarat, was composed, though, it remained unpublished and inaccessible to the academic domain.¹³ In this context, Khanjar Beg's *mathnawī* is almost identical to the advisory writing of Shaykh Muḥammad. Thus, the presumption that the period of Akbar did not witness the composition of any advisory text on statecraft for him is justified except in the case of the *mathnawī*. His *mathnawī* is important for its connection with contemporary history and for its content and unique features. It is a polythematic poem, *inter alia*, advice for Akbar.

This article attempts to introduce Mīrzā Khanjar Beg's *mathnawī* with an emphasis on its content, structure, and style and to contextualise it in the contemporary partisan politics. The article peruses the *mathnawī* as an advice book for rulers. It argues that it was an important writing on the art of governance during Akbar's reign which eluded historians' attention

al-Rahmān discusses the poets of Akbar's time and their works but does not mention the composition of a single poetic work on advice related to the management of state affairs for the emperor except Khanjar Beg's *mathnawī*. See 'Abd al-Rahmān, *Bazma-i Tīmūriya* (Azamgarh, 2011), i, pp. 431–432.

¹¹A number of advisory texts were composed after the death of Akbar. The *Risāla-i Nūriya-i Sulṭāniya* of Shaykh 'Abd al-Ḥaq Dehlawī, see Muhammad Saleem Akhtar, *Sind under the Mughals* (Islamabad, 1990), p. 134. The *Maw'izah-i Jahāngīrī* of Muḥammad Bāqir Najm-i Thani (see the introduction of Sajida Sultana Alvi in Muḥammad Bāqir Najm-i Ṣanī, *Maw'izah-i Jahāngīrī*, (ed. and trans.) Sajida Sultana Alvi, *Advice on the Art of Governance: Maw'izah-i Jahāngīrī of Muḥammad Bāqir Najm-i Ṣanī* (New York, 1989), p. 12; *Akhlāq-i Jahāngīrī* of Qāḍī Nūr al-Dīn Khāqānī, see Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, p. 71 were composed for Mughal Emperor Jahāngīr (r. 1605–1627). 'Abd al-Ḥaq also composed an advisory treatise, *Tarjuma al-Aḥādīth al-Arba'īn fī Naṣīhat al-Mulūk wa al-Salāṭīn* for Shāhjahān (r. 1628–1658), the successor of Jahāngīr. See Akhtar, *Sind under the Mughals*, p. 134; Moreover, an advisory text, *al-Ḥikmat al-Khālida* of Ibn Miskūyah was translated into Persian from Arabic by Taqyī l-Dīn Shustarī with the title of *Jāwidān-i Khirad* in Jahāngīr's time. This text (*Jāwidān-i Khirad*) was retranslated by Ḥājī Shams al-Dīn on behalf of the Mughal noble, Shā'istā Khān during the late seventeenth century. See Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, p. 69. *Ādāb al-Salṭanat* was also composed for Jahāngīr by Jerome Xavier, a Jesuit father at Mughal court. See Uroz Zver, "I Picked these Flowers Knowledge for You": Jesuit Rules of Statecraft for the Emperor of Mughal India", in *Yearbook of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law Volume 19, 2016–2017*, (eds.) Martin Lau and Faris Nasrallah (Leiden, 2019), p. 85.

¹²Abū'l-Faḍl mentions a number of prose and poetic writings including advisory books written in Perso-Islamic world such as the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* of Naṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī, the *Qābūsnāma* of Kaykāwus b. Iskandar, the *Gulistān* and the *Būstān* of Shaykh Sa'dī, the *Ḥadīqat al-Ḥaqīqa* of Ḥakīm Sanā'ī, the *Mathnawī-i Ma'nawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsi, the *Khamsa* of Niẓāmī, poetic collection of Amīr Khusrōw, Mawlānā Jāmī, Khāqānī and Anwarī etc. These books were in the imperial library and were read out to the emperor Akbar. See Abū'l-Faḍl, *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, (eds.) H. Blochmann (Calcutta, 1872), i, p. 115; Abū'l-Faḍl, *The Ā'in-i Akbarī*, (trans.) H. Blochmann (Calcutta, 1927), i, p. 110; 'Abd al-Rahmān, *Bazma-i Tīmūriya*, i, pp. 97–98.

¹³Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Tadhkiira-i 'Allama Shaykh Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir Muḥaddīth Pattanī: Tarjuma-i Risāla-i Manāqib*, (Urdu trans.) Sayyid Abū Zafar Nadwī (Delhi, 1954), p. 103; Muhammad Saleem Akhtar discovered a manuscript of this text in the Public Library of Khairpur, Sind, but the modern research is not available on this book. See Akhtar, *Sind under the Mughals*, p. 134.

for a long time. In this regard this article will be a humble contribution to the existing corpus of knowledge of the advice literature of Mughal India.

2. Khanjar Beg's *mathnawī*: content, structure and features

Mathnawī is the most useful, wide and encyclopaedic form in comparison to all forms of Persian poetry. It is the only form of Persian poetry in which each and every thing can be lucidly and vividly expressed. It is a poem in couplets without any rhyme scheme (*qāfiya* and *radīf*) and can consist of unlimited number of couplets. Commenting on the *mathnawī* form of Persian poetry, Shiblī No'mānī points out its usage and wide scope in the following words:

In all types of poetry, this form, in comparison to all other poetic forms, is the most useful, wide and encyclopaedic. Whatever sorts of poetry are, all of them can be well articulated through it. No form can be more suitable than *mathnawī* for expressing all things like human emotions, natural landscapes, narrating events and imagination. Mostly, a historical event or a story is recounted in *mathnawī*. On the basis of this, whatever aspects are related to life and society such as love and romance, sorrow and happiness, fury and anger, grudge and revenge it comprises all. In fact, it provides space to express whatever human emotions exist. Various events occur in history, so, every sort of narrative can be perfectly made. Natural scenes, spring and fall, summer and winter, morning and evening, forest and desert, mountain, greenery and vegetation etc. can be portrayed. The topic on ethic, philosophy and mysticism can be elaborated in great detail.

The reason for its simplicity and breadth is that every couplet of the *mathnawī* is different because it is not bound to the rule of composing whole poem in a rhyme scheme as it is essential in *ghazal* and *qaṣīda*. The number of couplet is not limited in it; therefore, it can be extended as much as one wishes. Any topic is not specific with it, war, love, mysticism, philosophy and narration, whatever subject one wishes, can be articulated in the *mathnawī*.¹⁴

Khanjar Beg composed his poem in the form of *mathnawī* without assigning it any title.¹⁵ He composed it in Persian language for Akbar during the early years of his reign in 1557c.¹⁶ The exact date of the composition of the *mathnawī* is not known but its content and context

¹⁴Shiblī No'mānī, *She'r al-'Ajam* (Azamgarh, 2014), iv, pp. 189–190; My own translation.

¹⁵Edward Sachau and Hermann Ethe mentioned a *mathnawī* entitled, 'Naṣā'ih ba Pādshāh Akbar (Pieces of Advice addressed to Akbar)' in the catalogue through the reference of *Safīna-i Khushgo*, a book on biographies of poets composed in the eighteenth century. See Ed. Sachau and Hermann Ethe, *Catalogue of the Persian Turkish, Hindustani, and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford, 1889), i, p. 655a. However, the title of the *mathnawī* has been given neither by the poet nor in the writings of his contemporary and in the writings of the later centuries. They only mentioned that Mīrzā Khanjar Beg composed a *mathnawī* which contained poet's own condition, praise and advice given to Emperor Akbar. See 'Abd al-Qādir Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, (eds.) Aḥmad 'Alī and Kabīr al-Dīn Aḥmad (Calcutta, 1869), iii, pp. 223–224; 'Abd al-Qādir Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, (trans.) Wolesely Haig (Patna, 1960), iii, pp. 310–311; Lakshmī Nārāyan Shafiq, *Shām-i Charībān*, (ed.) Muḥammad Akbar al-Dīn Siddiqī (Karachi, 1977), p. 91; Shaykh Aḥmad 'Alī Khān Hāshimī, *Makhzan al-Gharā'ib*, (ed.) Muḥammad Bāqir (Lahore, 1970), p. 87. In fact, Sachau and Ethe misunderstood the description—'mathnawī mushammil bar hasb-i ḥāl-i khud wa naṣā'ih ba pādshāh Akbar guzrānīda būd' (a *mathnawī* based on his own condition and advice presented to Emperor Akbar)—given in *Safīna-i Khushgo*. In this description Bindrāband Dās Khushgo, the author of *Safīna-i Khushgo*, says that Khanjar Beg composed a *mathnawī* which consists of his own condition and advice given to Akbar rather mentioning the title of the *mathnawī*. See Bindrāban Dās Khushgo, *Safīna-i Khushgū* (Oxford, The Bodleian Library, MS. Elliott 400), f. 72b.

¹⁶It clearly appears from the only and undated manuscript of Khanjar Beg's *Dīwān* which contains the *mathnawī* that it was composed during the time of Akbar. As it has been written on the fly-leaf of the first folio by the same hand that "Dīwān-i Khanjari dar muddat-i ḥazrat Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Akbar Pādshāh-i Ghāzī ba-siyār guftā" (the

suggest that he composed it during the second phase of the period of Akbar's regent, Bayram Khān (1556–1560) which encompasses the period from the second battle of Panipat (November 1556) to the arrival of royal ladies (Akbar's mother, Ḥamīda Bānu Begum and his foster mother, Māham Anga) from Kabul to India (April 1557). In this phase, the regent was more powerful and had complete control over state administration by creating a group of loyalists and attempted to become a *de facto* sovereign.¹⁷ Khanjar Beg was discontented with the regent's growing influence in the court and dissented from his policies. By composing this masterpiece, he endeavoured to draw the emperor's attention toward this matter. However, there were many other factors that led him to compose the *mathnawī*. Khanjar Beg's personal life, the contemporary political scenario particularly the partisan politics among Mughal nobles and the change that occurred during Bayram Khān's regency with regard to the nature of Mughal kingship which was redefined by the emperor Humāyūn (r. 1530–40, 1555–56), Akbar's father, bear a close connection with the composition of the *mathnawī*.

Khanjar Beg, a Mughal noble, minstrel poet and erudite man, was associated with the court of Humāyūn and Akbar. He belonged to Chaghtai nobles of Transoxiana (Tūrān) and came to India with Humāyūn. He was also one of the oldest nobles in Akbar's time and the son-in-law of Tardī Beg Khān, the Mughal governor of Delhi province in 1556.¹⁸ He joined Mughal service when Humāyūn was struggling to restore Mughal rule in India around 1554–1555. During the course of time, he became Humāyūn's confidant (*maḥram*) and boon companion (*naḏīm*), and was made a part of his inner circle.¹⁹ His close relationship with Humāyūn, his association with the emperor's inner circle and his stature in the Mughal court are evident from his engagement in very confidential and personal assignments of the emperor.²⁰

Dīwān of Khanjar Beg was written well during the time of Akbar). See Mīrzā Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar* (Oxford, The Bodleian Library), MS. Selden Superius 23), f. 1a.

¹⁷Bayram Khān's regency period (1556–1560) has been divided into four phases. The first phase covers the period from the accession of Akbar to the imperial throne (January 1556) to just before the second battle of Panipat (October 1556). In this phase, benefiting from the critical situation of Mughals in India which happened due to the accidental death of emperor Humāyūn, Akbar's minor age and the threat of Afghans, Bayram Khān secured the approval of his appointment as the regent of the empire (*wakīl al-saltanat*) from all nobles, who did so to protect their common interests. All powerful Mughal nobles, who could contest the regent for the post of *wakīl* such as Tardī Beg Khān, Mun'im Khān, Khidr Khwāja Khān, Khwāja Jalāl al-Dīn Maḥmūd and Khwāja Mu'azzam on the basis of their long service, blood relations with the emperor, recognised his position but all of them wanted to share power with him. They even did not want that the regent exercise power as *de facto* sovereign. The third phase begins from April 1557 and lasted to the middle of the year 1559. This phase witnesses the decline of the regent's power gradually. The fourth phase covers the period from the latter half of 1559 to 1560. This period witnessed attempts of the regent to regain his power and the growth of factional strife which led Akbar to dismiss him. See, Iqtidar Alam Khan, 'The Mughal Court Politics during Bairam Khan's Regency', *Medieval India – A Miscellany* 1, (1969), p. 22.

¹⁸Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, p. 223; Haig, iii, p. 310; Khwāja Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad, *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*, (ed.) B. De (Calcutta, 1931), ii, p. 447; Khwāja Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad, *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*, (trans.) B. Dey (Calcutta, 1936), ii, p. 675; Shaykh Farīd Bhakkari, *Dakhīrat al-Khawānīn*, (ed.) Syed Moinul Haq (Karachi, 1961), i, p. 229; Shafīq, *Shām-i Ghariḇān*, p. 91; Khushgo, *Safīna-i Khushgo*, f. 72b; Hāshimī, *Makhsan al-Gharā'ib*, ii, p. 87; Sa'īd Nafīsī, *Tārīkh-i Nazm wa Nathr dar Īrān wa dar Zabān-i Fārsī* (Tehran, 1965), i, p. 545; Muḥammad Muẓaffar Ḥusayn Ṣabā, *Tadhkira-i Roz-i Raushan* (Bhopal, 1879), p. 204; 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Bazm-i Timūriya*, i, p. 431.

¹⁹Khanjar Beg himself claimed to be Humāyūn's confidant and boon companion in one of couplets of the *mathnawī*, Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 122b, line, 162.

²⁰The references given in the contemporary sources suggest that Khanjar Beg was always assigned confidential or personal works of Humāyūn along with other confidants. They also illustrate his close relation with the emperor and his service at Mughal court. For instance, when Humāyūn made the secret plan for blinding his brother, Mīrzā

However, Humāyūn's accidental death in 1556 completely changed Khanjar Beg's life. He even lost his erstwhile position as a result of partisan politics during the period of Bayram Khān's regency. These developments, having a direct bearing on his personal life and career, leading him to resist the regent's attempts at becoming the *de facto* sovereign ruler, compelled him to compose the *mathnawī*. At the time of Humāyūn's death Khanjar Beg was with Tardī Beg at Delhi. After suffering defeat at the hands of Hemu, the Hindu military commander of Afghāns, in a battle fought at Delhi on 7 October 1556, Tardī Beg along with other nobles fled and met Akbar at Sirhind who was marching towards Delhi to attack Hemu and to recapture the province.²¹ There was the arch-rivalry between the regent and Tardī Beg Khān. The defeat of the latter in the battle gave an opportunity to the former to eliminate one of the powerful nobles and to establish himself as the only next to Akbar. The regent managed to convince Akbar to execute Tardī Beg on the charges of treason by presenting 'Alī Qulī Khān and Pīr Muḥammad Khān as witnesses against him.²² It was not only Tardī Beg who became a victim of the regent's political ambition, but even his adherents and companions including Khanjar Beg fell victim to the same. The regent put some adherents of Tardī Beg to death while some of them such as Khanjar Beg, Khwāja Sulṭān 'Alī and Mīr Asghar Munshī were imprisoned. However, later on, the three managed to free themselves.²³ Khanjar Beg remained in touch with the imperial court as a poet, if not anything else. He composed many poems with his pen name 'khanjar' including the *mathnawī* for Akbar collected in his *Dīwān*.²⁴

The partisan politics, rivalry, and jealousy prevalent in the Mughal court at that time are reflected in the *mathnawī*, because Khanjar Beg personally experienced and fell victim to the same. Moreover, the time from the death of Humāyūn in 1556 to the fall of Bayram Khān's power as the *de facto* ruler in 1560 was a period of confusion, suspicions, political crisis and development of unethical dispositions such as malevolence, malice and jealousy for power within Mughal nobility.²⁵ Khanjar Beg in the *mathnawī* tried to bring attention of Akbar towards the prevalent atmosphere of jealousy and partisan politics. He counsels the emperor

Kāmraṅ in 1553, Khanjar Beg was appointed for carrying out the act along with some other imperial servants such as 'Arīf Beg, Sayyid Muḥammad Pakna, 'Alī Dost and Jauhar Aftābchī, the writer of *Tadhkirat al-Wāqī'āt*. See Jauhar Aftābchī, *Tadhkirat al-Wāqī'āt*, (ed.) Sajida Sherwani (Rampur, 2015), p. 189; Khanjar Beg was present with them even at the time when Kāmraṅ was being blinded. See Bāyazīd Bayāt, *Tadhkirat-i Humāyūn wa Akbar*, (ed.) Hidāyat Ḥusain (Calcutta, 1941), p. 159; In one incident he was portrayed as the person who, along with a group of people, helped Jalāl al-Dīn Maḥmūd Ubhī, the superintendent of imperial household (*nūr-i buyūtāt*) in the preparation of food for Humāyūn. See Bayāt, *Tadhkirat-i Humāyūn wa Akbar*, pp. 73–74; He was also entrusted, along with five other persons, with the very confidential work of moving the dead body of Humāyūn to Sirhind after his accidental death at Delhi in 1556. See Abū'l-Faḍl, *Akbarnāma*, (ed.) 'Abd al-Raḥīm (Calcutta, 1876), ii, p. 66; Abū'l-Faḍl, *The Akbarnāma of Abū'l Fazl*, (trans.) Henry Beveridge (Calcutta, 1907), ii, p. 102.

²¹Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, (eds.) Munshī Aḥmad 'Alī and William Nassau Lees (Calcutta, 1865), ii, pp. 13–14; Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, (trans.) William Henry Lowe (Patna, 1984), ii, pp. 6–7.

²²Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, ii, p. 14; Lowe, ii, p. 7; Abū'l Faḍl, *Akbarnāma*, ii, pp. 32–33; Beveridge, ii, pp. 51–52; 'Arīf Qandhārī, *Tārīkh-i Akbarī*, (eds.) Sayyid Mu'īn al-Dīn, Sayyid Azhar 'Alī and Imtīyāz 'Alī 'Arshī (Rampur, 1962), p. 50. Tardī Beg was the last hurdle for Bayram Khān in his way to become the *de facto* sovereign after dismissing all powerful nobles from their significant positions. See Khan, 'The Mughal Court Politics during Bairam Khan's Regency', pp. 22–27.

²³Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, ii, p. 14; Lowe, ii, p. 7; Abū'l Faḍl, *Akbarnāma*, ii, p. 32; Beveridge, ii, p. 52; For the followers of Tardī Beg, see Khan, 'The Mughal Court Politics during Bairam Khan's Regency', pp. 27–28.

²⁴For the *mathnawī* and other poems of Khanjar Beg composed for Akbar, see Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*.

²⁵Khan, 'The Mughal Court Politics during Bairam Khan's Regency', pp. 22–26.

to understand world affairs carefully and to take control over the imperial authority as the centre of power in favour of all Mughal nobility and kingdom, and reminds him that acquiring good name (*nām-i nek*) constitutes the emperor's main (*aṣl*) objective. He says:

O, King! the duty of this world is to envy,
 This was there in the past, and still persists and will remain in future:
 With all these complicated affairs
 Only good name is real, the rest is nothing.²⁶

This period also witnessed the rise of Bayram Khān's power and his complete control over state administration which are explicitly reflected in his political and administrative policies. Having eliminated the last hurdle, Tardī Beg, and taken all political and administrative power, particularly the control of central administration in his own hands, the regent attempted to strengthen his power by appointing and promoting his servants and friends to high positions and kept all of them away from the capital and the emperor's contact. With such measures, the regent bestowed different titles on his own friends. He bestowed on 'Abdallāh Khān Uzbek the title of Shujā'at Khān and assigned him the *sarkār* of Kālpi; on Sikandar Khān Uzbek the title of Khān-i 'Ālam and appointed him to Sialkot to assist Khidr Khwāja Khān; on 'Alī Qulī Khān the title of Khān-i Zamān and assigned to him the *sarkār* of Sambhal; and entrusted Qiyā Khān with the assignment of Āgra. He gave special status to Pīr Muḥammad Khān by bestowing on him the title of Nāṣir al-Mulk who was attached to the emperor in person on behalf of the regent. Besides, the regent also took complete control of the central administration by dismissing old servants such as Khwāja Sulṭān 'Alī and Mīr Asghar Munshī. He also performed most of the duties of the officers of the central government through his adherents, Pīr Muḥammad Khān, Khwāja Amīn al-Dīn and Shaykh Gadā'ī.²⁷

The powerful position of the regent and his partisan policies caused resentment among other groups of Mughal nobles which comprised of Māham Anga, her son, Adham Khān, and Shahāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Khān and all those people who belonged to the Atka Khaīl family. They were resentful because the regent refused to share power with them. Apart from it, they were also critical of his discriminatory politics as they were assigned poor *jāgīrs* mostly in distant and hostile regions. For example, Adham Khān was assigned a *jāgīr* in Hathnath near Āgra which was the region of rebellious Rajputs, while Akta Khān was assigned *jāgīr* of Bahera in Punjab.²⁸ This kind of politics in the appointment of nobles in the Mughal administration was good neither for Akbar himself nor for the nascent kingdom. Khanjar Beg suggests the emperor to use the *uzuk* seal²⁹ with caution (*iḥtiyāt*)

²⁶In this article I have used Wolesely Haig's translation for the couplets incorporated in Badāyūnī's *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh* but I have replaced old words with their modern equivalents in order to make them reader-friendly. However, I have used my own translation for the rest of couplets. Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 129b, lines, 364, 366; Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, p. 224, lines, 6-7; Haig, iii, p. 311, lines, 6-7.

²⁷Khan, 'The Mughal Court Politics during Bairam Khan's Regency', pp. 28-30; Afzal Husain, *The Nobility under Akbar and Jahāngīr: A Study of Family Groups* (Delhi, 1999), p. 17.

²⁸Husain, *The Nobility under Akbar and Jahāngīr*, p. 18.

²⁹It was a small round seal in shape and was one of the most important seals used for issuing, *farnān-i Thabī*, the most important imperial order. It was used for rewarding imperial titles, high appointments in administrative posts, assigning *jāgīr* (revenue assignment) and large sums. It was entrusted to the most trusted person and not to the regent (*wakīl*) or to finance officer (*dīwān*). The contemporary sources do not reveal as to whom this seal

and prudence (*hushyārī*) rather than as a seal of mere endorsement of appointment already done by the regent. Addressing the emperor he cautions:

Kingship is best exercised according to law,
As the king's order is authenticated by his great seal.
Since it is your turn to exercise sovereignty,
It is essential for you to exercise caution and prudence.³⁰

Similarly, the problems of the nobles opposing the regent, to which Khanjar Beg himself belonged, are also reflected in the *mathnawī*. He hints at the problems faced by them and also laments Akbar's indifference towards their suffering. Drawing the emperor's attention toward nobles' problems, he says:

You press onward in every direction on foot,
While we on our horses are fainting with weariness:³¹

The main aim of Bayram Khān for taking these political measures was to exercise his power as the *de facto* ruler as he could not enjoy it in the presence of other powerful nobles who could contest him for the post of *wakīl*.³² In fact, Akbar was the nominal sovereign in general and a tool for the nobles who wanted to share power with the regent in particular. Akbar's position as a nominal ruler in this period is evident from the regent's interference in the personal life of the emperor. In 1556, Akbar's marital relation with the daughter of 'Abdallāh Khān Mughal, who belonged to a distinguished family, is the conspicuous evidence of the regent's control over the emperor's personal life. When the emperor wanted to marry the daughter of 'Abdallāh Khān, the regent did not approve of it because 'Abdallāh Khān was related to the emperor's uncle, Mīrzā Kāmīrān through the marriage of his sister. The regent even considered 'Abdallāh Khān as a partisan of Kāmīrān. In the end, the emperor had to issue an imperial order (*farmān*) to Pīr Muḥammad Khān, whose intervention helped in persuading the regent to give his consent for the marriage.³³ Here, it is worthwhile to note that it is not Bayram Khān's concern for the safety of Akbar, but his efforts to remain the *de facto* ruler as it is evidenced by his intervention in the emperor's personal life. Protesting against the regent's strong control over the imperial authority, Khanjar Beg tries to make Akbar realise his position and encourages him to consolidate power in his own hands. In the following couplets, addressing the emperor, he says:

You are like the candle and your kingdom as the house,
And the people around you are like moths.
The mote is not seen in the sunbeam if the sun does not shine,

was entrusted during the period of Bayram Khān's regency. After the regent's fall, it was placed under the charge of Khwāja Jahān. For the detail of seals and *farmān-i Thabī*. See Abu'l Faḍl, *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, i, pp. 47–48 and 194; Blochmann, i, pp. 54 and 270–273; Ibn Hasan, *The Central Structure of the Mughal Empire* (Lahore, 1967), pp. 100–101.

³⁰Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 130a, lines, 376–377; Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, p. 225, lines, 17–18; Haig, iii, p. 312, lines, 17–18.

³¹Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 131a, line, 411; Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, p. 226, line, 41; Haig, iii, p. 313, line, 41.

³²Khan, 'The Mughal Court Politics during Bairam Khan's Regency', pp. 35–36.

³³Abu'l Faḍl, *Akbarnāma*, ii, p. 57; Beveridge, ii, p. 88.

And where there is no candle there is no moth.
That is to say, the livelihood of all is from you,³⁴

Through these metaphors, Khanjar Beg attempts to project Akbar as the candle (*sham*) and the sun (*khwur* or *khurshīd*) (the real authority), who possesses light and sunbeam (*nur-i khwur*), the power to illuminate his house (*khāna*), the kingdom with candle light and the world with sunbeam (to provide tranquillity to the subjects of the kingdom and to make the world prosperous. But he is not able to illuminate them because he has given his light (power) to someone else (the regent); and he is not even aware of the significance of his authority and position. Furthermore, Khanjar Beg argues that if the candle (Akbar) is not aware of the significance of light (power), the moths (subjects) will face hardships for the livelihood of all subjects is derived from him and the kingdom does not mean anything sans the emperor.

With regard to Akbar being a tool in the hands of the opposing Tūrānī nobles, the composition of the *mathnawī* itself with its focus on making the emperor conscious of the value and significance of his power, on encouraging him to take all power in his own hands, and on redressing the grievances of the regent's opponents, illustrates how Khanjar Beg tried to persuade the emperor to weaken and dislodge the regent.

Apart from the above mentioned reasons for the composition of the *mathnawī*, Khanjar Beg's attempt to regain his lost position during Akbar's reign was also one of the motivating factors that led him to write it. His intent is reflected in several couplets which also illustrate that he was feeling insecure after being set free from imprisonment. Couplets emphasising his competent persona equipped with skills in different arts,³⁵ and asserting his close relationship with Humāyūn by portraying himself as the emperor's confidant and boon companion illustrate his intention to affirm himself as a capable person worthy of being in the imperial service.³⁶ Khanjar Beg, through many couplets, tries to impress Akbar that he remained at the service of Humāyūn only by virtue of his abilities and skills.³⁷ The couplets at the end of the *mathnawī* try to foreground the association of Khanjar Beg's forefathers and their image of the trustworthy well-wishers at the Mughal court.³⁸ This connection is also shrewdly employed by him to regain his lost position. Similarly, he by declaring himself to be a loyal, rightful, and honest servant, by portraying himself as an oppressed person at the hands of his enemies due to the death of emperor Humāyūn, and by giving clarification for his being a victim of the rivalry between Tardī Beg Khān and the regent manifest his intention of composing the *mathnawī* for securing imperial favour.³⁹ These developments

³⁴Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 130a, lines, 386–388; Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, p. 225, 19–21; Haig, iii, p. 312, lines, 19–21.

³⁵Khanjar Beg enumerates his skills in various arts and sciences such as in rhyming prose, poetry, astronomy, astrology, use of astrolabe, composition and solving of enigmas, arithmetic, mathematics, handling figures and geometry. Moreover, he also portrays himself a connoisseur of the art of music by claiming to have the unique and extraordinary knowledge of music both in theory and practice. For instance he claims to know about different forms of musical tunes, Indo-Persian music and his mastery over the art of musical theme and air (*fann-i šaut ua naqsh*). See Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, ff. 120b–121a, lines, 94–106.

³⁶*Ibid.*, f. 122b, line, 162.

³⁷*Ibid.*, f. 122b, line, 161.

³⁸*Ibid.*, f. 131b, line, 432.

³⁹*Ibid.*, ff. 131b–132a, lines, 426, 434–437.

—problems pertaining to his personal life, his being the victim of the rivalry between the regent and Tardī Beg Khān, the partisan politics and his fear of losing his imperial position—created frustration in Khanjar Beg which led him to compose the *mathnawī* along with explicit criticism of Akbar for which he apologises in the *mathnawī* (see below).

The trend of composing poetry for gaining imperial patronage by complaining about irregularities in the kingdom and through asserting one's capabilities and poetic skills was a prevalent tradition during that time across kingdoms. In this context, Khanjar Beg's persona bears some resemblance with Mustāfa 'Alī (1541–1600), the sixteenth-century historian of Ottoman Empire. Mustāfa 'Alī, a near contemporary of Khanjar Beg, was appointed in the periphery regions of the Ottoman Empire, who always attempted to serve at the centre and to maintain a proximity to the ruler.⁴⁰ Towards this end, he attempted to gain the goodwill of the emperor through expressing his potentials in his writings and complained against the corruption of officials and irregularities in the empire.⁴¹

The change in the nature of kingship during the period of Bayram Khān's regency can be cited as yet another reason for Khanjar Beg to compose the *mathnawī*. The image of the king in the time of Bābur was just a 'steppe clan leader' whose position was that of 'first-among-equals'. However, the image of king as established by Humāyūn, departing from his father's, was something more than 'first-among-equals' and finally it reached its zenith in the form of an all-powerful and absolute king during the time of Akbar and its clear manifestation can be seen in Abu'l Faḍl's *Akbarnāma*. In fact, it was Humāyūn who changed the image of king by redefining imperial policies and rituals. For instance, he tried to change the image of king ideologically by commissioning the book, *Qānun-i Humāyūni* in which his greatness as a powerful king was presented.⁴² The image of king as not being one among equals, which emerged in Humāyūn's time, was disappearing after his death due to partisan politics. Khanjar Beg observed it at the time and accordingly tried to remind Akbar through the *mathnawī* of what his father did for consolidating his image as a powerful ruler. He even exemplified Humāyūn and his efforts for strengthening himself and for consolidating his empire in the *mathnawī*.⁴³

The *mathnawī* was originally composed in four hundred seventy-seven couplets,⁴⁴ which has been traced and identified in the poetic collection (*dīwān*) of Khanjar Beg titled *Dīwān-i Khanjar* in the Oriental collection of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.⁴⁵ However, some couplets of the *mathnawī*, along with incorrect information of the actual number of its couplets, are found in a sixteenth-century historical chronicle, in the *tadhkiras* of the later centuries and in a modern piece of writing. 'Abd al-Qādir Badāyūnī's *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, an unofficial historical chronicle of Mughals written in the sixteenth century

⁴⁰Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600)* (Princeton, 1986).

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

⁴²Munis D. Faruqi, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (Delhi, 2012), pp. 59–63.

⁴³Khanjar Beg portrays Humāyūn as the shadow of God (*zill-i khudā*) who possessed the throne (*takht*), crown (*tāj*), empire (*mulk*) and army (*sipāh*); and conquered the world. But when the governance of Hind (India) fell into his hands, he bestowed himself and his kingdom with new life. See Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 129a, lines, 358–360.

⁴⁴Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, ff. 117b–133a.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, ff. 117b–133a.

is the earliest source in which Badāyūnī mentions the *mathnawī* and its composer while discussing the biography of several poets during the time of Akbar. Badāyūnī also extracts fifty three couplets from the *mathnawī* and puts them in his historical chronicle to establish the *mathnawī*'s significance as well as to show Khanjar Beg's interest and talent in Persian poetry.⁴⁶ However, his claim about the exact number of couplets that the poet originally composed the *mathnawī* in three thousands couplets (*si šad bayt*) is unsubstantiated.⁴⁷ Relying on Badāyūnī's description, Lakshmī Nārāyan Shafīq and Bindārban Dās Khushgo, the *tadhkīra* writers of the eighteenth century, also provide similar information about the *mathnawī* through quoting few couplets.⁴⁸ Sayyid Šabāḥ al-Dīn, 'Abd al-Raḥmān presents a similar picture of it and incorporates forty nine couplets in *Bazm-i Tīmūriya*, a twentieth century book written in Urdu on the intellectual history of Mughal India.⁴⁹

The complete *mathnawī* could not be traced or identified for a long time. It even escaped the attention of modern historians of Mughal India due to many reasons. One obvious reason is that it has not been clearly identified in the catalogue. Sachau and Ethe asserts that a *mathnawī* of Khanjar Beg in the catalogue consisting of pieces of advice presented to Akbar through the reference of *Safīna-i Khushgo* as the additional information for the reader but they fail to identify it clearly in the manuscript of the *Dīwān*.⁵⁰

The other reason is that the *mathnawī* could not get a wide reception in Mughal period. Contemporary historians except Badāyūnī do not mention this *mathnawī*.⁵¹ Abu'l Faḍl, the author of *Akbarnāma* and *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, even do not list him while commenting on the contemporary Mughal court poets. Badāyūnī's appreciation of Khanjar Beg's *mathnawī*, and the ignorance of Abu'l Faḍl about it can be explained in terms of the critical approach of Khanjar Beg to Akbar in it. Badāyūnī and Abu'l Faḍl were two opposite figures of the sixteenth-century Mughal India. The former was critic of Akbar and his policies while the latter was the great admirer of Akbar and everything which belonged to him. The lack of its reception in Mughal India can also be seen through the number of copies of the manuscript. Khanjar Beg's *Dīwān-i Khanjar* in the Bodleian Library which consists of the complete *mathnawī* is the only copy of the manuscript. The *mathnawī*, even as a separate form of written treatise like numerous Persian *mathnawīs* of the early modern period, was not known in any catalogue of a library because not a single separate manuscript copy of the *mathnawī* had been traced yet. Another reason for its lack of circulation in Mughal India was that it was written for an immediate cause. Despite the fact that the Bodleian manuscript copy is unicum, the *mathnawī*

⁴⁶Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, pp. 224–226; Haig, iii, pp. 311–114.

⁴⁷Wolesely Haig wrongly translated the words '*si šad bayt*' with 'three hundred couplets'. 'Abd al-Qādir Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, (trans. and ed.) Wolesely Haig, revised and enlarged by Brahmadeva Parasad Ambashthya (Patna, 1960), iii, p. 310.

⁴⁸Shafīq incorporated thirty couplets in his book while Khushgo included only nine couplets. However, Hāshmi, a nineteenth century *tadhkīra* writer, informs about the *mathnawī* without quoting a single couplet. Shafīq, *Shām-i Gharībān*, pp. 91–92; Khushgo, *Safīna-i Khushgo*, pp. 72b–73a; Hāshmi, *Makhzan al-Gharīb*, ii, p. 87.

⁴⁹'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Bazm-i Tīmūriya*, i, pp. 431–432.

⁵⁰Sachau and Ethe, *Catalogue of the Persian Turkish, Hindustani, and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, i, p. 655a.

⁵¹The other contemporary scholars, Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad, Shaykh Farīd Bhakkārī mentioned Khanjar Beg as a poet and noble but they did not refer to his *mathnawī* on the advice for Akbar. See Aḥmad, *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*, ii, p. 447; Dey, ii, p. 675; Bhakkārī, *Dhakhīrat al-Khawānīn*, i, p. 229.

reached Akbar orally through Khanjar Beg himself. He recited it in front of the emperor⁵² in the imperial court at Āgra, the capital city of Mughals.⁵³

The *mathnawī* is diverse in terms of its content, structure and features. It is didactic, reproachful, panegyric, apologetic, historical and autobiographical in nature which consists of a variety of themes such as autobiography, advice for Akbar on the art of governance with all features of advice literature, and of some reflections on political crisis and partisan politics prevalent at Mughal court in the early years of Akbar's reign. It begins with panegyric couplets for the emperor and his kingdom;⁵⁴ follows a narrative description on the poet's personal, intellectual and political life along with his skill in different arts, as well as his personal experiences.⁵⁵ Furthermore, it gives advice to Akbar addressing him directly and frankly using base language,⁵⁶ and reproaching the emperor for not being conscious of the authority he possessed, for his inattention to fulfil his duties, and for his negligence of state affairs and contemporary political problems.⁵⁷ The last part of the *mathnawī* contains patronising and apologetic couplets for his usage of frank and base language and criticism of the emperor.⁵⁸ However, it ends with supplications to God for the emperor's longevity.⁵⁹ Khanjar Beg's criticism of the sovereign in explicit manner is one of the remarkable features of the *mathnawī*.

The trend of using base language to address imperial authority and criticising him abruptly was perhaps used in medieval Persian court culture. In medieval Perso-Islamic World, the court poets were well-wishers for the ruler and his kingdom and one of their duties was to encourage him to pursue good and to avoid evils through offering advice to him.⁶⁰ But they were obliged to counsel and even on some occasions to criticise him in a well-balanced language that is called "oblique and indirect language".⁶¹ It means a language which at a time could conceal and reveal the message clearly without offending ruler.⁶² However, criticising and eulogising ruler at two different occasions served as a ritual for the transfer of allegiance between two patrons. The two odes of Abū 'Ubāda b. al-Walīd b. 'Ubayd al-Buḥturī written after the murder of his patron, the Abbasid caliph, al-Mutawakkil 'alā llah (r. 847-861), is this type of writing.⁶³ The indirect criticism of

⁵²Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, p. 226; Haig, iii, p. 314; Shafīq, *Shām-i Gharīban*, p. 91.

⁵³Addressing Akbar in a couplet, Khanjar Beg says that "I am in Āgra at this time". See Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 132a, line, 449.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, f. 117b, lines, 1-15.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, ff. 18a-27b, lines, 16-301.

⁵⁶The use of the words or expressions such as "Listen to me," or "Understand what I am saying," is called the use of base language in terms of addressing the imperial authority because they show the speaker's lack of expression; these are useless interpolations in his discourse, a deviation from eloquence and articulacy, and a sign of being dull witted. See Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 14.

⁵⁷Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, ff. 27b-131a, lines, 302-415.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, ff. 131a-133a, lines, 416-473.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, f. 133a, lines, 474-477.

⁶⁰Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, pp. 12-13.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³Al-Buḥturī composed two poetic works, one elegy for al-Mutawakkil, and other panegyric for his son, al-Muntaṣir billah who got his father murdered and usurped the throne. In the former accusing al-Muntaṣir for the murder of his father, al-Mutawakkil, al-Buḥturī stigmatised al-Muntaṣir and tried to get support from others against him while in the latter he panegyricised al-Muntaṣir. This dual service has been seen in terms of a ritual for the transfer of allegiance between patrons. See Samer Mahdy Ali, 'Praise for Murder?': Two odes by al-Buḥturī

ruler, particularly for his failure to maintain state affairs such as social and political order in his land or to achieve the goal of becoming an ideal ruler, is also found in the advice literature. The authors of advice literature do not criticise ruler directly. Generally, they criticise the failures of ruler and sometime ruler himself indirectly. They do it as well-wishers for their ruler and kingdom just to make him aware of the contemporary social and political problems and to urge him to solve them. This feature of advice literature has been termed the ‘positive protest’ of the authors.⁶⁴ Similarly, no work either in poetry or prose, particularly a didactic poem or advisory work is found in Mughal India which criticises a ruler unequivocally. In fact, Mughal emperors did not like such writings, though they patronised a large number of poets and authors.⁶⁵ In the context of the culture of criticising ruler, Khanjar Beg’s approach to criticism departs from Persian court poets of medieval Islamic world in terms of making explicit criticism. However, he tries to maintain a balance between criticising Akbar and not offending him by various ways in the *mathnavī*. For instance, Khanjar Beg warns the emperor about his unawareness and negligence towards the poor condition of the people and widening gap between the emperor and his subjects. In one of couplets, he frankly expresses his ideas and says:

You boldly confront the raging tiger,
While men flee every side in terror.⁶⁶

There are around seventeen couplets in which he warns Akbar against his overindulgence in pleasurable activities such as hunting, riding elephants, fighting animals, living an epicurean life and strolling in the country etc. while ignoring state affairs and every day suffering, fear and anxiety etc. of his subjects.⁶⁷ In the following couplets, he says:

You ride, laughing light-heartedly, on your fierce elephant,
But people lining the walls to see your pass are weeping.
You lay your hand on the tusk of the elephant,
But people take the finger of anxiety between their teeth.
You withstand unmoved the attack of the wolf,
While all, both great and small, wonder at you from afar:
In one dark night you travel a month’s journey,
While men struggle after you sighing for the light of a torch:

Surrounding an Abbasid Patricide’, in *Writers and Rulers: Perspectives on Their Relationship from Abbasid to Safavid Times*, (eds.) Beatrice Gruendler and Louise Marlow (Wiesbaden, 2004), pp. 1–3.

⁶⁴Ann Katherine Swynford Lambton, ‘Islamic Mirrors for Princes’, in *Theory and Practice in Medieval Persian Government* (Variorum), (London, 1980), p. 420.

⁶⁵There are also two examples from the time of Akbar and his successor, Jahāngīr, which show the dislike of criticism by Mughal emperors. ‘Abd al-Qādir Badāyūnī was critic of Akbar and his policies but he secretly composed his book. See Harbans Mukhia, *Historians and Historiography during the Reign of Akbar* (New Delhi, 1976), p. 111. But when the book appeared in the time of his successor, Jahāngīr, he was displeased; however, he did not take any harsh. See Muḥammad Bakhtāwar Khān, *Mir’āt al-‘Ālam*, (ed.) Sajida Sultana Alvi (Lahore, 1979), ii, p. 431. Similarly, Qaydī Shūrāzī, who was associated with Akbar’s court and got close to him, but when he criticised Akbar’s policy of *dāgh* and *maḥallī*, which Akbar did not like, he lost his imperial favour. See ‘Abd al-Raḥman, *Bazm-i Timūriya*, i, p. 463.

⁶⁶Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 130b, line, 399; Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, p. 225, line, 32; Haig, iii, p. 313, line, 32.

⁶⁷Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, ff. 130b–131a, lines, 396–411.

You wander almost naked in the cold,
While the people are shivering under their wrappings:⁶⁸

Khanjar Beg's criticism of Akbar is not on the grounds of the latter's indulgence in pleasurable activities per se; rather he considers these activities as part of imperial skills and ethos. His criticism emanates from his belief that Akbar, while overindulging in these activities, failed in dealing with state affairs.⁶⁹

In the advisory part of the *mathnawī*, Khanjar Beg attempts to compensate his criticism of the emperor with the constant portrayal of himself as courteous and loyal to him and tries to not portray himself as being discourteous. He does it in various ways. One of the approaches adopted by him for this purpose is to claim himself to be a well-wisher of the emperor and his kingdom. Further, he counsels the emperor to pay heed to the advice being proffered. This approach is reflected in many couplets of the advisory part. For instance:

Since my words are without guile
The counsels I should offer you are practical.
Since I strive only for your well-being,
Why should I conceal from you the words of truth?
To all words, whether uttered by this one or that one,
Give ear, if they touch the root of the matter.⁷⁰

Khanjar Beg also tries to neutralise his criticism of the emperor by employing a patronising tone towards the end of the *mathnawī*. In doing so, he depicts Akbar as the source of peace and stability in the kingdom.⁷¹

Yet another approach that Khanjar Beg adopts in the act of balancing is through admonishing himself for levelling criticism against Akbar. In this he projects Akbar's rule as sanctified by God and therefore, not subject to criticism.⁷² As a matter of fact, Khanjar Beg reminds himself that all his counsels are meaningless and looks down upon his criticism as a source of discomfort for Akbar.⁷³ Afterwards, he while addressing Akbar makes it clear that the whole of his *mathnawī* is nothing but a declaration of his loyalty to his emperor.⁷⁴ He even tries to maintain such balance by apologising to Akbar and asks for his forgiveness and requests him to pay heed if his counsel touches the matter of truth.⁷⁵ However, the fact is that maintaining such a balance in the *mathnawī* was aimed at gaining personal favour from Akbar. The prime favour being sought was regaining his lost position at the imperial court as earlier discussed.

Thus, the context, content, structure, and features of Khanjar Beg's *mathnawī* suggest that his *mathnawī* is polythematic in nature covering multiple themes, intents, emotions and

⁶⁸Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, ff. 130b–131a, lines, 396–397, 401, 407, 409; Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārikh*, iii, pp. 225–226, lines, 29–30, 34, 38, 39; Haig, iii, p. 313, lines, 29–30, 34, 38, 39.

⁶⁹Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 131a, lines, 413–415.

⁷⁰Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 129b, lines, 370–372; Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārikh*, iii, p. 224, lines, 11–13; Haig, iii, pp. 311–312, lines, 11–13.

⁷¹Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 131, lines, 416–418.

⁷²*Ibid.*, f. 131b, lines, 423–425.

⁷³*Ibid.*, f. 131a–b, lines, 419–22.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, f. 131b, line, 426.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, f. 133a, line, 470.

purposes. It is the polythematic feature of the *mathnawī* and its multiplicity in nature, particularly reproaching Akbar for his negligence toward state affairs in explicit terms, which makes it unique and distinguished from other didactic poetic writings composed particularly in Mughal India. Although Khanjar Beg composed many other poems in different modes of Persian poetry as contained in his *Dīwān*, and wrote several books,⁷⁶ it was the *mathnawī* and its uniqueness which gave him a place of pride for introducing a new form of poetry composition in the sixteenth-century Mughal India.⁷⁷ These characteristics also explain why Khanjar Beg chose the *mathnawī* genre rather than other forms of Persian poetry, and preferred poetic form to that of prose. In fact, it was the *mathnawī* genre with its flexible nature that suited Khanjar Beg to give expression to his diverse intents, assorted themes and multitude of emotions including the criticism of Akbar.

3. The *mathnawī* as an advice book

The advice literature or mirror for princes is a literary genre commonly written in prose. It provides ideal norms to human beings for edification in general and to a ruler for the management of state affairs in particular. It was popular during the middle ages across geographical boundaries⁷⁸ accumulating much fame in medieval Islamic society where it was produced in multiple traditions—pre-Islamic Iranian (Sāsānid), Islamic and Greek; and in multiple languages—Arabic, Persian and Turkish.⁷⁹

The genre consists of ideal norms for how a state and government should be administered focusing on how a ruler should be and what he should do for the establishment of an ideal state and society. It portrays the image of a ruler as divinely-ordained and an ideal being having knowledge of governance and dispensation of justice in his kingdom. A discussion on

⁷⁶Badāyūnī mentions the *Dīwān* of Khanjar Beg and presents him the author of several books but he highlights the *mathnawī* only. Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, p. 224; Haig, iii, p. 310.

⁷⁷Abd al-Rahmān gives the *mathnawī* an important place in his work because the *mathnawī* which contains the characteristics of truthfulness and frankness was composed at the time when the contemporary poets were engaged in composing panegyric poetry for erstwhile imperial authority. Commenting on the features of this *mathnawī*, 'Abd al-Rahmān points out, "One of the most important characteristics of this *mathnawī* is that when other poets were trying to compose poetry for panegyricising Akbar, Khanjar Beg was busy in advising Akbar in clear and conspicuous words which bear truthfulness and honesty. I [Ṣabāḥ al-Dīn 'Abd al-Rahmān] quote this long passage from the *mathnawī* so that a new style of poetry of that period could be brought to light." See 'Abd al-Rahmān, *Bazm-i Timūriya*, i, pp. 431–432; My own translation.

⁷⁸Cristian Bratu, 'Mirrors for Princes (Western)', in *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms - Methods - Trends*, (ed.) Albrecht Classen (Berlin, 2010), i, pp. 1921–1949; Mark David Luce, 'Mirrors for Princes (Islamic)', in *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms - Methods - Trends*, (ed.) Albrecht Classen (Berlin, 2010), i, pp. 1916–1920.

⁷⁹Ann Katherine Swynford Lambton, 'Islamic Mirrors for Princes', pp. 419–442; Louise Marlow, 'Mirrors for Princes', in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Islamic Political Thought*, (eds.) Gernahard Bowering, Patricia Crone, Wadad Kadi, Devin J. Stewart (New Jersey, 2013), pp. 348–350; Louise Marlow, 'Advice and Advice Literature', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Three, 2008, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/advice-and-advice-literature-COM_0026 (accessed 30 November 2019); The most famous advisory texts in Arabic produced in Perso-Islamic world are: the *Kitāb al-Tāj* of al-Jāhīz and *Uyūn al-Akhlāk* of Ibn Qutayba and the *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* of Ibn Miskūya etc., while the popular texts composed in Persian prose are: the *Qābūsnāma* of Ibn Iskandar and the *Siyāsatnāma* of Nizām al-Mulk Ṭūsī and *Naṣīhat al-Mulūk* of al-Ghazālī and the *Akhlāq-i Nāsiṛī* of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī etc. See 'Abdel Hakim Hassan Omar Muḥammed Dawood, 'A Comparative Study of Arabic and Persian Mirrors for Princes from the Second to the Sixth Century A.H.', (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of London, 1965), pp. 26–60; Richard Walzer and H. A. R. Gibb, 'Akhlak', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (eds.) H. A. R. Gibb, J. H. Kramers, E. Levi-Provencal, J. Schacht (Leiden, 1986), i, pp. 325–326; F. Rahman, 'Akhlāq', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 29 July 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/akhlak-ethics-plural-form-of-koloq-inborn-character-moral-character-moral-virtue> (accessed 19 December 2018).

justice (*adālat*) and just rulers is the focal point of the genre.⁸⁰ Moreover, it does not concentrate on framing the theory of state and government as it is the norm in the writings of orthodox Islamic jurists and the Muslim political philosophers. Rather, its concerns are with improving the contemporary circumstances and providing remedies for social and political evils without giving conspicuous description of the exact problems.⁸¹ It is also perceived to be a 'positive protest' against the failure of a ruler to maintain social and political order.⁸² Besides, politics is the main subject of the genre but the authors do not separate it from moral and ethical norms. One of the noted features of the genre is that advice is tendered through anecdotes, maxims, and tales concerning the rulers of Pre-Islamic Iran, Muslim rulers, prophets and caliphates with the help of Qur'ānic verses and prophetic traditions.⁸³

Apart from these features all advisory texts, on the grounds of their authors' ideological orientations, are broadly divided into two traditions: *akhlāq* and *adab*. Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* and those texts which incorporate his ideas are considered as advisory texts of *akhlāq*. The main feature of this tradition is that the authors do not give any place to the orthodox ideas of Islamic jurists nor to any form of discrimination on religious, sectarian and racial grounds. Rather, the advice contained in *akhlāq* writings is founded on secular grounds. The tradition of *akhlāq* does not attempt to advise ruler to implement the Islamic laws (*sharī'a*). Rather, it urges rulers to maintain social order and to establish peace and justice in the society. The rest of advisory texts written outside the *akhlāq* tradition are considered as advisory writings of *adab* literature. Although this tradition incorporates a number of similar features and elements of *akhlāq*, it sometimes gives considerable space to the promotion of Islamic laws and contains discriminatory ideas on religious, sectarian and racial grounds.⁸⁴ However, it does not mean that the authors of *akhlāq* writings completely ignore the references to God and Islam, rather, they incorporate their references but for different purposes. In fact, giving reference to classical Islam or its religious history is also a part of the *akhlāq* but the way in which it is done is different from the *adab* tradition. For example, the authors of *akhlāq* texts give references to God and Islam but they completely ignore the discussion on the defence and implementation of *sharī'a*, Islam and the protection of a particular community. On the contrary, they portray ruler as the one who sustains what exists in the world and whose main duty is to attain perfection as a social being, to maintain the social order and to help human beings using his intellect. If the reference to classical Islam or the discussion of *sharī'a* is ever brought up, it is used to illustrate or to strengthen the notion of the ideal ruler. Commenting on this feature of *akhlāq* literature, Muzaffar Alam points out:

They invoked the *sharī'a* and illustrated their discourses by citing such anecdotes from classical Islamic period as they found supporting their ideals... However, the connotations of the *sharī'a*, in these cases, were not the same as those that a jurist intended when he used the term. The ideal ruler in the Nasirean tradition was the one who ensured the well being of the people of diverse religious groups, and not Muslim alone.⁸⁵

⁸⁰Lambton, 'Islamic Mirrors for Princes', p. 419.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 420.

⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 419.

⁸⁴Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, pp. 10–11.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 49.

In contrast, the authors of *adab* writings consider the defence and promotion of *sharī'a* and the protection of Muslim community as the primary duties of ruler.⁸⁶

Khanjar Beg's *mathnawī* can be placed in the category of the *akhlāq* tradition rather than in that of the *adab* in terms of its ideological orientation. It consists of all the features of the genre of advice literature focusing on particular advice that is to make Akbar aware of the contemporary political crisis and to make him conscious of his responsibility towards state affairs. In fact, it is the central theme of his advice in the *mathnawī*.

The image of an ideal ruler, projected in the advice literature particularly in *akhlāq* tradition as the divinely-ordained and directly appointed by God to make the world prosperous and to establish justice and peace, is not different from that of the *mathnawī*. The ideal ruler in the *mathnawī* is also divinely-ordained, who is directly appointed by God as His representative and guard (*niḡahbānī*) of His subjects on the earth in the place of His prophets to establish His injunctions. Khanjar Beg hints that God deputed Akbar in this world, like many prophets He had earlier sent, to establish His injunctions; that is to protect humankind and to bring prosperity to this world. He also uses the phrases from advice literature in which the subjects are referred to as flock (*gala* or *rama*) and the ruler as the shepherd (*shabān* or *chobān*) who always protects his flock⁸⁷ and compares such responsibility of the shepherd to the practice and status of prophets (*rasm-i ambiyā'* and *manṣab-i ambiyā'*). To make the emperor conscious of his value as a divinely-ordained ruler and his responsibility towards protecting and guarding his subjects, he counsels him not to neglect the shepherd's duty for his dignity belongs to God's prophets. In the following couplets, Khanjar Beg says:

You are the shepherd, and your people are the flocks.
 The flock has come to your pasture;
 How can you leave the flock to wander unrestrained?
 God has appointed you their guardian,
 The shepherd's dignity belongs to His prophets;
 Neglect not then the practice of the prophets.
 But take heed to yourself and also to mankind.
 A happy life is a jewel. See that you value it properly,
 And count as gain both wealth and dominion.⁸⁸

The image of divinely-ordained ruler is also evident from another two couplets of the *mathnawī* in which the emperor is portrayed as the king of the world (*shāh-i mulk-i 'ālam*) appointed by God⁸⁹ and his rules sanctified by Him.⁹⁰

⁸⁶For details of the main duties of an ideal ruler in the advice literature of the *adab* tradition, see Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, pp. 26–46.

⁸⁷This image of ruler (shepherd) and the subject (flock) was very popular in the medieval Perso-Islamic world and advisory authors incorporated it in their works. See A. K. S. Lambton, 'Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship', *Studia Islamica* 17 (1962), p. 94.

⁸⁸Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, ff. 130a–b, lines, 388–392; Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, p. 225, lines, 21–25; Haig, iii, p. 312, lines, 21–25.

⁸⁹Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 117b, line, 1.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, f. 131b, lines, 423, 425.

Possessing good moral qualities is also one of the features of an ideal ruler portrayed in the writings of *akhlāq* and *adab* albeit with some ideological differences. The authors of *akhlāq* suggest rulers should imbibe moral values in order to become an ideal ruler. However, they completely ignore attributing a disposition to ruler's personality which demands the performance of any religious duty. For instance, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī attributes seven qualities—good descent (*abuwwat*), loftiness of aspiration ('*ulluw-i himmat*), firmness of opinion (*matānat-i rāi*), utmost determination ('*aẓīmat-i tamām*), endurance (*ṣabr*), affluence (*yasār*) and upright assistants ('*iwān-i ṣāliḥ*)—to the ideal ruler and explains the method through which a ruler can acquire these qualities to attain perfection.⁹¹ Similarly, the authors of *adab* writings also attribute a number of moral dispositions to the ideal ruler but in contrast to the *akhlāq* authors they advise the ruler to perform some religious practices as well. For instance, when Niẓām al-Mulk Ṭūsī, the author of *Siyāsatnāma*, advises his ruler to earn qualities like “modesty, good temper, compassion, forgiveness, humility, generosity, sincerity, forbearance, gratitude, mercy, knowledge, reason and justice”, he also requires the king to possess religious qualities like obedience to God, the performance of supererogatory prayers, respect for the learned etc.”⁹²

Akbar has also been portrayed as the possessor of good moral qualities on the line of *akhlāq* literature to present him as the ideal ruler. Moreover, Khanjar Beg equates the emperor's personality with those of prophets in their moral dispositions without suggesting him to perform religious practices rather urging him to know the worth of kingship. Moral values attributed to the emperor in *mathnavī* are justice ('*adl*), equity (*inṣāf*), generosity (*ḥilm*), knowledge (*jūd*), liberality (*ṣakha*), favour (*lutf*), grace (*iḥāsān*), humanity (*khulq*), kindness (*mīhr*) and faithfulness (*uqāfā*). By attributing these qualities to the emperor, he tries to portray him as a just, kind and generous ruler and urges him to understand the significance and value of the prestigious position of kingship. In the following couplets he says:

You are a king with a prophet's attributes,
 You are in the world for a great work.
 Justice and equity, generosity, knowledge, liberality,
 Favour and grace, humanity, kindness and faithfulness.
 All these you have by the grace of God.
 What shall I do if you ignore your own worth?⁹³

It is important to note that while projecting the image of the ideal ruler, Khanjar Beg does not make 'justice' the centre of discussion as it appears in the texts of *akhlāq* and *adab*. Generally, a just ruler and the demand of dispensing justice form the centre of discussion in the advice literature.⁹⁴ In contrast to this general characteristic of the advice literature, to make Akbar realize his responsibility towards the state affairs is his central theme of the discussion in

⁹¹ Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, (eds.) Mojtaba Minawi and Ali Raza Haidari (Tehran, 1976, pp. 301–302; G. M. Wickens (trans.) *The Nasirean Ethics* (London, 1964), pp. 227–228.

⁹² Lambton, 'Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship', pp. 102–103.

⁹³ Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 130b, lines, 393–395; Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārikh*, iii, p. 225, lines, 26–28; Haig, iii, pp. 312–323, 26–28.

⁹⁴ Lambton, 'Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship', pp. 91–119; Najaf Haider, 'Justice and Political Authority in Medieval Indian Islam', in *Justice: Political, Social and Juridical*, (eds.) Rajeev Bhargava, Michael Dusche and Helmut Reifeld (Delhi, 2008), pp. 75–93.

the *mathnawī* even though he declares justice as a trait of the emperor's personality in order to portray him as an ideal ruler. In fact, from its beginning to the end, the need of cultivating awareness in the emperor about the management of state affairs is the centre of discussion particularly in the advisory part of the *mathnawī* rather than justice and just ruler. It is an exceptional feature of the *mathnawī*. Emphasising on this feature, he also explains the disadvantages of a ruler's ignorance to draw Akbar's attention to be aware and conscious (*āgāh*) of his responsibilities and duties. For example, he believes that a ruler's ignorance can lead to disastrous consequences like fomenting of chaos and disturbance in the state. For him, committing a mistake (*sahw*) by an ordinary subject is just the loss of bread but a ruler's mistake due to his ignorance causes the ruin of his whole empire. He further explains that a ruler is distinguished from common people in the performance of one's duty and responsibility because a common man thinks only of his food and garment, but a ruler has to think about all his subjects. Counselling the emperor to be aware of himself, his subjects and God at all times and in all places, he says:

It behoves a king, both in season and out of season,
To take care of himself and both his subjects and God.
The poor man's error leads only to the loss of his bread,
The king's error is a calamity to the world.
The beggar takes heed only for his gullet and his patched robe,
In the king's heart there must be thought for the people.⁹⁵

The reason for this difference between Khanjar Beg and the rest of advisory authors is two-fold—(a) purpose of composing the texts, and (b) the demand of contemporary situation. Generally, the main purpose of authors of advice literature was to provide ideal norms of governance along with a reflection on contemporary problems through indirectly addressing the contemporary ruler. While, in contrast, his main purpose for the composition of the *mathnawī*, as earlier discussed, was to provide particular advice by directly addressing Akbar and to make him aware of his power and to keep abreast of the dynamics of the contemporary power politics, and to clarify his own victimhood in the rivalry between Tardī Beg Khān and Bayram Khān.

As far as advising the ruler through anecdotes, maxims and stories concerning rulers of Pre-Islamic Iran, prophets, caliphates or Muslim rulers to exemplify the ideal ruler is concerned, Khanjar Beg does not incorporate any story or anecdote related to past rulers as an example for Akbar to follow. Nevertheless, he equates the emperor with prophets in duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, he also cites ancient Iranian rulers and legends, the rulers of different dynasties of medieval Perso-Islamic world along with their fate as well as his own life experience as examples for the emperor to take lessons from. For instance, when he counsels the emperor to earn good fame, and to understand the complexities of worldly affairs, he reminds him of the many just and unjust rulers of the ancient Iran—Nawshīrwān, Qubād, Hoshang and Ḍaḥḥāk etc.,—of medieval Islamic world—Maḥmūd of Ghazna, Malik Shāh Saljūq, Sulṭān Sanjar and Halaku Khān etc.,—who ruled this world

⁹⁵Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 129b, lines, 373–375; Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, pp. 224–225, lines, 14–16; Haig, iii, p. 312, lines, 14–16.

but are not remembered today.⁹⁶ Similarly, advising him to consolidate his kingdom and to manage the state affairs efficiently, he presents Timurid and early Mughal rulers—Amīr Tīmūr, Mirān Shāh, Shāhrukh, Abū Sa‘īd Mīrẓā, Sulṭān Ḥusain Mīrẓā, ‘Umar Shaikh Mīrẓā, Bābur and Humāyūn—as ideals for him to emulate.⁹⁷ Apart from this, he presents his personal experiences in dealing with self-centred people as illustrations for advising the emperor in order to understand the self-seeking nature and real intentions of the people. For him, self-centred people are rich in skill and they always use it for their personal gains at the expense of others.⁹⁸ Couplets in which he cites personal experiences as templates to advise the emperor regarding evil intentions of the people appear in the *mathnawī* just before those couplets containing actual advice. It manifests his attempt to establish his personal experiences as the foundation for his advisory couplets. Using his personal experience as examples to advise the emperor is his exceptional way of counselling.

Insofar as the ideological orientation of Khanjar Beg is concerned, his *mathnawī* does not show a tilt towards juristic *sharī‘a* and does not advocate its implementation to differentiate among subjects. However, his ideological orientation favouring non-religious, non-sectarian and non-racial ideas is certainly reflected in the *mathnawī* in different forms. The first form through which his non-religious ideological orientation is reflected is through his choice of words. For instance, he uses non-religious words such as ‘*shāh*’ for ruler, ‘*khalq*’, ‘*khalq-i ‘ālam*’, and ‘*mardum*’ for subjects instead of using *pādshāh-i muslim* (the ruler of Muslims) for ruler and Hindus, Muslims, Shī‘as and Sunnīs for subjects. The usage of these words and expressions appear in many places in the *mathnawī*.⁹⁹

Similarly, his preference for the imperial order (*farmān-i shāh*) rather than Islamic *sharī‘a* to govern the kingdom manifests his non-religious ideological orientation.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, his interest in non-religious literature, his skills in various arts, as well as his references to ancient Iranian rulers and legends, and to the rulers of different dynasties of Medieval Perso-Islamic world rather than those of caliphs as examples for Akbar to take lesson from, also show his indifferent views on Islamic laws and his inclination toward non-religious ideas.¹⁰¹ Despite it, if he brings the reference of a religious figure to compare Akbar to prophets in duties and responsibilities, he does so to project him as an ideal ruler like the authors of *akhlāq* literature rather than to promote Islam.

Despite the fact that Khanjar Beg projects Akbar as a powerful ruler through incorporating the notion of the emperor being divinely-ordained, a great contradiction appears between his own advice and practices. Theoretically, he considers the emperor a powerful and ideal ruler and advises him to fulfil ruler’s responsibilities by taking power in his own hands, but in actual practice, Khanjar Beg goes against his own advice. This is evident from the differences between the advice of the *mathnawī* and his political activities after the fall of Bayram Khān. The content of the *mathnawī* clearly shows Akbar as a powerful

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 128a-b, lines, 323-345.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 129a, lines, 346-360.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 126b-127a.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 130a-132a, lines, 380-381, 385-386, 393, 396-397, 99, 402, 404-409, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 43.

¹⁰⁰ In one of the couplets, he praises and considers the erstwhile imperial orders as law and says that it is the best way to maintain kingship. Khanjar Beg, *Diwān-i Khanjar*, f. 130a, line, 376.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 128a-129a, lines, 323-353.

ruler who is divinely-ordained but his open criticism of the emperor goes against his counselling. Similarly, he does not accept the emperor's power thereby negating his own counsel. Khanjar Beg's activities after the fall of Bayram Khān are evidence in this regard. It is a historical fact that after the fall of Bayram Khān, Akbar was very curious to take all political control in his own hands through taking some political measures. For instance, he brought together a diverse group of Mughal nobles: Persian, Turani, Indian Muslims and Rajputs to balance the power of all nobles.¹⁰² But this political measure of the emperor was resented by Uzbek nobles,¹⁰³ who did not like his new style of ruling and revolted against him under the leadership of Khān-i Zamān and his brother, Bahādur Khān in 1565–67. Khanjar Beg allied with these rebellious nobles.¹⁰⁴ This contradiction appears because of its close relation with contemporary power politics and a direct connection with his personal life. He was more interested in Akbar wielding all the power because by doing so he could use the emperor as a tool in order to avenge Bayram Khān who had imprisoned him and executed his father-in-law. It was one of the reasons why he had no administrative position bestowed upon him by Akbar nor could his *mathnawī* get an important place in the Mughal India. However, appreciating Khanjar Beg's advice, the emperor honoured him with various favours.¹⁰⁵

The reflection of the features of advisory genre in the *mathnawī* along with its own features makes it eligible to be considered as an advice book for ruler. Moreover, Khanjar Beg considers the *mathnawī* an advisory writing for Akbar in some of its own couplets.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the advisory part of the *mathnawī* has also been considered as advice in the contemporary historical chronicle,¹⁰⁷ on the basis of which it has been given a place equal to the *Siyāsatnāma* of Niẓām al-Mulk Ṭūsī, a perso-Islamic advice literature.¹⁰⁸

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be argued that, though, the culture of composing treatises on statecraft both in the forms of poetry and prose, which was popular in the medieval Perso-Islamic world, got wide reception in the early modern India, the features attributed to the genre of advice literature of the Perso-Islamic world, along with the criticism of rulers in the direct and indirect ways by the poets and other men of letters claiming to be their well-wisher, was also present in the medieval India. However, the discussion on the *mathnawī* of Mīrzā Khanjar Beg suggests that it was an important treatise of Akbar's time in terms of its polythematic character and a source to know about Khanjar Beg's life and career, and to understand the historical characteristics of the period of Bayram Khan's regency. It was an exceptional composition of Mughal India because of its having the features of advice literature along with its own features such as the poet's direct address and explicit criticism of the contemporary ruler

¹⁰²Iqtidar Alam Khan, 'The Nobility under Akbar and the Development of His Religious Policies, 1560–1580', *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 12,1 (1968), pp. 29–31.

¹⁰³John F. Richard, *The Mughal Empire* (New Delhi, 1993), p. 17.

¹⁰⁴Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, p. 227; Haig, iii, pp. 314–315.

¹⁰⁵Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, p. 226; Haig, iii, p. 314; Shafiq, *Shām-i Ghariḇān*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁶Khanjar Beg, *Dīwān-i Khanjar*, f. 129b, line, 370.

¹⁰⁷Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, iii, p. 224; Haig, iii, p. 311.

¹⁰⁸Abd al-Rahman, *Bazm-i Tīmūriya*, i, p. 493.

which is not found in any other composition of that time. These features also make the *mathnawī* as an appropriate advice book for rulers which belonged to the advice literature of *akhlāq* tradition. However, it could not be in wide circulation during Mughal India due to its direct connection with the contemporary ruler, the poet's personal life and career, and with a particular purpose for its writing. At last, Khanjar Beg's *mathnawī* breaks the assumption that no advisory writing was ever produced in the time of Akbar and it contributes to the existing knowledge of Mughal advice literature.

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